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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Monk, Householder and Priest: Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual

D. Phil., St. John's College.

This thesis describes and analyzes the Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. The main question addressed is: What is the relationship of Newar Buddhism to Theravada Buddhism on the one hand, and to Hinduism on the other? The main research method was to spend two years doing fieldwork with Newar Buddhists in the city of Lalitpur.

Chapter One describes the different castes to be found in Lalitpur and tries to show in what way religious attitudes are determined by caste. Chapter Two discusses the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism. It shows how the relationship can be described in many different ways and ends with a summary and critique of previous scholarly theories. Chapter Three introduces some basic notions of Newar Buddhism and in particular the concept of the Three Ways, which is used to organize the subsequent exposition. Chapter Four introduces the basic vocabulary of Newar Buddhist ritual and includes a detailed description of the gulu mandala rite. Chapter Five focuses on the first of the Three Ways, the Disciples' Way, which embodies the values of celibate monachism. Chapters Six and Seven show what the Great Way (*mahayana*) means for Newar Buddhists. Chapter Six describes their pilgrimages, life-cycle rites, calendrical festivals and Observances (*vrata*). Chapter Seven describes the unique Newar socio-religious organization, the *guthi*. Chapters Eight and Nine describe the Diamond Way (*vajrayana*). This includes descriptions of various Tantric rituals and analysis of the role of Tantric ritual in all Newar ritual. It also includes a discussion of priestly identity and of the place and function of Tantric symbols in the total religion. Chapter Ten discusses the place of Tantric religion within Buddhism and Hinduism respectively. It also attempts to delineate the causes of the present decline of traditional Newar Buddhism. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main themes of the thesis.