

The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2017

Ethnography, History, Culture

Enduring Oppositions and Creative Dynamism in Nepal

David Holmberg

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Back cover shows Mahesh Chandra Regmi in the audience at the inaugural lecture on 24 April, 2003. Photograph by Bikas Rauniar.

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I am deeply honoured by the invitation from the Social Science Baha to deliver the Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture. Mahesh Chandra Regmi's scholarship has loomed large in my own understandings of Nepal since I first encountered his work in the early 1970s. Kathryn March and I first met him in the summer 1973 in his offices in Lazimpat. I remember the day well because the night before our meeting, the Singha Darbar suffered a devastating fire which we had witnessed from the porch of our *dera* in Baneshwar. We remarked to him that he must be saddened by the fire and the loss of what must have been troves of historical documents. He humorously quipped, 'Now, I don't have to read them all!' His monumental work on land tenure systems (Regmi 1963-68; 1976) was especially important in our explorations of forced labour regimes known as *rakam* (Regmi 1964) that were imposed on the Tamang communities in Nuwakot and Rasuwa, communities that we have had the good fortune to come to know over the last four decades. Although Mahesh Chandra Regmi is often viewed as an economic and political historian, his history of land tenure and taxation could well be understood as a cultural economy of historic Nepal in that it outlines the unique configurations that took form in Nepal. Today,

In a lecture like this one, it is impossible to show gratitude commensurate with the contributions of literally dozens of people who have taught me things and influenced my thought. I am particularly grateful to both Kathryn March and Suryaman Tamang, who have jointly conducted most of the ethnographic research that forms the basis of this paper. I also particularly want to thank all my graduate students, the highly productive intellectuals of the Tamang community, and, more broadly, the *adivasi-janajati* community, and my colleagues here in Nepal who have all shaped my understandings in important ways.

I want to explore these cultural dynamics as they have transformed Nepal and, in particular, the place of Tamang in Nepal.

Marshall Sahlins (2000) in a reassessment of the place of 'culture' in anthropological theory, reasserts the centrality of 'culture' as the focal object of anthropological science. He systematically exposes the incompleteness of the critiques of scholars like Dirks (1992) and Young (1995) who associate the concept primarily with a colonial project of essentialising cultural difference to establish a hegemonic imperial order. Sahlins also notes that scholars in the humanities challenge the concept of 'culture' as overly systematised and confining, despite their ironic self-definition as experts in 'cultural studies' (2000:167). Sahlins counters these pessimistic pronouncements of the 'end of culture' with the observation that

... 'culture' has taken on a variety of new arrangements and relationships, that it is now all kinds of things we have been too slow to recognize. Rather than celebrate (or lament) the passing of 'culture,' then, anthropology should seize the opportunity of renewing itself: that is, through the discovery of unprecedented forms of human culture. It is almost like we have found life on another planet, this history of the past three or four centuries that has given other modes of life on this planet - a whole new cultural manifold (2000:171).

Today, I want to work out from Sahlins' affirmation of the concept of culture and try to understand the transformations in Nepal I have witnessed as essentially cultural processes. I try to keep my approach to culture as dynamic and eschew ideas of culture as static symbolic orders and divorced from the productive and reproductive powers, both material and symbolic, that define humans as a species. In this orientation, I draw inspiration from my recently deceased colleague, Terry Turner, who developed an approach to culture that drew heavily on his engagement with the struggles of the indigenous Kayapo against the colonising forces of the Brazilian state. Culture for Terry Turner was inseparable from social production and social

action. It was, in his words, 'to be understood essentially as the means by which a people defines and produces itself as a social entity in relation to its changing historical situation' (quoted from Sahlins 2000:183; see Turner 1990).

It is precisely the changing historical situation that I want to examine today in reference to the western Tamang. In one respect, the paper I present to you today revolves around the power of culture and culture of power. I thus circle back to and extend upon the very first Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture, that of Harka Gurung, entitled, 'Trident and Thunderbolt: Cultural Dynamics in Nepalese Politics.'

The Production of a Village Collective

In their invitation, the Social Science Baha suggested that I might 'provide a grand sweep of the changes [I] have witnessed in [my] field site and Nepal over the years, socially, economically, and politically'. Toward this end, I want to first set the ethnographic and historic stage that I came to know at the beginning of my research in the latter half of 1975. At that time, Tamang were largely considered outsiders, even aliens, from the perspective of the political and economic elite of Kathmandu and the district administrative centres. Many people feared Tamang and told me it was dangerous for me to think about working with Tamang. Nevertheless, I was hospitably welcomed into the western Tamang community of Mhanegang, a politically key village on the border between Nuwakot and Rasuwa districts to the west of the Trisuli River on a massif that rises up from the Salankhu river eventually to the Ganesh Himal, or as the Tamang call it, *lhari*. I soon learnt that the Tamang viewed those whom they called *jarti* (*chhetri-bahun*) and the world they inhabited as alien as well. I came to understand these mutual relations as one of dynamic opposition. Their mutually complementary worldviews and socio-cultural practices appear to invert each other. But, first, let me set the scene.

Mhanegang appeared to my naïve eyes as a largely enclosed and self-sufficient, subsistence-based community when I first visited it in 1975. The particular history of Mhanegang, which I will talk about shortly, had led to what struck me as comparative isolation and closure. This closure was not necessarily typical of all Tamang communities at that time. In parts of Sindhupalchowk and other districts to the east, a different history of relations with greater Nepal had, although no less exploitative, taken different forms (see, especially, Åsman 2016). In my travels to Kavre and the area of Bara Temal at that time, I had found villages where large sections of the male population were working seasonally as porters for expeditions and treks or searching low-level employment in Kathmandu in occupations like rickshaw pedallers, construction labourers, or, in some instances, drivers.

The people of Mhanegang had yet to experience significant migration and survived primarily on the staples of maize, millet, and various beans and pulses as well as vegetables from their kitchen gardens. With the centre of the village at only 1000 or so metres in elevation and ample wet and dry fields, people in Mhanegang tended to be better off than their neighbours to the north in Rasuwa and higher on the hillsides above them. At that time, monetary needs were minimal and the cash that people required in the village was primarily for taxes, thread for weaving, cloth, salt, kerosene for crude lamps, and a few other essentials.

Everyone resident in the village was involved in agriculture. Even village *kami*, who had *jajmani* like relations with Tamang *bista* who provided grain in exchange for metal working service, had to supplement their metalworking with field labour. There were differences of wealth but nothing extreme. Some 10 per cent of households owned more than enough land to subsist; 10 per cent were virtually landless; and the remaining 80 per cent held enough land to feed themselves. Those with variably less land provided labour in exchange for grain from those with more land, effecting a kind of closure, at least at the subsistence level, on the village. Only three or four households produced enough grain to sell outside the

village. The older generation in the village remembered when slash-and-burn agriculture still opened new land and although the village appeared largely self-sufficient in the mid-seventies it was about that time that land was becoming insufficient to support a new, upcoming generation.¹ This pressure on the land propelled a few young people to search for salaried employment beyond the village beginning in those years.

We were, in fact, struck by the fact that money could buy us western visitors almost nothing in the village. People refused to accept money in exchange for various commodities that circulated in the regional system: dried fish, radishes, eggs, woven goods, bamboo baskets or whatever people who traversed through the village had to offer in their search for grain, especially *dhan*. We learnt that barter governed most transactions and thus stocked up on worm medicine and school notebooks when in Kathmandu that we could then exchange in the village for eggs and local produce. We eventually bought a *muri* of *dhan* from some Buddhist Lamas, who, in their efforts to put a tin roof on their small *gombo*, or Buddhist temple, had circumambulated through local villages taking up collections of grain that they planned to sell in the bazaar. Villagers said money was cheap and readily converted any cash they did not need into something of more stable value, often women's silver and gold jewellery because for them wealth resided with women and was dissipated by men. There were no shops in the village and no non-compostable trash at all. The closest commercial centre was Trisuli Bazaar, a good three to four hours' walk away for villagers, somewhat longer for us soft outsiders. Agricultural labour was largely collectively organised through exchange (*nang phapa/phopa*) which articulated with local ecology where growing seasons varied depending on the altitude of the fields.

This economic closure was supplemented and reinforced by strong kinship bonds that organised village communities in the area

1 Fricke (1986), in an excellent study of Tamang domestic economies, resources, and demography, found that large families and new resources to exploit was a defining dynamic in these agro-pastoral communities.

into exchanging clan lineages. Roughly one third of all marriages were with, from the male point of view, an actual father's sister's daughter (*asu la jame*) or with a mother's brother's daughter (*ashyang la jame*); another third with individuals who fell into this category (e.g., a father's father's brother's son's daughter). The remaining third of marriages were imagined after they were contracted as being likewise between cousins. Tamang made social reality fit their model of exchanging clan lineages. We anthropologists call this form of marriage cross-cousin marriage. Levi-Strauss (1969), in an encompassing comparative study of kinship systems, categorised cross-cousin marriage as a system of restricted exchange. This ethos of symmetrical exchange suffused outward to all social relations. In most everyday respects, kinship and society were coextensive; in other words, almost all interactions in daily life were between kinsmen and outsiders with anything more than passing relations were, as in many contexts in Nepal, encompassed in a rhetoric of fictive kinship.

Ritual life as well as economic and social life also produced local solidarity and closure. Communal sacrifices to local earth divinities marked out the village as a territorial unit and significant travel away from the community required special recognitions of these local divinities. In the annual ten-day festival of Chhechu in *phalgun*, about which I have written extensively (Holmberg 2000), the village closed itself off from the outside for three days and outsiders were historically forbidden from witnessing key dance dramas in which, among other things, villagers insulted dominant outsiders including 'kings and queens'. Although villagers celebrated Dasain, they did so in a distinctively Tamang manner which stressed the local socio-political production over and against the national polity (Holmberg 2006a). In both Chhechu and Dasain, headmen simultaneously produced themselves and were produced by Tamang villagers over and against the powers of the state. Shamanic practices, especially regional pilgrimages, also celebrated the irrepressible powers of local divinities and by extensions the peoples who celebrated them (Holmberg 2006b).

Local senses of time were governed by the annual shifts from wet to dry periods as governed by the monsoon. Villagers were caught up in intensive labour from *baisakh* to *asar* and relative leisure from *kartik* through *chait*. Subsistence labour overtook life in the monsoon and ritual life dominated activity in the subsequent dry season. In classic Durkheimian (Durkheim 1976) oscillation, village life moved annually back and forth from a period of almost continuous agricultural labour and social dispersal to a period of ritual intensity and concomitant social productivity through ritual.

To understand the political reality that I encountered in the 1970s, one must shift back a decade or so before that to the 1950s when regimes of forced labour organised both the polity and economy of the area known as the Five-Hundred Rivers Country in what was the Rana administrative district of West No. 1, before Nuwakot, Dhading, and Rasuwa were formed into separate districts (for a detailed description see Holmberg et al 1999). Tamang communities in the Trisuli area and up into what is now Rasuwa held usufruct of their lands on the pain of servitude in a set of forced labour regimes, including labour in fruit plantations (especially mangos) near Trisuli Bazaar, labour for royal herding stations, labour for paper production, and labour for portorage of government and military supplies. Forms of labour commuted to taxes in the late 19th included the production of charcoal and the grinding of charcoal for a munitions factory in Nuwakot.

Each form of forced labour had its unique requirements and regulations. For the *raj goth*, which produced *giu* for Rana palaces, and in the garden (*byengi*) *rakam*, each *dhuri*, or household in each village, was required to provide five-person days of labour each month in support of the *rakam* for an annual total of 60 days of unpaid labour. Labour in paper production was figured in amounts of paper required as opposed to a specific number of days of labour. Portorage, or *thaple hulaki rakam*, knew no set limits with villagers required to transport no matter what came along the main trails from Kathmandu to Gorkha or Kathmandu to Rasuwa Gadi. Additionally, households were required to provide agricultural

labour, firewood and the like to their headmen (*mukhiya*) and were subject to occasional other demands. We calculated that each household had to provide minimally some 90 days of unpaid labour under the *raj goth* system. These formal *rakam* obligations did not limit the forms of extraction devised by agents of the Nepal state. An array of additional taxes required contributions of animals for sacrifice at Dasain, and impressment into portering or other labour obligations continued to pile up on villagers in the Five-Hundred Rivers Country during the early decades of the 20th century. In our interviews with Tamang elders, they told us that agents of the state forced villagers to stay in their villages, and could not leave. Failure to perform labour obligations would result in the forfeiture of land and enslavement or exile beyond the reach of state agents.

The political order at the local level was intimately tied to these labour obligations. Headmen, as one village elder told me, walked like local kings. These *mukhiya* organised labour, collected taxes, and administered local justice. Their position was annually renewed with the bestowal of a turban by tax contractors for the state. In villages like Mhanegang, *jimwal* collected taxes on wet fields and *talukdar* taxes on dry field with the *jimwal* the pre-eminent authority in village judicial matters. The power of these village *mukhiya* was ritually supported by the other elite in the villages, Buddhist Lamas who sacralised their positions through the communication of *wang*, or magical power in annual rituals.²

Shah-Rana rulers viewed Tamang as a labour force in building their infrastructure and sustaining their lavish life styles. One of the primary forms of labour open to some hill-dwelling Tibeto-Burman peoples, was, as we all know, employment as soldiers in the British and, later, Indian Gurkha regiments. Tamang were historically excluded from this recruitment.³ Although British recruitment

2 I cannot take up this issue here, but the Rana era generated a sharp class division in villages where headmen and lamas constituted an ascendant class and villagers were known in legal documents as *raiti*, or 'tenants'.

3 Some Tamang managed to join either the British or Indian Gurkha regiments by declaring themselves to be Gurung or Ghale (Höfer 1978).

manuals referred to Tamang beef-eating practices as the reason for their exclusion, Tamang scholars now explain this exclusion as a result of the schemes of Shah-Rana overlords to monopolise the labour of the Tamang to build their infrastructure and supply their personal household needs.⁴ Tamang were from the early years of the Shah-Rana polity relegated as Bhote/Murmi to a lower status than Gurung and Magar. All, of course, were relegated the status of *matwali*, or alcohol-drinkers, but Tamang were additionally marked as *masinya*, or those who could be enslaved. Tamang entered the then new Nepal on the pain of servitude. The Tamang fought the advance of the Shah forces in a counter-insurgency and their defeat may also have played a role in their definition as enslavable.

As Mahesh Chandra Regmi pointed out, Shah-Rana royalties allowed for, and, in fact, depended upon considerable local and regional autonomy for the state to function. Once the administrative structures were established, as long as village communities fulfilled their obligations, there was little direct intrusion. Thus, although the communities in which I worked were incorporated into a lowly position of labourers in the state of Nepal, they were left relatively autonomous in local affairs. A rich oral culture came to flourish in these communities despite the fact that all their surplus labour and material were expropriated by the state. The apparent poverty of Tamang regions in the 1970s and the lack of development of visible cultural institutions like, for instance, the celibate monasteries of the Sherpa (Ortner 1989), were a direct function of this expropriation of labour and material resources. Tamang villages were allowed to languish even after the formal cessation of forced labour beginning in the early 1960s.

As we all know, Nepal formed through the 19th and well into the 20th centuries bureaucratically and administratively as a hierarchical state where social identity and possibility were intrinsically tied to *jat* identity. The *muluki ain* of 1854 codified an ideology of state that

4 Gurungs as well as Kirat troops had the exact same propensities to beef as Tamang but were nevertheless sought by the British and not marked in the same way as Tamang as not only beef-eaters but carrion beef-eaters.

classified people following Hindu cultural practices in a way that made it next to impossible for Tamang and other groups to gain significant access to pathways for advancement or recognition. To understand contemporary interethnic relations in Nepal, we must see that in its very beginnings these relations were at the cultural level oppositional and, in the Tamang case, dialectical.

The Evolvement of Cultural Oppositions

A number of years ago, in response to my brief summary of the formation of the Nepal state and the Tamang place in Hindu imagination, a reviewer remarked that in my description I was 'essentialising' caste, a then-common critique of anthropological approaches to the culture of caste (Appadurai 1988). I was struck at how misplaced this comment was from the perspective of Nepali history, and especially the Tamang. It dawned on me that it was not I who was essentialising caste in Nepal but rather the ideologues who wrote the *muluki ain* who were essentialising themselves and essentialising others. I began to reflect on what the consciousness of those who came to dominate Nepal in the late 18th century might have been. They had just consolidated through conquest and negotiation what was to become the state of Nepal that we know today. Although we do not have solid demographic information on Nepal at that time, we do know that the Tarai was sparsely populated and formed a barrier with India and we know that those who came to dominate Nepal were probably a minority population. The fact that Höfer could, in his superb study of the *muluki ain* (1979), interpret it as an artefact of the *dharmashastra* textual traditions and Hindu culture, I would suggest, a process of identity formation on the part of the high castes who constituted the political and ideological elite of the new state. In other words, dominant sections of the population in Nepal were confronted with a majority of people who were culturally and linguistically radically different from themselves and this encounter provoked identity anxiety. They, thus, had to form

an idea of themselves over and against those people whom they had politically come to dominate. Their socio-political action was also a form of cultural activism that worked to instantiate their superiority over and against those they had subsumed in the new state through violence or the threat of violence. There was thus an ontological imperative at the heart of the process of state formation. In the process of forming an identity of themselves and sacralising the state in the rhetoric of Hinduism, they confined others to identities not of their own making.

Historically, two forces came into dynamic articulation with the consolidation of Nepal. One was the preclusive and extractive thrust of the administrative and economic order that constituted the greater Nepal state, an order that relegated Tamang to an identity of low labourers (Campbell 1997). The second was an involutory process where local Tamang communities developed a culture in opposition to the very hierarchical culture that was produced by dominant populations. Cultural, social, and political life played out in complementary differentiation.

The most encompassing dimension of this opposition revolved around transactions encompassed in anthropological terms under the rubric of 'reciprocity'. Tamang, like many other Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups in Nepal, organised relations among themselves and with outsiders primarily according to an ethos, mentioned above, of symmetrical reciprocity, where if you give something, you can expect something of equal value in return. Internally, Tamang were organised into clans and these clans regulated their relations through marriage and these clans had equal status with each other. Where Tamang emphasised marrying out, caste communities emphasised, in fact, insisted on marrying within one's *jat*. Where Parbatiya castes sealed themselves off, Tamang clans opened to others. Commensal practices were oriented in the same way. Where sharing of food produced relations with outsiders in Tamang life, commensal restrictions marked hierarchy and separation in Parbatiya life. My Tamang friends often pointed out their different perspectives on exchange which constituted mirrored opposites. Where Tamang

showed deference to their wives' brothers, *shyangpo* (*salo-jethan*, Nep.), and these *shyangpo* could call on their sisters' husbands *mha* (*bhinaju-juwain*) for service, Parbatiya directly inverted those relations and treat their *salo-jethan* (*shyanpo*) in a subservient status.

Thus, dominant Hindu populations not only emphasised but enforced preclusive and hierarchical principles, where Tamang tried to encompass outsiders into a fold of equality and symmetrical reciprocity. We encountered a highly salient example of this complementarity in a community within the social orbit of Mhanegang. There, to our surprise, we encountered locally recognised Tamang clans by the name of Bhandari, Pathak, Basnet, Darlami and Nagarkoti, all of whom were made up of the descendants of marriages (often secondary) of outside high-caste functionaries who had come as a part of the *rakam* administration. These clans that resulted from the union of Tamang women with Bahun, Chhetri, Magar and Newar, respectively, functioned exactly as other Tamang clans in the local community, revealing an inclusive trajectory in social life.⁵ One can only imagine the consequences of a reversal of the terms of those marriages. If a Tamang man, for instance, married a Bahun woman, they would have to flee or meet violent consequences.

Cultural complementarity was accompanied by political opposition. During my initial field work in Mhanegang in the mid-1970s, open political resistance to the predominant order was muted. Political factions existed in the village and reflected the politics of the encompassing district of Nuwakot, with one village faction, known as the 'lower', allied with the underground Congress party operatives among primarily the Newar inhabitants of Trisuli Bazaar, and the other faction, known as the 'upper', allied with royalist forces associated historically with the Gorkha Parishad party based in Nuwakot town proper, which sits up on the hill above the bazaar below. In *satra sal*, about fifteen years before my residence in Mhanegang, open rebellion against Bahun moneylenders and

5 All these unions were, of course, between outside and hierarchically superior men with Tamang women.

landlords broke out in the region and the Royal Nepal Army killed many Tamang and imprisoned scores of political leaders, including the ascendant *mukhiya* in Mhanegang. This revolt against those most immediately involved in the exploitation of village Tamang led to the flight of scores of Bahun to Kathmandu, a situation that constituted one of the proximate causes for Mahendra's reassertion of royal dictatorship (Holmberg 2006a).

During the Panchayat era, the government banned open political speech and organisation. The Home and Panchayat ministry through the district CDO arrested and detained anyone openly opposing or suspected of opposing the political order. To the extent that village leaders would discuss politics with me, it was at night after several bowls of *raksi*. I and other anthropologists at the time were bound not to betray our informants and thus could not write about political resistance for fear of endangering those who had entrusted us. Violent opposition to the state had characterised the early years of the Nepal state but these real rebellions against the newly formed state were converted to mythic and ritual defiance against state authority.⁶

In a Tamang myth recounting the origin of the main caste groups in their world, they claim a superiority for their Buddhist textual traditions over Hindu and flip the hierarchical relation between Kami and Bahun. Moreover, in the ritual festival of Chhechu, Mhanegang

6 Mahesh Chandra Regmi unearthed a set of orders from 1850 v.s. (1793) which refer to rebellion among the Murmi, the ethnic term applied to Tamang at that time. One of these orders referred directly to inhabitants of Panchsayakhola, or the Five-Hundred Rivers Country, of which Mhanegang was a part: "When people belonging to the Murmi community engaged in rebellion, they were captured and beheaded. If any of the rebels is hiding there, seize him and hand him over to your *Amali*. [If] it has been proved that you were not involved in the rebellion, no action will be taken against those who were not involved." Similar orders were sent out to some fourteen other villages in Nuwakot and other orders issued to villages in Palanchok refer to rebellion in those areas.' (Regmi 1984: 129). The very formation of Nepal as a state, from the perspective of the Tamang, was based on conflict that evolved into cultural oppositions that sustain themselves to this day. Directly parallel to these sorts of royal order were orders to cease and desist from slaughtering cows and orders to respect Brahmans and the hierarchical order they ritually sustained.

Tamang mocked the forces of the state and outsiders, exorcised those forces as exemplified in particular evils associated with cannibalistic greed, rapacious sex, and the antithesis of symmetrical reciprocity, and re-created a local collective infused with magical powers generated from the Buddhas. Other manifestly ritual exorcisms were full of political content and oppositional imagery. In the terms of Scott (1999) these events were 'hidden transcripts', resistant political acts outside of the surveillance of state operatives. In fact, until a few years before our arrival in the village, we were told no outsiders had been allowed to witness the ritual and cultural displays of this ten-day local festival and the village completely closed itself off during the height of the performances.

This oppositional culture has transformed in significant ways in response to the extensive transformations that have unfolded since my initial research in the 1970s. The cultural configurations I encountered then were a local and perhaps highly particular distillation of a more general pattern across Nepal. The majority of the people in the village community had never even visited Kathmandu. A significant percentage of people in the village spoke only minimal Nepali language, adequate for simple economic transactions. Only one individual had been to the high school in Trisuli. The majority of villagers were non-literate and depended on a *baidar* for any written documents they required. Society was primarily a collection of kin and their ritual world focused largely on village divinities, evil spirits, and the Buddhist cultural hero, Guru Rhimborochhe (Padma Sambhava), who was linked to local territory in key ways. The experiential world of villagers was essentially local and their symbolic and ritual lives reflected that reality.

Dislocations and Infiltrations

It was a truism when I began my involvement with Nepal that the majority of the people, some 95 per cent, lived in villages not unlike the village of Mhanegang and engaged in one way or another in

agriculture, primarily subsistence agriculture. Villages were set over and against the urban world of government bureaucrats, Newar merchants and artisans, temple priests, Buddhist monasteries, royal palaces, tourists, hotels, development organisations, cinemas, embassies, and the like. After my first stint of field research from 1975-1977, I used to refer to that world as 'inside the Ring Road.' This geographic metaphor meant to capture the ignorance of almost all the urban-dwelling Nepalis I knew with life outside of the city and life their own caste communities. This was a trope picked up not so long ago by Manjushree Thapa in her book *Forget Kathmandu* (2005). The realities of life in hill villages was often invisible to those in the city in the same way that the rise of Maoist insurgency in rural areas was invisible to city dwellers two decades later.

The most striking change, at least for villagers in the communities I know best, has been the collapse of the sharp distinction between village and city and the concomitant expansion of the experiential worlds of villagers and ex-villagers. The village has moved to the city and the city has moved to the village. In the 1970s there were two buses a day plying from Trisuli Bazaar to Sohrakutte in Kathmandu and another two the other way. Over a decade ago, we estimated that over 80 buses and micros ferried well in excess of 1000 passengers, not counting private and government vehicles, between Trisuli and Kathmandu alone. Roads have been cut up incredibly precipitous hillsides into valleys and villages, roads that were only the dream of the village headmen in the 1970s.

By the late 1970s, the village had demographically outgrown the carrying capacity of local land. Men then in their 50s were the last ones to have seen new lands opened up and their children were moving into an adulthood where subsistence agriculture was no longer materially possible. Moreover, consumer desire had begun to draw young people toward the city and migration. By the 1990s, scores of village men had left for salaried employment in Nepal and beyond, to India, Malaysia, Hong Kong, the Gulf states, South Korea and even farther, a movement recently amplified by the impact of the horrific 2015 earthquakes. Kathryn March's research

reveals that something on the order of 65 per cent of all the men in Mhanegang between the ages of 18 and 65 are now employed outside the village. Dry fields throughout Nuwakot and Rasuwa are currently left fallow as younger villagers seek salaried employment and those remaining in the villages experience a crisis in adequate agricultural labour. As men migrate in search of employment, their wives either remain in the villages where the burden of care for elders, children, and livestock fall heavily on their heads as does agricultural work. Alternatively, women with young children move into small quarters in the city where they live modestly on remittances from their husbands and send their children to low-end boarding schools.⁷

Although the solidity of the village has diminished, it remains strong in the formation of social relations and personal identity for most people born in the village, something that may take a new form as a new generation is born in the city. As people migrate to Kathmandu, they tend to congregate in certain sectors of city. Initially, western Tamang took up residence in Balaju, Sohrakutte, and Naya Bazaar near the main road to Trisuli Bazaar; those from Kavre clustered in Koteshwor, those from Sindhupalchowk in the greater Baudha area, and so on. Migrants from particular villages can often be found in certain *tol* in Kathmandu and gathering for tea at particular shops often run by someone who migrated from the same village. No matter where people took up residence, their social worlds continue in significant ways to revolve around their clan mates, reproducing and sustaining kinship ties much like those in the villages. Thus, although villages are no longer isolates, the social segregation of groups in Nepal, in my experience, remains strikingly.

For migrants, the technologies of the internet allow ongoing relations. For example, when Kathryn March and I visited a daughter of a villager who now lives just north of San Francisco in

7 It is not entirely men who migrate and send remittances home. There are significant numbers of women who forward remittances to support their often-idle husbands in their home villages.

America, this young woman was conversing via an on-line video chat service with a young woman from the same village who was working in elder care in Israel. Shortly thereafter, the cousin of that young woman joined in the conversation from her residence in Switzerland. Mobile phones and internet make it possible for people to sustain close ties with their kin even when they are dispersed geographically. Those with ties to Mhanegang can even gather through a Facebook page.⁸

No matter where Tamang migrate, they, for the most part, link up with those with whom they can trace a trail of kinship, then those with whom they share a common district, both Tamang and non-Tamang, then those who are Tamang or other *adivasi-janajati* but hail from other areas of Nepal, and, finally, those who form a more general Nepali diaspora in their place of residence. These intergraded clusters can form in small communities and larger communities alike. We were surprised to find that over 20 people from Mhanegang and neighbouring villages live in the greater San Francisco area and form a mutual support society as immigrants in the US. On a tour of Lhochhar celebrations in New York and Washington, we met large communities of Tamang immigrants who, despite their class differences, gathered in solidarity on regular occasions. Where the numbers of Tamang are not great in the US, they reach massive dimensions in place like the Gulf where tens of thousands of Tamang have migrated largely as lower-level functionaries, security workers, or construction labour. Large clusters of Tamang also reside in parts of India, especially Darjeeling District, and in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and England.

The spatial expansion of villagers, both non-resident and resident, has generated a new experiential reality. In the past, Tamang in daily life referred to only three directions: up, down, and over there. Up lay the mountains of Tibet (*uisame*) and below lay *yambhu*, or Nepal, and even further below *gyagar*, or India and America. Now,

8 Kathryn March started this group as part of her research on the diaspora out from Mhanegang.

with relatives scattered throughout Nepal and the globe, the village locality, although still powerful for those who continue to reside principally in the village, has been supplemented by geographic experience far beyond the village, at a minimum to Kathmandu but for many far beyond to the Emirates of the Gulf and beyond to the cosmopolitan centres of the world. For those who take up residence at great distances from the village, their daily geographic experience is radically displaced from the village.

Villagers are also forming new marriage alliances. With one or two exceptions in the 1970s, all local Tamang married within a highly localised circle of kin. Women either married in the village or within a few hours' walk from their *maiti*. Although many marriages remain in the local circle of kin, more and more are contracted outside the locality, often at great distance. For example, in the family I know best and lived with during my initial research, the eldest daughter married into a prominent family across the river and up a massif well beyond the old circle of kin. She resides in Kathmandu with her daughter while her husband works outside Nepal. The second daughter married locally but after a stint in Israel now lives in Toronto. The third daughter married a man from Kavre. Both sons married locally, with the wife of the eldest son residing in Israel and the wife of youngest son now managing along with her husband and parents-in-law the family farm. The majority of new marriages even when at great distance, though, remain with other Tamang. An essential part of Tamang identity, whether in the village or beyond, remains the clan and local ideas of proper exogamous marriages continue to organise social life.

In the same way that Tamang have moved more and more out of the village and those who remain are back and forth to the city, agents of greater Nepali society have penetrated more extensively into village life. In the same way that roads have been pathways for people migrating out of the community or commuting to the Kathmandu Valley and back, they have been pathways for the insinuation of outside forces into daily life. In the 1970s, police rarely visited villages except the few times a year they attempted to

apprehend individuals bound up in particular legal cases. Usually villagers knew well in advance of these police forays and made sure to be far away from the village when the police came. In one instance, local women wielding sticks chased police out of their village. One policeman pulled me aside in the early months of my residence in Mhanegang and told me that I should be careful that this village and neighbouring villages were 'enemy' territory. The police have now established a post nearby and intervene more often. All of the police come from outside and usually from the *jarti* (*chhetri-bahun*) community and tend to convey an intimidating presence at any public gathering, ritual or civil, and villagers feel they must interact in an obsequious manner for fear of reprisals. In 2008, for instance, a *jarti* policeman from the local post, while walking through the village, arrested a Tamang man for butchering a dead cow, accusing him of cow slaughter.

The absence of elected local officials until recently greatly empowered the *sachib* of the VDCs (*g.v.s*) and made them more significant local presences. Appointed by the Home Ministry, these local-level functionaries were unaccountable to local officials and took over more and more of the budgetary power in local administration. In the Panchayat era, beginning in 2007 v.s. (1951) and in succeeding democratic governments after 1990, Tamang held key elected positions locally and were thus central to local administration. Tamang village leaders held either the position of *jilla sadyasya*, *pradhan pancha*, or *g.v.s. adyaksha*. It remains to be seen how things will play out in the new structures of local administration. In the recent local elections, a Tamang man was elected as the head for a newly formed *gaun palika* composed of five former VDCs. Before that, in the 2013 elections for the Second Constituent Assembly, the first Tamang ever from the electoral district and the village was elected in the First-Past-the-Post ballot.

Teachers, of course, were the first and most direct outside presence in the village community since the first primary school was opened a year or so before I arrived in the village for the first time in 1975. The school now has several more teachers and middle and

high schools are now relatively close by. Teachers have come, over the years, almost entirely from outside the community, sometimes as far away as the Tarai, and most often these teachers have been Bahuns. Although a smattering of Tamang teachers have appeared over the last decade, they remain a minority and very low in the hierarchy. Bahun teachers, of course, speak no Tamang language and their pupils speak little or no Nepali. Teachers, parents, and pupils remain culturally estranged. High-caste teachers attempt to sustain their bodily purity and do not reside with the local people. *Jyarti* functionaries posted to Tamang villages clearly feel they are in an alien world and Tamang villagers in return tend to view them as aliens. For the most part, these outsiders were fully steeped in their own cultural complexes, including a sense of superiority over Tamang villagers.⁹ These sharp cultural divides remain powerful in organising interethnic relations.

The most far-reaching transformations in local society and culture then stem from these two movements, the movement of villagers out to greater Nepal and beyond, and the penetration of agents of the nationalist agenda into local communities. When Tamang villagers made trips to Kathmandu when I first residing there, they said they were going to *yambhu*, or in Nepali, they said they were going to 'Nepal'. For them, Nepal was something beyond themselves, in some sense the equivalent of the territory north in Tibet that they called *uisame*, another distant foreign land, that differed from *yambhu*, or Nepal, only because that was where they traced their mythic origins. The last five decades have then seen a greater and greater opening of a once comparatively closed and contained local community accompanied by greater and greater articulation with greater Nepal and the world beyond. There is no

9 Ben Campbell (2013) succinctly captures the quality of Tamang interactions with officialdom in a community bordering on Langtang National Park, '... the fault lines of Nepalese caste society, in terms of the intrinsic hierarchies of humanity organized by birth and bodily purity, and exacerbated by language issues' (267) are supplemented by bureaucratic power, channelling Tamang into particular sorts of interactive 'tactics'. Campbell says that these include 'collective silence', and 'deferential modes of supplication' (267).

question that the impact of this two-way movement has generated profound and intriguing changes in what it means to be a Tamang.

Despite these forces diffusing and diminishing the old village collective, the village remains a real place in both social reality and sense of self. Many who now reside in the city retain their land and houses in the village and only a minority sell off their houses and fields even after long residence in Kathmandu or elsewhere. Almost all villagers return to the village during the Dasain/Tihar holidays. Those who are working in far-flung places will often take their leaves to return at the Dasain period. Although Tamang consciously reject rituals to Durga that they participated in the past, they still congregate to reconnect with their kin, feasting each other on meat, drinking copious amounts of *raksi*, gamble and the like. Mhanegang villagers, with hardly an exception that I am aware of, also return to vote. Election day and the activity surrounding it takes on a festive character with near-universal participation of those resident in Mhanegang. In the Constituent Assembly elections of 2008, some villagers travelled great distances within Nepal in order to vote in the village. Some even travelled back from the Gulf to get the opportunity to vote.

Finally, death brings everyone home. Final rituals surrounding death, especially the final banishment of the soul of the dead from the world of living and over and into the care of the Buddhas and rebirth, are still always performed in the Mhanegang even when people die far away.¹⁰ These rituals remain key in the production and reproduction of Tamang society in the village and neighbouring communities. Although notable changes have occurred in the practice of death rites that I will mention below, these rituals of production are key indicators of the place the village holds in the identity construction of villagers.

10 The exception here is women who have married in wider circles whose death rites will be performed in their husband's villages by their sons.

New Experiential Realities/New Forms of Buddhist Consciousness

If ritual is a context, as Geertz famously wrote, in which people tell 'a story' to 'themselves about themselves' (1973: 448), they are the places that the new realities of Tamang experience are given shape and meaning in, generating new orientations for Tamang of Mhanegang and beyond. Ritual productions that organised experience for villagers in the past no longer provide meaning for their new experiences. The array of rituals performed in the 1970s were all about local divinities, local evil spirits, and locally understood Buddhas. Shamans always began their rituals by instantiating themselves and their clients in a local space by offering incense out from the place they were sitting, then along trails above and trails below, recounting the names of key divinities along the way (*sangrap*). Sacrificers propitiated local earth divinities (*shyihbda*; *bhumi*, Nep.) and exorcised highly localised evil spirits. Village Lamas, whose primary role was to perform death rites in the process, regenerated a local social collectivity bound through exchange among clans (for details, see Holmberg 1989).

Activities that once tied villagers to locality have now diminished. Sacrificial rituals to territorial divinities have been truncated and, in some instances, abandoned. Knowledgeable ritual specialists have not been reproduced in the ways they were in the past. Lambu and Bombo, the repositories of a rich Tamang oral culture, are becoming fewer and fewer. The mythic recitations known as *thungrap* and *kerap* are rarely remembered nor are the old songs. The ritual of communal solidarity, Chhechu, was last performed in Mhanegang in *phalgun* of 2034 v.s., or 1978. Even though performances are sustained or revived in other villages of Nuwakot, Dhading, and Rasuwa, it is with new meanings related to new social realities.

Buddhist practice, for instance, has changed dramatically and the highly particularised ritual productions are now conforming to more universalising Buddhist orientations. In the seventies, Mhanegang folk always performed the final death rites in the dry season in the months of *kartik*, *mansir* and *push*, no matter the time of death. In the

process they clearly ignored the canonical Tibetan Buddhist teaching that the soul (*sem*) of the deceased is reborn within 49 days after death. Thus, from canonical perspective, Tamang mortuary rites, which included application of blessings and the lighting of butter lamps to enhance the karmic status of the deceased, were irrelevant as were all the other efforts of the Lamas because, canonically speaking, the soul had already been reborn. Although aware of the canonical teaching, local lamas continued to adapt their practice to the contingencies of local life.

Buddhist lamas now enforce the 49-day restrictions and all final death rites are performed within the 49-day strictures of high Tibetan Buddhism. A new group of Buddhist lamas trained by a teacher in Dhading district have been involved in an active attempt at reforming local practice to conform with principles of greater Buddhism. They have abandoned alcohol consumption and have adopted vegetarian diets. They ban alcohol and meat from their performance of final death rites and attempt to enforce a more solemn demeanour during the rituals and related commensality that usually are marked by a celebratory feasting. These innovations are not always welcomed by villagers and their more traditional Buddhist lamas who continue practices frowned on by the reformist lamas. Villagers now jokingly refer to these two kinds of lamas as *sang* lamas or 'incense lamas' and *chhang* lamas or '*raksi* lamas.' Villagers seem to have a decided preference for the *chhang* lamas whose practices, I was told by several, were more efficacious.

Buddhist structures are now as well more visible. In the 1970s, the visible Buddhist monuments in the village included a dilapidated and small *gombo*, or temple, high at the top of the village, a large *mhane*, or stupa, in the centre of the village from which the village took its name, and a few minor *mhane* along the trail up and out of the village. Now, the village hosts two local *gombo*, one of which was levelled in the 2015 earthquake, a rebuilt village *mhane* now plastered in cement, and a large prayer wheel. The construction of the latter was overseen by a young woman who had gone to a Tibetan nunnery in south India and has been a force in introducing more

universal ideas associated with Buddhist practice into the village community, especially among women. Several boys have also spent at least some time studying in the great *gombo* at Baudha. Where all Buddhist lamas in the village were, in the 1970s, non-literate, several are now minimally literate. Although these surface contours reflect an expansion of and transformation of local Buddhist practice, more significantly, a new understanding and articulation of universal Buddhist principles have taken form for many in the village. Migration has fuelled these local innovations. Migrants in Dubai, for instance, funded large parts of the construction of a large new *gombo* near Mhanegang. Funds from a national Buddhist development committee helped construct the new *gombo* in the village and also provided a statue of Shakyamuni, donated by the Thai government, for another *gombo* in the area.

In the 1970s, I never witnessed village lamas ever providing lessons on the precepts of Buddhism or explaining the meaning of their ritual actions. The communication of Buddhist ideas, I have argued elsewhere (Holmberg 1989), were largely para-textual and conveyed through the symbolic action of particular ritual acts, especially mortuary rites. In fact, the one lama of the village who claimed the hereditary status of *chawai*, or ancient lama, of the village *gombo*, told me that all the rules of high Buddhism around celibacy and *ahimsa* were for students, not accomplished lamas. He told me, 'If you light butter lamps, you kill insects; if you don't light butter lamps you cannot read/recite the texts? If we are celibate, there would be no children and then who would practise Buddhism? Those ways are just for beginners!'

Now lamas, especially those who lean in the direction of the *sang* lamas now provide teachings either during the performance of rituals in the *gombo* or immediately before or after. They have introduced new forms of Buddhist piety, piety that simply was not part of the picture in the mid-1970s. People showed respect toward the Buddhas as powerful otiose beings during ritual but discourse about Buddhist precepts was, in my experience, rare even for Lamas. Now, villagers have internalised new meaning to their actions. For example, the

lighting of butter lamps is no longer simply an offering but reflects a pious effort to achieve a purity of mind and enlightenment. Perhaps the best example of new forms of piety relates to the new role that the *gombo* plays in village life. In the 1970s no active Buddhist rituals focused on the one small *gombo* high up in the village.¹¹ Now, rituals occur regularly at the *gombo* on major Buddhist holidays and when these rituals occur, they are often the occasion for local lamas to offer teachings. The most graphic example of this shift is in the rise of annual observance of Nyungne, a ritual of fasting and purification at a nearby *gombo* above a neighbouring village. Three years ago, some 80 people participated in Nyungne in this *gombo* from multiple villages, including Mhanegang. Performances of Nyungne were unheard of until the last decade. Nyungne, the epitome of a piety in lay Buddhist practice with universal Buddhist themes, is performed in monasteries around the world and is now performed in what were once rustic hill villages.

Lamas and their village adherents now manifest a new universalising engagement with Buddhism that, I would argue, reflects the expansion of the experience of villagers. Local Buddhist symbology and ritual no longer encompass the existential reality they face. The highly particular social and spatial articulation of Tamang Buddhism is now shifting to the universalising representations of contemporary Buddhism. A concomitant development has been, I would argue, a new sense of individualism and self-reflection, not in rejection to the lineage and clan identities that were at the base of local identity formation in the past but in supplement to them and transformation of them. This rise of individualism is in direct correlation with the rise of new economic necessity and consumer possibility. In the old order, economic scope was constrained by inheritance in land or marital alliance and exchanges of labour in a

11 The absence of rituals there may have reflected the fact the powerful statue of Chhe-pa-me housed in the *gombo* – and said to be one of a set of three with the other two in Kyirong and Lhasa – was stolen just before I arrived in the village. It was reputedly perambulated through the village annually and the *gombo* lamas collected grain from villagers to support the *gombo*.

subsistence economy. A kind of individualism has been given scope in the last three decades in a way that a previous generation would find difficult to imagine.

Greater range of individual desire and intentionality now supplement and transform lineage, clan, affinal alliances, village, and region in the construction of identity without erasing them. At another level, Tamang draw more and more on an idea of membership in an encompassing Tamang society and see their identities as part of a national bloc of Tamang and beyond as *adivasi-janati* over and against the dominant groups they still refer to as *jarti*.

Constructing a New Tamang

In the 1970s, very few villagers saw themselves as part of a pan-Tamang community in greater Nepal, as a community characterised by a common Tamang history, culture, and society. Most people in the 1970s had ventured only as far as Trisuli Bazaar or regional pilgrimage spots. Regional differences were more salient than a common identity. They called folk across the Trisuli to the east and south, people classified by state agents and self-identifying as Tamang, Shar-pa or easterners. Those to the north, *torpa*, or if Tibetan-speakers, *bhote*. Nevertheless, the village Mukhiya and regional leader owned a copy of the Santabir Lama's *Tamba kaiten vhai rimathima* (2029 v.s.) that he had acquired in Kathmandu at a meeting of a fledgling Tamang cultural association. In some circles, then, Tamang had begun to conceive of themselves a part of an encompassing collectivity, but, in the mid-70s, it had almost no salience for the people of Mhanegang who were immersed in their local struggles for subsistence.

The major political transformations, witnessed over the last almost 30 years, rights to organise, rights to speak freely, and rights to consume ushered in first through the 1990 constitution, opened the door to a new form of assertion of *adivasi-janajati* rights and a florescence of Tamang cultural and political organisations along

with those of other *adivasi-janajati*. These movements have been able to capture the imagination precisely because they offer Tamang a new sense of who they are in the new world in which they found themselves. Tamang lives now are played out either fully in the urban areas of Nepal, in oscillation back and forth between village and city, or at great distance in permanent diasporic communities, or as migrants eventually to return to Nepal. Tamang, who, I was told by village elders, could not spend the night within the confines of Kathmandu but had to sleep on the outskirts when they carried mangoes to the Rana palaces, now constitute the third largest ethnic group in the city after Chhetri-Bahun and Newar.

Younger people are tied up in an economy far from the subsistence reality of their parents or grandparents, in a polity that in theory establishes legal equality, and in a world of communication unimaginable even two or three decades ago with television, Tamang radio broadcasts, mobile phones, social media, and the internet now accessible to vast stretches of the population. In this new world, Tamang are now constructing new models of themselves and their relations with others and, along with other *adivasi-janajati*, have ironically completely reframed the inter-ethnic social fields of Nepal. Tamang and others have refigured their cultural practices and have created entirely new cultural forms in the production of a new socio-cultural order reflecting their new circumstances.

Key to this process of identity formation have been the work of Tamang intellectuals (see Yonjan 2006, for a comprehensive enumeration of cultural production to that point) and political leaders. Tamang leaders have produced counter-historical narratives (e.g., S. Tamang 2048; P. Tamang 2051; M. Tamang 2008) challenging both the '*bir*' and '*rashtriya*' histories that Pratyoush Onta identified and analysed in his analysis of historical discourse in Nepal (1996). Tamang leaders, as well as leaders of other indigenous groups, have also produced entirely new cultural performances. Lhochhar, or the celebration of the Tamang new year, has a particular prominence in regard to these developments (see A. Tamang 2005; P. Tamang 2835/2055; P.B, Tamang 1996; Holmberg 2016).

Lhochhar was unheard of in the communities in which I worked in the 1970s. It is now celebrated quite literally from village *gombo* through districts to the Tundikhel in Kathmandu and outward to New York, Washington, San Francisco, London, Hong Kong, the Gulf, wherever Tamang migrants have a critical mass. The relative simultaneity (Hangen 2014) of these events produces a broad sense of community across the range of Tamang habitation in unprecedented ways. In these events, a new idea of Tamang is put on display and articulated in speech after speech. In the staging of Lhochhar celebrations in Kathmandu, the political, cultural, intellectual leaders of the Tamang sit side by side with ministers of state of the ruling government who provide a formal recognition of their existence as a political force (M. Tamang 2009). I would argue that participation in Lhochhar alone conveys an awareness and consciousness of membership in a wider community and a concomitant sense of personal empowerment. These events quite literally produce a social solidarity with specific goals. Those who participate experience inclusion in a collective joined in solidarity around a common purpose. They can construct for themselves new senses of themselves as fully Nepali of a very distinctive sort, as they join up with their fellow Tamang and wear their distinctive ethnic dress, see cultural performances, and hear demands for Tamsaling, a Tamang territory in a federal system. Cultural productions like Lhochhar now performed on a national stage in Kathmandu, regionally, and locally, serve then two simultaneous ends. The rise of Lhochhar as a cultural production relates directly to pan-Nepal social and political demands. On the other hand, Lhochhar generates not just membership in an empowering collectivity but fulfils an ontological imperative for individuals in new experiential worlds.

Although Lhochhar stands as the most encompassing pan-Tamang cultural event, cultural productions of multiple intellectuals and popular artists abound. All these productions are evidence of a new Tamang culture in the making, a culture that reflects the changing historical circumstances of Tamang. In the western Tamang region alone, the area I am most familiar with, several

groups now produce songs published on YouTube or DVDs that gain wide circulation within Nepal and beyond. Many of the songs produced for digital distribution are songs that used to be common at Tamang *jatra* and sung by lines of young men and women who danced back and forth. In re-mixed form and coupled with video, they work to organise a new sense of Tamang identity. It is these very songs and the associated dances that are blasted out at all Tamang public gatherings in villages, in districts, on the Tundikhel, or in the diaspora. These cultural performers travel far and wide and are in high demand and break out from the old regional boundaries that separated different linguistic communities.

These new cultural productions no doubt need further anthropological study but my provisional observations here, and, I am coming to conclusion, are that the dynamic elaboration of cultural difference by Tamang reflects the pervasive discrimination that still infuses most domains of life in Nepal and severely restricts the possibilities of Tamang. Exclusionary practices continue to mark most domains of Nepali life, perhaps less obvious than in the past but nonetheless evident in the daily interaction Tamang have in broader society in Nepal. Kinship, *jat* identity, and class all work to sustain the dominance of certain populations in Nepal who continue, whether consciously or unconsciously, to protect their ascendance. For example, Dambar Chemjong, in his analysis of the language of Nepal's new constitution, demonstrates that Hindu ascendancy remains legally enshrined in the new constitution. Of particular comparative relevance, Ajantha Subramanian (2015) has demonstrated in a fascinating study of the Indian Institutes of Technology, one of the most cosmopolitan sectors of South Asia, that the legacy of caste exclusion sustains itself even in the face of its overt rejection by these highly educated people, people who now invoke inherent merit as the basis for claiming ascendance. Echoes of a similar rhetoric are heard in the elite political, educational, and administrative spheres of Nepal.

It is difficult to reach a conclusion to what is an on-going and unresolved oppositional complementarity that has its origins in the

very foundation of the state of Nepal. Slavery in the United States is often referred to as America's original sin. Racial opposition and racism remain defining features of an American society that ideologically privileges individualism and equality. In a similar frame, *jat* consciousness remains a significant part of the *habitus* of dominant populations in Nepal, is perhaps Nepal's original sin. As Dumont (1970) noted long ago, caste could not be legislated away in India and that appears to be the case in Nepal as well. There is absolutely no question that from Tamang perspective, Nepal has made significant strides over the last 50 years. Possibility has expanded dramatically for western Tamang once confined spatially, economically, and culturally to their villages and on the peripheries of national life. Nevertheless, old exclusionary forms continue, in transformation, to organise life for Tamang in multiple domains of life. Contemporary cultural developments have been the vehicle whereby Tamang have produced new forms of social solidarity. This solidarity has yet to actualise political and constitutional forms that will fully allow Tamang and other *adivasi-janajati* to produce themselves in culturally distinctive ways. Nevertheless, Tamang and other *adivasi-janajati* groups have managed through their cultural movements to make the categories that were deployed to degrade them and relegate them to the margins as the basis of new social and political power. These powers have yet to be fully realised, in fact, they have been actively countered by the political elite and a new generation of ideologues, and probably will not be realised until there is a general acceptance on the part of those in power that Nepal's true strength lies in its cultural and linguistic diversity. The model of a culturally homogeneous Nepal that erases the historical and ethnographic reality of cultural difference in Nepal is a misrepresentation that will only foster its continuing cultural antitheses.

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Mahesh Chandra Regmi
(1929-2003)

The **Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture** was instituted by Social Science Baha in 2003 to acknowledge and honour historian Mahesh Chandra Regmi's contribution to the social sciences in Nepal.

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Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Cornell University in New York, **David Holmberg** has been synonymous with anthropological research with the Tamangs in Nepal since the mid-1970s. In an illustrious academic career spanning decades, several generations of Nepal-focused scholars were privileged to be trained by him. He maintains close ties with academic institutions in Nepal, the most significant being the Cornell Nepal Study Program (CNSP) in collaboration with Tribhuvan University, Nepal, initiated in 1993. He also chaired the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University from 1990 to 1997, then again from 2001 to 2008.

Professor Holmberg's areas of interest include ritual syncretism or hybridity: the relations among Buddhist, shamanic, and sacrificial practices, conceptions of power, state system of forced labor, and history of anthropology of the Himalayas to name a few. His publications include (with Kathryn S. March, Surya Man Tamang and Bhim Bahadur Tamang) *Mutual Regards: America and Nepal Seen through Each Other's Eyes* (1994) and *Order in Paradox: Myth, Ritual and Exchange among Nepal's Tamang* (1989).

