CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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Contents

Tragedy of Consensus
Crisis in Local democracy and Options for Improved Local Governance[1]

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Introduction

Background

A vital aspect of democratic development in Nepal that was missed out during the country's ongoing political transition relates to its local governance. The political transition officially began in 2006, as the government of the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) and the hitherto-insurgent Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) signed a Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) to end the decade-long 'people's war'. The CPA outlined a road map to peace through the election of a constituent assembly, the promulgation of a new constitution, and subsequent restructuring of the Nepali state, with a promise to address the real or perceived grievances of different social groups and movements. Having just come out of an intense armed confrontation and unprecedented levels of violence across the country, the political parties and other groups declared 'political consensus' to be the preferred *modus operandi* for societal engagement during the transitional period.

Not only did it provide a rhetorical device against the formation and toppling of governments in Kathmandu, it was also seen as an ideal template for political representation and decision-making in the central government as well as in hamlet-based rural formations. But, while this dictum allowed mutually opposed groups to engage with each other and achieve peace to some extent, it was also appropriated for developing a culture of collusion and providing ways for locally powerful political cadres and government functionaries to take over considerable resources.

Nepal's decentralisation policy, adopted after the restoration of democracy in 1990, treats local governance as a means of deepening democracy and rationalising service delivery. Well-represented, transparent, and accountable local bodies underpin the effective and efficient mobilisation of resources. However, the last local-level elections in Nepal were conducted in 1997, and local bodies have remained without elected representatives since 2002. Under this political vacuum, informal all-party committees mushroomed around district development committees (DDCs), municipalities, and village development committees (VDCs), and gradually infused their authority to influence in the local resource allocation processes. This process started after the transitional government took over in May 2006. By 2008, these informal political arrangements had formally been recognised as 'All Party Mechanisms (APMs)', initially comprising the seven 'parliamentary parties', and entrusted with the responsibility of ratifying local-level political decisions, pertaining particularly to resource allocation and service delivery. The APMs were not directly accountable to any constituency or formal authority but exercised de facto authority to take decisions on a variety of functions of the local bodies, such as resource distribution, management, and service delivery. More seriously, a culture of collusion pervaded these APMs. All local-level resources were distributed through the APMs using a practice of apportioning resources on the basis of negotiated hierarchy of the political parties in each locality, thereby eliminating any scope of opposition in the system. This paper examines the political

economy of how this was made feasible in the sub-national sphere, by focusing on local government units, and their explicit mandates with regard to the delivery of health and education services. Our discussion, therefore, focuses on both the 'governance' and 'delivery' aspects of the decentralisation policy of Nepal in the context of its political transition.

Decentralisation and LSGA

The Decentralisation Act was introduced in Nepal in 1982 but significant achievements were only made after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) of 1999 (Government of Nepal, 1999) and a series of subsequent legal and policy instruments considerably expanded the rights, duties, and responsibilities of local government (LG) units—DDCs, municipalities and VDCs. The decentralisation policy was seen as an opportunity to deepen democracy down to the local spheres by bringing a large number of people into the fold of democratic exercise, deliver services more effectively by 'bringing the government closer to the people', and embrace a more thoroughgoing equity as local officials were anticipated to better understand and respond to the expectations of the needy groups. Accordingly, LG units were entrusted with greater roles, especially with regard to the delivery of health and education, through revision in legislation in the respective sectors and pooling of donor assistance under a Sector-wide Approach (SWAp) in each. In this paper, we will discuss how the decentralisation was initiated in the country and whether or not it materialised as envisioned during the initial years.

LSGA 1999 represented an important advance vis-à-vis democratic development and devolution in Nepal. Under the LSGA, the government is required to pursue the following principles and policies for the development of local self-governance system (LSGA, Article 3):

1. Devolution of such powers, responsibilities, and means and resources as are required to make local bodies capable and efficient in local self-governance.

2. Building and development of institutional mechanism and functional structure in local bodies.
3. Devolution of powers to collect and mobilise such means and resources as are required to discharge the functions, duties, responsibilities, and accountability conferred to the local bodies.
4. Having the local bodies oriented towards establishing the civil society based on democratic process, transparent practice, public accountability, and people's participation, in carrying out the functions devolved on them.
5. For the purpose of developing local leadership, arrangement of effective mechanism to make the local body accountable to the people in its own areas.
6. Encouraging the private sector to participate in local self-governance in order to provide basic services for sustainable development.

LSGA 1999 created largely inclusive local bodies. This Act and a series of legal and policy instruments considerably expanded the mandates of local bodies, and attempted to establish leadership and oversight of local bodies with regard to development and service delivery within those jurisdictions. These new policies represent significant departures from the administrative decentralisation that came with Panchayat rule in 1960s. Under the new policy, representative and inclusive local bodies were created, their planning and funding capacity consolidated, and a range of accountability safeguards introduced.

Democracy

The local governance policy also provided for greater popular participation in development. The policy offered an opportunity to bring a large section of people into the fold of democratic exercise, and embrace a more thoroughgoing policy of equity as local officials were anticipated to better understand and respond to the expectations of the needy groups. Local bodies and line agencies

were mandated to create user groups, management committees, and other community structures at the grassroots. The policy specified 'handover points' that connected the social sphere around these entities and the formal domain of government. Arrangements were also made for checks and balances, accountability, and sanctions, which underpin good governance (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). These were done through electoral and social processes and by specifying instruments for public and social accountability.

Devolution

The other unique aspect of the local governance policy was to bring vertically organised service sectors – after harmonisation of the latter's policies and laws under sectoral reforms programmes – into the scope of local bodies. In this way, the mandates of local development and service delivery in the devolved sectors, of which education and health were covered in this study, converged onto the functions of the local bodies. The local bodies were required to further devolve the mandates to community-based structures to take charge of delivery. The funding for these devolved sectors came from the central government under inter-governmental transfer (IGT) and from donor assistance under the Sector-wide Approach (SWAp) within the rubric of sectoral reform programmes. This innovation in local governance policy was expected to work well in terms of good governance and service delivery.

Transitional Arrangement in Local Governance

It was in 1997 when the last local election was held in Nepal. After the expiry of their tenure in 2002, the local bodies remained without elected representatives. In order to address this political vacuum created at local level, civil servants were given authority to handle local bodies. Article 139 of the Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) had a provision for local bodies, stating that elections would be conducted to set up local government bodies and until then, the 'interim bodies shall be constituted at the District, Municipality and Village levels by consensus among all consenting

parties.' If under any circumstances the local election could not be held, the LSGA (Article 239) had provisions that the government could extend the tenure of 'interim bodies' for up to a year or in any other manner to perform the functions of local bodies.

Thus, as a transitional arrangement, the APM was formed according to the Interim Constitution in order to provide an advisory role to fill the political vacuum at the local level. The APMs were provided more guidance in the DDC, Municipality and VDC Grant Mobilisation Guidelines (2009) with added functions of coordination, planning, conflict resolution, monitoring, and review. Although no specific terms of reference is in place for APM, the local bodies' grant mobilisation guidelines instructs civil servants to consult the APM while making decisions on resource allocation and other local-level development activities. There is no uniformity in the emergence of APMs in the country though. They were formed primarily in the transitional period following the recognition of consensus in the Interim Constitution and were legitimated through a ministerial decision in July 2009.

The APMs were dissolved in January 2012 after the recommendation from the statutory Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority, following reports of huge misappropriation of budgets at local bodies. On 3 January 2012, all authorities were handed over to civil servants – Local Development Officer (LDO) in DDCs, Chief Executive Officer in Municipalities, and Secretaries in VDCs – with the roles and responsibilities of DDC president, municipality mayor, and VDC chairperson respectively. The methods of decision-making and usurpation of resources, however, continued.

Approach and Methodology

Research Methods
A combination of methods was employed in this study. The study started with a review of policy documents, literature, and media coverage on local bodies, and delivery of health and education

services. Thereafter, an outline of this research agenda was presented at a round-table meeting of the Nepal Policy Research Network in Kathmandu in December 2011. The meeting provided inputs on shaping the research themes, especially to explore the relationship between actors in local settings and the space for nurturing 'counter-politics' to expand spaces for transparency and accountability. We then identified stakeholders at national, district, and local levels; consulted with sectoral experts; and developed a research protocol, outlining key questions, data collection schedule, methods, and informants. Three consultation meetings were then held, one each focusing on local governance, education, and health sectors, with participation from senior government officials, NGO personnel, researchers and experts. We presented our research themes, objectives, basis of selection of field sites, and methods. The deliberations served to engage policy actors and helped sharpen our research questions and field methods.

Sampling and Selection of Study Area and Respondents

The field study was based on a study of six sample districts, and three localities (VDCs and/or municipalities) within each of the districts. The sample districts were chosen, first, by categorising the districts in such a way that they (a) represented above-average or below-average performance in Minimum Condition Performance Measure (MCPM)[2] scores available from the Ministry of Local Development (MoLD), (b) drawn from the country's three ecological zones, and (c) spread across the five development regions of the country. The MCPM average score was calculated for the period between 2006/07 and 2010/11, which was 61.01. Second, it was also ascertained that a devolved district in the health sector (Dang) and a district with one of highest number of community-managed schools (Kavrepalanchowk) were among the districts chosen. Third, we also ascertained that a district from amongst

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2   It is an annual measure of the performances of the local bodies, and a part of their funding is contingent upon fulfilling the minimum conditions and based on their score.

the 'eight-sister districts' of the central Tarai was also included (Mahottari, with 75th position in MCPM score).

Selection of Municipalities and VDCs

Within each district, case studies, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in three localities (urban, peri-urban, and remote). The urban locality was a municipality or VDC that formed the district headquarters, while the peri-urban and remote localities were VDCs, identified in the context of the district itself, through consultations with district-based stakeholders. The study included six urban localities (five municipalities, plus Darchula district where the district headquarters is a VDC), and the peri-urban and remote locations were the remaining VDCs. Accordingly, we covered six districts, five municipalities, and 13 VDCs in our sample.

Respondents

The respondents were identified in the district and locality levels using snowballing technique. This started mainly from a visit to DDC officials, and moved on to include government officials in local bodies, individuals in the health and education sectors, former local body officials, members of the erstwhile APMs, officials of local user groups or management committees, beneficiary individuals, among others.

Field methods

The field study was guided by the research protocol which included questions and information to be sought from different groups and individuals. The data collection schedule in the protocol was used in a semi-structured way, given the variety of individuals and their knowledge regarding the questions. We used interviews, discussions (FGDs), and narratives from respondents in the form of case-let[3] as the main field methods, complemented by observations where relevant.

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3   "Case-lets" here refer to brief case studies, involving primarily the narratives around specific cases in the study areas.

Region	Mountain		Hills		Tarai	
	Above Average	Below Average	Above Average	Below Average	Above Average	Below Average
Eastern		Sankhuwasabha				
Central				Kavre		Mahottari
Western			Syangja			
Mid-Western					Dang	
Far-Western	Darchula					

Note: 'above average' and 'below average' indicate respectively that the district had an MCPM score, which was above or below the average of MCPM scores of all districts of Nepal from 2006/07 to 2010/11.

The interviews with individuals provided views, observations, and experience of several groups in local settings. We held interviews with 499 individuals and also conducted 43 FGDs in the six districts. More insights on group experiences were gathered from conducting FGDs with school children, Dalit children, women's groups, former APM members, government officials, and others. Through 88 case-lets from our field study, we developed short narratives of decision-making practice, success or failure of projects, use and abuse of funds, the structure of APMs or other devolved entities, or other matters related to our questions and sectors. The field team also made notes from casual encounters and conversations with local people.

Analysis and Validation

Building on these local studies, the study made comparisons across local case studies at three levels. First, the study looked across locations to see whether the sectors and institutions within which local contestation over resources are taking place are dis/similar. Second, it considered if the channels used by local actors to appeal to national-level decision-makers for support are dis/similar in different locations. Finally, changes in the practice of local governance over time were compared across locations to identify common trends across the country, and also identify patterns of good practices as well as instances of transgression of institutions and law and order to offer general and specific pointers for local governance reform. The data, thus analysed, was presented to the experts and stakeholders in local governance, health and education for discussion, leading to further revisions, which was then finally validated before circulation among a wider audience.

Findings and Discussion

All-Party Mechanism and Their Role in Decision-Making

Despite the dissolution of APMs, former APM members continue to show presence and influence in resource allocation decisions in

DDCs, municipalities and VDCs in informal ways. However subtle and amorphous the existence of the APMs, their role is known to government bureaucrats and a select group of locals. APM members were found around their respective bodies, particularly during the planning and budgeting period. Even after dissolution, most of the APM members in all the six districts participated in VDC or municipal council meetings as party representatives. They continued to hold vital positions in local bodies with the power to alter decisions, albeit only through informal mechanisms.

Composition and Variance

The number of APM members varied across districts, with Mahottari representing 21 different parties. On average, district APMs comprised representatives of 12 parties whereas in urban locations (the five municipalities and Khalanga VDC of Darchula), the average number of APM members was nine. Likewise, in VDCs the number varied from three to nine. There are three main parties represented in APMs—UCPN-Maoist, Nepali Congress, and CPN-UML—common in all districts, VDCs, and municipalities. Other parties in the APM were found to be mainly Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), regional Madhesi parties in Tarai, and smaller left or ethnic parties in the hills. The APMs consisted largely of male members of political parties drawn from locally dominant social groups. The APM members in the Tarai were drawn largely from political cadres who previously served as elected officials. In the hills, they tended to be those engaged in some petty contracting and small business. The APM members came from formerly elected people; new cadres, especially from UCPN-Maoist, and local educated groups.

The political party in question made the nominations to the APM. APMs were initially drawn from among the seven parties and the Maoists, but later on expanded to others after the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections. Generally, any party that filed candidacy in the district was allowed representation in APMs. The political parties made a formal decision to send their chairpersons, or

other members, of respective jurisdictions to the APMs. In some cases, the APM members were recalled by the party and replaced by another member whereas in other instances, parties were found to nominate members on an annual rotational basis (such as the UCPN-Maoist in Sankhuwasabha APM). Thus, there is a variation in the number of members in the APM, representation as well as the basis for nomination.

Role of APMs after Dissolution

As pointed out earlier, despite the dissolution of the APMs in January 2012, former APM members continue to influence and participate in – to varying degrees – DDCs, municipalities and VDCs. They regularly participate in decision-making in informal ways which is known to government bureaucrats and a select group of locals. The formation and existence of APMs can be understood in their formal and informal forms. In their informal manifestation, local political cadres filled the vacuum of elected representatives after the expiry of tenure of elected representatives in 2002 and gradually asserted their power over government officials posted in DDCs, VDCs, or municipalities. After APMs lost formal recognition, they continued to exist in subtle and amorphous forms, without clarity on membership, decision procedures, etc. The APM, therefore, represents an operation of a 'complex' network of political party cadres and their inter- and intra-relations, and influence in local bodies.

The formal basis of the formation and existence of APMs corresponds to Article 139 of the Interim Constitution 2007 and LSGA Article 239 (2). Even within that, the role of APMs was of a consultative nature, without the power of 'teeth and claw', but their informal role is justified on the grounds of 'political consensus' that was taken up as a principle in the Interim Constitution as well as in the political discourse. The local body officials were required to consult APMs before any resource allocation decisions were made. On the other hand, the good governance law (Government of Nepal, 2008) required the local governments to follow detailed social accountability measures—such as public hearing and

public audit exercises, involving the people and representatives. But these prescribed practices too often degraded into the illicit decision-making of the APM members.

Complex Relationships

Many APM members in VDCs come from the same cultural/ethnic/kinship background in hilly localities. For them, the difference of belonging to different parties matters less with regard to resource allocation decisions. Even while parties have different ideological orientations, the village-based APM members engage in day-to-day exchanges and communication with others in locally unique ways and tend to have common interests around many issues. In many instances, the same group of people, who are often related to each other, participate in the leadership of most community-based structures. It is, therefore, a messy local context, where there is no clear separation of power and accountability, but which requires effective collective action and open deliberation for community-led development.

> ### Same people in all committees and social/geographical inequity in representation
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> In Bansing Deurali VDC of Syangja, a few key persons dominate the power positions. These individuals are involved in almost all the committees in the VDC. The same person was once the VDC chairperson, and is now the chairperson of the school management committee and the health post management committee as well as the leader of an influential political party. Wards 8 and 9 comprise largely of 'Poudel' Bahuns who belong to the same extended family. Although places like Sepat, Khilmalchour, and Natimute that lie in Wards 2, 3, and 5 respectively have a dense Dalit population, almost 90 per cent of the major positions are held by Bahuns; Dalits lack representation and have little say in the overall decision-making process.

Dominance of Three Parties: Power Proportionate to National Power

By and large, the three major parties (according to 2008 CA election)—the UCPN-Maoist, Nepali Congress and CPN-UML—are the key actors in the APMs. Even in the Tarai, where Madhes-based parties have achieved prominence, the same three parties dominate decisions, because these parties have the capacity to link up with leadership at the 'upper level' and can effectively engage with government officials. In the hills, some small parties have been accorded a role in the form of satiation, or *bujho lagaune* (meaning, that they were given their 'due' share), but have a proportionately low influence.

Collusion in APMs

Collusion is a tricky phenomenon to observe and document as it involves a tacit consensus between those within the APM and the nexus of one or more APM members with government personnel and others (including, for example, contractors, suppliers, or stationery stores). Even before the dissolution, APM members did not possess formal authority to approve resource allocation. But they have established relationships with other APM members as well as with government officials to serve their own interests.

The chief officials in DDCs and municipalities are frequently transferred and are perpetually new to their duty jurisdiction and hence rely upon the support of local leaders and staff members who are more permanently placed (especially those recruited with local resources). The latter are knowledgeable about other local actors—including political cadres/leaders, contractors, armed groups—and provide a key connection to the permanency of decision-making practices across the transfer of senior staff. Technical personnel in the district use their techno-bureaucratic power to endorse proposals and approve quality of construction, largely against the backdrop of bribe payments by user groups/construction committees.

Many APM members were formerly involved in taking meeting allowances and capital equipment (e.g., laptops), or pushing

for the political programmes of parties; and allocating resources that matched their personal priorities. They are said to encourage their favoured people to form user groups (sometimes fake one) to conduct construction work. This arrangement provides them with the space to take up resources, by patronising user groups. They also participate in user groups and committees (including School Management Committees) and take advantage of their linkages with, and information from, government functionaries.

The influence of APM members, in both formal and informal roles, on local bodies is pervasive yet subtle. We found that civil servants cannot press ahead bypassing APMs. As there is no formal mechanism to control or overlook APM's activities, they are at an advantageous position from which they can manipulate the local budget and decisions as per their needs. Therefore, APMs have an influential, rather than a facilitating role in local governance.

VDC secretaries play a key role in resource allocation decisions, which is subject to their capacity to garnering support of the local politicians. Local politicians and other actors, with the exception of former elected officials (VDC chair and vice-chair, in particular), are hardly aware of the detailed planning and fund disbursement process instituted after LSGA. In this context, the VDC secretaries understand how things work under legislation, and therefore possess the ability to work through the formalities by preparing (false) plans and disbursing funds against the same.

APM members are the main actors in decision-making within local government bodies and they become more active during the 'council period',[4] in order to align the budget as per their expectations. The interest of APMs in forming user groups can be attributed to their intention to promote their own business. Additionally, by holding major positions in different local structures, the APM members were found to have easier access to and power over public resources. APM members are found to use this access to suit

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4   An annual planning sessions where development programmes and resources in respective local bodies are discussed and recommended for budget allocation to the higher bodies.

their interests and block any decision that goes against their interests. We came across many instances where the APM members denied signing the minutes of council meetings if the decision was not in their favour. In many such cases, VDC secretaries are forced to run after them to collect their signatures. Though APM representatives have different political ideologies, it has been observed that they somehow manage to come to a common understanding at the time of resource allocation. We found that they generally adopt a proportionate division[5] of budget, aligned with the personal interests of APM members. As APM members are generally not aware of the official processes, the VDC secretaries have been found to support them, particularly through documentation, which in turn helps overshadow the illicit aspect of these activities. Thus, depending on circumstances, APM members and local body officials either come to a common understanding or blame each other for misappropriation of budget or misuse of authority.

Most of the local body budgets were allocated to the infrastructure sector. Our local respondents suggested that the APMs can easily manipulate and misappropriate budgets in the infrastructure sector as they themselves are the contractors in the district.

Drivers of Collusion

Intentionality and Motivation/Interests
There were multiple motivational factors for APM members to engage in decision-making in DDCs, municipalities, and VDCs. It should, however, be noted that the intentionality of APM members is not the sole contributing factor in decision-making. Because the *de jure* power of local body decision-making lies in the centrally appointed government employees, their intentions

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5   The 'proportionate division' of resource corresponds with perceived relative power of a party (mainly amongst the three major national parties) as reflected in the national election of Constituent Assembly, or sometimes the local perceived popular base. Accordingly the largest national political party could claim the largest share, unless there is significant opposition from others by reference to their local popular base.

and their interests come into play equally. Apart from deriving financial benefits, many APM members seek to exhibit their power to local people, maintain patron-client relationships, and give an impression to their constituencies that a particular project was the outcome of their influence, so that they could eventually win popular support or voter favour. The informality of the existence of APMs favoured identification in person of particular APM members with any development project or local activity.

APM members require the nexus with, and active support of, the government personnel in order to exert any influence on decision-making. Despite having good intentions, government employees are still required to seek the support of APM members, primarily to avoid hindrances during the implementation of projects/activities. In other cases, the imperative to build consensus also serves to develop nexuses as the government staff continue to seek the participation of APMs to legitimise their decisions (e.g., in council meetings).

Profession of APM Members
The APM members were diverse in their background, social standing and education. Many were 'ordinary' local cadres of political parties, but some had changed their profession after becoming part of APMs. In Sankhuwasabha, a district APM member purchased excavators so that he could provide them on lease for any road construction done with funds from the DDC. While in some districts, APM members are themselves contractors, in others they use personal equipments (e.g., excavators) for construction projects, and in yet others, the user committees favoured by the APM are formed by bypassing the formal process of the MoLD.

Opportunity for Collusion

Influence on Decisions
The tools and techniques used by APMs to influence the planning, budgeting and implementation varied across geographic regions.

While there was comparatively less security threats to local body officials in the hills and mountains, it was different in the Tarai, with officials facing threats if they opposed the decisions of APM members (or party cadres). The APMs in Tarai were less accountable or loyal to their parties compared to those in the hills and mountains. The APMs in the hilly region were often asked to report their decisions back to their party, whereas APMs in the Tarai seemed to have greater individual autonomy to seek individual incentives. Despite the disreputation of lawlessness in the Tarai, several abduction cases were also observed in the hilly region (Kavrepalanchowk). We found that a system for paying a commission consisting of 10 per cent of the construction project cost to APM cadres has been institutionalised in all regions. APMs in the hills and mountains were seen to be sharing good relationships with bureaucrats whereas this was not the case in Tarai, particularly in Jaleshwor Municipality of Mahottari. In most cases, APM members from the major political parties (UCPN-Maoist, NC, and CPN-UML) worked closely with local body officials to allocate resources and kept the information carefully guarded. Weak monitoring practices and the absence of check-and-balance mechanisms may be attributed to promoting these forms of malpractices and misappropriations in local bodies. The abuse of authority and resources by APMs was widely reported in the media in 2011 which finally led to their dissolution.

Ongoing Role of APMs

There is no consistency or pattern in the role played by APMs at the local level. In some places, government officials were seen consciously bypassing the APM members (Sankhuwasabha DDC), whereas in others, APMs were able to coerce the decisions. For example, in Salle Bhumlu VDC of Kavre, APM members made a resource-allocation decision during an informal gathering in one of their houses in the evening, which was then formalised the next day at the VDC office. In the Tarai, decisions were largely made by a small group of actors— VDC secretary along with current

and former APM members—through formal or informal gatherings instead of a larger Village/Municipal assembly. Thus, only a few people knew what was going on and where the funds were being allocated.

Programme Planning

Formally, the APMs were to have a facilitating role in the participatory, bottom-up, and inclusive planning processes. The village-level planning is carried out by 'integrated plan formulation committee' consisting of the VDC secretary, health post/sub-health post in-charge, JTA/VET in-charge, APM members, members from excluded groups, head teachers of (government) schools, representatives of NGOs active in the area, or representatives from other existing institutions. In some districts, public notices were issued while in others the information was disseminated through FM stations. However, the study found that fake documents were produced by the VDC secretary in Mahottari regarding wide participation. This practice though common in both the municipality and DDC in Mahottari goes unnoticed because the executive secretary of the municipality and/or LDO is transferred at short intervals.

APMs were, therefore, seen as directly involved in resource allocation and other important decision-making in local bodies, despite their formal mandate stating otherwise. It was also widely noticed that they channelled decisions to cater to their needs and constituencies; persuaded people to claim development budget in their locality; and hand-picked people for plan formulation committees, etc.

Resource Allocation

The conditional grant was spent in different ways than provisioned by their original mandate and found in formal records. Budgets on education and infrastructure were seen allocated for teachers' salary across Nepal. Most of the funds were allocated to wards linked to APM members where they could easily influence people and

have their say. Informal relationships were also observed among the APM members and contractors, allowing them to benefit each another through allocations for roads and other infrastructure. Decisions on resource allocation were mostly made in secret among APM members only. The allocation of resources through conditional grants or plans happened through a practice commonly referred to as *milaune* (literally, fixing the paperwork), something that was done by government staff.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The formal role of APMs in monitoring and evaluation is to facilitate participatory and unbiased monitoring as well as implementing social and public audit. They employ tactics and strategies such as liberal monitoring of projects from which they receive benefits, lobbying to provide high incentives to evaluators during the project monitoring phase so that the evaluators' report in favour of APMs, using nepotism while forming the local-level monitoring committees, and deploying paper-based social and public audits.

Collusion in Absentia

The VDC secretaries worked out of district headquarters in six of the 12 VDCs studied. A quarter of the secretaries worked from the adjoining VDCs, and only the remaining from the assigned VDC office. The secretaries working from district headquarters claimed that they faced security threats – and this excuse was reinforced and promoted by their union. On the other hand, the main reason for working from the neighboring VDC is that a single secretary is assigned for two (or sometimes up to three) VDCs. When the secretaries are away from their assigned VDCs, they maintain liaisons with APM members to avoid being answerable to the local population regarding services and projects. It was also observed that a significant number of members of APMs actually lived in nearby towns or large cities (Kavrepalanchowk's VDC APM members in Kathmandu, Mahottari's in Janakpur, and Syangja's in Pokhara). In this way, a good number of decision-makers in VDCs do not

have any direct interactions with the people and can, therefore, easily avoid accountability for their actions and decisions.

External Accountability of APMs

Counter-politics in Local Spaces
With significant advances in the peace process, it would be essential to enhance the oppositional, counter-politics in VDCs, municipalities and districts, rather than continuing with 'consensus' as the preferred template of political engagement. Ward Citizens Forums and Citizen Awareness Centres have been formed in some places (e.g., in VDCs in Darchula), while such bodies were yet to be created and made functional elsewhere. In the absence of deliberative platforms, the existence of these bodies has rarely helped to improve transparency and accountability. They are inherently seen as the enemy where they exist by APMs, but yet are not sophisticated to be able to expose the wrong-doings of individuals in power.

Though, clashes among major and minor parties have been noticed in APMs in all regions, representatives of the smaller parties were found to have been mobilised by the major ones in some cases. For instance, APM members from Salle of Kavrepalanchowk district lived in Kathmandu, were business owners with high financial status, rarely visited their constituencies, and instead used the APM members from the minor parties in their interest. This situation reflects the informal but amicable relationship among APM members representing major and minor parties.

Oppositional Voice
Because locally powerful political actors participate in decision-making in an informal manner, there is little 'structural' basis for any kind of oppositional voice. This vacuum is further reinforced by the fact that a significant section of fairly educated youth are away for foreign employment, enabling the network of APMs and local body officials to avoid social scrutiny and sanction.

While some degree of opposition were apparent from under-represented areas, many in-depth interviews did not spell-out cases of clear opposition and actions taken then after. For instance, a ward in Dhulikhel Municipality was left out in terms of representation in the APM, and the consequent budget allocations did not take into account the needs of that ward. In this case, not much of opposition was heard from unrepresented ward but in another case of Bansing VDC in Syangja, where the settlement is geographically dispersed, wards that felt bypassed in programme implementation protested. There were, of course, opposition arising out of personal grudges as well.

In municipal and DDC settings, information was found to be tightly controlled and guarded by officials of local bodies and the APM members involved in decision-making. Most decisions were made long after they were due, and some key personnel would already be transferred (especially in the context of the Tarai) by the time the decisions were publicised. The journalists in Darchula did report on the misappropriation of funds in government agencies but were found to be watchdogs without teeth. Therefore, although many cases of misappropriation and embezzlement in various settings such as the VDCs and schools were publicised by the media, no substantive actions were taken by the concerned agencies.

Improving Representation

The study found that several local actors were anticipating local elections. In this context, efforts to encourage the political establishment to hold elections would perhaps pay off in terms of democratic gains, both in the short and medium terms. The absence of elected bodies at the local level for over a decade has stifled the local public sphere, which, in turn, has curtailed the articulation of local people's needs, aspirations and priorities. The proxy arrangements in place are increasingly unclear about who is there to represent whom, who is to be held accountable for any wrongdoing in resource allocation, and how improvements are to be made. This has further worsened due to the absence of VDC

secretaries in their assigned duty stations, so that locals hardly have a chance to make representations or get heard.

Opening up of Deliberative Platforms

Despite several transparency and accountability tools introduced to nurture good practices in local bodies, there is a widespread tendency to either ignore or bypass them. Even the citizen charters (e.g., in Mahottari DDC) are not maintained properly, while hoardings in construction sites (showing the budget, contractor, commencement and end of the project, etc) are nowhere to be seen. The difficulty of openly contesting and opposing the decisions of government staff and political party cadres is gradually increasing in district and local levels.

Almost all the political parties that contested in the last election were represented in the APMs. The APM members from the top

Working from outside the VDC encourages bribes

Suga Bhawani VDC is two kilometres away from the Mahottari District headquarters of Jaleshwor and is situated in Ilaka No. 6 in the eastern part of the district. The VDC secretary rarely visits the VDC office located in Ward number 1. His 'personal' office is in Jaleshwor itself. All the official activities are carried out in Jaleshwor because of which the service receivers face difficulties in meeting the VDC secretary for regular administrative work. The registration charge varies from person to person and both the birth and death registration charges were found to be controversial. Although DDC officials mentioned having provided vital registration for free, the service receivers in the VDC complained that the secretary charges them Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 for birth and death registration respectively. However, the secretary claimed to have taken a minimal amount (only Rs 10/20) for the same.

three national parties played a dominant role at district and municipal level decision-making, with little space remaining for the members from the minor parties. Although all the members were given equal status during its formation, the level of their power was clearly segregated at the local level based on national politics. The members of minor parties, thus, felt under-represented and ignored during decision-making. Even when they had the space for contestation, many preferred to stay quiet as a mutual tradeoff, with the assumption that their programmes would be selected the following year.

Although issues of transparency, accountability, and representation have been debated time and again, the decision-making process at local bodies is not transparent. Most of the prominent programmes are selected by the members of major parties with very little voice from minor ones. The agreement paper makes the programme selection legitimate, helping make 'paper-fixing' an important part of decision-making at local level. APM members involved in various occupations were found using the programmes for their individual interests. For example, a contractor who was also an APM member in a municipality was able to win some contracts. This way, by asserting that the programme materalised because of him, he could exercise influence over people and also boost his business at the same time.

While APM members in DDCs and municipalities were seen to have exercised power, this was not the case in VDCs. APMs had very little to do in VDCs where civil society was strong; they have hardly any role in budget allocation and programme selection. For example, in Kolma Barahachaur VDC of Syangja District, none of the three APM members played a part in decision-making and the programmes were selected based only on the needs of the people. When asked about their relevance, most of the people said that these APM members were inexperienced with very little political knowledge and that their presence was nothing more than political representation. This is a case in point to demonstrate that if people are aware and civil society strong, the roles of APM members can be limited to participation only.

It is vital to mention here that there were no women in decision-making positions such as APM members and government officials or in school and health centres in all the six districts where data was collected. The quota set aside for women was fulfilled on paper but in reality they played no role whatsoever in VDCs, municipalities and DDCs. It is, however, assumed that the formation of Civic Awareness Center (CAC) will play a substantial role so that the unrepresented and under-represented groups can come forward and demand for their needs. The formation of both Ward Citizen Forum (WCF) and CAC is expected to play a vital role in decision-making in the coming years even though their function and performance was not visible during data collection as they were recently formed.

Social Mobilisation and Good Practices

In instances where WCFs were established and made operational (e.g., in VDCs in Darchula), there is more awareness about planning and budgeting processes. But, elsewhere, it was found that user groups and management committees as well as civic groups are frequently dominated by the same group of people and/or their allies, who collectively control information. In such cases, social scrutiny of the work of APMs as well as other functional committees was difficult. Social mobilisers under the government's Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP), were generally young women, who found it difficult to cope with the highly politicised atmosphere. They were not taken seriously by APM members (e.g., in Bhumlu Salle VDC in Kavrepalanchowk). The social mobilisers in Mahottari district had not received their salary for three months and told the research team how they were treated as 'second-class' citizens in the DDC offices.

Conclusion

The success of local governance policy was premised primarily on an elected leadership in local bodies and also on their capacity to assert political will and authority supported by a popular mandate.

When the LSGA was passed in 1999, Nepal was already struggling with the pressure of the Maoist insurgency. The tenure of local representatives expired in 2002 and the successive governments – even after the inclusion of insurgent Maoists into the parliamentary 'mainstream' – were either unwilling or unable to hold new elections. But reforms in local governance continued from the early 2000s. The Ministry of Local Development (MoLD) and line ministries introduced one tool after another to deal with the vagaries of the political context and to deal with the abuse of authority that came to notice. More controls and safeguards were pursued. The measures for transparency and accountability have been continually tried, and new problems have emerged. These problems represent dynamic ways for continuous improvement, but also point to systemic defects in the mode of representation and the *modus operandi* of decision-making.

The overall transgression that ensued in local governance out of the complex factors identified above formed a structural basis in favour of collusion. The collusions developed between members of APM and through their relationships with civil servants and other actors, and got further solidified and entrenched during Nepal's period of transition. This period began in 2006 after the government of the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) and the hitherto-insurgent CPN-M signed a Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), heralding an era of 'political consensus'. It was projected as the preferred modus operandi for societal engagement in the backdrop of widespread political violence and deep mistrust and uncertainties. But 'political consensus' was frequently used as a rhetorical device in the formation and toppling of governments in Kathmandu, even though it was also promoted as an ideal basis for political representation and decision-making at all levels of governance. A positive contribution of this practice in the backdrop of intense political violence is that it allowed mutually opposed groups to engage peacefully with each other instead of pursuing violence for political or economic objectives. The main problem with 'political consensus' was that it was appropriated as a tool for developing collusion and

usurping considerable resources by locally powerful political cadres and government functionaries.

The main finding from this study is the need to inculcate a pluralistic polity in local government – with a strong structural basis for nurturing oppositional voice and dissent. The policy measures adopted to control corruption and misuse of authority in local governments are creative and ingenuous, but they are largely a technocratic fix on the complex and messy post-conflict local politics. Corrections can start with early preparations for holding local government elections which would facilitate more transparent contestation and deliberation and enable people to elect those seen to represent their own interests. This should be followed by measures to enhance the capacity of local governments and ways in which they can be held accountable.

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A Meeting Space for
the Living and the Ancestors
The *Chautaara* among the Bahing Rai of Eastern Nepal

CLAIRE FEMENIAS

WHEN I arrived in Nepal in April 2009, I was expecting to discover a country and a culture linked to Hinduism and, of course, Buddhism. What I did not know until I learnt from a Rai friend talking about his tradition and culture that bury the deceased and honours them as ancestors is that Nepal is a country where shamans still exist and work as healers. That is why I decided to study the Bahing Rai funerals to complete my PhD under the supervision by Brigitte Steinmann, who herself had written about the Tamang funerals *(gewa)* in the early 1980s.

In the course of my research, I became aware that there are three aspects of Bahing Rai funeral customs of utmost importance, and I have structured my paper accordingly. First, in both rural and urban areas, we need to discern the main influences from Hinduism *versus* the cultural traits that are based on ancient Kirat tradition, or *riddum (fripdim* or *freilo* in Bahing Rai), in the various funerals steps, and also in the way death and its consequences are conceived among the living.

Second, the construction of a resting platform, or *chautara*, which demarcates the final step of the mourning period and which I have seen many even in a small village like Sarsepu[1] (Bigutar VDC,

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1   Visited in October 2010 and during December 2011-January 2012.

Okhaldunga District) comes to the fore. Given the frequency of their occurrence, I will try to answer the questions: why, where, and when they are built, and for what and for whom? Finally, I will analyse a complex ritual called the *khim dim*, which occurs once a year at *Poush Purnima*, and which is performed by the Rai priest, or *noxchog*, and his two assistants, the *nabuja*. The shaman, or *jam-cha*, does assist in this ritual but as a simple villager among his or her community. The great importance of this ritual in the Bahing community is evident when we consider that it results in the deceased's name being recited among the ancestors' genealogy. The *khim dim* constitutes the third and last step of the Bahing funerals.

The Rai System of Beliefs: A Complex Syncretism between the Hindu Religion and Kirat Traditions

The Kirati Oral Tradition, or Riddum

According to John Whelpton, 'The *vamshalis* (chronicles) of the Kathmandu Valley claim that Kiratas ruled there before the Indianised Licchavis came to power early in the first millenium AD.' That is why 'the word "Kiranti" derives from the Sanskrit "Kirata", the name applied in the classical Indian Texts to the Tibeto-Burman hill peoples generally'.[2]

But, if we take a look at the oral tradition of the Rai, the *riddum*, we can read their understanding of why the Rai called themselves 'Kiranti'. Among the Kulung Rai, for instance, we may find that, 'in the language of Nepal, Horem is called Kiro, which means just that, "worm". This is the reason why we too, we the Kulung Rai, are also called Kiranti, because we descend from Kiro, from the worm called Horem'.[3]

In discussions about Rai and Kirat culture in general, I noticed that one of the fundamental cultural concepts is of the notion of being the descendants. In fact, the whole oral tradition of the Rai is a complex genealogical speech that includes natural elements,

2   Whelpton 2005, p. 13.
3   Nicoletti 2004, pp. 15-16, citing an informant.

myths, and different species such as plants, wild animals, and human beings.

At its core, the *riddum* is a continuous succession of appearances or births of protagonists who themselves gave birth to other protagonists. All protagonists are connected to each other through three types of linkages:

- the filial link (who is the child of whom?);
- the marital link (who married whom?); and
- the Earth or Kirat link (what is the connection to Horem, the real first protagonist, or to her daughter, Ninamridum?)

The *riddum*'s cosmogoly reveals that each protagonist, whatever his or individual nature, belongs first to a whole. This connectedness is important to consider. For example, among the Kulung Rai:

- Horem, the Worm, was not born separately from the Water, the Earth, the Sky, or the Wind. First, she needs her grandparents (the Water and also the *Nagi*—the snake— who lives in water) and her parents (the Earth and the Sky) to appear. Lastly, she needs her husband (the Wind, Hukh) to be fecundated.
- Ninamridum, the mother of all species, needs her own mother, Horem, in order to avoid incest with her father, the Wind (Hukh). Ninamriddum also needs a bird to act as a messenger between the Earth and the Sky, to find her husband, Paruhang, or Jupiter, and to become pregnant.
- Tumno, the first human being whose mother is Ninamridum, was not born separately from plants, insects, or the wild animals. On the contrary, he needs them to eat and survive, as he is a hunter in the jungle.

A visual projection of the protagonists' genealogy might look like this:

The Memory of Hinduisation and Its Result: A Religious Syncretism

The memory of Hinduisation is still alive—in the village of Sarsepu, for instance, among the elders. They remember the time when Hindu laws were introduced for all castes and peoples in Nepal, and how following the new rules caused conflicts with indigenous world views. According to Hindu law, for instance, killing a cow is a crime punishable by death, as Hindus consider this animal a god. Moreover, the cow and its tail are supposed to help the deceased to cross a river while their soul is between death and reincarnation. This is why, the *Gai Jatra* ritual (literally, 'Cow
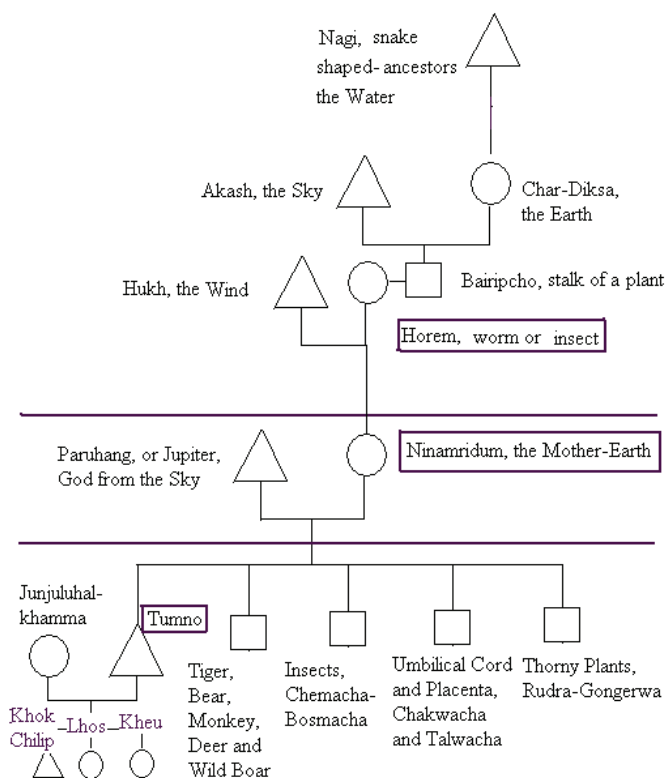
Figure 1: The protagonists' genealogy according to the *Riddum*

Festival'), for example, is performed with a cow, especially in the Newar community (cf. Figure 4). But in Kirat culture, among the Bahing Rai, it was customary to perform the *Hang* ritual, which is a rite honouring the *pachha* or clan, by sacrificing an ox. Because of the introduction of Hindu law, the animal that is sacrificed nowadays is a buffalo (cf. Figure 2).

This is also what Sylvain Lévi had commented in the 19th century: a long time ago, the Kirati people used to be beef lovers (Lévi 1908 tome 1, 266).[4] Also, in a widely known earth fertility rite, the Sakela Bhume, the Rai used to offer beef meat, but must nowadays use buffalo. In some peoples's perception, this means they are 'cheating', as one Tumbahang Rai told me.

Religious Syncretism as a Result of Both Influences: A Mix Between Animism and Hinduism

As mentioned above, it is obvious that the Bahing Rai system of beliefs is a complex and syncretic system of Hindu and Kirat influences that includes characteristics of both religions. Thus, the notion of pollution or purity, which is a central belief in Hinduism, is also meaningful among the Rai today. The same is true for the concept of caste or *jati*. As a foreigner, I was, for example, not allowed into a Bahing house where a *khim dim* was performed one Poush (the Nepali month corresponding to the time from mid-December to mid-January), with the explanation that I did not belong to their caste. Hence, I ate lunch and dinner seated in front of the main house with a Bahing Rai woman who was also not allowed to go inside either. It turned out that she, too, was restricted due to caste and purity notions: the woman had been married to a Rai man, with whom she had had two children, before having an affair with a Brahmin. She ran away with her lover and finally came back to her native village, where she still lives today with her mother and her two children. My informant told me that unless she marries a

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4   'Les Gourkhas ont entrepris des guerres répétées contre les Kirâtas, établis à l'Est du Népal, pour les obliger à s'abstenir de la vache qui était jadis leur nourriture de prédilection.'

Rai man, she cannot enter her own home during the time the *khim dim* ritual is performed there.

Another example of how strongly the Hindu beliefs system is anchored among the Bahing Rai can also be seen from the many Hindu festivals and rituals followed in the region. When I visited Sarsepu village for Tihar in 2010, I witnessed how the villagers performed Laxmi Puja, the Hindu rite for the goddess Laxmi, by offering *malas* (garlands made of marigold flower) to the oxen (cf. Figure 6).

Bahing Rai Funerals in Eastern Nepal: Burial, Mourning and *Chautaara*

If we take a closer look at the beliefs concerning death in Hinduism and Kirat philosophy, we will, despite the many Hindu influences on the Bahing, notice considerable differences as well. It is a fundamental belief in Hinduism, that a person's soul must be reincarnated in a new body after death, according to his or her *karma*;[5] if, in the course of a person's lifetime, the amount of positive actions is higher than the sum of negative actions, the soul will be reincarnated in a human being, a semi-god, or a god (the three higher kingdoms). If, however, the sum of negative actions is higher, the soul is reincarnated in an animal, evil spirit, or angry ghost (the three lower kingdoms). Thus, one must follow the *dharma*—literally the ethics and law of duty—in order to be better reincarnated after death.

The Bahing believe that after death one's soul goes to the *sarikhim*, or land of the ancestors, to stay among the ancestors' community, and provide goods and benefits to their descendants (Gaenszle 1999, 50). The funerals are performed to transform a spirit, which is potentially dangerous for the living, into a good spirit, an ancestor who looks after his or her children, grandchildren, and relatives. This animistic conception of the deceased is also connected to a territory: 'The point to make is that the function of [the] (funerary) ritual—and the same is true of marriage, as we shall see—is to

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5   Karma means, literally, 'action'.

strengthen the solidarity of the local unit and not that of the wider community beyond the confines of the village, or at the most, the locality' (Mc Dougal 1979, 124).

The First Step: Separating the Body and the Soul of the Deceased

The burial has two main functions: first, to get rid of the corpse, and, second, to separate the soul from the body in order to guide the spirit to the ancestors' land. This step is important as the priest is literally guiding the soul by singing the itinerary called the *bulam Nig Socho* or the *Sari Lam Socho*; the spirit of the deceased should understand that he or she is dead, and thus drift apart from his or her relatives and friends.

A symbolic piece of bamboo, called *Bala Lam* (*bala* meaning 'soul' and *lam* meaning 'way'), is used (cf. Figure 8) and placed obliquely in the grave (cf. Figure 9), linking the area of the deceased's navel *(süpüma)* and the sky. This symbolic piece of bamboo reminds us of the *riddum*; when Ninamridum gave birth to different species; her husband Paruhang decided to put each species in its own territory. Among the Kulung, for example, the umbilical cord and placenta, named *chakwacha* and *talwacha* 'were hung on the branches of a tree: a place that is neither forest nor village, neither earth nor sky' (Nicoletti 2004, 25). As the navel is obviously connected to the umbilical cord and placenta, the *bala lam* seems to be an *axis mundi* (cosmic axis), whose function in mythology is defined by Mircea Eliade as a connection between earth and sky and is relevant in many religions (Eliade 1965, 38).

The main mourner (for example, the elder son) shaves his head, wears white clothes, and is not allowed to eat garlic, onions, oil, salt or meat for the 13 days following the death. These practices are typically Hindu as death is considered impure and polluting for the deceased's family. But, we watched mourners walking around the grave, giving their last respect to the deceased, and doing *motti*—throwing soil three times with the left hand, which can be considered a typical practice mixing elements of Hinduism and Kirat Animism.

The Second Step: Killing the Pig for the Living, or Sashe

Once the pollution period is over, the second funeral step takes place in which all the relatives and villagers gather to eat pork, which is prepared for specially for the occasion. It is important to note that this rite was initially performed in order to match young people and, thus, to celebrate an upcoming wedding. Indeed, Martin Gaenszle, referring to Dumont, considers this to be evoking 'an older system of exchange'. And, 'though the case is not clear as among the Kham Magar, the Tamang and the Gurung, the funerary services of the wife-receivers in this perspective appear not only repaying for debts, but also as a token which allows future advances, thus giving the affinal relationship a diachronic dimension (cf. Dumont 1957)' (Gaenszle 1999, 63).

To summarise the concept, the sons-in-law (DH, yZH and ZS) who received wives from their fathers-in-law have to show their kinship predominantly on two occasions: first, during their wedding, and, second, during the funeral of their father-in-law, a man to whom they are indebted for receiving a wife.

To really understand the position of the wife-receiver and the position of the wife-giver, we must understand each perspective. The wife-giver chooses whether or not to give his daughter to someone. Therefore, such a deal puts the father-in-law in a higher position during rituals such as weddings and funerals. As Anne de Sales says, 'To the man who provides him descendants giving him a wife, the son-in-law provides (to his father-in-law) the access of the afterlife' (1991, 79: translation by author).[6] That is how the older system, referred to by Martin Gaenszle, works; it is an exchange in a diachronic dimension, thus the 'regenerative aspect' is ultimately the main focus of funerals.

I have participated in such rituals twice. The first time was in Rangadip, which is two hours' walking distance from Sarsepu village. Of course, I was not allowed to enter the home where the man had died, but I was allowed to sit on a stool outside while

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6   'À l'homme qui lui assure une descendance en lui donnant une femme, le gendre assure l'accès à l'autre monde.'

the villagers gave me *rakshi* (homemade brandy) and pork with rice. One woman took care of me, giving me more *rakshi* and meat. She was always smiling and staring at me. Her son looked at me shyly. I did not know what they were thinking, while they were watching me, but I felt strange and began to wonder what they expected of me.

The same thing happened again when I was in Surke village where a second funeral was being celebrated among the villagers. The young men played cards while the women sat together in front of the home talking. My friend and I sat with them in the yard and, when lunch was ready, a man and his son, served me and offered me more *rakshi* and meat. The only difference from my previous experience was that I already knew this man and his son as they were close relatives of my friend. What I did not realise at first was that they were viewing me as a prospective bride.

The End of the Mourning Period: Building the Chautaara *as a Meeting Space for the Living and Ancestors*

In this context of an older system of exchange, the building of the *chautaara*, or resting platform, seems like the continuation of the debt contracted by the son-in-law. As Anne de Sales writes about the Magar community, 'Regarding his role during the funerals, the son-in-law logically goes with the deceased to the last crossing which transforms him into an ancestor. He brings the stone that must be erected on the resting platform of the lineage in memory of the dead …' (de Sales 1991, 79, translation by author).[7]

The son is in charge of building the resting platform among the Dumi Rai: 'Generally, the platform is built by the person inheriting the property of the deceased' (von Stockhausen 2007, 66). However, among the Kulung Rai, the closest relatives and the neighbours build the resting platform: 'It is usual that relatives and neighbours build, in the name of the deceased, along one of the

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7 'Dans la logique de son rôle au cours des funérailles, le gendre accompagne le défunt lors de l'ultime passage qui le transformera en ancêtre. Il apporte la pierre qui doit être érigée à la plate-forme de repos du lignage en mémoire du mort …'

paths surrounding the village, a resting platform (cautaaraa N) for the walking people' (Schlemmer 2004, 519, translation by author).[8]

Martin Gaenszle even gives an example of a recitation among the Mewahang in which the *chautaara* is mentioned: '…(verse 27) and when the youngest brother comes, they (the two brothers) will also build a memorial resting-place for you, (verse 28) at that time your memorial resting-place (will be built) …, (verse 31) the eldest brother … the elder and younger brother will get together and construct a memorial resting-place, (verse 32) so be satisfied, (verse 33) don't take the form of a Grave-Haunting Spirit' (Gaenszle, 1999, 59-60).

In this recitation, the main task of the Kirati priest, or *noxchog*, becomes clear: as a psycho-pomp, he is the one in charge of guiding the deceased's soul to the ancestors' land during the funeral, and that is why the *chautaara* appears to be exactly the opposite ritual place of the grave. Actually, to bring benefits and goods to his or her descendants, on his or her way back to the living's home, the ancestor's spirit must take the itinerary of the *chautaara* and avoid coming back to the grave where his or her body remains. If such a thing happens, he or she will be considered a bad spirit, which causes disease and misfortune to his or her relatives. As von Stockhausen points out, offerings are made on the *chautaara,* among the Dumi Rai, accompanied by the following recitations: 'Now you are hungry, we have made this *chautaara* for you, your resting place, when you feel tired, come here and rest, don't worry, we are offering you *raksi* and meat, don't be jealous of us, go on your way being happy' (von Stockhausen 2006, 85).

In brief, the *chautaara* is a spatial continuation of the funerals, where the living and their ancestors can meet and continue their exchanges. It is important to note that, after separation of the body, the final aim of the funeral is to transform the potentially dangerous deceased's soul into a benevolent ancestor's spirit

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8   'Il est courant que les parents et les gens du quartier construisent, au nom du mort, le long d'un des chemins qui entourent le village, un banc de repos (cautaaraa N) pour les marcheurs.'

(Gaenszle 1999, 50). But, it seems also that the *chautaara* is a spatial continuation of the *bala lam*, the bamboo stick that separates the soul from the body, showing the way to the sky. We could even go so far as to say that the *chautaara* connects the earth to the sky in the opposite direction, linking the living to the ancestors, and remains as a space of exchange. Essentially, the *bala lam* separates the deceased's soul from the living, after offering and exchange rituals. This connection between the ancestors and the living is the main focus of the *khim dim* ritual, as suggested below.

The *Khim Dim*, the Ancestors' Ritual, and the *Chautaara*

As mentioned above, the most important concept in the Kiranti system of beliefs, is that of being descendants. This concept is particularly relevant to the *khim dim*, the ancestors' ritual which occurs every year in winter (Poush Purnima according to the Nepali calendar). In this season, the crops are stored, the men are still ploughing the fields, and the villagers have free time to celebrate rituals. That period is also a transition between two agricultural cycles and the *khim dim* is at a time quite close to the winter solstice (December 21). In 2011-2012, the special *chang* (rice fermented drink) was made on Push 13 (December 28, an *aũsi* or new moon) in preparation of the ritual, and the *khim dim* ritual started on Poush 24 (January 8, a *purnima* or full moon), and lasted for four days.

Calling the Deceased's Name as the Third and Last Step of the Rai Funerals

The *khim dim* is the last ritual in the funeral cycle of the Bahing. I was adverted to an important aspect of the ritual by my informants: shortly before this ritual, the deceased person receives a new name. A person's first name is given at birth, by elder women, and used during childhood. The second name is the official name, the one used in government documents. Finally, the third name is given after someone's death but before his or her burial. That name is given by the priest, or *Noxchog*, to the deceased's

spirit inside the home. The belief behind this is that the spirit of the ancestors is still alive, and the deceased's soul must be included in it by giving it a ritual name.

That ritual name plays an active role during the *khim dim*: the deceased's soul becomes an ancestor among its new community when the name is recited within the ancestors' genealogy, via the ritual language. After being separated from the body—and thus the grave—and guided to the *sarikhim* via the *chautaara*, the benevolent spirit is allowed to come back and visit the living on very specific occasions.

Offering to the Ancestors and Blessing the Living: the First Function of Khim Dim, *Also Found in the* Chautaara

During the *khim dim*, different kinds of offerings are made to the ancestors of the clan in a specific part of the home called the *nagle* (cf. illustration below). This place is considered to be the most
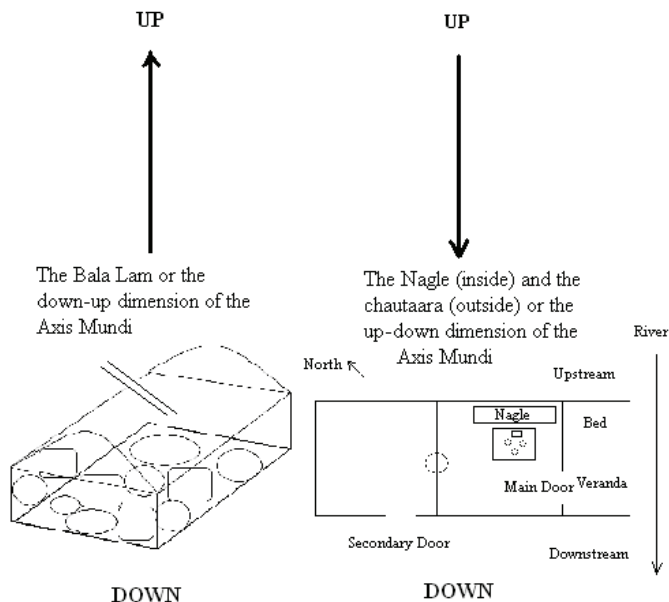
Figure 2: the up-down dimension of the bala lam and the nagle

revered place in the home where only seniors and ritual experts can sit. It is situated behind the three stones of the hearth, the *chula*, with different types of stones: *sari lung, bocol lung* and *chu-la lung*. Among the Athpahariya Rai, it is also the place where a deceased person is initially placed and where the body rests until burial (Dahal 1985, 37). Two big jars containing the ritual chang (*nachi* in Bahing) made on Poush Aũsi are also stored in the *nagle* (cf. drawing below). A pig is ritually killed in the yard of the house with a bamboo stick, imitating a bow and arrow, and its meat is ceremonially offered to the ancestors at the *nagle*, asking their blessing and protection for the clan.

Actually, the *nagle* (inside the home) and the *chautaara* (outside the home) are two different places (private versus public) where offerings are made. As a matter of fact, the same ritual offerings were later also performed at the *chautaara* before the *khim dim*, after the passing away of my friend's father, who had been a *noxchog*, as my informant documented for me (with photos). I, too, visited the *chautaara* that had been built in his memory but after the offerings had been made. Situated just below the house, the *chautaara* is quite long (around 12 people can sit on it) and is located at a crossing of two paths, one of which is a shortcut to the deceased's home.

According to my friend's photos (cf. Figures 9 to 14), before the ancestors' ritual, many offerings had been made at the *chautaara*. First, while the *rakshi* and food were offered, no one was allowed to sit on the *chautaara*, except the widow and the sister-in-law who could touch it while sitting on the ground and drinking *rakshi* (Figure 9). Only after this memorial moment could everyone sit on the *chautaara* (Figures 10 to 12), sharing good moments and laughing (Figure 12). Finally, all the villagers went home taking the shortcut, using the same path they had used to get there (Figure 14).

One More Ancestor into the Bahing Rai Genealogy and Life Goes on

The main function of the *khim dim* is to keep the memory of the ancestors alive among the living by means of the oral tradition,

the *fripdim*. The clan is perpetuated as each upcoming generation would be part of the ancestor's lineage as a direct descendant (the filial link) or as an ally (the marital link). After receiving offerings and food, having been well guided until the final destination, the *sari khim*, the ancestor's spirit, is allowed to come back on Earth in order to provide benefits and blessing to the living. These benevolent spirits are regularly satisfied with offerings, and it is expected that they guarantee good harvest and prevent diseases in return (the earth link).

It is interesting to note here an etymological link between the crop's fertility and the *nagle* part of the house located behind the ancestors' stone, the *mësüm lung*, where the ancestors are honoured during the *khim dim* ritual. *Nagle* denotes the rice crop, which is usually collected in Mangsir (November 15 to December 15). Nagle also signifies the ceremony where newly harvested crops such as rice and millet are eaten. This is another hint that the ancestors' spirits are linked to the living through the earth link, and it is thanks to the ancestors that the agricultural cycle is finally completed. Martin Gaenszle, referring to Bloch and Parry, mentions this concept among the Mewahang Rai: 'The forces of decay, mortality and impermanence are contrasted with those of
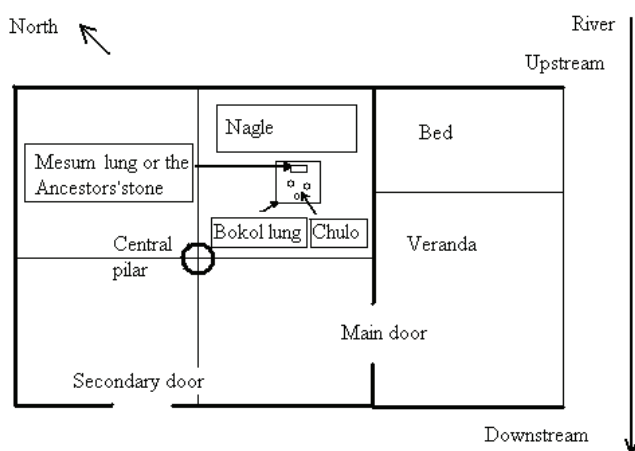

Figure 3: a Bahing Rai home viewed a ritual place for the *khim dim*

productiveness, vitality and eternal stability, and, by thus creating a transcendental sphere, the funerary rituals can "dramatize the victory of order over biology"' (1999, 50).

That the *chautaara* is a meaningful place as a meeting space for the ancestors and the living, can be illustrated by the following personal story.

Once, when I was in the village, I met a Bahing Rai man who usually lives in the UK with his wife and his two sons. His father, who is 87 years old and still lives in the village with his youngest daughter, is a *nabuja*, a *noxchog*'s assistant. The UK visitor, being the only male descendant of the family, is learning the oral tradition from his father and for that purpose goes back to village every year in the winter to perform the *khim dim* with his father. As we were walking back to town from the village, we sat down on the same *chautaara* that I have mentioned before, the *chautaara* which had been built in memory of my friend's father, the *noxchog*.

We were not tired as we had just left the village a few minutes earlier. But, he asked me to sit on, so I did. In fact, it was all about saying good-bye to someone who had passed away 10 months previously. And, I felt that for him it was also a way of receiving blessings from an ancestor who has just been integrated into the shrine of his house, the *nagle*. This story might be seen as an animistic use of the *chautaara*: we did not rest on this platform, but, in a way, we were saying 'good-bye' to the village (the living) and also to the deceased person (the ancestor).

The Bahing say the deceased do as the living do: they sit on their *chautaara* when they feel tired as they travel a lot, and after this rest, they go back to the *sari khim*, the ancestors' land, just as the living do, going back to their home, to the market—or even Kathmandu or the UK. Thus, for the Bahing, the *chautaara* is a resting place and a meeting space, from which all follow their own path.

In Grégoire Schlemmer's words, we may summarise that 'even if the *chautaara* is a quite recent construction (middle of the twentieth century) that must be connected to the memorial steles widespread in the tribal area of India (cf. Settar and Stontheimer,

1982), the resting platform is not built on the deceased's grave, which is doomed to disappear' (Schlemmer 2012, 2).[9]

In conclusion, we must remember that the *chautaara* is exactly the opposite of a grave for various reasons. First, the grave remains anonymous—with some exceptions—while the *chautaara* always contains a stone where the name of the deceased is engraved (Figure 15). Second, the grave is located in an isolated—western—part of the village while the *chautaara* is always located at a busy crossing (Figure 16). Third, the *bala lam*, is a down-up dimension of the *axis mundi*, while the *chautaara*, linking the ancestors to the living is an up-down dimension. The *bala lam* separates the deceased's soul from the living (disjunction or separation), while the *chautaara* links the ancestor's spirit to them (conjunction or connection). Fourth, the grave of the deceased is remembered among the living as a place of sorrow, while the *chautaara* is considered to be an auspicious place: many people told me that when they come to rest on the *chautaara*, the happy mood of the ancestors makes them happy as well. Finally, if we remember the ritual *khim dim*, the *nagle*—located in the private sphere of the home—is a place where only elders and ritual specialists can sit, while the *chautaara*, a public place where everyone can sit, is an auspicious resting platform, and therefore a more public counterpart to the *nagle*.

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9 'Mais ce bans et cette stèle – une innovation récente (milieu du 20° siècle) qui est à rapprocher des stèles mémorielles répandues dans le monde tribal en Inde (voir Settar et Sontheimer 1982) – ne sont pas réalisés sur la tombe du mort qui, elle, est vouée à disparaître.'

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Figure 4: *Gai Jatra* festival in Kathmandu, August 2010. (Photo by author)

Figure 5: Traces of the *hang* ritual in a Bahing Rai house whose members are not *hojupachha*, October 2010. (Photo by author)

Figure 6: *Gai Tika* celebrated in Sarsepu village with oxen for the Tihar festival, October 2010. (Photo by author)

Figures 7 and 8: Burial of a Bahing Rai woman (*Dillingpachha*) in Kathmandu, Pashupatinath forest, June 2010. (Photos by Shanta Mani Rai)

Figure 9: Honouring an ancestor in Sarsepu village. (Photo by Shanta Mani Rai)

Figure 10. A meeting space for the living and their ancestors.
(Photo by Shanta Mani Rai)

Figure 11: Gathering and sharing good moments. (Photo by Shanta Mani Rai)

Figure 12: Woman shaman, or *jamcha* (left), and widow (right).
(Photo by Shanta Mani Rai)

Figure 13: All the women together. (Photo by Shanta Mani Rai)

Figure 14: The living on their way home. (Photo by Shanta Mani Rai)

Figure 15: A *chautaara* in Sarsepu village. (Photo by author)

Figure 16: Resting on a *chautaara* in Surke Village. (Photo by author)

Figure 17: A Limbu commemorative bench in Sadobato (Kathmandu), where the *sakela* dance is usually performed by Kirati indigenous people (Rai, Yakha, Sunuwar, Limbu). (Photo by author)

Insurgency and the Quest for Identity in Yug Pathak's Novel *Urgenko Ghoda*

DINESH KAFLE

Introduction

THE 10-year Maoist insurgency in Nepal (1996-2006) made a significant contribution to Nepali literature, which is evident in the proliferation of a distinct category of creative writing. I propose to call this new category of writings as Nepali insurgency literature (NIL). NIL encapsulates several literary genres, including fiction, poetry, drama and memoir, and can broadly be divided into three camps: the *anti-insurgent camp*, which depicts the insurgency as an undesirable event that did more harm than good to the Nepali socio-political landscape; the *pro-civilian camp*, which maintains neutral ground, criticizing the way the atrocities from both sides to the war impacted the lives of common people; and the *pro-insurgent camp*, which depicts the insurgency as a historical necessity that would pave way for the transformation of the Nepali state. Among contemporary Nepali fiction, Pradip Nepal's *Aakash Gangako Tiraitir* (2057 BS [2000-2001]), Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Café* (2062 BS [2005-2006]) and Yug Pathak's *Urgenko Ghoda* (2066 BS [2009-2010]) can be taken as representative novels from the aforementioned camps respectively.

In this essay, I discuss Pathak's *Urgenko Ghoda* (literally, "Urgen's Horse") in the context of the Maoist insurgency, focusing on how the author envisages deconstructive re-reading of

history and assertion of ethno-territorial autonomy as agents of socio-political transformation of a highly unequal nation-state. I analyse how, through the depiction of the valiant female insurgent, Pathak has foregrounded the primacy of mythology and historical knowledge to stimulate the quest for assertion of identity among oppressed communities. Pathak in this novel has used Tamang mythology to cast light on the historical veracity of the problem of nation-making in Nepal. Presenting Mhendo as the ethnic face of the insurgency, the novel suggests that the insurgency empowered ethnic communities to assert their identity. Pathak's idea of a nation is one in which ethnic communities have autonomy and self-rule over their native territory; economic resources are equally distributed; and the political dominance and cultural hegemony of a certain group of people is diminished. Although the novel does not make explicit references to the Maoist insurgency, there are several allusions to the same—of a 'people's war' being waged in Nepal's hinterlands. It is on the basis of these allusions that I attempt to read the novel as a representative text of the *pro-insurgent camp*.

The Novel

In the beginning of the novel, readers are introduced to Yaman, the editor of a periodical titled *Sumeru Post*, along with two poets, Hritu Ranjan and Mausam Shrestha. As the trio rendezvous over drinks one monsoon evening, Yaman hands his friends copies of a banned publication, *Laal Pailo*, in which a novel titled *Urgenko Ghoda is serialised*. The narrative then follows Mausam and his wife, Ujjwala, who begin to read *Urgenko Ghoda surreptitiously, aware that they could face prosecution for mere possession of the periodical. In the metafictional narrative of Urgenko Ghoda, the protagonist of the novel,* Mhendo, an insurgent woman of the ethnic Tamang community, along with her fellow combatant, Pallavi, is on a journey from an insurgent camp to her native village of Ichong in the Tamsaling area, on the outskirts of Kathmandu. Mhendo is pregnant, and on the advice of her comrades, expects to

engage in non-combating activities of the Party in the Tamsaling area. To escape encountering security forces, Mhendo and Pallavi take many unexpected detours and seek shelter in camps and local households. Nonetheless, Mhendo finds the journey helpful, as she is able to interact with villagers and know more about their lives.

The reason for her growing interest in the lives of the people being that she is on a quest to unravel the mysterious history of the Tamangs, which involves a mythical warrior named Urgen and his white war horse, both of whom were believed to have been killed in cold blood on the banks of the Yabeng river. Mhendo hallucinates of Urgen and his horse chronically, and as her understanding of the historical subordination of her community grows, she draws inspiration from those hallucinatory images and is determined to avenge the killing of her warrior ancestor and reclaim the glory of the Tamangs.

Finding it impossible as a pregnant woman to walk any further on the difficult hilly terrain, Mhendo stays on in a Tamang village where she engages in the Party's propaganda activities, and also gives birth to a baby girl. She spends the first six months of her post-partum period in the hut of a Tamang woman named Silikmo, where she is visited regularly by her insurgent colleagues. Ultimately, she re-joins the the combatants, leaving behind her infant daughter in the care of Silikmo, as she considers that the time has come to launch an attack on Shankha Durbar, the centre of power in Yambu.

The novel is written in a multi-layered narrative generally associated with post-modern style, where readers also become part of the narrative itself as they read and respond to the novel simultaneously. The narrator appears to directly address the reader and tells them what he intends to do with the plot of the novel. For instance, the narrator says, 'Dear Reader, (Mhendo and Pallavi) are waiting for a favourable condition to move ahead. Meanwhile, a series of incidents are happening around the country, but they have not come across any such significant incident. In this free time, we will try to look for interesting stories that came as turning points in

Mhendo's life' (Pathak 2010, 56). The novel is also self-reflexive of its intent and impact, as readers from different walks of life, including Mausam and Ujjwala; college students; a police officer and his wife, also named Mhendo; army officers; and insurgents are found reading it surreptitiously. There is an interplay of fact and fiction, where characters themselves speculate on whether particular characters may be real or fictional: Mausam and Ujjwala discuss if Mhendo could be a real-life character. Even when they talk about 'revolutionaries', one asks the other whether s/he was referring to a fictional revolutionary or a real one.

As they continue to speculate, Mausam and Ujjwala are visited by an insurgent named Bisam, who could be the same Bisam called Bisu Dai by Mhendo in the novel. To her surprise, when Ujjwala asks Bisam whether he knows Mhendo, he, in turn, asks, 'Who? Mhendo, the revolutionary? How do you know her?' In addition to this meta-fictional narrative style, Pathak has also interspersed the plot of the novel with historical events and representation of public figures. For instance, Rupchan Bista of the novel is a fictional representation of the real-life person named Rupchandra Bista who, during the Panchayat years between the 1970s and 1980s, spread awareness among the villagers of Makwanpur and peripheral districts through a campaign called 'Thaha'. The novel also draws reference from the real-life event of the brutal killing of unarmed Maoists by security forces in Sindhupalchowk district during the ceasefire, and also depicts the infamous 'Madi incident', in which 38 people were killed and more than 70 injured when a public bus was blown up by the Maoists in 2005. Its invocation of real historical events makes the novel what Linda Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction' (Hutcheon 1988). For Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction denotes those postmodern novels that 'are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (Hutcheon 1988, 5). Novels of this kind not only draw attention to their status as cultural artifacts but also question the relationship between fiction and reality, thereby problematising the question of historical knowledge itself.

Khagendra Sangraula (2010) has argued that Pathak's *Urgenko Ghoda* is one of those novels written during that era of history when there was no restriction of expression, and the insurgency had already become a thing of the past. According to Sangraula, such writings memorialise the insurgency while also keeping in view the changes that had taken place in the society. As they are written after the insurgency years, 'they have presented history without fear of any kind. [Such] novels are not written by observing the conflict from atop a hill, nor are they written standing on history's no-man's land. They are written directly entering the wave of the history itself' (Sangraula 2010). He further argues that the literary works written in the aftermath of the insurgency are relatively objective (Sangraula 2010). Sangraula is right in arguing about the writings being informed by history, but Pathak's novel could hardly be considered to be written from an objective position; the novel is unequivocal in its ideological position, exemplified by the justification of violence as necessary means to a larger revolutionary end, and its foregrounding of the ethnic dimension of the 'people's war'. Similarly, Pathak himself has made his political position clear, such as in the 'open letter' exchange with Jugal Bhurtel, a Kathmandu-based social commentator. In his response to Bhurtel's argument that 'the larger Nepali society that went through an apocalypse of the so-called "people's war" is not in a position to stand yet another misfortune' (Bhurtel 2010), Pathak responded thus:

> Violence has emerged as an indispensable element during certain phases of transformation of society. Non-violence is a lovable thing for everyone, but human society has never become free of violence. Violence itself has different shades, so a mere denouncement of violence will not lead to non-violence. The voice of non-violence will remain subdued until the last of the weapons remains in the world. But what we need to do is identify the sources of violence, and turn the discriminatory state into a rational one. In this selfish society, such attempts at times become necessarily violent. (Bhurtel 2010)

For Pathak, therefore, violence is to be viewed as a means to a larger end used by the historically marginalized for transformation of discriminatory socio-political institutions.

Mythology and the Quest for Native History

Pathak's novel came out at a time when the discourse on restructuring of the Nepali state was at its peak following the April 2006 Movement. The demand for demarcation of federal boundaries on the basis of ethnicity was being debated, with the then UCPN (Maoist), backed by several ethnic parties, at the forefront of the demand. *Urgenko Ghoda* thus came at a historical juncture when it served not only aesthetic but also ideological purpose by adding to the discourse on the imperatives of ethnicity-based federalism and autonomous states. The novel brings into focus the historical marginalisation of the Tamang community whose place in history was lost when they were vanquished and displaced from their homelands by Khas rulers during the consolidation of the nation-state of Nepal. Mhendo's role, therefore, is that of a potential liberator, of righting the wrong inflicted on her community's historical identity. It is therefore befitting that the inspiration for Mhendo comes in the form of the Urgen's hallucinatory image, which remains with her as a shadow. As her grip gets firmer on the history, she grows more conscious of her duty as a descendant of Urgen—to win back the dignity that was lost in the course of history. Though she becomes aware of Urgen through myths prevalent among Tamang oral narratives, there are other elements which add to her understanding of history. She derives these elements from her father, Phurba, who is the first person to unearth the mystery of how the Khas rulers had killed Urgen and his horse on the banks of the Yabeng River. While assisting an expatriate researcher, Phurba, in his hallucination, sees thousands of white horses in the ruins of the ancient palace of the Tamang king of the Kabila principality. A visit to the palace of his ancestors provides him with impetus to begin his quest for the history of the Tamangs. 'Now we should

understand. We should know why our race has been marginal-
ised,' he says to his wife (Pathak 2010, 75).

There are yet other means that herald the understanding of his-
tory for Mhendo. For Sonam, Mhendo's artisan uncle, the inju-
stice done to his ancestors by the Khas rulers is manifested in the
sculpture he makes of his father. The narrator says, 'When he
made that sculpture, he was not driven by the lure of money, nor
was he inspired by his love of art; in the deep layers of his heart, he
was inspired by the consciousness about his ethnic group' (Pathak
2010, 80). The connection with the ancestors does not remain
confined to person-to-person relationships only, but spills onto
the surroundings. After 21 days of fruitless search for the right
kind of boulder to use for the sculpture, Sonam finds a suitable
one in the front yard of his own house. The sculpture he makes is
that of his long-dead father whom he had seen only as an infant,
and whose face he had completely forgotten, but it is the magi-
cal connection with his past that makes it possible for him to cre-
ate the sculpture. The connection with the boulder is established
only later by the Tanba, who says that Sonam's father had bre-
athed his last sitting on the same boulder when he came back as an
ailing fugitive from the labour camp, where he had been involved
in building the Shankha Durbar for the Rana rulers.

Mythology and personal history thus provide Mhendo with the
agency to embark on the quest for identity. Her conviction to stri-
ke the Shankha Durbar originates from this awareness of mytho-
logy and personal history, which is a narrative of the historical
oppression of her ancestors. She wants to destroy the power centre
that has been the reason for the hegemonic dominance of caste and
ethnic groups. There is also an immediate familial dimension to
her conviction, as she wants to avenge the death of her grandfather
and other ancestors as it was the same building that took their
lives. Mhendo writes, 'In my will to attack Yambu was the con-
viction to demolish the monarchy that had dominated and abused
the Tamangs for hundreds of years' (Pathak 2010, 133).

Her conviction is also imbued with ideological agency when

the insurgency accelerates its campaign to attack Yambu. As her understanding of the Tamang history gets clearer, and as she is involved in the battle for reclaiming her past through an insurgent struggle, the image comes to life: during her last battle against the security forces, she is depicted, by the use of magical realism, as riding Urgen's horse, and fighting valiantly like Urgen himself. Mhendo contemplates,

> Sangharsha Dai was telling me in my ears, 'Our ethnic group cannot remain cowardly and escapist. Keep fighting fearlessly, become a martyr after creating a history, but never become a coward. We, too, have a history of having won wars. Go on attacking the royal palace of Yambu, and relax only after you oust the king. Join the other ethnic groups in the war, and build a dignified world for all. Never return as the vanquished—the people's army never loses a war' (Pathak 2010, 146).

Even then, she is confused whether her conception of the ethnic struggle has any substance. The narrator says, 'Mhendo started to ponder whether there was problem in the conception of a Tamsaling native land itself. She had imagined the entire people's liberation army as the Tamsaling army. She knew that blind racism *[jatibad]* could not help the working class in their struggle' (Pathak 2010, 207-8). Mhendo eventually concludes, 'No, racism is not the meaning of my Tamsaling. In today's world, there is no use of racism' (Pathak 2010, 208). During her conversation with a village Mheme (literally, grandfather), Mhendo explains the history of exploitation and marginalisation of the Tamangs and the need to reclaim the history of bravery of the community:

> Several hundred years ago, Tamangs were an ethnic group of warriors, who were fearful of no one. But, as the Tamangs were very straightforward, they were deceived by the king whose descendants have occupied the big palace of Yambu. We are now fighting the war to demolish that palace and save the dignity of the Tamangs (Pathak 2010, 137).

When the Mheme expresses disbelief in Mhendo's talk of fighting against the king and questions whether she was talking of a separate Tamang country, Mhendo says,

> We won't have a separate country, Mheme. But we'll have a separate state within Nepal. We'll reclaim our language, culture, identity and dignity. The king is the leader of the elites. What's the use of replacing one king by another? What I mean is, we'll govern, make laws, further development activities and stand on our feet all by ourselves. Doesn't the idea of establishing the rule of the poor and the proletariat sound good? (Pathak 2010, 137)

Mhendo also develops her awareness of the history of marginalization through the teaching of Rupchan Bista, the local social reformer who advises Phurba, Mhendo's father, to give education to his children rather than make them cowherds. Rupchan is Mhendo's teacher who, with his 'Thaha' initiative, urges the villagers to seek their space in history. Ultimately, however, it is the insurgents who give her the means to choose the path of violence to reclaim her history.

The post-1990 identity politics brought to the forth the resentment of several ethnic groups of Nepal against the political and cultural hegemony particularly of upper caste rulers and administrators. The narrative of the novel also dwells on this issue, as Mhendo is fighting with conviction to upend the hierarchical structure put in place by Bahuns and Chhetri Khas rulers who pushed the Tamangs to the fringes of history. But it is also an upper caste reformer like Rupchan Bista who challenges the cultural hegemony imposed upon the Tamangs by the upper castes. He is the one who teaches Phurba to question the traditions he blindly follows, and asks him to shed the cultural garb given to them by the Khas rulers during the consolidation of the Nepali state. Upon seeing the rice and blood of a cockerel offered as part of the Dashain ritual on the door, Rupchan chides him for

his ignorance and inspires him to reconsider his faith in such practices.

> 'What is this, stupid?' Rupchan asked.
> 'This is the tradition of the Tamangs, Sir. This has been taking place since long!' His heart told him that some wrong had been done, but he still gave an honest answer.
> 'Can you tell me when exactly it began … who started it?' he asked firmly.
> 'Maybe our ancestors.'
> 'Not your ancestors, stupid! It was started by the law of the powerful. Is there a Dashain festival in your culture, and a deity of the Dashain?' his slender hands moved like furious snakes. 'Find out about it and tell me, stupid! It was started by the Rana rulers. Dashain was imposed upon your race. Once a man forgets his identity and history, what does he become but an animal? How long will you follow the tradition imposed upon you by the criminals?' (Pathak 2010, 69-70)

Historically, the Tamangs, as well as many other ethnic groups consolidated within the Hindu caste system, have been victims of both repressive and ideological state apparatuses, as Louis Althusser would have put it. The Gorkhali king Prithvi Narayan Shah and his descendants consolidated the Twenty-Two and Twenty-Four princely states scattered across the country through military conquest, whereas the Rana rulers used selective violence along with the Civil Code. Cultural hegemony has continued in different forms—Gorkhanization in the late-18th and early-19th centuries; the Rana Civil Code in the second half of the 19th century to well into the 20th; Panchayati Nepali nationalism in the late-20th century; and, to a lesser extent, multiparty democracy around the turn of the millennium. Lawoti (2010a) has argued that, rather than extending legal equality and welfare to the people, modern institutions such as the legal code of 1854 'in fact solidified the caste

system and dominance of the ruling caste while even the 1990 constitution privileged Hindu religion and its followers' (Lawoti 2010a, 104). The issue of undoing such acts of injustice found its way into the ideological manifesto of the Maoist party that began in the last decade of the twentieth century. According to Chaitanya Mishra,

> Oppressive structures of caste, gender and ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional dominance (have) been frequently marked as constituting the structural causes of the Maoists struggle. The caste system, while often regarded as a 'cultural' feature of Hindu society, nonetheless bears highly pronounced political and economic significance. This significance is particularly salient in relation to the 'upper-caste' groups and ethnic groups, on the one hand, and the 'untouchable' dalits, on the other'. (Mishra 2007, 107)

Mishra further argues that the Maoist resistance, 'while set in the backdrop of this historical dominance, also constitutes a resistance against specific features of the 1990 constitution' (Mishra 2007, 108). Mahendra Lawoti has also expressed a similar view, stating that:

> The Nepali Maoists raised many issues of the indigenous groups such as language equality, secularity of the state, and self-determination rights. The Maoists also formed various ethnic fronts and declared autonomous ethnic regions. They launched campaigns against the caste system and ethnic prejudice and resisted imposition of compulsory Sanskrit in schools, a language alien to most indigenous groups (Lawoti 2010b, 142).

The 'structural causes' of the Maoist insurgency, as provided by the former Maoist ideologue, Baburam Bhattarai (Bhattarai 2003, 154, qtd in Mishra 2007, 102), include: imperialist oppression,

expansionist oppression, semi-feudal relations and underdevelopment in agriculture, decline of industry, expansion of comprador and bureaucratic capitalism, regional inequality and the question of the nationalities. Mishra further argues,

> Ethnic, religious, linguistic and regionalist dominance have more recently come to be regarded as a salient cause of the Maoist struggle. The 'ethnic cause', to a significant extent, encompasses linguistic, regional and religious causes as well, although the overlap is far from perfect (Mishra 2007, 108).

Read in the context of the historical event of the insurgency, *Urgenko Ghoda* brings to the forth the collective memory of the community, and the necessity to redress the issue of marginalization through a restructuring very foundations of Nepali politics and society. Whereas mythology provides ideological impetus for her quest for liberation, the possibility of violent insurrection presents Mhendo with material conditions that would allow her to attempt to translate her quest into practice. Thus, Pathak shows that mythology and history and not dichotomous concepts but are intricately interspersed with and inform one another.

Urgenko Ghoda also dwells on what an insurgency entails in regards to the twin concerns of ethnic liberation and class struggle in the context of the Nepali state and society. Through Mhendo's ideological position, the novel shows that the quest for autonomous statehood based on traditional ethnic homelands does not necessarily come into conflict with the idea of federal restructuring of the state. In this sense, the novel aligns itself with the then UCPN (Maoist) worldview, which presented the case for ethnic federalism as an attempt towards empowering ethnic communities within the framework of a federal state.

Mhendo's struggle in the novel is to reclaim her ethnic heritage and establish an autonomous state. But, what about the question of class struggle that is the mainstay of the insurgency? For a large part of the novel, the issue of class struggle remains only in

the background, and Mhendo does not have a clear viewpoint in this regard. Mhendo's commander, Sangharsha, explains the nexus between class and ethnic struggle thus:

> Never forget that the issue of liberation of the ethnicities is related to the liberation of class. In every ethnicity, there are both the oppressor and the oppressed classes. But the party has raised the issue of ethnic liberation because some groups of people have remained victims of oppression just because they belong to a certain ethnicity (Pathak 2010, 133).

In the latter part of the novel, Mhendo herself explains this nexus to her cousin, Dorje, who backs out of the 'people's army' after feeling betrayed on the issue of ethnic struggle.

> *Dai*, you know that the 'people's war' did not start only with the issue of ethnicity. Even within caste (and ethnic groups), there are classes...It is true that many indigenous communities like the Tamangs are exploited because of their ethnicity, but dealing with only the issue of ethnicity will again be nothing than Brahminism...Our main aim is class struggle— ethnic liberation is possible only after the struggle of the proletariat class (Pathak 2010, 211-13).

Self versus 'Collective Cause' and the Death Metaphor

Mhendo not only challenges the traditional conception of a woman as docile and limited to household by joining the insurgency but also takes up the issue of reclaiming the history of her ancestors. Her primary concern is not that of women's liberation but that of the community, which comes to her as a more immediate task, and for which she is willing to sacrifice her responsibility as a mother. Right in the beginning of the novel, Mhendo accepts the precautions necessary for a pregnant woman with much reluctance: 'Her heart was dangling from the twine. On the one hand, there was Mhendo the insurgent, and on the other, Mhendo the

mother. She took leave from the people's army with a heavy heart' (Pathak 2010, 20). But few months after her delivery, Mhendo is again caught in the dilemma of whether she should assume the role of the mother for her newly born daughter for a considerable amount of time, or resume the life of an insurgent. Apart from the biological responsibility of mothering her child, Mhendo is also concerned with giving birth to a new chapter in Tamang history. Ultimately, it is the political that wins over the personal, so Mhendo concludes that Silikmo *didi* can replace her as the mother. In the battlefield, though, there is to be no replacement for Mhendo. It is with the desire of mothering the rebirth of her community's dignity that Mhendo decides to resume her activities in the insurgency. She writes in her diary:

> Tomorrow, when I stand on the front yard of Silikmo *didi*, wearing a combat dress and a cap with a glistening red star, a Mauser in the waist, and a bag with toothbrush, paste, handkerchief, changing dress, books, diary, pen, portable radio and other necessary things, my daughter will probably still be sleeping. Before wearing the combat dress, I will suckle her and keep the rare feeling of motherhood locked inside my heart. 'Didi, I am leaving my daughter in your custody. I am not sure if I will return from the war. If I become a martyr, please tell her once she grows up—your mother became a martyr for the country and its people!' As I will say this, Silikmo didi will keep nodding mechanically (Pathak 2010, 147).

Urgenko Ghoda rationalises martyrdom as means to end the historical discrimination at the hands of an oppressive power structure. So, when Jhilko, one of Mhendo's colleagues, expresses his frustration over the death of his friends, Mhendo says, 'Don't call them dead, friend. They are martyrs. Attaining martyrdom for the cause of the people by rising above the self and dying for petty selfish desire are entirely different things' (Pathak 2010, 189). Even before the execution of the Yambu attack plan, the insurgents led by Mhendo

are raided by the government's security forces and, following a fiery battle, which her team wins, Mhendo attains martyrdom. As she breathes her last, she feels content at the thought that she fought as valiantly as her ancestor, Urgen, and became a true Tamang martyr while defending her ethnic group. According to the narrator, 'Her lips were calm, but her eyes that were gazing at the horde of the white horses said, "Urgen! I have saved the dignity of the native Tamsaling land. See, I have fought valiantly and attained martyrdom fearlessly. See, Tamangs, too, are a valiant group"' (Pathak 2010, 238).

Conclusion

Through the depiction of a valiant Tamang woman as the face of an insurgency, *Urgenko Ghoda* casts light on the primacy of the question of ethnic liberation as an essential part of the reclamation of identity. In focusing on the question of ethnic liberation and autonomy, the author has highlighted the need for a reconceptualization of the idea of the nation itself, emphasizing on native concepts of homeland and territorial belonging. Shedding the garb of docility expected of a woman in a traditional Nepali society, Mhendo sets off to reclaim the lost history of her ethnic community, and in doing so, defies gendered notions of nation-making as male domain. Seen from the vantage point of the post-insurgency period, the novel, published during peacetime following the insurgency, ends without a definitive closure to the issue raised by the protagonist. It is important to take into account Pathak's attempt to end the novel with a degree of ambiguity. In doing so, the novel relieves itself of the risk of being identified as propaganda literature. Read in the context of contemporary Nepali history, the novel has markedly taken up the cause of the marginalized and the oppressed. There is a disjuncture between the worldview presented by the novel and the political changes that have taken place in the post-2006 period. The post-April Movement political climate of Nepal has been one of tension between the different forces regarded as the 'oppressors' and the 'oppressed'. The erstwhile 'elites' of Nepali society, including Bahuns and Chhetris, seem anxious about

their social and political footing as the erstwhile 'oppressed' communities like the Dalits, Janajatis and Madhesis have begun voicing demands for equality with newfound confidence. According to Khagendra Sangraula, 'Dalits have raised their voices for social dignity, Madhesis for Nepaliness, ethnic groups for their indigenous territories, the marginalised and the disadvantaged for new opportunities from the society and the state' (Sangraula 2011). In actual terms, the issue of ethnic autonomy is much more complex in a country where over a hundred ethnic and language groups exist.

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Education as a Poisoned Chalice
The Chepang Experience in Nepal

SHROCHIS KARKI

Introduction

THE development discourse has long been concerned about whether education leads to greater freedoms or the reproduction of existing inequalities. In this essay, I argue that education can be a poisoned chalice for marginalised communities because it can raise their hopes and expectations without providing them the necessary skills to achieve those outcomes. Similar dynamics of an unstable expectation-outcome nexus are at play throughout South Asia and the developing world, but the Chepangs (an indigenous group that informs this paper) and other similar groups are particularly affected. Although these groups are investing heavily on education as their way out of poverty and as a tool for upward mobility, the education they receive is usually lacking both qualitatively (in terms of skills and knowledge) and quantitatively (in terms of years of schooling and literacy rates). Their experience with education is more of an unequivocally poisoned chalice than it is for other groups because they lack cultural and other forms of capital as well, with serious consequences for the future of education and development.[1]

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1   This working paper was written in 2012, when the author was an MPhil student, and draws from a larger thesis on Chepang education. I would like to thank David Gellner, QEH Oxford, Uncle Jack (Kent Cooke), and the Chepang community without whose support this research would not have been possible. The usual disclaimers apply.

Education, Freedom, and Inequalities

Education is increasingly considered an uncontested social good and has become central to the discourse of development. It is thought to contribute directly towards greater freedoms that define development (Sen 1999, Dreze and Sen 2002), believed to benefit society at large and influence major life decisions (Levine et al. 2001), and expected to facilitate upward mobility (Vlassoff 1996, Dreze and Saran 1995, PROBE 1999). Education is supposed to be both an instrumental and a substantive freedom, i.e., it is a liberating end in itself while also being a means towards achieving other goals (Sen 1999). Basic education is not only valuable as a constituent element of the quality of life, but also provides abilities to facilitate employment and economic mobility, which in turn can contribute to enhancing human freedoms in other ways (Dreze and Sen 2002, 6). Consequently, international organisations, led by the United Nations (UN), put education at the centre of their development efforts (UNESCO 1951, WCEFA 1990, UNICEF 1998, UN Millennium Declaration 2000).

The centrality of education as a tool for development in Nepal is reflected by official data on financial aid: the official development assistance (ODA) for education has increased from 10% in 2000-01 to 24% of total ODA in 2008-09 (Kantipur 2011a). It is not just the donors who focus on the education sector. Whether restricted to prevent the formation of a revolutionary, conscious citizenry (Rana 1967, Sharma 1990), or expanded to 'develop the nation' (Ragsdale 1989, Skinner and Holland 1996), education has been considered central to Nepal's future by various governments for over a century. Even at the local level, people continue to equate education with progress and development, and pursue it with zeal and enthusiasm.

This conception of education, however, is contested. While education has the potential to transform lives; social, cultural, and economic contexts can mediate people's access to education and the freedoms it can provide (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Jeffrey et al. 2008). Education can then exaggerate and perpetuate inequalities

by reproducing existing differences in society (Katz 2004, Rowe et al. 2005). Ethnicity, caste, class, society, and religion are often intertwined in South Asia, contributing towards these inequalities (Shields and Rappleye 2008), as the Chepang experience demonstrates. The critique of the 'education for freedom' argument is based on the notion that education is not a 'black box' that leads to the same outcome for different people(s) in different contexts. Do schools really provide 'knowledge' that leads to mastery or simply 'degrees' that provide the opportunity for jobs (Dore 1976)? Jeffrey et al. argue that while education has the potential to transform lives, 'power and culture mediate people's access to the freedoms that education provides' (2008, 3). People from marginalised communities do not always benefit from schooling but often struggle to acquire work, political leverage, and respect (ibid., Katz 2004). It is often assumed that education facilitates meritocratic upward mobility, but schools are not neutral venues: they can exacerbate caste and class inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Levinson et al. 1996).

While theories of cultural production have been critical of education as a black box, they remain susceptible to falling into the trap of borrowing this black box in their own analysis. Jeffrey et al. (2008), for instance, rightly critique this notion, but then transition to examine the behavior of educated un/under-employed individuals without critically examining the types of knowledge acquired by the 'educated', the methods of teaching employed in their 'education', and how their experiences differ from those of the uneducated.

The debate on education has thus failed to pay critical attention to the differentiated experience of schooling based on the quality of schools and the learning environment – or lack thereof. 'The "black box" of imputed links between school attendance and its socially beneficial outcomes remains large and murky, as do the institutional and cultural contexts that selectively facilitate or block the processes of individual development' (Levine et al. 1986, 3). At present, the role of schooling in development is speculative,

perhaps because current research has simply jumped to pre-conceived conclusions about its effects.

It is easy to make grand claims about the outcomes of quality education, but defining quality is no small feat, for it is not a unitary, homogeneous entity. The debate on what constitutes quality education is a vibrant one,[2] but I have in mind a holistic framework that encompasses the complete learning environment, embedding education in the social, political, cultural, and economic context. The relationships between students, parents, teachers, and local communities determine this environment. Good-quality education is both a process and an outcome, so it brings together not just an enabling learning environment, but also helps aspire to and attain the goals that the community and those pursuing education value. This is possible through a curriculum that provides basic skills such as literacy and numeracy *and* relevant life skills that have value in local, national, and international contexts.

The Chepangs

The Chepangs are a highly marginalised indigenous community who live predominantly in rural central Nepal. Their literacy rate is 23% and, as of 2006, only 141 Chepangs had passed School Leaving Certificate (SLC), 28 had completed their Intermediary (10+2), 1 person had completed a Bachelor's degree[3] and no Chepang had acquired a Master's degree (NCA/CAED 2008, Appendices).

Their marginalisation is not limited to the educational sphere but reflected by it. The Muluki Ain, the first nationally applicable legal code adopted in 1854 to codify the social order, assigned them the status of 'enslavable alcohol-drinkers': it placed them close to the bottom of the social hierarchy, just above untouchable artisan castes. Their geographic concentration in the high hills makes agriculture especially difficult, and the agricultural produce of some

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2 See Adams 1993, PROBE 1998, UNESCO 2004, UNICEF 2000 (and their bibliographies) for a more detailed discussion of educational quality.

3 This person now holds a Master's degree as well (Field Interviews).

Chepang families is hardly enough for three to four months a year (Shakya 2008, Pradhan et al. 2006), although most families in Chautari, the village in Chitwan where I conducted my fieldwork, reported sufficiency for seven to eight months a year (field interviews). Chepangs thus find themselves at the bottom of both caste and class hierarchies.

According to the 2001 census, there were about 52,000 Chepangs in Nepal (Shakya 2008, 269). Given the relatively isolated and scattered way of Chepang life, this appears to be an extremely conservative estimate. The literature on Chepangs is sparse, with Ram Mani Dhungel's and Ganesh Gurung's ethnographic work in Dhading the leading sources of information on them. Their language is Tibeto-Burmese (Dhungel 1994) and they are thought to have adopted Hinduism many centuries ago (although many of them reported to me that they are now either Buddhists or not religious: see table 1). 'Their economy is forest- and stream-based, their technology simple and indigenous, and the family is the unit of production and consumption' (Gurung 1989, 42). Chepangs started agricultural life only recently, but it is slowly becoming their main source of food (Upreti 1966). These observations appear to be accurate even many decades later.

Research Methods and Sites

I carried out fieldwork research in the summer of 2010 in Nepal in Chautari and spent three weeks at Antyodaya School in Karaiya, the nearest town from Chautari. The findings are based on ethnographic fieldwork and participation observation; semi-structured interviews; archival research; and 'learning by teaching', where I volunteered to teach to give back to the communities but ended up learning a lot about classroom dynamics and educational expectations and outcomes that inform this paper.

This analysis is based on two main research questions: **1.** What is the perceived importance and value of education among the Chepang? and **2.** What is the quality of the education available to Chepang communities? The first question helped address what

Chepangs themselves thought of education, its perceived import-
ance, and its value in their daily lives. The second question hel-
ped analyse the nature and quality of schooling to map how the
current reality of education corresponds to expectations that are
often based on past outcomes. I focus only on school-based formal
schooling as education here, and the paper does not always direc-
tly address some key issues related to education, such as children's
perspectives, the content and curriculum taught in classrooms, and
the dynamics of the classrooms, although they do inform parts of
the broader thesis. Based on preliminary findings thus far, howe-
ver, I am convinced that further research on these issues will bols-
ter, rather than hinder, this analysis.

Chautari is a predominantly Chepang (21 out of 25 households)
village that is seven hours' walk from the nearest vehicular trans-
portation. There are two government schools about an hour's walk
from the village. Both schools are provisioned to teach from 1st to
5th grade. In total, 155 students attend Moonlight School (names
changed), which was founded in 1962 (NCA/CAED 2008, 124).
There are five teachers employed in the school, although none of
them are Chepang. About 180 students attend Sunshine School,
taught by four teachers, two of whom are Chepang.

The Perceived Importance of Education

As the table below shows, the parent generation in Chautari is
largely uneducated.

Table 1: Chautari Parents and Schooling

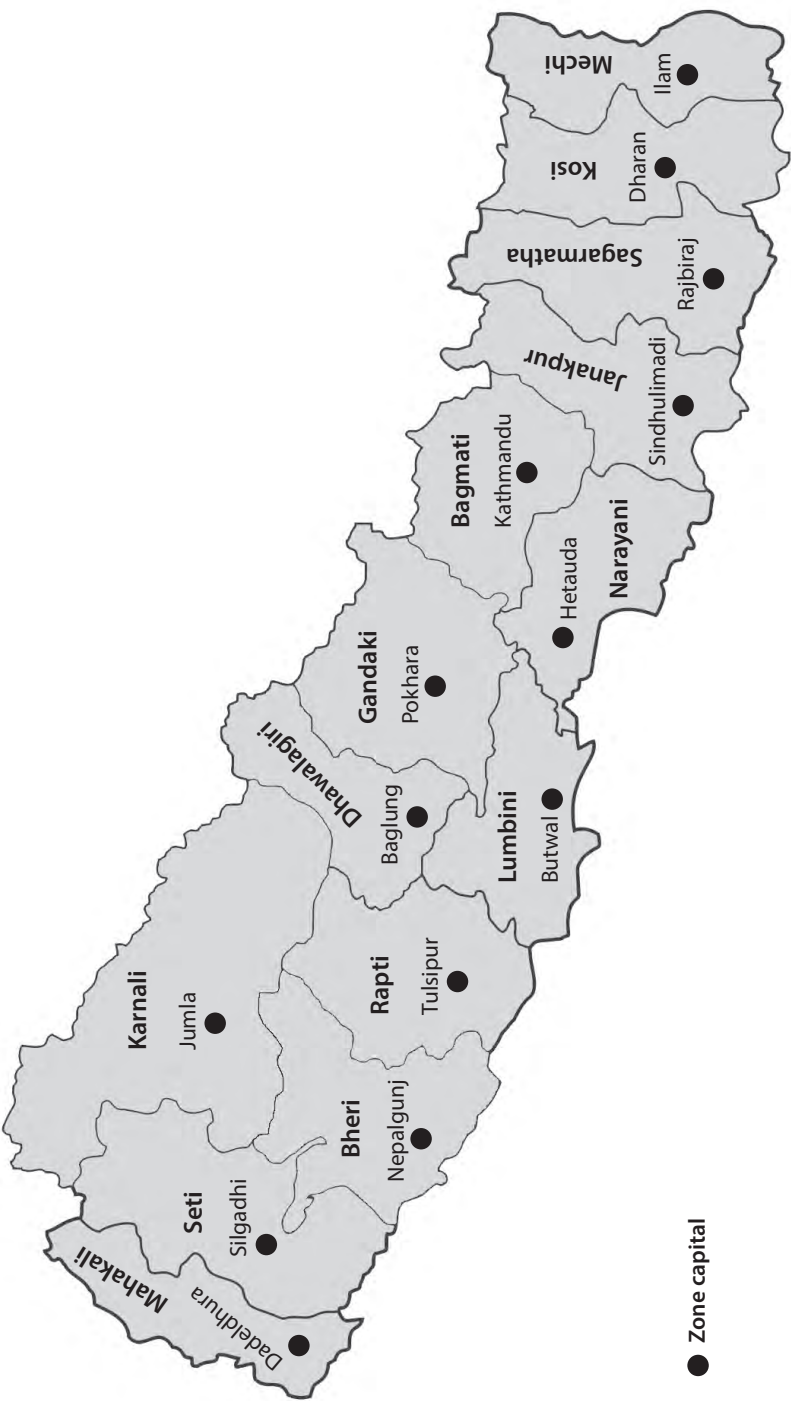| Years of Schooling	Number of Interviewees	Male, Female
0	25	9, 16
1 to 5	14	10, 4
6 to 9	4	3, 1
10+	0	0,0
Total	**43**	**22, 21**

Source: Fieldwork

Almost 60% of the adult population has not had any formal schooling, whereas only 9% of the population has had more than six years of formal schooling. There is also a gendered dimension to the findings: 13 of the 22 men interviewed had attended a school, whereas only 5 of the 21 women had any schooling. No one has passed the SLC, widely known as the 'iron gate' to further educational and employment opportunities for students in Nepal. However, the enrolment rate for school-aged children is almost 100%.

There are numerous facilitating circumstances for this generational transformation. For example, more schools are accessible to rural villages now, and primary education is practically free (Parent interviews 2010; NCA/CAED 2008). However, these external factors alone are not enough to explain why an uneducated generation is sending their children to school in such numbers. The impetus for education has come from the parent generation that missed out on schooling but does not want to deny their children the opportunities that they were not afforded. They blame their lack of education for being trapped into poverty, and are, thus, adamant about sending their children to school to break out of it.

Extreme poverty, lack of accessible schools, and ignorance were the most common impediments to education for the parent generation (Interviews 2010, NCA/CAED 2008). Some of the most common reasons for not attending school included not having the right clothes, not having easy access to schools beyond 3rd grade, and being shunned by parents in various ways if they tried to make it to school. While it is difficult to ascertain the exact circumstances they faced growing up, there is no doubt about their desire for education, and how desperate they are to right the wrong they faced as children, by sending their own children to school.

Chepangs, in general, attribute their poverty and general 'backwardness' to their lack of education (NCA/CAED 2008, 9), and this community was no different. They were resigned to their fate as farmers but felt that educated people could find a way out of this way of life. They harbour great hopes for their children, who they

Map 1: Political Map of Nepal

Zone capitals shown: Ilam (Mechi), Dharan (Kosi), Rajbiraj (Sagarmatha), Sindhulimadi (Janakpur), Kathmandu (Bagmati), Hetauda (Narayani), Pokhara (Gandaki), Baglung (Dhawalagiri), Butwal (Lumbini), Tulsipur (Rapti), Jumla (Karnali), Nepalgunj (Bheri), Silgadhi (Seti), Dadeldhura (Mahakali)

● Zone capital

Map 2: District Map of Nepal

(The four districts where Chepangs are concentrated have been highlighted, with Chitwan, the district where I carried out my fieldwork, highlighted in a darker shade.)
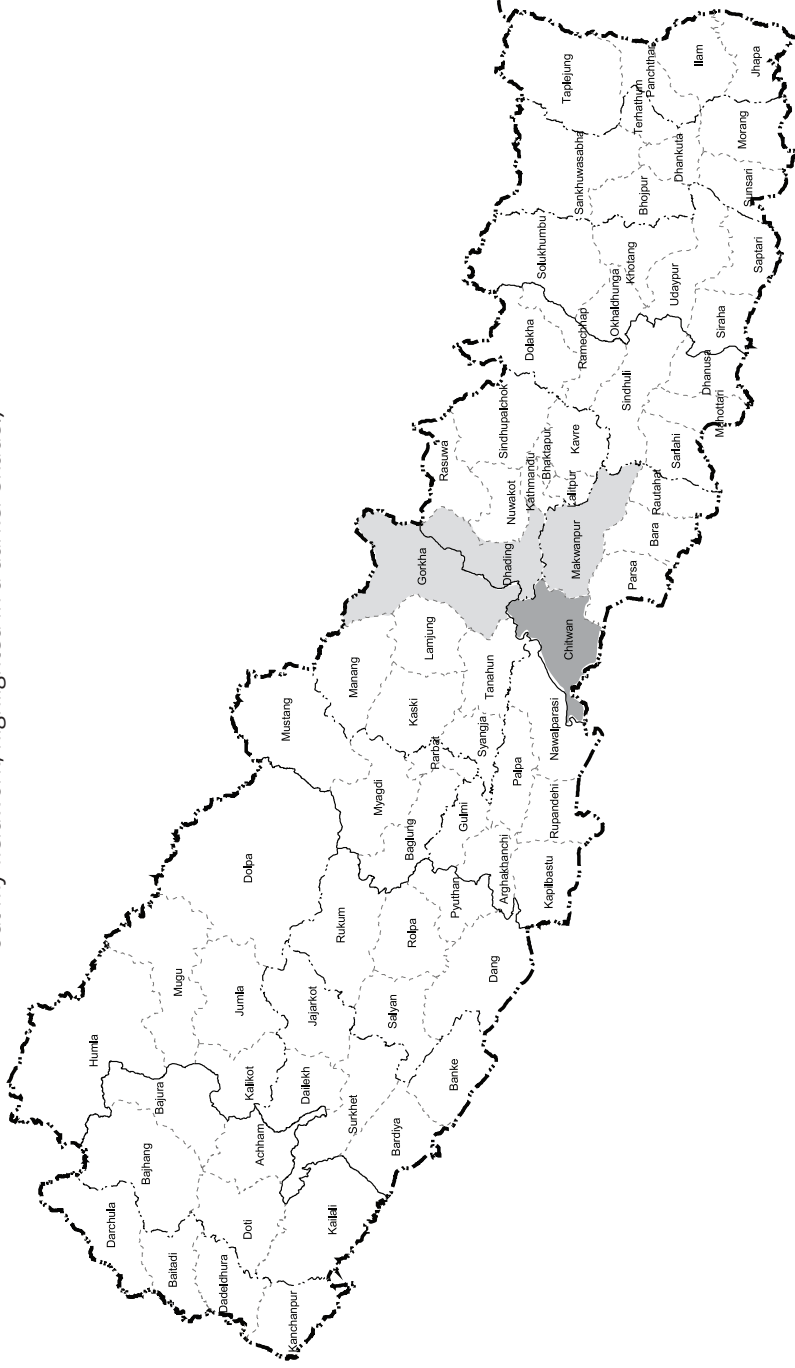
now send to school to be educated. As a mother summarised, 'the future depends on it [sending them to school]'.

The parent generation's commitment to their children's education was best embodied by what I observed closely at Ashish and Richa's house, where I lived over the course of my fieldwork.[4] Ashish and Richa have four children, all of whom are enrolled in schools across the country, with support from various individuals and organisations. Manisha, the eldest daughter, was studying in 9th grade in Karaiya, the nearest city (see later section). We got word that she was unwell and wanted to see her father. It was the middle of harvest season, and the family was already spread thin harvesting the maize, tending to the cattle, and planting new crops. They were worried about their daughter, but as Manisha made a partial recovery, they decided Ashish could not afford to take the two days off to see her. It was a painful, and yet necessary, decision.

However, just days later, the school sent a message to the parents of all the female students in the village to come to the city to sign a contract with Room to Read, the organisation supporting their education. Without so much as a discussion, both Ashish and Richa agreed that Ashish would go to the city immediately. They felt their situation was so dire they could not take time out to see their sick daughter, but when it came to a decision that involved her education, there was no hesitation. 'This is about her future, and we cannot play with that.' Indeed, at least one parent, mostly fathers, of all the female students at Karaiya from Chautari, got to the school.

The Chairman of Antyodaya confirmed to me that Chepang attitudes had changed over the decades. Whereas Chepang parents often 'ran away into the forest when we tried to enrol them' in the past, they now take an active interest in their children's formal education, and seem willing to make whatever contribution they can. The authority of the educational institution did not force

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4   All names in this paper have been changed.

them into submission even before; they choose to engage with the system now because they perceive education to be of value to them.

The Value of Education

Having established that Chautari residents place a high value on education, this section will explain why education has come to matter for the parent generation. The few Chepangs with even a few years of schooling have established themselves as part of the village elite, fueling Chepang perceptions of the importance of education.

Abhishesh is perhaps the most inquisitive person in Chautari. At 47, he is the chief breadwinner for his family of nine. His yearning for knowledge was obvious through the myriad questions he asked, and he attributed it to his time at Budhanilkantha School (BNKS). The school was built with British help in 1972 and has laid claim to the honorary title of the national school. Admission is through a merit-based national exam across the country, with the government providing about 25% of the seats as scholarship to deserving students who would not be able to afford it otherwise. As he recalls, Abhishesh's father chanced upon carrying some teachers' luggage as a porter many years ago and arranged for his son to appear for the exam. The exam was in Nepali, however, and as Abhishesh could not speak or write it at the time, he thinks the teachers must have felt sorry for his father and, so, admitted him. He studied there until the seventh grade, but had to leave BNKS after failing his exams.

Even if Abhishesh did not pass his seventh grade, he did not lack talent, as illustrated by this account from one of his classmates, Raju Tamot, currently a professor at Western Michigan University:

> Abhishesh was very fond of hunting, fishing, and gathering wild edible plants and tubers (...) He could reach the top of an almost impossible-to-climb tree in less than a minute, catch fish and crabs—and to our utter amusement, totally disable

the threatening claws of the crabs without ripping them apart! Unfortunately, he did not have many of the advantages we, the fortunate ones had, and he could not do well in his studies. Due to his inferior earlier schooling, he failed once in class 4 and again in class 7. It was then that he was expelled from the school.

(Personal correspondence, August 2010)

The failure to pass a formal exam, however, did not limit his quest for knowledge. Almost 30 years after being introduced to English, he still tried to converse in English with me. That he went to school, and a prestigious one at that, helped him get jobs outside his village instead of limiting him only to farm work. For example, he spent a few years working for the School of Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works (SEACOW), visiting villages across rural Nepal, providing basic healthcare and spreading information about plant nurseries. He attributes his years of schooling and his work-training as fundamental to his own capacity, and he can now 'think, speak properly and behave like a person'. He has used his skills well, for he owns a profitable plant nursery in his back garden. He owns the biggest house in Chautari and his family is also the only one there that can afford to 'indulge' in rice (instead of a maize-based diet) for a meal a day. In addition to his economic 'stability', he is also well-respected in the community. As he put it, 'I somehow got to go to school when no Chepang had gone… I got a job, I got some training, and it opened my eyes that I can do something with what I have. Even if it is not much, I know some things now…'. It appears that the exposure to education and subsequent training provided to Abhishesh were instrumental in making him a more confident and successful person.

The monthly meeting of the local Mothers' Association (MA), which controlled a substantial amount of capital in the village through membership dues, provided more evidence of how education matters in Chautari. There was general excitement amongst the group because the Chairwoman had convinced the district

Women Development Office to contribute Rs 8,000 (GBP 67.54) towards the Association's treasury. The committee wanted to elect a Treasurer to take responsibility for the finances. Ekta and Swechha emerged as potential candidates for the position. A discussion ensued over the qualifications necessary to hold the position. The general consensus seemed to be that the Treasurer had to be strong in speech and reliable in writing. They wanted the financial records to be well kept, and it was assumed that anyone who could not write was automatically disqualified. Ekta, who had no formal schooling and did not know how to write, was happy to withdraw from the race, and Swechha, who had four years of schooling and could apparently do basic arithmetic, was elected Treasurer unanimously. While Swechha might not have completed a degree, her ability to read and write at the basic level was thought to give her a clear advantage over everyone else, leading to her election.

These examples make clear that schooling has contributed to some people becoming part of the village elite; it then makes sense that Chepangs value education as the way out of their poverty. However, even some of these elite continue to struggle to feed their families throughout the year. There was also a sense of resignation at being trapped in the village, and I was constantly asked if I could facilitate a job opening for them in the cities. The mobility inertia that Hugh Wood (1965) described is true even today, as Chepangs only wish to change their residence in favour of urban areas. The elite cemented a place for themselves in the village, but that did not mean they were satisfied with where they were. Their status was as much a reflection of the deprivation and despair around them as of their own relative and modest gains in their society.

The Quality of Chepang Education

This section provides a comparative analysis of the quality of education available to Chepang students in varied contexts. This analysis is conducted at three levels: in Chautari; in Karaiya, a

nearby city with an exclusively Chepang boarding school; and nationally, where the recent boom in private schools has affected Chepang education.

Table 2: Chautari Children and Schooling

Description of Children (up to 18 years old)	Number of Children	Male, Female
Children under 3	11	3, 8
Children between 3 and 18 (school-age children)	65	25, 40
Total	**76**	**28, 48**

School-age children	Number of	Male, Female
Children at Sunshine School	26	7, 19
Children at Moonlight School	8	6, 2
Children at Antyodaya School	6	4, 2
Children studying elsewhere	6	2, 4
Children who are too young to walk to school	18	6, 12
Children not in school	1	0, 1
Total	**65**	**25, 40**

Source: Fieldwork

Accessibility

Even though many 3- to 6-year-olds are enrolled for school, 18 of the 65 school-age children do not attend because it is too far for them to walk each day. Most students do not begin primary school until they are about ten years old, and they often miss school due to inclement weather, or household chores. There is a clear link between education in early childhood development and better health, better jobs, and higher productivity (Van de Gaag 2002, Stash and Hannum 2001). Chepang children are losing a number of their productive schooling years because there is no school close enough to the village, and the problem is exacerbated by the rural topography, which makes movement difficult.

Teaching

Teacher attendance remains a serious concern in Chautari. Teachers often take turns to go to school; only one teacher is actually at the school to teach on any given day, and s/he just fills in the attendance forms for everyone else (Villager interviews; NCA/CAED 2008). A respondent at Antyodaya confirmed that some of the teachers from Chautari teach at private schools in Chitwan while also filing their attendance at government schools. The problem of teacher attendance is not unique to Chautari but is widespread in rural areas, including those with Chepang concentration (ibid.: 36; Ragsdale 1989). This behaviour necessarily affects Chepangs adversely, rendering their education irregular and ineffective. The teachers also become poor role models for the students, making drops in student attendance more likely.

Parent Involvement

Even if these young students were to get adequate supervision at school, their progress could be seriously challenged by the lack of academic support at home. The overwhelming majority of Chautari residents consider themselves uneducated so that, for them, education simply means sending their children to school. They do not know enough about their children's everyday activities at school, and are unable to supervise their academic work. While everyone wanted 'good education' for their children, when asked what that meant, the only response revolved around getting a school closer to the village. They did not associate education with anything but formal schooling. Teachers do not assign any homework for students to take home, while most students and their parents do not even know where their books or notebooks are.

Beyond Chautari: The Transition

The problems with education described so far are at village level, and they concern students in primary school. The poor quality of education in these formative years is no doubt crucial, but the difficulties do not end there. When they pass 5th grade, Chautari

children have to migrate to continue their education. The closest secondary school that conducts classes for up to 8th grade is more than three hours' walk each way, and so, beyond daily commuting distance. As such, Chepang parents have to bear a significant financial burden to be able to continue their children's schooling.

The parent generation is extremely worried about how they will manage to continue schooling for their children after 5th grade. As most government schools do not provide boarding facilities, they seek accommodation at the homes of relatives or rent a room close to the school. Some alternatives do exist – rare free hostels, or full-time work as domestic helpers – but these are not abundant enough to assuage Chepang worries about future education. The problems are exacerbated further when students finish 8th grade and are forced to move to the city to complete their secondary schooling. The *Education for All Chepang* report captures real-life experiences of many hardworking Chepang students who were unable to successfully make this transition and hence did not graduate from high school (NCA/CAED 2008).

Antyodaya: The Chepang School

Shree Antyodaya Janajati Awasiya Vidyalaya (Shree Antyodaya Indigenous Boarding School) is located in Karaiya, Chitwan and provides an opportunity for Chepang schooling in the city. The school was founded in 2000 as the first residential school exclusively for Chepang students. Unlike the government schools in the village, Antyodaya ensures regular teaching and provides free room and board to all students, guaranteeing two meals each day. At present, the school offers classes up to 8th grade and provides room and board to students who continue to 9th and 10th grade. Although accurate data was not available, it is estimated that about 400 students have attended Antyodaya since it was established. The ripple effects of the school have touched not only these students but also their parents, families, and wider communities. The parents in Chautari and teachers at Antyodaya attested that the students have become a source of positive energy in their villages

during vacations as they help teach their friends and siblings who are studying in the same grade in the government schools.

The school accommodates about 200 students in any given year and is considered a beacon for Chepang education. Yet some serious issues with Chepang education remain. Comparing the enrolment rates for 2009 and 2010, the graduation rate from 1st to 5th grade is fairly consistent but the number of students that pass on or continue to a higher grade seems to drop significantly from 6th grade onwards (see table). Of the ten 10th graders who appeared for SLC in 2009, only 3 passed the exam. The general consensus among the senior students and teachers at Antyodaya is that the increased familial responsibilities and progressively more difficult course material the students face as they get promoted to a higher grade contributes to this decline. At the same time, the school was unable to admit a new intake of 1st graders in 2010 because of financial constraints, and this accounts for the fall in overall enrolment from 2009 to 2010.

Problems Personified

I was able to find out a lot about the quality of education at Antyodaya when I offered to provide 'substitute teaching' services. I was shocked at the disparity between the actual and expected standards in all the classes.

The 8th grade experience encapsulates my stay at the school. The teacher had just taught a section on rationalization in mathematics. This was one of four sub-sections of about 20 chapters that the class had to cover over the course of the year. Over the next two weeks, I took seven fifty-minute lessons with these students. I also encouraged the students to meet me in the teachers' quarters after school for more help with the exercise; at least half the class took me up on the offer daily. Yet, in two weeks, only two of the 25 students could complete the exercise to a passable standard. When I explained the problems, they nodded in excited agreement and claimed that they knew how to solve them, but when they had to solve identical problems, they were completely lost, over and

over again. Although they got better with time, they do not ordinarily get to spend two weeks on a chapter; they get one day, or two if they are lucky. When I sat in on their regular Math class when the teacher was back, I noticed the same pattern in motion. The teacher would teach the lesson, ask the students to solve some questions, and when they failed to solve them, he would show them how to do so, before he was forced to move on. The lesson would have been given but it could not be learnt. This happened in practically every class.

The lack of financial resources has been a major issue leading to this stark situation. While the school's expenses have increased over the years, its sources of funding have not kept pace. A real consequence of increasing prices and uncertain funding has meant that, for the first time, Antyodaya did not enrol any new students this past year. The hopes and dreams of many families across the region rest on the opportunity to send at least one of their children to Antyodaya. An entire batch of Chepang children has lost this crucial opportunity, seriously affecting their educational opportunities.

Antyodaya is also unable to provide students with a balanced diet and an enabling environment. Students are forced to eat rice and potato soup for every meal through the year. About 75 students share a room and most students do not own reasonable mattresses or blankets. Teacher salaries of NRS 5,500 a month are simply not competitive enough to retain the best and most experienced teachers for long. The school can also only offer classes up to 8th grade. The school provides room and board to Antyodaya students who continue their education to 9th and 10th grade (and 11th and 12th grade as well for girls, because of Room to Read's support), but students have to enrol elsewhere to complete the final two years of secondary school and take their SLC exam. Although the school administration would like to expand to provide teaching up to SLC standard, the constraints discussed above have meant that they have not been able to do so yet. The transitional difficulties of moving from the village to the city are largely

Table 4: Enrolment at Antyodaya for the Last Two Years

2009				2010			
Class	Girls	Boys	Total	Class	Girls	Boys	Total
1	0	20	20	1	0	0	0
2	18	7	25	2	0	18	18
3	5	9	14	3	18	9	27
4	4	10	14	4	6	8	14
5	13	13	26	5	3	10	13
6	10	16	26	6	13	13	26
7	17	10	27	7	9	10	19
8	9	13	22	8	17	8	25
9	5	16	21	9	8	10	18
10	4	6	10	10	4	14	18
Total	85	120	205	Total	78	100	178

mitigated at Antyodaya but these challenges return when students have to quickly adapt to new schools and new systems while also preparing for the national exams. The results of students from Antyodaya who have enrolled in 9th and 10th grade in other schools are telling: only five of the thirty-six have passed all subjects in the latest exam, while at least half of the rest have failed three or more subjects. These results present two possibilities: students are not coping well with the transition or they are not being prepared well enough in the first place but are still allowed to pass and move on to higher grades. It is possible that both factors are significant: a new environment is bound to exert different pressures *and* the financial constraints at the school provide a strong incentive to pass students, so that they can continue to take new students each year. Either way, after over a decade of schooling, an overwhelming majority of students continue to fail the SLC.

The Rise of Private Schools

The rapid rise of private schools in Nepal provides another avenue for Chepang education, although the price of such education and

location of these schools present special challenges for Chepang enrolment.

The contrast between public and private schools is stark. Serious problems concerning poor physical infrastructure and teacher resources, outdated and unfriendly textbooks, exacting examinations, and social discrimination undermine educational gains in the village context throughout South Asia and the developing world (PROBE 1999). Drop-out rates remain high, and poor students and village students fare worse than the better off and urban students, India Human Development Survey (IHDS) 2010. Private schools establish a more concrete customer-based relationship with parents and students so they guarantee higher teacher attendance and presence, better infrastructure, and boast more favourable teacher-student rations (ibid., 103), even if their pedagogical instruments are not necessarily any better than those of public schools.

These private school advantages come with their own costs.[5] Private schools remain largely in the urban domain and inaccessible to most Chepangs. Even if private schools were available, which they are not in Chautari, they are far more expensive than public schools (PROBE 1999). Already, private schools serve as gatekeepers of privilege: only those with the necessary economic muscle can pursue the glories associated with better quality education. Yet, it is not only rich parents who send their children to private schools; even poor parents make great sacrifices to send their children to these schools in the hope of a better future. This strategy provides an escape route to some, while condemning the rest of the populace to government schools. Less than one percent of Chepangs from Chautari had access to private schools, and even those who had this access only spent the last two years (9th and 10th grade) in these schools, as a matter of last resort, since Antyodaya was commissioned only to teach till the 8th grade. That they meet the minimum requirements of attendance, infrastructure,

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5   For a more critical analysis of private schools, including the political contestations associated with them, see Caddell 2006, Graner 2006, and Kantipur Reports (Various)

resources, and greater personal attention to students exudes the impression of better quality education in private schools.

The rise of private schools can actively undermine public schooling. As the confidence level around government education has diminished, anyone who can come close to affording private education for their children opts for this route. When parents from a relatively privileged background swap government schools for private ones, there is even less parental pressure to improve government schools (PROBE 1999). The higher fees at private schools afford them the luxury of higher teacher salaries; there is, thus, a strong push away from public and a pull towards private schools for teachers as well. Indeed, Sunshine, Moonlight, and Antyodaya School were dealing with the repercussions of losing teachers constantly to private schools in Chitwan and elsewhere. The rapid increase in the culture of private schools has often led to even lower quality education for most Chepangs who are resigned to failing government schools in Nepal.

The Poisoned Chalice: Expectations and Outcomes

It is no surprise that Chepangs value education and pursue it with vigour when the whole nation has been captured by its alleged potential to change lives for the better. Chepangs are increasingly sending their children to school, despite the challenges in doing so. They invest their limited resources to facilitate their children's education because they appear convinced of education's ability to transform their future. It was clear in Chautari that although most of the parent generation had not been afforded the opportunity to pursue schooling, those villagers who had even a few years of schooling had established themselves as the core of the village elite. These villagers were not only economically well off but were also endowed with social and cultural capital that they could use to cement their position as the local elite.

Yet, this rosy picture tells only half the story. Chepangs are increasingly sending their children to school, but the schools they go to, the education they receive, and the environment in which

they learn remain far from ideal. By simply sending their children to school, the parents believe they are educating them, without really recognising how or what these children learn. At the village level, schools are far and few between, resources scarce, teaching standards low, and parent involvement negligible. It may be difficult to specify exactly what 'quality education' entails – further theoretical and empirical research is required to bolster this definition – but the present cannot be this. The situation is comparatively better at the regional level, particularly because of the presence of a free boarding school that caters exclusively to Chepang communities. However, even here, severe financial constraints have led to the forced exclusion of students, an inadequate environment for learning, difficulties with teacher retention, and problems with transition to higher education. As a result, Chepang students are simply going through the rituals of schooling. Most students do not pass regional and national exams; even those who do pass get credentials rather than gain mastery of knowledge. The pass rate for SLC for Chepangs is extremely low, and the transition rate from SLC to higher education is even lower. Third and fourth grade students in Chautari are unable to recite or recognise English or Nepali alphabets, and many ninth and tenth grade Chepang students in Karaiya are barely able to solve third grade questions. Even if they finish their schooling, the opportunities available are extremely scarce. After all, there are only so many jobs in the cities and the emphasis on development and modernisation in Nepal has not been supplemented by industrialisation to facilitate further employment opportunities for all educated people (Pigg 1992, Liechty 2003). Jeffrey (2010) and Katz (2004), among others, have documented vividly the plight of the so-called 'educated unemployed' in northern India and Sudan; the same dynamics are emerging in Nepal as well.

The difficulties for Chepang students to master knowledge, or even gain credentials for that matter, could seriously undermine their future prospects. It is unlikely that they will gain meaningful employment in the urban economy, which could force them

to return to their villages. Manual labour is seen as low-level work that educated people do not enjoy and are forced to take up in the villages only when their city aspirations do not materialise. This is especially true in Nepal, where 'village life' has been posited in 'counter-distinction' to development, so to return to the village would be to become undeveloped again (Pigg 1992, 503). If forced to return, even if they were to 'succeed', they would still not have achieved 'development'. Education allegedly promises Chepangs the possibility of upward social mobility, but given the current state of education they receive, both the perception and possibility of such mobility could be seriously restricted.

These findings appear contradictory: on the one hand, even a few years of schooling can help people cement their place as part of the village elite but, on the other hand, the quality of education is so bad that Chepang students are unlikely to gain much from their schooling. However, these findings should be understood in context. First, while a few years of schooling has helped establish *some* Chepangs as part of the village elite, their improved position is still relative only to the rest of the village; their socio-economic status is still low in absolute terms. For example, Abhishesh has a large house and can feed his family rice, instead of maize, one meal a day; this differentiates him as elite only because the rest of the village cannot afford that. Second, education made a significant difference in older generations because most people had no education, so even a few years of schooling still differentiated them from the rest of the population. The younger generation, however, has embraced schooling as a norm, so simply going to school is not going to differentiate them from the rest of the village.

In his book *Social Limits to Growth*, Fred Hirsch (1977) argued that the value one gets from education is also dependent on the educational level of the rest of society. As more people get more education, its value decreases. He likens getting an education to owning a car; while the earliest owners got the most benefit out of it because they could drive freely in roads with no traffic, as cars have become more commonplace, the roads are now congested.

Education is restricted not only by the physical limitations of providing it to more people, but also by the absorptive limits on its use. There are social limits to consumption beyond which the social environment cannot cope unless the quality of the product deteriorates.[6] Hirsch's analysis thus blurs the distinction between private and public goods, whereby pursuing education can be a personal preference, albeit with public consequences. In essence, Hirsch is expanding the notion of diminishing returns to the public sphere: as more people pursue education individually, *ceteris paribus,* the marginal utility of education decreases after a certain point. Education contributes not only in absolute terms, leading to the mastery of knowledge, but also in relative terms, providing a basis for differentiation in the population (Hirsch 1977, Dore 1976). At the same time, however, when certain people get benefits in society because of their education, as did the Chautari elite, there are greater demands for more education to promote equality. 'Diploma disease' is likely to be the outcome, with more people pursuing higher education to differentiate themselves from the rest; only, 'the rest' are likely to pursue the same strategy.

This race to the top through education is not only localised to Chautari or the Chepangs but is ongoing at the national and international level. The spread of public education has diluted a critical avenue for differentiation as more and more people have access to schooling. Private schools have increasingly stepped in to provide further avenues for differentiation, and it is this development that most threatens the quality of rural education. The vast difference in the experience of educated and uneducated people has been widely assumed and documented, but the rise of private schooling has allowed for further differentiation within the educated. This rise has led to a perverse selection mechanism, whereby only those students who cannot afford private schooling, and mostly those teachers who cannot find gainful employment in private schools,

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6   In his analysis, Hirsh considers only the instrumental value of education. While this is problematic (see Dreze and Sen 2002), it is consistent with Chepang expectations from education and development: tangible 'things' (Pigg 1992).

are stuck in non-functional government schools. The poorest and most marginalised are then also the ones most likely to endure the lowest-quality of education, which in turn traps them in their poverty and perpetuates marginalisation. While all private schools might not provide good quality education, the perception that they are better than public schools helps differentiate their students from the rest, providing more avenues for gainful employment, greater freedom, and empowerment. Education, then, is not enough; it is the quality of education on offer and access to such education that determine whether freedom from or reproduction of existing caste and class inequalities results. As Chepangs pursue more years of schooling, then, they still remain at the bottom of the education ladder, as the whole ladder moves further up.

It remains to be seen how Chepang perceptions will change with time to accommodate a new meaning of education where schooling does not automatically equate to literacy or numeracy, so those who have actually acquired the mastery of knowledge, and not just credentials, are differentiated. In the meantime, not only is differentiation more likely during mass schooling but, given the rise of private schools and deteriorating quality of public schooling available to them, Chepang graduates are bound to increasingly find themselves at the wrong end of the differentiation spectrum.

This nexus is especially poignant given Nepal's recent political turmoil. The monarchy-led Panchayat era (1960-1990) development state (Gellner 2001) followed by multi-party democracy and high literacy led to high expectations for 'development'. Various governments have introduced half-hearted reforms that raise expectations without changing the outcomes, especially because the plans and policies on paper are not implemented but subverted (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2008, 74). Nepal is still recovering from the decade-long civil war fuelled by the frustration caused by 'high expectations, deep disappointments' (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2004); the same nexus emerging in education is of particular concern.[7]

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7   The 'youth bulge' theory makes a similar case, arguing that raised expectations combined with growing numbers of young people entering a constrained job

Conclusion

A growing chasm is emerging between expectations of education and its likely outcome. The power of education as a tool—*the* tool— for development is visible in some ways, but, because of the low quality of education, it remains unlikely that these freedoms will be realised for most marginalised communities. At a theoretical level, these findings contribute towards mediating broader debates on the role of education. As more people participate in formal education, schooling can have diminishing returns; consequently, it is not enough for differentiation as these communities remain at the bottom of the ladder (Hirsch 1977). The dual forces of better quality education and higher credentialing are now necessary to set oneself apart from the rest (Dore 1976), but the Chepangs are falling behind on both counts. Formal schooling should be viewed holistically, taking into consideration the whole milieu of teacher qualifications and standards, enrolment and attendance rates, and the learning environment for children (Carney 2003). When Chepang and other students from marginalised communities only have access to lower quality education while 'the rising middle class of Nepal (i.e. predominantly the same upper caste groups…) can now redefine and reorder schooling in ways that reinforce historic power differentials and socio-economic distinctions' (ibid., 95), they are unlikely to make significant progress. If students continue to fall on the wrong side of the differentiation spectrum, the difference between expectation and outcome is likely to cause frustration and dissatisfaction among the Chepangs; with serious negative consequences (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2008; Jeffrey et al. 2008; Bhattachan 2007, 2008).

Further research can bolster these findings, but this thesis sets the platform for some policy recommendations. In line with the UN's development goals, national and international actors spend significant energy and resources on enrolment programmes. In

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market contribute towards violent conflict. See Beehner 2007, Urdal 2006, and Fuller and Pitts 1990. Also see Shields and Rappleye 2008 on the different faces of education in relation to conflict in Nepal.

evaluating these programmes, quantitative data – emphasising enrolment, retention, and graduation rates – is often privileged over qualitative inquiries. This thesis, however, formulates a case for a more subtle and nuanced approach, focusing not only on *how many* but also on *what* graduates actually learn. The government has failed to enforce policies to either support and improve public schools or to monitor the rapid rise and conduct of private schools. As they stand, education policies assume schooling facilitates upward mobility and 'development'. Many of these policies, however, end up perpetuating and exaggerating the plight of the poor without following up or commenting on what happens to them after they leave formal schooling. There is an urgent need for new policies that are more realistic in their expectations and mindful of the need for better quality education for the poor and the marginalised to address these serious concerns.

In this context, education has raised Chepang expectations without providing them the skills to facilitate those outcomes. The quality of education available to most Chepangs does not further greater freedoms but, given the educational opportunities available to other communities, differentiates them adversely, denying them a more competitive edge through education. Under these circumstances, upward mobility seems unlikely for most Chepang students, and education has, thus, become a poisoned chalice.

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The interviews in Chautari were carried out in July and August 2010. All names have been anonymised (except for public figures, who have been marked by *) to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

The children listed in **bold** are those who have already been noted in connection with their other parent. The Chautari interviewees are listed according to the order in which they were interviewed, rather than being grouped by family, as a further aid towards anonymity.

M= Male, F= Female, D= Deceased.

Sagun's (Interviewee 39) responses are not credible. He claimed to be 25, for instance, even though he looked at least 50 and his eldest son, by his own account, was 22.

In Chautari:

Interviewee	Alias	Age	Sex	Years of schooling	Children
1	Richa	35-36	F	0	1M, 3F
2	Aakash	45	M	2	3M, 3F
3	Ekta	45	F	0	2M, 5F
4	Ashish	42	M	3	**1M, 3F**
5	Abhishesh	47	M	9	**2M, 5F**
6	Abhay	56-57	M	0	3M, 3F
7	Kanchan	29	F	0	2M, 1F
8	Renu	25-30	F	0	1M, 3F, 2D
9	Anuva	40	F	0	**3M, 3F**
10	Sneha	19	F	5	1F
11	Swechha	26	F	4	**3M, 3F**
12	Sampreeti	25	F	0	2M, 2F
13	Sonu	35	F	0	1M, 5F
14	Shraddha	21	F	7	1M, 1F
15	Drona	28	M	5	2M, 1F
16	Aabhushan	32	M	8	3M, 2F
17	Shikha	34	F	0	2M, 2F
18	Basistha	30	M	5	**2M, 2F**
19	Pooja	30	F	0	**3M, 2F**
20	Dinesh	31	M	5	**2F**
21	Kunal	22	M	8	1F
22	Nirdesh	60	M	0	2M, 3F, 1D
23	Narayan	23	M	5	2M
24	Pratapi	21	F	4	**2M**

25	Sabita	25	F	0	4F
26	Prashant	26	M	0	**4F**
27	Bigya	25	F	3	1M, 1F
28	Parag	23	M	4	**1M, 1F**
29	Sujata	40	F	0	2M, 4F
30	Prabesh	57	M	0	**2M, 4F**
31	Prayat	33	M	2	1M, 2F
32	Nirmala	60	F	0	1M, 2F, 6D
33	Rajesh	32	M	0	2M, 1F
34	Rachana	N/A	F	0	**2M, 1F**
35	Ritesh	44	M	3	**1M, 3F, 2D**
36	Suman	77	M	0	13D
37	Sumit	64-65	M	0	1F
38	Anju	50	F	0	**1F**
39	Sagun	25	M	0	2M, 1F
40	Shilu	22	F	0	1M, 1F
41	Suresh	35	M	0	**2M, 1F**
42	Sunil	35	M	2	1M, 3F
43	Heema	39	F	0	**2M, 3F, 1D**

Other Interviews in Karaiya and Kathmandu:

Interviewee	Position	Affiliation	Interview Date
Keshab Man Shakya*	Development Practitioner	UNDP, Helvetas, SNV-Nepal	July 13, 2010
Saurav	Teacher	Sunshine School	August 2010
Deepesh	Teacher	Antyodaya School	August 22, 2010
Sandhya	Teacher	Antyodaya School	August 23, 2010
Smriti	Liaison	Room to Read	August 23, 2010
Dilip Dhungana*	Chairman	Antyodaya School	August 25, 2010
Teeka Bhattarai*	Chair	Centre for Educational Policies and Practices	September 28, 2010

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The Historical Development of Nepali Magazines (1899-1960)

ANANTA KOIRALA, DEEPAK ARYAL & SHAMIK MISHRA

> For the development or progress of the language, magazines espousing both ideologies must forge unity. Class distinction exists in the society, but there is no such thing as a class language and there can not be so. *The exploiters and the exploited, both gain from the prosperity of the language. There can be language differentiation even in a classless society.* However, the rules that apply for class differentiation in the society are not applicable in case of the language.
>
> —Sharma, 2009 BS, emphasis added

Introduction

THERE is a striking similarity between the aforementioned quote by Shyam Prasad Sharma and the reasons and the subject matter covered by the magazines published before 1960. In other words, for the majority of the magazines published in that period, the general point of consensus was the need to develop and promote literature and culture, and the common objective of publication was to promote and develop the Nepali language. Though Banaras was a hub for Nepali language publications, the focus was mainly on literary publications, with occasional publications on religion, hagiography, etc. Hence, the need for magazines and periodicals for the promotion of the Nepali language-culture was evidently felt. Therefore, it was around this same period that the publication of specialised magazines started. The production, publication, and distribution of magazines and periodicals drew special interest

as they were thought to be the most effective medium to promote Nepali language, literature, culture, and nationalism.

This study will elucidate on the growth of these two groups of magazines that played an active role in the promotion and propagation of Nepali language, literature, nationalism, and culture. It will also explain as to how the independence movement and the Hindi language movement in India influenced the Nepali-language magazine journalism, which had its beginnings in Banaras. It will further touch upon related aspects such as the subject area of the magazines; the regional, ethnic, and gender backgrounds of the writers, publishers and editors involved, in addition to a discussion on the specialised or thematic magazines.

The notices, appeals, advertorials, and editorials published in the magazines during the period under review are used as primary sources of evidence in this paper. The first part of the paper will discuss on the features of a 'magazine' in the context of the world and Nepal, while the second part will deal with the birth of Nepali-language magazines and the Indian nationalist movement's influence upon them. The third part will dwell upon the control of magazine publication in the hands of particular communities, the fourth part will provide some examples of the reasons stated for the publication of these magazines, and the fifth will mention the contributions of specialised magazines.

The 59 magazines (13 thematic and 46 other magazines) published between *Indu* (1917 BS), and *Upanyas Tarangini* (1959 BS) all housed at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP), form the basis for this study. The study also incorporates the publishers' reasons for the publication of the magazine, with particular emphasis given to the editorials, appeals, and advertorials published on the first and last issues.

Features of a Magazine

Before we go any further, it is imperative to define a 'magazine' in the Nepali context. To distinguish a magazine from other periodicals, certain features such as content, size, page, design, periodicity,

among others can be used. For the purposes of this study, the following have been taken into consideration to compare the features of a 'magazine' in relation to a 'broadsheet' and a 'tabloid': smaller size; more pages; presence of some sort of binding; seriousness of the subject matter, elaborate articles and news; better quality paper; the use of a better quality or a different 'cover page'; periodicity of the publication ranging from weekly, fortnightly, to monthly, bimonthly up to even annual; portable; and focusing on a particular (specialised) subject matter or audience.

The Review (Daniel Defoe, 1704), published in the English language, is considered to be the first magazine in the world (Gamble & Gamble 1989, 127). This four-paged magazine was published three times a week in the beginning, but was later published only twice a week. With its focus on literature and literary criticism, the magazine gave less priority to news, a characteristic that can also be seen in the early Nepali-language magazines.

In Nepal, it is difficult to define a 'magazine' based on any one of the aforementioned parameters owing to their variance. For instance, the size, designs, and total number of pages of *Sundari* (1963 BS), *Chandra* (1971 BS), *Chandrika* (1972 BS), and *Sharada* (1991 BS) have differed several times. In particular, the first issue of *Janayug* fortnightly (2009 BS) had eight pages, while the second and third issues had 13 and 24 pages respectively. By the fifth issue, however, the total number of pages had shrunk back again to eight. Variations in color, graphics, paper quality, etc. can also be attributed to the technical and logistical limitations of the times.

Moreover, if 'mouthpiece' publications – biannual, annual, or irregular – are also to be included as 'magazine', the list can run really long. Therefore, the *Gorkha Sansar*, the mouthpiece of the Gorkha League, despite having several features of a magazine, has not been included in this study. Similarly, mouthpiece publications like *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan Patrika* (1998 BS), *Chhatra* (2007 BS), *Indradhanu* (2008 BS), *Vidyarthi* (2009 BS), *Sagarmatha* (2016 BS) have been excluded.

Regarding the subject matters covered by the early magazines,

The Tatler (1709) published by Richard Steely, and *The Spectator* (1711) published by Joseph Edison, covered few serious issues whereas humour- and entertainment-related contents, essays, and short stories found more space. A magazine generally published matters related to entertainment, literature, and other contents, and news-related contents were few (Gamble & Gamble 1989, 128). In the case of Nepal, where most of the magazines were short-lived, literature was the subject of choice. So much so that even the magazines that started out as specialised and dedicated to a different sector like industry, women, among others eventually drifted from their original focus and veered towards literature. The magazines that were started for 'the service of language and literature', however, are observed to not have deviated from their objective. However, in mentioning this, it is equally necessary to also acknowledge that publications like *Balsakha*, *Danphechari*, *Nepal Siksha: Aadhar Siksha*, and *Nepal Ayurved* monthly, were largely successful in maintaining their initial objectives.

In the publication sphere outside of Nepal, the trend of specialised magazines targeted at a particular audience appears to have started only after the mid-nineteenth century, a century and half after the first magazine was published. In the case of Nepali language, however, magazines were started with a particular audience in mind from their inception itself. For instance, early magazines like *Sundar*, *Madhavi*, *Chandra*, *Janmabhumi*, and *Adarsha* had literary focus, whereas magazines like *Mahila*, *Udyog*, *Balbalika*, and *Krishi* were theme-based.

Udyog monthly (1992 BS), despite mentioning that 'the magazine has been born to disseminate knowledge on industry and commerce among all the brothers and sisters, and in the service of the country, countrymen and the king', seems to have given ample space to literature (Shrestha 2059 BS, 146-160). Likewise, *Jagaran* weekly (2007 BS, Volume 1, No. 1), despite having an objective 'to inspire the citizens with modern literature and arts by introducing international arts and literature', appears to have been influenced by politics as evident by the examples of political articles

published in it. Further, the publication uses adjectives such as 'illustrated', 'entertainer', 'only', and 'colorful' after its title. In 1923, the now famous *Time* magazine, appeared as a news magazine, and had achieved significant commercial success by 1930. In Nepal's case, magazines like *Yugvani* (2004 BS), *Keto* (2010 BS), *Sewa* (2008 BS), *Janayug* (2009 BS), *Agradoot* (2010 BS) etc. were dedicated to news and analyses. However, they could neither survive long nor attain commercial success, both of which could be related.

An examination of the editorials, publisher's notes, advertorials, and appeals published in the Nepali-language magazines up to 1960 help to understand the reasons why they could not find commercial success, This examination revealed a lack of subscribers/patrons, very few advertisements, difficulties in distribution, and catering and responsive only to a particular community as the main reasons. Almost all the magazines discontinued after a period. Although a few periodicals like *Sharada* and *Uday* had a longer run, the process of the old magazines dying out and the launch of new ones went on.

Background of Nepali-language Magazines and India

In the decade of 1870, when Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-85), Hindi litterateur and activist, intensified content generation, publication, and distribution of Hindi-language books, periodicals, and other materials in an effort to cultivate public opinion against the ruling British, Banaras became the foremost destination for the promotion and propagation of Hindi language and literature. Harishchandra, with help from allies who supported the Hindi language movement and opposed the British rule, gave lectures, wrote essays, stories, poems, plays, satires, all linking Hindi language with Indian nationalism and as a tool against the British. This period later came to be known as Bharatendu Era (Orsini 2004; Sharma 2006).

These activities by Harishchandra not only increased the readership of the Hindi language but also inspired people to write

in the language and several new writers and activists were subsequently born out of this (Orsini 2004). One such name was Ram Krishna Verma (Khatri) who dedicated his life to the advancement and promotion of the Hindi language. Verma, under the inspiration, guidance and help of Harishchandra, not only opened a bookshop, but in 1884 also established a printing press by the name 'Bharat Jeevan Press' (Orsini 2004, Sharma 2006). The lore of Motiram Bhatta (1923-53 BS) inspiring Verma to open a printing press for the promotion of Gorkha Bhasa is more popular in Nepal.

This Bharat Jeevan Press (BJP) is said to have contributed to the production of Nepali-language materials. However, out of the 256 titles of books published by the BJP, 119 of them were in Braj Bhasa—a dialect of the Hindi language used for writing poems, ghazals, and other literature, that became popular in the Banaras region. Only a dozen books published with Ram Krishna Verma as publisher were in the Nepali language, which cannot be considered a significant number when compared to the 256 titles. Besides, publishers like Babu Madhav Prasad Sharma, Punya Prasad Upadhyay, Homnath Kedarnath, Harihar Sharma, Vishvaraj Harihar and printers like Gorkha Pustakalaya, Sarvahitaishi Company, Prabhakari Printing Company, Hitachintan Press have also published/printed quite a volume of Nepali language materials. Among these, publications like *Upanyas Tarangini, Sundari,* and *Janayug* were printed by Hitachintak Press, and *Madhavi* by Prabhavkari Printing Press.

It is essential to mention the writers, publishers, and activists working in the Hindi language movement because the movement was initiated more with the objective to obtain national language status and promote nationalism, than to make financial profit. All this had a direct influence upon the Nepali language publishing, as Bhatta was collaborating with Verma in the publishing sector, and there was a proliferation of Hindi language materials in Banaras both around the same time. Verma gradually expanded his area of publication that had primarily included *bhajans* to grammar and

appeals for saving the cow. With such diverse volume of publication, Hindi became the common language of Banaras (Sharma 2006) .

With the likes of the Harishchandra, Devaki Nandan Khatri, Ram Krishna Verma, Kattik Prasad Khatri espousing the Hindi language as a medium against the British rule, and a tool for the promotion of Indian nationalism as well as some financial gain, it would have been only natural for the Nepalis witnessing this milieu to be inspired or influenced by the phenomenon to try something similar with the Gorkha Bhasa. As a result, this not only triggered a publication spur consisting of magazines and periodicals in the Gorkha Bhasa but also helped the emergence of the campaign of construction, reconstruction, and propagation of the myths of national personalities. Thus began the promotion of notions on Nepali nationalism, *Bir* history, and Nepali identity (Onta 1996, pp 37-76).

The 'development, promotion, and progess of Nepali language' started to appear as a common theme for all the magazines published thereafter in the Gorkha Bhasa/Nepali language. One of the most common objectives was 'to provide information on the Nepali and Gorkha language, culture and history, and create awareness about the same'. The group that continued to be active in the production, distribution, and consumption of Nepali language contents consisted mainly of individuals who were either educated or still students in Banaras. The Nepali language campaign was bolstered by the fact that this group belonged to a particular community and subscribed to a similar cultural ideology. As a result, this group held dominance not only over the content generation (writing and editing) and distribution, but the subject matter and basic agenda as well.

Magazines: Under Whose Control?

Chalmers (2002) has described in detail the roles and the efforts made by the publishers of the Nepali language materials to increase readership. He further notes that such publishing houses had an

important role, from a cultural and political perspective, for the newly born awareness on 'Nepali' or 'Nepali language', despite them also working for power and profit.

Though the early magazines did not match the financial gains made by books at the time, their publishers, editors, and writers did experience an improvement in their societal status as respected and accepted personalities. They also exercised their powers towards decision-making pertaining to publication content. Citing Tanka Subba (1992), Chalmers (2002) further writes that the periodicals and magazines published till 1997 BS was under the control of Bahuns and Newars, the communities with better cultural and educational reach than other Nepali communities. However, even 20 years after, that is around 2017 BS, particular communities still held sway in editing, writing, and publishing (Aryal 2068 BS, 134-138). If we are to look into the 59 publications categorised as magazines, the editors are either Bahuns or Newars, with a few exceptions such as Keshar Bahadur of *Janamitra*, Birendra of *Suskera*, SL Wangdel (*Prabhat*), Sanumati Rai (*Naba Prabhat*), Ashok Kumar Das Gupta (*Khetipati*), and Ananda Singh Thapa (*Jagrat Gorkha*).

Similar near-complete monopoly of these very communities can be observed in the literary magazines as well. The writings of Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Siddhi Charan Shrestha, Madhav Prasad Ghimire, Kedar Man Byathit, and Bal Krishna Sama, among others, have been published in both kinds of magazines. These litterateurs had a strong presence even in specialised magazines dedicated to other subjects (Aryal 2068 BS: 134-138). This is also the case in editing and publishing. For instance, Matri Prasad Sharma and Ram Mani Adifor *Madhavi*, Surya Bikram Gyawali for *Janbhumi*, Riddhi Bahadur Malla (*Sharada*), Hriday Chandra Singh Pradhan (*Sahitya Srot*). Many Nepali writers and litterateurs have begun their careers with magazines: they first published their stories or poetry in magazines before publishing major literary works.

If we are to take note of the places from where magazines

have been published, 29 were published from Kathmandu and nine from Banaras, though the latter is the place where Nepali-language magazine publication first began. Of the magazines published before *Sharada* came into existence in 1991 BS, *Adarsha* monthly was published from Kalimpong (India) and the remaining from Banaras. Another interesting observation is that all the specialised magazines such as *Udyog, Gharelu Ilum, Balsakha, Shanti, Gaunghar* were published only from Kathmandu. Except for *Shanti* monthly (2014 BS) and *Swasnimanchhe* quarterly (2015 BS), which have individuals as publishers other magazines have been published either by government or institutions.. Similarly, apart from *Khetipati*, which was published by the government of Bengal, no other specialised magazine was published from outside of Kathmandu. Some of the literary magazines, however, had been published from places like Biratnagar, Birgunj, and Jhapa.

Objectives of Magazine Publication and Challenges of Distribution

Similar to the claims of publishers in India terming the Hindi-language magazines as service to the Hindi language (Orsini 2010, pp 7, 52-53), the publishers of the magazines in Nepali language also claimed it as 'service'. Despite the underlying commercial motives, the most common reason cited for publication was the magazine's potential to contribute to the advancement and betterment of the Nepali language. Some, when faced with hurdles in publication and distribution, and bogged by low sales, even published appeals citing non-cooperation and disinterest on part of the readership for the betterment of the nation and the language. For instance, *Upanyas Tarangini Monthly* (1959 BS), in its second-issue editorial, emphatically argued that not receiving any support from its readers was the reason it was closing down and indicating that they were willing to publish and distribute Nepali-language novels if they received support.

Nepalis do not understand novels. Whereas in English, Persian,

Bengali, Punjabi languages, the readers demand that they publish novels costing a hundred rupees each, and also receive letters of appreciation from the government. Those *Madiseys* (*sic*) deride us for not having any novel in the Gorkha Bhasa and not having any patron generous enough to support the publication of novels. Anxious with these thoughts, we are sending this monthly paper at your service. If you accept this, we will present you with novels of various kinds. *Translation, Authors*

It went on to provide a list of publications printed by the Hitachintak Press, and also published the novel *Mahendraprabha* with the pagination of the novel itself. So it can also be argued that *Upanyas Tarangini* was more a novel than a magazine which could not continue its print-run beyond two issues. This 'magazine' raised the issue of the derision of the Gorkha Bhasa by drawing comparisons with the progress made by other languages. Hence, it tried to relay the message that it is necessary to publish, distribute, and sell the magazines in Nepali language not only for the betterment of the language, but also to strengthen the foothold of Nepali in relation to other languages. 'If the reader does not wish to receive this magazine, inform us with a postcard' writes the editor and further eggs on, 'or else the second issue will be "book-posted" to you as it is none of my concern to work for the advancement of the Gorkha Bhasa.' This goes on to show how the magazine placed the betterment of the Gorkha Bhasa as central to its existence, and faced the major challenge of a lack of enough subscribers.

Similarly, an advertorial published in the inner cover of the book *Nalopakhyan* in 1956 BS is an appeal about *Sudhasagar* — the magazine that claims to have published the first Nepali language content in Nepal — provides references to the prestige of the Gorkhalis and tries to convince the readers about the necessity of magazines for the development of both the nation and its language:

> Regarding this topic, we expect that our Gorkhali gentlemen will surely do their part for the advancement of the nation

and the language. The *Madiseys* [Indians] (*sic*) publish thousands of periodicals and yet one or two of them even enjoy 10,000-12,000 subscribers, whereas in our Gorkha [language] there is only one [magazine] and all the readers have to spend is a meager one company rupee [Indian currency] to register as a subscriber. If this monthly does not get your support and is forced to discontinue, I will not be the only one to suffer as this will also be a matter of shame for you. What will the foreigners say? Look, the only monthly published from Nepal had to shut down because these Gorkhalis could not pay even one rupee for an entire year. The intellectuals from Nepal please take note of this and help this lone orphan 'Sudhasagar'.

Despite this emphatic plea, it is hard to say if the subscribers actually came forward for the sake of the country and the language. Save this notice, we do not have any other mention, information, or the print-run of this magazine. So we cannot provide further analysis into the kind of magazine it was for the lack of crucial information such as contents, size, etc.

Madhavi, a literary monthly published by Pandit (Pt.) Ram Mani Aa.Di. and edited by Pt. Matri Prasad Sharma also had a similar argument for its existence. On the first editorial titled 'Preamble', it clarified, 'In our Nepali language there is no grammar, neither is there a good dictionary, nor publications of any special use. [*Madhavi*] aims to fill in those gaps' (*Madhavi* 1965 BS).

Chandra Monthly published from Banaras (1971 BS) also appears to have the main objectives of dissemination and conservation of the Nepali language. Its first editorial reads:

Dear readers, as you know, there is not a single monthly paper in the Nepali language at the moment whereas in other languages of this country [India], finest papers (monthlies, fortnightlies, literary magazines, daily newspapers) are

being published with or without pictures. The advancement of the language and literature are up to these publications. This shows how, despite Nepali being spoken by hundreds of thousands, the language lags far behind among the languages of this country [India]. The reason for the advancement of peoples like the English, French, German is the advancement of their national languages (Devkota 2024: 44).

By the time it reached Volume One, Issue Eight, it published an editorial titled 'Lovers of the Nepali Language, Realize!' that expresses grave concern over the fact that the monthly was about to die out due to lack of subscribers. Further, it states that it is the *dharma* of all the Nepalis to support Chandra because it was the only monthly in Nepali and was priced low yet disseminated high thinking. The editorial further goes on to say that although the publication had been in print for eight months, there were no more than 200 subscribers and it would continue to incur losses unless the subscription reached 700 (*Chandra* 1971 BS, 15).

Likewise, the *Chandrika Monthly* (1972 BS), published by Paras Mani Pradhan, mentions that the 'Gorkha Bhasa' born from Sanskrit- the language of the gods themselves- and spoken by around 5.2 million people, still has a very worrying status. So long as there is no betterment of a language, there cannot be any other kind of advancement (Devkota 2024 BS, 46).

According to Chalmers (2002), the publications were vying for power as well as money. They also tried to attract more readers by adopting newer approaches for sales and distribution. Making the cover page more attractive, publishing in colour instead of black and white, using graphics and photographs, publishing advertorials in other magazines were other methods that were used during this process.

The above examples clearly illustrate that all the magazines were initially started with the objective of advancing the cause of the Gorkha Bhasha, but they eventually died out due to economic reasons. However, prosperity of the language was not the sole reason

for the publication of these magazines, although the publishers continued to reaffirm otherwise. They also had an eye for profit-making through sales and subscription.

Some Specialised Magazines

Udyog

The *Udyog* fortnightly published by the Industry Office, Government of Nepal, introduced itself as 'the only industry-related publication on the Nepali national language' (*Udyog* 1992 BS). It began publication on Bhadra 1, 1992 BS, under the editorship of Suryabhakta Joshi. As the first magazine focusing on a topic other than literature, *Udyog* published articles and news related to industry and commerce. However, like some other magazines, *Udyog* also gradually digressed from its stated mission and started giving space to other materials (Shrestha 2059 BS, pp 146-160). Alongside matters related to industry and commerce the *Udyog* also carried poetry woven around the theme, say, the benefits of industry and commerce. Furthermore, write-ups on the scientific way to do agriculture, newer technologies being invented in the world, and others also found space in the magazine. It eventually became a platform for the litterateurs who lacked the wherewithal or the approach to be published in *Sharada*, the premier literary magazine of that time (Shrestha, 2059 BS). After nearly two years of starting publication, the fortnightly got discontinued and reappeared again in Bhadra of 1995 BS as a monthly. It continued in its struggle to survive until the last issue, by when it had reached its 9th issue of volume 14.

Mahila

Kamal Mani Dixit (2017 BS) notes that magazines like *Gorkha Sansar* (1983-85 BS), *Rajbhakti* (1985 BS) and *Tarun Gorkha* (1986-87 BS) carried articles penned by women. Dixit further claims that the credit for introducing a maximum number of women litterateurs goes to *Sharada* and *Uday*, as never before

were women writers so visible. *Mahila* (literally, women in Nepali) monthly was published from Jestha of 2008 BS by the Nepal Women's Association. Kumari Kamakshi and Kumari Sadhana Pradhan were the editors of the magazine which mainly carried contents related to women's issues and promoted women writers. Published with the aim to take up women's issues, , an appeal in Mahila mentions that, it will carry articles written by women. However, articles written by men on women's advancement would also be published.

Similarly, women magazines such as *Pratibha* (2009 BS) and *Swasnimanchhe* (2015 BS) are also worth mentioning here. *Pratibha* was published by All Nepal Women's Association. With the stated purpose 'to awaken the dormant consciousness of women, and propagate qualified education in them', the magazine also published news related to the activities of Nepal Women's Association and All Nepal Women's Association. A review of the contents of *Swasnimanchhe* revealed the following categories: introduction; literature, education, and culture; literary criticism; society and law; and current affairs. The current affairs section covered in brief news ranging from politics, society to international happenings.

Others

In addition to specialised magazines, there were others that were dedicated to education, medicine, agriculture, children among others. For instance, *Nepal Ayurved* monthly was published by the Nepal Ayurvedic Organisation in 2009 BS. *Balsakha* Party published *Balsakha* monthly in 2008 BS primarily targeting children. Also, *Gaunghar* (2015 BS) edited by Surya Prasad Shrestha covered development activities in rural areas.

Department of Agriculture started to publish *Krishi* quarterly from Mangsir, 2017 BS, with news and views on agriculture and other related activities in the country. Likewise, there was *Gharelu Ilum* for domestic and cottage industries, *Nepal-Siksha* for adult learning, *Danphechari* for folk literature, and *Shanti* for spirituality and religion, among others.

Though these non-literary magazines brought about different and fresh perspectives to their readers and had an encouraging presence, they too eventually withered away. In fact, these specialised magazines, published by the related organisations, were shorter-lived than their literary counterparts. This may have been the case as the new categories of readership attracted by these magazines may not have been enough to sustain the magazine itself. However, this shows that specialised magazines existed long before in the Nepali publishing scenario, and is not a new phenomenon.

Conclusion

The Nepali publishing industry was in its infancy when Nepali magazines began to be published. The aforementioned two groups of magazines – literary and specialised – published between 1959–2017 BS contributed in their own ways towards the growth and development of magazine journalism in Nepal. Though all the magazines published during that era did not last long, they nevertheless initiated a tradition of magazine production, distribution, and consumption. Of particular significance is the efforts made by the magazines to attract readers, and to adapt to their tastes and demands.

A group of magazines adopted culture, society, religion, language, and nationalism as their agenda. Such magazines were run by a particular group or community, and the shadow of Indian nationalism and Hindi language movements can clearly be observed in them. The specialised magazines had different priorities, and while some stuck to their objectives, others changed their course and became more or less literary magazines. In this period, when magazines were published with the primary mission to promote Nepali language-literature, culture, and nationalism, they also served two other functions: first, they helped in the expansion and growth of the Nepali publishing sphere including journalism, and second, they provided the Nepali-language readers some exposure to different specialised fields.

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'We the Janajatis'
Activism of *Inap Weekly* for Newars and Pan-Janjati Movement in Nepal (1980-1990)

HARSHA MAN MAHARJAN

THE dominant narrative about the relationship between Janajatis and the state during the Panchayat period speaks of exclusion and discrimination only.[1] But the shift in ethnic awareness around the referendum in 1980 shows that the narrative should account for resistance as well. Such resistance is most visible in the Newars, a group with strong social and cultural capital. The Newars have a long history of opposing the state through various institutions. Quite similar to Nepali nationalism (Chalmers 2003), Newar nationalism was constructed through periodicals in an Indian city

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1 This article is part of a report I submitted to the Social Inclusion Research Fund on a comparative study of representation of Adivasi Janajati in Newar newspapers(*Nepal Bhasha Patrika* and *Inap*) and Gorkhapatra during the last decade of Panchayat system (1981-1990). An earlier version of this paper was presented at 'Structures of Exclusion', a conference organised by the Indian Formation Research Society, 23-25 November 2011, University of Delhi and Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya organised by The Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies, Britain-Nepal Academic Society and Social Science Baha from 18-22 July 2012. I am grateful to all participants of those conferences. I want to thank Sharad Kasa from Asha Saphukuthi where I accessed the archive of *Inap*. For providing me comments and guidance, I want to thank Ekku Maya Pun of Kathmandu University; Pratyoush Onta, Yogesh Raj and Sharad Ghimire of Martin Chautari. However, I am solely responsible for the arguments and ideas presented in this paper. Another version of this article was published in *Citizen, Society & State: Crating an Inclusive Future for Nepal (2014)*.

of Calcutta in the Rana period and Nepal Bhasha newspapers of the post-1950 period nurtured this nationalism inside Nepal.

Previous studies on Nepal Bhasha[2] journalism show that *Inap* was the most influential Nepal Bhasha newspaper during the last decade of Panchayat system (Bal Gopal 1995, Manandhar 2000). This paper studies the representation of Adivasi Janajati issues in *Inap*. Analysing its content, content makers and context, and using the theories of alternative and activist media, this paper argues two things. First, *Inap* not only countered state policy related to Newar community, it also promoted culture, literature, traditions, etc. of this community. Second, it provided a platform for other ethnic groups to pour their grievances against state policies and thus promoted the pan-Janajati movement in the last decade of Panchayat period.

In the Panchayat period, the use of the word 'Janajati' was not popular as in the post-1990 period. So, to make this study easy, I have taken into consideration 59 communities given in appendix 2 of National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFDIN) Act 2002 as Adivasi Janajati groups (NEFDIN 2003).

There is a big shift in the discourse of ethnicity in 1990s and 2000s. In 1990s, scholars, both Nepali and foreigners, were in search of 'some mysterious, essential, almost mythical or magical characteristic'of ethnic groups (Fisher 2012). But in 2000s, the argument that the idea of ethnicity is fluid, which Levine (1987) claimed in the case of Nepal in 1987, became dominant. Some scholars like William Fisher (2012), Chaitanya Mishra (2012), etc. started to argue that ethnicity is hybrid and performative. But as David Gellner (2012) argues, even this fluidity-awareness cannot negate the 'historical oppression'. So, this paper discusses oppression and its resistance or activism from *Inap* against Panchayat's cultural politics. It brings some facets of pan-Janajati movement in the last decade of Panchayat and the role of Newars in Janajati movement.

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2   Newar activists often use Nepal Bhasha instead of Newari. In some places I have used Newari instead of Nepal Bhasha in this article.

The upcoming sections are divided into two parts: the first part consists of a brief history of Nepal Bhasha journalism and the life of *Inap*, whereas the second part is the content analysis of issues presented by *Inap* on Adivasi Janajati,.

Brief History of Newar Journalism till Inap

Newar Journalism started in an Indian city, Calcutta,in 1925 during the Rana period. A Nepali student, Jagat Man Vaidya(widely known as Dharmaditya Dharmacharya) started to publish a magazine in Nepal Bhasha(Newari), *Buddha Dharma.* He had gone there in 1921 to appear for the pre-matriculation exam (Lacaul 1105 NS). He met Anagarika Dharmapala[3], the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society, there and became his disciple (Gellner 1986). One of the society's[4] objectives was to establish a press and publish newspapers related to Buddhism and Buddhist culture (Levine and Gellner 2005). While in Calcutta,[5] Vaidya changed his name to Dharmaditya Dharmacharya. He edited magazines in Hindi, Bengali, Nepali and English, and also published magazines in Nepal Bhasha to preach Buddha Dharma.

Since another of his concerns was Newar language, he published ten issues of magazines in Nepal Bhasha, within five years,changing the earlier name,*Buddha Dharma,* to *Buddha Dharma wa Nepal Bhasha.* Dharmaaditya also led a delegation of students who demanded one paper on Nepal Bhasha instead of Nepali (Parbatiya) as a vernacular in the University of Calcutta[6] which was turned down by the then vice-chancellor, Ashutosh Mukharjee, who referred to the fact that there were not enough text books

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3   He was a SriLankan Buddhist.

4   He moved this society's headquarters from Sri Lanka to Calcutta in 1892.

5   In 1923, after the matriculation exam, Dharmaditya returned to Kathmandu for a short time and informed his friends about his activities in Calcutta. According to Lacaul, Dharmaditya also informed them that he was interested in reforming Buddhism (Lacaul 1105 NS).

6   In 1920s, the British introduced compulsory examination of papers in vernacular languages in Indian Universities (Levine and Gellner 2005).

in Nepal Bhasha. As reported by Prem Shanti Tuladhar[7] (2000), Dharmaaditya then 'realised' how newspapers were an appropriate and powerful media which could help to increase the number of writers and texts as well as bring awareness related to language and literature among Newars.

The first daily newspaper in Nepal Bhasha, *Nepal Bhasha Patrika,* was started on 2 October 1955. Its editor and publisher was Fatte Bahadur Singh whose *Nepal Bihar*, a collection of poems by different people, was confiscated by the Rana government and its contributors were jailed in 1059 NS.[8] Citing an interview with Manik Lal Shrestha, the son-in-law of Fatte Bahadur Singh, Razen Manandhar(2000) claimed that the views of Indian Buddhist scholars, such as Ananda Kausalayan and Swami Krishna Nanda, on Nepal Bhasha motivated Singh and others to publish this newspaper.

Ananda Kausalayan was reported to have said that, as Nepal Bhasha had a deep relation with Nepal, its retention was also related to the very existence of Nepal. Manandhar goes on to claim that among those who opposed Ananda were, Purna Prasad Brahman who wrote leaflets opposing his views and Bal Krishna Sama shared in this opposition. Quoting Kashinath Tamot, Prem Shanti Tuladhar also says that Swami Krishna Nanda told Fatte Bahadur Singh to start a daily if he was interested in promoting his language. In a similar but slightly altered anecdote the words of Ananda inspired Fatte Bahadur Singh, Basu Pasa, Prem Bahadur Kansakar, Krishna Chandra Singh Pradhan, Puskar Mathema, Purna Kaji Tawa and Swayambu Lal Shreshta to collect money to publish a daily newspaper (Manandhar 2000). According to Tuladhar

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7   Tuladhar is joined by other Newar activists/scholars in her claim that during the time of Chandra Shumsher (1901-1929), the Rana government would have rejected or censured the publication of Newar periodicals. Newar scholar and activist, Bal Gopal Shrestha, reported that in 1905, Chandra Shumsher prohibited the use of Nepal Bhasha from the court and administration. The language of Newars was then called Newari (Shrestha 1998/99).

8   According to Prem Shanti Tuladhar(2000), not only its poem, but also its preface, was the reason behind the confiscation.

(2000), 72 people helped this venture financially. Despite differences in stories of Manandhar and Tuladhar, they both seem to agree that the main reason of starting *Nepal Bhasha Patrika* was the promotion of the language.

Bal Gopal Shrestha, a journalist and scholar, did not think that it did much to bring awareness in Newars, except for serving news to the community and holding a monopoly over publications in this language for three decades (Shrestha 1995). Instead of *Nepal Bhasha Patrika*, Shrestha praised *Inap*, a weekly newspaper published in 1982. Shrestha wrote this about *Inap*: "It played a vital role in developing language awareness among the Newars. Its circulation was not limited to the Kathmandu Valley but also reached many other Newar towns outside the valley" (Shrestha 1995).

However, Prem Shanti Tuladhar (2000) writes that *Nepal Bhasha Patrika* did promote the Newar language through daily news and a daily newspaper directly enforced the existence of Newars. She further argues that the name of newspaper was itself a means of 'opposition' to those who informally used to term Newari, instead of the more formal Nepal Bhasha.

Malla K Sundar already had more than ten years' experience in journalism when he started *Inap*. In 1967, he joined *Samaya*, a Nepali weekly as a reporter. During that time, he learned about journalism from journalists such as Bichitra Devkota, Gopal Das Shrestha, Manindra Raj, etc. After this, he joined the news agency of Nepal, Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) as a reporter in 1971.[9] In 1981 he even got an opportunity from RSS to study for a Diploma in Journalism from International Education of Journalism, Belgrade in wire reporting (Malla 1989).

The anecdote behind the beginning of *Inap* goes as follows: A friend met Malla K. Sundar in RSS and asked him to help with his new Nepal Bhasha newspaper called *Bhintuna*[10] which would be edited by Buddhacharya Shakya. But, to their surprise, this newspaper was later published in Nepali language. On Buddhacharya's

9   Personal interview with Malla K Sundaron 17 Oct 2011
10 Welcome

assurance that they could apply for a new newspaper in Nepal Bhasha, both of them visited the Chief District Officer (CDO) in Lalitpur. Fortunately, the CDO was on leave and the next responsible official being a close friend of Buddhacharya, provided Malla with the license to publish *Inap* within 15 days of application, and without the submission of the normally requisite police report.

The government had stopped providing license to new newspaper after 1971. Perhaps one reason for this was the recommendation of the National Communication Services Plan 1971, which had recommended the government to promote old newspapers instead of new ones (Maharjan 2009). Malla informed that the word Nepal Bhasha was mentioned in the license instead of Newari. Many people including friends from RSS helped him voluntarily to prepare the newspaper.

Yet he needed someone who could help him. He found Ashok Shrestha who had previously gone to Okhaldhunga as a school teacher and was also the editor of *Sagar*, a Nepali leftist newspaper, which was banned by the court on 4 April 1982 (Shrestha 2005). After this, he worked in *Nepal Bhasha Patrika*, and also wrote articles related to corruption and crime in *Inap*. He also did some reporting for *Bimarsha,* a well-known Nepali newspaper during the Panchayat period. He did long interviews with many important personalities from literature, politics, etc.[11]

Inap, with its leftist inclination, helped in grooming many young Nepali journalists in Nepal Bhasha. *Inap* was an influential newspaper during this period, with a circulation in many districts of Nepal varying between 2000 and 6000. It played an important role in creating a wave of Janajati movement during the Panchayat period.

According to Malla, the Panchayat government demoralised him by limiting his work inside RSS. Malla himself was an influential person in journalism: he was elected as the Secretary of Nepal Journalist Association in 1986.

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11 Personal interview with Sundar K Malla on 17 Oct 2011

Issues of Adivasi Janajati in Nepal Bhasha Newspapers

The content of *Inap* shows that it was an alternative publication. However, it is important to acknowledge the debate among scholars regarding what makes an alternative press or media. In 2007, Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentiers presented four approaches of alternative media: serving the community, alternative to mainstream media, linking to civil society and rhizomatic media (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentiers 2007). Among these paradigms, I have used the first two in this paper. *Inap* dealt with counter-hegemonic content and its three main characteristics were community, opposition and solidarity.

Although the earlier focus of *Inap* was linguistic rights, it later widened its focus to cultural rights. It also provided a platform for discussion on pan-Janajati movement and helped in crystallising its issues. Furthermore, it demanded education in mother tongue and government's support for the development of other languages.

Of Newars

Anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista claimed that Newars were 'the indigenous inhabitants of the valley of Kathmandu' and while a majority of them live in large cities of the Kathmandu Valley, the rest 'are spread almost equally through the eastern and western hills and related Terai plain'(Bista 1967, 15-16). Over the course of time, Newars have travelled and migrated from the valley for business and trade.

So the censuses from 1952 to 1981 showed that speakers of this language were declining. In 1952, 4.65 % of total population (8,235,079) were Newar-speaking people whereas this decreased to 2.68 % of total population (15,022,839) in 1981(Central Bureau of Statistics 1987). While this data did not give exact number of Newars, it did show the tendency of some Newars to not speak Newar language. In an article published in 1986, David Gellner (Gellner 1986) claimed that most of the Newars who settled outside the Kathmandu valley had stopped speaking Newari although they were still following a few Newar customs.

Promotion of Traditions of Newar Culture

'Invention of Tradition' was an idea made popular through a book by the same name edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. In its introduction, Hobsbawm argues that invented traditions are 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition' (Hobsbawm 2008[1983], 1). This section discusses two of such traditions: the celebration of anniversaries of writers and promotion of activities related to Nepal Sambat New Year in *Inap*. The argument here is that the newspaper did not invent but promoted these traditions.

Inap published special issues on the occasion of birthdays of luminaries, especially writers and contributors. On these occasions, in addition to publishing editorials praising the luminaries, it also published news on programmes to be organised by different institutions.

The edition of 11 May 1983 (28 Baisakh, BS 2040) was dedicated to the memory of poet, Yogbir Singh. The middle of the front page contained a box with a photo of Yogbir Singh with a *hukka* in his hand, and text expressing gratitude from the family of *Inap:* 'Offering a flower on the feet on the occasion of his 97th birthday'(please see fig 01).The same page also contained news which introduced him as one of the famous poets of the reformation period and further went on to say that Gathu Pariwar was organising a programme on 13 May at Ason, Kathmandu (Inap, BS 2040). *Inap* also published an editorial with the title, 'Yogbir Singh Myana Choni Tini(Yogbir Singh is will live on)'. The editorial also rhetorically alluded to his contribution on social reform, language and social awareness before institutional political movement in BS 1997 and argued that death could not kill him. It even criticised the state for neglecting his contribution while celebrating that of the foreign writers' (Inap, BS 2040a).

This edition also contained articles and a poem about the poet. According to Prem Shanti Tuladhar (2000), Yogbir Singh used to write poems in Nepali language under the name Jogbir Udas,

but he started to write poems in Nepal Bhasha after Dharmaditya published *Buddha Dharma wa Nepal Bhasha*. He was also active in social movements like Arya Samaj, Adambar Mat, etc during the Rana rule.

Inap also published a special edition on 18 Jestha 2040(1 June 1983), marking the occasion of Dharmaditya's 81st birthday. The edition had several similarities with the one published for poet Yogbir Singh: a gratitude column, news, editorial, and articles on Dharmaditya Dharmacharya. The gratitude column introduced him as the first journalist of Nepal Bhasha and offered gratitude on the occasion of 81st birthday of Dharmaditya Dharmacharya. The news with the headline, "Dharmacharya Budhi Saniba Hanigu"(Dharmacharya's Birthday Celebrated on Saturday) informed the readers about a programme being organised at

Figure 1: *Inap*'s gratitude for Yogbir Singh. (Inap, 11 May 1983/28 Baisakh 2040 BS), p. 1.

Figure 2: Special issue on Dharmaditya Dharmacharya (*Inap*, 1 June 1983/18 Jestha 2040 BS), p. 1.
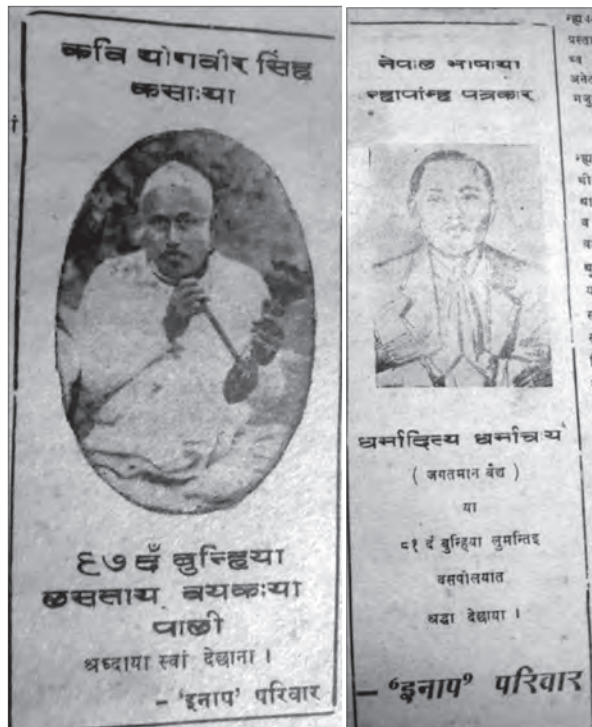
Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala, Lalitpur,on 4 June, in honour of Dharmaditya who had done memorable work for Nepal Bhasha and Buddhism (Inap, BS 2040b). The editorial defined him as a patriotic person whose life was full of struggles, and praised him for being brave during the Rana period (Inap, BS 2040c). Most remarkably, this edition contained an article by Narmadeshwor Pradhan claiming Dharmaditya as a person with rebellious sprit who saw Buddhism and Nepal Bhasha as two sides of the same coin. Besides, this edition also included articles by Jyan Bahadur Newa, Baikuntha Prasad Lacaul and Santa Harsha Bajracharya, and listed the important events of his life.

In the next edition on 8 June 1983 (25 Jestha, BS 2040), *Inap* had published news that *prashashan* (administration) obstructed and did not allow Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala, Lalitpur to organize the birthday of Dharmaditya. Though it also informed that Nepal Journalists Association (NJA) condemned the action and passed a resolution using words like *tanashahi prabriti* (tyrannical tendency), it did not mention the reason behind the obstruction. It also mentioned that NJA had demanded with the government that these people from administration, who challenged the constitutional guarantee of right to assembly without weapon, should be brought to the book. At last, it also included condemnation from Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala on the 'irresponsible action' (Inap, BS 2040d).

These are only two examples. *Inap* had published materials on the occasion of the birthday of Sukhraraj Shastri on 15 Bhadra 2040 (13 August 1983) and of Siddhidas Mahaju on 12 Aswin, BS 2040 (28 September 1983).

Inap published news, articles, and editorial on the occasion of New Year 1104 Nepal Sambat. From 1979, Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala, a loose network of different Newar organisations established in open environment after the declaration of referendum began to organise different programmes to mark the New Year. These programmes saw participation from a huge number of people. In the first programme, representatives from different ethnic

group were invited (Gellner and Sharkey 1996), and this programme done by Newars was inspirational to others (Malla, NS 1120). Therefore, for the first time, Newar activism was related with cultural rights, and general people came to the road demanding their cultural rights (Shakya 2011). Since Malla K. Sundar, the editor of *Inap*, was also the secretary of Khala during Panchayat period, the newspaper gave priority to the event and also became a forum to counter people who were opposing it.

The main focus of news published on the front page on 2 November 1983 (16 Ashwin, BS 2040) was to show how this event was being celebrated in different places in Nepal. The news lead mentioned how Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala planned to celebrate the New Year by organising different programmes and urged all to participate in these programmes. The rest of the news informed activities being organised in three cities of Kathmandu Valley and also outside of it. In the beginning, it mentioned two activities in Kathmandu: Bhintuna rally at 6:30 am in Basantapur and motorcycle rally organised by Olympus Club which would start from Jhochhe, Kathmandu, followed by cycle rally going to be organised by Pode group in Lalitpur, and rallies to be organised by Birat Nepal Bhasha Sahitya Sammelan in Bhaktapur. It went on to say that different programmes were being organised in places like Butwal, Narayanghat, Trishuli, Biratnagar and Hetauda. It further went on to say that Yuba Bouda Samuha was going to organise a speech programme about Nepal Sambat on 3 November (*Inap*, BS 2040e).

The editorial of the same edition was entitled Nepal Sambat wa Rastriyata (Nepal Sambat and Nationality). The first paragraph concluded that though there were two groups of people – one celebrating the Sambat and another criticising it – both groups contributed to the debate about Sambat. Despite this neutral beginning, the editorial gradually sided with the people celebrating it and went on to openly counter the views of those opposing it: According to the editorial, the main thesis of people in opposition was that the Nepal Sambat was the Sambat of Newars, and celebration of

this Sambat was a communal activity because of which it was narrow-minded to demand national recognition for the N.S. To dispel this, the argument presented by the editorial was that Nepal Sambat was not limited to Newars only, and even if it was being celebrated by Newars as claimed by people criticising it, it was national or *rastriya* as Newars are Nepali and all culture of Newars were Nepali or *rastriya* (*Inap*, BS 2040f).

Besides these materials, this edition also contained letters to the editor about different activities on the occasion of the New Year like motorcycle rally, mass rally, etc. In some of those letters, writers had criticised the tendency of using Hindi, playing love songs in tractor rallies, wearing paper hats, using same routes for rallies, etc. This edition also had articles on Nepal Sambat.

The next edition, published on 16 November 1986 (30 Kartik, BS 2040), followed up on the news of the New Year. But the focus of the headline was on examples of obstructions to the motorcycle rallies by "communal' administration" (*sampradaik prashashan*). The lead of the news explained that people celebrated the New Year despite threats and obstruction from the administration. According to the news, though the administrators threatened rally organisers, the rally was organised in Lalitpur and two participants of the motor-cycle rally were injured when police lathi-charged them in Koteshwor, Kathmandu. Beside this information, it contained news on different activities related to Nepal Sambat (*Inap*, BS 2040g).

Thus, *Inap* helped in disseminating information about the programmes of influential writers of Nepal Bhasha and on Nepal Sambat. It promoted these activities by writing news on programmes before they took place, wrote editorials, and also reported on the events. More than this, it focused on hindrance from administration.

Oppositional Media

Inap seems to be a protest press similar to US's Black Press of which Gunnar Myrdal said:

> Most white people in America are entirely unaware of the bitter and relentless criticism of themselves; of their policies in domestic or international affairs; their legal and political practices; their business enterprises; their churches, schools, and other institutions; their social customs, their opinions and prejudices and almost everything else in white American civilization. Week in and week out these are presented to the Negro people in their own press. It is a fighting press (Myrdal 1944, 908).

Inap also became the platform for expressing grievances and lodging complaints against the government and their repressors. It was an activist press; it opposed government's 'repression'. One example of this was the news published on 12 Aswin BS 2040 about Radio Nepal's policy related to language. The news informs that Radio Nepal denied airing an advertisement of a drama written by Vijaya Malla. The main reason behind this was the drama was in Nepal Bhasha. According to the news, Newars knew that Radio Nepal would not air the advertisement in Nepali language, so they had translated it into Nepali language. But when staff in Radio Nepal came to know that the advertisement was related to a Nepal Bhasha drama, they refused to air it (*Inap*, BS 2040).

Inap's activism can be easily discerned upon going through the words used in the news. It first criticised Radio Nepal for its repression by using bitter words in its headline (please see fig 02). Its lead also went on to claim that the communal tendency of Radio Nepal was becoming chronic. This news shows anguish of Newar community and the tone of news and use of words go on to show that *Inap* was an activist press.

Inap had also published criticisms of government policies in forms of sayings of imminent people on the second page. In particular, two instances of such sayings will be examined.

The first one, by Dharmaditya Dharmacharya, was published in the first issue on 28 Poush BS 2039. In a letter of protest to historian Sylvain Levi, he expressed his opposition of people claiming

Nepal Bhasha as Newari. In his opinion,'Newari' was a vulgar term for the true name, 'Nepalbhasa' or 'Nepali' (Maharjan 2011).

The second saying by Sidhidas was published on 19 January 1983 (5 Magh BS 2039) and expressed the belief that there would be no ethnic group in the absence of language. The slogan, besides giving importance to languages of these groups, also criticised the policy of 'one language and one costume' of the then government. Although this policy is no longer existent, this slogan has
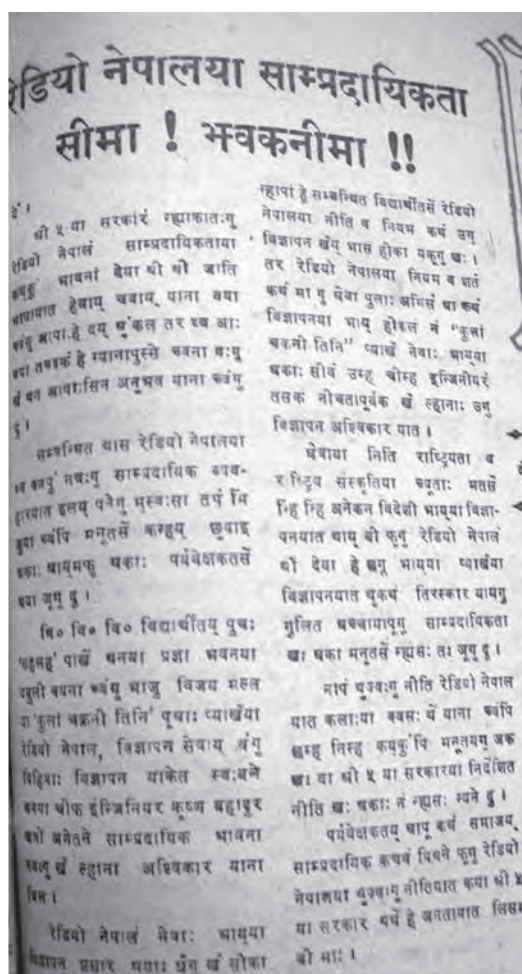
Figure 3: *Inap*, 12 Aswin 2040, p. 1.

come to be an important part of the Nepal Bhasha movement and is still used during the Nepal Sambat New Year celebrations by the Newar community.

Both of these sayings prove that language was the main issue of Newar activism. Besides the two cases, *Inap* published news on non-Newars when they spoke for Newar community. For example, it carried the views of politician Rajeshwor Devkota on 19 January 1983 (5 Magh BS 2039), who had said at the time that Bikram Sambat, the Sambat followed by the government, was impractical and also went on to suggest that the use of Sambats evolved inside Nepal (*Inap*, BS 2039). Though he did not mention any of the Sambats in particular, for Newar activists, his views were similar to their sentiments, and thus this view was published in *Inap*.

In another case, on 6 April 1983 (23 Chaitra BS 2039), it published views of scholar Rishikesh Shah on language policy of Nepal. In this news, based on an interview with him, it was written that he opposed the government's policy of 'one language and one costume, questioned the said unification by King Prithvi Narayan Shah and was of the opinion that there was still a need of emotional unification (*Inap*, BS 2039a)

Inap acted as a watchdog when it came to mainstream press; it tried to monitor others on behalf of the community. We see this trend on 2 February 1983 (19 Magh, BS 2039) when it countered the views published by Nepali language weekly *Punarjagaran* on Nepal Bhasha movement and national language. In its Poush issue, *Punarjagaran* had published comments on the need of one language as national language. *Inap* opposed *Punarjagaran*'s view and went on to point how countries like India, Yugoslavia, Switzerland, etc. were using more than one language as national languages.

The focus of the news was on *Punarjagaran*'s view that people were unnecessarily giving priority to Nepal Bhasha, because of which *Inap* accused *Punarjagaran* for being *sampradayik* or communal (please see fig 04). By way of counter-argument, *Inap* published a letter from a reader that stated that promoting Nepali

Figure 4: *Inap*, 19 Magh 2039, p. 1.

language through Royal Nepal Academy, Radio Nepal, Royal Nepal Film Corporation, Ratna Recording Corporation, Sajha Prakashan and Janak Shikshya Samagri Kendra was a form of repression (*Inap*, BS 2039b). It is interesting how this news was published as a letter from the side representing the voice of Newar people, which means that *Inap,* in this case, acted like the guardian of Newars.

Besides such news, it also published articles which criticised the language policy of Nepal. Since many people thought that *Inap*

criticised the government directly, they requested its editor, Malla K. Sundar, to tone downits criticism.[12]

Inap published news and editorials opposing the government's policy of 'one language and one costume' and demanding for education in mother tongue. It can thus be surmised that presentation of opposition views was an important characteristic of this newspaper during the Panchayat period.

Of Other Janajatis: We the Janajati

Similar to other alternative presses, *Inap* also had aspects of seeking solidarity and networking with other Janajatis, thus promoting a pan-Janajati movement in the last decade of the Panchayat era.

Media Solidarity

There is no doubt that Newar newspapers promoted Nepal Bhasha movement, which was intricately linked to other language movements. Unlike the state-owned newspaper *Gorkhapatra* which never presented issues of different Adivasi Janajati groups (like Newar, Tamang**,** Raute, Chepang, Rai, Sherpa,Tharu, Limbu, Danuwar, Darai, Kumal, Musahar, Dura) from the frame of cultural rights, *Inap* showed empathy to these other ethnic groups (Maharjan 2011).
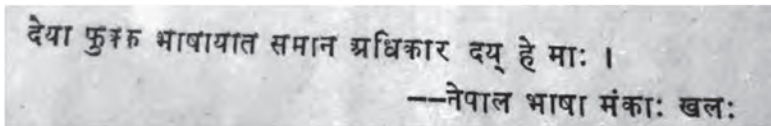
देया फुरुह भाषायात समान अधिकार दय् हे मा: ।
——नेपाल भाषा मंका: खल:

Figure 5: *Inap*, 11 Fagun 2039 BS, p. 2.

Malla K. Sundar, the editor of *Inap*, was also a Newar activist. He worked in Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala which initiated Nhudaya Bhintuna programme to commemorate the New Year in Nepal Sambat. But Khala's beliefs extended beyond Newari and a

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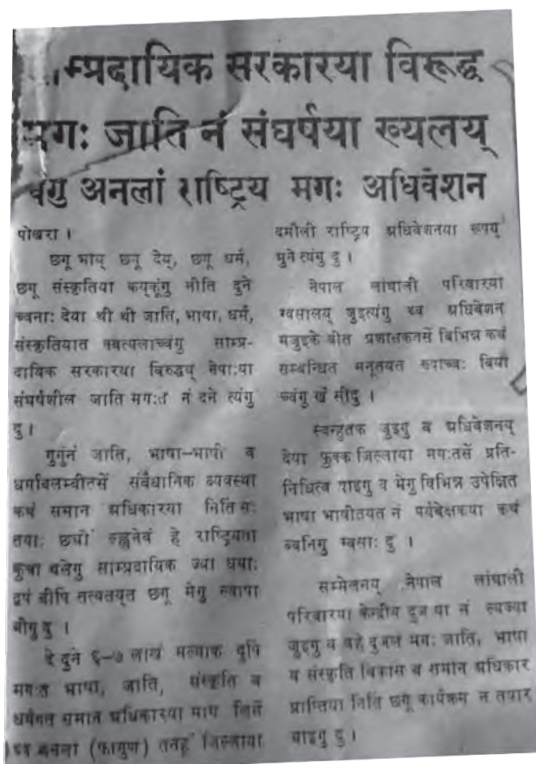12   Interview with Malla K. Sundar on 20 June 2011.

Figure 6: *Inap*, 28 Poush 2039 BS, p. 1.

statement published in *Inap* embraced the equal rights to all languages of Nepal (cf Fig 05). This same attitude of equality was also reflected in the news and views published in *Inap*, related to movements of other groups such as Magars and Tamangs.

Inap published news on the activities of Magar Association, Nepal Langhali Pariwar, from its first issue on 12 January 1983 (29 Poush, BS 2039).[13] The news informed its readers of the first general assembly of the Nepal Langhali Pariwar being organised in Tanahu (*Inap*, BS 2039d). Although the news itself was not a big thing, the representation of the Magar community through the

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13 According to Harsha Bahadur Budhamagar, this association was established in BS 2036 with aims to raise social awareness among Magars. It organised its first general assembly in February of 1980 (Budhamagar,BS 2048).

headline and lead, telling the readers that Magars were also agitating against the communal government, was important. Through this news, *Inap* tried to tell its readers that like Newars, Magars were also agitating against the government. The news provided information on preparation of the programme (cf. Fig06).

Inap duly followed up on the event and also published an editorial marking this occasion. On 23 February 1983 (11 Fagun, BS 2039), it reported that Nepal Langhali Parwar was organizing its general assembly on 26 and 27 February 1983 (14-15 Fagun BS 2039 (*Inap*, BS 2039e). The same issue also contained an editorial which declared the occasion as auspicious not only for Magars, but also for all Janajatis. It went on to urge Magars and Kirats to unite and wished them good luck. It went on to say that, despite Magars' involvement in the country's unification, recruitment in Gorkha recruitment, and national police and army, the State had still ignored its culture and language. Lastly, it stressed on the need for unity among all Janajatis to solve this problem (*Inap*, BS 2039f).

Inap continued to provide updates in its next issue published on 2 March 1983, by reporting on the programme. According to the news, all participants severely criticised the policy of 'one language, one costume' of the government and the Chief District Officer of Tanahu obstructed Khagendra Jung Gurung's speech on history, saying that he was undermining the integrity of the state (*Inap*, BS 2039g).

Besides Magars, *Inap* had also published news about Tamangs. On 30 November 1983 (14 Mangsir, BS 2040), it published news related to the national assembly of Tamangs, which was going to be held under the chairmanship of Iman Singh Tamang Lama from 21-25 Fagun in Hetauda (*Inap,* BS 2040h). Therefore, these examples illustrate how the Newari newspapers showed solidarity with movements of Adivasi Janajati.

Pan-Janajati Movement
Although the scholars of the Janajati movement have mostly focused on the activities in the post-1990 period, the content on

Adivasi Janajati in *Inap* shows activities which could be argued to be the first phase of Janajati movement, without which the Janajati movement of the post-1990 period seems to be impossible.

Malla K. Sundar, the editor of *Inap*, said this about the movement in an article: 'The Janajati movement began in 1979 (Shrawan, BS 2036) during a multi-lingual public gathering. The Newars initiated the struggle, not just for themselves but also for other dominated groups such as the Magar, Rai, Gurung, Tamang, and Thakali' (Malla 2000/01, 45). What he was referring to here are the activities of Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala. Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Chair of the Khala said in an interview: 'We held a mass meeting in Jana Bahal; there were representatives of different languages and I was the speaker for Nepal Bhasha' (Gellner and Sharkey 1996, 39). *Inap* had yet to be established when this event occurred in 1979.
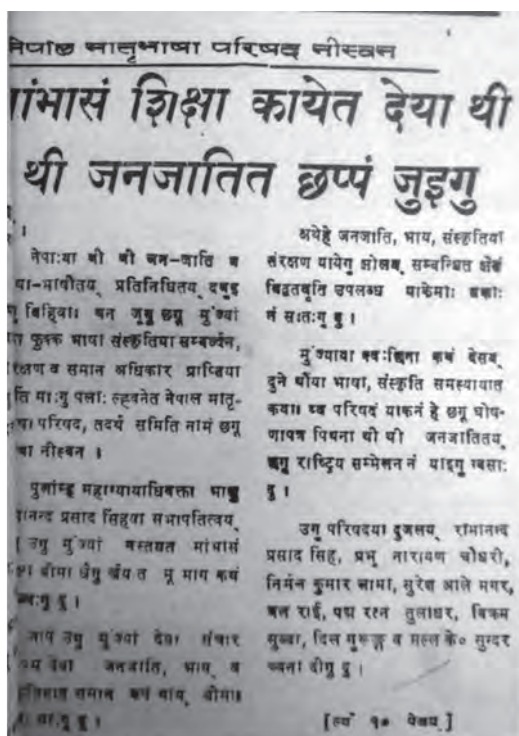

Figure 7: *Inap*, 2 Fagun 2041 BS, p. 1.

Inap gave priority to news on Nepal Matribhasha Parishad and Sarva Jatiya Adhikar Manch, two organisations which demanded cultural rights in that decade. Both the organisations had members from different Janajati groups so its nature was different from Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala, Langhali Sangh, etc. Parishad was for the promotion of languages other than Nepali. When Nepal Matribhasha Parishad was established in February of 1985, *Inap* published news entitled 'Nepal Matribhasha Parishad Established: Different Janajatis of Nepal United to Seek Education in Mother Tongue', mentioning the names of standing committee members (Prabhu Narayan Chaudhari, Nirmal Kumar Lama, Suresh Ale Magar, Ghala Rai, Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Bikram Subba, Dil Gurung and Malla K. Sundar), as well as the aims and future activities of the Council.

The news (cf. Fig 07) mentioned the demands of the Parishad: languages and cultures of different Janajatis should be recognised in media and scholarship should be provided to preserve these languages and cultures. It also contained information about a national seminar, focusing on the problems of Janajatis, being organised by the Parishad. It is notable that *Inap* kept on referring to cultural and linguistic issues as Janajati issues. One of its members Padma Ratna Tuladhar remembered the organisation in an interview: '…we formed the Matribhasha Parishad (Mother Tongue Movement) which brought together activists of Nepal Bhasha, Maithali, Bhojpuri, Tamang, Rai, and Limbu, etc.' (Gellner and Sharkey 1996, 39).

In case of Sarva Jatiya Adhikar Manch, *Inap* published news and an appeal in Nepal Bhasha, Tamang and Magar languages focusing on 'criticism of government's language policy on 9 March 1988 (26 Fagun, BS 2044). According to the news, this organisation was formed by people belonging to different language, religion and culture and its policies and programmes were, therefore, published in 12 languages: Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Chamling, Bantawa, Rai, Sherpa, Maithali, Thakali, Tharu, Nepali and Bhote. According to the news, 27 people, including Malla K. Sundar, had

signed the appeal of Sarva Jatiya Adhikar Manch. The institution, which was established to oppose special treatment of one caste group, language and religion, demanded mainly that equal rights be granted to all Nepalis irrespective of ethnicity, language and culture (*Inap* 2044 B.S). This demand has been echoed by the Janajati movement in the post-1990 period.

Therefore, *Inap* published news and views of other ethnic groups to promote Pan- Janajati movement, as well as to make allies, gain their support, and also to get a larger section of the population to oppose the Panchayat government and its "autocratic" policies related to cultural and language rights.

Conclusion

This content analysis helped in understanding the intentions of content makers. First, *Inap* gave preferences to issues of Newars as well as other Adivasi Janajatis. Second, quite similar to state-owned papers, it regularly disseminated praises for deeds of literary and historical figures from the Newar community through editorials, news and articles. This ultimately helped in promoting and establishing new traditions of Newars. By ignoring gender and class differences among Newars, it also presented Newar identity as one category. Third, it contained articles and editorials about other Adivasi Janajati and promoted pan-Janajati movement.

Like other ethnic/alternative/activist media, community; resistance and solidarity were also the basic characteristics of *Inap*. It tried to serve multiple communities – Newars and other Janajatis – in the formative stage of Janajati movement when issues of the movement were not crystallised and institutions related to ethnic groups as well as pan-Janajati movement were themselves just forming. The background of the editor, his relation with identity politics movements also had direct impact upon *Inap*'s content. But *Inap* also served another purpose related to the politics of Newar's recognition in Janajati movement; it reminded its readers that Newars, too, were Janajati, and not the oppressors. This image is crucial in analysing the prominent role of Newars

in Janajati movements of post-1990 Nepal and the debate about whether Newars are Janajatis.

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Non-electoral Representation in Public Policy
Institutional Capacity of Community Electricity User Groups in Nepal

Saumitra Neupane

Introduction

THE legitimacy of state policies is determined by the extent to which they represent, or can successfully claim to represent, some set of social interests. While electoral representation remains crucial in this regard, the claims of elected representatives that they act on behalf of citizens have been scrutinised and segmented to border contestation by other actors and entities that also make representative claims (Urbinati and Warren 2008, 392). The public policy process, which was once restricted to elected representatives, is now progressively being opened to new actors through initiatives that aim to improve public sector governance. Newer and more complex arrangements cut across boundaries between public and private as well as state and non-state, opening plural and often informal modes of engagement with citizens at local, national, and supranational levels. While new and important questions are being raised about the scope and legitimacy of traditional notions of electoral representation for effective policy making, alternative modes of representation are also being advocated.

Arrangements that link citizens and states in new ways and seek to rebuild relationships between citizens and their governments

have empowered non-state actors such as civil society organisations (CSOs) in the public policy arena. CSOs have aided the ability of citizens to act collectively and autonomously vis-à-vis the government, and, at the same time, assert their rights towards policy engagement. In recent years, in addition to traditional service delivery functions, CSOs have also engaged in policy processes (DFID 2004). They have been found to be effective in transferring disempowered voices and marginal ideas to the heart of public governance (White 2009). Showcasing promising prospects through distributed knowledge acquisition and decentralised problem solving, CSOs strengthen deliberative democratic norms of governance, where ordinary citizens can participate in and influence policies that affect their lives.

Often referred to as the third sector, distinct from government and business, CSOs are, in most cases, intermediary institutions that exist under the banner of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), professional associations, foundations, independent research institutes, community-based organisations (CBOs), cooperatives, faith-based organisations, people's organisations, social movements, and labour unions (CSI 2012). Globally, both the number and scope of CSOs have multiplied, with many CSOs claiming to legitimately represent their respective constituencies in the public policy process. Although many state and supra state organisations are keen to include CSOs in their decision-making process, they are faced with the question of which organisations demonstrate legitimate claims to speak on behalf of citizens (Castiglione and Warren 2006).

This paper discusses the legitimacy of these 'non-electoral' (Saward 2005, 182) representative claims originating from within CSOs, which demand a rightful place in public policy processes. It assesses the institutional capacity and practices of Nepal's community electricity user groups (CEUGs) and discusses its representative legitimacy for participation in public policy processes in Nepal.

Changing Discourse on Civil Society

A contemporary, pragmatic challenge for democratic theory and practice is to identify the contexts in which governance mechanisms exhibit serious and systematic democratic deficits, and then to devise appropriate institutional remedies (Fung 2004, 671), which the literature identifies as the need to involve, engage, and increase citizens' access to the heart of public governance and decision-making. Gaventa (2004) mentions that globally there has been increasing attention on citizen participation, 'that is the ways in which ordinary citizens exercise voice through new forms of inclusion, consultation and/or mobilization designed to inform and influence larger institutions and policies'. Attention has also been given to strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of these institutions and policies through changes in institutional design, while at the same time increasing focus on enabling the structures for good government. He further explains that as participatory approaches are being scaled up from projects to enter the restricted domain of policy formulation, questions about how citizens engage and make demands on the state also come to the fore. Within this debate, citizens move from being simply 'users or choosers' of public policies made by others, to shapers of policies themselves (Cornwall and Gaventa 1999, 50). During the late 1960s and the 1970s, there was a growing demand in many parts of the world for citizens to be involved in decision-making processes that affected their lives, including in the social policy arena. The form of participation that emerged focused largely on establishing consultative mechanisms, often in the form of various types of civil society.

On the evolution and changing discourse on civil society, Harris (2006) elaborates on three distinct lines of thought that have guided and shaped the idea of civil society globally. The first, shaped during the dying years of the Roman republic, was perceived virtually coterminous with government, law enforcement, and the cluster of institutions that comprise the state. In the beginning of the 19th century, an alternative conception evolved where it was

viewed as the characteristic sphere of private property, commercial capitalism, and the various legal institutions and cultural support systems that these entail. The notion of civil society went into eclipse in the mid–20th century, and it was not until the late 1980s that it resurfaced in international and mass media debate as dissidents in Eastern Europe began to press for the development of autonomous public, legal, and social institutions to act as counterweights to the overbearing powers of totalitarian states. Although it began as a reaction against communism, an explosion of interest in civil society across Western countries among political theorists and civic activists began to revive civil society discourses to explain certain perceived deficiencies in their own liberal and democratic regimens. In the modern state, the idea of civil society envisages a stage where organisations speaking on behalf of voluntary non-profit and participatory movements constitute a powerful third sector, at par with state governments and the international economy. In recent discourses, the idea of civil society is identified with the enunciation of universal standards of democracy, fair procedures, rule of law, and respect for human rights.

Nepali discourse on CSOs encompasses a wide array of both formal and informal institutional arrangements. They confront a variety of pressures from citizens to address the complexity of development functions at both the local and national level, for which CSOs have advocated and demonstrated capacity in when partnering with the government in planning, monitoring, and influencing public policies (Dahal 2001). However, the contextual reality of CSOs in Nepal is largely concentrated around NGOs, both national and international. Nepal has observed a mushrooming growth of NGOs from 220 in 1990 to 37,000 in 2007 (Dhakal 2007), and the number is still growing. Since the 1950s, these organisations have complemented government actions by bridging funds, services, knowledge, and technology. As instruments of change, they have instituted innovative strategies towards promoting participatory forms of governance as well as advocating new agendas for policy contestation. Their performance and

accountability have, however, been exaggerated. The claim of these groups for a rightful place in public policy processes rests on claims that their expertise, representativeness, and processes of deliberation meet a standard that entitles them to influence, or even make, decisions that have consequences for those they claim to represent.

Origin and Evaluation of Non-electoral Claims in Representation

The legitimacy of policies and actors rests primarily on the extent to which they legitimately represent, or can successfully claim to represent, some group or larger set of social interests. The shifts in styles of governance from state-centric and more formal modes to plural and often informal modes of engagement with citizens at local, national, and supranational levels raise questions about the scope and legitimacy of traditional notions of political representation (Saward 2005). A number of theorists have criticised features of electoral and legislative representation, mostly on the grounds of unjust historical and contemporary exclusions, therefore justifying the growing discourse on non-electoral representation. Within political science discourses, non-electoral representation is identified as an effective means of enhancing public sector governance to facilitate active citizen participation in public planning, decision-making, and implementation, as well as towards ensuring and strengthening responsiveness, transparency, and accountability of government actions.

Saward (2008) explains that representation is about a claim representing the politics of, and dynamic relationship between, claimant and population represented, and not a given fact or a possession. He further explains his ideas on core ingredients to a representative claim, 'Maker-Subject-Object-Referent-Audience' and says that 'we might elect a politician or a party into office, but the simple fact of their election, important though that is, does not mean they can or will speak for the range of interests and identities that make us up.' Saward further explains the basis of representative claims by non-electoral entities in addition to presenting a few key ideas on the basis of which these claims can be legitimately

substantiated. He classifies claims by grouping them into three categories based on 'deeper roots' representative claims, 'expertise and special credentials' claims, and 'wider interests and new voices' claims. Claims can be substantiated on the basis of 'connecting' criteria, which focus on the positioning of claimants within certain formal and informal structures that connect them to institutions in a way that may bolster their democratic credentials; 'confirming' criteria, which focus on whether constituencies of varied kinds do or can accept claims in a way that lends them some democratic credibility; and 'untaintedness' criteria, which focus on claims located deliberately outside governmental institutions. He further explains that fidelity of cases to confirming and connecting criteria enables authorisation, or apparent and episodic prior consent; and fidelity to an idea of untaintedness enables authenticity, or apparent and constant responsive consent. The distinctive strength of key types of non-electoral claims tends to be closely linked to underlying values of authenticity. Saward further calls for recognition of the fact that constituencies are no longer only singular, territorial, fixed, and possessed of transparent interests. This, he says, 'will begin to recognise the inevitability, even the democratic necessity, of a wide array of other, non-electoral representative claims in complex contemporary democratic politics.'

Service User Groups and Legitimacy of Non-electoral Representation in Nepal

The question of legitimacy of representation among various civil society actors and institutions has been a constant source of contestation. Over the past few decades, discourses have shifted their curiosity towards larger-scale, mass-based rural movements (Cornwall and Gaventa 1999, 55), which are sufficiently close to the grassroots and can accountably address the political economy of their surroundings.

Nepal has an established and acclaimed history of CBOs successfully working for local social services and public goods. Initiatives at the grassroots level such as local forestry committees, water

supply groups, irrigation and sanitation working groups, mothers' groups, micro-hydroelectric groups, and dairy cooperatives (Yadoo and Cruickshank 2010, 2943) have emerged as key grassroots institutions in strengthening development and democracy through collective action of associated members and service users. With the re-establishment of democracy in 1990 in Nepal, the implementation strategy of most development agencies, programmes, and projects has been group-led development and group-oriented activities. The typology of user groups in Nepal can be classified as customary and sponsored. Some are culturally embedded self-initiatives of local citizens, established as part of age-old tradition or in response to contemporary exclusion or threat; others are interventions of outside origin (Biggs et al 2004).

User groups in Nepal have been seen as successful in enabling access to services, strengthening local resource bases, mobilising multipurpose community development initiatives, and encouraging savings and credit for local investment, all of which can in many instances contribute to the goals of social inclusion and empowerment of group members. These groups exist principally to enhance the social and economic positions of group members and to give group members a stronger voice in policy and political arenas (Biggs et.al. 2004). Institutional arrangements such as user groups have been received with keen interest both locally, as important CBOs, and nationally, as potentially legitimate apparatuses of non-electoral representative entities for policy deliberations.

User groups across all 75 districts in Nepal function in various sectors, provisioning and managing infrastructure, services and resources. The collective membership base of these user groups in sectors such as forestry, irrigation, drinking water management, and sanitation, etc, is estimated to be around 20 million users, which is equal to almost two third of Nepal's nearly 30 million citizens. Users in the forestry sector alone account for almost 35 per cent of the country's population (DoF 2012). The basic difference between NGOs and user groups, in their legitimacy as representative non-electoral policy actors, is embedded in the institutionalised norms of

collective action, autonomy, self-governance, and regulatory structures within user groups, which enable participatory management of local resources, infrastructure, and services; democratic decision-making; and adoption of egalitarian agendas. A large membership base endows unequivocal rights to user groups in making legitimate claims of representing citizens, ensuring participation, and influencing policy processes in Nepal. Avowedly claiming to have strong democratic norms, they seem to demonstrate a higher awareness of, and access to, members' concerns. While they have been widely acclaimed for ensuring efficient service delivery, their claim of representing citizens' voices in policy processes, and their institutional capacity to access public voices to influence policy processes and decisions, have received very little attention.

Community-based Electricity Distribution in Nepal

Community electricity user groups (CEUGs) represents a growing network of users in 48 districts of Nepal. Where over 16.5 million people in Nepal do not have access to grid electricity, and only 8 per cent of the rural populace has access to grid electricity (NEA 2011), the role and contribution of CEUGs in decentralised rural electrification has been paramount. The promulgation of the Community Electrification By-laws in 2003 has facilitated the formation of CEUGs and distribution of electricity, powering over 116,000 households across rural Nepal (NACEUN 2012). The demonstrable success of CEUGs has enabled policy recognition. The National Association of Community Electricity Users-Nepal (NACEUN), formed in 2005, has been acting as the collective and representative voice of all CEUGs, advocating for the protection and promotion of equitable rights of its associated electricity users. NACEUN has been continuously raising its voice at various policy platforms, representing the needs and challenges of operating within the current centralised and generation-oriented national electricity regime. These policy agendas raised by NACEUN call for appropriate policy and legislative reforms to address the identity of user-based community electrification in Nepal and ease

current bottlenecks in promotion, development, and extension of user-based programmes. Given that NACEUN is a relatively nascent network, its institutional governance and management capacity are still evolving. However, the legitimacy of claims in representation put forward by these user groups remains crucial in identifying user-based community electrification within the national discourse on non-electoral representation in Nepal.

Objective and Methodology

Drawing upon the case study of South Lalitpur Rural Electricity Cooperative (SLREC), the study assesses the institutional capacity of CEUGs. To ascertain the legitimacy and role of non-electoral policy actors representing the collective voice of electricity users across Nepal, this study documents processes and functions within the system that enable users to participate in decision-making and agenda setting.

The nature of the study encompassed the need for qualitative data to be partly complimented with quantitative information, and be generated using primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected from key informants and groups involved with the community electrification programme at the local and the national level, using semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Secondary data has been collected through a review of relevant literature, documented minutes, and records at SLREC and NACEUN. The scope of this study encompasses empirical findings from the field site at Pyutar VDC, which is one of the working VDCs within the scope of SLREC. For the purpose of the study, the relevance and relatedness of local issues from Pyutar VDC were traced from the bottom up to the broader issues and agendas at SLREC, and the national policy agendas being advocated by the national association.

South Lalitpur Rural Electricity Cooperative

Established in 2000, South Lalitpur Rural Electricity Cooperative is a first-of-its-kind CBO that successfully applied for grid

extension and taking over local distribution of electricity from the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) (Yadoo and Cruickshank 2010, 2944). Beginning its electrification campaign with an 80:20 co-partnership scheme, where 80 per cent of the total capital cost is financed through government grants and the remaining 20 per cent collected by the respective applicant agency or community, it has successfully electrified over 4011 households to date (SLREC 2011). With 157 shareholders when it started out in 1999–2000, at the time of writing there were altogether 825 shareholders, consisting of both individual and institutional shareholders, as of December 2011. Classification of 632 shareholders from 2010 shows that 436 shareholders were male, 42 female, and the remaining 154 institutional (SLREC 2011). Encompassing 19 VDCs south of Lalitpur District, it is among one of the largest electricity user cooperatives in Nepal.

Structurally, SLREC operations is divided into three distinct tiers: the general assembly (GA), executive committee (EC), and transformer sub-committee (TSC). The GA is the apex governing body at SLREC, which convenes every year to discuss, deliberate, and endorse key strategies and policy-level issues regarding community electrification in the 19 VDCs of south Lalitpur. A major responsibility of the GA is to choose the executive and the accounts committee every three years. Member shareholders, representatives from the district development committee, the village development committee, and TSCs, along with invited observers and dignitaries, participate in the GA.

The EC is the responsible authority for operational and management issues at SLREC. The GA, through election or mutual consensus, chooses 13 members for the EC, which comprises a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer and nine general members for a term of three years on a voluntary basis. It manages the day-to-day operations at SLREC. The EC members meet on a monthly basis to discuss agendas collected and tabled by the general manager and the chairperson.

Enabled through the Transformer Sub-Committee Guidelines,

TSCs are local grassroots governance units that primarily liaise between consumer households in the project area, SLREC management, and governing authorities. While they support the operation and implementation of electrification at the local level, periodic interaction with local citizens and consumers allows TSCs to bring to attention issues and problems of local users to the SLREC EC for appropriate action. At the time of writing there were 73 TSCs operational within SLREC's working area of 19 VDCs. All TSCs are formed at the beginning of the electrification campaign in the concerned localities. A local gathering is facilitated by the SLREC, where representatives of local political parties, VDC members and ward representatives, representatives of schools and health posts, key community leaders, and members of the general public are invited for a discussion at the beginning of the electrification campaign in the locality. The local gathering, through general consensus or voting, chooses nine members for the positions of chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer and five members. All positions within the TSC are voluntary and last for a term of two years. The operational scope and jurisdiction of the TSC are limited to the load capacity of one transformer unit, i.e., the total number of consumers connected through one electricity transformer. To enable wider representation of the voice of local consumers and to support democratic decision-making at SLREC, TSCs have been integrated as institutional shareholders. A total of 58 (out of the 73) TSCs had bought SLREC shares.

Community Electrification at Pyutar VDC

Located just 14 km south of the district headquarters, Pyutar VDC lies alongside the border with Makwanpur District. Pyutar is characterised by its geographic remoteness and limited accessibility. With 326 households and a total population size of 1903 (985 males and 918 females), Pyutar's two largest ethnic groups are Tamang (1196) and Brahmin (410) (CBS 2001). While distribution of electricity through SLREC began in 2004, the households in Pyutar VDC were only electrified in 2010–2011.

A total of 195 households in eight wards of the VDC had been electrified through three TSCs, with only Ward Three remaining to be electrified.

Of the three TSCs, the Pyutar TSC is the largest, extending its service to households in five wards of the VDC. Established in 2009–2010 through a community gathering of over 80 community members, representatives for Pyutar TSC were selected through general consensus. Although the term of the current TSC had expired, a new committee had not been formed.

Policy Narratives in Community Electricity Distribution

Key narratives at Pyutar VDC were based around access to electricity, the problem of loadshedding, and the quality of electricity supplied. Extension of the grid and the beginning of the electrification campaign began with exuberance and hope among community members as it was promised that all households in the VDC would be electrified. However, only 195 households in Pyutar VDC had been provided access to electricity. While the potential and the benefits of electricity are being realised by a select few in the VDC who have increased access to electrical appliances and electricity-based entrepreneurship, over 60 per cent of households still do not have such opportunities.[1] Households without access to electricity have been forced to rely on solar systems or traditional kerosene lamps, *tuki*, depending on their level of income. While the VDC had already disbursed NPR 1,000,000 to the Nepal Electricity Authority to commence new electrification schemes, locals had been waiting for over two years for the project to begin. Those already with a connection were troubled by loadshedding, particularly at a time of peak demand from 6 to 8 o'clock in the evening. Additionally, the low capacity of the extension line, users' distance from the national distribution centre, and frequent disturbances in other parts of the extended distribution line often resulted in the supply of low-quality electricity.

1   Focus Group Discussion with residents and electricity users at Pyutar VDC, 26 April, 2012. Lalitpur, Nepal.

Examining the various issues and problems collected from the 19 VDCS, the key issues in community electrification being voiced by SLREC were as follows:

- Foremost, the state should recognise the rights of the rural populace to access essential services like electricity, and should introduce policy measures that ensure equal access for all rural households.
- A new institutional structure should be created for the management and governance of community electrification, and provisions for a separate basket fund at the national and district levels should be established to enable an efficient, transparent, and accountable community electrification regime.
- Problems of poor quality electricity should be resolved, primarily the lack of a high capacity transmission line and a distribution centre solely dedicated to serving the 19 VDCs of south Lalitpur.
- Change in the tariff structure that duly considers local demand and consumption patterns to enable a just electricity regime.

Through the federal governance structure of NACEUN, issues and agendas from across 207 community electrification user groups are brought into consideration of the central executive committee. The annual meeting of the national council enables representatives of all user groups to collectively discuss and deliberate on various policy challenges and bottlenecks for the smooth and just implementation of community electrification programmes across the nation. Collective mandate and policy agendas are framed through the national council and the general assembly of NACEUN for policy discourse and advocacy in promoting community electrification and the rights of its users. Key issues being advocated by NAECUN in community electrification at the national level were as following:

- Owing to the difference in mandate of the community electrification movement and the objectives of the NEA, there is the need to create a new and inclusive governing institution for the management, monitoring, and promotion of community electrification.
- Creation of a separate basket fund at the national and district levels for community electrification is needed and should be managed by the new governing institution.
- Inclusive and equitable power sector reform is needed through targeted policies for the promotion and development of rural electrification. Also, policies to accommodate the interests and agendas of the rural population are needed (Ghimire 2011).

User Involvement and Decision-making in CEUG

A cooperative model has enabled SLREC to adopt a 'one member, one vote' policy, ensuring balance of power and authority among members, and supporting the institutionalisation of stronger democratic practices and norms. The participation and involvement of communities in the provisioning, management and monitoring of electricity have resulted in higher efficiency compared to the state service delivery apparatus. Localised decision-making practices have enabled better prioritisation and more transparency and accountability of the cooperative's actions. The level of participation and representation of local electricity users along with the cooperatives' decision-making structure plays an important role in preventing the exacerbation of socioeconomic, cultural, and political divides within communities.

In the case of SLREC, two major issues surface with regard to participation and representation of local users in the decision-making process. The first pertains to the differences in the role and capacity of cooperative service users and members. Two distinct profiles exist with regard to the governance and management of SLRECs. The cooperative provides services for more than 4,011 households in the 19 VDCs of south Lalitpur. While an average

of four to five individuals benefit directly from a single household connection, only the legitimate owner of the house is a registered user at the cooperative in reality. The users participate in local planning and management functions and represent their concerns and problems in the cooperative through appropriate formal and informal channels. However, there are only 825 shareholder members who can directly participate in actual decision-making roles by casting their votes. While the role and capacity of service users can be seen as passive and secondary, with only access to decision-making, the 825 shareholder members within the cooperative have both access and control over management and policy decisions at SLREC. While users' concerns are actually represented in the cooperative's agenda, their inability to decide on their own is structurally constrained. Though SLREC had made it compulsory for all new users to purchase at least one share – to be progressively mandated for the older users – its enforcement has been sluggish especially among old users. A clear privilege of making key decisions regarding cooperative leadership, strategic direction, and agenda setting limited to only 825 shareholder members also raised questions about the limited accountability of the cooperative.

Despite the cooperative's effort at promoting the involvement and participation of women in its governance, their actual representation at the GA as shareholder members and on the EC is limited. Weak representation of women at SLREC's agenda-setting and decision-making functions has resulted in the agenda raised at the cooperative being weak in terms of providing the perspectives of women in the context of challenges and constraints of community electrification.

Politics, Leadership, and Accountability in Community Electricity Governance

The issue of electrification has been a playground for political contestation in the 19 VDCs of south Lalitpur. Since its beginning, the electrification movement has faced the criticism of being controlled by the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified

Marxist-Leninist) (UML, in short) supporters. Other political forces at the local and the district level have even claimed that the cooperative's actions have been used as a medium to push political agendas. These claims were found to be widely accepted by service users, members of the TSC, and local political parties in Pyutar VDC. Local party politics was found to be integrated in the management and governance of community electrification at Pyutar VDC, with some political representatives being represented at the TSC as well as the EC of SLREC.

A comparative analysis of the leadership of SLREC from 2005 till the time of writing showed three different ECs had been formed: two formed in consensus, in 2004 and 2007, and political diplomacy sought in 2010 to forge consensus for the current EC. Comparison of the EC members from 2004 and 2007 indicate that ten of the 13 members were the same; one member from the accounts committee of 2004 had been included as a member of the executive committee of 2007. Four were found to have been on all three executive committees, including one who served in the ECs from 2004 and 2007 and included on the last accounts committee. Out of the total 39 member positions available in all three ECs, new members had been introduced for 15 committee positions of which nine were on the third executive committee. Also, female representation on the executive committee was found to be low, and the same member was the only female on both the committees of 2004 and 2007. The third EC had no female representation as there were no provisions for reservations.

With the changed national political climate, the association of SLREC and its leadership with the UML came as a major obstacle for budget allocation in electrification. To address this issue, the SLREC leadership and individuals outside the cooperative negotiated a power-sharing agreement to include representatives of all three major political parties in the EC of the SLREC. Accordingly, about five days prior to the GA of December 2010, positions in the to-be formed EC were divided between the three political parties: Chair from the UML, Vice-chair from the Communist Party

of Nepal (Maoist), and Secretary from the Nepali Congress (NC). For the first time in the history of the SLREC, elections were held during the GA for the position of Vice-chair and general members with two Maoist representatives competing for the former position.[2]

The operation of the Pyutar TSC and initiatives in community electrification at Pyutar VDC were found to be primarily controlled by selected individuals and a few political party representatives. The collection of feedback from member from Pyutar has been largely through informal channels such as informal day-to-day gatherings at the tea shop, milk processing centre, etc. The cooperative does not actually mandate TSCs to be accountable to local concerns since there is the fear of losing local representatives who serve voluntarily. However, for local users and residents of Pyutar, the Pyutar TSC is the sole authority in electrification and thus they do hold the TSC accountable for delays in service and they expect it to represent their concerns at the SLREC.

The role of the all-party mechanism in budgetary allocations for electrification has created an overlapping leadership nexus, with one individual performing as both a political party leader and a TSC representative. However, this has further strengthened political accountability of local representatives, as they are judged by users and locals based on their effort and dedication to working for local electrification and user agendas. Since these representatives have been asked to appear at public gatherings to answer and commit to promises made by the SLREC for electrification, their political legitimacy is dependent on their ability to successfully represent and lobby for agendas raised by local users and residents.

Representative Legitimacy of National Policy Agendas

Integrating agendas of individual user groups through an elaborate representative structure has allowed NACEUN a legitimate base to advocate for the rights of its associated members and individual

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2   Personal communication from Govinda Bajhgai, General Manager of South Lalitpur Rural Electricity Cooperative, 21 April, 2012.

users for the promotion and development of community and rural electrification. The inclusion and participation of individual user groups in an accessible and democratic set-up has helped establish the representative legitimacy of NACEUN as the sole collective voice of both community and rural electrification. The due recognition of this voice among policy actors and institutions in Nepal has enabled NACEUN's entry into spaces for policy deliberation.

Tracing the voice and agendas of local users through community electricity distribution institutions has enabled a better understanding of NACEUN's claims to being the official voice representing local concerns in the national policy discourse. On reviewing the origin and journey of local narratives in Pyutar VDC, it can be said that users' concerns and problems have been well represented at the SLREC, to the extent of even having transformed the policy agenda of NACEUN. It can be concluded that the national policy agendas in community and rural electrification successfully encompass local users' problems, which provide a legitimate base for addressing policy bottlenecks.

Conclusion

The user based community electrification programme, with a collective agenda beyond lighting, upholds the capacity of collective community action in ensuring an egalitarian, efficient, and decentralised service delivery model. Through a growing network of user groups across Nepal, the movement encapsulates the ethos of a successful community-based initiative that empowers rural communities, households, and institutions to collectively work towards management of a complex development service, such as the extension and distribution of electricity. Complexities in community electrification are not limited to local distribution and management; they are, in fact, spread over a larger domain of national policies and legislation. The limited scope of national resource policies and institutions, including in hydropower development, has failed to recognise the need for and potential of involving communities in developing sustainable policy agendas. Narrow policies

and the perfunctory promises given by political representatives have failed to address the concerns and challenges of rural communities, especially the need aspect of electricity. Given such a context, the user-based community and rural electrification movement in Nepal have paved the prospect for rural communities and electricity users to unify in advocating for the protection and promotion of collective agendas. The growing constituency of CEUGs and users across Nepal and the increasing recognition of dialogues initiated by NACEUN underscore the importance of non-electoral modes of representation in public policy discourse.

While the call for establishing an accommodating policy process for non-electoral actors will strengthen representation of marginalised voices, it is also important to address the vulnerabilities associated within these representative claims. To enable an accessible, equitable, and accountable representation system within non-electoral institutions, it is imperative that cooption and coercion of power in decision-making and representation be duly addressed, especially at the local level. The role of leadership (representatives) and integration of party politics within the CEUGs and its governance are the noted critical issues from this study. Both have been found to play a major part in shaping who participates, who represents, and who decides. Though the concerns of local users have been found to be well encapsulated in national agendas, decision-making at Pyutar TSC and SLREC have been largely under the control of a select few individuals, mostly supporting a single political party. While control, support and influence of political leadership have hindered inclusion and participation, in the case of the SLREC, this trend has given rise to new avenues to demand accountability. It has been seen that politics and development are inseparable, and leadership capacities can switch between electoral and non-electoral spaces. The idea of a non-electoral representative agency, especially in the form of a user-based CBO network, provides a space for electoral contestation, thus building overlapping lines of accountability for both electoral and non-electoral agencies in the promotion and protection of local voices.

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'Objectionable Content'
The Policing of Nepali Print Media during the 1950s

Lokranjan Parajuli

AFTER the popular movement of 1950–51, the Nepali print media sector experienced a decade of significant growth. With the publication of the weekly, *Jagaran*, and the daily, *Aawaj*, both from the private sector, in 1951, the Nepali press also emerged from the state's direct purview. This paper assesses the status of press freedom during this period of growth, between 1950 and 1960. By studying actions taken by state agencies (mostly the Kathmandu Magistrate's Office) against various newspapers, it seeks to answer the following questions: First, under what legal regime did newspapers function during that decade? Second, to what extent did newspapers enjoy the freedom of press enshrined in the Interim Constitution? Finally, what was considered to be 'objectionable content' during that decade? By answering these questions, this paper shows that the freedom enjoyed by the press was gradually curtailed through legal amendments, resulting in an increase in actions taken against various newspapers. It also argues that state agencies were particularly sensitive towards three institutions or agencies: the Shah monarch and his family; the prime ministers and their governments; and foreign embassies and individuals. The likelihood of state action against newspapers increased when negative content was published in relation to any of these figures or institutions (cf. Hutt 2006).

The first section of this paper examines the constitutional-legal

arrangements that governed the press and publication sector in 1950–1960 in order to show the gradual shrinking of the freedom gained in 1951. The second section looks at a number of variables related to government action against the papers. The third explores what constitutes 'objectionable content' in the eyes of government agencies.

The first section uses legal state documents as its source. The second and third sections rely mainly on the book, *Nepali Patrapatrika ra Chhapakhanako Itihas* by Grishma Bahadur Devkota (2024 BS). More than half of this book is devoted to detailing actions taken against newspapers for publishing 'objectionable content'. However, the entirety of what constitutes such contents and full details of the actions taken by state agencies are not mentioned in the book, thus limiting the scope of this research.

Constitutional/Legal Provisions

Before 1951

The now-infamous *Muluki Ain* (literally, 'law of the land') of 1854, prepared and enacted by the first Rana prime minister, Jang Bahadur, contained no reference to the press and publication sector.[1] In 1920, Article 31 was added to the fifth part of the *Ain*, making it mandatory for any published document to adhere to the following procedure: it had to first be presented to the Nepali Bhasha Prakashini Samiti; the Samiti would then review it, and, if deemed appropriate, would provide a no-objection letter. Only then, would the document go to the press (PCN 2030 BS).[2]

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1   Presumably, because there was no such need felt. In fact, it was Jang Bahadur who brought the first printing press, popularly called *giddhe* (vulture) press, to Nepal in 1851.

2   If a document was published without prior permission from the office, the publisher or printer would be fined Rs 50 in the case of 'non-objectionable' content. If the content was found to be 'objectionable', all copies would be seized and the case referred to the appropriate authority for further prosecution (PCN 2030 BS: 124–25, also Acharya 2008 BS: 157–63). It is worth noting here that Krishna Lal Adhikari wrote an apparently non-political book, *Makaiko Kheti*

Nepal's first press act, the *Chhapakhana ra Prakashan Sambandhi Ain*, was enacted on April 14, 1948, and consisted of four sections and 34 articles. The Act prohibited the publication of a paper without first getting permission from the concerned authority of the state.[3] Article 6 proscribed the publication of content which, directly, indirectly, or satirically, using words, symbols, and sentences in books, papers, and other documents, committed the following: incited one to murder or conspire against *Shree Panch* (the king) or *Shree Teen* (the Rana prime minister), obstruct governance or the government, arouse sexually *(kamatur garaune)*, or disturb social harmony, etc.[4] This Act also required both the printer and publisher to deposit 1000 rupees in cash or collateral of the same value (PCN 2030 BS).

Provisions after 1951

After the Delhi Compromise of 1951, political leaders returned to Nepal along with King Tribhuvan. On February 18, 1951, Tribhuvan read out a proclamation, popularly known as the royal proclamation, or *shahi ghoshana.* Subsequently, the Interim Constitution of 1951 (*Antarim Shashan Bidhan,* 2007, literally 'Interim Governance Act') was promulgated. The document legally introduced Nepal to a new system of political governance. It guaranteed freedom of speech, with provisions related to freedom of expression and publication being stipulated in Section 2, Article 16(a).[5]

(Farming Maize), and got it published only after receiving permission from the authorities. Despite this, the book was later banned and all, but one, copies were seized. The author was also jailed for the 'crime' of publishing the book, eventually dying in incarceration (see Ghimire 2068 BS and Poudel 2045 BS).

3   Article 9 of this Act detailed the procedure to be used to acquire permission from the concerned office.

4   There were 14 points detailed in the list of things that the publications ought not to do (see PCN 2030 BS: 93–112).

5   It should also be noted here that on September 9, 1952, Tribhuvan promulgated a special Emergency Power Act, through which he arrogated enormous executive power, thereby abrogating the king-in-council principle—the principle on which the Interim Constitution was based. The new Act clearly stipulated that '[t]he executive power of the State shall be vested in the King who shall exercise it

However, even before the formal transition of power and before the Act actually came into force, some newspapers had already begun publishing. For instance, *Jagaran* began on February 15, the day that Tribhuvan and other political leaders returned to Nepal. *Aawaj* appeared in the market on February 19, a day after the royal proclamation. More newspapers came out in the following weeks and months. These papers did not fully adhere to the now-redundant but still existing legal document from 1948. On May 15, 1951, the Secretary to the Home Department sent out letters to both the publishers and printers of the papers, reminding them of the 1948 Act, urging them to follow the existing law and assist the government in maintaining law and order. The letter further asked them to send two copies of the printed material to the office immediately after publication.

This attempt to revert to the governance using an old law created a stir and resulted in the papers condemning the effort. Both *Janamitra* monthly and the Bulletin of the Nepali National Congress ran editorials on the matter. 'Inappropriate order of the interim government; against press freedom', wrote the former, adding that, 'the revolution was waged to break the draconian law and civil rights were attained, but now there is this attempt to curtail the press freedom by using the same old act'. The latter declared that the people must oppose such an arbitrary *(manpari)* action of the government. In light of a barrage of such criticisms, the government issued a press release on May 18 in order 'to clear misunderstandings'. 'Since the old act is yet to be amended and a new act is still not on the horizon, the press is printing irresponsibly *(jathabhavi)*', stated the release. This, it was claimed, forced the government to draw the attention of the press towards the existing law in order to maintain law and order. Moreover, it was also mentioned in the release that the law 'will soon be amended and the press freedom shall in no way be curtailed' (Devkota 2024 BS: 232–33).

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directly or through the subordinate officers according to the laws framed by him' (Chauhan 1971: 62).

Two Acts of 2009 BS

In 2009 BS, two acts, namely the *Nepal Chhapakhana ra Prakashan Registry Ain 2008* and the *Chhapakhana ra Prakashan Sambandhi Ain 2009* were introduced. The former covered the registration of the printing press and publication-related issues. The focus of the latter was on the regulation of the content of the press (i.e., newspapers and bulletins).

The preamble of the Registry Act mentioned that the Act was prepared to 'control the press and newspapers and to collect and preserve a copy of all the documents either printed or lithographed from within Nepal'. It prohibited the publication of a newspaper without following proper legal procedures, that is, without first getting permission from the concerned office.[6] Those papers that were already in print were required to register and acquire permission from the concerned authorities within 35 days of the enactment of the Act.[7] One major change was that the mandatory 1000-rupee deposit (for both printer and publisher) had been removed.

The second act was enacted during the same year, within five months of the first. This act was prepared and enacted because, according to the government, 'even though the old act of 2005 BS was replaced by the act of 2008 BS, the press remained confused *(bhramma parera)* and continued to publish materials in bulletins, booklets, newspapers which posed a challenge to the law and order situation of the country'. Therefore, as the preamble clearly mentions, this act was promulgated 'in order to fully control, regulate the press and maintain law and order' (PCN 2030 BS: 73–92).

This Act more or less reinstated the provision of requiring a deposit from both the printer and publisher of the paper—an ambiguous provision, since it was left to the authority to decide whether or not to ask for the deposit. Furthermore, the authority

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6 Violation of this provision was a punishable offense. The punishment for a violation was either a fine of up to Rs 2000, six months' imprisonment, or both (PCN 2030 BS).

7 In districts outside Kathmandu, the district police officer could take a decision on the application to register a newspaper.

could now ask for any amount as long as it did not exceed 1000 rupees. This allowed government officers to treat certain agents differentially, and, thus, violated the new legal principle that all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law.

Moreover, this Act prohibited the press from publishing certain content, the violation of which became a punishable offence. If a paper, book, or other publication contained content deemed likely to contribute to increasing the crimes listed in Articles 5(1) to 5(9),[8] the government authority could then ask for a deposit of 500 to 3000 rupees. Article 36 of this Act also allowed the government to impose a ban on the publication of news and criticism in cases it deemed reasonable to do so in the 'public interest' *(duniyako hit nimitta)*. It was, however, up to the government authority to decide what was considered to be in the interest of the public and what was not.[9]

Amendments of 2010 BS

The 2009 BS Act was amended on April 28, 1954. The existing Article 5 was scrapped, resulting in both press owners and publishers subsequently being required to sign declarations that they would not violate the law and if violations did occur, they would bear the consequences as per law.[10] The existing Article 5(d) was also scrapped. In its place, a provision was created, whereby printing or publishing materials against the king, his family, ambassadors to Nepal, the legally formed government, and the judiciary/judicial administration, and fomenting hatred amongst the king's subjects

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8   This included inciting murder or other violent activities; fomenting disrespect or hatred towards the king, his family, and the government; creating law-and-order problems, and so on (PCN 2030 BS: 73–92).

9   This article, along with Articles 4 and 8 (which allowed the bureaucrat to seek a deposit from both the printer and publisher), was the most criticised by the press. The report of the first-ever Press Commission, formed under the press attaché of the palace and later reorganised and headed by a special judge of the Supreme Court, also recommended revisions to the aforementioned articles (see PCN 2060 BS: 266–383).

10 This provision was added, it appears, to further deter printers and publishers from publishing materials that were against the rulers.

(jati, varna and *upajati)*, the king, and his government, all became criminal offences (Devkota 2024 BS: 236–37).

Amendments of 2014 BS
The Press and Publication Act was amended once again on December 4, 1957, with particular emphasis on Article 5(d). With this amendment, the publication of content that fomented hatred and disrespect towards foreign countries or caused disturbances in the relationship between friendly countries was also considered a criminal activity and, hence, became a punishable offence. As per the amended provisions, if disrespect or hatred was fomented against the king and his family, 'direct action' *(thadai karvahi)* would be taken against the offender. An additional penalty of a three-year imprisonment, a fine of 3000 rupees, or both, was imposed alongside other punishments as per the existing laws of Nepal. If a similar offence was committed against the government, the punishment was two years of imprisonment or a fine of 2000 rupees, or both. A similar offence against a government employee would amount to six months imprisonment or a fine of 500 rupees (Devkota 2024 BS: 237-38).

In 1959, King Mahendra had a constitution drafted and promulgated even though it had been agreed in 1951 to hold elections to a constituent assembly.[11] Article 4(7) of Part 3 of this constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and publication, freedom of assembly without arms, freedom to form associations, and freedom of movement.[12] Although freedom of expression and press was thus accepted in theory, in practice this freedom and the political space were both gradually curtailed, regulated, and controlled by laws introduced and amended at regular intervals. Thus, the

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11 Such an election was never held. After several postponements, the country did hold its first general election in 1959, but not for the purpose of a constituent assembly. Instead, it was for the parliament. The constitution, which was intended to govern parliamentary politics, was enacted a week before the parliamentary elections (see Chauhan 1971).

12 For an analysis of the 1959 Constitution of Nepal, see Appadorai and Baral (2012).

gains of the 1951 political movement slowly seeped away even as Nepal's political governance system gradually became more regimented and the control of the monarchy became more tenacious.

Media Growth and Sanctions against the Press

Growth of the Press

Historically speaking, the Nepali print media sector is more than a century old, with the first newspaper of the country, *Gorkhapatra*, being established in 1901. However, it was only after the movement of 1950–51 that the sector saw any growth.[13] Compared to the number of newspapers registered in the first five decades of the 20th century (a total of 16, including literary magazines), the number of papers registered in the decade following the overthrow of the Rana regime is exceptionally large (264). With the publication of *Jagaran* (edited by Hridayachandra Singh Pradhan) and *Aawaj* (edited by Siddhicharan Shrestha), the Nepali press also came out of the state's direct purview. While this growth was mostly centred in Kathmandu, we can also see a few papers published outside of Kathmandu. Of the 264 papers registered between 1950 and 1960, half were published at intervals of a day and up to a fortnight and were, therefore, likely to be newspapers. The rest of the publications were likely to be magazines, bulletins, or literary and other types of journals (cf. Aryal 2068 BS).[14]

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13 Even though the press was severely restricted in Nepal during the Rana era, Nepali entrepreneurs in various Indian cities were involved in the newspaper business–e.g., *Gorkha Bharat Jeevan, Gorkhe Khabar Kagat, Gorkhali, Gorkha, Tarun Gorkha, Gorkha Sansar, Gorkha Sevak, Asam Gorkha, Gorkha Samachar*, etc, catering to an 'imagined' Nepali community. See Onta (1996) and Chalmers (2003) for discussions of the formation of Nepali identity and the Nepali public sphere in the early 20th century.

14 The distinction between newspapers and other variants is important because it was largely the former that attracted the attention of the state. There is a possibility that no issues were ever published of a number of registered newspapers. Furthermore, some were shelved after a period of time. It should also be noted here that some of the papers died due to state intervention, as is discussed in the latter sections of this article.

Table 1: Annual Media Growth

Year (BS)	Number of papers published (registered)	Daily-fortnightly only	Year (BS)	Number of papers published (registered)	Daily-fortnightly only
1955–2006	17	6	2012	20	17
2007	5	4	2013	24	15
2008	15	8	2014	39	22
2009	22	8	2015	28	11
2010	20	11	2016	34	8
2011	20	15	2017	37	13
Total (2007–17 BS)				264	132

Source: Derived from *Nepalko Patrapatrika ra Chhapakhanako Itihas* by Grishma Bahadur Devkota (2024 BS).

The table above shows that the number of registered papers increased annually.[15] However, the growth is not even and the fluctuation is more pronounced in the case of newspapers. In 2014 BS alone, 39 new papers were registered, perhaps 22 of which were newspapers. This is an important year politically, with Tanka Prasad Acharya's prime ministership of more than 18 months coming to an end.[16] King Mahendra then appointed K.I. Singh as prime minister, and Singh was only able to remain in this post for 108 days. Later, the monarch began ruling directly. Mahendra's antics were criticised by many of the political parties, leading them to collectively launch the *satyagraha*, eventually forcing Mahendra

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15 This increase was not limited to newspapers. The period also witnessed the establishment of two news agencies, namely, Sagarmatha News Agency and Nepal News Agency. After the royal takeover in 1960, the government dissolved both entities, subsequently setting up a National News Agency (Rastriya Sambad Samiti, later renamed Rastriya Samachar Samiti) under official patronage. Mahendra's press secretary was appointed the chairman of the new news agency (see Baral 1975, also Belbase and Murphy 1983).

16 While accepting Acharya's resignation, King Mahendra also stated that Acharya had resigned on the grounds of not being able to hold the election, an accusation that Acharya refuted, even going as far as making his resignation letter public (see Joshi and Rose 1966).

to reach a compromise with them (see Chauhan 1971, also Gupta 1993). In order to increase their voice during this tumultuous political period, the parties began publishing new newspapers, thereby leading to a surge in the total number published.[17]

Actions Taken against the Newspapers

With the rise in the number of newspapers after 2008 BS, the number of actions taken against them also increased. During this period, 34 papers faced at least one type of action, amounting to 100 actions collectively (see Table 2). The number of actions increased gradually until 2014 BS and then decreased sharply the following year. A total of 24 actions were taken in 2014 BS compared to just four in 2015 BS. These two years were, as mentioned earlier, years of intense political bickering. The next year, a kind of national government was formed under the chairmanship of the Nepali Congress (NC) leader Suvarna Shamsher. Thus, there was less acrimony amongst the parties, and also between the government and the parties. Besides this, government agencies were also gearing up for the upcoming election, all of which resulted in fewer actions against the newspapers. By 2016 BS, the first popularly elected government under B.P. Koirala of the NC had come to power. The outcome of the election was quite surprising. While many established leaders of various parties failed to win seats, the Nepali Congress won with a two-third landslide. The number of actions against the media increased slightly, totalling nine in 2016 BS and doubling in the following year. In 2017 BS, many political parties, including the royal palace, were ganging up against the ruling Nepali Congress government (Baral 2012a). This was orchestrated by the palace, and especially involved those parties that had fared badly in the election (Baral 2012b). This conflict was also reflected in the press. Subsequently, when the press also began publishing criticisms, the government agencies began taking action.

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17 Between 2013 and 2014 BS, we also see an increase in the number of severe actions taken against newspapers. Although a number of newspapers were shelved, the individuals associated with them returned to the field with new ones.

Table 2: Annual Actions Taken against the Media[18]

Year (BS)	Number of actions taken	Year (BS)	Number of actions taken
2008	1	2013	22
2009	2	2014	24
2010	4	2015	4
2011	8	2016	9
2012	8	2017	18
Total			100

The actions against newspapers were disaggregated in order to see whether there was a difference in outcome on who was leading the government at the time. Table 3 shows that no newspaper faced any actions when King Tribhuvan was ruling directly.[19] Similarly, the government under Mohan Shamsher, formed after the fall of the Rana regime in which NC was a coalition partner, also took no action. The sole action listed in Table 3 during Mohan Shamsher's period of office was taken by the Apex Court against the Nepali National Congress Bulletin in a contempt of court case.[20] The government under Suvarna Shamsher also took fewer actions, being limited to four instances. Going by these figures, the government under Tanka Prasad Acharya seems to have been the most negative towards the press as, during his tenure, a total of 34 actions were taken. The B.P. Koirala government comes second in this list with 27 actions; two thirds of which were taken in the second half of his tenure. Though the K.I. Singh government lasted for just over 100 days, there were already 11 actions in that period. Furthermore, if one were to compare the figures taking the time factor into con-

18 Unless otherwise stated, all the tables included in this paper have been prepared by the author. This has been done after coding various actions taken against the print media mentioned in *Nepalko Patrapatrika ra Chhapakhanako Itihas* by Grishma Bahadur Devkota (2024 BS).

19 After the fall of the Matrika Prasad Koirala government, owing mainly to conflicts within the Nepali Congress party, King Tribhuvan ruled for 10 months with five royal advisors.

20 Three members of the party were found guilty in this contempt of the court case. The ruling was based on the 2005 BS Act.

Table 3: Actions under Various Governments

Head of government	Date of term	Duration	Number of actions
Mohan Shamsher Rana	Feb. 18, 1951–Nov. 12, 1951	8m, 19d	1
Matrika Prasad Koirala	Nov. 16, 1951–Aug. 10, 1952; June 15, 1953–March 2, 1955	8m, 28d and 1y, 8m, 17d	14
Tribhuvan Shah	Aug. 14, 1952–June 14, 1953	10m	-
Mahendra Shah	Apr. 14, 1955–Jan. 26, 1956; Nov. 15, 1957– May 14, 1958	10m, 23d and 6m, 2d	9
Tanka Prasad Acharya	Jan, 27, 1956–July 13, 1957	1y, 5m, 18d	34
KI Singh	July 26, 1957–Nov. 14, 1957	3m, 18d	4
Suvarna Shamsher Rana	May 15, 1958–May 26, 1959	1y, 10d	4
BP Koirala	May 27, 1959–Dec. 15, 1960	1y, 6m, 18d	27
Total			**100**

sideration, K.I. Singh's government emerges as the most negative towards the press.

Of the 132 papers (daily to fortnightly) published in the period 1950–60, more than a quarter (34) faced action. During this period, *Samaj* daily, edited first by Pashupati Dev Pandey and later by Mani Raj Upadhyay, faced action 21 times. The Hindi weekly, *Sahi Rasta* (edited by Mani Raj Upadhyay) and *Nepal Samachar* (edited by Shankar Nath Sharma) also faced six actions each during the decade. The dailies, *Samaya* (edited by Manik Lal Shrestha), *Diyalo* (edited by Tarini Prasad Koirala) and *Halkhabar* (edited by Bindunath Pyakurel and later Dataram Sharma), all faced five actions each. The rest of the papers faced four actions or fewer (Table 4).

The dailies faced the highest number of actions. Nineteen dailies, 11 weeklies, and two bi-weeklies faced action during this period. Similarly, state agencies also took action against one fortnightly publication and a bulletin. If we disaggregate the data in terms of the language of the papers, we find that four Hindi language newspapers,[21] three English, and one Newari paper were also prosecuted. The rest of the papers were Nepali.

Types of Actions

We can only assess the state of press freedom correctly after analysing the types of actions faced by papers for publishing content deemed 'objectionable' by the state. The following types of actions were taken by the government, or its constituent agencies: oral clarifications; written clarifications; forced deposits (new or additional) or quashed deposits *(jafat/syaha garne)*; fines; closings; and imprisonment. As is evident from Table 5, most of the actions

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21 On a side note, this shows the prevalence of Hindi in the Nepali or Newari heartland. This prevalence, however, slowly withered away, especially after the accession of Mahendra to the throne, after which the state vigorously pursued a one national language policy (Nepali) at the expense of other languages of Nepal. The Nepali-only policy did not go unchallenged, but the state's might ultimately prevailed (see Gaige 1975). We find very few, if any, examples of an influential Hindi language press after 1960.

Table 4: List and Frequency of (Papers Facing) Action

S.N.	Name	Type	Frequency of actions	S.N.	Name	Type	Frequency of actions
1	Samaj	Daily	21	18	Goreto	Daily	2
2	Sahi Rasta (Hindi)	Weekly	6	19	Sandesh	Weekly	1
3	Nepal Samachar	Daily	6	20	Ranko	Weekly	1
4	Samaya	Daily	5	21	Desh Seva	Bi-weekly	1
5	Diyalo	Daily	5	22	Motherland (English)	Daily	1
6	Halkhabar	Daily	5	23	Bhugolpark	Daily	1
7	Samyukta Prayas	Weekly	4	24	Jhyali	Weekly	1
8	Sameeksha	Weekly	4	25	Bulletin of NNC	Bulletin	1
9	Rastravanai Weekly		4	26	Nepal	Daily	1
10	Naya Samaj (Hindi)	Weekly	4	27	Nepal Bhasha Patrika (Newari)	Daily	1
11	Dainik Samachar	Daily	3	28	Nepal Pukar	Weekly	1
12	Nepal Times (Hindi)	Daily	3	29	Prahari (Hindi)	Weekly	1
13	Jan Prayas	Weekly	3	30	The Commoner (English)	Daily	1
14	Everest News (English)	Daily	3	31	Ujyalo	Daily	1
15	Sahi Sandesh	Daily	2	32	Karmavir	Weekly	1
16	Swantantra Samachar	Daily	2	33	Kalpana	Daily	1
17	Aarthik Nepal	Fortnightly	2	34	Khasokhas	Bi-weekly	1
	Total					34	100

were limited to seeking clarifications, of which some were oral clarifications, but a large majority (71 per cent) were written. The most common was for the editor, publisher, or both to be asked to report to the Magistrate's Office within a specified time. There, they would be asked several questions relating to the 'objectionable' content. In a few cases, the Magistrate's Office would post a letter seeking clarifications, with the editor or publisher also posting their explanations or clarifications in response.

As explained above in the legal section, it was initially required by law that anyone who wished to publish a paper had to deposit 1000 rupees. However, this requirement was apparently not adhered to by the newspapers that began publishing immediately after the political change of 1951. The provision was discontinued briefly but reintroduced later. As per the reintro-

Table 5: Types of Actions

Types	Frequency	Per cent
Oral clarification	3	2.6
Written clarification	82	71.3
Deposit (new/additional)	16	13.9
Fine	5	4.3
Ban	5	4.3
Imprisonment	4	3.5
Total	115*	100

*The total number of actions taken against the press was 100. In the table, the various categories of actions total 125. This is because some papers had to face two actions at the same time. For example, the government would first demand a written clarification from the papers. If this was found to be unsatisfactory, they would be penalised—either through an increase in the deposit they had to submit, or by being closed down. In such cases, both actions have been counted.

duced article, newspapers (although not all, as it was left for the authority to decide which) were now required to deposit a certain amount of money at the beginning of their operation. If the government agency perceived that something published in the paper was objectionable, it could seek a further deposit of up

to 3000 rupees. This option began to be used by government agencies and, as Table 5 shows, a deposit was sought in approximately 14 per cent of the cases. In some instances, the earlier deposit was quashed *(syaha garne)*, and a new or additional deposit sought. Some papers were closed down, either because they were unable to deposit the amount required or because they were unwilling to do so. Generally, it was cheaper to start a new paper than pay the additional deposit. In some cases (five, to be precise), the government closed the papers. During K.I. Singh's tenure, two papers *(Samaj* and *Desh Sewa)* were closed; during Matrika Prasad Koirala's tenure, two other papers *(Rastravani* and *Khasokhas)* were banned, and during Mahendra's period of direct rule (November 1957 to May 1958), a pro-NC paper, *Ujyalo,* was also closed.

When the government authority asked for a large sum as deposit or gave an order to close down a paper, the individuals associated with it would usually begin publishing a new one. For example, *Diyalo*, an NC-leaning paper edited by Tarini Prasad Koirala, was asked to deposit 3000 rupees. This was imposed on the paper for publishing content that 'fomented disrespect and hatred towards the monarch on a regular basis'. The paper was then shelved, and the same individuals registered a new paper, *Ujyalo*, which did not last long either. It was not only banned when Mahendra was ruling directly, the 500 rupees it was asked to deposit while registering was also considered forfeited. This group then began another paper, *Kalpana.* Similarly, *Prahari* was registered when *Sahi Rasta* closed down and when *Samyukta Prayas* was closed, it led to the publicatioin of *Jana Prayas.* Table 5 also shows that five of these papers had to pay fines. However, it was not always the government that imposed fines; the judiciary was also involved in disciplinary matters. A few individuals filed libel cases in the court, resulting in the court ruling in favour of the victims and ordering the papers to pay them compensation.

Some editors or publishers were also imprisoned for content published in their papers. Among those imprisoned were the

editors Ishworananda Shresthacharya of *Ranko* weekly and Mani Raj Upadhyay of *Samaj* daily. *Ranko*, a mouthpiece of the Nepal Janvadi Prajatantra Sangh, had published a news item with the provocative headline 'Nehru government's grave is to be dug in Nepal', based on a speech made by the Nepal Janvadi Prajatantra Sangh leader Prem Bahadur Kansakar. The government under Matrika Koirala not only seized the printed copies of the paper from hawkers in the streets, but also imprisoned the editor for two days and Kansakar for three months (cf Gautam 2009, 170–71). Another paper, *Samaj*, was against the K.I. Singh government from day one. After the appearance of a number of news items deemed to be against the interest of the then-government, the Kathmandu Magistrate's Office first sought clarification from the paper, and later jailed the editor under the Public Security Act.[22] However, because the K.I. Singh government did not last long, the editor, Upadhyay, was released after two weeks.

Jhyali, a weekly paper edited by Pramod Shamsher Rana, published a news item on an allegedly failed agreement between the Nepali and Indian governments. It reported that the Nepali government had proposed a treasonous *(rashtraghati)* agreement with India which could not materialise because Nehru did not agree to sign it. The paper even published a copy of the alleged agreement. When the paper hit the market, the Kathmandu Magistrate's Office sent its staff to bring Rana into its office with orders to use force should Rana decline to be escorted. As per the official note prepared by the magistrate, Rana was to be given the maximum penalty provisioned in law, i.e., two years of imprisonment and a fine of 2000 rupees. Rana was released after he deposited 2000 rupees and an additional 432 rupees that guaranteed avoidance of arrest.[23]

22 '*Rajdrohi* [person charged with treason] gets premiership; *Rajbhakta* [person loyal to the monarch] gets a Magistrate's Notice' was the headline of a news item published by *Samaj*. This was published after the Magistrate's Office sought clarification on the earlier pieces related to K.I. Singh's appointment as prime minister.

23 *Jhyali* had its deposit returned after it approached the B.P. Koirala government.

Action-taking Authority

Which authority actually took actions against the papers? As Table 6 shows, it was more often than not the Magistrate's Office, in particular, the Kathmandu Magistrate's Office. Of all the actions recorded, 87 were taken by this office. Usually the Magistrate's Office itself initiated actions against the papers but sometimes it was the home secretary, the home ministry, and even the prime minister's office which asked the magistrate to take action. In a few cases, the police office also took the initiative (e.g., *Nepal Samachar*, *Khasokhas*, *Rastravani)*. In the case of *Sahi Rasta*, a police officer ordered the paper to close down due to its publishing 'objectionable' content. However, when the paper moved the

Table 6: Action-taking Authority

Authority	Frequency
Kathmandu Magistrate's Office, Home Secretariat/Ministry	87
Police	6
Judiciary	7
Total	**100**

court, the court not only ruled in the paper's favour, it also berated the police office for breaching the law. The court declared that the law did not allow the police to do anything on their own, further ordering the concerned authority to reprimand *(nasihat dinu)* the officer who took the action (Dahal et al. 2065 BS: 3-5). Although it was the judiciary that took the first action against a newspaper after the 1950–51 movement, it also stood by the press in certain cases during the later years of the decade. When the government demanded a large sum or tried to close down a paper for publishing 'objectionable' content, the paper usually sought the court's intervention. The court, in general, also read the content and gave a ruling. While in some instances the ruling favoured the press *(Sahi Rasta)*, at other times it did not *(Diyalo, Nepal Bhasha)*.[24]

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24 *Nepal Bhasha* published a couple of news items in which it called for a secular state. It also criticised the legal provision that made killing of cows a criminal act

While the role of the judiciary was on the whole not negative, it had to interpret existing laws. As the laws themselves became narrower, this naturally impacted the court rulings.[25]

'Objectionable Content'

Because action was taken against papers based on published material, it is important to explore what content was considered objectionable. The oral and written clarifications sought by the state authorities, alongside the additional questions asked, speak about the nature of objectionable content in the eyes of these agencies and individuals. The (incomplete) transcripts of the clarifications and questions were therefore coded for this purpose. News material or content considered negative and related to the following institutions and individuals was found to draw the attention of state authorities. This included criticism of the monarch, the monarchy in general, and the royal family; criticism of the government, head of the government, or government bureaucrats; and criticism of foreign governments or individuals. This is evident from Table 7.

If we look at the content referred to, we find that it was not only negative or critical content that dragged the publisher or editor to the magistrate's office, but also simple information. This is especially evident during the first half of the decade in which even informative content was flagged. Editors and publishers were subsequently asked why and on what basis the news was published. In the latter period, however, we do not see such clarifications being sought.

If we analyse the objectionable content, we find that more than

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in a country in which the 'majority of the people are non-Hindu'. The action taken by the Home Ministry said that the paper had tried to create a 'poisonous environment' *(vishakta vatavaran)* in society and, hence, should have been asked to deposit the maximum amount (Rs 3000). However, because the paper was being published in the language of a minority community, only Rs 1000 was levied as punishment. The editor, Phatte Bahadur Singh, was returned his deposit when he approached the NC home minister in 1959.

25 See Dahal et al (2065 BS) for details of some of the Supreme Court verdicts relating to newspapers of the period.

Table 7: Objectionable Content

Type of content	Frequency	Percent
Monarch/royal family	25	20
Prime minister/government	53	42.4
Indian government/institutions	16	12.8
Other foreign countries/individuals	8	6.4
Government bureaucrats	13	10.4
Newspapers	2	1.6
Other individuals/institutions	8	6.4
Total	125*	100

* The total number of objectionable items (125) exceeds the total number of actions (100). This is because there were multiple examples of objectionable content or materials in some news items. For example, if a report criticised both the Nepali government and India, or the government and the king, and the clarification also referred to both, then both are coded.

40 per cent of the action were due to papers criticising the government, its head, or its ministers. Content related to or negative about the monarch and his family drew the second highest rate of actions, around 20 per cent. This shows that despite the effort to sanctify the monarchy it was not above criticism. The third-largest category of objectionable content (around 19 per cent) related to foreigners—both institutions and individuals. Of the content related to foreign institutions or individuals, more than two thirds were related to India, the Indian government, or the Indian military missions in Nepal. The amendments made to press-related laws also show an attempt to safeguard the three major institutions, with the primary protected figure being the monarchy.

Colourful Content: Like Questions, Like Answers

The newspaper content from the 1950–60 period against which some of the actions were taken may seem amusing in today's context, as are the questions asked by the state authorities. In almost all cases, the questions asked usually began with: Why? Based on what evidence? Do you have any evidence? How do you know

this? What is your source? What evidence do you have that this was, in fact, the case? What do you mean by this? What do you want to imply? And, so on.

For example, *Samaj* daily published a news report with the title, 'Chairman of the Royal Council to visit France', in which it stated: 'It is understood that the chairman of the Royal Council is likely to visit France in the near future.' The Kathmandu Magistrate called the publisher of the paper to its office, asking, 'What is the basis of this report?'

In another example, *Samaj* reported that 'Nandalal Pande MA' was fasting unto death in Nakkhu jail. Among other questions, the magistrate's office asked the publisher, 'How do you know that this man has an MA degree? From which university did he get his degree? What is the basis of this report?'

One is amazed, not only by the state agents' concern for the truth, but also by some of the news items. 'There is a rumour *(gamgum halla chaleko)* that of the total six lakhs set aside to publicise Nepal's five-year plan, some amount is given to an individual related to a foreign newspaper,' reported *Samaj*. The same paper threatened the government with action, stating, 'This paper will be forced to take action should the press attaché of the king not take appropriate action for the way news related to PM K.I. Singh's biography has been broadcast.' Similarly, *Sahi Sandesh* called Khadga Man Singh Malla a madman *(bahula)*. *Hal Khabar*, when asked to produce evidence for the news that it ran, pointed to another paper that had printed similar content but which had been published after *Hal Khabar* had carried the news.

Criticising the Government: Influence of Partisan Press?

Healthy criticism of those at the helm of power, be it the government's head or its ministers, is considered perfectly natural and is tolerated to a large extent in a democracy. However, those at the receiving end have seldom shown patience in digesting the criticism, especially in the case of Nepal. The various actions taken against the papers in 1950–60 further illustrate this. As Table 7

shows, it is the newspaper content (news, opinion pieces or articles, editorials, letters to editors) related to the government that drew the most attention. Of all the actions, 42 per cent were due to material containing objectionable content related to the government. If we add the objectionable items related to government bureaucrats, the total reaches 50 per cent.

The large amount of objectionable content highlights an uneasy relationship between the press and the government. This is also because of the political environment of the period. Political parties, both in and out of the government, usually had acrimonious relationships with one another. The problem became acute when the king appointed K.I. Singh as prime minister on July 26, 1957, and less than four months later, removed him and began to rule directly. A similar case can be seen when the Nepali Congress emerged victorious with a two-third majority in the first-ever general election in 1959. This reduced the smaller parties' chances of participating in the government, especially in the immediate future. Lok Raj Baral writes, 'When the first parliamentary election was over in 1959, many of those who had suffered ignominious defeats predictably mobilized their resources to stigmatize the government on each and every count. The press, as it was divided along group lines, joined the fray in promoting political tension or in disseminating misgivings' (Baral 1975: 172).

Most of the papers against which actions were taken were affiliated with one party or another, and functioned more or less like the party mouthpiece. For example, *Ujyalo, Diyalo, Kalpana* and *Nepal Pukar* were run by individuals close to the Nepali Congress. *Samyukta Prayas, Jana Prayas* and *Halkhabar* were affiliated to K.I. Singh's United Democratic Party. Likewise, *Samaj, Sahi Rasta* and *Prahari* were close to the Praja Parishad. Since these newspapers were run either by a party or an individual close to the party, it was not unusual to find the views of the party and its leaders reflected in them. We also find that the actions taken by a government were annulled when the leadership of the government changed. Likewise, there are examples

of government agencies' (such as the magistrate's) decisions being reversed by a minister or prime minister upon a journalist approaching them.[26]

The Monarchy: Not beyond Criticism, Despite Severity of Law

The changes that occurred in the legal sector during this period, especially those relating to freedom of expression and the press, are also indicative of the changes that occurred in the power structure of the political sector. As described in Section 1, freedom of the press had been gradually been curtailed through amendments in laws related to press and publications. At the same time, these laws were primarily concerned with safeguarding both the monarch and his family. The penalty for criticising the monarch or the institution of monarchy became increasingly severe. Efforts were made to place the king and his family above the law and, in the process, engineer a situation in which he could not be criticised. In a sense, the institution was gradually becoming sanctified.[27] This also demonstrated the growing power of the king.

Despite the increasing severity of punishment, however, the press was still criticising the king. There are no examples of action being taken against the press for criticising King Tribhuvan. That was so either because the papers did not criticise Tribhuvan, or alternatively, because the state agents did not penalise the papers when Tribhuvan was ruling directly. The press did not spare his son, Mahendra, though. This is despite the fact that Mahendra

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26 For 'disrespecting and fomenting hatred against the monarch and the government', the Kathmandu Magistrate's Office ordered *Samaj* to deposit an additional Rs 1500. If this deposit was not submitted, the office would issue an order cancelling the paper's licence. *Samaj* did not get a favourable decision upon moving the court but when the paper approached the newly elected prime minister, B.P. Koirala, he revoked the decision, saying that 'the new government's policy is to promote the press by providing as much facility to the press and not to control it'.

27 The 2014 BS Press Commission report included a section (12) on 'rules for the journalists', in which it recommended that journalists not promote matters that would lead to criticism and drag the monarch and his family into dispute. This was due to both being 'pristine high-level institutions' (PCN 2060: 348).

had become quite active in politics. He was, in fact, using one party after another for his personal benefit, and discarding them once their utility was over (Joshi and Rose 1966). The Nepali press began to criticise Mahendra on a regular basis. Mahendra used to tour Nepal in style as well as distribute money to individuals of his liking, all using state funds. He was also criticised for taking a large sum of money (52 lakhs) as a salary, and for ruling directly (see *Samaj, Samaya, Diyalo, Bhugol Park, Swatantra Samachar,* etc). Political leaders such as Ganesh Man Singh, Pushpa Lal, Bishwa Bandhu Thapa and Tulsi Giri[28] criticised and even derided Mahendra at public functions for being an autocrat, and the papers reported these criticisms (see *Nepal Pukar, Ujyalo*). When state agents sought clarifications from the publishers or editors, they argued that it was the fundamental right of the press to criticise the monarch (see Devkota 2024 BS). This shows that despite the palace's efforts to tame the press and control the public sphere, the press continuously took risks and challenged such moves.

Foreigners: Above Criticism

From the actions taken against the newspapers, it becomes evident that the Nepali state had become very sensitive towards foreigners and careful not to antagonise them, whether individuals, institutions, or countries. Initially, the law prohibited papers from criticising the foreign embassies in Nepal. Later, the law was amended to make it a punishable offence to foment hatred towards foreign and potentially friendly countries, and to do anything to disturb the friendship between the two nations. Of all the press items that drew objections from the authorities, half were related to India. State agencies sought clarification on news items related to the Indian government, the then-prime minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Indian military mission to Nepal.

It has already been mentioned that the editor who published a

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28 It is ironic that the latter two, Thapa and Giri, became Mahendra's henchmen after he dismantled parliamentary democracy and introduced the partyless Panchayat system.

news item with the title, 'To not fight against foreign intervention is impotency; Nehru government's grave is to be dug in Nepal', was imprisoned for two days. The person who gave the speech that was being reported was imprisoned for three months. Newspaper content (see *Sahi Rasta, Samaj, Goreto, Sandesh, Diyalo,* etc) that criticised Nehru and reported the 'terror' of the Indian military mission drew state action against themselves, including having to submit new deposits. When *Naya Samaj* published an item in which it mentioned that a certain bureaucrat in the Soviet embassy in Nepal, whose job performance was considered unsatisfactory, had left the country, the paper had to report to the magistrate's office for clarification. Similarly, when *Samaj* opposed in a series of articles the travels of Professor Giuseppe Tucci of Italy, accusing him of removing Nepali artefacts and stealing, the Publication Department of the government refuted the charge and the magistrate's office also sought clarification. Another paper, which criticised American aid to Nepal for being ineffectual, also had to report to the magistrate's office. It thus becomes clear that state agencies were very concerned about materials relating to both foreigners and foreign governments.

Conclusion

After the downfall of the century-long Rana family oligarchy in 1951, the political system of the country changed drastically: democracy replaced autocracy. Referring to the decade that followed, Lok Raj Baral writes, 'People not only changed their political styles but also made innovations in various fields' (Baral 1975: 171). Kamal P. Malla recalls the 1950–60 period as a 'decade of extroversion…for it was a decade of explosion of all manner of ideas, activities and organized efforts' (Malla 1979: 192). People all across the country became excited, creating new avatars of themselves as individuals, and as associations such as political parties, schools, libraries, literary organisations, theatre groups, clubs, newspapers, and so on (Parajuli 2009).[29]

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29 See Onta (2012) for an account of an academic exercise in the non-university setting in 1940–70.

Enjoying the democratic space as well as freedom of speech and press that had been enshrined in the new constitution, the number of newspapers increased significantly during the 1950s. But, despite this enormous growth, the press was both immature and disorganised. This is evident from the content produced. Political parties emerged as key players in the media sector, running a significant number of influential papers. The acrimonious relationship between the parties, and particularly with the party in government, was subsequently mirrored in the papers (cf. Baral 1975). This also meant more actions were directed against the papers that supported opposition parties, thereby instigating a surge in the number of actions against the media.

State agencies were primarily sensitive to criticisms of three institutions or agencies, namely, the monarch and his family, the prime minister and the government, and foreign countries and individuals. However, the Nepali press of the 1950s took risks, choosing not to shy away from criticising even institutions such as the monarchy. The courage shown by the press is commendable but a pertinent question remains: How does one explain the preoccupation of agents of the state with evidence or source? Likewise, the concern towards the Indian government, Nehru, or other friendly countries is perhaps understandable, but why did they protect an Italian professor? The preoccupation with evidence or source is not just to unfold the 'truth', as it may seem. Instead, it should be viewed as unease about the transition to an open society on the part of those who had controlled everything in the past. Similarly, for government officials, whether it was an Italian professor or any other foreign individual or institution, the publication of negative news meant straining the relationship between the two governments, or so it was believed, and that was to be avoided at all costs. These officials, who were vanguards of information in the bygone era, also wanted to regulate the information that was disseminated to the public.

Scholars have documented the gradual transformation of power, from the people to the palace, in the 'democratic' decade of 1950–60. The grip of the Shahs on the affairs of the country gradually

increased, ultimately leading to a period of total control after the 1960 royal coup (see Joshi and Rose 1966, Chauhan 1971, Gupta 1993). Much of the same could be said about freedom of press and publication, as is evident from the changes made in the laws governing the media sector described in the first part of this paper. We thus see a parallel growth of the public sphere and of attempts to regulate it. In the end, however, the nascent public sphere could not withstand the hegemonic political project of the Shahs and ultimately succumbed to its power (cf. Onta 2010).

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Remittances, Stability and Stagnation in Nepal

Jacob Rinck

Introduction[1]

THE importance of labour migration for young Nepalis is hard to overlook. It shows every day in the crowds thronging the foreign ministry, where they apply for passports; the countless advertisements of manpower agencies which broker jobs and visas for a fee; and, ever too often, the news of injury or death through abuse or accident in foreign lands. Less obvious are the many ways in which those who stay here profit, as the money the migrants earn is sent back and spent, mostly on day-to-day consumption, and makes its way to big businesses, small businesses and the state. As the volume of remittance approaches almost a third of the GDP, the question arises what effects these revenues have – between being spent by individual households and balance of payments – on Nepal's politics and economy.[2]

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2   Labour migration has long played an important role for Nepal, but the current scale is unprecedented. The value of official remittances has grown exponentially over the past two decades: from $55 million in 1993, to $678 million in 2002, $2.99 billion in 2009, $3.47 billion in 2010, and to an estimated $4.07 billion in 2011. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/RemittancesData_Inflows_Apr12(Public).xlsx. The World Bank estimates the total value of remittances at between 25-30 per cent of the GDP (2011c).

This article attempts to provide a tentative, and necessarily fragmentary, answer to this question. It therefore examines the remittance revenues which accrue – directly or indirectly – to the state and the politicians and bureaucrats who constitute it, the business sector, and the wider population. It explores the broad incentive structures that emerge for these ideal-typical constituencies and suggest that remittances stabilise Nepal's political system, economy, and society, but also sustain a state fundamentally unaccountable to the wider population.

A well-developed body of literature argues that the extent to which states depend on their populations to finance their core activities, and the class structure which they have to negotiate extraction with, is a crucial factor in shaping their relations with society. The more dependent the state is on its citizens or specific groups among them, the stronger the latters' leverage in the negotiation of enforceable claims vis-à-vis the former. A prominent exponent of this perspective is Charles Tilly, whose work on state formation focuses on the importance of war and preparation for war for the development of modern European states (1985, 1990). Earlier analyses influencing him include those of Joseph Schumpeter (1955) and Barrington Moore (1966). Other manifestations of the broad proposition that state financing matters are rentier-state/semi-rentier state approaches and the fiscal sociology paradigm of Mick Moore (2011).

My analysis is indebted to all of the above. I take from them the basic proposition that the manner in which governments and political elites earn their income, and what kind of class configurations they interact with, shapes the kinds of states they produce.

The State

Nepal's state finances are largely autonomous from domestic economic conditions. The budget income illustrates this – external rents, both remittances and aid money, make up a significant part of revenues. For the 2011/12 budget, the state derives 22.5 per cent of its estimated income from foreign grants, and 42.3 per cent

from import and consumption taxes (Nepal Ministry of Finance 2011).[3] Much of these, in turn, is driven by foreign remittances.[4] Income from income, profit and capital gains taxes is meagre in comparison, at 16 per cent.

Nepal, therefore, fits rather neatly into the definition of a rentier state, which 'gain[s] a large proportion of [its] revenues from external sources, such as resource rents'. The model posits that 'the reduced necessity of state decision-makers to levy domestic taxes causes leaders to be less accountable to individuals and groups within civil society' (Di John 2008,13). Strictly speaking, Nepal belongs to a slightly separate category of 'semi-rentier states', since it receives rents through aid and remittances, rather than natural resources such as oil or gas. The difference is important: incomes for the state are largely indirect, and the rents, overall, less easily controlled.[5] Nevertheless, the general model captures Nepal's specific dynamics well.

Relatively autonomous from a domestic tax base, the state has little positive incentive to encourage productive economic growth. Evidence is of course circumstantial, but a wide range of examples indicates the indifference of many politicians and bureaucrats to domestic and international investment; the probably most prominent one is the hydropower sector. After a license bonanza after the end of the war in 2006, infighting in the bureaucracy and between major parties has stalled the development of several thousand MW of hydropower potential. The widespread corruption, too, indicates just how little the government cares how companies do – in a particularly blatant recent example, a state minister at the telecommunications ministry personally asked telecom operator Ncell for a bribe of Rs. 50

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3   Not all of the tax income is unambiguously attributable to direct consumption, since the budget estimate does not provide a sufficient breakdown of the numbers.

4   Improved revenue mobilisation in 2010 was largely due to taxes on imports and consumption driven by remittances (World Bank 2011a).

5   For an overview of the literature on the differences between rentier and semi-rentier states, see Ostrowski (2011).

million to import microwave frequency equipment.[6]

Beyond the absence of a positive incentive for promoting domestic growth, the patronage system at the heart of Nepali politics provides a disincentive for creating the conditions necessary for it. There are indications that rent-seeking has become a compulsion for political parties, and many individual politicians and bureaucrats, because the patronage based on it and enabling it is so pervasive that it now perpetuates itself and has become a constitutive component of Nepal's political economy.[7]

While the causes of rent-seeking and patronage lie elsewhere, the remittance economy is crucial for sustaining them. Precisely how much of political rent-seeking remittance revenues underwrite beyond the formal income of the state is difficult to say with certainty. But given that they account for a significant share of Nepal's overall economy, we can assume the proportion is large. Rents from remittances (other than taxes) are hard to control centrally, but politicians and civil servants individually have many ways to influence their distribution through the wider economy—be it by failing to regulate cartels in transport, retail or banking, or by extorting businesses themselves. Because individual politicians and bureaucrats not only profit, but, in fact, depend on skimming rents off a wide range of legal and illegal economic activities, they are a natural constituency against limiting rent-seeking opportunities and, therefore, any serious attempt to establish a transparent and rule-bound state.

The remittance economy makes pervasive rent-seeking politically and economically sustainable. Were Nepal without remittances, the environment created by the predatory practices would strangle economic growth, and rob both formal taxation and informal extraction of its basis. With extraterritorial employment at the heart of sustained growth, politicians and bureaucrats can have their

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6   Humagain, Mukul. 2012. 'State info minister's Rs 50m Ncell demand raises pvt sector's hackles.' The Kathmandu Post, April 25.

7   See for example International Crisis Group (2010). Aditya Adhikari (2012) provides a fascinating account of the Maoists' adaptation to this system.

piece of the cake while leaving enough for everyone else to avoid both a complete economic breakdown and a concerted political pushback.

The Business Sector

One might assume that the private sector should form a natural constituency in favour of a predictable state following the letter of law and regulation, but business elites survive and thrive rather comfortably as things stand, sharing in on the rents created by remittance-induced consumption. They are also largely invested in sectors which can stomach the predations of the political sphere, and sometimes profit from collaboration with it.

At a GDP share of between 25-30 per cent, and rising, remittances are a significant driver of the economy (World Bank 2011c). Consistent with the immediate needs of many families and the lack of investment opportunities, most of the money is spent either for the consumption of imported goods or on property. The result is a glaring export deficit, a dangerous real estate bubble, and a booming service sector (World Bank 2011a). Remittances have not led to growth in productive industries. A breakdown of the fiscal year 2011 GDP by sector reflects this: services make up 50 per cent, agriculture 35 per cent, and industry 15 per cent. Industry grew by only 1.2 per cent annually between 2007 and 2010, compared to 5.8 and 8 per cent annual growth in consumption-driven commercial and social services (World Bank 2011a, 2011c).

The small GDP share of economic sectors heavily dependent on stability and rule of law may be one reason why there is so little business pressure for either. Many companies, such as manufacturing, avoid investments requiring fixed assets. For example, the Khetan Group, one of Nepal's biggest business houses, parted with brewery shares worth Rs. 3 billion (approximately $27.3 million) in April 2012, and plans to focus its activities on the service sector. Its chairman Rajendra Khetan said with reference to government corruption: 'One of the reasons why we sold our stake in Gorkha Brewery and Bottlers Nepal to foreign investors was

excessive demand for money'.[8] Many of the sectors making up the bulk of the economy – import, wholesale and retail, transport, real estate – are flexible enough to cope with the domestic political situation, as long as demand is high, which, in turn, is largely driven by remittances earned abroad.

Rent-seeking by administration, politicians, and unions cuts into these profits too. But the response of the private sector is inhibited by its deep ambivalence about state regulation. Many companies are in too vulnerable a position to press sector-wide interests forcefully. They depend on the flexibility of the bureaucracy in some instances and are, therefore, loath to risk valuable personal relationships in confrontations with regulators. Often, the private sector is divided. Companies in the same sector may lobby for or against stronger regulation, depending on whether it is in their short-term interest or not–a dynamic which plays out, for example, in the hydropower sector. Generally, even business elites have limited leverage in joint negotiations for formal regulation, simply because the state as an institutional entity is not very interested in economic growth. Informal case-by-case negotiations, in contrast, take place with individual politicians and bureaucrats with identifiable short-term interests. Many businessmen therefore accept that pay-offs are part of what it takes to do business; avoiding unfavourable regulation through individual negotiations with administration and government has long been part of the business culture.[9]

While many businesses simply have limited positive incentives to press for a predictable regulatory environment, there are also some which depend on its very absence, and many which profit from it–at the expense of competitors and consumers. There is a large number of semi-legal or illegal ways to make additional cuts

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8   Humagain, Mukul. 2012. 'State info minister's Rs 50m Ncell demand raises pvt sector's hackles.' The Kathmandu Post, April 25.

9   Laurie Zivetz, who conducted research on industrial entrepreneurs in Nepal in the mid to late 1980s, writes: 'By and large, entrepreneurs are compelled to tackle each obstacle as it comes and to work within loosely defined patronage networks in which 'source and force' reign over national development concerns' (1992, 144).

in otherwise legal businesses, many, if not most, of which depend
on negotiating the non-application of laws and regulations with
the bureaucracy. Examples come from a broad variety of business
activities. They range from the very small scale, such as the ubiqui-
tous illegal pay-parking in Kathmandu, to the very big, such as tax
fraud, worth billions of rupees, or caps on interest rates for bank
deposits.[10] In fact, there are, therefore, distinct disincentives to cal-
ling for a less flexible and arbitrary state for all those who increase
their share of the spoils through cartels and other illegal business
practices.[11]

   While businessmen, politicians, and bureaucrats compete
amongst each other for shares of the rents, they also need each
other to play ball in order to keep the game going. The negotia-
tions of state regulation in which this dynamic plays out are per-
vasive, because they involve the interests of a broad cross-section
of the business world. For the same reason, they also shape politics
and bureaucracy at all levels.

Popular Pressure

As importantly, labour migration and remittances help to limit pop-
ular pressure on the state. Migrant workers themselves are (mostly)

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10 At the height of the liquidity crisis in 2010, private banks agreed to cap interest
    rates on deposits at 12 per cent. "'Cartel' banks of Nepal." 2010. myrepublica.
    com, August 24. Businesses suspected of VAT and income tax fraud in an
    investigation started in November 2010 lobbied strongly for individual exceptions
    and amnesties. '518 firms evaded Rs 6.59 billion in taxes.' 2012. myrepublica.
    com, April 15. Many of the service sectors profiting from remittance revenues
    are heavily cartelised. These include, among others, the transport sector, whose
    associations have come under intense scrutiny over the last year. See for example
    'Consumer group slams hike in freight charges.' 2012. *The Kathmandu Post*,
    June 13. Other examples include petrol stations selling diesel purchased at the
    lower rate for private consumers on to businesses, sharing profits with officials of
    the Nepal Oil Corporation, violation of construction regulations, and of course
    corruption in public procurement.

11 A drastic example of proactive defiance occurred in Narayanghat, Chitwan,
    in June 2012, when local businessmen rioted to prevent the Inland Revenue
    Department from investigating suspected tax fraud. 'Businesses hit back at
    revenue squad.' 2012. myrepublica.com, June 6.

the young men who are not angry and not on the streets, as they might otherwise possibly be.12 Instead, they and their families lift themselves out of poverty and, sometimes, into middle class.13 Many of those who do not go abroad profit from higher wages and the spoils of the rent economy. This exit option and the steady rise in living standard may well have contradictory influences on distributional struggles such as the Janajati and Madhesi movements. On the one hand, they may have resulted in rising aspirations and, thereby, contributed to the momentum of these movements. On the other hand, without these factors, the distributional struggles which form one aspect of current identity movements, and the backlash against them, may have been fiercer. They may also have taken more radical and, possibly, violent forms.

Remittances do cause tremendous social change, although with uncertain outcomes. Reports indicate that new wealth already upsets local political power relations. This is particularly the case in the Tarai, where remittances enable former landless tenants, often low caste or Muslim, to break out of exploitative patron-client relations, as well as less deprived groups to adopt middle-class consumer habits and aspire to the corresponding social and political status. On the other hand, the old elites are well placed to profit from new opportunities, for example in the remittance business, moneylending, or the emerging consumer economy.[14] The jury is

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12 The number of Nepali labour migrants is estimated at four million–around one-third of the male working population. At least one member of almost every second household is or has been abroad, and 30 per cent of households receive remittances (World Bank 2011b). The argument that migration serves as a 'pressure valve' and contributes to changing Nepal's social structure has also been made in a report by the International Crisis Group (2010, 42).

13 Lokshin, Bontch-Osmolovksi, and Glinkskaya (2007) attribute 20 per cent of poverty reduction between 1995 and 2005 to remittances. The World Bank (2011b) estimates that remittances are responsible for 6 of the 10 per cent points by which poverty declined between 2004 and 2010 (from 31 per cent to 21 per cent).

14 At the same time, local elites are uniquely placed to profit from the changing economic dynamics, for example as money lenders for the initial costs of migration. See UNRHCO (2011).

therefore still out on quite how much power relations will shift and which groups are to profit the most. But some of the most durable and pernicious inequalities appear to be under attack, and old elites are at least rattled.

Less clear is whether such local power shifts may result in fundamental political transformation, or whether they will find their place within the broad parameters of the patronage economy. There already is a small, but influential, urban upper-middle class calling for a more formal and responsive state.[15] The new members of an emerging broader middle class wanting improvements in infrastructure and policing might strengthen this constituency. They might also be less eager to share the spoils with the state and other brokers, push back in particularly distorted sectors skimming profits of remittances, such as the cartelised transport sector, and demand a stronger protection of consumer rights. But they are likely to come up against internal contradictions. As members of this class move into business themselves, they will just as likely use their new clout to move from generating rents to claiming their share of them.

Remittances have helped many Nepalis to move out of poverty and challenge entrenched inequalities. Drastic social change is likely to result in political change as well, but there is no telling as to how fundamental it will be. As new members enter middle-class professions and businesses, they will encounter the compulsions and temptations of the patronage economy. It is, therefore, difficult to see how remittances could produce a substantial social stratum with an unambiguous interest in a strong and accountable

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15 Columnist and writer Aditya Adhikari analyses the emergence of a broader urban middle class and its political implications. Especially younger members of this class resent the existing order and its political leaders as corrupt and rotten, strongly subscribe to the ideals of liberal governance, and want a more responsive state with stronger institutions. They are small in numbers, but their socio-economic position grants them outsize influence. At the same time, their staunch liberalism clashes with the agendas of other influential constituencies, such as Janajati and Madhesi activists. 'New bourgeoisie', *The Kathmandu Post*, June 19 2012.

state, and better conditions for long-term investments. There is certainly nothing inevitable about it.

Conclusion

The remittance economy is not the source of Nepal's development into a patronage democracy, but the amounts of money involved, and their diffusion throughout the system, suggest that it has become an important factor for its reproduction. At the core, remittance revenues sustain a durable political settlement, which keeps important constituencies – the political elites, the business sector, and a broad section of the population – happy and interdependent enough to not want to upset it.

Remittance-driven growth has taken the edge off distributional struggles since 2006, including the ethnic and regionalist movements, in two interrelated ways. For many young people with few opportunities in Nepal, who could otherwise have become protagonists in more violent forms of protests, labour migration opened up alternative ways to pursue their aspirations. More broadly, remittances drove the expansion of the overall economic pie, and enabled the patronage system to accommodate a relatively large number of newcomers, such as the Maoists, the Madhesi parties, and, so far more at the local level, Janajati activists. To seek inclusion into the patronage economy, rather than more fundamental transformation, was, therefore, both viable and encouraged.

The tendency towards rent-seeking in business may have roots in longstanding political economic patterns. Analyst CK Lal writes about Nepal's political culture: 'During Jang's [Jang Bahadur Rana, JR] rule, the notion of Nepalipan acquired two traits in addition to the centrality of Hinduism and kingship – mercenary military and monopoly merchants' (2012, 13). Even though the class configurations underlying it are drastically different now, the idea and the ideal of monopoly trade with political backing still go strong today.

Chances are they still might in the future. The implicit assumption of many commentators appears to be that Nepal can and will

eventually move towards being a liberal democracy. But this may be far from inevitable. Instead, Nepal could well remain in the growing club of states which survive predominantly on rents and thereby manage to stay aloof of their populations.[16] As long as aid and remittances form the backbone of Nepal's economy, the fundamental dynamics laid out in this paper are likely to remain relevant: a state with little need for a strong domestic economy and little accountability towards its citizens, an economy too dependent on the informality of the state to effectively press for its transformation, and a significant part of the population just not miserable enough and in too ambiguous a position to rebel.[17]

All this begs the question whether there is a constructive way to engage with the remittance economy. To lean back and assume the constant influx of finance will somehow translate into economic development is wishful thinking—apart from the theoretical arguments in this paper, precedent from around the world shows it does not.[18] This does not mean remittances should be discouraged—they improve the lives of many Nepalis every day, and are an important guarantor of stability. One possible immediate step would be to reduce the financial and social costs of migration and make it more profitable (for example through more training, better consular services, and improved loan conditions). While this would likely increase the size of the pie and contribute to a some-

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16 Mick Moore (2011) notes an increase of state non-tax revenues relative to tax revenues, and of (illegal) political revenues relative to state revenues in much of the developing world during the late 20th century.

17 A range of commentators have drawn attention to these dynamics. The World Bank (2011b) notes the possibility of remittances leading to popular apathy towards domestic politics, and providing a 'cushion' limiting pressure on the state to reform governance. Economist Chandan Sapkota identifies symptoms of 'Dutch disease' and links the complacency of policy makers to the remittance economy. For a collection of his newspaper columns and blog articles see www.sapkotac.blogspot.com.

18 Remittances do tend to raise the standard of living and alleviate poverty, but have no or negative impact on economic growth. While this may be a general statement, it is important to note that there is no success story to cite. See a study of Barajas et al. (2009).

what wider distribution, it would hardly change the fundamentally rent-seeking nature of Nepal's state and economy.

One possible strategy for countries in which rent-seeking and distribution are crucial to stability but hinder economic development is a dual track growth strategy: to retain protected and distorted sectors for the sake of stability while insulating and promoting emerging dynamic sectors. Unfortunately, most countries which have pursued this strategy with some success are also characterised by a stark concentration of state authority: Malaysia, Indonesia, or China (Di John 2010). On the other hand, the example of India shows that it can be done in a 'fragmented multi-class state' as well (Kohli 2010, chs. 5-8). Whether a variation of this path is feasible in Nepal is beyond the scope of this paper, but it might merit debate.

A major risk of doing nothing lies in the fact that there is no Plan B. This leaves Nepal's economic, and by extension, political system, in a vulnerable position. Nepali migrant labourers are concentrated in a handful of regions and countries – the Gulf has over 800,000 Nepali migrant labourers, more than 300,000 of them in Qatar alone (World Bank 2011b).[19] The breakdown of one or several of the key markets could pose a significant threat to Nepal's stability. This is a risk Nepal can ill afford.

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19 The overall figure for Nepali migrants in the Gulf states is from the Nepal Migrations Survey (2009), the number for Qatar from 2010.

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Stability in Transition

JAMES SHARROCK[1]

Introduction

THIS paper is about ways of looking at local politics in Nepal after
the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006.[2] The first
part of my paper draws on ideas developed in Sudan, Afghanistan
and the Congo to critique development actors' thinking about
'post-conflict' countries. I suggest that development actors and
others wishing to intervene in Nepal's local political environment
should not solely concentrate on what they think local politics lacks
according to ideal frameworks of the state. Instead, I highlight dif-
ferent ways of viewing the state and local politics in developing
and post-conflict countries, particularly focusing on theories that
seek to better understand local political realities. I then use short
case studies to illustrate examples of local-level transitional politics
in Nepal. Thereafter, I highlight some possible benefits of culti-

vating such an understanding of local politics among development actors. This will be followed by a suggestion of how to carry out such an analysis. I conclude that development actors need not follow a resigned acceptance of the reality of politics, nor should they only ask, 'What is missing?', when looking at local politics and the Nepali state. Rather, I suggest that a realistic form of analysis would integrate detailed studies of the local political reality with continuing long-term goals to reform political practices such as corruption.

This paper argues that an understanding of these results, if linked to policy implementation, could assist development interventions in unpacking issues such as corruption or patronage. In particular, it argues that an understanding of the impact of political practices can assist interventions in identifying political practices which are effective and supported locally, and those that are not. The alternative is continued (and often wilful) ignorance of the complex reality of Nepali politics. I also explore some of the difficulties faced by development actors implementing analytical findings, although the focus of the paper is on critiquing forms of analysis. My paper is particularly aimed at development actors as well as analysts working on security, peace-building, and post-conflict issues in general. It is also a contribution towards analysing local-level politics, a topic that has been researched in the past but not widely in post-conflict times.[3] It should be noted that the form of this paper still reflects its origins as a short discussion paper intended to generate a debate among development actors in Nepal.

Methodology

This paper is based on my own field experiences, mainly in the Eastern region of Nepal and Dailekh district in Nepal's

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3 Work covering local level politics and the state in Nepal includes Baral et al (2004); Borgström (1980); Burghart (1996); Caplan (1975); Gellner (2001); Gellner and Hachhethu (2008); Holmberg, Pettigrew and Tamang (2009); Ramirez (2000); and Sagant (2008). An outstanding example is International Crisis Group (2010).

Mid-Western region, when working with the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), The Carter Center, and the UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID) during 2007-2008 and 2011-2012. Nearly all the case studies were gathered from field trips. I also draw on publicly available reports by the United Nations Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator's Office (UN RCHCO), International Crisis Group and The Carter Center. My field experiences were short (usually one week), multiple field trips in mixed teams of Nepalis and internationals. Each visit focused on one district and typically included time in the district headquarters as well as outside the headquarters in village development committees (VDCs).[4]

On field trips I typically conducted interviews with a range of mostly male interlocutors, including politicians, NGO representatives, journalists, government officials and citizens. My presence as a foreigner had an impact on what I was told in ways that are difficult to assess. However, I benefitted by my not being in any redistributive capacity or with aid to disperse, a fact that became more widely known in each district as the number of my visits increased. In this paper, I focus on findings from Dailekh, Ilam, Taplejung, Udayapur and Sankhuwasabha, all essentially hill districts. This focus is also shaped by the fact that I have a large amount of data from these districts. Tarai districts are not covered, as my field visits to the Tarai were fewer in number. Therefore, they may or may not share the general dynamics outlined in this paper, and I believe that further research would need to take place to make this comparison more sound. The data is enough to generate some initial thoughts on political dynamics but my findings are tentative and very far from in-depth anthropological research. It is worth noting that all the information collected during my field visits was originally collected for different purposes. More research is hence needed, especially in developing detailed case studies.

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4   Nepal has 75 districts that are divided into administrative units known as Village Development Committees (VDCs) which are divided further into wards. There are usually nine wards in each VDC.

For ease of usage, this paper describes Nepal as being in 'transition' or as a 'post-conflict' state, both problematic terms. It is important to recognise that Nepal's political history has involved several other transitional periods.[5] The definition of Nepal's 'transition' during the peace process or Nepal's 'post-conflict' status is highly debatable, particularly given the continuities between politics before, during and after the conflict. Also, a 'transition' or 'post-conflict' time period implies a phase that will end and lead to a something quite different, both of which did not happen in Nepal after 2006. This paper focuses on the post-2006 situation and highlights many local arrangements that have emerged primarily after the CPA and during this transitional period and so, to describe this situation, the terms, 'post-conflict' and 'transition', retain some use. One aim of this paper is to question and unpack, rather than redefine, popular development-led terms such as 'stability', 'good governance' and others.

Much of this paper analyses both politics and the state together because, through political parties in Nepal, they are inseparable and mutually dependent on each other (International Crisis Group 2010, 40). Local government is the most important level of government to Nepalis. However, it is important to note that there are clearly strong connections between local, regional, and national politics. A common analysis in Nepal, as elsewhere, defines politics as political decision-making in the capital, especially by political parties, and local-level actors are all presumed to be waiting for top-level decisions. Alternatively, many older anthropological studies of Nepal have tended to view local actions in isolation and taking place in discrete, disconnected environments. In reality, the interaction and feedback between different levels of politics is much more complex than a top-down approach or local politics being viewed in isolation.

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5   Including, for example in 1951-1960, as mentioned in Baral (2012, 98).

Assessing Local Politics

Looking at current local political arrangements in developing countries has often revolved around focusing on what is missing from an ideal picture of a functioning and service-delivering state. This is particularly the case for development actors as well as analysts working on security, peace-building, and post-conflict issues. A clear expression of this view was in the edited collection, *Nepal in Transition* (2012). At the end of the book, the editors bemoaned the fact that Nepal 'is still far from qualifying as a liberal democracy in which the procedural aspects of elections is complemented by respect of individual liberty, the rule of law, and the respect of basic rights, all of which are secured by checks on the power of each branch of government, equality under the law, impartial courts… and separation of religion and state' (von Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan 2012, 368).

The importance of holding local elections, introducing greater accountability and making citizens feel more secure is indisputable to many observers of Nepal and other developing and post-conflict countries. Advocating ideal outcomes is also important for local civil society, victims who seek justice and accountability, and those excluded by current political processes. Reducing patronage and corruption is undoubtedly a politically desirable outcome in the long term. However, asking 'What is not working?' or its variations such as 'Where is the next conflict coming from?' is not the only form of analysis that development actors can carry out. Actors could also, this paper argues, carry out a detailed study of local political practices, including political interests, patronage, and corruption before they make interventions.

The root of an analysis that defines states by what they are not lies in a common understanding of Max Weber who said, 'the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence'. Weber famously also said, 'A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1958 ed, 78). Even though

Weber was very cautious in his use of this definition, social scientists have been quick to place many kinds of states as operating under this ideal description of a coherent, effective bureaucracy. Translated into development analysis, this means viewing the Nepali state and politics solely in terms of what it cannot deliver – both in terms of weak delivery of services and in the failure to provide security. This is undoubtedly an important form of analysis, but not the only approach.

An approach in which 'state capacity is gauged against a measuring stick whose endpoint is a variant of Weber's ideal-type state', according to Joel S. Migdal, ascribes too much power and coherence to the state (2004, 15). As Migdal says, 'it posits a human society where one incredibly coherent and complex organisation exercises an extraordinary hegemony of thought and action over all other social formations intersecting that territory. It provides no way to theorise about arenas of competing sets of rules, other than to cast these in the negative, as failures or weak states or even as non-states' (Migdal 2004, 15). In contrast, Migdal's state-in-society approach suggests an alternative definition. Migdal says this is both the state's 'image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory' alongside its 'actual practices' (Migdal 2004, 16).

Migdal's view is echoed by a recent report summing up six years of research on crisis states. The authors state: 'The dominant position in the policy community when addressing the condition of a state, or public authority, in the developing world is based on the proposition that "good governance", defined as liberal democratic and free-market institutions, is the source not only of a state's ability to preside over peace and stability, but also over growth and development. These are generally assessed by the formal rules adopted by a state and the policies articulated and implemented. Our research suggests that a better understanding of the possibilities of progressive institutional change and policy reform can be achieved by seeing the state as a political settlement embodying a set of power relations' (Putzel and Di John 2012, iii).

Other academics have considered, or used, alternative ways of understanding how state and political practice actually works in developing countries, including those affected by conflict.[6] Alex De Waal's ideas on the marketplace of politics in Sudan and other countries are particularly useful (2006, 2009, 2010), despite the political situations in Nepal and Sudan being markedly different. De Waal focused on international engagement with 'fragile states', but his analysis can also be applied to states defined internationally as 'post-conflict' as well. De Waal's views (when) applied to the Nepali context suggest that instead of solely measuring Nepal against a post-conflict Weberian ideal state, academics and policy practitioners with knowledge of Nepal should also concentrate on understanding what the practice of politics looks like at present and then – in an ideal world – marshal their knowledge and findings in ways that inform current debates and policy.

When looking at Sudan, Alex De Waal made several points, which are arguably applicable to Nepal. De Waal said: 'These countries are defined by what they are not: they are not delivering services in an equitable manner; they are not exercising a monopoly in violence within their territories; they are not choosing their leaders through democratic processes, and they are not putting international assistance to its rightful use. In turn this approach leads to approaches for peacemaking, peacebuilding, reconstruction and development that are premised on trying to achieve a particular normative standard' (2009, 5). To privilege this view means that policies to create stability and peace focus on what is missing, not what works or what is actually taking place. This approach also leaves out other important questions such as why local politics has remained largely stable in Nepal since 2006.

De Waal also attempted to generalise a theory of patronage in the political marketplace of 'fragile' states. He did this in the context of multiple peace agreements between different rebel

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6   This paper has found Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999), Chabal and Daloz (1999), Coburn (2011), Khan (2001) and Migdal (2004) useful, amongst many other works.

movements in Sudan with the central Khartoum government. De Waal defined patronage politics as 'the ability to gauge the monetary price that can be offered to any particular individual to secure his loyalty (it is a very gender-specific exercise), and more widely to read the market so as to know the likelihood of that price rising or falling in the future' (De Waal 2009, 8).[7] The point De Waal makes about the failure to incorporate the role of patronage in political affairs and conflict management is applicable to Nepal (2009, 7). Without understanding factors like how patronage works and why people 'may have more confidence in them than in weak formal institutions' (2009, 2) external interventions in local politics will almost inevitably be misguided. As De Waal writes, 'one of the drawbacks of the western, institutionalized normative standards is that they do not draw a clear line between patronage systems that maintain stability, and those that generate instability' (2009, 12). As a first step, De Waal recommends understanding how political patronage markets work, something to which this paper is a very small contribution.[8]

In practical terms in Nepal, this approach means, for example, that the abolishment of All-Party Mechanisms (APMs) in Nepal in January 2012 may be rethought in light of more informed understandings. National development projects, such as the multi-donor Local Governance and Community Development Programme, may, under this framework, be reconfigured to take into account local specifics. Also, at the same time, a more informed approach might help actors better understand the strength (not fragility) of current local political arrangements and to distinguish between different types of patronage and corruption, in particular

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7   De Waal also highlighted different elements of the market place, which were worth assessing when seeking solutions to a conflict: namely affordability, sustainability and the increasing monetisation of patronage systems.

8   De Waal (2015), published after this paper was written, contains De Waal's most developed outline of the political marketplace model. It would be an interesting exercise to consider the differences and similarities between Nepal and De Waal's model of 'advanced political marketplace governance systems' in the Horn of Africa.

practices which are less harmful and actually aid stability and those which do not. In broader terms it would also help identify what the International Crisis Group identified, in contrast to popular fragile state discussions, as the 'resilient flexibility' of the Nepali state (2010).

Development Actors and Local Politics

Besides the particular frame of analysis that this essay seeks to critique, development actors do have other reasons for ignoring local politics. This includes wilful ignorance, lack of interest in the topic, centralisation in country capitals, and organisational constraints. Rather than analysing the practice of politics to assess what works, donors may effectively turn a blind eye to all corruption and patronage, viewing it as a price literally worth paying in order to generate a form of stability. This has arguably been the case in Nepal with donor support for Local Peace Committees (explained further below) and, at the national level, in continued DfID support for the Nepal Police despite criticisms of their project and lack of police reform.[9]

National partner staff may also be acutely aware of how local political practice works but may not easily be able to feed their knowledge into programme design. In a very different context in the Congo, Séverine Autesserre identified international inaction on local conflict and micro-level issues as ultimately stemming from the 'dominant international peacebuilding culture' (2010, 22). This culture 'established the parameters of acceptable action' and 'made it possible for foreign interveners to ignore the micro-level tensions that often jeopardize macro-level settlements' (Autesserre 2010, 10). She also identifies the fact that internationals perceived routine violence in the Congo as one barrier preventing a greater focus on local peace building.

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9   See for example the Independent Commission for Aid Impact report on DFID's Peace and Security Programme in Nepal (2013). ICAI reports to the UK Parliament through the House of Commons International Development Committee.

The main focus of this paper is on how development actors and others have analysed local politics in the post-conflict period. I suggest below one method of analysing local politics, along the lines of a political economy study. Part of my optimism that a study of local-level politics can take place comes because of my involvement in one such study in Dailekh on behalf of DfID in 2012. A team of Nepali researchers, including NGO staff from Dailekh (but not from the VDCs under study) and researchers based in Kathmandu, spent a week in each VDC asking a series of questions to try to understand local politics. We visited five VDCs, developed our own semi-ethnographic methodology and focused questions on leadership, institutions and political change. The study benefitted greatly from the combination of researchers from Dailekh, who generated trust among key informants, and Nepali researchers with technical skills from Kathmandu. In only the one week of stay in the field, it generally proved difficult to obtain information on internal political conflicts inside a VDC but a useful outline analysis of trends in local politics emerged, some findings of which are presented further below.

My optimism is also partly based on the fact that many development organisations have recognised, often in theoretically advanced ways, the importance of different ways of looking at the state in developing and post-conflict countries (as in OECD 2010, 2011). These are often highly generalised and typically still ultimately focused on the goal of a Weberian ideal state. However, a large set of theoretical literature, toolkits and guidance notes now exist which explore notions around, for example, a 'political settlement' (The Asia Foundation No 2, 2010) to provide guidance on carrying out a political economy analysis (DFID 2009) and stress the importance of breaking down patronage and corruption (Stabilisation Unit 2012).[10]

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10 The development policy communities of practice that focus on working politically have expanded since the paper was written, for example in two movements: Thinking and Working Politically (TWP Community of Practice 2015) and Doing Development Differently (The DDD Manifesto Community 2014).

However, despite some reason to be somewhat optimistic about the potential of development actors to carry out such a study, I am less confident about the ability of large development organisations to integrate and implement political analysis into their planning and programming. This is an additional challenge, which this essay does not intend to explore. Development actors have carried out local-level political economy analysis in Nepal earlier, but with little sign of implementation. Also, the extent to which development actors have been able to incorporate theoretical thinking from headquarters into programming and implementation in the field remains unclear. The continuing approach, in Nepal at least, has been to analyse politics along the lines of the 'What is missing?' thesis. Due to its focus on analysis rather than policy and implementation, this paper does not also engage deeply with debates around the nature of development raised, for example, in Ferguson (1990) or Mosse (2005). None of this assumes that there are no politically attuned development projects currently taking place in Nepal.

Local Political Bodies in Nepal during the Transition

Formal politics at the local level takes place through a number of institutions. The core institutions established under the Local Self-Governance Act (1999) are the district development committee (DDC), village development committee (VDC) and municipality, which were all set up to be elected bodies. However, local elections have not been held since 1997 and unelected representatives have headed local bodies since 2002. They have done this largely by chairing meetings officially termed All-Party Mechanisms (APMs), which consisted of local political party nominees and key government officials.[11] APMs represent a link between national and local politics, as they are, in many respects, a replication of Kathmandu-level arrangements. As explained below, they have subsequently developed a local logic of their own.

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11 These were the Local Development Officer for the DDC, the Village Development Committee Secretary for the VDC, and the Executive Officer for Municipalities.

In the transitional period, although formal authority rests with civil servants, through APMs political party representatives have assumed de facto responsibility to settle disputes, manage budgets and oversee development work. Following widespread allegations of corruption and mismanagement, in January 2012, the Ministry of Local Development abolished APMs.[12] However, APMs remain active informally and are politically important in VDCs and district headquarters. Another important institution, Local Peace Committees (LPCs), were created in 2006 as part of the transition, but political disputes meant they were not fully active until 2009. As with APMs, LPCs were present at DDC and VDC levels, and controlled by political party representatives, who also rotated the chair.

LPCs were formally given a large local peace-building mandate. In practice, however, they became primarily used by political parties to handle the distribution of interim relief compensation to conflict victims. It became apparent very quickly that party members and those connected to them were seen as getting relief funds, alongside some actual conflict-affected victims. Most LPCs soon became inactive. Political parties at the local level also developed informal roles in many other local bodies such as DDC coordination committees, VDC committees and smaller user groups. With no elections or other political programmes, participation in these bodies remains a major activity of district and VDC political party branches (Carter Center 2011c, 2).

Another important local body, especially in the Eastern hill districts, is the Indigenous Nationalities District Coordination Committee (INDCC). This was set up at the district level to make recommendations to APMs on the 15 per cent of the DDC budget specifically allocated for socially marginalised groups.[13] The

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12 APMs were officially disbanded by the Ministry of Local Development on 3 January 2012, following recommendations from the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority.

13 The 2006 procedures actually state that the 15 percent is for socially and marginalised communities, including senior citizens, Dalits, indigenous nationalities, disabled, Madhesis, Muslims and other underprivileged groups. In several districts, NEFIN and other identity-based groups have claimed control of this 15 percent.

INDCC is chaired by the district Local Development Officer (LDO) and typically includes representatives from major political parties, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) and NGOs. In several Eastern hill districts, NEFIN has gained strong influence over these funds. This paper argues that an analysis of how transitional politics worked shows that APMs, LPCs and INCCs (in the Eastern hills) were all important in generating stability at the local level, particularly through their use of patronage and government spending. Later case studies highlight ways in which these formal structures of leadership and decision-making interacted with more important, informal ways of practising politics.

Debating Local Political Arrangements

It is worth placing the discussion in this paper in the context of debates on political arrangements in Nepal. It is important to remember that many of the political trends described here are not new. Earlier, in the 1990s, as Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka has written, 'distributional coalitions' gained ground in Nepal. They were successful at resource capture 'because politicians, bureaucrats, and entrepreneurs form coalitions and manage to institutionalize their practices in a sustainable manner' but they 'decisively reduced' people's confidence in the state and democratisation (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2008, 72). Prashant Jha similarly and forcefully argued that the 1990s were a failure in democratisation, including at the local level (Jha 2012). In contrast, Kanak Mani Dixit stated that the 1990s were a success, including in 'promoting participatory development and local government' (Dixit 2012). In current debates about the peace process, assessments of the extent of democratisation in the 1990s have proved to be an important fault line between different commentators.

There are two broad views on local political arrangements in Nepal in the current post-conflict period. One states that such local bodies like the APM are a necessary evil in post-conflict situations in order to maintain peace and stability. Adhikari (2010) highlights

some of these functions, illustrating that an expanded group of actors benefitted from patronage and government spending. The creation of a money-fuelled harmony, goes this argument, was a price literally worth paying in order to build cooperation and 'peace-build' among local political leaders. Donor support for LPCs, in particular, can be seen as an attempt to institute barely disguised elite capture in order to generate local peace. If donors were not aware of how corrupt LPCs were, reports soon made their practices common knowledge.

The other, contrasting, view on local post-conflict political arrangements is that APMs and other such bodies had become unacceptably corrupt, deepening unaccountability as well as the democratic deficit. APMs were also seen as creating problems for the future. This view prevailed when the Ministry of Local Development abolished APMs. It was argued that having such arbitrarily nominated bodies in Nepal made a mockery of the 2006 People's Movement in Nepal. Political representatives, the argument went, were accountable to no one except their parent parties. Prashant Jha articulating these concerns, noted the exclusionary nature of bodies like the APM and said, 'the mechanisms do not take into account changing social realities and newly emerging political forces. While they provide the appearance of stability, such bodies undermine institutions and the rule of law in the long run. This, in turn, has the potential of inducing conflict and so the present calm is deceptive at best' (Jha, 2011).

It is useful to understand debates on local bodies in the context of post-conflict Nepal. An APM or LPC had the ability to generate inclusivity and a form of stability while also deepening the democratic deficit and becoming more and more closely linked with corruption. To some extent, their poor performance has less to do with any inherent flaw the design of APMs and more with co-optation by local political processes, often in ways which ultimately encourage local political stability at the cost of any democratic accountability.

Despite its focus on how local politics works in practice than on existing arrangements, this paper does side with the second view.

As the transitional period stretched out beyond 2006, local political arrangements became increasingly unsustainable. The distribution of patronage and corruption in such arrangements are typically linked to political goals. Development actors, too, can point to a long list of local governance failures linked to APMs and LPCs. What this paper seeks to challenge is the best methods of handling such political practices. This paper will argue that if development actors continue to pursue an analysis using only the 'what is missing?' thesis alongside an unquestioning or wilfully ignorant approach to stability, then little will change. It is likely that the worst excesses of patronage and corruption will remain unreformed, thereby continuing to marginalise many people.

Case Studies from the Field

Before documenting some examples of how local politics in the post-2006 period has worked in practice, it is worth highlighting some factors that are different and unique to the hill districts of the Eastern region and Dailekh. The Eastern region hill districts are unusual in Nepal for their relatively high level of political awareness as well as high level of identity politics with a long history before the transitional period.[14] Some possible factors behind that include the relative wealth generated from cash crops; income from a long tradition of migration, including to foreign armies and other destinations; infrastructure development, enabling many hill citizens relatively easy access to the Tarai; and the cultural importance placed on education. Dailekh district in the Mid-Western region is particularly unusual for having a long history of opposition to the Maoist movement, generating faultlines that re-emerged in early 2013.[15]

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14 Hangen (2010) and Fitzpatrick (2011) are interesting recent works covering aspects of hill regions in Eastern Nepal.
15 See Lecomte-Tilouine (2008) for more on the anti-Maoist movement in Dailekh during the conflict.

Quiet Cooperation and Sharing the Spoils

In multiple visits to Eastern hill districts and Dailekh district in the mid-Western region, I heard about tensions, disputes, accusations as well as clashes that had occurred over tendering processes, all between political parties. However, this activity appeared to exist within certain bounds. Levels of cooperation – especially between political parties and government officials – were very high. Many groups had strong interests in demonstrating to visiting outsiders that they are important local actors. However, when it came to potential crunch points, local actors seemed to find ways to avoid substantial confrontations which would threaten the continuation of the resources they are seeking to control. As stated in the International Crisis Group Nepal's *Political Rites of Passage* report (2010), 'budget lines involving donor money risk getting cut off if violent contestation of local disbursement is too visible and no one involved is interested in losing the resources they are competing to control.' Whether this cooperation would last under the impact of elections or other external shocks in unclear.

Most district and VDC councils in the Eastern hill districts operated on a consensual basis and were largely free of major conflict. Political parties often operated by informal norms that their influence on local bodies should be in proportion to their relative organisational or electoral strength, and they divided positions and influence accordingly. The APMs, in many districts, influenced every stage of the 'planning process, through contracting, implementation as well as quality control' (UN RCHCO No.37 2012, 2). Others described cooperation using different terms. Many non-party affiliated interviewees described the same process as one of 'dividing up the budget' according to party interests, and noted that there is financial incentive for parties to agree quietly on 'who gets what' projects and positions (Carter Center 2011c, 4). A government official in the Eastern region complained, 'This is not "*loktantra*" [democracy] we live in, it is "loot-*tantra*"' (Carter Center 2010, 3).

In Sankhuwasabha, in 2010, local journalists stated that when

it comes to the allocation of development budgets, political parties work very closely together, especially through the APM. At one point, the Maoists demanded NPR 100,000 from the VDC development budget in order to build a social trust in the name of a deceased party member. This led to a dispute in which all the three main parties (NC, the UML and the Maoists)[16] eventually reached an agreement among themselves to each take NPR 100,000 from the budget. While the parties claimed to have used the money to build social trusts that will benefit the community, local journalists stated that the money has been primarily used for party activities or personal enrichment. Since APMs and LPCs involve the main parties 'democratically' dividing the spoils, the benefits of continued political cooperation are clear.

Multiple government, political party, media, and civil society representatives across the Eastern hills and Dailekh stated that having influence on local bodies was a major source of political patronage for parties in the district headquarters and VDCs. In Taplejung, journalists and the local Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) complained about the ability of all political parties, including the two main Limbuwan parties, to have people accused of crimes released from jail.[17] As in Sudan, there is no reason to invest in or support formal networks when informal 'patronage mechanisms can dispense resources, sometimes in a way that is recognizably fair. People may have more confidence in them than in weak formal institutions' (De Waal 2009, 2). In another case in Sunsari, Limbuwan cadres arrested in early 2012 actually joined the NC, partly in the correct assumption that the NC had more informal power to prevent them from going to jail. A strike was called in the local town, enforced by the NC and all charges were soon reportedly drop-

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16 There are three main political parties in Nepal. The full-form of their names are Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). I will use the respective common short forms NC, UML and Maoist.

17 The two main Federal Limbuwan State Council factions are the FDNF-affiliated Kumar Lingden faction and the Sanjuhang Palungwa faction.

ped. The necessary and vital support for formal structures should be first understood by development actors to operate in this highly effective informal context.

Managing Disputes and Demonstrating Local Influence

Local citizens or visitors to Eastern hill districts and Dailekh, having witnessed widespread corruption, impunity of political party cadres, clashes between political parties, tendering disputes, and the deep reach of political parties in every decision-making body, had reason to believe that local political life is far from calm. But alongside this, as described above, exists a certain form of stability in which no party attempted to overthrow the local political order. What happened when disputes arose or when new forces challenged the local all-party consensus? The following case studies will look at ways in which boundaries of political behaviour were policed by the all-party consensus.

Unsurprisingly, political disputes and clashes were most often resolved informally rather than through formal judicial processes or mechanisms. This often took the form of arrangements between either the political parties, informal leaders, or through all-party meetings. Chief District Officers (CDOs, the most senior government official in a district) and senior policemen, who were reluctant to expose themselves to political pressure, usually encouraged political parties to resolve their disputes privately as opposed to everyone facing the cost of cases going to court. However, in some districts, serious political disputes were brought before all-party meetings called by the CDO or police. An agreement between political parties after clashes typically involved apologies, compensation for injuries or property damage, and promises not to repeat such behaviour. In Ilam, to take an example, a personal financial dispute between NC and Maoist members in one VDC threatened to turn violent. However, the issue was resolved peacefully with political parties taking a leading role in mediation, as encouraged by the administration, local police, and civil society organisations.

In the transitional period, political parties have been increasingly

used to prevent relatively 'apolitical' disputes from spiralling out of control. This can also be termed the growing 'politicisation' of local disputes. In 2011, journalists in Sankhuwasabha said this trend was due to the fact that at least one person involved in a dispute will seek the support of a political party, compelling others involved to also seek political party support. Sometimes this happened even before the local police or district administration came to know about the case, illustrating the strength of political party networks when people want to get things done. In a VDC in Udayapur, in a not-unusual step, an informal mechanism had been set up, whereby representatives of political parties and local intellectuals were consulted in order to resolve disputes.

In VDCs in Dailekh and the Eastern hills, it was clear that informal dispute resolution was the norm. Vertical accountability mechanisms, supported by development actors such as Ward Citizens Forums (WCFs), lacked access to the village decision-making political core. In one Dailekh VDC in 2012, the WCFs were completely cut off from the political core and, for most villagers, had no clear function or purpose. The social mobiliser position in VDCs was also not politically empowered by local leaders. However, disputes among top-level village and district leaders were resolved at the top leadership level, illustrating a measure of informal accountability at that level. In one VDC in Dailekh, there were allegations that a user group representative had misused the budget allocated for a new health post office. In response to complaints, the accused representative was withdrawn from the user group by his own party. He was punished by the party at the VDC level and not allowed to participate in user groups again.

There is also widespread recognition that political parties' networks and local influence, although corrupt, can generate positive local outcomes that work, illustrating the need to distinguish between different types of corruption and patronage. Mushtaq Khan has usefully explored ideas around good and bad corruption (2001), calling for a distinction to be made 'between situations where corruption has impoverishing effects from those where

corruption allows rapid growth' (2001, 132). Khan also writes that 'structures are the problems so anti-corruption strategies which are concerned with the possible effects of corruption on development have to explicitly identify the underlying political problems' (2001, 132).

NC and Maoist cadres clashed during a dispute over positions on a Campus Management Committee in Sankhuwasabha in 2011. The situation was resolved when representatives of all three main parties were guaranteed key positions within the Committee, with limited representation from smaller parties. Eventually, in a very typical outcome, a UML supporter was appointed president of the management committee, an NC supporter was made vice-president of the management committee, and Maoist supporters were allowed to dominate the rest of the management committee. Despite problems around the politicisation of the committee, there was widespread recognition locally that political parties, with their attendant patronage, corruption, and informality, actually assisted the campus through their ability to access crucial VDC and DDC funds. As one interviewee reiterated, 'Without political parties, we would not get this extra money.'

Handling New Political Forces

Political parties also adopted particular strategies when dealing with new or minority forces challenging the prevailing consensus. Judgements would take place as to whether new forces should be taken seriously or whether continued exclusion would be more harmful in the long term. New forces may be admitted or not, depending on the context and local pressure.[18] Gaining access to and understanding aspects of this local analysis would greatly assist development actors. In districts like Ilam, Panchthar and Taplejung, access to 'distributional coalitions' (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2008) has improved for NEFIN and organisations represent-

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18 This is in contrast to what Coburn (2011, 179) found in Istalif, Afghanistan, where the inherently fragile situation and weak state encouraged political groups to cooperate, without testing each other.

ing Rai and Limbu communities, especially Kirat Rai Yayokkha and Kirat Yakthung Chumlung. In part, this was also due to new local government procedures that required 15 per cent of all local government spending be devoted to 'socially and marginalized communities' (DDC and VDC Procedure No. 11[3] 2067 BS).

Expanded coalitions that recognised new political forces such as NEFIN have arguably been a factor in generating local stability within these districts. In many Eastern hill districts, NEFIN played a prominent role in the INDCC meetings at the DDC. INDCCs have a large say over how the 15 per cent of local spending is distributed. NEFIN gained a prominent position in the INDCC in different ways in each district. In Udayapur, interviewees said NEFIN's act of locking up local politicians in the DDC office in 2010 played a big part in convincing politicians to agree to NEFIN demands for greater representation. It was widely stated that, since then, NEFIN has had a strong voice on the INDCC and a close relationship with the Local Development Officer. The NEFIN district president said, 'We strongly protest if the INDCC tries to implement the budget on its own without consulting us.'

Yet, other groups within the same district were not considered deserving of admittance to local coalitions. In Udayapur, in 2011, the Tharu Welfare Assembly, a NEFIN member organisation, said that they were left out of the INDCC process and resented NEFIN's gatekeeper status on behalf of all identity-based organisations. This decision to continue to exclude Tharus was, in part, based on a calculation regarding Tharu political strength and numerical support within the district (both were seen as low). Across the East, and in Dailekh, larger parties dominated decision-making. Interviewees in numerous districts stated that smaller parties are regularly sidelined, potentially, as Jha (2011) argued, storing up problems for the future.

Leadership and Institutions at the VDC Level
In villages in Dailekh, political decision-making was typically restricted to a 'political core' of important village leaders, which

was central to decision-making, conflict resolution and the control of village resources. The effectiveness of other leaders and institutions in the village depended on the strength of their connection to this group. The large number of institutions and potential positions also formed an important part of political patronage networks. The perception of the power of institutions was also closely tied to whichever leader was in charge of the institution.

The political core of village leaders differed greatly from the formal theory of who is supposed to hold power in a village. In theory, the VDC secretary and VDC council members play an important role. However, the political core did not usually involve the VDC secretary (except in the unusual case of one VDC in Dailekh). This was despite the increased formal powers granted to VDC secretaries in the absence of local elections. Nor were the other VDC council signatory members seen as powerful (namely, the village Junior Technical Assistant and the Health Post In-charge), despite their formal positions. The real political core typically consisted of four to five leaders who held both a mixture of formal and informal positions: it regularly included NC and UML members of the APM, one or two government officials (such as important school teachers) plus influential informal leaders, including those with strong links to the district headquarters. Meetings took place informally and outside the APM.

However, the political core in one southern Dailekh VDC consisted of the three main party representatives (NC, UML and Maoist) and an additional Maoist cadre, co-opted for his ability to cultivate higher-level links at the district and national levels. In the majority of VDCs visited, members of the political core also came from historically powerful village families. A common pattern was as follows: earlier generations of the dominant families were village leaders in pre- and early-Panchayat times, around the 1950s and 1960s; typically, the next generation of the same family were appointed Pradhan Panchas[19] in the 1970s/1980s; followed by the

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19 Chairs of Panchayat-modelled Village Development Committee, called Village Panchayat

next generation taking on formal village positions in the APM or other transitional bodies in present-day politics. One example of this was in a remote Dailekh VDC where the men from the same family used to hold the Mukhiya position in the Panchayat period, the next generation included a Pradhan Pancha in the early 1980s, and the youngest politically active member from the same family is now the chair of a UML-affiliated school management committee.

Political parties were also prominent actors in institutions in which parties formally have no role, such as user groups and school management committees (SMCs). SMCs have a range of responsibilities, including the appointment and dismissal of certain categories of teachers while user groups are responsible for the management and implementation of local development projects such as irrigation and roads. Parties frequently accused one another of trying to 'dominate' these bodies. I found numerous cases of political parties trying to influence SMCs and user groups, partly as a way of demonstrating local strength. Sometimes, this took the form of political parties monopolising key positions in their own strongholds (such as 'capturing' the whole SMC of a particular school). Other parties complained about this but often tacitly accepted the result, knowing that their own areas of strength would remain unchallenged.[20]

Sub-VDC Perspectives

Another important issue, which only in-depth analysis of local politics would reveal, is that sub-VDC perspectives may be more important for many citizens, particularly as a factor in exclusion. More developed areas inside VDCs tend to correspond with areas where leaders and former leaders live, and also where there are roads, markets and VDC offices. Dalits were often among the most marginalised communities inside a VDC, but being isolated or lacking political leadership, or not having access to the political core, can also affect other castes and ethnicities, including those

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20 For more on this, see Carter Center (2011c).

who are assumed to be powerful. Exclusion from village-level power structures can take place by identity along community and caste lines; politically and geographically by ward, cluster of wards, neighbourhood or area.

In several VDCs in Dailekh, Chhetris and Brahmins were among the most marginalised. Brahmins in one remote VDC were excluded from power, essentially because they lived in wards away from the dominant Thakuri majority. One source of exclusion (e.g., geographic isolation) sometimes overlapped with other sources (e.g., being a Dalit). In one VDC, wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 were relatively well developed and, not coincidentally, the home of current and former village leaders. Also, the main road passed through the wards and the market was located there. In the same VDC, wards 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were relatively underdeveloped with ward 7 in particular also being isolated geographically and containing a majority indigenous population. Development actors planning for an intervention that does not take into account these kinds of local differences by district, VDC, and sub-VDC levels may ultimately end up reinforcing current transitional arrangements in local politics.

Implications

The above case studies illustrate on a small and limited scale that post-conflict local politics operates along complex dynamics not immediately visible to or easily understood by external actors. A large driver of continued cooperation and stability is the need to maintain a flow of resources and funds. New members are admitted or rejected to the local 'distributional coalition' depending on assessments of their political strength. The distribution of resources and funds marginalises many citizens but is routinely divided equally among top leaders. Patronage mechanisms are central in understanding local politics: they further political power and are widely viewed as more effective than formal structures. When disputes or corruption occurs, informal mechanisms are preferred over formal routes. Top leaders in the political core are primarily held accountable by each other, and not by ordinary citizens. Party

and family politics influence nearly every position and decision inside a VDC. The informal political core of leaders in a VDC has more say over the development budget and decisions than do formal leaders. Institutions and citizens that are not linked to the political core are usually politically irrelevant. Marginalisation at the sub-VDC level, in terms of access to decision-making and political power, can also be significant.

An understanding of how local politics in the post-conflict period has been operating could bring benefits to development actors and others, without necessarily abandoning long-term goals of change. Understanding the nature of patronage and distribution of resources would help them consider the impact of creating new institutions, which often provide yet more opportunities for patronage and corruption (as opposed to reforming existing institutions). Recognising also that it is the nature of power relations in a particular area that determine political and developmental outcomes would help explain why institutions behave differently in different contexts. This involves identifying the political core of informal leaders in a VDC or district, particularly so that external actors understand who their programmes should at least acknowledge in order to be effective. This would also help indicate different types of marginalisation at the district, VDC, and sub-VDC level.

Understanding disputes and conflict can also help development actors think about accountability mechanisms, especially the suitability of supporting formal vertical structures such as Ward Citizens Forums in a political context in which the only practices that worked effectively involved informal horizontal mechanisms among top leaders. In order to effectively 'read' the local political balance of power, development actors could also learn from how local political actors assessed potential new political forces that may be admitted to the 'distributional coalition'.

Each type of analysis suggested here would underline the importance of local specificities and hopefully encourage development actors to reconsider national frameworks for programme

implementation, such as in the multi-donor Local Governance and Community Development Programme, which arguably took for granted a level of homogeneity across Nepal. What is being done by the UN, donors or some NGOs, is actor mapping, security analysis, or a contextual analysis, all largely based around the first kind of framework on what is missing, that this paper sought to critique.

Mapping Local Political Interests

De Waal writes, 'If it is correct that stability can be "bought" through a well-managed patronage system, it should be possible to calculate the optimal "stability payoff" – the level of resources that should ideally be spent on stabilization through patronage' (De Waal 2009, 13). In analysing local political realities, development actors do not have to follow an attitude of resigned acceptance of the status quo. It should be possible to model and map local patronage networks in Nepal as part of assessing the possible impacts of outside interventions.

Existing political economy analyses produced by development actors tend to be highly generalised and theoretical (DFID 2009). One tentative suggestion would be to research local political interests from the very beginning. This is qualitatively different from the current practice of actor-mapping, security analysis or a contextual analysis for the level of micro-detail gathered, the focus on informal structures and the guiding principle behind it (not 'what is missing?' but 'what is happening?'). An understanding of the economic, social, historical and political contexts, and a mapping of local leaders and institutions, including who is involved in the political core of decision-making, is required. Studies need to find out how decisions are taken locally and who takes them, the reality of how money is spent, and which groups are included or excluded. All of this would also take into account links between the local political core and district, regional and national actors.

It then becomes a lot easier to identify corruption and patronage practices, who benefits, who is marginalised, who takes decisions

and what (if anything) has changed. It would also make it easier to identify aspects of political practice that are wholly negative and need to be addressed immediately as part of interventions and those aspects that effectively generate some form of stability at present and could be dealt with through longer-term strategies. More detailed issues to gather at this stage would include the' views of ordinary citizens on leadership, the nature of institutions and decision-making in the VDC or district, answers about how people obtain jobs or decisions or approval for projects and questions around how leaders become powerful and what makes them locally legitimate.

Further details could be sought around decision-making blockages, accountability mechanisms, sub-VDC exclusion, and how new political forces are handled by existing powerful groups. Developing these approaches would assist those designing interventions to i) understand what is different and unique about local political dynamics at VDC or sub-district level, and ii) identify political practices which are effective and supported locally and those that are not. Development partners could then potentially consider which types of interventions are most likely to work in a political settlement.

Conclusions

It is clear that if development actors are seeking political marketplace-based solutions in Nepal, it may be worth actually trying to better understand the local political situation, as described above. The limited case studies used here suggest that in a never-ending transitional period, politicians and others will continue to practise local politics in ways that satisfy donors and the government while ensuring that money keeps flowing in. Although there are real divisions and competition in local politics, there remain, in the absence of elections or other external shocks, strong incentives to cooperate. Institutions set up in the transition such as APMs and LPCs work to generate stability because they have been co-opted by local political processes. In this light, abolishing APMs has,

unsurprisingly, made very little difference on the ground. Parties still sit together, albeit without calling the meetings APMs. Further research needs to be carried out, but it is clear that corruption, patronage and managing the continuation of development funds are likely to be part of local post-conflict Nepal in the near future.

Making efforts to understand local realities does not mean justifying or supporting current practices. As stated, it is clear from many parts of Nepal that an emphasis on stability through transitional political arrangements is not necessarily inclusive. However, the alternative is to continue to design programmes and operations around versions of an ideal Nepali state or to continue ignoring the reality, without analysing local political practices or the resilience of current arrangements. Would that really help the marginalised? Creating new institutions and structures through interventions does not take place in a vacuum or from a blank slate. Strategies for political or economic reforms that challenge interests embodied in a political settlement will either fail or can, in the worst case, even provoke new conflicts. Efforts by development actors also, as suggested, still build on a different conception of the Nepali state as a largely failed, rather than resilient, institution. Also, as suggested, the gap between existing development tools and analysis and actual policy practice, an area not covered by this paper, remains wide.

The current approach of development actors in Nepal can be characterised as formal adherence to the 'What is missing?' thesis of looking at local politics mixed alongside occasional wilful ignorance regarding the reality of political practices. As suggested, the aim of achieving good governance and security is still a necessary standard for development actors and civil society to try to achieve as well as a vital goal for citizens to demand from the state. Current forms of situational analyses are important for development actors to understand political processes in post-conflict situations. However, these approaches need to be placed alongside other, more analytically rigorous frameworks which privilege understanding what is happening through a detailed study of local political interests. This can obviously never capture all aspects of the local

political reality. Ideally, this should occur before any interventions are designed and can co-exist alongside long-term efforts to reduce, for example, the importance of corruption and patronage. What is needed is maintenance of both an important long-term ideal and short-term pragmatism about what actually works.

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Walking with the Ancestors
'Localising' religious tradition and ethnic identity among the Dumi Rai of Eastern Nepal[1]

ALBAN VON STOCKHAUSEN

WHEN I left for Eastern Nepal for my first large ethnographic field research in 2001, I was studying anthropology and comparative science of religions at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. On reaching my research area, I quickly became aware that working among the Rai, in my case the Dumi Rai,[2] a small subgroup living in the northern parts of Khotang district, meant a lot of walking. At that time, no road had been built to anywhere near my research area, and even today, it takes a two-day walk from the nearest airfields in Lamidanda or Diktel to reach the area where I usually stayed. It slowly became clear to me what my supervisor, Professor Michael Oppitz, had meant when he kept on reminding us students of the importance of field research on foot rather than by other means of transport. Its importance lies in the different experience one gets of the research area: landscape is strongly organised around the footpaths that cross through it. Without

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1   This is an adapted version of the paper presented on 21 July 2012 on the panel 'Contemporary Studies on Ritual Performance and Ethnic Identity among the Rai of Eastern Nepal', as part of the 2012 Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya.

2   Often designated today as part of the Kirat-Rai, referring to the ethnonym Kirat that encompasses both the Rai and Limbu ethnic groups.

walking them, one cannot get close to its people and their cultures.

While walking towards my research area in the Low Mountains and Hills of Eastern Nepal,[3] with every footstep, I met the cultures that inhabit it. Some of their traces are clearly visible in the form of small shrines, graves, resting platforms, or other man-made objects and buildings. However, these 'material' manifestations of religious activity are only the tip of the iceberg when searching for relationships between the shamanic religious practice of the Rai and its relationship to the inhabited landscape. The full range of the symbols and references waiting to be found will only appear to the visitor with prior knowledge of the ritual texts that are uttered in various ancestor-related and other rituals. A selection of these rituals, places, and spatial concepts, which are at the centre of my current research project,[4] are introduced in this paper.

The examples are taken from the settlement area of the Dumi Rai in the northern parts of Khotang district in Eastern Nepal. Dense forests are rare at altitudes below 2000 metres, and, compared to other regions of Nepal, the area is quite densely populated[5] and characterised by irrigated rice fields in the lower parts along the rivers (up to an altitude of approximately 1500 metres), and by maize and millet fields further above. Villages are generally small, and larger settlements have only developed around the weekly marketplaces. Most traditional Rai houses are situated in small hamlets, often inhabited by people of a similar clan amid the fields they cultivate. Most Dumi Rai settlements can be found in the VDCs[6] of Makpa, Sapteshwar, Baksila, Kharmi, and

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3 Geographical designations according to the classification proposed by Smadja in Smadja (ed.) 2009, p. 54.

4 This paper is based on the research project 'Ritual and Space: Identity based on Ritual Landscape' under the project 'Ritual, Space, Mimesis: Performative Traditions and Ethnic Identity among the Rai of Eastern Nepal', headed by Professor Martin Gaenszle at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan, and Buddhist Studies (ISTB) at the University of Vienna, in cooperation with Marion Wettstein, funded by the FWF (Austrian Science Fund). The data represented here should be seen as preliminary results of an on-going research project.

5 Ramirez 2009, p. 147.

6 Village Development Committees.

Jalpa of Khotang District. Some can also be found in the neighbouring areas, especially in regions inhabited by Koyee, Sampang, Nachhering and Chamling Rai, groups with whom the Dumi frequently intermarry. Within the Dumi inhabited territories, there are also a large number of settlements belonging to other ethnic groups, mostly Chhetri/Bahun and Gurung, but also some Tamang, Sherpa, and Kami communities.

Due to the lack of roads, and the importance of agriculture, the natural environment features prominently in the everyday life of the inhabitants in the area. Most of them work as farmers; their fields and the forests—located around them and at higher altitudes—constitute their everyday habitat. Here, they spend the larger part of their lives, working to raise crops, graze their animals, cut leaves for the animals in the jungle, hunt, perform rituals, or just walk through the landscape on their everyday journeys to the fields. The larger trails on which these movements occur also perform a social function: while walking, one constantly meets people and the usual small talk on such encounters circles once again around one's own movements and destination in the landscape. The topics are: 'Where do you come from?' and 'Where are you going to?'. Life means movement in the natural environment and the constant interaction with the landscape one inhabits. The French geographer Roger Brunet (1992) has formulated a definition of the term 'landscape' as being

> the result of a multiplicity of acts […]. In its representations as in its material elements, landscape is firstly the product of practice, of daily action, of a practice exerted on the physical world, between the simple touching up[7] and integral artifacts […]. Landscape, like a series of clues, says a great deal about the society that produces it. Not without bias: parts are hidden; misleading polysemantic clues refer to different indices; the 'message is scrambled', partly because of *remanence*[8],

7 Translation most likely refers to the French word *accentuer*, English 'accentuate'.
8 The translation most likely corresponds to the French word *rémanence*, which
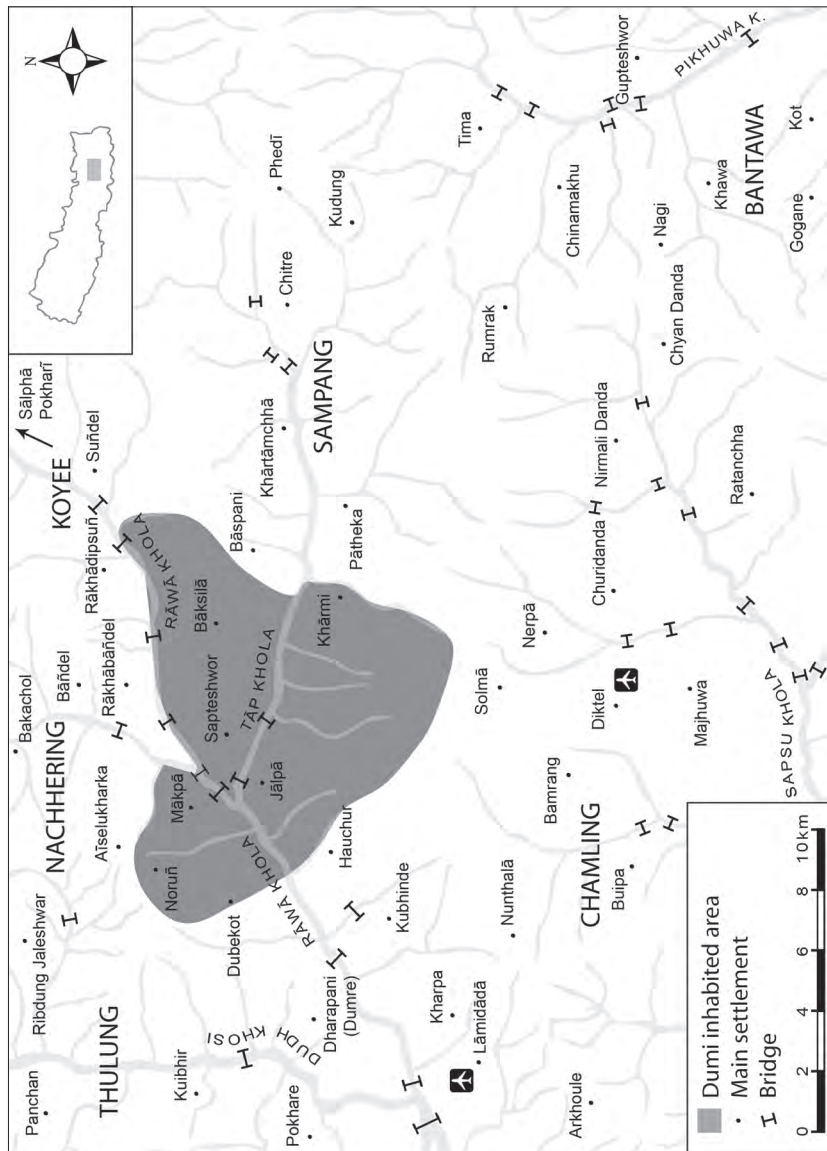
Figure 1: Map of Dumi inhabited areas

> many traces are dead, come from past movements. Through all these angles, landscape is not a reflection […]. It is what it is; what is sufficient to […] consider it as the work of men and of natural forces. And it is revealing, to those who know how to look at it.[9]

Joëlle Smadja states that landscape can be understood as 'a polysemous term' and 'the product, the result, at a given time, of the use of space and resource management by a population. It depends on natural features, on representations that society has of it, on its cultural and social values, its political, economic and technical history, and on its needs.'[10] Citing Deffontaines (1998), she adds that it is 'a memory, a palimpsest, but also a scene where practices take place in real time'.

These definitions are clearly formulated from the viewpoint of geographers who focus on different aspects than those examined by anthropologists or scholars working on the various religious traditions of the people inhabiting a certain area. Being one of the latter two, I wish to use the following pages to illustrate how some of the above given 'markers' of landscape among the Dumi are actually interwoven with factors of religion and ethnic identity when the recitations of the shamanic, ancestor-related rituals of the Dumi and their mythologies are analysed in detail. To gain more clarity, I decided to subdivide my explanations into four different landscapes in which religious practice and ethnic identity are embedded: the natural, the social, the mythological, and the ritual 'landscape' as defined by the Dumi. Due to the limitations of this paper, I want to focus here on the latter two, which also represent the focus of my current research activities in Eastern Nepal. But, first, I would like to briefly introduce the first two and discuss their contribution in embedding the religious practice and ethnic identity of the Dumi Rai.

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refers to a situation where minor parts of a former condition continue to exist.

9   Brunet et al, 1992, pp. 338-339, in, Smadja (ed) 2009, p. 14, fn 36, translated from the French.

10 Smadja 2009, p. 14f.

Natural and Social Landscape

One very important aspect when it comes to 'localising' the religious tradition and ethnic identity of a certain group is related to the natural features of the environment: the flora and fauna of the inhabited areas. As we shall see in the discussion of the *chinta* ritual later on, shamans continuously perform movements and utter words that relate to certain animals that are typical to places they visit on their journeys or that play an important role in mythological stories. Looking at the natural environment of the Eastern Nepalese hills in general, it becomes clear that the vast differences in altitude of the different regions also entail different natural environments. In the 'natural' habitat of any of the groups we find that there is a very typical, unique set of plants that is available within the climatic and topographic conditions of their settlement area. If one walks for a day to the north or to the south, these conditions change greatly and many of the species referred to in the ritual texts cannot be found anymore. While analysing various ritual texts for plant or animal names, it becomes apparent that only species found prominently in the texts exist in the actual settlement area of the respective group or—in case of a far-reaching shamanic journey—at the places visited during a particular ritual.

Another aspect of localisation lies in the social embedding of shamanic rituals. The idea of being rooted in a certain natural environment finds its parallels in the idea that rituals can only be done for people who are rooted in the known genealogy of a certain group. A Dumi ritual cannot—in some cases—be performed for a non-Dumi person: only if one is part of a Dumi proto-clan does one have ancestors that can be related to in a ritual setting. In many cases, this rule gets even more localised, as, for instance, when rituals can only be performed if certain members of the core family are present. For some rituals, all of the children must be living near their parents' home, while others require that the wife and children of the person who performs it are still alive. If a single member of the family leaves this 'social landscape', its integrity

may fall apart and the religious practice and identity of a house-hold could be seriously challenged.[11]

Mythological and Ritual Landscape

References to the inhabited topography can be found throughout many of the mythological stories told by the Dumi. In many cases, these stories also have associated reference points within the inhabited landscape. Most of these references seem to be related to the early migratory history and settlement patterns of the Dumi: Where did the Dumi come from? How did they divide into the various lineages and clans found today? Why did certain clans settle in certain spots? Many of the answers to such questions are given in mythological stories and reinforced through visible points in the landscape. The places everybody knows act as triggers to recall the mythic scenes depicted in mythological stories—such that the landscape serves as a mnemonic device. In the following paragraphs, I give two examples of such places.

One can be found near the *bhume-than*[12] of the small hamlet of Haiapu, a settlement on the northern flank of the Baksila ridge. Here, a stone slab, the size of about two square metres, is believed to mark the place where the founding ancestor of the 'Ratku' clan came to and later settled. A small hollow in the stone is said to be the place where the rice he had brought with him was pounded.

Another example takes up a story very common among many Rai groups—an explanation of migratory movements using stories of how certain ancestors followed animals to reach new settlement places.[13] This story can be found in the village of Makpa, on the northern side of the Rawa Khola. Here, the first settlers are said to have followed a hunting dog to the site of the present-day villa-

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11 A very common situation today because many people leave to work in the Gulf countries or in Kathmandu.

12 Place of worship for the annual *bhume* ritual, related to the fertility of the fields.

13 A similar story can be found in the mythology of the Sampang Rai, concerning the migration of some Sampang to a village far outside their core settlement area, i.e., in Bhojpur district. Other examples can be found in Greter 2009, p. 17; Allen 1997, p. 375; Schlemmer 2004, pp. 53-54.

ge. The supposed grave of the animal is located only a few minutes outside the main village and the dog's name 'Makipa' is remembered in the village's name, 'Makpa'.

In both examples, mythological stories have actually manifested themselves in real places and objects. The documentation of such historical and mythical sites is one important part of my current research. However, most places of importance for the religious and ethnic identity of the Dumi cannot be found by studying the mythology of the Dumi but rather by studying the ritual chants recited during their rituals. Two of these are of exceptional significance when searching for references between ritual 'texts'[14] and inhabited environment: the chant recited during the death ritual, to guide the spirit of the deceased to the ancestral village,[15] and the chanting done during the so-called *chinta* healing rituals, when the shaman travels to the 'otherworld' taking the spirit of the sick person with him. In general, rituals among the Dumi are concerned with keeping the ancestors content and with preventing them from exerting negative influences on the living. It is their belief that dissatisfied ancestors are the cause of diseases and misfortune and only by re-enacting the primordial 'ideal' situation in a ritual context can they be pleased and harmony restored between the living and the dead.

Death Ritual and Ancestral Landscape

The most prominent 'material' manifestations of ritual activity in the landscape are the so-called *chautaro*—'sitting' or 'resting' platforms erected in the context of death rituals performed by the Dumi. They are to be found along every footpath, mostly at crossings or at sites with a panoramic or especially beautiful view. They usually consist of a set of stone benches used for setting down baskets, and some of them even have water sources within them

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14 Rai tradition is historically purely oral. The term 'text' thus refers to ritual chants/ speech uttered during shamanic rituals. Only in recent years have some of these 'texts' actually been recorded on paper.
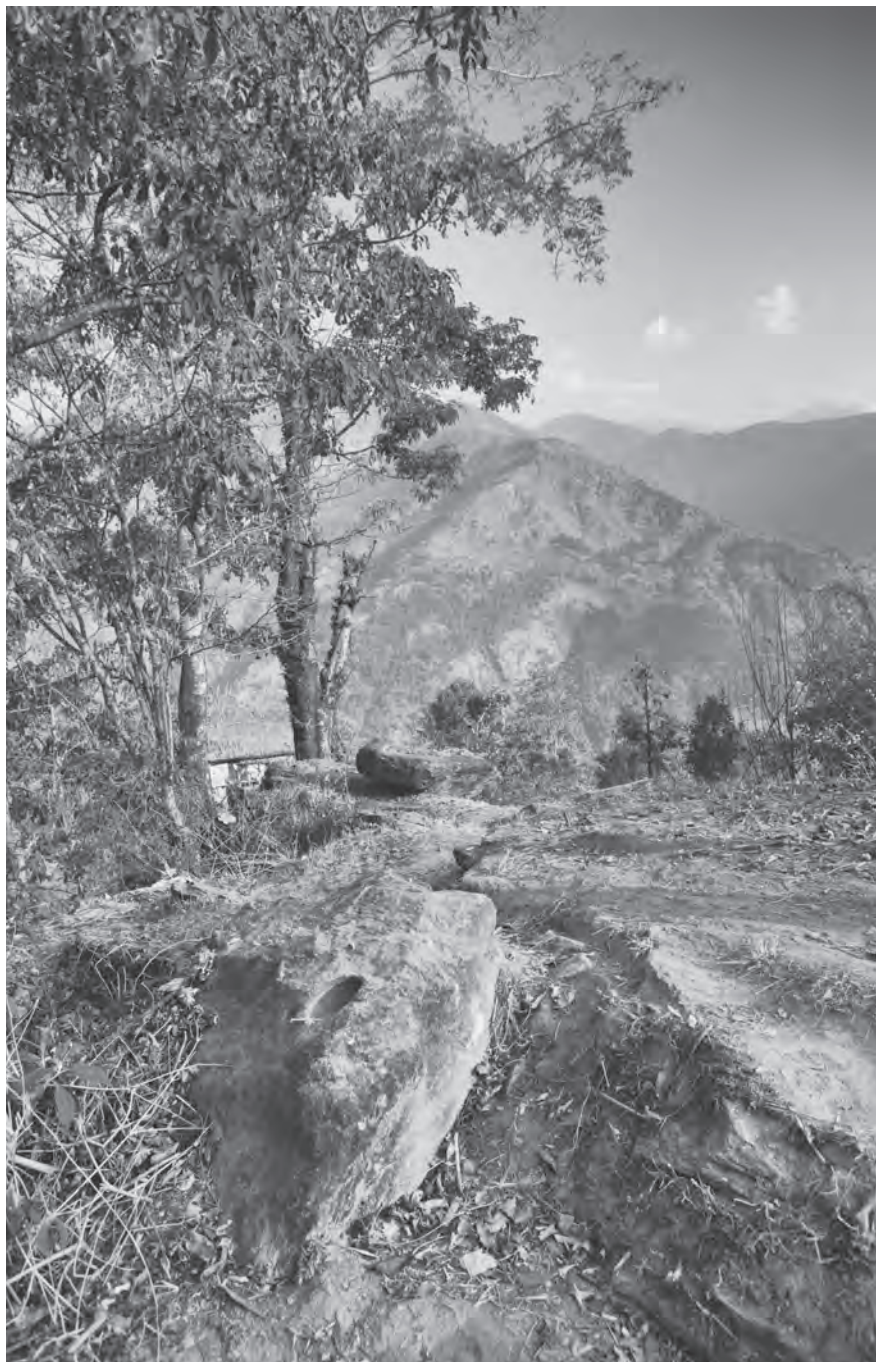
15 Cf. von Stockhausen 2006.

Figure 2: Ancestral stone at Haiapu village. January 2012.

where the exhausted traveller can quench his thirst. Most of them are accompanied by a pair of large *banyan* trees. Every *chautaro* is dedicated to a certain deceased person[16] and its erection forms an integral part of his or her death ritual. These *chautaro* are among the most visible traces of ritual activity in the area and their connection to shamanic practice and the death ritual becomes obvious when looking at the inscription plates usually included in them. They contain information about the person the platform was erected for, and sometimes include information about his life or the cause of death. In most cases, a number of religious symbols are included: sun and moon, but also tridents, or, in the past, symbols of shamanic paraphernalia.[17] Most of these symbols are related to Hinduism, which has a strong influence among the Dumi and neighbouring Rai groups.[18] Similar platforms are also to be found among most of the neighbouring non-Rai groups, although their mode of construction and religious embedding is supposedly quite different.[19]

A central part of the death ritual consists of guiding the spirit of the deceased person into the ancestral world. Upon examining the concept of the ancestral realm among the Dumi and the chants recited during such death rituals, we quickly realise that the path the spirit has to go to reach this realm is, in fact, a path which, by and large, could also be 'walked' by the living. The spirit does, however, enter the ancestral world, but as the latter's structure is congruent with the topography of the living, the basic journey the spirit takes seldom leaves the actual landscape that the Dumi inhabit.

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16 Or a married couple in some cases.

17 I never saw any of these symbols on Dumi *chautaro* myself, but their historical existence was confirmed to me by several elder Dumi. However, among the Chamling further south of the Dumi areas, these symbols are still frequently used on the inscription plates.

18 Due to the historical absence of a script, it can be assumed that these stone plates are a more recent addition to the resting platforms.

19 More may be read about them in the context of another Rai group, the Bahing, in the contribution by Claire Femenias in this volume.

The knowledgeable elders that recite these words of guidance for the spirit of the deceased chant a descriptive itinerary that starts at the house where the dead body is placed. It continues through the main door, where the spirit then embarks on a long journey through the topography inhabited by the Dumi, visiting a multitude of important places. On the way, the spirit is asked again and again to take a rest and realises that it has now joined the ancestral realm. The family members that attend the ritual also try to influence it in such a way that it will realise the necessary transformation from life to death.

But the question now arises as to what these places 'en route' are. Most of these places also play an important part in the everyday life of the Dumi: among them are countless water sources, large stones and other landmarks, trail-crossings or places of historical importance mentioned in mythological stories. In a study on Dumi death rituals, I documented the various places spirits are taken to on their way to the areas where the ancestors are supposed to live. The latter are called *balamdel* in the local Dumi language, which roughly translates as 'ancestral place'. All these 'ancestral places' are located within the real topography and they were imagined by my informants as village-like structures.[20] Every sub-clan of the Dumi has its own version of the *balamdel*.

If we compare their location with the map of Dumi-inhabited areas (Figure 1), we see that these 'ancestral villages' are mostly located in the area between the Rawa Khola river in the north-west and the Tap Khola river in the south-east, not necessarily overlapping with actual present-day settlements. The actual Dumi-inhabited areas extend much further, in the VDCs of Sapteshwor and Baksila on the central ridge, Kharmi and Jalpa on the slopes in the South-East; and Makpa, Bepla and Norun in the north-west above the confluence of the Rawa Khola and the Tap Khola.

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20 In fact, some of them exactly resemble the areas they are located in. One shaman described the 'otherworld' as 'same as the place we are in', with 'the same fields, houses and jungles' but with people of a smaller stature than we are (NP12_NbA02_10500).

In this way, all of the *balamdel* are located within just a small part of the Dumi-inhabited landscape. However, one of the *balamdel* is clearly located outside the centrally located Baksila ridge in the densely forested mountain areas to the north-east of the main settlements of the Dumi. This situation gives us another important clue about the possible meaning of these journeys and places. We are at once reminded of the mythological story of the migration of a group of ancestors from the Baksila side to Makpa village, which today constitutes the largest Dumi settlement on the north-western side of Rawa Khola. And it becomes clear that the entire area was only settled long after the *balamdel* had been 'anchored' in the landscape. The 'core' area of identification for the Dumi had already been established at that point in time. Makpa is clearly understood as a 'later' settlement in the migration history of the Dumi. I would expect to find the same situation in the other 'isolated' areas south-east of the Tap Khola river: most of the people living there actually trace their origins back to the already identified area in the middle, the Baksila ridge as I call it.

Do these locations actually point to a 'primordial' Dumi settlement area – or what was understood as such by their forefathers? There are stories that tell of some earlier migrations, when the Kirat divided themselves into the Limbu and the Rai, and of the time when the latter was fragmented even further into the dozens of groups known today. However, most of the groups recognise a certain point in time, a clearly defined generation in their genealogy, as the 'point zero' when it comes to defining their identity as a group or a clan.[21] There is a clearly known starting generation for Dumi culture and its activities are materialised and re-enacted in the context of various rituals, and, in the present context, the chants of the death ritual. The aforementioned references to the core settlement area contained in the location of the *balamdels*

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21 Very detailed documentation has been done by Chatur Bhakta Rai on the genealogies of the different Dumi clans. Some of these have been partly introduced in various issues of *Isilim* magazine published by Dumi Kirat Rai Funsikim, where 'genealogy' is a separate subject area.
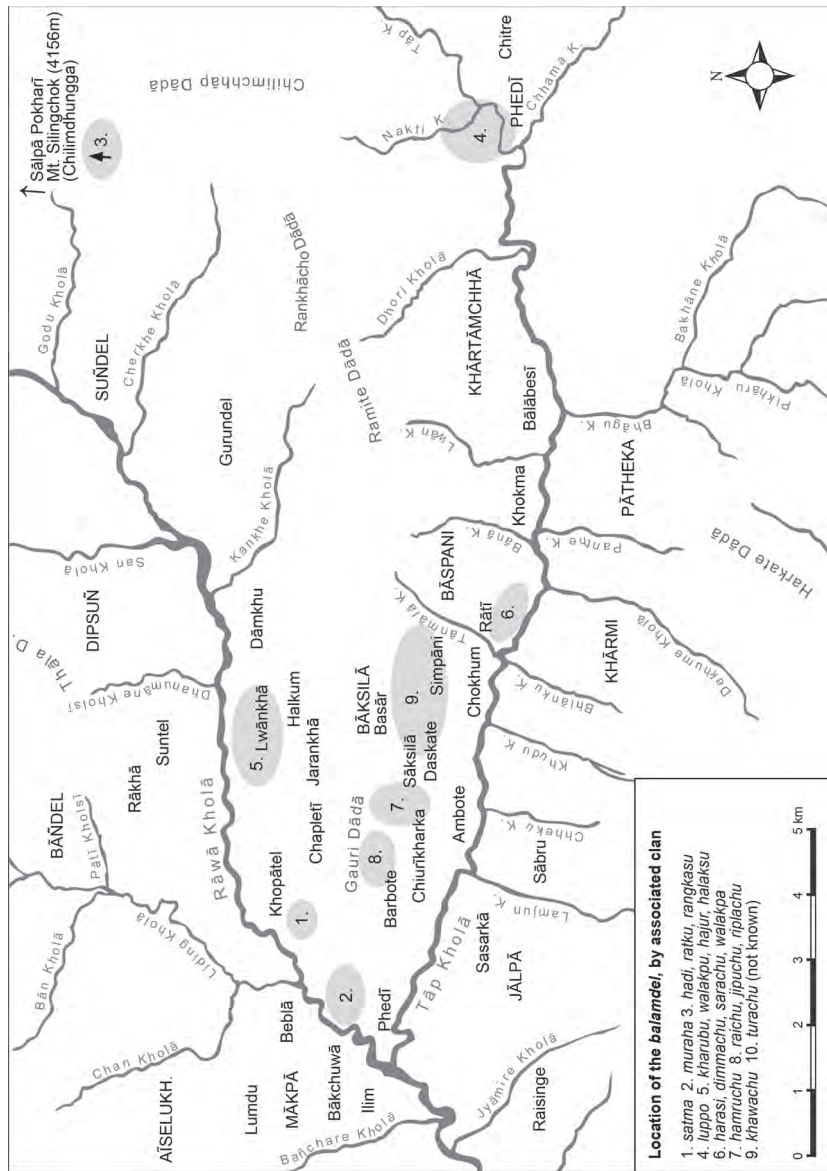
Figure 3: Approximate location of Dumi ancestral villages *balamdels*. (Preliminary listing)

are further highlighted when we visualise the stations of the actual journey during the death ritual on the map. Once again, the route remains largely within the area already identified by the *balamdels*.

The journeys vary from clan to clan, and if we look at the rituals performed by the clan whose *balamdel* lies outside the core settlement area of the Dumi, we again notice that the journey actually returns to the ancestral land of the clan: the spirits of this clan are actually guided outside the main area to a mountain called Chilimdhunga, north-east of the Dumi areas. The reason for this becomes clear when we look at the history of the clan that this journey relates to. Historically, the clan actually belonged to the neighbouring Sampang Rai who live in the areas south-east of Chilimdhunga and which was only integrated into the Dumi clan system at a later stage. The clan may have completely changed its identity, but its *balamdel* has remained inside its historic settlement area in Sampang territory. Some of these historical migratory movements are re-enacted in the route taken by the spirit on its way to the dwelling place of its ancestors.

The Shamanic Journey during *Chinta* Healing Rituals

The second, very common, ritual that includes a multitude of references to the inhabited landscape is the *chinta*, the shamanic healing ritual. This has currently become my central focus to supplement my data connected with the death rituals.

During a *chinta* ritual, the shaman takes the spirit of a sick person[22] with him on a long journey that lasts an entire night. It is conducted by the shaman in full ritual attire, supported by a number of drummers who take turns to play a *dhol*, a two-sided long drum that is fixed to a bamboo rack inside the house of the person who is being treated. To the sounds of the drumming, the shaman starts to tremble and his 'guru' spirit takes control of him. His running movements and wild dancing show the spectators that the

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22 Or entire households – sometimes the ritual is conducted as a preventive measure to secure health and prosperity. The shamanic journey, however, follows the same itinerary.

Figure 4: Journey during Death Ritual.

ritual journey has begun. On such journeys, the shaman visits in his mind the ancestors of the patient's clan, who are located at various places in the landscape. The shaman asks the ancestors for the causes of the disease to be treated.[23] To do this, the shaman takes symbolic offerings with him, parcels to please his ancestral counsellors. After the disease has been analysed by various means of divination, the shaman takes steps to fight the cause that has been identified.

After analysing some of these shamanic journeys, it became clear that they might also be related to historical migration patterns and include information about how the group's ancestors relate to the particular landscape. Compared to the journeys during the death ritual, the *chinta* route encompasses a far larger spatial area. Whereas the spirit of a deceased person never leaves the core settlement of the Dumi on his way to the village of the ancestors, during *chinta*, the shaman travels a lot further, from Khumbu in the northern parts of Nepal to the Tarai region in the far south. On the way, he refers to a lot of plants and animals that are typical of the visited areas.

I would like to illustrate – in strongly simplified notes – some of the stations and main events of an exemplary journey by a shaman of Baksila village.[24] All the visits are done by the shaman without actual movement of his body to the actual location. As the audience around him sees it, he continues to dance near the drum and the altar, all through the night-long ritual in which the journey is undertaken. For the spectator, the stations of the journey are only revealed in his recited words and his dance movements. An exemplary chronology of a *chinta* ritual is explained below.

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23 Diseases or mishaps are thought to be caused by the ancestors. Either by 'malicious' ones who have not been properly integrated into the ancestral realm (after dying, for instance, an unnatural death) or by 'good' ancestors who have been angered by the living (because, for instance, they did not do regular rituals and offerings for them).

24 Based on NP12_NbA02_09600.

At the beginning of the ritual, the drum is fixed into a bamboo frame, and an altar is set up with rice and divinatory paraphernalia, and the shaman gets dressed in his ritual attire.

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The drum begins to play, the household and jungle deities are asked for their blessings (they represent certain ancestors) and the shaman starts to tremble.

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The spirit (soul[25]) of the person the ritual is performed for is taken symbolically by the shaman and placed inside the altar.

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Now, the shaman visits several places and objects inside and in front of the house, all of which are related to the ancestral world and worshipped in the context of ancestral rituals. On reaching the courtyard of the house, the shaman cleans himself with some water kept in vessels on the altar and performs different movements symbolising a certain type of bird, monkey, and buffalo.

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Now, the actual journey starts and several water sources are visited around the house, starting with the well where the household members get their water and then continuing to more than 25 water sources of general importance in and around the area inhabited by the Dumi. All of these places can be located within the real landscape. At some of the stations, the shaman again performs various movements, symbolising different animals or symbols referring to mythological stories.

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On reaching the source of a river to the south-east of the Baksila ridge, the shaman ascends to Paruhang, the primordial ancestor and creator who stands at the root of the genealogy. He asks him for advice and help in order to find out about his patient's illness.

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25 The term 'soul' might be misleading as it implies the Western concept of a singular entity. In the context of the Rai, this notion is much more complex. See Gaenszle's work (1999, 2000, 2002, 2003) and Hardman (2000) for an in-depth discussion of personhood among the Rai.

Figure 5: The shaman Tek Bahadur Dumi during a chinta ritual.
Chiurikharka, October 2006.

Then the journey continues to several mountain peaks and water
sources of regional importance, to the north-west of the areas inhabited
by the Dumi, and then takes him to various places in Solukhumbu
district. On the way, the primordial ancestor Paruhang is visited.

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Here, he reaches the most important station on the ritual journey,
which can be located somewhere near the Bhote Koshi, a river that
comes down from Tibet, north-west of Namche Bazar. The disease is
examined here in great detail and various treatments have to be done.
In case of rituals performed for an entire household, several bamboo
sticks with sacred threads around them are buried at this stage at several
places around the building.

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Now, the shaman turns back to the south and reaches Jawajum, better
known as Tuwachung, a hilltop near the famous pilgrimage place of
Halesi (Maratika) in Khotang district. Tuwachung has an important
place in the mythology of most Rai groups because the cultural hero

that appears in many of their mythical stories is supposed to have lived there. The shaman performs movements that symbolise the invention of weaving by the two sisters of the cultural hero.

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The journey goes further down the Dudh Koshi river to a place where ferrymen *(majhi)* live. Here, the shaman rows the boat over the river himself, and further investigates, by looking into the water, the disease he is supposed to treat.

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He then crosses into Tharu[26] areas, where he again finds ancestors that can help him find out more about treatment options.

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He finally reaches the place of primordial creation, 'where the sun sets'. Here, again, he meets ancestors. The disease is then left at the point where several major rivers join in the southern regions of Nepal and the soul is washed in their water. Now, the journey comes to an end and the shaman turns around so as to return to the house of the patient.

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On his return, he visits places of historical importance, among them Siktel in Bhojpur District, another place that is frequently mentioned when people are asked where the Dumi originally came from. He then visits a few of the water sources in Dumi area again and bids farewell to his tutelary deities.

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He reaches the fireplace inside the patient's house, the place where he was dancing throughout the ritual, and the spirit of the patient is symbolically returned. Then the altar is dismantled, and some of the offerings are divided among the drum players and the shaman.

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The ritual attire is now taken off, the drumming ends, the shaman stops trembling and the ritual is concluded.

In comparing the *chinta* journey above to the one recited during

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26 An ethnic group living in the Tarai lowlands of Nepal.

the death ritual, it becomes clear that both of them seem to be closely linked to the ethnic identity of the Dumi and both exhibit historical migration patterns of the Rai in Eastern Nepal. In the death ritual, this is done at a very local level and, thus, in relation to the identity of the Dumi sub-group of the Rai, or even to smaller social units. The *chinta*, on the other hand, represents the Dumi's embedment in the larger Rai/Kirat community. Some of the ancestors who are visited are located far away in today's Sherpa areas of Khumbu and others in Tharu-inhabited areas of the Tarai lowlands. References to all of these ethnic groups can also be found in the mythology of the Rai, especially in stories that refer to the early migratory movements to today's settlement areas. In general, it can be said that the so-called 'ancestors' are located around the whole of eastern Nepal, and that the *chinta*, as such, is a good example of how landscape is used as a mirror for the territorial embedment of one's own ethnic identity.

Conclusion/Outlook

A new interpretational layer has been added to the eastern Nepalese landscape, especially during the last decade of the conflict, and the ongoing development and strengthening of new and existing ethnic identities in Nepal. With their politically motivated claims for stronger representation in a transforming Nepal of recent years, political players have worked on forming a new pan-Kirat ethnic identity which strongly ignores the traditional patterns and 'roots' described in the paragraphs above. In this context, local identities stand in the way because a common ethnic identity also has to be supported by a common culture if it is to be credible. Political leaders seem to agree in their perception that if they want to be accepted as a major group, the Kirat have to be represented as a unique entity. To accomplish this, common 'landscapes' and traditions have to be identified if they exist, or created if they do not.[27]

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27 The contribution by Marion Wettstein in this volume also discusses an example of such a new development: the revival of the Sakela dance (a semi-traditional

Another example of such a newly 'developed' or better 'highlighted' point in the landscape context is Tuwachung, the aforementioned hill near the pilgrimage site of Halesi, where the cultural hero and his sisters are believed to have settled. It was probably part of the shamanic journeys for centuries, but before the political developments in recent years, its importance lay on an entirely different level. I went there for the first time just a few years ago to look at some of the marks the mythical ancestors are said to have left.[28] The entire hill was overgrown with a dense cover of vegetation. To find some of the places related in the mythological stories, my informant Chatur Bhakta Rai,[29] who had brought me there, and I had to ask the local Chamling people to direct us to the exact locations. On the day of this first visit, an organisation was established to look after the 'development' of the 'heritage' site.[30]

When I visited Tuwachung again in 2011, I was amazed to see what had happened: the place had entirely changed its looks, it had been 'developed' by the new organisation and others into a site of common Rai heritage, with planned parking lots and guest houses and walls encircling the important 'heritage stones'. On the day I visited, which was close to Baisakh Purnima, several thousand people came to the hilltop to celebrate a Sakela dancing competition.

The 'development' of Tuwachung hill is a good example of how political actors are trying to 'elevate' the spatial definition of ethnic identity from a very localised level onto a more general, all-encompassing one. Suddenly, the ethnic identity does not just operate between the two rivers any more – the way it did for the one single small group – but is turned into a 'Pan-Rai' or 'Pan-Kirat' identity

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dance common among many Rai groups) and how its importance has changed in the past few years.

28 These are, for example, stones that contain impressions which are said to be related to the weaving activities done there by the mythical sisters of the cultural hero.

29 Chatur Bhakta Rai is the former president of Kirat Rai Yayokkha, a social and cultural organisation of the Kirat that is also strongly involved in the 'development' of places like Tuwachung.

30 Tuwachung Jayajum (www.tuwachungjayajum.org).

which covers, and thus lays claim to, a much larger territory in Khotang, Okhaldhunga, Bhojpur, and other districts of Eastern Nepal. And, of course, if we look at the identity that the Kirat political players in general want to create, we see an area of expansion that covers the entire eastern part of Nepal, from Sherpa inhabited areas in the north to the plains of the Tarai.

Analysing the ritual journey of the *chinta*, as we did earlier, it also becomes clear that there could also be some arguments to support such a claim in the actual local traditions. Many of the areas envisaged as part of a new political order have been understood for a long time as inhabited by 'brotherhoods'[31] of the Kirat. For example, many Rai shamans 'work together' with Sherpa deities when they perform their rituals. This, of course, does not mean that all groups are actually part of the same entity, but it rather supports what linguists have already demonstrated at another level: that most hill and mountain dwellers of Nepal and the extended Himalaya are of the same (Tibeto-Burman) origin.[32] Whether that is enough to support the various claims of the political actors, only the future will tell. For anthropology, it would be a great loss if the local traditions disappeared under such disputable, enforced 'developments'. Ethnic identity among the Rai seems to be strongly rooted in the landscapes inhabited by the various groups, and that 'landscape' also forms a core concept behind the creation of new (political) territories.

A lot of work has been done before on sacred and political landscapes, but it was mostly related to other parts of Nepal.[33] In the case of the region at the crux of my study, most sources have been concerned with differing religious contexts. In my current

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31 A term used to relate to the ancestors visited during the chinta.

32 Cf. for example van Driem 2001.

33 For example, the volume by A.W. Macdonald (1997) on the Tibetan Buddhist context; Pettigrew and Tamu (2002) as well as Pettigrew, Tamu and Turin (2009) on the shamanic context in Western Nepal; or also Witzel in his paper on Nepalese hydronomy (1990) and the volume edited by Balthasar Bickel (1999). Other works include the papers by Lecomte-Tilouine (1987, 2009); Nicoletti (1999); Ramirez (2009) and Kind (2012).
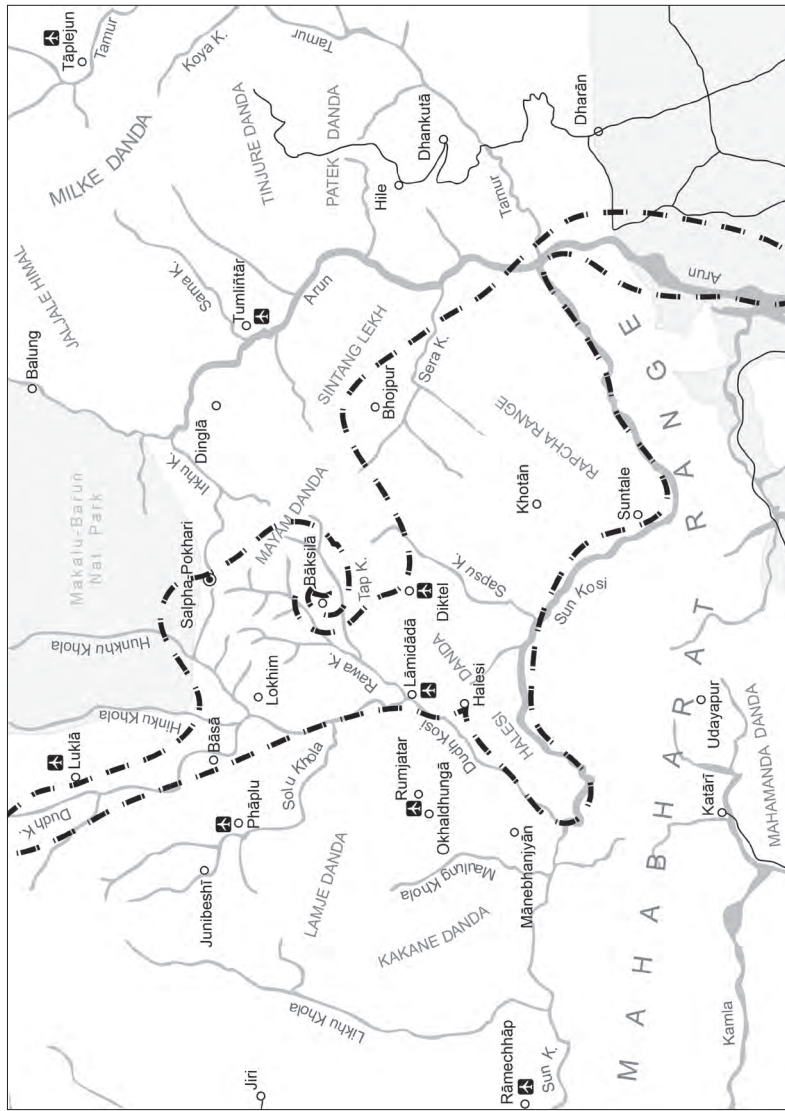
[Figure 6: Approx. Journey during Chinta]

Caption: Approximate journey during a chinta ritual (According to Birka Bahadur Rai).

research, I am trying to find out more precisely how the concept of (sacred) landscape actually looks among the Dumi: how it concurs with the real topography and can, therefore, be mapped 'onto' it. In the context of Dumi shamanism, the world of the ancestors seems to be a kind of 'mirror-image' of the world inhabited by the living.

Other important questions are concerned with the possibility of a Dumi ethnic identity outside the actual settlement areas: Are rituals only possible locally? What happens if rituals are 're-located' into different surroundings? Can a Dumi landscape develop in Kathmandu or Hong Kong? And what are the markers of ethnic identity if either the religious practice or these landscape-related parts of it might not be possible anymore?

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Figure 7: The shaman Bishal Wambule Rai looking at two effigies he uses during his chinta rituals. They symbolise Sherpa deities. Phedi, November 2010.

Dancing Who We Are
The Embodiment of Rai Ethnic Identity in *Sakela* Performance

Marion Wettstein

THE *sakela* dance of the Rai, who mainly live in the middle hills of Eastern Nepal, is the focus of this paper.[1] In many respects, this dance and its development can be regarded as a prime example of a folk dance that has been cultivated in a process revolving around the definition of ethnic identity.[2] A cursory glance round the globe reveals that (folk) dance is linked with ethnicity in many countries where the definition of ethnic identities is undergoing a process

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2   During the discussion of this paper at the Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya 2012 at which it was presented, the suggestion was made that the term 'ethnic' should be avoided and be replaced by 'indigenous'. This, in my view, derives from the current debate in Nepal about which groups are indigenous to the country and which are not, with the implication that the respective rights should be seen in a different light. Since my paper is not related to this discussion, I will consciously use the terms 'ethnic' identity and 'ethnic' group.

of evolution, especially, but not exclusively, in the post-colonial context (for an overview see Reed 1998). Taking the *sakela* as its example, this paper addresses the question of why dance seems to represent such a powerful means in the process of building identity. It approaches this question primarily from the perspective of the somatic aspects of dance and song. First, I shall take an ethnographic look at the dance itself and its context; afterwards I shall track the political and historical processes by which the dance has become so closely linked to the Rai ethnic identity in Nepal over the last few years. Drawing on this example, the last section will outline why, in what respect, and under which conditions such concepts as 'somatics' or 'embodiment' may be regarded as useful models for explaining the effectiveness of dance in shaping feelings of ethnic belonging.

As an experiment in trying to let readers get as close as possible to the somatic experience of dance, I shall introduce each of the following paragraphs with a semi-fictive preamble. The aim of these brief introductions is to evoke an emotional reaction that will hopefully create a suitable atmosphere that helps establish empathy with the dancers in their physical, emotional, and cognitive realities.

An Ethnographic Background to the *Sakela* Dance

Sweat was running down her temples. Her black hair was adorned with a gold-coloured, ornamented disc, and she was dressed in a traditional red velvet top and a black wrap skirt with white dots. The young girl tirelessly followed the ever-repeating dance steps with enormous pleasure. Once in a while she joked with the young man dancing next to her. While he jumped about wildly in his jeans, white T-shirt, and fashionable sun glasses, she tried to perform the hand gestures and footsteps as correctly and with as much distinction as possible: 'Come-come', her hands said simultaneously with those of all the other dancers. And, again, 'Come-come', this time she waved towards a friend who was standing outside the circle of dancers, still undecided. The dance had just started, and her friend in a pink mini dress and high heels

purposefully put on a bored face. But, she was unable to resist the call of
the rhythms for long and joined the circle of dancers, just as elegantly as the
elderly gentleman who was all smiles in his traditional waistcoat and who
had come with bare feet. A group of women started loudly to sing a cho-
rus: 'Hāmro bhūme turyo!' (We finished the worship of our land deity!) And
everybody felt that this was exactly what the sakela dance was all about—
or was it not?

The *sakela* (Dumi), which is called other names by different Rai
groups[3] and sometimes referred to as *caṇḍī nāc*[4] (Nep), is per-
formed among many Rai groups, although not all. In particular,
the Chamling and Bantawa Rai are known for their passion for
dancing it. The dancers, men and women, young and old, cir-
cle a ritual tree or leafy branch, dancing a repetitive basic step.
Every once in a while they simultaneously perform gestures with
their hands, their feet, or their whole bodies. For this, they fol-
low a dance leader who indicates the beginning and determines
the order of the gestural sequences. In between these sequences,
which are often repeated three times each, rounds of basic steps are
danced, to which the dancers may choose to sing some of the stan-
zas of the *sakela* song repertoire, or improvise stanzas on the spot.
Also, when singing, the performers follow a song leader, who at
times may be the dance leader as well.

The themes that are performed in the bodily gestures can be
categorised into the following: agricultural work involved in plan-
ting and harvesting (such as scattering the seeds, binding the seed-
lings, weeding, hoeing, planting the paddy, cutting the ripe crops,
drying the crops, threshing, collecting, carrying them in a basket,

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3   *Sakela* is the most commonly used term in a 'Nepalised' pronunciation among
the Dumi, whereas *sakala (sʌkʌla)* would be the proper Dumi pronunciation
according to one of the few remaining native speakers in Halkum village. *Sak(h)*
ewa is the most commonly used term in Chamling or Bantawa.

4   Some ethnic activists are trying to convince people to avoid the term *caṇḍī nāc*
for the *sakela* dance, as they believe it is a designation given to the dance from
outsiders, especially from Hindu communities who interpret it as a form of
devotion to the Hindu goddess *caṇḍī*, which is considered inappropriate.

putting them in storage, cooking, and eating); leisure activities (such as combing one's hair, oiling one's hair and face, looking into the mirror, placing a *tika* [Nep] on one's forehead, plucking flowers, fixing them in one's hair, threading a garland, playing the *binayo* [Nep, Jew's harp], walking to the market); imitations of animals, many of which have mythological significance (such as the tiger, monkey, frog, lizard, flea, tortoise, butterfly, fly, and a whole set of different birds); pure 'foot' movements; and framing gestures of greeting, respect and farewell. Among the Dumi Rai, the community on which my research focuses,[5] these bodily gestures are mostly called *sili* (Dumi). *Sili*, however, is also used as a general term for the *sakela* dance as a whole, for certain sequences that belong together, and also for the movements a shaman (*sele dhāmi,* Dumi/Nep) performs in his nightly healing rituals. Occasionally, the word is used as a general term for every choreographed movement within Rai culture (as, for example, the movements of the *māruni* dance, Nep). This, however, is rather uncommon. The term is not used at all to describe classical Nepali dance. In this paper, I shall limit the term *sili* to describe a single unit of gestural movement. It is very difficult to assess how many different *sili* are known throughout the Rai region. Among the Dumi Rai, I witnessed and documented around 100 different *sili*, but I have been told of another 80 without as yet having seen them performed (cf. also C.B. Rai 2008/ 2065 BS). The stanzas that are sung while dancing may correspond thematically to the single *sili*, but they may also focus generally on the seasons in which the dance is performed—planting and harvest—or, as is often the case, they tell of love and romance.

Among the Dumi Rai, most songs for *sakela* dancing are

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5   For a different perspective on specifically the Dumi Rai, see von Stockhausen in this volume. Further ethnographic information about the Rai in general can be found in Femenias in this volume (Bahing Rai), Allen 1975, 1976 (Thulung Rai), van Driem 1993 (Dumi Rai), Ebert and Gaenszle 2008 (Kirat Mythology), Gaenszle 1991, 2002 (Mewahang Rai), Hardman 2000 (Lohorung Rai), McDougal 1979 (Kulunge Rai), Nicoletti 2006 (Kulunge Rai), or Schlemmer 2004 (Kulunge Rai).

nowadays sung in Nepali, not in Dumi. The Dumi language is only rarely spoken in the region today, mainly in the regions around Makpa village and among a few families in Halkum village in Khotang district.[6] As the dance groups are mostly composed of participants from many different villages, it would be impractical even in Makpa to sing the *sakela* songs in Dumi. In my research, I was only able to collect ancient stanzas in the Dumi language from three elderly people. The text of the song, which might be titled the *dolokuma* (Dumi) song, on account of its chorus, suggests that the *sakela* dance is much more closely linked to Dumi mythology than is visible at first glance. But, this is another story and shall be told another time.

Traditionally, the *sakela* dance is not danced the whole year round. It is closely linked to a certain ritual which is performed once, or, among some groups, twice a year, mostly in the months of *Baisākh* (April/May, Nep) and *Maṅsir* (November/December, Nep)—preferably around the full moon. Depending on the season, these rituals are also called *ubhauli* and *udhauli* (Dumi). In spring, a ritual called *bhume pujā* (worship of the deity of the land or soil; Nep) is performed over the entire Rai area, in some groups with a strong emphasis on the *sakela* dance, in others without any dancing at all. In most Rai groups, the *bhūme pujā* is the ritual basis for the dance. Among the Dumi Rai, for instance, a shaman (a *sele dhāmi* or a *nāgire* priest; Dumi/Nep) is in charge of conducting the ritual at the specially designated place where the *bhūme* deity lives (*bhūme thān;* Nep). Usually, the deity, which may be male or female, is manifested in small stones that are covered underground throughout the year. During the *pujā,* they are dug out and presented to the community. A female pig is offered by the community and cocks and hens may be offered communally or by individual households. In a second *pujā,* the *jalim puja* (Dumi/Nep), fresh maize plants are offered, either at a specially designated place or in the house that is considered the first house of the

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6   For a discussion of the Dumi language, see also van Driem 1993.
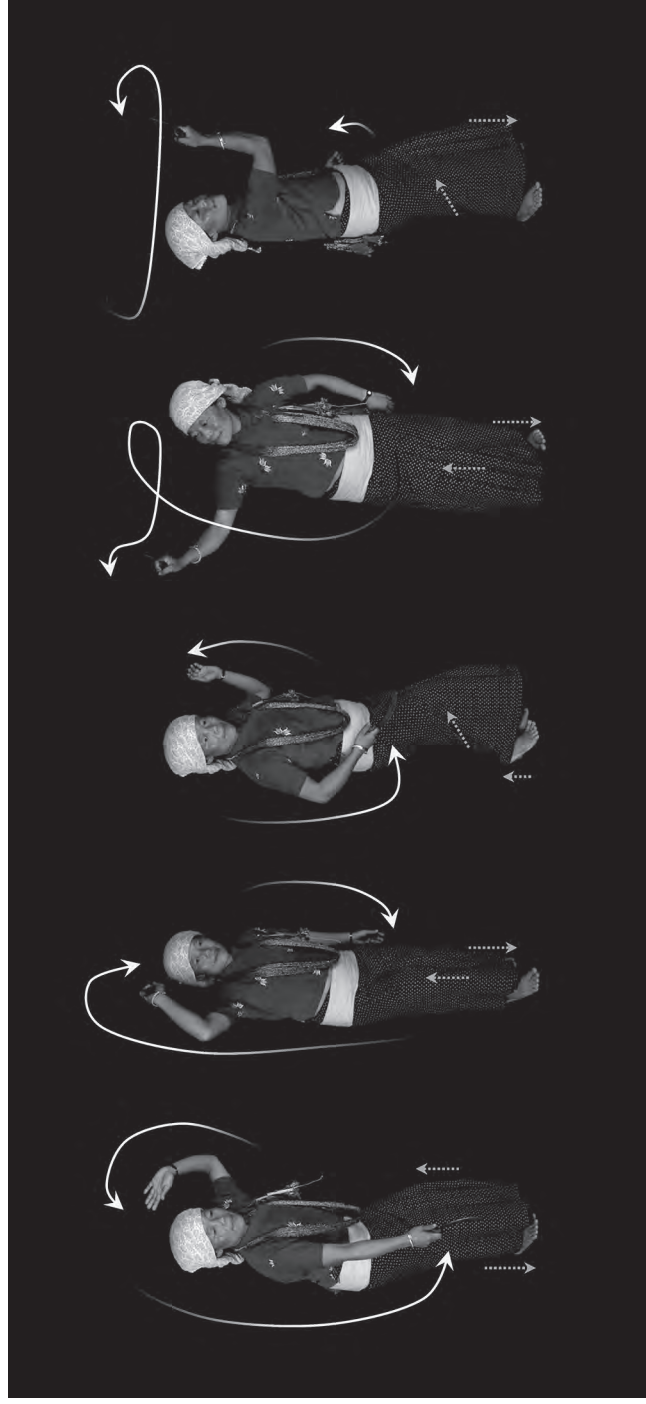
Studio photographs of *sakela sili* (units of dance movements) with Laxmi Rai from the Dumi Rai village, Rudalung, in Khotang District of Eastern Nepal. Here performing the 'jungle cutting' *sili*. Lalitpur, August 6–12, 2011 (Photo by Alban von Stockhausen).

settlement (*tupsumi kim;* Dumi). Local variations of these ritual activities may include an emphasis on the so-called *inkhuli (yinkhuli) thān* (Dumi/Nep)—although it has not yet been established with certainty what *inkhuli* means[7]—or, on specific important places in the history of the individual villages, especially in the Makpa region. Often, there is a taboo on planting activities for three days once the ritual has taken place, after which the actual planting season starts.

In villages where the *sakela* dance is part of the ritual, it is usually performed by specially rehearsed ritual dancers (*masumadi*, an umbrella term for male and female; Dumi) during the *pujā* itself while the other attendants are mainly the audience. Towards the afternoon, large circles of lay dancers may assemble at another spot (the school grounds for example) and dance for the fun of it. The ritual dancers and the shaman may join in for some time and, depending on the mood, the dances may continue through the night, sometimes until the next morning. At some point in the night or the next morning, the dance will be officially ended (*sili mārne;* Dumi/Nep), after which it is forbidden in this specific village to dance *sakela* until the next season, or the next year.

Because dancing is such fun, the villages in Dumi Rai region, for instance, have developed a special timeframe for their *bhūme pujā* so that the rituals in the different villages do not all take place on the same day, but one after the other over a period of one or two weeks, with only a few of them overlapping. This allows passionate dancers to travel from village to village and dance at several *sakela* events. After this, they are well rehearsed and may take part in one of the secular dance competitions that have been organised for some years now in the bigger villages and market places in the district.

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7   In some Dumi Rai villages the inkhuli is an old grinding stone placed somewhere in the fields (for example, Halkum village), an old water source (for example, Daregauda village), or a special stone (for example, Makpa village).

Identity Processes, Cultural and Political Activism, and the *Sakela* Dance

On the other side of the circle of dancers, which had grown much larger within a few seconds, the cymbal players now forced the pace. 'Ahure-e-e, wa-wa-wa-a, soi-soi-soi!' the singers shouted excitedly in response as it started raining heavily on the grounds of Tundikhel in central Kathmandu. Unimpressed by the rain or by the voice yelling over the loudspeaker that was trying to convince the audience of the importance of one's own culture, language, and religion, the dancers proceeded to circle the leafy branch that had been stuck in the ground. The circle of dancers had no mind to listen to the speech of the political leader on the stage, who was emphasising that dancing the sakela was a crucial part of Kirat Rai culture. Of course, it was, they had always known it, and they had always danced it—just as the forefathers had always danced it. With one difference: their forefathers had not worn high heels.

A circle of dancers performing a *sakela* dance during the *bhūme pujā* (annual ritual for the deities of the soil or land) in the Dumi Rai village of Sabru, Khotang District, Eastern Nepal, May 25, 2011 (Photo by Alban von Stockhausen).

And they certainly had not danced the 'mobile phone sili'. Actually, was it grandpa who had said that they had not danced at all during bhūme pujā in his days?

The *sakela* dance and the *bhūme pujā* have seen a tremendous revival over the last decade or so. In the Dumi Rai region alone, five to six new *bhūme thān* have been inaugurated in the last few years, each of which has to be attended with annual rituals and dancing from the year of its instalment onward. And, each will add a new station to the dance calendar kept by the people passionate about dancing. When I first became interested in the *sakela* dance among the Dumi Rai some 10 years ago, it was regarded as nearly extinct and only a few elderly people, those who had been ritual dancers all their lives, still danced it. But, within a few years, *sakela* became very popular in both the villages as well as the urban surroundings of Kathmandu and Dharan. Some Rai groups who traditionally had not practised the dance suddenly started to organise lessons for their youth, and the youth loved it. If one visits a *sakela* event today, the majority of dancers will be young people. The *sili* are copied from those groups that had always known a large range of them—notably the Chamling and Bantawa Rai—and new movements, albeit mostly referring to traditional culture, are also invented. Similarly, the *sakela* dance is becoming more and more popular in the diasporas, as evidenced by the many YouTube videos that have been posted online in the last five years.

In my view, the revival and implementation of the *sakela* dance is to a large extent an effect of the agenda of the Kirat Rai Yayokkha—the cultural and political ethnic umbrella-organisation of the Kirat—and its many sister- and sub-organisations, which all promote the ethnic and political identity of the unified Rai or Kirat. Currently, the Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, and Yakkha are all subsumed under 'Kirat'. Among these four groups, traditional dances that move in circles around a ritual centre are of great importance. The Yayokkha organises major events and

gatherings throughout the year, many of which take place in Kathmandu. On such occasions, political and cultural leaders address the audience, emphasising the importance of maintaining one's culture. And the factors that prove most popular among the Rai are the local languages; the local customs, including the shamanic religious practices and rituals; and the local dances, in particular, the *sakela* dance.

Whenever a formal cultural gathering takes place, there will be at least one group invited to perform a *sakela* dance, either on stage or together with the audience. Dance competitions with awards of considerable sums of money are held each year, and proper dance groups have formed over the last few years that rehearse their performances on a regular basis. Such dance groups also ensure that their members are accurately dressed in traditional attire when they perform, and traditional dress has become associated with the *sakela* dance in general among the Rai.

It is interesting to note that cultural practice as a means to express and reinforce ethnic identity does not seem to have the same importance throughout Nepal in the processes of identity formation that have been taking place since the 1990s. As the example of the Thangmi shows (Shneiderman 2009), some ethnic groups in Nepal prefer to focus on basic rights and development rather than on cultural preservation in their ethnic self-definition (Shneiderman 2009:117). Shneiderman argues that unlike India, Nepal does not have an affirmative action system, and basic rights are not secured in the highly corrupt state. The affirmative action system in India attaches certain rights to a specific definition of ethnic culture, which, in turn, is objectified through clearly describable ritual and cultural practices. The lack of such a system in Nepal has thus, among the Thangmi at least, shifted the focus away from cultural practice when it comes to defining ethnic identity. For the Rai, who in terms of numbers outweigh the Thangmi by far, this argumentation does not apply. Among them, the focus on cultural practice is very strong. When considering the reasons for this difference between two ethnic groups which, in the

opinion of some,[8] might even belong to the same major group of the Kirat in Nepal, we can look to Pfaff-Czarnecka who suggests that '[w]ithin relatively short spans of time, strategically important signs can be interpreted anew, or they may acquire additional conditions' (2003:137) and

> [p]rone to 'capture' are religious elements, rituals, specific habits and customs, historical notions, ritually important sites, cultural notions considered (by some people) as elements of the national culture, dress, and others....Indeed, in Nepal specific cultural or religious notions were turned into ethnic markers only after the ethnic activists sought to define their identity *in reaction* to the prevailing public figures of the national society and of the minorities in particular (2003:138).

That is to say, after the 1990s. Pfaff-Czarnecka sees the process of ethnicity formation in Nepal in the light of symbolisation. In my view, we can, however, see a process beyond that, especially when observing the role that the folk dance *sakela* assumes for the Rai. I will come back to this in the next section. For now, I shall take a closer look at the way and extent to which the *sakela* dance is currently incorporated into the agenda of the Yayokkha.

For some years now, *sakela* performances have been organised by the Kirat Rai Yayokkha on the grounds of Tundikhel in central Kathmandu on the occasion of the annual *ubhauli/udhauli* festivals. These events are announced for a specific date by the Yayokkha central committee of Kathmandu with a formal, written invitation sent to all cultural and activist organisations, associations, and dance groups. Pitched along the demarcations of the grassy square in Tundikhel are rows of colourful tents, some of which offer food, while others sell books or provide information about groups and associations. On the main ground surrounded by these stalls,

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8 Mainly individual influential cultural or political activists belonging to different local ethnic groups.

several leafy branches have been stuck into the ground at some distance from one another. Some are surrounded by a circular barrier of rope demarcating a dancing space around the branch at the centre. On one side of the square ground is a stage with loudspeakers and microphones for addresses given by the invited speakers. The invitation will usually be for 9 o'clock in the morning, but hardly any participants turn up at that time. Only some officials and the appointed shaman of the Kirat Rai Yayokkha may turn up at that early hour to perform a small ritual.

Most people arrive at around 11 o'clock and Nepali music will be played from CDs over the loudspeakers on stage. Around 12 o'clock, the official opening of the festival will be held with speeches that may go on for an hour or two, and in the early afternoon, the appointed shaman will officially inaugurate the first dancing circle. Speeches may continue the whole afternoon, including reading out the list of donors who have backed the festival and the announcement of future events. In the meantime, many more participants will have joined the festival and the dancing circles will have become occupied by different groups, some of them official dancing groups from a specific region which will have brought banners and containers with rice beer to give to the dancers, while others may be composed of youths of mixed Kirat origin who are there to enjoy themselves. Between 4 and 6 o'clock in the afternoon the number of participants will usually have reached its peak, which on a good day may well be as many as 6000 people. After the main speeches are finished, the official event is over and the stalls are slowly taken down. But, some participants may choose to stay until much later. Many dancing groups move on to private homes or smaller compounds after the event and continue dancing and singing there.

This new type of *sakela* performance is certainly not just an urban phenomenon. *Sakela melā* (*sakela* fairs; Nep) are also organised in rural areas. One of the most prominent examples may be found near the pilgrimage site of Halesi, on Tuwachung Hill. Merely 10 years ago, nobody danced on Tuwachung Hill, and

only a few old people who lived near the hill used to know that on its ridge there were historical stones that were closely linked to the mythology of the Rai. These stones, they used to say, were the place where the two mythological sisters, Toma and Khema,[9] settled and invented the craft of weaving. A local committee of cultural activists took up this story and within a few years, Tuwachung Hill had grown into a centre of worship and *sakela* dance, with a big festival held twice a year at *ubhauli* and *udhauli*. When I attended the festival in summer 2011, I estimated that there were 4000 participants, most of them from the surrounding Chamling Rai region, but also from other Rai groups as well as other castes. Besides the spontaneously formed *sakela* dance circles, around 15 different official dance groups attended. Apart from the festivals in Kathmandu and Dharan, the Tuwachung festivals may thus be regarded as among the largest *sakela* dance events nowadays.

These *melā* and festivals for *ubhauli* and *udhauli* still incorporate a ritual component, if only in that there is always a shaman present who inaugurates the event, or conducts a minimal offering to the central tree or branch. In the secular dance competitions, however, the original ritual elements are often completely missing. Generally speaking, a certain degree of 'folklorisation' has taken place over the last 10 to 15 years: a process of detaching the dance from its original ritual context and placing it in a new form of performance that stands for itself and is symbolically linked to ethnic identity, conservatism, and traditionalism. And, within this, there is also room to come up with new ideas. Experiments with newly invented *sili* and new forms of performing old *sili* could be observed in many dance competitions. At present, such inventions are still sanctioned by the organisers of the dance competitions and shows. They are regarded as 'not original' and innovative dance groups, for example, are not awarded prizes at dance competitions. But, slowly, the notion that tradition is evolving and does

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9   The names used among the Dumi Rai. Other variations in different Rai groups may also include Toyama, Tawama, Gramu or Grame for Toma and Khiyama, Laju, or Lasme for Khema (personal communication Chatur Bhakta Rai).

not have to be fixed or 'pure' and 'original' is seeping in. Even the more conservative powers in the cultural organisations have recently confided to me that it is okay when young people dance a mobile phone *sili*. Put simply, this new trend in attitudes towards the dance reveals that *sakela* describes the reality of people's lives, and if the reality shifts from agriculture to office work, then this is what the new *sili* will be about. However, until now the majority of *sili* are still concerned with the rural lifestyle, as described above, and it is generally understood that the dance describes the life of the forefathers rather than the life of the present.

We can observe worldwide that so-called 'traditional' dances are used by political interest groups to implement the notion of ethnic identity. We also find examples of how dance has been used to inscribe propaganda, or how it has been banned by power-holders because of its potential in resistance movements (see the case of Greece, Loutzaki 2001, or the Chinese revolution, Strauss 1977, and the general overview in Reed 1998). Referring to Meyer (1995), Reed states that '[d]ance is a powerful tool in shaping nationalist ideology and in the creation of national subjects, often more so than are political rhetoric or intellectual debates' (1998:511). The crucial question here is: Why? Can we explain this transformative power of dance in general? And, if so, can we explain why certain dances, as in our case study, the *sakela*, seem to be especially apt for this purpose? In the following section, I shall approach this question in light of studies on embodiment and the somatics of dance. My aim is to try to grasp the essence of what 'embodiment' really means in terms of the link between dance practice and political propaganda.

Effects of Somatic Experiences and Embodiment in Dance Related to Identity Processes

Now the dancers had to concentrate on the dance leader, who had just announced the beginning of a new dance movement by yelling a loud 'Hey!' and swinging his arms down to catch everybody's attention. A general

jumpiness could be felt—which sili comes next? The dance leader knew very well how to please his circle. He smirked and put his hands behind his buttocks and rubbed his palms together three times in time to the cymbals. Delighted squeals and giggles accompanied him and the circle followed him as he performed the jhinge sili, the movement of the fly cleaning itself. Everybody enjoys the jhinge sili, and soon the songs accompanying the dance told of romantic love, disappointed hopes, deep feelings of belonging, and of never forgetting each other despite the separating mountains. Time became irrelevant, the rain was not felt, bodies moved, driven by a mysterious force. Misty-eyed faces drifted into a half trance. For a short time, or for a timeless moment, many a mind and body dissolved into integrated oneness.

Dance and song, especially when combined, have a great potential for generating moments of oneness, and, when performed in a group, the experience of togetherness, of social unity on top of that, is amplified. And, this might be a reason, as current arguments go, why dance—whether employed intuitively or out of calculation—is such a powerful element in the processes of casting ethnic identity. But, how can we understand this moment of 'oneness'? Why and how does it occur?

Cognitive scientists agree that in the Western world it was Descartes who in the 17th century determined the paradigm of the separation of mind and body, known as 'Cartesian Dualism'. This paradigm defined the mind as the sole seat of knowledge (Descartes 1637, 1641). For many years, the mind-body relation was discussed chiefly in terms of what determined what, assuming there was even a link between the two, which was denied at times (for a counter-critique, see Broad 1918). Only recently has a new understanding of an interrelationship developed, along with an integrative approach. A major influence in this new understanding of mind and body in Western philosophy was Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodied knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1945, Tanaka 2011), even if other thinkers, notably MacMurray (1935), had deemed the Cartesian Dualism problematic long before, and viewed man as an integrated being of body, mind, and emotion.

Similarly, in the field of movement and dance studies, an important new approach has developed since the beginning of the 20th century that has a more holistic understanding of the body-mind-emotion complex. Most influential in this approach have been practitioners and thinkers of dance and movement such as Rudolf Laban, who developed a new form of dance movement and a dance notation (Labanotation); Frederick Matthias Alexander and Moshé Pinchas Feldenkrais, who both developed movement techniques to reduce not only physical but also mental stress and pain (Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method). Equally influential has been the expressive movement art of Eurythmy designed by Rudolf Steiner and Marie von Sivers and which was developed further by Gerda Alexander (Eutony); and the 'sacred dances' of the spiritual and esoteric guru George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, who, for instance, had a strong influence on theatre director Peter Brook (see his film *Meeting with Remarkable Men*). Most influential in the second half of the 20th century, especially in North America, was the formulation of the concept of somatics[10] by Thomas Hanna in the 1970s (Hanna 1970, 1980, Batson 2009).

Mainly inspired by the Feldenkrais Method, it quickly flourished and brought a general upswing to therapeutic and educational movement techniques that focus on the awareness of body sensation, movement and conscious embodiment, especially for the treatment and fast relief of chronic pain. Drawing on neurological research, Hanna's somatic concept is designed to eliminate unwanted muscle tension, even among the elderly and those who have suffered many years of pain, through isolated, conscious, active body movement. Somatic techniques, of which many have evolved since Hanna, proved to be attractive for pain therapy and also for (dance) movement education. Many of these concepts draw on the healing effects of ancient Asian body-mind techniques, such as yoga, that was westernised and reformulated for an international

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10 Derived from the ancient Greek term 'soma', meaning as much as 'from the body'.

following around the turn of the century. While in dance studies the focus is placed on active, conscious embodiment, the subconscious influences between mind, body, and emotion are of great concern in the fields of psychosomatic research and therapy. And, whereas in Western medicine, somatic means anything body-related, generally speaking, the term 'somatics' is applied today to describe processes of body-mind integration. Put simply, over the last century, thinkers and practitioners of movement and dance studies have recognised that it seems possible to actively or passively link a thought pattern or emotional pattern to a physical movement pattern as well as de-link it again, at any age.

With these concepts of embodiment and somatics at the back of our minds, we may suggest an explanation as to why dance might be such a powerful means for the process of ethnic identity building. If a collective folk dance like the *sakela*, which lasts for several hours and is infused with positive emotions and joyful moments of oneness, is combined with constant messages of ethnic pride and identity, the experience of oneness fuses with the notion of ethnicity, and, likewise, becomes integrated into the total experience. In cultures that were never strongly influenced by Cartesian Dualism—that is to say, many parts of the non-Western world, including the former colonies—bodily movement and dance always continued to be important aspects of everyday life. The conceptual framework and the practice concerning the transmission of knowledge include these aspects today. This is the case with the *sakela* dance. As we saw in the beginning, the gestures of the dance consist mainly of an inventory of movements from agricultural techniques, knowledge about the biosphere that is linked to mythology and oral tradition, and topics of socially accepted leisure activities. The *sakela* dance had, therefore, once been a strong means of teaching and learning relevant cultural techniques and values among the Rai. The tradition of learning through dancing is still deeply rooted in society, and could hence easily be revived in the context of learning a new set of values: that of ethnic identity.

In theory, one might suggest that any message can be fed into

the minds of people through the medium of dance. However, the essential condition is that people do actually dance, and that they enjoy dancing, so that a positive emotion is linked to the practice. Many folk dances are communal dances, and are by nature linked to notions of togetherness, and in-group identification, and are therefore highly suitable as a means of inscribing ethnic identity. It is not surprising that it was precisely the *sakela* dance that was chosen from among the many dances of the Rai—whether consciously or unconsciously—to become the 'national' dance of the Rai. Of the Rai dances, the *sakela* is the one with the highest integrative function. Everybody can join in and the circle of dancers not only symbolises but also physically enacts the whole society moving around an *axis mundi*.

Conclusion

As always in Nepal, dusk had come quickly and the dancers were now moving in the near dark. Thanks to the full moon they could still follow the dance leader who meanwhile, after several hours, had arrived at the movements of weaving. Even though weaving was a disappearing craft among the Rai, nearly all of the dancers were able to perform the *sili* of plucking cotton, turning the spinning wheel, and weaving fabric. When the cloth was measured and folded, and the belt and turban were bound, the dance leader indicated the last *sili*: 'Bye-bye', the hands waved in the circle of dancers, 'bye-bye', and 'bye' again. The cymbals stopped abruptly and the circle quickly dissolved. This was the end of this year's spring *sakela* dance in Kathmandu. It was suddenly quiet on the grounds of Tundikhel and within a few minutes the people had scattered in all directions. But wait. Behind one of the colourful tents a pair of cymbals started to play anew. The night was still young…

As we have seen, the instrumentalisation of the *sakela* dance for the construction of an ethnic 'we-feeling' in a national political agenda is a relatively recent phenomenon. We may recall here that Pfaff-Czarnecka (2003) pointed out the volatility of

Chatur Bhakta Rai *(second from right)*, then president of the Kirat Rai Yayokkha, enjoying a *sakela* dance together with dancers from Rudalung village at the large *sakela melā* on Tuwachung Hill near Halesi, Khotang District, Eastern Nepal, 6 June 2011.
(Photo by Alban von Stockhausen)

the meaning of symbols, the rapid change that can be observed in the way a certain phenomenon gets attached, detached, and re-attached to diverse symbols. There would be no point, therefore, in insisting on the notion that a certain practice (the *sakela* dance) is attached to a certain meaning (Rai ethnic identity). All we can observe are the changes and shifts the dance undergoes in time in all its aspects. While considering the reasons why certain practices, such as dance, are more prone to being utilised in processes of ethnic identity construction, we may acknowledge the importance of the somatic experience linked to the emotional experience in this process. Anthropology has seen a long tradition of emphasising symbols and meaning. But since the concept of embodiment has taken shape, especially among thinkers like Mauss (1934) and Merleau-Ponty (1945), and to some extent taken hold of anthropology (see Csordas 1990,

Kersenboom 1995, van Wolputte 2004, Mascia-Lees 2011), I believe we are coming a step closer to possible explanations of what happens within people in a process of restructuring or shifting identity in general. Nevertheless, I still consider that the notions of the bodily, physical processes that have been described by a few pioneer studies, especially in the field of the embodiment of movement in material culture (such as Ingold 2001, Keller 2001, Sennet 2008, or Noland 2009), have not found the widespread attention in anthropology that they deserve. Asking why specific dances are more suitable for these purposes than others, we might be well advised to pay more attention to the body and the physical world surrounding it, to the space the dances occur in, and to the interconnectedness of the inner emotions, somatics, and the mind in relation to the social outer world. As research about dance in Nepal is generally speaking still in its infancy,[11] a large-scale comparative approach accounting for the phenomenological, somatic, emotional and identity aspects would be a promising endeavour in this era of great shifts in identity in Nepal.

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11 Most research on Nepal that includes dance as a topic mainly focuses on other aspects, especially ritual, mythology, and musicology. Among the very few explicitly dance-specific approaches, we find, for example, the works of Schrempf 1999 (Tibetan cham dance), Berg 2008 (Sherpa Dumji dance), or parts in Shresthova 2011 (Bollywood dance in Nepal).

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