



HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

Volume 20
Number 1 *Himalayan Research Bulletin no. 1 &
2*

Article 7

2000

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Recommended Citation

. 2000. Roundtable: The Politics of Culture and Identity in Contemporary Nepal. *HIMALAYA* 20(1).
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol20/iss1/7>

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Roundtable: The Politics of Culture and Identity in Contemporary Nepal

Organizers: William F. Fisher and Susan Hangen
Panelists: Karl-Heinz Krämer, Laren Leve, David Homberg, Mukta S. Tamang, Judith Pettigrew, and Mary Cameron

William F. Fisher and Susan Hangen
Introduction

In the years since the 1990 "restoration" of democracy, ethnic activism has become a prominent and, for some, a worrisome part of Nepal's political arena. The "janajati" movement is composed of a mosaic of social organizations and political parties dominated by groups of peoples who have historically spoken Tibeto-Burman languages. This movement has reshaped political discourse in Nepal by persistently challenging the previously-accepted view of national culture, religion, and language, and by presenting a potentially revolutionary vision of Nepal as a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious state. This conflict pits anger and resentment about the two-hundred-year-history of economic, political, and cultural dominance of Nepal by high-caste hill Hindus against fears that Nepal is on the verge of violent disintegration that would make it another Sri Lanka or Yugoslavia.

This roundtable brought together scholars who have conducted extensive research on different dimensions of the janajati movement to share their perspectives, explore the divergent and sometimes contradictory modes of activism in the janajati movement, and to discuss the changes that are occurring as new organizations emerge, actors reposition themselves, and new issues arise.¹ The roundtable's primary goal was to explore in some depth the complex and changing nature of relationships among various actors, social organizations, political parties, and

local populations involved in and affected by the janajati movement in Nepal.

We asked the roundtable participants to consider several themes that derived from our own discussion:

1. To what extent and to what end does it make sense to talk about a "janajati movement"? Reflecting a wide variety of intentions, goals, definitions, and strategies, do the wide-ranging practices of activists in social organizations and constitute a movement or are they but a discordant set of disparate actions? To what extent are groups like the MNO or the Janajati Mahasangh engaged in the same project?

2. How significant is the distinction between social and political spheres in Janajati discourse? Some Janajati activists take pains to distinguish between activities and groups that are part of a Janajati social movement, on one hand, and those which are part of a Janajati political movement, on the other. While this distinction appears on the surface to echo distinctions made by social movement theorists, we might question how cleanly this demarcation can be drawn. What is the relationship between new assertions of social and political identity and attempts to create effective political strategies?

3. How do post-1990 ethnic social and political organizations differ in form, membership, and in the issues they address from those which existed during the Panchayat era? How have previously existing ethnic organizations re-positioned themselves and re-cast their historical narratives in the post-Panchayat era?

4. How does the work of foreign and Nepali scholars articulate with contemporary ethnic politics in Nepal? How have the ways in which scholars have classified difference in Nepal influenced or informed the strategies contemporary political activists employ to assert or re-classify difference?

5. How does the Janajati movement articulate with in a larger frame encompassing the politics of difference in

¹Roundtable was part of the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, held in Boston, MA on March 12, 1999. Roundtable participants included William Fisher, David Gellner, Susan Hangen, Karl-Heinz Krämer, Lauren Leve, Kathryn March, and Mukta Singh Tamang. Addition extended comments were provided by David Holmberg, Judith Pettigrew, and Mary Cameron.

contemporary Nepal, including the politics of class, gender, and geography?

William F. Fisher, Chair
Opening Remarks

I welcome everyone to the AAS roundtable on the Politics of Culture and Identity in Contemporary Nepal. We are fortunate to have here today a wide range of scholars who have conducted research on different aspects of the Janajati movement. I will start with some background remarks to help frame and initiate our exchange.

Within Nepal there are widespread disagreements about the seriousness of Nepal's "ethnic problem", the threat it poses to national integration, and its causes. Some say that the Janajati problem is one of the most serious problems faced by Nepal at the moment but others argue that the current furor is merely the work of a few disgruntled ethnic elites in Kathmandu, who are out for personal gain, and some even point to the complicity of foreign scholars in emphasizing ethnic differences and promoting a critical view of the two hundred year history of nation building in Nepal.

Some of my high caste informants have said dismissively that the whole Janajati movement could be ended with just 20 or so high government appointments. When I paraphrased these claims to Janajati activists they laughed and noted that they too had heard these remarks. But they interpreted comments like this as signs of growing respect for the movement since the estimated number of government appointments needed to end the movement had apparently doubled within one year.

Scholars, too, have questioned the size of the janajati movement and challenged or dismiss the authenticity or significance of views expressed by a collection of ethnic "elites" or "intellectuals." One of today's participants, in a recent volume, has cautioned us not to unquestioningly "give full credence to the most vocal and most active proponents of ethnic identity" and has reminded us of the "duty to pay attention to the values and world views of ordinary people."² I agree with this view but offer an additional caution. It is apparent that what appears on the surface to be a resurgence of traditional ethnic identities in Nepal is, at least in part, a selective intellectual construction oriented as much to the future as to the past, and as much toward the modern as it is to the traditional. Janajati activists are

negotiating identities as they move toward modernity their own terms.

But while everyday lives are important anthropological material, we would be ill-advised to treat some people as more "ordinary" than others and thus more worthy of study, and we risk oversimplification if we focus on some momentary lack of fit between what activists say and the feelings of those on whose behalf they claim to speak, and then take this lack of fit to be evidence of how unauthentic the voices of ethnic activists are. Tracking a movement is not merely a matter of assessing the size of the constituency at a particular moment, but also entails close attention to both the persistent assertion of new views, histories, categories, and perspectives as well as the resonance of some of these assertions with a wider population.

The innovative narratives of the activists may not always reflect change that has already happened in the villages, but we should bear in mind that the politics of culture entails simultaneous battle at numerous levels in various political and geographic spaces. It would be ironic if as anthropologists we emphasize the need to listen to and make space for previously unheard voices but at the same time dismiss some voices by insisting that we are the best determiners of whose voices are ordinary or authentic enough to be heard.

Depending on the speaker, current ethnic unrest is attributed to a variety of causes. Ethnic activists attribute it to two hundred years of Hindu oppression and growing awareness of this history among affected social groups. But less charitable views portray it as a misunderstanding and misuse of new democratic processes and political freedom to promote what are essentially communal claims. In the judgement of this latter group, there is no basis for the fear of ethnic conflict at the grassroots level or among rural areas in Nepal.

At the heart of the debate about identity, difference and national culture are two competing views of the nation of Nepal. One portrays a democratic Hindu kingdom composed of a harmonious flower garden of four varnas and 36 jats which share a heroic past, speak a common language, follow a common religion, and are led, at least symbolically, by a divine and benevolent king. A second view opposes a Nepali past of internal colonization, Hindu oppression, and the forced assimilation of non-Hindu minorities into a hierarchical system, to an emergent vision of Nepal as a "nation in the making". In this view, this "nation in the making" if it is to achieve nationhood at all, can only do so as a culturally plural and secular society.

For many residents in Nepal, the term "janajati," at least as it is currently used, seemed to appear almost overnight and within a few years had become widely used and ac-

²David Gellner. 1997. "Ethnicity and Nationalism in the World's only Hindu State," in *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom*. Eds. David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and John Welpton. Harwood. pp. 19, 23.

knowledge. The term became popular in the mid 1980s among a small group of ethnic activists who deliberately translated into English as “nationalities” and employed it to draw attention to their argument that Nepali society consists of a number of different but equal nationalities which collectively constitute the nation. It became common on the national scene by the mid 1990s. The ambiguity of the English definition for “nationalities” is also consistent with the different claims and strategies which are present in the janajati movement: “nationalities” may refer to “groups of people, each of which has a common and distinguishing linguistic and cultural background and form one constituent element of a larger group (as a nation)” or it may also suggest that each of these aggregations of people is “potentially capable of forming a nation state.”³

The Janajati activists have set out not only to oppose what they describe as a state-created and maintained system of social hierarchy but also to demarcate and shape a new social system—one that is non-hierarchical and non-discriminatory. They set out to do this through a number of interrelated strategies: 1) They challenge the symbols of the nation, subversively appropriate and recodify signs, and look within their own group’s history and traditions for symbols of unity around which their community may be re-imagined and mobilized. It is in this process that social groups may become political entities—nationalities—which may begin to bargain with the state for increased social, political, and economic rights of their citizens. 2) They legitimize their actions by citing a history of subordination, land theft, and slavery at the hands of the ruling elite. 3) They emphasize a number of stark dichotomies: janajati and jati, indigenous and non-indigenous, Hindu and Non-Hindu, flat nose and pointy nose, all of which call attention to ongoing processes of discrimination. 4) They establish new sets of categories within which to locate peoples: foremost in this process is a re-writing of their community histories and a demand for a reconceived national historical narrative. They also embrace previously despised characterizations and reinterpret them with positive attributes.

Stokely Carmichael noted the importance of this kind of process:

“the basic need is to reclaim history and identity from what must be called cultural terrorism...we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society and to have these terms recognize”.⁴

The report of Nepal’s National Committee for the UN

³See, for instance, the unabridged Oxford English Dictionary.

Year of Indigenous People also makes this concern very clear:

“We, the indigenous people of Nepal, wish to protect our ethnic identities...and we are working to redescribe history. We want to write our histories ourselves.

The government that has been ruling has been covering up the true facts about indigenous people, and has been describing, writing, and publishing history from imperialist and internal colonialist perspectives. We want to announce that, on the religious front, we are free from the country and the state’s constitution, and want to act accordingly...we have been divided by the cultural and political repression of Hindu nationalism. We want to be equals again. We want to use our ancestral land, sources and media freely again...Our culture is caught between the unjust Hindu culture and the excessively liberal Western culture...Instead of increasing the standard of living of janajati peoples, development projects conducted by the governmental and nongovernmental organizations actually decrease it and act to eliminate cultural identity...we want a society unified in diversity.”⁵

The counter narratives of nationalism put forth by the janajati are often dismissed as a strange brew of facts, fictions, and myths. Indeed, some of the details of these stories may not stand up to intense academic scrutiny and may be justifiably labeled confused. But these narratives are more about emotion than reason and the model of ethnically plural nationalism they promote may indeed prove more viable and enduring than state-imposed integration based on suppression, exclusions, and intolerance.

It is ironic that a state which classified and divided its population as a means to assimilate and rule the diverse segments through a state-sanctioned hierarchy must now find a way to address the insistence of these diverse segments that national unity can emerge through acceptance of them as separate and different elements of the population.

David Gellner
Brunel University, London

Before responding to the questions which the organizers have asked us to address, I would like to make three preliminary points.

First of all, the organizers refer to some people’s “fears

⁴Carmichael, S. and C.V. Hamilton. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Vintage.

⁵National Committee for the International Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. 1993. “Indigenous People of Nepal.”

of violent disintegration” in the face of identity politics in Nepal. But that process has already begun: large tracts of the western hills are not fully or at all controlled by the government, but the main actor here is the CPN (Maoist). The relationship between the Maoists and the Janajati activists is by no means straightforward, but there are some links. And, of course, ethnic identity can play a role even when it is not consciously a principle of recruitment or organization. My point is that we should be discussing the Maoist problem at the same time.

Second, a methodological point. As scholars we are always a step behind. Things happen on the ground and we are not always there. Even if we are ‘there,’ participant observation is not sufficient to grasp a complex phenomenon like ‘the Janajati movement.’ A variety of methods, and the cooperation of many different scholars, as in the present panel, are necessary.

My third point is on the ethics of involvement. Some people say, ‘Don’t get involved, don’t offer advice. You’ll only look stupid; and, in any case, it is patronizing to offer advice.’ Others would say, ‘There is -- at some point -- a duty to get involved and not to maintain the Olympian detachment of the armchair observer.’ For myself, I believe that scholars working in Nepal do have a duty to concern themselves with ethnic politics, and to do so in all humility. They also have a duty not to become the mouthpiece of nationalist movements, but to represent, or at least to be aware of, the full plurality of ordinary people’s voices.

Turning now to Bill and Susan’s questions: they have asked us, ‘Who are the activists?’ In the case of the Newars my estimate is that there are 1-200 people, more if you include all the students who do no more than organize and publish campus magazines in Newari. They are, however, just the tip of an iceberg. The concerns they articulate and the rhetoric they use go much wider and deeper. They can, on occasion, mobilize quite large numbers of people, e.g. for the Bhintuna celebration at the beginning of the so-called Newar New Year. There is an important split between the ethnic and the Buddhist activists (the latter being more numerous). There is some overlap of the two groups: a few people are equally active in both spheres. But for the most part, activists EITHER give priority to Buddhism -- in which case they want to reach the largest audience possible, and therefore use Nepali as well as Newari; and they want to reform, i.e. to change, traditional Newar culture -- OR they are cultural nationalists whose prime aims are to preserve both Newari and traditional Newar culture.

On the question of the social versus the political in activist discourse: it is essential for ethnic activists to try and keep party politics out of their organizations. Why? Since 1990 everything has become political. Trade unions have all split along party lines. Any organization that wants to maintain its unity and build a mass organization (the dream of every activist) must stop the politically active being prominent in the organization. If well-known political figures are office holders in an ethnic organization, then the organization is assumed to be aligned to their party (this happened, for example, to the Nepal Bhasa Manka Khalah, headed by Padma Ratna Tuladhar). This immediately alienates potential members who are supporters of the other parties. In order to prevent this happening the Jyapu Mahaguthi has a rule barring the politically active from holding office within the organization, though they are welcome as ordinary members. This is intended to prevent the organization being hijacked by a particular political party, and to try and ensure that the organization continues to represent all Jyapus (effectively: all Jyapus of Kathmandu, and some outlying villages; Lalitpur has its own Jyapu organization). By maintaining a distance from political parties, ethnic organizations can hope to encourage a kind of bidding process between the parties to win their support, and indeed there is some evidence that this has been happening.

I don’t want to go on too long, so let me conclude. I think that the way forward for the Nepalese state is to endorse some form of what has been called ‘strategic essentialism’. It should give some kind of recognition to some ethnic groups, i.e. continue the first multiculturalist steps that have already been taken. Whether these policies should include quotas or reservations for public sector jobs, educational opportunities, and seats in assemblies, as in India, is one of the most difficult current questions of Nepali politics. At the same time the state should attempt to encourage multiple and cross-cutting identities, including a common Nepaliness.

Susan Hangen
Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The “Janajati” Movement: A View from East Nepal

We are Mongol, we are Mongol,
No matter what others call us,
We are Mongol.

While researching the Mongol National Organization (MNO) in eastern Nepal, I heard activists sing the refrain of this song at numerous political gatherings. The term "Mongol" hails from early 19th century ethnology and highlights the idea of racial unity among the numerous groups of peoples who have historically spoken Tibeto-Burman languages. As this song suggests, the MNO asserts this ethnonym in a field in which other people call "Mongols" other names. By insisting on the term Mongol, the MNO rejects both the label "matwali," issued by the 19th century Nepali state, and the label "janajati" which has become prevalent in the post 1990 wave of ethnic activism in Nepal. The MNO's rejection of the term "janajati" is at once an acknowledgment that the party operates in a wider field of activism, the "janajati" movement, and a way of locating itself within that movement.

As one of several ethnic political parties that has emerged since 1990, the MNO positions itself in the movement as a "political" rather than a "social" organization. The MNO sees political power as "the main key that can open all locks" for Mongols and seeks to gain control of the Nepali state — through elections, if possible, or by armed revolution if not. Their plans to transform the state so that it benefits Mongols include: restructuring Nepal as a federation of states where Tibeto-Burman languages are used and abolishing the monarchy, which it sees as a buttress of Hindu dominance.

Though the MNO's founder-president, Gopal Gurung, is sometimes assumed to comprise the extent of the MNO, the party has an active "grassroots" base of support with active party committees in 8 districts. The MNO's stronghold is in the rural areas of Ilam district, where it has had limited electoral success at the village level. Given the party's relatively short history, relatively undeveloped party structure, and lack of financial resources and legal status, the MNO has been surprisingly successful in elections. In the first local elections in 1991, the party won 57 seats at the village level and managed to gain control of several Village Development Committees. In 1994 national elections, the party received the third most votes after the large, long-established and well-funded Congress and Communist parties, and received more votes than the third most popular party in the nation overall, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party. As Articles 112(3) and 113(3) of Nepal's 1990 Constitution forbid the Election Commission from registering political parties that are explicitly community or region based, the MNO is an "illegal" party. The MNO is presently the only political party that has been denied registration on this basis and still continues to put up candidates for election, albeit as independents. Other identity based political parties either boycott elections, or have widened the definition of the community who they claim to repre-

sent so as to secure registration from the Election Commission. By continuing to operate as a political party despite this ruling, the MNO places itself in constant conflict with the state, thus creating and sustaining an example of high-caste Hindu dominance of the political.

By contrast, the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh, and the single ethnic-group focused organizations that constitute it, insist that they are non-political, social organizations. These organizations seek to promote the "languages, religions and cultures" of janajatis and to raise public awareness about issues affecting janajatis through publications and conferences. Their work can be seen as political in that they operate as "pressure groups," working to influence members of the government to form policies that will uplift janajatis and pursuing incremental changes within the present system. For example, during the drafting of the 1990 Constitution, the Janajati Mahasangh made recommendations to the Constitution Commission; and later the organization spearheaded opposition to teaching Sanskrit as a compulsory language in schools. As the widespread currency of the term "janajati" reflects, this strategy of accommodation is the prevalent and legal way to make claims on the basis of ethnicity in post 1990 Nepal. Furthermore, some activists in these organizations have argued, it is a more effective way to secure rights for janajatis at the present moment than attempting to directly seize political power.

As a strategy to gain political power at the national level, the MNO's participation in electoral politics as a small and unregistered party is of limited effectiveness. (We may also question the effectiveness a violent takeover of the state, the MNO's other plan.) At the village level, however, taking the format of political party has enabled the MNO to include people in its membership who are not brought into the janajati organizations. Political parties are able to mobilize a wide sector of the population, because people can take part in them and align themselves with them simply by voting for them. Thus although MNO leaders and activists come from among the *tulo manche* of the village, ordinary villagers also consider themselves to be part of the MNO and call themselves "Mongols" — whereas they feel alienated from the social organizations which emphasize writings, formal speeches, and cultural entrepreneurship. As one uneducated woman who supports the MNO and wasn't involved in the local Gurung organization told me, "they probably only let people who can read or write take part in those organizations." So by being a political party the MNO is able to create space for a wide range of types of participation in the movement. Even though the MNO has a marginal position in the movement at the national level because of its confrontational stance towards the state, at the village level it is able to create a kind of populist base.

The question of the extent to which the MNO is engaged in the same project as the Janajati Mahasangh was a central topic of debate among MNO members. Since the Janajati Mahasangh as a coalition has a very limited presence in Ilam District, the debate focused on how the MNO should relate to the single-ethnic group focused "social organizations" which compose the Janajati Mahasangh.

Most MNO supporters perceived the work and goals of the social organizations and the MNO to be compatible, and mutually enhancing. Individuals asserted that the social organizations create support for the MNO by raising people's awareness and by encouraging Mongols to break away from Hinduism. Other people described how joining the MNO led them to get involved in the social organizations. The MNO encourages Mongols to become "not Hindu" and look for "their own language, religion and culture" but only the social organizations offer Mongols specific cultural identities.

MNO leaders, however, criticized the social organizations and urged other leaders, in particular, to refrain from taking part in any of their activities or programs. First, MNO leaders argued that the social organizations' emphasis on promoting language, religion, and culture could mislead and confuse people into believing that this is the entire goal of activism. Uplifting Mongol languages and cultures is meaningless, they insisted, without the power to institutionalize the use of these languages and cultures — "like growing cash crops without a market to sell them in," as one MNO leader often explained.

Second, the leaders criticized the social organizations for promoting individual ethnic group identities, rather than Mongols as a coalition, which could fracture the unified Mongol identity and political block. MNO leaders also expressed fear that if they participated in social organizations associated with single ethnic organizations, they could be seen as aligned with one ethnic group more than with other ethnic groups. As one leader stated, "We are fighting for the freedom of all Mongols, not just one group."

This ethnographic reading of the MNO raises some important issues in considering the janajati movement at large. It is important to remember that what may be an effective strategy for an organization at the national level may not be so effective at the village level, and vice versa. The challenge of creating a unified, concrete identity from a heterogeneous population without negating the multiple identities within the group is a critical issue for the janajati movement. It is also a central problem for all nationalist projects, and thus, examining the debates over this issue in this movement in Nepal can shed light on ethnic and nationalist politics elsewhere.

Karl-Heinz Krämer

Nepal's ethnic groups are still lacking integration and participation in the modern democratic Nepali state. But their situation has, nevertheless, improved compared to *panchayat* times. The guarantee of fundamental rights is much safer today. Especially the right of freedom of opinion and expression and the freedom to form organizations (article 12) have helped the ethnic elites to make their arguments heard among their own groups and in the general public.

The greatest problem is still the attitude of the Nepali state. There is hardly any organization outside the ethnic camp that really wants to understand the ethnic argumentation. Politicians may be talking about participation of ethnic groups and suppressed castes, but the facts speak a different language, and there is hardly any change in attitude in sight. Another outstanding example are the human rights organizations which have come into existence in greater number. They may be talking about indigenous groups, but like the political parties they, too, are dominated by members of high Hindu castes, especially Bahuns. Many of these people cannot understand the arguments of the ethnic leaders, since they have never learnt to view the Nepali state and society from the ethnic perspective because of the one-sidedness of the national education system.

Last month I have taken part in a conference organized by POLSAN in Kathmandu on the topic of "democratization and development of civil society in Nepal". There I have presented a paper on this topic against the multiethnic background of the country. This paper dealt especially with the legal situation on the one hand and the implementing political sphere on the other hand. Even though I had already chosen a moderate style of argumentation, my paper set off a controversial discussion almost disregarding the other partly very interesting papers. One Bahun (Dwarika Nath Dhungel) even turned my arguments on the problems of integration and participation into the opposite stating I wanted to disintegrate Nepal. And even in the press my arguments were distorted. Spotlight (issue of 26 January), for example, stated me to have argued that Nepalese ethnic groups are a threat to Nepal's integrity supporting Dwarika Nath Dhungel's biting critics that there is no reason to believe that there is any such threat of ethnic conflict.

I take these reactions as proof that the ethnic argumentation is having an effect. And with this I will turn over to the set of themes derived from Bill's and Susan's discussions. If we speak about a "janajati movement" then we must be aware, that we are not talking about a coherent movement but more about a general process of growing ethnic awareness. When we are talking here about the *janajati*, then we first of all think of Nepal's divergent eth-

nic groups. But we must also be aware that in recent years these groups have been joined in their action by the so-called suppressed or untouchable castes. All these groups have in common that they have been disadvantaged in the modern Nepali state in respect to legal rights and to political, social and economic participation. Even if it is not a single movement, all these groups, nevertheless, have a similar fate, similar intentions, goals, definitions and strategies. And they have founded organizations of their own representing their interests against the Nepali state and its central elites. It thus makes sense to talk about a "janajati movement."

Nevertheless I see some differences between those organizations that started with social issues and only became political in the second end (to these groups I especially count the organizations of the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh) and those organizations that predominantly work on a political basis and call themselves political parties, like the Mongol National Organization of Gopal Gurung. The latter again took a very radical stand when I met him last month, distancing himself from the current Nepali state. The groups of the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh take a much milder approach, even though one cannot deny that there are radical political figures also within that group. Suresh Ale Magar and Padma Ratna Tuladhar, for example, actively took part in celebrations of the NCP (Maoist) on the completement of three years of *jana yuddha* that took place in New Delhi.

Even though these persons differ from the argumentation of Gopal Gurung, who distances himself from a Gurung identity and instead speaks about a common Mongol identity of all Nepali ethnic groups, they have in common with him that they use their social ethnic engagements for the propagation of a *janajati* political movement. Gopal Gurung may use the term Mongol instead of *janajati*, but in the end he is talking about the same thing.

The introduction of the new constitution in 1990 offered a chance not only to change the political system but also to reconsider the state's politics of nationalism. There can be no doubt that democracy has definitely entered Nepal in 1990 when the new constitution was promulgated. Sovereignty exercised by the king for centuries was transferred to the people. The constitution further stipulated provisions like constitutional monarchy, a parliamentary form of government, a pluralistic society, and a civilian order. It also reinstated popular election of the parliament based on the principle of universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage. But there are still a number of shortcomings within the constitution itself, and there still exist undemocratic laws enacted under the previous authoritarian regime requiring replacement or amendment. The guarantee of fundamental rights, like those of freedom of opinion and expression or

of organization, has opened up chances for ethnic political argumentation. Interestingly enough ethnic political parties are a product of the 1990s and it was only after the people's movement that the socio-culturally oriented *janajati* organizations became politically active institutions, proving their groups as historic entities of a common Nepali state. It was especially the self-historification of the ethnic groups that provided them with political arguments in their dialogue with the Nepali state.

Scholarly works on Nepal's ethnic movement are still in an infant state. It have especially been anthropologists, first foreigners later also Nepalis, who wrote about greater ethno-political consciousness and organizations. Foreign political scientists and historians working on Nepal are comparatively few in number, but among corresponding Nepali scholars a change in attitude can be observed in recent years. This becomes obvious when I compare the talks I had with them five years ago with their current argumentation. But it will take time. A special problem of Nepali scholars is that they still recrate themselves mostly from the Chetri and especially the Bahun groups. Under the *panchayat* system these persons represented the state ideology of politics, society and nationalism, and most of the controversial argumentation the ethnic organizations are confronted with today is still based on their writings. Ethnic and thus cultural difference, which has been accepted as given by the current constitution, is still challenged by many Nepali intellectuals, as I have mentioned in the beginning. Political ethnic argumentation in recent years has mainly been focussed on this, let me call it stubborn, attitude of leading Nepali scholars. Radical forces within the ethnic movement have already started to oppose them with militant demands and argumentations. Here I see a great danger for the future of the ethnic movement and of the Nepali state in general.

The *janajati* movement must be seen as part of development of civil society in Nepal. A well-developed civil society potentially influences government in two ways. It enhances political responsiveness by aggregating and expressing the wishes of the public through a wealth of non-governmental forms of association, and it safeguards public freedom by limiting the government's ability to impose arbitrary rule by force. Based on rights, rule of law, freedom and citizenship, civil society becomes the place for a critical rational discourse. It is a precondition for the existence of democracy and a property of democratic states and societies.

The 1990 constitution with its guarantee of fundamental rights has laid the foundation for the start of this process in Nepal. As such the *janajati* movement must be seen in the context of similar movements of the so-called untouchable castes, the women, or even the Maoists as far as

their political arguments in favour of downtrodden sections of Nepali society are taken into consideration. But only a politically self-conscious civil society imposes limits upon state power. If the political practices of a self-conscious civil society transgress the boundaries of the state sponsored political discourse, a crisis of legitimacy of the state results. I hope today's discussions will shed some light on the question if such a crisis is given in Nepal.

Lauren Leve
Wellesley College

Framing Religion, Politics and Culture in *Janajati* Activism: Lessons from Theravada Buddhism

Are political revolutionaries and social reformers – those who would take over the state and those who ask only for greater freedom to practice and reproduce what they see as their indigenous cultural identities – properly part of the same movement? One of the problems it was suggested that speakers might address today is conceptualizing an interpretive framework for analyzing the diversity of parties and practices that fall under the rubric of *janajati* politics. My remarks will be directed largely to this concern. In part, this approach is methodologically driven; unlike many of the others on this panel, I have not done fieldwork on *janajati* activism *per se*, nor have I worked with people who would identify themselves as involved in this movement. Yet, the fact that many of these people do appear to me to be acting within the realm of cultural politics nevertheless, provides the root contradiction that animates these comments.

To begin, I propose a brief detour through the recent history of “religion” in the construction of the nation. As anyone who followed the debates that surrounded the drafting and release of the VS 2047 (1991) Constitution will know, the current wave of public contestation over the place of Hinduism in the democratic nation-state began at the same time as, and in dialogue with, the rise of post-Panchayat assertions of cultural and linguistic subnationalisms. Since 1990 (when I started doing fieldwork in Nepal, and hence, when my ethnographic “memory,” as it were, begins), protests and marches in favor of a secular state have given rise to publicized refusals to celebrate Dasain,⁶ and Hindu nationalist anxiety has grown, as manifested in the heightened visibility of militant Hindu associations like the VHP, and the increasing hostility being directed toward Christianity. Accusations of

⁶ See Pfaff-Czarnecka (1993) and Hangen (1997).

“*Bahunbad*” by public intellectuals, Buddhists and *janajati* leaders have pointed to ways in which nationalized Hinduism has masked and supported Monarchical power and high caste Hindu privilege. And Hindu nationalists and loyalists have reacted aggressively in their own defense.⁷ Yet, to the best of my knowledge, religious organizations that are not explicitly linked to an ethnocultural or political agenda are generally not construed as falling within the *janajati* sphere by activists or scholars, whether Nepali or foreign. This raises the question as to why language and culture are considered appropriate bases on which to claim political identity, whereas in the same context, religion is not.

My research has been on a Theravada Buddhist reform movement which has clashed with the Nepali state in different ways at various times since the 1920s and 1930s when it first emerged among Newar Buddhists, and which has played an important part in re-articulating ethnic and religious identity for many Newars since then. Theravada Buddhists as a whole do not see themselves as appropriately involved in *janajati* politics. Almost all will contest the assertion that Buddhism is in any way political; and the collaborations between Buddhist monks and *janajati* activists that sprung up in the wake of the *jana andolan* were, and continue to be, fiercely debated within the Theravada community. Yet, I see important points of analogy between the Theravada Buddhist reform and the *janajati* movement, and in the ways that Theravada Buddhists and *janajati* activists are positioned by and position themselves vis-à-vis the state. Thus it is instructive to compare their points of contiguity and common cause, as well as of divergence and disavowal.

There are significant structural parallels between the Newar cultural renaissance/anti-Rana resistance at the beginning of this century of which the early Theravada reform was a part,⁸ and the politicization of ethnic and religious identity today. During the 1920s and 1930s, Theravada was a religious reform that had political implications in a state where political and religious subjectivities were intertwined. Thus, although its robed representatives never actually aspired to state power, their politics of culture were perceived by the Ranas as provocative nonetheless. Despite protestations that their undertaking was *religious*, not political, Theravada monks and nuns were expelled from Nepal twice in the first half of this century for ordaining Hindus and women, and preaching against such

⁷ Many of these trends and events are also documented in Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997).

⁸ See Gellner (1986; 1992:13-18; 1997), Lakaul (1985), Malla (1982), Pradhan (1985 (2041 VS)), Shrestha (n.d.), Upreti (1992).

cultural edifices as sacrifice and the caste system. At the same time, many of its lay devotees were jailed, fined, and harassed.

The position of Theravada Buddhists in relation to the state became less problematic after 1951, due in large part to King Tribhuvan's personal spiritual propensities.⁹ But in the months immediately following the *jana andolan*, a number of prominent Theravada monks began to attend meetings of the *Janajati Mahasangh*, and they were among the leaders of the call for the constitutional recognition of Nepal's ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity that rocked Kathmandu over the summer and into the fall of 1990. At the same time as they were pressing for these political reforms, however, they were also active in a number of more religiously-oriented activities, including preaching *dharma* at the meetings of individual *janajati* associations, and organizing Buddhist training camps which aimed to propagate their putatively "pure" brand of Buddhism among ethnic groups whose religions and cultures they argued had been "corrupted" by a long history of Hindu domination. In conjunction with this goal, one monastery even arranged the initiation of six young boys from what they explicitly publicized as *janajati* castes – one Gurung, one Magar, one Tharu, and three Tamangs – as novice Theravada monks, and sent them to Thailand for high school and further Buddhist training in the hope that they would return to spread Theravada Buddhism among their native communities.

As it turned out, by 1996, four of the six boys had disrobed, rejecting their roles as representatives of their *jats* to return to normal teenage life. More significantly, most of the monks had broken with the *Janajati Mahasangh* by this time; as it was explained to me, because the organization became "too political." Yet, considering that I had seen one of the very same monks who told me this in 1995 rallying crowds at the Tundikhel in 1990, and that he himself had been one of the ones expelled in 1944, this assertion of an ontological distinction between the "religious" and "political" realms struck me as a strange denial of Theravada lived experience. Briefly, I interpret this opting out of ethnic politics at least in part as an act of resistance to events internal to *janajati* politics themselves – when the secular state initiative was defeated and their partner groups moved on to other issues and modes of organization, I suspect that the monks felt rather marginalized, and being able to claim a higher authority, under the sign of the religious, offered

an identity-appropriate language in which to voice this protest.¹⁰ But the rhetoric makes sense only because these domains – religion and politics – had already been constructed as separate, and differentially valued, by the state.

During the Panchayat period, the language of "religion" was appropriated by the state, which used it to represent itself as a domain of selflessness, service, and devotion to tradition, authority, and the collective good, including the traditional authority represented by the King, whom official nationalist discourse portrayed as affectively bound to his citizens, and as the foremost provider for the public good. (Just think of the billboard at Ratna Park on which King Birendra proclaims: "Just as I have affection for my country and my people, I have that same responsibility for my sick and hungry people."¹¹) At the same time, this moral and moralizing state was rendered opposed to the world of "politics," which was associated with political parties, and represented as an anti-nationalist realm of self-interest and greed. The result of this was the depoliticization of the state through its identification with – and embodiment as – *dharma*, and the corresponding vilification of what came to be defined as "politics," a discursive production that continues to underlie much of what is and isn't recognized as "political" today.

I would not propose this as a full explanation for the Theravada monks removing themselves from the avowed ethnopolitical landscape. But it illustrates one outcome of the way that the Nepal state has historically positioned itself as a religious entity, and used Hindu tropes and categories in the process of governance. Religion is implicit in identity – and identity politics – in Nepal, even when it is not explicitly politicized in these terms. Even today, critical categories of belonging to the nation-state derive from and reference a Brahmanical worldview. This underscores the importance of engaging with religion as an organizing factor in ethnic and nationalist politics. To do justice to the complex relations between nationalism, class and *janajati* identity in Nepal today, it is important to insist on an analytical language that will make sense of the political dimensions of cultural assertions without assimilating ethnonationalism¹² to an economic logic that assumes that the politics of identity are *in fact* about commanding resources and making material claims on the state, or oth-

⁹ In the later part of his life, the King became extremely close to the knowledgeable and charismatic Theravada monk, Bhikshu Amritananda. For a brief period prior to the King's death, Theravada received explicit royal recognition and some state patronage as a result of Amritananda's influence.

¹⁰ Adams (1998) takes a similar approach in her analysis of the political uses and implications of discourses of science by medical doctors involved in the *jana andolan*.

¹¹ "Jasari malai mero desa ra janatako mamata cha, usai gari bhok ra rogle pidita mero janataprati mero jimmedari cha. Sri Panc Birendra."

¹² I take this expression from Tambiah (1996).

erwise reducing religion to politics by other means.

What does this have to do with delineating an analytical space for contemplating religion, politics, and culture in *janajati* activism? In comparing Theravada Buddhist and other *janajati* organizations, I am not proposing that Theravada Buddhism is the same as the MNO or the Newar member-groups of the *Janajati Mahasangh* (with whom in some cases it shares members). Nor would I claim that this very partial commentary addresses the whole of the problem. I have tried to make two points in this presentation: first, that interpreting current events in the *janajati* field requires broadening conventional definitions of what counts as political. "Culture" is not merely about social identity, but also participates in defining the category of "the political" itself. Hence, analyses of the relations between politics and culture must be ready to open up inherited definitions of what counts as political action, even when this departs from the self-appraisals of activists and others who may also act as anthropological informants. My thinking here has been influenced by Partha Chatterjee's (1986) reading of the history of anti-colonial nationalism in India, in which he proposes that the period of social and religious reforms that preceded the articulation of nationalism as a political movement must be seen as a constitutive stage of that event. Ongoing debates in Nepal recognize language, culture and religion as mutually implicated vehicles through which the Shah-Rana state has defined and dominated its diverse subject peoples. Here, where collective identities have emerged in dialogue with the classificatory systems and policies of the Hindu nation-state, seemingly apolitical processes of religious and cultural transformation are indeed integral aspects of contesting state power.

As a second, related point, I have proposed that scholarly analyses of cultural identity in Nepal should be attentive to the complex politics of religion, not only as identity, but also as discourse. An objectified notion of "religion" has played a critical – if as yet mainly unstudied – role in configuring *janajati* identities and activities in a context where identity categories have historically been defined along religious lines. Finding appropriate conceptual frames to guide future inquiry is an important step towards producing a relevant and informed anthropology of ongoing process of identity formation, cultural politics, and activism. This task calls for further engagement with the complex role of religion in constituting ethnic, national, and nationalist identity.

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Ethnic Movements in Contemporary Nepal

The comments I make today are based on collaborative research I have done and continue to do with Kathryn March and Mukta Singh Tamang both of whom are speaking at today's roundtable. I want to further acknowledge the important contributions to this work made by my long term research associate, Suryaman (Himdung) Tamang and Amrit Yhonjan of Tamang Language and Literacy Council.

I. I should preface my remarks today with the qualification that they are Tamang-o-centric. The first point I make is historical. Ideologies of difference in contemporary Nepal transform those which took form with the consolidation of the Hindu state of Nepal in the late 18th century. Nepal formed, for Tamang, in the exercise of violent force by high-caste, Indo-Nepalese who deployed a hierarchical ideology conflating caste and ethnicity to organize diversity. Tamang were conceived of as low, beef-eating, Buddhists, subject to enslavement, unfit for military duty, capable primarily of physical labor, and, in the west, subject to regimes of compulsory labor or *rakam*. In a word, the history of Nepal is not one of the *phulbaari* or "garden" of the discretely flourishing blossoms of Prithvi Narayan Shah but of domination of discrete sectors of the Nepalese population by an elite. The term *phulbaari*, active in discourse about ethnicity in Nepal at least since the fall of the Ranas in 2007/1950, must be seen as part of the continuing quest for an ideology of difference but one which, in the contemporary context, disguises the infrastructural reality of relations of domination and subordination in Nepal. In Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, it constitutes an active misrecognition of relations of domination. Contemporary *janajati* movements are a continuation of a history of opposition to relations of domination and the ideologies that support them.

II. My second point relates to the larger transformations in political and cultural discourse that followed the collapse of the Rana regime and the reconstruction of old orders of domination in the *panchayat* era and led to the liberalizations succeeding the People's Movement and the new constitution in 1990. In reference to the western Tamang, identity politics did exist in the past. Communities produced themselves as collectivities around local headmen and in opposition to the outside, especially the royal regime of the Ranas/Shahs and the system of corvee labor, in extensive and elaborate Buddhist rituals which generated power both symbolic and real in local communities. During this period, there was no possibility for wider organization under the rubric of "Tamangness." What we think

of as Tamang areas were involuted, cellular like units tied in chains not unlike the chains of dialects of Tamang language. During the period of the 1950s and 1960s after the collapse of the Rana regime, there were more organized political actions based on identity to the northwest of Kahmandu. Inspired in part by organizers for the Congress Party, local communities of Tamang who were severely oppressed by in-migrating Bahun, rioted and looted. These Bahun had, at least in Tamang recountings, acquired land and local political influence through legal manipulations that were only possible because of their association with dominant powers. In 1960 anti-Brahman riots occurred in what are now Nuwakot and Dhading districts where Tamang villagers looted and drove out all Brahman families from several villages. Troops killed and wounded several Tamang and arrested hundreds. Mahendra used the presence of these "Brahman refugees" in Kathmandu as one of the pretexts for dissolving the first democratically elected government in 2017 v.s. and banned, one can presume not incidentally, the first Tamang cultural association which had been organized by Santabir Lama in 2013.

Contemporary *janajati* organizations among Tamang are a new urban-based movements which became possible only after liberalizations of the new constitution. They are distinguishable from earlier identity politics because they are Kathmandu-based, nation-wide efforts at organization inspired by transnational rhetorics of nation, diversity, indigeneness, and identity especially those current in greater India. The leading Tamang ethnic organizations have distinct political leanings if not party affiliations. Although these organizations are based in Kathmandu, they are beginning to influence local communities in significant ways. For instance, Tamang in the area we work, have abandoned the celebration *Dasain* as a Hindu festival and are focussing on making Buddhist *lhosar* a focal context for asserting Tamang culture in a broader alliance with ethnic associations like the Gurung who have developed, in some areas at least, an anti-*Dasain*/*Tihar* which is celebrated at village and district cultural centers at the time of Gurung *Lhosar*. Buddhism is in many respects the rallying point for broad opposition but is confounded, I should note, by mass Tamang conversions to Christianity in some regions.

In the urban/village contrast, one must note the following:

1. The diversity of peoples called Tamang is substantial in both language and culture due to the history of isolation and regional involution. The creation of pan-Tamang identity is an urban based political *cum* cultural effort at a new, synthetic iden

tity.

2. Concerns with the preservation of Tamang language and

culture are primarily the concern of Tamang residually displaced to Kathmandu or the Terai where issues of nation and diversity are especially salient.

3. At present, party division and longstanding political factions in village communities are more influential in village life than ethnic associations at least in the western Tamang areas where Tamang are the dominant population.

My final point is brief and meant to lead into the comments of my collaborators. Colonial typologies of caste and tribe articulated early on by scholars like Brian Hodgson set the stage for modern anthropology which started off in an unproblematic acceptance of the basic terms of those typologies. These typologies, it turns out, are largely consistent with those of Hindu state ideologies leading to a curious triangulation in the representation of difference in Nepal where Hindu colonizers produced categories of difference which incorporated non-Indo-Nepalese which were then applied in principle in the formative ethnology of Nepal. These categories ironically are in significant measure the nodes of contemporary *janajati* organization which are constructed as challenges to the models of the Hindu state. They have led furthermore to the charge that anthropologists, particularly those of the western persuasion, are fanning the flames of ethnicity. It is common for high caste intellectuals and elite of Nepal to debunk the ethnic movements as “constructed” but to debunk these movements is to attempt to disempower groups historically denied power in Nepal at the very moment they begin to exercise power in a challenge to the old order. An apperception of conditions of differential power based on group membership is essential to ethnic peace in Nepal and must begin not in the denials and defensiveness that are so common among dominant sectors of the population but in acceptance of the reality of differential power and continuing superordinate position of certain hereditary groups.

Mukta S. Tamang

Representation of Diversity in School Textbooks:

Implications for Politics of Culture and Identity in Nepal

I would like to discuss the issue of how cultural diversity is being represented in school textbooks in Nepal and what are its implications in the politics of culture and identity in the country. The existing school textbooks, as one of the state-owned devices, evoke the concept of diversity to create a harmonious national culture, at the same time reifying difference by categorizing peoples with particular dispositions. Various ethnic activists have challenged the existing state renderings of diversity for their representations in school textbooks and other public media. They contend that the conceptualization of the multicultural reality of Nepal in dominant narratives legitimizes the hege-

monic Hindu order. The contest over what diversity and nationalism constitute forms one of the core elements in contemporary politics of culture and identity in Nepal.

Given the current literacy rate in Nepal, which is only about 39% of the total population, school education can have only limited influence in generating consciousness of national scope. Nevertheless, formal education provides a ground for producing a group of dominant elite who are able to perpetuate the power to control the statecraft and produce and reproduce consciousness, including that of diversity and nationalism. The debate on strategies in terms of both contents and media for gradually universalizing schooling in Nepal, for example, has provided a forum for encounters between *Janjati* discourse and previously dominant views. School textbooks comprise one important state-deployed means reflecting the negotiated results of such debate.

School textbooks, particularly the Nepali primers titled *Mahendra Mala*, and social studies from their beginning, introduce Nepal to children with quotes from King Prithvi Narayan Saha. A famous quote which goes “Nepal is a garden of four *varna* and thirty six *jat*” (नेपाल चार वर्ण छत्तिस जातको फलबारी हो) is found across the books of various grades. The quote is understood and interpreted in dominant modern Nepali discourse as recognition of cultural diversity and an endorsement of the policy of harmony and co-existence.

Along this line, Prayag Raj Sharma (1997), for example, suggests that the idea of cultural diversity has been a part of and implicit in Nepal’s historical legacy. He further suggests that the state has done a great deal to create a collective consciousness of cultural diversity as a positive value. Some of the descriptions in textbooks glorifying pluralism, appear to support the idea that the government is committed to fostering the notion of harmony and co-existence in multicultural and multi-lingual Nepal. One example of such text, found in a social studies book for grade 7, tells the children the following:

Nepal is a country like a beautiful garden ... She is so beautiful because of the existence of peoples with many different castes, ethnicities, religions, customs and qualities. (हाम्रो नेपाल एउटा सन्दर बगैचा जस्तै हो ... यस्तै धेरै किसिमका जाती, वर्ण, धर्म, स्वभाव र गणका मानीस बस्ने भएर नै नेपाल यति राम्रो देखिएको हो।)

The understanding of diversity, however, cannot be seen separate from the project of national integration. The five year plan for education in Nepal prepared in 1956, for example, stated its rationale as to “develop a system of education that is national in character and suited to the genius of the people and to develop citizenship in all Nepalis.” Similarly, the new education plan of 1971 states that

“...Nepalese society will not lead to national solidarity and independent sovereign nationhood without [a] central guidance in planned socialization (aimed) at coordinating the various economic and social interests, harmonizing diverse multi-lingual traditions into a single nationhood.”

How does centrally guided planned socialization harmonize diverse traditions? How are mutually contradictory concepts of diversity and national integration articulated in dominant conceptions? To bring down these contradictory concepts of diversity and uniformity to the level of comprehension of children, the children have been told as follows:

Development of feelings that ‘we are Nepali, Nepal is our country’ will foster our nationalism. (हामी नेपाली हौं, नेपाल हाम्रो देश हो भन्ने भावनाको विकासले हाम्रो राष्ट्रियताको विकास हन्छ ।)

Nepal is our birth place. We are all Nepali. We have no discrimination. We all are subjects of one country. (नेपाल हाम्रो जन्म भूमि हो । हामी सबै नेपाली हौं । हामीमा कुनै भेदभाव छैन । हामी एकै देशका एकै प्रजा हौं ।)

Through these lessons children learn about themselves as members of a single and unified nation. National integration, therefore, is an extended version of P.N. Saha’s physical unification, bringing diverse cultural, social and economic spheres under control of the state. To meet the further demand of modern nation building, children have been taught several other unifying elements such as the state prescribed slogan “our king, our country; our language, our dress” (हाम्रो राजा हाम्रो देश, हाम्रो भाषा हाम्रो भेष) and a set of national symbols drawn from Hindu symbology and active kingship (cow, flag, red blob, crown, royal crest, coat of arms, scepter, royal standard, and national anthem). One of the most illuminating text descriptions spread across children’s books reads as follows:

(Nepal is the name of our country. We all are Nepali who live in Nepal. There are peoples of many different *jat* (caste). Bahun, Chhetri, Newar, Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu are *jats*. There are other *jats* as well. Despite many *jats*, we have one king. We have one country. All *jat* do not follow the same religion. Some worship Shiva, some worship Buddha, some worship Bishnu and some Devi. In Nepal all are called Hindu.) क्षेत्री, नेवार, गरुडो, थारु, मगर, राई, लिम्बु भन्ने जात हो । यस्तै अरु जात पनि नेपालमा छन् । जति जात भए पनि हाम्रा राजा एउटै छन् । हाम्रो मलक नेपाल एउटै छ । सबै जात एउटै धर्म मान्दैनन् । कुनै शिवजीको पजा गर्छन्, कुनै बृद्धको, कुनै विष्णुको, कुनै देवीको पजा गर्छन्, । नेपालमा यी सबैलाई हिन्दु भन्छ ।

The following statement gives an example of further reifying the glory of unification, through a textbook lesson to children:

Prithvi Narayan Saha is the founder of modern Nepal. Had he not unified the weak and disputing small nations of the country, we would not have been able to identify ourselves as Nepali belonging to Nepal. (पृथ्वी नारायण शाह नेपालका यग प्रवर्तक हुन । भगडाल र साना साना कमजोर राज्यहरूलाई उनले एकै सत्रमा नवाधिदिएको भए आज हामीले नेपाल र नेपाली भन्न पाउने थिएनौं ।)

This account makes invisible the conquered population and creates a myth of pre-unification Nepal consisting of ethnic populations as “weak others” who frequently fought with each other. Sporadic narratives of Nepal’s different cultural groups included in various editions of the school textbooks since the 1960s, while giving the impression of fairer representation of diversity, often portray ethnic communities in a stereotypic mode. Either through a asymmetrical caste-based or modern development-based evolutionary perspective, the ethnic communities are portrayed as backward populations with particular kinds of social, cultural and economic dispositions at the bottom rung of the social ladder (Pigg 1992).

Diversity in this national integrative framework becomes an ideology of domination by inclusion. As an ideology, it has constantly been manipulated and adjusted by the ruling elites in Nepal to perpetuate the unequal power structure. As Harka Gurung (1998) succinctly puts it, diversity to the homogenizing state of the dominant Hindu elites means “variation (of the peoples) not only in genus and species but also in status and privileges ordained by the law of the land, Muluki Ain (1854)”. The unequal status is characterized by economic exploitation, political oppression and cultural marginalization. In the educational sector, for example, 96% of the school textbook writers come from high caste hill Bahun, Chhetri and Newar communities and those groups accounting for 70% of the country’s total graduates.

The discourse on diversity produced by means of education, therefore, subtly but vehemently undermines the possibility of co-existence within a plural society. As children of imagined communities, school students in Nepal are misinformed and taught to see themselves as members of the Hindu national community in order to promote national integration (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Chatterjee 1993). Integrative framework with hegemonic content would view ethnic plurality as a deterrent to co-existence rather than as a possibility for mutuality.

Violence to the concept of true diversity by the state over the last two centuries can be taken as a common genesis of the Janajati movement in Nepal. Although ethnic organizations and political parties such as MNO, Janjati Mahasangha, and Jan Mukti Morcha have a varieties of approaches and goals ranging from effective implementation of constitutional provisions to radical structural

changes, their concerns are fundamentally directed toward transformations of existing understanding and practice of cultural diversity in Nepal.

Judith Pettigrew
Comments

Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh (TPLS) ("Tamu Religious and Cultural Organisation") is a Pokhara based Tamu (Gurung) organisation. Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh's self-appointed mandate is to preserve and revitalise Tamu cultural traditions and in particular the shamanic traditions of the *pachyu*, *klehbri* and "bonist lama".¹³ The organisation was founded in Pokhara in late 1990 by seven men all of whom are ex-British Gurkha soldiers/officers. The founder members are shamans, sons of shamans or members of shamanic clans. Earlier in that year two of the founder members had travelled into the uplands in an attempt to discover if the places chanted by pachyu shamans during their journey to escort the soul(s) of the dead to the afterworld, which is also the Tamu downward migration route, existed in the physical landscape. Their discovery that "text" matched landscape formed the basis for a movement to revitalise the declining and threatened shamanic traditions which culminated in the founding of TPLS in November 1990.

TPLS now have branches throughout west-central Nepal and also in Kathmandu. Their *kohinbo* "shamanic monastery" in Pokhara, whose architecture is based on shamanic symbology contains a museum and also serves as a cultural centre, a site for shamanic rituals, an office and a meeting place. It's design has been reproduced in miniature in several locations in different districts. The organisation's activities include among others the celebration of Lhosar ("Tamu New Year" celebrated on 15 Poush (end of December), the hosting of death and other shamanic rituals at the kohinbo, the organisation of and participation in local and national Tamu conferences and the ongoing search for sacred geography. TPLS members are also involved in a community archaeology and ethno-history project with researchers from the Universities of Cambridge and Central Lancashire.

TPLS members state very clearly that they are a religious organisation and not a political one ("we are on the religious side not the political side"). They explain that the shamanic traditions are under threat from Buddhism, that young people no longer want to train to be shamans, that

¹³Bonist/bonpo lama is the term TPLS members apply to the lamas who conduct death rituals in collaboration with the shamans and like them include animal sacrifice as an integral element of their practice. In the villages they are called "purano" "old" lamas in contrast the the "naya" "new" Tibetan Buddhist lamas).

townspeople are losing their language and that people are forgetting how to "do things the Tamu way". In essence people are forgetting about the cultural centrality of the shamanic traditions and TPLS have taken on the role of reminding them "so that we don't lose our culture". By reminding Tamus of the centrality of the shamanic traditions TPLS simultaneously remind people that they are not Hindu, that the Tamu-mai have a northern origin and that contained within the Pye ta Lhu ta is the "correct" version of history. They remind people that Tamu history was rewritten by Hindus in the 17th Century and that in the rewriting one group of clans became constructed as 'superior' and the other as 'inferior'. The clans according to the shamans pye are equal "there is no superior and no inferior among the Tamu-mai". TPLS's stance on the relationship between the clans, while widely supported at an overt level particularly in the towns, is contested often covertly by those Tamu-mai who perceive a hierarchical relationship to exist. While membership of TPLS is free and open to all Tamus ("by birth all Tamus are members") in reality not everyone would want to be involved.

In spite of TPLS's claim that they are a cultural and religious organisation their activities clearly also have a political dimension. Their concern over loss of cultural knowledge, language, and religious infringement is matched by a concern to re-socialise a version of the past based on shamanic knowledge which directly contests Hindu interpretations of Tamu history, provides the basis for the assertion of a Tamu identity which is non-Hindu, and addresses the contentious issue of clan hierarchy.

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Ironies in the Janajaati Movement and the Politicizing of Ethnography in Nepal: Some Cautionary Remarks

As an anthropologist and writer on lower castes in far western Nepal, I, like the people I work with, often feel I am outside looking in on what is written about Nepali culture. In this regard, I find the recent attention to so-called 'janajaati,' and the rapidity with which the term has entered Himalayan academic discourse, remarkable. When I first heard the word janajaati, I translated it as "people," (as did many Nepali colleagues and friends unaware of "the movement" since it literally means 'people groups.' Admittedly in the past I have worked exclusively in a village instead of the rarified political atmosphere of Kathmandu, I rely on spoken rather than written texts to understand people and their culture, and I refer mostly to the history of caste discrimination, the experience of bodily rejection imposed on those of lower caste, and the process of disen-

franchisement. I wondered, based on my translation of janajaati, was there now a unification movement in which all barriers would be broken, a sort of second stage people's movement following on the heels of the first? Would Nepal again distinguish itself, following a relatively nonviolent restoration of democracy, as a country that could bring its myriads of people together? Would caste barriers be broken, not through government quotas but through the people's will? The answer is no. The janajaati movement spoken of by the few mostly men involved in it, and their social science mouthpieces is, like the groups claiming membership, difficult to place boundaries around. What is evident about the so-called janajaati movement, however, is that it presents many ironies that need pointing out. To call this era in Nepal's history the janajaati-yug, as was done recently in an article in *SINHAS*, is short-sighted and political, and does not, in my estimation, represent the significant movements taking place in Nepal. At a time when international dollars and Foucaultian ideas help to constitute the practices by which groups in Nepal make their boundaries and stake their identity claims, the recently coined term janajaati should not be used uncritically as an indigenous term. For in fact its circulation seems exclusively Kathmandu-based, and its translation as "ethnic minority" is transparently of western politics.

Concerned that I was unaware of something important about to happen as the next era of anthropology in Nepal unfolded (after all, a yug is a long time), I did a quick study of the janajaati phenomenon during the last weeks of my own research this past summer. I interviewed some prominent and controversial Tamang and Thakali leaders, asked Nepali friends and colleagues what they thought of the movement, and attended a UN-sponsored conference in Kathmandu on the world's indigenous people (in Nepali, *aadibaasi*). The latter event was most revealing. The prominent members of the janajaati movement attended it, and gave speeches using the two terms interchangeably. Though everyone had the UN guidelines for the identification and protection of the world's indigenous people (those whose cultures are at threat of extinction due to political, economic and environmental upheaval), the groups in Nepal to whom 'indigenous' clearly applies in this sense, the Chepang and Santal, were glaringly absent from the proceedings. I wondered throughout the short conference if the UN would accept the indigenous status of those making speeches.

From this admittedly short exploration, there are four points I would like to make about the politics of the janajaati movement in Nepal. First, it is unclear who qualifies as an ethnic minority. Leaders have established criteria of what a janajaati is, but these are debatable on several grounds. An important criterion is an indigenous status, and it is on this basis that the janajaati movement has justified its par-

ticipation in the UN-sponsored indigenous people's movement. A second criterion is a history of state-sponsored discrimination based on ethnicity (religion, language, social organization), in the past and now; this is the thrust behind the politics of the movement. They often characterize the latter as having been "conquered" by another dominant group (read Hindus). However, the first criterion of indigenous status is difficult to prove, and does not always presuppose the second one of discrimination. For example, while the Newars are the indisputable indigenous people of Kathmandu, they are not particularly interested in the janajaati movement, perhaps because as a group they are relatively successful. The ease of identifying the largest ethnic group in Nepal, the Newar, ends with it. All other groups' origins are less than clear, a fact that keeps the janajaati movement ambiguous and questionable to those on the outside. Are the Sherpa an ethnic minority, according to the movement's criteria? If so, on what basis? They are not indigenous people, and it is unclear which of their rights have been violated. The people of Mustang do not really know what to call themselves. They reject the term 'bhotay', and many have simply adopted the last name Lama. Are the Thakali a bounded ethnic minority or an indigenous group? Hard to prove, since some claim that the Thakali as a group is less than a hundred years old, having chosen their name from the Thak Kola near where they live. What about the Khaas of far western Nepal? They are an ancient group in Nepal, yet one would be hard pressed to locate them in the centuries of intermarriage that have characterized their history. Finally, groups who are the most endangered, the Chepang and the Santal, are only marginally involved in either the janajaati or *aadibaasi* movements.

Second, as has already been pointed out, the movement conflates *janajati* with *adibasi*.

Third, the movement's leaders seek to correct what they rightfully claim has been state-supported and legislated discrimination (within the army, the schools, etc.) against certain groups. They want equal treatment under the law. Here, regrettably, I find the greatest irony of the so-called *janajati* movement. For while on the one hand their legitimacy claims cite discrimination toward them, most if not all these groups have themselves, over the decades and centuries, adopted the most discriminatory practice of Hinduism, social, economic and religious marginalizing of lower castes. When I pressed *janajati* leaders on this point, they said that at times in their history adopting certain Hindu practices was necessary, such as untouchability, or risk ostracism and possible imprisonment. In effect, because they felt dominated, they also needed to dominate. Would they, then, welcome the most oppressed groups, the untouchables, into their movement? Lower castes would technically meet the criteria of *janajati* participation — oppression by a dominant group, development of their own lan-

guage, state-supported discrimination. When asked, the janajaati leaders thought they would not want them involved, since untouchables have their own dalit organizations. Would they consider relinquishing their own discriminatory practices for the obvious contradiction they present to their own movement? They, again, thought not because of the present culture of Nepal. It is these sorts of contradictions that ethnographers of the janajati movement need to consider.

Turning to my last point, and the final irony of the janajaati movement is its sexism. They mostly exclude women. On this point, leaders (men) claim that janajaati women are equal to men, within their cultural groups, and therefore not in need of equal protection under the law. In contrast to these claims, though, anthropologists of ethnic minorities in Nepal have not concluded that women have equal status in all the groups, though often they have greater economic power than their high caste Hindu counterparts. Though under current Nepali law women still cannot inherit land equally with men, leaders in the women's movement find little participation from women of ethnic minorities.

I would caution against assuming a Nepali-wide and vibrant janajati movement that is indigenous and well supported by the people, or that proposes viable measures to right the wrongs imposed on non-Hindus. The Nepali government has changed many of its discriminatory laws, and has introduced school texts in ethnic languages such as Maithili, with more in the works. The government has done little, however, to end two entrenched forms of discrimination — against lower castes (16-20% of Nepal's population) and against women. It is the dalit and women's movements, as well as the growing efforts to protect Nepal's environment, that I feel are significant movements with lasting consequences for large numbers of people.

Kathryn March

Triangulating Tamang ethnohistory: the production of identities in colonial encounters (a collaborative project of David Holmberg, Kathryn March, Mukta Singh Tamang, and Amrit Yonjan)

Introduction and general scope of the project

Brian Hodgson served the British Empire during much of the first half of the 19th century, first in India, then Nepal. He was one of those remarkable civil servants who not only administered British rule, but also imagined himself a scholar, learning several languages and researching a wide variety of topics—about wildlife, botany, linguistics, reli-

gion and society. His writings influenced the course of South Asian studies profoundly. Among his unpublished papers, archived in the India Office Library, is "*Murmiharu ko kulachar*" (मर्मिहरुको कलाचार) or, as he rendered the title himself, 'Manners and customs of the *Murmi*.'¹ '*Murmi*' is the name Hodgson applied to (at least some of) the peoples today known in the central Himalayas as '*Tamang*.'

Tamang, today, number some 600,000 persons, living throughout the middle hills of Nepal, making them the largest single ethnic (formerly known as 'tribal') group in Nepal. Tamang peoples came originally from the central Asian plateaus to become peasant subsistence agriculturalists in Nepal. They speak dialects closely related to Tibetan, practice Buddhism and respect its textual specialist *lama*-s, as well as embracing a vigorous shamanic tradition. Unlike lowland Nepali society, Tamang communities are not organized along caste lines, according to which endogamous groups are explicitly ranked in terms of ritual purity and occupational pollution; instead, Tamang have unranked exogamous clans. Tamang incorporation into modern Nepal has been problematic: for two hundred years, Tamang rents, taxes and especially *corvee* labor were essential to the creation of the state of Nepal, but Tamang peoples have been otherwise excluded from modern opportunities, such as education, civil service, and mercenary military service by the social, religious and political practices of the Hindu state. Nepal nationalists are proud of the fact that Nepal was never colonized by any outside forces; Tamang nationalists grapple with a history of considerable internal colonization by caste Nepali forces. Hodgson's folio *Murmiharu ko kulachar*, dated Saturday, Jesth 1, 1904 BS (Bikram Sambat = ca. 1847 AD) is part of the MSS Eur Hodgson (Vol 56: folios 64-78); it comprises fourteen oversized pages handwritten in somewhat archaic Nepali and is without question the oldest documentary evidence specifically about Tamang cultural practice.

"*Murmiharu ko kulachar*" is a fascinating document. It was produced in a three-party interaction: Brian Hodgson, working with and through a literate scribe-assistant, to interview a Tamang man from a village to the north and east of the Kathmandu Valley. The proposed collaborative project has two primary aspects: first, to glean from the document itself all possible evidence about the three individuals involved and their respective investments in their interchange and, second, to analyze interviews of contemporary Tamang individuals regarding the document, its details and significance. The overarching objectives are to refine anthropological understanding of colonialism to include the role of dominant elites in processes of internal

¹ MSS Eur Hodgson Vol 56: folios 64-78, dated Saturday, Jesth 1, 1904 VS (1847 AD).

colonialism, to add to our understanding of the genesis, codification and contemporary redeployment of Tamang identity, to explore possibilities for integrating scholarly work constructively with Tamang cultural revival movements and ethnic identity politics, and, finally to further clarify the importance of working collaboratively with local Tamang including activists to collect, interpret, make public, and preserve their cultural artifacts.

The document and its significance for understanding Tamang ethnic identity

As a written text, “*Murmiharu ko kulachar*” follows many of the conventions of government documents from Nepal of the same period: the way in which it is dated, framed and scrupulously identifies its interviewee not only by name, but by locality. The rest of the document outlines a sequence of major life cycle rituals, beginning with childbirth rites and ending with funerary ones, with considerable attention to ritual detail. A careful reading of this document reveals traces of all three of its original interlocutors. Although it is written largely as a monologic record of statements attributed to the Tamang interviewee, it shows clear traces both of the structure of Hodgson’s questions and of the interventions of the translator-scribe. The surface contours of the document, then, can be read to unravel some of the mysteries of its production at the intersection of three differently interested parties.

Hodgson (born 1800 - died 1894) began his career in 1816 in the Indian Civil Service, arriving in India in 1817. From 1820-1842, he served as the first official British Resident and, at the time virtually only, European to live in Kathmandu. After a brief return to England, Hodgson came back to retire and continue to work on his scholarly papers from 1844-1858 in Darjeeling, which must have been where the interview for this “*Murmiharu ko kulachar*” document took place. We know something of Hodgson’s style of work from his primary biographer, Hooker, and from Hodgson’s own reports (in *Miscellaneous Essays* Vol 2): he apparently liked to prepare lists of questions in advance, then allow a *pundit* in his employ to pose the questions and record the answers; although Hodgson is not reported to speak much during these exchanges, he was allegedly often physically present. His questions clearly reflect both British colonial concerns and his own scholarly understandings of South Asian society.

We know something in general about Hodgson’s assistants, although not about the specific assistant working with him on “*Murmiharu ko kulachar*.” According to contemporary scholars in Nepal, Hodgson regularly employed at least three known assistants, each of whom had a significant career as *pundits*, writers and intellectuals in his own right: Khardar Jit Mohan was named as Hodgson’s scribe for the influential 1848 survey; Amritananda was appointed

as the official *Pundit* for the British Residency and is the author of an 1831 AD grammar of his own right (as described in work by his descendant Kamal P. Malla; Shiva Sankar, too, seems to have been a frequent translator for Hodgson (and accompanied the eminent Prime Minister Jang Bahadur on his trip to Europe). Evidence internal to the document suggests that the assistant working with Hodgson in Darjeeling on Saturday, the 1st of Jesth-month, 1904 Bikram Sambat (BS = 1847 of the Christian Era), was probably a high caste man from the Newar community—the ethnic group dominant in the Kathmandu Valley and associated with its many high cultural traditions. In particular, throughout the document, there are misspellings of the sort typically made by native-Newari speaking persons bilingual into Nepal, such as:

वाहापछि सत्क्यारिलाई भात कखराको मास मसला जवान कटि मासमा हालि खवाउछ । मेठि तेलमा डहाई खवाउछ । जवानले दत आउछ । मेठिले आगवाधिछ, भात्या जाद खवाउछन् ।

After this, the new mother is fed rice and chicken, with spices and ground *jwanu*. Fenugreek seed is fed after it is fried in oil. *Jwanu* makes mother’s milk come in. Fenugreek binds the body; rice beer is served to the mother.

In this short passage alone several words are spelled according to common Newari mispronunciations including sl6, d]l7, and hfb. These misspellings bespeak the scribe’s own ethnicity, but throughout the document there are, as well, other revealing linguistic and stylistic movements. The inclusion of Tamang terms for certain items or rituals sometimes appears to index practices so outside high caste expectations that the scribe is obliged to note them and occasionally comment on them.

About Dhan Krishna Yonjen, the Tamang person who was interviewed some 150 years ago, so far, we know only what the document records. He (we are reasonably confident he was a man) came from a village called Phulbari or ‘Flowergarden’ for which there are several possible contemporary candidates, in the Timal region, still a very important Tamang area of residence, lying precisely within the four boundary points named in the original document, as the opening passages of the document describe:

स्वस्तिश्री सम्वत् १९०४ साल मिति ज्येष्ठ श्रदि १ रोज ७ का दिन तेमाल फलवारि गाउको धनकृष्ण योभ्जन मर्मिका मख जमानि लेख्याको इनहरुको चलन् रित व्यवहार लज्योटेमाल भनि बोलाउँछ ।

Auspiciously dated the year 1904 (VS) Jesth 1st the 7th day (Saturday): Their customary rites written according to the oral testimony of Dhan Krishna Yonjen from Phulbari Village, Temal, called by them Lajyang Timal.

इनका आदिस् स्थान् साँगा पर्व तावाकोसि पछिम् दोलपादेखि दक्षिण मोर्तिदुंगादेखि उत्र यत्रि भित्र अठार जात बाह्र तमंग बोलाउँछन्।

Their place of origin lies west of Sanga, east of Tamva Kosi, south of Dolakha, north of Mortidunga; within these (boundaries), they are called the eighteen clans of the twelve Tamang.

This Dhan Krishna Yonjen seems quite knowledgeable about many aspects of Tamang ritual practice, much of which is recognizably consonant with contemporary practice, but his knowledge does not exceed that of an ordinary adult layperson. He does not, for example, offer any ritual recitations associated with any of the practices, as either a *lama* (a specialist in Buddhist text) or a *bombo* (a shaman) almost certainly would have.

The project triangulating the production of Tamang identity in Nepal

Building upon the translation work and analysis already done, as well as several interviews of various contemporary Tamang, we want to show how the vision of Tamang identity produced in this text results from a complex colonial, national, and ethnic history. The specific work of this international collaborative project is part of a larger ongoing project that David Holmberg and Kathryn March have been conducting since 1993 on the genesis of Tamang identity in Nepal. In this portion of that work, we plan to work with Mukta Singh Tamang and Amrit Yonjan during the 1999-2000 winter intersession to complete analysis of the document itself and its related contemporary interviews to show the interplay of British colonial and scholarly interests with those of the elite national interests of the scribe-assistant and those of the local Tamang informant.

We will be focusing specifically upon those moments in the document when each viewpoint dominates. For example, we believe we can show how in some instances the caste-based understanding of identity as embedded in the life cycle of Sanskritic rites of passage dominates. In the description of birth ritual, for instance, the document records:

इनका नहारन् छोरा भया दिन ९ छोरी भया ८ मा नहारन् गर्न पछ्छ । लामा दाकि गर्छन्...

They have to the naming ceremony on the 9th day (after the birth) if (the baby is) a son and on the 8th day if it is a daughter. They invite a lama (for the ceremony).

And

बाहादेखि लामालाई (योन) दक्षिणा दिनपछ्छ । छोराको आना चार छोरीको आना दई दिनपछ्छ ।

After this, they have to give a payment/gift (*yon*) to the lama. For a son, 4 *anna*, for a daughter 2 *anna* must be given.

No contemporary Tamang interviewed could imagine any context, past or present, in which Tamang people would do different birth rituals for girls as opposed to boys. Nor is the idea that the birth of girl children should be less ritually heralded a particularly British one. Here, the inevitable inference is that idea that girls' rituals should be hastier and less elaborate probably originated with the scribe-assistant, according to whose high caste expectations these differentials would be commonplace.

There are important observations to be made about the interplay of high caste and British social ideology through this document. Too often, studies of the colonial encounter focus upon the European domination of the local without adequately analyzing the role of local elites. This work with the Hodgson papers will help show how local elites (true 'subalterns') in South Asia have had pivotal roles in formulating scholarly understanding of the region. In *Murmiharu ko kulachar*, in particular, it is important to understand how the performance of religious life cycle rituals became the primary markers of ethnic identity to the exclusion of other social, political and economic forces. Although Tamang need to be understood as peasant farmers, who were excluded from virtually all emergent state opportunities at the same time that they were expected to provide most of the manual labor upon which that state was built, this Hodgson document formulates them primarily in terms of life cycle rites. This view, which certainly became Hodgson's, is remarkably consonant with that of high-caste Hindu *parbatiya*-s in Nepal, whose privilege it protects even more than it secures European dominion.

In other passages, however, the Tamang point of view does not yield to the expectations of caste. In the description of marriage rituals, for instance, the scribe-assistant records both the permissibility of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage and of respectful flows of behavior and gifts going from the groom's family to the bride's. Both of these would be unthinkable in a high caste world.

विहालावा । वचन् छना लावा इनका विहाको विधि इनका मामाचेला फफचेलाको विहा हन्छन् ।

Biha laba. Bachan chhuna laba. According to their marriage customs, marriage with the mother's brother's son and the father's sister's son is permitted.

र माईति पगि कोस्यालि लग्याको राखि छोरि जवाि

एकः ठण चम्दत्क जम्द

दवैजनाले आमावावलाई धोक दिन्छ । छोरिले आमाको गोडा उथाई धोक दिन्छ वावलाई भन्या घडामाडि कपाल निघुरन्छ वावले छोरिको कपाल हातमा थापि उथाउन्छ फेरि जवालि पनि सासको गोडा छोई धोक दिन्छ

When they get to her house and give the gifts, both the daughter and the son-in-law bow down to her mother and father. The daughter lifts her mother's feet and bows to them. She bows to her father with her head at his knees; he lifts her head with his hands. Then the son-in-law also touches his mother-in-law's feet as he bows down to her.

Most striking of all, however, are the passages on *sati* recorded in this document, which I reproduce in their entirety below. *Sati*, of course, is the self-immolation of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres. Along with foot-binding and female genital mutilation, *sati* (as many other writers have explored) stood as an important icon for the British of the barbarism of the non-western world. Efforts to eradicate *sati* regularly reminded British colonial officers in South Asia of their self-proclaimed civilizing mission. This passage leaps into the record so completely outside of the otherwise dominant organization of life cycle rituals that we can fairly hear Hodgson's explicit question.

इनका सति जान्यादस्तर अघि थियेन आजकाल भन्या ११२ जाँछन् मनाहि गर्दैन । सति जान्याको विधि खसम मन्याले पर्वत्याको माफिक राम बोलि कपालमा पानि खन्याउन्छ ।

In the past they didn't have the custom of going in *sati*. Nowadays one or two go. They don't forbid it. The one who followed her husband in death according to the custom of *sati*, just like a *parbatya*, saying "Ram," pours water on her head.

यति गन्यापछि मनाहि गर्न हदैन । लामा दाकि ल्याई यज्ञ गन्या सराजाम गरि गाई, दड, जौ, तील, घिउ, अक्षेता गरि चिहानमा लैजानपछि ।

After [she] does all this, it is not possible to forbid her [doing or becoming *sati*]. They invite and bring a *lama* to do *yanya* and right afterwards taking along a cow, milk, barley, sesame seed, clarified butter, and *acheta*, they have to take her to the cremation grounds.

घरमा सतिले जो आफ्ना खसमको ज्याभयाको आलमाल कर्जो रिन कार वार लिन्या दिन्या दि भया जस्ता लियादियाको उस्तै लिनदिन भए नभया पनि दसवन छैति चौथाई जो सर्दो पगदो गरि कारवार फछ्या गरि सतिघरदेखि निस्कन्छ ।

In the house, the *sati* must take care of the affairs of her own husband, making good on whatever

goods, debt, interest, or trade he took or gave, as well as whatever this way or that, with or without, paying out whatever tenth, sixth or quarter share of profit that's due, balancing all trade, the *sati* comes forth from the house.

मर्दा सदाका रितले लामाले अघि वाट लागि अघि लैजाँछ । उसपछि सतिलाई दोलिमा हालि वोकि लैजाँछ । चावल पैसा थाउ थाउ देउतामा छर्दै जाँछ ।

The corpse is taken out in front by the *lama* first as always according to custom. After this, putting and carrying the *sati* in a palanquin, she is carried off. Distributing uncooked rice and money here and there to the gods, they go.

वातवातै लागि सदाकै रितले अलग्या दाडामा लागि खाडल खनि सोला बनाई तयार गरि मर्दा सोलामा चहाई राषछ र लामाले जज्ञ गर्छ । जौ तील पोल्छ ।

Making conversation all the way, according to the customs of forever, taking them onto a high hill, digging a pit, building a pyre platform and getting ready, they carry and place the corpse on the pyre platform and the *lama* does *yanya*. He throws barley and sesame seed.

वाहा देखि सतिलाई दद कंड देखाउन भनि गाईको दद बटुकामा र ष्याको सतिले हेर्न लाउन्छ र यति गरिसक्यापछि सति सोतामा आफ्ना खसमसित संगै खसमलाई दाहिना पारि अंगालो हालि सत्छ ।

After that, saying that they will show Dudh Kundh to the *sati*, they make the *sati* look into a bronze bowl of cow's milk and, after finishing doing that, the *sati*, on the pyre platform with her own husband, keeping him on her right side, embracing him, lies down.

वाहापछि त्यस सोलमा सति निस्कला भनि निस्कन नहन्यागरि घारो बाधि उमाथि दाउदाले थिचि ठूलो भार गरि राषछ र छोरा हन्याको छोराले दाग आगो दिन्छ , छोरा नहन्याको दाज्य भाईहरुले आगो दिन्छ , आगो सल्काई दिन्छ ।

After that, saying the *sati* might get out of the pyre platform, so that she won't be able to get out, tying her to a pole, pressing firewood on top of her, making a big barrier, they put her there and the son (if they have a son) lights the fire; if they don't have a son, the older and younger brothers light the fire; they start the fire.

चारैतिरवात ससक्यालि कोहोलो वाजा इतयादि गरि हाहाहा गरि सतिको सव्द नयाउन गरि कोहोलो गर्छ । सोलाको साचो भत्काई दिन्छ र त्यसै काठ दाउराले थिचि त्यसै गरि सति पोल्छ र सदाका भैं चिहान त्यसै छोडि नहाई सदाका भैं वातोको विधि गरि घर पस्छ । सदाका भैं मलामिहरुलाई खवाई पियाई सदाका भैं आफ्ना आफ्ना घर घर फर्किजाँछन् ।.....

Whistling loudly from all four sides of the pyre platform, making loud noises with all kinds of instruments, shouting “HaHaHa,” not letting the *sati*'s words get out, they make loud noises. They let the pyre platform be completely destroyed and pressing down with the wood and firewood of it, doing this, they burn the *sati* and, as always, bathe right after leaving the cremation grounds and, as always, doing the rituals all along the path, they get home. As always, they give the *malami*-s food and drink, and, as always, everyone goes home to their own houses.

तीनदिन जठो वारि तिन दिनका दिन सदाका रीतिले र खसम स्वास्नि दवैजनाको अंसवनाई ग्यावलावा गर्नभन्याको सद्धै सदाकै रितले गर्छ र मर्ति जोडा र चाहिन्छ अरु थोक सबै वरो वर हो ।

Avoiding pollution for three days, for three whole days, as always, according to the customary practices since forever and building an inheritance for both husband and wife, they do what is called doing the purifications of *gyawalawa* according to ancient custom and they need two sacred sculptures. All the other things are the same.

अस्तराषन लिन वत्ति वालन नन तेल फन ज्याअधिको विधि कहि आयाको वमोजीम सबै थोक क्रिया गर्न यकै हो । अरु वढता केहि गर्न पर्दैन ।.....

To put ?, to light lamps, to open the way for salt and oil, whatever previously described rituals, as described above, everything is the same as for all death observances. They don't have to do anything special [for a *sati*].

Discussions about whether or not Tamang ever practiced *sati* were heated in our various interviews. Most Tamang people were quick to assert that they did not. One incident of a Tamang *sati* was reported. Amrit Yonjan is following up on that report with some additional interviews. We think that it is likely to be a case involving a Tamang-origin woman who had been taken into (often bonded) do-

mestic service in an elite and high caste household in Kathmandu and who might have been expected to *sati* along with other women in the household. The passage itself is interesting in, first, its oblique statement that '*sati* is not forbidden' and, next, in its assertion that, when done, it is done "just like a *parbatya*," which is the term of reference for caste Hindus; the remainder of the passage recites Sanskrit passage with only the most passing references to Tamang mortuary practice.

All these examples point to a much more nuanced understanding of both European and internal colonization in the Nepali context. Rather than documenting the absolute domination of British ideas and interests, there is a richer weave. Hodgson's fascination with life cycle ritual coalesces well with caste Hindu idealizations about the centrality of life cycle rituals as the defining marks of identity, but not about the legitimacy of *sati*. Tamang reliance upon *lamas* to perform many of their rituals can, in some ways, be transposed with the caste Hindu prevalence of Brahmin priests. Over the life course idealized in these rituals, however, the centrality of marriage to caste Hindu constructions of life contrasts sharply with the Tamang emphasis upon death rituals as the most important. In these, and many other, examples, this document is an important record of how identities were formed in the colonial and postcolonial period.

In the contemporary context, the various debates generated by this document, and the meetings and interviews we have done about it, need to be understood as part of recent developments in ethnic identity politics in Nepal. Since the political changes of 1990, which limited the powers of the monarchy under a new national constitution which promised substantial freedoms, including rights to a free press, use of languages other than Nepali, and electoral politics, members of many previously suppressed ethnic groups have been trying to understand the history of their exclusion from national politics and opportunities. Through the formation of various ethnic pride associations, they have been trying to (re)write their histories. The record of their engagement with this document provides important insights into these more modern processes of identity formation as well.