

10 Procession and Pilgrimage in Newar Religion¹

MOST VISITORS to Kathmandu valley are immediately impressed by the immense proliferation of physical manifestations of the sacred or divine. As well as the countless temples and shrines dedicated to almost every known deity of both the Hindu and Buddhist pantheons, not to mention numerous others of purely local significance, there is an almost infinite number of sacred places and objects scattered throughout the valley: some man-made structures, such as *caityas*, *stupas*, *liṅgas*, wells, statues and cremation grounds, others natural features, such as trees, stones, caves, rivers or hill-tops. Religion is, as it were, visibly made manifest wherever one turns. But what is perhaps even more striking is that this proliferation of sacra is matched by an equally visible emphasis on highly-organized human physical activity as the primary mode of religious worship. To an exceptional degree the Newars spend a great deal of their time, energy and resources making offerings at temples and shrines, performing sacrifices and other elaborate rituals, attending numerous and popular festivals and fairs, and participating in processions and pilgrimages. These two features of Newar religion, that is to say the objectification of the divine and the

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proliferation of rituals of the physically active or 'doing' kind, are but two sides of the same coin. Because the divine is scattered around the landscape in a great variety of physical forms, so too is there a corresponding development of ritual procedures designed to bring worshipper and deity into productive contact.

Such pragmatic and this-worldly features of Newar religion are, of course, in marked contrast to the high repute commonly accorded to renunciation, detachment and physical quiescence in important strands of orthodox Hindu and Buddhist doctrine and practice. Though a few contemporary Newars do occasionally opt for the other-worldly approach to salvation, it has been of very little importance since celibate monasticism of the Buddhist variety went into decline some six or seven hundred years ago. Today, a visitor to the valley, rather than hear Buddhist monks quietly chanting in a monastery or come across Hindu ascetics in a state of deep meditational trance, is more likely to witness a married priest busily performing a domestic ceremony in a crowded courtyard, a group of peasants pulling a god's chariot through a noisy market-place, or a procession of neatly dressed men, women and children making offerings to all the *caityas* in a locality.

In chapter 6 I argued that the decline of Newar monastic Buddhism coincided with the increasing political dominance of a minority of orthodox Hindus. Though rulers were mostly tolerant of Buddhism, the inevitable decline in royal patronage steadily eroded the economic and political support base that had previously underpinned the elaborate monastic system with its large body of celibate monks. This process was yet further accelerated when the Newars were conquered by the highly militaristic and orthodox Hindu Gorkhas in 1768. Nevertheless, throughout this long period the Newars retained a high level of commitment to Buddhism. But the decline in royal patronage for such elitist religious activities as organized monasticism was matched by a corresponding increase in activities of a more popular kind. I briefly examined some of the principal forms that this transformation took, in particular the offering of priestly services by the descendants of the former monks to a wide range of lay clients, the opening of the former monasteries as places of public worship, and the development of a large number of popular cults based on the worship of syncretistic deities.

In the present chapter I intend to draw attention to yet another manifestation of this popularization of Newar religion—the proliferation of numerous and highly-organized processions, ritual journeys and pilgrimages. Such a development has, of course, its initial *raison d'être* in the multiplication of temples, shrines and other forms of objective sacra. But what is especially distinctive of the Newar response is the highly elaborate and community-based way that they go about organizing such activities. It is only on comparatively rare occasions that the Newar goes on a physically arduous pilgrimage to a remote shrine, and it is even rarer to find the journey marked by penances, austerities or bodily sufferings. On the contrary, most Newar ritual journeys are confined to the valley, seldom take longer than twenty-four hours, and are pleasant social occasions usually undertaken with this-worldly rather than other-worldly motivations, such as the preservation of health, accumulation of merit, or success in a business or political enterprise.

Let me stress here the contrast that I am making between these two forms of ritual journey. On the one hand, there are those major pilgrimages, frequently of an arduous kind, which sometimes also involve the crossing of political boundaries, to remote and famous shrines, temples or other sacred places, and on the other hand, there are those much more concentrated journeys which involve the sequential visiting of numerous shrines within a restricted locality. Just as organized monasticism is in large measure dependant on state or elitist support so too is the development of the long range form of pilgrimage. Ambitious rulers, seeking for ways to give added legitimacy to their expanding domains, make land or other grants for the establishment of major shrines or temples of sufficient fame to attract devotees and pilgrims from afar. By contrast, the locality-based variety of ritual journey is almost wholly a product of popular support within a community.

Amongst Newar Buddhists these locality-based ritual journeys have been developed to quite an exceptional degree with numerous varieties focussing on different classes of sacra. But before describing two of the more popular of such journeys, I need to place them in the broader context of ritual movement in general—movement, that is, that has as its primary aim the bridging of the gap between human worshipper and objectified sacra. Such

movements are of two main kinds, on the one hand the going forth of humans from their various residences to visit temples, shrines, rivers and other forms of sacra, and on the other the periodic going forth of iconographic representations of deities from their abodes so that humans may the more easily see, worship and make offerings to them. The most elaborate and popular festivals in the Newar religious calendar combine both forms of movement, that is to say, humans and gods meet whilst both are abroad on ritually prescribed journeys.

The simplest of all ritual journeys are those that most Newars individually undertake almost every morning when they visit one or a number of their favourite local temples, a visit which may take only a few minutes and involve no more than a token offering with simple *prasād* in return. Another popular and recurrent individual ritual journey is that undertaken, again in the early morning, by most housewives when they carry gleaming brass pots from their homes to fill with 'pure' water from a nearby well, water which subsequently will be used by the male head of the house in his daily devotions to the domestic deities. Though both of these journeys are very simple affairs, they are nevertheless quite clearly of a ritual kind, a fact which is made apparent in the careful observance of various taboos whilst undertaking the course of the journey.

Individuals may also voluntarily decide at any time or for any one of a number of reasons to go on a more extended tour of sacred places. Popular choices include visiting a set of *tīrthas*, i.e. fords, bathing places, junctions or other sacred spots on a river, a set of temples dedicated to a particular class of deities or all of the ex-monasteries (*bāhāhs* and *bahīs*) in a town, city or district. Decisions to make such pilgrimages, which commonly consist of visiting one of a set of shrines on successive full moons, are usually made after some personal misfortune, such as the death of a close relative or the collapse of a business enterprise.

But by far the most popular form of ritual journeys are those that are jointly participated in by the residents of a locality on a regular, frequently annual, basis. Such community-based journeys, like virtually all regularly recurrent Newar social events, especially those of a religious kind, are organized and funded by corporate ritual associations known as *guthis*. *Guthi* are established when individuals, or sometimes groups of individuals, set aside areas of

land, the income from which is to be used in perpetuity by their patrilineal descendants for the performance of a ritual. Sometimes, when a *guthi* is founded by a king or other wealthy individual, the income is alone sufficient to finance a major annual ritual performance. However, in the case of annual pilgrimages to specified temples, etc. it is more usual to find that dozens, in some cases even hundreds, of small groups of worshippers, each constituting a separate *guthi*, visit the shrine separately to perform their own separate acts of worship. For example, during the sacred Newar month of *gū(n)lā*, which occurs between mid-July and mid-August, dozens of both lineage-and locality-based *guthi* associations set out each day from all over the valley to visit Svayambūnāth, a sacred complex located on a small hill a few kilometres west of Kathmandu and on which are located a huge and very ancient *stupa*, three Tibetan monasteries, and numerous shrines, groves and caves of mythological importance to all Newars, especially to those who profess Buddhism. Each of these small *guthi* groups, consisting mostly of some three to a dozen families, approach the hill with the men playing drums, cymbals and horns and after performing a ceremony focussing on the worship of the group's founding ancestor, as well as making offerings to a variety of sacra on different parts of the hill, spend a number of hours picnicking and consuming considerable quantities of rice-wine until finally it is time for a noisy and discordant journey home again.

Also during the month of *gū(n)lā* each Newar Buddhist householder ritually prepares his home by establishing an altar on which are displayed all of the household's images. In front of the images are placed large baskets or mounds of five offerings, the *pañcadān*, consisting of four varieties of grain together with salt. All day long the male members of the two highest Buddhist castes, that is to say the castes whose ancestors were once the celibate inhabitants of monasteries, but are today mostly married ritual experts, visit their lay clients' houses in order to collect their share of the offered alms. Such a ritual journey is, of course, the direct obverse of the typical pilgrimage in that the journey is undertaken by sacred persons in order to receive homage and offerings by resident laity. It is, indeed, quite clearly modelled on the classic monastic custom of monks visiting lay householders to seek alms.

Dīpaṅkara *yātrā*

One of the most popular of the many community-organized pilgrimage-type ritual journeys undertaken by Newars is that known as Dīpaṅkara *yātrā*. It occurs whenever five astrological omens coincide on the same day; a full moon, the first day of the month, the first day of the week, the lunar mansion known as Revatī, and the lunar conjunction known as Harsana. Such a coincidence of omens is a comparatively rare occurrence, the gap between performances often being as long as 15 to 20 years. For example, the *yātrā* that I participated in October 1967 was the first that had taken place for 19 years, and so far as I am aware it has not occurred since. The *yātrā* is funded and organized by a *guthi* consisting of the residents of Nāg Bāhāḥ, a large residential courtyard which is one of the principal ex-monasteries. Its main *caitya*, or reliquary monument, dates back as early as the seventh century AD, and according to some informants it was once the leading monastery in Patan. But what is of special interest in connection with the Dīpaṅkara *yātrā* is that the *bāhāḥ* is named after two huge *nāgas*, or water serpents, which are iconographically represented on the wall of a small shrine in the corner of the courtyard. *Nāgas* are associated with the origins of human habitation in the valley, and are worshipped as powerful deities by both Hindus and Buddhists alike, especially when drought is feared. According to a widely known tale, long ago during a particularly bad drought the *nāgas* had seized Prajñāparamitā, the Buddhist goddess of wisdom and knowledge, and selfishly held her in custody. But Dīpaṅkara Buddha, who supposedly preceded Gautama Buddha, succeeded in wresting Prajñāparamitā away from the *nāgas*, thereby both ending the draught and leading to the universal acceptance of Buddhism as a superior religion.

Dīpaṅkara Buddhas became extremely popular in the valley from the beginning of the Malla period and today every ex-monastery of any kind of repute possesses images of one or more of these imposing figures. They are so constructed from basketry, metalwork and cloth that a man can stand concealed inside and walk about as though literally a Buddha moving amongst mortals. On numerous occasions these Buddhas are taken out of their storerooms and brought on procession. According to some informants the Dīpaṅkara *yātrā* is so called because the route taken by the pilgrims replicates

that of the legendary Dīpaṅkara when he spread the Buddhist *dharma* throughout the valley. However, there is another, and more popular legend which has as its central figure Śaṅkarācārya, the renowned ninth-century South Indian Hindu reformer who zealously combated Buddhism by advocating the development of a Hindu version of the form of celibate monasticism that had been so successful during the preceding millennium throughout much of Asia. Śaṅkarācārya figures in countless Newar Buddhist tales as the chief villain who laid the foundations for the downfall of Buddhist monasticism in the valley, though many of the tales also depict him as ultimately defeated by the Vajrācārya, the newly emergent non-celibate and Tantric Buddhists who have remained to the present day as the owners and ritual custodians of the ex-monasteries, including Nāg Bāhāḥ. According to the tale, Śaṅkarācārya, when visiting Nāg Bāhāḥ found a white bull and took it to Pāśupatināth as its proper abode. Pāśupatināth is, of course, the principal Hindu shrine in Nepal, which is dedicated to Pāśupati, a form of Siva, and hence indeed the proper abode of a bull, which is Siva's divine mount (*vāhana*). But Śaṅkarācārya clearly anticipated trouble from the Nāg Bāhāḥ Buddhists for he put a whole series of magic blocks all around Pasupati so that the bull could not escape. However, the Nāg Bāhāḥ Tantric priests began to slowly draw the bull back to Patan through the power of their Buddhist *mantras*. But because the bull kept getting temporarily blocked by Śaṅkarācārya's magic traps, the route that it traversed from Pāśupatināth to Nāg Bāhāḥ was long and circuitous, and it is precisely this route that is today followed by the pilgrims during Dīpaṅkara *yātrā*. During its journey back to Nāg Bāhāḥ the bull circumambulated the 129 gods and goddesses today visited by the pilgrims, until finally it reached Nāg Bāhāḥ where it turned into stone and where it still stands as an image in Nāg Bāhāḥ's courtyard.

The pilgrimage route, which begins at the shrine of the bull in Nāg Bāhāḥ, after traversing various parts of Patan, most notably Kwā Bāhāḥ, the old Newar palace area with its surrounding temples and the famous ex-monasteries of Tanga Bāhāḥ and Ta Bāhāḥ, leaves the city via Lagankhel in the west where it heads straight south to Bungamati, the small southern town which, as the country residence of the famous deity Matsyendranāth, is of special importance to all Newars. The pilgrims then head north again

visiting numerous temples, *caityas* and other sacred spots in the Newar towns of Khokona and Chobar before briefly re-entering the western suburbs of Patan and from thence going north again to cross the Bagmati river en route to Kathmandu. Only a few places are visited in the capital city prior to heading west to Kimdol, Icangu and back again to Svayambhu, a major destination where numerous offerings are made. The route then returns to Kathmandu where a number of shrines, temples and ex-monasteries are visited in the northern and western areas of the city, including Tham Bahi, Lazimpat, the King's palace area, Naksal and Tangal. Heading east out of the city the pilgrims then visit Cābahi and Baudhanāth before approaching the Pāśpatināth area where 15 major shrines must be visited, including, of course, that of Lord Pāśpatināth himself. After again crossing the Bagmati only a few stops remain before Patan is re-entered and the pilgrimage comes to an end at the Mahālakṣmi shrine in Thachē *tol*.

Young and enthusiastic pilgrims, who make only a few brief stops for food and rest, can complete the full circuit quite comfortably within twenty-four hours. Others, either the less energetic walkers or those more inclined to take lengthy breaks for food and rest, may take as long as 36 hours, whilst a significant minority are content to complete only certain sections of the full-route. According to my calculations, approximately 7,000 participated in 1967 and of these a good 5,000 completed the full circuit. Most were both Buddhists and Patan residents, and with only very few exceptions were also members of those 'clean' castes that are traditionally identified as Buddhist, most notably the Vajrācārya and Śākya, that is, the members of the ex-monastic ritual associations, together with their principal clients, the Uray and the Buddhist Śreṣṭha and Jyāpu. Adult participants were about equally male and female, and I would estimate that a good three-quarters were young adults aged between 15 and 40. Everyone arrived in immaculately clean clothes of the best quality and armed with a substantial bag or box containing their offerings, something in the order of 2 or 3 kilos of rice, lesser quantities of maize and/or corn, and a considerable number of low denomination coins.

The principal reason offered for participation was simply that this was a rare and important occasion for Patan Buddhists to visibly and dramatically proclaim their status as such. Informants stated that it

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made them feel good to jointly participate in such a popular community activity. Some, specifically referring to the Śaṅkarācārya and bull origin myth, asserted that the event was celebrating the triumph of Tantric Buddhist ritual efficacy over that of orthodox Hinduism. Most of those I spoke to also made some reference to the merit that they would accumulate by making offerings to so many deities, but they did so very much as a minor after-thought. Though those who completed the full-circuit undoubtedly took some pride in their achievements, the stress on suffering or discomfort was low key. On the contrary, most comments focussed on the more enjoyable aspects of the experience, the sense of shared achievement, pride in Newar Buddhist status, and the pleasure of picnicking on the slopes of Svayambhū towards evening. In short, it was a large-scale community financed and organized event in which the primary values evoked were of a distinctly Durkheimian kind.

Despite the overwhelmingly Buddhist character of the event, the syncretism of Newar religion was also fully reflected in the diversity of deities worshipped. Of the 129 listed in the official guidebook only 42 are quite explicitly Buddhist, while 60 are Hindu and 27 are fully syncretistic. By far the most popular are the various forms of the Devī, most of the 17 being located at *tirtha* near rivers, followed by 10 Gaṇeśa, 9 Buddha, 7 Bhagavan, 5 Bhairavā, 5 Mahādeva and 4 Lokeśvara.

Wālā

A similar and even more emphatically Buddhist community-type religious event is that known as *wālā*. Like the Dīpaṅkara *yātrā*, *wālā* consists of a procession of devotees making offerings at a succession of shrines, in this case *caitya*, or Buddhist reliquary monuments, in the almost wholly Newar city of Patan. Again, like most Newar ritual events, it can be performed either on a cyclical basis when the astrological signs are correct, in which case it is funded by the income from a substantial *guthi* trust account, or it can be performed whenever a particular individual decides to sponsor and finance the event from his or her private resources. Patan, which has been almost exclusively Buddhist for a least 1,500 years, is, as may be imagined, richly endowed with *caitya*. Though there are no formal restrictions as to who can construct a *caitya*,

only those that have been properly consecrated by the Buddhist Tantric priests, the Vajrācārya, are admitted to a formal list of *caitya* eligible to receive offerings during a *wālā* procession. This list is kept by the Patan *ācāh guthi*, which may be described with considerable accuracy as the Vajrācārya trade-union, a formal organization which protects the vested interests of its members vis-a-vis their clients, their competitors, especially the Brahman priests, and the government. Though it is in conformity with the anti-caste spirit of Buddhist doctrine for a Vajrācārya to consecrate a *caitya* built by anyone, even a member of an unclean caste, the fact that the Vajrācārya have, like their Brahman competitors, formed themselves into a closed shop through the hereditary transmission of clients, has ensured that the list of formally consecrated *caitya* is substantially restricted to the members of high-ranking Buddhist castes. Most are, in fact, owned by the members of the former monasteries, the Vajrācārya themselves and the Śākya, with a small number built by prominent Śreṣṭha or Jyāpu laity. There are currently some 500 *caitya* on the official *ācāh guthi* list.

Early in 1978 an interesting event occurred in Konti, a low-caste area on the outskirts of Patan. A Nāy, that is to say a member of the impure butcher's caste, built a substantial *caitya* in the courtyard of his house. This man, by name Bekhanārā, had originally grown rich through a boom in the butchering profession, an event in large measure precipitated by the influx of western tourists that occurred in the early 1960s. But by about 1975 he had established himself as a merchant, dealing mostly in fruit, a 'pure' commodity, and had given up butchering. The *caitya* cost him over a thousand Australian dollars to build, and his decision to do so was clearly taken, in conjunction with his change in occupation, to improve his ritual status. However, the physical building of the structure was a mere beginning, for without consecration it was also without religious worth. Initially it seems that Bekhanārā's ambitions were modest enough for it was his intent simply to use his own *purohit* to perform the consecration ceremony. Like other members of his caste, he traditionally employed as his *purohit* a man known as a Nāy Gubhāju. These men were supposedly the descendants of a true Gubhāju, that is a Vajrācārya, who had married a Jyāpu woman, and as a result of such degradation had been obliged to take the Nāy as their clients. Needless to say, though the Nāy Gubhāju could

consecrate the two structures in a manner acceptable to the members of the Nāy caste, such a ceremony would not be acceptable to the high-ranking Buddhists and would certainly not result in the admittance of the *caitya* to the formal list of those eligible to be worshipped during a *wālā* ceremony. For the man to realize his ambition of sponsoring a *wālā* ceremony it was essential that he succeed in persuading a genuine Gubhāju to consecrate his *caitya*.

When word got around in Patan that he was looking for a cooperative Gubhāju, many of the older and more conservative members of the caste objected strongly. However, it also soon emerged that the ex-butcher had a considerable number of influential supporters amongst the Gubhāju, most notably a man by the name of Ratnaraj Gubhāju, a high-ranking and popular member of Kwā Bāhāḥ, the foremost of Patan's ex-monasteries. Ratnaraj immediately agreed to consecrate the *caitya* for the Nāy, an action that won the approval of the growing number of Gubhāju who felt that Patan Buddhists must take every opportunity to combat the pernicious influence of caste. One very learned and much respected Gubhāju won over a number of waverers at a public meeting in Patan by recounting the myth of origin of *wālā*, a myth which recounts how the daughters of a fisherman in the holy Hindu city of Benares progressed, by means of both building and worshipping *caitya*, from the most debased of all statuses to that of celibate Buddhist nuns and from thence to rebirth as the daughters of the Raja of Benares. The message was clear—if *caitya* building and worship originated in the action of girls of the most debased of all castes, then it was clearly quite in order for a much respected former butcher to do likewise. It is, so it was agreed, precisely through such uniquely Buddhist forms of worship that people of low caste may hope to attain the ultimate goal of *nirvāna*.

The division amongst the Kwa Bāhāḥ Gubhāju over the issue was such that a full meeting of the *bāhāḥ's* membership association (*ācāh guthi*) was summoned, but having failed to reach a decision the liberal progressives decided to lodge a complaint with the government that the Nāy Gubhāju was being subjected to discrimination on the grounds of caste by the *ācāh guthi*, contrary to the government's anti-caste legislation.

The government sent a delegation of high-ranking officials to Patan to investigate the allegations, an action which greatly stiffened

both the Nāy Gubhāju and the progressive high-caste Buddhists' resolve to hold a *wālā* in the name of the Nāy Gubhāju. Because Bekhanārā could not himself alone finance such a costly undertaking, the Nāy caste as a whole decided that they would jointly contribute—he was now their champion in a struggle to improve the public image of their caste. The progressives on their part also negotiated with the Nāy Gubhāju by offering him, as compensation for his loss of leading role in the *wālā*, the right to perform the important Vedic sacrificial ritual of *yājñasala* on the second day. Furthermore, the Nāy Gubhāju was granted permission to perform the rite on the same *yājña* structure as that used by Ratna, the high-caste Gubhāju, on the first and third days. By thus performing the same ritual on the same structure, the two men were in effect proclaiming their ritual parity with one another. Furthermore, in the *wālā* procession itself the Nāy Gubhāju, as part of his duty as one of the presiding *purohīts*, was required to make an offering known as *nislāḥ* to the owner or caretaker of each of the 500 *caitya* visited. Each *nislāḥ* consisted of flattened rice, uncooked banana, sweets, ginger and salt on a clay saucer, and each recipient, most of whom were of high-Buddhist caste, especially Śākya and Gubhāju, was ritually required to eat the offerings. Once again, such commensality, even of such 'pure' foods as those offered, was quite contrary to the normal canons of inter-caste behaviour. Numerous informants stressed the importance of these two acts as indicative of anti-caste solidarity and status homogeneity amongst Newar Buddhists.

The *wālā* procession itself took place successfully on 16 October 1978. Preceded by a Gubhāju reciting appropriate *sūtras* and accompanied by a drummer sounding out a three-time rhythm representing the *triratna*, the Buddha, Dharma and Saṃgha, together with a cymbal player, the 3,000 or so devotees were led by Ratna, the officiating orthodox Gubhāju performing the chief worship, and immediately followed by the Nāy himself and the Nāy Gubhāju, with the latter also performing *agrapūjā*. *Agrapūjā* requires the presentation of five offerings to each of the 500 or so *caitya* visited, a *nislāḥ* saucer plus a piece of rope, a *piṇḍa* ball of the type offered to ancestral spirits during *śraddha* rites, sesame seeds, honey, ghee and a miniature broom, a collection deemed especially appropriate for the spirits of the dead associated with *caitya*. The route, which

took the devotees to all of the 15 main and most of the 100 or more branch *bāhāhs* and *bahīs* in Patan, plus the courtyards of numerous other Buddhist households that contained *caityas*, as well as many LokesVara, required the making of some 1,700 offerings in all and took about six hours to complete. The whole route had been carefully marked out with coloured ropes by the members of an organizing committee set up by the Patan *ācāh guthi* and with representatives drawn from all of Patan's named localities (*tol*). Furthermore, those participating from each locality, especially localities with an important ex-monastery, turned up for the procession in identical or near identical clothes, including in some cases plastic buckets of the same size and colour for carrying the required offerings. I would estimate that approximately three-quarters of the participants were female, and of these almost half were from the large Jyāpu or agricultural labouring caste, that is to say the main caste from whom the Gubhāju priests recruit their lay clients. Some devotees carried trays with hundreds of tiny oil and wick-burning offerings to place on or around the *caitya*. All those who had participated in a ceremony on the preceding day at the new *caitya* in the Nāy's courtyard were obliged to keep silent throughout the procession, a fulfilment of the *ahoratra vrata*, or ascetic vow made the day before. They were expected to keep in mind the three jewels of Buddhism, and each step taken on the journey was said to have a value equivalent to an offering of 1 *lal*, or 1/100th of a *tola*, of gold.

Conclusion

In my opening comments I distinguished between two forms of pilgrimage commonly found in South Asian communities; on the one hand, those major journeys over long distances to famous shrines, and on the other, those locality-based journeys frequently of a circular kind that enable the devotee to visit numerous shrines, most of them of purely local significance. I suggested that the great-shrine type of pilgrimage most commonly develops as a direct consequence of royal or other elitist patronage. It is most especially when rulers succeed, whether through conquest or some other means, in greatly expanding their political domains, that they are most likely to seek added legitimacy by building impressive temples, monasteries or other shrines and in providing facilities to

encourage long-range pilgrimage. A royally endowed temple that draws large numbers of pilgrims not only adds to the ruler's prestige, but hopefully leads to increased loyalty and political commitment. Important economic gains are also likely to flow from a high pilgrim intake. In addition to the likelihood of flourishing markets at the great centres, direct pilgrim taxes can become, as in Puri, Orissa, a major source of royal revenue (Eschmann et al. 1978).

In Kathmandu valley, prior to the Gorkha conquest, the maximal political units only rarely exceeded in size the three small city states of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaon. Though these states were at various times engaged in important external relations, not with one another but with major polities in north India and Tibet, they exhibited a high level of both autonomy and internal solidarity. It is, so I would contend, primarily for this reason that Newar worshipping practices have so strongly developed in the direction of pragmatic and highly-localized action, above all the constant making of offerings at countless shrines of purely local importance. The influence of rulers on this pattern of ritual action has been primarily to integrate the local shrines within each city state into connected networks, and this has been most effectively achieved through the sponsorship of numerous community-type pilgrimages and festivals.

After the Gorkha conquest, that is since 1768, the previously autonomous Newar city states have been incorporated into the much larger nation state of Nepal. As might be expected, the Gorkha rulers, especially the Rana dynasty which held power for a hundred-year period that ended just thirty years ago, took every opportunity to develop, through their *patroNāge*, a number of Newar festivals that especially appealed to them, as events of not just Newar but of national importance. *Pāśpatināth*, which has enjoyed the *patroNāge* of the Newar Kings of Kathmandu for a long time, became a pilgrimage centre of greatly increased popularity and today the annual festival of Sivaratri draws huge crowds of devotees not only from many remote parts of Nepal but also from parts of India as well. Other Newar cults that have undergone major expansion and development since the Gorkha conquest include the chariot festivals in honour of Matsyendranath and Kumari. The key feature of all of

these popular cults is the way in which they combine the procession of both gods and humans on prescribed ritual journeys.

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