

# Paradigm of Hindu-Buddhist Relations: Pachali Bhairava of Kathmandu

by

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Corrections to errors in the printed text are **highlighted in yellow**

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# A Paradigm of Hindu-Buddhist Relations: Pachali Bhairava of Kathmandu

## Introduction

[page 106>] Despite his supreme position in a number of Tantric schools including the very brahminised and prestigious currents of Kashmir Shaivism, Bhairava, the *kshetra-pala* (protector of the local territory), seems, at first sight, to have a modest place beside the other gods of Bhakti in the Hindu pantheon. But in Nepal, where the tribal substratum is still very visible in the social organisation of the Newars, this savage god is probably the most popular and omnipresent of the pantheon. Among his singular manifestations, Pachali Bhairava is not only the most important but also the one that best illustrates the indigenous character of his worship and his penetration into Nepalese culture. His temple, beside a cremation-ground on the Bagmati river, is above all frequented by (twelve families of) Hindu farmers (and earlier by Buddhist oil-pressers) living in the southern part of Kathmandu for whom he serves as the clan-deity. The annual festival, celebrated during Dasain, provides the occasion for the transfer of (the jar of) Pachali Bhairava from one farmer family to the next and also requires the specialised participation of members of several Buddhist castes. The twelve-yearly festival that takes place on the day of Vijayadashami, just after the annual festival, is characterised by an exchange of swords, supervised by a "brahmin" Vajracharya, between the Hindu king and a low-caste gardener possessed by Bhairava (or by his consort Bhadrakali). Through their nine-month long Nava Durga dances at various strategic points in the Kathmandu Valley, these Buddhist gardeners universalise the king's ritual identity and ensure the renewal of his power and kingdom. The primordial role of the Tantric Bhairava in the cosmogonic festivals finds its counterpart in the fact that the Vedic Indra, "the king of the gods," still retains his ancient [<106-107>] privileges in Newar religion. Though the worship of the various gods of the Hindu pantheon is Tantric in content, the symbolic articulations of the different levels and moments of their cult during the annual festival of the royal Bhairava make no sense except in terms of the transposition of a Vedic sacrificial schema. From a structural perspective, the brahmanicide Bhairava, the Tantric god par excellence, simultaneously represents the consecrated "pre-classical" *dikshita* (sacrificer) who regresses into an embryonic state charged with death, evil and impurity, and the shamanising adept endowed with magico-religious powers while in a state of possession. Instead of attempting to retrace the "roots" of Tantra back to an extra-Vedic textual or sectarian tradition, this anthropological study approaches the phenomenon as deriving from the translation of Vedic symbolic structures into a parallel, alternate and even counter-tradition that would have facilitated the acculturation of tribal communities to the caste-society. The real force behind the Buddhist challenge, which in this way also assured its own identity in the face of the enveloping Hindu order, derived from its

privileged relations with cultures alien to Brahmanism. The religious struggle, which was intense in India, paradoxically saw Buddhism adopt the structures of Hinduism, which, in turn, interiorised Buddhist values and innovations. Newar civilisation is a “Hinduised” sacred world where Vedic, Buddhist and tribal elements are fused together in a mythico-ritual synthesis that has never been seriously challenged by renunciation. The Tibetan cycle of the subjugation of Rudra, in which a transgressive Tantric adept is made to undergo a redemptive death by a Bhairava-like divinity, can even provide the framework for deciphering the soteriology underlying the public representations of death in Benaras, “the great cremation ground” of the Hindu universe. It is no doubt this homology, between the esoteric psycho-physical practices of Tibetan Tantricism and the Hindu sacrificial ideology, that is expressed in the Newar belief that Kathmandu is the halting-place of (Pachali) Bhairava in his frequent flights between Lhasa and Benaras. In the final analysis, however, the “Tantric” Bhairava would have conserved a Shamanic experience of transgressive sacrality within the very heart of Indian religious culture.

## Sunthar Visuvalingam

### **A. Between Veda and Tantra: Towards an Acculturation Model of Hindu-Buddhist Relations**

(Dedicated to Prof. F. B. J. Kuiper who,  
with his thorough schooling in “Indo-European” studies,  
has done so much to rehabilitate  
the Near Eastern, Dravidian, Munda and Shamanic contributions to the Vedic tradition)

Among the many spiritual traditions born and developed in India, Tantra has been the most difficult to define. Almost everything about it — its major characteristics, its sources, its relationships to other religions, even its practices — are debated among scholars. In addition, Tantrism is not confined to any particular religion, but is a set of beliefs and practices that appears in a variety of religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism. This book explores one of the most controversial aspects of Tantra, its sources or roots, specifically in regard to Hinduism. The essays focus on the history and development of Tantra, the art history and archaeology of Tantra, the Vedas and Tantra, and [[107-108](#)] texts and Tantra. Using various disciplinary and methodological approaches, from history to art history and religious studies to textual studies, scholars provide both broad overviews of the beginnings of Tantra and detailed analyses of specific texts, authors, art works, and rituals (Harper and Brown, *Roots of Tantra*, backcover).

The roots of Tantra<sup>1</sup> — a religious outlook, doctrine and practice that pervades Indian culture as a whole — are perhaps coeval with the equally ill-defined roots of “Hinduism” itself. The presumably

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<sup>1</sup> [108>] The original French version of this paper (1989-91), by Elizabeth alone, focused on the problematic of Newar kingship — the articulation of its profane and sacred dimensions, its symbolic function within a sacrificial model of society, and the king’s relationship to the Hindu pantheon — for it was requested for a collective volume on “Classifying the Gods.” In the subsequent English version (1991-2000), I attempted to contextualise Elizabeth’s theses within the larger problematic of the Veda-Tantra and Hindu-Buddhist polarisation of Indian religious culture for a collection of essays examining the “roots” of Tantra. After awaiting nine years that also saw my personal interaction with other contributors at a conference in Los Angeles in March 1995 around this volume, we eventually received the following letter (only upon enquiry): “It is with deep regret that we are returning the article that you submitted [in 1991! - SV] to the *Roots of Tantra* [2002 - SV]. Although SUNY Press has accepted the bulk of the manuscript for publication, the readers for the press felt that your article did not quite blend in well with the overall direction of the book. We are herewith returning you the edited version of your article in the event that you might want to submit it to another forum. Please know that Robert and I have agonized over the return of your article. It has great scholarly merit. We were not really given any options however; our only alternative was to turn down the publications offer and go hunting for another press. For the sake of the project, we decided to conform to SUNY’s request. We thank you for your submission and wish you well in finding another venue. - Sincerely, Katherine Anne Harper, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Art History.” This has been the third time in a row that SUNY Press has turned down contributions from myself to different volumes against the “expressed wishes” of the editors. *The Roots of Tantra* has been critically discussed online at our Abhinava forum (see note 5 below).

Updated in September–October 2003 for publication in *Evam*, the current version also records the debate, since Elizabeth’s first ethnographic presentation in Paris, over several issues in the interpretation of Newar religion (and, ultimately, of “Hindu” tradition), especially the retention, role and significance of a “tribal shamanic” substratum (see note 32 and 33) and the symbolic identification of the king with the sacrificial victim, both of which have been already addressed in Chaliar-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava and the Goddess,” and where G. Toffin seems to have reversed his stance in his own contribution to the volume (see also note 18). More significantly, I attempt, in the concluding section, to respond to the reservations regarding Elizabeth’s resort to my conceptualisation of acculturation and transgression as aspects of a single problematic peculiar to “Hinduism,” that were expressed, during her defense of her state-thesis, by Prof. Jan Heesterman, who was otherwise the

“authoritative” lead article in this most recent collection of studies devoted to the problem begins by conjuring away the very existence of “Tantrism” (thus toeing the line of the latest “Indological” fashion of affirming that “Hinduism” itself is only a recent invention?):

The beginnings of the Hindu Tantric traditions are all the more difficult to find in that Tantrism is a protean phenomenon, so complex and elusive that it is practically impossible to define it or, at least, to agree on its definition. Is not this difficulty due to the fact that we see and try to define an entity that does not really exist as such? Even if we do not go that far, even if we do not endorse H.V. Guenther’s remark that Tantrism is “probably one of the haziest notions and misconceptions the Western mind has evolved,” the fact [[108-109](#)] remains that Tantrism is, to a large extent, “a category of discourse in the West,” and not, strictly speaking, an Indian one. As a category, Tantrism is not — or at any rate was not until our days — an entity in the minds of those inside. It is a category in the minds of observers from outside. To use the fashionable jargon of today: it is an **etic**, not an **emic**, entity.

The term Tantrism was coined by Western Indologists of the latter part of the nineteenth century whose knowledge of India was limited and who could not realize the real nature, let alone the extent, of the Tantric phenomenon. They believed that the practices and notions they discovered in Hindu and Buddhist texts named Tantra (hence Tantrism) were something very particular, exceptional, and limited, contrasting sharply with the general, respectable, field of Indian philosophy and religion, a particular domain one could easily circumscribe. But with the progress of studies in these fields one came to realize that, far from being a limited phenomenon, Tantrism was in fact something vast,

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most enthusiastic in his reception of the paradigm of “transgressive sacrality.” Prof. Antonio de Nicolás, philosopher and poet, also provided constructive (and enthusiastic) feedback, just prior to final submission, on our underlying theoretical paradigms as developed across several papers, including this one. We are grateful to the editor of *Evam*, our friend Prof. Makarand Paranjape, for having graciously and patiently extended this opportunity — the space, time and encouragement — for us to clarify our “acculturation” model of Indian religious history. I would not have resumed these (more than just) “scholarly” pursuits if not for the autonomous “politico-cultural” space that is being created by Rajiv Malhotra and the Infinity Foundation: I seize this opportunity to thank Rajiv for supporting our project on *Abhinavagupta and the Synthesis of Indian Culture*. The issues at stake are of too vital consequence for Indians at large to be left in the (often unscrupulous) hands of professional Indologists. [[108](#)]

diffuse, diverse and very difficult to define satisfactorily. Mircea Eliade was perhaps the first to point it out, when he wrote in a book published in 1948 that, after the fifth century C.E., Tantrism became a pervasive Indian “fashion” (*une “mode” pan-indienne*). Neither in traditional India nor in Sanskrit texts is there a term for Tantrism; no description or definition of such a category is to be found anywhere. We know also that, more often than not, Tantric texts are not called Tantra....

Tantrism, thus, would be quite simply the various forms taken over the course of time by large sections of Hinduism or Buddhism. Depending upon the background, the origins, and the local influences, the evolution was more or less marked by a rejection of the orthodox Vedic rules and notions; it included more or less local autochthonous cults and beliefs, local religious behaviors, and magical and/or other practices. All of this resulted in the more or less “Tantric” character of the different groups concerned. But, whatever the case, the variety of Tantra that baffles us might very well be nothing more than some of the ways in which Hinduism or Buddhism were actually understood, believed, and practiced by Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese practitioners during the last two millennia. These various religious forms we may decide to call Tantric in order to differentiate them from older or different forms of the same religions, but we ought not try to set them apart as a particular religious entity that we choose to call Tantrism, an entity that probably never existed as such.

We would thus be rid of the difficult notion of Tantrism. This would be very convenient! But is it possible? I am not sure. I fear we still have to toil to find a solution to the problem of Tantrism. (Padoux 17, 23-24)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [109>] It is surprising that an authority on “Kashmir Shaivism” would not start from the fact that Abhinavagupta’s writings, for example, often make a clearcut distinction — indeed a veritable “ideological” opposition — between the *bhairavagama* (“traditions of Bhairava”) and other transmissions, particularly the Vedic orthodoxy (even while affirming that the essence of the former permeates all of them!). It seems to me that a consideration of Tantra (or of Buddhism, for that matter) should begin with what is most distinctive within its self-representation. Padoux’s (admittedly inconclusive) argument is suspiciously similar to, and even less justifiable than, that being used to dismiss “Hinduism” as a legitimate category simply because “Hindu” was never used as a self-

A working definition of Tantrism must begin by distinguishing this outlook clearly, even if only minimally, from Vedic sacrifice, [[109-110](#)] world-renunciation, the magico-religious power invested in kingship, Shamanism, Yoga, Bhakti and “popular” (including goddess) cults, but with the intention of eventually accounting for and “justifying” its coexistence with and compenetration of all these other domains and expressions of the vast range of Hindu-Buddhist religious experience: a bodily “technology” for perfecting the individual that gradually took on the shape of a self-sufficient corpus of beliefs and techniques that all these other traditions could draw upon and adapt to their respective frames of values and perceptions. Its various elements may have very well pre-existed within Vedism, temple-worship, Shamanism and as unsystematized forms of “Yoga” but Tantrism may be said to have been constituted as a recognizably distinct current only when they were extracted, reformulated, systematized and integrated into the coherent corpus of a shared pan-Indian tradition. Unlike the public drama of the Vedic sacrifice performed by Brahmin officiants for ensuring *svarga* (heaven) for those twice-born wealthy enough to pay for their exclusive services, Tantric *sadhana* (practice) is an individual discipline of interiorization whose transmission is in principle available to everyone irrespective of caste. Though certain tantricized sects, like the Pashupatas and Kapalikas, were composed of renouncers, they were not averse to the cultivation of *siddhi* (power) and even espoused (transfigured modes of) radical sensuality. While admitting and even prescribing the elaborate worship of deities, Tantra is more concerned with incorporating their powers than in relishing a subservient devotion towards an external(ised) God. Whereas the “secularised” Hindu king could draw simultaneously upon the twin resources of the brahmanical sacrifice and left-handed transgression to affirm his quasi-divine temporal dominion, the tantric rites epitomized by the “royal” *abhisheka* (“consecration”) are intended to confer on even the lowliest adept a more fundamental *svatantrya* (spiritual autonomy). Indian householders participating in popular festivals and pilgrimages may well be living out a symbolic universe that is derived from and sustained by such an esoteric understanding, but it is the Tantric adept who effectively “realises” their meaning within his/her own inner experience. Notwithstanding general typologies that go beyond the subcontinent, the two primordial currents of out-of-body experience distinguishable as (Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman) “shamanism” and (Dravido-African) “possession” are manifested as localized phenomena inseparable from the communal life of specific ethnic groups. The phenomenology of the tantric experience — as exemplified in *avesha* (“possession”) by Bhairava — is not simply reducible to either one of these currents.

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descriptive term by those who held its tenets. Ultimately, such pronouncements are merely translating the inability of the “Indological” taxonomy to account adequately for the nature of the object studied into claiming its very non-existence. But is this so surprising, after all, coming from an Indologist who declared, already in his Ph.D. thesis, that Abhinava, being an Indian, does not see the contradictions in his own thought? [[109](#)]

It is thus conceivable for one to be a Tantrika without claiming to adhere to any of these other modes of religious practice or endeavour. Many of its elements — such as the use of *mantra* (sound syllables), *yantra* (geometrical shapes), breath-control, meditative practices, esoteric physiology (such as the *chakras*), etc., to focus the mind, transform one's self-representation and the nature of consciousness itself — may be found dispersed in similar and/or altered forms and not only within these other Indian traditions. But nowhere else in the world do they seem to have found a religio-cultural environment, a [[110-111](#)] civilisational laboratory, so conducive to their crystallisation into a self-standing "technology" of the individual (non)self that has found canonical expression in a closely knit family of distinct yet cross-fertilising *agamas* (traditions). Tantra, in the final analysis, would denote not so much a distinctive set of codified beliefs and ritual practices — much less a (learned) textual tradition — but a specific vantage point within the Indian semiotic system that would "reduce" the latter to the outer expression of a common denominator of core esoteric techniques, the representations that surround and support their practical implementation, and above all the extraordinary experiences and transformations that constitute their sole end and justification for the individual aspirant. In the fundamentally oral/visual culture of ancient India, the study of *tantra* lies less in the uncertain history of the "written manuscript" and the dispersed geography of epigraphic finds but in the systematic decipherment of the larger "text" of a shared religious culture within which these documents are themselves embedded and of which they are the ephemeral precipitates.<sup>3</sup>

The still unresolved controversy over the relative priority of Buddhist over Hindu Tantras, narrowly understood as sectarian textual traditions, is itself symptomatic of an inadequate conceptualisation of the role of Buddhism in the formation of not only Hinduism but of Indian civilisation as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere perhaps is the inadequacy of such a text-based approach more

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<sup>3</sup> [[111](#)>] For example, in the absence of explanatory texts, the meaning of Bhairava is best reconstituted by an analysis of his origin-myth, Ganesha through the details of his iconography, and the Vidushaka (clown) not so much from the existing treatises on dramaturgy but from his own behaviour in the Sanskrit plays themselves. Lorenzen's contribution ("Early Evidence for Tantric Religion") to *Roots of Tantra* simply ignores Elizabeth's constructive critique (in "Bhairava's Royal Brahmanicide") of his manner of reconstructing the history of the Kapalika "sect" and persists in restricting evidence of such "roots" to surviving written testimony alone.

<sup>4</sup> This theoretical difficulty is especially well illustrated by the recent intellectual flip-flop by Madeleine Biardeau to whom we otherwise owe so much for our understanding of the anthropology of Hindu civilisation (*L'hindouisme*). Whereas her earlier work takes for granted, if not explicitly insists on, the "self-sufficiency" of the Brahmanical frame of reference — a topic on which I had repeatedly



apparent than in the still surviving Newar cult of (Pachali) Bhairava, which defies comprehension in terms of sectarian categories. Its symbolic universe resists reduction even to a Hindu-Buddhist “Tantrism” that would be opposed to Brahmanical ideology, on the one hand, and to Shamanic practices on the other. Unlike both Vedic and “primitive” religions, however, Tantric soteriology already presupposes the cultural supremacy of the ideal of individual *moksha/nirvana* (liberation) as propagated especially by Buddhism. At the same time, it reflects the imperative of revalorising the world, the human body and even the exercise of (royal) power in social relations from this transcendental standpoint. This incomplete movement of “return” to an immanent mode of sacrality that Hinduism co-opted on the politico-cosmic and aesthetic-emotional levels through the symbolic universe of Bhakti, resulted in a cultural synthesis that permitted the retention of indigenous [**<111-112>**] cults and forms of social organisation within a dominant “Aryan” discourse.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Hindu-Buddhist Convergence in pre-Islamic Kashmir

The examples of Buddhist Logic, the *shanta-rasa* (sentiment of tranquility) and the cult of Bhairava — drawn respectively from the domains of philosophy, aesthetics and religion — should suffice, for our present purposes, to illustrate the cultural significance of Abhinavagupta’s ambivalent treatment of the Buddhist heritage just before the Islamic invasions of the twelfth century. Indian

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taken issue with her even in private discussions — her most recent and voluminous rendering of the *Mahabharata* now claims that this Hindu epic reflects and responds to the menace of (emperor Ashoka’s embrace of) Buddhism seen by the classical brahmins in “apocalyptic” terms. The thesis upheld in this paper is a more nuanced one: Buddhism was seen as a “life-and-death” challenge, no doubt, and right down to the eleventh-century Abhinavagupta, but its contributions at every level were also admired, studied and readily assimilated as a living resource for the renewal of Hinduism. [**<111**]

<sup>5</sup> [**<112>**] I am currently editing a series of collective volumes on *Abhinavagupta and the Synthesis of Indian Culture*, and this may be taken as an invitation to specialists of Tantrism, scholars of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and anthropologists of Indian religions to bring their valuable expertise to bear upon this interdisciplinary project. Also visit our homepage at <http://www.svabhinava.org/abhinava/> for contributions online. Our papers on Bhairava, the *Vidushaka* (clown of the Sanskrit drama) and transgressive sacrality (not just in Hinduism), including all those listed in the Works Cited at the end may also be found in sister areas of the above svAbhinava site. You are also welcome to discuss the theses defended in this (and our other related) paper(s) at the “Light of Asia” Hindu-Buddhist <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Hindu-Buddhist/> and/or Abhinavagupta “Indian Traditions and World Culture” <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Abhinavagupta/> forums. [**<112**]

philosophy derives primarily from Brahmanical-Buddhist debate over the status of the world. Buddhists renounce the world by underlining its suffering, unreality, impermanence and by negating the Self, whereas Brahmanism as a whole attempts to reconcile the transcendent principle with life-in-the-world. The Buddhist critique of reality is first *vibhajya-vada* (analytic), then logical (the Madhyamika principle of non-contradiction) and finally epistemological (the Yogachara-Sautrantika attack on Nyaya categories as mental constructs). Abhinava's "Pratyabhijna" or "Doctrine of Recognition" presents itself as the synthesis of all the otherwise incompatible schools of Hindu philosophy. Above all, it is a systematic defense of the traditional Nyaya-Vaisheshika categories (substance, quality, action, relation, etc.), as the only possible basis of all *loka-vyavahara* (worldly transactions), against the critique of Buddhist Logic. Yet, its sophisticated epistemological analysis wholly follows the methods of Dharmakirti (and Dharmottara) in rejecting the Nyaya insistence on the externality of the world. The result is an inclusive non-dualism that, unlike the Advaita of Shankara or the Vijñānavāda of Vasubandhu, affirms the reality of the world but as internal to Consciousness. The acceptance of the principle of momentariness results in a dynamic conception of the world and of the Self, as ultimately invested with the creative power of *Ishvara* (the Lord). Bhartrihari's earlier defense of (Vedic) *agama* (tradition), though now pitted against the *tarka* (logic) of the Buddhists, is ultimately identified with (supra-human) *pratibha* (intuition). The Shaivas of Kashmir have used the Buddhist critique of the independent reality of the world, as generally espoused by the orthodox Brahmanical schools, in order to restore *svatantrya* (an absolute autonomy) to the supreme Self. The historical course of this philosophical debate reflects a shift in perspective from the clear-cut choice between the Brahmanical insistence on the external authority of Vedic scripture and the uncompromising Buddhist rejection of the world, to a shared Tantric worldview that affirms the creative power of the absolute Consciousness, irrespective of the status [[112-113](#)] of the individual self or of the world.

It is evident that the passages on the *shanta-rasa* (sentiment of tranquility) in Bharata's treatise on dramaturgy, the *Natyashastra*, had been interpolated into some manuscripts as a response to its effective use by the Buddhists to promote the ideal of renunciation through poetry and theatre. Orthodox Hindu dramaturges refused to accept *shanta* because the traditional eight emotions were sufficient to account for *pravritti* (activity) in this world in pursuit of the legitimate *purushartha* (life-aims). The only sustained example of the viability of *shanta* that Abhinava, in his ambivalent defense, is able to provide, is the play *Nagananda* on the Bodhisattva Jimutavahana, which was written by the "Hindu" king Harsha, who however longed to end his life in the robes of a Buddhist mendicant. The presiding deity he stipulates for *shanta* is, not surprisingly, the Buddha himself. Abhinava ultimately justifies the necessity of *shanta* by appealing to the supreme pursuit of *moksha* (liberation), arguing that it underlies all the other "mundane" *rasas* as their common denominator. Does this signal the triumph of the Buddhist renunciation ideal within the heart of Hindu sensibilities? Not quite! For

Abhinava integrates *shanta* in such a way as to leave the existing scheme of *rasas* intact and even concedes that it is impossible to represent “tranquility” in its pure form on the stage, that it needs to be supplemented by extraordinary modes of the other *rasas*. He hardly speaks of *shanta* in his Tantric writings, but exults in the experience of *rasa* in the context of hedonistic activities like eating and sexual intercourse. Abhinava refers approvingly to Buddhist theories of *rasa* as a “stream of consciousness” and, by then, even monks like Dharmakirti had begun to write very sensuous poetry in Sanskrit. The endorsement of the Buddhist *shanta* has resulted not in the rejection of the world-drama but in its appreciation in an aesthetic mode (*Visuvalingam*, “Towards an Integral Appreciation of Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics of Rasa”).

The religious inspiration behind the Shaiva philosophy and aesthetics of Kashmir came from the Tantric cults of Bhairava. By that period, Mahayana Buddhism had already attained its radical Vajrayana phase and shared much in common with Hindu Tantricism. Esoteric texts, which were inaccessible to laymen, nevertheless passed back and forth between Shaiva and Vajrayana adepts, and Trika texts even found their way into Tibetan hands. The manner and degree to which such shared Tantricism may have permeated Kashmiri society may be better appreciated by studying Hindu-Buddhist collaboration in the Kathmandu Valley, which has remained free of both Muslim and Western domination. The socio-cultural dimension of Tantrified royal festivals, especially their trans-sectarian significance, has been very well conserved in the Newar cult of Pachali Bhairava which is, in other respects, peculiar to Kathmandu. Especially evident is the clan-based “tribal” infrastructure of Newar society, with the “shamanising” phenomena of trance and possession. Not only do the Newar Buddhists, who are integrated into the caste-system, venerate the Hindu pantheon, their quasi-brahmin Vajracharya priests are often the principal officiants for the Hindu community, especially at the royal level of the Bhairava-cult, the ritual structure [<113-114>] of which is derived from the paradigm of the Vedic sacrifice. The development of Buddhist Tantricism seems to have contributed not so much to the abandonment of the Brahmanical tradition but to the generalisation and consolidation of its symbolic universe even quite independently of the direct mediation of the Hindu brahmins who originally came from India.

## 2. Why Was World-Negation Necessary in the First Place?

In practice, Buddhism ends up accommodating life-in-the-world so totally that, especially with the emergence of Vajrayana Tantricism, the differences with Trika Shaivism become purely doctrinal, a question of a “language-game.” On the other hand, Hinduism (e.g., in Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta) ends up largely interiorising the Buddhist ideal of (world-negating) renunciation. The ambivalent status of Buddhist Logic, *shanta-rasa* and Vajrayana practices within the philosophical discourse, aesthetic sensibility and religious practice of “Hinduised” culture reflects this gradual convergence of the

Brahmanical and Buddhist paradigms. Apart from the Muslim destruction of its monastic institutions, the common textbook explanation for the death of such a hoary millennium of Buddhism in its homeland is its re-absorption by a rejuvenated and enveloping Hindu religious culture (e.g., the well-known Bhakti movements in Kashmir, South India, Bengal and elsewhere). This however raises the even more formidable question as to why, in the first place, the birth of Buddhism was at all necessary?

Renunciation presupposes a desacralised world, denuded of meaning, which is hence rejected in favour of transcendence. It has no permanent place in the this-worldly sacrality that characterised the mythico-ritual universes of both Vedic and tribal societies. Yet, as attested among the Newars, Buddhism seems to have played a crucial role in the elaboration of a synthesis between Brahmanical and tribal cultures. The perennial transcendent values enshrined in the Buddhist tradition notwithstanding, its socio-historical role seems to have been primarily that of facilitating a process of acculturation in which the Vedic symbolic universe ends up becoming the dominant unifying force throughout the subcontinent. Buddhism, along with other more short-lived heterodox movements, emerged in Magadha of the sixth century BC, where the Aryan Kshatriya (aristocracy) had already begun to question the sacrificial order. A similar trend in the Brahmanical heartlands to the west had instead resulted in the gnostic speculations of the Upanishads still centred on the Vedic Revelation. Even more important was the explosion of mercantile activity and the opening of trade-routes to the south, north and elsewhere, which created the arteries through which Buddhist missionary activity could peacefully spread to pre-Aryan populations and even adapt indigenous cults to its own ethico-rational and egalitarian outlook. The “secularising” cultural milieu witnessed the incorporation of tribal republics — like those of the Vrijjis and Licchavis whom the Buddha admiringly set as a model for his own *sangha* — into the growing imperialism of the Magadhan state. The cultural necessity of Buddhism was dictated by the breakdown of Vedic authority at the point where the still “pastoral” Aryan [~~114-115~~] values came into headlong collision with indigenous populations within the emerging and expanding context of a new level of politico-economic organisation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [~~115~~>] It has been noted, no doubt correctly, that the mentality that praised the savage side of life is precisely the urban, and not the rural, mentality, and that this attitude of renunciation can only be considered a revealing indication of the changes that occurred in India in the middle of the first millennium BC, when the ancient Vedic society articulated into distinct clans gave place to a much more complex world in which the food surplus, the population increase, the emergence of cities and the brisk commerce between

From the time of emperor Ashoka, Buddhism seems to have been the most dynamic religious force in unifying the subcontinent. Kashmir (an early stronghold of Sarvastivadins), Bengal (especially under the Vajrayana dominated Pala dynasty), South India (fifth to eighth centuries.), Nepal and other regions have all passed through a phase of Buddhist dominance before their eventual Hinduisation. Benaras, subsequently the socio-religious centre of classical Brahmanism, was itself associated with heterodox and pre-Aryan cults around the time of the Buddha, who supposedly set the Wheel of the Law turning at Sarnath for the benefit of his five brahmin disciples. The leadership of this proselytising religion was increasingly taken over by converted brahmins who shared the same cultural ethos as their orthodox adversaries. At the same time, the renunciation of Brahmanical society opened these scholar-monks to far greater possibilities of freely experimenting with pre-Aryan modes of religious experience. The intellectual and socio-political power and prestige of Indian Buddhism certainly came from its common roots in the dominant Aryan culture, but its driving force, appeal and dynamism seems to have derived from its privileged relation to societies external to Brahmanism. This universalising but world-negating religion seems to have been destined, by the constellation of factors conditioning its very birth, to provide a common language for cultural communication between the otherwise closed universes of South India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Tibet, China and Japan, with their own particularistic and ethnically oriented religions like Dravidian folk-cults, local forms of Shamanism, Bon, Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism. Little wonder that Buddhist emissaries from these Asian countries were generally received with such honour by even Hindu kings and their brahmin counsellors.

In its religious rivalry with Buddhism, Hinduism was in turn obliged to gradually interiorise successful Buddhist innovations and to legitimise them within the framework of the Vedic tradition. Through the so-called process of "Sanskritisation" (a misnomer, especially in the Newar context), the sacrificial universe was increasingly propagated and consolidated by non-brahmins and even by religious specialists of non-Aryan origin. This was facilitated by an underlying compatibility between the purified Brahmanical sacrifice and the cults of possession and bloodletting [<115-116>] generally associated with Indian folk-religions. As the cultural gap between the Brahmanical and the hitherto

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them, permitted the hatching of this urban mentality that so valorised the absence of cities. The title of the book, then, implicitly refers to this paradox: the wisdom of the forest was born from the weariness of the city and with the eagerness to rehabilitate and affirm the non-social and transcendental dimension of man. (Ilarráz and Pujol; translated here from Spanish by Visuvalingam)
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This tension between the urban life and its renunciation that provides the context for the emergence of Buddhism was, however, not new to Indian civilisation (see note 36). [<115]

pre-Aryan societies narrowed — and with the gradual integration of their disparate symbolic universes — Buddhism was deprived of its *raison d'être* as a socio-historical force. The only way Buddhism could survive in India was by competing with the Hindu appeal to indigenous populations, even at the cost of increasingly compromising its original world-negating posture. Radical Shaiva-Vajrayana Tantricism could be jointly opposed to both the purified extrinsic ritualism of the classical Mimamsa and the ethico-rational ethos of early Buddhist “Protestantism” (which is still retained in some measure by the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka). Understood in this way, “Hinduism” appears to be not so much a fixed religious doctrine but a process of controlled acculturation that legitimises itself by referring back, directly or indirectly, to the Vedic Revelation (cf. [Smith](#)). Perhaps the best symbol of this process is the non-Vedic transgressor-god Bhairava, adopted by both Hindu and Buddhist Tantricism, in whom the figure of the consecrated Brahmanical sacrificer is wholly merged with that of the Shaman in ecstatic trance.

### 3. The Buddhist Role in the Hinduisation of Nepal

But it is perhaps of greatest significance, that here alone Mahayana Buddhism has survived as a living tradition. Valley Buddhists have sometimes been pressured, but scarcely persecuted; Buddhist monuments have been destroyed by nothing less benign than time and neglect. The Katmandu Valley is thus not only an immense museum of Buddhist antiquities, but it is a unique oasis of surviving Mahayanist Buddhist doctrines, cultural practices and colorful festivals.... Buddhism has been slowly declining since about the twelfth century. Today, the process has picked up speed, and Buddhism is rapidly disappearing. But Nepali Buddhism as a living force has hardly been explored, and even its monuments await documentation. The study of Buddhist remains in the Katmandu Valley, social and physical, is urgent. ([Slusser](#), *Nepal Mandala* 270).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [\[116>\]](#) “I have read with enormous interest the papers you sent me respecting Pacali Bhairava. You are accomplishing the in-depth research I hoped younger generations of scholars would undertake based in part on the general work (*Nepal Mandala*) that I felt was a precondition. Naturally, I have nothing to add and I stand in profound awe of the depth of your scholarship” This was communicated in a letter to Elizabeth from Mary Slusser, art historian, lead author/coordinator of *Nepal Mandala*, after reading the original version of this paper. We basically share her perceptions of and sympathy for Newar civilisation, even while attempting to incorporate them within an explicit theoretical framework that would highlight their global significance for South-Asian cultural history. [\[<116\]](#)

Let me introduce Elizabeth's presentation of Pachali Bhairava by providing a historical sketch of Hindu-Buddhist relations in the Kathmandu Valley along the lines of this acculturation model. The political history of Nepal is generally divided into the following periods: the pre-historic "tribal" or Kirata period, the Licchavi period from about AD 300 to 879, the following Transitional period which continued till AD 1200, then the Malla period which ended in 1769, when the Gorkhas under the still reigning Shah dynasty conquered the Newars and unified the whole of modern-day Nepal.

"On the basis of varied evidence — literary, historical, anthropological, linguistic, and that of tradition — we may then speculate that the *kirata*, [<116-117>] metamorphosed by millennia of miscegenation and acculturation, form the matrix of the Katmandu Valley population, which in contemporary Nepal is designated Newar" (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 11). During the Licchavi period (about AD 300 to 879), the process of "Sanskritisation" and a Brahmanical ideology (of sacrifices, the institution of *panchali*, etc.) was imposed from above on the indigenous Tibeto-Burman (Kirata) population by Vedic kings (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 18-40), who were known in India rather for their "republican" values and conservation of the "tribal" aspects of Aryan culture. Like the Karkota dynasty of imperial Kashmir, these predominantly "Vaishnava" monarchs seem to have facilitated the transposition of Vedic sacrificial paradigms onto a Pancharatra Tantric mould centring on Hindu temple worship (cf. Inden). Ancient Buddhism, in spite of its rejection of the hierarchical system of social values and the pantheon of gods deriving from the Brahmanical sacrifice, was patronised fully by these monarchs who built *stupas* and gave away entire villages to the *sangha* (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 271-80). What is more, Manadeva I became a penitent in the Gum-Vihara, Shivadeva II (AD 694-705) converted to Buddhism, and Vrishadeva (about AD 400), the founder of Svayambhu-Stupa, seems to have been an openly Buddhist king. The Licchavi kings evidently found in the egalitarianism and non-iconicity of ancient Buddhism an inheritor of tribal Vedism that was almost as legitimate as classical Brahmanism centred on the sacrifice. And all this even before the late achievement of the Hindu-Buddhist Tantric synthesis.

The "transitional period" (c. 879 to 1200), which has bequeathed to us so few artifacts of higher civilisation, probably saw the collapse of this *pax vedica* around a centralised authority and the affirmation of a succession of indigenous powers (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 41-51). Already present during the Licchavi epoch, Vajrayana Buddhism came into full bloom during this period of relative anarchy, when Nepal was considered a Buddhist country by the Chinese and the Tibetans who came to study there (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 281-86). The slow maturation of "Aryan" culture within Newar society must have continued under Buddhist auspices, even independently of any royal patronage. The role of the Vedic Indra, whose iconic representations do not become popular until the eleventh century but who continue to wear Licchavi style crowns, was played by the Bodhisattva Vajrapani (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 267-69), the revealer of Vajrayana teachings. The importance of the number five in



Newar Hinduism, and in the worship of Pachali Bhairava in particular, is found also in the five Tathagatas of Mahayana Buddhism: indeed, Amoghasiddhi, Vairochana, Amitabha, Ratnasambhava and Akshobhya, may have even received occasional animal sacrifices in Nepal. The spatial organisation of the Licchavi *stupas* (as at Patan) already reflects a pentadic structure probably derived from a Vedic paradigm. This would have been the period when Aryan cultural patterns were thoroughly indigenised by the Newars into a uniquely Nepali mould.

The ascension of the Malla king and culture-hero, Gunakamadeva, whose cultural significance seems to have been confused with that of Amshuvarman (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 45), probably indicates the turning-point at which the [~~117-118~~] ancient Licchavi patterns reasserted themselves from below, even outside of, specifically Vedic institutions. (The probably low-born) Amshuvarman (AD 605-621), the most illustrious ruler of the Licchavi period, was not only an ardent “Shaiva” but also a devotee of Bhairava who continued to generously patronise Buddhist institutions. Gunakamadeva is the legendary “founder” of Kathmandu, who would have instituted various royal festivals, including the Pachali Bhairava festival and the Nava Durga dances. Just as in Kashmir, the Tantric reworking and interiorisation of Vedic paradigms, initiated by the Pancharattras, continues under Shaiva auspices (cf. Goudriaan et al 21) during this Early Malla period (1200-1382). Esoteric Shaiva techniques for intensifying (the Fire of) Consciousness are understood by Abhinavagupta as an internalisation of the Vedic Agnihotra. This vegetarian “fire-sacrifice” was subsequently incorporated into a Tantric ritual framework, as attested by the Agnishala (temple to Agni)” at Patan; conversely, the Hindu-Buddhist meat-offering to the Tantric divinity Pachali Bhairava is, in turn, modelled on the Vedic paradigm. The Late Malla period (1382 to 1769) is heralded by the ascension to the throne of Jayasthiti Malla (AD 1382), who came from the royal Vaishnavite milieu of Mithila in Bihar. This Indian prince reorganised the caste system along more orthodox lines and accelerated the process of “Hinduisation” among the Newars (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 52-76). Despite their induction into the Vedico-Tantric symbolic universe and the growing hold of the Bhakti religion of classical Hinduism, the faith and religious observance of the majority of Newars still remained Buddhist well into the Shah period.

Unlike the Newars, the Gorkhas are a staunchly Hindu Indo-Nepali ethnic group that claims an “Aryan” cultural heritage. Prithvi Narayana Shah, the unifier and founder of modern Nepal, patronised Newar religious institutions (e.g., the Nuwakot Bhairavi), including Buddhist ones (e.g., by contributing to the rebuilding of the Svayambhu Stupa), even before his conquest of the Kathmandu Valley in 1769. After the Gorkha conquest, he supervised, financed and participated wholly in Newar royal festivals like the Indra and Pachali Bhairava Yatras. Despite the loss of power to the Ranas for a century (1846 to 1951), a period when Buddhism was sometimes officially discriminated against, his descendant Birendra Bikram Shah continued to patronise and participate in these Newar festivals (until his assassination on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2001; see note 19). Notwithstanding the neglect of their language and



culture, the Newars have enjoyed a role in administrative affairs disproportionate to their numbers under the royal dispensation of the Shahs. With the erosion of the underlying socio-ritual structures (e.g., the *guthi* system which was their primary economic basis) under the impact of modernisation, these festivals have become increasingly irrelevant to the political unity of Nepal. Paradoxically, the introduction of (parliamentary) democracy has perhaps endangered the (relatively) privileged status of the Newar minority.

Torn between genocidal communal strife and the menace of totalitarianism, our age of demystification could perhaps endorse our "Tantricising" reduction of divine kingship into a symbolic cipher for a generalised inner condition of **individual autonomy**. [<118-119>]

# Elizabeth Chaliar-Visuvalingam

## B. The King and the Gardener: Pachali Bhairava of Kathmandu<sup>8</sup>

[119>] "The mysteries of *Nepal Mandala* have only begun to be explored by means of a hitherto neglected but major source, the oral traditions and customs of the Newars themselves" (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 122-23).

(Dedicated to the memory of Punya Ratna Vajracharya)

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<sup>8</sup> [119>] This section is based on fieldwork financed by three missions from the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) in October 1984, 1985 and 1988. A Lavoisier Fellowship from the French Ministry of External Affairs in 1990 had allowed me to pursue this research at the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University on the invitation of Prof. Michael Witzel.

The late Punya Ratna Vajracharya, a Newar scholar, helped me read manuscripts in Newari relating to the cult of Bhairava and explained to me some of the finer aspects of his tradition. I thank all those interviewed in Kathmandu, especially the *Juju* and Lakshmi Narayana Malakar. My thanks are also addressed to my research assistants, Akal Tuladhar (1984, 1985) and Nutan Dhar Sharma (1988); their friendship and competence remain precious to me. Nutan is now working with the German team at the South Asia Department. of the University. of Heidelberg in their projects on Nepal, Benares and South India.

The paper was originally presented (16 June 1989) to the CNRS research-group 299, directed by G. Toffin, at the Centre d'Études Indiennes (Paris), then to the interdisciplinary seminars of Prof. Witzel at Harvard on the cultural history of Kashmir and Nepal (April 25, 1991), and again (jointly with Sunthar Visuvalingam) to the Harvard Buddhist Studies Forum (November 5, 1991). Earlier full-length French versions of this article (with more abundant ethnographic details omitted in this position-statement intended for a wider audience) have benefited, in the 1990-91 time-frame, from the comments of Profs. M. Biardeau, C. Jest, R. Levy, M. Witzel, Drs. H. Brunner-Lachaux, N. Gutschow, M. Slusser, G. Toffin and N. Peabody. I express my gratitude to Niels Gutschow for having agreed to draw all the maps for this article. Maria Green, at the Dept. of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, helped translate the original paper from the French. My husband, Dr. Sunthar Visuvalingam, whose knowledge of Nepali facilitated my fieldwork, contributed greatly to the theoretical developments. The present paper was a prescribed text for the Spring semester course (1992) he taught on "Heresy and Religious Change in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam" at the Experimental College of Tufts University.

Representations of Bhairava, the terrible aspect of Shiva, are numerous in the Kathmandu Valley, where his cult is much more alive and important than in India. Images of Bhairava can be found in Buddhist monasteries as well as in Hindu temples. Bhairava dwells also in houses, fields, cremation grounds, wells, street-crossings, the four wheels of the chariot of Matsyendra-natha at Patan, and so on. Specialists of Nepal have remarked on this omnipresence of Bhairava, the scope of his festivals and, sometimes, also the peculiarities of his cult with regard to India (Nepali 298-305, 343-51; Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 235-39, and passim; Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 441-47).<sup>9</sup> Safe from the devastating Muslim invasions of the twelfth century and from Western influence since the seventeenth century, Nepal has maintained to the present day certain characteristics of the cult of Bhairava which have long since vanished in India. The Newar genius has also elaborated the cult of Bhairava by adapting it to its own cultural context; a prime example of this is the royal dimension of Bhairava.

The identification of Bhairava with the Hindu king is already present in India, but it seems to have been largely eclipsed by his function of *kshetra-pala* [<119-120>] (guardian of the local territory) and by his opposing role of transgressor god among extreme sectarian groups such as the Kapalikas or the Kaulas. In his native land, this “popular” god has been defined especially in relation to classical Brahmanism. The Puranic origin myth, which describes the decapitation of Brahma by Bhairava (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide” 160-63) is much less important in the Newar tradition. This explains why the Bhairavashtami,<sup>10</sup> the festival celebrating the manifestation of Bhairava as brahmin-slayer is not celebrated. Through a slow evolution — no doubt assisted at first by values of *ahimsa* (non-violence), later by the puritanism of Islam, and finally by the rationalism favoured by the West — Bhairava-worship in India has been gradually taken over by purity-minded brahmins. In this way, his principal temples in holy cities such as Benaras, Ujjain and Haridwar are almost all in the hands of brahmin priests. It is they who manage the eight main temples of Bhairava in Benaras and the temple of Kala Bhairava at Ujjain. In these temples, they present only vegetarian offerings and, exceptionally, meat coming from animals that have been sacrificed elsewhere. Most devotees of Bhairava come and worship him on an individual basis, singing his

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<sup>9</sup> Slusser goes so far as to affirm: “Wherever the Nepali is, physically or psychologically, Bhairava is not far away” (*Nepal Mandala* 235). I have already indicated the richness and the complexity of the cult of Bhairava in South Asia — above all in Nepal — with all the necessary references in my earlier articles (especially Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide” 157-60, 205-10). [<119]

<sup>10</sup> [120>] Festival of the birth of Bhairava, on the eighth day of the black fortnight of the month of Margashirsha (November-December), which is directly connected with the Puranic origin myth (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava Kotwal of Varanasi”). [<120]

praises just as they would for any Bhakti god. In fact, this *bhakti* (religion of love) is largely responsible for the “normalisation” of the public aspects of Bhairava-worship in India.

The importance of the royal cult is connected with the conservation of a social “infra-structure” that comes from the autochthonous substratum of the Newar culture (Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 585-93). G. S. Nepali (173-74, 299, 304) notes, for instance, that the almost untouchable and hardly civilised Du(n)yeeya(n) or Duiya, who live on the geographical fringes of Newar culture, have Akasha Bhairava as their main deity. They call him “Sawa Dya” or “god of the tribes” (Newari: *Sawa*, Sanskrit: *Savari*), and it is they who provide the *Sawo Baku* (dancers) to incarnate Bhairava during the Indra Yatra, the royal festival par excellence in Nepal. Such considerations have led this pioneer of Newar anthropology — with whom we had the privilege of studying the Pachali Bhairava festival in October 1988 — to affirm that Bhairava is a tribal god. He is right, if this means that Bhairava played a primordial role in the Hinduisation of tribal divinities (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide” 191-99). But this process was so successful in India that the antecedent stages are almost beyond recognition, at least in the social organisation, even where the tradition affirms explicitly that the god — like the Oriya national god, Jagannatha, the focus of pan-Hindu pilgrimage — has a tribal origin. On the other hand, the system of clans directed by *thakali* (elders) is still operative among the Newars, and Bhairava is above all the “Aju Dya” (ancestor-god or grandfather). Several dynasties of Newar kings, in spite of their Aryan sounding names, must have surely been of tribal origin. They would have adopted Aryan religious values and social customs not only because of their cultural prestige, but also in order to extend and [<120-121>] affirm their political power well beyond their own communities of origin.

The Nepalese chronicles attest to several precise identifications of kings with Bhairava. The king Shivadeva (1099-1126) — son of Shankaradeva (about AD 1069-1083) who restored the Vedic ritual of *Agnihotra* at Patan — is said to be the incarnation of a Bhairava from Assam. The most famous king of the Licchavi period, Amshuvarman (AD 605-621), whose mastery over Brahmanical culture was renowned as far as India, is said to have burnt human flesh as incense before a particular Bhairava (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 25-27, 337, 339). In the Newar context, the king is the centre of gravity for the socio-religious community and the bloody side of the sacrifice, rejected by classical Brahmanism, is very much in evidence. The festivals of Bhairava in the Newar tradition are intimately linked to kingship and involve the participation of the entire community. Participation is not in an individual capacity, but a function of caste, royal delegation or specialised knowledge. The public worship of Bhairava is above all in the hands of Tantric priests, be they “aristocratic” Karmacharyas (of kshatriya status), Buddhists, farmers or of low-caste like the Kusles (former Kapalikas). The relative smallness of the community of Rajopadhyayas (court brahmins) should not mislead us into underestimating the extent of their influence on the religious life of the Newar society. The ritual purity that guarantees them their rank at the summit of the Newar hierarchy does not prevent them from eating meat. They are, in effect, the depositaries both of Tantrism and Vedism, and their *gurus* unite the two

traditions in their own persons (Toffin, "La voie des 'héros,' tantrisme et héritage védique chez les brahmines Rajopadhyaya du Népal" 19-34). "The Thakali, i.e., the eldest in the kinship unit, is the preferred choice for this duty. The Thakali is the central figure in the socio-religious life of the Newars, connected with the deepest level of the non-Indianized substratum of the population, and is perhaps an ancient tribal priest" (Toffin, "La voie des 'héros,' tantrisme et héritage védique chez les brahmines Rajopadhyaya du Népal" 33). They no doubt played a primordial role in the elaboration of the royal cult where these two crucial aspects of Hindu religion are brought together. After all, even the brahmin Shrotiya is not only the pure being par excellence, he is above all the one who incarnates the ritual knowledge of the Vedic sacrifice. It is because of this sacrificial background, inhabited by all the high gods of Hinduism, that the royal Newar festivals remain deeply Brahmanical and even Vedic.

Buddhism, the most important contestant of the Brahmanical model, is still a major component of Newar society, in contrast to India where it has long since disappeared. Tibet adopted Tantric Buddhism from India, and Vajra Bhairava is particularly venerated by the Gelugpa school, which represents the orthodox religion. The Tibetan influence, reinforced by the commercial exchange between Kathmandu and Lhasa, played a determining role in the flowering of the Bhairava cult in Nepal. This is evident, for instance, in the "confusion" between the iconography of Buddhist divinities such as Mahakala or Samvara and that of the Hindu Bhairava. Vajrayana was already present in Nepal by the reign of Amshuvarman, and (Vajra) Bhairava, another name for Yamantaka, is mentioned in a Shivadeva [<121-122>] II (about AD 694-705) Licchavi inscription (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 291-92, 237, 239n.101, 272, 282, 286; Chaliier-Visuvalingam, "Bhairava's Royal Brahmanicide" 209). Among tribes in the process of assimilation to the "great tradition", lamas compete with officiating brahmins for their place beside the shaman priest. But Newar Buddhism, which thus distinguishes itself from Lamaism, has mostly abandoned the ideal of renunciation and is integrated into a social life governed by Hindu norms with their strong concern for purity. On account of their monastic past and, above all, of their mastery of Vajrayana Tantrism, the Vajracharya priests enjoy a religious prestige (nearly) equal (even among the Hindus) to that of the Rajopadhyaya brahmins. Whereas the latter are afraid of too openly displaying their knowledge of radical Tantrism — which would only confirm their loss of status with regard to the Parbatiya (Indo-Nepalese) brahmins — the Vajracharyas, for whom the Tantric *diksha* is the central and the highest point of their religious life, seem to be the true depositaries of the royal secrets of Bhairava. On the other hand, even within the Hindu community, there is strong competition between the Karmacharya and the Rajopadhyaya for the officiating role at Tantric ceremonies (Toffin, "Culte des déesses et fête du Dasaï chez les Néwar (Népal)"). But whether it is mediated by a Karmacharya or a Vajracharya, this is a Tantrism that fits into the sacrificial framework of classical India while at the same time guarding a certain autonomy with regard to the brahmins themselves. There is *de facto* collaboration among these ritual specialists in maintaining a Brahmanical model of society, in the face of the centrifugal tendencies of its communal components. And in spite of the opposition between

Brahmanism and Buddhism on the religious level, such Newar phenomena can teach us a great deal about the true role of Buddhism in the great process of acculturation that gave birth to Indian civilisation.

In this way, the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, the Buddhists included, explain with a remarkable unanimity that Bhairava came (as a king) from Lhasa, or more often, from Benaras, so much so that Bhairava is often called Kashi Vishvanatha.<sup>11</sup> The Benaras-Kathmandu-Lhasa axis is a constant in the ethnography of Bhairava in Nepal and, in order to demonstrate its conceptual value, we have even used Tibetan Tantrism to interpret the significance of Bhairava in the “great cremation ground” which is Benaras. The royal cult is still so much alive among the Newars that it is possible — through a global study of their cosmogonic festivals (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide” 183-91) — to reconstruct the royal dimension of the cult of Bhairava in his own native city beside the Ganga. What is more, by confronting the position of Bhairava in the Hindu pantheon with the Vedic sacrificial paradigm, with the core-structure of the *Mahabharata*, and with more general data from the anthropology of India, we have outlined an ambivalent model of Hindu kingship [<122-123>] based on a theory of transgression (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide” 199-205). The present ethnographic study will have the supplementary interest of illustrating the role of Tantric Buddhism within the same acculturation thesis, but this time through a detailed yet totalising analysis of a single Newar cult focused on the temple of Pachali Bhairava beside a cremation ground at the southern extremity of Kathmandu.<sup>12</sup>

## 1. Mythologiques of Pachali Bhairava, King of Pharping.

Pachali Bhairava, king of Pharping (a town to the south of Kathmandu), has the habit of locking himself in a room of his palace to eat enormous quantities of rice and a goat. His wife insists upon coming and sharing his meal. The king accepts but informs his wife that he will have quite another appearance, and that she will have to throw some grains of rice on him in order to restore his human aspect. His wife is so terrified at the sight of Bhairava that she runs away forgetting to throw the grains. Afraid of being discovered by his subjects, the exposed king takes refuge in the place where the temple of Pachali Bhairava still stands

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<sup>11</sup> [<122>] Banaras, also called also Benares, Varanasi or Kashi, is the holy city of the Hindus. The principal divinity of this town is Shiva-Vishvanatha who is invariably “confused” elsewhere with his guardian Bhairava (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava Kotwal of Varanasi”). [<122]

<sup>12</sup> [<123>] There are, of course, partial descriptions in Nepali 303-04, 347-50; Anderson 156-63; Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 238-39; and Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 444-46. The cult of Pachali Bhairava has, however, never been studied systematically, at all its levels, and certainly not with the intention of deciphering the significance of Newar kingship. [<123]

today. His wife stumbles a little further on and becomes Lumarhi, the dangerous goddess Bhadrakali whose temple stands at the edge of the Tundikhel field.

In another version, Pachali Bhairava has the habit of leaving Pharping each morning to bathe in the Ganga at Benaras and returning to Kathmandu in the form of a handsome man. In this way, he seduces a young girl of the butcher caste (Nepali: Kasai) who tends a troop of pigs near the temple site. In other accounts, he is a Jyapu (farmer) who thus breaks all the rules of caste. Before long, she too becomes curious and he finally agrees to reveal himself provided she throws some grains of rice as soon as she sees his real identity. She too forgets and flees as soon as she is confronted by her grotesque lover. Bhairava pursues her through the night, but day starts to dawn and he seeks to hide himself. He reaches a cremation ground and wraps a bamboo mat around himself, such as the Newars use for their dead. This one had in fact been used to bring a corpse to the cremation *ghat*. He has no time to disappear totally underground and the stone venerated today is his buttock! Another version explains the close relationship of the Kasai caste with the god Ganesha. The seduced butcher girl becomes pregnant and her fear at the grotesque appearance of her lover provokes the premature birth of the child, who is adopted by the Kasai. The child is none other than Ganesha, who is venerated by the butchers of South Kathmandu in the form of a small bronze statue attached to a drum that they play during different ceremonies.

Punya Ratna Vajracharya related yet another account in which Bhairava is not a king but a Jyapu: Bhairava walks with his daughter Kumari and his son Ganesha during the festival of Indra. Bhairava's wife, Ajima (also of Jyapu caste), is jealous because she is not with them, and asks Bhairava to stroll with [[123-124](#)] her around Kathmandu. He agrees, but not during the Indra Yatra. That is why during the Pachali Bhairava festival, Bhairava walks with Ajima through Kathmandu. During the Indra Yatra, the procession of the Kumari or Virgin-Goddess is in fact accompanied by Ganesha and Bhairava, but in this context, Bhairava (like Ganesha) is a small boy of the Buddhist Sakya caste. The boy's Sakya family regularly sends a tray of offerings to the temple of Pachali Bhairava. We may already note the strong symbolic link between the royal festival of Indra and that of Bhairava.

## 2. Pachali Bhairava Temple and the Dualist Structure of Kathmandu

The word "Pachali" could be a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word *pancha-linga*. During the reign of the Mallas (thirteenth-nineteenth century), this god was known under the name Panchalingeshvara (Lord of the five Lingas) or Panchamurti Lingeshvara. It is even said that there are five *lingas* hidden under the stone that everybody can see today on the altar. But for [Slusser](#) (*Nepal Mandala* 235, 239; cf. 47-48), Pachali Bhairava would have been rather the god of a *panchali* of Dakshinakoligrama, a village that corresponds roughly to the southern part of modern Kathmandu. The Licchavi (third-ninth century) institution of *panchali* or *panchalika* — precursor of the modern *panchayat* — was an administrative subdivision whose members

feasted together in the name of their divinity. This practice is still conserved in contemporary associations called *panchi guthi* that have charge of several Bhairava statues. Thus the underlying socio-ritual conceptions do not seem limited to the cult of Pachali Bhairava, nor even to Bhairava as a particular god. In the *Mahabharata*, legitimate "kingship" is expressed by the hierarchical internal structure of the five Pandava brothers whose union is symbolised by their common wife, Draupadi-Panchali (Chalier-Visuvalingam, "Bhairava's Royal Brahmanicide" 174-77). In Nepal, this "black" (*krishna*) heroine is identified with the goddess Bhadrakali, the wife of (Pachali) Bhairava. Her most favoured husband is Arjuna, model king and son of Indra. He incorporates the totality of the five brothers, as is also clear from the fact that his conch is called *pancha-janya*, term derived from *pancha-jana* (five tribes). The ritual paradigm perhaps dates back to the tribal origins of Vedic culture, when the five tribes still had a social reality.

The opposition between the lower (south), Yangala, and the upper (north), Yambu, halves of Kathmandu dates back to the Vedic Licchavi dynasty, when the village of Dakshinakoligrama was still a distinct entity, apparently more important and more populated than the rival village of Koligrama to the north (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 87-95).

"From the 11th to 13th centuries, three distinct dynasties, all bearing the same name of Thakuri, succeed one another. First to come are those who claim to be the descendants of Amshuvarman, and who reign until about 1050. Then come the Vaisya Thakuri of Nuwakot, who reign until 1082. Under these first two dynasties, the institution of the double kingdom, *dvai-rajya* or *ubhaya-rajya*, is in full force. The kingdom is a single entity, but is divided into two parts, each managed by a different king ... The two kings were united by kinship; they were two brothers, a father and a son, or a maternal uncle, and his nephew, etc.... This institution, which is briefly [*<124-125>*] mentioned in the *Artha-shastra* (VIII.2), is historically attested only in Nepal. It is doubtless to be connected with the partition into a kingdom of the North and a kingdom of the South of the Licchavi times.... It perhaps still survives, in a manner, in the dualist structure of the Newar agglomerations of the Kathmandu Valley. [It is only in 1200 that] the king of Thakuri origin, Ari Malla, founds a new dynasty: the Mallas who will reign till 1769. (Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 35-36)

The vestige of this politico-ritual dualism, which also provides the underlying structural paradigm of the Mahabharata, "war"; (Visuvalingam, "The Transgressive Sacrality of the *Dikshita*" 454, 462n69), is found in the continuing existence of two Newar *juju* (kings) residing respectively in the south and north of Kathmandu. Man Singh Malla belongs to the sub-caste of the Thaku-juju, descendants of the ancient Vaishya



Thakuri kings, who live primarily in the Bhimsen-than (south) and Thamel (north) in Kathmandu. The *Juju* is the direct descendant of Gopushya Thakuri. The role (of the ancestor) of the *Juju* in the time of the Mallas was most probably very similar to his present role under the Shah dynasty. The southern part or the lower part of the town (Newari: *kotva*) is, in this way, opposed to the upper part (Toffin, "Les aspects religieux de la royauté néwar au Népal" 69). The *Juju* of the North has no connection with the worship of Pachali Bhairava. Under the Mallas, the Thaku-juju were still very important in the political life of the Valley. After the unification of Nepal by the Gorkhas, however, they lost all their power. Nevertheless, the ancestor of Man Singh received the authorisation from Prithvi Narayana Shah to continue celebrating the annual festival of Pachali Bhairava. For the Thakuri, who claim that their ancestors founded the cult of Pachali Bhairava, the god is also their "Aju Dya" or "grandfather." Man Singh Malla lives in the Kva Baha near the Bhimsen temple which belongs to him. In his temples, Bhimsen is flanked by his younger brother, Arjuna, and by their common spouse Draupadi-Bhadrakali. While the "ideal king" receives only vegetarian offerings, Bhimsen, whom the Newar explicitly identify with Bhairava, receives blood sacrifices (Chalier-Visuvalingam, *Étude préliminaire du culte de Bhairava dans la Vallée de Katmandou*). The worship of Bhimsen, so dear to the Thaku-juju but also popular among the tribal people (Nepali 322), is therefore not foreign to the cult of Pachali Bhairava and its royal dimension.

Most of the chronicles, for example the *Bhasha-vamshavali* (Malla 5-6), explain that it was the king Thakuri Gunakamadeva (AD 924-1008) who established the worship of Pachali Bhairava. The god is very much associated — at least in the Newari imagination — with the founding of Kathmandu, because it was this same king who is traditionally believed to have founded both the town and the festival. He would have brought the Nava Durga to the Kathmandu Valley, would have started the festival of Indra Yatra, the Lakhe dances, and so on. He would also have instituted, on the advice of the god Karttikeya-Skanda, the ritual conflict — including human sacrifices — that took place between the Yambu (north) and the Yangala (south) of the town during the festival of Sithi-nakha, precisely in order to prevent his subjects from revolting (Anderson 66-71; Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 339). The [<125-126>] political institution of the double kingdom was abolished by 1484 at the latest, when Ratna Malla made Kathmandu his kingdom, but the socio-ritual structure and the practices derived from it are still preserved (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 91). I was repeatedly informed that the kings of Patan were involved in the annual festival of Pachali Bhairava and that a *puja* tray is still sent by their descendants, who are called precisely Bhairava Malla, living in Mangala Bazaar at Patan. This would correspond quite well to the historical role of the *pitha* as a neutral place for diplomatic exchanges between the rival kings of Kathmandu and its twin town of Patan (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 239).

Gunakamadeva himself would have come from Pharping and the god Pachali Bhairava would be no more than the hypostasis of this Thakuri king. The cult of Pachali Bhairava, involving the annual rotation of a pot among the Jyapu families, does indeed exist in this village at the southern rim of the Valley. Even today, if somebody from Pharping is found among the spectators of the Malakar dances of Kathmandu, he is

immediately promoted to the rank of *Thakali* for the duration of the dance. Pachali reigned in the past over Pharping with the goddess Dakshinakali as his queen, and it is said that he will come back to his native village when the road from Kathmandu to Pharping is full of houses. It would seem that the Vedic paradigms of Pachali-worship at Kathmandu had been established by the Licchavis. Amshuvarman, whose palace seems to have been in the modern district of Jaisideval, where the Jyapus of the south live (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 119-23), was already a devotee of Bhairava. The first Thakuri of Kathmandu claimed to be descended from Amshuvarman, though his name had been removed from the Licchavi genealogies, doubtless because of his suspect origin (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 25, 30, 42). The “Thakuri” king Gunakamadeva, who is the real architect of the modern form of Pachali Bhairava-worship in Kathmandu, could well have been of equally humble origins.

The first reference to Pachali Bhairava is an inscription of AD 1333 that was discovered in the Maru Sattal or Kashthamandapa at the centre of Kathmandu (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 147). This wooden building, which marked the northern boundary of Yangala, seems to have been the royal council chamber and the temple of Pachali Bhairava. The god is invoked as witness to a political treaty and as the guardian of certain funds deposited as a pledge in this temple. Towards the beginning of the twelfth century, this part of the city was called Kashthamandapa from which is derived the modern name of the city, Kathmandu. In 1379, the King Jayasthiti Malla gave this Sattal to the Natha ascetics connected with the worship of Bhairava (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 367). Their descendants, the Kapalikas or Kusle Yogins, continued to live there until recently (1966), when they were turned out so that restoration of the building could be begun. The Kashthamandapa still provides shelter today for a statue of Gorakthnatha and is still associated with the worship of Pachali Bhairava. Locke (434) adds that “customs still current among the Buddhist Newars of Kathmandu indicate that the building also had had Buddhist associations.”

The *pitha* (open sanctuary), one of the most ancient temples of Bhairava in [<126-[table of castes is on page 127]-128>] Kathmandu, is situated in the south of the modern town near Tekudoban at the confluence of the Bagmati and Vishnumati rivers. It is very close to the cremation *ghat* on the Bagmati — the Ganga of the Kathmandu Valley — and is surrounded by other, non-riverine, cremation grounds. Under the shade of a big Pipal (*ficus religiosa* = banyan) tree, on the altar of the open sanctuary, there is a stone representing Pachali Bhairava, around which there are stones that symbolise his *gana* or attendants (map 1). Facing the altar is the Vetala in human form on which blood sacrifices are performed (photo 1). Because of the similarity of Pachali Bhairava with the human buttocks, people coming from the plains of India made fun of the sacrificial practices of the Newar. So king Pratapamalla (seventeenth century.) covered most of the original emblem leaving only this stone for the sight of the devotees. What is underlined here is that Bhairava represents impurity, above all the impurity of death.



Photo 1 The Vetala in the *pitha* receiving sacrifice of poultry. [page 172]

Map 1: Details of shrine within *pitha* (open sanctuary) of Pacali Bhairava

[wait for final version of the paper for this map image – SV]

Table of the different castes participating in the cult of Pachali Bhairava [whole of page 127]

<b>Participants</b> (by caste-affiliation, from daily cult to twelve-yearly festival)	<b>Daily Cult</b> at Pachali Bhairava <i>pitha</i>	<b>Annual Festival</b> Pachali Bhairava Yatra	12 Yearly Festival <i>khadgasiddhi</i>
<b>Maharjan</b> (Jyapu) Hindu farmers 12 families of the Dangol sub-caste: guardians in turn of <i>pitha</i> and <i>dyahche</i>	Thakali (Eldest) in clan is <i>Achaju</i> (temple priest) for a year	His nephew incarnates Ajima Day when family changes & children undergo tonsure	[Bhairava jar has rotated through all 12 Jyapu families]
<b>Manandhar</b> (Salmi) "oil-pressers" Hinduised Buddhists	[May have been involved earlier]	Children underwent tonsure, erected pole & carry torches	
<b>Sakya</b> Buddhist caste of goldsmiths, etc., who have received first initiation. Provide 5-year old boy-Bhairava for the royal Indra festival	Clean the Pachali jar 3 times a year Family regularly sends offerings		
<b>Juju</b> "king" descendant of ancient Vaishya Thakuri M. Man Singh	Sends <i>puja</i> plate on Saturdays. [Has own temple to Bhimsen.]	Patron of festival: steals jar from Jyapus, performs <i>kasi puja</i> , <i>mamsahuti</i> , etc.	Just carries the royal fan for the current Shah king
<b>Karmacharya</b> Tantric priest Lava Ram Karmacharya Srestha (division Chathariya)		Directs all the Tantric <i>puja</i> (rituals) for the <i>Juju</i> [role formerly assumed by a Joshi]	Mere observer
Sthapita (sub-division of Buddhist Tuladhar merchant caste) Ratna Panna		Assists the <i>Juju</i> and the Karmacharya/co-patron?	Mere observer
Kumari "virgin goddess" from Buddhist Sakya caste		Impassably witnesses buffalo-sacrifice before royal palace	
<b>Chitrakar</b> 3 groups of Buddhist painters a) Yoga Raj Chitrakar (1st day) b) Mane Bahadur Chitrakar (3rd day) c) Prem Chitrakar (4th day)		All 3 groups participate: Jar sent to Jaisideval home Cleans jar with a dried fruit Feeds Pachali and repaints eyes	Prem Chitrakar prepares masks for Malakar dancers 9 months before
<b>Malakar</b> (Gathu) "gardeners" (Buddhist group directed by) Lakshmi Narayana Malakar Live at foot of Svayambhunatha-Stupa		Play special music sacred to Bhairava during the rituals, and follow the procession of the Pachali Bhairava jar to the door of the royal palace	Bhairava (or Kali) dancer exchanges swords with king/perform Nava Durga dances for 9 months
<b>Kasai</b> (Khadgi) Hindu "butchers" Purna Bahadur Ganesha	[Participates in rituals of <i>Juju's</i> Bhimsen temple]	Incarnates Ganesha to carve sacrificial victims in his arms Enters trance with Ajima	[no longer perform sacrifices as before]
<b>Rajopadhyaya</b> "court-brahmin" (originally from Hindu Bhaktapur) Lives now at Brahma tol (quarter)			Sponsors comic dance of vegetarian Sweto Bhairava
<b>Vajracharya</b> (Gubhaju) Buddhist priest a) Badri Ratna Vajracharya b) Babukaji Vajracharya	Performs <i>puja</i>	[ <i>Puja</i> for individual families]	Directs <i>khadgasiddhi</i>
<b>Shah</b> Gorkha royal dynasty ruling since Prithvi Narayan's conquest of the Kathmandu Valley from Mallas in 1769. Birendra Bikram Shah (1972 till now)		Sends royal sword from the old Malla palace in Hanuman Dhoka and provides young male buffalo for sacrifice	Funds Nava Durga dances/exchanges swords with Bhairava (or Bhadrakali)

### 3. The Structure and Participants of the Daily Rituals

"In Katmandu, the Jyapu farmers who still represent a third of the population of the old town are spatially distributed in four sectors, each associated to a particular temple: Svayambhunatha (Simbu) and Lutimaru Ajima at the north-west, Bhadrakali at the south-east and Pacali at the south" (Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 485). The principal devotees of Pachali Bhairava are farmers and oil-pressers who live in the southern part of Kathmandu. At the daily level, the farmers are the most involved because they maintain the open-air temple, called a *pitha*. The Achaju (Tantric priest) who performs the daily rituals is none other than the *Thakali* (eldest male member) of the family currently in charge of the open-air temple. The daily rituals are performed, morning and evening, by the farmer guardians and by a Buddhist "brahmin" Vajracharya priest (photo 2). They offer, among other things, eggs, goats, and above all poultry to Pachali Bhairava, but the animals are never sacrificed on the altar itself but only on the Vetala (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 337, 362). Every Saturday, a tray of offerings from the house of the *Juju* is brought in the open-air temple for the daily ritual. Special rituals are also celebrated on the eighth day of Dasain (Maha-Ashtami) and on Pachare or Pishacha-chaturdashi, a three-day festival beginning on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Chaitra (March-April).

Photo 2 Vajracharya, with bell in left hand, performing ritual at Pachali Bhairava *pitha*. [page 172]



In the Newar tradition, each god has generally two temples. One is situated outside the town, and the god is venerated there in the open-air temple called a *pitha*. The other is inside the town, and the god is venerated in a closed temple called a *dyahche* in Newari (cf. Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 326). This *dyahche* is, in fact, a special room inside the house of the family who keeps the Bhairava jar. In the closed temple, Pachali Bhairava is represented by and worshipped as a jar (Newari: *tepa* or *kom*) filled with beer (photo 4). Its guardian must perform a ritual during Tihar, a five-day festival beginning on the thirteenth day of the waxing fortnight of the month of Karttika (October-November). The Sakyas (a Buddhist caste) are responsible for cleaning the jar three times a year, during the festivals of Tihar, Ghantakarna and Pachare. Beside the Bhairava jar, an oval-shaped silver bowl called *patra khola*, representing Bhairava's wife [*<128-129>*] Ajima, is also venerated by the same family. The *dyahche* which shelters the divine image for a limited period is sometimes confused with the *agache*. The *agache* is also a closed sanctuary within the city where the lineage divinity is kept for an unlimited period of time. "The only difference between the *agache* and the *dyahche*, is that in the first case the divinity never leaves its temple, whereas in the second case it is exhibited before the eyes of the public once a year during its



procession to a temple (*pitha*) situated outside the locality” (Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 83n16; also cf. chs. 18 and 20). The *agache* of Pachali Bhairava is in fact in the house of the *Juju*.

Photo 3: *Thakali* (elder), with shaved head and robed in white, warming himself beside perpetual fire at the *pitha* of Pachali Bhairava. [page 173]

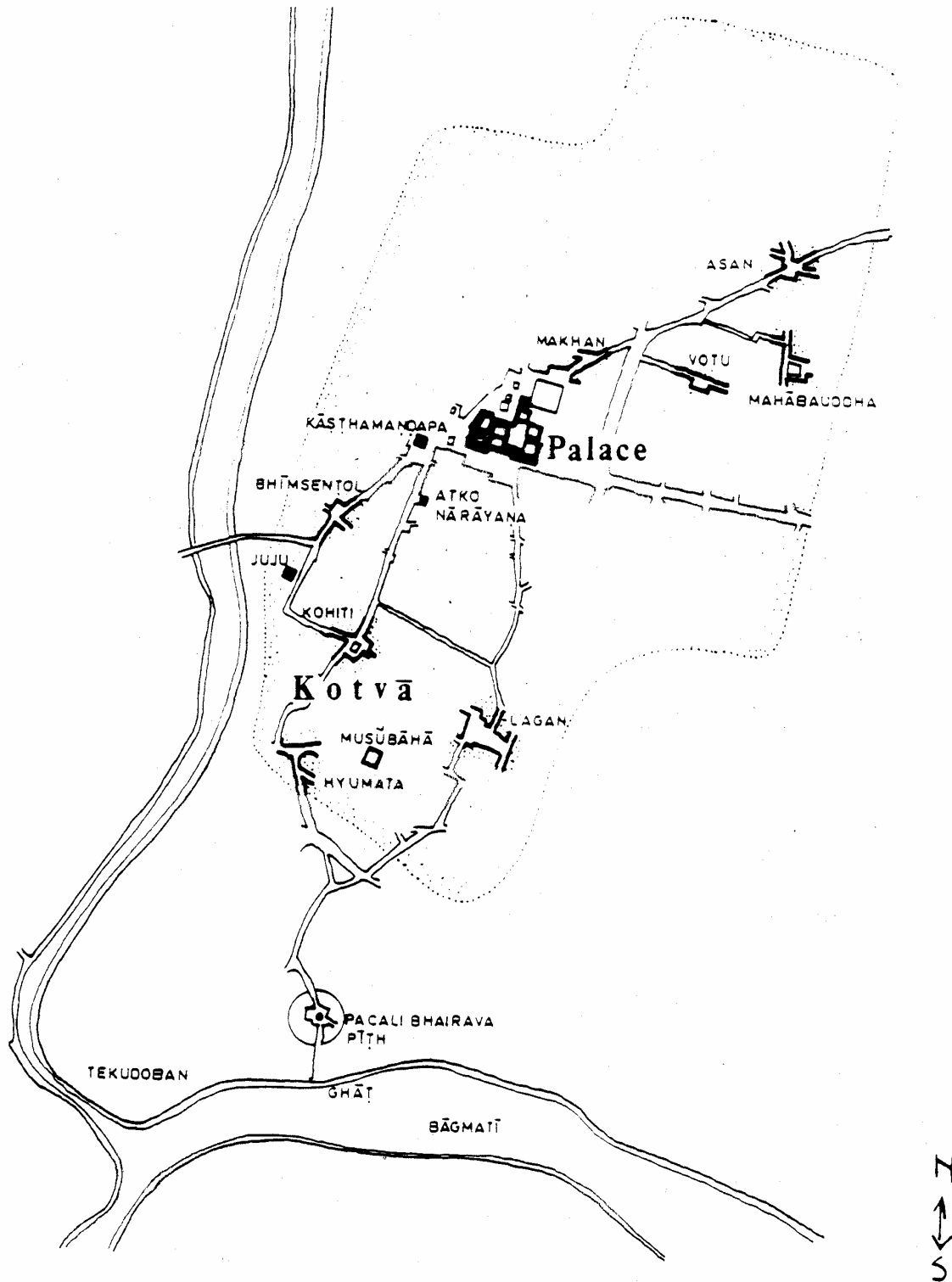


What is puzzling, already at this level of the cult, is that a Buddhist priest, (Babukaji) Vajracharya, performs the daily morning ritual, which follows that performed by the Achaju from the Hindu Jyapu caste. The relation of the Buddhists with the open-air temple of Pachali Bhairava appears to be quite ancient, for they associate this divinity with Svachchanda (Lalita) Bhairava (Malla 6). Described by Hindu Tantras used in medieval Kashmir as “white, five-faced (the embodiment of the five Brahma *mantras*) and eighteen-armed, he is worshipped with his identical consort Aghoreshvari, surrounded by eight lesser Bhairavas within a circular enclosure of cremation grounds. He stands upon the prostrate corpse of Sadashiva, the now transcended Shiva-form worshipped in the Shaiva Siddhanta” (Sanderson, “Shaivism and the Tantric Traditions” 669)

The Manandhar: Pachali Bhairava had also a very important role in the ritual life of the former caste of oil-pressers. They are Buddhists and employ a Vajracharya as a priest, but this has not prevented them from being very Hinduised and, in fact, they worship all the Hindu gods (Nepali 171). Until very recently, they used to shave the heads of their sons in the *pitha* on the fifth day of the annual festival, in a *rite de passage* by which the boys became adults integrated into their caste. The Manandhar still carry torches to light the path of the annual procession of Pachali Bhairava. According to Toffin (*Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 580), a mask of Bhairava, who is their lineage god, to be venerated only by the initiated, changes residence each year, passing successively into the house of every member of the *guthi*. This corresponds very well to what happens with the Pachali Bhairava jar among the Jyapus. Until 1885, the oil-pressers were an impure caste and their own account of the story connects their livelihood with the (accidental) killing of a child. It is hence not surprising that they should be called upon to provide the music during funeral processions. It is the Manandhar who erect the pole of Indra at Kathmandu during the Indra Yatra and who carry it, after the festival, to the cremation *ghat* near the Pachali Bhairava *pitha*.

Map 2: Katmandu: Principal sites relating to the cult of Pacali Bhairava.

[by Dr. Niels Gutschow – page 171]



#### 4. Rotation of Pachali Bhairava Jar during the Annual Festival.

During this annual festival, the Pachali Bhairava jar that is usually kept inside the closed temple is moved on the fourth day to the *pitha* (open temple). At the end of the festival, on the night of the fifth day, the Pachali Bhairava jar will be put into a different closed temple where it will stay for one year. In all, there are twelve *dyahche* (closed temples), all belonging to the Jyapu of the southern part of Kathmandu. On a rotation of twelve [~~129-130~~] years, the Jyapu are, first of all, guardians of the open temple of Pachali Bhairava for one year. They then take guardianship of the Pachali Bhairava jar in the closed temple. This heavy bronze jar, on which is engraved an image of Pachali Bhairava, measures over twenty centimetres in diameter (photo 4). The *Thakali* (eldest male member) of the Jyapu family that keeps it must perform a daily ritual in the closed temple throughout for one year.



Photo 4 The bronze jar with the encrusted image of Pachali Bhairava seated, like Svachchanda Bhairava, on a prostrate corpse. [page 172]

The annual festival of Pachali Bhairava starts on the first day of the waxing fortnight of the month of Ashvina (September-October). The jar is carried by the Jyapus from the closed temple to the house of the Chitrakar (painters) in the Jaisideval quarter, where it will remain until the fourth day. On the third day, the painters of Votu tol (quarter) come to clean the jar with a dried fruit (Newari: *phaka*). On the fourth day, the painters of Bhimsen district come to feed the god, following which the ritual offering of wine and beer (Newari: *galpay thanegu*) is performed by the *Juju*. There are thus three groups of painters, all Buddhists, involved in this annual festival. The principal role goes to the painters of the Bhimsen district, who must paint (or repaint) the eyes (Newari: *drishtikam negu*) of the divinity who is engraved on the jar (cf. *Slusser*,



*Nepal Mandala* 237). They are also responsible for decorating the door of the new *dyahche* of the Hindu Jyapus.

The *Juju* still plays the role of the sacrificer or the patron of the sacrifice (Sanskrit: *yajamana*) in the annual festival, an essential role in which this Hindu “king” is assisted by the Buddhist Sthapita or “carpenter” (Newari: *sikhami*). On the first day of the festival, it is Sthapita Panna Ratna who receives the farmers of the *dyahche* in order to give them the authorisation to carry the jar from their home to the painters. His is the responsibility of preparing all the ritual materials for the annual festival of Pachali Bhairava, and it is he who is responsible for the Mamsahuti (see below). Among other duties, he must ritually position the Pachali Bhairava jar on the altar. The obligation of participating in the annual festival was first laid upon the Sthapita by the Malla dynasty. It is a hereditary duty, passed from father to son, involving only himself and not his community. His role exceeds that of simple assistant of the *Juju*, and one often gets the impression that this Buddhist of the sub-caste of Tuladhar merchants is as much the patron of this festival as the *Juju* himself. This is in spite of the fact that Pachali Bhairava is neither his lineage divinity nor his personal divinity. Punya Ratna Vajracharya told me how the Malla kings of Patan became linked to the worship of Pachali Bhairava after the arrogant but futile attempt of their ancestor to fill the Pachali Bhairava jar with gold coins. In the “sacrifice” called *tuladana*, which was very popular till Malla times, the patron used to give his own weight in gold and in jewels to the god (*Slusser*, *Nepal Mandala* 74, 217). This Tuladhar (literally “the one who holds the scale”) could easily have been the intermediary who weighed the king for such a *atmayajna* (sacrifice of the self).

A ritual of invitation (Sanskrit: *nimantrana-puja*) is performed late in the night of the third day by the Karmacharya accompanied by the *Juju* and the Sthapita. The Karmacharya performs rituals to invoke gods both surrounding and within the *pitha*, like Ganesha and Sweto Bhairava, before proceeding to the platform (Newari: *phalca*) where the Pachali Bhairava jar will be put first. The Sthapita and the *Juju* must participate in a more elaborate ritual performed on the altar itself which is covered with flowers of a particular plant (Newari: [*<130-131>*] *kanasva*). The Sthapita must, among other things, wash the gods that are around the altar with (a pot of water which has been consecrated with) three uncut lemons (Newari: *tasi*). Having finished, the *Juju*, the Sthapita and the Karmacharya proceed northwards from the Bhairava *pitha* to perform the ritual of leave-taking (Sanskrit: *visarjana puja*) inside the Machali-pitha. Machali is, in fact, Matsyeshvari or “The Goddess of the Fish” who is identified also with one of the three Siddhilakshmis. In Nepal, there are three Siddhilakshmis: this one, another in Bhaktapur near the Akasha Bhairava temple and a third one, Purnachandi, at Patan. “The Newars, who maintain the early traditions of the region, preserve [Guhyakali’s] link with the Northern Transmission. For them Guhyakali is the embodiment of that branch of Kaulism. Linked with her in this role is the white Goddess Siddhalakshmi (always written Siddhi-Lakshmi in Nepal) one of the apotropaic deities (Pratyangira) of the *Jayadrathayamalatantra* and the patron goddess of the Malla kings (1200-1768) and their descendants” (*Sanderson*, “Shaivism and the Tantric Traditions” 684). During

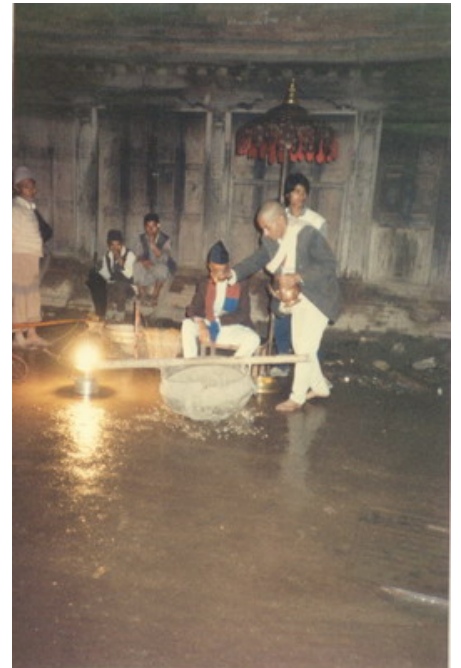
the full moon of the month of Magha (January-February), the Manandhars of the southern part of Kathmandu, along with the *Juju*, perform their *puja* to the *divali* (ancestors) inside the Machali temple. There is no doubt a close relationship between Machali and Pachali Bhairava, for the *puja paddhati* (manual) used by the Karmacharya is entitled the "Machali Pachali Yajna Vidhi." This communal worship of Pachali/Ajima/Machali-Siddhilakshmi would be an exoteric cult, as opposed to the esoteric Tantric cult of Svachchanda Bhairava/Aghoreshvari (Sanderson, oral communication, April 1990, at Harvard University).<sup>13</sup>

Photo 5 Seated Karmacharya performing puja before the closed gate of the Atko Narayan temple for the Juju, standing for his photo. [page 173]



Photo 6 Karmacharya performing kasi puja for the Juju seated in front of the kasi (brass vessel), while the two porters look on. [page 173]

The evening of the fourth day, the jar is brought from the painters' house to that of the *Juju*, who is said to have "stolen" the jar. Having performed a ritual of welcome upon its arrival, the *Juju* later leaves his home accompanied by the Karmacharya and an assistant who carries a big red umbrella, a royal attribute of the *Juju*. This group heads towards the Atko Narayana temple, the most important temple of Narayana in the southern part of Kathmandu, standing to the south of the Kashthamandapa. At the precise moment when the Indra pole is erected at Hanuman Dhoka, the *Juju* used to have a pole raised inside the precincts of Atko Narayana, the same that would later be raised at the entrance to the Pachali Bhairava *pitha*. It is also said that Atko Narayana is the son of Pachali Bhairava. The real priest of this temple, Narayana Gopala Rajopadhyaya, does not play any role and does not participate in




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<sup>13</sup> [131>] "It is certain that the Kashmiri and the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley looked out on much the same distribution and interrelation of Shaiva Tantric cults at this time, and it is highly probable that each community inherited these traditions independently by participating in a more wide-spread system, which may have included even the Tamil-speaking regions of the far south of the subcontinent" (Sanderson, "Shaivism and the Tantric Traditions" 663). [<131]

the regular worship of Pachali Bhairava. Narayana is, after all, the pure and Brahmanical form of Vishnu.

After the Karmacharya has performed a simple ritual before the closed temple gate (photo 5), two porters bring a huge brass vessel called a *kasi* (photo 6), which belongs to the *Juju*. The *kasi* is “a small earthen pot [[131-132](#)] used for storing grain or various kinds of food” (Manandhar 27). The Karmacharya draws a diagram, on top of which he places the *kasi* and performs a ritual while the Kasai play some music. The two porters then carry the *kasi* towards the Kashthamandapa, where they must circumambulate the Bhuteshvara three times. This “Master of Ghosts” is a stone in front of the Kashthamandapa, which is considered to be a manifestation of Pachali Bhairava (cf. Manandhar 45). They must also go on to circumambulate the Sweto Bhairava stone in Brahma tol while the *Juju* pauses for them to rejoin him at a specific spot on his way to the *pitha* of Pachali Bhairava. It is here that the clay jar of Pachali Bhairava was broken, which prompted the king Shivasimha Malla to have it remade in bronze.

But the actual festival starts on the fifth, with the ritual of Ka(n)-Joshi-Bwake-gu, in which a copper vessel, Kasi, large enough to accommodate four persons, is worshipped by an Achaju priest. In the former days there was a strange custom of selecting a Joshi who was one-eyed. The Joshi was carried in the copper vessel to a place known as Bhutisa, near the Gorakhnatha temple, in the heart of the city. Bhutisa means the dwelling place of ghosts and spirits. From Bhutisa, the one-eyed Joshi was carried to the temple of Pacali Bhairava at the southern end of Katmandu town ... Nowadays only the copper-pot is worshipped during which streams of water are kept flowing into it from four clay vessels called Ampah. (Nepali 347-8)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [[132](#)>] Nutan Sharma (see note 8), when he visited us in Paris in July 2003, suggested that Nepali’s statement about the “one-eyed Joshi” would be based on a misunderstanding of the Newari terms used to describe the *kasi puja*. The term would actually be *kam jasi bva-kegu* meaning the “running of an empty (*kam*) vessel” (*jasi*, not *josi*!), which certainly corresponds to the situation these days. However, it seems clear, from all the other (not just circumstantial) details surrounding the *kasi*, that what is being enacted here is the (at least symbolic) human sacrifice that was the moving principle of the Vedic sacrificial schema and had been retained (and often actualised) in its Tantric elaborations (see note [19](#) below). The (willing?) immersion of a one-eyed brahmin astrologer in the *kasi* might seem (not just ridiculous but) implausible, but so was the choice of a horribly deformed brahmin from the Atreya clan to take on the sins of the king in the Vedic *Ashvamedha* (see notes [23](#) and [29](#) below). Similarly, it is inconceivable as to how such a complex array of deformities could have been found (as prescribed) in a single person, let alone their being combined with a talent for acting, in the (admittedly ridiculous) brahmin clown of the Sanskrit theatre.

When the *Juju* arrives at the *pitha*, the jar of Pachali Bhairava has already been put upon its *phalca* (platform) under the shelter. While the *Juju* was performing the ritual to Atko Narayana and the *kasi puja*, the Jyapus remaining in his house had “stolen” back the jar. On the *phalca* there is therefore the Pachali Bhairava jar and, on the left (if you face the jar), the *patra khola* (small silver dish) that represents Ajima. Following on the heels of the *Juju*, the porters throw the *kasi* brusquely on the Vetala in human form.

Lava Ram Karmacharya, the Tantric priest has fasted and shaven his hair in order to participate in the festival. He belongs to the high-ranking Chathariya sub-division of the Sreshtha caste that had ancient royal or governmental [<132-133>] functions. His duties belonged previously to the Joshi, a fact that seems to be confirmed by the role of the one-eyed Joshi in the *kasi puja*. The Joshis, also of Chathariya caste, are astrologers. They are composed of a combination of brahmin and farmer (Vaishya) elements, and they consider themselves to be “fallen brahmins” (Nepali 156-57). There are no more Joshis at Kathmandu to officiate at the annual festival, and that is why the *Juju* resorts to the services of the Karmacharya (photo 5).

After the arrival of the Sthapita, his assistant from the Buddhist merchant caste of Tuladhars, and then of the band of Malakar musicians led by Lakshmi Narayan, the Karmacharya, seated in front the altar, begins a ritual with the Sthapita on his right and the *Juju* on his left. The Sthapita washes all the divinities around the altar three times, using a different pot each time, and the third time he puts a *tasi* (lemon) into the pot.<sup>15</sup> The Malakars continuously play a musical routine consecrated to Bhairava. Thereafter, the jar is brought from the platform to the altar along with the small bowl representing Ajima, which is carried by the *Thakali* of the temple guardians. The Vetala is covered, except for the head, with *kanasva* flowers (photo 1). A specific repertory of songs is sung in honour of Pachali Bhairava. It is at this moment that the change of

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Clearly, what preoccupied the ritualists (even when disguised as dramaturges!) — semioticians *avant la lettre* — was not so much the physical presence or absence of the human victim but the symbolic notations invested in the actors and objects of the sacrificial scenarios. In this regard, it seems perfectly plausible that the term *kam jasi/josi bva-kegu* embodies a deliberate ambiguity. In the tenth Act of the Sanskrit play, *Mricchakatika* (The Little Clay-Cart), for example, though the brahmin hero finally escapes execution in the nick of time, all the accompanying notations suggest that he (and the “evil” king!) had been put to (a symbolic) death. This “studied equivocation” is immediately repeated when the hero insists that the real villain, whom the crowd wants to substitute in his place, be *muchyate* (freed), which is precisely the Sanskrit term used by the ritualists to describe the fate of the animal when it is “liberated” (i.e., sacrificed). [<132>]

<sup>15</sup> [<133>] As in the *nimantrana-puja*. During the Bisket Yatra in Bhaktapur, for example, the leaves of this fruit are attached to the summit of the *linga* pole) that represents Bhairava. For the sacrificial equivalence of the lemon and semen in the Tamil “folk-cult” of the Kattavarayan, see Visuvalingam, “The Transgressive Sacrality of the *Dikshita*” (441). [<133>]

guardians takes place: those who have tended the *pitha* (open-air temple) throughout the year, now take charge of the Pachali Bhairava jar, again for a full year, while other guardians assume responsibility for the open-air temple. It is the Sthapita who must ritually put the jar on the altar. *Nepali* (348) has already noted that Pachali Bhairava must await the arrival of the Ka(n)-Joshi-Bwake-gu procession before being installed on the altar.

After the ritual without the Pachali Bhairava jar on the altar of the *pitha*, the Karmacharya, in the presence of the *Juju* and the Sthapita, now performs a ritual with the jar on the altar. At the end of this second ritual, the new guardians of the *pitha* put some wood in the sacrificial area for the *homa* (fire-offering). Before this, the Sthapita must fill the jar with beer and a mixture of rice and meat (Newari: *samay*). According to Slusser (*Nepal Mandala* 238), the contents from the previous year have been emptied at Panchanadi (literally “five rivers”), one of the nine auspicious places on the Bagmati river where pilgrims come to bathe during Dasain. The Pachali Bhairava jar is then sealed by the Sthapita. All kinds of virtues are attributed to this ambrosial mixture.

Photo 7 Ganesha (Purna Bahadur) sacrificing a goat in his arms before the sacrificial fire. [page 174]



It is the early hours of the morning now, and there is a huge crowd. The Sthapita lights the *homa* fire. Ganesha Purna Bahadur or Kasai, who that night incarnates Ganesha, son of Pachali Bhairava and Ajima, starts to sacrifice the goats. He

must sacrifice them in his arms while the music is now played by the Kasai (*Nepali* 245). With the animal in his arms, he first cuts its jugular vein and then cuts off its head. This is given to the Sthapita, who puts it onto a rice-filled tray beside the Karmacharya. Two goats are sacrificed, and there are therefore two heads put beside the [*<133-134>*] Karmacharya. But according the devotees of Pachali Bhairava — who cannot explain it to me — there will, in fact, be three heads of sacrificial victims. These heads are the last to be thrown into the fire. As the butcher carves the victims, the Sthapita throws the pieces of the sacrificial victims into the fire (photo 7). Hence this *homa* is called Mamsahuti (offering of meat). The *Juju* throws only some grains of rice. While meditating on the instruments of the *homa*, the Karmacharya finishes it and puts a *tika* made of soot from the sacrificial spoon onto the foreheads of the *Juju*, the *Juju's* son, the Sthapita,



and the anthropologist! The ashes of the *homa* are thrown in the Bagmati river. At the same time, some blood sacrifices are performed on the Vetala by the new guardians. The *Juju* then gives a *dakshina* (honorarium) to the Karmacharya. The Sthapita gives some rice pancakes to the *Juju* and the Karmacharya. According to Ganesha Purna Bahadur, the *homa* fire is “stolen” by the Jyapu to be brought to the temple of Sikali at Khokana near Patan. According to Anderson (160), it was once a buffalo whose blood was shed on the jar, on the sacrificial area, and all around the altar, as an offering to Pachali Bhairava. The detached head was offered to Agni, the Vedic god of Fire, and the other pieces were thrown into the fire, one by one, on behalf of the other gods.

While the Indian Ganesha has remained an auspicious and Brahmanical divinity, the Newar Ganesha regularly and publicly receives blood sacrifices during the course of their festivals. All the same, the fact that Ganesha is incarnated by a Kasai finds some justification in Hindu mythology where the birth of the elephant-trunked god is generally considered to be marked by impurity. As revealed in their origin myth, it is the impurity of the Kasai — the result of his profession of bloodletting — that gives him the right to kill the sacrificial victim (Nepali 175-77). The Kasai, who were known previously under the name of Khadgi (sword-bearers), claim to be descendants of the Shahi Thakuri, the clan to which the current royal family of Nepal belongs. The Kasai formerly performed sacrifices during the twelve-yearly festival, but they no longer do so now. Ganesha’s *dyahche*, as opposed to that of Pachali Bhairava, does not change each year but remains on the same site in the Hyumat district, where these members of the impure butcher caste live.

The *Pancha-kom* (fifth day), which is the day of the change of family among the *dyah-palah* (guardians), is also the occasion for the initiation of the Jyapu children into the adult life in their community. On the morning of the fifth day, the Jyapu bring their children, above all, their sons, into the *pitha* to perform the same tonsure-ceremony that was described above for the children of the Manandhars, who for their part have stopped performing it some ten years ago. The Jyapu make various offerings to Pachali Bhairava, asking protection for their children. The Jyapu guardians of Bhairava sacrifice, on the Vetala, the poultry offered by the devotees, while the Kasai continue to sacrifice goats all day long.

Photo 8 Gorkha infantry, in traditional (black) military uniform, escorting the king’s sword into the Pachali Bhairava *pitha*. [page 174]

On the night of the fifth day, a huge crowd is assembled in the *pitha* when the Gorkha infantry arrives escorting the sword of the king, normally kept in the Malla palace at Hanuman



Dhoka (pic. 8, see p.174).

Photo 9 Ajima, dressed in black, carries the *patra khola* against his/her chest, while in a state of trance. [page 175]

Then comes the group of Malakar musicians directed by Lakshmi Narayan [<134-135>] Malakar. Finally the Kasai musicians arrive accompanying Ganesha, the son of Pachali Bhairava and Nay Ajima (Newari: Nay = Nepali: *Kasai.*), incarnated by Ganesha Purna Bahadur. Ganesha is also called by the name of Nay Ajima, the concubine of Pachali Bhairava. Ajima is the general word, in Newari, to indicate the feminine aspect of the divinity. The Kasai procession stops before going inside the *pitha* and awaits for the astrologically auspicious moment for the meeting of father and son. When the moment arrives, the Malakar musicians come to welcome the Kasai and accompany Ganesha to his father. The ritual manifestation of jealousy between the *patra khola* (true) Ajima, dressed in black,<sup>16</sup> and Nay Ajima, dressed in white, is expressed by altercations between the Jyapu and the Kasai, followed by the inevitable reconciliation. The Pachali Bhairava jar is violently shaken when the small statue of Ganesha takes his place beside it, a sign that Ganesha (or Nay Ajima) has finally arrived. Purna Bahadur takes his place on the altar near Bhairava, and sits next to the stone representing Ganesha.



After some time the sword of the king is put on the altar, and the *Thakali* of the Jyapu receives a *tika* from the representative of the king, as do all the other members of the *guthi*. Ajima, with half-closed eyes

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<sup>16</sup> [135>] Contrary to what Anderson writes: "Ajima dressed completely in white ..." (162). As opposed to Anderson, who speaks only of Ganesha, Nepali (349) speaks only of Nay Ajima. Slusser (*Nepal Mandala* 239), for her part, confuses the two Ajimas for a single one, whom she connects with the Kasai woman of the myth. This confusion, first between Nay Ajima and Ganesha, and then between the two Ajimas, is perfectly understandable, given the fluidity of their symbolic identities at the mythico-ritual level. [<135]

and evidently in a trance state, is then carried to the altar from a nearby building (photo 9). The Jyapu, who the day before had taken on the year-long charge of the *pitha*, put a mixture of rice and meat (Newari: *samay*) under the armpits of Ajima and Ganesha, who also enters at this time into a trance. It is repeated that Ajima is not the real mother of Ganesha, but only his stepmother. Ajima is impersonated by the sister's son (Newari: *bhincha*), that is to say the nephew, of the *Thakali* (eldest male member) of the Pachali Bhairava *guthi*. If there is no nephew, the role is assumed by the husband of the *Thakali's* daughter. He must fast the whole day from the morning of the fifth, so that he can enter into a trance. His body is completely shaven, his fingernails are cut, and he takes a bath to purify himself. He must hold firmly to his chest the *patra khola*, that seems to be symbolically assimilated to a *kapala* (skull), and thus becomes possessed by the goddess Kali.

The procession — led by the Gorkha infantry and followed by the representative of the king carrying the sword, by Ganesha, by Ajima carrying the *patra khola* and, finally, by the jar of Pachali Bhairava carried by the Jyapu — moves off towards Hanuman Dhoka. It is the group of Malakars who are at the very end of this procession. They never stop playing, as their music is a part of the ritual and essential to Pachali Bhairava. The path of the procession is the one shown on map 2. During the procession, the Manandhar and the Jyapu of the southern part of Kathmandu station before their houses statues of Bhairava doing a ritual, *hathu-haye-gu*, to make rice-beer flow from Bhairava's mouth. Those who catch the small fish [[135-136](#)] previously placed in the beer are considered particularly blessed by the god (Nepali 368; Anderson 135). The Jyapu, the Kasai and the Manandhar drink enormous draughts of alcohol throughout the festival. The participants are naturally very drunk and aggressive.

Photo 10 Arrival of the Pachali Bhairava jar before Hanuman statue beside the palace-gate.





The procession arrives at Hanuman Dhoka, where the ancient Malla palace is located (pic. 13, see p.176 [photo 10]). A crowd has already gathered before the statue of the monkey-god Hanuman. We note the discreet arrival of the Kumari or virgin goddess, draped as always in red, the incarnation of the tutelary divinity of the ancient Malla kings (Allen; Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 474). Ajima and Ganesha pause for a long moment before the closed doors of the palace until a very young buffalo is offered on behalf of the king. The guards of the palace throw it very brutally through the door of the palace which they shut immediately thereafter. The buffalo is straightaway sacrificed by the Kasai, and the blood is made to spout over Ajima. A violent quarrel erupts between the Kasai and the Jyapu over the carcass of the animal. The Jyapus exultantly seize it, succeed in keeping the head, and drag away the buffalo in great haste, leaving a trail of blood along the street up to their new *dyahche*.



Photo 11 Veneration of Kumari (Virgin-Goddess), draped as always in red, during the procession before Hanuman Dhoka.

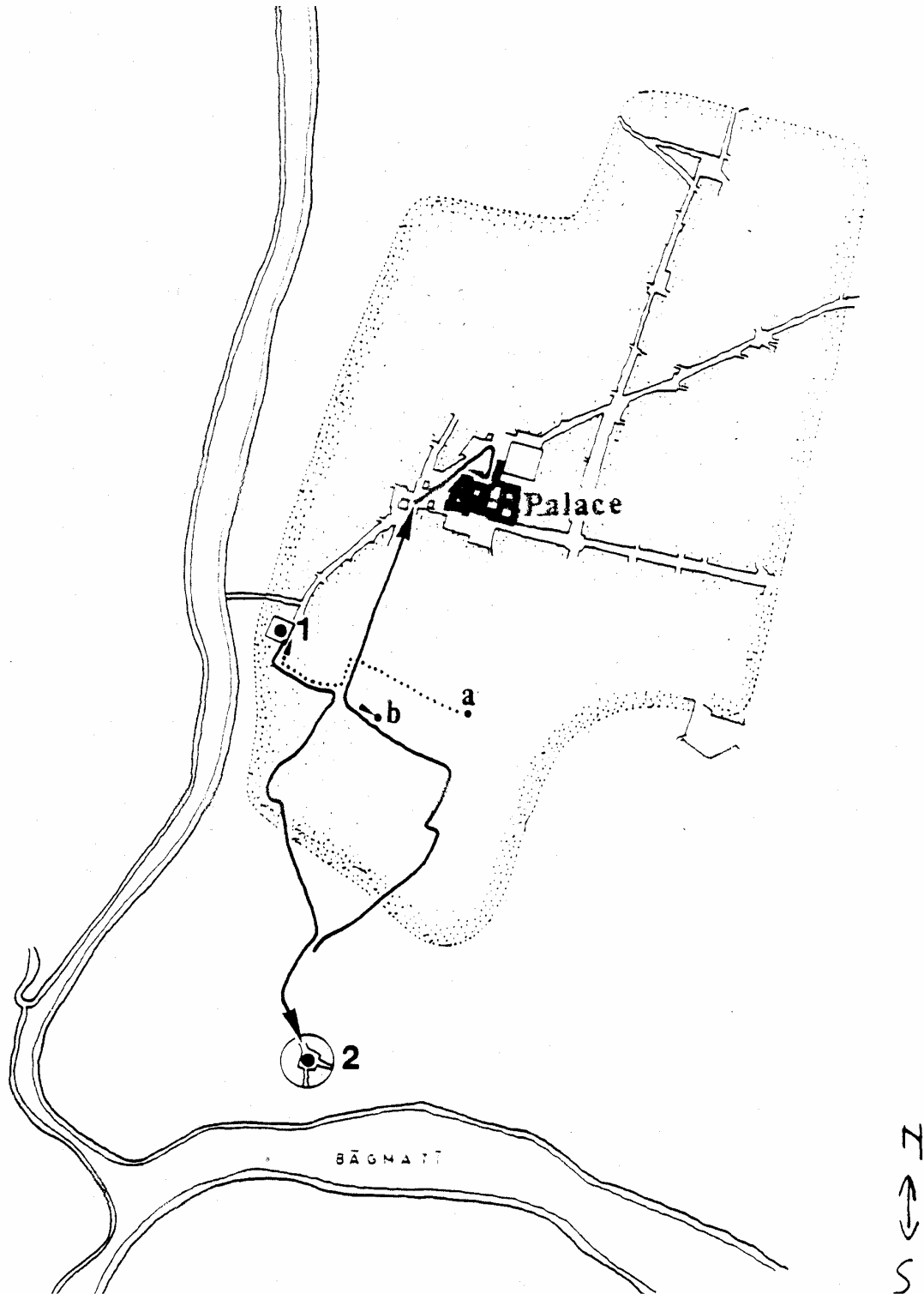
The Jyapus exploit this occasion to settle old scores with their enemies with impunity. Those Jyapus who are still carrying the jar of Pachali Bhairava, stop for a moment in front the Kumari and venerate her (photo 11). Then the Kumari, the "daughter" of Bhairava, goes back to her nearby house. The heavy jar of Pachali Bhairava is slowly carried back towards his new *dyahche* in Jaisideval, where the eldest male member of the Jyapu family charged with the closed sanctuary for this year performs the welcoming ritual upon receiving the jar and the *patra khola*. This family must give some wine to the Malakar and rice to the Sthapita, four days after the festival.

Procession Routes during the annual festival of Pachali Bhairava [map 2 by Dr. Niels Gutschow]

- 1) The *Juju's* house (Bhimsen quarter).
- 2) *Pitha* of Pachali Bhairava.
- 3) *dyahche* of Pachali Bhairava 1975-1976.
- 4) *dyahche* of Pachali Bhairava 1976-1977.

Map 3: Procession Routes during the annual festival of Pacali Bhairava.

[map by Dr. Niels Gutschow – [page 171](#)]



## 5. Khadgasiddhi or the Twelve-yearly Empowerment of the Royal Sword and the Nava Durga Dances



Photo 12 [Nabina Rajbandari: taken on Vijayadashami 1991] Bhadra-Kali (Malakar), dressed in blue (like Bhairava), prepares to exchange her reddened sword with the king of Nepal, under supervision of Badri Ratna Vajracharya (wearing black hat) and the *guru* of the Malakar dancers (wearing white turban), at the Simha-dvara.

The last twelve-year festival took place on 2 October 1987 (Ashvina 16, Bikram Samvat 2044). The most important event takes place during Dasain in the night of Navami to Vijayadashami of the month of Ashvina (September-October) during the waxing fortnight, four days after the annual festival. The Hindu king exchanges his sword with a Malakar who incarnates Bhairava. This ritual *khadgasiddhi* (empowerment of the sword) is officiated by a Buddhist priest, Badri Ratna Vajracharya. The Malakars of Kathmandu, who are all Buddhists unlike their counterparts in Bhaktapur, play the principal role in this Hindu festival. These Buddhist gardeners live at the foot of Svayambhunatha-Stupa. They claim an equality of caste with the Hindu Jyapu, a status denied to them by the latter (Nepali 169). Slusser (*Nepal Mandala* 348) even suggests that, originally, the Malakar dances also may have been annual events. The government must give quite a lot of money — one lakh (i.e., a hundred thousand) rupees in 1987 — to the Malakars who have to suspend

their normal work for nine months. The Malakars dance as much for Bhadrakali, their lineage deity (Nepali: *kuladevata*), as for Pachali Bhairava. Bhadrakali's most recent empowerment of the king's [[136-137](#)] sword took place on 18 October 1991.<sup>17</sup> (The dancer representing) Bhadrakali is dressed in blue — **like Bhairava** — during her own *khadgasiddhi* but in his/her usual red during that of Pachali Bhairava (photo 12).

It is interesting to note that the ritual calendar is the same for the Hindu gardeners who likewise incarnate the Nava Durga at Bhaktapur (cf. [Gutschow and Basukala](#) 140-52). Everything begins with the festival of Ghantakarna on the fourteenth day of the waning fortnight of the month of Shrawana (July-August). On this day, the Malakar go to the royal palace and present the king with some coins and betel before proceeding to the *dyahche* of Pachali Bhairava. The *guru* of the dancers, Lakshmi Narayana Malakar, performs a ritual with the members of their *guthi* and the dancers. There are altogether thirteen dancers: Bhairava (always in blue), Simhini, Vyaghrini, Ganesha, Kumar, Chamunda (Ajima), Varahi, Indrayani, Vaishnavi, Kaumari, Mahalakshmi, Brahmayani and Rudrayani. This troop is referred to in Newari by the general term *gathu* (gardener) *pyakha* (dance). The dancer who incarnates Bhairava will become the guru of the dancers at the next twelve-year festival. After Ghantakarna, there is a two-hour daily instruction in the dances at the *dyahche* where rituals are performed on Saturdays and on the fourteenth day of each fortnight. Ghantakarna is the demon whose grotesque effigies are used to expel evil from all the quarters of Newar towns ([Nepali](#) 377-79; [Anderson](#) 72-76; [Toffin](#), *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 518). His is also one of three festivals when the Pachali Bhairava jar is cleaned inside his *dyahche* (*supra* on page 28). At the Asan tol crossroads, it is the mask of Akasha Bhairava, which temporarily plays this scapegoat role before going back to its temple. The symbolic role of "scapegoat," so closely associated with the divine king, seems to be inscribed into the very calendar of the *khadgasiddhi*.

During the Navami (ninth day) of the waxing fortnight of the month of Ashvina, the Malakars sacrifice a buffalo to Pachali Bhairava in the *dyahche*. Then the dancers go to the *pitha* to perform a ritual on the altar. They are accompanied by the *pancha-kanya* (five virgins) who are, in fact, the wives of the *guru* of the dancers, of Bhairava, of Kaumari, and of the two musicians. The role of the *pancha-kanya* seems to correspond to that of the royal Kumari in the annual festival, and the importance of a mystic "virginity"

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<sup>17</sup> [[137](#)] I was unable to witness the Pachali Bhairab *khadgasiddhi* in 1987. As for that of Bhadrakali in October 1991, G. Toffin refused to fund a requested research-mission to Kathmandu and told me on his visit to Harvard, where I was researching at the time, that he was planning to study the festival himself (see note 32). However, our Newar friend, Nabina Rajbandari, who was in Kathmandu at the time, kindly offered to attend and take some photos for us. The principal participants were also very forthcoming regarding the details of the festival. [[137](#)]

explains the inclusion of the wife of the dancer who incarnates Kaumari. There is, in fact, in the Newar pantheon another goddess called Panchakaumari (Five Virgins) — often identified with Balakaumari (Child-Virgin) — who is represented by five stones and who seems to be very much connected, conceptually, with Pachali Bhairava (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 334-37). Tika Bhairava in the south of the Valley, for instance, has Bala and Jaya-Kaumari as wives. The numeric base of five is [[137-138](#)] fundamental to the conception and the worship of Pachali Bhairava. Kumara-Karttikeya, whose *shakti* (feminine power) is incarnated by (the different forms of) Kaumari, is the god of war par excellence, which accords well with the martial significance of the festival of Vijayadashami for the Hindu king.

At twilight, the Malakars visit the painters of Bhimsen tol to receive their masks. Prem Chitrakar began the fabrication of the masks nine months before the ritual exchange of swords and at a time that had been astrologically calculated. The painters of the Bhimsen district made these masks from some earth collected near the *dyahche* of Pachali Bhairava and brought to them by the Malakars, who also pay for the same. The dancers then return to the open *pitha* and place their masks on the altar.

The Malla kings had two appointed priests, a Hindu *Purohita* and a Buddhist Vajracharya. Tales are still told today of the legendary exploits of Lambakarna Bhatta and Jamana Guvaju, the two Tantric priests in the entourage of Pratapamalla (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 74, 290, 292, 359). Badri Ratna Vajracharya is responsible not only for the *khadgasiddhi* of Pachali Bhairava but also for the *khadgasiddhi* of Bhadrakali. The latter also takes place every twelve years during the early hours of Vijayadashami (photo 12), but at the Simha-dvara, the lion-door near Indra Chowk, one of the eighteen gates that had surrounded the ancient Kantipura which is now Kathmandu. The *khadgasiddhi* of Pachali Bhairava is more recent than that of Bhadrakali, and this primacy of the Shakti or feminine aspect is also attested in the Bisket Yatra at Bhaktapur: it is only after his decapitation that (Kala) Bhairava (Kashi Vishvanatha), drawn by curiosity from Benaras, would have been integrated into a festival originally consecrated to Bhadrakali alone. The hereditary charge of performing the ritual exchange of swords is reserved for Badri Ratna's family alone, as it was their ancestor who would have brought Bhadrakali from Assam to Kathmandu. The Buddhist priests would have chosen the Malakars as dancers because they are easily possessed by the divinities. Badri Ratna Vajracharya is the official priest of the Malakars of Kathmandu. He performs all the life-cycle and other rituals of these avowedly Buddhist gardeners.

Late in the night Badri Ratna Vajracharya arrives to consecrate the masks, and then proceeds to purify the dancers. Then he, this Buddhist priest, performs a *homa* in the sacrificial area of the *pitha*. After this *homa*, he puts a *purna-kalasha* (vase of plenty) in the sacrificial area and another pot called *nasa-kalasha* in front of the altar. The *nasa-kalasha* represents *Nasa dya* or (Shiva) Nataraja, the god of dance (Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 488). The spirit of the divinities must first enter the *purna-kalasha*. Then Badri Ratna Vajracharya must "stabilise" Pachali Bhairava in the sword of the Bhairava



dancer as follows. Holding in his right hand a *vajra*, he grasps in his left hand a cord that ties the *purna-kalasha* to the sword, which has been placed on the altar. He invites Pachali Bhairava into the sword using various *mantra* (sacred formulae). The dancers then put on their robes and go up to the altar. The Bhairava dancer seizes the sword and the entire troupe goes directly to the Kashthamandapa, where the *khadgasiddhi* takes place (photo 13). It is already the “tenth (day of the waxing fortnight consecrated to the Goddess), [*<138-139>*] the day of Victory” or Vijayadashami, which is the culminating day of the Dasain celebrations (Toffin, “Culte des déesses et fête du Dasāi chez les Néwar (Népal)” 55-81).

Photo 13 [Tej Ratna Tamrakar: taken on 4th October 1987]. Bhairava (Malakar) prepares to exchange his sword with the king, around the Bhuteshvara-stone, under the supervision of the Vajracharya (black hat) and the *guru* of the Malakar dancers (white turban).



The exchange of swords takes place during the early hours of the Vijayadashami in front of the Kashthamandapa, precisely at Bhuteshvara. The King’s sword or *mula-khadga*, usually kept in the Malla palace at Hanuman Dhoka, is brought by Tej Ratna Tamrakar, the head of the palace’s administrative affairs or *hakkim*, to the Kashthamandapa. The *Hakkim* takes his place behind the chief priest (Sanskrit: *mulacharya*) of the Taleju temple, but in front of other *guthis* carrying their own swords. Upon the arrival of the king (accompanied by the queen in 1988), the Malakars begin to dance and the royal sword is handed over to the king. Badri Ratna Vajracharya intervenes at this point and orders the Bhairava dancer to stand up on the Bhuteshvara stone (photo 14). Having exchanged his own sword for that of the king, Bhairava

dances at the four corners of Kashthamandapa, all the while brandishing the royal sword and making it understood through his gestures that he is conferring upon it a very special power. This exchange of swords between the king and the Bhairava dancer standing on Bhuteshvara is repeated three times to the accompaniment of very potent music played by the Malakars. The Nepali king and his kingdom are thereafter under a very special protection. The *khadgasiddhi* is in many ways reminiscent of a similar ceremony during the ancient Vedic sacrifice of Rajasuya (engendering a king)(Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* 133; cf. Toffin, *Les aspects religieux de la royauté néwar au Népal* 62n13).

Photo 14 [Tej Ratna Tamrakar: taken on 4th October 1987]. Bhairava, standing on the Bhuteshvara-stone, exchanges his reddened sword with the king, under the supervision of the Vajracharya and the *guru* of the Malakar dancers.



Even if the cult of Pachali Bhairava, strictly speaking, involves only the inhabitants of the southern part of Kathmandu, where his *dyahche* is located (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 91), all Nepalis consider themselves in some way to be the devotees of Pachali Bhairava. The current king of the Shah Dynasty participates in the *khadgasiddhi* — as an integral part of the Hindu festival of Dasain — just as he participates in other Newar royal festivals, above all the Indra Yatra. He is merely carrying on with a religious policy adopted from the beginning by his ancestor Prithvi Narayana Shah. This unifier and founder of modern Nepal captured Kathmandu in 1768 during the Indra Yatra just as the Kumari was about to give the legitimising *tika* to the last Malla king. Instead it was Prithvi Narayana who received it amidst popular applause (Toffin, *Les aspects religieux de la royauté néwar au Népal* 61). The Shah king and his Indo-Nepalese brahmin counsellors seem to have very well understood the ritual meaning of the Newar festivals, despite the “strangeness” of these festivals with regard to the norms of classical Hinduism. Even before his conquest of the Valley, Prithvi Narayana had been a devotee of the Newar Bhairavi of Nuwakot — to the northwest of Kathmandu — whence he had launched his attacks against the Mallas. The Dhami of Nuwakot, a Jyapu of the Dangol sub-caste, still wears royal insignia given by the Shah king of Kathmandu, and enters into a trance each year in order to incarnate Bhairava and renew the whole kingdom (Chalier-Visuvalingam,



*Étude préliminaire du culte de Bhairava dans la Vallée de Katmandou*; and *Étude des fêtes* 44-65; Chali-Visuvalingam and [[139-140](#)] Visuvalingam, "Bhairava and the Goddess" 285-94).

Photo 15 [Tej Ratna Tamrakar]. Bhairava (Malakar) leads the Nava Durga dances in the court-yard of Nasa Cok within the old Malla palace at Hanuman Dhoka.

The dances of the twelve-year festival continue for nine months, and end during the month of Ashadha (June-July) on the eighth day of the waning fortnight or *krishnashtami*, more exactly, during the night called *bhalabhalashtami*. In this way, the Malakars dance, among other places, in the inner courtyard of the southern *Juju's* house, in front of the northern *Juju's* house (in the quarter called Asan) and above all in Nasa Cok inside the Malla palace at Hanuman Dhoka (photo 15). The dancers must dance thirty-three times in all, of which ten take place outside Kathmandu, including at Patan and at Bhaktapur. The Malakars can also be invited to dance in individual homes.

The second to last dance is a very particular and comic one, the dance of Sweto Bhairava, in which the well-known theme of *nyalakegu* (Newari), "catching fish," recurs (Levy 127-29). During the Nava Durga dances of Bhaktapur, for example, this *Sweto* (white) faced Bhairava "must try to empty out a basket of fishes over the heads of the spectators. Such an act is a very bad omen, and so the people scatter in front of Bhairava, all the while taunting him" (Toffin, "Culte des déesses et fête du Dasaĩ chez les Néwar (Népal)" 66). But behind this "semblance of humour" lies the symbolism of human sacrifice in which Sweto Bhairava has the role both of victim and of sacrificer. The dance takes place in Brahma tol where there is a stone corresponding to the representation of Sweto Bhairava inside the *pitha* of Pachali Bhairava. It may be recalled that during the annual festival the *kasi* must make a detour in order to circumambulate this stone before rejoining the *Juju* at the place where the clay jar representing Pachali Bhairava had been broken (Toffin, "Culte des déesses et fête du Dasaĩ chez les Néwar (Népal)" 34). The procession to the royal palace also circumambulates the stone, which had been established by a Rajopadhyaya from Bhaktapur who is also the patron of this dance. Pachali Bhairava, the meat-eating god, becomes Sweto Bhairava in the house of the brahmin, accepting only vegetarian offerings. No blood sacrifice is allowed. The Rajopadhyaya, however, does make some meat offerings to the other dancers. We recognise here very clearly the Brahmanical pole of the cult of Pachali Bhairava, the pure pole that forbids blood sacrifices even on the altar of his *pitha*.



The last dance, which takes place in the Jaisideval quarter in the Bhusa Nani Baha, is a *puja* representing the death of the divinities. Bhairava, Ajima (Bhadrakali) and Varahi are arranged to form a triangle around some *sija*, rice offered to the dead. The importance accorded to (Vajra) Varahi in this last dance is probably connected to the fact that she is the consort, among others, of Chakrasamvara, the Vajrayana Buddhist equivalent of Bhairava. While the Malakar play music, the dancers throw *sija* into the triangle three times. On the second throwing, all the divinities die except these three, who will wait to die at the last casting of rice. The Malakars, holding their masks in their hands, circumambulate a *hiti* (fountain) near the Kashthamandapa, and then head towards the *pitha* of Pachali Bhairava. Showing signs of great weakness, the dancers place their masks on the altar. Lakshmi Narayan Malakar starts a *puja* during which he puts meat offerings onto the altar and gives drinks to the dancers. The drinks revive them, so that they are able to participate in the *puja*. Finally they [*<140-141>*] proceed to the cremation ground of Tekudoban. While the Malakar play music for the dead or *si baja*, the Bhairava dancer burns the masks. The ashes are not conserved to make new masks, as in Bhaktapur, but are thrown into the Bagmati river. There is no period of impurity after this incineration: the dancers must only wash their faces and hands before taking wine and *samay* (a mixture of meat) inside the *pitha*. The dresses are torn into many pieces, which become precious relics for the devotees of Bhairava. After four days, they must perform a last *puja* on the altar, to which all the members of the *guthi* of Pachali Bhairava are invited. These dances merit an entire study by themselves, but it is already evident that death — real or symbolic — is at the centre of the cult of (Pachali) Bhairava.<sup>18</sup>

## 6. Socio-Political Levels in the Sacrificial Schema

The annual festival of Pachali Bhairava is based on the Hindu sacrificial schema, where there reappears the ancient theme of the theft of the Fire and *Soma* (ambrosia), represented in the present case by the jar of beer. The three roles of Vedic sacrifice remain: the patron of the ceremony, the divinities and

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<sup>18</sup> [*<141>*] Thus, commenting, in his Introduction, on Toffin's contribution on the (regeneration every twelve years of the) Nava Durga cult at the village of Theco, Axel Michaels observes that some of the dancers "have to swing their heads continuously, for anyone who looks into their eyes for too long would have to die immediately. It is believed that during the festival one person a year dies in the village or its neighborhood. The goddesses are thought to have 'eaten' the unfortunate person" (29). In fact, the displacements and operations to which the *kasi* is subjected (see note 14) clearly suggest that it is the (substitute for the) king-divinity (see note 1, again, for Toffin's earlier objections), who is being sacrificed (and symbolically consumed) during the annual Pachali Bhairava festival. [*<141>*]

the officiants.<sup>19</sup> It is possible to distinguish three socio-political levels that correspond to the daily ritual, the annual festival and the twelve-year festival. At the daily level, Pachali Bhairava is a lineage deity belonging particularly to the Jyapu of southern Kathmandu while also playing an important role for the Kasai, Manandhar, etc. The *Juju* does no more than offer a *puja* tray every Saturday, and the current Nepali king does not participate at this level at all. In the twelve-year festival, Bhairava reveals himself to be a royal divinity, and it is a Buddhist Vajracharya who supervises the exchange of swords. By dancing in front of the house of the northern *Juju* and elsewhere in the Valley, the Malakars extend the symbolic power of the king far beyond the southern part of Kathmandu. The Rajopadhyaya, who is the patron of the dance of Sweto Bhairava at Brahma tol, comes from Bhaktapur. Although centred in Kathmandu, the symbolic kingship of Pachali Bhairava seems to extend even beyond Patan to the whole Valley and, now, embraces the modern state of Nepal. The Jyapu have no role in this festival. In their annual festival, however, the Kasai, the Sthapita, and the Chitrakar all take part; the Malakar continue to play an important role and [[141-142](#)] the ritual sword of the ancient Mallas is brought to consecrate the *pitha* of Pachali Bhairava with the seal of kingship.

What seems problematic is this intermediate level, which is also the richest, in which the *Juju* — acting as “sub-king” — is seconded by the Sthapita. To the minor role of the *Juju* during the *khadgasiddhi* corresponds the Sthapita’s role of “co-patron” in the annual festival. Having received his charge from the Mallas, he probably represents the king at the *Juju*’s side during the annual festival. The Sthapita must be present at the twelve-year festival, and it is perhaps the direct participation of the king — be he Malla or Shah — in the *khadgasiddhi* that reduces his role to that of mere witness. By centralising the politics of the kingdom, the Malla apparently sought to integrate the ancient dualist structure through an adaptation of its ritual basis. That is why the patron of the annual festival is not only the southern *Juju*, but also the real king, represented by his sword and above all through the person of the Sthapita.

But the annual festival is also, and above all, the occasion for the transfer of (the *dyahche* and *pitha* of) Pachali Bhairava to a new Jyapu family. We see a rotation among the *Thakali* (“elders”) of the twelve

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<sup>19</sup> For the Hindu sacrificial schema, cf. Biardeau and Malamoud; and, in the Newar context, cf. Toffin, “Analyse structurale d’une fête communale néwar.” Malamoud had objected to Elizabeth’s derivation/assimilation — during her thesis-defense — of the Newar poles (including the *linga*) as the place of blood-sacrifice from/to the Vedic *yupa*, because the victim was not immolated at the stake in the classical brahmanical sacrifice. Not only have we (Chalier-Visuvalingam and Visuvalingam, “Bhairava and the Goddess” 256n2) responded to this objection, but Malamoud himself demonstrates now in his latest book (*Le jumeau solaire*) how human sacrifices in the (even contemporary) Tantric and folk context have their pedigree and theoretical model in the Vedic sacrificial thought. [[141](#)]

families that constitute this particular clan of farmers. The fact that Bhairava is often referred to as *Aju Dya* (ancestor or grandfather) among the Newar, supports the conclusion that this Hindu god has served in the assimilation of lineage divinities deriving from the tribal “infra-structure” (or rather, origins) of Newar society (cf. Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 589-90). Even the north-south partition of Kathmandu (and of Bhaktapur and other Newar villages) corresponds well to the dualist organisation characteristic of tribal societies. The institution of the “double-kingdom” already in Licchavi times, and its legitimisation by the *Arthashastra*, suggest that this “political” process of Hinduisation, which would have commenced from the very beginnings of Nepalese history, was, in the past, important in India as well. The imposing figure of Bhimsen-Bhairava flanked by Arjuna seems to reflect the transformation of a tribal leader into an exemplary Hindu king. The maternal uncle/uterine nephew relationship between the *Thakali* and the person representing Ajima finds its parallel in the relationship between the two kings. It would seem therefore that, like the *Juju* and the Sthapita, the *Thakali* also represents the sacrificer.

Though “co-opted” by the Hindu sacrificial system, the Jyapu who incarnates Ajima still maintains the state of possession that is so important in the Tantric worship of Kali and of Bhairava. This function of trance is institutionalised at the properly royal level in the person of the Malakar who incarnates Pachali Bhairava. The choice of the Malakar to incarnate the impure god seems to be dictated by two conflicting requirements. The three castes responsible for the annual festival of Pharping — the Kusle, the Kasai and especially the Pore, among whom the mask of Pachali Bhairava circulates — are all untouchables. In principle, the “possessed” should belong to the lowest castes of untouchables. But this would prevent the exercise of his public functions, which put him in physical contact not only with the king — to whom he gives the *tika* — and the *Juju*, but also with the totality of the other [[142-143](#)] higher castes, including the Rajopadhyaya. The task of representing the Nava Durga at Bhaktapur was given to the Malakars only after the divinities shredded a pig into pieces in order to prevent their Tantric master, a Rajopadhyaya brahmin, from catching them (Levy 110). The choice of a marginally pure caste to incarnate Bhairava is thus the result of a compromise between the requirement of impurity — the source of power — and the requirements of the public context that does not allow the explicit valorisation of the impurity. In the final analysis, the Bhairava-Malakars represent nothing less than the hidden transgressive dimension of the Hindu king himself.

The Buddhist Malakars, who claim to equal the Hindu Jyapus, seem to represent the latter in some way at the royal level. The Jyapus may also have been Buddhist until fairly recently. This would be confirmed by the role still played by the Sakyas, Chitrakars and the Vajracharyas even at the level of daily worship. In spite of the Shaiva (re-)assimilation of Vajrayana Tantrism during the Malla period, two-thirds of the Newar population remained Buddhist even into the nineteenth century (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 286-93). The process of Hinduisation is particularly visible among the Manandhar, who are still Buddhists (supra29). This would explain the choice of the Buddhist Sthapita to represent the Hindu Malla king among his Jyapu subjects. The Hindu nucleus of the Pachali Bhairava cult is found rather at the intermediary level around the *Juju* and (his

relations with) the Kasai. The well-known “conservatism” of the Jyapu would consist rather of their having maintained, first under a Buddhist and then under a Hindu facade, the tribal infrastructure of their socio-ritual organisation. What matters is that this “Buddhist” cult of Svachchanda (Lalita) Bhairava has remained deeply Vedic in its sacrificial structure and already profoundly Hinduised in its contents. It is on this basis that the Malla and the Shah Kings — always directed by a Vajracharya — have been able to play the role of the royal patron in the cult of Pachali Bhairava.

The choice of a Buddhist priest to officiate at the essentially Hindu worship of Bhairava — and especially at the royal level — is not an isolated fact. For instance, it is a Vajracharya of Kathmandu who conducts the Bhairava Yatra at Nuwakot, a festival very much connected, on the symbolic level, with Nepalese kingship (Chalier-Visuvalingam, *Étude des fêtes*). The fact that the king — even one who calls himself “Hindu” in public — transcends sectarian differences, is not enough to explain this phenomenon. It seems that these Vajracharya brahmins, more numerous among the Newars than the Rajopadhyayas, have preserved certain esoteric traditions much better than their Hindu counterparts. It is thus Asakaji Vajracharya who gave me the details concerning the eight cremation grounds associated with the eight Bhairavas of the Valley (cf. Chalier-Visuvalingam, *Étude des fêtes* 29). Vajrayana Tantrism has borrowed a great deal from left-handed Shaivism, and some of its divinities such as Heruka, Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi, were conceived after the model of (Vajra) Bhairava and of Kali. The ritual paradigms are unchanged (Sanderson, “Vajrayana”). Tantric *abhisheka* (consecrations) — both on the Hindu and the Buddhist sides — are charged with connotations of kingship. Even when [<143-144>] Bhairava is not, strictly speaking, the personal divinity of the Vajracharya concerned, it is only a question of adapting the Buddhist rituals to the Hindu context of their patrons. It is precisely during the Vijayadashami that the Khadga Yatra (sword-processions) takes place, during which the Vajracharya priests, trembling in a state of trance and accompanied by the Ashtamatrikas (eight mothers), brandish swords charged with divine power and (pretend to) attack the spectators (Anderson 153-54). The *khadgasiddhi* itself may be understood as the exteriorisation of the trance state experienced during transgressive rituals performed secretly in extreme left-handed Tantrism.

What is striking, however, is especially the manner in which the three socio-political levels have been integrated — by superposing the three *yajamana* (sacrificers), namely the *Thakali*, the *Juju* and the King — in order to constitute a single all-inclusive cult. It is worth noting that the *khadgasiddhi* coincides with a complete rotation of Pachali Bhairava among the twelve Jyapu families, as if this clan constituted in itself a mini-kingdom. This integration of top and bottom is revealed most fully at the intermediary level, which explains the importance still accorded to the *Juju* today. It is the same sacrificial schema that underlies both the renewal of the political power of the king and the accession of the Jyapu children to their full communal rights. The theme of “stealing” is common to the Jyapu and the *Juju* and even a Westerner like Gehrts Wagner was required literally to steal a goat in order to complete his initiation into a musicians’ guild in

Bhaktapur. The myths about Pachali Bhairava do not hesitate to draw parallels between the Jyapu Bhairava of the annual festival and the royal Bhairava of the Indra festival (*supra* 22). That is why the rotation of the jar among the houses of the *Thakali* must necessarily make the “detour” not only through the house of the *Juju* but also before the Hanuman Dhoka palace. Thus, what seems to be at the centre of the festival is not so much the political power of the king — be he Malla or Shah — but rather the “king” as a symbolic locus shared in a hierarchic way also by the *Juju* and the *Thakali*, not to mention the other actors who take part in this great ritual drama which is the cult of Pachali Bhairava. The king is, after all, only the *yajamana* par excellence, and his pre-eminence at a political level could have been contested at any moment by historical vicissitudes. The king-dominator — who is also, let us not forget, the king-victim — is, above all, the symbolic knot tying together the invisible threads which unite the whole of Nepalese society (cf. Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 592-93).<sup>20</sup>

## 7. Pachali Bhairava in the Hindu Pantheon: Kingship and Transgression

In my essay “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide: the Problem of the Mahabrahmana,” I have borrowed the theory of transgression — elaborated by [ <144-145> ] Sunthar Visuvalingam (“Transgressive Sacrality in the Hindu Tradition”; and “The Transgressive Sacrality of the *Dikshita*”) on the basis of the semiotics of the clown of Sanskrit theatre — to frame a sacrificial model of Hindu kingship that converges on essential points with the problematic posed by two articles of G. Toffin (“Les aspects religieux de la royauté néwar au Népal”; and “Dieux souverains et rois dévots dans l’ancienne royauté de la Vallée du Népal”). These articles not only call into question the overly static and linear social hierarchy of Louis Dumont, but they also raise the question of the well attested identification of the Newar king with Bhairava. One may nevertheless wonder how the royal Bhairava can be integrated into the Hindu pantheon amidst such sovereign gods as Indra, Shiva and Vishnu. I shall conclude my section of this essay by showing how the cult of Bhairava can be deciphered precisely on the basis of the respective claims of these sovereign gods to kingship.

The festivals of Pachali Bhairava — and perhaps the ritual life of the Newars in general — are part of a royal cosmogony, representing the symbolic death and re-birth of the king as the sacrificer par excellence. The “pre-classical” *diksha* turned the sacrificer into an impure being, filled with a “dangerous sacrality”

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<sup>20</sup> [ <144> ] Bear in mind that this concluding thought was penned in 1991, well before the patricidal assassination of king Birendra on 1 June 2001, and the upsurge of Maoist “terrorism” so representative of the centrifugal forces now threatening to tear the nation apart. While it is fashionable these days to decry the autocratic aspects of traditional kingship, insufficient attention has been paid to its unifying and “individuating” (borrowing the term here from Carl Jung) role at the symbolic level. [ <144> ]



(Heesterman, "Vratya and Sacrifice" 12-15). On the first day of the Pachare festival (*supra* page 128), the pure Shiva-Pashupati, Nepal's royal and "national" god par excellence, becomes Luku Mahadeva who was hidden all year long in a heap of rubbish like a *pishacha* (unclean demon), in order to receive offerings otherwise forbidden. He is worshipped by everybody, the non-Shaivaite Hindus and Buddhists included, which shows that this is not a sectarian phenomenon. Pachare is a festival of mother-goddesses involving Pachali Bhairava and above all his consort Bhadrakali. On the second day, the Nepali king would come, preceded by the Kumari on her white horse, in order to venerate Bhadrakali (*supra* page 123). This ritual core gave birth to the "festival of horses," or Ghoda-Yatra, on the Tundikhel field, that is still organised by the army and presided over by the king of Nepal (Anderson 263-71; Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 232, 317, 338, 342-44). The basic elements of Pachali Bhairava worship, such as the *khadgasiddhi* or the perpetual fire, do not derive from a single Vedic sacrifice, such as the Rajasuya or the *Agnihotra*, but rather from the whole of the sacrificial system. The Ashvamedha or "horse sacrifice," reserved solely for triumphant emperors, had certainly disappeared centuries earlier from the Indian scene, but its ritual paradigm still seems to order the life of the Nepalese people.

The Tantric divinity Bhairava has taken on all the symbolism of the royal sacrificer who, during the Ashvamedha, would return to an "embryonic state" in the impure world of Varuna.<sup>21</sup> This explains why Bhairava is often represented by a pot symbolising the [<145-146>] womb (cf. Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 352). The importance given to the eyes engraved on the pot underlines this assimilation (see page 130). There is no need to resort to psychoanalysis to understand this symbolism, because the "thousand eyes" that Indra, the *netra-yoni*, bears on his own body are explicitly identified with the vagina by the Hindu tradition itself. The *tasi* (lemon) that, as in India, symbolises death and semen, condenses an entire embryonic process (see note 15); so too does the association of Matsyeshvari (see page 131), of the Sweto Bhairava

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<sup>21</sup> [<145>] For king as the sacrificer, cf. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition* 27, 92 and chs. 2, 3; also cf. "Vratya and Sacrifice." My use of the term "embryonic" is taken from Kuiper's "Cosmogony and Conception: A Query":

In the light of the current parallelism between myth and ritual, however, it should be noted that in the Vedic ritual of the initiation (*diksha*), the *dikshita* must again become an embryo ... in order to be reborn. The dangerous and inauspicious character of the *dikshita* while being tied ... must probably be explained from his being in Varuna's realm. The same notion of rebirth also underlies the statement of the ritual texts that the sacrificer by sacrificing regenerates his own self. (*Ancient Indian Cosmogony* 116). [<145>]



dance (see page 140), and of the Hathu-haye-gu (see page 135-36), with fish (cf. Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 376). It was during the conjunction called the *matsyodari-yoga* (fish-womb), when Benaras was enveloped, like an embryo, by the maternal waters of the Ganga, that the Kapalika Bhairava was liberated from his brahmanicide by coming out from a pond named Kapalamochana (Chalier-Visuvalingam, "Bhairava's Royal Brahmanicide" 177-83). The Vedic king also emerged from a basin — from his death-like condition — by discharging his impurity onto a deformed scapegoat with whom he was identified.

The *jumbaka* had to be a brahmin, charged with evil, and the king himself was reborn as a brahmin on receiving the *diksha* (Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* 56, 78, 137, 160, 161 and n.25).<sup>22</sup> The purity of the brahmin and the impurity of Bhairava seem to form the two extremes of the dialectic of the transgression that transforms the royal adept into a *maha-brahmana* (a brahmin par excellence). While the impurity of the royal *dikshita* is expressed through his identification with Bhairava as incarnated by the Malakar, his "brahmin-hood" is rather represented by his supposed "son" the god Ganesha. The true aspect of the "beautiful" Bhairava is as grotesque as that of the *jumbaka*, and he is as gluttonous as the *sarva-bhakshaka* (omnivorous) Ganesha. It is Bhairava himself who is (re) born as Ganesha from the womb of Ajima, who would have the same role here as the sacrificer's wife in the Vedic paradigm. What is more, the violent shaking of the jar at the precise moment of Ganesha's arrival confirms that it is Pachali Bhairava who also plays the role of the "mother" by giving birth to himself. Finally — and despite the distribution of roles at the social level of the festival — Bhairava, Ganesha and Ajima are a single symbolic entity derived explicitly from an embryonic process. That is why Ganesha — who himself has a belly like a jar (*kumbhodara*, *lambodara*, *mahodara*, etc., the last being also the name of one Vidushaka) — is explicitly identified with his own mother (Nai) Ajima (cf. note 16). The crucial point here is that, despite the absence of the *purohita* and the practical effacement of the brahmins, as strictly defined, from this Newar festival, the hold of Brahminism is exercised above all at the symbolical level. The mythico-ritual universe mediated by the classical brahmin largely surpasses both his social body and the insistence on purity that forms the basis of the Hindu hierarchy.

Indra is the king as *yajamana* (sacrificer) par excellence, forming a couple in this regard with the *purohita* (officiating brahmin) who directs him through the rituals of sacrifice. In offering himself to the divinity through [<146-147>] the intermediary of a victim tied to the sacrificial post, the Vedic king renewed his kingdom through his own rebirth. It is through this sacrificial violence, assimilated to a brahmanicidal killing of his *purohita* Vishvarupa, that the warrior-god of Dumézil's second function universalises himself ritually so as to annex not only the third function (fertility) but also the first function (sovereignty). Just as

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<sup>22</sup> [<146>] For the constant assimilation of the Hindu king — and of the brahmin — to an untouchable, see Shulman; and Gomes da Silva. [<146>]

the sacrificer is bound by the cords of Varuna, the statuettes of Indra, wound with strings, are placed during the Indra Yatra in a prison-cage at the foot of poles, or on scaffolds so as to represent Indra like a thief with outspread arms. But the role of the sacrificial victim, during the Indra Yatra, is assumed by the “tribal” (Kirata) king Yalambara whose head, cut off by Krishna to prevent him from joining the “losing” side in the Mahabharata war, fell into the Indra Chowk where it is still venerated in the form of Akasha Bhairava. Already in the Sanskrit drama, the *Mricchakatika* (see note 13), the brahmin hero being led to his sacrificial execution is compared to the pole carried towards the cremation-ground at the south of the town at the end of the Indra festival. When the Indra pole is lowered, a funeral procession of Manandhars carries it to the southern cremation ground to be thrown in the Bagmati river. Then the pole is hacked into pieces which are used to feed the perpetual fire of the *pitha* of Pachali Bhairava (see pages 129, 150; curiously enough, the Lat-Bhaira stone pillar in Benares is said to have undergone a similar fate — destroyed by fire and thrown into the Ganga — only this time at the hands of Muslim weavers, who themselves regularly participated in its cosmogonic “marriage”). Indra, the royal sacrificer, and his sacrificial victim are one and the same.

After the classical reform of the Vedic sacrifice, the profane *yajamana* (sacrificer) is transformed by the *diksha* into a (temporary) brahmin, the pure being par excellence who stands at the summit of the Hindu hierarchy (Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition* 154). The annual festival of Pachali, *Panchakom*, may have already existed in a Licchavi Pancharatra prototype as the “5-night sacrifice” of the (Rigvedic) Purusha (*Sukta*), whereby the sacrificer-victim became identical with the whole universe. Vishnu would represent this properly brahmanic dimension of the king, through which he affirms himself as the conservator of the socio-religious order based on the pure/impure opposition (Toffin, “Dieux souverains et rois dévots dans l’ancienne royauté de la Vallée du Népal” 74-78). The identification of the king with both Indra and Vishnu, is underlined by the raising of the pole of Pachali Bhairava, inside the precincts of the Atko Narayana temple, by the *Juju* exactly at the moment of the raising of the pole of Indra at Hanuman Dhoka (see page 131). This is why the *Juju* attends the preliminary rituals inside the Atko Narayana temple first, before going to the *pitha* of Pachali Bhairava to supervise the blood sacrifices. On his way to the *pitha*, the *Juju* must sit down at a particular place where long ago his subjects used to come to pay homage to this “walking Vishnu.” But this purification seems to be, in reality, the first phase of a dialectic of transgression that results in the death of the king-sacrificer through the intermediary of a substituted victim. The one-eyed Joshi, who, in front of the Vishnu temple, is placed within the enormous *kasi* (pot) — thrown very roughly till today onto the Vetala receiving the blood sacrifices for [<147-148>] Pachali Bhairava — thus prolongs the role of the brahmin *jumbaka* in the Ashvamedha.<sup>23</sup> This leads us to think that the third head (*supra* pages 133-34) hidden

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<sup>23</sup> [148>] For details, see Kuiper, *Varuna and Vidushaka* 218; and Thite 68-9. Filling the *kasi* with water corresponds well to the fact that the *jumbaka* too was (drowned?) in the (amniotic) waters of a pond. Cf. *supra* 34.

behind the two heads of the sacrificed goats during the *homa* (Mamsahuti) must have belonged to this deformed Joshi who represents the king-sacrificer. The Mupatra (Sanskrit: *Mahapatra*), a quasi-buffoonic figure, who at the end of the Indra Yatra at Bhaktapur “kills” with his sword the statuette of Indra on the pole (Nepali 64), first of all receives the crown of Vishnu before the temple of the latter on Dattatreya square.

Throwing grains of rice — which the wife of Pachali Bhairava forgets to do — is not only the way to cure (Sweto) Bhairava of his stomach ache after his meal of children-fishes, but serves also to exorcise the possessed (Levy 128; cf. *supra* pages 123, 140). It is through the psycho-physical esoteric practices, codified in the Tantras, that Bhairava has assimilated the autochthonous religions with their sacred poles, as well as the ecstatic trance that supports them. Even in the philosophical system of “Kashmir Shaivism” in which Bhairava has become a metaphysical principle to be attained through a “Brahmanical” gnosis, this substratum is revealed through symptoms such as the trembling, swooning and fainting that accompany *avesha* (possession). Thus, the Newar king, inasmuch as he assumes the figure of the Tantric adept, seems to draw his magico-religious power from a Shamanic inspiration easily reinterpreted as *bhairavavesha* (possession by Bhairava). This is what happens, for instance, to the Dangol Dhami of Nuwakot, who celebrates on behalf of the whole Newar community the erection of the New Year poles and drinks the sacrificial blood from many buffaloes, all the while wearing the royal insignia of the king of Nepal (see page 139). The brahminised *dikshita* was first and foremost the consecrated warrior, the Vratya, comparable to later militant Shaivite ascetics like the Pashupatas and the Kapalikas (Heesterman, “Vratya and Sacrifice”). The Malakar dancer in trance, who brandishes his red sword to better incarnate Pachali Bhairava, would prolong the Shamanic aspect of Hindu kingship, even while revealing a transgressive dimension in this experience that relates it to the murderous fury of the warrior-king (*supra* page 144). Hence, the *khadgasiddhi* inaugurates the day of Vijayadashami — the Kshatriya festival par excellence — which marks the resumption of military activities in Nepal and in India (Toffin, “Culte des déesses et fête du Dasaï chez les Néwar (Népal)” 60, 67, 77; Biardeau “L’arbre *sami* et le buffle sacrificiel”).

The founding-myth of the Indra Yatra and its calendar reveal that the king of the gods sacrifices himself to the goddess Taleju, who assumes the form of the Kumari and goes out on the day of the full moon of Bhadra in order to re-legitimise the power of the king for the following year. This day also marks the beginning of the *mahalaya shraddha*, during which ancestors are venerated, especially when the sun is in the sign of the Virgin.<sup>24</sup> The synchronisation of the enthronement of the king, the veneration [<148-149>] of the Shakti and the propitiation of the dead, can be explained only by the single underlying sacrificial schema.

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<sup>24</sup> The *kanasva* flowers carried in the *kasi* and covering both the Vetala and the altar of Pachali Bhairava are “a kind of flower sacred to the Sun God” (Manandhar 24, ad *kanhay svam*). [<148]

The role of Bhadrakali, consort of Pachali Bhairava, who puts on his blue dress to exchange, in turn, her sword with the king (see *supra* [page 137](#)), suggests the androgyny of the king Bhairava. At Nuwakot, for instance, the gender of the divinity inside the temple is most ambiguous and, even though the festival is called Bhairavi Ratha Yatra, it is the Dhami incarnating Bhairava, but still accompanied by his wife, who plays the most important role. Again, Jagannatha, the royal divinity in Puri, is esoterically assimilated not only to Bhairava when he is united with the Devadasi (dancer) representing Bhairavi; he is also directly identified with the goddess Kali. Toffin likewise emphasises how the Newar king drew his magico-religious power by identifying himself with his Shakti. In fact, the sexual liaison between the Tantric king and the goddess Taleju fits perfectly into the paradigm of the sacrificer returning to the womb to form the primordial androgyne. All these elements are found in the condensed scenario before the door of the palace at Hanuman Dhoka, where the king-buffalo is sacrificed before the impassive Kumari, precisely at the moment when Pachali Bhairava arrives from the *pitha* in the form of the jar. But this is done in a such way that the blood spouts onto Kali-Ajima, whom the myths assimilate indirectly to Taleju-Kumari (see *supra* [pages 123-24](#), 136 [photos 10 and 11](#) [**39X**]).<sup>25</sup>

Tihar (Diwali), a festival during which Pachali Bhairava is especially venerated in his *dyahche* (see *supra* [page 128](#)), is also called *yama-panchaka* (the five days of Yama). Yama is propitiated directly and also through his different aspects: the dog, the crow and the cow (Anderson 164-74; Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal* 538-42). The dog is, above all, the animal of Bhairava, the sacred cow is the (feminised) brahmin, while the crow represents the Mahabrahmana (funeral priest).<sup>26</sup> The intimate relation between the brahmin and death is demonstrated, for instance, by the fact that at Bhaktapur the funeral mat of the Rajopadhyaya is used as the canvas for the painted image of Akasha Bhairava. Petrified at Tekudoban, near the confluence of the Bagmati and the Vishnumati, after wrapping himself in a funeral mat (see *supra* [page 123](#)), Pachali Bhairava, coming from Benaras, represents above all the kingship of death to whom everybody, without exception, is a condemned subject. As the Bhuteshvara (Lord of Spirits), he renews the power of the Indo-Nepalese king who, through the exchange of swords, appropriates the regenerative

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<sup>25</sup> [**149>**] For the theme of androgyny, and the overlapping Vedic and Tantric paradigms of sexuality in popular Hindu religion, see Chalier-Visuvalingam, "Union and Unity in Hindu Tantrism."

<sup>26</sup> For example, Dharmaraja Yudhisthira, the epic counterpart of Varuna-Mrtyu, finally gains access to *svarga* (paradise) only because he insists on being accompanied by his impure dog, who reveals himself to be Dharma (= Yama) in disguise. While his brahmin friend is being led to the sacrificial stake, the Vidushaka (Maitreya) in the Sanskrit play *Mrcchakatika* is compared to the crows cawing for oblations (of human-flesh?) at the Indra festival. Recall also the ancient Vedic practice of sometimes interring the dead man enveloped within the body of a sacrificed cow. [**<149**]

strength of the death of the Brahmanical sacrificer. The Indra statuette, put to death at the transposition of the Vedic sacrificial post at Bhaktapur, is explicitly called Yama Deo by the Newars. Nick Allen has proposed completing the “Indo-European” ideology of Georges Dumézil with a “fourth function,” incarnated by Yama, that would represent the Other both as a devalorised and excluded group and as a [[149-150](#)] central transcendent principle. If Bhairava, as Yamantaka, vanquishes this sovereign god of profane death to reign in his place on the *mahashmashana* (great cremation-ground) that is the holy city par excellence of Varanasi, it is because Bhairava, this Absolute of “Kashmir Shaivism,” is realised through an initiatory death that Yama himself would have represented in the Vedic religion.<sup>27</sup>

The perpetual fire beside the altar of Pachali Bhairava (photo 3) must be linked to the role played by this Tantric god in the “Vedic” *Agnihotra* at Patan ([Slusser, Nepal Mandala 266](#); and *supra* page [121](#)). In this ceremony, as opposed to the Mamsahuti, the sacrificial fire of the Rajopadhyaya priest, who is rather the incarnation of Mitra-Varuna, receives only pure vegetarian offerings. Michael Witzel, to whom I owe my knowledge of the *Agnishala*, adds that a barrier has been built to prevent Bagh Bhairava of Kirtipur from extinguishing, by his ferocious glance, the benefic fire of the *Agnihotra*. Indeed, the Vajracharyas would perform a similar but secret Mamsahuti (meat offering), annually, into the fire at this temple of this “Tiger” Bhairava. Agni is still venerated in the form of a demoniac image at Svayambhunatha, where a perpetual fire was also kept at the beginning of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the *Agnihotrin* of Patan, when he is about to die, is still brought into the *Agnishala* to breathe his last. Bhairava would thus represent the

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<sup>27</sup> [[150](#)] Nick Allen’s talk, presented in Paris in 1989 to the same seminar series conducted by G. Toffin where the original French version of my own paper was delivered, also highlighted the “interferences” between this “fourth” and the (representations of the) remaining three functions. Visuvalingam pointed out that the would-be “fourth” was in fact not a (social) “function” at all but rather a reflection of (the effects of the dialectic of) transgressive sacrality within the operation of the other functions. Yama has been generally taken for an “Aryan” divinity related to the divine twins, the most recent argument being that of Asko Parpola, who attributes him to an “Iranian” (more specifically “Scythian” = Saka) cult that would have invaded the subcontinent from Afghanistan (BMAC). Without being able to develop the argument here, we hold rather that this whole complex — of kingship, death, judgment, solar symbolism and royal incest — may be traced back to a pre-“Indo-European” (para) Elamite cult. Charles Malamoud’s interpretation of the Yama cult within the sacrificial and funerary paradigm is based on the assumption that the twin-incest did not take place (simply because of the incest taboo prevalent in all societies?). Not only does this do violence to the “studied” ambiguity of the Vedic myth in this regard, it also ignores the fact that among the Newars, for example, twins of opposed sex are ritually married before they separate to lead their independent lives (we owe this information to Nutan Sharma). What is vital from the perspective of transgressive sacrality is the very ambivalence of the incest.

baneful aspect of the sacrificial fire, that which manifests itself as the eater of corpses. After all, the “twice-born” used to sacrifice regularly to the Vedic Agni primarily in order to be reborn after death from the fiery womb of the funeral pyre. Half a century ago, a perpetual fire was still maintained in the royal palace of Hanuman Dhoka, whence citizens could borrow its flame, and Amshuvarman already mentions an *Agnishala* in the palace of Managriha. (Pachali) Bhairava — as we have seen at the end of the Indra Yatra (see *supra* page 147) — is the fire (of Consciousness) from which the sacrificing king is reborn.<sup>28</sup>

In the principal cremation ground (Chupinga) to the south of Bhaktapur is the sacred stone for the Masan (= *shmashana*) Bhairava who is [ $<150-151>$ ] “conceived as being below the burning body. The body must be consumed before the spirit is free to leave the locality. The fire does this, but Masan Bhairava also is associated with the destruction of the body and the liberation of the spirit” (Levy and Rajopadhyaya 264). The esoteric Trika (or “Kashmir Shaiva”) techniques for the universalisation of the all-devouring Fire of Consciousness were lived through as a mode of transgressive sacrality condensed into the mytheme of brahmanicide. Though the Puranic myth of the decapitation of Brahma does not seem to figure prominently in the mythology of the Newar Bhairava, the same principle has been introduced into the founding-myth of the Taleju temple at Bhaktapur. The only suitable place the invading Indian king, Harisimhadeva, could find for establishing his royal tutelary goddess — thus superceding the pre-existing Licchavi cult to Maneshvari — was the home of (the Tantric) *Agnihotra* (Brahmin) who always sat upon the stone of the Kshetrapal Bhairava within the courtyard of the (present) Taleju temple (Levy and Rajopadhyaya 236-37, 239n36, cf. 261, 264; and *supra* page 149). This Rajopadhyaya’s ritual suicide in his own Shiva temple, in protest against his forcible eviction, rather suggests — through the twisted logic of the myth — that the paradigm of “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide” (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava’s Royal Brahmanicide”) underlies, and conceptually unites, both the Vedic *Agnihotra* and the Tantric cult of the royal Taleju.

In front of the royal palace at Hanuman Dhoka, the statue of Kala Bhairava, known also as Adalata (court of justice) Bhairava — a towering, black and solitary figure — is the principal witness before whom state functionaries take an oath each year. This role corresponds precisely with his function of *Kotwal* (policeman-magistrate) in Benaras. Criminals and litigants would also swear while touching Bhairava’s foot, and he, who bore false witness, it is alleged, vomited blood and died on the spot. Until the nineteenth century, the image received occasional human sacrifices, the same that (Mitra) Varuna already demanded to

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<sup>28</sup> A phenomenological exploration of the (continuity between the Vedic and Tantric) symbolism of (the sacrificial and sexual) fire may be found in my section on “Bhairava-Consciousness and the All-Devouring Fire” (Chalier-Visuvalingam and Mopsik). My interest in this question began already with my Masters thesis in 1974 (Chalier-Visuvalingam 2002), that is, even before I undertook Ph.D. research from 1977 in Benares (at the Hindu University) on Bhairava. [ $<150$ ]



maintain, paradoxically, the terrifying *rta* (order) firmly hidden within the heart of the Vedic socio-cosmic order. But the Vetala receiving the blood of the sacrifice is, in reality, none other than Pachali Bhairava himself, the king-victim whose “sacred transgression” is represented by the deformity of the Joshi (cf. *supra* page 147-48).<sup>29</sup> Kala Bhairava, who takes on the sins of the pilgrims in Benaras, is the scapegoat par excellence, and the brahmin *jumbaka* of the imperial Ashvamedha was Varuna himself as the black incarnation of Evil. The supreme judge is also the worst brahmanicide: if the merciless *Kotwal* imposes so just a punishment upon himself before extending his *karuna* (mercy) to his subjects, it is because his judicial murder is endowed with a properly “soteriological” significance or *bhairavi-yatana* which exculpates every pious Hindu who chooses to die in Benaras (Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Bhairava Kotwal of Varanasi”).<sup>30</sup> [**<151-152>**]

The specificity of Nepal could thus be summed up as the passage from the Vedism of the Aryan Licchavis to the Shamanism of the autochthonous Tibeto-Burman populations, without necessarily taking the detour of Bhakti that promoted Vishnu and Shiva — along with Brahma — to the rank of the supreme trinity in India. The exaggeration of the values of purity, that gave birth to classical Brahmanism, seems to respond to the challenge posed by renunciation of the Buddhistic type, that Hinduism, in its turn, has sought to co-opt through Bhakti. The religious struggle, which was intense in India, has paradoxically seen Buddhism adopting the structures of a Hinduism that integrated, in its turn, Buddhist values and innovations. The real strength of Buddhism — that which assured its own identity with regard to Hinduism — came from the beginning from its privileged connections with cultures foreign to Brahmanism. The relative independence of Buddhism vis-à-vis the caste society would have given it a privileged role in the process of acculturation between Aryans and indigenous people. But renunciation presupposes a profane world rejected in favour of transcendence. This situation corresponds neither to Vedic culture nor to tribal culture, and could have been realised only in a very limited way in the Kathmandu Valley. Vajrayana practice differs from Tantric Hinduism essentially in its philosophical interpretation, which amounts to very little as far as the functioning of Nepali society is concerned. Newar civilisation appears rather as a “Hinduised” sacred world in which Vedic,

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<sup>29</sup> [**<151>**] So too, the deformity of the clown of the Sanskrit drama, prolonging that of the Varuna-jumbaka (Kuiper, *Varuna and Vidushaka* 213-22, cf. 208-10), translates the transgressive dimension of the *purohita*, with whom the king formed an indissociable pair (see note 14). Dumézil (*Flamen-Brahman* 28-9) had already suggested that the *purohita* may have originally functioned as the scapegoat of the Vedic king. [**<151**]

<sup>30</sup> [**<152>**] See also our articulation of the judiciary murder of Bhairava and the martyrdom of the Muslim warrior, Ghazi Miyan, in Benaras (Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam, “Between Mecca and Benares”). [**<152**]

Buddhist and tribal elements are fused into a mythico-ritual synthesis that has never been seriously challenged by renunciation. Whereas in the Indian context, the disappearance of cosmogonic festivals has reduced the royal Indra to a miserable figure before the sovereign gods of Bhakti, the underlying sacrificial paradigm permitted the Newar god-king to easily assimilate the autochthonous religions, especially Shamanism, through the Tantric figure of Bhairava. The conservative values of the Vedic Mitra are retained in the Brahmanical representations of Narayana as a brahmin-king, in Pashupati as an ascetic-king, and even in the Buddha as a renouncing-king (the royal deity at the 'Hindu' Paśupatinatha temple is crowned once a year as the Buddha), but the values of transgression, once the prerogative of Varuna, were simply taken over by Bhairava.

# Sunthar Visuvalingam

## C. Between Lhasa and Benaras: Vedic Sacrifice, Buddhist Tantricism and Tribal Cultures

Pachali Bhairava, petrified beside the cremation ground on the Bagmati-Ganga, represents an interiorised experience of death, transgression and rebirth. It is around this **shared** experience that the Hindu sacrificial, Buddhist Tantric and tribal Shamanic dimensions of the Bhairava cult are differentially articulated. The co-opting of Buddhist castes and Vajrayana adepts into the Hindu socio-religious universe seems to have been facilitated by a specifically [[152-153](#)] Tantric Buddhist reading of this Vedic symbolism of sacrificial death. For their part, the autochthonous populations, particularly those that have undergone religio-cultural fusion to constitute present-day Newar ethnicity, have readily assimilated (the proponents of) Hindu-Buddhist Tantricism because it not only incorporated their socio-economic infrastructures but also elevated their Shamans into prestigious religious guarantors of the emerging “Hindu” polity.

### 1. Bhairava as the Royal Sacrificer from Hindu Benaras

If the royal Bhairava is repeatedly said to have come from Benaras, this is because the symbolic geography of Kathmandu has been subjected to “colonisation” by a Hindu sacrificial ideology that had been invested most fully in the *mahashmashana* (great cremation ground) of the Hindu universe. On emerging from the impure death-like embryonic condition of the *diksha*, the Vedic king offered himself in sacrifice through a substitute victim attached to the sacrificial *yupa* (pole) which represented the *axis mundi*. This is represented beside the Kapalamochana tank in Benaras by (the stump of) an ancient pillar which has long been identified as the *lat* (staff or cudgel) of the policeman-magistrate Bhairava. Lat Bhairava is, in fact, the ancient Mahashmashana Stambha (pillar) where Kala Bhairava used to not only devour the sins of pilgrims but also administer the “punishment/suffering” of Bhairava or *bhairavi yatana*, which alone conferred *moksha* (final emancipation) even on the worst of sinners. The *Kotwal* (policeman-magistrate) apparently presided over the public execution of criminals in what was probably a significant cremation-ground, which would account for the terrible character even of its metaphysical transposition. Once a year, the royal head of (Kala) Bhairava is still brought in procession to “crown” the pillar and to celebrate the cosmogonic marriage of this *linga* of Bhairava with the adjacent maternal well.

It is this transformative paradigm — whereby esoteric Tantric notions of internalised death and sexual union are both derived from and re-inscribed within the symbolic universe of the archaic Vedic

sacrifice — that has been extended to Nepal to form the integral basis of a royal cosmogony where the New Year poles are simultaneously the sacrificial *yupa* and the phallic *linga*. The cosmogonic *linga* of the Bisket Jatra at Bhaktapur is explicitly identified with Kashi Vishvanatha who came from Benaras in the form of Kala Bhairava, only to be decapitated in honour of his consort Bhadrakali. Their sexual union is re-enacted both by the collision of their respective chariots and the erection of the pole in the hollow mound of earth. It is also certainly not accidental that the royal festival of Indra's *dhvaja* (banner) at the capital, Kathmandu, coincides with the marriage of Lat Bhairava which is celebrated exactly on the full moon of Bhadra which signals the beginning of the season for death-rituals. Though these royal cosmogonies were no doubt originally borrowed and adapted from Hindu India, it is the present-day ethnography of Newar Tantricism that allows us to reconstitute, in this manner, the true significance of Bhairava even in his native city of Benaras, the socio-religious centre of Hinduism. [[153-154](#)]

## 2. Bhairava as the Tantric Adept from Buddhist Lhasa

The royal Bhairava also appears as the transgressive Tantric adept, endowed with magico-religious powers, who has transcended all sectarian distinctions. The "Hinduisation" of Newar Buddhism was however not a simple surrender to the caste-ideology and the underlying values of the Brahmanical sacrifice. The tutelary divinity of the gardeners is not Bhairava but Bhadrakali, who is for them essentially no different from the Buddhist Vajravarahi. The Vajracharyas themselves primarily worship other Bhairava-like divinities like Chakrasamvara, Heruka, and Mahakala, and distinguish between their own private rituals and their officiation at the public festivals of the Hindus. The relative independence of the Buddhist re-reading of Hindu sacrificial paradigms is best demonstrated by the manner in which Shaiva Kapalika themes have been reworked into the Tibetan cycle of the subjugation of Rudra, in a context where Hinduism had been unable to exercise similar pressures on the socio-political level.

The immeasurable world-pillar, from which Bhairava emerged to appropriate Brahma's central head, is reduced to more handy ritual proportions in the *khatvanga* (cranial-staff) which the Kapalika wields as a weapon. On the basis of the explicit textual evidence of Tibetan Buddhist Tantras further elucidated by the oral traditions of their *lamaistic* practitioners, the skull-topped *khatvanga*, provided with a *yajnopavita* (Brahmanical cord), has not only been identified with the world-tree, also called Amrita and growing in the cremation-ground. The entire symbolic complex has been derived from esoteric psycho-physical, especially sexual, techniques centring on the production of the ambrosia of *mahasukha* (supreme felicity), through a process of alternating ascent and descent within the *sushumna*. This ritual system refers back to the liberating murder by (a Buddhist divinity like Heruka assimilated to) Bhairava (Jigs-byed) of the demonised, and still terrible, Rudra, but in a scenario that

deliberately underlines the consubstantiality of divine killer and demoniac victim amidst the transgressive valorisation of impurities (like excrement, etc.) converted into nectar. Though philosophically elaborated in the light of specifically Buddhist tenets, the underlying techniques are indistinguishable from those of the corresponding Shaiva Tantras and the formal symbolic system is clearly derived from the Hindu, and even Vedic, universe. Like Mahakala, the *sushumna* is said to devour Kala (death) represented by the alternating lateral breaths; and in the Tibetan Tantras Rudra "eats" or is "eaten" by his mother in the cremation-ground beside the cosmic tree called "Amrita" or "Khatvanga" and especially "Fornication," and ultimately attains deliverance to become Mahakala.

The erection of the *linga*, which is what the poles representing Indra and Bhairava are called in Nepal, signifies above all the neutralisation and annihilation of *prana/apana* (the opposing vital breaths) resulting in the raising of the *kundalini* up the median channel or *sushumna* in the very act of sexual (and even incestuous) intercourse. If the most virtuous of saints cannot aspire to that salvation which even and especially brahmanicides are assured of in Benaras, this is only because Bhairava as executioner-cum-victim is identical with the all-devouring Fire of [[154-155](#)] Consciousness that consumes all the impurity of sin, and because the sacrificial death was itself assimilated to its fiery ascent up the *sushumna* as the (*maha*) *shmashana* (pillar), now remaining as the Lat Bhairava. The perpetual cremation at Manikarnika, where three streams unite(d) to flow out as the Brahmanala or Pitamahashrotas into the milky way of the Ganga, confirms that all death in Benaras is (modelled on) the initiatic process whereby this flame of consciousness pierces through the sinciput at the *Brahma-randhra* (aperture of Brahma) to be freed forever. Even the apparently alternative fate, which is reserved especially for those who sin in Benaras itself before dying there, conforms rigorously to the above model of initiatic death. They are transformed into *rudrapishacha* (ghoulish Rudras) before undergoing the *rudra yatana* (punishment of Rudra) at the Mahashmashana-Stambha. The figure of the Rudrapishacha appears to be a mythic projection of the *pretavad* (fiendish) Pashupata ascetics who once haunted these cremation-grounds. The (mystic) decapitation of the Tibetan adept, corresponding to the *kapala-kriya* (skull-breaking) performed on the Benaras corpse, when the divine life-force escapes through the *brahmarandhra*, also corresponds to the murderous liberation of Rudra by a Bhairava-like (Jigs-byed) divinity who penetrates the demon at the base of the spine to flash like an arrow or comet through "the opening of the Door of Heaven." Rudra had already received the Tantric initiation in his original incarnation as the master "Deliverance-Salvation/Black," whose name "alludes to his ambiguous nature: he will do evil, but will be finally delivered with the status of the god Mahakala." This salvation often occurs in the explicit context of copulation belonging to the same symbolic complex, which is not foreign to the Hindu cremation-rites. If Bhairava, the Brahmanical *dikshita* from Benaras, can remind the Vajracharyas of the Vedic roots of their Buddhist Tantras, then

Bhairava, the Tibetan Lama from Lhasa, could easily return the compliment by explaining to the Hindus the esoteric content of not just their royal cosmogony but their death rituals as well.

### 3. Bhairava as the Newar Shaman of Tribal Nepal

What has happened to the indigenous religion of Nepal in the course of these centuries of cooperative rivalry between Brahmins and Lamas for the souls of the Newars?

The early chronicles identify the Kiranti with the Kirata when they affirm that the Valley Kirata, vanquished by the Licchavis, settled in the region between the Tamur and the Arun rivers, a region embraced by the Kirant Pradesh.... Traditional ties of these eastern hill people with the Kathmandu Valley are apparent from customs that ordain the annual return to the Valley of some Kirantis for the observance of religious ceremonies. (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 10)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> [156>] Gautama V. Vajracharya, in his commentary on a Newar painting of the *Pilgrimage to Gosainkund* that was displayed in a recent (till 17 Aug. 2003) exhibition at the Chicago Art Institute, attempts to connect the Newars to the Nipas primarily on philological considerations:

The Newars, for example, call themselves Nevâ: thus the village of modern Nuwakote, which is designated here as Nevâ Kuti, literally means "the Newar town." This information tallies with the fact that in classical and modern Tibetan languages Nuwakote is always known as Bal-po rdzon (Newar village). Levi seems to be correct when he suggested that the aborigines called Nipas could be the ancestors of the Newars. Moreover, the well-known chronicle *Gopalarajavamshavali* tells us that the Nepas (in Sanskrit, Nipas) were the cattle breeders who migrated to the valley from Malakha, apparently a small village in Nuwakote. Since in the Newari language *pa* and *va* are often interchangeable, the word Nepal actually means the house of the Nipas, just as Himal means the abode of snow. ... Apparently, the story of the sacred pools of the valley and their link with the sacred lake was introduced by the Nipas, the ancestors of the Newars, when they migrated from Nuwakote. Besides, the Nipas, the ancestors of the Newars, are ancient people who lived in the Himalayan region. The earliest reference to these people is found in the Vedic literature. The ritual of



## The Buddhist city of

Patan, alone among the Valley towns, is persistently associated with the tradition of the Kirata, the people who appear to have been the Valley indigenes. A mound, and probable *stupa* ruin, at the city center is traditionally held to have been the palace of Patuka, a Kirata king who, it is said, abandoned his palace in Gokarna to rebuild it in Patan. The mound is known simply as Kiranchem, the Kirata's Palace [*<155-156>*] (literally, House), or as Patukadom, Patuka's Hillock. The Newar name for Patan, Yala, is generally believed to perpetuate the name of another Kirata king, Yellung or Yalambara, the alleged founder of the dynasty and of the city. (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 96)

Mock conflicts during the Indra Yatra commemorate the invading Aryan chief's capture by the tribal Yalambara, whose decapitated head has become the present Akasha Bhairava at Asan tol (*supra* 55). We may now even reverse our perspective, and argue that the acculturation process discernible among the Newars may reflect the cultural history of Benaras itself, for it was not always the socio-religious centre of classical Brahmanism as we know it to be today.

The Newari word *yala* means the same as *yupa*, and, more broadly, signifies any sacrificial post, pillar, or standard. The tall poles raised for Bisket- and Indra-Jatra, and on many other ritual occasions, are known to Newars even now as *yalasin* (wooden poles). Perhaps both names, Yala and Yupagrama, were determined by the existence of a small community associated with Vedic sacrifice at this crossroads.... One is tempted to see in the ancient Patan tumuli

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the pilgrimage is not, however, the original contribution of the Nipas but of the inhabitants of Uttarakuru, who performed a conceptually similar annual ritual of traveling along the bank of the Sarasvati river. (*Himalayas, An Aesthetic Adventure* 284)

In support of this plausible Nipa (strand in the) ancestry of the Newars, we may recall the importance of Bhairavi Ratha Jatra of Nuwakot for the (annual renewal of now Kathmandu-based) Nepali royalty: every year a "shaman" the *dhami*, in a "trance" of sorts while wearing the insignia of the king, becomes possessed by Bhairava/i to utter oracles for the well-being of the kingdom (Chalier-Visuvalingam and Visuvalingam, "Bhairava and the Goddess" 285-94). Would the Nipa have thereby retained the shamanic roots of their religious system after having adopted, as the urbanised Newars, the "Hindu-Buddhist" institution of kingship? [*<156>*]

and the names Yala and Yupagrama, an analogy with pre-Buddhist pillars and tumuli of northern India. Objects of worship, the pillars and tumuli dotted the Uttarapatha, the great northern trade route, and clustered around the trading centers.... Patan, almost certainly a stopover on the trans-Himalayan trade route, whose southern terminus intersected the east-west Uttarapatha, may mark the northernmost extension of this practice. (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 97 and note 79)

Lat Bhairava, which is surrounded by the ruins of Buddhist architectural monuments, was itself probably a (pre) Ashokan pillar standing at the central crossroads of ancient Benaras, where the Uttara-Patha crossed the road to Sarnath. Hiuen Tsang (seventh century) saw it standing beside a huge *stupa*. Even during the reign of Aurangzeb (seventeenth century), when it stood within the compound of a beautiful mosque, the Muslim caretakers [[156-157](#)] spoke of the remains of a Buddhist king of Bhutan reportedly buried within the mound. The "Ashokan" *stupas* of Patan could have "originated as pre-Buddhist funerary mounds, which, as in India, were converted into Buddhist monuments" (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 96), for the original *stupa-cult* itself synthesised Vedic *yupa-yashti* (sacrificial symbolism) with pre-Aryan funerary practices but within the non-violent ethics of *ahimsa*. Notions of initiatic death may have thus already been important to Benaras, within a (pre) Mahayana Buddhist framework, even before they were reworked into the antinomian practices of Shaiva Tantricism.

Benaras is particularly sanctified because there the Ganga flows northwards towards its own source. Kala Bhairava bathed in the Kapalamochana tank precisely during a heavy monsoon flood when the Ganga began to flow backwards into the Varana river transforming the whole of Benaras into the primordial mound of archaic cosmogony. This identification of the fertile mound with the very source of the life-giving waters — the Gaumukh (mouth of the cow), in the case of Benaras — is expressed in the founding myths of some Nepali tribes rather in terms of a clod of earth flowing downstream from the source to coagulate at the present site of the tribal settlement. Even before the arrival of the Licchavis upon the Nepali stage, Buddhist penetration may have transformed an indigenous cosmogony of the primordial mountain into the worship of the *stupa* at Svayambhunatha (Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* 298-302; Gutschow and Basukala). Svayambhu, which is ritually connected with a Kotwal Bhairava at the gorge where the Bagmati exits from the valley, was probably the site of a pre-historic cult related to the draining of the Kathmandu Valley (there is a similar draining "myth" associated with the Dal lake in the Kashmir Valley). A similar acculturation of a pre-Aryan cosmogony centred on Benaras may have occurred under Buddhist auspices before it was eventually incorporated into the sacrificial paradigm of the Bhairava cult.

The *Kashi-Khanda* claims that Shiva himself was once a stranger to his own sacred city (Eck 146-57). The local traditions recall an ancient period when Benaras was ruled by a righteous king (Divodasa) but without any of the Hindu gods. Not only was Sarnath the site where the Buddha (supposedly) set the Wheel of the Law in motion, but Benaras seems to have become a centre of Buddhism even before it became the bastion of classical Brahmanism. It is through a long series of ruses that the Hindu gods are depicted as having gained a foothold within the city of the heretics. They were finally obliged to preach “protestant” Buddhism in order to wean away the city from its original *dharma*, and it was only then that the Benarasis had no alternative but to accept the sacrificial ideology. The ideal life-style of popular Benaras culture or *Benarasipan*, as incarnated in Kashi Vishvanatha, seems to have been inspired by the wild, eccentric Pashupata ascetic. Even now Benarasi “orthodoxy” is of a very peculiar kind, and the local brahmin *literati* still take pride in their habits of pan-chewing and *bhang-consumption* (Visuvalingam, “Towards and Integral Appreciation of Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics of Rasa”). The continuing worship of *bir-babas*, etc., probably goes back to the *yaksha* cult of pre-Aryan times. It is perhaps more than a mere reflection of recent “Hinduisation” that [*157-158*] the Kirantis of Nepal still trace their mythical origins to Benaras.

Finally, we may note that Prof. F. B. J. Kuiper’s reconstruction of *Ancient Indian Cosmogony* (90-137) reduces the central Rigvedic creation myth of Indra slaying Vritra — which was celebrated in New Year (pole) festivals similar to those which have survived among the Newars but have been lost in India — to the socio-cosmic exteriorisation of a *regressus ad uterum*. He finds parallels to the primordial mound in other non-Aryan archaic cultures, even in primitive religions, and derives the archetype from an *anamnesis* undergone during a shamanising experience. In that case, it would have been only a matter of time before the Brahmanical socio-religious ideology of the dominant Aryans and the pre-existing tribal worlds of the subcontinent were brought together within a single overarching symbolic universe.<sup>32</sup> In his recent linguistic analysis of *Aryans in the Rigveda*, Kuiper concludes that

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<sup>32</sup> [*158*>] Finally, I want to call attention to the social background of the Nine Durga Newar cult. As pointed out, the *guthi* association attached to the deities is a highly organised system, maintaining a moral and communal solidarity between its members, and cooperating in the carrying out of rituals and festivals. But what is interesting is that this type of social grouping falls almost totally outside the caste-system. It is true that notions of purity and pollution still prevail in the internal organisation of the cult and that some religious specialists from other castes are called on certain occasions. Yet, on the whole, the group is socially and ritually self-sufficient. What is more,

Sanskrit itself “had long been **an Indian language** when it made its appearance in history” (*Aryans in the Rigveda* 94).

Navadurga *guthi* highlights such values as egalitarianism, dichotomy between initiates and non-initiates, territorial bonds, village unity, which are secondary or alien to the caste system. Emphasis is placed on ‘horizontal solidarity,’ cooperation within a single localized caste, instead of the ‘vertical solidarity,’ so characteristic of the caste society. Like other Newar secret associations related to ritual dance and possession, this type of *guthi* irresistibly reminds us of the groups of shamans of the hill tribes of Nepal, especially the ones of the Northern Magars studied by M. Oppitz (1991) and Anne de Sales (1991). Even if such closed *guthi* groupings are a mere leftover in the changing modern context, they are still crucial for the fullest understanding of Kathmandu Valley civilization. From this point of view, at least, the dangerous Navadurga Hindu goddesses have been tamed by Newar social institutions. (Toffin, “A Wild Goddess Cult in Nepal” 249)

Perhaps, what’s really in question here is not so much some radical incompatibility between tribal values and pre-modern Hindu society, but rather the “sociologising” approach to caste and to the underlying pure/impure opposition (*Visuvalingam*, “The Transgressive Sacrality of the *Dikshita*” 433)?

What's especially noteworthy about Toffin's conclusions above, is that when Elizabeth presented the ethnographic portion of this paper in Paris (16 June 1989), the primary objection he voiced was our recognition of an (antecedent) “shamanic” core to Newar rites of “possession” (and ultimately to the Bhairava cult itself), whereas Anne de Sale herself expressed sympathy for this approach. After refusing to publish the original French version of this paper (“Le roi et le jardinier”) in *Classer les Dieux* (and we leave it to our readers to judge whether it “fits in” with the other papers in that volume and, more importantly, addresses its proposed theme of “classifying the gods”), he repeated the same objections during Elizabeth's formal thesis defence. Ironically, he now affirms this thesis above, as if it were his opinion all along, apparently unaware that we had taken the trouble to argue, against his objections, for these “shamanising” links to a tribal infrastructure in the very same volume as his own paper (see *Chalier-Visuvalingam and Visuvalingam*, “Bhairava and the Goddess” 291-92). Similar unacknowledged “reversals” of his position on other issues such as the king-victim, Bhairava as the epitome of “transgressive sacrality” have been prepared for by not only refusing to publish our work and, more recently, dismissing our theories as “out-dated,” but also cutting off funds for research, insisting for example that he would study the twelve-yearly *khadgasiddhi* festival himself.

The inherited Vedic **culture**, however, must for a long time have remained dominant, notwithstanding the foreign influence that made itself felt: a foreign myth could only be adopted by transforming it into an Indra-myth and non-Aryan sorcerers were incorporated and became Vedic *rishis*, authors of a separate collection of hymns.... As a sociological term "Aryan" denotes all those who took part in the sacrifices and festivals. There is nothing novel in this [**<158-159>**] definition. Not always, however, may it have been realized that many among these "Aryans" had non-Aryan names and that this fact points to some inescapable conclusions. Statements to the effect that the Rigveda was no longer purely Aryan ... are therefore correct to the extent that they refer to the language and ethnic components: both were "Aryan." **Culturally**, however, the Rigvedic society was Aryan without quotes, but this reveals how ambiguous the term is. (*Aryans in the Rigveda* 96)

It was only natural — and perhaps inevitable — that Buddhism, which peacefully mediated this ongoing process of acculturation — and well beyond the confines of the Indian subcontinent — had rapidly assimilated, developed, systematised and propagated these techniques and their symbolic encoding, thereby contributing to the consolidation of Tantric tradition.

#### **4. Towards an "Acculturation" Model of "Hinduism" and Indian Religious History**

In this way, the transgressive ideology upheld by Madam Chaliar — and that may be called the sacrificial ideology — presents two opposed faces; on the one hand, the dynamic and ambivalent sacred, that manifests itself in violent transgression, and on the other hand, the perfect stasis of transcendence.

This double-faced ideology indeed seems to be just as much at the background of the Vedic sacrifice as of the cult of Bhairava, saturated with sacrificial resonances and finding transcendence once again in Bhairava-Anuttara.

From this point of view, the current acculturation theories — Hindu/tribal dichotomy, "great" and "small" tradition, Brahmanical supremacy or absorbing more or less successfully the autochthonous religions — to which the author perhaps gives too much place, contributes nothing essential to the central thesis. The fundamental double structure is already in place from the beginning,

in Vedic sacrificial thought, and ready to develop and renew itself — which seems to accord well with the views of the author. Hence, there is no need to invoke elements in tribal or other terms, nor to write a conjectural history (as in the case of Nepal). Rather, there is a need to reconsider acculturation — a task to which the study of Madam Chaliar, in fact, invites us. (Heesterman, Citation from official French report on thesis defense by Chaliar-Visuvalingam; translation mine.<sup>33</sup>

What is the fundamental problem [**<159-160>**] posed by what we already know (and as merely sketched in this paper) of the complex and inextricable mesh of Newar religious culture and, by extension, of the difficulty of defining “Hinduism” (prompting some Indologists to deny its very existence writing it off as a recent “construction”)? Despite the presence among them of (even Buddhist) “Brahmins” (often with mongoloid features that are almost as striking as the black-skin of some *kurukkal* Shaiva priests of Dravidian South India!), the Tibeto-Burman speaking Newars clearly

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<sup>33</sup> [**159>**] Heesterman was, from the outset, enthusiastic in his endorsement of the paradigm of “transgressive sacrality” (TS) and immediately accepted when I visited him in Leiden in **January 1986** to personally solicit his participation in the international pilot-conference on this topic at the **November 1986** South Asia conference in Madison. This was reflected, for example, in his choice of the topic “The Vedic Origins of Vegetarianism” for his keynote paper to the entire conference, while at the same time delivering a paper on “The Notion of Anthropophagy in Vedic Ritual” to our TS sub-conference. Similarly, at Elizabeth’s thesis defense, he intervened forcefully, in the face of Toffin’s reservations, to support Elizabeth’s interpretation of the king as the (symbolic) victim, by pointing out that this was already true of the Vedic *Rajasuya* that Toffin himself had seen as a likely model of the Pachali Bhairava festival. Though largely indebted to Heesterman for his “transgressive” understanding of the (not just “pre-classical”) Vedic sacrifice, my exchanges with him have focused on the following differences: Heesterman’s misleading use of the term “transcendence” to characterise the purified “classical” Brahmanical ritual system, thereby simply assimilating the sacrificer to the (Buddhist and Jaina) renouncer; his perception of the “inner conflict” of Vedic tradition as a “problem” doomed to remain unresolved, rather than as a willfully maintained dialectical paradigm and cultural resource; and, finally, the lack of any real attempt to think classical Brahmanism and radical Tantrism together within a single paradigm, whose Janus-faced orientation would be explicable only by rethinking “Hinduism” as a “semiotic” strategy adopted by the Vedic sacrificial ideology for assimilating its Other. Why was the “pre-classical” transgressive dimension, largely rejected from the public face of classical Brahmanism, reworked into the emerging forms of Tantric doctrine and praxis, with brahmins par excellence, like Abhinavagupta, straddling both worlds? [**<159**]



do not belong to the “ethnicity” (the “Licchavis”) that would have initially introduced the Vedic tradition into the Kathmandu Valley, much less into the subcontinent. The “memory” of this cleavage is expressed in the opposition between Indra and Bhairava, which even finds festive enactment as a ritualised “conflict” between the invading Aryan chief and the indigenous people of the Valley. Nevertheless, Newar society is held together by a “Hindu” sacrificial schema and mythological frame of reference, the ritual trunk of which, while proliferating like the Indian banyan (*ficus religiosa*), is firmly rooted in the soil of Vedic tradition that, as a separate and independent current, has been reduced to a mere vestige and shadow of itself (as in the Tantrified *Agnihotra* of Patan). The challenge for the contemporary scholar deciphering the religious system “from the outside” is to account satisfactorily for the “acculturating” process through which originally autonomous elements would have fused together to constitute a single (admittedly hierarchised and segmented) society and, conversely, tolerated a constant fission of subgroups even while holding them together organically within a shared universe of representations. What ethnography reveals to us, when deciphered from the vantage point of the cult of (Pachali) Bhairava and in the light of the larger religio-cultural history of the subcontinent, is that these diverse representations have been woven into the often unrecognisable and bewildering mosaic of a single fabric through an unceasing, never simply given but ever renewed, semiotic process: it is this cognitive activity, of which the Newars, to varying degrees in the course of their daily lives, are themselves both the objects and the agents, that has secreted the proliferating signs that glue together a coherent symbolic order still centred, through the “person” of the king-Bhairava (as through the royal *vidushaka*), on transgressive disorder.<sup>34</sup> Freed from the materiality of the sacrifice and the constraints of real life, this symbolic order finds its purest [**<160-161>**]

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<sup>34</sup> [**160>**] Like Prof. Antonio de Nicolás, in chapter 3 of his intuitive *Meditations Through the Rig Veda* on “Culture and Meaning: The Hymns and the Sacrifice,” we believe that this was already the original preoccupation of Vedic religion: the *Rigveda* “narrates the struggle of the Aryan families of ‘seers’ (*rishis*) as they tried to unify the world of diversity and opposition around them through sharing in a common ‘vision’ — a common ‘viewpoint’ (*darshanam*). India was the battle ground of this struggle and the intended reconciliation, and to India we owe what no other nation has been able to offer ...” (51); “the fact is that the Indian civilization, like any other great civilization, is a composite creation of the influence and dialectical tension of many civilizations.... What is significant in the Indian Aryan case, is that the Aryans of India ‘heard/saw’ this diversity and tried to reconcile its continuity and innovation through the sacrifice, a condition which escapes any reader of the Rig Veda if he does not exclusively attend to the text itself and share in its original intentionality” (52). It is even likely that the roots of this preoccupation are to be found in (the elite of) the Indus-Sarasvati civilisation, whose ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity is only beginning to be adequately appreciated. [**<160**]

expression in the (classical) drama that unfolds around the well-formed (royal) hero who forms a bi-unity with his *alter ego*, the deformed *vidushaka*.<sup>35</sup>

The central problem posed by the history of Indian religions, up till and even beyond the Islamic era, is the emergence, consolidation and extension of this shared semiotic system that admitted of a multiplicity of regional variants and accommodated divergent, even conflicting, doctrinal positions. This macro-history is composed of a number of interrelated mysteries some of which have been addressed in the above study: the emergence and disappearance of Buddhism as a dynamic and independent cultural force, the ambivalent relationship between Vedic sacrifice and Tantric praxis, the nature and role of Indian kingship vis-à-vis the competing religious paradigms, the integration of tribal cultures and diverse ethnicities into a larger "Aryan" discourse, and ultimately the "processual logic" that presided over the elaboration of an elastic symbolic universe that was able to encompass and regulate such unity-in-diversity. The parties that competed over and thereby contributed towards this emerging common trunk of discourse took their stand on priorities that were not mutually incompatible. Though the most insistent on "doctrine" (non-Self, impermanence, etc.) and individual salvation, Buddhism, unlike the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, was characterised from the beginning by a healthy distance from the world, an open-endedness towards the future, a distrust of external (at least to the collective Sangha) authority, a readiness to experiment and innovate that rapidly assimilated and sought to synthesise cultural elements from every side, thus serving as a catalyst in the forging of this common discourse. The persisting Shamanic core of the religious life of the diverse "tribal" communities, on the other hand, would have ensured the development and conservation of this esoteric "bodily" dimension, as reflected in Tantricism, within and despite the adoption of an urban material culture impregnated by a mercantile ethos.<sup>36</sup> By subscribing to the

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<sup>35</sup> [161>] Just as the (supermassive) 'black-hole' at the very hub of the galactic organization, gives birth to and feeds upon its host system, mysteriously regulating even its furthest reaches through some intangible synchronicity, the sacrificial order (*rta*) too revolves around a deliberately maintained chaos, disruptive and deadly, that would be the source of all life. This might not be a gratuitous analogy for such esoteric notions surrounding death have been expressed through astronomical correlations in India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, South America, etc.

<sup>36</sup> This coexistence, opposition and complementarity between ascetic practices and values, on the one hand, and a mercantile mentality, on the other, would have already characterised the Indus-Sarasvati civilisation (c. 2500–1900 BC), which was an integral part of the larger Third Millennium Middle Asian interaction sphere (to use the terminology of Gregory Possehl). As such, the socio-economic conditions that gave birth to Buddhism could be understood, in important respects, as a re-

Hindu-Buddhist pantheons, rituals, and myths, these localised communities were able to overcome their relative isolation, communicate with each other, gradually fuse through symbiosis and eventually constitute new ethnicities, like that of the Newars. What is important, from the perspective of these diverse and distinct [<161-162>] indigenous communities, would be that this overarching “Aryan” umbrella not just allowed but facilitated the adaptation and retention of much that mattered to them of their distinctive institutions and life-styles. This was possible because the “acculturation” operated not on the basis of doctrinal uniformity, nor of enduring political unification (i.e., a historically constituted nation with a continuous existence), nor through the atomisation of Newar society into (supposedly equivalent and autonomous) “individuals” as in the modern West, but through the generalised endorsement of a shared symbolic framework that regulated communal life and determined the system of values. The uncontainable polyvalence of these symbols favoured unity-in-diversity.

Can we meaningfully characterise Newar religion, especially at the wider communitarian level and in its socio-political dimension, as being profoundly “Hindu”? Rather than allow the very object of our study to evaporate simply because it does not fit our preconceived reductive categories, it is our modes of analysis that need to be adapted to account for and do justice to the self-representations of the subjects who have ‘constructed’ this system of relations. Formal Vedic sacrifices were practiced during the Licchavi period and have left their symbolic imprint on place-names, cults to various deities like those of Indra and of Pachali Bhairava, “national” festivals, organisation of the pantheon, royal mythology, and other aspects of Newar life, despite the intervening obscurity of the Transitional period. Within this frame of reference, yet side-by-side and overflowing beyond its core practices, there developed a pantheon of Hindu gods, who were anchored across space and time, networked through multiple sanctuaries with their officiating priests and set into regular motion through the seasonal rhythms of public festivals. What re-emerges to the gaze of the anthropologist-historian after the apparent disintegration of this “Vedic” culture during the Transitional Period, is a generalisation and bewildering proliferation of the original symbolic universe, even without any explicit or self-conscious reference to a narrowly defined “Vedic” tradition. These developments opened the religious

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emergence of an earlier ideological tension that had been overlaid for more than a thousand years, at least in north-west of the subcontinent, by a pastoral Vedic tradition that devalued the life of the city (see note 6). Instead of attempting to derive one unknown (the conditions facilitating the rise and rapid spread of Buddhism) from another (viz., the value system and religious representations of the Indus-Sarasvati civilisation), this paper takes Magadha of the sixth century BC as constituting a radical break. However, a complete picture would eventually require a better assessment of the religious life of the elites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, and its enduring impact on the surrounding and subsequent cultural developments. This may well demand a re-evaluation of the role and significance of Jainism as well. [<161]

representations to alternative, even contesting, Buddhist and particularised local (re) interpretations, even while ensuring thereby that these “sub-systems” remained, and became even more firmly, integrated within the encompassing semiotic system. These “non-Hindu” specialists did not merely “appropriate” large swathes of this symbolic geography; they became, in their own way, ardent propagators of a “life-support system” that was never experienced as alien. It is in this sense that the Newar lives within a “Hinduised” universe: whether he represents himself entirely as Buddhist or rather as a Jyapu (farmer) faithful to the ancestral traditions, regardless of their religious veneer, of his “caste,” the Newar cannot help but participate, directly or indirectly, in this semiotic system that provides a unifying frame of reference for all that is distinctive about his immediate polity and, beyond that, his larger Himalayan “ethnicity.” The “trans-national” outlook that “Hinduism,” understood as a semiotic system, had conferred on Newar self-representation is reflected in the extent to which enduring links, both symbolic [[162-163](#)] and institutional, have been cultivated with (even South) India (Madhes).<sup>37</sup>

The otherwise inexplicable “irregularities” that we have noted in and around the cult of Pachali Bhairava may be understood as historical precipitates, falling into the, as it were, “predetermined” slots of such a broad-based logic of religious acculturation. Instead of simply formulating an abstract model — based on an inevitably selective use of disparate historical and ethnographic data — of the religio-cultural dynamics underlying the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism, we have sought, simultaneously, both to apply and demonstrate the same through a coherent, systematic and comprehensive decipherment of its “sedimentation” in the cult of this specifically Newar divinity localised in the south of Kathmandu. While providing an empirical “test” of the acculturation paradigm, this hermeneutic exercise suggests, conversely, that the “mindless syncretism” of the Newars does indeed obey a rigorous, though implicit, logic that has a rationality of its own. A ritual framework that involves the cooperation of such a diversity of social actors has been able to hang together despite the vicissitudes of history, and has symbolically anchored itself into the spatio-temporal universe of the whole Kathmandu Valley. It is therefore incumbent upon any would-be detractors of this model to offer an alternative framework that does sufficient (if not equal) justice to all that we know today of Pachali Bhairava and his links to other places, times and divinities. We have attempted to steer a mid-course

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<sup>37</sup> [[163](#)>] For example, the primary officiants of the royal cult at the national shrine of Pashupatinath have always been and continue to be Bhatta priests from Karnataka in South India (currently being studied by Axel Michaels and Nutan Dhar Sharma). Hindu “kingship” was primarily a symbolic institution that had little in common with and, indeed, seems to have impeded the development of modern nationalism that has been able to assert itself only through a process of reduction. [[163](#)]

between two opposed approaches to the study of religious phenomena in historical perspective that nevertheless collude with each other in driving a wedge between 'elite' self-representation and the lived reality of 'common' folk, a dichotomy that is fraught with long-term consequences for the 'cultural politics' of the social groups under study that may be gullible enough to appropriate these alien and divisive categories of thought. The "anthropological" approach tends to minimise the role of "elite" self-representation as expounded in canonical texts and would deduce from ethnographic data that Buddhism (and subsequently Indian Islam) is polytheistic, caste-based, world-affirming, and, in short, indistinguishable from Hinduism. When it does not simply turn away from such "degenerate" and "syncretic modes" of religious life, the "text-based" approach of the "classicist" would, for its part, prefer to focus on the 'true' Buddhism or 'Hinduism' as expounded, debated and refined by the literati, philosophers and theologians like the polyglot Vasubandhu or our Abhinavagupta.<sup>38</sup> The "dialectical" approach outlined here refuses to sacrifice either pole, and is instead intent on understanding how self-representations and lived reality have not only remained in constant (and, on the whole, productive) tension but have interacted mutually within a spiralling movement, the underlying [<163-164>] logic of which was that of the gradual integration of disparate social groups within an overarching shared religious culture. It would seem that "Hinduism" had "from the beginning" (see note 33) been a semiotic process defined by such an orientation that has not just accommodated, but actively

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<sup>38</sup> [161>] When in the early 1980s Elizabeth began extending her field-work on Bhairava to the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (falling under Himalayan Studies) and India (Elizabeth belonged then to a research team on Tantra directed by André Padoux) were the provinces of entirely separate research institutions in France that hardly worked together on such questions. This was not simply because of the tension between anthropologists and textual scholars, an opposition that was already being broken down under the impact of the monumental work of Louis Dumont and Madeleine Biardeau, but because Indologists felt that Newar practices, if they happened to know something of them, were somehow "all mixed up," whereas ethnographers felt it convenient to work under the overall assumption that the categories of classical India were less relevant for Nepal. When Prof. Cornille Jest learned, when we happened to run into him on our first visit to Kathmandu, that we were attempting an empirical and theoretical synthesis of the two domains, he encouraged Elizabeth to join the Himalayan Studies group whose direction had been taken over from him not too long ago by G. Toffin. It is an eloquent testimony to the fruitfulness of the direction of inquiry undertaken in this paper that it has been taken up in earnest and very systematically by the multidisciplinary research project at the University of Heidelberg. For example, many of the German contributors (anthropologists, Sanskritists, geographers, historians, architects, etc.) to their forthcoming volume on *Visualizing Space* (2004) in Benares (which also contains our paper extending this acculturation model to Hindu-Muslim syncretism) have previously worked (and even lived) in Nepal. [<164]

encouraged the symbiosis of multiple, even conflicting, practices, doctrines and religions. In all likelihood, the Newars were not so much a unitary race that first underwent Buddhist influences, then gradually adopted Hindu culture, but rather a mixed population that became a recognisably distinct “ethnicity” through such acculturation.

But other religious traditions too have their own complex and evolving semiotic systems and, like Christianity, have come to encompass alien populations and even absorb entire cultures. The traditional Jewish problematic of the Other and the contemporary American “melting-pot” model of “multiculturalism” might perhaps serve as foils that offer a distinctive handle on what we mean by an “acculturation model of Hinduism.” In its most banal sense, acculturation is typically something that simply “happens” when different (even hostile) communities are juxtaposed in time and place and begin to interact with each other; hence, no religious tradition can escape the transformative power of its immediate surroundings as evidenced by the varied evolution of the Abrahamic tradition(s) as conditioned by time, space and general (desert, rural, urban, industrial, humanist, postmodern, etc.) mentalities. Nevertheless, Judaism was predicated on the vigilant opposition between the community of believers, who wholeheartedly submit to the unique universal transcendent God, and its polytheistic neighbours, who posed the constant risk of contamination to the traditional faith and practice. The “election” of Israel was understood not as some intrinsic superiority of the Jew over the Gentile, but as a reflection of the subservience of the former to a universal ideal that was to be a “light unto the nations,” a messianic burden from which it would be relieved only at the end of times. The “inner conflict” of Judaism consists precisely in the tension between the universalising ideal and the separatist attitude that would be the historical prerequisite for its conservation and eventual realisation when the messiah does indeed arrive. Acculturation, in such a (for example, [[164-165](#)] Greco-Roman) context, was fraught with danger for it not only exposed the Jew to seductive foreign modes of thought and practice (such as philosophy and idolatry), but also provided a fertile climate for radical reinterpretations, such as Christianity, that could threaten to implode the traditional edifice from within. The problematic relation to the Other in the Abrahamic legacy becomes acutely apparent in today’s impasse where the same “ethnocentric” universalism, since incarnated (and, as it were, plebianised) and generalised in Islam, insists with even greater vehemence on the line that separates the *umma* (community of believers) from those beyond the pale. Even Christianity that, in principle, individualised faith and dissolved the religious law — and may likewise be understood as playing a mediating role between Jew and pagan similar to that played by Buddhism between brahmin and tribal — never really escaped this founding and inherited opposition between Jew and Gentile whose lines were simply redrawn around the “sacrificial” figure of Christ. Ongoing and inevitable cultural contacts (e.g., the exposure to Judaeo-Christian monotheism) may have well triggered these schismatic developments (e.g., adoption of Islam by the pagan Arabs) but it could hardly be said that the



intentionality encoded into these Abrahamic religious systems was the acculturation of neighbouring communities. "Hinduism" with its internalisation of the (transgressive) Other (Bhairava) can only be understood, on the contrary, as a semiotic process that was entirely driven by and orientated towards acculturation.<sup>39</sup>

But what of acculturation in the modern context, where the secular domain — with its own inherent, shared and levelling dynamism — offers a neutral and privileged space for the mutual encounter, mingling and inevitable transformation of conflicting faiths? In the "melting-pot" of contemporary (especially American) society, for example, the "individual" is for the most part free to mix and match his preferred food, attire, political engagements, religious beliefs, and so on, from a wide palette of choices made available by its diverse ethnic components within a (founding, continuous and still) dominant (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant – WASP) culture. Finding themselves in a new, complex and unprecedented situation, defined above all by disruptive/enabling thresholds in both the material conditions and the ideological contours of the adopted homeland, immigrant communities and their religious representations are compelled to undergo a continuous process of self-redefinition, not just to attract and retain adherents but even to ensure their very survival within a competitive milieu imbued with "foreign" values and aspirations. Of course, such a state [[165-166](#)] of affairs would have been inevitable in the case of both Hindu-Buddhist interaction in ancient India and, more recently, with respect to Hindu-Muslim acculturation (as reflected, for example, in the furor about conversions). A corresponding "neutral" ground would have also existed in the subcontinent and whose model would have been provided especially by the "secularising" milieu of the court and as reflected in the profane face of Indian kingship (so emphasised by Louis Dumont). The royal circles (such as that of Jayapida in late eighth-century Kashmir) nurtured prolific trans-sectarian production in aesthetics, philosophy and even Tantra or often provided the spiritual impetus and material incentive for the same. However, unlike the modern "separation of church and state" that insists on excluding (at least

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<sup>39</sup> [[165](#)>] The comparison is actually more complex because the classical brahmins (with their isolative insistence on purity and adherence to Vedic orthodoxy) occupy a role that is in many ways analogous to that of observant Jews (as a "nation of priests"). However, their material dependence on the rest of Hindu society (not just protection and immunity from the king), including and especially the untouchables, and their participating in and taking custody of the wider symbolic universe that envelopes even their polar opposite prevents us from clinching this parallelism with orthodox Jews bound by the legalism that later came to be embodied in the Talmud. The most striking consequence of this contrast is that a radically Tantric brahmin, like Abhinavagupta, ends up being transformed into a "super-Hindu" of sorts, whereas an overtly transgressive Kabbalist, like Sabbatai Zevi or Jakob Frank, is cast out of the tradition as a heretic. [[165](#)]

overt) religious representations from the common public sphere, the “secular” in the classical Indian context was rather a privileged space wherein divergent, and even conflicting, sectarian commitments could fruitfully engage, explore, and challenge each other on a more or less level playing field. By ensuring his trans-sectarian status, it could be argued, the sacred (and even transgressive) dimension of the (god) king, as the fulcrum of a sacrificial model of society, would have only reinforced this (outwardly) “secular” aspect of the royal function as a catalyst of socio-religious acculturation. The Indian solution to the problem of ethnic diversity and religious pluralism was not a “humanism” that would make Man the least common denominator and measure of all things, but a “divine-centredness” that encouraged multiple kaleidoscopic *darshanas* (views) of what lay beyond human perception (and even comprehension). The three interlocking frameworks we have attempted to recover in the Newar cult of Pachali Bhairava — Shamanism, Buddhism and Vedism — are all built around and geared towards transcendence. Though Bhairava, like the newly arrived immigrant-refugee to the Promised Land, appears to “Hinduised” society as the Outsider in human guise, this terrifying embodiment of Abhinavagupta’s Anuttara (Absolute) remains at heart as unspeakably and unrepresentably Other as the God of Moses (and of Sabbatai Zevi).

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## E. List of Maps

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