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Publications Office  
 School of Oriental and African Studies  
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**John Whelpton** studied classics at the University of Oxford and then lectured in English at Shri Thakur Ram (Birganj) and Amrit Science (Kathmandu) campuses of Tribhuvan University from 1972 to 1974. After taking a doctorate at SOAS, London, where he was an editor of *South Asia Research* and occasional teacher of Nepali, he moved to Hong Kong, from where he makes regular visits to Kathmandu. His main publications are *Jang Bahadur in Europe* (1983), *Nepal* (World Bibliographical Series, 1990), *Kings, Soldiers and Priests: Nepalese Politics and the Rise of Jang Bahadur Rana, 1830-57* (1991), (ed. with D.N. Gellner and J. Pfaff-Czarnecka) *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom* (1997), and (ed. with Martin Hoftun and William Raeper) *People, Politics and Ideology: Democracy and Social Change in Nepal* (1999).

**Pancha N. Maharjan** is Lecturer at the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. His doctorate, from Banaras Hindu University in 1995, was on 'Electoral Politics in Nepal: A Study of 1981 and 1986 National Panchayat Elections'. He was a Visiting Fellow at International Institute of Asian Studies in Leiden and a British Academy Visiting Fellow in the UK in 1999. He has carried out extensive fieldwork on elections in Nepal. Among his publications are *Local Elections in Nepal, 1997* (CNAS, 1998) and (with others) *People, Polity and Governance: A Survey Analysis of Peoples' Response to the Democratic Experiment in Nepal* (Kathmandu, 1996).

**Michael Mühlich** studied ethnology in Berlin, presenting his MA in 1990 on the 'Social structure of the Brahman-Chetris in Nepal'. He went on to conduct research on the culture of the Sherpas and in 1994 received his doctorate at the University of Freiburg, published in 1996 as *Traditionelle Opposition: Individualität und Weltbild der Sherpa*. He has taught at the universities of Berlin and Leipzig. With support from the German Research Council (DFG), he has since 1997 conducted research on credit systems and urban development in Nepal. He has published articles on the Sherpas, the Manangis, the Newars, and the Brahmans and Chetris.

**Charles Ramble** received a DPhil in Social Anthropology from Oxford University in 1985. His thesis concentrated on a community of Tibetan Bonpo lamas in Mustang, Nepal. After a period of post-doctoral research in Mustang and Tibet, he spent several years working as a naturalist and anthropologist in national parks in southern and eastern Nepal. Between 1992 and 1997 he was engaged as a Tibetologist on a multi-disciplinary research project in Mustang, in association with the Universities of Bonn and Berlin. He is currently a researcher at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna.

**Karma Phuntsho** is writing a DPhil on Mipham at the University of Oxford. Trained at the Nyingma Institute in Byalakuppe, Karnataka, he was the abbot of a nunnery in Dharamsala.

# Nine Years On: The 1999 election and Nepalese politics since the 1990 *janandolan*<sup>1</sup>

John Whelpton

## Introduction

In May 1999 Nepal held its third general election since the re-establishment of parliamentary democracy through the 'People's Movement' (*janandolan*) of spring 1990. It was in one way a return to the starting point since, as in the first (1991) election, the Nepali Congress achieved an absolute majority, whilst the party's choice in 1999 for Prime Minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, had led the 1990-91 interim government and would have continued in office had it not been for his personal defeat in Kathmandu-1 constituency. Whilst the leading figure was the same, the circumstances and expectations were, of course, very different. Set against the high hopes of 1990, the nine years of democracy in practice had been a disillusioning experience for most Nepalese, as cynical manoeuvring for power seemed to have replaced any attempt to solve the deep economic and social problems bequeathed by the Panchayat regime. This essay is an attempt to summarize developments up to the recent election, looking at what has apparently gone wrong but also trying to identify some positive achievements.<sup>2</sup>

## The political kaleidoscope

The interim government, which presided over the drafting of the 1990

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Krishna Hachhethu for comments on an earlier draft of this paper and for help in collecting materials.

<sup>2</sup> The main political developments up to late 1995 are covered in Brown (1996) and Hoftun *et al.* (1999). A useful discussion of the political situation in the wake of the *janandolan* is Baral (1993), whilst voter opinion is analysed in Borre *et al.* (1994). Major issues under Koirala's first government are treated by contributors to Kumar (1995), and Martinussen (1995) deals with the problems involved in setting up effective local government structures.

constitution and the first general elections under it, was principally a coalition between Congress and the main Communist parties though also containing two royal nominees. The Congress administration under Girija Koirala which succeeded it in May 1991 faced vigorous opposition from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninists) [UML] and the smaller Communist parties, including the repetition on a smaller scale of the street protests which had been used against the old Panchayat administration. Opposition focused on an agreement with India over water resources and on an accusation that the government was involved in the deaths of UML leaders Madan Bhandari and Jivraj Ashrit in summer 1993. The real problem for the government was, however, dissension within its ranks, and, in a miscalculated attempt to impose discipline upon his party, Koirala called mid-term elections for 1994 against the wishes of the party's president, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, and of its senior statesman, Ganesh Man Singh. The elections were held in November, after an unsuccessful legal challenge to the dissolution of parliament, and they left the UML as the largest party (with 88 seats out of 205 in the House of Representatives (Pratinidhi Sabha)) but without an absolute majority. Coalition negotiations were inconclusive and so the UML formed a minority government under clause 41(2) of the constitution, with Man Mohan Adhikari as Prime Minister and general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal as his deputy. In June 1995, after Congress, supported by the National Democratic Party [NDP] and the Sadbhavana Party, requested a special session of the House of Representatives (Pratinidhi Sabha) to bring a no-confidence motion against the government, Adhikari tried to pre-empt defeat by recommending another dissolution and fresh elections. The king acceded to the request but, in a reversal of the previous year's roles, Congress and its allies asked the Supreme Court to declare his move unconstitutional. The court this time ruled against a Prime Minister and parliament was restored: the rationale was that in 1995, unlike the previous year, there was the possibility of forming a replacement government from within the current parliament and that the right to bring a vote of no-confidence in a special session took precedence over the Prime Minister's right to seek a dissolution.

In September 1995, after Adhikari's government was voted out of office, Sher Bahadur Deuba, who had replaced Koirala as leader of the parliamentary Congress party after the mid-term election, became Prime Minister as head of a coalition with the NDP and Sadbhavana in September 1995. The government was faced from February 1996 by an escalating 'People's War'

launched in the mid-western hills by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN(Maoist)]. Although Deuba did manage to secure ratification of the Mahakali Treaty on water resource sharing with India in September 1996, his ability to handle the country's problems was impeded by the need to concentrate on ensuring the government's own survival. While the NDP's president, Surya Bahadur Thapa, was strongly committed to the alliance with Congress, the leader of the parliamentary party, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, was attracted by the UML's offer to join an alternative coalition under his own leadership. Chand was able to win considerable support amongst NDP MPs, including even ministers in Deuba's government, and no-confidence motions were brought against it in March and December 1996. These involved frantic manoeuvring by both sides to suborn the others' supporters and retain the loyalty of their own, and calculations were complicated by the opportunistic behaviour of a number of independent MPs and members of minor parties. After March, Deuba expanded his cabinet to a record 48 members to accommodate almost every NDP MP. He prepared for the December 1996 vote by sending several unreliable NDP ministers on a government-financed trip to Bangkok for 'medical treatment' and one Sadbhavana waverer to Singapore. He thus ensured they would not be in the House when the vote was taken. The result nevertheless showed that his government was in a minority and he only survived because the opposition had not obtained the legal requirement of 103 votes.<sup>3</sup>

Despite protests from his party, he therefore felt compelled to take back into the government the ministers who had previously resigned and voted with the opposition. However, when he himself sought a vote of confidence in March 1997, two of his own Congress MPs were persuaded to stay away from the House and the government was left without a majority.

After Deuba's resignation, Girija Koirala, who Congress hoped would be more acceptable to Lokendra Bahadur Chand, replaced him as leader of the parliamentary party. In the end, however, Chand rejected overtures from Congress and stuck to his earlier choice of alignment, becoming Prime Minister at the head of an NDP-UML-Sadbhavana coalition. Despite the

<sup>3</sup> For a no-confidence motion to be successful, the constitution (Art.59(3)) requires it to be passed *pratinidhi sabhako sampurna sadasya sankhyako bahumatbata* ('by a majority of the entire number of members in the House of Representatives'). This is interpreted as meaning a majority of the House's prescribed strength of 205, although in December 1996 actual strength was only 200.

NDP's formal predominance, the strongman of the government was the deputy Prime Minister, Bamdev Gautam of the UML. Gautam masterminded a UML victory in local elections during the summer; Maoist activity led to voting being postponed in certain areas and, in those where it went ahead, Congress candidates, who were the main target of Maoist violence, were frequently at a disadvantage.

Surya Bahadur Thapa was able to win back support amongst NDP MPs and the government was defeated in another no-confidence vote in September 1997. Thapa then took office at the head of an NDP-Congress-Sadbhavana coalition but in January 1998, realizing the tide among his own MPs was again flowing Chand's way, he recommended the king to dissolve parliament and hold elections. On the afternoon of the same day, UML members and eight rebel NDP MPs petitioned the palace for a special session of parliament. This time, instead of accepting his Prime Minister's advice and allowing the opposition to make a legal challenge, King Birendra himself asked the Supreme Court for its opinion. This action caused some apprehension that the monarch might again be seeking an active role, but the royal move probably accelerated rather than altered the final outcome. After the Court had ruled in a majority judgement that a dissolution should not be allowed, Thapa faced a no-confidence vote in February 1998. The coalition survived as it retained the support of eleven NDP MPs and was also backed by two from the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party [NWPP].

In accordance with an earlier understanding, though after some squabbling over the exact date, Thapa handed over the leadership of the coalition to Congress in April 1998. Girija Koirala formally terminated the coalition with the NDP and Sadbhavana and formed a minority Congress government. Indignant at being cast aside in this manner, Thapa and his party abstained when Koirala sought a vote of confidence. In contrast, Chand and his supporters, now organized as a separate party, joined the UML in voting for the new government. At the end of May, Koirala launched a large-scale police operation against the Maoist insurgents in the mid-western hills and, although this succeeded in inflicting heavy casualties on the Maoists, the government came under heavy criticism because of deaths amongst innocent civilians. In August the administration appeared to change tack, reaching an agreement with an alliance of nine left-wing groups to compensate the

<sup>4</sup> The parties involved were: Unity Centre, Masal, Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist), Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist-

families of victims and not to proceed with legislation giving the security forces special powers.<sup>4</sup> Four days later the cabinet was expanded to include ministers from the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) [CPN(M-L)], a faction whose leadership included Bamdev Gautam and which had broken away from the UML in March that year.<sup>5</sup> However, demands from the CPN(M-L) for additional ministerial posts and disagreements over policy towards the Maoists led to their resignation from the cabinet in December.

Koirala reacted with an immediate request for a dissolution and, as was now customary, the opposition responded with a demand for a special session. With no need this time to consult the Supreme Court, King Birendra summoned parliament, but the motion of no confidence Bamdev had planned was stymied by an agreement between Congress and the UML to form a coalition to oversee elections. This was in theory to be open to participation by other parties, but in the event only Sadbhavana was actually included. Immediately after obtaining a vote of confidence on 14 January 1999, Girija Koirala applied again for a dissolution and the date for elections was then fixed for 3 May. Both the UML and the parties outside government objected strenuously to the Election Commission's plan, supported by Congress, to hold the elections in two phases on 3 and 17 May. Their argument was partly the legalistic one that this procedure violated the royal order, which referred only to 3 May, but they were chiefly concerned that the delay would increase the scope for electoral malpractice. The Election Commission's case was that because of the threat to security from the Maoist rebels, polls could only be held simultaneously throughout the country if large numbers of temporary police were recruited and that police of this type had previously been shown to be unreliable. The wrangling continued but the Commission went ahead on this basis and the campaign got under way.

Maoist), Communist Party of Nepal (United), Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party, Rastriya Janandolan Sanyojak Samiti (a front for the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)), and the United People's Front. The CPN(M-L) and NWPP were the only parties formally represented in parliament but two nominally independent MPs were actually Masal-backed.

<sup>5</sup> Technically speaking, this was not a true coalition (i.e. a government appointed under Art. 41(1) of the constitution in virtue of jointly possessing a majority in the House of Representatives). CPN(M-L) ministers were instead simply added to an existing government formed by Congress under Art.41(2) as the largest party in parliament.

### The parties and the 1999 election campaign

Congress went into the election as the senior partner in the government and, as in previous polls, as the only party to put up candidates in every one of the country's 205 constituencies. Offsetting these advantages was the record of continual internal conflict, which had begun almost immediately after the Congress victory in the 1991 elections and had been the cause of the mid-term elections in 1994 and the resultant instability. The tussle for influence between the senior troika of Girija Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh, and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had continued as a two-way struggle after Ganesh Man Singh's death in September 1997. There was tension also between the three 'second-generation leaders'—Sher Bahadur Deuba, Ram Chandra Paudel, and Shailaja Acharya. Deuba possibly secured the leadership of the parliamentary party and the premiership in 1995 partly because Koirala believed he would be more tractable than the others. However, especially after Koirala succeeded Bhattarai as party president in May 1996, he disagreed continuously with Deuba over how to manage Congress's relations with its coalition partners. In November one of Koirala's aides complained that the government media were treating the Congress party, and particularly Koirala himself, as the opposition.<sup>6</sup>

Conflicts within Congress were sometimes presented as ideological ones, with opponents accusing Koirala of departing too far from the party's professed socialist principles. In August 1996, Jagannath Acharya, and fellow Congress dissidents who claimed to be acting in support of Ganesh Man Singh, proposed setting up a socialist pressure group within the party, whilst Ganesh Man Singh himself and K.P. Bhattarai both seemed more ready to co-operate with the Communist opposition than did Koirala. More often, however, individuals at all levels argued that they were not receiving due recognition for their abilities or past sacrifices. The argument seemed basically to be one over place and patronage.

The ill-defined division of authority between a Congress Prime Minister at the head of the government and the Congress president in command of the party machine was arguably part of the trouble. It had caused conflict between B.P. Koirala and his half-brother M.P. Koirala in the 1950s as it did between Girija Koirala and K.P. Bhattarai in 1991-94 and between Girija Prasad Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba from 1996 onward. However, just as Deng Xiao Ping continued to wield decisive influence within the Chinese

<sup>6</sup>*Spotlight*, 22/11/1996.

Communist Party after he had relinquished all his official posts, an individual could retain authority within Congress whilst technically not in a leadership position and might then still clash with a formal office-holder. Even if a senior figure might personally have preferred to withdraw from the fray, his followers, owing their own position to his earlier efforts, might try to keep him involved in the game. Thus arguments between Girija Prasad Koirala and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai over appointments to the Central Committee continued after Bhattarai had handed over the presidency to Koirala in 1996, and even after Koirala, whilst still retaining the presidency, had become parliamentary leader in 1997.

As at earlier elections, the announcement of the party's candidates in February produced strong reactions from those who had been passed over. The selection process involved the submission of recommendations by local-level units but final decision by a committee of senior party figures and, according to one report, local preferences were followed in only 25% of cases.<sup>7</sup> There was a feeling amongst some of Koirala's own close associates that he had not asserted their claims strongly enough: his own daughter, Sujata, publicly protested against her exclusion from the list, whilst Manisha, B.P. Koirala's granddaughter and now a Hindi film star, issued a statement deploring the failure to select her father, Prakash. Shailaja Acharya announced that, in protest, she would turn down the nomination she herself had been given, though she rapidly allowed herself to be persuaded to stand. There was also general criticism of the failure to nominate any member of the occupational castes. It was alleged that both Koirala and Bhattarai had allowed the second-generation leaders to nominate many of their own followers even where stronger candidates would have been available.<sup>8</sup> The party leadership eventually responded to the storm by altering the selection in 21 constituencies.

Despite the controversy, the party was largely able to unite behind the candidates chosen. As before, a number of dissidents did stand as independents but their number was much lower than previously and results were to show that none of them possessed a strong enough local following to prevail over the official candidates. One former dissident, Palten Gurung, who had stood

<sup>7</sup>*Spotlight*, 12/3/1999.

<sup>8</sup>*Saptahik Bimarsha*, 5/3/1999. The paper also criticized the party for failing to select any journalists. *Bimarsha's* editor, Harihar Birahi, had himself been one of the unsuccessful would-be candidates.

successfully against the official candidate in 1994, was awarded the party's nomination this time, but in general those who had violated party discipline were excluded without the party forfeiting local support.<sup>9</sup>

The maintenance of party unity was made much easier by Koirala's key decision, announced in December, to put forward Krishna Prasad Bhattarai as the party's candidate for the premiership in the next parliament. This neutralized the most important cleavage, even though some cynical observers doubted whether Koirala would be content to leave Bhattarai in the driving seat for long.

As well as their previous internal disarray, Congress also faced the danger of being punished by the electorate for the country's disappointing economic record during nine years when the party had been in government for longer than any of its rivals. Koirala's strategy was to blame poor performance on the instability of the coalition governments since 1995 and to argue that Congress could provide sound government if it was given a clear majority. Although Koirala had spoken out in December 1998 against World Bank pressure for privatization of the water supply system and was later to criticize the introduction of VAT in 1997 as an unsuitable foreign imposition, the Congress manifesto included a strong commitment to continuing the policies of economic liberalization. The document's language suggested that the party's de facto abandonment of its original socialist stance was now being more fully reflected in its rhetoric (Khanal and Hachhethu 1999: 15-16).

In its performance pledges, the manifesto gave no promises of instant transformation, but the party proposed to achieve a 6% annual increase in incomes over the next five years and to raise the average income to US\$700 within twenty years. Congress also promised to seek an all-party consensus on a solution to the Maoist problem and to introduce special assistance, including education programmes, for the areas affected. On the contentious issues in Nepal-India relations, including a review of the 1950 treaty and the alleged Indian incursion at Kalapani, there was simply a pledge to reach solutions through diplomacy.<sup>10</sup>

For the country's second party, the UML, internal disputes were also a central problem and had in fact led to an actual split in the party in early 1998. The

<sup>9</sup> *Gorkhapatra*, 25, 26/3/1999 (*Nepal Press Digest* 43: 13).

<sup>10</sup> *Nepal Press Digest* 43: 12.

UML had been formed in 1991 by a merger between the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) ['the MALEHs'], the Leftist grouping with the most extensive network of cadres, and the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist) [CPN(M)] which, in the persons of its leaders, Man Mohan Adhikari and Sahana Pradhan, represented continuity with the original Communist Party of Nepal.<sup>11</sup> A number of former CPN(M) activists had quit the new party in 1991 to re-found their old organization, but in general the union had worked smoothly, with senior figures from the MALEHs having the most influence and Adhikari providing a dignified figurehead and also mediating internal conflicts. The main cause of tension was the long-standing rivalry between the 'hard-line' and 'soft-line' factions within the MALEHs, these labels being replaced with 'majority' and 'minority' after the hard-liners' victory at the unified party's convention in 1993. The majority group was led by Madan Bhandari until his death in 1993, when he was succeeded as general secretary by another member of the same faction, Madhav Kumar Nepal. The minority group was centred on C.P. Mainali.

After 1996 Mainali found an ally in Bamdev Gautam, who had been appointed deputy general secretary to run the party machine whilst Madhav Kumar Nepal served as deputy Prime Minister in Adhikari's 1994-5 government. Gautam's post was abolished in July 1996 and he subsequently led a campaign to remove M.K. Nepal from the general secretaryship. Rivalry between the opposing groups continued whilst Bamdev had his own turn as deputy Prime Minister in the 1997 coalition with the NDP. It continued up to the party's Nepalgunj convention in January 1998. Tensions were running so high that police had to intervene when rival groups of cadres clashed on the streets. Gautam and Mainali, who now also had the support of Sahana Pradhan, again found themselves with a minority of delegates, although they alleged that this was the result of a rigged selection process. Their demand for a form of proportional representation within the party's institutions was not met and finally on 5 March 1998 they announced a formal split, taking 40 of the party's MPs in the House of Representatives with them. Over most of the country they attracted only a minority of cadres but, probably because of Sahana Pradhan's involvement, support for the dissidents was particularly

<sup>11</sup> For the history of the Communist Party and its fracturing after 1960, see Whelpton (1994: 53-60) and (in Nepali) Rawal (1990/1). Charts of the main schisms and mergers are provided by Rawal, Hoftun *et al.* (1999:391) and, together with a succinct summary focusing particularly on the Maoists, in Mikesell (1996).

strong amongst activists from the Valley's Newar community.<sup>12</sup> The name of the pre-1991 Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) [CPN(M-L)] was resurrected for the new organization.<sup>13</sup>

The move was presented as one over political principles and ideology. The leaders of the new CPN(M-L) attacked their parent party for selling out national interests by supporting ratification of the Mahakali Treaty with India in 1996. They also denounced the failure in the documents passed at the convention to identify the United States and India as principal enemies of the Nepalese people or to accept the probable need for violence in achieving fundamental change in society (CPN(M-L) 1998a: 5-14; CPN(M-L) 1998b). The formulations accepted at the UML's sixth convention in fact represented another stage in the watering down of communist orthodoxy which had begun in the pre-1990 CPN(M-L) and had continued with the acceptance of Madan Bhandari's theory of *bahudaliya janbad* (multi-party people's democracy) at the fifth convention in 1993. C.P. Mainali had actually opposed Bhandari on this issue,<sup>14</sup> but now the new party was accepting *bahudaliya janbad* and arguing that it, not the UML, was the true custodian of Bhandari's legacy.

The UML argued in reply that there were no real differences of ideology between the new party's line and its own, but merely differences in emphasis. The author of one party pamphlet argued that the UML still regarded the US as the "centre of world imperialism" but that there was no purpose in tougher rhetoric when both the UML and the CPN(M-L) sought peaceful relations with the two countries (Neupane 1998: 26-7). The UML also pointed out that whilst Bamdev had opposed the Mahakali Treaty at the time of ratification and was doing so again now, he had been perfectly willing to accept it when in government during 1997.

Whilst allowing for partisan exaggeration, the dispute was almost certainly about power within the party rather than about the party's fundamental direction. As one journalist sympathetic to the UML allowed, Sahana Pradhan in

<sup>12</sup> One of the few major Newar figures in the UML to side with the party leadership was the leader of the sweeper caste in Kathmandu. His wish to undermine the CPN(M-L)-aligned head of the municipality was probably a factor in a strike which badly affected the city's garbage disposal system.

<sup>13</sup> The older and newer parties are differentiated in this paper by using the abbreviations 'the MALEHs' and 'CPN(M-L)'. In Nepali, *male* is generally used to refer to either of them.

<sup>14</sup> For the evolution of the concept of *naulo janbad*/*bahudaliya janbad* see Whelpton (1994: 55-57) and for Mainali's 1993 arguments Hoftun *et al.* (1999: 241).

particular may indeed have had genuine misgivings about the playing-down of the role of violence in social change (Dixit 1998a), but her new party was certainly not urging violence now. Their argument was rather that Communists should try to proceed peacefully but must expect that their opponents would eventually turn to violence to oppose them: non-violent transformation could be seen as a theoretical possibility but not presented as the most likely future scenario (CPN(M-L) 1998a: 11; CPN(M-L) 1998b: 18). This difference in long-term perspective would not have prevented the factions continuing working together if other, more urgent factors had not been present.

In its election manifesto, the UML highlighted very specific performance pledges, including the elimination of illiteracy within five years and the trebling of real individual incomes within twenty years. The party was more cautious over economic liberalism than Congress, without totally rejecting the approach: it condemned "indiscriminate liberalization and privatization" but announced its own intention to carry out "selective privatization" (CPN (UML) 1999: 12, 36). The UML adopted a similarly guarded attitude to the VAT controversy, criticizing Congress for introducing the tax without proper preparation, but not opposing it in principle. On relations with India its language was slightly tougher than that of Congress, but did not, of course, go to the extremes that the CPN(M-L) had been calling for.

The party put forward as prime ministerial candidate its veteran leader, Man Mohan Adhikari. Worries were expressed over his continuing health problems but the choice was probably dictated by the need to evade an early decision between the claims of Madhav Kumar Nepal and Khadga Prasad Oli. The party was also able to capitalize on the generally good impression made by Adhikari's short-lived, populist government in 1994-95; an opinion survey conducted in a number of different districts in February showed that he was regarded as the best of the post-1990 Prime Ministers.<sup>15</sup>

In addition his stance of 'extreme moderation', whilst annoying to some radicals, probably served to reassure more centrist voters. Despite his frailty, Adhikari campaigned across the country until collapsing after a rally in

<sup>15</sup> HIMAL-MARG Opinion Poll, surveying almost 8,000 voters in 104 constituencies in February/March 1999. Results, published in full in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, were summarized in *Spotlight*, 23/5/1999. Adhikari was named as their preference for Prime Minister by 31% of respondents, compared with 14.3% for Girija Koirala and 13.0% for Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. 40% named Adhikari's government as the best since 1990, with Koirala's administrations selected by only 17%.

Kathmandu. His death seven days later on 26 April took much of the heat out of the campaign in the Valley and also meant that polling was automatically postponed in the Kathmandu-1 and 3 constituencies, which he had been contesting.

After splitting from the UML in March 1998, the CPN(M-L) had adopted two conflicting strategies: seeking to establish themselves as a more radical Leftist force than the parent party, but also strengthening their position by becoming the Nepali Congress's junior partner in government. Their inability to gain the concessions they wanted from Congress led to their resignation in December. Whilst still expressing opposition to the Maoist insurgency, Bamdev Gautam became increasingly strident in expressing support for its long-term objectives and in his condemnation of excesses by the security forces. As his political opponents eagerly pointed out, this marked a dramatic volte-face from his stance when deputy Prime Minister and home minister in 1997. He had then been one of the staunchest advocates of legislation to give the police special powers to deal with the insurgency, a proposal abandoned in the face of widespread protests by human rights activists and many Leftist groups.

The Marxist-Leninists also accused their former colleagues of corruption, and Gautam declared publicly that members of the UML were responsible for the deaths of Madan Bhandari and Jivraj Ashrit at Dasdhunga in 1993.<sup>16</sup> All such allegations tended to rebound on the heads of people who had so recently been part of what they were now condemning. The party's credibility cannot have been enhanced by Gautam's claim that he had known the truth about Dasdhunga in 1993 but had been unable to speak out as a party member. The same could be said for C.P. Mainali's reported admission that he had taken 'commission' as a minister because he had been instructed to do so by the party. Nor, finally, did the Marxist-Leninists' own recent record in government help much, since many believed they had been involved in one of the recurring scandals over the procurement of aircraft for the national airline, RNAC.

To the left of both the UML and the Marxist-Leninists were three groups

<sup>16</sup> As part of their propaganda campaign before the UML's January 1998 convention, Gautam and his allies had apparently arranged the publication of an article accusing Madhav Kumar Nepal and Khadga Prasad Oli of involvement (Neupane 1998: 19). Madan Bhandari's brother, Prem, supported the allegations, but his widow, now a UML MP, sided with the UML leadership.

which all traced their origins to a faction led by Mohan Bikram Singh, one of the leaders of the pre-1960 Communist Party of Nepal. The first of these groups, known as Masal, was composed of Singh himself and his rump followers. They had boycotted the 1991 elections but backed a number of independent candidates in 1994, of whom two were elected to parliament. Singh still preferred to operate 'underground' but, in order to take part in electoral politics, had set up the National People's Front [NPF] or Rastriya Jana Manch.

The second group was the Unity Centre, which for some time before the 1999 election had been co-operating quite closely with Masal. The Unity Centre, too, was an 'underground' party using an alias—United Popular Front (Pokhrel) [UPF]<sup>17</sup>—for its more conventional activities.

Finally, there was the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which was now conducting an insurgency in several hill districts. The party's general-secretary, Pushpa Kumar Dahal ('Prachand') and its most prominent politburo member, Baburam Bhattarai, had until a split in 1994 been working with Lilamani Pokhrel inside the Unity Centre/United Popular Front, and the UPF had been the third largest party in the 1991-94 parliament. The Maoists possessed two front organizations: the United Popular Front (Bhattarai), which was now itself essentially a clandestine group, and the Rastriya Janandolan Sanyojak Samiti or National People's Movement Organization Committee, which took part openly in agitational activity with other left-wing parties.

Singh, Pokhrel, Prachand, and Bhattarai all concurred in rejecting the legitimacy of parliamentary politics and, although only the last two made explicit use of the label 'Maoist', all of them retained the Maoist ideology abandoned by the UML. The differences between them were largely tactical. Singh and Pokhrel were willing to contest elections as part of an effort to 'expose' the inadequacy of the system. In contrast, Prachand and Bhattarai had rejected the electoral path in favour of what they termed 'People's War' but others,

<sup>17</sup> The reference to the party leader, Lilamani Pokhrel, is necessary to avoid confusion with the UPF (Bhattarai), but Pokhrel's party is now referred to by the Election Commission simply as 'United Popular Front', since the courts ruled in 1994 that it, rather than Bhattarai's organisation, was the legitimate successor to the pre-1994 party. However, because Baburam Bhattarai was the figure who was more in the public eye, media reports before and just after the start of the 'People's War' frequently used 'United People's Front' on its own to refer to his group. The Pokhrel group was also at one time known as the 'UPF(Vaidya)' and Bhattarai's as the 'UPF(Bhusal)'.

including many Leftist factions, described as 'individual murder and terrorism.'<sup>18</sup> There had from time to time been rumours of disagreement between the two men, with Bhattarai favouring a more moderate approach. However, there was no hard evidence of this and towards the end of 1998 Bhattarai himself quashed rumours that the Maoists were considering participating in the coming election. A meeting of the Maoists' central committee in autumn 1998 had confirmed Prachand's position as party supremo as well as deciding to move to the establishment of 'base areas.' In October, Prachand set forth his uncompromising political views in an extended interview with the Maoist-aligned weekly *Janadesh*.<sup>19</sup>

The NPF fielded 53 candidates in the election and the UPF(Pokhrel) 40. Although they had significant ideological differences with the UML, both were able to reach limited seat-sharing agreements with it. The UML withdrew in favour of the National People's Front in six constituencies in return for support in seven, and backed the UPF (Pokhrel) in three in return for support in four. Pokhrel's group also made similar arrangements in some areas with the Marxist-Leninists.

The remaining left-wing group with a real possibility of winning seats was the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party [NWPP]. Despite its small size, it had some political importance because of the hold on the loyalties of the Newar cultivators of Bhaktapur enjoyed by its leader, Narayan Bijukche ('Comrade Rohit'). Ideologically, it was quite close to Masal and the Masal-derived parties since it had never officially renounced Maoism. However, it tended in practice to have a slightly more accommodationist approach to the parliamentary system. The party had won four seats in 1994 on a very small share of the popular vote, since its support was geographically concentrated in its Bhaktapur home base and in Jumla. The hung parliament, however, had exposed the group's members to enticement from other parties anxious to win more support. One MP had defected to the UML at an early stage, whilst Bhakta Bahadur Rokaya had stayed away from the House, despite party instructions to vote for the December 1996 no-confidence motion against the

<sup>18</sup> The phrase used in the manifesto of the Marxist-Leninists (CPN(M-L) 1998b: 10).

<sup>19</sup> *Janadesh*, 3/11/1998. Prachand's singling out of politburo member 'Kiran' (Mohan Baidya) as a colleague to whom he was particularly close was seen by some as an indication of coolness towards Bhattarai. Nevertheless, Bhattarai's column in the same issue of the paper enthusiastically backs the party line, hailing the insurgents' creation of 'base areas' as the first step in a worldwide communist revolution.

Deuba government, and had then been given a post in Deuba's cabinet. A third MP also showed signs of rebellion, leaving Rohit himself the party's only reliable representative in parliament. There were problems, too, in the party organization, culminating in the NWPP's vice-president and the treasurer of the Jumla unit leading a breakaway faction. Rohit himself continued to soldier on and was calling in January 1999 for an alliance of Leftist groups to promote 'revolutionary parliamentarianism'.

The party's manifesto did in fact argue that parliamentary action alone could not bring about a fundamental change in society, but it also proposed a number of specific reform measures and highlighted its own previous role in pressing for legislation to protect the country's cultural heritage. It took a hard line against privatization and the acceptance of foreign capital and advocated improving the performance of public corporations by strengthening discipline over their management rather than selling them off (NWPP 1999: 22).

The split in the National Democratic Party had not been unexpected. Surya Bahadur Thapa and Lokendra Bahadur Chand, bitter rivals in the Panchayat period, had always found it difficult to work in tandem and had not been able to unite their followers in a single party until after they had contested the 1991 election separately. Tension between them increased when the election of a hung parliament allowed the NDP to play a balancing role between the two major parties, with Thapa becoming an advocate of co-operation with Congress while Chand was won over by the UML. After Thapa had engineered the fall of the Chand-led UML-NPD coalition in September and Chand's ally Rajeshwor Devkota had failed in his challenge to Thapa's leadership at the January 1998 party convention, the split was formalized. Thapa's supporters were recognized as the legal continuation of the original party and Chand's styled themselves the 'NDP(Chand)', reviving the name under which they had fought the 1991 election.<sup>20</sup>

Both parties had handicaps in common. The first was the difficulty of establishing a distinct character in the minds of the electorate. The two were most clearly distinguished in foreign policy: Thapa had generally been seen as more sympathetic to India, whilst Chand stood for a more assertive Nepali

<sup>20</sup> Immediately after the split the Chand group used the name 'New NDP'. The media sometimes refer to the Thapa faction simply as the 'NDP' and sometimes as the 'NDP(Thapa)'.

nationalism, a factor which had made co-operation with the UML easier. However, once Congress had abandoned its alliance with the NDP in April 1998, Chand appeared to move towards Congress, the more pro-Indian of the two major parties, whilst Thapa became closer to the UML. In addition, both Thapa and Chand were tainted by the role of individual members of the pre-split NDP in creating the instability of the Deuba period. The records of some MPs had been unsavoury in other respects. The Thapa faction's Mirja Dilsad Beg, MP for Lumbini-4, who had associations with the Bombay underworld and was wanted by the Indian police, had been assassinated in Kathmandu in summer 1998, apparently on the orders of an Indian gang boss. One of the NDP(Chand)'s MPs, Khobari Ray, had been arrested in September the same year for the attempted murder of a security guard at a Kathmandu disco. As in India, criminal connections did not necessarily preclude an individual retaining support in his own area, but they hardly enhanced the party's popularity in the country generally. The NDP factions had been handicapped in 1991 by their association with the sins of the Panchayat period, but now they were also identified with the worst excesses of the post-Panchayat era.

The remaining serious electoral contender in 1999 was the Nepal Sadbhavana ('Goodwill') Party, normally known simply as Sadbhavana. With three MPs in the 1994-99 parliament, this group did have the advantage of a clear platform as a Tarai regionalist party. It advocated regional autonomy, reservations for Tarai people in the public services, and the rapid grant of citizenship certificates to all those who were resident in the Tarai when the 1990 constitution came into force.<sup>21</sup> In addition, its leader, Gajendra Narayan Singh, had obtained maximum advantage from the hung parliament, serving as a member of every coalition government since 1994 except for the brief Congress-M-L partnership. However, as was the case with Comrade Rohit's NWPP, a small party's ability to play a balancing role also meant that individual members were exposed to temptation. Hridayesh Tripathi, the best-known personality in the party after Singh himself, had at one point set up a breakaway group with the help of a Sadbhavana representative in the upper house. This organization, the Nepal Samajbadi Janata Dal, was only

<sup>21</sup> The 1990 constitution simply reaffirmed Panchayat-era constitutional provisions and legislation, which allowed citizenship to those born in Nepal or with at least one Nepal-born parent. In the absence of a comprehensive birth registration scheme, this posed problems for many individuals. Sadbhavana wished instead to use the electoral roll for the 1980 referendum as evidence of pre-1990 residence.

formally reunited with Sadbhavana in November 1997. The party's third MP, Anish Ansari, had also struck out on his own when the Deuba government was under challenge at the end of 1996, and had finally been expelled from the party in January 1999. Tripathi and, to a lesser extent, Ansari had both enjoyed government positions despite their disagreements with Singh.

In its election manifesto the party sought to broaden its appeal by calling for the reservation of 30% of public posts for members of the hill ethnic minorities as well as 50% for the Madheshis and also by simply advocating the use of 'local languages' rather than specifically mentioning Hindi. However, in addition to his party's opportunist image, Singh himself also had the disadvantage of his Rajput caste, which could be a liability with other sections of the Madheshi population. Among non-Madheshis he suffered, of course, from being seen as too closely linked with India.<sup>22</sup> Finally, though Sadbhavana MPs had had considerable success advancing their personal careers, they had not been able to secure concessions on their central demands, whether in office or staging theatrical protests such as their burning of the constitution in autumn 1998.

### The issues

In the election campaign, the question of Nepal's relations with India was, as usual, given a lot of attention by the politicians. The terms on which India and Nepal agreed to develop and share the water of the rivers flowing through the Nepalese hills towards the Ganges had always been a source of controversy in Nepalese politics. As it is by far the stronger party, India was inevitably in the driving seat and any agreement was regularly denounced as a sell out by opposition groups in Nepal, particularly those on the Left. Girija Prasad Koirala's 1991-94 government had run into stiff opposition, including violent street protests, when it tried to argue that an agreement with India concerning the Tanakpur project was only a minor one and therefore exempt from the constitutional requirement for ratification by a two-thirds majority of the combined Houses of Parliament. Further negotiations with

<sup>22</sup> It was rumoured in Kathmandu that he had deserted the Deuba administration in March 1997 on Indian instructions because New Delhi, having neutralized opposition to its economic objectives from Madhav Kumar Nepal, now wanted to win over Bamdev Gautam by allowing him a spell in power as Chand's deputy. Perhaps more plausible, however, is the suggestion that Singh waited to see which way the political wind was blowing and then made sure he ended up on the winning side (*Saptahik Bimarsha* 7/13/1997).

India under both the 1994-95 UML administration and the Deuba coalition government had combined this issue with other projects on the Mahakali River. When the resulting Mahakali Treaty was presented for ratification in September 1996 the UML had only decided to support the agreement after a disputed vote on its central committee. Bamdev Gautam had been a leading opponent of ratification and the issue became, as has been seen, a major plank in the platform on which the Marxist-Leninists split from the UML.

To the resources problem was added the continuing call for a revision of the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty which the Rana government had signed with India when facing growing opposition from dissidents. This gave nationals of each country the right to live and work in the other, and clashed with the desire of many Nepalese to control the border—both to protect the employment opportunities of Nepalese citizens and to allow Nepal greater control over her own economy. There was also resentment over provisions in the treaty and in letters exchanged in association with its signing which implied Nepalese acceptance of inclusion in India's security sphere.<sup>23</sup>

Long-standing complaints had been aggravated by the recent discovery that Indian troops had apparently been in occupation of a small area at Kalapani in the north-west corner of the country for many years. The dispute here turned on whether the stream to the west or the east of the area was to be regarded as the main course of the Mahakali, which formed the recognized border between the two countries. Finally, there was the issue of the ethnic Nepalese 'cleansed' from Bhutan and now housed in refugee camps in the south-east of the country.<sup>24</sup>

Amongst Nepali intellectuals and political activists, particularly those on the Left, these issues were of the greatest importance, and this explains the central role of the Mahakali Treaty controversy in the polemics which accompanied the split in the UML. Demands for the annulling or re-negotiation of agreements with India had also been among those put to the government in 1996 just before the Maoists launched their 'People's War'. They were

<sup>23</sup> Article 3 of the treaty committed both governments "to inform each other of any serious friction or misunderstanding with any neighbouring State likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations subsisting between the two governments." The accompanying letter provided that "the Governments shall consult with each other and devise effective counter-measures" (Jha 1975: 37-39).

<sup>24</sup> For background on the Bhutanese refugee issue see Hutt (1996). A good collection of Nepalese viewpoints on Nepal-India relations generally is Dhruva Kumar (1992).

similarly amongst the objectives of the coalition of nine smaller Leftist groups which organized against the Congress government in 1998. Relations with India, therefore, played a significant part in the parties' campaign rhetoric.

Amongst parties contesting the election, the greatest concern was shown by the more radical left-wing groups and by the NDP(Chand), all of which denounced the Mahakali agreement in their election manifestos. The most extreme stance was possibly that of the UPF, who saw Nepal facing the threat of 'Sikkimization' (absorption into India as had happened to the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim in 1974). The UPF and the CPN(M-L) called for a work permit system to control the influx of Indian labour. On the other hand, Congress and the UML placed little emphasis on such issues, in contrast to previous elections when divergent approaches to relations with India had been a major point of disagreement between the two main parties (Khanal and Hachhethu 1999: 19).

Another issue which, like the Indian question, touched on national security, was the Maoist insurgency. This was at its most severe in four core districts—Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, and Salyana—but was affecting 35 of the country's 75 districts and around 25% of the population in some degree or other (Tiwari 1999). Official government figures released in February 1999 put the total number of dead at 616, of whom 35 were policemen, 112 unarmed citizens, and the remainder supposedly insurgents.<sup>25</sup> In the April 1999 edition of their annual human rights yearbook, a reputable NGO, the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) gave a total of 538 deaths up to the end of 1998, including 129 killings by the Maoists and 409 by the police.<sup>26</sup> Estimating the Maoists' actual strength was difficult, especially since actual fighters were backed by a larger number of supporters and sympathizers. One very detailed 1997 newspaper report put the number of guerrillas at 1,600,<sup>27</sup> whilst in campaign speeches in 1999 Bamdev Gautam used a figure of 4,000.

<sup>25</sup> *Kathmandu Post*, 13/2/1999.

<sup>26</sup> INSEC (1999: 134) provides figures for each month from February 1996 to December 1998 but also implies that some deaths may have gone unrecorded. Official sources put the death toll during the May-November 1998 police operation alone at 227 (Amnesty International 1999: 4).

<sup>27</sup> *Gorkha Express*, 17/10/1997 (*Nepal Press Digest* 41: 43). The report also claimed that the guerrillas were supported by a 'militant group' of 200, a 4,000-strong 'security group', 1,200 in a 'volunteers' group', 10,000 ordinary members, 400 intellectuals, 30 journalists, 38 engineers, and 12 medical practitioners.

As a direct influence on the elections the Maoists were important, first of all, because their activities might restrict the ability of candidates to campaign in certain areas, particularly in the case of Congress workers, who had been the principal targets of Maoist violence in the past. Their call for a boycott of the elections might also substantially affect the turn out and therefore the credibility of the results. Their hold over local people was based to a considerable extent on intimidation in areas where the state's own presence had normally been weak, but they did also enjoy some genuine support. Their propaganda laid particular stress on ethnic minority (*janajati*) issues and, at least at the start of the insurgency, their fighters seemed to be recruited especially from amongst the Kham Magars, a group less well integrated into mainstream Nepalese society than Magars generally.<sup>28</sup> According to INSEC's analysis, out of the 409 persons killed by the police by the end of 1998, 149 were Magars, compared with 86 Chetris and 42 Brahmins.<sup>29</sup> In autumn 1998, when it was believed that the Maoists might decide to reverse their previous policy and take part in the election, a Home Ministry intelligence report had apparently estimated they would emerge as the country's third-largest party with between 20 and 25 seats.<sup>30</sup> It was against this background that the Marxist-Leninists made their sympathetic statements about the Maoists and even one or two NDP candidates seemed at times to be angling for their local support.

Amongst Kathmandu intellectuals, the principal concern was often not so

<sup>28</sup> A sadly plausible description of the situation in Rolpa shortly before the outbreak of the 'war' is provided by a foreign observer who had herself been brought up in a communist state: "The problem lies in the situation many young Magars are in. Education in the Magar areas is bad to non-existent, the health status in parts catastrophic and no interest from the official side in improving anything or even lending an open ear to their problems and needs. Money and big projects are brought to the lower areas but never reach the Magars. So they see their only hope in a radical solution which they think the [Maoists] can bring. Like in most 'revolutions' they are being misled and misused and afterwards they will be thrown by the wayside" (Hughes 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Tiwari (1999) implies that by 1999 the occupational castes were a major support base and a speaker at a Kathmandu seminar in spring 1999 claimed that 54 Dalits ('oppressed ones', the name which lower caste activists have adopted from their Indian counterparts) had been among those killed by the police as Maoists. (*Kathmandu Post*, 1/4/1999). INSEC give a figure of 34 Dalits killed by December 1998.

<sup>30</sup> *Asan Bazar*, 31/10/1999. Slightly varying versions of the Home Ministry survey results were given in different newspapers.

much the Maoist activities themselves as the methods the police were using to counter them. As argued in Amnesty International's April 1999 report, there was little doubt that many of those supposedly killed by the police in 'encounters' had in fact been extra-judicially executed. It was also probable that the security forces had sometimes killed innocent persons who were then simply claimed to be guerrillas (Des Chene 1999). With the police already exceeding their legal authority, the proposals to increase that authority by fresh legislation or by amendment of existing laws had met strenuous opposition. There was also concern about action taken against people who were sympathetic to the 'People's War' but not actively involved in it; an example was the raiding of Maoist newspapers and the detention of some of their staff. The human rights aspects of the government's anti-insurgency measures thus continued to arouse controversy.

Against this background, reports from Nepal in the international media sometimes gave the impression that the insurgency was the key issue in the campaign.<sup>31</sup> It is probable, however, that its importance in the mind of the average Nepalese voter was considerably less. The February-March 1999 HIMAL-MARG survey (see above, n. 12), which sampled opinion in half the constituencies across the country, found that only just over two per cent of the voters questioned regarded the Maoist problem as the main one facing the country. This ranking put the issue on a par with pollution and the Bhutanese refugees. The reason for this relative lack of concern was, presumably, that outside the most-heavily influenced areas, there was not enough Maoist activity to rival the many other difficulties with which ordinary Nepalese were daily confronted.

The 'ethnic' question also probably generated less enthusiasm at grassroots level than amongst the intelligentsia.<sup>32</sup> Activists had, nevertheless, continued to highlight the issue and operated in a plethora of different organizations, many of them, like Gopal Khambu Rai's Khambuwan Rastriya Morcha and

<sup>31</sup> For example, Peter Popham, 'Maoist terror in Shangri-la' *South China Morning Post*, 16/5/1999 (originally published in *The Independent* (UK)). Kedar Man Singh, in 'Back to the Centre' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3/6/1999, published after the election, also suggests that concern with the Maoist problem was a key influence on the result.

<sup>32</sup> On ethnicity as a factor in Nepalese politics see Gellner *et al.* (1997) and Hoftun *et al.* (1999: 311-40). Useful presentations of the *janajati* activist and of more sceptical, 'mainstream' views are provided by Krishna Bhattachan (1995) and Dilli Ram Dahal (1995) respectively.

<sup>33</sup> Ethnic autonomy or full self-determination had been a key part of the Maoists' platform

Bir Nemwang's Limbuwan Mukti Morcha, allied to the Maoists.<sup>33</sup> There was an on-going controversy over the use of regional languages, highlighted by a March 1998 Supreme Court ruling against the employment of Newari by the Kathmandu municipality and of Maithili in the Tarai districts of Dhanusha and Rajbiraj. Despite this, there were signs that the whole problem might be becoming less of an issue between parties. In particular, Congress, which had earlier been opposed to the whole concept of 'reservations', was softening its stance. The common programme announced by the NPD-Congress-Sadbhavana coalition after the expansion of Surya Bahadur Thapa's cabinet in October 1997 included quotas for lower castes in medical and technical institutes. In addition, Girija Prasad Koirala appeared to endorse preferential treatment for the local Magar community in teacher recruitment during a visit to Maoist-affected areas in May 1998 (Subedi 1998). One intellectual associated with *janajati* causes actually suggested that the Congress election manifesto contained more on the *janajati* issue than many of the left-wing groups traditionally more identified with it.<sup>34</sup>

However, whilst a consensus might have been emerging between the two main parties, a number of smaller parties continued to take a more radical line. The CPN(M-L), the UPF and, more surprisingly, the NDP all advocated the conversion of Nepal's Upper House, the Rastriya Sabha, into a 'House of Nationalities' representing the different ethnic groups. The CPN(M-L) and UPF also made manifesto commitments to grant autonomy to ethnic communities.<sup>35</sup> On the issue of mother-tongue education, Sadbhavana arguably went further than any other party, promising to introduce such a system rather than simply recognize the right to it (Khanal and Hachhethu 1999: 18; Sadbhavana 1999: 13).

The issue of corruption had attracted great attention in the media throughout

from the beginning and was strongly emphasized in Prachand's November 1998 *Janadesh* interview.

<sup>34</sup> Speech by Krishna Bhattachan at a Nepal Janajati Mahasangh function, reported in *Kathmandu Post*, 17/4/1999.

<sup>35</sup> The practical difficulties of such autonomy were perhaps reflected in the somewhat tortuous wording adopted by the CPN(M-L): "making the necessary arrangements for granting the right of autonomous administration through self-determination in districts or regions with ethnic geographical composition, diversity, and distinctive local characteristics" (*jatiya bhaugolik banaut, vividhata ra sthaniya vishishtata raheka jilla wa kshetrama atmanirnaya antargat swayatta shasanko adhikar dina awashyak vyavastha garnu*) (CPN(M-L) 1999: 39).

the nineties, and had come to a head in 1998 with the 'red passport' scandal, involving MPs allowing improper use of their diplomatic passports. Corruption within the administration had also been the subject of increasing public complaint by aid donors. Yet, again, the HIMAL-MARG poll suggested it was not a central concern for most electors: only 7% selected it as the major problem facing the country.<sup>36</sup> One suspects that many electors, whilst certainly not approving of it, simply took it for granted as an inherent part of the social system.

The answer to the question of what was uppermost in voters' minds was quite simple: to borrow a slogan from the 1992 USA presidential campaign, "It's the economy, stupid!" Local lack of development was cited by 29% of respondents to the poll, rising prices by 28%, and unemployment by 18%. To attract votes, therefore, a party needed to appear able to improve the general economic situation, but, most importantly, to offer direct benefits to the voter and his community. This is not really inconsistent with evidence from a 1994 opinion survey that a candidate's *aphno manche* status or caste was even more important than the offer of a development project (SEARCH 1994: 91; Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 249). Someone closely connected to the voter would be thought more likely to steer benefits his or her way.

The parties offered contrasting prescriptions on how the benefits of development were to be achieved. As has already been seen, Congress was now identified more than ever with economic liberalism, whilst the UML, though not offering full-blooded socialist alternatives, wanted a larger role for the state sector. The NDP was nearer to Congress on the economy generally but it complained in its manifesto of the lack of transparency with which privatization had been conducted and also advocated curbs on the growing commercialization of education (Khanal and Hachhethu 1999: 17). On this second point the NDP appeared more distrustful of the private sector than the UML, which merely promised 'harmonization' of private and public education. The smaller Leftist parties continued to take a traditional communist stance.

### The conduct of the election

The campaigning process itself involved candidates representing 39 political parties (out of a total of 96 who had registered with the Election Commission) and 633 independents. There were, as in previous elections, a number

<sup>36</sup> *Spotlight*, 23/5/1999 (see fn. 12 above).

of violent clashes between party activists but the most serious disruption was the work of the Maoist insurgents. In March, the UML candidate in Rukum-2, who had himself previously been a Maoist, was murdered by his former comrades; and in neighbouring Rolpa district eight UML activists died when persons thought to be Maoists set fire to the house they were in.<sup>37</sup> It was also reported that police actually advised candidates in Rolpa to remain at district headquarters because they could not guarantee their safety if they visited the villages.

It was originally intended that polling would take place in 93 constituencies, including the Maoist-affected districts and the Kathmandu Valley, on May 3, and in the remaining 112 on 17 May. In the event, the deaths of Man Mohan Adhikari and of two other candidates resulted in postponed voting in Kathmandu-1 and 3 (8 June), Siraha-5 (19 June), and Sunsari-3 (26 June). Out of 13,518,839 registered voters, 8,649,664 or 65.79% cast their ballots. This compared with 62.01% in 1991 and 65.15% in 1994.

Voting was judged largely free and fair by most observers, but, as usual, there were irregularities in some areas and re-polling had to be ordered at 101 booths, compared with 51 in 1991 and 81 in 1994 (Khanal and Hachhethu 1999: 22). This was despite the fact that, in the interests of security, the number of booths had been reduced. This change in itself made it more difficult for individuals in remote areas to cast their votes and also increased the danger of others voting fraudulently in their name (Khanal and Hachhethu 1999: 9-10). Opposition parties claimed that Congress was guilty of widespread rigging, but there were also accusations against the UML, with the CPN(M-L) in particular alleging that it had been the victim of both major parties. In September 1999, a government minister was reported as admitting at a government seminar that rigging had taken place in 10% of cases, and that in his own constituency he had rigged in one village and his opponent had rigged in another!<sup>38</sup>

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's government resisted opposition demands for a parliamentary investigation into past irregularities but, following a boycott of

<sup>37</sup> Prachand subsequently promised 'investigations' into the incident whilst Baburam Bhattarai (*Deshantar*, 21/3/1999, in *Nepal Press Digest* 43: 13) appeared to deny outright that the perpetrators were Maoists.

<sup>38</sup> The minister, Govinda Bahadur Shah, had defeated the UML's Bim Bahadur Rawal in Accham-1 in far-western Nepal. The reported admission was made at a Kathmandu seminar organized by Amnesty International (*Kathmandu Post*, 11/9/1999).

parliament in August by the UML, it did agree to the formation of a committee to consider ways of improving the conduct of future elections.

The 1999 election was also sometimes marred by violent clashes between party workers. The most serious led to the deaths of five persons in Rautahat district where the UML general secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal, was contesting from constituencies 1 and 4. There were also widespread violations of the Election Commission's limits on election expenditure. These varied in different regions, with a maximum of 275,000 rupees allowed for each candidate in the Kathmandu Valley. At a seminar after the election, a member of the UML's central committee, Keshab Badal, suggested that the actual expenditure probably averaged between two and three million rupees, whilst the CPN(M-L)'s Hiranya Lal Shrestha alleged that one individual had spent over ten million (Khanal and Hachhethu 1999: 36).

By and large, the Maoists did not try to disrupt voting, whether because of the enhanced security measures or, as Prachand claimed, because it had never been their intention to do this. However, there was an unsuccessful attempt to seize a ballot box on its way to district headquarters in Rukum, whilst two Maoists were beaten to death when they allegedly first scolded and then physically attacked a group of voters returning from a polling station in Salyan. In addition, in the first reported attack by the insurgents on army personnel, two soldiers guarding a ballot box at a village in Rolpa were killed on 9 May. Turnout fell to around one third of the electorate in the areas where the Maoists were strongest, and there were also reports that some of those voting did so only under pressure from the authorities.

### The results and pointers for the future

The counting of votes began when the polls closed on 17 May and, contrary to most analysts' expectations of another hung parliament, Congress emerged as the clear winner with 110 seats (111 after the June polling) and 36.5% of the popular vote. This was just slightly more than the 35.4% it had obtained in Nepal's first parliamentary election in 1959 and slightly less than the 37.8% which secured it 110 seats in 1991. The UML won 71 seats as against the 69 won in 1991, its share of the vote being now 30.74% in comparison with 27.98% then. However, the return to the 1991 starting line in terms of numbers of seats obscured a rather different voting pattern. The total vote won by Leftist factions was more than 3% above the Congress total (see Table 3) and the party's victory was due principally to the split in the

UML in 1998. Although the Marxist-Leninists failed to gain a single seat, they secured 6.38% of the total vote. Had this gone instead to the UML candidates, the parent party would have won an additional 43 seats—40 from Congress and 3 from the NDP—thus gaining a comfortable overall majority.

Two other Communist factions, the NPF and the UPF, won five and one seat respectively, the winning candidate in every case having benefited from the UML's agreement to withdraw in his favour. The sole UPF winner was the party leader, Lilamani Pokhrel, while the successful NPF candidates included the two nominally independent Masal supporters who had been members of the previous parliament.

The NDP gained 11 seats, one more than its strength after the defection of the Chand group, and retained its status as third party. Like the Marxist-Leninists, the NDP(Chand) failed to gain any seats but affected the result by taking votes away from the parent party. In some cases the two factions had managed to agree on letting the other have a clear run, but in five constituencies their rivalry let in a candidate from a third party. The NDP leader, Surya Bahadur Thapa, lost to Sadbhavana in Sarlahi-2 for this reason, but managed to return to parliament by winning narrowly in Dhankuta-2 thanks to the ML/UML split. Another casualty was the NDP's Prakash Lohani, who lost to the UML by 15 votes. The NDP(Chand) itself missed victory in three seats (including both the Rupandehi constituencies contested by Deepak Bohora) because of votes going to NDP candidates. The NDP should have won the Sunsari-3 seat in June, since the UML had promised to back its candidate there in return for support in the other three constituencies voting that month. However, almost 6,000 UML voters disregarded their party's instructions and voted for the UML's own candidate, whose name remained on the ballot paper.<sup>39</sup>

Sadbhavana had mixed fortunes, increasing its number of MPs from three to five but suffering a decline in its total share of the vote and also the loss of Gajendra Narayan Singh's own seat in Saptari-2. His place as leader of the parliamentary party was taken by Badri Prasad Mandal, who defeated Shailaja Acharya, one of the three 'second-generation leaders' of Congress, in Morang-7.

<sup>39</sup> This was a repeat performance of what had happened in the by-elections at the beginning of 1997, when the UML had promised to support an NDP candidate in Baitadi-1 but failed to deliver on the bargain.

Looking at the overall voting pattern, the most significant feature is perhaps the emergence of the Left parties as the block with the highest popular support. This was not translated into a majority of seats, partly because of the general vagaries of the electoral system but principally because of the rivalry between the UML and ML. Apart from those who rejected participation in elections altogether, the Leftist groups all paid lip service to the principle of *ek tham ek bam* (a single Leftist candidate for each constituency). However, failure to achieve this in 1991 and 1994 had cost the Left as a whole 14 and 8 seats respectively; this figure had now increased to 42. The inability of the Marxist-Leninists to establish themselves as a credible force should mean, however, that many of their voters are likely to support the UML next time round, though some might, of course, become disillusioned with electoral politics altogether. The decline in votes going to the Left as a whole between 1991 and 1994 was due principally to the decision of the Prachand-Bhattarai group to abandon conventional politics.

A long-term drift towards the Left, with the UML its main beneficiary, is also predictable from the nature of the party's support base. A 1991 voter study highlighted the tendency of younger voters to support the Left (Ore *et al.* 1994: 63-4) and a later comparative analysis of election results suggested that a 1% increase in the 18-25 age-group boosted the communist vote by 2.36%.<sup>40</sup>

This does not, of course, necessarily argue that Nepali government policy will change radically, since the UML itself has moved towards the centre. It is likely, however, that the Communist 'trademark' will become increasingly attractive.

<sup>40</sup> According to an IDFS study, 'Third general election: emerging scenario'.

TABLE 1: 1999 ELECTION RESULTS:<sup>41</sup>

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	percentage of total seats	percentage of total votes
Nepali Congress	205	111	54.15	36.14
Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)	193	71	34.63	30.74
National Democratic Party	195	11	5.37	10.14
Nepal Sadbhavana Party	68	5	2.44	3.13
National People's Front	53	5	2.44	1.37
United People's Front	40	1	0.49	0.84
Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party	41	1	0.49	0.55
Communist Party of Nepal Marxist-Leninist	197	0	-	6.38
National Democratic Party (Chand)	184	0	-	3.33
Rastriya Janamukti Party	130	0	-	1.07
Nepal Janata Dal	24	0	-	0.13
Janamukti Party Nepal	26	0	-	0.11
Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist)	28	0	-	0.09
Nepal Dalit Shramik Morcha	22	0	-	0.08
Hariyali Nepal Party	45	0	-	0.07
Nepal Janata Party Rastriya Sambridibad	15	0	-	0.06

<sup>41</sup> Based on the Election Commission's website ([www.cybermatha.net/ec/](http://www.cybermatha.net/ec/)). Figures for the number of seats contested may be slightly different in other sources, presumably because of nominations being made and then withdrawn before polling.

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	percentage of total seats	percentage of total votes
Communist Party of Nepal (United)	19	0	-	0.06
Rastriya Janata Parishad	39	0	-	0.04
Shivasena Nepal	25	0	-	0.02
Jana Congress	12	0	-	0.02
Nepal Praja Parishad	8	0	-	0.01
Nepal Socialist Party	6	0	-	0.01
Bahujan Samaj Party Nepal	3	0	-	0.01
Nepal Janahit Party	1	0	-	-
Liberal Democratic Party	1	0	-	-
Sanyukta Prajatantra Pty	2	0	-	-
Nepal Rastriya Ekta Pty	1	0	-	-
Prajatantra Sagarmatha Dal	1	0	-	-
Save the Nation Movement	3	0	-	-
Samajbadi Garib Party	2	0	-	-
Socialist Democratic Party	3	0	-	-
Pragatishil Upayog Tatto Nepal	1	0	-	-
Mechi Mahakali Jana Samanvaya Dal	1	0	-	-
Nepal Samyabadi Party (Marxist-Leninist -Maoist)	3	0	-	-
Nepal Janabhavana Party	1	0	-	-
Nepal Rastrabadi Dal	1	0	-	-
Prajatantrik Nepali Janata Party	1	0	-	-
Nepal Suraksha Party	1	0	-	-
Rastrabadi Janata Party	1	0	-	-
Independents	633	0	-	2.83
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2238</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>97.25</b>

TABLE 2: SEATS WON IN SUCCESSIVE ELECTIONS

	1991	1994	1999
Nepali Congress	110	83	111
Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)	69	88	71
National Democratic Party	[4] <sup>42</sup>	20	11
Nepal Sadbhavana Party	6	3	5
United People's Front	9	-	1
National People's Front	-	[2] <sup>43</sup>	5
Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party	2	4	1
Communist Party of Nepal (United) <sup>44</sup>	2	-	-
Independents	4	7	-

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF VOTE OBTAINED BY MAJOR BLOCKS

	1991	1994	1999
Congress	37.75	33.85	36.14
The Left	36.82	34.40 <sup>45</sup>	39.48
UML	27.98	30.85	30.74
ML	-	-	6.38
Others	8.83	3.55	2.36
NDP	11.94	17.93	13.47
Thapa	5.38	-	10.14
Chand	6.56	-	3.33
Ethnic	4.57	4.54	4.20
Sadbhavana	4.10	3.49	3.13
RJMP <sup>46</sup>	0.47	1.05	1.07

<sup>42</sup> In 1991 Surya Bahadur Thapa and Lokendra Chand, having failed to agree on terms for establishing a single party, led separate organizations, viz. the National Democratic Party (Thapa) and the National Democratic Party (Chand).

<sup>43</sup> The Communist Party of Nepal (Masal), for which the National People's Front is simply an electoral vehicle, did not formally contest in 1994 but backed a number of nominally independent candidates, two of whom were elected.

<sup>44</sup> This party, originally the Manandhar faction of Keshar Jung Rayamajhi's pro-Soviet communist party, contested the 1991 election as the Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic), but adopted the new name at its merger with Tulsī Lal Amatya's and

Analyses of the working of the Nepalese political system, whether during the period of parliamentary experimentation in the 1950s, under the Panchayat regime, or after the 1990 return to democracy, normally emphasize the continuation of a personalized, patronage-based brand of politics, regardless of the constitutional form in which it is clothed.<sup>47</sup>

There is, of course, a danger in this line of argument since there is an implied contrast with a presumed 'modern' system in which ideology is all-important. Political systems in developed countries do not all operate on this pattern. One has only to think of the importance of factions led by powerful individuals within the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, or of the American Democratic and Republican Parties, which do not possess coherent and contrasting ideologies in the same way as 'classic' European parties of the Right or Left. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that in Nepal, as in developing countries generally, patronage networks do play a particularly important role. This is a continuation of the traditional way of doing things and is also reinforced by the divide between the traditional and modern sectors of the economy. Those operating at village level will tend to look to patrons with access to the modern sector and the ability to ensure that some of its benefits are passed down to village level.

In this kind of environment, behaviour stigmatizable as favoritism and corruption readily arises, and the situation worsened during the 1994-99 hung parliament. The constant changes in the administration as each set of new leaders sought to place its own people in influential or lucrative positions attracted a stream of criticism from the media and increasingly public protests from aid donors. It was widely argued that the situation was aggravated by successive rulings from the Supreme Court, which prevented an incumbent Prime Minister from calling mid-term elections so long as there was the possibility of forming a new government from within the current parliament. However, more frequent elections would not necessarily solve the problem

Krishna Verma's groups and retained it after the other groups again separated from it.

<sup>45</sup> This figure does not include votes obtained by independent candidates backed by the Masal group, two of whom were elected. Masal had boycotted the 1991 election while in 1999 it participated through its front organization, the NPF.

<sup>46</sup> I.e. the Rastriya Janamukti Party which claimed to represent the hill 'tribals'.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, the final chapter of Joshi and Rose (1966), Bergström (1980), or Hoftun *et al.* (1999: 247-51).

because they might result in another hung parliament, as the 1999 election itself had been expected to do. The basic problem is that if the political system makes frequent changes of government likely, it becomes important to insulate the civil service to some extent from political appointments.

As with civil service appointments, there was great difficulty in many other spheres in getting all sides to abide by agreed 'rules of the game'. This was particularly evident in the conduct of elections, since the party in power was sometimes guilty of putting improper pressure on the officials supervising the polls, and was certainly always suspected by its opponents of so doing. At local level, in cases where one party was considerably stronger than the others, activists would sometimes use their numerical superiority to take over polling stations and not allow supporters of other parties to vote freely. These practices were less common than the supporters of losing parties made out. However, they did exist and they contributed to an atmosphere of mistrust and to the belief that it was sensible to break the rules when one could get away with it as the other side would certainly do so.

The 'People's War' can be seen in one sense as an extension of such practices, with the insurgents not just trying to distort the rules of the system but to disregard them altogether. As with less dramatic forms of extra-legal activity, a vicious cycle is set up in which violence by one side justifies violence by the other. This had begun in Rolpa district even before the official start of the 'War'. In autumn 1995, after the fall of the UML government and the formation of Deuba's Congress-NDP-Sadbhavana coalition, there were serious clashes between the Maoists' activists and those of other parties, and also with the police, who had been drafted into the area in a special security operation. Both the Bhattarai group and a number of other Leftist parties accused the security forces of bringing false charges and torturing detainees, but there was certainly also intimidation of opponents by the Maoists.<sup>48</sup>

The insurgency which commenced in February 1996, though undeniably an important new development, was also an escalation of a problem which already existed.

<sup>48</sup> Des Chene (1998: 46) focuses on a major police operation in the run-up to the November 1994 elections. However, the 1995 clashes attracted by far the most media attention, and there may be some confusion between the two episodes.

Estimates of the seriousness of the current situation vary widely. Except when trying to make the case for extra powers for the security forces, governments have generally tended to stress that the problem is largely under control. Others sometimes speak and write as if it portends the total collapse of the present Nepalese state structure. In fact, it is probably still best regarded as a central phenomenon in marginal areas but a marginal force in the central ones, an aspect well brought out by Gyawali (1998). Rural-based guerilla movements have often been able to supplant regular state authority in areas of the countryside but generally fail to gain control of the major, urban centres of power unless other factors come into play. The classic example is Mao's own movement, which could probably have maintained itself indefinitely in Yanan but would not have made itself master of China without the situation produced by the Japanese assault on China and the subsuming of this struggle into a world war.<sup>49</sup>

The Maoists have been able to gain a hold on Rolpa and other backward areas precisely because they are not of crucial economic importance and were only weakly penetrated by the Nepalese state. The government had hitherto relied on a small number of local 'big men', who owed their influence partly to state patronage but were also chosen partly because they were already influential. Social control was maintained by these individuals and also through the self-regulating mechanisms of village communities. The traditional order has broken down with an increasing imbalance between resources and population, and as local people become increasingly aware of the benefits available through 'development' but enjoy little personal access to them. In this situation it was possible for would-be revolutionaries to win over recruits and to supplant rival wielders of influence, whether they be local landowners or government-appointed school teachers.

In dealing with the security aspect of the problem, there are two theoretical alternatives available to the government. The first, which has been put into practice intermittently, is to rely on intensive, large-scale military action against areas where insurgents are based in large numbers.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Dixit (1998b) provides a detailed comparison of the Nepalese situation with that in China and elsewhere, arguing that the conditions that have enabled armed revolutionaries to triumph in certain countries do not exist in Nepal.

<sup>50</sup> The word used should perhaps be 'para-military' rather than 'military' since under existing legislation the police, not the army, has to deal with the situation and any change in this policy would be highly controversial politically.

This approach almost inevitably leads to casualties among the general population and to widespread human rights abuses. The method can work, nevertheless, and it enabled Chiang Kai Shek to force Mao and his comrades out of their original base in southern China. It was also used successfully by Mao himself against the Tibetans in 1959 and, arguably, by the Indian government to break the back of Sikh separatism in the Panjab. In his 1998 *Janadesh* interview, Prachand appeared aware of this possibility but seemed confident that left-wing forces generally would be sufficiently powerful to stop the state bringing its full force to bear against the rebels.

The second approach would be more surgical, with lower intensity but longer-term operations and a greater reliance on intelligence gathering at village level and on special-forces operations against insurgents in the jungles. This would not automatically prevent human rights abuses but it would reduce them. It would need to go hand-in-hand with efforts to improve facilities in the affected areas: for governments, as indeed for insurgents themselves, sticks and carrots are not exclusive alternatives but complementary measures. It might be possible to secure a consensus between the two main political parties to back such a policy, with a renewed emphasis on the rule of law. This would imply the UML and the constitutional Left backing firm action against law breaking by would-be revolutionaries whilst the new Congress government made a greater effort to bring police behaviour more into line with the laws theoretically controlling it. Given the ethos common in police forces throughout South Asia, this will not be easy, but a start could and should be made.

Despite the 'People's War' and many other problems, the record of multi-party democracy since 1990 does have some positive aspects. Though the trend was obscured by events in the two years before the 1999 election, a stable three-party or perhaps just two-party system appears to be developing. After their recent *débat*, the CPN(M-L) and the NDP(Chand) are likely to see the bulk of their activists returning to their parent organizations, whilst many of those in either of the NDP factions may be considering a move to one of the two main parties. Minor parties are unlikely to be eliminated altogether but their role will probably remain minor. Should the Maoists at some point abandon the use of force they would probably be accommodated within the system as a new third party, supplanting (and probably hastening the decline of) the NDP.

In addition, although worries have sometimes been expressed about the palace attempting to claw back some of the power surrendered in 1990, the constitutional monarchy has worked reasonably well over the last nine years. In particular, the Supreme Court has been accepted as the referee by all parties and, whether or not one likes the restraints it has imposed on prime ministerial power, the rule is now clear for everyone to see.

A second cause for mild self-congratulation is that the ethnic and religious divisions within the country, though certainly of some political importance, do not seem likely to split it asunder. The overwhelming majority of voters opted for mainstream parties with support throughout the country. Even the tendency for Congress to be more popular in the west and the UML in the east, which seemed to be emerging in 1991, was weakened in 1994. Though the 1999 results seemed at first sight partly to restore it, this is really only because of the distorting effects of the UML/Marxist-Leninist split. It is only in a small number of constituencies right along the western border that one can still discern a 'Congress belt', possibly connected with the ascendancy in this region of Sher Bahadur Deuba, who won in his own Dadelhdhura constituency by the widest margin of the election (20,811 votes).

Parties appealing specifically to particular ethnic groups, regions, or religious communities do exist but have attracted minimal support. Gore Bahadur Khapangi's Rastriya Janamukti Morcha, formed to advance the interests of the hill 'tribals', had never been a credible force. The upward trend in its vote (from 0.47% in 1991 to 1.07% in 1999) was simply the result of its putting up more candidates to lose for it at successive elections. In fact, the sheer variety of ethnic groups in the hills and their generally interspersed settlement patterns, plus the fact that the Nepali language and Parbatiya culture formed the one framework which linked them all, meant that the prospects for any 'ethnic' party were limited. In the Tarai the use of Hindi as a link language and the cross-border nature of the main castes and ethnic groups made regionalism a theoretical possibility, but Sadbhavana was clearly failing to capitalize on it. The 1990s saw occasional trouble between Hindus and Muslims in Tarai districts where the latter were settled in large numbers, whilst Hindu traditionalists quite frequently voiced complaints about Christian proselytization. However, none of this had any significant effect on the election campaign, and Shivasena Nepal, modeled on the genuinely menacing Maharashtrian prototype, found few to vote for its 25 candidates.

These reasons for cautious optimism should not, of course, detract attention from democratic Nepal's failure to meet the economic expectations of 1990. The liberalization policy followed by Congress governments appeared to have some success in increasing investment in the early nineties, but the growth rate fell to under 4% in 1997 and around 2% in 1998.<sup>51</sup>

Agricultural productivity remained low, despite the priority given to boosting this in the 'Agricultural Perspective Plan' adopted in 1995.<sup>52</sup>

To date (October 1999), the Bhattarai government, dominated by familiar faces and hampered by the old tension between party and government, has shown little sign of being able to tackle this fundamental problem. Nevertheless, despite the desperate position in which many of the poorest find themselves, the majority of the rural population are still managing to 'get by' with a variety of strategies, including reliance on foreign remittance earnings, which may amount to as much as 25% of recorded GNP (Seddon *et al.* 1998: 5). Failure to achieve a real breakthrough on the economic front is unlikely to result in an apocalyptic collapse of the Nepalese state of the type many seem to fear (and for which some on the radical Left may hope) but will continue to blight individual lives. It remains to be seen whether the government, and the political parties generally, will be able to marshal the will needed to make real progress.

<sup>51</sup>Figures from a report by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific, cited in *Rising Nepal*. 9/4/1999 (*Nepal Press Digest*, 43: 15).

<sup>52</sup> The strategy, set out in detail in APROSC and JMA (1995), includes plans to boost irrigation, fertilizer and extension service inputs as well as road construction. A summary extract is given in *Nepal South Asia Centre* (1998: 218) and a critical discussion is provided by Cameron (1998).

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# Problems of Democracy in Nepal<sup>1</sup>

Pancha N. Maharjan

## Background

Nepal, the only Hindu kingdom in the world, is situated between two giant neighbours, India and China. It was unified by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768. In 1846 Jang Bahadur Rana seized power. He became Prime Minister and devised a hereditary system of prime ministership with an agnatic line of succession. The Ranas became de facto rulers and the King a figurehead. For 104 years Rana Prime Ministers kept the King like a prisoner in a jail.

In order to free themselves from the autocratic Rana rule, people formed political parties with the help of King Tribhuvan and launched a movement during the 1940s. In this movement, the revolutionary forces were supported by the King and also received support from newly independent India. In view of the dangers this development posed, the Prime Minister Padma Shamsher Rana announced a constitution on January 26 1948 and promised to rule according to it. The main characteristic of this constitution was its provision for elections to village and town Panchayats (councils), district assemblies, and the legislature (Lower House). But Padma Shamsher's brothers did not give him a chance to enforce this constitution and forced him to resign. Subsequently, Mohan Shamsher Rana came to power in February 1948. The struggle against the Rana regime reached a climax in 1951 when the Ranas were forced to hand over power to the King and the political parties.

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper presented at the IAS in Leiden on 5 February 1999 and at the NIAS in Copenhagen on 19 March 1999. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my friend Bert van den Hoek for his help and valuable comments on this paper. I am also extremely grateful to Dr David Gellner and Dr Michael Hutt, who gave me an opportunity to present this paper at Brunel University and SOAS in London.

### The Dawn of Democracy in Nepal

The year 1951 is considered to be the dawn of democracy in the history of Nepal. On February 18 1951 King Tribhuvan formed a Rana-Congress coalition government and proclaimed his desire to govern according to a democratic constitution which was to be framed by the elected representatives of the people themselves (Joshi and Rose 1966: 91). However, the King's intentions were not fulfilled, due to conflicts between three forces: the King himself, the Ranas, and the people. The King wished to be an absolute monarch, the Ranas wanted to regain their lost power, and the people wanted to see neither an absolute monarch nor the re-emergence of the Ranas. In November 1951 the Ranas were ousted from power forever. There were also conflicts between the leaders of the political parties, which strengthened the King's position. In this game, the leaders of the political parties proved themselves to be more loyal to the King than to the people or to democracy. Thus, the King changed the government several times, and general elections were not held until 18 February 1959.<sup>2</sup> The elected Nepali Congress government then tried to implement its election promises, including the nationalization of forests, abolition of the *zamindari* system, land reform, a progressive land tax, the fixing of a ceiling on land holdings, and protection of peasants' rights. The landlords reacted against these policies: they successfully lobbied the nominated members of the Upper House of the parliament, receiving support from most of the smaller parties there, and made a nationwide protest which called for the King to intervene in the government. Taking advantage of the shortsightedness of the leaders of most of the small political parties and the persistence of a feudal culture, King Mahendra, the son of Tribhuvan, dismissed the newly formed democratic government and dissolved the parliament on December 15 1960.

### The End of Democracy

After ending parliamentary democracy in Nepal, King Mahendra took all the executive, legislative and judiciary powers into his own hands and ruled directly for two years before introducing the partyless Panchayat system.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> Elections were held to 109 seats of the House of Representatives. Only nine political parties and independents participated, with a total of 786 candidates contesting. The Nepali Congress secured 74 seats, the Gorkha Parishad 19 seats, the Samyukta Prajatantrik Party 5 seats, the Communist Party of Nepal 4 seats, the Praja Parishad (T.P. Acharya) 2 seats, the Praja Parishad (Mishra) only one seat. The Nepal Tarai Congress, the Nepali Rastriya Congress, and the Prajatantrik Mahasabha failed to win any seats.

<sup>3</sup> The Panchayat system had four layers: (i) National Panchayat (legislature), (ii) Zonal

first elections to the village and town Panchayats (councils) were held in February 1962 without any constitutional provision, because a new constitution was not promulgated until December 1962. Elections were conducted by counting the raised hands of the voters. Subsequently, the 'Back to the Village National Campaign'<sup>4</sup> was made into a constitutional institution and all the authorities relating to the elections were subject to it. This institution controlled the selection of election candidates from village to national level on the basis of their loyalty. This not only excluded the candidates of political parties but also prevented the emergence of an alternative leadership, especially from the younger generation within the partyless system. This created conflicts within the system on the one hand and heavy opposition from outside the system on the other. Due to a students' strike on 6 April 1979, King Birendra was compelled to proclaim a referendum on 24 May 1979, which was held on 2 May 1980. In the referendum two options were offered to the people: a 'multiparty system' or a 'Panchayat system with some changes'. The referendum resulted in 54.8 % voting for the Panchayat system and 45.1 % for a multiparty system, although there were allegations that the government had manipulated the vote. Accordingly, a third amendment to the constitution was made: direct elections on the basis of adult franchise were introduced, but the participation of political parties remained banned. Elections were held in 1981 and 1986 after this amendment to the constitution but, due to the ban on participation by political parties, there was vehement opposition to the system and a Movement for the Restoration of Democracy was launched in February 1990.

### The Restoration of Democracy

The Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was launched jointly Panchayat (abolished by the 1st amendment of the constitution), (iii) District Panchayat, (iv) Town and Village Panchayat. The electoral constituencies for the National Panchayat were based on geographical boundaries, i.e. the 75 districts.

<sup>4</sup> In the beginning, the 'Back to the Village National Campaign' was a campaign in which King Mahendra called on all the intellectuals as well as bureaucrats to go to work in the villages for one day each year. In the name of this campaign politicians made the BVNC into an institution, and through the second amendment of the constitution it was made a constitutional institution, the Gaun Farka Samiti (committee). Then all the authority involved in elections—candidate selection, candidate invalidation, election cancellation, reelection, etc.—was shifted to it. Mostly, the committee used to conduct elections on the basis of a consensus model, deleting disliked persons from the candidate lists. For this, the committee had formed sub-committees from national to village level. These would conduct elections at each level.

by the Nepali Congress (NC) and the United Left Front (ULF).<sup>5</sup> To support the MRD, other radical communist parties also formed the United National Peoples' Movement (UNPM).<sup>6</sup> The MRD was headed by Ganesh Man Singh, the Supreme Leader of the Nepali Congress. It was started in February 1990 and succeeded in overturning the autocratic Panchayat system within 50 days. Thus multiparty democracy based on a constitutional monarchy was restored in April 1990. His Majesty the King immediately proclaimed that there would be a House of Representatives with 205 seats (a Lower House directly elected by the people) and a National Assembly or Upper House with 60 members, of whom 10 would be nominated by the King, 15 elected by the members of the District Development Committees of the 5 regions,<sup>7</sup> and 35 proportionately elected by the parties in the Lower House.

Before the elections, various communist forces had tried to form a single umbrella organization, but they fell apart into different alliances. These included: (a) a merging of the Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist (CPN-M) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist/Leninist (CPN-ML) to form the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist; henceforth UML); and (b) the combining of three radical communist forces—the Communist Party of Nepal-Fourth Convention (CPN-FC), the Communist Party of Nepal (Masal/Prachanda), and the Communist Party of Nepal (People Oriented/Ruplal)—to form the Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre) for the purpose of boycotting the elections.

The Unity Centre later formed the United People's Front of Nepal (UPFN) to bring together those communist forces which differed with the UML, yet wanted to contest the elections. This Front comprised the members of one faction of Communist Party of Nepal (Mashal (Mohan Bikram)), Communist Part of Nepal (Masal (Prachanda)), CPN-FC, the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party (NWPP), Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist/Leninist/Maoist (MLM), and some independents. In this way the Unity Centre played a double role: it was boycotting as well as participating in the elections, under

<sup>5</sup> The ULF was formed by various communist parties: CPN(Marxist), CPN(Marxist-Leninist), CPN(Verma), CPN-Democratic(Manandhar), CPN(Tulsilal), CPN(Fourth Convention), Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party, and independent communists.

<sup>6</sup> The UNPM was formed by the CPN (Masal [Prachanda]), CPN (Mashal [Mohan Bikram]), CPN(People Oriented [Ruplal]), CPN(League), and CPN (MLM).

<sup>7</sup> For administrative purposes, Nepal is divided into 75 districts and 5 regional development centres.

two different names. By playing this double role it showed its lack of faith in the parliamentary system by remaining in underground politics, but also kept in touch with the people by participating in the elections. Only the members of the UPFN came into the public sphere, while the members of the Unity Centre remained underground. In this way they were engaged in semi-underground politics. From the very formation of the UPFN, suspicions and conflicts between the members were apparent. As a result, the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party left the UPFN before the 1991 elections and the CPN(Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) did so afterwards. The Unity Centre split into two further groups before the 1994 elections. At present, one faction under the Unity Centre led by Nirmal Lama participates in the parliamentary process, but did not win any seats in the 1994 mid-term elections. On the other hand, the underground Unity Centre led by Prachanda launched a Maoist insurgency movement in February 1996 but the leadership of the movement was given to Dr. Baburam Bhattarai.

To contest the 1991 elections, 48 political parties had applied to the Election Commission for registration, and the Commission recognized 43 of them. Only seven of these succeeded in winning seats: the NC, the UML, the UPFN, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP), the NWPP, and the CPN-D. The NC became the majority party, the UML became the second largest party, and the radical communist UPFN became the third force in Nepalese politics.

Among these parties, the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist parties had historical links with the struggle for democracy in Nepal of the 1940s. The root of all the other communist parties was the same but they had split into different factions during their period underground in the Panchayat system. The Nepal Sadbhavana party emerged in the 1970s demanding regional rights for the Tarai people known as 'Madheshi' (Nepali citizens of Indian origin). The two Rastriya Prajatantra ('National Democratic') Parties were formed by members of the Panchayat system's old guard on the same day and with the same name: Rastriya Prajatantra Party (Thapa) and Rastriya Prajatantra Party (Chand). In the early 1990s both parties were popularly known as 'Panchayati Party', 'Mandale Party', or 'Conservative Party'. They united in 1992 but split again after their national convention in 1998. Only the Nepali Congress and the UML have nationwide organizational networks, while the influence of the other parties is confined to particular areas. According to the origins, natures, and ideologies of the parties, they can be divided into four categories: social democratic (NC); communist (UML,

UPFN, NWPP, CPN-D, etc.: these can be categorized in different terms, but in terms of their roots and ideology it is logical to label them communist); regional (NSP); and conservative (RPP).

General elections for the 205 seats of the House of Representatives were held on 12 May 1991 and the results were as follows:

NC	110
UML	69
UPFN	9
RPP	4
NSP	6
NWPP	2
CPN-D	2
Independents	3

Thus, the Nepali Congress formed a government under the premiership of Girija Prasad Koirala. The newly formed government proposed programmes including (i) free education for all up to higher secondary level (tenth level); (ii) an end to the dual-ownership of land;<sup>8</sup> (iii) programmes for squatters and landless people; (iv) health posts in all villages; (v) transportation link roads to district headquarters; (vi) rural development programmes; (vii) the provision of communication facilities in all villages; (viii) privatization, etc.

However, Prime Minister Koirala faced many problems from the opposition as well as within his party from the beginning. In opposition, the UML declared that it would topple the government within two months. Next, a civil servants' strike broke out demanding a salary increase, as well as several other strikes

<sup>8</sup> The Land Reform Act of 1964 had provided tenants with security of tenure and part ownership. Under the law, if a landlord wanted to remove his tenant he was obliged to compensate the tenant with 25% of the land. After 1990, tenants were demanding that the legal provision be changed to 50% instead of 25%, while, on the other hand, communists were encouraging the tenants to demand 'land to the tillers'. The NC government brought in a programme to end the dual ownership of land. Land was categorized into three regions: hill, Tarai, and Kathmandu Valley. On the basis of this categorization, levels of compensation were fixed at 30% for the hills, 40% for the Tarai, and 50% for the Valley. Accordingly, any party, whether landlord, tenant, or jointly, can submit an application to the office concerned to remove the dual ownership of land.

or 'Nepal-bandhs'.<sup>9</sup> When Koirala concluded a treaty on water resources with India, the Tanakpur Barrage Project, this was strongly contested by the opposition parties. As supreme leader of the Nepali Congress, Ganesh Man Singh warned the Prime Minister that he should present all the documents relating to the treaty in the parliament because, according to the constitution, any treaty concluded by the government regarding national resources had to be ratified by a two-thirds majority in parliament. Until the Supreme Court's decision in this case, the Prime Minister hesitated to bring it to parliament and made many efforts to ratify the treaty by a simple majority. In 1992 the Unity Centre called a strike in memory of the 'martyrs' who had died in the movement for the restoration of democracy. In this strike more than a dozen people were killed in encounters with the police and a curfew was imposed for 24 hours. The problem was solved only with the help of the party president and supreme leader of the Nepali Congress, through an agreement with the UML. Later in 1992, expecting to receive support from dissident Congress MPs, the UML tabled a vote of no-confidence motion against the Koirala government. In this case, Ganesh Man Singh supported Koirala. Though he condemned the Prime Minister in a number of cases, he always supported the government when it ran into trouble. However, when Koirala could not get the support of 36 MPs of his Nepali Congress in the vote of thanks motion to his Majesty the King for his royal address in parliament, he dissolved the parliament and unexpectedly called a mid-term poll.

Mid-term elections were held in November 1994, and produced a hung parliament along the following lines:

UML	88
NC	83
RPP	20
NWPP	4
NSP	3
Independents	7

<sup>9</sup> A 'Nepal-Bandh' is a kind of strike. *bandh* means 'closed'. In a *bandh*, a political party or parties calls for shops to be closed throughout Nepal. If they find shops opening they may harm them. (Sometimes a *bandh* may occur only on a local level.)

This hung parliament became an unfortunate state of affairs for the Nepalese democratic process. It produced seven different governments in less than five years:

- (1) UML minority government in November 1994;
- (2) NC-RPP-NSP coalition government in September 1995;
- (3) RPP-UML-NSP coalition government in March 1997;
- (4) RPP-NC-NSP coalition government in October 1997;
- (5) NC minority government in April-May 1998;
- (6) NC-ML government in August 1998;
- (7) NC-UML-NSP coalition government in January 1999 (purely for the purposes of the elections of May 1999).

#### **The Minority Government 1994-5**

Due to the lack of a majority party, the largest party in parliament, the UML, formed a minority government in November 1994. Historically, this was Nepal's first communist government. For a minority government it introduced a large number of programmes. Among them were 'Build Our Village Ourselves' (BOVO); a monthly allowance of 100 rupees for the elderly; programmes for squatters and landless people; programmes for depressed and suppressed communities; and other programmes in the fields of education, culture, health, and irrigation. However, all these were more in the nature of propaganda to catch the sentiments of the elderly and rural people. Accordingly, the government allocated Rs. 500,000 to each village under the BOVO. These funds were distributed without any policy, programme, or planning through the hands of political cadres with a political and ethnic bias (the party is dominated by Brahmins, and this was reflected in the distribution of these funds. Even in their home territory, known as the 'red fort' Jhapa district in eastern Nepal, for instance, they hesitated to distribute even a little in villages dominated by the Tamang hill ethnic group) (Maharjan 1998a: 178). The UML government was politicizing every field—the bureaucracy, the police, education, corporations, the media, etc. It ignored the other parties and forgot the reality of being a minority government which could collapse at any time. These things worried the other parties and compelled the NC, RPP, and NSP to unite in voting for a no-confidence motion in September 1995. The minority government collapsed after nine months.

#### **Coalition Governments**

After the success of the no-confidence motion, a coalition government of NC-RPP-NSP was formed under the leadership of Sher Bahadur Deuba (NC) on 13 September 1995. After the formation of the government, the three coalition partners agreed on a 10-point programme to run the government. These were:

1. Commitment to strengthen democratic norms and values based on constitutional monarchy and parliamentary system;
2. Emphasis on sustainable development;
3. Maintenance of a balanced foreign policy;
4. Encouragement to the private sector in development activities;
5. Utilization of water resources through bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation, keeping the national interest as a topmost priority;
6. Making the village a focal point of development activities;
7. Depoliticization of educational institutions, including universities;
8. Respect for the liberty, integrity, and impartiality of the media with a policy of developing the government-run media into national media;
9. Arrangement to provide citizenship to all Nepalis born and residing in the country;
10. Launching a specific program to uplift the living standards of the backward and deprived section of the people including the scheduled castes [sic], Janajati [minority groups] and the Madheshi community [Tarai people] (CNAS 1996: 19).

From the formation of the government onward, the Prime Minister had to face problems not on policy matters but in terms of power. His Nepali Congress colleagues, and coalition partners who were not included in the cabinet, started to threaten his government. Then those who were included in the cabinet as assistant ministers were not satisfied with their positions and demanded to be upgraded. In order to maintain the government, the Prime Minister expanded the cabinet three times to include as many as 48 members. He was not only compelled to enlarge the cabinet, but also pressured to upgrade some members who were in cabinet positions. He was heavily criticized in all sectors—by intellectuals, in the press, by opposition parties, and even by his party president because of his 'Jumbo Cabinet'. In

reaction to this he said that he had been compelled to take these measures. None the less, two major treaties with India—the Mahakali treaty on water resources and the Trade and Transit treaty—were concluded during his term and should be considered noteworthy achievements. However, these were not assessed highly by others and did not give him a chance to work properly. He was pressured to include more persons in the cabinet, to upgrade positions, or to provide privileges such as increments in the allowances paid to the law makers, the purchase of duty-free Pajero motors (later this came to be termed the 'Pajero Culture'), chances to travel abroad, etc. In order to save the government he encouraged dirty politics and corruption. Deuba's colleague and vice-president of the Nepali Congress, Shailaja Acharya, made a nationwide march to make the people aware of corruption and dirty politics.

At the same time the UML, Deuba's coalition partner the NSP, and the Chand faction of the RPP, tabled motions of no confidence in March 1996, December 1996 and March 1997. Deuba could easily survive the first no-confidence motion with the help of his senior colleagues Girija Prasad Koirala and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, but the UML and RPP-Chand were angered and did not stay aloof from a plot to bring another motion. For this, the RPP (Chand) group offered 5 million rupees to four RPP central committee members (Renu Yadav, Thakur Singh Tharu, Ramchandra Raya, and Ramlochan Mahato) if they would change their loyalty from Thapa to Chand.<sup>10</sup> With much effort, the UML, the RPP(Chand), and the NSP tabled a second no-confidence motion in December 1996. To defeat the motion the government had sent five MPs abroad, keeping some at unknown places, and blackmailing another. In spite of all these efforts, the vote of no confidence created a constitutional problem. 101 MPs stood in favour and 86 against the motion. Constitutionally, 103 votes are required to pass a no-confidence motion, but 86 votes against the motion meant that Deuba had not secured sufficient votes of confidence. All the opposition parties called on him to resign on moral grounds, but he refused because of the lack of any constitutional provision to cover this case. In March 1997, however, he could not survive due to the absence of two MPs (Chakra B. Shahi and Deepak Jung Shah) belonging to his own party. The RPP had successfully persuaded these two Nepali Congress MPs to absent themselves during the motion.

After the motion, an RPP-led coalition government consisting of UML-RPP-NSP was formed. This government held local elections in 1997. Due to over-

<sup>10</sup> This was publicly disclosed by Surya Bahadur Thapa in a talk programme organized by the Political Science Association of Nepal, June 19 1996.

politicization and over-manipulation in the local elections, this government could not last long and in October 1997 it was replaced by an NC-RPP-NSP coalition government led by Surya Bahadur Thapa. Before bringing the motion, Koirala and Thapa had made a secret understanding for a long term but Thapa had to quit the government due to pressure from Koirala in April 1998. The ML split from the UML in 1998 and then, to win a confidence motion, Koirala promised to include the ML in the government. Consequently, the ML joined the cabinet, but made ten demands, of which one was for the replacement of the Inspector General of Police. When this was not fulfilled by the Prime Minister, the ML withdrew from the government. Prime Minister Koirala then dissolved the parliament and called for mid-term elections to be held in March. The ML submitted a letter to the King, asking him to call a special session of the parliament to table a no-confidence motion against the Koirala government. Accordingly, the King decreed a special session. To get a vote of confidence, Prime Minister Koirala asked other parties to participate in the government for the purposes of the May 1999 general election. The opposition parties were demanding that a national government should be formed to hold the elections. At the same time, some MPs from the Nepali Congress itself were in favour of elections being held in November 1999. However, the UML was ready to go along with Prime Minister Koirala in order to marginalize the ML. Then the UML and the NSP joined the government and voted in favour of a confidence motion held on 14 January 1999. After securing the confidence motion, the Prime Minister dissolved the parliament and declared an election for May.

### Problems of Democracy

A hung parliament and its consequences—minority governments, coalition governments, the tabling of no-confidence motions, and the splitting of parties—should not be considered problems of democracy. These are the corrective measures of the democratic process when the executive and the parties neglect democratic norms. Unfortunately, a side effect of these 'corrective measures' has been an increase of corruption and instability. That a decline in moral values certainly destroys democratic norms must be considered a problem of democracy. All these things are happening in Nepal's democratic process only because of an undemocratic culture among the politicians. Their undemocratic behaviour caused political enmities to develop among the politicians at both inter-party and intra-party levels. The instability of the governments as well as all the no-confidence motions tabled in the House were produced solely by inter-party and intra-party enmities among the politicians,

which aggravated problems such as price increases, unemployment, corruption, politicization, insecurity, a Maoist insurgency, and ethnic problems. These have become the problems of democracy in Nepal. They are the by-products of the undemocratic political culture of the politicians. These problems have been increasing very rapidly since the formation of the majority government of the Nepali Congress in 1991.

#### **Inter-party enmity**

After the formation of the Nepali Congress government in 1991, the UML declared that it would topple the government within two months. This was done not merely because of any policy or programmes, but because of an ideological difference, i.e. inter-party enmity. Other examples of inter-party enmity are the UML-supported strike by civil servants; the opposition parties' condemnation of the treaty on the Tanakpur Barrage concluded with India in 1991; and the 1992 strike organised by the CPN(Unity Centre).

After the mid-term election of 1994, all the no-confidence motions tabled in the House were basically guided by inter-party enmity rather than being based on policies or programmes. The RPP's support for the first no-confidence motion tabled against the minority government was based on inter-party enmity because, at the beginning of the restoration of democracy, the UML had accused the RPP of being a 'reactionary party' and a 'Mandale party'. The UML treated the RPP as second-class citizens, hence the RPP had an attitude of enmity towards the UML. It therefore supported the motion and became a coalition partner of the Nepali Congress. However, in subsequent no-confidence motions, the UML also sided with the RPP to take revenge on the Nepali Congress. Next, the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party (NWPP) did not vote for the UML during the no-confidence motion, because it resented the defection by its Dailekh MP to the UML. Similarly, it did not vote in the no-confidence motion for the Nepali Congress either, because the NC had sent one NWPP MP (Bhakta B. Rokaya from Jumla district) to India during the motion. Similarly, the ML joined with the Nepali Congress government due to its enmity with the UML, and the UML joined the Nepali Congress coalition government only because of its enmity with ML.

#### **Intra-party enmity**

This is the problem to which most of the parties in the parliament are most vulnerable, and it has existed since the majority government of the Nepali Congress in 1991. In the beginning, Ganesh Man Singh, who had been given the honorary title of 'Supreme Leader' of the Nepali Congress, advised the

Prime Minister not to appoint corrupt people or defeated candidates and to achieve an ethnic balance in political appointments. These were the best suggestions for running the government under the new democracy. But Koirala took it negatively and argued that the Supreme Leader always created trouble and spoke against the Brahmins. Ganesh Man Singh suggested that all the documents on the Tanakpur Barrage treaty should be presented in parliament. If the parliament considered it to be a treaty, i.e. not just an agreement, it should be ratified by a two-thirds majority in the parliament. The Prime Minister retorted that the Supreme Leader always spoke against the party. In this way enmity between the leaders developed. Later, Ganesh Man Singh left the party to which he had devoted his whole life.

The enmity in the party heightened further when the Prime Minister sacked six ministers in December 1991 without consulting the Supreme Leader or the party president, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. In this case the party supremo's reaction was that it was a massacre of his own friends. This not only hurt Ganesh Man Singh, but also hurt the party president Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Because of this perceived arrogance on the part of the Prime Minister, one group in the Nepali Congress started to persuade Bhattarai to contest the by-elections in February 1994 in order to counter the Prime Minister in parliament. This conspiracy was made to fail by a counter-conspiracy of the Prime Minister. The incident further magnified the problem of enmity, and revenge was taken on the Prime Minister by abstentions from the vote of thanks motion in July 1994. Purely because of the enmity between the two leaders, the Prime Minister dissolved parliament and went to the polls. Later, intra-party tensions were exacerbated by the attempts to form coalition governments. Everyone would demand positions in the cabinet. Those who were not given the chance would threaten to go against the government. It was proved by the Deuba cabinet, which the Prime Minister was compelled to enlarge and enlarge, as he publicly stated.

In the UML, there was also a difference between majority and minority groups. The majority group belonged to the party's general secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal, and the minority group to Chandra Prakash Mainali (previously the general secretary of the party). They differed in their voting on the Mahakali treaty in parliament and intra-party differences became a major problem when Bamdev Gautam tried to become general secretary of the party during his deputy premiership, thus threatening the incumbent general secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal. Through a decision of a Central Committee meeting, Bamdev Gautam was degraded from his position of deputy general

secretary. This hurt Bamdev Gautam so badly that he successfully persuaded a minority group to split from the party.

In the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa had been political enemies ever since the Panchayat system. Therefore, in the beginning, they had formed two different parties. Though they later merged, Thapa was sympathetic to the Nepali Congress and Chand to the UML and at last they had to split because of their historical enmity.

Even in a small party such as the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, which had only three representatives in parliament, the general secretary Hridayesh Tripathi showed sympathy for the UML whereas the party president Gajendra Narayan Singh had a soft spot for the Nepali Congress. This problem created political enmity between the two top leaders of the party. Later, Tripathi formed his own party, the Nepal Samajbadi Janata Dal, but formally he is still representing the NSP in the parliament.

Rising prices, corruption, unemployment, insecurity, politicization, the Maoist problem, and ethnic problems are the most burning issues in Nepal today. While tabling no-confidence motions, all the opposition parties charged the government with increasing these problems rather than solving them, but as soon as they became a part of the government themselves they would leave these matters alone rather than trying to solve them. When Shailaja Acharya spoke the truth about the corruption prevailing in the ministries she was forced to resign from the post on charges of having spoken against her party's government.

#### Corruption

While Girija Prasad Koirala was Prime Minister in 1991, reportedly, the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) appointed an incompetent agent in Europe on the recommendation of Sujata Koirala, the daughter of the Prime Minister, and this led to a heavy financial loss to RNAC. Later the government formed an inquiry commission to find out the facts and Koirala had to face this inquiry commission during the UML's period in office. During the Nepali Congress-ML government, the ML tourism minister was charged with indulging in the misuse of money by hiring a plane from the Chase air company. In this case, RNAC had misused US \$700,000 to hire the plane in contravention of official rules and regulations. Later, RNAC neither got the plane, nor was it refunded the money. In this case also an inquiry commission was formed and the inquiry is still going on. Similarly, at the time of the NC-RPP-NSP coalition government, the agriculture minister Padma Sundar

Lawati (of the RPP) concluded an agreement with the Nichimen Company for the supply of fertilizer and cancelled the tender of Pearl Developers Company, despite the fact that the latter company was ready to deliver the fertilizer at a lower cost. Through this deal it is alleged that the minister expected to receive 40 million rupees. The abuse of Letters of Credit also became a most notorious scandal. In this case 2000 letters of credit (July 1994-October 1995) were issued to a total value of US \$36.1 million (CNAS 1996). Other scandals such as the purchase of Landrovers and smokeless stoves by the Ministry of Defence were also recorded in the auditor's report under the heading of financial irregularities.

Numerous cases could be adduced to demonstrate corruption. A most burning problem of Nepal today is not only straight financial corruption, but also the time has come to redefine the term 'corruption' in a new way, i.e. the performance of technically legal acts with a corrupt motive. Functions performed by persons with corrupt motives should be counted as corruption. For instance, the MPs' purchasing of Pajero motors under the privilege of duty free import (243 MPs—60 from the Upper House and 183 from the Lower—received this privilege); going abroad without reason; drawing a huge amount of money for medical expenditure without being sick or incurring such expenses; selling diplomatic passports. The return of Bharat Gurung's assets is another case in point. (Bharat Gurung was an ADC of former Prince Dharendra: his assets had been seized by the government under a court order charging that they were acquired corruptly during the Panchayat period.)

In the field of finance, according to the Auditor General's Report, the amount of the budget spent on financial irregularities since the very beginning increased to 22.7 billion rupees in 1996. The total budget of Nepal was just 51.6 billion rupees in 1995-6. To compare, with regard to abuse of authority, the Home Minister presented a report to parliament recording that 544 cases had been submitted to the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). The CIAA received 718 complaints from the public in 1996 whereas in 1997 it had already received 1,645 complaints (Dahal 1997).

Politicians have blamed themselves for the corruption, as follows:

Mr. Chandra Prakash Mainali (ML): "Political parties are the main source of corruption."

Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani (RPP): "There is a rock-solid alliance between

smugglers, politicians, and intellectuals that has formed a class involved in encouraging corruption.”

Dr. Ramsharan Mahat (NC): “We are not sincere, this is the bitter truth. Even though parliamentarians give anti-corruption speeches, they fail to implement it in reality.”

Mr. Ramchandra Poudyal (Speaker): “Unless we develop a culture to limit the expectations of the people from their constituency, corruption cannot be brought under control” (Kathmandu Post, 20 January 1999 (internet service)).

### Price Rises

Prices are artificially made to increase at any time at any rate. For instance, in 1998 the price of one kilogramme of potatoes increased by 300% (Rs. 10 to Rs. 40), one kilogramme of onions by 400% (Rs. 10 to Rs. 50), one kilogramme of rice by 66% (Rs. 15 to Rs. 25). Similarly, the price of one kilogramme of salt increased 477% (Rs. 7 to Rs. 40). There is no food item which is not affected by price rises. In 1999, the nation may face a serious shortage of rice: although it is a rice importing country, it exported most of its own rice production to Bangladesh. Government has no time to control this because it is busy politicking or is itself involved in corrupt practices.

### Politicization

Politicization has become a serious problem in the bureaucracy as well as in other public institutions. Every new government has controlled all these institutions by changing personnel through appointments and transfers from the highest level (secretary) to the lowest. The bureaucracy and the educational institutions are controlled by organizations affiliated to the parties. On the recommendation of these organizations, every government has changed numerous official personnel. In this way personnel numbering from 2,000 to 12,000 persons were transferred in 1997 (Dahal 1997). This creates a big problem for the functioning of government offices.

### Security

Life is really made very difficult by inter-party conflicts in rural areas. Furthermore, the withdrawal of criminal cases from the courts by the political parties boosts the morale of the criminals on the one hand and demoralizes the police and the courts to handle new cases on the other.<sup>11</sup> This process has endangered the security of the rural people. In the Maoist case, people

<sup>11</sup> Most of the governments under the different parties have tended to withdraw criminal

are trapped between the police and the Maoists. There is no mechanism for providing security to the general people in the Maoist-affected areas.

### Unemployment

The nation is producing a huge amount of manpower, both educated and uneducated, but due to the lack of development projects the government is unable to employ it. In 1998 the government publicly apologized for its policy of exporting labour abroad.

### Problems of the Maoist Insurgency<sup>12</sup>

The Maoist group intensified violence in the country after the start of its People's War on 13 February 1996. The Maoists' main objective is to establish a republican state and their strategy is to establish rural bases first. Therefore, they choose their battle ground mostly in remote districts where the police force is very limited and where it is difficult to control the whole area. Their stronghold areas are the western hill districts—Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Salyan, Sindhuli, and Gorkha. At present, the Maoists have expanded their activities to more than 44 of Nepal's 75 districts. They use guns, hammers, khukuri (curved Nepali knife), and explosives. With their faces masked, they have attacked innocent village people<sup>13</sup> with these weapons, killing or injuring them very badly by cutting and chopping their hands and legs. They have also burnt commoners' houses and looted their property, according to some weekly papers.

The Maoists have created a serious law and order problem and threatened the security of the people. Between the beginning of the Maoist People's War on 13 February 1996 and 2 November 1998, 380 people were killed. Among them, 270 were killed by police (16 suspected), 104 by Maoists (1 suspected), and 3 arrested by police; but no information exists on the whereabouts of missing people, and 3 Maoists accidentally died in an ambush, according to the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), a human rights NGO.

Up until the 1997 local elections, the Maoists' target was only the Nepali Congress political workers and supporters (Maharjan 1998b). After the elections, they also started to attack workers of other parties. According to

cases against their own party members from the courts on political grounds. Among 563 such cases of robbery, girl-trafficking, drug dealing, murder, official corruption, smuggling, forgery, etc. 243 cases related to NC and UML leaders (Dahal 1997).

<sup>12</sup> This section is taken from Maharjan (1998c).

<sup>13</sup> The government alleged that they were innocent people, but the Maoists said they were informants of the police and suspected people.

information provided by INSEC, the people killed in the Maoist war include 161 farmers (42.89% of total), 50 political workers (13.16%), 31 police (8.16%), 18 people's representatives (4.74%), 14 students (3.68%), 13 teachers (3.42%), and 9 others (2.37%). 145 (38.16%) of the people killed are under 40 years of age.

The Maoists' People's War has brought about an earthquake in Nepalese politics since the formation of the Deuba-led coalition government, and has created terror in Nepalese society. The government has been criticized from different sides with regard to the security of the people. On the one hand, sympathizers of the Maoists have charged the government with killing innocent people. On the other hand, some sections of the people have accused the Maoists of killing innocent people and have criticized the government for not providing the people with security. If we evaluate the government's actions seriously, we find that the government has never tried to tackle the roots of the Maoist problem. To show its concern over the Maoist problem, the government also arrested innocent people, some of whom were even killed in police custody. Similarly, the government said that there was a lack of adequate laws to punish the Maoists. Therefore, to control the situation, the government tried to pass the Terrorist Bill 2053 on the one hand, but invited Maoists to talks on the other, and a committee was formed to mediate.<sup>14</sup> However, the terms and conditions, responsibilities, rights, and duties of the panel members were not defined by the government. Furthermore, the government never issued a formal letter of invitation to the Maoist party for the proposed negotiation. The government's condition that top Maoist leaders such as Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai should be involved in the negotiations was not acceptable to them without a letter of safe conduct. Due to this, the negotiations are yet to be held. Meanwhile, some MPs have tried to solve the problem by proposing a package of development projects in the affected districts, but this has been rejected. Prime Minister Deuba said that if such projects were initiated in these districts, other districts would also demand the same, and that this would be impossible to fulfill (Padma Ratna Tuladhar, personal communication).

After the fall of the Deuba coalition government, the Chand government did not take the problem seriously either. The main intention of this government was to conduct local elections in its favour. Some people even accused the

<sup>14</sup> With the exception of Jaya P. Anand (NC), all the members were human rights activists: Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Rishikesh Shah, Birendra K. Pokharel, and Bishwakant Mainali.

UML of being soft-hearted towards the Maoist party, in order to take advantage from the Maoists in the local elections. Consequently, the UML captured more seats in the Maoist-affected areas (Maharjan 1998b). The Maoists' demand for donations from the UML is also evidence of the government's intriguing role and its unwillingness to control the Maoist problem.<sup>15</sup>

Soon, the Chand government was replaced by a coalition led by RPP president Thapa. At first, Thapa gave a statement that there was no need for an Anti-Terrorist Bill to control the Maoist problem. However, the Thapa government tried to bring in another bill, which was not called an anti-terrorist bill, but which was more subject to abuses of power than the bill presented in the previous cabinet (Padma Ratna Tuladhar, personal communication). Police personnel were trained by military commandos for the purpose of suppressing the Maoist insurgency, but during this period nothing was heard of either Maoist actions or government reprisals.

After Girija Prasad Koirala took office in April 1998, the 'Kilo Sera Two Operation' (KS2) was carried out to solve the Maoist problem. During this operation, more than 40 people were killed by the police (*Janadesh*, 27 October 1998). The police denied this and even the existence of 'Kilo Sera Two Operation'. According to them, they had just mobilized more police forces and made them more active. After the KS2 operation, people began to say that the Maoist problem was decreasing day by day. Koirala declared his commitment to solving the problem and called upon the people to participate in national development in order to cut off terrorism. Within three days, after the Maoists had announced the formation of 'base zones' in several areas of the country, 19 people had been killed. The number of deaths increased after the ML joined the Nepali Congress government and assured Congress of its help in solving the Maoist problem, and soon exceeded more than 600 in total.

<sup>15</sup> The Maoist Party sent a letter to the UML demanding a donation. This letter was sent with an active worker of the Maoist party, who went to deliver it to the Party Secretariat. But, after opening the letter, it was sent to the Singhadurbar for the Party General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal. Madhav Kumar Nepal called three members of his party who had defected to the UML from the UPFN. Then they decided to donate Rs. 8,00,000/-. A committee of UML which was formed for the study of Maoists was also informed. It seems that the party feared that the Maoists could create a problem for the UML coalition government (*Deshantar*, 13 July 1997).

<sup>16</sup> This section is taken from Maharjan 1998c.

### Problems of Ethnic Groups <sup>16</sup>

Ethnic problems in South Asia are classic examples of majority groups suppressing minority groups. Nepal should learn from the ethnic violence in South Asia. If this type of problem is underestimated in our prevalent political process, it will be difficult to stop the ethnic insurgency which is boiling up for the future (for details, see Bhattachan 1995: 135).<sup>17</sup> Since the MRD, the aspirations of the ethnic groups have been rising. Instead of fulfilling these aspirations, political elites are engaged in wiping out the minorities in every field, which may be fuel for the Maoist insurgency. Ethnic groups are searching and waiting for a strong dynamic leadership. The Maoists have already declared that they are also searching for an understanding with the ethnic groups. If these two different lines should meet in a certain point in the future, it will not be difficult to predict the consequences. Here, I would like to present three cases of ethnic issues, which, if underestimated by the government, may lead to ethnic violence and to the possibility of an ethnic-Maoist alliance.

#### (i) Language Issues

After the reestablishment of democracy, most of the ethnic organizations came out unitedly demanding their constitutional rights—language, religion, and autonomy. Consequently, the interim government made a gesture by removing the Nepali language from the syllabus of the Public Service Commission's examination. However, this decision did not last long. Through the Supreme Court's (SC) decision on a Brahmin's writ petition, the Nepali language was reintroduced as compulsory in the syllabus of the Public Service Commission's examination.

The language issue became more serious when some candidates fulfilled their electoral assurances by recognizing local languages in local institutions. In this regard, they used Newari in the Kathmandu Municipalities, and Maithili in the Janakpur and Rajbiraj Municipalities and in Dhanusha District Development Committee. Later this was prohibited by the Supreme Court's decision of 14 April 1998.

In reaction to the SC verdict, the 'United Struggle Committee for Language

<sup>17</sup> Rajbhai Jakami, General Secretary of the Jyapu Mahaguthi and a member of the Newa Rastriya Andolan expressed the view in a public meeting organized by the Nepal Bhasa Action Committee at Hotel Vajra, that other Janajati groups had requested the Newars to take leadership in the language issue.

<sup>18</sup> The committee was formed under the convenorship of Amaresh Narayan Jha (Nepal

Rights' was formed.<sup>18</sup> In order to proceed with the campaign, this committee organized a seminar on 'Use of National Languages in Local Bodies and the Supreme Court's Order'. In this programme political leaders<sup>19</sup> spoke against the SC verdict and the meeting concluded with a commitment to struggle against the court's order and a decision to hold meetings in different parts of the country. A follow-up meeting was held in Rajbiraj on 11 May 1998. Similarly, the Akhil Nepal Janajati Sangh submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister on 31 March 1998 against the Supreme Court's order. The General Secretary of ML and the Unity Centre also condemned the Supreme Court's decision (*Sandhya Times* (Newari daily paper), 31 March 1998).

This case was pending in the Supreme Court and people were waiting for a second decision on the same issue. Malla K Sundar said, "We are not so concerned about the coming verdict of the court, but we are more sensitive about the way in which some Brahmins are lobbying the judges of the

Maithil Samaj). MP Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Dr Krishna B. Bhattachan, and Prof Subodh N. Jha are advisors to the committee. Other members of the committee are Suresh Ale Magar from Akhil Nepal Janajati Sangh, Rajbhai Jakami from Newa Rastriya Andolan, Parasuram Tamang from Nepal Janajati Mahasangh, MP Pari Thapa from Akhil Nepal Janajati Sammelan, Dr Om Gurung from Akhil Nepal Budhijibi Sangh, Mukti Pradhan from Nepal Rastriya Budhijibi Sangh, Krishna Sen from Akhil Nepal Jana Sanskritik Sangh, Suresh Karmacharya from Nepal Janajati Mukti Andolan, Dharendra Premarshi from Maithil Bikash Manch, Krishna P. Shrestha from Dwalkha Gwahar Khalak, and Bishwanath Pathak from Awadhi Sanskritik Bikash Parishad.

<sup>19</sup> These were: Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Malla K. Sundar, Krishna Gopal Shrestha, Hridayesh Tripathi, Keshav Sthapit, Mahanta Thakur, and Suresh Ale Magar.

<sup>20</sup> In a public meeting, Malla K. Sundar said that a delegation of Brahmins was lobbying, and even visiting the residences of the Supreme Court Judges, to bring a verdict in their favour. Ironically, the delegation was led by the incumbent Registrar of the Tribhuvan University—a secular institution. The meeting was organized by Nepal Bhasa Action Committee on 16 October 1998, at Hotel Vajra. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the people about the 'Verdict on the Language Issue'. Next, in a seminar organized by POLSAN at Hotel Himalaya on 29 March 1998, a lawyer, Kashi Raj Dahal, commented on Bhattachan's remark that there is no significance in pursuing language issues. Using local languages in municipalities is illegal and unconstitutional. He reemphasized that if any local language has to be used in the municipalities or in any public places, first it must come out through a constitutional amendment. To challenge this, some followers of the Language Movement Action Committee (LMAC) are considering presenting a private bill to the parliament. If they do, there will be a serious problem for political parties who have made a false commitment to the LMAC.

court to turn the decision in their favour.”<sup>20</sup> The insensitivity of the ruling elites towards the language issue has compelled the ethnic groups to organize themselves and to assert their rights strongly, in a way that may invite ethnic insurgencies in future.

(ii) *Lack of Equal Opportunities*

Nepal is composed of different nationalities or ethnic groups. Constitutionally, all nationalities have equal rights in every field, but it is difficult to bring these constitutional provisions into practice. Demographically, there is a lopsided representation of the Brahmins in the bureaucracy and other fields. Brahmins constitute 12.9% of the total population, Chetris 16.1%, Newars 5.6%, Tamangs 5.5%, Magars 7.3%, etc., but their representation in the bureaucracy shows very different percentages (see Tables 1 and 2). The selection of the Public Service Commission for the post of Section Officer gives an indication of the Brahmins' future domination in the policy making process, i.e. Brahmin 73.5%, Chetri 16%, Newar 8.5% (only in technical posts, which cannot be upgraded to policy level in the future), others 2%. These new officers will be policy makers in the near future. Without any representation of the other ethnic groups at the policy level, it is difficult to foresee positive decisions from communal Brahmins, as Malla said. After the restoration of democracy, a trend appeared in the selection procedures that indicated the vulnerability of the right to equal opportunities, which requires a rethinking.

Table No. 1

Ethnic/Caste Representation in the Bureaucracy

Type of Appointment	Ethnic/Caste Representation				Total
	Brahmin	Chetri	Newar	Other	
1. New Appointments	147	32	17*	4+	200
III class Officer	73.5	16.0	8.5	2.0	100 %
2. Promoted to	39	5	3**	3++	50
III class Officer	78.0	10.0	6.0	6.0	100 %
3. Promoted to	149	23	33	13	218
II class Officer	68.3	10.6	15.1	6.0	100 %
4. Promoted to	51	6	12	3	72
I class Officer	70.8	8.3	16.7	4.2	100 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>540</b>
	<b>71.5</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>100 %</b>

\* Statistician 6, Computer Officer 8, Sociologist 3.

\*\* Computer Officer.

+ Tarai people.

++ Magar 2, Muslim 1.

Source: *Nepal Rajpatra*, HMG, Nepal. (Decision Date: 2050.1.28 - 2053.2.17).

Table No. 2

## Ethnic/Caste Representation in Senior Positions

Ethnic/Caste groups	1989	1989	1989	1990	1990
	S.O.	D.S.	S.	U.T.	Graduates
1. Brahmin	54.50	45.60	31.25	40.97	44.33
2. Newar	26.60	29.90	25.00	28.93	30.67
3. Chetri	11.15	13.40	31.25	11.00	13.67
4. Terai People	5.15	7.90	9.37	14.23	10.90
5. RLMGT	0.85	2.08	-	03.22	1.99
6. Muslim	0.29	-	-	0.87	0.37
7. Other	1.28	0.90	-	0.74	0.24
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Note: S.O. = Section Officer

D.S. = Deputy Secretary

S. = Secretary

U.T. = Tribhuvan University Teachers

RLMGT= Rai, Limbu, Magar, Gurung, Tamang

Source: Poudyal (1992)

(iii) *A case study of heightened ethnic feelings: the Vegetable Market Management Committee, Kalimati* <sup>21</sup>

A vegetable market was established at Kalimati, Kathmandu, to manage the farmers' marketing problem. Since a few years ago, attitudinal problems along ethnic lines have started to emerge between the retailers (Parbates: Brahmin and Chetris) and the local farmers (Jyapus). Parbates are trying to displace the Jyapus by pleasing the Parbate officials of the committee. Most places of the market became occupied by the retailers, who started to misbehave towards the Jyapus of Kathmandu. The Jyapus would need the place only for a few hours in the morning but, through their links with the authorities concerned, the retailers created a lot of problems for the Jyapus at all hours. In 1997 a serious confrontation between the Jyapus and the ward authorities and others, was avoided through an informal negotiation between the municipality authority, the Mayor, the ward authorities, and the Jyapu Maha Guthi (an organization of the Jyapu community). The Vegetable Market Management Committee suggested to the farmers that they should form a committee and register it in the relevant office, and promised to deal with that committee at an official level, with regard to the allocation of space. The management committee, however, neglected all the rules it had previously made, and once again it undermined the Jyapus. The Jyapu community is taking this issue seriously on an ethnic basis, because the market place is now filled with Parbates and Madheshis. In this way, people are compelled to think on an ethnic basis, which cannot be considered a healthy sign for the consolidation of democracy.

#### Problems of Free and Fair Elections

Since the restoration of democracy, two general elections and two local elections have been held (the May 1999 election had not taken place at the time of writing). Three elections were conducted by the Nepali Congress government and one by the UML. There were no political parties who did not criticize the government on electoral matters, and there was no political party in the parliament which did not use its money and muscle power in the elections according to its strength. In the 1997 local elections, the

<sup>21</sup> The author is a member of the Advisory Board of the Farmers' Vegetable Market Management Committee, and the farmers of Kathmandu, Thimi, and Bhaktapur are the general members of this committee. The author is also the Coordinator of the Advisory Board of the Jyapu Maha Guthi, town unit, Kathmandu.

UML coalition government exceeded all the electoral malpractices of the past (Maharjan 1998b). None the less, measures have been taken by the Election Commission to check electoral fraud: these include computerizing the voters' lists, issuing identity cards, fixing a ceiling on election expenditure, creating a code of conduct, etc. With the dependency of the Election Commission on the government and the undemocratic culture of the politicians, however, elections cannot be conducted in a free and fair manner. Therefore, without improving the undemocratic behaviour of the politicians, free and fair elections in Nepal are beyond expectation.

### Conclusion

Between 1951 and 1999, Nepal has seen four types of political system: (i) a transitional democratic system after the dawn of democracy; (ii) a multi-party parliamentary system under an elected government for 18 months; (iii) the Panchayat system for 30 years (including direct royal rule for two years); and (iv) a multi-party parliamentary system after the restoration of democracy.

After the dawn of democracy, a democratic system could not be installed for eight years because of the undemocratic culture of the political leaders. Due to this, governments were changed seven times, and they included the King's super-cabinet (twice) and the King's direct rule (twice). After eight years elections were held and a democratically elected government was formed. But, due to the shortsightedness of these leaders and the feudal culture, democracy collapsed after 18 months. The next political system was one of autocratic rule. Under this system the King ruled directly for two years, and then introduced the Panchayat system. During the first phase of the Panchayat system, elections were conducted on the basis of counting the raised hands of the voters. Later, elections were held on an indirect basis. Under the indirect electoral system, candidates were selected as the authorities wished. After the referendum in 1980, direct elections were introduced for the first time in the history of the Panchayat system, but political parties were still banned. The reformed Panchayat system ran for eight years, until democracy was restored in 1990. Within nine years, two general elections were held and another is going to be held very soon in May 1999. The November 1994 elections resulted in a hung parliament which produced seven governments without completing a five-year term.

Within nine years, the restored democracy has been facing the problem of unstable governments as a by-product of hung parliaments. Due to the

unstable governments a lot of problems have increased which directly affect the people. These problems became a serious obstacle to the consolidation of democracy in Nepal, simply because of the politics of inter-party and intra-party enmity. These are a by-product of the undemocratic culture of the politicians.

The Maoist problem is an outcome of bad governance as well as the bad performance of the democratic forces. Therefore, the future of democracy in Nepal will depend on the Maoist insurgency. The Maoists can be defined in two ways—either they are real Maoists or they are handled by some unseen factors. If they are real Maoists in the sense that they are really committed to the people and to national development through a people's republic, it will be unfortunate for the democratic forces, because the Maoists have been getting increasing moral support from the rural people as well as from ethnic groups. If the government of any party or parties tries to solve the problem by means of force, terrorism or ethnic violence may occur in future.

On the other hand, some intellectuals have speculated that the Maoists are handled by some unseen factors to create a problem in the democratic system, which may frustrate the people's hopes for democracy and provide grounds for the old guard of the Panchayat to reverse the system. This speculation cannot be easily discarded if we recall the Gorkha and Bajhang incidents in 1959-60,<sup>22</sup> and some Panchayat old guards' demands for the King's direct involvement in politics at present.

Whatever may be, both of these factors should not be underestimated or neglected because the Maoist insurgency has become a serious threat to democracy in Nepal. Without solving the Maoist problem, the consolidation of democracy in future is impossible. This problem can be solved only through:

1. commitment and agreement of all the political parties to solve the Maoist problem;
2. negotiation with the Maoist party;
3. winning the people's hearts by solving the national problems outlined above.

However, unless the politicians improve their own morality themselves, it

<sup>22</sup> Yogi Naraharinath and the Bajhangi king created law and order problems in Gorkha and Bajhang districts respectively in 1959-60.

will be difficult for them to reach these solutions. Democracy can only be consolidated if the politicians improve their morality first.

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## Credit relations in Nepal: social embeddedness and sacred money

Michael Mühlich

### 1. Introduction

In recent years the research field of economic anthropology has witnessed an increasing interest in works concerning the topic of money and credit. On South and Southeast Asia there are major contributions by Schrader (1996) on the Chettiar moneylenders of Burma, Hardiman (1996) on the relations between peasants and the Baniya traders-cum-moneylenders of Gujarat, and Znoj (1995) and Sherman (1990) on the meaning of money among the Rejang and Batak of Sumatra. Credit relations also receive attention in other works, such as Steinwand on credit relations in Thailand (1991), Hesse (1996) on the social structure of a bazaar town in North India, or Humphrey (1992) on the ethics of barter among the Rai, as well as Sagant (1996) on social change concerning religion and landownership among the Limbus of East Nepal. If a common denominator of all these contributions could be defined, it might be the question of whether there is an 'impact of money' on traditional societies (see Bohannan 1959), an assumption that, of course, can hardly be denied. Schrader (1991: 47) addresses the question of whether moneylending is a phenomenon to be associated with the introduction of cash crop production. With regard to Nepal, the appearance of moneylenders seems to have a connection with the expansion of revenue collection from agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, as the Sanskrit terms *kusīda* and *vārdhusika*, explained by Kane (1974: 417f.), indicate, any form of taking high interest for loans in cash or kind was already regarded as usury in the classical period in India. Extending this position, the development of credit systems among peasants could consequently be seen as a reaction to hardship suffered from usury. Geertz (1961), however, in applying the metaphor of 'middle rung', associates rotating savings and credit associations (RoSCA)

with support in the transition from tradition to modernity in a wider sense, as a step of adaptation to the domain of the market. A further position was earlier stated by Malinowski, who compared the traditional village chief or clan headman to a "tribal banker" (Malinowski 1937: 232, see also Trenk 1991: 69), thus assuming that there exists a functional relation between credit and redistribution. Most authors also share the understanding that mediums of exchange do already exist on a pre-monetary level of a barter or subsistence-oriented economy. Thus a preoccupation with the idea and functions of money within modern western values could lead to an oversimplification of the topic. It would also reduce an understanding of the 'social embeddedness' (Polanyi 1977) of traditional economies.

The problem of distinguishing credit from exchange may, on the one hand, be treated from a formalist point of view, where credit, in cash or kind, necessarily implies some benefit or profit for those involved in the transaction, whether it be in terms of interest or access to resources. Labour exchange, especially if delayed, might then be considered a special case of credit relations, since the mode of repayment is in kind without necessarily any interest even if one's access to resources is enhanced. In addition, from such a perspective, credit relations may be considered as corresponding to what Znoj (1995: 30) called the "liquidating mode" of transactions. Gift exchange, on the other hand, does not carry the notion of a mandatory repayment—it is directed more towards fulfilling moral obligations. From a substantivist point of view, however, economic transactions are embedded in the social and religious values of traditional societies. Thus credit relations, including terms of security, terms of interest, and gains or benefits from credit, are explained by their dependency on social and ritual relations.

The first section of this discussion will focus on the historical development of credit practices in Nepal, showing the embeddedness of credit practices within religious and institutional relations, including changing aspects of law. The second section will then present a short introduction to traditional credit systems and informal credit practices that are still prevalent in Nepal.<sup>1</sup> Thus credit practices and systems such as the *dhikur* system of the Gurungs, Thakalis, and Manangis, the *guthi* system of the Newars, the *kidu* system

<sup>1</sup> Research on credit relations and urban development in Nepal, conducted from June 1997 to November 1998, was made possible by a research grant provided by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. I express my gratitude also to members of the Nepal Research Centre—Philip Pierce, Mahes Raj Pant, and Aishwarya Dhar Sharma—and my friends among the Chetris, Manangis, Newars, and Sherpas.

of the Tibetan-oriented Sherpas, and the *parma* system of the Chetris will be introduced. A more comprehensive treatment of the topic, however, would have to consider the socio-structural and religious backgrounds of the respective groups and practices and the reasons for indebtedness. It would have to document such reasons textually, and provide a cultural and ecological perspective on the different groups' respective economic settings. As Schrader (1994: 45) notes for Nepal's economic history, the impact of monetization and cash crop production has fallen mostly on trading enclaves, while large parts of the country have remained on a subsistence-oriented level. However, this does not exclude the possibility that a comprehensive study of credit in Nepal, focusing on monetary as well as indigenous mediums of exchange, will reveal regional differences of credit practices and adhering value orientations. Since my aim here is limited to pointing out the wider social frame, or the social embeddedness and sacred aspect of credit practices in Nepal, I will restrict myself to the aforementioned points. To begin with, I would like to relate a small story that inspired me in part to conduct this study of credit relations in Nepal, a country where, according to an old proverb, "only strangers need coin—people who know each other can do without" (Rhodes 1989: 115).<sup>2</sup>

In spring 1992, while I was staying in Jiri to prepare for research among the Sherpas, one old woman who lived in a thatched hut near the house of my landlord was able to build a house to replace her hut by means of 'borrowing' voluntary labour. My friend and cook, a Jirel of that area, worked out the plan. It was necessary merely to have an enormous amount of *chang* (homemade beer) and some money to buy tree-cutting rights—enough for the tiles of the small roof and some wooden frames. In effect, credit-worthiness was attributed to the woman and she was able to receive voluntary labour from the neighbours because she was offering them *chang* or homemade beer, considered in this context as a medium of exchange. Since *chang* is an item that is involved in nearly every Sherpa ritual, there is a shared understanding of the value attached to it as a gift. It was in this way that my interest was aroused in ritual as a model for the economic sphere, as a means of creating relations of mutual trust and acquiring help and credit.

However, although credit and mutual help come about in this kind of ritually guaranteed manner among the majority of Nepal's northern peoples, this is

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rhodes, with a reference to information given to him by Dr C.E. Challis. While conducting research in Nepal, I could not find a Nepali version of this proverb myself, though informants agreed to the contents of the translation. Quite a few of the other proverbs I collected point up the problems that arise from relations based on money.

by no means the case everywhere. To understand the development of the different practices of credit still current in Nepal, we will first focus on their historical development.

## 2. The historical development of credit practices in Nepal

From the perspective of ethnographic history, the historical development of credit practices in Nepal can be subdivided into three successive periods. The ancient period of the 'Nepal' or Kathmandu Valley is characterized by the adherence of credit to patronage relations embedded in the hierarchy of the caste system, whether related to Buddhist or Hindu institutions. From the 17th century onward, with the introduction of small coins, a process of monetization was set in motion. The second period, from the foundation of Nepal as a nation state (1769 AD) until the end of the Rana era (1950), is characterized by the development of a feudal administrative bureaucracy that brought credit relations into line with the increasing monetization of the economy. The third period, lasting until the present and beginning with the introduction of land reforms (1964) and the formalization of legal practices with regard to private credit relations, has witnessed changes in favour of debtors and the introduction of credit programmes, but also an increasingly disembedded economy.

### 2. 1. Credit in the realm of the king

During the epoch which extends from ancient times through the Malla period up to the foundation of modern Nepal by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, there is strong evidence to suggest that all land within the realm of the Kathmandu Valley was not individual property but was encompassed by the rights of members of joint families and ultimately protected and owned by the king. Thus, for example, it could not be individually dedicated for religious purposes except by an act of law or the consent of the king.<sup>3</sup> What could be mortgaged in times of need was not land but the right to the use and fruit of it. In a similar way, under the *kipat* system in the eastern hill regions, land could not be owned by anyone outside the local community (see Sagant 1996, Forbes 1996). Thus, most of the Limbus of East Nepal, who gave immigrants the use of their land in exchange for credit, were faced with a dilemma

<sup>3</sup> Such an opinion is shared by Sharma (1983: 13), Pokhrel (1991: 18f.) and Hamal (1994: 12), for example. Kölver and Sakya (1985: 6, 78) take a similar view in their study of sales and mortgages, including relations of tenure, in the early mediaeval period of the Kathmandu Valley.

when the *kipat* system was abolished in the 1960s and state landownership, *raikar*, which provides for individual land rights (Pokhrel 1991: 240), was finally introduced into their region. Today, however, we still find in some regions of Nepal exceptional cases of mortgaging the right to the use of land. This practice seemed, apart from historical considerations, to be especially widespread in those areas where irrigated rice cultivation was possible, that is, in areas that provide rich and double harvests.

In historical times the mortgaging of the right to the use of the land was also connected with institutional practices. Since ancient times, though rather less so after the formation of the modern state of Nepal, Buddhist monasteries have been the recipients of donations—especially donations made by traders, but probably also donations made by many of the marginal members of society.<sup>4</sup> In the Kathmandu Valley the relation between the Buddhist priests and farmers was also significant. Documents from the Rudravarṇa Mahāvihāra in Patan, studied by Kölver and Sakya (1985), show that between about 1000 AD and 1300 AD this monastery functioned like a bank. The documents revealing this may be considered as an exceptional finding, because such documents, even if they do exist, are hard to obtain in other monasteries. They reveal that certain functionaries from among the entire Order (*sangha*) of this monastery were specifically entrusted with investing the accumulated wealth as credits—to farmers, for example. In return, the monastery acquired the right to the use and fruit of the land (*karṣakaparibhoga*) for a certain period (*ibid.*: 77f.), namely to let this land to tenants (who might be the debtors themselves). The profits therefrom could then be used to meet the expenses of the monastery and for conducting rituals, as well as for investment in social works. It is interesting to note that at this time a member of the entire Order could rise to the highest level of the ten eldest members of the *sangha* only if he had proved himself able to act responsibly in the trust that was concerned with the finance of the monastery

<sup>4</sup> The importance of traders as sponsors of Buddhist temples may be inferred from comparative evidence concerning the sponsoring of Buddhist temples and monasteries in India (see Nath 1987: 42ff.) as well as from works on the history of and contemporary practices among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley (see Lewis 1984: 12ff., Gellner 1996). While the accumulation of wealth through trade has a long history in Nepal, going back to the Licchavi period, according to Rhodes (1989), the effects of monetization on the wider public were probably only significant from the 17th century onward. The introduction of small coins facilitated the individual accumulation of wealth by traders, artisans and also farmers, and this made itself felt in, among other things, the construction of impressive private buildings.

(*ibid.*: 19).

What, for comparison, can we discover in the historical past of the institution of the Hindu temple in Nepal, a religious institution that until modern times has been the main focus of religious donations in Nepal, especially donations made by kings (Michaels 1994)?<sup>5</sup> Among the many documents of the Paśupatinātha Guthī that were microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, only a few, most of them dating from the time of King Girvana Yuddha Shah (1797-1816 AD), have any connection with loan practices. And as far as these documents are concerned, we (Aishwarya Dhar Sharma and myself) could not find any evidence of banking activities comparable to those of the Buddhist monastery discussed above. The Hindu temple of Paśupatinātha gave loans only, and exceptionally, to members of the *guthī* itself, that is, to members of the treasure house or to temple attendants. The temple was careful to store the documents of the loan transactions entered into by individual members of the *guthī*, who mortgaged the land that they received from the temple instead of receiving any income in cash. Since the ultimate holder of these lands was the temple or the god Paśupatinātha himself, it was natural that the debt documents should be stored there. The general attitude, however, seems to conform to the Hindu ideal, laid down in the ancient scriptures of Manu's *dharmaśāstra* (see Nath 1987: 93), that priests eligible to be the recipients of gifts made at sacrifices (or, by implication, others serving at the temple) should not be involved in what are considered degrading activities, such as breeding cattle, trading, artisanship, domestic service, and moneylending.<sup>6</sup>

While there are thus clear differences in regard to finance and credit between these religious institutions, a common feature of both traditions has been the importance of patronage relations as a source of support in what was long a non-market economy. Society, rather, was integrated into a caste hierarchy, with corresponding importance being attached to patronage relations that

<sup>5</sup> In the case of the Paśupatinātha Guthī there is evidence of the donations having been dedicated to social works as well, especially to *sadāvarta guthīs*, which are responsible for feeding pilgrims, devotees at festival times, and poor people living in the area of the temple (see also Tandan 1996).

<sup>6</sup> A general comparison regarding credit practices in Hindu temples in South Asia would, however, be confronted with different facts. As Hardiman (1996) has shown, the Jain tradition has not prohibited moneylending activities, while in Hindu law the ethics of moneylending have undergone a process of secularization over time. Moneylending and banking activities also seem to be relative to caste. The involvement of a temple cult with banking

kept landlord and tenant bound to long-term contracts and forms of mutual dependence. The system was guaranteed by the overlordship of the king, there being with all probability in the historical period of the Kathmandu Valley no private ownership of land in the modern sense. The traditional corporate pattern of landownership has continued on in *guthī* land, though its importance has decreased.

## 2.2. Feudalism and the *thek* system of revenue collection

During the period which begins with the unification of Nepal as a territorial nation state and lasts until after the downfall of Rana rule in 1950, ending definitively only with the introduction of the Land Reform Act of 1964, the general situation of landownership changed. The king necessarily had to delegate part of his power to local elites or send his own administrators to remote regions in order to implement his law and collect taxes from local communities (see Regmi 1981: 60ff.). This development of an indirect rule (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1989: 97) also contributed to the rise of local elites and administrators who were equipped with extensive landholdings, which they received as tax-exempt *jāgir* or *birtā* land grants, that is, as a convertible source of income instead of payment in cash (Regmi 1978a: 22f.). Peasants were under an obligation to work the lands of the administrators, with the duty of supervision being given to middlemen. The share of the harvest expected by the administrators and their middlemen on *jāgir* and *birtā* lands probably exceeded by several times the amount expected as tax revenue from taxable lands (Regmi 1978a: 32), or more than half of the crop. Under the Rana rulers this practice of granting landholdings to members of the ministerial class and to local elites was used more exploitatively, since, in some regions, additional levies and unpaid labour were also exacted from peasants working taxable lands (Regmi 1978a: 136f.). Thus a system of governance by intermediary rule emerged that subjected the common people to the will of the local gentry, who received regionally specified contracts (*thekkā*) to collect the taxes. Under the *thekbandī* system in the hill regions of central Nepal, under the *thekthiti* system of the far-western and far-eastern regions, or under the *ijārā* system of the Tarai, local elites or administrators commanded a tax

activities was witnessed by Schrader (1996: 107f.) among the Chettiar traders and bankers in Burma, whose heritage is connected with South India. Schrader suggests that the environment of the temple and the publicity given to transactions conducted there provide an atmosphere of reliance and trustworthiness for business with non-Chettiars. For Nepal, I could not find any evidence of public banking activities connected with Hindu temples, though further research by other scholars may unearth some.

from farmers and tenants—sometimes at a rate that was fixed, sometimes at a rate that rose a little each year (Regmi 1981: 79f., 82f.). These fixed tax revenues (*kut*) did not reflect the actual amounts harvested and thus they could force people into a position of indebtedness when they could not cover their subsistence needs (see also Pfaff-Czarnecka 1989: 98). In some cases this may have led to indebtedness to traders, who provided peasants with grain stocked by them after the harvest in the autumn and sold or provided as credit against higher rates when grain was expensive in the spring and before rice-plantation (Toffin 1984: 326ff.). As a further consequence, many farmers may have had to mortgage their land to their moneylender or tax-collector, as several collected documents indicate.<sup>7</sup> The contracted amount of tax was even increased, as in the *thekebandi* system of the hill regions, by competitive bidding (Regmi 1981: 83) among candidates for the tax-collector's post. On the other hand, this principle could force a defaulting tax collector, such as a *jimidār* of the Tarai region, into debt himself, if he was not able to command enough tax revenue from the farmers of his area. In addition to unpaid labour, the local tax collector also demanded an additional fee for his position as mediator between the locality and the government, and this was called *ghyu khāne*, itself related to the act of hospitality of offering clarified butter at a meal for high guests, treating them as gods. As village people have narrated in their memories of the Rana times, it was usual that in order to receive a favour (or credit) from the administrator the applicant had to engage in the practice of *cākari*, that is, being continually attentive to a superior—a practice which is religious in origin (see Bista 1992: 89ff.). In a similar way, a *sāhu*, a rich man in the role of moneylender, could command the same acts of reverence and gifts of respect in addition to the interest that had to be paid.

<sup>7</sup> A similar situation persisted in the 17th and 18th centuries in parts of India (in Gujarat, for example) where the British used their contacts with banking firms and usurers to implement their rule by giving tax and farming contracts to such intermediaries, though this system slowly gave way to direct rule (Hardiman 1996: 44). Under the Rana system, by contrast, coercive measures of military presence and the establishment of tax offices (*māl addās*) (Regmi 1981: 89) were not imposed to abolish the practice of tax collection by intermediary contractors (*thekkādār*) but to supplement them. These measures enforced the principle of collecting taxes not in relation to the actual amount harvested but in relation to a contractually pre-fixed amount, and thus divided the landowner with links to the feudal bureaucracy of the Rana class from the common peasant.

### 2.3. Private loans, their modes of repayment, and bonded labour

The interest on loans in the informal sector had earlier been incomparably higher than that prescribed by the law. In the Muluki Ain of Jang Bahadur Rana, written in 1854 AD, the interest on loans that were formalized in debt documents, called *tamsuk*, was fixed at 10 per cent per year.<sup>8</sup> The debt could be transmitted to the heirs of the debtor only if the heirs claimed their inheritance. Even before this, the kings of Gorkha had decreed a law that was mildly in favour of the debtors (Riccardi 1977: 41), with the interest being fixed at 20 per cent per year and not to be calculated for a period exceeding 10 years. The Muluki Ain, however, then made a clear distinction between loan agreements between government employees, which bore an interest rate of 11 per cent, loans taken by government employees from common people, and loans between commoners. If a government employee took a loan from a commoner, the latter could not force him to pay it back; otherwise he would be punished by law. Thus government employees were both much better protected from usury and able to exploit their position of power. In addition, government employees could receive low-interest loans from the government treasury itself, a practice that has continued into the present.

A commoner who was not literate, by contrast, was obliged to pay back to a creditor whatever had been freely arranged. If a creditor thus demanded much higher interest than was allowed by law without having recorded this in a contract of debt, he could not be fined. The only consequence of a legal dispute would have been that a formalized debt document would be issued according to the law. In practice, this meant, of course, that many illiterate, poor, or dependent people afraid of involvement in law cases took out loans at higher interest rates, either with or without a *tamsuk*, and sometimes deposited gold and jewellery. Informal loans at interest rates of *say kaḍā tīn*, that is at monthly rates of 3 per cent, or at *say kaḍā pāñca*, that is at 5 per cent, or sometimes even more, are still common today.<sup>9</sup> Another legal possibility, especially to be found in rice-growing areas, was the already mentioned mortgage of the right to the use of the land instead of interest payments,

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Mahes Raj Pant for his assistance in translating the relevant passage of the Muluki Ain compiled during the reign of Śrī Pāñca Surendra Bikram Shah Dev. The copy of our text is a reprint of 2022 vs (1965 AD).

<sup>9</sup> For further modes of calculating interest see also Graner (1997: 82f.), referring to Gurung (1949) in her study of the area of Melamchi (north-east of Kathmandu). Further detailed information on credit practices in Nepal is given by Dahal (1981/82). I am grateful to Kashinath Tamot for this reference.

called *bhog bandhaka*. This was preferable to a creditor, since he was able to receive the produce of two harvests a year from such land. In various debt documents, repayments of the interest in kind, in grain or rice, are also mentioned, though again, according to the Muluki Ain, this could not be enforced.

The Muluki Ain, as well as documents from Malla times, also specified that a debtor could not offer as repayment the enslavement (*kamāra*) or bonded labour (*bandhan*) of his family members, though he could do so for himself (see Höfer 1979: 125, Gaborieau 1981: 146). Mahes Raj Pant has shown on the basis of documents from Rana times and others from the 15th and 16th century that in order to pay back a debt a person could offer a creditor his labour for the rest of his life or until the loan was repaid (Pant 1996, 1997). It is, however, to be remembered that caste must have been an important factor. Thus in the Muluki Ain of 1854 a distinction was drawn between those castes who could be enslaved for reasons of punishment and those who could not, though it was mentioned that even high castes could become enslaved by sale or in becoming bond-servants (Höfer 1979: 121ff.). The general attitude reflects, however, a better standing of the high castes. This also holds true inversely, as noted by Hamilton in the 1820s: "A poor creditor, in general, has no resource against a powerful debtor, except sitting Dherna [*dharnā*] on him; and unless the creditor be a Brahman, he may sit long enough before he attracts any notice" (Hamilton 1971: 104). On the other hand, as we have come to know from the daily media, bonded labour, though abolished officially in 1924 by Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana (Krämer 1996: 47) and banished from the terminology of the legal code in 1935 (Gaborieau 1981: 146), is still a practice found in many parts of the Tarai. The system is more covert in the practice associated with the term *kamaiyā* (Sharma 1998). In Bardia, for example, where a high proportion of the Tharu population has become indebted to local moneylenders, especially from the high castes, it is still the practice that people who cannot repay their loans and lose their land to the moneylenders work as tenants on what were originally their own fields, while they are also expected to send a daughter to provide free service to the house of the landlord-cum-moneylender. This service is called *kāmlahriya* by the Tharus of Bardia (originally bearing the meaning of 'work-help'), a term which was also in use among the Tharus themselves with a less exploitative connotation.

#### 2.4. The modern period of credit practices

The Land Reform Act of 1964 (2020 vs) was meant to alter the situation

of the tenants in their favour, if they could prove that they were tilling the land at the time the Act was introduced. Tenants could acquire 25 per cent, or according to the recently renewed Act, up to half of the land that they had tilled, if the landowner and tenant agreed to dissolve tenancy relations and share ownership rights (section 26D).<sup>10</sup> Tenants could otherwise receive 25 per cent of the value of the land in the case of its sale. The Land Reform Act of 1964 also changed the practice of informal debt contracts, which from then onward had to be registered at the land tax office (Muluki Ain 1997: 401). The interest rate, to be paid in cash (already fixed at 10 per cent by the old Muluki Ain) was given primacy over arrangements for the use of the land instead, in that lands mortgaged in such a way had to be converted into unsecured loans (Land Reform Act, section 17) or, if the creditor worked the land himself, into tenancy rights (section 25.3).

In theory, the introduction of the Land Reform Act also provided better protection against practices of usury. However, land registration and measurement, as well as the valuation of the land by government authorities and the introduction of compulsory savings, could give rise to many other malpractices. In addition, established loan practices could not be dissolved overnight, since those in need did not have any alternatives to fall back on. Thus the implementation of the Act gave relief only to those who had already been in a situation of bad debt. The banking system introduced in 1937 with Nepal Bank Limited, and expanding beyond the Kathmandu Valley only after 1956 with the foundation of the Rāṣṭriya Bank and its commercial branch, the Rāṣṭriya Bāñijya Bank (Regmi 1978b: 74f.), was still beyond the reach of the greater part of the population. Many private loans were still being given at much higher interest rates, though these were not written down in *tamsuk* documents. In addition, the law did not instigate any severe punishment for practices of usury, since it merely directed that illegal payments of interest above 10 percent were to be counted towards having reduced the repayment of the principal. The ideal of the law and its implementation in reality were and are still far from each other. Modern efforts to meet these challenges, though welcome to the majority of the population, have stirred up controversy of their own. This recalls a point made by Trenk (1991: 41) who summarizes one position regarding the transition to modernity from traditional forms of credit practices. Though often characterized as forms of exploita-

<sup>10</sup> An unofficial English translation of the Land Reform Act of 1964 was made by Mahesh Chandra Regmi, who kindly made this text available to me.

tion, traditional credit practices are embedded in multiplex social relations. These latter enhance the level of trustworthiness, which may even legitimate practices of usury from the perspective of the debtors (see also Hardiman 1996), whereas modern forms of credit are exposed to problems arising from the single-interest orientation of credit programmes. Partakers or shareholders are less bound together by traditional notions of trust, thus increasing the necessity for deposit of collateral as a substitute for traditional relations of trust.

### 3. Examples of traditional credit systems

We will turn our attention now to traditional forms of mutual help. In addition to the assumptions regarding the origin of credit systems given in the introductory note, the ethnographic evidence from Nepal suggests that traditional credit systems may to some degree also have a ritual connection. Membership in some of these associations is complemented by the notion of debt, as well as its material manifestation in the form of nominal or substantial sums of credit, that individual members share in relation to the god of their ritual association.<sup>11</sup> It is this embeddedness of the economic sphere in a sphere of religiously founded values that may have incidentally brought about systems of mutual help to protect people from the effects of crop loss, loss of investment in trade, or other misfortunes.

In this context my data also suggest that the religious and social functions associated with communal associations in Nepal, especially in respect of the *guthi* system of the Newars, have to be complemented with a perspective that until now has not been seen as contributing to understanding their *raison d'être*, that is, their importance for financing ritual traditions as well as their importance for mutual economic support in times of need. The question of whether the systems proposed here to be studied as an inclusive category of associations related in some way or the other to practices of credit are absolutely different from each other, as Quigley proposed in his study of the *guthi* organizations of the Dhulikhel Shresthas (1985: 57), seems to me to be answerable in the negative: it is a question of difference of degree rather than kind. As Quigley states, the comparison of the *guthi* system with rotating credit associations, such as the *dhikur* (*dhi.gur*) of the Annapurna area, would not be justified, since in the *dhikur* system membership is motivated

<sup>11</sup> Comparative evidence for South Asia is provided by Schrader (1996: 107f.), with regard to the Chettiar temple as a religious and economic institution. I will elaborate on this point concerning Nepal in a future contribution.

by access to financial means, while there is no restriction on the use of the funds and usually no limitation on group formation by age, with groups even being formed by women and children. On the other hand, while Quigley also contends that other ethnographers have found evidence of credit relations related to *guthis* among the Newar farmer caste, for example, he holds that this would not be of major significance, given the "customary poverty" (1985: 54) of most such associations. In his well-founded contribution on 'caste' a more important reason for the adherence of Newars to their *guthi* organizations is explained by the fact that they provide a corporate identity for their members in a socio-political situation, where access to the higher ranks in society through hypergamous alliances is possible only for the higher Hindu castes. The *guthi* system would thus provide the Newar castes (especially the higher ones among them) with a means of retaining a degree of exclusivity, and not conforming to the demands of one's local *guthi* organization would mean jeopardizing future prospects of proper marriage alliances for one's offspring (Quigley 1993: 108). As I see it, the aspect of credit need not contradict this perspective, since the credit involved in ritual relations may also help to foster ties of membership, while it also generates the possibility that achieved surplus funds will provide a resource to fall back on in times of need. As one Newar friend told me with regard to this aspect of their *guthis*: "This is how we survive." The members of some such associations may receive what could be called a sacred credit—a credit, given from the funds of the association, that is constitutive of continued membership and regarded as an auspicious prospect for success.<sup>12</sup> Since such credit is usually given without a need for the deposit of collateral, it is especially helpful for those in actual need who, though without means at present, are considered reliable and trustworthy by the other members of the association.

A similar stance can be taken with regard to the *kidu* system of the Tibetan-oriented populations. In her description of craftsmen's associations originating in Tibet, Ronge (1979: 132ff.) has pointed out that the *kidu* (*skyid-sdug*, 'happiness and sorrow', Ronge 1978: 96) system of locality-bound or originally regional Tibetan groups of mutual aid may have developed by learning from the *pālā* (or *pārā*) organizations of Newar traders in Lhasa.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Miller (1956) supposed that the *kidu* system developed originally as a system of mutual aid in Tibet, similar to the more individualized system of

<sup>12</sup> This point of view was related by informants of Tuladhar and Shrestha castes in Kathmandu.

<sup>13</sup> My thanks are due to Christoph Cüppers for this reference.

mutual support called *ganye*. Quigley (1985: 56) quotes Doherty (1978) as holding that the *kidu* organizations as described by Miller bring to mind the *guthi* system of the Newars. However, the *guthi* system, as Quigley (1985: 57) states, emphasizes exclusivity of membership and upholds the values of the religious community, while, by contrast, *kidu* organizations would only require that members be Lamaist and not be in the Tibetan monkhood. To assume that such systems of mutual help are of a very different nature when compared to the *guthi* system seems to neglect processes of cultural adaptation, as well as the possibility of generating communal institutions with comparable social functions in cultural settings relatively independently of each other.

### 3.1. The *dhikur* system: continuity and change

The first example under this assessment may show that in those associations that are seemingly motivated only by financial reasons, there are still also ritual, and not simply purely economic, aspects involved, which help to build credit relations on notions of trust. One such example is the *dhikur* system among the Gurungs, Thakalis, and Manangis of the Annapurna area (Messerschmidt 1978). The lexical meaning of this term is literally a 'circle in times of need' or otherwise a 'circle of grain'. This system was transported, either by acculturation or cultural contact, to other groups, especially through migration to the Kathmandu Valley. Thus it became very popular among Kathmandu residents under the name of the *dhukuṭi* system, referring to the creation of a 'treasure' by means of it (Mühlich 1997). There are different varieties of the system: it is usually connected with a kind of rotational fund of money, though in its area of origin loans of grain are also given. In order to run the *dhikur* system, the treasure (or *dhukuṭi*) is stocked by equal shares among partaking persons. This money is first received by the one who starts the *dhukuṭi*, usually the person in actual need of credit, who has to provide a *jamāni*, a guarantor, for the payment of his further shares. In the second round a secret bid decides who will receive the treasure next, and so on.<sup>14</sup>

In the original variant of the *dhikur* system, called *dhukor* by the Manangis, which is still prevalent among migrants to Kathmandu, money is collected in order to help members of their *kidu* group. The debtor has to provide a *jamāni*, the guarantor of the loan if the debtor is not able to repay. Then

<sup>14</sup> For this secret bidding the participants write down the amount that they would pay for receiving the credit. For example, if the treasure collected by 10 people is 50,000 rupees, then someone who wants to win the bid might ask to receive the credit for 42,000 rupees, meaning that he himself would pay 8,000 rupees in the next round, while the other nine

he will visit his friends with bottles of homemade beer (*chang* or *phyi*) to request their help ritually. Some of them may not be able to help out with credit, but are supposed nevertheless to give a small contribution for free. At an initial feast, the shares of the creditors will be settled upon, to be repaid either according to the *dhukuṭi* formula or according to the principle of 'glory' (*kīrti*) in one total sum after a period of several years, when a feast is again organized, with all services being attended to by the debtor himself.

While the *dhikur* system in the hill areas, as well as among migrant Manangis in Kathmandu, functioned among people known to each other through long-term ritual relations, the so-called *dhukuṭi* system that was assimilated by other people in Kathmandu arose in an environment of more short-term business relations. In addition, there was a decrease in the emphasis that was traditionally put on the presence of guarantors. Alternatively, if that aspect was continued, then the principle of help offered in times of need that has guided the community-based *dhikur* system disappeared and was replaced by a motivation for quick profits from investment in business. Thus quite a few conflicts and personal tragedies occurred from this aberrant system. However, sometimes, when the *dhukuṭi* system is introduced to support neighbourhood-based cultural or other types of activities, it has worked to cement traditional mutual help relations.

### 3.2. Attached credit relations in the *guthi* system of the Newars

The term *guthi* is related to the Sanskrit word *goṣṭhī*, meaning 'association' (Gellner 1994: 231) or 'the committee of trustees in charge of a temple or of a charitable foundation', as Bühler translates the term in early inscriptions at the stupa of Sanchi (see Nath 1987: 68 referring to Bühler 1894). The financing of these associations could be achieved in various ways, such as land endowments and donations, tenancy arrangements, and also by the evolution of credit relations. In Nepal the term first appeared in Licchavi inscriptions of the fifth to the eighth centuries AD (Toffin 1984: 177). As indicated, among the Newars one important function of the *guthis* is to finance the organization of religious, social, and economic traditions (Toffin 1984: 179), during

participants would have to divide the rest of the money, the payable 42,000 rupees, among themselves, the shares being thus about 4,660 rupees per partaker. At the start of the credit round the shares of the participants start low, while they become bigger towards the end of the credit round, when someone might, for example, receive the credit for a bid of 49,000 rupees. Further detailed information on the principles involved in mutual help systems among the Thakali may be obtained in the recent contribution by Vinding (1998).

which credit relations may sometimes evolve by lending out reserve money (*jagedā paisā*) from the funds of the *guthī* to its individual members, the interest from which is then used for the sponsoring of ceremonies related to the *guthī* organization. The Newars have *guthīs* of various kinds, such as those responsible for conducting death rituals (*sī guthī* or *sanā guthī*), for conducting lineage rituals (*dya guthī*), overseeing certain temple festivals, and maintaining public services (drinking water tanks, rest-houses, and so on).

A detailed classification of Newar *guthīs* has been given by Gellner (1992: 235ff.). He also points to the category of economic *guthīs*, which he cites as a rare case in contrast to the ritual preoccupation of *guthīs* in general. Such associations, founded on the principle of voluntary membership, in being still related to a cult, are or have been more frequent than assumed, especially among farmers, while in former times they may have also been more prominent among artisan and trader castes. Gellner (1992: 236) also states that a few *guthīs* do occasionally give loans, but this would just be seen as a way of managing their capital (for financing their rituals). The preoccupation of *guthīs* with ritual functions and their moral collectivism has been emphasized by Quigley (1985), who assumes that the amounts involved in occasional credit transactions from the funds of the associations are too small to be accounted for as banking activities. Nevertheless, some *guthī* funds involve substantial amounts of money nowadays, as may have been the case in earlier times, and it seems to be a question of some relevance under what conditions this money is given as credit in contrast to those practices found outside one's community or in a bank. The economic associations, as mentioned by Gellner (1992: 236), also include ritual groups maintained by investing wages collected from labour contributions in the fields of its members, as among the Maharjans or Jyapus (farmers), who thereby also gain access to labour support for moderate wages. These associations are called *mankāḥ guthī* ('collective associations') or *mankāḥ khala* ('team of volunteers', 'cooperative group'). These economic and, at the same time, ritual organizations of the Newars are not necessarily bound to family, clan, or sub-caste membership. Often they are founded on the principle of locality, that is, either on actual or original common residence, though they may define membership sometimes on the basis of caste boundaries or caste-group boundaries, and so are able theoretically to incorporate a large number of persons (usually between 20 and 25, sometimes more). Nearly every *guthī* runs either on the income that it receives from former land donations (and a share of the tenant's harvest) or on a cash fund, which is, in ideal terms, continually

growing from additional donations and collected fines, as well as the interest received from lending the surplus amount of money to private members of the *guthī*.<sup>15</sup> In case the surplus amount is not disbursed as credit to single members of the association, it was and still is sometimes customarily the duty of the *pālā* ('feast organizer'), selected on a yearly rotating basis, to take the excess money as credit and to pay it back with a moderate interest payment until the *guthī*'s meeting the next year. This responsibility is nowadays, however, more often discharged by depositing the *guthī*'s fund in a bank account.

My data suggest that the possibility of attached credit relations in *guthī* organizations may occur among all groups or castes of the Newars. Detailed documented evidence was found for a *sī guthī* called *Śrī Kankeśvarī Sī Guthī* among Shresthas in Naradevī (Kathmandu), who originally migrated to Kathmandu from Thimi. Further documented examples are from among the Shresthas in Sankhu, while detailed interview information was also received on a *dya guthī* (lineage *guthī*) among Jyapus (Maharjan, farmers) in Jyatha Tol (Kathmandu) and in Khokana as well as among the Shilpakars (carpenters) in Patan. Outside the Kathmandu Valley documents and other forms of informations were available in Tansen for *sī guthīs* of the high Buddhist castes of Sakya and Vajracarya. There was also the case of the *Śrī Sanāthan Samāj Guthī* (*sanā guthī*), likewise involved with caring for mortuary rites, and comprising members of different higher castes (Shrestha, Joshi, Pradhan, Amatya, Rajbhandari), all of whose members took a nominal debt from the *guthī* which is passed on to one's offspring as long as membership is continued in the association.

<sup>15</sup> In some *guthīs*, to whose accounts I was granted access, the interest on the reserve money (*jagedā paisā*) that is lent to its members usually ranges between 15 and 20 per cent per year, but, as one case indicates, it may be bargained over and so sometimes reaches much higher rates (of up to 38 per cent per year). The sums borrowed currently range between Rs. 25,000 and 50,000. The interest rates were for various reasons smaller but equally fluctuating in former times (see Frese 1994). While in cases of moderate interest payments, the primary advantage for the debtor lies in the fact that, according to tradition, it is not usually necessary to offer any material security for the credit if taken from the *guthī*, in the exceptional case of much higher interest another motivation seems to be uppermost in people's minds. Here, the bargaining over interest that is conducted in order to receive the credit seems to be related to the notion of auspiciousness, the credit being explained as a *śubha lakṣana*, 'auspicious sign', for the success of one's envisaged investment or endeavour.

It is difficult to assess whether the possibility of attached credit relations in *guthīs* depends on the specific background of caste. If one compares the data from twelve *guthī* associations of the Tuladhars of Asan in Kathmandu, as presented by Lewis (1984: 80-2), one will notice that only one instance concerned lending the excess funds of an association as credit among its members, while all other cited associations have kept their funds in bank accounts or received income from land endowments and individual contributions. The situation is not very different for Vajracaryas of Kathmandu. As indicated, among Shresthas involved in farming, such as in Sankhu, or Maharjan (farmers) of Kathmandu, I could find more instances of credit related to *guthīs*. Outside the Kathmandu Valley, especially in Tansen, this picture of a difference between farmers and other Newar castes has dissolved again, since credit relations were there also found related to *guthīs* of Sakya, Vajracarya, and other Newar castes. In addition, one has to remember, as shown above, that the banking system is a relatively recent invention in Nepal.

A detailed analysis of documents concerning the financial organization of one economically oriented *guthī* in Kathmandu, dating from the years 997-1026 NS (1876-1905 AD), was conducted by Frese (1994). The study involves a *mankāḥ guthī*, which Frese supposed may have been primarily founded for financial reasons, though it also dedicated part of its surplus income to purchasing communally used working tools (e.g. for metalworking), and also for conducting feasts and rituals of the Buddhist Tantric tradition (*ibid.*:5). Membership in this association fluctuated and was on a voluntary basis, and an entrance fee had to be paid (1994: 6). The 24 persons maximally involved came from Buddhist householders of monasteries (Jhvā Bāhāl, Nani Bāhāl, Takṣa Bāhāl, Dagu Bāhāl, and Madu Bahī) or were Buddhist laymen from various places in Kathmandu. According to the documents, the interest was usually thought to be fixed at 10 per cent per year, though in fact the effective interest payments were sometimes a little less. According to Heiko Frese (personal communication) this may reflect an ideal, with the debtor usually paying what he could offer at the time of repaying the credit, whereas to outsiders or newcomers it probably gave the impression of an upper limit not to be exceeded. While it is difficult to assess the effective economic importance of such *guthīs* at that time, since the credits in the documented case did not exceed much more than 120 *taka adhari* (1 *taka* = 1 rupee = 2 *taka adhari/takā moha(r)* or 2 *moha* rupee), it is evident that by the end of the period mentioned the *guthī* had accumulated an amount of nearly

800 *moha* rupees (Rs. 400). This must have been considered a substantial sum of money at that time. As Frese (1994: 79) further states, the *guthī* had supplied credit in a yearly rotating manner to all of its members. Such rotating credit associations exist nowadays in the form of *mankāḥ guthīs* also among farmer castes, as was witnessed in the case of a group established by Maharjan (farmers) and Dangol (potters) in Yetkha and Naradevī in Kathmandu. However, similar developments may also be observed in the context of cultural adaptation.

It is in relation to the aforementioned notion of neighbourhood support that I would like to highlight one successful case of borrowing or acculturation within the *guthī* system of the Newars. An interesting configuration arose when the members of such a *guthī* privately started up a *dhukuṭī* credit round. This happened a few years back in Patan's Padmāvati Mahāvihāra. The younger generation of this monastic lay community from among the Sakya caste participated in the credit round, which worked so well that it inspired the founding members to extend credit operations by learning how to manage a cooperative bank. Through ties of friendship they met members of the SCOPE cooperative of Nyakha Bāhā, from whom they received training on the subject, the trainers themselves having connections with or being part of the GTZ project concerned with the Small Farmers Development Programme. Thus, thanks to their own motivation and relation to a traditional ritual organization, a network of trust evolved that now, in the form of a savings and credit cooperative, has extended its circle of membership to all inhabitants of Ward No. 20 in Patan. This is just one example of local initiative exhibiting traditional as well as modern forms of cooperation (there are a couple of other such examples in Patan and the district of Lalitpur).

### 3.3. *Ritual and credit in the kidu system of the Sherpas*

My third example refers to the system of mutual help current among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. This example nicely demonstrates the interaction between ritual and economic spheres, with the ritual providing a model for the latter. Among the Sherpas, as among most other Tibetan-oriented communities of Nepal, the expression *kidu* signifies a system, either an institution or a less formal structure, embodying adherence to the principle of 'mutual help that is offered in good and bad times'. If it is an institution it does not necessarily bear the actual name of *kidu*, but it will have a name that connotes the same thing: *sevā kendra* (service centre) or *kalyāṅkāri samiti* (welfare organization). More generally, the term functions globally for different (sub-) systems of group help, graded by short-term or long-term reciproc-

ity, type (that is, for good or bad times), and residential proximity.

For the help offered by the system of *martsa* the Sherpas have applied a term meaning 'support for a common interest' (*chisa martsa*, 'communal fund') for which contributions are requested from households inhabiting a widely scattered village or valley area.<sup>16</sup> In particular, a fund called *martsa* is established, either by equal contributions or donations. This fund is lent out on interest to villagers, the profit from the interest payments being used for a common project. For example, village monasteries, yearly ceremonies (such as the *dumji* or *drub-chen* in former times, or the *nyungne* nowadays), bridges or rest-houses, may be sponsored from *martsa* funds, with the merit from such works accruing to the interest payers and donors. In the case of the former *dumji martsa* and the modern *nyungne martsa*, villagers of the Junbesi valley in Solu have either taken a real loan from the fund, on which they pay the interest, or are charged yearly interest on a fictive loan. In both cases the collected interest is used to co-sponsor the yearly ceremony, the unmet costs being borne by the organizing householders (*chiwa*, (*spyi-ba*)) of that year. In addition, the necessary sacred objects or voluntary labour are donated by members and original residents of a widely scattered locality (called *yül*).<sup>17</sup>

In a small locality, one shares a stronger sense of mutual cooperation with people of one's own neighbourhood, the *yülowa*. The *yülowa* group usually consists of about 10 to 25 households, who may be of different clans. These are households that send one another special invitations to feasts in the neighbourhood called *dhen*. They are also bound together by a complementary system of *kapchang*. The lexical meaning of the word *kapchang* is 'help given

<sup>16</sup> There seems to be no Tibetan equivalent for the Sherpa term *martsa*, which may also be pronounced 'matsa'. In a future contribution I will, however, show evidence that this term and its concept of establishing a fund for the finance of ceremonies was continually applied by Sherpas in documents concerning the rules for contributions and the dedication of such funds.

<sup>17</sup> Ramble (1990: 192), from his data on Lubra, reports an even more surprising case of sponsoring village ceremonies by payments of money. These are treated similarly to a capital loan by the priests who accepted the payments, the yearly interest of 10 per cent being used to perform the ceremonies, while the donors receive their share of interest in the form of merit. What is especially worth mentioning here is that the obligation of the priests to continually perform these ceremonies is inherited through generations, even though the original patrons may have long since passed away. (My thanks to the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* for this reference.) A further case, similar to that of the Sherpas,

upon occasion', especially during life-cycle events. Sherpas relate the word to three different kinds of help.

The first meaning is related to a wedding or funeral ceremony, on the day following which neighbours will invite guests to their own house for the feast called *dhen*. In return for these invitations the guests are expected to give presents of *khatag* (white scarf) and money to the hosts.

The second meaning is used in connection with the construction of a house. Thus one Sherpa explained:

At the beginning of building a house I conduct a *sang* (smoke sacrifice), for which I invite all my fellow villagers, all my relatives, and then I start to build my house. Then the villagers bring *kapchang*. Suppose there are 40-50 labourers and the carpenters; then the villagers will bring *kapchang* and feed them. They bring food and beer (*chang*) and will also give some help and work for one day.<sup>18</sup>

A third application of *kapchang* arises again in connection with house construction. The whole process of building a house is traditionally embedded in a kind of *rite de passage*. Before the start of construction the site must

is reported for Helambu by Clarke (1991: 49), who explains that all households that have membership in the village perform the duty of rotationally sponsoring the yearly *na-rag* festival. He writes: "This duty accompanies a right to a loan from the village temple. Blessed money may be regarded as more effective in trade than a private loan, and the costs of this day are seen locally as the annual interest on the loan as well as an opportunity to make merit by giving." (My thanks to Franz-Karl Ehrhard for this reference.)

<sup>18</sup> If they give more days of work this would then be considered as *roa*, a system of voluntary help which builds on long-term reciprocity. This may as well refer to help given for ceremonial occasions, such as service at feasts of the life cycle. This again would be distinguished from the short-term reciprocal form of mutual help called *naglag* that applies especially to working on the fields. Apart from these forms of help, there are also ceremonial gifts specified according to the type of the event, e.g. *sorok* (gift of money) during funeral rites or *dusok* (gift of money) at marriage. All these gifts are expected to be reciprocated at a similar event, while the ideal is to give a little bit more than one received, of course, according to one's means. In other words, the balance should not be settled. In the case of *dusok* these gifts may be considered analogous to credit, since they are written down in an account book by the householder and read out loudly to the audience at the end of the feast. Thus the obligation to reciprocate them (with voluntary interest) is implicitly formalized.

be ritually purified by appeasing the forces of nature (the *lu-sabdag*) at which time *kapchang* is offered for the first time. In the second stage, the householders who are being supported by relatives and villagers experience a situation of liminality. They experience an inversion of the role of the ideally generous householder (*jindhag* (*sbyin-bdhag*)) and are now invited by the neighbours to the site of their new house, where they are even fed. Finally, in order to conduct a second *sang* at the inauguration of the new house, villagers will come together once more, as the same man told:

On the day when I finished building my house I did a very big *puja*, for which I invited all my relatives and villagers. This *puja* is also called the *sang* for the *khangbi tsoa(g)* (i.e. when the *darchen* (flagpole) is erected in front of the house). At that time they will also bring *kapchang*, [but as the house is already built] this will be money. The *nangba* (the patri-group) will give more *kapchang* than neighbours.

What we can infer from this ritual process is that a domestic commodity, i.e. *chang*, is imbued with ritual, or sacred, meaning as a medium of exchange. *Chang* is used in many ritual contexts among the Sherpas (Mühlich 1995), while it was occasionally used, in the form of *cadle* (yeast made from *chang*), as a means of payment in former times (Mühlich 1996: 189). In the process of building a house, however, we can see how the meaning of *chang* is extended, in *kapchang*, to include various contextually dependent forms of help and gifts which are to be reciprocated in a delayed exchange, similar to a credit and sometimes topped (replacing our understanding of 'interest'). The ritual process accompanying the construction of a house thus transforms the new householder couple, formerly dependent on their own family, into members of a community-based system of mutual help.<sup>19</sup> We might also note briefly that this system of mutual help reduces the costs of building a standard house by two thirds of the costs that would otherwise arise when all labour is being paid for. Viewing this from an economic perspective, the Sherpas' ritual involvement with people of their neighbourhood as well as with the wider locality generates a natural basis for credit-worthiness, so that,

<sup>19</sup> A similar observation has been made by Wangmo in her description of the Bhutanese tradition and rites accompanying the construction of a house. As she states (1985: 114), the consecration ceremony of the house construction can be seen as similar in importance to those ceremonies held at marriage and death, thus corresponding to a *rite de passage*. (My thanks to Christoph Cüppers for this reference.)

in general, no one is forced to become dependent on mortgaging land or other valuables. Credit is usually given informally at yearly interest rates of 20 per cent, there being no compound interest if there is a delay in repayment. Sometimes the creditor himself will have to bear the burden of default. In general terms, however, the sanction to be expected by exclusion from systems of mutual help related to ritual and labour support still seems a higher risk for the individual debtor than any loss of investment for the creditor. This holds true, as far as I could see, also for other *kidu* systems, as among the Manangis, the Khatsaras (or Newar-Tibetans), the Newar *guhīs*, and probably for other northern groups of Nepal as well.

#### 3.4. *The parma system and attached relations of credit among Chetris*

The dominant culture in Nepal, that of the Chetri and Brahman castes, has a rather different ethic underpinning mutual help, credit, and credit-worthiness (see, for instance, Bennett 1983, 1994; Caplan 1972; Pfaff-Czarnecka 1989; Miller 1990; Gray 1995). While the original religious tradition forbade activities of moneylending for priests, or permitted only lenient interest rates for members of the high castes, reality has shown that for the high-caste peasantry moneylending was a means to achieve dominance over ethnic populations (see Sagant 1996). Regarding internal community credit relations, moneylending is considered to be unworthy or with reluctance in one part of the culture; and as an opportunity, but only if conducted according to moral standards of reciprocity, in another. Among the Chetris the reciprocal system of mutual help and agricultural labour exchange, called *parma*, is complemented by their system of voluntary help called *śramadān* or *samradān* which is used for the construction of bridges, paths, and other community projects under the guidance of the ward representative.

As Gray (1995: 179) states, *parma* with its emphasis on perfectly balanced reciprocity is conceived separately from relations of generalized reciprocity within the *santān* or extended household group, where solidarity is exhibited by entitlements to property. Even though the members of *parma* groups do not share such interests, there is an appeal to values of the brotherhood (*dāju-bhāi*). It is a system of help that is also meant to offer support for ritual services, such as attending to guests and preparing meals. In some communities *parma* groups seem only to be recruited by female members of the households of the locality and the same caste, while in others they are more extensive. Usually, the members of the groups will match ties anew each year. Membership may fluctuate according to the size and wealth of the households involved, landholding patterns, and also changing ties of

friendship. The boundary between mutual help related to ritual and labour exchange, on the one hand, and long-term economic support, on the other, thus seems to be more strict. For example, in a community of Chetris in the western part of the Kathmandu Valley, those people who are in need of support for 'social loans' related to life-cycle ceremonies may turn to their neighbours who do not hold back in providing help. Interest-free loans are given, called *painco* for small short-term loans and *sāpaṭī* for bigger amounts for a somewhat longer period. After one year, the loan taken in the context of mutual support, however, may change into a market-type one, a *karjā* or *rin*. In the second year it bears an interest rate of 36 per cent, which is still tolerable considering the first interest-free year; but in the third year, the interest rises to 60 per cent. Besides these ritually effected credit relations, I have noticed cases of mortgaging land, including ceding use of the land, in contracts between neighbours or near relatives, a practice that, given the importance of enduring systems of mutual help, is probably less common among the northern people of Nepal.

Taken together, the system of mutual help in the Chetri community I visited tends to be restricted to the *parma* groups. Still, in these groups, members of all castes interrelate to provide help for agriculture and also for feasts and house construction. Where these relations are functioning, material support and credit may be offered without formal contracts. The pressure for repayment is more intense, however. In contrast to these traditional *parma*-related groups of householders involving members of all castes of the locality, the more modernized system of the forest-user group of the same visited area, representing in ideal terms the whole village, has not attracted people from the lower castes.

#### 4. Conclusion

Following this brief contribution on credit practices and systems in Nepal, two major aspects, those of social embeddedness and sacred money given as credit, will be summarized. In the first section of this article, the notion of the social embeddedness of credit relations in Nepal was understood in analogy to the wider social frame provided by the society's institutions and changing practices of law. The treatment of the subject thus followed the outline of an ethnographic history presented by Polanyi (1977) in his treatment of the change from a non-market to a market economy in 17th- and 18th-century Europe. Polanyi showed that there was a change in the power of institutions and practices of law which supported a change from an "embedded" to a "disembedded" economy, where most goods, including land,

become transformed into commodities (Polanyi 1977: 104ff.). In Nepal, by contrast, religious institutions and the civil law, constituted at first by the king and then by his administration, have somehow continued to influence the economic sphere up until the recent present, or at least until the 1960s. Only then was the economic sphere, and with it relations of credit, made relatively independent of recognition of status, caste, and patronage relations. The drift towards a market economy has not, however, resolved the inequalities that were tolerated under the former traditional system. Indeed, as in other traditional societies, such as in parts of India (see Hardiman 1996, Trenk 1991), relations between moneylenders or rich people and peasants or commoners are still sometimes structured according to old patterns, despite measures to improve access to credit for the common people. The reasons for this are manifold and beyond the scope of this article. One clue can, however, be seen in the multiplex character of the long-term relations between creditor and debtor that sometimes rely less on a material basis than on mutual trust.

This latter point leads to the second aspect presented in introducing the different forms of credit systems that exist apart from private credit relations. This aspect concerns the sacredness of the credit that is received by the members of ritual associations. Of course, we cannot term such practices as banking activities, because access to credit is restricted to the membership of the association concerned. Under such circumstances, it may sound exaggerated to call such money received in credit 'sacred money', because this would evoke a metaphor introduced by Laum (1924) in describing the evolution of money from sacrifice in ancient Greece. In ancient Greece, the atmosphere at the king's court where attendants received their portions in line with their status and rank must have been much more public, whereas the meeting of a ritual association in Nepal is usually a secret affair. In some of these associations the credit to be disbursed, however, is considered the possession of the god of the association, and in this sense it is sacred. What is derived as benefit is not only interest, but for the debtor the accumulation of merit and the belief in the power of what has been called blessed or auspicious money. Examples, such as credit practices related to the *guthīs* of the Newars and those related to the village monastery among the Sherpas, among the Lubragpas (Ramble 1990) and the Helambu Sherpas (Clarke 1991), bear witness to these sacred aspects of credit. A vivid description of the meeting of a *guthī*, given by one informant, verifies this perspective:

Until the meeting has decided who will receive the fund next, nobody may touch it. If somebody does not return the credit in time he may fear punishment by the god. If his business or endeavour is successful he may attribute this to the auspiciousness of the credit.

Thus he will feel obliged to redistribute a part of his gains by sponsoring a ritual or making a donation in return for the boon or credit obtained. I suppose that it is under such conditions that attached credit relations could evolve in ritual associations in a manner where credit-worthiness is not based primarily on the material security or the public status that an applicant for credit can offer, but on relations of trust. In a similar way, among other traditional groups of mutual help, such as among people related in *kidu* and *dhikur* systems, somebody who has received credit in the form of help, in cash or kind, will feel obliged to pay it back at a similar ritual or ceremonial event for the donor, sometimes with an increment, thus bringing out the notion of voluntary payment of interest. A reader with a formalist understanding of economics might oppose this understanding of credit and interest. But just how appropriate is a formalist understanding of money, credit, and interest when dealing with the economic requirements of a traditional society and its regional differences and variations? Modern definitions of interest, as a compensation for delayed consumption, for loss of security (by giving away one's savings) or as a compensation for lost opportunity of investment, are not easily applicable to the setting of a traditional economy, where saving focuses less on personal accumulation of wealth and more on enhancing one's social esteem and relations with relatives, neighbours, and friends, and, not least, one's relations with the gods, who, from a traditional perspective, still provide a source to fall back on in times of need. Thus saving often turns into credit, which may be conceived, on the one hand, as a form of creating unity among the members of a cult, replacing in a sense the notion of descent, and, on the other hand, as a means of providing security by lending.

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**MICHAEL VAILLANCOURT ARIS**

27 March 1946 — 27 March 1999

## A Literary Biography of Michael Aris

Charles' Ramble

The first academic article I ever wrote was a review (published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*) of recent books on Tibet and the Himalaya. One of these books was *Bhutan: The early history of a Himalayan Kingdom* (1979), the first substantial work by one of my doctoral supervisors, Michael Aris. That I should now find myself trying to sum up in a few pages what the author achieved in the two decades that have elapsed since then is, to say the least, sobering.

The obituaries that appeared in the British national press were largely silent about Aris's scholarly achievements, and they sustained beyond his death the persona he had been allocated by the media in life (Per Kvaerne's piece in the *Independent* being a notable exception): the 'English academic' or 'Oxford scholar' husband of Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the political opposition in Myanmar. Aris, a stalwart supporter of his wife and her cause, never objected to this designation, and the press for its part is hardly to blame for mentioning the subject of Tibet or Bhutan so infrequently in connection with his name: our public imagination still classifies the Himalaya (as opposed to, say, ancient Greece, or the modern Masai) as an arena of mysticism and mountaineering rather than of historical and anthropological enquiry.

Michael Aris did as much to alter that image as anyone has in the last twenty years. I do not mean that he wrote worthy tracts with which to batter down the walls of Shangrila; the profession produces any amount of that literature, but of course it isn't read by the people on the other side of the door. Aris's opus was a wooden horse. Most of his books were the kind of thing anyone with a reasonably well-informed interest in the area might allow into his or her house. The works are by no means sensationalist, but no one who read them would feel that the Himalaya had been diminished; they

leave the edifice standing, but replace cobwebby mysticism with the magic of humanism.

Aris's books and articles are listed in the bibliography provided in this Bulletin. A sense of his achievement may be had by taking a close look at a few selected works, while at the same time trying to observe the whole opus through slightly unfocused eyes to see what shapes and colours stand out.

Geographically speaking, the most salient area was of course Bhutan. Aris had gone there in 1967 and stayed for six years as—among other things—private tutor to the younger generation of the royal family. *Bhutan* charts the country's career from breakaway Tibetan principality to theocratic nation-state, but stops short at the emergence of the present ruling dynasty in the first decade of the present century. The book received mixed reviews, with the more severe critics focusing on the usual defects of works that have begun life as doctoral theses, viz., too many facts, no obvious purpose, contempt for the reader. Until its publication, most of what was known about Bhutan had been written from an Indian (or British Indian) perspective, or depended on the accounts of a handful of European travellers. Whatever its deficiencies, *Bhutan* was the first work to look at the country's history from the inside, as it were, while giving due weight to its cultural and political neighbourhood, and as a history of that period it remains unsurpassed.

The author picked up the threads of his account in *The Raven Crown* (1994). The crown in question stands for the ruling dynasty of Bhutan, now in its fourth generation, which superseded more than two centuries of theocratic government. Although it is also a historical study, the book is altogether a different proposition from its predecessor. To begin with, it is vastly more reader-friendly. Richly illustrated with monochrome photographs, mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the work has something of the quality of Robert Graves's historical pot-boilers. *The Raven Crown* does not of course masquerade as a work of fiction, but the wealth of historical detail is finely balanced by perceptive commentary and the spice of hearsay and legend. The waning years of Ugyen Wangchuk, the founder of the dynasty, recall the serene close to the martial career of Graves's *Count Belisarius*:

In the final years after the death of his much-loved queen, [Ugyen Wangchuk] went into retreat, living very humbly in a small residence he had made for himself by the side of his daughter's mansion at Lamé Gönpa. There he would receive no

one at all during the morning while he occupied himself with his devotions. It was only in the afternoon that visitors would come from far and near and he would attend to matters of government ... He greatly regretted the acts of violence he had committed in his youth, but the unprecedented peace of his long reign must surely have given him a measure of happiness. His subjects regarded him not only as a king but also practically as a lama.

[He] finally expired with his head resting in the lap of his son and heir. (p. 109)

*The Raven Crown* is the work of a scholar who has mastered both the subject of his study and the prose in which it is conveyed; and while the tone is never patronizing, we can surely read in the closing paragraph a tutor's valedictory words of advice to an esteemed student:

Traditions can be maintained, revived or recast, others invented. In the end it is the king alone who decides to what degree he retreats into ceremony and obfuscation or emerges into the light of day. Ritual and reality have to be balanced in new and meaningful ways. The king has to sense the mood of his subjects, and win their trust to express their will clearly and with no reserve. (p. 146)

While both *Bhutan* and *The Raven Crown* are preoccupied with rulers, high lamas, and international affairs, a number of Aris's works reveal an interest in popular culture that is unusual among historians of Tibet and the Himalaya. One example of this interest is an early piece entitled "'The Admonition of the Thunderbolt Cannon-ball' and its Place in the Bhutanese New Year Festival" (1976). The ostensible aim of the article is to present a Bhutanese document that is recited, on the occasion of the New Year, to a group of actors representing a military company. While the preamble declares the author's intention to "relate [the recital] briefly to the wider context of the New Year celebrations" in both Tibet and Bhutan, it is in fact the context itself that takes pride of place, with the text being practically relegated to an appendix. The first-hand observations of rituals are those of an eye tutored by familiarity with the society, and the economy of writing contrasts favourably with much modern Himalayan ethnography, which is too often underdescribed and overinterpreted. Aris may have spent much of his time with princes and

lamas, but a number of near-asides reveal a genuine common touch:

This process [of Tibetanization]... has tended to obscure much of the early cultural life of the Bhutanese peoples. Although the arts of textile and basket weaving bear the true stamp of indigenous crafts of great antiquity, they alone seem to survive as the single expression of the true native genius for the physical arts. (p. 604)

Many years later he was able to pursue this early interest in an article entitled 'Textiles, Text, and Context: The cloth and clothing of Bhutan in historical perspective' (1994), a highly readable account of the historical dynamics that have affected the regional textile cultures of the country. As certain observers have remarked, there is great deal in high Tibetan art and literature that is afflicted by stasis and conservatism, and Aris recognized that real vitality was often to be found on the fringes of the Buddhist State. "The Boneless Tongue": alternative voices from Bhutan in the context of Lamaist societies' (1987), a study of wandering bards of the Himalaya, is a particularly good exercise in the same spirit. (One of the unfinished projects at the time of Aris's death was in fact a study of vernacular epics of Bhutan.)

Western histories of Tibet have depended very largely on mainstream historical works by the Tibetans themselves; the social history of the Tibetan cultural area, which must depend for its sources on the local equivalent of parish registers and the like, is still in its infancy. Aris was keenly aware of this lacuna in the discipline, and a conference that he convened in St Antony's College in 1997, 'The History of Tibet: New Resources and Perspectives', was intended to be the first of several measures to draw attention to the fact and to redress the balance.

An interesting theme that recurs in Aris's work is the way in which Tibetans (or Bhutanese) and Europeans perceived each other; and, more subtly, how these encounters may have led the observers on either side to modify their perception of themselves. Such impressions were by no means always conveyed in writing but might be preserved through the media of painting and photography. *Views of Mediaeval Bhutan* (1982) reproduces the canvases (as well as a part of the journals) of Samuel Davis, who had visited the country in the late eighteenth century. *Lamas, Princes and Brigands*, of which Aris was a contributing editor, presents some of the remarkable photographs taken by the explorer-botanist Joseph Rock, who travelled in the Sino-Tibetan marches during the first half of this century. During the Eighth Seminar of

the International Association of Tibetan Studies, held in Bloomington in 1998, Aris introduced a project on which he was working, and that he did not live to complete. This was the so-called 'Wise Collection', an assemblage of maps and paintings of landscapes, buildings, and ceremonies by a Tibetan artist who had been commissioned to travel through Tibet in the mid-nineteenth century for this purpose by the eponymous British patron of the collection.

What about the Himalayan view of the Europeans? 'India and the British According to a Tibetan Text of the Late 18th Century' (1994) and *Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse on India' of 1789* (1995) both deal with the efforts of a renowned Tibetan scholar to come to grips with a description of British India that he had received from a Bhutanese disciple. A later work, 'Himalayan Encounters' (1997), is a rather odd but interesting collage of brief testimonies by Tibetans and Bhutanese of their meetings with foreigners.

Why this preoccupation with cross-cultural perspectives? There were, I think, several related motives. Michael Aris's early training was as a modern historian, not as an Orientalist or anthropologist. His doctorate, from SOAS, was in Tibetan literature, but his later Junior Research Fellowship at St John's College, Oxford, returned him to the intellectual open market. In this environment he was obviously aware that, from the viewpoint of the more mainstream specializations within the field of history, Tibet and Bhutan might seem almost comically exotic. By underscoring the connections that had been established with Tibet and Bhutan by representatives of a more familiar world—soldiers, missionaries, and servants of the Company or the Empire—Aris sought, I think, to bring the image of his chosen field out of the clouds and onto a recognizable continuum of knowledge.

This project was part of his long, and frequently frustrating, campaign to establish Tibetan and Himalayan studies on an institutional footing in Oxford. One of his first forays was a hopeful article entitled 'Resources for Tibetan Studies at Oxford' (1982), in which he argued his case by citing the *embaras de richesses* in Tibetan texts housed in the Bodleian Library. He did not live to see the project realized; but a mere month before he died benefactions had been pledged by generous friends sufficient to endow in perpetuity the post of Lecturer in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Oxford which will be in place by October 2000. His family and close academic colleagues have now launched an appeal for the 'Michael Aris Memorial Trust for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies' for the purpose of endowing further posts, resources, and studentships at Oxford. Aris had the satisfaction of knowing that his

own academic subjects would continue and flourish after his passing.

But there was another facet to Aris's fascination with cultural boundary-crossing which lies closer to the heart of the anthropological enterprise, and surely has much to do with his own personal circumstances. The problem is clearly spelt out in 'Himalayan Encounters' (1997):

Is it possible to conduct a meaningful discourse across the barriers separating European and allied Himalayan cultures? Are we so locked into our own habits of thoughts and expression and so conditioned by them that true communication between them is difficult or impossible? (p. 179)

The introduction to *Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse'* offers a fine portrait of the heroic age of contacts between Bhutan and the West. Both sides are represented by men deeply immersed in their respective traditions, striving to come to terms with something profoundly alien without compromising the integrity of those traditions.

The British officials who travelled to Bhutan and Tibet in this period exemplified the cosmopolitanism and learning of the European Enlightenment, typical of a small but influential minority in India in this period ... The head lamas of Tibet and Bhutan with whom the British had their dealings were monk-statesmen who saw little conflict between their sacred and secular offices. Thus the emissaries from both sides easily assumed the combined role of scholar diplomats... The gentle prejudice and natural imperfections we can discern in [*Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse'*] now, more than two hundred years later, can surely be forgiven. (p. 2)

There is no inexorable march from the dark age of mutual incomprehension to a golden future where cultural barriers are dissolved. Aris frequently contrasted the eloquent openness of the early British travellers with the imperial bombast of their Victorian successors. But he never succumbed to the dogma of laying the blame for all things bad at the imperialists' door; on the contrary, he allowed the Tibetans and Bhutanese an active role in their international affairs:

There is a world of difference between the inspired and sympathetic accounts written by Bogle, Turner, Davis and Hamilton in

the 18th century and all the dull invective of British officials in the 19th century. Some of that difference can surely be attributed to more than a change in British imperial attitudes and a decline in English prose style. (*Bhutan*, p. 263)

Bhutanese expansionism in the Indian plains and growing civil unrest within the country itself were equally to blame. In 1979 Aris convened the Second Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Oxford. The proceedings, which he co-edited with Aung San Suu Kyi, were entitled *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*, the representative of the British and, after 1947, the Indian governments. Richardson was the guest of honour at the 'History of Tibet' workshop in 1997; Aris edited and wrote a preface to his collected papers (*High Peaks, Pure Earth* [1998]) and, significantly, dedicated *Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse'* to him on his ninetieth birthday. The Victorians may not have lived up to the promising start made by their predecessors in Tibet—there had been no one approaching the calibre of Brian Hodgson, the polymath British Resident in Kathmandu; but Aris appreciated that the Empire had at last acquitted itself in Tibet in the person of Hugh Richardson, the greatest scholar-diplomat of them all. Michael Aris himself came from a diplomatic background, and his sensitivity in dealing with the political undercurrents in Tibetan Studies earned him further respect among his colleagues. This dimension of his contribution has been expressed most poignantly by Braham Norwick, in a letter which he wrote to Anthony Aris on the death of his twin brother:

His combination of charm and scholarship won our hearts as well as our minds. It was he who set the tone of the International Association for Tibetan Studies. Thanks to his efforts and skills, that group became the major organization fostering academic studies of Tibetan culture and history. It was Michael who managed to keep the Soviet and Chinese scholars working in rational harmony with the Asian and western scholars whose major allegiance was to the Dalai Lama and democracy, and he helped to bring joy as a component of serious studies...

Michael Aris's quest to place Tibetan Studies on a par with any other established field of scholarship underlay the most controversial and, I think, the most important book he wrote. This was *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706)*

(1988). To appreciate the furore caused by this book a little explanation is required.

There is a category of Tibetan literature called *terma*, literally 'treasure', which occupies a special place in the Lamaist tradition. The Buddhist treasure texts (the Bonpo equivalent are a different matter, and do not concern us here) are believed by Tibetans to have been written by Padmasambhava, the eighth-century magus who was involved in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet. Tibet was not yet ready for the teachings contained in the treasures, and Padmasambhava accordingly concealed them (in rocks, caves, and so forth) for rediscovery at a more propitious time. The occasion presented itself after the eleventh century during the reintroduction of Buddhism into the ruins of the Tibetan empire; and more pertinently, when the disparate groups of Buddhists in the country were trying to achieve institutional coherence amid the rise of new schools. The legitimacy of the Nyingmapa—literally, the 'Old'—sect depended heavily on the authenticity of these rediscovered treasures. One of the most prolific 'treasure-discoverers' (*tertön*) was Pemalingpa, and it is his biography with which the first part of *Hidden Treasures* is concerned.

The second part deals with a work that purports to be the secret biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama. The latter was removed from office at a relatively young age, and conventional evidence indicates that he died in exile on his way to Peking. But in spite of his reputation for worldliness (he renounced the few monastic vows he had taken, and is credited with the authorship of some very unmonkish poems) he has always been a hugely popular figure among Tibetans. The belief that, far from being a mere libertine, he was actually a nonconformist saint, was sustained by his 'Secret Biography', according to which he did not die after leaving Lhasa but went on to have a long and illustrious career as a wandering lama. The authenticity of the biography is officially recognised by the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Aris's conclusions were simple and unequivocal: the 'Secret Biography' is a work of fiction and the 'treasure-discoverer' Pemalingpa was a charlatan. *Hidden Treasures* managed to cause offence across an impressively wide spectrum: first, in Bhutan (the Sixth Dalai Lama was the descendant of a brother of Pemalingpa, and both are forebears of the Royal Family); second, among Western scholars, where even rationalists found Aris's position presumptuous and his categorical rejection of the *terma* tradition unreasonable; and finally, Western devotees of Tibetan Buddhism, about whom he was uncharacteristically forthright:

To what extent can the symbols, habits of thought and belief systems of one people be truly intelligible to another whose own are very different? Many people today seem content to disregard this basic problem in epistemology when it comes to Tibet. Particularly the great number of westerners who now go through the motions of adopting the external forms of Tibetan Buddhism seem to believe that the myths, gods and symbols of Tibet can be transposed to a western setting and have precisely the same relevance, value and power as in their land of origin. (p. 3)

And of the two protagonists themselves:

I believe their future reputation will not benefit from the sort of uncritical adulation western devotees reserve for such figures. There one finds a conscious suspension of disbelief that is a contradiction both of traditional faith, which is deep and uncontrived, and of modern rationalism, which is our own heritage. (p. 4)

Accusations of charlatanism, hypocrisy, and exploitation are nothing new where Tibetan religion is concerned. They are indeed the normal rhetoric of Chinese Communist ideology, and it would be surprising not to hear them from that quarter. But there are, at present, only two internationally audible positions on Tibetan society: unqualified adulation and unmitigated condemnation. With a few notable exceptions, there is still a kind of tacit agreement among Western scholars to say nothing too publicly about the historical warts of which they are only too well aware, lest these be exploited for purposes of hostile propaganda. Aris regarded this reticence as a disservice: if Tibetan civilization was to hold its own as a subject of serious scholarship, there could be no special pleading, and nothing should be off limits.

There is a particular reluctance on the part of many modern scholars to recognize the entirely fabricated nature of the Tibetan 'treasure-texts'. It is as if their enthusiasm for things Tibetan and Himalayan has blinded them to an obvious truth. There is no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that any of the 'rediscovered' texts of the cult actually date from the period claimed for them.

...Most important of all, many of Pemalingpa's contemporaries were of the opinion that he was basically a fraud. If they... were

capable of holding that view, then surely the rational and critical scholars of the twentieth century can do so too. (pp. 96-7)

It is axiomatic in Buddhism that the excesses and idiosyncracies of saints are not to be judged according to the criteria applicable to common folk. But Aris gave no quarter, and the standard of ordinary decency he invokes in *Hidden Treasures* sometimes makes Pemalingpa look very shabby indeed. (Elsewhere, he did not miss the opportunity to reprimand the great nineteenth-century saint Shabkar on the grounds that he "was not slow to record the very high opinions and expectations held of him by others. ... Saint though he undoubtedly was, there is a conspicuous element of what looks like vanity in some of Zhabs-dkar's writing." [*Himalayan Encounters*, p. 183, fn. 17])

Seen from another perspective, all Aris was doing was applying to the two biographies the same stringent criteria that are quite normal in modern textual criticism. But the approach that he applied to Pemalingpa's biography—reading between the lines to reveal his mastery of the artisanal techniques essential to good legerdemain, as well as the deep personal insecurity that might have driven him to seek public adulation and a respectable spiritual paternity in the figure of Padmasambhava—provided sufficient grounds for some readers to condemn the author as a *tendra*, an enemy of the Buddhist doctrine.

It is unfortunate that the passages such as those quoted above eclipsed the equally sharp remarks Aris made about shoddy Western scholarship that too often substitutes theoretical dogma for sensitivity and thought.

Structuralism, neo-structuralism, post-structuralism, nihilism, individualism, pragmatism... are all Western constructs which developed out of conditions very far removed from those obtaining in the societies that gave birth to the mysteries studied here. To impose on oriental societies the models which these various schools have developed for the analysis of European societies can only lead to confusion, distortion or oversimplification unless those societies are first studied from their own viewpoints and through the products of their own great and literate cultures.

...One key to the problem, I believe, lies in language—in the simple recognition that habits of mind and attitudes of belief are revealed not just through a choice of words but through tone and

nuance.... this sort of fluency, which depends more on mental sympathy than on verbal dexterity, is not easy to teach and can really only be acquired by one's own efforts.... I believe this approach will continue to yield more dividends than any amount of neo- or post-structuralism. (p. 40)

Can an individual be both a scholar and a believer without placing swathes of territory out of bounds to critical inquiry? I often heard the question asked in relation to Michael Aris. One possible answer is, I suppose, that the bigger a person is the more room there will be to accommodate incompatible worlds, but a bibliographical overview such as this is hardly an appropriate place to pursue the matter. An important part of Michael Aris's achievement was his quest to wed the legacy of the European Enlightenment to Tibetan and Himalayan Studies. This is not just a question of being hard-headed: anyone can do that, and humanism is altogether a more subtle affair than mere polemic. The moral authority for hard-headedness has to be grounded in a profound sympathy with a culture, and it is difficult to convey this sympathy in a few quotations, especially when a man chooses not to advertise it in his published work. But if we are to confine ourselves to a consideration of Aris's writing, perhaps I could make my point by cheating slightly for the sake of economy, and cite a short work that he never published. A number of people were aware of Michael Aris's regard for the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche as something more than a scholar. The lama's reincarnation was enthroned in Kathmandu in 1997, and Aris was one of the many visitors who came to attend the ceremony. Not long after returning to England he sent me a letter that concluded with the following words:

...I managed to talk to Suu on the phone yesterday, the first time since Christmas Eve. She was in good heart, tho' impossibly busy.

Oh yes, and here is a poem I wrote in Tibetan as I flew back from Kathmandu. What do you think?

As ever,

Michael

mtshungs-bral bla-ma'i zhal-gyi dkyil-'khor de  
 dus-yun ring-du ma-mjal blo-pham che /  
 gsung-gi bdud-brtsi zhim-po ma-'thungs-par /  
 chu-med-bzhin-du kha-skom shin-tu che /  
 de-ltar sdug-kyang kha-rtsang glo-bur-du /  
 gnas-tshul ya-mtshan chen-po 'di-ltar 'byung /  
 khyod-kyi blo-sems ma-skyo ngu mi-dgos /  
 bla-ma slar-yang mi'i tshul-du 'dzin /  
 mig-gi 'bras-bu lha-rigs myu-gu gcig /  
 bya-rung-kha-shor 'dabs-su 'khrungs-tshar yod /  
 zla-tshes 'di-la brtan-brtan mgron-du shog /  
 lo-rgyus de-ltar thos-nas dran-med brgyal /  
 dran-pa slar-yang gsos-nas tshab-tshub-gyis /  
 nam-rgyun 'gan-khur spangs-nas gnam-grur 'dzul /  
 gnam-gyi mkha'-dbyings brgyud-nas bal-yul 'byor /  
 de-nas rkang-pas sa-brtan reg-tsam-du /  
 mi-rigs skad-rigs mi-gcig chos-grogs mnyam /  
 chos-srid gnyis-kyi re-ba bskyed-bzhin-du /  
 yang-srid khri-ston phyogs-su mgyogs-por 'byor /  
 byams-brtse bla-ma'i sku-skyes yid-'ong-de /  
 'jigs-zhum bral-bar khri-mthon stengs-du bzhugs /  
 nges-med phyag-rgya zhabs-rgya sku-rtses gnang /  
 khrom-chen dkyil-du mandal rten-gsum bzhes /  
 rang-gi lha-dar dri-med phul-ba-nas /  
 phyag-gi 'gram-lcag chen-po ha-har gnang /  
 da-lta pha-yul phyogs-su phur-bzhin-skabs /  
 mgo-yi phyag-dbang byin-rlabs gsal-por tshor /  
 dga'-skyo zung-gi ngang-du rang-khyim slebs /  
 snga-ma'i 'gan-gyi 'khur-po ma-bslang-gong /  
 yang-srid mchog-gi zhabs-pad brtan-par smon /  
 chos-sgrogs kun-la thugs-rje-che-che zhu /

An English rendering might read something like this:

The magic circle of my matchless lama's face—  
 How sad I was not to have seen it for so long!  
 Without the sweet nectar of his words to drink  
 I was as parched with thirst as someone with no water.  
 And though I mourned so, suddenly, the other day  
 Something wonderful happened:  
 "Don't be sad; you have no need to weep;  
 Your lama has again taken human form.  
 A young sprout of divine provenance, a glory to behold,  
 Has been born near the Great Stupa of Bodnath.  
 Be sure to come as a guest on the appointed day!"  
 On hearing these words I fainted.  
 When I had recovered my senses, I hurriedly  
 Set aside my day-to-day duties. I took a plane  
 And travelled through the sky to Kathmandu.  
 As soon as I had set foot on firm ground,  
 Together with my fellow-disciples of various races and tongues,  
 Filled with hope for affairs of the spirit and of the world,  
 We hurried to the seat of that exalted rebirth.  
 The beautiful incarnation of my beloved lama  
 Was sitting, unafraid, on his high throne,  
 All alone, making playful gestures with his hands and feet.  
 He received the threefold offering in the midst of the crowd  
 And as we each presented him with an impeccable scarf  
 He laughingly slapped our cheeks;  
 Now, as I fly back to my country  
 I can distinctly feel the blessing of his hand on my head.  
 So I arrived home, joy mingled with sadness.  
 But before I resume the common round of duties  
 I pray earnestly to the lotus feet of this wonderful incarnation,  
 And to all my fellow-disciples I say,

*Thank you, thank you...*

“Of the whole enormous area which was once the spirited domain of Tibetan culture and religion, stretching from Ladakh in the west to the borders of the Chinese provinces of Szechuan and Yunnan in the east, from the Himalayas in the south to the Mongolian steppes and the vast wastes of northern Tibet, now only Bhutan seems to survive as the one resolute and self-contained representative of a fast disappearing civilization”

*A Cultural History of Tibet* by David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson.

Michael Aris's entire career as a Tibetologist and Himalayan specialist was spent recording the history and extant traces of this “fast disappearing civilization”. A few weeks before his death on 27 March this year, his 53rd birthday, he had convened a Steering Committee at St Antony's College, University of Oxford, for the purpose of seeking funds to endow posts, studentships and resources for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at the University of Oxford. His intention was to provide this country for the first time with a firm institutional base for these subjects. Even before Michael Aris's death, his hopes and efforts were rewarded by benefactions which had been pledged by friends of the family, Hans and Mīrit Rausing and Joseph and Lisbet Koerner. Michael Aris's family and his academic colleagues have now established an educational and research Trust entitled “The Michael Aris Memorial Trust for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies”. With the magnificent benefactions from the Rausing and Koerner families, the Trustees have decided to endow a post of Lecturer in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at the Oriental Faculty, University of Oxford. The post will be advertised before the end of the year and an appointee will start teaching in October 2000.

The Trustees are also delighted to announce that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has graciously agreed to be Patron of the Appeal.

The First Oxford International Chamber Music Festival will take place 3–8 July next year and a concert will be held at St. Antony's College on 5th July in support of The Michael Aris Memorial Trust. Further details on the Festival will be posted in November.

For further information please contact

The Michael Aris Memorial Trust  
10 Parkfields  
London SW15 6NH  
Tel: 0181 785 6313 Fax: 0181 785 0999  
Email: [aristrust@serindia.com](mailto:aristrust@serindia.com)  
Web: [www.serindia.com/aristrust](http://www.serindia.com/aristrust)

## Karma Phuntsho

The week after Michael died, *Kuensel*, a bilingual weekly and the only newspaper in Bhutan, reported the demise of the doyen of Bhutan Studies. The whole kingdom of Bhutan joined Michael's family in mourning the untimely death of one of her greatest historians and friends, chanting prayers and lighting thousands of butter lamps in major temples and monasteries. For Bhutanese old and young, Michael personified scholarship on Buddhism and Bhutan.

Michael's contact with Bhutan—and other Himalayan regions—began when he obtained the exceptional privilege of going to Bhutan in 1967 as a royal tutor arranged through his friend Marco Pallis. Young and adventurous, Michael found himself a stranger in an unknown corner of the world, where there were no vehicle roads, hospitals, or electricity and only few who knew the language he spoke. Soon after his arrival, he was appointed the English tutor to the princes and princesses of King of Bhutan. He loved his royal pupils and they loved him too. During our long walks or afternoon teas, he would often tell me how much he adored the country, the exotic culture, and hospitable people.

The first time I met Michael was in 1997 when I joined Oxford. I vividly remember that cold evening on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997 sitting in a small house in Wolvercote having just reached Oxford when Michael rang me to say “Kuzug Zangpolā” (*sku-gzugs bzang-po-la*, Good Health) and welcomed me to Oxford with his benign character and fluent Dzongkha. He was the first and the only foreigner I have met who easily impressed me with his knowledge of Dzongkha, the official language of Bhutan. Since then, Michael and I spent much time together talking about things, places, and people we had in common and a strong bond grew between us, mainly due to our common

interest in Tibet, Buddhism, and especially Bhutan.

He enjoyed narrating the pranks the naughty princesses played on him. He once told me how the princesses instructed him to greet a minister who was coming to their classroom. They taught him how he should bow down and say, *O lyonpo shang bom dug la*. As the minister entered the room, he conveyed his greetings with utmost courtesy while his mischievous pupils burst into laughter behind him. His greeting meant: "O minister, (your) nose is enormous." His pupils also insisted that he find a local girl to marry and during the festivals, they would ask him to choose one from the dancing girls. He always declined, sensing their tricks. However, to his astonishment, they found him a 'maiden', who, when they brought her in, turned out to be an old woman with a huge goitre dangling down her throat. Michael's time in Bhutan was full of adventure and fun, and at the same time productive, something rarely obtained by a foreigner. For some time he lived in a house in Uchu, bought for him by the dowager queen. He also stayed in Wangdicholing Palace in Bumthang and in Thimphu, the capital town, working for the government as a translator. In all these places, Michael found himself at home and he enjoyed sharing every facet of Bhutanese village life. It was in those days he learnt his fluent Dzongkha and delved into the history and culture of Bhutan, on which he was later to become the West's foremost authority.

During his time in Bhutan, he also came across the great Tibetan masters such as the Karmapa, Kalu Rinpoche, and Polu Khenpo from whom he could imbibe Buddhism and knowledge on Tibet. Above all, he had the opportunity to study with Dilgo Khyentse, one of the greatest Tibetan Buddhist masters of this century. Khyentse was to leave a great impact on the life of both Michael and Aung San Suu Kyi, and to prove in years to come an unparalleled source of inspiration, hope, and wisdom for them. Michael's meeting with Khyentse and other outstanding lamas residing in Bhutan after the fateful invasion of Tibet became his good fortune as it shaped his future as an eminent historian of Tibet.

Michael also worked with the King and the senior officials, giving them a hand in various development projects. He saw Bhutan reluctantly shed its historic isolation and enter modernity with education, roads, and medical facilities reaching even remote parts of Bhutan. He also witnessed the development of Bhutan's national language into a proper written form, the local and village codes of conduct into a formal judiciary system, and the regeneration

of traditional scholarship. In all these areas, Michael always gave unrelenting support to the Bhutanese and cherished a deep admiration of the virtue of the rich and unique spiritual and traditional heritage of Bhutan. He left Bhutan in 1977 to visit again only in 1989 but for the rest of his life, Michael lived a Bhutanese life, in the sense that Bhutan occupied much of his thoughts and deeds.

Michael had in a way known Bhutan better than most of the Bhutanese do. With his royal ties, he had privileges which an ordinary visitor can only dream of; he had every access and the support to carry out his research as he wished. He also held a unique position in the Bhutanese world, blending traditional knowledge with modern scholarship. To the older Bhutanese scholars, he was a zealous student of Bhutanese culture and history and a symbol of foreign interest in and respect for their own wisdom. They admired the zest with which he worked and generously dispensed what they knew. For the younger generations, most of whom received a western education and unfortunately lacked interest or skill in their own language and culture, he was like a beacon of modern Bhutanese scholarship. He presented their own history and culture in English, the language in which most of the Bhutanese youth can communicate best even today. Thus, he served as a bridge between the traditional and the modern, learning from the former and passing it to the latter. In the eyes of the Bhutanese, Michael became the only foreigner who knew their culture and history with adequate insight into the religious, historical, and ethnographic dimensions of the country.

Of over forty books, monographs, and articles he wrote, around thirty are on Bhutan, and out of six books, four are entirely on Bhutan, one half on Bhutan and the sixth on something related to Bhutan. Among them, it was his book *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives*, a critical presentation of Padma Lingpa, a major Bhutanese saint, and the Sixth Dalai Lama, that provoked controversy and perhaps did the most to earn him a wide, albeit mixed reputation. For some time, it made Michael a little infamous among the traditional rightists in Bhutan. However, for his unsurpassed academic contribution on the country and its history, the Bhutanese always acknowledge him as the foremost western savant on Bhutan.

Michael was a profound historian and capable of presenting his case with lucidity verbally or in writing. He was not a philosopher per se and his knowledge of Buddhism, an indispensable factor in mastering Himalayan history and culture, was adequate but not outstanding. The only serious work he

did on Buddhism is his translation of Jamyang Khyentse's short text entitled *Brief Discourse on the Essence of All the Ways*. He was, however, one of the very few western Tibetologists who attempted and did well in writing letters and poetry in Tibetan.

Michael was an extraordinary person with friends and connections in all sections of the society. He was very tactful and often ready to pull strings for a good cause. Being good at heart, soft in words, refined in manners, and yet enduring with a stiff upper lip the frustrations of his long and indefinite separation from his wife, the challenges of raising his children by himself, and the insidious ailment terminating his life, he proved, to many of us, the epitome of a true English gentlemen.

### Bhikṣuṇī Dhammāvati

I did not know Michael Aris 25 years ago, in 1974, when he and his wife came to Nepal. He left his wife here in Kathmandu while he set off hither and thither to remote villages and to Lhasa in order to carry out his research on Mahāyāna Buddhism. At that time his wife, Aung San Suu Kyi, used to come daily to Dharmakīrti Vihāra to teach English to the students of our study circle. Occasionally, I would see him when he came by the convent to meet his wife.

I had known Michael's mother-in-law, Daw Khin Kyi, from long before. As the Burmese ambassador to Delhi, Nepal was also part of her responsibilities, and so she came on a regular basis, and I would often meet her when she did.

Michael's wife, Aung San Suu Kyi, presented me with a copy of a book about the Buddha's 500 births. For six years, I told the stories from this book in public. To celebrate the completion of the recitation of these stories, a five-foot tall statue of Lord Buddha was set up in the Vasundhara temple on the Ring Road. Michael and Suu assisted in this meritorious act.

Moreover, one year before Michael passed away, he promised to look into cost of supporting the education of the novices at Dharmakīrti Vihāra. Alas, he passed away before he was able to fulfill this intention.

As far as I remember, he came to Nepal three times. Once he came with his wife and three-month-old son. The second time, he, Suu, and the two boys all came. On the third occasion, they took the two boys to Burma to perform their temporary ordination, and came afterwards to Nepal. I can't remember now in which years these events happened.

Later on, Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest for political reasons. Nevertheless, in 1995, when I was in Burma and when I went to Panditarama, she would often come from her house to offer the main meal; whenever she did so, she would come see me as well. Last year, too, when I went with lay supporters to Burma she invited us several times to her house, but out of fear of the political authorities the lay supporter who had invited us to Burma would not allow it. What a pity.

Bhikṣuṇī Dhammāvati, Dharmakīrti Vihāra, Kathmandu.

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*an exhaustive bibliography*

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#### Projects in progress at his death on 27th March 1999

- (1) A study of the life of the Bengali Buddhist pandit Vanaratna (1384-1468).
- (2) Edition and revised translation of the Royal Chronicle of Sikkim composed by Thutob Namgyal and Yeshe Drolma, 1908.
- (3) A study of the vernacular epics of Bhutan.
- (4) Edition and translation of the Bhutanese chronicle of relations between Bhutan and Nepal, c. 1870.
- (5) Edition and translation of the chronicle of the Brogpa people of Mera-Sakteng in Eastern Bhutan, c. 1730.
- (6) A facsimile edition and commentary on the 'Wise Collection' of Tibetan picture-maps and drawings of Tibetan ceremonies and festivals, c. 1860, preserved in the British Library, London.

## Announcements

### A report on the 5<sup>th</sup> Himalayan Languages Symposium

Kathmandu, Nepal, September 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

#### About the Symposium

For the first time, the Himalayan Languages Symposium was held in Nepal, in the very heart of the Himalayas, the home of lesser-known indigenous languages which are in urgent need of documentation and linguistic analysis. This has been a unique opportunity for scholars from East and West to exchange their views and establish closer scholarly contacts for future research.

This year's symposium was held at the Kathmandu Guest House in the heart of Kathmandu's tourist area. The symposium was jointly sponsored by the Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University, the Royal Nepal Academy, and the Linguistic Society of Nepal.

The Permanent Secretariat for this annual Symposium is maintained at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Previously, the Himalayan Languages Symposium has been convened at Leiden, Noordwijkerhout; Santa Barbara, California; and Pune, India.

#### The symposium programme

A call for papers was sent out to over 160 scholars in various countries of the Americas, Europe and Asia who are engaged in research on subjects related to Himalayan languages and language communities. The 3-day symposium covered topics including the description of previously undescribed languages, historical and comparative studies, Himalayan languages in theoretical and typological perspective, sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics, language planning, and the prehistory of Himalayan language communities. The symposium programme was published, and included information on the organization of academic sessions, the titles and subject areas of presentations, and the

participation of Nepalese and international scholars. The foreign scholars included those from the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, China, India, Bhutan, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. The Nepalese scholars were represented by senior professors from various language departments of Tribhuvan University, journalists, writers and students. We are hopeful that the truly international character of this symposium will give new directions to future research on the languages and ethnic communities of the Himalayan region. Out of 68 papers submitted, 48 papers were presented at both the regular and parallel sessions.

#### **Outcomes of the Symposium**

This symposium has been widely acclaimed as very useful and stimulating. Its main outcomes can be summarized as follows :

1. The research scholars and linguists working on the languages of the Himalayas have greatly appreciated this forum for presentation of their findings from on-going projects and the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas with other scholars.
2. The Himalayan region is an area of great cultural and linguistic diversity, and research into the minority languages and ethnic cultures of this region can serve to preserve and promote these languages and communities. The symposium has thus stressed the need for consistent research planning in the Himalayan belt, for coordination and collaboration in research activities, and for the training of more manpower for linguistic research.
3. The Organizing Committee decided to publish the proceedings of the 5th Himalayan Languages Symposium. The Chairman, Prof. Dr. Tej R. Kansakar announced this at the concluding session of the symposium and requested all the paper presenters to submit the final drafts of their papers before the end of 1999. He also gratefully acknowledged the generous financial assistance to be given by the Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University to meet the costs of this publication in the year 2000.

#### **Members of the Organizing Committee**

1. Dr Churamani Bandhu, Professor and Head, Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University;
2. Member, Department of Language and Literature, Royal Nepal Academy;
3. Dr Tej R. Kansakar, Chairman, Organizing Committee; President, Linguistic Society of Nepal;

## **Announcements**

4. Dr Madhav P. Pokharel, Professor, Central Department of Linguistics;
5. Dr Yogendra P. Yadava, Professor, Central Department of Linguistics;
6. Mr Til Bikram Nembang (Bairagi Kainla), Kathmandu, Nepal;
7. Dr George van Driem, Director, Himalayan Languages Project, Leiden University, The Netherlands;
8. Dr Ballabh Mani Dahal, Professor, Central Department of Nepali and Central Department of Linguistics;
9. Mr Nirmal M. Tuladhar, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University.

#### **Date and Venue of the 6th Himalayan Languages Symposium**

The 6th Himalayan Languages Symposium will be held on June 15, 16, and 17, 2000 in the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, USA.

## CONFERENCE ON THE BUDDHIST HERITAGE OF NEPĀL MAṆḌALA

1-5 November 1998.

In November of 1998, a substantial conference was held in Kathmandu bringing Newar and foreign scholars together to consider the heritage, present state, and future of Buddhism in Nepāl Maṇḍala. For five days, there were seminars, lectures, slide shows, and heated discussions. It was more than an academic conference, however, and the arts and ritual skills of the Valley's Buddhist communities were on show, attracting crowds of curious Nepalese and tourists alike. Outdoors, there were stages filled with Gyanmala troupes; indoors, there were performances of traditional Vajrayāna dance. Vajrācāryas constructed a complete Vagiśvarakīrti Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and performed the Saptavidhanottara Puja, and there were displays of sculpture, painting, and calligraphy.

*Here is the press release which preceded the conference.*

Nepal, the birthplace of Krakuchchanda, Kanakmuni and Shakyamuni Buddhas and the place of the origin of Swayambhu, is a country repletewith Buddhist ideals. Buddhism had spread in Nepal in the hoary past and Buddhist culture has been an integral part of the life of Nepalese people. Preservation as well as continuation of many Buddhist rituals and practices is indeed a loving tradition of Nepalese Buddhists, which is a unique feature of Nepalese culture on the whole.

Nepal Mandal, the present-day Kathmandu valley, comprised of the three cities popularly known as the ancient Buddhist cities of the world, is undoubtedly the principal seat of Newa Buddhists. Their society is based on the profound principles of Sravakayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana; and, thus, they have their own way of viewing the world. To them, the eyes of Swayambhunath are a symbol of the awareness of emptiness and the five wisdoms of five celestial Buddhas which dispel five principal delusions. They possess a unique culture and lifestyle rituals pertaining from birth to death. Hundreds of Viharas (small and big) were constructed in the Valley as Buddhist institutions. Innumerable Chaityas exist that exhibit their faith in Buddhism.

But, unfortunately, natural calamities, political disorders, foreign invasions, government policies that occurred in the valley from time to time and the slogans of modernization have debased the ancient values and practices. In order to preserve and promote Buddhist philosophy, religion, culture, art and architecture inherited by the Newa Buddhists of the valley by means of research and studies, Lotus Research Centre and other organizations jointly propose a conference with the theme "Buddhist Heritage of Nepal for A Better Life".

*As a result of the conference, the following statement was issued.*

Whereas there has been this past November 1-5 of 1998 a Conference on the Buddhist Heritage of Nepal Mandala, with a wide-ranging program of seminars, lectures, cultural exhibitions and rituals,

We who have taken part in this conference collectively make the following declarations:

**First:** Adi Buddha Shree Swayambhu Jyotirupa Dharmadhatu Vagisvara is the foundation of the Buddhist culture of Nepal Mandala: through the Conference, our knowledge about the Buddhist culture of Nepal Mandal has been increased and our faith and devotion to this culture has been reaffirmed. We thereby demand that there be greater attention of the concerned to the preservation and development of the Buddhist culture in and around the Kathmandu Valley, which has existed in an unbroken continuity for thousands of years.

**Second:** Given the special relation of Sakyamuni Buddha to the Buddhist culture of the Kathmandu Valley, the importance of his birthplace as a pilgrimage destination for all the Buddhists of the world, and its status as a World Heritage Site: we deplore the fact that although the master plan has been ready for several years, it has not yet been implemented; we are horrified to hear that precious antiquities have been lost from the site; and we demand that attention be focussed on this critical situation. Indeed, this is a cause for national embarrassment in the eyes of the world. Bearing in mind the reputation and dignity of the nation of Nepal, we challenge all local and national offices of the government to work for a prompt conclusion of the Lumbini project.

**Third:** The majority of Buddhists who live in the Kathmandu Valley or whose roots are here, whether they are young or old, women or men, lay people or priests, have no opportunity for the study or understanding of their own Buddhist culture. We therefore demand that schools and universities offer course in Buddhism and Buddhist culture. Moreover, we together feel that it is necessary to found a Buddhist university, and we demand that this be undertaken immediately.

**Fourth:** Just as we speak of Tibetan, Indian, Chinese or Japanese Buddhisms, so too here in the Kathmandu Valley there is an indigenous form of Buddhism which is well known as the Buddhism of Nepal Mandal. In order to better describe and identify this unique and ancient form of Buddhism we propose the establishment of a periodic seminar.

**Fifth:** Various universities and research centres around the world are undertaking study, teaching and research into Newar Buddhism. In Nepal itself, however, we lack a central reference point for such research. The Lotus Research Centre has gone some ways towards realising this by establishing an internet website; and we believe that a major information centre dedicated to the study of Newar Buddhism must be established.

**Sixth:** Those Buddhist Newars who live in Nepal outside the Kathmandu Valley have traditionally followed Newar Buddhism; but because of a lack of Vajracaryas, they are now compelled to abandon their traditional rituals. Understanding this, there is an immediate need for concerned people to teach the traditional rituals, so that those dwelling outside the Kathmandu Valley need not abandon their own Buddhist culture and identity.

**Seventh:** Newar Buddhist treasures are being stolen every year: divine images, illuminated manuscripts, caityas, and even the root deities of important monasteries. Yet these looted religious treasures are never found or retrieved although they occasionally surface in the international art market. We must guard this, our own material religious inheritance, while at the same time drawing world attention to the Nepalese government's apparent inability to protect our priceless heritage.

**Eighth:** The kingdom of Nepal is comprised of many religions, ethnic groups, languages, cultures, and political parties. Within this diversity, there is an abundance of co-operation, mutual respect, and affection. This co-operation, religious tolerance, mutual respect, and affection is the very foundation of the nation, and it is this relationship which sustains the nation. We believe

that it is the duty of the whole of Nepal to avoid damaging this relationship by caring for every member equally.

**Ninth:** Nepal Bhasha has been stated as a national language in the Nepalese constitution. We call for the execution of the constitution recognizing Nepal Bhasha as an official language in Newar majority regions.

**Tenth:** This five day conference, including various seminars, exhibitions, and cultural programs on the riches of classical Newar Buddhist culture is complete. May the merit developing from its performance be dedicated to the support and welfare of all beings.

May all beings be happy.

For further information, please consult [www.nepalonline.net/lrc](http://www.nepalonline.net/lrc).

The HARVARD ORIENTAL SERIES is pleased to announce the recent release, on Dec. 24, 1998, of volume 55:

*Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts*

compiled, edited, and translated by Gregory G. Maskarinec  
Cambridge, Mass. and London, England 1998

ISBN 0-674-60795-3

pp. xii, (Nepalese text) N 1-391, (Engl. transl.) 1-391; pp. 392-695  
(commentary, indexes) = total pp. xii+1085. price: \$ 90

Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts is a bilingual (Nepali and English) critical edition of three complete, representative repertoires of shaman texts collected over the past twenty years in Jajarkot District, Western Nepal. Throughout that area, shamans continue to fulfill important therapeutic roles, diagnosing problems, treating afflictions, and restoring order and balance to the lives of their clients and their communities. Each of these efforts incorporates extensive, meticulously memorized oral texts, materials that not only clarify symptoms and causes but also detail the proper ways to conduct rituals. These texts preserve the knowledge necessary to act as a shaman, and confirm a social world that demands continued intervention by shamans.

This volume, the first of its kind, includes both publicly chanted recitals and privately whispered spells of the area's three leading shamans, annotated with extensive notes. Containing over 250 texts totaling nearly 11,000 lines of material, this work endeavors to provide a comprehensive documentation of a non-Western healing system through the material that sustains and preserves that tradition, demonstrating that shaman texts remain thoroughly meaningful.

For information write to:  
Editor, Harvard Oriental Series,  
Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies,  
2 Divinity Avenue,  
Cambridge MA 02138, USA 617-495 3295;

The book can be ordered directly from Harvard Univ. Press.; see:  
<http://128.103.251.49/default.html> or email to: [cal@hup.harvard.edu](mailto:cal@hup.harvard.edu)

AN *IN FIERI* ARCHIVE OF  
VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE HIMALAYAS

Report by: Valerio Calisse and Martino Nicoletti

Since 1984, a group of Italian ethnologists has carried out various scientific expeditions to Nepal and north-east India (Himachal Pradesh).

At the same time, the project 'Sacred and Non-Sacred Space in Eurasia' (directed by Professor Romano Mastromattei—University of Roma II—'Tor Vergata') has produced a considerable number of videos in semi-professional format. Most of these documents have been edited in order to be shown at important ethnological film festivals and international scientific congresses.

Some of this data will be shown together with other documentaries filmed and edited by European anthropologists during a monographic session of the 'Visual Anthropology' course held by Dr. Martino Nicoletti (Academic Year 1998/99) at the University of Perugia.

List of videos

- A Shamanic Ritual in a Tamang Village*  
(A. Vincenzo, camera). 1988, 60 minutes.  
*A Tamang Shamanic Ritual in Baudhnath*  
(M. Romanò, camera). 1989, 160 minutes.  
*A Sherpa Shamanic Ritual in Helambu*  
(M. Romanò, camera). 1988 (edited 1990), 57 minutes.  
*The Tamang: Life and Religious Features*  
(M. Nicoletti, camera). 1990 (edited 1991), 14 minutes.  
*The Triten Norbutse Bon-po Monastery*  
(M. Nicoletti, camera). 1990 (edited 1992), 7 minutes.  
*The Chepang: Life and Worship of a Little-Known Group in Nepal*  
(D. Riboli, camera). 1990 (edited 1991) 12 minutes.  
*A Tamang Shamaness' Séance*  
(M. Nicoletti, R. Mastromattei). 1990 (edited 1994).  
*A Shamanic Séance in Pratapur (Tarai)*  
(M. Nicoletti, camera 1; C. Sani, camera 2). 1990, 64 minutes.

In 1997/98, three further videos were edited:

**Along The Sacred River – The Bagmati In The Valley of Kathmandu – Nepal**  
(Lungo il fiume sacro – la Bagmati della valle di Kathmandu – Nepal)

Director: Caterina Bonapace, 1998, 36 minutes, Beta, colour, commentary: Italian

The Bagmati, the most sacred and important river in Nepal, runs through the valley of the capital, Kathmandu. There are numerous Hindu temples along the river banks, in which rituals are performed and where ascetic pilgrims can find a place to stay. Today, unfortunately, many areas are so polluted that the rituals can no longer possible be performed and most of the temples are in a state of ruin and disrepair or are occupied by the homeless. Cultural stratification, differing needs, and the abandoning of sacred traditional values have caused a visible change and sense of loss even in places where religious feeling has been alive for centuries. This video journeys through the sacred and ritual nature of the river, providing a more complex analysis of its current situation.

**Pa-wo: A Tibetan Oracular Ritual**  
(Pa-wo: un rituale oracolare tibetano)

Director: Martino Nicoletti, 1998, 25 minutes. Betacam, colour, commentary: Italian.

Wangchuk, an old Tibetan, took refuge in Nepal after the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Here he continued to practise the profession of Pa-wo, or 'living oracle'. The occasion for the séance presented in the film, which took place in May 1993, was a consultation by those present relating to personal matters. The Pa-wo had to convince the mountain warrior divinity, Thang-lha, that the problem merited his interest and intervention. Despite the considerable age and physical frailty of Wangchuk, he was able to dance and play with great energy and vitality for most of the ritual. The documentary examines the link between spirit possession and the musical rhythm which both induces and maintains the trance.

**Sanu Kancha: Trance, Music, and Dance in Nepal**  
(Sanu Kancha: trance, musica e danza in Nepal)

Director: Valerio Calisse, 1998, 42 minutes, Betacam, colour, commentary: Italian.

At the age of 27, Sanu Kancha, a Nepalese farmer of Tamang descent, decided to become a Shaman (*bombo* in Tamang) in order to contribute to the welfare and protection of his people. The shamanic séance presented in this video was held for the purpose of conjuring up the spirit of a famous Tamang Shaman, Sete Rumba, who died in 1993. This ritual took place in November 1997, in a private house in the Makwanpur district. Music is a constant element in any shamanic séance. For the whole duration of the ritual, which continued from dusk to dawn, the rhythm of the drum, the chanting of evocatory formulas, the ringing of bells, and sounding of the bone-trumpet, characterized the various phases of the session, and assumed a fundamental role.

For further information, contact:

Prof Romano Mastromattei  
Universita' degli studi di Roma Tor Vergata, dip. di storia  
via Orazio Raimondo  
00173 Roma, Italy

Dr Martino Nicoletti  
Universita' degli studi di Perugia  
Dip. uomo e territorio, sez. antropologia  
via dell'Aquilone, 7  
06100 Perugia, Italy

Valerio Calisse  
e-mail: [v.calisse@excalhq.it](mailto:v.calisse@excalhq.it)

HIMALAYAN PANELS AT THE 16TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON MODERN SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

(Edinburgh, Scotland, 6<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> September 2000)

### Himalayan life histories

Convenor: Michael Hutt

This panel has been inspired in part by the SOAS-based Centre of South Asian Studies' project on South Asian Life Histories. Various perspectives can and have been taken on processes of social, cultural, and political change in Africa and Asia, and these include several famous life histories (one thinks of Freeman's *Untouchable*, or Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*), but in the field of Himalayan studies as conducted by researchers from the Euro-American world there have been only a few attempts to view these processes through the prism of an individual life—examples include Snellgrove's *Four Lamas of Dolpo*, Fisher's *Living Martyrs*, a life history in Lynn Bennett's *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters*, an extended case study in Linda Stone's *Illness and Feeding the Dead in Hindu Nepal*; and an article by Mary Des Chene in the recent collected volume *Selves in Time and Place*. There is however no dearth of autobiographical and biographical material in published form, and anthropologists have often collected oral histories in the course of fieldwork in the Himalaya. As well as bringing examples of such material to light, it is intended that the panel will also address a variety of questions, such as: in what contexts and for what purposes are life histories told in the Himalaya? What light do such life histories shed on local concepts of selfhood and agency? What languages are selected for the telling of life histories, and are there generic styles or forms? Are these modelled on forms and genres found outside the immediate region? How does a life history help our understanding of local society? Are local conceptions of individual life courses changing and if so how? Can life histories be used to reconstruct history? And so on... Contributions which address these or related concerns and which bring little-known Himalayan life histories to light will be welcomed.

Please contact Michael Hutt on [mh8@soas.ac.uk](mailto:mh8@soas.ac.uk).

### Resistance and the state in Nepal

Convenor: David Gellner

Much recent anthropological research has been concerned with resistance, but resistance has often been understood in an unhelpfully diffuse way. Even under the Panchayat system political scientists wrote about the state apparatus in Nepal, but only a few scholars did so from bottom-up perspectives (e.g. Borgström, *The Patron and the Pancha*, Delhi: Vikas, 1980). It is certainly time to think about the presence of the state in the hills and plains of Nepal and to ask a variety of questions about its mode of operation. How did the state impinge on villagers' lives before 1990 and how has that changed since then? What are the factors that have led some to support the Maoist movement? What determines how active that support is? How far do the rights-based individualist and ethnic revivalist discourses of urban intellectuals penetrate to the villages, and when they do, how do villagers respond and/or make use of them? Does the issue of Nepal as a Hindu state concern people in remote areas? How far are the agencies of the state, as well as the numerous NGO and INGO agencies active in rural areas, acting together, and how far do they compete against each other? Do villagers perceive the state as monolithic and controlled by certain groups, as an amorphous series of parasitic gatekeepers, or in some other way? What are the effects of the rhetorics of empowerment and participation pushed by government and NGOs?

Contributions which address some of these or related concerns, and which provide both empirical material and analysis of the state and resistance, will be welcomed, especially those which advance our understanding of the Maoist movement.

Papers already promised include:

Anne de Sales 'Between Ethnic Claims and Maoism: The Case of the Magars of Western Nepal'

Philippe Ramirez 'Nostalgia for Order and Political Harmony in a Rural Area of West Nepal, 1986-90'

William Fisher title t.b.a.

Colin Millard 'Perceptions of the Maobadi in Dorpatan district, Nepal'

Please contact David Gellner: [david.gellner@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:david.gellner@brunel.ac.uk)

**Bhutan: socio-cultural parameters and changing times**

Convenor: Françoise Pommaret

The panel will focus on the traditional parameters and cultural markers of Bhutan, which are still operative in the framework of contemporary Bhutan. In the last forty years, Bhutan has undergone tremendous social and cultural changes. However, there has always been an emphasis on upholding 'traditional values'. The blending of these two apparently contradictory forces is one of the most interesting challenges that Bhutan faces today. This panel will present different aspects of these changes and the ways that traditional parameters and socio-cultural markers of Bhutanese society have adapted to them, but also how these changes have been influenced by traditional parameters. The papers presented will cover various fields, such as development, agriculture, architecture, history, religion, politics, languages, law, and the economy.

Please contact: *Fpommaret@aol.com***For further details about the conference please contact:***south.asia.conference@ed.ac.uk*Web page: *http://www.ed.ac.uk/sociol/sas/index.htm*

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*niem@wlink.com.np*

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Die Burushaski-Sprache von Hunza und Nager. Teil I: Grammatik, Teil II: Texte mit Übersetzungen, Teil III: Wörterbuch Burushaski-Deutsch, Deutsch-Burushaski* by Hermann Berger. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998 (Neuindische Studien 13).

Reviewed by Hermann Kreutzmann

The long-awaited publication of Hermann Berger's studies of the isolated language of Burushaski has finally appeared after more than 35 years of work. Together with his previous tome on the Yasin-Burushaski (*Das Yasin-Burushaski (Werchikwar): Grammatik, Texte, Wörterbuch*, published as Vol. 3 in the Neuindische Studien series) which belongs to the same group of isolated languages, this means that a most extensive collection of texts and lexemes is now available. The work comes in three volumes: a grammar (271 pp.), a collection of texts (273 pp.), and a dictionary (646 pp.). Based on Berger's own collection, the 67 texts are provided in transcription and in German translation. The material consists mainly of ghost stories and was recorded in 1959 and subsequently checked (mainly in 1961) and analysed.

The dictionary was extended substantially through the provision of entries by Allama Nasir-ud-din Hunzai, who features as co-author of the dictionary (Volume III). Allama Nasir-ud-din Hunzai is the best known and most respected local scholar of the Hunza Valley who independently had started the compilation of a dictionary which can now fortunately be merged with Berger's work. Certain aspects of the Nager-Burushaski and local variants

were contributed by Hugh van Skyhawk. Thus we are now in a favourable position to use the most comprehensive language study of Burushaski to date.

Burushaski still remains an unwritten language: although some efforts have been made by local scholars to provide it with a script, these are not widely accepted. This would be necessary for the further collection and preservation of texts and poems, for the provision of Burushaski classes to young students, and for the processing of material for transmission by the local radio station at Gilgit as part of the Burushaski medium programme. Although the release of the three volumes was greatly appreciated when they were formally launched in Gilgit recently, some expectations of the interested public (not necessarily only the academic public) should be mentioned. It was suggested that an English-Burushaski version of the dictionary would be more helpful than a German one, because the language of academic institutions in Pakistan, and increasingly the medium of instruction in schools as well, is English. Some professional advice and support for the introduction of a written form of Burushaski remains a desideratum. Obviously it was not the aim of the present publication; none the less, expectations are high. Now that it has finally become available it is to be hoped that Berger's contribution will provide a sound foundation for further publications on Burushaski which fulfill the expectations of the Burushaski speakers. They are the only ones who can preserve and develop their language and use it as their domestic medium of communication and for the maintenance of their cultural heritage.

*Ascètes et Rois : Un monastère de Kanphata Yogis au Népal* by  
Véronique Bouillier. Paris: CNRS Editions, coll. CNRS  
Ethnologie, 1997. 263pp.

Reviewed by Philippe Ramirez

At first sight, this book looks like a monograph about a Nepalese monastery occupied by Kanphata yogi renunciators. As such, the monograph in itself would have constituted a very respectable contribution to Indian and Himalayan studies. However, its bearing is much wider. The Caughera monastery, which was founded at an uncertain date by Ratannath, a follower

of Gorakhnath, played a major role in the history of the Rapti region, but has never been described before. Véronique Bouillier reveals its spatial organization, which reflects a ternary religious landscape wherein Gorakhnath, Siva's ascetic form, sits beside the terrifying Bhairav and the Goddess. The ritual life of the monastery, carefully reported hour by hour and day by day, occupies an astonishing importance, suggesting that ritual may well be the prime vocation of this institution. It is unfortunate that the density of the description leaves little room for individual figures and experiences; the reader would have liked to have read a couple of life stories, making him understand how the monastery's dwellers reached it, and the radical break with their previous life that was involved in the renunciation.

Starting from this ethnographic sketch of a regionally significant monastery, Véronique Bouillier has managed to raise a number of issues which pertain to fundamental aspects of the anthropology and history of Nepal and India: the figure of Ratannath, the position of renunciators in a Hindu kingdom's ritual complexes, land tenure history—these three themes constantly interweave.

The saint ascetic Ratannath, the founder of Caughera monastery, is the hero of a rich mythology which provides evidence for relations between the Hindu monarchy of the so-called medieval period (14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and the disseminators of Sivaite tantrism. A fascinating aspect of Ratannath, which is brought to light remarkably well by Bouillier, opens some very promising perspectives: this figure is situated on the boundary between Hinduism and Islam, in a position which greatly blurs such a boundary and inspires renewed approaches to the religious as well as the political history of the subcontinent. Going from myth to ritual, the Ratannath figure puts on the clothes of sovereignty. The author suggests in fact that he might be none other than "the real sovereign of a territory under the authority of the monastery and the symbolic sovereign of Dang valley whose administration he delegates to the king..." The staging of the sovereignty reaches its climax when, following the annual election of the monastery chief (*pir*), a procession of all the yogis walks through the Dang-Dekhuri area to finally reach Patan Devi shrine, in the Indian district of Gonda. This visit, which is important not only for the yogis but for Dang Tharus as well (Giselle Krauskopff has given a major contribution on this question) inverts the political configuration prevailing elsewhere where the one who comes to see the Goddess is the subordinate. One may wonder if the procession as it exists today is not an adaptation or a reinterpretation of a similar ritual which formerly signified the submission of Dang to an authority centred on the Indian side of the present border.

Finally, the book contains a well-documented section dedicated to the temporal role of Caughera monastery, i.e. its economic and administrative relations both with the Nepalese state and its own dependants, particularly in the framework of the *guthi* attached to the religious institution. Bouillier emphasizes that the very particular religious situation of the monastery did not result in a juridical exception, as compared with other religious institutions. Considering the formulation of the numerous legal documents presented here, my feeling is that they do not differ from those concerned with secular circles. Thus it seems to me that the political status of this particular monastery in Gorkhali and Rana Nepal may be compared not only to the status of other *guthis* but also to that of the dominant Bahun-Chetri lineages, on which the Nepalese state definitely lay.

*Development, Society and Environment in Tibet: Papers presented at a panel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies* edited by Graham E. Clarke. Vienna, 1998. 199pp.

Reviewed by Perdita Pohle

The proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies held at Schloss Seggau in Graz in 1995 are published in a total of seven volumes which contain a selection of the total of 228 papers read at this conference. Apart from the general volumes (Vol. I - II, ed. by H. Krasser, M.T. Much, E. Steinkeller, H. Tauscher, 1997) the papers presented at special panels are published in five separate volumes (Vol. III - VII) edited by their respective chairpersons. Graham E. Clarke of Oxford University was one of the organizers of a panel session which focused on economic, social, and environmental changes in Tibet. He prepared and edited the volume reviewed here.

Because our knowledge of contemporary Tibet is still very modest and the country itself is only partially open to international researchers, the papers presented in this volume are of an extraordinarily high value. They introduce original case studies of social and environmental change in Tibet undertaken by experienced Western, Tibetan, and Chinese scholars. In addition to empiri-

cal data collected during extensive field research, primary statistical data are also reviewed. By taking both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the papers are able to give a representative analysis of the present situation in Tibet.

The volume begins with an essay by the editor which provides a comprehensive introduction to the subject matter of the volume. In this he links Tibet and its special political and environmental situation to the broader context of a more intellectual debate on development issues and environmental problems. Starting with a brief historical account of cultural and economic linkages between Tibet, China, and the wider world, the author points out the extent to which changes in Tibet and China have to be taken as part of a universal process of development, especially during this century. Whether these are the Western ideas of material progress and economic growth bringing general human betterment that were promoted after World War II, or the environmentalist ideas about conservation, balance, and survival alongside nature that arose in the late 1960s—almost all of these ideas have influenced and still are influencing Tibet's development. However, a question arises about the way in which and the degree to which China has introduced its particular cultural and political vision of modernity to the ecological particularities of highland Tibet and its special socio-cultural and demographic situation. Considering economic modernity, the author critically points out that Western-derived models of economic growth do not fit with the special environmental and socio-cultural situation in Tibet. Tibet is not a temperate lowland with a high agricultural production, nor does it have a high population density with a high capacity for human institutions. Also, it has no coastal access, there is no possibility of low-cost infrastructure for transport and communication, nor is there open access to markets and flows of information. In spite of this, Tibet has its own civilization with a complex of values and institutions which do not always centre on material need. With regard to the rise of Western ideas of environmentalism in contradiction to the ideas of material progress, Clarke points out that there is a belief among several Western groups that Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism lead people to live in harmony with nature. Underlying this belief is the issue of the degree to which different cultures predispose different environmental attitudes and behaviours. According to the author, this issue has to be approached with caution. Although Buddhist societies have some cultural caution about disturbing the land, such that intervention might require the sanction of a ritual specialist, Clarke argues that it is incorrect to assume that just because they were Buddhist,

people did not change the landscape. Over a long historical period there was a consistent expansion of indigenous Tibetan agriculture: in the forest areas of the Himalayas, for instance, alpine pastures, farmlands and settlements were created. However, the critical difference between modern and traditional agricultural practice may be found in three points (p. 30): technical focus; industrial power to alter the environment extensively and rapidly; and economic pressures for growth.

This is proved by Winkler's observations on 'Deforestation in Eastern Tibet: Human Impact Past and Present'. His paper focuses on two headings: first he examines the historical impact of fire, people, and their grazing animals on forest distribution; second, he discusses the extent of, causes of, and possible solutions to modern deforestation. According to Winkler, the phenomenon of forest-free south-facing slopes in eastern Tibet is not merely a result of climatological factors but very likely also the result of human and animal impact: the intentional burning of forests and the intrusion of grazing animals. But whereas this impact took place over many centuries or even millennia, recent deforestation is only a matter of several years or decades. Since the industrial world made its way onto the Tibetan Plateau via Chinese modernization, the forests have been reduced by nearly a half, mostly through planned commercial timber extraction.

Four articles of the book are concerned with nomadism. In his paper 'The Washu Serthar: A nomadic community of eastern Tibet', Gelek provides an interesting description of traditional social structure, lifestyle and religion. Like other nomadic groups of Tibet, the Washu Serthar have undergone fundamental changes since 1960, including collectivisation, loss of religious freedom, prohibition of the right to trade, and after 1980 decollectivization and commercialization. In her article 'Life and Economic Patterns of Nomads on the Eastern Tibet Plateau', A. Manderscheid examines two different forms of nomadism. These are the completely mobile groups of pure pastoralists ('Brog Pa) and the mobile groups who practise arable agriculture as well as pastoralism (Sa Ma 'Brog). In her conclusion about the chances of survival for nomadism on the Tibetan Plateau she states that "mobile herding in Tibet may well not be completely supplanted, as has been the case in other regions of the world. However, over a longer period of time, development could lead to nomads becoming animal breeders, oriented towards a market production system" (p. 67). N.E. Levine analyses and discusses the same trend in her paper 'From Nomads to Ranchers: Managing pasture among ethnic Tibetans in Sichuan'. This first considers traditional social systems

and pasture management among Golog Tibetans, and then stresses some of the consequences of recent government programmes to develop pastoralism. According to Levine, today's Chinese governmental policy moves toward the intensification of pastoralism do not involve only experiments with forage plants and improved animal breeds but also the continued fencing of pastures and housing of pastoralists. But if the nomads are converted to ranchers and come to be confined to fenced plots, all flexibility is removed from the system of pastoral management with the experienced consequences of pasture degradation. Despite this, markets and transportation facilities are simply too undeveloped to support such an elaborate ranching economy. The Chinese ideology and idea of developing animal husbandry is clearly reflected in Lobsang's short paper 'The Development of Animal Husbandry on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau'. In this he proposes five main strategic measures for improvement, including: (1) the development of grassland by improving and enclosing pastures, and planting green fodder; (2) putting outside start-up capital at people's disposal; (3) establishing a new commercial market structure based on the socialist market economy; (4) providing education, research, technical training, and the application of new technologies; (5) establishing a developed co-operative economy according to principles of Marxism and economic reforms.

A second article by Clarke ('Socio-Economic Change and the Environment in a Pastoral Area of Lhasa Municipality') is based on his own field research in the area of Damshung, northeast of Lhasa, and considers changes in traditional Tibetan pastoralism. His comprehensive and very informative account centres in particular on the environmental impact of market forces. He comes to the conclusion that there has been "a change from traditional nomadic to a more modern, semi-settled, form of pastoralism which, combined with increase in stocking levels for market sale and notwithstanding remedial measures, leads to localised land degradation in peri-urban areas and along road corridors" (p. 118).

Two articles in the book deal with agricultural issues in Tibet. H.A. Osmaston's paper on 'Agriculture in the Main Lhasa Valley' presents detailed observations on agriculture and the environment from case studies of individual farmers, semi-nomads, and their communities in central Tibet. The results are interpreted against the background of official policy, administration, and data on the wider agricultural economy. The paper considers the impact of reforms since 1980 on areas of arable production and 'mixed' pastoral/arable production. It concludes that 'mixed' areas have resulted in increased wealth

but at the same time the economic reform policy has led to environmental problems of land degradation, especially on the hills and parts of the uplands, by overgrazing. R.D. Schwartz's paper on 'The Reforms Revisited: Grain procurement in Tibet' outlines how Chinese procurement policy is implemented in Tibet, describes its impact on rural livelihoods, and asks whether state procurement policy has had the effect of retarding or promoting the development of market sales of agricultural products.

In the final article of the book, 'Economic Patterns of the Tibet Autonomous Region' Rong Ma provides an account of modern economic history that focuses on subsidy and nationality relations. He examines records and statistics on the twentieth century economy and places them in the context of relations between the Tibet Autonomous Region and the lowland Han regions of China.

This book is a unique new work. On the one hand it is a useful contribution to the present interdisciplinary scientific debate on development and social and environmental change. On the other, it is essential reading for those concerned with an objective assessment of Tibet's present and future development. Despite the very profound information given by the various authors, the book is also very thoroughly prepared, including an introduction to the contributors and their scientific and institutional backgrounds, lists of plates, maps and tables, notes on transcription as well as a comprehensive glossary at the end. Unfortunately the editor passed away on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998 and was not able to witness the success of his work. Despite this tragic circumstance the book has been completed with the help of Mrs Jinchai Clarke.

*Contested Hierarchies: A Collaborative Ethnography of Caste among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal* edited by David N. Gellner and Declan Quigley. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. 364 pp., 19 plates, 12 figures, 30 tables, appendix, index.

Reviewed by Martin Gaenzle

The concept of caste has long dominated discussions of South Asian anthropology, but more recently its heuristic value has been increasingly questioned.

The present volume is a forceful statement in favour of caste as an analytical category, and can be seen as a critique of overly deconstructionist views which regard caste as a mere colonial construction. Instead, as Gellner argues in his introduction, the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley are particularly suitable for a study of caste, as here certain biases of research in India can be avoided. Above all, the institution of kingship is still very much alive in Nepal, and this, among other things, allows for a reevaluation of a Hocartian perspective on caste. Also, the Newars, though agriculturalists in the majority, have a very urban culture (on various scales) and so it is possible to counteract the heavy focus on village studies which has characterized anthropological studies in other parts of the subcontinent. Besides contributing to the discussion of these theoretical issues, the book is highly valuable in providing a detailed compendium of Newar ethnography: as most of the major anthropologists who have worked on the Newar in recent times have collaborated to produce this volume, it represents the 'state of the art', with all the tensions this is bound to imply.

The chapters of the book represent the major Newar castes or caste groups, partly described in a local context, partly in a more general manner. The first contribution by Todd Lewis deals with the Uray of Asan Tol (Kathmandu), a caste of Buddhist merchants which consists of various sub-castes (Tuladhar, Kamsakar, Rajkarnikar, etc.). Here caste, which operates as a marriage circle, is criss-crossed by various different *guthi* associations both above and below the level of caste. The common Buddhist identity is still a marker of exclusiveness today. As Lewis points out, this has its roots in the historical context: in the Malla period, Hindu and Buddhist castes competed in factional politics vis-à-vis royalty, with both sides getting their share. The following chapter deals with the "dominant" Hindu caste, the Shresthas. In fact, here the term 'caste' is the most problematic, because the Shrestha are perceived as one caste by outsiders, but internally they are divided into several more or less endogamous status groups. The Shresthas are the major patrons in the traditional system, i.e. they are at the core, representing the royal function. But, as Quigley argues, not all Shrestha lineages are equally powerful as patrons, and because of this various status groups have developed.

The longest chapter is Ishii's study of an 'intermediate settlement', i.e. a settlement which is neither a fringe settlement (almost exclusively inhabited by one caste) nor a large urban settlement, like Kathmandu or Lalitpur. In this very detailed description of Satungal, a multi-caste town of roughly 1,500 inhabitants, it becomes clear that caste organization and kinship practices

differ considerably, depending on the kind of settlement. In any case, the numerically largest caste, here as in most other places, are the Maharjans, the peasants, who are generally regarded as the 'true' Newars. These 'urban peasants' are dealt with in a chapter by Gellner and Pradhan. Looking at the Maharjans, it seems, one can observe Newar culture in its 'original' form, but this suggestion, the authors warn us, has to be treated with caution.

Two further chapters, one by Toffin and one by Gellner, focus on Newar priesthood. In his chapter on the social organization of the Rajopadhyaya Brahmans Toffin points out the unique status of the small caste of Newar Brahmans: on the one hand they are renowned throughout the country for their strict orthodoxy, but on the other their status has been in steady decline since the Shahs and Ranas favoured Parbatiya Brahmans. This puts them in an awkward position, because in order to retain a Brahmanic identity they have to distance themselves from the Newars. In the case of the Shakyas and Vajracaryas described by Gellner there is also a decline, if not in status then in the importance of their religious role. In particular, it is Theravada Buddhism and Hinduism which threaten the old system and thus the priestly vocation is less in demand. In consequence, Gellner argues, the Shakyas and Vajracaryas have reinforced their identity as Newar Buddhists and tend to become a "quasi-ethnic group".

The last two descriptive chapters deal with various occupational castes at the lower end of the caste hierarchy. Toffin describes the Citrakars, the painters and mask makers in the traditional system of ritual service, who belong to the 'clean castes', and finally Gellner gives an account of the low, i.e. 'unclean', castes in Lalitpur. Though not based on intensive and prolonged fieldwork this chapter is a valuable source on Newar 'untouchability', especially since this is still the least-known area of Newar society. It is interesting to see that even the 'unclean' castes are rather heterogeneous, some tending to replicate the high-caste model and others tending towards a subculture of their own.

In spite of all the differences in the details of social organization which are described in these chapters it also emerges that there are clear continuities. Every chapter brings out the fundamental importance of the *guthi* system, and the strong ties to locality. Both of these features have often been stressed, but the unity in diversity comes out with particular clarity in this documentation of different castes in different settings. Another strength of this ethnography is that all the authors also deal with recent changes and trends of development, such as the transformation of social groups and occupational patterns,

modernization, party politics, ethnic movements, etc.

In what respect then can one speak of 'contested hierarchies'? The title holds out the promise that caste is here not seen as part of a self-perpetuating system but rather as something which is moulded and manipulated by conscious actors. And indeed, several of the contributions have something to say about social status being a matter of contestation. In particular, Quigley stresses that the internal ranking of Shrestha sub-groups is rather fluid and that the boundaries of the group as a whole are permeable. Similarly, Lewis points out status rivalries between local Uray groups in Kathmandu, and Toffin stresses the differing status ascriptions of Rajopadhyaya Brahmans and Parbatiya Brahmans. Clearly, caste rankings are not always unambiguous and are often subject to dispute. But on the whole such contestation remains relatively marginal to most of the studies. The main emphasis is on normative aspects, and agency is not made a special focus (some case studies would have been useful here). It seems that dispute is often associated with the dissolution of institutions. After all, in the traditional system where the king was at the centre of power there were obvious limits to contestation: hierarchy was often imposed on people from above.

Whereas the contestation of hierarchy from the Newars' side is not as central an issue as one might expect (it is not taken up in the conclusion), the contestation of anthropological theories on Newar society is a recurrent theme, and it is a virtue of the book that these are not covered up. In his conclusion Quigley points out these tensions. One controversial issue is the conceptualization and representation of the caste hierarchy. Gellner proposes to distinguish mainly six 'blocs' of castes, which can be represented as vertically arranged layers. This, he argues, is the way Newar themselves depict it when speaking of 'higher' and 'lower' castes. Quigley, on the other hand, regards this as misleading and prefers the 'mandala model': the king is at the centre and all the other castes are in a circle around him. The problem with this representation is that all the service castes appear to be similar in status, and in fact, Quigley's point is that Brahman and Untouchable are not all that different. I have serious doubts about his view of the Brahmanic function. After all, the ethnography of Newar priestly castes clearly shows their eminent position. In fact, Quigley admits that there is a status difference which he describes in terms of distance from the centre. But once such a distinction is introduced we are back to the vertical model. Of course, in this model the crucial point is that the king is supreme, not the priest. But it has to be borne in mind that in a mandala the real centre is always a divinity;

it protects the king and is accessed through priests. It is interesting to note in this respect that the old royal palaces of the Malla kings always contained the temple of their *kul devata*, Taleju, who was served by the Rajopadhyyaya Brahmans (p. 189).

Another controversial issue is the question of whether 'Indianization', i.e. the transformation of a 'tribal substratum' through continuous influence from the south, is crucial for an understanding of Newar society. While Toffin in particular stresses the non-Indic elements of many contemporary Newar customs, both Gellner and Quigley are sceptical that this is of much relevance. It is true that the transformation of Newar culture has been a complex and long-term historical process, and so one has to be very careful in making general statements about 'tribal' and 'non-tribal' elements. But at the same time it emerges from the contributions to this book that this transformation is not only a matter of history and that certain tensions between different cultural orientations can still be recognized. Emulation of a high-caste Hindu model, for example, is still an important strategy (though not the only strategy) in the construction of a cultural self-identity (e.g. in terms of marriage practices, use of priestly functionaries, religious orientations, etc.). And so one has to ask: What kind of choices are taken by individual actors, and what are the reasons for such decisions? I think there is still considerable scope for future research on such issues, especially if more fieldwork is done among the Maharjans outside the big cities.

All in all, the volume is a very impressive documentation of Newar culture, on a high level of ethnographic and theoretical standards, and excellently presented (the book is well illustrated and has a carefully prepared index, for example). Moreover, it opens up a space for dealing with matters of agency, contestation, and cultural change without falling into the traps of an impressionistic 'psychoethnography' (S. Parish). It is an important contribution to the anthropology of South Asian culture and society, and so one can only hope that it will also receive due recognition and debate among scholars with comparative interests.

*Teach Yourself Nepali* by Michael Hutt and Abhi Subedi. London: Teach Yourself Books, Hodder and Stoughton Educational, 1999. 308pp. Appendices: cardinal numbers; kinship terms; key to exercises; Nepali-English glossary (1325 words); English-Nepali glossary (398 words).

Reviewed by Marie-Christine Cabaud

Michael Hutt is Reader in Nepali and Himalayan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, and a specialist on Nepali language and literature. One of his recent publications (1997) is a reader for those who already know some Nepali, which provides extracts in both prose and verse, with numerous grammatical notes and a sizeable word index. Abhi Subedi is a professor of English, a historian of Nepali literature, and a writer. Among his many articles and works in Nepali and English, one should mention in particular his history of Nepali literature, which remains a fundamental reference book despite being twenty years old.

As to content, the two authors combine their respective expertise and aim to guide the beginner through the language of everyday verbal exchanges. They adopt the classic method: 34 short texts (only two of which are not dialogues) progressively introduce grammatical difficulties. The texts cover many aspects of life in Kathmandu, as well as providing a little on villages (identity, times of day, means of transport, shopping, numbers, the calendar, the doctor, airport, marriage, religion...). At the same time, most useful grammatical forms are also covered, from inflexions of the verb to subordinate clauses. At the beginning of each text the context is explained in English; then one finds the new vocabulary in a box, followed by the translation of the dialogue, and grammatical explanations. This is in turn followed by exercises. The authors deliberately avoid linguistic jargon (explanations "are intended to be as clear and jargon-free as possible"). A few illustrations provide a little Nepalese atmosphere. There is an accompanying cassette tape of the dialogues.

The book is well in keeping with the Teach Yourself series. It permits solitary study, without the help of a teacher. No new difficulty is introduced

without the key to resolve it. The book uses a middle level of the language, with occasional incursions of more elaborate or more elementary forms, all the while respecting social hierarchies. The result is a very contemporary Nepali which at the same time satisfies academic standards. It also provides, by means of the very dense dialogues, a great variety of tools. A regular and methodical learner has a good year of work, perhaps more, within two covers. At the end of it, he or she should be comfortable experiencing total immersion.

None the less, it is perhaps regrettable that the roman transcription appears in the body of the lesson, but not in either of the two vocabulary lists. This may have been from a commendable wish not to rush students or to force them to learn a good system of Latin transcription, which is always useful to know.

The tables and grammar explanations could be a little more comprehensive. For example, the 3rd person forms of *ho* appear in a separate table six pages after the 1st and 2nd persons. Why not group them all in a single table, even if the 3rd person is not used at once? For *cha*, why not group the personal pronouns, the affirmative and the negative forms together, so that all three forms can be seen on the same line? Why show the contingent future and the complete future in two different tables, so that one has to turn the page to go from one to the other?

One may also regret the profusion of translation exercises, which have forced out more entertaining kinds of exercise (rearranging sentences that are mixed up, filling in the blanks...). Of course these mild criticisms do not refer in any way to the quality of the Nepali used in this book. They simply express concerns about the balance and progressivity of explanations, and about ease of acquisition.

To conclude, this book represents an innovation among texts on Nepali in English. The existing books of an academic sort (by Clark and Matthews) begin with the grammatical rule and move on to show its application. Karki and Shrestha's *Basic Course in Spoken Nepali* addressed itself to people already immersed in a Nepali context and privileged the practical side of learning language to the detriment of grammatical explanations. In this book, by contrast, the authors use grammar in order to assist a solid acquisition of the spoken language.

*Ein Labyrinth von Identitäten in Nordpakistan: Zwischen Landbesitz, Religion und Kaschmir-Konflikt* by Martin Sökefeld. Culture Area Karakorum Scientific Studies 8. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1997. 383pp.

Reviewed by H. Herbers

Questions of identity and ethnicity represent a broad field of study in anthropology and other disciplines such as political science and human geography. In the present study, the author focuses on processes of identity formation in Gilgit, the urban centre of the Northern Areas of Pakistan with approximately 40,000 inhabitants. In doing so, he aims to present and analyse a vast body of material gathered during his 15 months of fieldwork in Gilgit. The final aim of his analysis is to contribute to an understanding of social relations in the area, both with respect to characteristics which the acting groups or individuals ascribe to themselves, and in relation to attributes which other groups and individuals ascribe to them.

In his introductory chapter, Sökefeld outlines the aims of his study and gives a broad overview of the colonial and anthropological literature on what is today the Northern Areas of Pakistan. He then goes on to describe his situation in the field and to introduce Gilgit from three different perspectives. These are: (a) the multiple connections between Gilgit and the surrounding areas; (b) the history of Gilgit as the administrative centre of the region; and (c) an account of the town of Gilgit with its hamlets, its economy, etc.

Before presenting the ethnographic material, the author discusses major theoretical concepts (Ch. 2) relating to his analysis, such as ethnicity, plurality, culture and interpretation, culture and discourse, and culture in the making. He argues against the extensive use of analytical concepts such as ethnicity which do not have an equivalent in indigenous contexts. According to Sökefeld, to employ the concept of 'ethnic group' would be effectively to misrepresent the actual relationships and distinctions found in Gilgit and would therefore not contribute to a true understanding of the situation. Following Barth's concept of plural society, as elaborated in his study *Sohar: Culture and Society in an Omani Town* (1983), Sökefeld highlights instead the

different ways in which people may belong to different social categories at different times, and the plurality of perspectives on group membership. He stresses the difference between the social categories used by the local people in their daily lives and theoretical abstractions applied from outside: the step from observations or talks with individuals in the field to a generalization must be reconstructable.

Consequently, the three chapters which follow focus on identity processes and discourses in Gilgit. By meticulously evaluating the ethnographic material collected during his field work, Sökefeld characterizes social categories along the lines of indigenous notions. He divides his material regarding the processes of identity into three parts. In the first part (Ch. 3), he discusses differences between people from Gilgit and people from outside. He starts with accounts of the 'original settlers of Gilgit', who claim to have undertaken the difficult task of first cultivating the barren land; they had the power to integrate newcomers by sharing land and arranging marriages. Due to historical events—i.e. the arrival of the Kashmiri Dogras and the British colonizers—the ownership of land changed and waves of migration into Gilgit took place, turning the 'original people of Gilgit' into a minority. The chapter proceeds to describe various categories, such as descent groups, groups living in the same area, kinship groups, craftspeople of low status (including their noteworthy attempts to improve their social standing), and people migrating into Gilgit from adjacent valleys. In the discussion of all these categories the author convincingly shows the multi-layered process of identity formation, which is both a personal matter—with perspectives depending on the single person narrating and elaborating on the respective subjects—as well as a matter of integration and segregation on a higher level.

In the second part (Ch. 4), he deals with the conflict between religious groups, namely between the Twelver-Shia and the Sunni. After outlining the process of different waves of Islamization, the author discusses accounts of the so-called tensions between the religious groups in the area, which culminated in the massacre of 1988, or, as Sökefeld himself puts it, "the Kerbala of the Shia in Gilgit" (p. 218). These events had a strong impact in that they further polarized the groups in spite of the ties which had existed between them (e.g. through intermarriage) and changed the political environment (elections were fought along religious lines, for example). Identities were re-examined and religion became a dominant factor in the ascription of identity, although individuals from both sides expressed their regret and chose

to act on categories of identity other than those defined by religion.

In the third part (Ch. 5), the author explores the Kashmir conflict with regard to the formation of a political identity. Due to the Kashmir conflict the Northern Areas are under the sole administration of Pakistan. Today its inhabitants are still deprived of fundamental civil rights such as the right to vote in the elections for the National Assembly. This unsatisfactory political situation led repeatedly to insurrections in the area, to reforms in the 1970s, and finally to various demands by different people and political parties. One is for the integration of the area within the state of Pakistan as a fifth province, another is a call for an independent state. In the process of the new political mobilization since the mid 1980s, different categories of identity which are supposed to support the creation of a political entity, such as language and local culture, are being discussed; but one may doubt whether the pluralistic political culture with its differing aims and ideologies can be united into one force against the domination of the Northern Areas by Pakistan.

In the final chapter (Ch. 6), Sökefeld summarizes his central point: Individuals cannot and should not be seen as representatives of a group but rather be taken seriously as those who speak, act, and interpret events on their own account. Citing Giddens, he stresses the mutual influence of actors and structure. Throughout the presentation of his ethnographic material, Sökefeld shows that the positioning of the actors and the practical logic of daily life can only be understood if one takes seriously the flexibility of mutual ascriptions.

*Swasthani* adaptation by Pallav Ranjan. Kathmandu: Spiny Babbler, 1999. 126pp.

Reviewed by Michael Hutt

Pallav Ranjan divides his English adaptation of the *Swasthani Vrat Katha*, the 'Story of the Fast to the Goddess Swasthani', into twenty-two short 'readings'. Two thirds of these deal with characters and myths from the Hindu Puranas. Readings 1 and 2 deal with cosmology and the creation of the world. The main theme of readings 3 to 7 is the story of Shiva's marriage to Satidevi, daughter of Dakshya Prajapati, Dakshya's insulting of Shiva, Satidevi's self-

immolation, and Shiva's mourning and scattering of the pieces of Satidevi's body, during which the demon Taraka takes over the world. Readings 8 to 15 begin with the birth of Parbati, who manages to secure Shiva as her husband by reading the Swasthani stories, and go on to recount the myths of Shiva as Kirateswor in the forest near Pashupati, the births and exploits of Ganesh and Kumar, the defeats first of Taraka and then of the demons who had created Three Cities, and the bizarre series of seduction, murder, and suicide involving Bishnu and Shiva, and Jalandar and his wife, Brinda.

Finally, readings 16 to 22 contain the story of Goma, a girl who is cursed by Shiva to marry a man ten times her age. This is in some ways the most interesting section of the text. At the age of seven, Goma marries a 70-year-old man, Shivasharma, and they live with her parents. Some years later, Shivasharma decides he must go home, and Goma goes with him. As soon as they have departed, her parents die in an accident, and on their journey thieves steal everything from Shivasharma and Goma, then Goma becomes pregnant. When they reach Shivasharma's village he goes begging for food but dies in a fall. Goma bears a son, Nawaraj, and they are supported by some local rich people. In time, Nawaraj marries Chandrawati, then he searches for and finds his father's bones but does not return to his mother. After a while Chandrawati goes back to her parents, leaving Goma alone. Goma goes mad, but Parbati sends the Rishis to teach her the Swasthani rites, and when they leave she finds gold under their seats. Goma's readings of the Swasthani stories bring her son back to her, and Shiva, now suddenly benevolent, sends Nawaraj to become king of Labhanya and take a new wife. Goma is summoned there too. Nawaraj holds a feast and magnanimously invites Chandrawati too, but on her way to Labhanya Chandrawati becomes angry with her bearers for stopping to listen to the Swasthani stories en route, and when they resume their journey she falls into a flooding river. Chandrawati is so evil that the river does not flow again until some villagers dump her body on the bank, where she becomes an unrecognizable object. Not even the soil will allow her to eat it. Two priests on their way to the feast promise to bring food back for her but the grainstore suddenly empties when they go to get some, and the rice turns to ash when she tries to eat it. The Apsaras come and tell her to read the Swasthani and make offerings of sand; finally, she is restored to her family.

The *Swasthani Vrat Katha* is a crucial text for anyone who wishes to understand the ideals and constraints that have traditionally governed the lives of women (particularly, but not exclusively, Brahman and Chetri women)

in Nepal. My understanding of it prior to reading Pallav Ranjan's rendering relied heavily on the summary and analysis that appear in Lynn Bennett's book *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and symbolic roles of high-caste women in Nepal* (Columbia University Press, 1983, especially pp. 274-306). Bennett referred to an edition compiled by Babu Madhav Prasad Sharma and published in Banaras in 1955, which extends to around 300 pages. Pallav Ranjan's retelling of these stories is in almost flawless English and is highly readable. For instance, when Shivasharma hears Goma's mother, Sati, voicing her horror at the idea of her daughter marrying such an elderly man, the words Ranjan has him say are genuinely poignant:

There are old people in this world, mother, and then there are children. There are people who are pleasant to look upon and people who are ugly. Some people do not have descendants and some have too many. Some have wives that are older than they are and some have husbands who are older. Some of us are rich and some poor. The world is like the potter's wheel. It is always spinning. Everyone becomes old and dies. There are none who will not age. Why do you feel that you are better than I am? Why will you not respect my life? If this is how you feel, I will die now, before your eyes.

Parts of Ranjan's adaptation appear highly condensed in comparison with the edition cited by Bennett. For instance, Bennett quotes from her own translation of the episode towards the end of the Goma story, in which an Apsara instructs Chandrawati how to perform the Swasthani vow, and these instructions continue for 26 lines (Bennett 1983: 277), but Ranjan simply gives us "So she asked the Apsaras what she should do. According to their advice, Chandrawati learned to worship the Swasthani with a clean mind" (p. 118). Thus, it would seem that Ranjan has prepared his adaptation for a readership that would find this level of detail irrelevant and tiresome.

It would have been instructive if Pallav Ranjan had provided some insight in his brief preface into the way in which he prepared this adaptation. Certain passages are very close indeed to the original, which suggests that a text was at least consulted, while others are omitted (suggesting an intention to abridge, perhaps) or simply different (suggesting that a different text was consulted or that Ranjan relied on an oral source or his own memory). It is also a shame that Ranjan's introduction does not really bring out the important role the text has played and continues to play in the lives of so many women in Nepal.

Which brings us to the question of readership. For whom is this 'adaptation' intended? Nepali readers with a mastery of English will admire the elegance of its prose, and will also appreciate this effort to bring this text to the attention of a wider readership. To introduce the text to a foreign readership which is unable to approach it in its original language would be a worthy aim, but if this is indeed the intention the success of the initiative is rather circumscribed by the absence of any real explanation or analysis of the text's precise significance and meaning, despite the fluency and accessibility of the English rendering itself. To fully understand what is going on here, a foreign reader would need also to be directed to a work like Bennett's.

This is not to detract from Pallav Ranjan's achievement, which is notable and worthy of praise. The text is also greatly enhanced by the inclusion of illustrations whose abstract nature suggests that they emanate from the same mythic dimension in which these stories take place.

### Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the lead editor, Michael Hutt. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the 'Harvard' format.

*In the body of your text:*

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

*In the bibliography:*

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak Bhandar.

Miller, M.D.D. 1988. 'A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya' *Kailash* 6(2): 121-83.

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EBHR  
c/o Michael Hutt  
SOAS  
Thornough Street  
Russell Square  
London  
WC1 0XG  
Great Britain

email: [mh8@soas.ac.uk](mailto:mh8@soas.ac.uk)  
Tel: +44 (0)171 323 6240  
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