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II. RESEARCH REPORTS

***Impact of Human Activities on Ecosystems and Vice-Versa with Reference to Sikkim Himalayas**

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Research Associates: Veena Bhasin, B.S. Khangarot and P. Venu

Sponsored by: Department of Environment, Government of India, New Delhi

The political integration of Sikkim with the rest of the country has incited the process of economic development in the state. This project is based on the well-known fact that areas which are closed for a long time and suddenly opened to development programs may suffer geo-biologically due to indiscriminate human interference. It is expected, as well as witnessed in other similar situations, that these programs have a profound transforming influence in affecting the traditional mode of living human populations but are also likely to bring certain deep-seated changes in terms of social psychology and ecology of the area. The present proposed study is an attempt to study the effect of planned change on the people concerned and ecosystems of the area and the problems created by social, economic and technological forces external to the area.

The project is designed for a period of three years. Initially it focused on a thorough survey of four different areas in East, West, North and South Sikkim. A detailed study is being conducted in the Lepcha reserve "Dzongu" and among Bhotias of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim. The basic data is being collected through observation and interviews with the help of four different schedules. The data is being collected at three different levels — district, village and household. These different schedules will furnish us with information regarding different aspects of life of the local population as well as the extent to which different programs have affected the lives of people. Tests of the physio-chemical properties of selected water sites have been carried out. Toxicity tests of insecticides and heavy metal on amphibian tadpole larvae and fish (common carp) have also been carried out for determining pollutants' effects. Data from the forests in and around the selected areas have also been collected. Physio-chemical analysis of certain specific plants of ethnobotanical interest and some dried herbaceous plants is being done to find out mineral composition.

An analysis of survey data will result in a series of reports, both descriptive and prescriptive, with regard to development programs in rural areas for a more efficient developmental model. The negative impacts of developmental change can be limited by careful planning and thorough knowledge of the area. The findings of this project could be beneficial for planners, administrators and researchers.

***A Survey of Dardic Languages of Kashmir**

Researcher: Ruth Laila Schmidt
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Abstracted from "Indian Linguistics" (Vol. 42, Nos. 1-4, March - December 1981).

The research project, initially on "A Comparative Study of Dardic Phonology," was revised to include a survey of six languages traditionally classified as Dardic. Four of these languages are usually classified in one sub-group: Kashmiri, Kashtawari, Poguli and Siraji. Two are Indian dialects of Shina: the dialect of Dras, and the dialect of Tilel. The Indian Shina data was amplified by data, from other sources, for the Pakistani dialects of Gilgit and Indus Kohistan. Thus we had — or expected to find — four dialects of Kashmiri and four of Shina, with fairly good geographical balance.

We also expanded our scope to include not merely phonology, but selected morphological and syntactic features as well. In particular, we took account of features or traits which have been considered by various scholars, including Grierson, Morgenstierne, Kachru and Fussman as typically Dardic. We hoped that at least some of these features would prove to be isoglosses. Ideally we hoped to show not only the isoglosses between Shina and Kashmiri, but also their traits in common. And although our research has raised new points of discussion, the over-all picture has been clarified. Kashmiri and Shina have more features in common with each other than either has with other Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the region, such as Pahari or Punjabi. Furthermore, a study of core vocabularies shows that

both these languages are Indo-Aryan, and not a mixture of Indo-Aryan and Iranian. We hope these results will lead to renewed discussion about the origins and development of the Dardic languages.

The Dardic languages are spoken over an area which extends approximately five hundred miles from east to west. It includes four major mountain ranges and access has always been difficult. Today this area falls in three countries: India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Because our time was limited and our six languages were located at distant points, we designed a research instrument consisting of a word list and 57 sample sentences. The word list contains 280 core vocabulary items selected from various sources. The 57 sentences incorporate these core vocabulary items in different grammatical and syntactic frames, and we are grateful to Dr. Franklin Southworth, who devised them.

Because of the sensitivity of the area and the diversity of the written sources, this was organized as a team project. Dr. Omkar N. Koul was the Indian research supervisor, I did the planning and implementation, and Vijay Kaul collected all the data. All of us participated in the analysis and interpretation. A number of scholars made their own data available to us, notably Dr. Georg Buddruss of Germany, Dr. N. Ramaswami of India, and Mr. Zarin of Pakistan. The data for Siraji and Kashtawari was collected in Doda and Kishtawar. The data for Drasi was collected mainly in Dras. Speakers of Poguli Kashmiri and Tileli were available in the Kashmir Valley. All the data was tape-recorded by Vijay Kaul, transcribed in the field, and checked with the speakers. It was later also transcribed by myself or Dr. Koul. In some cases the speakers were called back for more interviews. In general it was a time-consuming process to win their confidence and explain the purpose of the survey, and not less than a week was required to get a word list and sample sentences from one speaker, plus transcribe them. For each dialect, data was collected from at least two speakers.

Six features were found to be common to all or nearly all the dialects studied:

1. Assimilation of vowels across syllable boundaries. This occurs in all the dialects; however, it occurs less frequently in Siraji, Gilgiti and Drasi.
2. Retention of OIA consonant clusters in the initial position characterizes all the dialects spoken in India, both Shina and Kashmiri. However, this feature is becoming obsolete in Tileli. The Shina dialects of Pakistan appear to have lost these clusters recently.
3. Loss of aspiration of voiced stops characterizes Kashmiri, Kashtawari and all the Shina dialects. But Pobuli and Siraji retain the aspirates even in *tadbhavas*, /dhil/, 'bark of tree'.
4. All the languages have pronoun systems distinguishing plus or minus near and plus or minus visible. Shina dialects have very complex systems showing up to four degrees of distance distinction and plus or minus visible. Tileli has an additional dimension: inclusive versus exclusive.
5. The nominal systems of all the languages show well-developed inflectional systems, including markers for the agent case. However, agreement in past tense sentences is invariably between the semantic subject and the verb.
6. All the languages possess postpositions of the Dardic type, which are added to inflected nouns.

Six features separate Kashmiri and Shina. The first three may also be considered isoglosses between Kashmiri and other IA languages.

1. Palatalization of consonants occurs in Siraji, Poguli, Kashmiri and Kashtawari, though in Kashtawari it does not seem to have a high functional load. Kashtawari could be more conveniently analyzed as having shortening of word-final vowels. Palatalization does not occur in any of the Shina dialects.
2. Kashmiri, Poguli and Kashtawari have developed a centralized vowel series. No Shina dialect has developed a centralized vowel series.
3. SVO word order occurs only in Kashmiri and Kashtawari.
4. Retention of OIA consonant clusters in final (as opposed to initial or medial) position occurs only in Shina (Drasi and Tileli).
5. All the Shina dialects preserve the ancient three way contrast among sibilants, which has been lost in the other dialects.
6. The development of contrastive tones is peculiar to Shina and appears in Gilgiti and the Kohistani dialect.

Kashmiri and Shina share approximately half their vocabulary along with other phonological and morphological features traditionally considered "Dardic". On an equal number of other points, they may be distinguished from each other. The most important differences are phonological: the emergence of tone systems in Shina, the development of palatalization and centralized vowels in Kashmiri, the retention of the three way contrast in sibilants of Shina.

Kashmiri is unique among IA languages in having SVO word order. Its vowel system and its palatalized consonants also place it in a unique position among Indian languages. These features deserve further study to see whether they may be derived from OIA sources, or whether they must be searched for in some unknown substratum.

Kashmiri does not show the homogeneity of Shina, unless the group is considered to consist only of Kashmiri and Kashtawari. Another way of saying this is that there has been more convergence among languages spoken in the vicinity of the Kashmir Valley than among Shina and its neighbors.

Siraji cannot be considered a dialect of Kashmiri in the strict sense. Unless it can be classed along with Western Pahari, it is probably a creole.

And lastly, the Dardic features described above do not for the most part characterize Pahari or IA languages of the plains. Dr. Shackle has pointed out some points of agreement between Northern Lahnda (Hindko) dialects and the Dardic languages; these are probably accounted for by the archaic nature of both. The patterning of the features as described here is unique to Shina and Kashmiri; and until further work is done, may be considered to define this subgroup of the Dardic languages.

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***Ethnic Identity among the Mewahang Rai of Eastern Nepal**

Researcher: Martin Gaenszle
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The projected study involves ethnographic research among one of the Rai subtribes, the Mewahang Rai of the lower Sankhuwa Khola, west of the Arun River, in the southern part of Sankhuwa Sabha District in Koshi Zone of Eastern Nepal.

As the Rai subtribes are known to differ from each other to a considerable degree, not only in dialect but also culturally, this study, focused on one particular subtribe, intends to help clarifying the problem of diversity against the common ethnic background of these groups. However, one has to ask what kind of social entity these "Mewahang Rai" represent, because it cannot be taken for certain that this segmentary group is a well-defined unit with fixed boundaries.

Therefore, the main theme of the research will be the complex problem of ethnic identity. Not only are there other more or less closely related Rai subtribes involved in interaction with the Mewahang Rai, but there also are Tamang, Sherpa and the various Hindu castes, which — especially the latter as promoters of Hinduization in particular and social change in general — may affect the self-conception of the Mewahang Rai. The problem of ethnic identity can be tackled on different levels.

First, one can draw conclusions from historical material. For example, by studying the settlement patterns through records of land ownership and genealogies one can follow the development of the group's composition in a diachronic perspective.

Second, there is the socio-structural level. It has been argued that the differentiation of the subtribes is due to fissiparous tendencies immanent in the kinship system, as was observed among the Kulunge Rai (Charles McDougal, 1979: The Kulunge Rai). Yet it remains to be shown whether similar processes take place within other subtribes as well, and which consequences follow from the constitution of new groups regarding inter-group relations.

Third — and much emphasis will be put on this point — ethnic identity can be described as expressed on the symbolic level. This implies the study of myth and ritual from a comparative point of view, but the cultural symbolism can also be regarded as a medium of processes such as inter-group differentiation and intra-group identification, and therefore as subject to, as well as agent of, change. Thus the three levels taken together may elucidate the role of indigenous concepts with regard to social processes and regional history.

The research is financed by the German Academic Exchange Service through a scholarship for dissertation projects, beginning January 1984.

***Aspects of Change in a Tamang Community of Eastern Nepal**

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This Ph.D. dissertation research is funded by a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service.

The researcher's particular interests are in minority-majority group relations, ethnicity, and intraethnic procedures of change, especially in Sri Lanka and Nepal. For further information write:

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***Women and Ritual in Nepal: The Swasthani Vrata**

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The project "Women and Ritual in Nepal: The Swasthani Vrata," funded by the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program, was conducted from November 1981 - February 1983. The project focused on the Swasthani Vrata, text and ritual, as single context wherein women's roles in ritual could be more accurately evaluated. The project was researched on three main levels: conceptual, social and phenomenal.

* * *

Findings on the conceptual level focus primarily on the text, Swasthani Vrata Katha, and people's ideas concerning the text and ritual vrata. I examined numerous personal collections and archive collections of Swasthani texts in Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktaur, the three main cities of the Kathmandu Valley. Primary findings revealed that Swasthani texts are in great abundance in both published and unpublished manuscript form. The Nepal Research Centre, in conjunction with the National Archives, has collected over six hundred separate editions of Swasthani manuscripts. These contain not only the Swasthani text itself but colophons which give details about authorship, social life, and family histories for the time in which they were written.

Investigation of the vast collections of Swasthani manuscripts has led to important findings. The text is much older than was originally thought. The oldest versions seem to be 500-600 years old. Many of the older texts contain references to Sakya Muni Buddha which suggests a previously unrecognized link with Buddhist religion. The possibility of still older texts containing earlier Newari names of Swasthani, and her possible original identity as an indigenous local diety, as yet inconclusive, is still under investigation. Most of the Swasthani manuscripts are written in both Newari script and Newari

language, and so reflect more general connections with Newar culture and society than had previously been assumed by myself and others.

This finding required my acquisition of competence in both written and spoken Newari language as a basic research tool, and this has opened some very useful avenues of comparative study in other Newari ritual traditions as a means of investigating the cultural importance and uniqueness of the Swasthani tradition itself.

The sheer number of available Swasthani editions -- literally hundreds, varying widely in relative Hindu or Buddhist emphasis and in content of particular episodes included in each version -- made determination of an authoritative edition for translation an extensive and long-term research project in itself. Under such conditions, preparation of a full scholarly translation from any one manuscript (or even from comparison of a small sample) seemed a rather arbitrary exercise of limited scholarly value. Thus, in keeping with the scope and intent of the project, I (a) conducted a preliminary survey of the range and variety of stories included in these editions by examination of as many versions as possible and by consultation with local scholars and editors who had worked with different editions, (b) further investigated through observation, readings, and informant interviews, to determine which stories and episodes are at present in widespread use and/or widely known to participants in Swasthani performances, and (c) chose to translate a Newari Swasthani, Sri Swasthani Dharma Vrata Katha (1980), which though far from being an authoritative edition was compiled by the author, Acyutananda Rajopadhyaya 'Juju', based on his consultation of a wide selection of older Newari Swasthani manuscripts. Thus, while such an edition of Swasthani must be viewed with a critical eye, it nevertheless uniquely illustrates the range and variety of possible stories contained in the hundreds of varying Swasthani texts as a whole. The dissertation will include an abridged translation of this text, including some full translations of certain portions which are required for illustration and analysis of points central to the overall study and relationship of text to ritual.

In substantive terms my research has confirmed my original hypothesis that there is an emphasis in the contents of the texts on stories of female characters acting as agents of social cohesion. Informants in fact tend to stress these stories in conversations about Swasthani even more than do the printed texts themselves. This finding seems significant in light of analysis arising from studies of performance phenomena described below.

* * *

Findings on the "social" level focus on observations of social interactions involving Swasthani and interactions and roles which are stimulated or created through doing Swasthani. My hypothesis that Swasthani is a very widely observed tradition has been substantiated. In household performances any caste may participate. There is no restriction on participation by male or female, young or old; and, although Swasthani apparently originated in and remains centered in Newar culture, it has also spread and become popular with a wide range of non-Newar ethnic and caste groups throughout Nepal.

Investigations also support my hypothesis that this ritual tradition centers on the household and the family with emphasis on the conjugal family. There is no emphasis on patrilineal or corporate male organizational aspects of society, as there is in many other ritual traditions. One of the more important aspects of Swasthani, in contrast to many other ritual traditions, is its completely voluntary nature. Participation is determined solely by individual choice, while type of participation is subject to the practical consideration of one's ability to read and financial means.

* * *

Investigations of the phenomenal level center on two kinds of performance: the household family ritual, and the public ritual vrata performance. It is important to note that Swasthani has additional creative influence on other aspects of performing arts in Nepalese society; there are gaine songs (sung with sarangi), bhajan (devotional songs), masked ritual dances, and theatrical performances. Nevertheless it seems that the ritual tradition is the source of inspiration for these other performances, and the logical focus of analytical investigation.

Analysis of these ritual performances suggests a theoretical approach to more general analysis of female participation in Newar culture. Considering the family performances, the voluntary, household-centered nature of the ritual produces a leaderless configuration of actors who may be female, male or both, according to the membership and wishes of members to take part from one household to the next (see Figure 1). Note that all the performer's places are optional (indicated by

FIGURES

F = Family
 ♀ = female
 ♂ = male
 () = optional

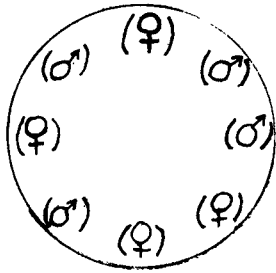


FIGURE 1
Household Swasthani performance

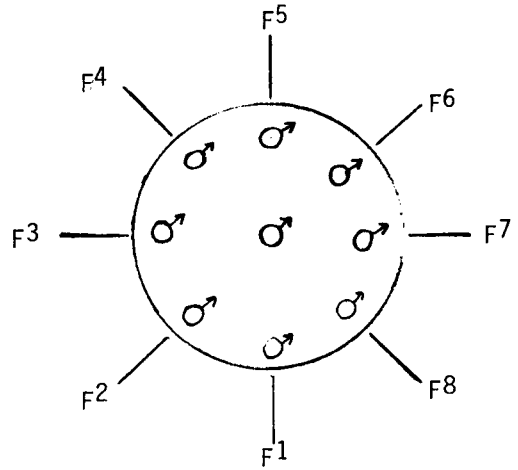


FIGURE 2
Guthi male cooperative

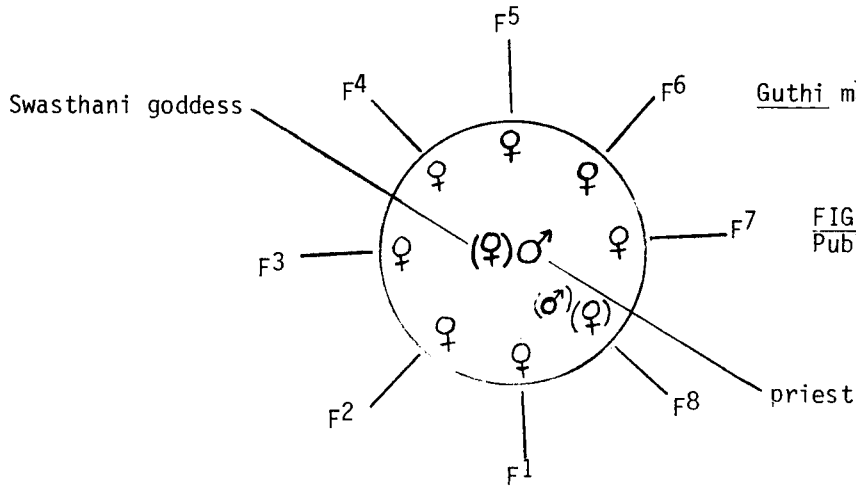


FIGURE 3
Public Swasthani vrata performance

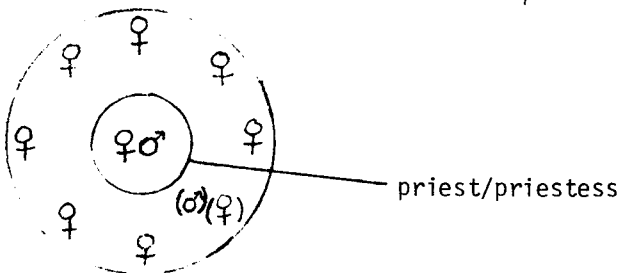


FIGURE 4
Aṣṭami Vrata performance

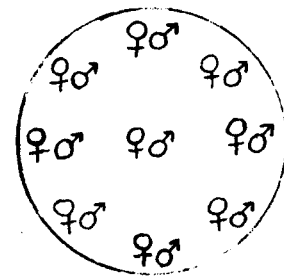


FIGURE 5
Newar Buddhist Tantric ritual performance

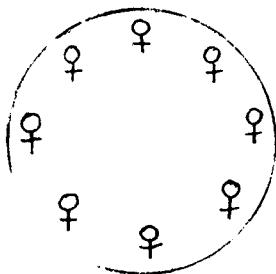


FIGURE 6
Asta Matrka mandala

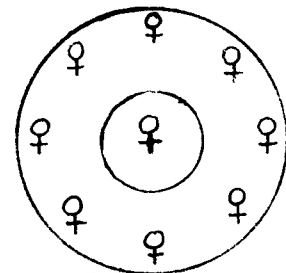


FIGURE 7
Asta Matrka Mandala with Swasthani at the center

parentheses), and that there is no "central" actor. If there is a central focus to such performances it can only be the Swasthani goddess herself. Nevertheless, the primary impetus to perform Swasthani in particular households seems to come from the women of the family. The configuration of actors and actions shown in Figure 1 yields quite a different picture of social participation and initiative from that given by much of the traditional male-oriented social science literature. An interaction pattern more typical of these traditional views might be seen in the organization of the guthi, a socio-economic cooperative, characteristic of Newar society, in which male representatives of various families act together on behalf of the entire guthi membership (see Figure 2). Obviously this represents a very different order of interaction from that of the Swasthani household ritual shown in Figure 1. The difference might be conceived as reflecting a widely-accepted hypothesis of intercultural women's studies, which has been specifically suggested as holding true for Nepal as well: that male dominance is characteristic of the "public" sphere of society, while greater female "power" and initiative are characteristic of the "domestic" sphere. However, we find an equally great contrast with the male-dominated model in another "public" sphere of social interaction which is the public vrata ritual performance exemplified by the Swasthani vrata held annually at Sankhu, in which an overwhelming majority of the actors are women (see Figure 3).

All three of these patterns shown (in Figures 1, 2, and 3) constitute, in a sense, models of Newar social interactions, analytically derived from the phenomena of Newar life and culture. The models derived from Swasthani performances are no less real, no less public, and no less characteristic of Newar society than that of the guthi meeting; and they are of considerable economic importance as well, given the time, labor, and materials invested in them. The real difference lies in the remarkably greater degree of participation of women in the ritual performances. A few men also take part, and the priest who reads the text is male. However his position is somewhat ambiguous, since he acts as a representative of the tradition represented by the Swasthani text itself, and so ultimately of the goddess Swasthani. The actual vrata, as the name implies, consists of the ritual observances kept by the predominantly female group of participants.

Again, one might conceive of this difference in degree of female participation in public events as reflecting a difference between secular and ritual spheres. However, although women do very frequently participate in Newar rituals by making offerings and other acts, one could certainly point to rituals in which female participation was not nearly so important. Rather, the pattern shown in Figure 3 seems more characteristic of the vrata-type of ritual. A Newar Buddhist vrata, the astami vrata ritual, shows this configuration of participants (see Figure 4). The impetus for the main distinctive feature of the Buddhist vrata, the requirement for both the priest and priestess to be present, almost certainly derives from the ideal model of Buddhist Tantric rituals which require participation by male-female couples (see Figure 5).

This pattern (Figure 5), still followed in secret Newar Buddhist Tantric rituals, may have provided historical impetus for a greater emphasis on female participation in rituals of a more public nature such as Swasthani, and so may provide a clue to the nature of historical Buddhist connections with the Swasthani tradition. However, although the Buddhist vrata differs from Swasthani performance in requiring the presence of both a priest and a priestess, like the priest in Swasthani, these two act together as mediums of the particular god or goddess for whom the ritual is being performed. The priestly role in vrata performances seems to be that of a mediator of tradition, determined mainly by hereditary obligation according to respective Hindu or Buddhist customs. The essential aspect of vrata performances, which actualizes and legitimizes the performance as an authentic vrata, is the voluntary participation of the other actors, the majority of whom are invariably women. If any theoretical contrast is to be drawn from these patterns of interaction, it is that voluntary social interactions (at least in these contexts) are achieved by women, in contrast to the hereditary and obligatory roles filled by men. Again, if the Swasthani texts emphasize female actors as agents of social cohesion, this voluntary aspect of women's ritual participation may provide a behaviorally-derived model to illustrate and verify the conceptions of female roles presented by the textual tradition.

Thus investigation of Swasthani performances leads to an alternative model of female participation in Newar social interactions, as well as potential clarification of the conceptualization of female roles in Swasthani ideology. Our analysis of performance roles suggests a clarification of a further conceptual dimension of Swasthani. In the texts, Swasthani is conceived of as the central diety of a mandala of eight female protective goddesses who are known as the Asta Matrka. These goddesses belong to the oldest stratum of Newar religious belief; their aniconic shrines surround every town, neighborhood, and village in the Nepal Valley, as well as the entire valley/nation of Nepal itself. Their presence defines a kind of matrix (the name Asta Matrka literally means "eight mothers") within which one's living

place is situated and daily life is carried out. Thus, they represent a Newar "world view" in the most basic sense of defining a cosmos of everyday experience, one's own world on both localized and more inclusive scales (see Figure 6).

The local Asta Matrka shrines seem to represent a mandala without a central deity; the geographic locus itself — village, town, or valley/nation — is at the center. It seems fully logical, likewise, to place Swasthani at the center of this mandala, for Swasthani is also a basically aniconic goddess whose name literally means "one's own place". In fact, as some informants say, "Swasthani means 'one's own place' — meaning Nepal!!". Thus, the Asta Matrka mandala with Swasthani at its center (see Figure 7) depicts the cosmos of Nepalese/Newari personal experience, and depicts it in a form that corresponds to the configurations of predominantly female actors observed in actual Swasthani ritual performances.

Summary

Investigation of conceptual, social, and performance levels of Swasthani tradition allows derivation of new models of female participation in Newar society which have not previously been shown either by traditional male-centered approaches or by women's studies approaches utilizing more quantitative, less value-centered means of investigation. It suggests a possible new approach to questions of women's (and men's) status and roles. From the standpoint of Nepal and comparative religious studies, it provides a description and analysis of a religious tradition which Nepalese Hindus and Buddhists themselves consider to be demonstrably linked on various levels with some of the oldest and most influential elements of Newar religious and cultural traditions.

Note: A documentary video tape on "Women and Ritual in Nepal: The Swasthani Vrata" is in preparation by Linda Ittis and Ter Ellingson.