

DEMOTING VI SHNU



*Ritual, Politics, and the Unraveling
of Nepal's Hindu Monarchy*



ANNE T. MOCKO



Demoting Vishnu

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HINDU MONARCHY

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Any serious attempt to understand a public festival or ritual, no matter how ancient in origin, should not rest on the assumption that it necessarily serves to maintain the status quo.

—BRUCE MCCOY OWENS (1989: 321)

The impact of a particular enactment of a ritual is a product of its past performances. Memories associated with those earlier ritual experiences color the experience of a new enactment of the rites. Rites thus have both a conservative bias and an innovative potential. Paradoxically, it is the very conservatism of ritual forms that can make ritual a potent force in political change.

—DAVID KERTZER, RITUAL, POLITICS, AND POWER (1988: 12)

India has had democracy for 60 years, but don't its kings still have a role? There's a religious role that continues. In 5–7 days, there'll be the Jagannath chariot festival [in Puri, India]. . . . Before they pull the chariot, first the king has to sweep. Until Puri Naresh, the king sweeps, the chariot doesn't move, the people just have to sit there—the chariot doesn't move. But India has democracy. . . .

Whatever was the kings' religious tradition, their cultural role, that's still going on. And you would never say "former king" there [in India].

There's only a "former king" in Nepal [where the king has lost his ritual roles].

—ASSISTANT ROYAL GURU MADHAV BHATTARAI (July 6, 2010)

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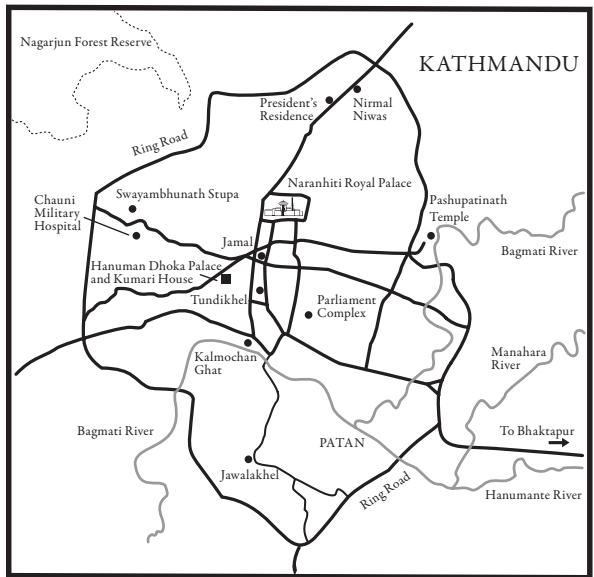
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I

Introduction

ON THE MORNING of June 11, 2008, journalists jostled in the entrance hall of Narayanhiti Royal Palace in the center of Kathmandu. A burst of noise and a scuffle of movement ensued as King Gyanendra entered the hall, smiled, greeted the audience, and seated himself at a small table set up for the press conference. The king pulled a pair of bright-red reading glasses from his pocket, took a three-page statement out of an envelope, and asked for silence. He then read his prepared remarks, professing his love for Nepal and his gratitude to all who had helped him during his reign, and confirming that he would be complying with the new government's decision to dissolve the 240-year-old monarchy. He thanked the press and left the hall without fielding questions. That evening, the now-former king walked out of Narayanhiti Palace and together with his wife (the now-former queen) climbed into a black sedan. A driver steered them through the west gate and drove them up to a forest bungalow north of the capital, where they would spend a few months in quiet retreat before returning to the city to assume lives as ordinary citizens of Nepal.

The departure of Gyanendra Shah from Narayanhiti Palace was an extraordinary event for several reasons. First, it marked the end of a king's rule not precipitated by that king's death, which was irregular (though not unknown in Nepal's history). Far more crucially, the departure of the former king marked not only the end of his particular reign, nor even only the end of a 240-year-old dynasty, but the end of the very institution of monarchy itself. King Gyanendra was not removed in order to place a new king on the throne: he was removed in such a way that there would cease to be

a king of Nepal. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the departure of the Shahs, however, was how orderly and peaceful it was. On the final day of Gyanendra's kingship, he was not under arrest, embroiled in street protests, or hounded by his erstwhile subjects, nor was he threatened with violence or prosecution. Rather, he was giving a press conference and packing up his last personal possessions. Unlike deposed heads of state in other countries (such as, most recently, Tunisia, Libya, or Egypt), Gyanendra Shah was not killed, arrested, or sent into exile. He was formally requested by the government to leave the palace, but he was permitted to stay in Nepal with no official recriminations, and he was even granted a year's use of a nationalized government property for temporary residence following his demotion. At the time of writing, he lives in his private residence in downtown Kathmandu and travels periodically within the country and abroad.

How is it that a deeply entrenched social institution such as Nepal's monarchy could have ended so calmly? After all, the monarchy was not an institution that had been gradually fading into the background over the course of years or centuries. Less than a decade before the dissolution of the monarchy, Gyanendra's brother had been a secure constitutional monarch, and less than three years before his departure Gyanendra himself had been the executive head of the government, passing laws and commanding the army. The end of Nepal's monarchy was the result of revolution, not quiet obsolescence, and yet it was accomplished without injuring or punishing the king himself.

Instead, for the two years following Nepal's peaceful national uprising in 2006, the opponents of the monarchy had been acting systematically against the office of kingship, rather than the person of the king. Over the course of the so-called Interim Period, they incrementally blocked the king's access to all of the objects, locations, events, duties, privileges, and relationships through which the monarchy had been constructed and supported, and redistributed that access to "the head of state"—which they chose now to construe as meaning the prime minister rather than the king. By separating Gyanendra Shah from all the social practices and ceremonies that had made him a monarch, they effectively prevented him from reproducing his royalty, and thus they dismantled the social office "king of Nepal." When Gyanendra left Narayanhiti Palace in June 2008, there was so little fuss or drama because the work of his demotion had already been accomplished: over the course of the preceding months, he had already ceased to be king in anything but his residence.

In particular, starting in July 2007, the new government actively worked to disrupt and appropriate the king's active calendar of royal rituals. Ritual had been one of the most crucial of the practices of kingship, for, perhaps more starkly than any other practice, it had performed the king as being basically different from all other social actors. Many political actors might travel in fancy cars, lower-level government officials might swear lesser-ranking colleagues into office, and the prime minister might

live in a residence very similar to a palace. But no one outside of the royal lineage could have a privileged relationship to the country's gods and goddesses, inaugurate the chariot procession at Indra Jatra, preside over the showing of the sacred *bhoto*, or offer blessings at Dasai. Ritual constituted a particular individual—a king—as someone special enough to exercise the other privileges and duties of kingship. Removing those rituals rendered a formerly special individual ordinary.

It is the purpose of this book to account for the system of rituals that had in previous decades and centuries helped to support and produce the institution of monarchy in Nepal, and to examine how and why that system unraveled in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In focusing on the dynamics of royal ritual, it is not my intention to suggest that the king was an unworldly holy being at the center of an exotic spiritual land, nor that the reasons and ways that the monarchy came under attack can be exclusively explained in religious idioms, for Nepal was not a theater state. Rather, I take my cues from the leaders of the interim administration who demoted their king, men who explained to me that it was crucial to seize royal rituals because so long as Gyanendra Shah retained his rituals and his palace residence, he would continue to be the king no matter how many other privileges and powers they stripped away. In other words, it was the ongoing practice of royal rituals that at a most basic level underwrote his social identity as "king," and it was the collapse or discontinuation of those rituals that would enable the institution of kingship to be permanently brought to a halt.

DEMOTING THE GOD-KING?

At first glance, the collapse of Nepal's monarchy might well seem to be a subject better suited to the expertise and attentions of a political scientist or security expert rather than a historian of religion, and indeed I hope that in the future scholars from other disciplines will undertake complementary analyses of Nepal's recent party dynamics and military situation. However, even the most secular of Nepal's political participants acknowledge two realities: first, that Nepali politics are not just performative, but that political actors frequently engage in explicitly religious ritual; and second, that the monarchy itself and the old kingdom model of statehood were founded on explicitly religious (Hindu) ideologies. For these reasons, a religious-studies lens turns out to be a helpful one to understand Nepal's recent transition from Hindu monarchy to secular democracy. Moreover, kingship specifically and political processes more generally have long been of interest to scholars of ritual and religion, based upon the complex cross-cultural ways kings and other politicians can participate in religious practices and ideologies, as well as the ways religious idioms can shape and authorize social power.

Monarchy in particular has been an object of interest to anthropologists, social scientists, and historians of religion for well over a century because of the strategies by which various monarchies have laid claim not just to juridical or economic privileges, but to symbolic and cosmologic idioms of power. This discussion was initiated by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* and A. M. Hocart in *Kingship*. In each work, kingship was treated as an archaic political institution, one that typified prescientific society: premodern Europe, the ancient Near East and Asia, and the colonized world of their day.¹ Both scholars also tended to frame monarchy as part of broader processes of sociopolitical evolution, and Frazer for one clearly expected kingship to gradually give way (like magic and religion) to more “rational” forms of governance. Most importantly, however, both accounts focused on the divine pretensions of monarchs: claims of rulers to be god-kings.

Many observers of Nepal’s monarchy have echoed Frazer and Hocart’s interest in god-kings, insisting that Nepalis worshipped their king as an avatar of the god Vishnu. Indeed, when King Birendra died in 2001, the third sentence of his *New York Times* obituary read in part, “the Nepalese considered him a reincarnation of Vishnu.”² The claim that Nepalis worshipped their king has been made in academic literature, in popular literature (such as travel books), in palace-sponsored propaganda, and in Nepalis’ own discussions about their country, and it typically conveys the impression that the Nepali people are simple, quaint, traditional, exotic, spiritual, and backward.³ The question of the divinity of Nepal’s king may be quite a bit more complicated, however. Certainly there are extensive rhetorical links between Nepal’s kings and Vishnu. The Shah dynasty’s throne was decorated with twining snakes in imitation of the iconography of Vishnu’s Shesha, for example, and the royal palace was named for a temple to Vishnu (under the epithet “Narayana”). Some pre-Shah Malla kings claimed to be “images of Hari” or “amshas (fragments) of Vishnu.” Historically, however, fairly few Nepali kings had the audacity to claim status as Vishnu’s *avatar*, and one first-millennium king may even have lost his throne for the audacity of commissioning a statue depicting him as Vishnu.⁴ Many kings made no such claim to divine status; indeed, Inden points out that across the Indian subcontinent South Asian monarchs rarely made claims to full divine kingship.⁵ In fact, the specific phraseology of kings as *avatars*, while not unknown in earlier eras, seems not to have been especially common in Nepal prior to the *panchayat* era (1960–1990), suggesting that the ubiquity of the phrase *avatar of Vishnu* in recent decades and the concomitant insistence that Nepalis worshipped their kings may actually be a product less of traditional religious/political patterns than of twentieth-century royal propaganda.

In the twentieth century, though, Nepal’s kings were at pains to make sure people said that they were “avatars of Vishnu,” and many foreign observers dutifully

absorbed and repeated this exoticism. Contemporary Nepalis are also widely familiar with the concept, probably as the result of national school curricula and the palace's control over the national media from the 1960s through the 1980s. Yet despite the fact that people (both Nepali and foreign) continue to repeat the claim that the king was venerated as Vishnu, I have to date never met anyone who espoused a personal belief in the godliness of the king. Nepali friends and acquaintances (especially when discussing my research with me) frequently explained to me that "Nepalis" believe/d that the king is/was Vishnu, but they never said that *they themselves* hold/held such a belief. They rather attribute such belief to other people: "people" generally, old people, rural people, royalists (*mandales*). Some people have claimed that they themselves respected the king in ways *similar* to how they respect gods, or that if they met the king they would behave in ways *similar* to worship, but I have never yet met someone who was willing to make a theological claim that he or she believed the king to have been god. This disconnect was typified by a conversation I had with a taxi driver in the fall of 2009:

DRIVER (in English): The Nepali people, you know, they thought the king was like a god. He was, I don't know how you say in your language, an avatar of Vishnu. They said like that.

AUTHOR (in Nepali): And you? Did you believe the king was Vishnu's avatar?

DRIVER (in Nepali): It's like this: I used to work in a restaurant, and I had two managers. One was very strict, but the other one was good. Both of them I had to respect with my mouth, but only one of them I respected with my heart. The kings were like that. Gyanendra I respected with my mouth, but Birendra I respected with my heart. He was a good person, Birendra, and I loved him. Nepali people, we all loved him.

This conversation makes clear that the driver is familiar with the claim that kings were avatars, but when prompted to discuss his own position, he stops talking about divinity and talks instead about affection. In other words, he shifts in register between official narratives and personal understandings—a rhetorical shift I have found common in discussing the monarchy. When speaking abstractly (and particularly when speaking English), many Nepalis of my acquaintance have repeated the familiar ideology of divinity or *avatar*-hood, but when asked about their own feelings they have spoken instead about respect, usually in thoroughly secular terms.

The divinity of the king thus seems to have been an oddly dissociative discourse—an idea that everyone knew about, and many people repeated, but something potentially no one believed himself or herself. It is possible that I have failed to document a case of a true *avatar*-believer because my research has been conducted in the

twilight and aftermath of the monarchy, and that some people who might have held such beliefs have now recanted them or now do not voice them. However, I did speak with many devout royalists during my research, none of whom listed the king's divinity as a reason why they supported the monarchy. I think it is likely that even when the monarchy was firmly in power, there were many in the country who knew and could repeat royalist ideologies but who did not take them to heart. The claims of the divinity of the king seem, then, to serve as an example of how official narratives may be pervasive and yet empty—how a political ideology may be widely familiar and widely circulated without actually penetrating most people's private convictions.⁶

It is to this pervasive but dissociative official ideology that the title of this volume, "Demoting Vishnu," is directed. The title is not intended to suggest that Nepalis believed that their king was Vishnu, and that his demotion was an affair of deep theological significance. Rather, it is intended as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the pretensions of Nepali royal rhetoric and has (to date) been easily recognizable to Nepalis as such. In fact, most Nepalis have laughed when they have heard the title, sometimes quite hard, and many of them repeated it to themselves as if savoring a fine joke. Most people I know continue to see ex-King Gyanendra not as a holy man but as a person who wanted to claim extraordinary and unwarranted status for himself and who thus deserved a comeuppance.

RELIGION, POLITICS, KINGSHIP

The significance of the demotion of the king of Nepal was not, then, that the world lost a god-king. If the purpose of the present volume is not to analyze the valences of divine kingship, however, that is not to say that the resources of anthropology and religious studies will not be useful, for monarchy has proved an enduring subject of interest within both disciplines far beyond discussions of royal divinity. More recent scholars of religion have taken a variety of approaches to understanding monarchies, particularly paying attention to religious/ritual pretensions and performances of kings. They have explained traditions of kingship in terms of the performative nature of all politics, the logics of cultures and social structures, and the usefulness of religious practices for placing political claims beyond question or challenge.⁷ These subsequent studies of monarchy have, in the course of their analyses, engaged some of the basic philosophical questions of culture and social organization, regarding the social creation of meaning, the separability (or not) of different spheres of cultural activity, the continuities and discontinuities between Western/non-Western or contemporary/premodern social practices—indicating that monarchy provides a particularly rich opportunity to interrogate social processes more generally.

Within discussions of monarchies around the world, there has been a particularly vibrant conversation about the religio-political roles and statuses of kings in South and Southeast Asia. These debates have focused on several questions distinctive from the broader debates already indicated, including the modes of operation of precolonial states and the extent to which they were centralized or decentralized, the evidentiary uses and limits of normative literary texts about kingship, and the roles kings played in the social order relative to priests, to the caste system, and to the acquisition and distribution of resources.⁸ More recent studies of South Asian kingship have particularly focused on the assertion of royalty in limited or constrained circumstances, including a rising interest in so-called little kings/kingdoms as well as in monarchs under the Mughal, colonial, and postcolonial political systems.⁹

The present project draws on and complements several specific debates on the nature and roles of monarchy, particularly in South Asia. First, it responds to questions of whether the king had a preset structural role in society, and if so how that role was constructed and sustained. The question of the “structural” status of kings was powerfully raised by Louis Dumont, who posed the theory in *Homo Hierarchicus* that South Asian kings and Hindu priests existed in a logical/structural complementarity: that kings and priests defined one another and in turn set the terms for the caste system.¹⁰ This theory has been extensively critiqued, particularly for depicting Indic society as being fundamentally static, and I similarly want to resist the idea that Nepal possessed some immutable system that locked kings and priests together at the top of a changeless and totalizing hierarchy. While I do want to argue that the kings of Nepal had a distinctive social position, I do *not* want to argue that this was simply because of an abstract, logical play of binaries (such as pure/impure or brahmin/ksatriya). Rather, the role of the king was a dynamic process, conditioned by historical circumstances and constantly performed through time.

Further, it is crucial to highlight—*contra* Dumont, and *contra* most orthodox Indic texts on the nature of monarchy—that the kings of Nepal were actually not primarily defined in ritual relationship to brahmin priests.¹¹ This is not to say that the Nepali monarchy did not have relationships with brahmins; on the contrary, the Shahs kept brahmin priests on their payroll throughout the history of the dynasty. The eighteenth-century Shahs in Gorkha had patronage arrangements with five different priestly families, and in recent decades there was an office in the Narayanhiti Palace Secretariat staffed by as many as a dozen full-time brahmin-caste religious advisors, ritual specialists, and astrologers, who came to work and drew salaries much as the other office administrators at the palace. The Shahs also made gifts to brahmins on various occasions and came into contact with priests at a variety of key temples where they worshiped.

However, these relationships do not match the classic understandings of the king/priest relationship in South Asia. According to classical Indic texts such as *Manu* or the *Arthashastra* (the primary sources for structuralists like Dumont, as well as for many other scholars), kings would always be left socially and religiously vulnerable by their warrior activities, and they would hence have to rely upon brahmins to absolve them of the dharmic liabilities of their job (such as killing during wartime). According to orthodox texts, then, the brahmin priest would have supposedly been an indispensable and powerful complement to any king.¹²

It is possible that this arrangement indeed pertained for some now-departed monarchies; it is also possible that this arrangement was simply the conceit of the brahmins who wrote classical Indic texts, and that no kings relied on religious justification quite so heavily as their priests thought they did/should. Certainly a reliance on brahmin priesthood to absolve their warrior deeds does not seem to have constituted the core logic of the Shah monarchy. The Shah monarchs, at least those of the recent decades, do not seem at all to have felt or been understood to be vulnerable because of the dharmic liabilities of their office or to have been in constant need of priestly absolution; instead, they seem consistently to have stood as the employers and patrons (occasionally family friends) of priests.

This status imbalance may be largely due to the fact that at any one time there were many brahmin priests serving a single powerful king in different ways, or that the king had many claims to forms of sociopolitical power that far exceeded his religious activities. The status of the Nepali royal brahmins may also have been weakened by the fact that for many of the most crucial rituals of the king's annual calendar, the relevant ritual specialists were not high-caste brahmins at all, but rather members of the local ethnic Newar community from a mix of caste backgrounds. In short, then, while the Nepali monarchy did confirm the truism that brahmin priests provided specialty tasks that Hindu kings were not able to perform on their own behalf, the structured relationship between the Shah kings and their priests generally placed the king as the drastically senior partner, not the vulnerable supplicant. The Shah dynasty of Nepal thus presents a crucial case for examining the ritual status of South Asian kings, challenging the often-asserted centrality of brahmin priests to royal religious identity and performance.

Discussions about South Asian kings as ritual figures have not been restricted to discussions of brahmin priests, however, and there has been a lively academic debate about the role of rituals themselves in South Asian monarchies, relative to kings' more practical powers. This debate was sparked by Clifford Geertz in *Negara*, in which he argued that Balinese kingship was not really about political administration but rather revolved entirely around ritual—in his classic formulation, that “power served pomp, not pomp power.”¹³ Subsequent works then have extensively debated

the nature of Indic kingship itself and the ability of precolonial Indic kings to control resources or territory. The result has been a debate that can rather simplistically be described as an argument as to whether South Asian kingship was entirely about ritual or only mostly about ritual.¹⁴

In evaluating how symbolic, ritual power related to practical, financial, administrative power for the case of the Shahs, I would like to adopt a position somewhere between the argument put forward by Geertz (that kings are symbolic figures) and the argument more normally adopted in the historiography of Nepal (that kings are politicians). I do contend that ritual was central to the Nepali monarchy, but I do not want to suggest that ritual was the sole substance of the monarchy, or that ritual could, or had to, substitute for control over military and/or financial resources. Rather, ritual was part of a broad complex of practices of monarchy, one that was particularly important because it specially marked off the king as the person who *could* have access to all the other various practices of monarchy. Ritual made him into the person who could be king. In turn, then, separating someone designated as king from those rituals did not instantly deprive him of the entirety of his kingship (as Geertz's argument might suggest), but rather it deprived him of the basic authorization to be king.

Relatedly, despite the polemics of many of Gyanendra Shah's opponents—that the presence of the monarchy indicated that Nepal had been stuck in a premodern past, or that the country was on a fixed track to “evolve” from monarchy to democracy—Nepal had not retained its kings because its society was backward or behind. Rather, the performance of royal ritual across decades and centuries had allowed the Nepali monarchy to survive and adapt as an institution to changing political circumstances, including the introduction of party-based parliamentary politics in the twentieth century. When the institution fell, it did so because of specific sociohistorical pressures, specific historical events, and specific actions of key political figures (including the king himself). This book is therefore not the story of Nepal joining the modern world by throwing off feudalism, but rather the story of historically situated, institutionalized challenges to an entrenched pattern of power, a process that resulted in the downfall of a king. It thus involves a discussion of ritual kingship in a pointedly modern context—a context in which the monarchy had retained and actually expanded its power during the twentieth century, and in which the king had been at the center of a modern nation-state.¹⁵ The king of Nepal in recent decades ruled a country with a modern state apparatus, including a tariff and taxation system, a Ministry of Finance, and a system of government schools; he presided over a parliament, ratified laws, and endowed the nation's constitutions. Rather than importing yak tails for fly whisks like the ancient kings of India, the recent Shahs enjoyed cosmopolitan luxuries, including limousines, a Swiss bank

account, and a personal physician in London. King Gyanendra's predecessor Birendra may have been consecrated in an elaborate Vedic *abhisheka*, but he also learned to fly his own helicopter. The king of Nepal was also in more recent decades a media figure whose subjects knew him through radio broadcasts, magazine photos, and television. This means that the recent Shahs have probably lived lives that had as much or more in common with those of Hugo Chavez, Barack Obama, or Hollywood celebrities than they had with ancient Indian kings such as Rajaraja I of the Chola dynasty. Yet despite the modernist amenities and aspirations of the Shahs, the Nepali monarchy nevertheless maintained clear continuity with some of the classic practices and ideologies of precolonial Hindu kingship. They maintained key ties with tutelary deities and claimed affinity to Vishnu. They gave money to temples and maintained a permanent staff of Hindu priests. At their coronations they walked beneath red cloth parasols and rode on elephants. The recent Nepali monarchy thus had not departed entirely from the ideologies and idioms of power of the long-gone monarchies described in Sanskrit texts or Telugu poetry. It had instead become something of a hybrid institution, laying claim to the plural authorities of Hindu kingship and modern statehood.

Perhaps the most interesting demonstration of this hybridity was the monarchy's appropriation of the rhetoric of democracy. Nepali politicians and rulers began to be exposed to the language and institutional practices of democracy in the 1920s, and King Tribhuvan swept to power in the early 1950s at the head of a pro-democracy movement. This meant that at the same moment that India's remaining kings were yielding to parliamentary democracy, Nepal's kings were capitalizing on it to make their positions stronger. In fact, Nepal's kings would spend almost six decades representing themselves as the champions of democracy in their country, harnessing the authority of the new system—if not always fulfilling its intended results of representative governance or human rights. The more recent anti-royal political rhetoric in Nepal (which proclaims that monarchy and democracy are fundamentally incompatible) tends to obscure the interesting and audacious program of the Shahs to strengthen their own positions, perhaps counterintuitively, through appeals both to the deep Hindu heritage of ritual kingship *and* to modernity and democracy.

RECEIVING THE KING

An interest in monarchy in the context of modernity and democracy might suggest that the proper focus of analysis should be on the perception and reception of the monarchy among the general public of Nepal, for that is the context in which democracies tend to focus their political performances. This project, by contrast, is primarily concerned not with the reception of political ideologies, but rather with

their production. This means that most of the coming discussion will defer the questions of who within Nepal found what kinds of ideology compelling—particularly who wanted the king to go and why, or who wanted the king to stay. I have chosen to focus on the production rather than reception of ideology for two main reasons. First, this has simply been my primary interest in the project: I have found the high-level changes in Nepal's government to be quite startling and have been fascinated to watch top-level, institutionally invested political elites carrying out a revolutionary project.

Second, though, I have had major methodological concerns about trying to study the “audience” or reception of the monarchy. Despite the persistent appeals in political rhetoric to “the Nepali people,” there is no such singular, unified entity simply waiting to be recorded. There are many millions of people who live within the boundaries of Nepal, who hold many millions of opinions, and who encountered (or did not encounter) the monarchy in millions of different ways. Determining who should be studied to determine what “the people” thought about the monarchy, and how such a study should be undertaken, was too amorphous to be seriously contemplated. Moreover, many of the practices that had sustained the monarchy were simply not *for* the general public, and many royal duties were carried out in ways that actually excluded the public gaze. Often, the monarchy was performed not for “the people” but for the king, top-level palace insiders, and the top leadership of the government and the army. Examining what the end of monarchy meant for “the people” would thus have missed many interesting points of contention in the battles over the institution’s existence. Thus, most of this volume will be dedicated not to explaining what the monarchy meant or didn’t mean to the general public, but to explaining how and why political elites stopped participating in elite activities.

Nevertheless, to avoid giving the impression that Nepal’s monarchy was simply elitist, or that royalist ideologies once produced were simply absorbed by the masses, I would like to note some of the regularities and some of the variations I have observed in the political opinions of people outside the immediate circles of those who orchestrated the king’s demotion. There are some points of widely common opinion in Nepal regarding the ex-monarchy. Most people loathe Gyanendra’s son, former Crown Prince Paras, for example, and people who have no direct connection to the palace overwhelmingly believe that former-king Gyanendra was somehow involved in the death of his brother Birendra. Also, there are more people who support monarchy as an abstract concept than who approve of Gyanendra—or who want Gyanendra (or his son) to be king in the future.

More useful than these broad generalizations, though, is my informal understanding of certain patterns as to how people respond to royal ideology. Broadly, it has been my experience that people tend to find royalist rhetoric more or less compelling

depending upon their life experiences and social location. Thus, as a first principle, people seem to find royal ideology compelling in more or less direct variation with how close they were to “the center”—the institution of the palace specifically and, to a slightly lesser extent, the capital generally. Thus, people who were actually employed by the palace tend to be more sympathetic to royalist ideology than people employed in the government’s regular civil service, who in their own turn tend to be more sympathetic to royal claims than people who are, say, farmers. People who live in Kathmandu are more likely to have been sympathetic to the monarchy than people who live away from the capital—and of people living outside the capital, the further away they live (and the lower they are in local hierarchies, or the more ethnically different they are from the Bahun/Chetri Hindu elite), the less sympathetic they are likely to be.¹⁶ Sympathy toward the monarchy also seems to vary significantly by age. Those who are now elderly sometimes express profound deference to the monarchy,¹⁷ and those who are now middle-aged (and who were thus educated during the pro-monarchy nationalist days of the *panchayat* period) often express a reflexive respect for the monarchy; those who are in their mid-thirties or younger, however (which is to say, those who came of age after the 1990 revolution), tend to be far more skeptical of the monarchy and are far more likely to have advocated its dissolution. In short, then, Nepalis as a general rule seem to have assented to royal ideology less and less as they were located further and further away from the center, and as they had had fewer and fewer years of ideological indoctrination through their schooling and their general lives.

At the logical other extreme of the pattern, it is also my impression that no one found the ideology of the monarchy more compelling than the man who stood at its absolute center: ex-King Gyanendra himself. This would seem to confirm Roy Rapaport’s observation that

[one] of ritual’s peculiarities [is that] the transmitter-receiver becomes fused with the message he is transmitting and receiving. In conforming to that which his performance brings into being, and what comes alive in its performance, he becomes indistinguishable from it . . . This is to say that *by performing a liturgical order the performer accepts, and indicates to himself and to others that he accepts, whatever is encoded in the canons of the liturgical order in which he is participating.*¹⁸

While I have unfortunately not had the opportunity to ask Gyanendra myself, everything I have learned about him suggests that he is an absolute believer in the institution he embodied. As far as I can tell, he has truly and honestly believed in all the primary articles of faith of the recent monarchy: that the king was the symbol of

unity for his people, that ‘the people’ loved and revered him, that only the king could safeguard democracy. He may even have believed that he was (or that his people considered him to be) an incarnation of Vishnu.

Over the course of the rest of this volume, then, as I discuss the construction of official political ideologies and royalist narratives, I do not mean to suggest that once constructed those ideologies were then straightforwardly consumed and accepted by “the Nepali people.” Rather, every person who encountered those ideologies would have done so through particular demographic, geographic, and institutional lenses (as well as according to idiosyncratic preferences and experiences), and with the possible exception of the king himself, no one would have simply accepted every aspect of the official rhetoric about the monarchy.

RITUAL AND THE SURVIVAL (OR DEMISE) OF THE MONARCHY

The important point of attention for this analysis is not, therefore, that the king of Nepal might or might not have had theological status, or that he might or might not have been popular with his subjects. (He often wasn’t.) The key is not even that Nepal “succeeded” in evolving from monarchy to democracy. The key is that Nepal’s top-level political actors had been performing their status and relationships in particular ways, backed by the inertia of routine and the force of institutional support, and these actors and institutions first came under scrutiny and then were dramatically rearranged in the early twenty-first century. In the course of this transition, the king of Nepal lost access to the rituals that had been performing his kingliness. Ritual was not the sole practice that constituted kingship, but it was foundational. This is because ritual is a basic mode of political operation, a set of idioms, gestures, symbols, and sounds through which government and corporate life are made visible, audible, and sensible to others, in both physiologic and psychological senses. Rituals do not “legitimate” kings or other political figures. Kingship and political power is rather taught and intuited through the act of ritual, meaning that effective rule is essentially inseparable from the ceremonial creation of authoritative actors. It is not that kings without rituals are exposed as political operatives or oppressors of the people, but rather that kings without rituals simply *are not kings*.

This leads me to propose the following counterfactual thesis: Had King Gyanendra maintained access to his annual schedule of royal rituals, he would have continued to be king—even if he lost all connection to the government, and even if he lost the right to live in Narayanhiti Palace. It would have been an abbreviated, highly limited form of kingship, but a kingship nonetheless. Ritual could have, on its own, sustained the existence of his royal social identity.

Clearly it is not possible to directly prove a counterfactual—that Gyanendra would have remained king if he had not lost his royal rituals. That does not mean, however, that this proposition is wholly undemonstrable. There are, in fact, two indirect sources of evidence that quite clearly suggest that the monarchy might well have survived on rituals alone. The first form of evidence can be found within Nepal’s own history. Over the course of the 240 years of the Shah dynasty’s rule over united Nepal (which will be explained further in Chapter 2), the roles of the king in the practical governance of the country were remarkably variable. While a few kings wielded autocratic control over the entire executive structure of the government, far more of the Shah kings took more limited roles. Many of the Shah rulers were minors for much or all of their reigns, and for entire decades at a time the Shah kings had little role in governance. Indeed, during the Rana period (1846–1951), the Shah kings of Nepal were entirely sidelined from executive roles. They were maintained at state expense in the palace, and they were brought out on certain restricted occasions to preside over public rituals and perform their sovereignty, but they were given no access to the tax system, the administration of the military, or the central bureaucracy. Thus, the Nepali monarchy was not indissolubly bound up with the technical administration of the government: it rather had a performative value that far exceeded—even floated free of—the king’s practical involvement in politics. The king’s role in the daily running of government offices or legislation was inconsistent over time, and apparently entirely negotiable. What was not inconsistent and not negotiable was the performance of his unique social status as king, primarily in the context of formal religious rituals. Gyanendra could have been stripped of all his administrative, legal, and military roles and still kept company with many of his predecessors. What he could not afford to be stripped of were his performative roles.

Beyond these clues from the Shah dynasty’s own history, it is also possible to look to evidence from nearby and culturally cognate situations regarding the possible fates of nonruling monarchs. In Nepal itself, there are a handful of families still considered royal, even though their territories were long ago incorporated into the broader nation; the *rāja* of Bajhang and the king of Mustang in particular maintain active social roles in their communities and regions, sustained through symbolic practices, even though they have long been politically subordinate to the central state. There are also remnants of multiple monarchies to Nepal’s south, in India. Monarchy has not formally been part of the Indian political framework for decades. Many of the subcontinent’s monarchies were subsumed into the British colonial system in the nineteenth century, and those that survived as semi-integrated “princely states” were all officially folded into independent India in 1947. The legal status of all monarchs was dissolved shortly after Independence, and the disbursement of royal Privy Purse to ex-royal families was discontinued in the early 1970s. But, “the

disappearance of these kingdoms did not necessarily provoke the disappearance of kings: royal rituals continued to be celebrated, while many members of royal families became political leaders.”¹⁹ There continue to be people recognized as kings of various royal dynasties in many parts of India today, including the Raja of Puri, the Zamindar of Ramnad, the Raja of Kullu, the Maharaja of Jodhpur, the Chatrapati of Maharashtra, and so on. Several of these royals have served in local and national government, but it is not politics or legislation that primarily sustains their social identities: those kings who continue to have robust identities as kings do so because they continue to perform royal roles in local rituals. Thus, the Maharaja of Banaras plays a prominent annual role in Ram Lila and endows a huge *tazia* for the city’s Muharram processions every year.²⁰ The *raja* of Orissa has to sweep in front of the chariot of the god Jagannatha before the annual *rath yatra* can begin, and rituals continue to be performed with him and on his behalf by royal brahmins and *devadasis*.²¹ In the small northern state of Mandi, the participation of the *raja* has been restored in the rituals of Shiva Ratri, and in Kullu, Raja Mahesvar Singh continues to care for his family’s royal tutelary deity Raghunath.²² What these Indian cases suggest is that monarchies in similar, nearby cultural contexts were fully capable of surviving legal dissolution and political disempowerment as long as they maintained performative identities. Kings could continue to be kings on the strength of rituals alone.

In the Nepali context, the politicians of the Interim Period were well aware both that the country’s own Shahs had survived repeated administrative curtailment in large measure on the strength of their ritual performance, and that there were “kings” in India maintaining their theoretically long-dissolved status through rituals. In fact, several people who participated in the transition explicitly told me that the Interim Government attacked King Gyanendra’s ritual roles because of the centrality of those rituals to the construction of his identity. In Nepal’s own past, rituals had been practices to which kings could retreat when out of favor or out of power, practices that could sustain their kingship until the time was suitable to make a bid for increased executive, military, or financial control. Had the Interim Government left royal rituals alone, they claimed, those rituals (and the status they constructed) would have sufficed to let the king remain a king, in effect buying him time to regroup and seek out a future opportunity to seize governmental power. But the Interim Government wanted the king gone for good, and that meant appropriating his rituals.

RITUAL, RHETORIC, AND SOCIAL POSITION

Why was it that ritual could make the king the king, and why was it that taking his rituals away could stop him from being the king? This project proposes that it was because rituals have the capacity to create social positions, to mark certain social

actors as being different from, and privileged in comparison with, other social actors. All social actors who hold established social offices are to some degree ritualized as part of their positions, but the more exclusive or prestigious the role, the more heavily ritualized it tends to be. The man designated “King of Nepal” held a highly distinctive and exclusive social role, one that was argued for and presumed in the context of distinctive ritual roles. These roles were performed on a routine basis, punctuating the king’s schedule every few weeks, building and sustaining the embodied idea of his kingliness. When the king of Nepal eventually lost access to the rituals that had constructed a culturally specific argument for his unique social position, he lost the social position itself.

But what is meant here by the term “ritual”?²³ J. Z. Smith writes, “Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention. It is a process for marking interest.”²⁴ According to practice theories, ritual is a form of social behavior to which people become habituated through repetitive participation. It is “characterized by standardized, repetitive interpersonal symbolic actions, patterned according to social customs, which involve constant form over time, and which influence or orient human affairs.”²⁵ Or, in Roy Rappaport’s formulation, a ritual is “a form or structure, … the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers.”²⁶ In other words, a ritual is a regularized social performance, an orchestration of human bodies and objects at times and in places that have already been established as meaningful to and by a particular community of people, and in its orchestration confirms and advances that designation of meaning. Or, put another way,

[t]he performance of [the] ritual establishes the existence of conventions and accepts them simultaneously and inextricably. Ritual performance is not in itself merely, nor even necessarily, factitive. It is not always performative in a simple way, merely bringing into being conventional states of affairs through conventional actions. It is, rather, *meta*-performative and *meta*-factitive, for it *establishes*, that is, it stipulates and accepts, the conventions in respect to which conventional states of affairs are defined and realized.²⁷

In short, a particular ritual performance always grows out of and then contributes to a socially and culturally specific history of practices, embedded in the bodies, experiences, memories, and ideologies of its performers and observers.

Any sizeable group of people develops repertoires of places, objects, gestures, and times that are designated as special and appropriate for deployment in ritual performances. These collectively recognized repertoires may vary *in content* very little from ordinary, nonspecial places, objects, gestures, or times, yet they become “marked” as

special by the very fact that they are deployed in particular circumstances. Thus, a regular “unmarked” hat might be worn at the convenience and discretion of the wearer (say, to block sun while gardening), while ritualized “marked” headgear (such as a crown or wedding regalia) will be worn only on particular occasions, in particular spaces, and by particular people.²⁸ Ritual then is the manipulation of specially marked objects, spaces, words, and gestures, at marked times, by people authorized to do so. In turn, ritual also is the primary practice that serves to *mark* objects, spaces, words, gestures, times, and people. In J. Z. Smith’s phrasing, “[a] ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way. . . . These are not substantive categories, but rather situational” or relational distinctions.²⁹

Through this pattern of conforming to and confirming social patterns of meaning, ritual serves as a mode of presenting arguments about the world, of announcing the existence and nature of human relationships—whether that be relationships to other people, to deities, to animals, or to the inanimate world. Ritual represents “a form of rhetoric, the propagation of a message through a complex symbolic performance. Rhetoric follows certain culturally prescribed forms whose built-in logic makes the course of the argument predictable at the same time that it lends credence to the thesis advanced.”³⁰ Ritual is a framework through which social relationships can be acted out and apprehended. While in other contexts the relationships between people (or between people and the nonhuman world) may be complex, messy, and indeterminate, in the context of ritual those relationships are presented as clear and well defined. In fact, though, rather than reflecting an already clear and well-defined circumstance, it is ritual itself that clarifies and defines the relationships at stake, while announcing those relationships to be already accepted social truths. Ritual is thus a form of “discourse” in the strict Foucauldian sense: it creates the realities of which it “speaks,” and it produces ways of talking about reality in the context of institutions, specialists, and vested interests.

To say that ritual is a form of rhetoric is not, however, to suggest that the “meaning” of a ritual is announced by the semantic content of the liturgy or the explanations of the ritual’s purpose offered by the participants. Rather, rituals create social meaning primarily by enacting certain relationships through performance.³¹ In particular, participants in rituals are oriented to one another in space in the context of the ritual itself, and are similarly oriented toward the setting of the ritual, any icons or deities made present, and any objects manipulated in the course of the practice. The rhetoric of the ritual is thus produced first and foremost not through words but through the purposeful arrangement and movement of people and objects in space—what Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman call the “architectonics of enactment.”³² A wedding, for example, stages the movements of participants in space based on their social relationships—by turns reinforcing and modifying existing

social relationships—thereby arguing for the existence of a new kin relationship in an intuitive, embodied fashion, facilitated by special outfits, special words, and special venues. Likewise, rituals also stage relationships between human participants and nonhumans, including divinities, objects, and sacred spaces. That is to say, in the context of ritual, people interact (or are prohibited from interacting) with nonhumans in stylized ways that lay out a basic orientation of the humans to the subhuman or superhuman world. Thus in a Hindu temple, for example, certain actors (such as brahmin priests or high-caste devotees) enter the space and engage it in very particular ways. They may approach a representation of a deity and manipulate their bodies in particular ways: they may fold their hands in front of their chests or bow; they may utter significant speech, sing, place a flower in front of the god, or kill a goat. Any of these gestures argues for particular realities: that the temple precinct is a special space; that the deity is special and deserves particular forms of respect; that particular substances are appropriate to temple spaces; that an animal may serve as an instrument of worship. Moreover, at the same temple, low-caste individuals or menstruating women may be prohibited from entering that same space, approaching that same deity, or performing those same gestures. That prohibition shapes who they can be in the world and what that temple space can mean for them and for others.

Ritual, then, involves not just a social consensus of the kinds of gestures, objects, times, and people suitable for symbolic performance, but also a social consensus for stipulating who can engage in which symbolic performances when. Rituals are thus subject to (and productive of) culturally specific idioms of authority: patterns of limiting access to authorized spaces and practices to particular individuals, often subject to the approval of gatekeepers.³³ In this respect, ritual is profoundly political, for it serves “as a tool for social and cultural jockeying; it is a performative medium for the negotiation of power in relationships.”³⁴ The very prerogative of a particular person to participate in a ritual (particularly a tightly controlled, high-prestige ritual) is predicated upon having a certain social status, a status that the performance itself then confirms and extends. Moreover, rituals physically position certain human bodies in relation to other human bodies—as well as in relation to sacralized spaces and objects—and thereby perform (or deny) the prestige, privilege, or status of the performers and observers relative to one another. In this way, ritual performances “construct and inscribe power relationships” and permit “a power situation [to] appear a fact in the nature of the world.”³⁵

This capacity for ritual performance to announce relationships, together with its ability to combine and deploy culturally specific idioms of importance, can be examined not just for the ways it argues for social configurations broadly, but for the effects it can have specifically on individuals. Just as an object can become “sacred”

through repeated ritual attention, so too can a particular person be ritually “worked upon,” by being performed repeatedly over time in ritual contexts to have particular kinds of relationships with other people. The cumulative outcome of that performative work is social identity. The performative nature of social identity has been most persuasively addressed in the context of gender theory, particularly at the micro-level of behavior and interaction. Judith Butler writes, for example, that

gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body, and hence must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.³⁶

In the context of the performance not of gender but of state power, there is similarly the production of “the illusion of an abiding head of state” through the stylization of one particular body and the stylized repetition, not of mundane acts or gestures, but of public performance and spectacle. Through the repeated, stylized, public gestures of royal ritual, a king becomes a distinctive kind of person, marked as separate from and more special than the people around him—a process that crafted an apparently abiding (though ultimately illusory) royal self that served as the king’s “body politic.”³⁷

By attending to this process, it becomes evident that ritual does not merely reflect structures or processes that “really” exist elsewhere. Rather, the stylized, symbolic gestures of ritual help create the identities and relationships that condition access to (and positioning within) social processes. Social realities are not reflected in symbolic behaviors such as ritual: they are created by them. In the context of Nepal’s monarchy, rituals that included the king would mark for him a special social identity through the ways they would stage him relative to all the other human participants, divinities, the space of the ritual, and the objects involved. The king would stand in higher or more central locations than any other actor, and everyone else present would be arranged to look at him; he would be allowed to approach gods or temples to which no one else would be allowed access. He would arrive last out of anyone present but would conduct his ritual gestures first, and many rituals could not be conducted until he arrived. These ritual patterns argued for the basic importance of the king, his superiority to everyone around him, and the necessity of his presence for the proper completion of the rituals themselves. Royal rituals argued, in short, that the king of Nepal was unique and indispensable.

As rituals stage arguments about the world, they do so in ways that are extraordinarily difficult to argue against. People who observe rituals performed by others, or who participate in rituals planned and orchestrated by others, have very few options

for outwardly opposing the view of the world put forward in that ritual, other than not attending or purposefully disrupting the proceedings. Moreover, rituals put forward arguments in ways that are often difficult even to recognize, by couching them in performative, aesthetic, and often emotionally satisfying ways. For this reason, some arguments that might very well fail if presented as propositional statements (such as “the king of Nepal is necessary for the proper functioning of the world”) may go unchallenged in ritual. Thus, ritual is a particularly subtle and durable—hence potentially very powerful—mode of suggesting to people what the world is like and how they should relate to it.

Despite the fact that rituals are difficult to *disagree* with, however, it does not follow that those who participate in or observe rituals automatically or necessarily *agree* with the ritual’s arguments either. All a ritual requires is that the people who are present must *perform* agreement.³⁸ While many traditions (notably Christianity) insist that conviction and internal states of mind are essential for ritual performance, in actual fact most rituals may be adequately performed as long as people show up and play along, regardless of their motivations or internal mental states. This means that there is no easy jump from the “message” of a ritual to the internal states of the participants or observers of that ritual. Rituals suggest modes of being in the world, but they cannot compel assent. They can only induce the appearance of assent.³⁹

So how then were people brought to perform assent to the social identity “king of Nepal”? To understand this, it will be necessary to explore throughout this volume the system of rituals surrounding or featuring the king. This was not a “system” in the sense of being unified or homogenized, either rhetorically or institutionally; indeed, many royal rituals argued for slightly divergent visions of kingship. Rather, I am considering as a “system” those ritual performances that had in common the fact that they featured the king. These king-centered practices provided opportunities to examine the king and explain what monarchy was, even if they produced slightly different answers. The king’s social position—his identity as king—was the product (or perhaps the sum total) of plural practices united around a single social actor. Across the various rituals of kingship, the king was marked as someone important, someone unique, someone higher than all the other people around him. At Bhoto Jatra, thousands of people would gather for the occasion, but the ritual could not begin until the king arrived; at an enthronement, dozens of the country’s most powerful people would gather together, but only one person would finish the ritual with a crown on his head. In addition, royal ritual practices reinforced and were in turn reinforced by many nonritual royal practices. This meant not only that the king would uniquely be blessed by the goddess Kumari, but that the king was the only person whose portrait could appear on money, the only person who could sit in the throne at the front of the parliament hall, and the only person who could accept the resignation of a prime

minister. These nonritualized (or less ritualized) royal practices created further depth and content for the social position, and helped to reproduce it in time. Monarchy was the nexus of these plural, ongoing processes of marking, differentiating, hierarchizing; the king was the person who was marked at every turn as unique, and who united these many practices into a single identity and institution.

Monarchy may thus be viewed as what Foucault refers to as a “discursive formation”—an observable regularity between dispersed and heterogeneous “objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices,” facilitated and mediated by institutions and institutionalized authorities.⁴⁰ The varying practices of monarchy, while not necessarily unified in form or content, nevertheless coalesced around the person designated as king, producing the relatively stable social idea “king” around which institutions and other actors could orient themselves. Monarchy was hence not an object or a thing or even a person, but a loosely integrated, much-elaborated system of practices staged through time. The following chapters will thus attempt to account first for the system of institutionalized practices that had made particular men into “kings,” and then to account for how that system of institutionalized practices was changed in order to not just annul the status “king” but also disconnect that status “king” from the last man to be so designated. In other words, I ask: How was the discursive formation “monarchy” elaborated and supported, why did it falter, and how did its opponents finally go about blocking and dismantling it? How was it that royal practices, chiefly royal ritual practices, had produced the social position “king,” and what did it mean for those royal practices to be directed elsewhere?

TWO TYPES OF RITUALS

To understand the ritualization (and then deritualization) of Nepali kingship, it will be helpful to distinguish between two different types of rituals, which can be divided based upon their differences in timing and purpose. These two types of ritual I am designating for convenience as “succession rituals” and “reinforcement rituals.” The first category—succession rituals—will designate those rituals that mark the end of one officeholder’s tenure and the beginning of a new officeholder’s tenure: the rituals to transition the practices of an institution from one specially marked person to another. These rituals smooth over and sustain the social office itself during a moment of tension, transition, and potentially crisis. There are succession rituals for any transmissible social office,⁴¹ but because monarchies are distinct from most other offices insofar as they premise political power upon biological lifespans, their transition rituals are designed to be performed not according to any calendrical or cyclical consideration, but rather according to the lives and deaths of the royal family. Thus, royal succession rituals tend to focus chiefly on the funeral of one king

and the coronation of his heir. The purpose of these succession rituals is to create continuity across monarchs—to suture together the roles and activities of a series of individuals into a single enduring social identity “king.” They dissolve one individual’s kingship at the same time that they create a new individual’s kingship, allowing the publicly constructed abstraction “kingship” to endure.

It is worth noting that many of the rituals that may be included under a category of “succession rituals” may largely overlap with the practices famously designated by van Gennep and Turner as “rites of passage.”⁴² However, what I intend here is not a reinvention of an old category, but rather a reorientation to some of the practices contained in it. Specifically, van Gennep and Turner were interested in the role of rituals in the life of an individual. Van Gennep in particular showed how rites of passage could—by disconnecting, transitioning, and finally reintegrating an individual into the social order—create changes in that individual’s status, such as fiancé to husband, girl to woman, candidate to president-elect to president. While certainly this is a useful way to approach many rituals, it is not ideally suited to the present context, where the issue is not the personal trajectory of a specific individual but rather the “life” of an institution (the difference between, for example, a biography of the 14th Dalai Lama and an account of the continuous presence over centuries of successive Dalai Lamas). Thus, for monarchy, an analysis of “rites of passage” would analyze the life of a single king and would examine that king’s “coronation—reign—funeral.” By contrast, an analysis of “succession rituals” would attend to the “life” of the office and would examine instead the “reign of one king—funeral of old king and coronation of new king—reign of new king.” This approach emphasizes how certain royal rituals helped to ensure the existence of the office “king of Nepal” beyond the lifetime of any single king, creating durability in the office (such that it could outlive any single officeholder) and flexibility in the institution (such that it did not rely solely on the charisma of any single king).

Succession rituals, then, are relatively obvious in their staging and their purpose. More subtle, in many ways, are the “reinforcement rituals” that follow and build upon the succession of an individual to social office. Reinforcement rituals permit the constant reproduction of a social office throughout the duration of the officeholder’s tenure. These rituals are regular, often performed on a calendar basis, and unlike succession rituals involve no change in status for the officeholder. (Royal reinforcement rituals for example featured the king performing rituals in his existing capacity as king.) These rituals routinize an office and ideally render it unremarkable. Crucially, reinforcement rituals are also practices that are more likely to obscure their actual effects on social relationships. Succession rituals are relatively explicit about their purposes in bringing individuals into or out of office, and hence their rhetoric can be straightforwardly apprehended by participants and observers.

Reinforcement rituals, however, do not as explicitly divulge their creative and productive purposes. They appear instead to *reflect* rather than *produce* a social status. Thus, it would seem intuitive to most observers that King Birendra attended Bhoto Jatra because he was king, rather than that he became kingly by attending Bhoto Jatra (or that Jimmy Carter gave a State of the Union address because he was then the president, rather than that Jimmy Carter became presidential by giving the State of the Union address).

Of course, it is not entirely wrong to say that reinforcement rituals reflect social position, because an individual would normally need to have already been established in office by a succession ritual (and perhaps several prior reinforcement rituals) as a basic precondition of participating in the event at hand. The king would already have to have been enthroned before being blessed by the goddess Kumari at Indra Jatra, for example. In that sense, reinforcement rituals do indeed reflect an existing state of affairs—namely that the incumbent has already been designated as fulfilling a particular social position—and so they do conform to their apparent purposes. But that same ritual through its very performance *reasserts* the fact of the social position, thus reproducing it, reinforcing it, and permitting it to extend into the future.

The king of Nepal participated in a broad variety of reinforcement rituals, most of which happened on an annual basis. In addition to the annual rituals that will be the focus of later chapters, there were a handful of rituals that were celebrated on a less frequent cycle—such as major anniversaries of the king’s rule, or Samyak, which was held every five, seven, or twelve years—as well as events such as special-occasion Vedic *yagyas*, which might be held only once but which fit into the routine schedule of the king. Between his assorted ritual commitments, the king would be brought out in public to perform his kingliness every few weeks, reinforcing his presence in the local imagination and rhetorically elaborating the content and density of his office. Reinforcement rituals thus do not simply respond to existing realities, nor produce realities *ex nihilo*, but rather they participate in dynamic, ongoing feedback systems of habituated practices that incrementally extend a social position forward in time.

Reinforcement rituals are thus routine, but that does not necessarily mean that they are invariant. Rather, they may vary from year to year under various pressures and circumstances, and be variously well performed, adequate, fraught, or failed.⁴³ While institutions can clearly withstand a certain amount of variability in the performance of reinforcement rituals, what is most centrally at issue in the present context is a circumstance where reinforcement rituals were modified in ways that the monarchy could not actually survive. Crucially, when opponents of the monarchy set about dethroning King Gyanendra during the Interim Period, they did not stage

any of the available succession rituals that could have transferred kingship to someone else. Instead, they acted against the *reinforcement* rituals, uncoupling the reigning king from the rituals that had routinely reasserted and reproduced his kingship. In slightly different terms, they denied Gyanendra access to the means of reproducing his office. In so doing, they fundamentally disrupted the logic of the office itself, damaging neither Gyanendra as a person nor Gyanendra's individual reign, but rather the performance of the institution of monarchy itself.

METHODOLOGY

This project seeks to explain how it was possible to stop Gyanendra Shah from being king of Nepal, and in so doing it pursues a methodology that rests at the intersection of history and anthropology. The project is historical in the sense that the primary events of interest are now in the past, having taken place between 2001 and 2008, and in the sense that the argument is at pains to set those key years into the context of the decades and centuries of practices and political configurations preceding them. The project is also historical in the sense that its primary research questions have to do with the reasons for and mechanisms of change. The project is anthropological, however, in the sense that it is centrally concerned with the construction of social meaning through ritual practice, and in that the analysis requires a sense of the cultural "status quo" that formed the background of the royal demotion. The majority of actors in the events of 2006 to 2008 are also still alive and available for interviews, and so much of the material for the project was collected through interviews. Thus, the project might alternately be deemed be a "history of recent events with a significant oral-history component" or an "ethnography of event" (to borrow a phrase from Emma Tarlo).⁴⁴

In compiling the present account, I have relied on a variety of sources. In addition to a wide variety of secondary sources on the history and development of Nepali politics, the project has drawn from media accounts and depictions of the monarchy, particularly from the decade of 1999 to 2008 to provide background information. These help to contextualize my primary ethnographic and interview work, conducted over a full decade of visits to Nepal. I was living in Nepal in 2001 when Gyanendra became king, and I returned in 2003, 2007, and 2008 to develop language skills and hone this project; I then conducted my primary research over almost a year and a half in 2009–2010, and returned for a three-month follow-up trip in 2011. During this research, I have attended or observed all of the major rituals discussed in this book, and between 2007 and 2011 I conducted formal interviews with over four dozen individuals who participated variously in the institution of the monarchy and its dissolution. I have spoken with members of the government at the

time, ritual planners, local administrators, political activists, palace staff, priests, and insiders of various types, and I am deeply grateful to all of them for their generosity with their time.⁴⁵

In presenting these materials, I will be giving particular attention to the interplay of the various institutions involved. I have been especially interested to track how those responsible for dismantling the monarchy operated through the routine systems of government administration. Thus, my research has been rather less about political policy than it has been about the implementation of that policy—less about the content of ideology than about the institutionalized performance of ideology—and has particularly focused on the negotiations and competitions between interested actors that happened over the course of that process.

Finally, I would note that the present project is not intended for a purely specialist audience, but instead is designed to be accessible to a more general audience. To that end, I have been at pains to keep as much of the text of the argument in English as possible (by referring, for example, to the Royal Council rather than the Raj Parishad), and when using Nepali-language terms I have sought to render them in ways that will be maximally accessible to English speakers without being unrecognizable to Nepali speakers. This means that I have avoided using diacriticals, and have adjusted the spelling of some words from their technical or standard transliterations to produce more readable results (hence “guti” rather than “guthi,” “gut̪hi,” or “guThi”; “Dasai” rather than “Daśai,” “Dasain,” or “Dashain”). For readers interested in fully accurate pronunciation, an appendix is provided with a list of Nepali words as spelled in the text with their Devanagari-script equivalents.

2

The Rise and Fall of the Shah Dynasty

OVER THE COURSE of time, the role of the king of Nepal had been variable and often contested—but up until the early twenty-first century, there had never been serious question or doubt about the continued *existence* of kingship in the country. During the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, the Shah dynasty had survived a variety of difficulties, including child kings, inept kings, and a nearly continuous struggle for supremacy with the country’s prime ministers. Not only had the institution of monarchy survived these challenges, it flourished and even expanded in power during the twentieth century. To understand this resilience through time, it is important to look far beyond the character, competence, or charisma of individual monarchs. Indeed, despite the general popularity of King Birendra in the 1990s, the monarchy had never relied for its institutional strength on the king’s charms or on public approbation. Rather, the monarchy had achieved longevity through the continuity of royal practices (including, but not limited to, royal ritual), and this situation had been ensured not so much by individual kings as by other political actors at the top levels of the government. That is to say, the survival of the monarchy often depended on the fact that prime ministers, army leaders, collateral royal relatives, party politicians, and so forth found the monarchy persuasive or useful to their own ambitions.¹

The result was that, for the nearly two and a half centuries since Nepal was created as a country, kingship was diligently performed as the institution at the core of the Nepali state, no matter how the configuration of that state might otherwise vary.

Shah kings had served every role from autocratic head of government to puppet figurehead, but no matter what their involvement in the routine running of the state apparatus, they had always lived in a palace and always performed their uniqueness (and superiority over all other political actors) in rituals and assorted state ceremonies. This institutional endurance across variable political situations made it remarkable, even improbable, that the monarchy should then so rapidly collapse in the early 2000s (primarily from 2001 to 2008). Yet over the course of less than a decade, the structures and ideologies of Nepal's party politics, government bureaucracy, and military forces realigned so radically that the very groups and individuals who had once invested their energies in upholding the monarchy turned instead to dismantling it.

THE GORKHALI CONQUESTS AND THE RISE OF A DYNASTY

The territory that today comprises the nation of Nepal was not historically ruled as a single polity. Instead, up to the late 1700s, political power tended to be decentralized among dozens of minor principalities, many of which extended no further than a single town or valley. These principalities were ruled by small-scale *rajas* who formed alliances, married into each other's families, and launched periodic military campaigns into each other's realms—usually for plunder or prestige more than permanent administrative expansion.² The model of political power during this time period was part militant, part charismatic, and part ceremonial. In particular, around the late seventeenth century, *rajas* across the Himalayan foothills began increasingly modeling their kingship on the forms and ideals of Hindu rule that had developed in India (but that were now under pressure from expanding Mughal control). Himalayan kings aspiring to Indian prestige adopted various royal/religious tropes, from grandiose Hindu titles to traditional material trappings (cloth parasols, elephant processions, fly whisks); they endowed temples and arranged for Sanskrit scholars to live and work at their courts.³ Many of these *rajas* also developed particular relationships with a local deity to cement their authority. Thus the king of Kaski maintained a temple for the goddess Kalika next to his palace, the ruler in Dang worshipped Ratannath, and the *raja* of Dolakha worshipped Bhimeshwor.⁴

Of all the monarchies of the southern Himalayas, the most locally prestigious were the Malla monarchies of the Kathmandu Valley. The Kathmandu Valley was the wealthiest in the region (optimal for agriculture and located on a major trade route between India and Tibet) and was able to support an unusually lavish urban culture.⁵ While over the course of millennia the Kathmandu Valley saw the rise, consolidation, and dissolution of various political configurations, by the beginning of the eighteenth century it hosted three monarchies, centered in the cities of Kathmandu,

Patan, and Bhaktapur, whose rulers competed with each other for prestige. They built ever more elaborate palaces and temples, endowed ever more elaborate festivals, and patronized ever more literary works than one another. The result was a local efflorescence of cultural production through royal patronage, from religious architecture to ritual practice to literature.

In 1743, however, this longstanding (though often shifting) system of locally based, prestige-oriented minor principalities was disrupted when an exceptionally ambitious man named Prithvi Narayan Shah became *raja* over the relatively minor town of Gorkha.⁶ Prithvi Narayan started with few material resources, but he rapidly demonstrated political and military acumen, as well as a personal charisma that instilled loyalty among his soldiers, courtiers, and administrators. He created an unusually effective political administration, and he launched an unprecedented program of empire building. He began strategically marrying into some neighboring royal families and conquering others outright, rapidly expanding the scope of land controlled by Gorkha. Perhaps most importantly, he recognized the strategic advantage of the European military hardware beginning to be available in India, and he nearly bankrupted himself outfitting the region's first state-of-the-art standing army. Over time, this army would develop such a formidable reputation that neighboring rulers whose territories were targeted by the Gorkhalis began capitulating or fleeing prior to any fighting.⁷

Prithvi Narayan's ambition, however, was to claim the richest, most prestigious prize in the region, the Kathmandu Valley, and for more than two decades, he conquered and consolidated its surrounding areas. Finally, during the festival of Indra Jatra in 1768, the Gorkhali army entered the city of Kathmandu and took the city unopposed. Within a year Prithvi Narayan Shah had routed all three Malla kings and established full military control over the entire valley. He had himself recrowned on the Malla kings' coronation platform in Hanuman Dhoka Palace and relocated his capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu. From this point onward, he was no longer the *raja* of Gorkha but the *mahanajdhiraj* (the "king of kings") over a Gorkhali empire centered in Kathmandu, an empire that would come to be named "Nepal" and that would henceforth be ruled by a centralized state headed by the Shah dynasty.

In styling himself king over a united empire, Prithvi Narayan distanced himself from some of his roots in Gorkha and adopted instead many of the idioms of authority from the far more prestigious Malla kings whom he had supplanted. He added a wing onto the palace in Kathmandu in the local Malla style, and he adopted the flag of the king of Bhaktapur.⁸ He established a tutelary relationship with the Living Goddess of Kathmandu; he worshipped at Pashupatinath Temple, the Swayambhu-nath stupa, and the temple of Machindranath in Patan.⁹ He did not fully embrace the court culture of his predecessors, however: more of a soldier than an aesthete, he

spent far more time in military camps than in his ornate capital. He also continued to rely almost exclusively on advisors, administrators, and personal priests from Gorkha rather than integrating into his inner circle any of the ranking members of the Malla courts.¹⁰

Prithvi Narayan Shah was the most successful empire builder the Himalayan foothills had ever seen, and at his death in 1775 he left the largest consolidated kingdom in local history. Given the political culture of the period and the difficulty of administering mountainous territories, it would not have been surprising to see his empire fragment after his death. But Prithvi Narayan's new state would prove durable, and his descendants would rule for more than two centuries to come—largely because rivals for future political power would find it more convenient to rule *through* a Shah king than replace him. Following Prithvi Narayan's death, the country would be headed by a succession of remarkably weak kings but administered by a succession of highly ambitious powerbrokers, first from within the family and then from the ranks of the capital's courtiers.

PUPPET KINGS AND THEIR PUPPET MASTERS (1777–1950)

When Prithvi Narayan Shah died in 1775, his legacy should have been relatively secure. Most of his conquered territories were being administered by loyal retainers or relatives, and he left behind him two adult sons capable of running his empire: a crown prince deeply involved in Malla court culture and a younger son who was a popular and successful military general. Unfortunately for the newly established dynasty, however, Prithvi Narayan's elder son became ill and died a mere two years after acceding to the throne, and Prithvi Narayan's two-year-old grandson Rana Bahadur became king in his place. The advent of a toddler king in 1777 launched a protracted period of instability at the top of the Gorkhali state, and it would take almost half a century for the country to have an adult on the throne again. Instead, for all but five of the next fifty-four years, the country would be ruled (at least nominally) by children and teenagers. (For a list of kings of the Shah dynasty, including the number of years each spent on the throne as a minor, see Table 2.1.) This dynastic instability left room for someone other than the king to control administrative and military matters. The Shahs' kingship would continue to be diligently performed, but for more than a century and a half their ritualized sovereignty would be divorced from pragmatic governance.

For the first few decades of weakening royal executive power, political control was wielded on behalf of child kings by regents appointed from within the Shah family itself, mostly queens and uncles who were not able to directly succeed to the throne.¹¹ By the early nineteenth century, however, Shah-family factionalism (and

TABLE 2.1
KINGS OF NEPAL'S SHAH DYNASTY

	King's name	Lived	Ruled	Years on the throne (years as a minor)	Level of government involvement	Regents or others who controlled government on king's behalf
18th century	Prithvi Narayan	1723–1775	1743–1775 (<i>Gorkha</i>) 1768–1775 (<i>united future Nepal</i>)	32 (0)	High	—
	Pratap Singh	1755–1777	1775–1777	2 (0)	High	—
	Rana Bahadur	1775–1806	1777–1799 (<i>also as regent 1804–1806</i>)	22 (17)	Low	Queen Rajyalaxmi Devi (mother) General Bahadur Shah (uncle)
19th century	Girvan Yuddha	1797–1816	1799–1816	17 (17)	None	Queen Lalita Tripura Sundari (stepmother) Ex-King Rana Bahadur (father) Premiers Damodar Panday and Bhimsen Thapa
	Rajendra	1813–1881	1816–1847	31 (15)	Variable	Queen Lalita Tripura Sundari (step-grandmother) Premier Bhimsen Thapa
	Surendra	1829–1881	1847–1881	34 (0)	None	Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana Prime Minister Pranaudip Singh Rana
	Prithvi Bir	1875–1911	1881–1911	30 (12)	None	Prime Minister Pranaudip Singh Rana Prime Minister Bir Shumsher Rana Prime Minister Dev Shumsher Rana

20th century	Tribhuvan	1906–1955	1911–1955	44 (12)	None until 1951, then moderate	Prime Minister Dev Shumsher Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana Prime Minister Bhim Shumsher Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher Rana Prime Minister Padma Shumsher Rana Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher Rana
	Mahendra	1920–1972	1955–1972	17 (0)	High	—
	Birendra	1945–2001	1972–2001	29 (0)	High	—
	<i>Dipendra</i>	<i>1971–2001</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>3 days</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Gyanendra Shah (uncle)</i>
	Gyanendra	1947–present	2001–2008	7 (0)	High	—

administrative incompetence) enabled ambitious non-Shah courtiers to begin making bids for control over the government.¹² The first non-Shah to claim control over the country was Bhimsen Thapa, who governed from 1804 to 1839. Thapa was uncle to the dowager queen, Tripura Sundari, and although the queen remained nominal regent through the unbroken minorities of two consecutive Shah kings (her stepson and step-grandson), it would be Thapa who conducted all official government and military business on her behalf. He crafted the first power structure in which the government was nominally led by the Shah king but administered in all practical terms by a powerful premier, and he held on to his position for most of his adult lifetime.

By the 1830s, however, Bhimsen Thapa's position became tenuous. His niece, the dowager queen, died in 1831, disrupting Thapa's primary claim to power as part of her protracted regency, and King Rajendra (who had come to the throne as a child but had now reached adulthood) claimed his right to run the government himself. King Rajendra's senior wife convinced her husband to imprison Thapa, and the deposed premier reportedly committed suicide in jail in 1839. Following Thapa's death, the Shahs attempted to rule the government directly once again but floundered. King Rajendra proved an indecisive and ineffectual ruler, while his queens and his heir schemed openly against each other and against a rapid succession of premiers for control of the government. The resulting chaos enabled the rise of Jung Bahadur Rana,¹³ a young but ambitious and ruthless member of the court. In 1846, after co-ordinating the mass slaughter of all the courtiers and generals who opposed him in an incident known as the Kot Massacre, Jung Bahadur convinced Rajendra's junior queen to appoint him the new prime minister and Commander in Chief of the Army, a move that in one stroke made him the most powerful member of the government. From there, he set about constraining the powers and privileges of the monarchy. He sent King Rajendra into exile in India, leaving Crown Prince Surendra nominally in charge. A year later, in 1847, Jung Bahadur formally deposed King Rajendra and installed Surendra as the new king. He kept the new king under strict surveillance in Hanuman Dhoka Palace in Kathmandu and gave him no access to finances or government administration. Indeed, for the century following the take-over of Jung Bahadur, the Shah kings were more tightly constrained and more separated from the governance of the country than they would be at any point before or since. Jung Bahadur and his successors rarely permitted the Shah kings to leave the palace except to preside over ceremonial functions, where the king was expected to remain silent. The Shahs were isolated and controlled, while the Ranas built up a powerful para-monarchy that would dominate Nepal from the 1840s until 1951.¹⁴

Jung Bahadur Rana and his successors remade the premiership in several specific ways that created institutional stability for themselves. Jung Bahadur had recognized

that it was the premier rather than the king who had become the country's primary nexus of wealth and power, so he established himself as prime minister rather than attempting to depose the Shah king directly. He also recognized, however, that previous premiers had ultimately been vulnerable because of the ad hoc nature of each prime minister's rule, with their power cobbled together through combinations of regency, favor from the Shah family, and personal acumen. To remedy this vulnerability, Jung Bahadur regularized his position in several ways. First, he had King Surendra declare him to be *raja* over the two districts of Kaski and Lamjung—a new role that would make the Ranas semi-royals, more important than courtiers but still subordinate in prestige to the Shahs—and tied that “kingship” to his position as prime minister.¹⁵ By refashioning the premiership as a minor monarchy, Jung Bahadur was able to claim a premiership for life that his relatives could inherit upon his death. While preserving the illusion that the Shah kings were still the ascendant rulers and the Ranas their junior supporters, this move asserted a stable authenticity to the Rana line and allowed Jung Bahadur to begin an ambitious program of conquest by marriage: he arranged three marriages between his family and the Shahs, which would result in his own daughters becoming queens and which inaugurated an enduring pattern of Shah/Rana intermarriage. Every subsequent Shah king would marry at least one Rana girl, and this alliance between political dynasties permanently tied the political interests of the Ranas to the personal interests of the Shahs.

Jung Bahadur and his descendants further crafted their para-monarchy by appropriating many of the practices of the Shahs. Jung Bahadur and his relatives began sporting crowns obviously styled after the Shah crown; they built themselves palaces and referred to themselves in the royal “we”; they endowed temples and accompanied the Shahs to rituals like Bhoto Jatra and Indra Jatra.¹⁶ They styled themselves “*Shree Teen*” (“Three Times Glorious”), an unabashed imitation of the Shah king’s title, “*Shree Panch*” (“Five Times Glorious”). The Ranas did not copy the Shahs in all things, however. Crucially, Jung Bahadur had spotted a persistent institutional weakness in the Shah pattern of succession: specifically, that by insisting on primogeniture, the Shahs had produced decade after decade of child rulers. Jung Bahadur wanted to keep his new hereditary premiership within his own family, but he did not want to risk having baby prime ministers, and so he devised an alternate system of brother-to-brother inheritance. Once Jung Bahadur himself died, his next-eldest brother would become prime minister for life, and only after every male of his generation had passed away would the premiership pass to the next generation (beginning with Jung Bahadur’s sons). In the meantime, all the collateral Rana males would fill top-level positions in the military and government bureaucracy. Thus, not only would every new prime minister come to the post as an adult, but he would have

trained for the position through years of service and be backed by a network of his relatives to help him run the country. In this way, Jung Bahadur Rana created a formidable family-based political machine that could keep administrative control resolutely out of the hands of the Shahs.

Under Rana rule, then, the only political role for the Shah kings to play was to legitimate the government. Thus, the Shahs continued to appear on coinage, to lend their names to administrative documents written and processed by Ranas, and to participate in state rituals. The Shahs continued to celebrate Basanta Shravan, to inaugurate Indra Jatra, and to attend the Machindranath festival in Patan, for example—but now they were accompanied and closely monitored by the Ranas. The Ranas had created a system within which they could use the Shah kings much as they used inanimate royal objects (like crowns): they could display a Shah king in public on special occasions, but they could trust him to remain ornamental and politically inactive.

ASSERTIVE SHAH KINGS ADMINISTER THE GOVERNMENT (1951–1990)

By the 1940s, however, the Rana hegemony was weakening. The Rana family still held tight control over the government and over the king (now King Tribhuvan, who had come to the throne as a child in 1911), but their system was beginning to be challenged by underground political parties—particularly the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal, many of whose members had trained as cadres in the emerging political parties in India that were working to overturn the British colonial regime. To many (especially to young Nepalis who traveled to India for higher education, largely unavailable in Nepal), the Rana regime appeared to be an exploitative colonial power in all but the color of the rulers' complexions, and the enthusiasm around Gandhi, Nehru, and Indian independence fired a similar enthusiasm to create democratic party-based rule in Nepal as well.¹⁷ This period witnessed the rise of the rhetoric of electoral democracy, the rise of party-based political activism, and (counterintuitively) the rise of a muscular, authoritarian monarchy.

The reorganization of the Nepali state in the 1950s began with a somewhat unlikely alignment between the underground party-based revolutionaries (who, mostly from bases in India, were distributing polemical literature and launching some guerilla attacks against the Rana regime) and King Tribhuvan, cloistered in Narayanhiti Palace in Kathmandu. Tribhuvan proved sympathetic to the Nepali Congress in particular and saw in the Congress's anti-Rana visions an opportunity to escape from his gilded cage and build a more active, public life. Eventually, the Nepali Congress, the king, and the government of India conspired between them to create a public crisis for the Ranas by removing King Tribhuvan—the Ranas' single most important claim to sovereignty—from the country. Accordingly, in 1950,

when King Tribhuvan obtained permission from the Rana government to go on a hunting trip to southern Nepal, he packed his two heirs (his eldest son and his grandson) into a car and drove to the Indian Embassy. From there, he was transported to India in a diplomatic helicopter, where he settled in Delhi to publicly and repeatedly announce that he refused to return to captivity. This situation was intensely embarrassing to the Ranas, who had for more than a century ruled Nepal on the pretext that they represented the Shah king and his wishes.

After an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve King Tribhuvan from the Indian Embassy before he actually flew to India, the Ranas attempted to depose him instead. They claimed that since King Tribhuvan wished to abandon Nepal, he was no longer its monarch, and therefore the new Shah king would be King Tribhuvan's second grandson, the four-year-old Prince Gyanendra—who had been left behind at Narayanahiti Palace during the “hunting trip.” Accordingly, Rana Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher had little Gyanendra crowned on the traditional stone coronation platform and even minted some new coins in his name. No one accepted Prince Gyanendra as the new king, however, and not even the Ranas suggested that they were entitled to rule the country on their own. Eventually, the Ranas agreed to step down in favor of a king-led, party-backed government. King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu on February 18, 1951, where he was greeted by thousands of people in the streets of the capital and hailed as the man who had “brought democracy to Nepal.” After more than a century of being sidelined, a Shah king was ready to claim an active place at the head of the Nepali political system.

The transition from Rana autocracy to party-based politics and king-led administration was not smooth, however.¹⁸ The newly above-ground parties faced factionalism within their own ranks, hostility toward and from competing parties, and competition from various members of the Rana family who were still serving in the administration in “transitional” roles. The king was also patently unprepared to rule. Tribhuvan had been king for forty years, but he had never received any kind of practical training in administration or legislation, and he was more interested in using his new freedom to socialize and travel abroad than to reform Nepal’s political system. Efforts to create a new political system were also complicated by the fact that the support of the Indian government during the king’s flight from the Ranas had come at a price: Tribhuvan now had “advisors” from the Indian government present at the palace, in his office, and at every cabinet meeting he chaired.¹⁹ Throughout the 1950s, the government of Nepal limped along ineffectively, fulfilling nobody’s goals or visions of reform.

The country did manage to convene its first general election in 1959, however. The Nepali Congress was voted into a decisive majority in the parliament, and the Congress’s articulate leader, B. P. Koirala, was sworn in as the country’s first elected prime

minister. By this point, however, King Tribhuvan had passed away and been replaced by his ambitious son Mahendra, who had concluded over the preceding decade that political parties were unsuited to governing the country. He thought that the country needed a strong, central leadership rather than debate and competition—and he thought that he was just the person to provide that strong, central leadership. In the aftermath of the 1959 election, as B. P. Koirala's government floundered and as enthusiasm from the election waned, Mahendra created an opportunity to seize the government. In December 1960, initially with support from the parliament's opposition parties, he dissolved the Congress-led administration and installed himself as the executive head of the government. He temporarily suspended the premiership and replaced the cabinet with a Council of Ministers, to be chaired by the king. Over the following weeks and months he consolidated his position, sidelining and/or silencing his detractors and establishing the monarchy where he thought it belonged: as the executive and not just symbolic center of the government.

Within a year or two, King Mahendra was prepared to assert openly that his move was not a transition or interlude but rather the beginning of a new order he called the “partyless *panchayat*.” Given (he argued) that Western, party-based democracy had so clearly failed to produce modernity and prosperity, it was time to institute a Nepal-specific form of “democracy.”²⁰ This form of democracy would be based not around parties but around village-centered councils of elders (*panchayats*) and supposedly apolitical “class organizations,”²¹ overseen by a “traditional” Hindu monarch. Mahendra’s *panchayat* was in its design a somewhat paradoxical combination of localized regional administration and top-down royal autocracy. The country’s administration would be organized from the bottom up through a system of local Village Development Committees, whose members could be nominated to regional and zonal *panchayats* and from there a National *Panchayat*. To prevent oppositional leaders from rising up through the ranks, however, the palace would keep close watch on regional, zonal, and national elections, and no candidate would be allowed to advance without sanction from the palace. In this way, Mahendra’s local, partyless, grassroots “democracy” was in fact orchestrated by the king and his closest advisors.

To support this new system, King Mahendra developed a combination of techniques to suppress opposition and aggressively promote his new vision. He outlawed political parties and punished known party leaders, confiscating their property and imprisoning them for political activities. He enhanced domestic intelligence services and developed elaborate networks of informants reporting to the palace.²² He instituted tight press censorship and punished or shut down any newspaper or magazine critical of his regime. He filled government media outlets with messages praising the king and the *panchayat* system. Through his own prolific speeches and writings, as well as through pieces supported or actively commissioned by the palace, he

articulated a new theory of Nepali monarchy, one that involved a unique blend of appeals to tradition and modernity. The king was to be the “symbol of unity” (*ekta ko pratik*) to a diverse country, who protected the country’s sovereignty and whose primary goal was the development and progress of his country. The Shah kings had brought democracy to the nation by overthrowing the Ranas and giving the country its constitution, he claimed, and he himself had protected that democracy by ejecting the selfish, divisive political parties.²³

The role of the king was in large measure, according to Mahendra’s formulation, a function of the fact that Nepal was a Hindu nation. Accordingly, even while he was modernizing the monarchy (placing it at the heart of politics and building for it a sleek new palace), he was also strategically heightening its traditionalism. “[T]he 1962 Constitution . . . added ‘Hindu’ as an attribute of the state, defining Nepal as an independent, indivisible, and sovereign monarchical Hindu state,”²⁴ and the Hindu king at the center of that state was praised for his protection and guidance in the royal panegyric now officially adopted as Nepal’s national anthem. For as long as could be remembered, palace-endorsed sources claimed, the Nepali people had revered their king as an incarnation of Vishnu. During his rule, Mahendra moderately enhanced rather than preserved or scaled back royal religious responsibilities, and in his writings and speeches he routinely referenced his ritual status as “the world’s only remaining Hindu king.” Through this kind of rhetoric, King Mahendra argued for a strong new role for himself as both the authentically traditional leader of his country and the eminently modern head of state.

In addition to establishing a revised theory of monarchy, King Mahendra’s *panchayat*-era propaganda articulated a new form of nationalism for the country as a whole. In the nearly two centuries since Prithvi Narayan Shah’s conquests, Nepal had been administered as a single polity under the government in Kathmandu, and it had been treated as a single country by neighboring powers, including India, Tibet, and China—but its citizens had never had a unified sense of “Nepali-ness.” King Mahendra wanted to create a single national, linguistic, and ethnic identity in place of the myriad languages, outfits, traditions, and identities locally practiced across the country. King Mahendra’s government enforced Nepali as the single national language, the *daura suruwal* as the national (men’s) clothing, and Hinduism as the national religion.²⁵ By implication, this form of nationalism envisioned the prototypical citizen as a Nepali-speaking Hindu male, of high caste, hailing from the mid-hill (*pahad*) region—not coincidentally, the caste, religious, ethnic, and linguistic background of the king himself. That is to say (with little exaggeration) that King Mahendra set out to re-form the entire nation in his own image.

King Mahendra’s program was not limited to ideology, for he also attempted to extend the practical presence of the monarchy and the central government (which

he often conflated) far beyond the reaches of the Kathmandu Valley—a project unprecedented in Nepali history. He approved plans for an east/west highway that would connect the country as it never previously had been, and he increased tower infrastructure so that the state-owned Radio Nepal could reach all corners of the country.²⁶ He founded elementary schools across the country that would teach (in a single national language) a unified curriculum that was heavily nationalistic and overtly pro-monarchy.²⁷ In a novel spin on the very old Indic practices of royal progresses and *digvijaya*, Mahendra also instituted an annual royal tour: every year, the king and/or the crown prince would travel with his top advisors to a different area of the country for two months, hearing the petitions of his subjects directly and intervening on their behalf. This marked the first time in history that many people living outside of Kathmandu would have had the opportunity to see the king in person.

In the hands of King Mahendra, then, the monarchy was gradually transformed into the dominant political institution of the country, and the king became a feature of people's consciousness and direct experience in ways he never had been in the past. When King Mahendra died in 1972, he passed this new model of kingship on to his son, Birendra, who upheld and even strengthened most of his father's innovations and maintained the *panchayat* system throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The hegemony of the *panchayat* was never complete, however. The dissolution of B. P. Koirala's government in 1960 and the official elimination of party politics did not eliminate the parties themselves. The Nepali Congress and Communist Party of Nepal continued to operate underground, and many of the more radical leaders who would engage in open civil war in the 1990s and 2000s got started opposing and disrupting the *panchayat*. College campuses began to see increasingly strident activity among student unions—one of the few avenues for semi-party-based political participation—and student groups developed a strong, street-based form of obstructionist, oppositional politics. Many Nepalis, even those not connected to a party or party-substitute, resented the corruption, propaganda, and surveillance network of the *panchayat* system, and by the late 1980s anti-king (and anti-queen) pamphlets, artwork, and objects were freely circulating.²⁸

CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY IN THE 1990S

In the late 1980s, discontentment with the autocratic palace was growing, and the political parties outlawed under the *panchayat* system (the Nepali Congress and several competing communist parties, operating underground or from India) began making plans for a joint campaign against the government in Kathmandu. Beginning in February 1990, protestors took to the streets of the capital and its surrounding cities by the thousands. The demonstrations collectively came to be called the

People's Movement (*Janandolan*)²⁹ and were primarily carried out by university students affiliated with the politicized student unions. The demonstrators clashed with riot police on several occasions, resulting in several dozen deaths that helped inspire and sustain further protests. Most dramatically, in early April, a demonstration of many thousands of people marched on the palace itself, demanding an end to the *panchayat* system and a return to multiparty electoral democracy. Given the choice between reestablishing order by brute force and capitulating, King Birendra opted to capitulate. He again legalized political parties, announced the end of *panchayat* rule, called for a national election, and commissioned a new constitution that would shift his own position from autocratic head of government to ceremonial head of state.

This capitulation to the demands of the People's Movement was perceived by many in the king's inner circle (not least his own brother, Prince Gyanendra) as a disastrous move—one that had weakened the monarchy and handed over the governance of the country to unprincipled obstructionists.³⁰ But in many respects the move strengthened the monarchy. King Birendra kept his throne and could claim status as a patriot and protector of democracy. He was able to influence the framing of the new constitution, which enshrined his status as head of state and granted him sweeping unspecified powers to "resolve difficulties" if the need arose. As he left behind his executive duties and confined his activities to ceremonial functions (such as public rituals, awards ceremonies, and state visits abroad (Fig. 2.1)), he became more and more popular, such that by the late 1990s he was one of the few widely liked political figures in the country. The palace and royal family as a whole were not necessarily popular—in particular, Birendra's nephew Paras had earned a terrible reputation for violence and philandering—but Birendra himself was held in higher regard than he ever had been during his two decades of *panchayat* control.

Partly contributing to the increase in Birendra's popularity was a broad frustration with multiparty democracy. Following the euphoric People's Movement in 1990 and national election in 1991, the political parties had had to actually govern the country—a task for which they showed little aptitude. Decades of underground activism had trained party members for making demands and sabotaging their opposition but not for legislating or implementing policy. Worse, the new government structure enshrined in the 1990 Constitution facilitated a winner-take-all approach to rule. It concentrated power in the top of the executive branch, in the hands of the prime minister and cabinet (who disproportionately controlled budgets, legislation, and appointments, with minimal accountability to other parties or government branches), and limited the constructive participation of opposition parties.³¹ This system encouraged minority parties (and factions within majority parties) to focus on tearing down the administration in power, with an aim to replacing it with their



FIGURE 2.1 King Birendra lighting a brass lamp at a municipal ceremony in Bhaktapur, 2000. Then-Prince Gyanendra is standing to the left of King Birendra, applauding; Queen Aishwarya and Crown Prince Dipendra are standing together in the background. (Photo by Siegfried Woldhek)

own administration. Consequently, the ruling party at any one time spent much of its energy and resources simply holding on to power, often unsuccessfully, and a “revolving door” system emerged. The country had twelve administrations in the twelve years after 1990—including three separate prime ministers in 1997 alone. This high-stakes, unstable contest led politicians and government bureaucrats alike to increasingly focus their energies and interests on the capital. Patronage jobs and development contracts soared in Kathmandu, while government services and infrastructure initiatives in most of the country stagnated or shrank. Around the country, education levels and career expectancy were rising, but infrastructure and employment opportunities were not materializing for anyone beyond the well-connected elites in Kathmandu. The system of multiparty democracy did not appear to be delivering on its ideals and promises.

These shifts in political culture, government institutions, and public perception created the climate in which a revolution could flourish. In 1996, the most radical of the parliamentary opposition parties, the CPN (Maoist) United People’s Front, presented a list of demands to the Nepali Congress-led administration. The forty demands covered issues ranging from treaties to gender equality to eliminating the privileges of the royal family and ended with a polite but ominous paragraph:

We would like to request the present coalition government to immediately initiate steps to fulfil these demands which are inextricably linked with the Nepali nation and the life of the people. If there are no positive indications towards this from the government by 17 February, 1996, we would like to inform you that we will be forced to adopt the path of armed struggle against the existing state power.³²

The administration likely could not have taken immediate steps to create gender equality or “duly honor orphans, the disabled, the elderly and children,” but more importantly, the administration did not take the demands seriously. The United People’s Front was in full earnest, however, and on February 17, 1996, they quit the government and launched a guerilla war, calling themselves simply the Maoists.³³

The Maoists initially launched their struggle from the western districts of Dang and Rolpa—regions where discontent was high and government presence/effectiveness was low. Local sympathy (plus government apathy) gave the Maoists an environment in which to establish themselves as an effective organization and fighting force. They smuggled some weapons into Nepal from India, but they also began rapidly increasing their arsenal by raiding police and army posts. They set up training camps to turn young men and women into guerilla fighters (Fig. 2.2),³⁴ and they created pamphlets, newspapers, and radio stations to spread their message. Most importantly, they began establishing a para-government. They set up free schools, where children could learn both literacy and Maoist ideology;³⁵ they set up roadblocks to collect “taxes.” They created people’s courts where a Maoist would hear the facts of a local dispute and hand down an immediate verdict and punishment (in dramatic contrast to the government’s glacial judicial system). They punished caste, gender, and ethnic discrimination. They captured land owned by elite families often living away in the capital and redistributed it to local peasant families. They also began expanding the territories over which they held control, taking over local government administrative centers and intimidating or eliminating anyone who opposed them. Soon the Maoists were running something close to a state within a state, and they declared their intention to topple the king-centered feudal system in Kathmandu.

The central government was slow to respond. The Home Ministry, which oversaw the police and local judiciary, did not initially judge the Maoist insurgency to be a significant problem and took few steps to reinforce police outposts, while King Birendra, as Commander in Chief of the Army, was hesitant to order the national military to fight domestically. Perhaps most critically, no one in the government took seriously the discontents of the rural populace that were helping the Maoists to recruit cadres and control villages, and made no efforts to improve local infrastructure or services. By 2000, death tolls were rising from conflicts between Maoists and

police officers, and refugees were beginning to leave rural villages to seek safety in Kathmandu. The situation was rapidly deteriorating, with no clear options for resolution in sight.

KING GYANENDRA (2001–2006)

At the turn of the millennium, despite the major political problems of a fractious parliamentary system and a violent Maoist insurgency, the monarchy was actually thriving as an institution. King Birendra was the nation's head of state, the subject of the national anthem, the Commander in Chief of the Army; he convened parliament, signed laws into effect, and swore all high-ranking members of government into office. His face was familiar across the country: he was depicted on every denomination of paper currency, and his photograph hung in all government offices and many private businesses. He was at the height of his popularity, and even the Maoists (who officially endorsed an antimonarchy platform) did not consider his overthrow a realistic goal.³⁶ He was only in his mid-fifties, in relatively good health (despite having suffered a mild heart attack), and he was pursuing an active public calendar. Birendra's position seemed sufficiently secure and stable that in 2000, plans were already in motion for the thirtieth anniversary of his accession in 2002.

Birendra would not live to see that anniversary, however. On June 1, 2001, he was shot to death inside Narayanhiti Palace during a Shah family dinner party—an incident that also claimed the lives of his wife, all three of his children, three of his siblings, a cousin, and a brother-in-law. The palace massacre threw the country into mourning but also into confusion and, soon, anger. Over the long weekend from Friday to Monday, while Crown Prince Dipendra lingered in a coma before finally dying, members of the palace and the government scrambled to organize funerals and cover for what seemed likely an inside job. They released very little information, and while they eventually identified Crown Prince Dipendra as the sole shooter, they also had gone ahead and declared him king for the three days he lived after the shooting. This account made so little sense to so many people that conspiracy theories rapidly gained currency, most of which (directly or indirectly) blamed the man who came to the throne on Monday, June 4: Birendra's brother, Prince Gyanendra.

Gyanendra, second son to King Mahendra, had worked actively for the monarchy in his position as a collateral royal relative, appearing at ceremonial functions and advising his brother. Though he was third in line to the throne, he had never been seriously expected to rule (since Birendra had already had a son and heir by the time he came to the throne in 1972), and he had neither the long training nor the compelling public presence of his brother. Where Birendra had been genial, graceful, and warm, Gyanendra was stiff, portly, and awkward—and habitually adopted a

sour-looking expression as his “serious” demeanor.³⁷ Gyanendra also brought with him his gentle but very shy wife Komal to be the new queen—a pointed contrast to the flamboyant and elegant late Queen Aishwarya—as well as his only son, the widely reviled playboy Prince Paras, who would now be heir to the throne. The new royal family struggled to step into their new roles, refusing even to take up residence in the royal palace for the year of official mourning, commuting instead for work and ceremonial duties from their private residence up the street.

The succession of 2001 badly damaged the institution of monarchy (for reasons and in ways that will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 3) and alienated huge numbers of people in the country. Worse, the uncertainty of the transition appeared to provide a major opportunity to the Maoists. The Maoists launched a series of raids and detonated explosives at various points in the country, including the capital (where they had rarely staged activities in the past). They were quick to condemn the new king, Gyanendra, as a murderer and illegitimate pretender to the throne—a charge that gave active, organized voice to the widespread discontent with the government’s handling of the situation and provided the Maoists with years of rhetorical attacks against the king and the state. It briefly seemed in the weeks after the massacre that the Maoists might make a bid to take the government by force, but they proved unable to sustain enough momentum to gain a decisive victory, and within a few months a fragile political equilibrium had been reestablished.

Despite the problems within the palace and the problems with the Maoists, the members of the government and ruling political elite remained loyal to the monarchy and worked to accommodate and integrate the new king. All the ranking members of the government, judiciary, and military paid homage to the new king at his coronation, bowing and depositing coins at his feet. Parliament invited King Gyanendra to address them and declared his birthday a national holiday. The National Treasury designed a new currency with his portrait, and the army issued him a dress uniform. Government offices all over the country received official photographs of him to hang on their walls, and the palace commissioned a flattering book to be written about the new monarch.³⁸ By the first anniversary of the palace massacre, the palace and the government had patched together a tentative working relationship, albeit one built primarily if not entirely on loyalty to the status quo rather than to each other (Fig. 2.3).

In 2002, however, the government entered a new period of dysfunction, which King Gyanendra significantly exacerbated. In the spring of 2002, with the Maoist insurgency remaining entrenched despite the deployment of the army and the imposition of a state of emergency, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba found himself facing factionalism within his party and a no-confidence vote in the parliament. Deuba requested that the king dissolve the House of Representatives pending

new national elections (a power granted to the king under the 1990 Constitution), and allow the cabinet to rule the country in the meantime. King Gyanendra complied with this request, but it quickly became apparent that a national election would not be possible, since the Maoists now controlled perhaps a majority of territory in the country and had vowed to forcibly prevent polling. Within months it was also clear that Deuba's administration did not have a workable plan for moving forward in the absence of elections. So in October 2002, King Gyanendra used his extraordinary constitutional powers to fire Deuba and install a new prime minister in his place.³⁹

Had the king selected someone dynamic, independent, and new for the position, his move might have been celebrated as precisely the sort of house cleaning the ineffective government needed. Unfortunately, King Gyanendra instead installed someone far too familiar to his subjects: Lokendra Bahadur Chand, of the conservative palace-leaning RPP party. Chand had been prime minister three times before, including as a palace-selected premier during the *panchayat* era and later for two weeks in 1990 as a palace-selected stopgap premier during the People's Movement. Although King Gyanendra was preserving the government structure established under the 1990 Constitution, and although his first instruction to the new Chand administration was to hold new national elections, the selection of Chand seemed to signal that the new monarch shared his father Mahendra's deep suspicion of party politics and believed that the government would be only improved the more sympathetic (or even subordinate) it was to the palace.



FIGURE 2.2 Soldiers in the Maoist People's Liberation Army resting near Janakpur, May 2006. (Photo by Josh K. Lustig)

The Chand government was not able to hold elections, nor was it able to resolve the Maoist crisis. By the spring of 2003, the administration was facing criticism from the palace, attacks from the Maoists, and demonstrations from the mainstream parliamentary parties calling for the reinstatement of the House of Representatives. In June 2003, Chand resigned, and with no parliament to elect a new premier and no national elections in sight, the king once again appointed a prime minister. This time, Gyanendra selected Surya Bahadur Thapa, another member of the pro-palace RPP party and another *panchayat*-era politician. (Thapa had been prime minister four times before, three times during the *panchayat* period.) Thapa not only found intractable both the Maoist situation and the need for national elections, he also faced even deeper opposition from the mainstream parliamentary parties than had Chand. Not only did anti-administration street demonstrations continue, but leaders from the various parliamentary parties refused to participate in anything he initiated. They refused to join his government or his attempted negotiations with the Maoists, and they even snubbed his party invitations.⁴⁰ Thapa's administration lasted less than a year, and he tendered his resignation in April 2004.

Having faced relentless criticism for firing an elected prime minister and replacing him with two successive palace-leaning *panchayat* politicians—criticism often couched as comparisons with his father Mahendra—King Gyanendra decided to try a new strategy, and he reappointed Sher Bahadur Deuba, the man he had dismissed two years earlier, in the hopes that he could thereby conciliate his critics and return the government to a semblance of working order. Deuba's appointment did not result in either a fresh start or a reconciliation with the parliamentary parties, however. A few members of the mainstream parliamentary parties consented to join the Deuba cabinet, but the larger faction of his own Nepali Congress declined, and the administration lacked any momentum or vision. Deuba had been once again instructed to resolve the Maoist crisis and hold national elections, but his administration made no particular progress on either. No plan was made for electing or otherwise reconstituting the parliament, and with all normal legislative processes suspended, the governance of the country continued to be carried out through cabinet directives and royal executive orders. By December 2004, the parliamentary parties were calling on Deuba to resign.

At this point, King Gyanendra laid plans to take drastic control of the situation. On February 1, 2005, he appeared on live television to announce that he was once again firing Deuba but that this time he was taking direct control of the government himself. As his father had done forty-five years earlier, he eliminated the post of prime minister entirely and installed himself as chairman of a new handpicked

cabinet—a cabinet notably including two arch-conservatives from the *panchayat* era, Kirti Nidhi Bista and Tulsi Giri (the latter an intimate of King Mahendra who was instrumental in the early *panchayat* regime). King Gyanendra also imposed a sweeping state of emergency, suspending freedom of speech and freedom of the press, arresting all high-ranking leaders from the political parties, and granting himself unfettered access to the government's financial and military resources. To enforce the new state of emergency and help ease the transition into the new regime, the palace directed the army to shut down all internet access, all mobile telephone service, and all international landlines in the country just prior to the king's official announcement on live state television—a blackout that would be enforced across the country for a full week and then be continued on a limited basis against anyone deemed an opponent to the government.⁴¹ The king's new regime additionally instituted an aggressive new military campaign against the Maoists, backed by antiterrorism resources from George W. Bush. In his public speeches, King Gyanendra expressed hope that his takeover would be temporary, and that as soon as his administration could hold elections, the governance of the country could devolve back to “the people.”

King Gyanendra's “February 1 Move” was almost immediately unsuccessful. Not only was the army still unable to defeat the Maoists militarily, but the heavy-handed authoritarianism of the king's government consolidated unprecedented opposition. Up until 2005, the various factions within Nepali public life had tended to fragment as they focused on different interests, goals, and grievances. Now, however, the king's government created a unifying point of resentment. The royal administration was resented by mainstream political parties for eliminating their role from the government. It was resented by Maoists for being a ‘violent reactionary regime,’ headed by a murderous class enemy. It was resented by media for censoring all print, radio, and television, as well as harassing and arresting hundreds if not thousands of journalists. The regime was resented by Nepalis who were not politically affiliated for cutting off their cellphones and for sending troops with automatic weapons to patrol the streets of major cities. Even the government's own civil service resented the administration, which had promoted known royalists while shunting any government worker suspected of party sympathies into a furloughed “permanent reserve pool.”⁴²

It is not clear whether the king and his advisors miscalculated reactions to the royal takeover or merely expected to succeed at enforcing order quickly enough that they could endure unpopularity.⁴³ In actual fact, however, the regime's opposition was extraordinarily high while its successes were quite modest, and within six months of the king's takeover, representatives from the mainstream parliamentary parties started traveling to Delhi to hold secret negotiations with the Maoists on

how to conduct a joint movement to topple the government. This resulted in a 12-Point Agreement signed in November 2005—an event that signaled a conclusive realignment of all the major political institutions of the country in opposition to the palace.

For its first major campaign, the new oppositional front (the seven parties represented in the old parliament plus the Maoists) successfully sabotaged the municipal elections held in February 2006. Gyanendra had thought that his direct administration would succeed where all the appointed governments had failed, and that if he could both defeat the Maoists and convene elections to restart normal government functioning, it would justify his takeover. Instead, the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoists refused to allow any party member to stand in the election, and they embarrassed or intimidated so many of the candidates who did register that more than half the 4,146 available positions had *no* candidate running at all.⁴⁴ Fewer than 20 percent of eligible voters cast ballots—an all-time low in Nepali history—and the election was widely regarded as a disastrous failure to produce a government mandate.

Two months later, beginning in the first week of April 2006, the Seven Parties plus the Maoists launched a sweeping street-protest campaign, which would come to be called the Second People's Movement, or Janandolan II. Mainstream party protestors, quietly bolstered by thousands upon thousands of Maoist cadres, took to the streets on April 6. At first the protests, though larger than usual, did not seem unlike the street demonstrations that had become a standard part of Nepali politics. Instead of petering out after the preannounced three days, though, these protests actually increased in intensity as days went by. Despite the government's repeatedly announced curfews, demonstrators flooded Kathmandu's Ring Road (including Maoists brought in from all over the country), while tens of thousands of people gathered in various cities, small towns, and even villages across the country.⁴⁵ The protests stretched into their second and then third week, with no sign of abating. If anything, they were expanding: early in week three, an estimated half-million people clashed with riot police at the Gongabu intersection on Kathmandu's Ring Road.⁴⁶ Unwilling (or possibly unable) to insist on a brutal military suppression of the protests, the king began looking for ways to step down gracefully as executive head of the government. On April 21, King Gyanendra appeared on national television to invite the political parties to name a consensus prime minister for him to appoint to lead the government.

The protestors rejected the king's first message. The parliamentary parties immediately declared that they opposed any settlement that did not include the restoration of the dissolved House of Representatives, and they called on all the protestors to stay in the streets until the king was forced to back down completely. Eventually, King Gyanendra contacted the parliamentary Seven Party Alliance,

headquartered at Nepali Congress president G. P. Koirala's house in Kathmandu, to ask what he would need to say in order to bring an end to the demonstrations. The leaders of the Alliance (without consulting the Maoists) drafted a brief statement and faxed it to the palace.⁴⁷ On April 24, 2006, King Gyanendra again appeared on live national television and read a statement largely in the words that had been prepared by his opponents. It read in part, "according to the road map of the agitating Seven Party Alliance (SPA), we, through this Proclamation, reinstate the House of Representatives . . . We call upon the SPA to bear the responsibility of taking the nation on the path to national unity and prosperity."⁴⁸ The Seven Party Alliance and the thousands of nonaligned protestors were jubilant and immediately called off the Janandolan movement. Their Maoist allies were not thrilled, however, since the Maoists had never counted the reinstatement of the House of Representatives a major political goal, and they briefly considered continuing the protests on their own.⁴⁹ In the end, though, they too acquiesced to the king's concession, and so the postrevolution period began. The fourteen months of the king's direct rule were over, and the government was now in the hands of his opponents.

THE INTERIM PERIOD (2006–2008)

When King Gyanendra handed over control of the government to the Seven Party Alliance, he possibly thought that the result would be similar to his brother's peaceful resolution to the 1990 People's Movement and that he would remain a constitutional monarch, performing ritual and ceremonial duties while party politicians staffed the cabinet and the bureaucracy. It is also possible that he feared prosecution or exile—fates that would be meted out to deposed North African leaders a few years later. In fact, however, something far more complicated and interesting happened. As the victors of the Nepali People's Movement consolidated their control over the government, they began systematically identifying all the practices, objects, prerogatives, and responsibilities that had made the king the king and gradually revoked them from Gyanendra. In this way, they effectively dispersed the components of the institution of monarchy without damaging the monarch himself, allowing them at the end of the process to calmly ask the former king to leave the palace and take up a civilian life instead.

The process of demoting the king happened incrementally over the course of two years, in what can be viewed as three main phases. The first phase, comprising the remaining months of 2006, was primarily spent revoking the executive authorities of the king—both the powers entrusted to him under the 1990 Constitution and those appropriated by him after his February 2005 coup—and reconfiguring the

government both to include the Maoists and to function without reference to the palace. The second phase, which lasted from early 2007 through early 2008, was devoted to appropriating the symbolic and cultural authorities of the king, accomplished in particular by arranging for the key religious rituals of the king's annual calendar to be performed instead by the prime minister. Finally, the third phase, which spanned the spring months of 2008, centered around the legal dissolution of the monarchy by the newly elected parliament and the removal of the now former king from the palace.

The fact that this process unfolded in a relatively orderly sequence should not be taken to indicate that the king's opponents were following an elaborate advance plan, however. At the time, political actors were following a general policy to block, frustrate, or snub the king whenever the opportunity arose, but the specific strategies they pursued evolved over time. Moreover, it is crucial to note that while the result of the overall process was effectively revolutionary, the steps toward the result were gradualist, largely due to the fact that the interim political actors who had primary access to the king and his activities were all moderate career politicians with years if not decades of experience in government. The Maoists, who would probably have pursued more extreme or dramatic courses of action, had little direct contact with the king and little control over the instruments of government: they initially held no governmental positions at all, and the Maoist leadership was often excluded from policy decisions. Instead it was the primary interim leadership—particularly the centrist Nepali Congress, which managed to appoint the prime minister, the Home Minister, and the Finance Minister from their own party—who had superior opportunities to thwart the king, because they disproportionately controlled the mechanisms of government and had intimate knowledge of the monarchy and its many roles in the political system. This meant that while the Maoists generally provided the energy and political will to end the monarchy, it turned out to be the pragmatists of the mainstream parties who actually implemented the process—with the consequence that the king's demotion was often more measured and bureaucratic than radical or revolutionary.

Phase 1: Curtailing the Executive Monarchy

As soon as King Gyanendra announced the reconstitution of the House of Representatives on April 24, 2006, the leaders of the parliamentary parties—particularly the two largest parties, the center-right Nepali Congress and the moderate Marxist UML—began planning how to restart the government offices and institutions that had been suspended four years earlier. Their first move was to appoint a new prime minister to lead an interim administration. The immediate consensus among the

parliamentary leaders was Girija Prasad (G. P.) Koirala, younger brother to Nepal's first elected prime minister B. P. Koirala. G. P. Koirala had served as prime minister three times between 1991 and 2001, and at age eighty-one he was not only the president of the Nepali Congress but the most formidable figure in mainstream politics. Once Koirala was decided upon, an initial cabinet list was drafted (reflecting the electoral percentages from the 2002 House of Representatives, and therefore including no Maoists), and the new interim leaders began strategizing how to prevent the king from dissolving the parliament or cabinet again. The key, they decided, would be to eliminate the cabinet and parliament's procedural reliance on the king.

Their new independence from the monarchy was expressed first regarding oaths of office. Traditionally, the king had always personally administered oaths of office to the prime minister and members of the cabinet, and when G. P. Koirala was declared interim prime minister, the palace duly invited him to Narayanhiti Palace to be sworn in. Lacking any alternate plan for how to invest the premier with authority of office, Koirala complied and took his oath of office from King Gyanendra on April 25. Once he was installed in office, however, the new interim cabinet had an alternate source of authority for their swearing-in, and the new ministers took oaths of office from Prime Minister Koirala instead of from the king. (A few months later, worried that Koirala's initial oath implied that the government's sovereignty still flowed from the king, the cabinet and prime minister retook oaths of office to each other in the prime minister's office.) The question of official oath taking was a practical procedural issue, but it was also symbolic—a question of how to correctly perform government power while still disconnecting the authority of the government from the authority and person of the king.

Similar conundrums were posed by the first meeting of the reconstituted parliament, whose proceedings had always prominently featured royal symbolism. Every painting in the House of Representatives' meeting chamber featured the Shahs or the Ranas, and representatives' badges all bore a crown. A gilt throne sat at the front of the chamber, and each session of parliament commenced with a royal mace being placed on the throne, a practice that signified the king's legal role as the man who convened parliament and signed all laws into effect. Each of these practices was to be suspended for the first meeting of the reconstituted House on April 28 (four days after the official end to the Janandolan). Parliamentary groundskeepers removed the old paintings and the throne from the chamber, and members discarded their badges pending the creation of a national seal without a crown. The first meeting was convened without the ceremonial installation of the mace; parliamentarians registered a motion to debate a Constituent Assembly, then devoted most of the meeting to patriotic democracy speeches and motions in support of the twenty-three protestors who died during the Janandolan.⁵⁰

Over the next two weeks, the House prepared a sweeping legal measure to redefine the government: the May 18 House Proclamation (see Appendix A). This document, which had been drafted by the leadership of the parliamentary parties without consultation from the Maoists, would radically reconfigure the executive functioning of the government to eliminate the procedural roles of the king. For example, the proclamation renamed both the government and army to eliminate the king's claim over each, officially altering "His Majesty's Government" to "Government of Nepal" and changing the "Royal Nepal Army" to the "Nepalese Army." The cabinet was made responsible to the House of Representatives (rather than the king), and now the prime minister (rather than the king) would open sessions of parliament. The proclamation rescinded the royal family's tax-exempt status, granted the House of Representatives the right to unilaterally change the laws of succession, and gave the House of Representatives or the courts the unprecedented right to formally question "[a]cts performed by His Majesty the King."⁵¹ It also called for the commissioning of a new non-king-centered national anthem, and it declared the country a secular state—undercutting one of the key modern rationales for why the country needed a monarchy in the first place. The proclamation represented a far-reaching demotion of the king: it undercut his roles in the legislative, executive, and military functions of the government and gave formal, legal permission for the House of Representatives, cabinet, premiership, and army to operate without reference to him.

The reorganization of powers under the proclamation was considered by the interim administration to be a signal victory against the king, and so for the time being, they allowed King Gyanendra to maintain any non-executive roles, duties, and privileges. He was permitted to remain in the palace with his full staff, and he was permitted to attend any function deemed religious or cultural. The king thus appeared in public that year for Bphoto Jatra in July and Indra Jatra in September according to routine—though no one from the government appeared at his side—and he performed all the traditional royal observances for Krishna's birthday, Dasai, and Basanta Shrawan. He was still included in the national budget, though the palace's funding levels were cut and the royal discretionary fund was discontinued. For the moment, however, the king's existence was not considered especially problematic by the interim administration so long as he did not interfere in the practical governance of the country.

What the administration was far more deeply concerned about was finding ways to incorporate the Maoists into governance and mainstream politics. In June 2006, the interim administration signed an eight-point agreement with the Maoists—proclaiming their joint intentions to write an interim constitution, integrate the Maoists into the government, and collaborate with the United Nations to disarm the People's Liberation Army—and the interim Home Minister flew to western

Nepal to personally escort the top two Maoist leaders, Chairman Prachanda and Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, to the capital to meet with the prime minister. Prachanda and Dr. Bhattarai would from this point onward appear regularly in all the mainstream media, advocating their perspectives (including a passionate demand to end the monarchy) from a position of mainstream legitimacy—and their voices would be amplified and supplemented by vigorous, occasionally violent public demonstrations carried out by Maoist cadres, particularly the newly formed, highly disciplined Maoist paramilitary group, the Young Communist League.⁵²

The integration of the Maoists into the government was not accomplished for several more months. In November 2006, Prime Minister Koirala and Maoist Chairman Prachanda signed the Comprehensive Peace Accords, officially ending the Maoist armed rebellion, and in January 2007, the government promulgated an interim constitution. This constitution provided for the dissolution of the reinstated House of Representatives and its replacement by a legislature-parliament. This new legislature-parliament would contain all 209 of the existing parliamentarians from the Seven Parties and would then add 73 Maoist parliamentarians and 48 miscellaneous parliamentarians.⁵³ Based on this new Maoist presence in the parliament, the cabinet would be reshuffled and the Maoists would be granted three ministry portfolios—including for Minister of Information and Communications, who would serve as government spokesperson. This would mean that the Maoists would officially become part of the governance of the country and a Maoist would actually speak for the government; it meant in turn that the erstwhile rebels would be obliged to advance their agendas and programs within the idioms and confines of the state apparatus.

The new constitution had two major ramifications for the monarchy. First, it was not framed as a gift from the king given to the country for its benefit (as had all Nepali constitutions in the past). Instead, the preamble read, “We the people of Nepal, in exercise of the sovereign powers and state authority inherent in us . . . promulgate this Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 (2007) . . . in order to institutionalize the achievements of the revolution and movements to date.”⁵⁴ Second, the new constitution solidified the position of the prime minister, at the sweeping expense of the monarchy. The duties of the prime minister were now officially expanded to include all the governmental functions of kingship:

159. Provisions regarding the King. (1) No power regarding the governance of the country shall be vested in the king. (2) The Prime Minister shall perform all works pertaining to the governance and operation of the country.⁵⁵

This provision was interpreted among political leaders to mean that the prime minister was now both the head of government *and the head of state*, eliminating the

continued need for a king in the routine ceremonial performance of the nation.⁵⁶ The provision would thus offer the justification for the government's coming appropriation of the king's various ceremonial duties.

Phase II: Overriding the Ceremonial King

The interim government hypothetically could have left in place its early policy to cut the king out of government while allowing him to live in the palace and perform his social identity through assorted rituals and ceremonies. The result would likely have been similar to the aftermath of the 1990 People's Movement, which dramatically curtailed the executive power of the king but allowed the institution of monarchy to endure. This option was not pursued, however. The



FIGURE 2.3 King Gyanendra visiting Dantakali Temple in Dharan, Nepal, 2005. Chief of Army Staff General Pyar Jung Thapa is standing (left); Col. Tika Dhamala is kneeling. (Photo by Dambar Krishna Shrestha)

Maoists wanted to dissolve the monarchy on principle, while the mainstream parliamentary parties wanted to continue acting against the monarchy to protect and enhance their own positions. The growing consensus among all parties was that the monarchy had historically been proved to be proficient at weathering periods of reduced control only to rise up later to take over the government—leading to the logical conclusion that politicians' own positions in the parliament and cabinet were jeopardized by the continued existence of the king. Moreover, negative feelings toward the king and his family abounded,⁵⁷ and any act against the king met with more enthusiastic support in the press than any act that supported him or sustained the status quo. While Nepali politicians are not notably responsive toward their electorate, few wanted to risk an outright royalist reputation. As a result, there was strong political will within the government to continue dismantling the monarchy and no political will for actively protecting it.

The interim administration does not seem to have ever seriously considered deposing the king by force, however. All the leaders of the parties and the security forces had worked hard to make the Janandolan as bloodless as possible, and not even the Maoists ever called for Gyanendra's death. In fact, at almost the same time that Gyanendra was being demoted, Saddam Hussein was being executed in Iraq, and there were Nepalis who demonstrated in Kathmandu against that hanging, insisting that execution was not an appropriate way to handle a deposed head of state.⁵⁸ The interim administration had admittedly formed the Rayamajhi Commission, which convened for several months in 2006 in an attempt to investigate King Gyanendra and his year of direct rule; when King Gyanendra refused to appear before the commission, however, the government had not compelled him. (The Rayamajhi Commission's report, issued in November 2006, had recommended legal action against more than two hundred people as well as the passage of laws to specifically curtail the king, but the recommendations were never implemented.)

Instead, the administration went about denying King Gyanendra access to the practices that had constructed his unique social identity and appropriating those practices for themselves. In particular, starting in July, Prime Minister G. P. Koirala would be sent to act in all royal rituals in place of the king, thereby transferring a diffuse ritualized royal authority and symbolism from the monarchy to the party-based government. This process, however, was by no means smooth or automatic, and Prime Minister Koirala did not simply step directly into every one of the king's old roles. Rather, the interim government developed policies and strategies over time, beginning with piecemeal and partial replacements of the king. With each successful replacement, however, the monarchy weakened and the interim government grew bolder, until by the end of the year the premiership had effectively eclipsed of the monarchy in the performance of the state.

The first vulnerability in the king's ritual identity showed in March 2007, when the government permitted King Gyanendra to go to the Shiva temple at Pashupatinath for Maha Shiva Ratri. That day, the temple priests and royal security guards shut down the temple to all other devotees for two hours, causing a long line of worshippers to stand in the rain. Frustrated, they began throwing rocks at the king's guards and car—an event that permitted the administration to argue that "the people" opposed the king.⁵⁹ Two months later, in May, when the temple priests of Lord Bhimeshwor in Dolakha notified the capital that the image had begun to sweat (an event that, in the past, had always necessitated ritual intervention from the palace), both the palace and the prime minister's office dispatched sacrificial goats. The government's *puja* and goat sacrifice were conducted in the temple itself, while the palace's *puja* and goat sacrifice were conducted just outside.⁶⁰ Both these incidents suggest that early in 2007, the government, the palace, and local religious specialists were all ambivalent about how to handle royal religious responsibilities: it no longer seemed obvious that the king would fulfill religious obligations as he had before, and the administration was happy to see the king at a disadvantage, but it was not yet prepared to actively sabotage the king or replace him entirely.

The situation would be clarified in July 2007, when the prime minister would for the first time publicly claim the right to perform the king's ritual duties. After apparent consultation among the prime minister, his top advisors, and possibly a handful of other party leaders, the prime minister's office notified organizers that the king ought to be disinvited from that year's Bhoto Jatra ritual and the prime minister invited in his place. While the administration worried in advance about pushback or even rioting from the observing crowd, on the actual day of the ritual, the crowd greeted the prime minister with apparent enthusiasm, and the palace did not attempt to send the king on their own. The ritual was completed very much as usual, despite the dramatic switch in participants, and the success of its new tactic emboldened the interim government to embark on a campaign to appropriate any ritual that had previously included the king. This included sending the prime minister to worship Krishna on Krishna Janmastami in August and to inaugurate the living goddess Kumari's chariot procession in September. Prime Minister Koirala even insisted that he receive blessings and offerings from the royal family's Dasai *ghar* in October. Throughout most of these dramatic appropriations (which are the subjects of Chapters 4 through 6 and so will not be treated in detail here), the interim administration was able to proceed with minimal opposition from the palace. King Gyanendra did surreptitiously arrange to attend one ritual in the hours after the prime minister's visit, and palace priests refused to show up to perform Basanta Shrawan for the prime minister in February 2008, but in general, the government was able to control procedures or exert quiet pressure in ways that would allow them to alter state rituals freely.

This period of appropriating the king's ritual and cultural practices coincided with the creation of several other new king-free state practices. In spring 2007, the national bank released the first run of currency that did not feature a royal portrait, replacing the image of the king's head with an image of Mount Everest. In August, the government unveiled the country's new national anthem. The old anthem, "Shreeman Gumbhir" was generally translated with the English title "May Glory Crown Our Illustrious Sovereign" and matched pompous praise for the king with a ponderous, heavy melody. That song was now replaced by a song that clearly and intentionally decentered the king from national life—a song whose tune suggested Nepali folk music and whose lyrics celebrated the unity in diversity of the people of Nepal:

*Sayyau tunga phool-kaa haami eutaa maalaa Nepali
Sarvabhaum bhay phailiekaa Meki-Mahakali*

We are one Nepali garland, made of hundreds of flowers,
Sovereign, spread from the Meki River to the Mahakali River.

The new anthem and currency, while more mundane than the ritual replacements at Bhoto Jatra or Indra Jatra, struck far more deeply at the pervasive integration of the monarchy in people's daily lives, and—like the other symbolic manipulations of this phase of the king's demotion—made a powerful argument that the country could fare perfectly well without a sovereign.

Phase III: Election and Eviction

By the spring of 2008, it was plain that King Gyanendra had been outmaneuvered. His opponents controlled the government, the military, the national budget, the sympathy of the international community, and even the public rites that had for so long ritualized the king as a unique social being. King Gyanendra still retained a few vestiges of his status, however: he still lived in Narayanhiti Palace, and he still legally held a royal title. For his opponents to finalize their victory over the institution of monarchy, these last two claims to power would also have to be overturned.

The event that would initiate this final phase of demotion was the national election of April 2008—the country's first national vote since 1999.⁶¹ Holding an election to reestablish an electoral mandate for the government had been a goal throughout the interim period, announced as early as the May 2006 House Proclamation. The election would not only create legitimacy, it would also create a new legislative body. Instead of electing representatives to a standard parliament, Nepalis would be electing representatives to a Constituent Assembly, a body that would be charged

both with legislating for the country and with drafting a new post-interim constitution. Replacing the House of Representatives with a Constituent Assembly marked a momentous shift in Nepali politics. Electing a Constituent Assembly had been a core Maoist demand since the launch of their insurgency, and for many years it had been unimaginable that the mainstream political parties would willingly dissolve either of the central instruments of their participation in national politics (the 1990 Constitution and the House of Representatives). But by 2007, the creation of a new legislature and a new constitution had become mainstream policy objectives across the political spectrum, and following two major delays, the Constituent Assembly election was scheduled for spring 2008, two years after the Janandolan had toppled the king-led administration.

On a technical level, the election was designed to send representatives to the Constituent Assembly. Nevertheless, it was widely understood that the election would also function as a national referendum on the future of the monarchy. The Constituent Assembly was expected to vote on the legal status of monarchy in one of its first meetings, and so it became a matter of crucial importance whether the representatives elected to it endorsed or opposed the king. In the weeks and months leading up to the election, the Maoists campaigned most emphatically against the king, but all the major mainstream parties similarly adopted platforms endorsing secular democracy and the end of the monarchy. Only the conservative RPP-N party (a conservative branch of the palace-leaning RPP, led by King Gyanendra's close supporter Kamal Thapa) openly advocated for the continuation of Hindu kingship.

On April 10, 2008, Nepalis across the country gathered to vote. The polling was conducted peacefully, and an estimated 60 percent of the country's eligible voters cast ballots. King Gyanendra spent the day at Dakshinkali Temple in the southern rim of the Kathmandu Valley, performing an elaborate special *puja* to request the goddess's protection and blessing. Within a few days, election results began to be reported. The Maoists had won a commanding victory, 229 out of 601 seats, and would be in charge of forming the next government. Prachanda would be the new prime minister. The moderate Nepali Congress and UML parties achieved modest results, just over 100 seats each. The openly royalist RPP-N had won only four seats.

The Constituent Assembly convened for the first time on May 28, 2008. Anticipating the announcement of the monarchy's dissolution, people began gathering in the streets near the assembly's meeting hall and near the palace from early morning. The Constituent Assembly spent much of its day debating a proposal to create a presidency, however, and they did not raise the resolution to dissolve the monarchy until late into the afternoon. Finally the antimonarchy proposal came to the floor and was adopted by a vote of 560 to 4. The monarchy was legally ended, and the now former king was given fifteen days to vacate Narayanhiti Palace. The crowds in the streets were jubilant.⁶²

Gyanendra confirmed that he respected the election and parliamentary resolution and would leave the palace. His departure would thus require not force but rather complex logistical planning. Narayanhiti was a huge property, employing hundreds of staff and housing millions of rupees worth of physical objects, and for decades it had served as both a family residence and a center of national governance. Now that monarchy was dissolved, the question arose as to what in the palace was the property of the king as a private individual and what was the property of the king as the embodiment of the state. In other words, what should Gyanendra and his family be entitled to simply take with them as personal belongings, and what did they need to leave behind as national property? The newly ousted royals assumed that the palace was mostly filled with the possessions of their family, while the government and broader publics assumed that the contents of the palace had been largely paid for by state, directly or indirectly, and should be nationalized. An inventory team was sent to the palace to at least determine what the highly secretive complex contained, but rumors flew that unmarked trucks were entering and leaving the palace to spirit valuables to Gyanendra's private residence.⁶³

On Monday, June 2, the Home Minister and two of his top deputies went to the palace to meet with the ex-king and discuss his departure. Gyanendra indicated his willingness to leave, but he presented a list of requests: first, that his stepmother and step-grandmother be allowed to live out their lives in their private residences on Narayanhiti Palace grounds, even after the main building was turned into a museum; second, that the government continue to provide him with security following his departure; and third, that he himself be provided some sort of temporary residence away from downtown Kathmandu, where he might retire with privacy.⁶⁴ The Home Minister responded favorably to all three requests, pending official endorsement by the cabinet, and made two requests of his own: that Gyanendra depart the palace as planned and that he hand over the royal crown to the government. The demoted king acquiesced.

On Friday, June 6, 2008, Gyanendra prepared to give his departure statement. He had summoned the major media outlets to come to the palace for a press conference, and by 10 a.m. or so journalists of all kinds were crowded into the entrance hall of Narayanhiti Palace. Gyanendra entered, smiled and greeted the journalists, and seated himself at a small table. He pulled a pair of bright-red reading glasses from his pocket—glasses he had never before worn in public, since he had apparently thought they were beneath the dignity of the king. He then took a prepared statement out of an envelope and began to read, opening not with the traditional royal salutation “Beloved Countrymen” but with the more informal and colloquial “Dear Nepali brothers and sisters.” He professed his love for Nepal and his gratitude to all who had helped him during his reign; he also obliquely expressed dismay that he had ever

been thought culpable in the death of his brother and family members. He finally announced that he had tried his best for the country, and he confirmed that he would be complying with the new Constituent Assembly's decision to dissolve the monarchy. He thanked the press and then left the hall without fielding questions.

That evening, Gyanendra and Komal Shah got into a black sedan and were driven out of the west gate of Narayanhiti Palace. The staff of the palace was not notified about the precise time they would be leaving, and so most people were simply in their offices inventing work for themselves;⁶⁵ the royal couple's departure was witnessed by a few journalists and a modest crowd near the gate (mostly student activists), but there was no particular fanfare or ceremony. Once Gyanendra and Komal left Narayanhiti, they were driven in a small motorcade to a once-royal-but-now-nationalized bungalow in Nagarjun National Forest, on the rim of the Kathmandu Valley. They brought with them a small private staff as well as the security detail provided by the government, and they prepared for a period of solitude that would last for the coming year.

The following day, the head of the palace inventory committee and the Home Secretary took official possession of the crown and the royal scepter from the former king's two main administrators and presented the two items to a team of jewelers and customs agents for appraisal.⁶⁶ The jewelers certified that the gems and other materials were all authentic,⁶⁷ and then the government representatives locked the crown into a small room in Narayanhiti's main building. They sealed the door and placed a twenty-four-hour army guard in front of it. With this gesture, the two final, basic objects of kingship—the palace and the crown—were now officially in government hands. The king was gone, the monarchy was gone, and the possibility was open for a “New Nepal.”

CONCLUSION

The historical development of the monarchy demonstrates that the institution was far from static over time and that the king's level of involvement in the administration of the government could vary dramatically. A few Shah kings, notably Prithvi Narayan and Mahendra, wielded sweeping executive powers, but the majority of Shah kings took minimal or no part in practical governance. What did not vary, at least up until the interim period, was the fact that the Shah kings *performed* the government. They appeared on the currency and signed laws, greeted diplomats and lived in palaces, visited temples and received divine blessings—and perhaps most crucially, they were supported in doing so by the political elites of their day and the people who actually did carry out the day-to-day tasks of governance. In other words, wholly independent of their quite variable executive functions, kings were

people who were ritualized at every turn as unique social beings able to represent in their bodies the government and the nation. The interesting question, from this perspective, is not “why was the monarchy replaced by parliamentary democracy?” but rather “why did all the institutions and individuals who had for decades consented to ritualize the king as the embodiment of the state stop consenting, and how did they start reritualizing the state?”

3

Succession Rituals and the 2001 Crisis

HAVING LAID THE groundwork of the historical development of the monarchy and reviewed the basic phases of its dissolution, we can now examine in more depth how networks of ritual practices had combined to create the social identity “king of Nepal” and how those networks of ritual practices unraveled to leave Gyanendra Shah merely the “former king.” The subsequent three chapters will explore reinforcement rituals and the ways they were actively attacked and coopted during the interim period, but the present chapter is devoted to a rather different set of rituals and a rather different set of circumstances under which those rituals weakened the institution of monarchy. The present chapter is devoted to succession rituals, with particular focus on the rituals performed in the wake of the 2001 palace massacre. These were the rituals that were designed to transfer the institution of monarchy from a king to his successor—in this case, from Birendra to Gyanendra. In 2001, however, although multiple succession rituals were conducted in good faith and supported by the main political establishment of the time, their performance left Gyanendra’s kingship incompletely established and the institution of monarchy itself profoundly weakened.

Any transmitted social office is vulnerable at the moment when it passes from one holder to the next, but the Nepali monarchy possessed a rich and complicated repertoire of rituals to create and facilitate institutional transitions. In the immediate aftermath of a royal death there were funerary rituals for the old king as well as an enthronement of the new king; there were also rituals in the years before and after a

royal transition to prepare for and support the moment of change. In the context of the 2001 transition from Birendra to his brother Gyanendra, most of the possible rituals were performed, and they were all organized on the basis of precedent and past protocol. Thus (theoretically) they should have provided continuity with a long-established system of practices. However, the actual circumstances of Gyanendra's succession far exceeded anything anticipated by the institutional logic of the monarchy—so much so that the rituals that were supposed to confirm him in office proved inadequate to the task. Despite the good-faith efforts of palace staff and various members of the government, the transmission of kingship from Birendra to Gyanendra failed in many substantial ways.

In his volume *Ritual Criticism*, Ronald Grimes provides a helpful typology of the many ways rituals can fail.¹ These various problems in ritual performance he labels “ritual infelicities,” and he enumerates nine different categories of infelicitousness. Out of those nine categories, three in particular help explain various difficulties with—the infelicities of—the succession rituals of 2001:

- *Gloss*: when a ritual procedure is used to cover up a problem.
- *Flop*: when a performance fails to create an appropriate mood or atmosphere.
- *Defeat*: when one ritual act discredits or invalidates other ritual acts.²

Grimes cautions that “[no]one can ever judge a rite as failed or flawed in any absolute way,” but rather that it is “flawed from person or group X’s point of view or in relation to goal Y.”³ In this case, the succession rituals of 2001 were performed with the generic goal of sustaining the institution of monarchy beyond the lifetime of any single king, and with the specific goal of making Gyanendra the king of Nepal. Through a confluence of crises and infelicities, however, the rituals failed and the 2001 succession fell far short of both goals.

Barbara Myerhoff writes that “Rituals always contain the possibility of failure. If they fail, we may glimpse their basic artifice, and from this apprehend the fiction and invention underlying all culture.”⁴ When the succession rituals of 2001 failed, they revealed the artifice, the social construction, and the non-inevitability of the monarchy. The result was that in the course of a few short weeks, one of the most entrenched social institutions in Nepal was thrown into confusion and vulnerability. This faltering in the transmission of the institution, the questioning of the necessity and obviousness of kingship, would in turn create the possibility for subsequent campaigns against Gyanendra—campaigns that began in Maoist-endorsed conspiracy theories in the hours and days after the massacre but that ultimately culminated in the revolution of 2006 and the monarchy’s full dissolution in 2008.

THE DEATH OF KING BIRENDRA

It had been the tradition of the Shah family to gather for dinner on the first Friday of each month, and the dinner for June 1, 2001, was scheduled to take place at Tribhuvan Sadan, the modest bungalow in the Narayanhiti Palace compound where Crown Prince Dipendra resided. The evening began as usual, with family members making their way into the party and the aides and bodyguards dismissed to the nearby guardhouse.⁵ Sometime around 9 p.m., however, gunfire erupted, and within minutes more than a dozen members of the royal family lay dead, dying, or grievously injured.

Although King Birendra was still alive when he was pulled into a car by his aides, he died of his wounds somewhere on the way to Chauni Military Hospital in the southwest corner of the city. Upon reaching the emergency room, he was vigorously treated anyway by panicking doctors, but finally declared dead around 10 p.m. His wife, Queen Aishwarya, and younger son, Prince Nirajan, were obviously dead at the scene of the shootings, and their bodies could barely be lifted intact. His daughter, Princess Shruti, initially seemed only slightly wounded, but she died of internal bleeding soon after reaching the hospital. Crown Prince Dipendra had survived a gunshot through the head but was comatose. He was rushed to the hospital and placed on life support. Palace staff scrambled to get the half-dozen other dead and wounded members of the extended royal family to the hospital and to get into contact with King Birendra's younger brother, Gyanendra—now the most senior male of the Shah family to be breathing and conscious—who was in the city of Pokhara at the time of the shooting. They attempted to send a military helicopter to fetch him, but due to fog they were unable to bring him to the capital until around dawn the following morning.

News of the shootings began to travel by word of mouth almost as soon as it had happened, and by sun-up most of the Kathmandu Valley knew that the king was dead. The BBC and the Indian press were reporting in the early hours of the morning that the Crown Prince had killed his parents before turning the gun on himself, and Nepalis across the country were glued to televisions and radios trying to figure out what had happened. The palace, however, was refusing to make a statement until the Royal Council had met to decide the succession, on the theory that the throne must not be publicly admitted to be empty. The council met on the morning of June 2 and decided that since Crown Prince Dipendra was technically still alive, he should succeed his father. Once this decision had been made and the requisite paperwork signed, the government finally announced shortly after noon that King Birendra was dead, Crown Prince Dipendra was the new king of Nepal, and his uncle Gyanendra would serve as regent until Dipendra was able to assume his responsibilities.

About two hours after this announcement, the government began airing the royal family's joint funeral. Live television cameras panned across the five royal bodies laid

out on the hospital lawn (King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya, their children Shruti and Nirajan, and Birendra's unmarried cousin Jayanti) as well as the line of government officials and dignitaries invited to pay their respects at the hospital. Around 6 p.m., brahmin priests hoisted the royal bodies onto their shoulders and began walking a several-mile route through the capital to Pashupatinath Temple (the city's most important Shiva temple and cremation site), followed by high-level representatives from the government and army. Crowds gathered by the thousands along the route, crying, throwing flowers, and shouting their support for King Birendra. After some three hours of procession, the bodies finally reached their destination: the stone cremation platforms in front of Pashupatinath Temple on the banks of the Bagmati River. Just over twenty-four hours after the fateful dinner party, the royal bodies were laid out, the pyres were lit, and King Birendra and most of his immediate family were reduced to ashes.

By the end of the weekend, Crown Prince/King Dipendra's condition was worsening, and in the early hours of Monday, June 4, he too passed away. The Royal Council promptly declared his uncle and regent, Prince Gyanendra, the new king of Nepal, and by noon on Monday they had the crown on the new king's head. The government placed the entire capital under curfew following conflict between protestors and police, and in the afternoon, with the curfew still in effect, Crown Prince/King Dipendra's body was loaded into an army jeep, driven to Pashupatinath Temple, and cremated.

Once the cremation of his nephew was completed, King Gyanendra appeared on national television to announce the formation of an investigation committee to determine what had happened at Friday's dinner party. The investigation committee was duly formed the following day, and the two-person committee was granted three days to complete its inquiries. Its investigations included no forensic investigation (such as blood spatter, bullet trajectories, or gunshot residue) and instead relied entirely on eyewitnesses present that night at the palace. All the witnesses named Crown Prince Dipendra as the lone shooter.

But this information, released to the public at a press conference the following week, was met with extensive skepticism. Many across the country contended that the royal witnesses were precisely the people with the most incentive to lie about whatever had really happened. Moreover, many Nepalis had already developed their own stories. They had spent hours and days speculating during the information vacuum after the shootings, and the official story was not nearly as emotionally satisfying as many of the conspiracy theories that were circulating. These informal theories of the crime named several likely culprits—most frequently India, the CIA, and the new king, Gyanendra. Even though most theorists conceded that Gyanendra had in fact been in Pokhara at the time of the shooting, many stories

credited his son Paras with actually committing the shootings, and many more fingered Gyanendra as the planner. The question most commonly asked and answered by the conspiracy theories was, “Who benefitted?” Clearly, many thought, the answer was “the new king.”

PALACE SUCCESSION RITUALS, 2001

The royal massacre immediately threw the nation as a whole, but most specifically the palace and the institution of monarchy, into chaos. In the immediate aftermath of the shootings, however, the senior staff at Narayanhiti Palace attempted to rescue some sense of order and normalcy out of the chaos, by trying to follow precedent in conducting the various rituals to conclude the kingship of Birendra and establish the kingship of his successor. Because most of their efforts involved applying “normal” procedures to spectacularly abnormal circumstances, however, the resulting ritual performances can overwhelmingly be classed as both glosses (rites “that hide or ignore contradictions or major problems”) and flops (rites where “all the procedures may be done correctly but the rite . . . does not generate the proper tone, ethos, or atmosphere”).⁶ As a result, despite the efforts and intentions of the planners, even the rituals that were executed smoothly still proved infelicitous.

The Cremation of Birendra

The first succession ritual organized by the palace—designed to help conclude the rule of the now-dead incumbent king—was Birendra’s cremation. This ritual was planned and executed very rapidly, however, in a highly volatile atmosphere, and even though all procedures were executed according to protocol, the situation was so shocking and fluid that the event lacked the gravity, pomp, and controlled grief characteristic of past state funerals. Moreover, following “normal” funeral procedures appeared to ignore the violent circumstances of the king’s death, as well as the irregularity of holding a royal funeral for multiple people simultaneously.

Much of the infelicity of Birendra’s cremation was based on its timing, for royal protocol stipulated (in keeping with normal Hindu conventions) that a royal body should be cremated within twenty-four hours after death. Accordingly, even while the palace’s Military Secretary and Principal Secretary were still at the hospital overnight, the Chief of the Royal Household had already begun making preparations for the royal funeral. He gave orders for palace staff to obtain marigold garlands and saffron cloths to adorn an unspecified number of royal bodies; he called Pashupatinath Temple to tell them to get ready for a state funeral; he contacted the staff of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace Museum to request a palanquin in which to carry the body of the queen.⁷ As morning dawned, no one from the government or palace had yet

officially confirmed the royals' deaths, but hospital and palace staff began to wash and prepare five royal bodies for viewing and cremation. Each was wrapped in cloth to the neck, and King Birendra was additionally swathed about the head. Prince Nirajan's head was wrapped in a white surgical bandage (apparently holding it into one piece). Queen Aishwarya was laid into the palanquin with her face tilted out of view—possibly concealing the ravages of the gunshots. Despite efforts to present the bodies well, the funeral was unable to gloss over the violence of their deaths.

The palace also had clearly underestimated public reactions to the massacre. Staffers had arranged for dignitaries from the government to pay their respects to the deceased royals but had not made plans for any form of public visitation. Instead, thousands of people living in or near the capital flocked to the route the funeral cortège was expected to take. The procession ended up being so congested with mourners that it took more than three hours to cross the city, and the crowd was highly emotional—alternately devastated and angry. Mourners wept and showered the cortège with flowers. People began yelling and throwing rocks at Prime Minister G. P. Koirala, who was walking behind King Birendra's body, prompting the premier to borrow a motorcycle helmet and seek shelter in a bulletproof car. After a second rock-throwing incident damaged the premier's vehicle, his driver left the funeral cortège altogether and drove Koirala back to his residence.⁸ An additional angry crowd that gathered outside Narayanhiti Palace had to be dispersed by riot police.

Finally, shortly before 10 p.m., the priests carrying the bodies reached Pashupatinath Temple and lifted the dead royals onto pyres draped in advance with marigold garlands and covered with canopies. King Birendra was placed on the stone platform immediately below the temple itself—the most prestigious and auspicious cremation site in the country, used for the cremation of dead kings and prime ministers—and a military guard assembled just across the river fired a gun salute. An obscure royal cousin, who was nevertheless now one of the king's closest surviving male relatives, circumambulated his body, sprinkled water on his pyre, and lit it. Priests from the temple did the same for the four royal bodies arranged progressively below the king, and the five pyres burned into the night.

The Enthronement of Gyanendra

Despite the fact that Crown Prince Dipendra had technically been declared king over the weekend, the next ritual facilitating the succession would not actually occur until Monday with the enthronement (*gaddi arohan*) of Gyanendra.⁹ This ritual was similarly infelicitous in attempting to perform normalcy in the face of extreme irregularity ("glossing" the situation in an unconvincing way) and in failing to strike an appropriate mood around the proceedings ("flopping"). The enthronement

consisted of a simple ritual in which the new king would ascend the stone coronation platform used by his Shah ancestors and their Malla predecessors, to sit on a low throne and be invested with Nepal's distinctive jewel-studded, plumed crown. The chief purpose of the enthronement ritual was to link the newly declared king to two of the most distinctive objects connected to the monarchy: the headgear worn by no one but the king¹⁰ and the gold-and-velvet seat that framed the monarch with nine golden snake heads, a visual idiom shared between the royal throne and the iconography of Vishnu. By performing the enthronement, palace staff together with members of the government and military intended to authorize Gyanendra's kingship as they had not been able to so authorize the kingship of his briefly appointed nephew, but the results were tepid.

Dipendra's doctors had declared him dead around 4 a.m. on Monday, June 4, and the palace attempted to follow protocol by ritualizing the succession as rapidly as possible. While the Royal Council organized their meeting to legally establish the succession, the Chief of the Royal Household began organizing logistics for an enthronement. Staffers got the crown out of the palace vault, solicited an auspicious time (*sait*) for the event from the chief royal astrologer, contacted the staff of Hanuman Dhoka Palace Museum to bring the red-velvet single-wide throne down from its display, and issued phone invitations to top-level members of the government, the security services, and the palace administration. By 10 a.m., everything was staged and the official guests were beginning to arrive. Gyanendra himself, though, was closeted in the impromptu office he had established next to his wife's room at the Military Hospital (where she was being treated for gunshot wounds to her shoulder and upper chest), and he was debating whether or not it would be safe to attend his own enthronement.¹¹ There were rumors that the Maoists would make an attempt on his life during or just after the enthronement, and Gyanendra was reluctant to leave the hospital. Eventually, though, Gyanendra consented to be driven back to his private residence to change clothes, and thence to take part in the ritual.

When Gyanendra arrived at the old Hanuman Dhoka Palace (the Malla palace of Kathmandu, inhabited by the Shahs until the late nineteenth century and subsequently used for ritual purposes), he was escorted into the courtyard by Prime Minister Koirala, while a military band played the national anthem. With a simple black hat covering his shaved head,¹² he passed through the ranks of soldiers standing at attention in the courtyard and ascended the coronation platform. As the television cameras rolled, he sat on the throne and placed one foot on a low stool. The new king looked dour, and he slouched slightly. The Chief Royal Guru (*bada rajguru*) briefly blessed the new king and placed the crown upon his head. The band played the national anthem again. The Royal Guru stepped back, and the assembled dignitaries lined up to pay their respects and perform their allegiance to the new king.

One by one, beginning with the prime minister and continuing in order of precedent, each assembled member of the government, military leadership, and palace staff folded hands in front of heart, ascended the platform, and laid a coin on the carpet at the new king's feet, bowing deeply in the process. The new king raised his folded hands to each in return. Finally, an attendant mounted the stone platform and raised a red parasol over the new king.

King Gyanendra then rose from the throne, still wearing the crown, while those assembled shouted affirmation. He stood briefly in front of the throne before descending the coronation platform and walking out of the courtyard. He paid his respects at the Ganesh temple a few hundred meters away and was then escorted by the head of the army to a horse-drawn carriage—a vehicle that had been deemed ceremonially important if not ideal from a security standpoint.¹³ As the carriage pulled away, the small crowd that had gathered to watch the procession stood sullenly, watching the new king in unenthusiastic silence. Some among the crowd began shouting slogans against the new monarch, including “*Gyanendra murdabaad!*” (between “down with” and “death to” Gyanendra).¹⁴ At about the same time, angry young men began gathering in the streets near Narayanhiti Palace, throwing rocks at the riot police called to secure the scene. Eventually police in two different areas in the city fired on protestors, killing a total of three people, and the Palace Military Secretary recommended a shoot-on-sight curfew be established in the capital for the rest of the day.

Despite the crowds marring the mood of the event, the coronation party reached Narayanhiti Palace without incident. When they reached the palace's south gate, they paused to have their entrance blessed by the assistant royal priest before driving up to the main building.¹⁵ Then King Gyanendra entered the palace for the first time as king and briefly addressed the assembled palace staff who had not attended the prior ritual. The staff queued to pay their respects, in an echo of the recent enthronement ritual: each staffer approached the king, placed a coin at his feet, and raised his or her hands in respect. After this simple program was finished, King Gyanendra sent the crown back into storage and returned to his private residence to change clothes and eat.¹⁶

The Cremation of Crown Prince/King Dipendra

After Dipendra was declared dead in the early hours of Monday, palace staff began making preparations for his funeral—a succession ritual that was highly irregular in its circumstance and mood. His body had remained at the Military Hospital for about twelve hours, pending the enthronement of his uncle, Gyanendra, but palace staffers prepared and laid out the body in the grass on the hospital lawn as had

been done for the other royal dead, arranging Dipendra on a bamboo stretcher, shrouding him to the neck and again around the top of his head, and draping him in marigold garlands. Dipendra's face was visible and calm, and the fatal head wound was concealed, glossing over his violent cause of death. Important political figures arrived for visitation, including the prime minister and heads of the major branches of government. Among those in attendance was Pashupati Shumsher Rana, a member of the Upper House of Parliament and the father of Dipendra's girlfriend, Devyani.¹⁷

During the viewing, the high-level staff from the palace had been debating how to transport the body to Arya Ghat, given the volatile mood on the streets following the morning's coronation. King Gyanendra initially wanted a full walking funeral procession, but in the end, he ordered that the body be transported to the cremation by vehicle instead.¹⁸ Dipendra's body was accordingly loaded into the back of an army truck to be driven around (rather than through) the capital. A handful of additional vehicles carried high-level palace staffers and government officials to the cremation, and shortly after 6 p.m. the motorcade sped to Pashupatinath Temple along the capital's bypass (Ring Road), which had been cleared by police and army personnel of both well-wishers who were attempting to strew the route with flowers and protestors who were attempting to obstruct the funeral.

Upon arriving at the cremation site, priests from Pashupatinath Temple carried Dipendra's body to the waiting pyre, which had been prepared in advance (at the directive of the palace) upon the temple's most privileged stone platform—the platform where his father had been cremated two days earlier, directly below the temple. The army fired a gun salute from the steps across the river, and around 7:30 the priests lit the body as television cameras broadcast live video feed. No member of the royal family was present for the cremation—not even Dipendra's cousin Paras, who had been for years a friend and close companion to the dead crown prince/king.

Secondary Funeral Rituals and the Problem with Katto

In addition to the primary funerary ritual—the cremations—there were also numerous further rituals arranged by palace staff on behalf of the dead royals, which took place over the following weeks and months. Most of these were performed equally for all the deceased, with little fanfare and almost no publicity from the press. For example, the thirteen-day *kriya* rites (prescribed for all high-caste Hindus) were performed quietly for each decedent at the temple complex of Kalmochan Ghat in the southern part of Kathmandu. The Chief of the Royal Household arranged for most of the palace priestly staff and a number of “freelance” priests to recite texts at Kalmochan Ghat and Narayanhiti Palace throughout the two weeks following the

massacre, and then again on the thirty-, forty-five-, and ninety-day anniversaries of the deaths. There were also a large number of memorial rituals organized across the country by individuals or groups not connected to the palace, including lamp lightings, text recitations, and the construction of innumerable small shrines around photos of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya. Men across the country shaved their heads—a mourning gesture normally reserved for the deaths of parents or a brother—and many families observed a partial fast. These various rituals and observances were crucial to the funerary observances generally, but none advanced the succession. There was, however, one final succession ritual to help dissolve the kingship of a deceased monarch, a ritual not performed for any member of the royal family except the king himself. This was the ritual designated in Nepali as “feeding *katto*” (*katto khuwaune*), generally shortened in English to simply *katto*.

The ritual of *katto* was performed on the eleventh day after the death of a king and involved four main gestures: feeding a brahmin an elaborate meal, giving him a variety of gifts, dressing him in the clothes of the dead king, and sending him into exile. These gestures together would cause the brahmin to lose his caste and force him to live the rest of his life in ignominy.¹⁹ *Katto* was performed twice in 2001—once for Birendra and once for Dipendra—and because it was not likewise performed for Queen Aishwarya or any of the various princes and princesses, the *katto* was one of the key funerary rituals to specifically mark kings as special social beings.

In preparation for each *katto*, invitations were issued in advance to high-level palace staff, the prime minister, top members of the government and military, and the local and international press corps. Palace staffers under the Chief of the Royal Household arranged for a tent at the Kalmochan Ghat temple complex to be erected and filled with a household’s worth of goods: a bed and bedding, clothing, cabinets, bags of rice and lentils, dishes, and so forth. Meanwhile, low-ranking royal priests were dispatched to the area around Pashupatinath Temple to identify two high-caste brahmins poor enough and elderly enough to be willing to participate.

On the day of each *katto* ritual, palace staff brought to the tent a collection of eighty-four dishes cooked in the Narayanhiti Palace kitchen and collected the brahmin responsible for eating the *katto* from his house. Upon reaching the tent, the *katto* brahmin washed, wrapped himself in a ritual cloth *dhoti*, cooked rice for himself, and sat down to eat at least one bite from each of the ritual eighty-four dishes. Once he finished eating, palace staffers dressed him in articles of clothing from the dead king (jacket, sunglasses, a red-and-gold tunic/trouser set mimicking the outfits each decedent had worn for his coming-of-age ceremony), and a cheap replica of the royal crown. They then led him out of the tent to where an elephant was waiting to take him “into exile”—in practice, across the Bagmati River and a few miles down the road into the city of Patan, to the open square at Jawalakhel used every year for

Bhoto Jatra (see Chapter 4). The brahmin was then supposed to stay at Jawalakhel for three days in an outdoor pilgrim's shelter, pending his permanent departure from the Kathmandu Valley to live in exile.

There were, however, several problems in the actual performances of the *kattos* of 2001 that rendered them infelicitous. The problems began when one of the elephants needed for the *katto* killed a woman while he was in transit from Chitwan National Park to Kathmandu, picking her up and smashing her into the ground as her children looked on—a horrifying incident that resonated uncomfortably with the sudden and bewildering violence of the massacre itself. Of far deeper import, though, were the conflicts that arose between the palace and the two brahmins who performed the rituals, Durga Prasad Sapkota and Devi Prasad Acharya.

Because in performing the rituals any *katto*-eating brahmins would lose their caste (and with it the ability to work as priests), there had previously been a tradition of selecting elderly brahmins past their main work lives and remunerating them handsomely for the stigma and future unemployment they would face. Past brahmins who had eaten *katto* had received as gifts all the materials collected for the ritual itself (including the elephants) and then had received land grants, either in far-flung parts of Nepal or in India, where they could settle during their exile from Kathmandu. Accordingly, the brahmins who agreed to participate in the 2001 *kattos* anticipated that doing so would make them rich.²⁰ Due to administrative changes since *katto* was last performed in 1972, however, the palace was hampered from making private gifts of either land or elephants, since after 1990 both national property and national park animals had been placed under the control of the government and could not be simply distributed by royal decree. It is possible that the palace could have gifted land from the royal family's personal properties, but instead palace staff added a modest cash gift to the household items and trusted this would suffice.²¹ The decision was not effectively communicated to the brahmins, however, who each had sought and found buyers for the elephants and who were both counting on receiving land and houses. It was only after both brahmins had eaten the *katto* and were sitting together in the pilgrim shelter that it became clear to them that no land or house was forthcoming and that the elephants had already been sent back to Chitwan National Park. Accordingly, the two men summoned a press conference at their pilgrim shelter to air their grievances. Both insisted they had been cheated, and they refused to go into exile until they had received what was due to them. After several days of their complaints, the government finally dispatched an army jeep to pick the two men up and drive them back to their homes near Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu. The ritual thus came to an acrimonious non-ending, with the brahmins aggrieved, the government and palace embarrassed, and (with no one having gone into exile) the ritual itself incomplete.

The *katto* thus served as the unsatisfactory conclusion to the broader complement of palace-staged succession rituals. All of the palace-sponsored rituals (including *katto*) were organized according to palace protocols and precedents, but most of them nevertheless were intensely problematic and met with resistance from many observers and from some of the participants. All of the rituals were attempting to gloss an unprecedented event by following normal procedures, but nobody coordinating or observing the rituals could ignore the fact of the royal family's mass murder. Many of the rituals also flopped when they suffered problems in their execution that compromised their gravitas, leading them to be inadequate in their mood or atmosphere. The condition of the royal bodies was painful, the continuous unrest in the streets of the capital was disruptive, the lackluster demeanor of the new king at his enthronement was uninspiring, and the highly public dispute over the remuneration of the *katto* brahmins was awkward. Taken by themselves, then, the palace-orchestrated succession rituals were thus highly infelicitous, and while "rituals are efficacious to some degree merely by their taking place,"²² these rituals did not go far toward establishing a smooth succession from Birendra to Gyanendra. However, the palace-orchestrated succession rituals were never supposed to operate in isolation and should have had plenty of other practices bolstering them in case of failure.

STATE-ORCHESTRATED SUCCESSION RITUALS

While the palace orchestrated the main events that were intended to mark the transition of the social identity 'king' from Birendra to Dipendra to Gyanendra, there were also several additional rites of succession orchestrated by members of the government and the para-government institution of the Royal Council. These events can be usefully described, following Peter Winn's terminology, as "legal rituals": those "concrete, visible sets of symbolic acts" that create a legal situation or relationship, which will then be subject to the "regulative rules" of law.²³ In this case, the government's first succession rituals were intended to transfer legal status and executive power from king to king, while the subsequent rituals were intended to establish culpability for the deaths of the royal family. Both types of rituals were problematic in their individual execution, but they were far more damaging to the monarchy in the ways they collided with each other and with the palace's succession rituals.

The Declaration of Succession

Following the massacre, the most procedurally important of the government's legal rituals was the declaration of succession. This ritual was performed once on Saturday morning and once again on Monday morning—the first declaration legally establishing both Dipendra's kingship and Gyanendra's regency, and the second

declaration legally establishing Gyanendra's kingship. Both these rituals were the responsibility of the semi-government/semi-palace institution of the Royal Council, an organization that consisted of the top-level members of the government, the secretary-level staff at the palace, and a variety of hand-picked prominent citizens and palace confidants, who were summoned to the Royal Council's office complex as soon as each incumbent king was declared dead. In each case, the Royal Council's primary responsibility was for its members to sign a document transferring executive power over the government from one king to the next,²⁴ a gesture that was considered a prerequisite to publicly announcing the previous king's death or commencing his funeral.

Despite the presence among the Royal Council of lawyers (including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) and medical doctors (including the chairman of the Royal Council himself), the group held no formal discussion regarding the ambiguities of Crown Prince Dipendra's medical prognosis, his legal culpability for the massacre, or his ability/suitability to fulfill the duties of the office before they transferred the kingship to him. Nor did anyone raise the possibility of delaying the formal pronouncement of succession until the crown prince's status could be clarified.²⁵ Instead, in both instances, the Royal Council rushed to declare the new king as quickly as possible, privately offering several rationales for this emphasis on speed over deliberation. First, they claimed that tradition dictated that a new king had to be announced before the government could announce the old king's death, and second, that the new king needed to be proclaimed and then enthroned so that he could personally authorize the funeral of his predecessor.²⁶ Most commonly, though, members of the Royal Council from the time simply insisted that "the throne could not be left empty."²⁷

Birendra and Dipendra both died during the night, so in both cases the Royal Council convened between 8 and 9 the following morning. The members then spent some time talking among themselves. After only brief, limited discussions about the situation, the chairman asked each time for a show of hands from those who wished to follow the standard succession. Both votes passed unanimously—indicating that everyone understood the meeting to have ritual rather than deliberative purposes—and each member of the Royal Council who was present signed his name to a legal document certifying the succession. As soon as each meeting concluded, the chairman of the Royal Council convened press conferences to announce on behalf of the government the passing of the former king and the succession of his heir.

By declaring the succession so quickly—twice—and by simply following the order of inheritance, the Royal Council was attempting to gloss over a highly problematic and irregular situation. Additionally, the declaration of Dipendra's kingship would appear to be an instance of what Grimes refers to as a "misapplication": a circumstance

when a ritual act is performed with inappropriate people or in inappropriate circumstances.²⁸ Dipendra, regardless of his status as crown prince and eldest son of his father, was not a suitable candidate for kingship at the time of his declaration. He was possibly already brain dead and certainly unable to take up official responsibilities; if he survived, there was no certainty that he would regain consciousness or ability. He also might have been criminally culpable for the death of his father, rendering his succession highly problematic, and yet the Royal Council promptly and without debate invested him with all the powers of the state. In the end, the Royal Council succeeded in compounding the anomaly of the situation rather than solving it.

The Investigation

Beyond the Royal Council's legal certification of the succession, the other major succession ritual organized at the state level was the report of the official massacre investigation committee. While on the one hand an investigation might appear to be a fact-oriented practical exercise, it is likely that at least portions of any public government investigation can be analyzed for ritual dimensions, and in this particular case, most of the investigation seemed more formal than substantive, with the central goal being not to conduct a forensic investigation of a crime scene but to rapidly produce an official narrative about the massacre—an exercise that was all the more problematic for the ways that it contradicted the other succession rituals being staged.

The massacre investigation committee was officially formed by King Gyanendra as one of his first acts of office on the day of his enthronement. The committee consisted of two individuals, the Chief Justice and the Speaker of the House—Keshav Prasad Upadhyaya and Taranath Ranabhat, neither of whom had any law-enforcement or investigative background—and the two men were given a scant three days to determine what had happened. Following a slightly late start, the investigation team spent two days visiting the site of the shooting and interviewing eyewitnesses, followed by one day preparing their written report. The two men neither performed nor ordered formal forensic analysis of the scene, and there had been no postmortem analyses performed on the royal dead.²⁹ While firearms collected at the scene were reportedly sent away for ballistics testing, no results were incorporated into the official report. This meant that the government's investigators relied entirely upon the narratives of royal relatives and palace staff members.

Following the interview-based investigation, the two investigators brought a bound copy of their written report to Narayanhiti Palace, where they ceremonially presented it to King Gyanendra. With this formal conclusion to their investigation, they then convened a press conference to publicize their findings.³⁰ These findings most notably named Crown Prince Dipendra as the sole shooter but attributed to

him no motive. The summary document presented to the journalists provided details collected during the investigation but offered them in no narrative structure save chronology, leaving many points unexplained or disconnected (thereby ripe for immediate appropriation into burgeoning conspiracy theories).³¹ The Speaker of the House then displayed for the journalists a table full of weapons recovered from the scene; he jokingly lifted one of the weapons, pointed it at the journalists, and made fake firing noises.

The official release of the committee's findings was intensely problematic on several levels and hence ineffective in promoting the succession from Birendra to Dipendra to Gyanendra. To work as a succession ritual, the official investigation and the production of the official report should have helped produce a more compelling public narrative about what had happened and why Gyanendra became king, but instead it fostered doubt, suspicion, and conspiracy theories. There are several reasons for this infelicity. The press conference itself flopped: the Speaker of the House failed to achieve the standard gravitas of this type of official ritual, and the committee's explanation for the tragedy was a recitation of information divorced from any emotional logic—a narrative that seemed plausible and satisfactory to no one. This narrative also relied entirely on the credibility of the eyewitnesses, all of whom were palace insiders. Moreover, in a highly unfortunate confluence of timing, the press conference (which was the only official performance that clearly identified Dipendra as the shooter who caused his father's death) happened to convene the same day as Dipendra's *katto* (the only event that unambiguously performed his kingship).

Perhaps most problematic, the material gathered in three days and presented at the press conference was not simply an "initial finding" to be probed more deeply over a longer investigation: it was the entirety of the state's effort to determine what had happened. A charitable interpretation of events might suppose that King Gyanendra ordered the investigation be completed quickly in an attempt to pressure the investigators into efficiency or to bring information more rapidly to the public, but no one I have spoken to in the years following was willing to see things in so charitable a light. Instead, almost anyone not directly connected to the palace presumed that the investigation committee and its presentation of findings were *exclusively* a performance—that they were "all ceremony and no substance," a barefaced effort to direct suspicion away from the real conspiracy and the likely culprits: Gyanendra himself and his son, Prince Paras. Thus, far from creating a narrative of transition that persuasively transferred power from Birendra to Dipendra to Gyanendra, the official narrative presented at the press conference helped bolster instead the rising *counter-narrative*, the story that Gyanendra came to the throne not as the result of tragedy or his nephew's violent folly, but because of his own unbridled lust for power and either his or his son's willingness to kill to gain the throne.

Despite the fact that both the investigation and succession/declaration ceremonies were coordinated with the palace and were intended to bolster the palace's orchestration of the succession, both of the state's interventions in the succession ended up working at cross-purposes to the palace's efforts to create Gyanendra's new identity as king. By not giving the time to seem sufficiently deliberative and by not explaining enough publicly, both the official investigation and the Royal Council's declarations undermined Gyanendra's succession and lent credence to the widespread perceptions of coverup and illegitimacy. Thus the government's succession rituals, far from solidifying and improving the transition, compounded the confusion and conflict, overall making the situation worse.

TALES OF TRANSITIONS PAST

Many Nepalis and foreign observers found the succession rituals of 2001 hasty and sometimes bewildering, but those rituals were actually the result of the palace and government attempting to follow established protocol under extraordinary circumstances. Indeed, almost everything the palace and government did following the massacre followed an established past procedure.³² To understand why those in charge performed the 2001 succession in the ways they did, it will be helpful to look briefly at the precedents they were following. In particular, the two highly successful royal successions of the twentieth century help clarify how and why the succession of 2001 faltered as it did.

King Birendra himself had come to the throne in what may be considered a nearly optimal succession in 1972. His father, King Mahendra, had died suddenly but peacefully of a heart attack while on a hunting trip in the Terai, surrounded by his personal physicians and a handful of close confidants. That same morning, the Royal Council met to confirm the succession, and Crown Prince Birendra was enthroned as king within hours, before his father's body had been transported by helicopter back to Kathmandu. Birendra gave a live radio speech pledging his commitment to the country and to his father's ideals, and Mahendra was cremated that night at Arya Ghat. The dead king's pyre was lit by his middle son, Gyanendra, and while the dead king's eldest son, Birendra, began running the country, both his younger sons (Gyanendra and Dhirendra) jointly retreated to Kalmochan Ghat to perform the thirteen-day *kriya* death rituals on his behalf.

On the eleventh day after Mahendra died, the palace organized a *katto* ritual. The polluting meal was eaten by Sri Ganesh Bhatta, who received a house and tract of land in southern Nepal for his service.³³ On the thirteenth day, the royal family gifted some of Mahendra's possessions to palace brahmins, and the palace gradually eased out of formal mourning over the course of a year. Mahendra was mourned formally

and correctly (and probably by many quite sincerely), but his death did not plunge the nation into chaos or paroxysms of grief and anger. Nor did it particularly raise problems in establishing the kingship of his son, who as crown prince had been active for years in his father's administration and who moved smoothly into place at the head of an ambitious and authoritarian regime.

Mahendra himself had also taken over kingship seamlessly from his own father, Tribhuvan, when the latter died on March 13, 1955. The 1955 succession rituals took place on a slightly longer timescale than those of 1972, however, because unlike any other king in Nepali history, Tribhuvan died abroad (while undergoing heart treatments in Switzerland). Mahendra was declared king and enthroned as soon as Tribhuvan's aides called with news of the death, but Tribhuvan's body did not arrive back in Kathmandu for three days (following a day of preparation and bureaucracy in Switzerland and a day of viewing and public mourning in Delhi).³⁴ As the new king, Mahendra, began taking up the routine duties of kingship, the dead king's pyre was lit by his second son, Basundhara, and his thirteen-day *kriya* rituals were undertaken at Kalmochan Ghat by both his younger sons, Basundhara and Himalaya. On the eleventh day King Tribhuvan's *katto* was performed by a Bhatta brahmin from India who received a house and land in southern Nepal in recompense,³⁵ and on the thirteenth day the palace brahmins received auspicious gifts.

Both these transitions (from Tribhuvan to Mahendra in 1955, and from Mahendra to Birendra in 1972) were performed quickly, with a far shorter interregnum period than is typical of many monarchies in the world. In both cases, the dead king was officially replaced by his son before the majority of the country's population likely even received news of the royal death. Nevertheless, both transitions were acceptable and uneventful, in large part because there was nothing surprising or challenging about either set of circumstances. Both Tribhuvan and Mahendra had been ailing for some time prior to their deaths, and both had had earlier heart attacks for which they received much-publicized medical treatment abroad, making their actual deaths unsurprising. Moreover, both Tribhuvan and Mahendra had adult sons ready to step straight into office. In both 1955 and 1972, an adult crown prince was already active in the administration of the palace and the country. Mahendra in particular had been grooming his son Birendra for years, familiarizing him with the administration of the government and establishing a separate Crown Prince's Secretariat out of the palace. Both the crown princes had increasingly begun to represent their fathers domestically and internationally prior to their accessions, and when the ailing senior kings began traveling abroad for medical treatment, each crown prince had repeatedly taken his father's place running the government. These circumstances all helped to normalize the successions when they happened.

Additionally, neither previous royal transition was threatened by any kind of weakness in the dynastic lineage. Even though both Tribhuvan and Mahendra died relatively young (at 48 and 51 respectively), at the time of their deaths they both were fathers and grandfathers several times over, and the Shah lineage was able to show strength and solidarity even in the absence of the king himself. Each man left not only an adult crown prince ready to take over the kingship, but younger sons to handle the funeral arrangements, grandsons ready to be new crown princes, and dowager queens to live on in mourning. Thus the successions of 1955 and 1972 happened in the context of strong, efficient family lineages, grieving the loss of the patriarch but eminently equipped to carry on into the future.

The two successions of 1955 and 1972 both represented optimal royal transitions. This was not necessarily normative for the dynasty as a whole, however: more often than not the Shah kings of the nineteenth century died while their heirs were still minors, and Tribhuvan himself succeeded at age five. Despite this fact, the monarchy was able to survive as an institution in the face of less than ideal circumstances because of the robust institutional mechanisms in place. In fact, the very strength of the institution's succession practices may actually be most visible in the least successful succession of the Shah dynasty: the first coronation of Gyanendra in 1950.

After King Tribhuvan and both his primary heirs decamped to India in protest of Rana rule (as explained in Chapter 2), Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher Rana enthroned and crowned Tribhuvan's four-year-old second grandson, Prince Gyanendra, at Hanuman Dhoka Palace to serve as a new captive puppet-king. The ploy failed for a number of reasons, including the domestic unpopularity of the Ranas and the diplomatic intervention of the Indian government. From a ritual point of view, however, the attempted transition from Tribhuvan to Gyanendra failed because there was no way for the Ranas to ritualize the conclusion of Tribhuvan's kingship through his funeral or his formal resignation of powers. Thus the office was still clearly occupied by the incumbent—an incumbent who was incredibly well established, having already been on the throne almost four decades. Gyanendra, by contrast, was a child clearly being manipulated by the Rana premiers, and he was not even directly in line for the throne. So long as his grandfather King Tribhuvan was alive (not to mention his father, Crown Prince Mahendra, also clearly capable of kingship in every way save the opposition of the prime minister), there was no need to put a living king's second grandson on the throne.

The failure of Gyanendra's abortive childhood enthronement thus highlights three issues that would become relevant and problematic again for his eventual succession five decades later: first, that a succession needs to involve a complex combination of ritual practices, which have to reinforce one another to be fully effective; second, that simply declaring someone king is insufficient to make it so; and third,

that it is a major handicap to come to the throne without years of social preparation in the status of crown prince. Despite the Ranas' efforts, Tribhuvan had remained the king and, as soon as he returned to Kathmandu, Gyanendra went back to just being a prince, until the disastrous royal dinner party five decades later.

RITUAL, NARRATIVE, AND THE FAILURES OF 2001

So why was it that most of the same rituals performed in similar ways helped produce effective successions in 1955 and 1972, but not 2001? There are of course plural reasons for the difficulty of the 2001 succession, some to do with the actual ritual performances (such as the demeanor of Gyanendra at his enthronement), many to do with factors far beyond and even irrelevant to the rituals (such as the Maoist insurgency or the ongoing implication of Prime Minister Koirala in a corruption scandal), and some to do with the complex intersections and interactions between ritual performances and broader events.

In this last context—which is the most interesting for present purposes—what may have turned out to be the biggest problem with the succession rituals of 2001 was the extent to which they failed to frame and perform a reasonable, satisfying public narrative about how and why Birendra stopped being king, and how and why his brother, Gyanendra, took his place. One of the main purposes of public rituals generally (and succession rituals particularly) is to stamp collective narratives about relationships and statuses as *officially true*. Thus a wedding socially recognizes a sexual partnership, a funeral marks a biologically deceased person as being socially dead, an inauguration marks an election winner as being a mayor, and so forth. Of course, the rhetoric of a ritual may in fact deviate from private or biological realities and convictions (such that a wedding may solemnize a relationship that is unstable or unromantic, a funeral may be separated by days, weeks, or even years from the biological death that it ostensibly marks, and an inauguration may install the winner of a rigged or contested election), but the ritual serves to clarify and/or establish what can be publicly recognized as being the case.

In the case of the royal rituals of 2001, however, the relationship between ritual and public narrative broke down. Neither the government nor the palace (nor anyone else in the country) was entirely clear what had happened or what narrative the rituals were supposed to serve, and some of the succession rituals clashed with or outright contradicted one another. The succession rituals of 2001 were also performed too quickly, because the organizers were implementing procedures and timelines designed for situations where the narratives were clear. But the events of 2001 were too aberrant, too shocking, too sudden for the design of the regular ritual procedures, and so Gyanendra was left at the end with rituals that made him only partially the king.

Problems of Public Narrative

Of all the differences among the successions of 1955, 1972, and 2001, one of the most striking was the contrast between the mundane circumstances of the first two and the shocking circumstances of the last. Prior to 2001, a Shah king had never died from overt violence, and both kings within living memory had died of pedestrian natural causes following long illnesses. Never before had a king died at the same time as any other member of his family, meaning that at no other time in history had royal funerals needed to be conducted *en masse*. Nor had there ever before been a major question of guilt or fault regarding the cause of the prior king's death. No one had spent hours (or years) dissecting minutely what made Mahendra's heart fail, much less whether the new king, Birendra, had in any way caused that failure. In other words, public narratives about the deaths of Tribhuvan and Mahendra were easily constructed and widely accepted, due to the basic comprehensibility of the circumstances.

The death of Birendra, though, was as hard to explain as it was unexpected, and it fit into no easy narrative. Birendra had not succumbed to a longstanding disease: he had been shot. His son Dipendra, though older than either Birendra or Mahendra at succession, had not been nearly as well placed to take over (having not been married and not played a particularly important role in the administration of palace or government affairs), and more immediately, he was in a coma at the time when he was declared king and thus unable to be crowned. Birendra's junior son was dead and thus unable to perform his father's cremation or *kriya* rituals, while Birendra's brother, Gyanendra, was the one handling all palace affairs, first as regent but quickly as king. When Gyanendra was enthroned, he was coming in not as the efficient, publicly groomed first son of his father, but as the businessman brother and backstage advisor who was only the technical next in line after the sudden deaths of Birendra's entire line. People had difficulties grasping *any* of the major facts of the massacre: Who shot Birendra and why? How did Dipendra die? Why had Gyanendra been in Pokhara instead of at the palace, and how was it that his own son Paras escaped being wounded in the shootings? There was no clean, easy story about Birendra's death that could be enshrined as public truth even months or years later, certainly not in time to animate the succession rituals.

To clearly establish Gyanendra's kingship, it would not be enough just to account for the death of Birendra (hard as that would have been). There would also need to be a satisfying narrative about the confusing two-day period of Gyanendra's regency, a time that was not obviously an interregnum since Dipendra had been technically declared king, but was also not quite another reign since the declared king had not been enthroned. There was instead a profound and basic disconnect between the

narratives put forward over the course of the succession. There was no way to reconcile the narrative formed by the succession declaration and the *katto* (that Dipendra was king), the narrative framed by the absence of a palace enthronement ritual (that Dipendra was not king), and the narrative advanced by the official investigation (that Dipendra was a mass murderer).

The palace and government between them spent tremendous energy enforcing the first and third of these stories, with the result being rituals at cross-purposes to one another—such that on the same day that the *katto* performance claimed him as king, the investigation committee named Dipendra as the sole shooter and displayed his rifles tagged as criminal evidence. The tension between Dipendra's conflicting ascriptions was perhaps most obviously manifested in his primary funeral. His body was laid out in state at the Military Hospital, where it was respectfully visited and viewed by “the government” (the prime minister, Chief Justice, chairman of the Royal Council, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and so forth) in gestures suited to a king. As a king, he was placed on the cremation platform of particular honor at Arya Ghat, and the army performed a full royal gun salute before his pyre was lit. But as a criminal, he was denied a funerary procession: unlike any state funeral before or since (which have always featured slow walking processions through the center of the capital), Dipendra's body was loaded in a truck and driven as quickly as possible around the outside of the city, as security forces worked to clear the streets of anyone attempting to observe the small cortege go past. Meanwhile, members of the public who did make it onto the street responded in a similarly conflicted manner, with some people trying to sneak onto the road to decorate the route while others sought to reach the road to protest by burning tires or to obstruct the route with logs.

Ultimately, though, neither the government nor the palace ever managed to treat Dipendra conclusively as either king or criminal. Because of his coma and ultimate death, they were never able to stage the enthronement rituals that would have performed the official beginning of his kingship, and they were also never able to stage the legal rituals that would have fully established his criminality (such as an indictment, trial, or punishment). In Dipendra's case, all that the palace and government could do was announce that the crown prince had acquired two new social statuses—criminal and king—but they could never code them into the public rituals that would enter either status officially into public narrative. So in fact, regardless of whether Dipendra technically stood in line for succession, or whether he actually shot his family, in an important sense he could only remain what he started out as: the crown prince, the identity that had been crafted and constructed through years of performance, and that could not be simply replaced or added to through pronouncements alone.

What this meant for Gyanendra was that there was no compelling story as to how and why he had become king. With no one certain about what had happened, or why Dipendra had briefly become king and then died, there was no obvious role for Gyanendra to adopt relative to the massacre. The new king and palace staff seem to have presumed that it would be sufficient for the continuity of the monarchy that there was a legal stipulation that covered the situation—that, according to the law outlining the royal succession, Birendra's brothers would inherit the throne if his sons died without heirs. In actual fact, however, this technical right to rule did very little to make Gyanendra's new kingship compelling. Had the palace and government picked one story or the other to tell about Dipendra, it might well have worked more easily for the continuity of the monarchy. If Dipendra had been solely identified as a king who had tragically died before marrying and having children, then Gyanendra could have been stepping into a vacuum created by tragic circumstance; if Dipendra had been solely identified as a murderer who caused the death of his father, then Gyanendra could have been upholding the institution of monarchy in the face of the ruinous actions of his nephew. But as it was, with self-defeating messages about who or what Dipendra had been for the weekend he lingered alive, all Gyanendra inherited was ambiguity.

Ritual Timing

The narrative problems about who or what Dipendra had been had created a complicated interplay, whereby the various rituals and narrative elements of the succession ended up clashing with and undermining one another, instead of reinforcing one another to produce a satisfying consensus. The resulting muddle blunted or negated the rhetorical purposes and possibilities of many of the succession rituals, which would have created problems no matter how the rituals were performed or timed. In fact, though, the overall conflicts between narrative and performance were greatly exacerbated by the ways the succession rituals were timed. Throughout the approximately two weeks during which the succession was primarily dramatized, the palace and government consistently delayed releasing any information but rushed to perform all the rituals—a procedure that was backward from what would have made the rituals optimally successful and satisfying.

As mentioned above, one of the primary purposes of these sorts of public rituals is to take facts and narratives amorphously formulated and recognized elsewhere and to mark them as being officially true—to stamp narratives and relationships into public record. For this to succeed, the participants and observers of a given ritual need to know the relevant narrative beforehand: they need to know and on a basic level accept the facts and relationships about to be stamped as true. In the royal

transitions of 1955 and 1972, it was not a problem to hold rituals quickly, because the succession narratives were conventional and everyone had had years in advance to become accustomed to them. In both cases, an ailing middle-aged king had died of natural causes, and his thoroughly groomed, efficient adult son was becoming king in his place.

But in 2001—when the emerging narrative was confusing, contradictory, incomplete, and sudden—the palace and government carefully guarded information but fast-tracked ritual performances. This meant that an official version of what had happened was dramatized and stamped as authoritative before anyone in the country had time to digest what was happening. Thus, King Birendra's death was not officially confirmed until some fifteen hours after it had occurred, yet his funeral began less than three hours after the official announcement had been made. Two days later, Gyanendra was crowned just after 11 a.m., less than eight hours after Dipendra actually died and a scant two hours after the government's official announcement of his succession.

The unintended effect of this rushed timing was to suggest that the new king and/or the state wanted (or needed) to canonize a particular version of events before anyone had time or opportunity to think about that narrative. It reinforced the impression that someone had something to hide. While there was probably no way of handling the aftermath of the massacre that would have left the monarchy unscathed, public reactions would likely have been considerably less belligerent if the information/ritualization pattern had been reversed: rapid information dissemination, paired with delayed rituals. Not only would this have permitted more careful preparation for the rituals themselves, it would have given everyone time to hear and emotionally process the events before the new identities and relationships created by those events were constituted as public truths. It would, in other words, have facilitated instead of undermined a constructive interplay between ritual performances and public narratives.

RITUAL FAILSAFES . . . AND THEIR FAILURES

The succession rituals performed in the immediate aftermath of the palace massacre proved infelicitous in the face of an unprecedented situation and did not securely establish Gyanendra's kingship. However, the monarchy ought not have been relying exclusively on these immediate succession rituals. Rather, the institution had been designed to include numerous practices in the years prior and subsequent to the primary succession—practices that should have helped establish even a monarch coming to the throne under problematic circumstances. In fact, the palace and king began preparations for a royal transition years or even decades in advance by

appointing and grooming the crown prince, and they would seal the succession of a new monarch up to three years after his enthronement with a consecration ritual. These practices should have enmeshed the primary succession rituals in a gradual system of social marking, a system whereby an individual would first be designated as a future king, and then eventually enthroned as the king, and finally reinforced as being definitely the king. This system should have taken some pressure off the primary succession rituals and allowed some latitude for infelicitous ritual performance. By helping to construct kingship at times other than the unpredictable moment of transition, the peripheral succession rituals should have supported a successful transfer of kingship even in a moment of crisis, irregularity, or failure. But for the succession of 2001, even these peripheral succession rituals faltered, providing no assistance in smoothing the transition.

The Crown Prince as Proto-King

The primary practice ensuring institutional continuity was the appointment of a crown prince during the lifetime of the king. The crown prince was something of a king-in-process and was integrated gradually into his future role through a combination of rituals, proclamations, and eventually administrative tasks. Future Shah kings began to be socially marked from birth, receiving a title different from all their male relatives.³⁶ Within weeks, the king-to-be began receiving unique ritual attentions. For example, while the first rice-feeding ceremony (*annaprashan*) for any other member of the Shah family was celebrated as a private family event, the first rice of the king's first son (or first son's first son) was celebrated as a state function, with the prime minister carrying the infant during the ceremony.³⁷

While the king or crown prince's first son was heir apparent from the moment he was born, and was legally declared crown prince at the discretion of his father at any point after the latter's own succession, there was also (at least for each of the crown princes of the twentieth century) a separate ceremony when he reached his majority at age eighteen, establishing his fullest status prior to actually becoming king. At the ceremony for Dipendra in 1989, for example, the crown prince was awarded his most complete pre-king title (including the addition of "Dev" ["god"/"king"] to the end of his name) and given a ceremonial rank in the army. He was presented with a sword and authorized to govern the country in the case of the absence or indisposition of the king. After the event his birthday, like his father's, became a national holiday. The fully constituted crown prince would now also be allowed access to virtually any ritual object or practice specific to his father, including the right to enter the Shah family's worship room at the Gorkha palace (a right restricted to the palace's head priest, the king, and the future king). The crown prince could now be given

official administrative responsibilities: Mahendra created a new Palace Secretariat for Birendra to run; Birendra appointed Dipendra head of the National Sports Council; and Gyanendra appointed his son Paras to lead the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation. Following his full designation, the crown prince would also begin to devote more of his time to helping construct the public face of the monarchy, increasingly appearing at public functions and performing ceremonial duties (such as distributing awards).

This process of gradually marking and grooming the future king was important to the institutional continuity of the monarchy for several reasons. First, it apprenticed the crown prince to his future job. He would learn the king's duties and roles and get better accustomed to royal comportment at formal events. He would perform supervised administrative tasks in anticipation of his role as executive head of government, including running small portions of the government or leading the government for short periods of time in his father's absence. As future king, he would develop working relationships with the other institutions and individuals of the government, including the heads of the major political parties and the government's top-level bureaucrats. From a public relations standpoint, seeing the crown prince perform kinglike roles was crucial to help members of the government, members of the palace staff, military leaders, and the general populace to become accustomed to the idea of their future king. They could learn his temperament and judge his suitability. They could look into the future and envision what the country would be like with the crown prince at its head as king.

This system had worked very smoothly in both the royal transitions of 1955 and 1972. In both cases, the crown prince had already achieved his majority and was taking an active role in palace affairs. Even if Tribhuvan or Mahendra had died violently (by assassination, for example), the crown prince would still have been perfectly poised to take over. The system of grooming a proto-king could thus have significantly alleviated the crisis of a less-than-ideal royal death. But in 2001, the system of preparing in advance for royal transitions broke down. The monarchy had spent nearly three decades grooming Crown Prince Dipendra to be the next king of Nepal—but he was hardly able to step calmly into his kingship. Instead, as Birendra's body was being carried to Arya Ghat, Crown Prince Dipendra was lingering near death in the Military Hospital. Even though the Royal Council dutifully proclaimed Dipendra the new king, they were unable to formally enthrone him. This left Dipendra in an anomalous position, proclaimed the king legally but not elevated ritually. The result was a certain amount of confusion as to whether he was actually King Dipendra or still merely the crown prince.³⁸ The years of labor of marking him the proto-king should have smoothed his succession, but they were not adequate to make him king in the absence of any further rituals. With Dipendra's semi-succession and death, the monarchy lost decades of investment in its future.

Instead, the man who did become king was Gyanendra, who had never been groomed for anything more than a supportive role. The position of king was hardly foreign to him, since he had grown up in Narayanhiti Palace and had appeared at public functions on behalf of the monarchy for most of his life. He was a close (though not always heeded) advisor to his brother, and he directed the influential King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, all of which would have given him practical experience in the administrative, relational, and performative aspects of the job. Gyanendra was not an unfamiliar figure to the government or general populace of Nepal, but he was not especially popular and he had never been identified through any of the rituals or other routine practices of kingship as a likely candidate for the throne. His sudden accession came as a surprise to everyone, probably including himself. Gyanendra thus had none of the benefits of the special marking or special title that might have prepared his kingship, and so he had no built-up capital of proto-kingliness. This was a particular problem given his irregular succession. No king in the entire Shah dynasty had ever inherited the throne due to the violent death of his predecessor; no king had ever inherited the throne brother to brother (and only two had inherited in any pattern other than father to first son); no king had been crowned at an age when he could be a grandfather.³⁹ Gyanendra was thus an unlikely king, and his need for institutionalized assistance for his succession was correspondingly acute—but unmet.

The anomalous position of Gyanendra as a non-crown prince violated the usual performative and narrative preparation of the monarchy, which in turn created further difficulty for the timing of his enthronement. Under normal circumstances, when the successor to the throne had been a proto-king for years or even decades and was the thoroughly expected candidate, it would work well to enthrone him immediately. In Gyanendra's case, though, the "usual" system effectively rushed to the throne a man who had a clear legal claim but who had a social identity that was utterly insufficient. Because Gyanendra had never been made a proto-king, he could not simply be placed on the throne as soon as the previous king was dead. He had skipped key steps in the social creation of the next monarch, and thus his enthronement would have to overcome rather than capitalize on the practices of grooming a crown prince.

Beyond the difficulties of Gyanendra's own succession, the transition of 2001 also created a crisis for the monarchy in the longer term, because it raised the specter of the future succession of Prince Paras, Gyanendra's only son and (in the aftermath of the massacre) the only other male left in the direct Shah lineage. Far from being an asset to the monarchy, Paras was a major liability to the institution, both before and after becoming the crown prince. In just the year prior to the massacre, Prince Paras had appeared repeatedly in the national media for various exploits, including

assaulting a police officer with the butt of an automatic weapon and killing a popular singer in a hit-and-run crash. Following the massacre, Paras went from being an embarrassing royal cousin to being the presumptive future king. Even Gyanendra seems to have had grave doubts on the acceptability of his son. While he declared his wife queen within hours after his enthronement, he waited almost six months before officially conferring the status of crown prince on his only possible heir. The system of crafting crown princes as proto-kings had been designed to give the monarchy continuity in the future, to help the country become accustomed to the future king—but in this case, the elevation of Paras to the role compromised Gyanendra's own position further and led even committed royalists to worry about the future of the monarchy. Very few people were happy that Gyanendra was king, but the prospective kingship of Paras was widely considered disastrous.⁴⁰

It is probable that most monarchies go through difficult periods where the incumbent is little liked, and it is probable that most monarchies have enough institutional strength to withstand an individual hated monarch or perhaps even a few decades of successive unpopular reigns.⁴¹ But Nepal had lost a widely beloved monarch and gotten instead the two-day rule of a comatose crown prince, the advent of an unpopular new king whose succession was widely regarded as irregular and suspicious, and the prospect of a future king known for his wild behavior and indiscretion. Nor was there much respite in sight: Paras's own son, Hridayendra, was not born until 2002, and during the time his grandfather was king he was too young to have any public persona. (Nevertheless, there were many informal discussions proposing that the crown bypass Crown Prince Paras and go directly from Gyanendra to the entirely unknown young Hridayendra.) While the system of grooming crown princes should have eased even an irregular succession, in 2001 it left the monarchy even more vulnerable than it would have been simply following Birendra's violent death. By losing the labor put into Crown Prince Dipendra, the monarchy lost its past; by crowning an unprepared Gyanendra, the monarchy stumbled in the present; and by having to invest Paras as the new crown prince, the monarchy charted what was widely regarded as a dismal future.

The Crowned King Gets Consecrated

The establishment of the crown prince as a proto-king was not the only form of institutional insulation that succession rituals had against points of crisis or difficulty, however. In addition to the preparatory practices, there was also a ritual confirming the status of the king, generally conducted one to three years after his initial enthronement. This ritual was known as the consecration (*abhishek*) or royal consecration (*rajabhishek*), and it involved bringing both the king and queen to Hanuman

Dhoka Palace to be (re)crowned and blessed on the stone coronation platform—a ritual essentially parallel to the king's initial enthronement but on a far larger and more formal scale. The consecration was the final and most complete single gesture marking a king as fully the king, and the only major ritual establishing the queen. Because this ritual was not precipitated by the death of the previous king, it could be planned more elaborately than the often spur-of-the-moment enthronement, and it could be entirely devoted to celebrating and cementing the kingliness of the incumbent without any reference to his predecessor. The consecration was thus a ritual that might have been able to seal Gyanendra's kingship and help him to get past some of the difficulties of his succession—had it ever been held.

It is unclear when or how the practice originated of holding separated enthronement and consecration rituals for Nepali kings, though the existence of a seventeenth-century consecration manual for Drabya Shah suggests that it may be quite a longstanding one.⁴² Regardless of the possible existence of early antecedents, however, the practice of postsuccession consecration seems to have been thoroughly reinvented in the mid-twentieth century in accordance with Mahendra's vision of a modern, cosmopolitan monarchy.⁴³ King Mahendra was enthroned in March 1955 and consecrated in May 1956, a few months after the end of the formal year of palace mourning. The consecration was calculated to be a statement of the new king's vision of development, as well as his commitment to raising the status of Nepal in the international community. To that end, the primary audience for the consecration was not the local populace or domestic government but rather the dozens of foreign dignitaries and press representatives he invited, whose time in Nepal was divided between purposefully archaic ceremonial performances and modernist displays of "development" and democracy.⁴⁴ The consecration itself took place over the course of two days, during which time King Mahendra and Queen Ratna were first blessed and celebrated in accordance with Sanskritic idioms of kingship: the king and queen walked under red cloth parasols, and they rode elephants in an official procession; they gave gifts to brahmins; they were blessed with texts recited from the Vedas and water brought from the seven most sacred river confluences (*tirthas*) of the Indian subcontinent. Once the royal couple took their places on the double-wide throne on the coronation platform, the Chief Royal Guru crowned the queen and then (re)crowned the king.

These ancient ritual idioms were tempered with far more recent idioms of power and prestige. Right after the coronation, King Mahendra gave a speech at the Tundikhel parade grounds explaining details from his Five Year Plan and proclaiming his commitment to democracy and development while a plane flew overhead scattering flower petals (and advertising circulars). In the following week, King

Mahendra treated his foreign guests to a barrage of “the sort of activities which modern states are expected to provide on such occasions,” including a National Development Exhibition, a performance of folk songs and dances, a military revue, a youth athletic parade clearly inspired by the Olympics, and a series of state dinners and garden parties.⁴⁵ Perhaps no aspect of the celebration summed up the blend of modernism/archaism as well as the widely circulated photos of the king and queen sitting crowned on their double throne wearing Western clothing and sunglasses. The consecration of 1956 thus reflected Mahendra’s vision of “traditional” kingship updated to a modern world.

Mahendra’s consecration was in many ways uninteresting from the standpoint of the ritual’s liturgical content, since the consecration was in most respects a moderately elaborated version of his enthronement the year before. However, because the consecration could be thoroughly planned and orchestrated in a way the earlier enthronement could not, this second ritual provided an opportunity to stage a careful statement about Mahendra’s kingship and about the role of Nepal in the international community. Where the enthronement had simply marked the transition of Mahendra from crown prince to king, the consecration affirmed his kingship and allowed Mahendra argue for the importance of his country and announce his intentions to raise the power and influence of the monarchy at home and abroad.

Following King Mahendra’s passing, his son Birendra followed a similar pattern, using his consecration as an opportunity to intertwine Sanskritic ritual idioms with an internationalist rhetoric of democracy and development. King Birendra was consecrated in February 1975, fully three years after his succession, and he managed to secure an even more illustrious guest list than had his father, boasting delegates from fifty-six countries, including the crown prince and princess of Japan, the presidents of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Lord Mountbatten, Imelda Marcos, and Charles, the Prince of Wales.⁴⁶ Like his father’s consecration before, Birendra’s consecration took place at Hanuman Dhoka Palace, and on the main day the primary consecration took place out of view; however, this time the proceedings were carefully explained to waiting foreign guests. Primarily, this private ritual was explained as the anointing of the king and queen with a staggering variety of significant substances: water and mud from holy riverbeds, dust from a Vishnu temple, scrapings from the tusk of an elephant, the five holy products of a cow, dust from a mountaintop, and pots of ghee, milk, yogurt and honey carried respectively by representatives of the four Vedic social classes (*varnas*).⁴⁷

Once the private blessing was concluded, the king and queen returned to the stone courtyard and took their places on the double throne set up on the coronation platform, enclosed by a cloth and bamboo pavilion. The Chief Royal Guru placed the crown on King Birendra’s head, while the queen’s sister Komal (the wife of

Prince Gyanendra and herself the future queen) placed a smaller crown on Queen Aishwarya's head. Those assembled then lined up to pay their respects to the royal couple, and "representative subjects" offered the king and queen coins. The first in line to make the offering was the couple's three-year-old son, Dipendra.⁴⁸ Following the main consecration, the royal couple and their foreign guests processed to the open parade grounds for the king's speech. King Birendra spoke partly in English and partly in Nepali, and for the first time his words were broadcast on national radio. In the course of his remarks, he announced his commitment to provide national free primary education.⁴⁹ King Birendra had planned less of a program for his foreign guests in the following week than had his father, however, and most of the VIP guests left Nepal the following day.

A similar consecration was intended for Gyanendra, to take place a year or two after his accession.⁵⁰ But the consecration never happened, primarily due to political pressures. Over the course of the first year of Gyanendra's reign, the Maoist insurgency deepened and became more violent, after which the king authorized escalating counterinsurgency measures. Within eighteen months of Gyanendra's accession, Prime Minister Deuba had sacked the parliament and King Gyanendra had sacked Deuba, initiating the protracted crisis of governance that culminated in the national uprising of 2006. Given this situation, while a consecration could perhaps have dramatized Gyanendra as the full monarch ready to lead the country to peace and stability, it is more likely that it would have been presented negatively in both the mainstream and Maoist press as evidence of the new king's predilection for his father's vision of self-aggrandizing, authoritarian kingship. The consecration was never officially canceled, but it was never actually scheduled either, with those involved simply intending to perform it later when the time seemed right. In fact, though, the time never did seem right, and Gyanendra was ousted from power before the ritual could be performed.

The fact that there was never any consecration caused a difficulty not only for the reinforcement of kingship but also for the construction of a new queenship. Gyanendra's wife Komal had never been named crown princess, and she could not benefit from being enthroned with her husband. Not only was she still in the hospital being treated for gunshot wounds to her chest and shoulder at the time of Gyanendra's accession, she would not have been crowned then even if she had been well: the initial enthronement (*arohan*) was always performed for the king alone, while it was the consecration (*abhishek*) that was performed for the royal couple. This meant that the queen would only be fully authorized in her queenship with the second ritual, and without that ritual there was never a public ritual assertion of Komal's position. She was given the title of queen through a royal decree and presented robes and medals in a private ceremony at Narayanhiti Palace; otherwise, she merely began

appearing at public functions following her recovery, relying almost entirely on the routine duties and rituals of the monarchy to render her queen.

The consecration that never happened is not necessarily an example of a ritual failure in itself (though Grimes does offer the category of “omissions,” to cover rites not performed). It seems more symptomatic of the precarious position the monarchy occupied in the wake of the 2001 massacre, and an indication of the complex ways in which the internal dynamics of the monarchy affected and were affected by broader political currents. Had Gyanendra come to the throne under less difficult circumstances, a consecration might have mattered less and its nonperformance in the face of political turmoil been insignificant; had the political situation been calmer, a consecration might have been held, which might in turn have helped shore up the monarchy from its 2001 crisis. In actual fact, though, the internal weaknesses of the monarchy created by the palace massacre were compounded by strife and dissention within the broader political framework.

Regardless of the reasons, however, the fact that no consecration was ever held for Gyanendra meant that the second failsafe in the monarchy’s support system for smoothing transitions had also failed. Gyanendra had had no opportunity to be groomed in advance of his enthronement, and he likewise had no conclusive opportunity to be confirmed in his kingship afterward. In part, the failure of the failsafes meant that Gyanendra’s kingship was simply shaky, but in part it also contributed to an anomalous situation in which it fell largely to the king’s annual reinforcement rituals to mark Gyanendra as king. While the reinforcement rituals did in fact bolster Gyanendra’s social position as king, marking him gradually over time, they were never quite enough to entirely compensate for his chaotic and inadequate succession of 2001.

4

Reinforcement Rituals I: Seeing the Sacred Vest

IF GYANENDRA HAD come to the throne under disastrous circumstances, he nevertheless did become the king of Nepal, and in the months and years following June 2001, he stepped into all the various roles of that office. He convened the parliament and inspected the army, he held press conferences, he wrote birthday greetings to other international heads of state, and he started appearing on newly printed national currency. He began receiving the blessing of the Living Goddess Kumari during Indra Jatra, and he offered special animal sacrifices at Dakshinkali Temple. Over time, these routine duties and “reinforcement rituals” accomplished some of the work that his succession rituals had failed at: they made his kingship seem established and, if not exactly inevitable, at least basically stable. But following the Janan-dolan movement of 2006, the monarchy came under scrutiny, and the new interim administration began to challenge every practice Gyanendra undertook, including the variety of rituals he annually performed.

The process of revising the king’s traditional ritual responsibilities proved distinct from the broader campaigns of the interim government, both in its significance and in the procedures necessary to effect it. As the administration began interfering with royal ritual, members of the government suddenly had to negotiate with significant numbers of nongovernment actors—people who were not beholden to bureaucratic or party structures, whose allegiances might often be stronger to the palace than to the new administration. During other phases of the interim government’s antimonarchy campaign, the government was able to pursue its ends by reorganizing procedures

within institutions it controlled, according to procedures it controlled: it could amend the budget, reissue currency, and boycott palace events all within the course of its own routine operation. But royal rituals were often organized and performed by people only indirectly tied to the government, or people who were financially beholden to the government yet personally loyal to the palace. Moreover, despite some overlap and similarity in the staging of royal rituals, any single ritual might be organized and performed by dozens of people only loosely connected to each other and often entirely separate from the people who organized and performed other rituals. This made royal ritual unusually diffuse and complicated from a procedural and institutional perspective, and therefore unusually challenging to influence. Therefore, royal rituals are interesting not just for the fact that they were changed during the interim period, but for the ways in which they changed, and the institutional negotiations that were required in order for them to change.

This chapter, and the two that follow it, focus on three major reinforcement rituals that had helped sustain the monarchy up until 2006, but that then came to be appropriated by the interim government in 2007. Each chapter explains first the basic procedure of the ritual in question, and how the monarchy had become involved with it, and then how the ritual was performed during the two years of the interim period (2006 and 2007), to illuminate the process of contestation. Taken together, these three chapters indicate how the monarchy's various reinforcement rituals had for centuries represented a loose system of practices sustaining the social reality of kingship, and how the institutional logic and legitimacy of the monarchy increasingly unraveled as those reinforcement rituals were challenged and appropriated. In short, these chapters demonstrate the ways in which ritual had been central to royal identities, and the ways it became a potent idiom in which to contest and reconfigure Nepal's political relationships.

The present chapter examines the ritual of Bhoto Jatra, the first reinforcement ritual at which the king was publicly replaced by interim Prime Minister G. P. Koirala. Bhoto Jatra is the first major public ritual the king would attend in each Nepali year, and as the first major performance of the king's annual ritual cycle it was used by the interim government in both 2006 and 2007 to test and establish its policies against the king. Bhoto Jatra also demonstrates particularly clearly the ways in which alterations to state ritual and ritual policy could be implemented by refashioning routine procedures of the state, including the issuance of official invitations and the meetings of the municipal administration. Beyond this, the negotiations over Bhoto Jatra during 2006 and 2007 occurred at the same time as other significant interim period events, permitting a nuanced insight into the ways debates about ritual inflected and were inflected by concurrent debates about other aspects of the monarchy.

ABOUT BHOTO JATRA

Bhoto Jatra is a somewhat peculiar ritual¹ that annually brought the king and the top representatives of the government to the city of Patan (just across the Bagmati River to the south of Kathmandu) to witness the public display of a small jewel-spangled vest: the *bhoto*. The *bhoto* is a black square of cloth studded with what are purported to be diamonds. It not an article of clothing ever worn by humans or even divine images but is rather a precious item entrusted to the care of the god Rato Machindranath—an important local deity, worshipped in the form of a wooden statue approximately the size of a small child, bearing a wide, flat red face with striking white eyes. The *bhoto* is widely said to have once belonged to a serpent deity (a *naga*), though it is now kept with Machindranath and taken along in a box when the god goes “on tour” during his month-long annual chariot festival (Fig. 4.1).

The chariot festival is the most important annual cultural event in Patan, lasting several weeks in the early summer. It features two wooden chariots with tall bamboo spires, pulled by ropes through the narrow streets of the old city. The taller of these—a spindly six-story-tall construction on a narrow wheeled base—carries the statue of Machindranath, while a shorter, more stable chariot bears the statue of a second local god, Minnath. Once the festival begins each year, the two chariots are pulled a few blocks at a time along their routes and then halted at designated points for a few hours or days for a variety of ritual observances, ranging from animal



FIGURE 4.1 Chariot of Machindranath near Lagankhel, Patan, 2010. (Photo by author)

sacrifices to lamp lightings to dropping a coconut from the top of the taller spire. The final stop on the chariots' route is at an area of the city called Jawalakhel*, normally used as an open market and bus stop. Unlike the more congested locations where the chariots stop earlier in the festival, this area has a large traffic circle, a broad brick-paved space, and a painted-concrete reviewing stand—all of which make the spot congenial for a large public event.

Bhoto Jatra is celebrated on the third day after the two chariots have arrived at Jawalakhel. In the early afternoon, the police and army begin to secure the area, blocking off traffic and taking stock of the crowd, and in the late afternoon they establish a large security perimeter around the chariots in preparation for the arrival of the government dignitaries. People from the area begin gathering by the hundreds, possibly thousands, often standing for hours in the heat and occasionally in the rain to secure a distant view. The Living Goddess of Patan (the local kumari²) arrives in a palanquin, and she is seated in a brick and wood rest-house adjacent to the concrete government reviewing stand.

Normally around 4 or 5 p.m., representatives of the state arrive. The dignitaries invited to Bhoto Jatra have traditionally included the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, the cabinet, the ministry secretaries, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, local municipal authorities, and the army chief, all of whom arrive in sleek government cars. Once the government officials were in place, the king and queen would arrive as a military band played the national anthem. The royal couple would sit in the concrete reviewing stand, and they would be sent *prasad*³ from Machindranath and Minnath. Then a bureaucrat (the head of Patan's branch office of the Guti Samsthan, explained below) would mount the chariot and show the *bhoto*, circling the edge of the chariot three times and holding it aloft from each corner of the chariot's square base (Figure 4.3). The king and queen would approach the chariots themselves to look upon the deities and toss them coins (give *dakshina*). They would pay homage to the Patan Kumari, and then, circumambulating the chariots clockwise, they would return to their waiting car to be driven back to the palace. The government officials would depart, the gods' attendants would begin transporting their deities back "home" to their respective temples, and the crowd would disperse. This would mark the end of the year's chariot festival.

BHOTO JATRA AS PART OF A BROADER RITUAL YEAR

Bhoto Jatra is only one event out of an ornate annual ritual cycle surrounding the god Machindranath—a ritual cycle that comprises upward of a hundred separate

* pronounced *JOW-la-kel*

major rituals performed at various times throughout the year.⁴ These rituals can be divided into two notable phases of activity: (1) a series of rituals through which the god's image is annually bathed and repainted and (2) the god's annual chariot festival, the roughly month-long period of pulling the wooden chariots leading up to Bhoto Jatra itself. Bhoto Jatra participates in some broader idioms of divinity and royalty pervading Machindranath's overall ritual cycle, yet in many respects it differs sharply in tone and performance from the rituals that precede it.

One notable difference between Bhoto Jatra and the rituals that precede it lies in the respective ethnic valences of the performances. Despite recent population influxes, the majority of the population of the city of Patan continues to be Newar. Though Machindranath is widely recognized as an important god, visited and respected by devotees across ethnic lines, he is dominantly worshipped by Newaris, and almost all of the events of the annual ritual cycle (apart from Bhoto Jatra) are attended primarily by local Newaris. Indeed, hardly anyone outside the Newar community knows about the early rituals of the bathing/painting phase or when they happen. Only one of the dozens of early rituals gets listed on government-issued Nepali-language calendars, and so people who are interested in attending any other event must learn from Newari-language calendars or by word of mouth when to show up. The early portions of the chariot procession are slightly more publicized than the bathing phase, partly by the presence of the chariot itself, which is literally the size of a narrow building and is always constructed on the major thoroughfare where the main flow of Kathmandu–Patan traffic drives past. The public construction of the chariot thus alerts the local non-Newar community to the imminent beginning of the chariot festival, prompting a modest number of non-Newar Nepalis and foreigners to join the Newari crowds when the chariot begins its journey. Bhoto Jatra, by contrast, does not run on such an informal or local basis. It is annually announced as a state and bank holiday for the Kathmandu Valley, meaning that it is officially brought to the attention of most of the inhabitants of the capital. Not only do a significant number of non-Newars attend as a result, but even those who do not attend still observe the occasion indirectly by suspending business, work, or school.

Another important contrast between the rituals leading up to Bhoto Jatra and Bhoto Jatra itself lies in the style of ritual performance. In contrast to Bhoto Jatra, the preceding bathing and chariot rituals all conform to an ornate Newari ritual aesthetic. These rituals involve elaborate (often archaic) costumes, singing and bell ringing, parasols and palanquins, late-night animal sacrifices, possession, feasting, and the consumption of substantial quantities of alcohol. They involve opportunities for all the participants to look at Machindranath's statue itself, and they tend to be chaotic, dramatic, noisy, and entertaining. In particular, people seem to take joy in watching the chariot lumbering down the street, expressing a mixture of horror

and glee every time the chariot threatens to fall over—an occurrence that is nearly constant by the end of the chariot's journey, since the construction tends to weaken and the spire tilt as the weeks go by.

But Bhoto Jatra itself is a fairly stodgy and controlled affair,⁵ and the experience for spectators primarily consists of standing in one place for several hours. While the young men in the crowd often engage in a certain amount of shouting, jostling, and fondling of unwary young women, the event as a whole is closely monitored by security forces, and several local organizations (including the Jyapu Society and the Nepal Scouts) assist with crowd control. Machindranath's chariot does not move during Bhoto Jatra itself, and it is oriented away from the crowds, so that the only people actually able to see the god are the state representatives on the concrete viewing platform. There is no recitation, singing, or bell ringing, and almost no one wears particularly interesting outfits: the majority of the VIP guests, and the official who displays the *bhoto* itself, always wear the standard dress of the government bureaucracy (the *daura suruwal*: a modest tie-across white shirt with matching trousers, complemented by a suit jacket and a traditional cap [*topi*]). The event always concludes before sunset, meaning there is no need for torchlight or oil lamps, and there is no post-Bhoto Jatra feast. Thus, Bhoto Jatra is a distinctly un-Newar event, an austere observance totally lacking most of the typical attractions of a Newari ritual. It is instead a ritual of state, with great emphasis placed on the arrival of important people in shiny sedans. Those who gather for Bhoto Jatra do get to see the *bhoto* for themselves (if they can secure a vantage), but the performance of the ritual seems designed less to allow spectators to see the *bhoto* for themselves than to allow them to be present while the king saw the *bhoto*.

The other notable difference between Bhoto Jatra and the rest of the ritual cycle is the variability between how and when the various rituals incorporate monarchy. For most of the twentieth century and for the first few years of the twenty-first, the living Shah king of Nepal had annually attended Bhoto Jatra, but he attended no other portion of the ritual cycle. However, the rest of the bathing and chariot rituals are not unconcerned with monarchy, nor are "kings" entirely absent from them. In fact, most major events throughout the ritual cycle continued to include symbolic kings. All significant ritual events are attended by a sword representing the Malla king of Patan, and the deity's annual bath is additionally attended by a sword representing the Malla king of Bhaktapur.⁶ These swords are treated in the ritual idioms once standard for a *raja*. They go on processions, they are shielded by red cloth parasols, they are shadowed by people bearing a torch and a yak-tail fly whisk, and the Patan Malla sword is always accompanied by the country's ceremonial military guards (the *Guruju ko Paltan*), who dress in the uniforms of the eighteenth-century



FIGURE 4.2 Sword representing the King of Bhaktapur “seated” in the courtyard of Machindranath’s temple, during preparations for the bathing ceremony, 2010. (Photo by author)

Nepali military and carry muskets and bayonets. The Patan sword continues to “live” at the medieval Malla palace in Patan, in a storehouse in the courtyard that continues to be an active ritual space, and the swords are given good “views” of any major ritual (Fig. 4.2).

These two swords have slightly different roles in the course of the rituals from each other, as well as from that played by the living king at Bphoto Jatra. The Bhaktapur sword is explicitly identified as Narendradeva, the king named in local mythology as the person responsible for bringing Machindranath to Nepal from India. This sword relates ritually to the god as a powerful patron or a facilitator and comes for the deity’s bath in order to assist in the image’s repainting: once the major painting has been completed, the bearer of the Bhaktapur sword helps “open the eyes” of the newly painted image, reanimating the statue.⁷ The Patan sword, by contrast, is usually nameless, though consistently identified by ritual organizers and observers as generically representing the Malla king of Patan. This sword is framed as the chief devotee of the god, and it is present constantly during all the different parts of the ritual cycle. In particular, whenever Machindranath’s statue moves from place to place, the bearer of the Patan sword carries the statue’s silver foot cover on his head. The Patan sword and its bearer also ride in the chariot with Machindranath throughout the chariot festival, accompanying the god as he goes on tour. Throughout these various rituals, the two Malla swords interact in intimate ways with the god’s

image, serving alternately as the god's patron and his closest devotee, and participating in conventional Newari religious and ritual aesthetics.

Bhoto Jatra, by contrast, framed kingship rather differently. First, whereas the two sword "kings" imply a local Newari/Malla royal presence for the Newari-attended early rituals, the living Shah king attended the more broadly nationalist Bhoto Jatra as the non-Newari king of united Nepal. The living king was moreover marked as a king not by the signs of traditional Sanskritic royalty (parasol, fly whisk, palanquin) but rather by the tokens of power more characteristic of colonial and contemporary nation-states (a motorcade, a national anthem played by a military band, accompaniment by representatives of the bureaucracy and the military). This meant that the Shah king was not in competition with the Malla "sword kings." Rather, all the various "kings" could participate in the ritual cycle at different points and in different idioms.

The continued participation of local Malla kings through their representative swords holds powerful implications for the capacity of ritual to sustain monarchy even after political upheaval. The actual Malla kings who had ruled over the Kathmandu Valley were deposed in the late 1700s, yet their sword representatives nevertheless continue to "attend" the rituals of a major local god into the twenty-first century. This suggests that some small kernel of Malla kingship was retained and nurtured in a ritual context for generations after the political end of the Malla kingdoms. Because the rituals made room for a performance of Malla royalty in ways that apparently did not threaten the new Shah kings, Malla kingship was able to maintain a social position—albeit depoliticized and sharply delimited—that identified the Malla kings as uniquely able to worship Machindranath, indeed necessary to the proper execution of the ritual cycle. Thus the Malla kings' relationship to the god has continued to be performed in ritual long after the kings themselves died, long after their descendants stopped living in palaces or controlling city administration, and long after every other facet of their rule was either coopted by the Shah kings or suspended when their kingdoms were folded into the larger nation.

The involvement of multiple "kings" over the course of Machindranath's ritual cycle further suggests an important and interesting dynamic, namely that the practices culminating in Bhoto Jatra do not all hinge around one single person, object, or relationship to which all other ritual gestures or actors are oriented. Rather, the rituals seem to presume a network of different important figures or objects, each of which contributes to more than it undermines the importance or interest of the others. There had been three "kings" involved in various rituals, but each played a slightly different role and held a slightly different relationship to Machindranath; the living Shah king was the highest-profile living guest, but he was joined by VIPs from the government and he appeared near the Patan Kumari of Patan. The

primary deity of all the rituals of the cycle is Machindranath, but he appears throughout the chariot procession side by side with fellow deity Minnath, and he has only the most perfunctory role to play at Bhoto Jatra, the best-attended event of the entire ritual cycle. While the ritual display of the *bhoto* does locate him as the central figure (insofar as the *bhoto* is entrusted to him and his chariot is the central site from which the *bhoto* is displayed), the god himself “does” nothing and is the recipient of only a basic homage from the king. The logic of Bhoto Jatra would seem to suggest not a binary king/god relationship, or even a king/sacred object relationship, but rather a situation in which the god Machindranath, the king, and the *bhoto* were all key nodes in a broader network of power that also included the Patan Kumari, the government representatives, two swords, Minnath, and the crowds—each necessary for the proper execution of the ritual.⁸ This would seem to allow some theoretical flexibility in restructuring the ritual’s performance—as long as the broader network remained intact or a participant removed was replaced by someone similarly powerful.

This is not to say, however, that the ritual of Bhoto Jatra did not frame the king as a uniquely important social actor. In fact, while the ritual on one level required the joint presence of Machindranath, the Patan Kumari, the king, and important witnesses, on another level the ritual annually commenced and concluded based entirely upon the presence of the king: when the king arrived, the ritual began, and when the king left, the ritual was finished. This reflects a broader logic of most Nepali state rituals, according to which the status of the participants is indexed by order of arrival, with the lowest-status participants arriving earliest and the highest-status last. In turn, then, the departures are generally reversed: the highest-status participants leave first, followed progressively by lower-status participants. Thus, while the king’s actual ritual actions were extremely mundane—consisting of little more than looking at the *bhoto*, greeting a few deities and dignitaries, tossing a handful of coins up into a chariot, and walking a few dozen steps—Bhoto Jatra nevertheless made a powerful visual argument for the importance of the king, identifying him based on his arrival and departure as the most important person present. Moreover, in its spacing and in its timing, it created a focus that was directed at the king. While the day before anyone could have approached Machindranath’s chariot at their leisure, on Bhoto Jatra all non-kings would be pushed away from the chariot by police, and they would have to stand around waiting for the king’s presence before the ritual could begin. In other words, the ritual established the king as the kind of person privileged enough to need to have a space cleared for him, privileged enough to have the entire ritual wait until he showed up, privileged enough for thousands of people to all crane their necks to get a glimpse of him. It was thus, despite the vague silliness of the central act of displaying a jeweled vest, a quintessential royal reinforcement ritual.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BHOTO JATRA

Bhoto Jatra, as a reinforcement ritual for the king of Nepal, asserted his social uniqueness, but it also rhetorically created for the modern kings of Nepal an identity rooted in historical continuity. Every year in living memory, Machindranath's chariot had been pulled through the streets of Patan, and every year the king had come to view the *bhoto* and circle the chariot. This created a local habitus in which the annual ritual appearance of the king was utterly reliable and beyond question. From a deeper historical perspective, however, the involvement of the king in Machindranath's ritual cycle was actually considerably more complicated and variable. Centuries of local kings had maintained (or even invented) their kingliness by worshipping Machindranath—by bathing him, giving him gifts, ornamenting his temples, viewing his *bhoto*—and thus taking part in this ritual cycle has long been a part of traditional Kathmandu Valley politics. The royal rituals involving Machindranath had upward of a millennium of history behind them, and kings had remained in relationship with the god across assorted shifts in both ritual practice and political power. This extended history made it all the more remarkable that the interim government should eventually succeed at separating Gyanendra from Bhoto Jatra.

The figure now known as Machindranath is one of the oldest deities continuously attested in the Himalayan foothills, and for almost as long as there is historical evidence for him, his worship has been bound up with assertions of kingship. References to the god himself go back approximately a millennium, and since these references indicate an already established god, it is possible he has been worshipped in the Kathmandu Valley far longer. An alternate name for the god appears next to a small red image in an eleventh-century manuscript, while a travelogue written by a Tibetan monk in the early thirteenth century describes a short red statue being bathed in Patan by the local king.⁹ By the end of the thirteenth century, there are clear and specific references in chronicles to *rajas* worshipping the god, and references even to two kings from outside the Kathmandu Valley making a point to bathe Machindranath following local military campaigns.¹⁰ By the fourteenth century, Machindranath's bathing ritual seems even to have been well enough established as a royal idiom that it could be leveraged to bolster a weak dynastic claim to rule.¹¹ By the end of the seventeenth century Machindranath held pride of place as the premier state deity (*rashtra devata*) of Patan, and participating in the ritual cycle was a nonnegotiable part of constructing, performing, and sustaining a royal identity.

Nor did the local prominence of Machindranath and his annual ritual diminish with the fall of the Malla dynasty. Unlike some city-state traditions (such as Bisket Jatra in Bhaktapur) that dropped in prestige and political significance after the Malla kings were deposed and the imperial capital was relocated to Kathmandu,

Machindranath and his ritual cycle were claimed and upheld by Prithvi Narayan Shah and his descendants to bolster their own royal identities. While the Shahs sought generally to preserve whichever ritual traditions of Malla kingship they adopted, thereby emphasizing continuity between their reigns, there are nevertheless several ways in which the traditions surrounding Machindranath appear to have shifted under the new regime. The Shah conquests affected the deity's mythology, for example. Narratives had long asserted that Machindranath had had to be brought from India to solve a drought plaguing the Kathmandu Valley, but now the cause of the drought was identified as Gorakhnath, the patron deity of Gorkha. The Shah kings also developed a new and heightened relationship to the welfare of Machindranath's chariot during its procession. Crises with the chariot had long been understood to correlate (either to predict or reflect) the welfare of the Malla kings and their kingdoms,¹² but in the post-conquest years any chariot-procession crises began to be more closely scrutinized in chronicles as lenses into the Shah kings' welfare—a circumstance possibly highlighting the fact that the Shahs were now the only kings around (so any bad fortune could not deflect onto any other local monarch) but possibly also revealing local Newari animosity toward the invaders. Shah-period written histories cite (even revel in) instances of royal death or disaster following chariot crises, such as that King Rana Bahadur was stabbed by his brother during an inauspicious chariot procession of 1806, or the fact that both King Surendra and his father Rajendra died in rapid succession during the festival of 1881 when the chariot broke entirely in half.¹³ In this way, the god Machindranath became powerfully intertwined with the assertion (and sometimes critique) of Shah kingship.

Most importantly for the present purposes, it was during the Shah period that living kings switched from primarily participating in Machindranath's bathing rituals to attending the display of the *bhoto*. It is not clear precisely when this happened, however, or why. It is not even clear when exactly Bhoto Jatra began to be part of the ritual cycle. Ethnographic descriptions of the *bhoto* showing do begin to appear early in the nineteenth century in both local and foreign accounts—but in none of the earliest accounts is it clearly indicated whether the king was present or not. Moreover, it is impossible to evaluate if these emerging accounts of the *bhoto* reflect an innovation in the deity's ritual cycle, a new prominence given to a previously unimportant ritual, or a gap in documentation regarding something that had long been important.¹⁴ The first apparent reference to the king attending Bhoto Jatra does not appear until 1928, when Percival Landon records:

I was watching with keen interest the presentation to the dense crowds of the coat worn by the god—a regular preliminary to the figure of Machendranath [sic] himself. The Maharaja motored up in time to be present when the curious

red-wrapped figure was taken from inside of the car and shown to the seething multitude.¹⁵

Given the dearth of clear historical evidence, it is possible that kings had been attending Bhoto Jatra for generations, but it is also entirely possible that the practice dates to the twentieth century during the reign of King Tribhuvan (r. 1911–1955), the first king to be definitively documented to attend in the 1930s and 1940s. The possibly late innovation in the Shahs' ritual relationship to Machindranath indicates that while the *fact* of a royal/divine relationship was highly stable, the *performance* of that relationship was dynamic and complex. The role the king played in the rituals themselves could actually shift and change, without necessarily disrupting the fact that those rituals asserted and reinforced the ruler's kingship.

Even if the practice of attending Bhoto Jatra was new under Tribhuvan, his reign lasted more than four decades, and so by the time of his death anything that he might have adopted (or probably more likely, anything that had been adopted in his name by his Rana minders) would have become well-established royal practice. Indeed, King Tribhuvan's successors—Kings Mahendra, Birendra, and Gyanendra—all scrupulously attended Bhoto Jatra from 1955 through 2006. This means that, despite the variability in kings' participation in Machindranath's ritual cycle over the long course of the deity's history, their ritual activities during local living memory have been remarkably fixed and consistent. As the Rana regime gave way to parliamentary democracy, which in turn gave way to the *panchayat* system and back to multiparty democracy again, the king's participation in Bhoto Jatra became one point of stability in an often unpredictable political climate. In particular, as party-based governments rose and fell in ever more rapid succession after the 1990 democracy movement, King Birendra's continuing participation in his reinforcement rituals such as Bhoto Jatra became one of the only predictable and smooth-running activities of the government.

Bhoto Jatra was also by chance the last public ritual King Birendra participated in before his death—indeed, his last major public appearance of any kind. Bhoto Jatra was celebrated in 2001 on May 24, one week before the royal massacre, and it provided observers a last glimpse of Birendra's carefully cultivated public persona. He honored the deities, he smiled to the crowd, and he was photographed chatting genially with the prime minister. Birendra was accompanied that year by both his sons and seemed on the best of terms with the crown prince, who would be accused of his murder in a few short days. The absolute normalcy of Bhoto Jatra 2001 may well have contributed in a minor way to the public difficulty in comprehending the royal massacre and the wide rejection of the official story of patricide and family strife.¹⁶

In subsequent years, in the wake of the massacre, King Gyanendra celebrated Bhoto Jatra in accordance with the traditions of his brother, Birendra, and his father, Mahendra. Gyanendra celebrated Bhoto Jatra for the first time in the spring of 2002, after he had been king for nearly a year, and he attended again in 2003, 2004, and 2005, each time accompanied by Queen Komal, but not Crown Prince Paras.¹⁷ The tenuousness of Gyanendra's kingship was signaled in subtle ways through Machindranath's ritual cycle, however. For example, for the new king's first participation in Bhoto Jatra in 2002, in an act of disrespect and disapproval, one of Machindranath's key ritual specialists wore an inappropriately soiled and tattered outfit to the event.¹⁸ There was also significant speculation about the viability of Gyanendra's kingship when the chariot toppled all the way over in 2004, requiring that the procession be suspended for several weeks for repairs. While the priests and other specialists who stage the chariot procession blamed the collapse on flaws in the construction and handling of the chariot, the press leaped upon the incident as an opportunity to criticize the government and the king, claiming that this local religious tradition was judging the failings of the country's leaders.¹⁹ It is hard to imagine that had the chariot collapsed ten years before (when King Birendra had been alive and secure in his rule) the press would have predicted doom for the monarchy. But by 2004, even at the ostensive height of Gyanendra's kingship, dissent that was almost unthinkable under Birendra had become possible under Gyanendra, and the fall of the chariot was used to articulate and to legitimate political grievance.

BHOTO JATRA INSTITUTIONS

To fully understand the processes of negotiating and redirecting Bhoto Jatra, it will be helpful to first get a sense of the assorted institutions involved. These various institutions had to work with one another to stage the event each year, and so the interim government needed to command, influence, coopt, or persuade each to cooperate with the plan to replace the king. In the case of Bhoto Jatra, these institutions were more easily aligned to the interim government than would be the case for subsequent reinforcement rituals, but that alignment was neither automatic nor inevitable.

At the top level of involvement, Bhoto Jatra relied in several ways upon the Home Ministry. The largest and most powerful single branch of the national government, the Home Ministry handled both general administration and matters of law and order (overseeing the police and the Armed Police Force). For Bhoto Jatra, the Home Ministry was the body that coordinated and provided security, as well as the body that issued formal invitations to all government dignitaries, including the king. The Home Ministry also controlled the municipal administration of the city of

Patan (as indeed it coordinated the administration of all of Nepal's towns and cities). There had not been elected municipal governments in Nepal since the mid-1990s; instead, all towns and cities in the country had a central municipal building that was technically a ministry branch office, headed by a Chief District Officer (CDO) appointed by the Home Ministry. The CDO of Patan served rather like a mayor, overseeing the events and interests of the city, but he reported directly to his Home Ministry superiors: in the context of 2006–2007, it is relevant to note that new CDOs had been appointed to each major city in the country after the Janandolan with the expectation that they would serve the interests of the new administration, rather than the king. In the case of Bhoto Jatra, the CDO of Patan would prove a crucial link between national politicians and local organizers.

Nepal's federal government did not directly fund or coordinate the Jatra itself, however. The primary oversight of the chariot festival fell instead to the Guti Samsthān. The Guti Samsthān is a national bureaucracy that funds and coordinates all religious sites and practices having implications for the state. Established in the 1960s during King Mahendra's reorganization of the government (a move that transferred religious patronage from the palace itself to a para-government office, initially reporting to the palace's top priest), the Guti Samsthān was designed to mimic the ministry system. It has a central office in the capital and then branch offices at the district level to coordinate local religious activities. It is formally headed by a political appointee from the party of the prime minister, but it is informally directed by a career bureaucrat, drawn from the ranks of people in the Guti Samsthān's own miniature civil service: like the government civil service, its employees join through examinations and are transferred or promoted on a routine two-year rotation. There is no permeability between the ministry civil service and the Guti Samsthān, however, and the Guti Samsthān's budget is completely separate from the national budget. The Guti Samsthān is thus not formally part of the government, yet it tends to be tightly aligned to government procedure and government interests.

The Guti Samsthān is responsible for monitoring and paying for the events of Machindranath's ritual cycle, but the actual execution of rituals lies in the hands of local *gutis*—nongovernmental organizations of ethnic Newars, whose membership tends to be based on lineage and/or residence. *Gutis* coordinate religious observances (such as the daily worship at a particular temple or the annual performance of a festival) and/or social services (such as funeral performances), and most date back to the pre-Shah period, when local Malla kings gave generous land grants to fund religious activities in perpetuity. For Bhoto Jatra, there are a wide variety of *gutis* handling the routine rituals of Machindranath, the upkeep of his two temples, and the assorted rituals staged along his chariot's route, as well as a separate *guti* for nearly every step of the construction of his chariot. This means that the successful

execution of Machindranath's ritual cycle requires the coordination of hundreds of specialists affiliated with dozens of local hereditary organizations, none of whom report directly to the government. While relatively few *gutis* performed tasks at Bhoto Jatra itself, the members of the *gutis* (the *gutiyars*) could be expected to form a bloc of people committed to the maintenance of tradition.

In addition, there was a final key institution in Patan that would need to be included in the negotiations surrounding Bhoto Jatra. The Jyapu Samaj (or "Farmer-Caste Society") is a recent grassroots social organization that recruits members by asking each courtyard (*tol*) in the city to elect adult and youth representatives to it. The Jyapu Society pursues a variety of social and cultural programs, ranging from typing classes to micro-lending programs to Newari-language-conservation projects. It had also, in the early 2000s, taken over coordinating major elements of the chariot festival and prided itself on alleviating tensions and competitions. By 2007, the Jyapu Society was organizing the actual pulling of the chariots, providing water and first aid to participants, and mediating disputes over which neighborhood got to host the chariots when.

It was not initially clear how the Jyapu Society might react to the interim government's intention to alter Bhoto Jatra. On the one hand, the society is a politically progressive organization, interested in providing local "development" initiatives and improving the community based on Westernized values such as human rights, and thus it might plausibly support a move away from monarchy and toward "democracy." On the other hand, the society is culturally conservative and at great pains to preserve and promote Newari traditions, language, and culture; thus it might fight any effort to radically modify a traditional ritual practice. The position the society took would be critical for the government's success or failure, insofar as the society was perhaps the most energetic and best-organized institution in the city, and one that commanded an unusually pivotal position in the organization of the festival itself.

Up until 2005, all of these various institutions (government, Guti Samsthan, *gutis*, Jyapu Society) worked together according to established patterns. The *gutis* arranged ritual events, which they staged with logistical help from the Jyapu Society and with funding from the Guti Samsthan, while the Home Ministry organized security and recruited dignitaries to grace the concluding ceremony of Bhoto Jatra. Following the Janandolan of 2006, however, the goals and procedures of the government began to shift, and over the next two years the other institutions involved would gradually realign in response.

BHOTO JATRA 2006: MONARCH EMBATTLED

In the first few weeks following the Janandolan of 2006, the reinstated House of Representatives had issued the May 18 Proclamation, suspending the king

from government and transferring all executive political functions to the cabinet or interim prime minister. To that extent, King Gyanendra's position was already compromised by the time of that year's *Bhoto Jatra* in June 2006. Nevertheless, Gyanendra was still king; he still lived in Narayanhiti Palace, he still received financial support from the government, he still received weekly briefings from the prime minister, and he still wanted to maintain his ritual calendar. The government's policy had not yet shifted on this point: the interim administration was for the moment prepared to support the king's participation in traditional rituals.²⁰ So there was no real debate about whether or not Gyanendra would attend *Bhoto Jatra* in 2006, only debates on how to handle the situation successfully.

Once it was confirmed that the king would attend *Bhoto Jatra*, the administration needed to decide whether or not it was willing to publicly perform support for the king by sending government representatives to *Bhoto Jatra* as usual. Following top-level discussions among the leaders of the parliamentary parties, it was decided that the administration would contribute the absolute minimum participation to the ritual by sending a single member of the cabinet (Minister of Education Mangal Siddhi Manandhar) to appear on behalf of the government. Selecting Manandhar was politically shrewd on several levels. As an ethnic Newar, he had a presumable interest in upholding the heritage of a Newari ritual like *Bhoto Jatra*, and as a former personal tutor of late Crown Prince Dipendra, he had some ties to the palace. Either of these could give the cabinet plausible deniability—reasons, if the administration were criticized afterward for his presence, why he might have decided to attend not



FIGURE 4.3 Display of the *bhoto*. (Photo by Bikram Rai)

as the government's representative but based on his own sentiments and nostalgia—though Manandhar himself subsequently insisted he would not have gone had he not been directed to do so by the cabinet and his party leadership within the UML.²¹

Once the issue of attendance had been settled, the Home Ministry and its municipal branches needed to work on security arrangements for the king—a tricky matter, and one without precedent. Bhoto Jatra would be the king's first public appearance since the Janandolan uprising only six weeks earlier, and the situation in the Kathmandu Valley was still volatile, with protestors from the uprising continuing to return to the streets at any provocation. King Gyanendra was enormously unpopular, and no one knew what might happen. His only other venture outside Narayanhiti Palace since the Janandolan had been a private visit to Dakshinkali Temple (located in a forest on the southern rim of the Kathmandu Valley). For this visit, security teams had hurried the king to the temple, cleared it of all devotees and street vendors while he performed his *puja*, and then whisked him back to the palace as quickly as possible, thus shielding him from contact with any members of the public.

But Bhoto Jatra was by definition a highly public event, and those responsible for the king's security worried about both organized assassination attempts and impromptu rioting. Based on these concerns, the Home Ministry directed the municipal administrator of Patan, CDO Ananda Pokharel, to make contact with the local branches of the political parties to try to defuse in advance any organized attempts to protest the king or block his participation in the Jatra. Pokharel accordingly convened an all-party meeting with the city-level representatives of the major political parties, where he secured assurances that there would be no organized incidents. Pokharel then met with the local coordinators of the Jatra to attempt to head off nonparty protests, and he consulted with his superiors at the Home Ministry to monitor any information that came up through the state intelligence networks.²²

Based on these efforts at the Patan municipal level, the administration was relatively confident that the king could participate in Bhoto Jatra safely. However, as final security provisions were being settled in Patan, the Maoists announced that they would be staging a major rally in downtown Kathmandu—their first ever above-ground rally in the capital—on the day of Bhoto Jatra. The rally was to be held at the open parade ground of Tundikhel, a mere three blocks from the royal palace, and squarely on the route normally taken by the king's motorcade to get to Bhoto Jatra. Suddenly, transporting the king to the ritual would require driving him past thousands of his most dedicated opponents—men and women who had demonstrated over the past decade a high level of antipathy against the king as well as a willingness to use physical violence to achieve political goals. Maoist leaders subsequently insisted that when they announced the rally they had had no idea that the king planned

to attend Bhoto Jatra the same day,²³ but the men planning the king's security worried that the Maoists not only knew about the king's program but had planned the rally specifically to intimidate him and possibly even target his motorcade.

In the days leading up to the rally, hundreds of buses full of Maoist cadres poured into the valley and convened at Tundikhel, just south of Narayanhiti Palace. Around noon on June 2, Maoists began gathering in the parade ground's open-air theater—a space normally employed for mass meetings of the mainstream political parties, or the occasional cultural rally—and party leaders began to address the crowd in turn. As the normal gathering space filled past capacity, frustrated cadres unable to get into the main rally

entered the adjoining Nepali Army (NA) parade ground and invaded the army pavilion by breaking the iron fence and barbed wire. Maoist cadres hoisted their red flags on the stage used by the King during the army's parades and other special ceremonies and wrapped up the heads of three statues of the (army) martyrs with banners and flags.

The rebels also tore the covering of the seats of the chair used by the king and covered it with a banner and chanted slogans against the king . . .²⁴

At this point, the whole rally might have degenerated into a riot, but the Maoists leaders were committed to conducting the rally without incident,²⁵ and as soon as their attention was drawn to the unrest they issued orders to stop the vandalism. Street-level leaders quickly moved in to divert the cadres away from the army pavilion and calm them down and were able to resolve the situation before police intervened.

As the rally was unfolding, however, it was not yet clear that it would remain a controlled and peaceful event, and the vandalism against the king's reviewing stand prompted those responsible for Gyanendra's security to feel even more deeply concerned about the possible dangers of bringing the king out in public. Security advisors at the palace and government officials convened an emergency meeting at the palace's Military Secretariat, where they spent several hours discussing options. Everyone present at the meeting from both sides urged the king to cancel his program and stay in the palace,²⁶ but King Gyanendra reportedly responded that canceling his appearance at Bhoto Jatra was not an option. According to one of the people present at the meeting, King Gyanendra announced, "For as long as I am on the throne, for as long as I am in the palace, I will see this *bhoto*. I have to go see Bhoto Jatra. According to our tradition I have to receive *tika* there and give *dakshina*—I have to do that job."²⁷ In response to this insistence, the

participants in the security meeting devised a number of plans for bringing the king to Bhoto Jatra that would not include driving him past the Maoist rally at Tundikhel, including bringing the king in by military helicopter—a plan Gyanendra rejected based on the negative media coverage it would likely engender. In the end, when the Maoist rally appeared to be dispersing peacefully, the king got into a car at the palace (only moderately late) and was driven to the Jatra by a slightly circuitous route.²⁸

Once he arrived, however, King Gyanendra's appearance was undermined by the cabinet's boycott of the event. In the end, the only VIPs in the observing area to meet him when he reached Jawalakhel were the Minister of Education and the Chief Justice (who appears not to have been instructed, or who perhaps disregarded an instruction, to stay away). However, King Gyanendra went ahead and presided over the ritual as best he could. The *bhoto* was displayed in his presence. He offered his coins and received *prasad*, he paid his respects to the Patan Kumari, and he returned to the palace.

In the end, then, Bhoto Jatra managed to be adequately performed in 2006. Yet the tension leading up to the ritual suggested a monarchy already weakened. With all the concerns over whether the king could appear in public at all, and with the dramatic absence of the people who should have appeared to represent the state in the ritual, clearly the normal procedures had been badly disrupted. The ritual had gone from business as usual to a fraught and delicate occasion, requiring intense negotiation and only barely being accomplished. The difficulties of the broader political situation had been translated into difficulties in the ritual situation. The ritual difficulties did not simply reflect political uncertainties, however. Rather, the ritual proved an opportunity to test and clarify the position of the king in a fragile moment, and to negotiate more chaotic political debates in the formalized, structured practices of ritual.

PREPARING FOR BHOTO JATRA 2007: NEGOTIATING CHANGE

By June 2007, when it came time to start planning again for Bhoto Jatra, much had changed: the position of the prime minister and the interim government had become deeply entrenched, and the position of king had been significantly eroded. The anti-monarchy Maoists had signed the Comprehensive Peace Accords, joined mainstream politics, and acquired seats in the parliament and cabinet. Prime Minister Koirala had begun taking over ceremonial as well as executive functions from the king: he had represented Nepal at the most recent SAARC convention, and he had authorized a *puja* for Lord Bhimeshwor of Dolakha. In spite of all of these appropriations, however, it was by no means certain what would happen for the major royal rituals of the coming year, the rituals at which the king himself was supposed to preside.

A few weeks before Bhoto Jatra of 2007, the chief administrator at the Guti Samsthan's central office began to be concerned that an invitation would need to be issued soon for someone to preside over Bhoto Jatra, and it was not clear whether that person would be the king or the prime minister. This administrator, Hem Raj Subedi, sent a letter to the prime minister's office to raise the issue—an unusual move, since normally the Guti Samsthan does not have any direct contact with the government, and when it does the normal procedure is to make a formal petition through the Ministry of Culture, or occasionally the Ministry of Land Reform.²⁹ But Subedi contacted the highest level of the government directly, and the prime minister's office duly requested that a small delegation come from the Guti Samsthan to explain the issue and make recommendations. The prime minister and his advisors listened, and within a few days the Guti Samsthan was notified that Prime Minister Koirala intended to take the king's place at Bhoto Jatra.³⁰

Once that decision had been made, the task was to implement it in such a way that it did not meet active opposition. At the highest level, this meant negotiating with both the palace and the Maoist leadership—the two most likely sources of resistance, albeit for opposite reasons. On the palace side, Prime Minister Koirala most likely discussed the matter directly with King Gyanendra's chief administrator, Palace Principal Secretary Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan. Though publically the interim government kept strict distance from the palace, informally Koirala and Maharjan had continued to have routine contact with one another throughout the interim period, and according to a close aide to Koirala the two men might talk several times a week.³¹ This meant that the palace was likely aware in advance about the decision to disinvite the king from Bhoto Jatra, and would presumably object to this latest encroachment.

As for the Maoists, they had continued to pursue a volatile style of street politics, despite having entered the political mainstream and the government. In the context of Bhoto Jatra, the prime minister's office feared that the Maoists might denounce the continued attendance of the upper levels of the government at overtly religious rituals. While most interim politicians accepted state involvement in religious institutions and activities so long as the king did not take part, the Maoists had long been agitating against not just the monarchy but against the idea of the Hindu state and had been demanding a complete end to government involvement in religion. The decision to send the prime minister to Bhoto Jatra thus went against a major point in the Maoist platform, and the prime minister's office worried that the Maoists could turn Bhoto Jatra into a focal point for protests and pressure on the government. But informally, the Maoists agreed that removing the king from his ritual was a significant enough step that they would not publicly oppose it.

Once the top-level negotiations were under way, the management of the Bhoto Jatra “recasting” largely devolved onto the local administration of Patan—the local branch of the Guti Samsthan and the Patan CDO’s office. Working together, these two organizations took steps to diffuse points of tension and conflict in advance of the Jatra. The first challenge they encountered was the process of inviting dignitaries to the event. Fortunately for the interim government, the king’s invitation to Bhoto Jatra was normally initiated within the Guti Samsthan and then issued through the channels of the Home Ministry, and thus the process of redirecting that invitation was relatively easily accomplished. As in previous years, therefore, the head of the Patan branch office of the Guti Samsthan conferred with astrologers to fix a precise date and time for Bhoto Jatra, and then forwarded that information to the Patan CDO’s office.³² The CDO’s office then sent the information to the central Home Ministry’s Internal Management Section (responsible for issuing government invitations). The Internal Management Section then directed formal invitations to the VIP guests as usual, based on a list of the positions of the people who had been invited in previous years—including the cabinet ministers, the Chief of the Army, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Then the Internal Management Section issued an invitation to the prime minister, to attend not as a VIP guest but as the “chief guest.”³³ It did not issue an invitation to the king.

Once the invitations had gone out, the CDO’s office hosted a series of meetings with locals, much as it had the previous year. Again there was an all-party meeting, held with representatives from the local branches of the major political parties, at which the CDO announced the intended ritual replacement and requested all the parties’ peaceful cooperation. This time there was also a separate meeting held with members of the local community, both people connected and not to the Jatra, in particular with religious figures (priests and activists) who CDO Ananda Pokharel thought might oppose the move. Pokharel reported later that most of the participants in this meeting were unhappy about the proposed change but seemed resigned to it.³⁴ Perhaps most importantly, CDO Pokharel met multiple times with the Jyapu Society, with both the upper levels of the society’s leadership and with its youth branches. In these meetings, he stressed the importance of the society’s role in keeping the chariot festival safe and peaceful and asked them to help make Bhoto Jatra 2007 a success. With the society’s youth representatives, Pokharel took a further step and deputized them to be his force responsible for keeping the peace at Bhoto Jatra and ensuring no riots broke out.³⁵ This was an ideal tone to take with the society: members of the society frequently claim that its primary vocation consists of promoting peaceful cooperation in the city, and so dozens of young men and women (who might in other circumstances have fostered rebellion) enthusiastically committed themselves to ensuring the ritual’s success.

In fact, despite the administration's wariness, there never seems to have been very much opposition to the proposed alteration to Bhoto Jatra. There was relatively little pro-monarchy sentiment in Patan, even among those organizing the Jatra, and indeed Patan has a reputation as something of a non-loyalist city—a center in the Kathmandu Valley (along with Kirtipur) for instigating and supporting oppositional movements. (It may even have been this local context that helped persuade the interim administration to debut their new strategy of ritual appropriation at an event in Patan rather than in Kathmandu.) Beyond this, however, Bhoto Jatra proved congenial for experiments, because the government had an unusually high level of control over the proceedings. Unlike many of the rituals performed during Indra Jatra or Dasai, Bhoto Jatra did not include any major ritual gesture that needed to be performed by someone institutionally affiliated to the palace or to an independent temple, whose loyalties might irreconcilably conflict with the state. Much of the performance of Bhoto Jatra specifically involves government actors (the VIP guests, the military security perimeter, the "head of state"), and the main ritual gesture (the showing of the *bhoto*) is performed by a member of the para-governmental Guti Samsthān. While it is possible that the Patan Kumari could have boycotted the event—or, potentially most disruptively, the local chariot-pulling volunteers could have refused to bring the chariot to its final destination at Jawalakhel—the interim government was in an advantageous position to control the planning and execution of the ritual. Once the Jyapu Society supported the change, the government's edge was decisive.

And, by coincidence, the palace was too preoccupied to launch much opposition.

THE BHOTO AND THE BIRTHDAY

Bhoto Jatra 2007 coincided with a quite different challenge to the monarchy, in a wholly different register and on a different scale. In 2007, the weekend that had been selected by astrologers for Bhoto Jatra—the first weekend in July—happened to also mark King Gyanendra's sixtieth birthday, meaning that maneuverings over Bhoto Jatra got mixed with controversies surrounding the birthday celebration. The birthday was no minor issue, and not just because it was a milestone birthday. Kings' birthdays had always been celebrated in the past not as personal events but as national events, and at this moment in the interim period it was a pressing concern to decide whether or not a royal birthday had public significance.

In the twentieth century, the king's birthday had been a formal national holiday, and the government and local groups had staged birthday tributes of all kinds all over the country. From the *panchayat* period onward, these had tended to juxtapose

the person of the king with nationalist development projects and, to a lesser extent, religious ritual. In 1968, for example, for King Mahendra's forty-ninth birthday several regions of the country announced new development initiatives, the palace organized a parade to the Tundikhel parade ground where King Mahendra could make a speech surrounded by "class organizations" shouting their gratitude to him, and the priests at Pashupatinath Temple organized a special *mahayagya* fire ritual.³⁶ In 1999, King Birendra's birthday was marked by a black-tie dinner, an interregional police skills performance at the Mahendra Police Club, and several other events co-ordinated by a national "Birthday Celebration Committee" chaired by the prime minister and comprising nearly two dozen subcommittees.³⁷ An eight-page special birthday color feature appeared that year (as most years) in the *Kathmandu Post*, featuring photos and adoring essays by national political and academic figures. The queen's birthday and the crown prince's birthday too were celebrated with state functions, national holidays, and lavish press tributes.³⁸ Even during Gyanendra's more troubled reign, his birthday had still been a national occasion. In 2003, for example, his birthday had been celebrated with a religious worship service, a cultural program at a formal dinner, a boxing competition, and a polio eradication camp.³⁹

There were also a number of specific birthday practices that had key implications for the king's status and official relationships. First, the king's birthday was celebrated at all of Nepal's embassies abroad and was the only occasion during the year for which embassies received dedicated budgets for parties.⁴⁰ Celebrating the king's birthday as a diplomatic event argued that the king was in an important sense equivalent to the nation itself and that the basic biological processes of the royal line (birth, death, procreation) had national and even international significance. Second, the monarch's birthday was generally celebrated with a formal dinner hosted by Nepal's police force. This, along with a similar dinner for the monarch hosted by the army at New Year's, helped annually solidify social relationships between the monarchy and the security forces. The royal birthday would also provide an occasion for the king to renew his relationship with the brahmin priests on staff at the palace. On the king's birthday according to the lunar calendar (not usually the same as the national holiday, which was calculated based on the solar calendar), the palace would host a *tula daan*—a gift giving based on weighing. The king would sit on a large platform and be weighed against a variety of substances (rice, grains, oil, ghee, cloth, silver, gold), and a volume of each substance equal to the weight of the king would be gifted to the palace's brahmans.⁴¹ Finally, on the king's birthday itself, the palace would be opened for the general public to enter the palace grounds to personally felicitate their monarch—the only time other than Dasai when commoners were permitted inside the formidable palace gates without express personal invitation. People would often wait in line for hours, and Sepideh Bajracharya reports that even

in the difficult year of 2004, a birthday-wishing crowd spilled all the way down the main thoroughfare leading up to the palace. That year, Gyanendra sat in a tent on the palace lawn as people filed past and greeted him or gave him gifts; the names of well-wishers were recorded and they were later sent official certificates of gratitude from the king for their presence and their gifts.⁴²

If this, then, was the pattern established for royal birthdays up until the interim period—formal programs, testimonials of the king’s greatness, parties, throngs of well-wishers—the palace determined in 2007 that something special should be planned for a royal landmark birthday such as a sixtieth “diamond jubilee.” The palace accordingly announced plans for a three-day affair from Friday, July 5, to Sunday, July 7, to fete the king—a celebration that was quickly labeled in the English-language press as the king’s “birthday bash”—and the palace secretariat issued invitations to over a thousand people for a Friday night gala party. The palace support staff dutifully purchased alcohol, soft drinks, and light snacks for several hundred people and began preparing the grounds for the party.⁴³ A few days before the party, however, the international diplomatic community stationed in Kathmandu announced that none of them would be attending the king’s birthday celebrations. While American Ambassador James Moriarty probably spearheaded this boycott effort, he was joined by the ambassadors from India and from the entire European Union, creating a clear public message that the international community did not support or want to socialize with the beleaguered monarch. The following day, several anti-monarchy youth groups announced that they would be holding street rallies and protests against the king’s birthday, prompting the palace to issue an emergency request to the interim government for extra security. Even the two openly royalist political parties, the RPP and RJP, started to hedge about whether their leaders and members would be celebrating the diamond jubilee.

On Friday, July 5, while Machindranath’s chariot was lumbering toward Jawalakhel, the palace prepared for its gala birthday party. That night, though, out of the thousand invitees, only around a hundred people (including royal relatives) attended.⁴⁴ These attendees did include a few political and military figures, but all from past administrations—all people who had retired long before or who had been ousted from government with Gyanendra following the 2006 uprising. No one from the interim government attended, nor did anyone from the diplomatic community. That night, as the party proceeded in its meager fashion, Maoist groups staged a torch-lit rally on the streets of the capital, mustering probably as many protestors as there were party guests. Each Maoist held aloft a flaming torch as the groups moved through the darkened streets, shouting slogans against the king.⁴⁵

The next day, Saturday, the government made the formal announcement that Prime Minister Koirala would take the king’s place at Sunday’s Bhoto Jatra. At the same time

as the statement was being released, a group of several hundred royalists was gathering near the center of Kathmandu—at the statue of King Mahendra just south of the palace—preparing to go to the palace to offer their birthday wishes to the monarch. The original plan had been for the royalists to convene at the downtown parade grounds and then march triumphantly up to the palace, but they had been repulsed by Maoist youth from the paramilitary YCL, who were “protecting” the Tundikhel parade grounds.⁴⁶ After being pushed away from Tundikhel, the pro-birthday group had been further intimidated by a different anti-birthday rally being staged by the eight ruling parties just down the street, in front of Tri-Chandra College.

Perhaps because of the extra-heavy deployment of the Armed Police Force that day on the streets around the main palace gate, no major violence broke out near Narayanahiti Palace, and the opposing groups merely shouted slogans at each other. In other parts of the city, however, small groups from the YCL roamed around, monitoring for people who appeared to be on their way to the palace. Each time they found someone walking in the direction of the palace carrying flower bouquets or gifts, they stopped the person, confiscated the tributes, and on a few occasions roughed up the well-wisher. Several hundred people nevertheless made it to the palace, but far fewer people came to offer felicitations to the king than usual, and many of those who did had to conceal their intentions. Supporting the king had become physically dangerous, and royalists were now in the position of possibly paying for their allegiance with their bodily well-being. The royal birthday had stopped being an occasion to celebrate the head of the nation or to argue for his ascendancy and had become instead an occasion to snub the king and attack his supporters in the streets.

THE FIRST RITUAL REPLACEMENT OF THE KING: BHOTO JATRA 2007

This, then, was the context in which Prime Minister G. P. Koirala took the king’s place at Bhoto Jatra: after weeks of planning and negotiation with the local people of Patan and during a tense weekend of celebration, protest, and boycott over the king’s birthday. Although the decision to send Koirala to Bhoto Jatra had been made a few weeks in advance, the government had only notified the public a day earlier, and now the government waited to see what the responses might be. The press coverage of the “birthday bash,” however, was depicting the king as an over-proud man, unwilling to accept his new status, and intent on using state funds for self-aggrandizement, so at that particular moment local sympathy for the king was at an even lower ebb than usual.⁴⁷

On Sunday, July 8, 2007, the open square at Jawalakhel began to fill with security personnel and their assistants. The youth volunteers of the Jyapu Society and some seven hundred police officers circulated visibly, while army personnel ringed the area

discreetly. Although government officials were feeling confident that there was no major plot afoot, there could be no certainty, and the prime minister's office had further complicated the situation by handing down the unusual directive that the public should be allowed up close to the chariot and that traffic should be disrupted for an absolutely minimum time, in order to emphasize the prime minister's participation at the state function as a democratic, populist leader. This meant, however, that security forces would have far less control of the situation than they normally would, and there would be a far smaller secured space around the prime minister. It is likely that the decision to permit the VIPs and even the public to flood around the prime minister was a bid to counteract rumors that the prime minister's health was failing. In fact, the prime minister's health *was* fragile—so fragile that the CDO had felt it necessary to establish an aid station close to the main viewing pavilion in case Koirala collapsed or required oxygen to support his failing lungs.⁴⁸ But the government was determined to present the leader of the interim government in as robust a manner as possible, and showing Koirala confidently striding through the crowds may have been calculated to shore up impressions of his health and vitality.

In the late afternoon, the VIP guests began to arrive. Unlike the year previous, representatives from the interim administration turned out in force to witness the ritual and support the prime minister. The two deputy prime ministers were present, as were the Chief Justice, the Speaker of Parliament, assorted members of parliament, most of the cabinet, the majority of the ministry secretaries, and the heads of all three security branches. Representatives from the Guti Samsthān were present, and (unusually) the head of the Jyapu Society was invited to be part of the group who would greet the prime minister upon his arrival.⁴⁹ The only notable absence was that the Maoist members of the cabinet had decided to boycott the event, for although their party had agreed not to stage a major demonstration, they wanted to register their disapproval that the interim government was prepared to uphold a state ritual event.

Shortly after 5 p.m., Prime Minister Koirala arrived at Jawalakhel. In contrast to previous years, when the king had walked formally from his car straight up to the reviewing stand, Koirala walked among the VIPs for several minutes shaking hands and exchanging greetings.⁵⁰ Finally, he mounted the reviewing stand and sat on the provided couch. The priests of Machindranath and Minnath brought him *prasād* from the two deities, and the head of the Patan branch of the Guti Samsthān mounted the chariot and displayed the *bhoto*. Koirala rose and walked toward the chariots. He tossed coins to Machindranath, paid his respects to the Patan Kumari, and walked clockwise around the chariots. Then, with the ritual completed, he returned to his sedan and was driven back to the prime minister's residence. As soon as the prime minister departed, the other VIPs departed

as well, and the crowd dispersed peacefully. The ritual had been completed successfully.

AFTERMATH

Although there was no immediate opposition to the interim government's modification of Bhoto Jatra, the replacement initially seems to have been jarring to many local Nepalis. The king had been attending Bhoto Jatra every year that anyone could remember, and to see Prime Minister Koirala take the king's place disrupted that deeply habituated local knowledge. In the weeks after Bhoto Jatra, the replacement of the king formed a major topic of conversations in Patan; over the course of these conversations, few people supported the king or lamented his fall from power, but most were still surprised to see him removed from his ritual roles. I got the feeling that many people of my acquaintance thought there ought to be *a* king around to perform rituals—maybe just not Gyanendra (whose audacity at having tried to stage a grand state birthday disgusted them).

Possibly the most striking response to the interim government's modification of Bhoto Jatra was the treatment of the event by a satire television program a week or so afterward.⁵¹ In the episode, one of the characters aspires to be prime minister. To prepare himself for his future office, he purchases a small child's vest, much like the *bhoto*, and every time he goes out to make a public speech he pulls the vest out of his pocket and solemnly displays it to the crowd. This program—which was greeted with much hilarity among the family I was living with at the time—suggests that not only did the prime minister's appearance at Bhoto Jatra constitute a major news event, but it had also struck at least the program's writers and my host family as a strange and surprising activity for a prime minister. The humor surrounding the replacement of the king at Bhoto Jatra suggests that the annual traditions of the royal ritual had been effectively insinuated into many people's ordinary experience and expectations, regardless of their political commitments or opinions. Ritual had operated at a level below people's conscious convictions and had become part of an unquestioned (or rarely questioned) ordinary state of affairs—so much so that when that ordinary state of affairs *was* questioned and profoundly altered, the new performance was anomalous and incongruous, suitable for comedy.

The performance of Bhoto Jatra had annually celebrated the king as someone special, someone without whom the ritual could not happen, someone entitled to a privileged interaction with the physical image of one god and the living incarnation of a goddess. But during the interim period, that special status was first challenged and then denied entirely. Bhoto Jatra, as the first major public ritual of the annual royal calendar, had provided a testing ground in both years for new government

strategies and in both years had established a pattern that the interim government then followed for subsequent rituals. Bhoto Jatra provided an effective way to test policy, not just because it was first but also because the government had unusually good control over the institutional mechanisms for staging the event, and perhaps even more importantly because the logic of the performance of the ritual itself did not resist the alteration. While other rituals might call for the king's special tantric relationship to a goddess or the king's status as a member of the royal lineage, Bhoto Jatra merely required that the king be more important than the average person. Although participating in Bhoto Jatra asserted a status that the prime minister had not necessarily held before, there was nothing about the ritual that would particularly prevent him from acquiring that status. There was no reason why a prime minister should not arrive in a fancy car, stand in a reviewing stand with the top members of the government, pay homage to a god, or receive *prasad*. There was only force of tradition that demanded that the role be fulfilled by the king, and with no one prepared to face the consequences of opposing the state, the tradition was changed and the ritual recast.

5

Reinforcement Rituals II: Gaining the Goddess's Blessing

IF BHOTO JATRA was the first of the king's reinforcement rituals to be coopted by the state, Indra Jatra was the most decisive. It was the single event most foundational to the annual ritual reproduction of the monarchy, not only the practice that was claimed to give annual divine authorization for the king's rule, but the festival that more than any other was embraced by the government as the quintessential expression of Nepal's unique culture. The Nepali government had been inserted militarily and bureaucratically into the various events of Indra Jatra in more ways than at any other ritual or festival, and the government in recent years made a point to use Indra Jatra as an opportunity to put "the nation" on display to international tourists and diplomats.¹ This made control over Indra Jatra crucial during the interim period, for the political stakes were higher than they had been at the various other rituals in the royal calendar.

Because Indra Jatra was such a potent idiom through which to perform the nation, the character of the state, and the uniqueness of the king, it also became the single occasion during the entire interim period when the palace actively contravened the directives and wishes of the government. At various other points, people from the palace often resisted government demands passively—refusing to comply with various requests, or not showing up for meetings—but during Indra Jatra in 2007 the king left the palace, without clearance from the government, to participate in a ritual from which the government had explicitly excluded him. This act of disobedience signaled not only the importance of Indra Jatra to the monarchy but

also the complexity of the government's task in endeavoring to reorchestrate ritual practices controlled by people who had little allegiance or sympathy with the anti-monarchy cause.

INDRA JATRA IN BRIEF

Indra Jatra is an eight-day-long festival that is celebrated in Kathmandu every fall, in the second half of the Nepali month of Bhadra (usually early to mid-September). Events are staged variously across most of the premodern section of the city—the cultural heart of the capital—but most of its core observances are centered in or near Durbar Square, the open complex of temples around the Malla-era palace, Hanuman Dhoka. Like Machindranath's ritual cycle, Indra Jatra is staged primarily by the local Newar ethnic population, and also like Machindranath's ritual cycle Indra Jatra includes a vast array of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of individual ritual observances, staged by no fewer than twenty-nine major planning organizations (*gutis*). These events range from the raising of a fifty-foot wooden pole to a candlelit procession honoring the dead, from a *tableau vivant* of the nine forms of the Goddess to the ritual gift of a cow to a brahmin, from firecrackers to the street antics of masked dancers (including the demon Lakhe and the white elephant Pulukisi)—and there tends to be little effort made to unify all of the various aspects of the festival either narratively or institutionally. Indra Jatra is in this respect not so much a single observance as it is a designated time and place at which a great variety of festive events happen in close proximity.²

Perhaps the least popular element of Indra Jatra is, counterintuitively, the worship of Indra himself. Indra is present throughout the festival: a number of images of him are erected around the old city and are worshipped during the days of the festival, while it is his emblem—the Indra pole (the *Indra dhvaja* or *dhoj*, alternately called the *lingo*)—that inaugurates and closes the festival. Indra's worship is not particularly high profile or entertaining, however, and people attending the festival frequently ignore Indra images in favor of more engaging sights or activities. Indra nevertheless provides the ostensive occasion for the *jatra*, and his inclusion in the festival highlights Nepal's engagement with broader South Asian literatures and cultures.³ Indeed, it is an Indra story (which bears a strong resemblance to the broader tropes of Indra narratives across South Asia) that features as the primary mythology of the festival. According to this story, Indra's mother needs a *parijit* flower for her worship—a flower that is commonly named in Sanskrit narratives but that in this story grows only in Kathmandu. Indra, as the dutiful son, leaves heaven to fetch one for her, but the citizens of the city capture the hapless “king of the gods” instead and hold him for ransom. In the end, Indra's mother bribes the citizens of Kathmandu to

let her son go, in exchange for taking their dead straight up to heaven.⁴ This story explains why most of the images of Indra displayed during the Jatra are either imprisoned in boxes or tied with ropes to platforms, and why there is a candlelit procession honoring the dead—but it does not explain the existence or logic of most of the popular and widely anticipated elements of the festival.

One of the most popular and very possibly the oldest element of Indra Jatra is the worship of images of Bhairab, a fierce form of Shiva widely worshipped throughout Nepal.⁵ During Indra Jatra, many of the Bhairab images of old Kathmandu are brought into the streets to be worshipped publicly. In some places these are Bhairabs of modest size and similarly modest devotional significance, but there are two enormous Bhairabs—Swet Bhairab of Hanuman Dhoka and Aakash Bhairab of Indra Chowk—that become available for elaborate devotional activities only during Indra Jatra. Aakash Bhairab is a metal image of the god's face, approximately five or six feet high, normally worshipped in a temple in Indra Chowk Square but for the Jatra brought into the street and installed on a large platform. From there, it is the object of nightly worship, transforming a normal market area into a charged ritual space. The Swet Bhairab image is also metal and is even larger. It is permanently housed in one of the north-facing walls of Hanuman Dhoka Palace, concealed throughout the rest of the year by latticed wooden doors and unavailable for worship. During the festival, however, the lattice doors are opened. Worshippers do *puja* throughout each day, and each evening, a jar filled with alcohol is fitted to a spout running through Swet Bhairab's mouth, to flow freely into the mouth of any devotee able to get close enough. (This is, unsurprisingly, one of the most popular elements of the entire Indra Jatra festival.) The worship of these and other Bhairab images helps to establish Indra Jatra as a special—and fun—time in the ritual life of the city.

By far the most prominent element of the festival, though—the practices best known beyond the local Newari community, and the most important for the present discussion—surround neither Indra nor Bhairab but rather the Kathmandu Royal Kumari (henceforth simply “the Kumari,” following local usage),⁶ who became the Shah dynasty's central tutelary deity. The Kumari is a little girl, normally selected at approximately age three from a local Kathmandu family to become a living image of the goddess Taleju, a goddess who in various forms has been the patron of Nepali kings for several centuries. The Kumari is housed and raised at state expense in the Kumari House, a combination residence and temple located across a small square from Hanuman Dhoka Palace in Kathmandu. She is cared for by a family who resides at the Kumari House (*Kumari Ghar* in Nepali, *Kumari Che* in Newari) and whose hereditary job it is to care for the goddess. Once a girl is designated as Kumari, the goddess is understood to reside in her full time until she reaches approximately age twelve, and she is worshipped in ways that are analogous to the treatment of

inanimate images of gods and goddesses. She is worshipped by hereditary priests every morning and evening, and she appears at a second-story window twice daily for devotional audiences (*darshan*). During the rest of the day, she is homeschooled by tutors, and she plays in the inner courtyard. Her birth family is permitted to come visit her, but during her tenure as goddess they are expected to approach her as devotees and not as kin.

The Kumari is one of the most popular deities of Kathmandu, an object of substantial interest to both local Nepalis and foreigners. Thus her appearances at Indra Jatra tend to be the most anticipated moments of the festival. For three days (on the third, fourth, and eighth days of the festival), she is taken on procession around the city in a large chariot—processions that many refer to not as Indra Jatra but Kumari Jatra (Fig. 5.1). This marks one of only a handful of times when the Kumari leaves the Kumari House during the year, and one of the few occasions when it is permissible to photograph her.



FIGURE 5.1 Kumari being lifted into her chariot during Indra Jatra 2010. The person holding her is Gautam Shakya, Kumari House liaison to the government. (Photo by author)

In addition to the general importance of having the goddess appear in public and tour the old city, Indra Jatra had also (up until the interim period) provided two opportunities for the Kumari to interact ritually with the king of Nepal. The first opportunity was on the third day of the festival, when the king would come with his family to publicly inaugurate the Kumari's chariot procession. In the late afternoon, members of the government, the heads of the security forces, and all foreign diplomats posted to Kathmandu who cared to attend would assemble in the throne room of Hanuman Dhoka Palace and come to stand outside on the white steps of its balcony. Once the important guests were in place, the Kumari would be carried across a white cloth to her chariot and placed in her seat. The king would come from the throne room out onto a side balcony directly overlooking the chariot and would toss coins down to the goddess to the accompaniment of a gun salute and a military band's rendition of the national anthem. Once the Kumari had received this offering, it was possible to begin pulling her chariot, and the vehicle would be pulled around to the reviewing steps at the front of the building so that the coin toss could be repeated in front of a much larger crowd (Fig. 5.2). The chariot would then be pulled off through the square to begin its tour through the city, and the dignitaries would leave. Thus, rather like Bhoto Jatra, this first day of Indra Jatra was a public interaction between two powerful beings—a deity in a chariot and a king offering gold coins—and a major reason to attend the Indra Jatra festival on this particular day was to see both the Kumari and the king.

The Kumari would then complete her chariot tour that night, go on a similar procession (though through different neighborhoods) the following night, and then take a three-day break. On the final day of Indra Jatra, she would be taken out for one final tour, at the end of which she would return to the Kumari House so that the king could come alone to worship his tutelary goddess privately. On this occasion, he would worship her and she would bless him—a gesture widely held to signify that the Kumari was authorizing the king to reign for the coming year. In recent decades, the Kumari House staff would phone the palace when the goddess returned to the House, and the king would drive himself (or be driven with an attendant or two) to Hanuman Dhoka Square. He would be escorted upstairs to the Kumari's private worship room, where Hanuman Dhoka Palace's Taleju priest would touch the king's shoulders with the Kumari's sword. The king would offer the Kumari a plate of betel nuts and a solid gold coin, and the Kumari would reach out her left hand and smudge a red blessing mark—a *tika*—on his forehead. The king would then leave the Kumari. Sometimes on his way out, he would stop to confer with the Kumari's caretakers to see if they needed anything particular; sometimes he would simply return to Narayanhiti Palace.

As soon as the royal blessing was completed and the king had departed, the doors of the Kumari House would then be opened to the public, and any Nepali who

wanted to enter could come in to worship and be blessed by the Kumari. Thus, although the royal blessing was conducted privately, the fact that it was happening was widely known, for very often hundreds of people would be waiting outside to worship the goddess and would see the royal sedan pull up to the Kumari House. The king's secret blessing was in this way a key part of many participants' experience of the festival. Even for those participants not close to the Kumari House when the king arrived, the royal blessing was part of the rhythm of the festival, generally coinciding with the official end of the festival as a whole (the taking down of the Indra pole). In a way, then, the Kumari's blessing of the king would have helped to frame the festival, providing a climax and formal finish to the heightened excitement of the week.

RITUALS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

The king's ritual interactions with the Kumari at Indra Jatra demonstrate two different possibilities for creating social importance through ritual. First, a ritual may create attention through publicity, gathering as many people together as possible to witness an event. For example, the king of Nepal was observed by thousands of people inaugurating the Kumari's initial chariot procession. In complete contrast, however, a ritual may also create importance through privacy or secrecy, by radically limiting the people who are allowed to be present or witness something. On this logic, the fewer people to have access to the event, the more important or potent it is argued to be. In this way, the king of Nepal was known to go to the Kumari House to be blessed by her, but only three people were permitted to be present at the event besides himself and the Kumari: the priest of the Taleju temple, the Kumari's head caretaker, and the head of the Kathmandu branch office of the Guti Samsthān. This event was kept so private because it was understood to be so powerful, but also it was so socially powerful because it was so private.

The alternation at Indra Jatra between radically public and radically private rituals highlights the rhetorical effects of access and audience and points to different possibilities for arguing a state. In Western electoral contexts, the state is staged as transparent and responsible to the voting public (regardless of the actual daily procedures of government representatives) through rituals that are overwhelmingly public and publicized, staged in recent decades for the gaze of the television-watching public. In Nepal, however, many of the king's rituals were not directed explicitly toward his subjects. Often the king's rituals were entirely private (including his blessing from the Kumari, his annual trip to Pashupatinath Temple on Shiva Ratri, and his visits to the shrine room in the Gorkha Palace), and these rituals argued the importance of the king according to the exclusivity of his actions—a message that was furthered

in many of the king's daily practices, which largely shielded and isolated the monarch from the general public and crafted his home in Narayanhiti Palace as a secret and unknowable territory. In addition, many royal rituals were directed at elite guests rather than the general public. Annual rituals such as Basanta Shravan (a religious-text recitation program at Hanuman Dhoka, celebrating the spring) were not rigidly secretive, but they were also not open to the public (either in person or through video feed); they instead included only top representatives of the government. While the general public in Kathmandu could peer through the bars of a fence to see the army displays on Shiva Ratri or Phulpati, the display was entirely directed at the viewing stands filled with VIP invited guests. In many contexts, then, the monarchy was performed not to and for the general public, but to and for the top-ranking representatives of the state or the king's most intimate confidants and supporters. Rituals that included, or even required, the presence of non-elite Nepalis to witness the king's activities must therefore be scrutinized not as simply the normal workings of political theater but as one specific category of rhetorical presentation among several choices, all of which combined to create the social position of the king and the government he headed.

Some Nepali rituals did, however, permit the assembly and legibility of a Nepali public, creating an audience for the state and a possible space in which to examine and interrogate the nation. In recent years, “the people” (*janata*) has emerged as one of the most important political categories in Nepal, and political platforms of every description are justified based on the will and desires of “the people.” In a country without consistent elections or voter phone polls, however, ascertaining the mood and political aspirations of “the people” is far from straightforward. There is, of course, no singular “the people of Nepal” that simply exists and holds some unified political ideology; there are, rather, some 29 million people who inhabit the country, who hold any number of political ideas and positions. These messy real people, though, can come together in certain circumstances, to constitute the rhetorical construct “the people,” and represent themselves (or be represented by others) as an authoritative, unified voice and presence. In particular, street gatherings have become the single most common way to see and hear the *janata*: “the people” gather in public thoroughfares, bus parks, university campuses, or fields, and “the people” are most often young men affiliated with political parties. In other words, there is a political potency in crowds of people gathering in Nepali public spaces, because crowds serve as locally legible instantiations of public will.⁷

In contrast to street protests, however, Indra Jatra gathers a rather different set of “the people” together, a different demographic gathering for a different purpose in a different kind of space—a religiously potent space, where the gods of the city come out from their temples and intermingle with the crowds. In the case of Indra Jatra,

“the people” do not normally assemble in order to assert a particular identity or make political demands, but rather to participate in a local tradition. Yet politicians, the palace, and the organizers of Indra Jatra have also construed “the people” gathered for the inauguration of Indra Jatra as a political entity, a unit of people approving the king and consenting to be governed by the state.⁸ Indra Jatra (and similar public rituals) thus permitted the top levels of the government to perform a harmonious and orderly political sphere, even (or perhaps especially) at times when no such thing existed outside the parameters of ritual.

THE KUMARI AND THE KING

Over the course of any given year, the king of Nepal might participate in the worship of dozens of deities, but the blessing from the Kumari at Indra Jatra marked a particularly privileged relationship between the goddess and the monarchy, based upon the goddess’s status as the Shah lineage’s tutelary deity.⁹ Tutelary deities are gods or goddesses with whom a king has a particularly intimate or privileged relationship, and the tutelary relationship (with its attendant authority for the king himself) was long common across the Hindu monarchies of South Asia.¹⁰ Hindu kings could establish themselves as a deity’s primary devotee and/or the primary patron of a deity’s temple, and they would often bring the deity to reside in a temple within or near the palace itself. In Kathmandu, the king’s special relationship to his goddess was manifested in the very architectural logic of Hanuman Dhoka Palace: the northern-most courtyard of the palace complex was dominated by a massive temple housing an inanimate image of Taleju, while the temple for the Kumari (the living instantiation of Taleju) was constructed within 50 yards of the palace to the south. When the Malla and then Shah kings lived there up until the late nineteenth century, they were literally surrounded by the goddess in her plural forms.

Similar to many traditions where a Hindu king has been linked to a goddess, the tutelary relationship between the Nepali king and Taleju had tantric overtones. This relationship originated in the premodern era, when religious initiations and trainings for secret or even transgressive powers were part of the routine purview of the monarchy,¹¹ and down to the present the Kumari would bless the king with her left hand rather than the right hand (the hand with which blessings would normally be given, whether by goddesses, priests, or laypeople). This inversion of the “appropriate” way to bless someone belongs to a broader set of tantric religious technologies that gain their power from transgressing normal practices and conventions, and while there is no evidence that recent kings and Kumaris had any tantric dealings beyond the left-handed blessing, many of the mythologies surrounding the Kumari speak of a time when the goddess Taleju interacted with kings in unmediated adult,

sometimes explicitly sexual, contexts.¹² One commentator has also noted that the gifts offered by the king to the Kumari (betel nuts, gold, a plate of sweet breads and pastries) mimic the gifts traditionally sent by grooms to brides,¹³ and indeed the Kumari wears red clothing all the time, even while she plays or sleeps—a color associated in Nepal with sexual, adult, married women. While clearly it would be inappropriate for a king to have anything like a marital or sexual relationship with a child, the Kumari is a little girl with the potency of an adult goddess, and her rituals play on that incongruity.¹⁴ It was through a privileged relationship to that paradox that the authority of the king of Nepal was annually renewed.

Historically, it was by ritualizing a tutelary relationship with the Kumari at Indra Jatra that the Shah kings asserted their new imperial sovereignty in the first place. Both Indra Jatra and the Kumari had begun as part of the Malla-era performance of kingship, and so predated the Gorkhali conquests. In the 1750s and 1760s, though, as Prithvi Narayan began pressuring the Kathmandu Valley, the local Malla kings made many efforts to counteract their ambitious neighbor's aspirations—some diplomatic and military, and some religious. Jaya Prakash Malla in Kathmandu particularly sought to expand his relationship to his tutelary goddess, Taleju, in the hopes of retaining his throne. Around 1760, he built a new temple for her across the square from his own palace and installed her living image, the Kumari, to be his special protectoress. He lavishly funded her chariot procession and began to appear in public to worship her at Indra Jatra, to link her growing power and prestige to his own. By the mid-1760s, however, Prithvi Narayan Shah had surrounded the Kathmandu Valley, and in the fall of 1768—the date now conventionally used as the beginning of the country “Nepal” and the rule of the Shaws over it—he captured the valley. Most of the chronicles and semi-contemporaneous histories suggest that he timed his invasion of Kathmandu for the first night of Kumari Jatra¹⁵ and claim that the Gorkhalis encountered no military opposition because of the festival. At least one chronicle account then goes on to report that Prithvi Narayan Shah stepped onto the public platform where Jaya Prakash Malla’s throne was set up to receive *prasad* from the Kumari in front of his subjects; Prithvi Narayan reportedly proclaimed to the people assembled that he was now the king of Kathmandu and seated himself on the Malla throne.¹⁶

This already-dramatic story of the conquest of Kathmandu has been further embroidered into the probably apocryphal claim that Prithvi Narayan Shah sealed his conquest not just by entering the city or sitting on the throne but by immediately receiving *tika* from the Kumari, thereby authorizing his first year of rule. This version of events circulates orally in Kathmandu now among people directly tied to the Kumari House and/or Indra Jatra, and it even appears in some travel literature and scholarly work.¹⁷ Regardless of its historical accuracy, however, the story’s theme—as

well as the readiness with which contemporary devotees seem to recall and retell it—suggests a fundamental conceptual link among the Shah monarchy, the Kumari, and Indra Jatra. That is to say, according to contemporary understandings of history, the Shah kings became kings of united Nepal not just by routing Jaya Prakash Malla militarily but by appropriating Indra Jatra and the Kumari, and they have continued to be kings of Nepal by annually renewing that relationship.

In more recent times, there has been particular local emphasis on the importance of the Kumari's *tika* to the sovereignty of the king. Specifically, in recent decades (if not longer), the Kumari's *tika* has been routinely interpreted as conferring sovereignty on the king for the coming year, suggesting a model of monarchy rather different from the roles structured by other ritual contexts. While at rituals like Bhot Jatra the king participated as a patron or privileged observer, the Indra Jatra blessing ritual structured the king as the special, intimate devotee of the goddess, dependent upon the goddess's favor for his right to rule. Indra Jatra thus suggested that the king's sovereignty was vulnerable, requiring annual renewal. Local Newars especially tend to cite this interpretation in light of one Indra Jatra in particular, that of 1954. That year, as King Tribhuvan's health began to fail, he made several trips to Switzerland for medical treatment and was out of the country during Indra Jatra. His son and heir, Prince Mahendra, took his father's place at both the inauguration of the chariot procession and the private *tika* giving; within four months, Tribhuvan was dead and Mahendra was on the throne. This sequence of events is occasionally

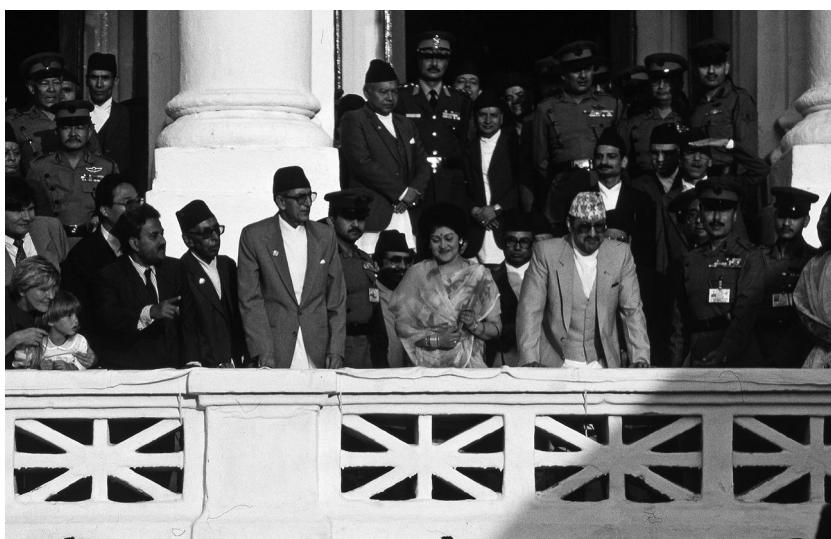


FIGURE 5.2 King Birendra (front, right) standing on the steps of Hanuman Dhoka Palace, preparing to inaugurate the Kumari's chariot procession. Standing with him are Queen Aishwarya and G. P. Koirala. (Photo by Jean Pierre Chanudaud)

cited by contemporary organizers of Indra Jatra as evidence of the potent influence of the Kumari on the monarchy and on the necessity of the Kumari's *tika* for any reigning monarch wishing to retain the throne.

Because of the local tradition that the Kumari could arbitrate and authorize the rule of the king, the most fraught performance of Indra Jatra in recent years (prior to the interim period) had occurred in 2001, three months after King Gyanendra's accession to the throne. In this context of crisis, the status of the monarch was not just hypothetically vulnerable or in need of perfunctory renewal: it was profoundly uncertain and in need of legitimization. To add to the basic instability on the monarchy's side, there also happened to have been a transition on the goddess's side as well, since one Kumari had just retired and a brand-new three-year-old Kumari had recently been installed. With transitions in both institutions at the same time, the first meeting of Kumari and king was unusually tense, and it seemed plausible that the relationship between the two could break down. But Indra Jatra 2001 went smoothly. The new Kumari and the new king fulfilled their ritual obligations to each other without difficulty, and the Kumari's *tika* was touted in some of the mainstream press as an indication that the king had been officially accepted by the goddess. *The Kathmandu Post*, for example, gushed:

The meeting had a great significance, as the pundits believe that this meeting, on this particular occasion, would make the monarchial system more strong. And the people heaved a sigh of relief when the Kumari offered her blessings to the King without hesitating, indicating a prosperous future for the King.¹⁸

Indra Jatra of 2001 helped accomplish what the enthronement rituals a few short months before had not completed: it helped craft Gyanendra into the king. During a time of crisis, the ritual performed, and thereby constructed, continuity and stability.

The bond between the king and the Kumari has thus been central to the construction and reproduction of the monarchy, but the relationship was not merely one-directional. In fact, as much as the Kumari confirmed the king, the king also confirmed the Kumari. Whenever it was time to install a new Kumari, the new candidates for the post would not only be vetted for goddess-appropriate appearance and temperament, they would also have to have their astrological charts examined to ensure that any new Kumari's chart harmonized to the king's. Moreover, once the finalist Kumari candidate was selected, the girl would have to go with her parents to the palace to meet the king and be officially approved for the position. While in practice this was a pro forma exercise,¹⁹ this step in the selection process reinforced the interdependency and mutuality of the two institutions.

It is also crucial to note that the relationship between the king and the Kumari was also important to the Kumari herself, a fact that becomes apparent in the differences between the Kathmandu Royal Kumari and the other local kumaris. There have historically been three major and several minor kumari institutions in the Kathmandu Valley, most formerly associated with local kings, but as the monarchies of Patan and Bhaktapur fell to the Shah dynasty, the prestige of their kumaris dipped as well.²⁰ Today, the other kumaris mostly serve part time during designated holidays; they live with their parents, attend school, and participate in regular society. Only the Kumari of Kathmandu, who successfully built a bond to the Shah dynasty, has retained elaborate, full-time, state-supported ritual status. Only the Kathmandu Kumari lives apart from her birth family in a temple with her own staff, and she is the center of the most prominent and widespread ritual attention. Because she has been bound to the reigning king, the Kathmandu Kumari has retained her full ritual and social position for centuries after the fall of the Mallas who initially installed her, and so the continuation of the royal tutelary link has been nearly as important to her (and to her staff) as it has been to the king.

Thus, through a variety of institutional confluences, practices, and accidents of history, the king of Nepal and the Kathmandu Royal Kumari had, by the time of Nepal's 2006 revolution, developed both symbolic and practical associations and had come to be in part defined by each other and by their special relationship. Because that special relationship was annually reproduced and reinforced during Indra Jatra, the festival of Indra Jatra as a whole became important for staging one of the unique identities of the king as the head of state.

THE INSTITUTIONS OF INDRA JATRA

While many of the institutions concerned with Indra Jatra are similar or identical in structure to the institutions of Bhoto Jatra, there were several specific circumstances in Kathmandu that disinclined many of Indra Jatra's organizers to cooperate with the proposed changes. This meant that the palace had allies against the interim government for Indra Jatra that it had not had for Bhoto Jatra, a fact that would prove crucial to the events of 2007.

On the one hand, the government is more overtly involved with the preparation of Indra Jatra than it is with the planning of almost any other once-royal ritual. The government is intimately involved in the Jatra's scheduling, for example. Whereas the date for Bhoto Jatra is determined by local astrologers only a few days in advance, the dates for Indra Jatra would be fixed by palace astrologers many months in advance, so that the inaugural day of the Kumari's chariot procession could be printed on government calendars in February or March. In addition, a few weeks in

advance of the Jatra, the government circulates a list of the auspicious times (*sait*) for each of the major events of the Jatra, in a memo issued to any person or office with an official responsibility to the festival: the Ministry of Culture, the police, the Indra Jatra Planning Committee, and so forth.²¹ The government also directly provides far more of the material resources for the Jatra than for other festivals, as well as providing most of the security. For example, the government both regulates and facilitates the retrieval of the Indra pole (*lingo*): the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation preselects the tree that is to be cut down, then the Ministry of Culture communicates with the local retrieval committee about the tree's selection, and finally, at the actual time of the procession to the forest, the government orders the traffic police to assist in the pole's transit, provides an army vehicle to transport the participants, and dispatches a handful of soldiers to escort the venture. The government (specifically the Internal Management Section of the Home Ministry) also issues invitations to the dignitaries who stand on the steps of Hanuman Dhoka Palace during the first day of the Kumari's chariot procession—primarily government ministers, ministry secretaries, and uniquely, foreign diplomats to Nepal (who are not, as a group, invited to Bhoto Jatra or to Dasai).

Despite this general government involvement and investment in Indra Jatra, the actual execution of the Jatra is nevertheless far more controlled by local non- or semi-government actors than Bhoto Jatra. The date for the festival was fixed by the astrologers employed by the palace. The Indra pole must be cut by local Newars, and local Newars control all the Indra and Bhairab images for the festival. The Kumari lives in a house funded by the state, but her caretakers are hereditary and are not direct government employees. The chariot is built and pulled by local Newars, and it is local Newars who provide the masked dancing, the music, the *tableau vivant*, and the candlelight procession for the dead.

Moreover, the staging of Indra Jatra is conditioned by a specific institutional reality, namely that the *gutis* connected with Indra Jatra are generally more powerful, organized, and skeptical of the government than those connected to Bhoto Jatra. As of 2011, there were approximately thirty *gutis* involved in Indra Jatra—ranging in size from the city-wide Manandhar Sangh to the three-person Swet Bhairab *guti*—but they have federated into the formidable Indra Jatra Planning Committee. The individual *gutis* continue to be responsible for organizing the individual events of Indra Jatra, but they now deal in a far more united way with the government than do the *gutis* of other temples or festivals. The Indra Jatra *gutis* have federated into the Planning Committee largely because of a pervasive feeling among them that they have over time been victimized by the government, and so they tend to approach their interactions with the government (primarily through the Ministry of Culture) suspiciously.

The Indra Jatra *gutis*, most of which were formed during the Malla period, were originally funded based upon land grants, which were farmed on a tenant system for the profit of the *guti*. However, over the past several decades, this land system has been dramatically altered, and the change has not benefitted the *gutis*.²² During the *panchayat* period, King Mahendra formed the Guti Samsthan as a semi-state holding corporation for *guti* assets, substituting annual cash payments for tenant rents or crops. Over time, the Guti Samsthan has tended to consistently pay out the “traditional” amount of money each year, in spite of rampant inflation.²³ Moreover, much of the original *guti* land has been lost, redistributed, or sold: land reform laws put in place since the 1960s have broken up large holdings and reverted much *guti* land to the tenants, while as Kathmandu property values soared after 1990, some *gutis* sold land and put the money into trusts, in the form of bank accounts whose interest payments never seem to match inflation rates. Many *guti* members also insist that after 1990, corrupt government officials altered or destroyed *guti* property records in order to transfer valuable assets to themselves. This loss of land forms a major subject of conversation among the Indra Jatra *guti* members and contributes to a strong sense that the government (particularly the post-1990 multiparty system) has badly damaged their traditional modes of organization and hence the viability of their cultural heritage. Several people I spoke with between 2009 and 2011 insisted that the *gutis* have only suffered since the 1990 democracy movement, because kings had protected *guti* interests but party leaders have only seen opportunities for profit.²⁴ Thus, whereas at least one of the key organizations connected with Bhoto Jatra actively embraced development ideology and the new republic system, the organizations connected with Indra Jatra entered the interim period feeling beleaguered and under threat from a hostile government.

The interests and priorities of the Indra Jatra *gutis* normally align with but are not identical to those of the people surrounding the Kumari House. The Kumari House has its own *guti*, and it also has the clan of the Kumari’s hereditary caretakers, who have a direct line of funding from and individual communication with the government. While the Kumari House has tended to coordinate with the wider Indra Jatra *gutis*, it also has institutional links and priorities that prompt it to operate as a distinct institution. In particular, more than any other institution of Indra Jatra (perhaps more than any other religious institution in the country), the Kumari House maintained consistent and direct contact with the palace and royal family, and up until very recently, the maintenance and the prestige of the Kumari House were directly tied to that relationship with the palace. Thus, the Kumari House was, as an institution, staunchly royalist and skeptical of nonroyal politicians and governments.

The staff of the Kumari House cultivates a strong sense of its importance and the uniqueness of its goddess, and so despite its loyalties, in more recent years it has

worked to formulate alternative, non-monarchy-based grounds for its continued existence and importance to ensure that the Kumari House survived even if the monarchy fell. Even before the interim period the Kumari House had begun articulating the Kumari's importance based on tourism. Around the time of the interim period, for example, the Kumari House began lobbying for a direct cut of the tourist revenue of Kathmandu's Durbar Square, on the grounds that of all the temples in the square tourists have the most immediate interest in the Kumari. Though this particular effort was ultimately unsuccessful, the staff of the Kumari House has repeatedly identified the goddess as one of Nepal's central tourist attractions and made this the basis of a variety of financial demands on the government. Despite these efforts to diversify its legitimacy, however, the Kumari House has been politically vulnerable in recent years because of the strength of its associations with the palace and monarchy. It was particularly an object of suspicion to the interim government, which (correctly) judged that the Kumari House would likely support the palace over the prime minister, and in the wake of the monarchy's formal dissolution the Kumari House staff has been rather anxiously endeavoring to establish its democratic credentials.²⁵

The other institution that would be somewhat at odds with the interim government over Indra Jatra was the local branch of the Guti Samsthan. While the primary role of the Guti Samsthan is to provide the resources that would allow local *gutis* to perform traditional tasks, the head (*hakim*) of each local branch office of the Guti Samsthan is expected to be present for (if not directly participate in) major ritual events in his district. In the case of Indra Jatra, this means that every year there is a small delegation of ritual-specific bureaucrats present at every major function of the festival. Most notably, on the final day of the Jatra, the head of the Kathmandu branch office of the Guti Samsthan would be one of the very few people who would actually be present at the Kumari's official blessing to the king. Throughout the interim period, the *central* office of the Guti Samsthan aligned to the government, but as it happened, the *local* head of the Kathmandu branch office was a brahmin priest with strong contacts with and sympathies for the palace. Thus, the Guti Samsthan would prove to be a crucial, yet rather unpredictable, institutional force in this contest over the traditional responsibilities of the king.

In addition to all these quite complex institutional allegiances around the festival itself, there would also be the palace itself for the interim government to contend with. At Indra Jatra, the role of the palace was rather more involved than for Bhoto Jatra, and so it would prove more difficult for the interim government to control the king's actions. The palace not only provided material offerings for the festival and the Kumari, but it also arranged the king's double attendance (to initiate the chariot procession and to receive the Kumari's blessing). The first phase of the palace's involvement, though, could be reasonably controlled by the Home Ministry. A few

days or weeks in advance of the Jatra, the Palace Secretariat would receive a formal invitation from the Indra Jatra Planning Committee; the Palace Military Secretariat would then make security plans for the initial visit and inform the Home Ministry and the CDO of Kathmandu. These were all procedures that could be rerouted by the central administration. On the final night of the Jatra, however, the palace controlled the king's movements far more independently. Because the timing could vary widely based on when the Kumari finished her chariot procession (and would therefore be available to bless the king), the palace could never make precise arrangements in advance for the king's movements. While in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the king would have lived across the street in Hanuman Dhoka Palace and would have merely needed to step across the square, in recent years the Kumari House staff would call the Chief of the Royal Household and request him to send the king for his blessing.²⁶ This meant that there was unmediated contact between the Kumari House and the palace and that the king would leave the palace, in a private car, based on the Kumari House's (and not the government's) word.

Indra Jatra can thus be seen as a center for elaborate negotiations between a variety of institutions, which during the interim period had sharply divergent interests and conflicting loyalties to one another. These institutions would act based on those interests and loyalties in a variety of ways, and as the state switched from cooperating with the monarchy to competing with it, the other institutions concerned with staging Indra Jatra were forced to choose sides and decide between defending the traditional configuration of the festival or conceding to the revolutionary program of the prime minister.

INDRA JATRA 2006

In September 2006, four months after the national uprising that had toppled his direct rule over the country, King Gyanendra was poised to observe Indra Jatra. It would be only his fourth or fifth venture outside of the royal palace since his capitulation, and it would be his most contentious action to date, insofar as participating would serve to assert his connections to the Kumari, as well as legitimate his claim to rule for another full year. The political parties had all informally made known their opposition to the king's participation in Indra Jatra, while the local *gutis* had publicized their intention to invite the monarch as usual. At this early point in the interim period, it was still the government's policy to permit King Gyanendra to attend all of his traditional functions in the king's traditional role, however, and so the administration backed the *gutis* in their desire to include the king. Nevertheless, members of the government were well aware that any apparent endorsement of the monarchy would be highly controversial and likely to spark rallies and protests from the local

party organizations—particularly the Maoists and the Maoist youth paramilitary, the YCL.

Accordingly, the CDO for Kathmandu, Sthaneswor Devkota, who was responsible for coordinating security and public order in the capital, held a series of meetings on behalf of the government, calling the leaders of the local party organizations to the CDO office and negotiating with them about their intentions to call strikes or rallies. Devkota argued to party members that it was the wish of “the people” to maintain tradition and invite the king, and he obtained pledges from each major group that they would cause no major disruptions to the Jatra. Devkota also coordinated a series of meetings with security representatives from the palace to discuss how to safely transport the king and ensure his successful participation in the Jatra. This was a moderate departure from past procedure: during the monarchy period, the palace would normally make security decisions by itself and then simply inform the CDO office or the Home or Defense Ministry on what police and/or army provisions would be needed. In a further sign of the palace’s diminishing position, these security meetings were not even held at the palace. Since journalists had learned about the security meetings at Narayanhiti Palace in preparation for Bhot Jatra and criticized the government for pandering to the palace, this meeting and all subsequent meetings regarding the king’s security were held on municipal properties, whether the CDO office itself or one of the local police stations.²⁷

Nevertheless, the government was prepared to let the king participate in Indra Jatra as usual, and on September 6, 2006, the opening day of the Kumari’s procession, King Gyanendra was driven to Hanuman Dhoka Palace to participate in the inaugural ceremony. The government established an unusually heavy security perimeter, but the king appeared as usual on the White Palace balcony, and the Kumari walked as usual to her chariot. The military band played the national anthem—the old anthem lauding the monarch, since the new anthem had been commissioned but not yet finalized. The king tossed coins to the Kumari, and the chariot pullers launched the goddess’s chariot into the streets of old Kathmandu.

But not everything was as it had been. Although invitations had been issued by the Home Ministry as usual, almost no other dignitaries appeared on the steps of the White Palace with him. No one from the cabinet showed up, and most of the foreign diplomats declined the visit also—perhaps concerned about the effects that being photographed with the rapidly sinking monarch might have on their own popularity and political capital. The king’s appearance was also largely ignored by the mainstream press: *The Kathmandu Post*, for example, printed photos of the Kumari being hoisted into her chariot but made no mention of the fact that the king had also been present. Moreover, CDO Devkota had not fully succeeded in suppressing political dissent during the actual Jatra. The Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Trade Union

Federation (Revolutionary) convened a mass meeting that day (ostensibly a routine convention) in nearby Ratna Park, necessitating a major detour for the king's motorcade,²⁸ and the small Maoist-affiliate party Newah Mukti Morcha (the "Newar Liberation Federation" [NMM]) staged a small but quite vocal black flag rally²⁹ on the edge of the Jatra gathering. The NMM leader, "identified simply as Shrestha, is reported as saying: 'We, the NMM, announced to protest the attendance of the Shah king to protest king Prithvi Narayan Shah's takeover by tricking the local Newar residents. We should culturally, socially, and morally boycott the king.'"³⁰

This suggests that while the major political parties had acceded to the government's official request not to disturb Indra Jatra, either the subgroups within the Maoist movement holding more deeply revolutionary and antimonarchy sensibilities rejected any kind of conciliatory position adopted by the top leadership of the main party, or (more likely) the Maoist leadership had quietly recommended that their satellite parties stage rallies so that they could both maintain relations with the mainstream parliamentary groups and defy the king.³¹ If the protests indeed represented a subtle, organized Maoist strategy, it suggests a high level of political savvy to deploy a local Newar political party to voice the anti-king message: rather than risk being depicted in the press as the evil iconoclast Maoists undermining valuable local Newar traditions, they could get the NMM to suggest that loving Newar tradition and defending traditional Newari culture was fully consistent with opposing the Shah king.

Despite the diminished VIP presence and the protests, the opening day of the chariot procession was appropriately performed, and five days later, King Gyanendra returned to the Kumari House to receive his blessing. On the night of the *tika* itself, there was no opposition, and the king was able to worship the Kumari and receive her blessing without incident, symbolically confirming a full coming year of rule. So despite some opposition, and despite signs that publicly associating with the monarchy was increasingly regarded as a political liability, King Gyanendra was able to successfully participate in Indra Jatra 2006. This successful maintenance of tradition was due in part to the desire of the local *gutis* to continue to invite him, but due in larger part to the fact that for the time being, the king's visits were still organized and supported by the state.

INDRA JATRA 2007

The real contest over Indra Jatra came in September 2007, the second year of the interim period. Between Indra Jatra 2006 and Indra Jatra 2007, of course, the monarchy's status had changed dramatically: the interim constitution was in effect, the Maoists were part of the government, the king had been scrubbed from the currency

and national anthem, and so on. By Indra Jatra 2007, Prime Minister G. P. Koirala had already observed the display of Machindranath's *bhoto* and had more recently gone in the king's place to worship Lord Krishna in Patan on Krisha Janmastami. Now he was poised to attend Indra Jatra and to receive *tika* from the Kumari.

The interim government anticipated that this would be the most contested and unpopular move in its bid to take over royal rituals. While the previous year the government had feared opposition and protest from the political parties, in 2007 the government feared opposition and protest from the local Newar community, the Kumari House, and the formidable Indra Jatra Planning Committee. To try to mitigate opposition, the new CDO of Kathmandu, Modaraj Dotel, convened a meeting a week or two in advance of the Jatra, bringing together the local security team, the head of the Kathmandu branch of the Guti Samsthana, and a variety of *guti* members and various local representatives. At this meeting, the *guti* members and community representatives voiced resentment about the intended change, and the Jatra's organizers even announced early in the meeting that they intended to invite the king instead of the prime minister. But the debate continued for several hours, and the representatives from the government gradually persuaded (or, likely, pressured) everyone to acquiesce to the change.³² As then-CDO Modaraj Dotel explained, "We told them that this [removing the king] had been the will of the people. They were the people—this was their change. They needed to accept it. And eventually they did."³³ Dotel later conceded, though, that the government would have had no formal recourse if the *gutis* had decided to go ahead and invite the king anyway; they could mostly just pressure the *gutis* vaguely and hope for the best. Dotel claimed that he did not know what the government would have done if the *gutis* had refused to cooperate—he just admitted that it would have been "very embarrassing" for the government.³⁴

After this meeting, the official invitation to inaugurate the Kumari's chariot procession was issued to Prime Minister Koirala, not to King Gyanendra, and the government made arrangements for the opening ceremony. On the day of the Jatra's opening, a heavy security perimeter was established, and the prime minister was driven to Hanuman Dhoka Palace, where he was joined by his cabinet and the majority of the foreign diplomatic community. The military band played the new populist national anthem (ratified only a few weeks previously), and the Kumari was carried to her chariot. The prime minister tossed gold coins to her chariot and thus publicly laid claim to the king's relationship to the Kumari. At the margins of the crowd, a number of small royalist groups protested the prime minister, shouting slogans and showing black flags. Despite this small protest, the inauguration of the Kumari's chariot constituted a major public success for the interim government. Prime Minister Koirala had—with the backing of the government and the international VIP

community—performed the public function of the king as chief guest of the Jatra. In so doing, he had claimed ascendancy for the government over the palace at this heavily weighted event.

But Indra Jatra was not over, and the ritual of the Kumari's *tika* was still to come. The interim government intended that Koirala should replace the king for that too, but this negotiation would be rather different and more complicated. The *tika* ritual was less public than the chariot inauguration, but it was also far less under the control of the government. It belonged instead to the domain of the Kumari House and the Kumari herself, over whom the government's influence was uncertain. But the interim government notified the Kumari House to expect Prime Minister Koirala to come for the royal *tika*, and from their perspective the matter appeared to be settled.

On the final day of the Jatra, the Kumari went to her chariot and began her journey through the city. As the chariot reached the intersection at Kilagal Tol, a group of people gathered in the chariot's path, blocking the Kumari's procession.³⁵ Presumably, the logic of this effort was that if the Kumari were unable to return to the Kumari House, she would not have to administer the state *tika* to the prime minister and tradition would remain unaltered. But in relatively little time, the police dispersed the blockade, and the chariot completed its route.

While the Kumari was out for her chariot procession, Kathmandu metropolitan police officers entered the grounds of the Kumari House to perform a security sweep of the premises in preparation for the prime minister's arrival—at which point they encountered army officers from Narayanhiti Palace's security team performing a similar sweep.³⁶ The police officers rightly deduced that this meant that King Gyanendra himself was planning an unannounced visit that night, and immediately informed their superior officers. Word passed up the chain of command to the District Superintendent of Police, who was already on hand to personally oversee the prime minister's visit, and when the top-level members of the government assembled at Hanuman Dhoka Palace in support of the prime minister's historic move, the police superintendent pulled aside the Home Secretary to alert him to the king's intentions.³⁷

According to the normal protocol under the interim government, if the king had wanted to leave Narayanhiti Palace, his secretaries or his security officers ought to have contacted the Home Ministry, informing the ministry of the king's plans (the time and place he would be going, the length of time he would remain, and the mode of his transport). Then the Home Ministry would have approved or denied the petition and arranged police security and traffic management accordingly. However, the palace presumed (probably rightly) that the Home Ministry would not approve a petition for the king to go seek the Kumari's blessing at Indra Jatra, likely citing "security considerations." So they simply did not make the petition. Instead, the

palace directly contacted the Kumari House and the head of the Kathmandu branch office of the Guti Samsthan to ensure support for a covert visit—a visit that would be arranged with the palace’s own staff and security, bypassing the government.³⁸

In one sense, the king was within his rights to plan such a visit. The official policy of the government, even during this time, was to permit the king to leave the palace (and even make religious observances) as a private citizen—just not as head of state. This policy left the king some legitimate standing for a Kumari House visit. After all, once the “head of state” has received the Kumari’s *tika*, the general public is permitted to go into the Kumari House; thus the king could argue that he simply wanted to go as an ordinary citizen to see the Kumari at the close of her Jatra. However, the connection between the Kumari and the king had been too intimate for too many years, and the last night of Indra Jatra was too significant a time, for the government not to be uncomfortable. Granted, the prime minister would be the one entering the Kumari House and receiving her blessing at the authorized time (as soon as the Kumari reentered her temple, and before the general public was allowed in), and so to that extent the state had laid claim to the ritual authority of the Kumari and the Jatra. However, clearly the king was laying claim to as much of the full ritual authority as he could (same place, same night) and he was the person with generations of tradition behind him, as well as the support of the Kumari House.

As the Home Secretary initiated damage control across the courtyard in Hanuman Dhoka, the prime minister entered the Kumari House with his security team and a handful of aides and was greeted by the caretaker staff of the Kumari House and the head of the Kathmandu Guti Samsthan. One of the prime minister’s aides reflected later that no one gathered at the Kumari House looked pleased to see them. No one present was prepared to challenge the prime minister’s right to be there, but no one wanted him there.³⁹ The prime minister went upstairs to the Kumari’s worship room with the Kumari’s chief caretaker, Jujubhai Shakya, along with the head priest of the state Taleju temple and the head of the Kathmandu Guti Samsthan office, and the *tika* ritual was performed. The priest touched the prime minister’s shoulders with the Kumari’s sword. The prime minister offered the Kumari betel nuts and a solid gold coin, and the Kumari gave the prime minister *tika*. The only variant from the usual royal blessing was that the Kumari blessed the prime minister using her right hand, whereas she had always blessed the king using her left.⁴⁰ But if this variation was recognized by the prime minister, he made no mention, and he quietly left the Kumari House.⁴¹

As soon as the prime minister departed, both the Kumari House and the government jumped into action in anticipation of the impending royal visit. The Kumari House staff cleared the Kumari’s worship room and immediately set up everything for an identical second ritual. Outside, the Home Secretary cleared out

all government representatives and as many journalists as he could, to make clear that the king's visit was not officially noticed or sanctioned. In addition, though, he requested a large deployment of plainclothes police to provide extra security to the area surrounding the Kumari House and to the driving route between the Kumari House and the palace. This response on the part of the Home Secretary points out a crucial tension in the interim government's handling of the king. On the one hand, they were doing everything they could to strip the king of his duties and privileges and were thus clearly the king's opponents—but on the other, as long as Gyanendra continued to be king, the administration considered themselves obliged to keep him safe, making them also the king's protectors. But being seen to protect the king in any way was politically problematic, and thus the Home Secretary opted to use plainclothes officers: the king must be made safe, but preferably in a way that would signify disapproval and prevent the public and the media from noticing that the king was receiving state support.

King Gyanendra arrived at the Kumari House that night sometime after 10 or 11 p.m., and according to the head of the Kathmandu Guti Samsthan, the people gathered there were pleased to see him, both the staff of the Kumari House and the crowds of people who had continued to mill around outside the Kumari House.⁴² The king arrived quietly, with few overt security measures, and was escorted upstairs to receive his blessing from the Kumari. The royal *tika* ritual was performed: the Taleju priest touched the king's shoulders with the Kumari's sword, the king offered the Kumari betel nuts and a solid gold coin (apparently this time provided at his own private expense—it certainly was not provided by the state), and the Kumari gave the king *tika*, this time with her left hand.⁴³ King Gyanendra quietly departed the Kumari House and returned to the royal palace.

AFTERMATH

King Gyanendra's 2007 trip to the Kumari House may seem understated, but it was the first and only time in the interim period when he overtly acted against the wishes and directives of the interim government—the one time when the embattled king actively rejected his demotion. His Indra Jatra defiance was not without cost, however. The first response from the government was a firm reprimand: Prime Minister Koirala reportedly exchanged strong words the following day with Palace Principal Secretary Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan.⁴⁴ On a more concrete level, the prime minister also issued immediate instructions to the Chief of the Army to reduce the number of soldiers stationed at the palace.⁴⁵ This was both a symbolic and a practical punishment. On the one hand, the king had previously been the Commander in Chief of the Army, and an entire army battalion had been dedicated to protecting

the palace grounds and the royal family, so by sharply diminishing the army's presence at the palace the prime minister further dissociated the monarchy from the military. In so doing, he separated the king from both the prestige of such heavy protection and the personal relationships engendered by close working contact.

On the other hand, by reducing the number of army personnel stationed at the palace, the prime minister was effectively forcing the king to be more dependent on the government. The political climate was still unpredictable, and King Gyanendra was clearly uncertain about his own safety: he was unlikely to leave the palace without heavy protection, but with his initial army presence he could still muster enough protection to venture out on his own. With a large force dedicated to his safety, the king had had the resources to organize his own security for Indra Jatra and move about in public without authorization from the interim government. By drastically cutting the army detail at the palace, the prime minister effectively ensured that the palace would be unable to arrange unofficial visits and that the king would in future have to rely on protection and transportation arranged at the pleasure of and on the terms of the government.

It is far more complex, however, to evaluate the more general effects of the tension surrounding Indra Jatra 2007. In this most contested of ritual contexts, the Kathmandu Royal Kumari gave two royal blessings, neither of which was quite fully traditional. The prime minister received a blessing at the traditional time, but he was not the traditional recipient, and the blessing was given with a nontraditional hand. The king was the traditional recipient, and he received it with the traditional hand, but at a nontraditional time and without the traditional backing and coordination of the state apparatus. It would appear that neither side emerged fully victorious in this exchange: the state succeeded only partially in appropriating the king's role, and the king succeeded only partially in preserving his traditional access to the goddess.

The prime minister had succeeded, though, in coopting the public face of the Indra Jatra official visit. He had been the one inaugurating the chariot procession, witnessed by thousands of people and covered widely in the press, and he was seen and photographed entering the Kumari House at the correct time. The King's subversive *tika* was administered upstairs and privately, and not even the people gathered in the Kumari House's courtyard (including the Kumari House's own staff and the prime minister's aides) seem to have known about the variations in the hand the Kumari used. Moreover, since the Home Secretary had cleared out the journalists from the scene, the king's blessing received little publicity, though news did spread some informally. This means that the state had successfully taken over the most public and official functions of the Jatra and had in some measure controlled the dissemination of knowledge about the Jatra as well. But they did not succeed in keeping the king away entirely, and so they did not fully deprive the king of his

annual authorization from the goddess. In this instance, then, although King Gyanendra did still lose most of his traditional role, he was able to resist the change and mount an opposition that prevented the government's wholesale cooptation of his previous prerogatives.

In the case of Indra Jatra, it is clear that ritual provided a crucial framework in which to contest, reorganize, and (uniquely) resist new configurations of political power. Ritual was a powerful political act and proved transformative. Yet it is important not to overstate this point or to attempt to entirely reduce politics to ritual. The ceremony of inaugurating the Kumari's chariot and the receipt of her blessing did not merely symbolize forms of political power; rather, it was the rituals themselves that made certain configurations of politics legible and available for thought, and in that sense the Indra Jatra rituals served as a very real forum for politics. At the same time, however, it mattered for the performance of Indra Jatra who controlled the budget and the military, and it also mattered for control over the budget and the military who was constructed through ritual as being the center of political sovereignty.

Despite the fact that during Indra Jatra 2006 and 2007 numerous political relationships were reconfigured relative to each other, it is clearly not the case that ritual is always or even usually politically transformative. For the overwhelming number of Indra Jatra performances through history, the rituals did not transform, challenge, or even dramatically authorize anything. In other years, when the monarchy was in almost every respect secure and the relationships between various political actors were not in question, Indra Jatra softly reflected and upheld what was already true: it reproduced the sovereignty of the king—and it did not really have much leverage to do otherwise. With all respect to those Nepalis who link Mahendra's 1955 succession with the fact that he received the Kumari's *tika* prior to his father's death, in most years the monarchy was *not* vulnerable and not dependent for its existence on the blessing of the dynasty's tutelary goddess. Most years the blessing of the Kumari would have been a symbolic confirmation of fact, an acknowledgment that the monarchy was a robust social institution.

But in a time of crisis and transition, in a time when the continuation of the monarchy was actually in doubt, then royal rituals developed a sudden potency, a capacity to not just reproduce the monarchy and the status quo, but to challenge and alter the relationships and identities that had been embedded into the performance of the ritual. In 2006, it became possible to challenge the way the ritual performed "the government behind the king," and in 2007, it became possible to recast the ritual entirely, to create for the country a category of "head of state" that could supplant the monarch. In other words, the rituals of Indra Jatra developed a dynamic, transformative potential during a period of broader fluidity and contestation. The

transitions of Indra Jatra did not occur in a vacuum, and for all that Indra Jatra was perhaps the single most important annual ritual to the Shah dynasty, the institution of monarchy was constructed and supported based on a complex combination of practices that mutually inflected and reinforced one another.

It is in this framework that King Gyanendra's resistance toward the interim government must be evaluated. The king was successful at Indra Jatra in defending some portion of his old ritual role: he received his blessing from the Kumari in 2007, against every wish of the government. But it was only a partial defense, and it was the only semisuccessful resistance to an otherwise sweeping campaign—a campaign through which the interim government was systematically appropriating and redistributing every other practice and idiom that had constituted the monarchy.

Ritual mattered and continues to matter politically, and during the interim period political relationships were negotiated and reconfigured in very real ways through the largely symbolic language of ritual. King Gyanendra's success in maintaining a role for himself at Indra Jatra mattered, and it did interfere with the interim government's efforts to dismantle his office. But ultimately, partial access to one royal ritual was not enough: the Kumari's *tika* alone could not support the institution of monarchy.

6

Reinforcement Rituals III: Celebrating the Nation's Patriarch

IN CONTRAST TO both Bhoto Jatra and Indra Jatra, which are centered in Kathmandu and which are part of the Newari cultural traditions inherited by the Shahs from the Mallas, the holiday of Dasai is the ritual highlight of Nepal's dominant Nepali-speaking, hill-centered Hindu culture—a nearly two-week-long holiday celebrated annually in the majority of households in the country. Because families celebrate Dasai across the country, not just in the capital, the rituals that make up Dasai provided an opportunity to perform the role of the king in some rather different ways than most of the other royal celebrations of the year. During other times of the year, many of the king's public rituals were part of Newari festivals, performed only in Kathmandu by specialized ritual actors; these rituals served to separate the king from his subjects and craft his royal identity according to cultural idioms unfamiliar to huge numbers of Nepalis. Dasai, by contrast, featured the king and the royal family performing familiar ritual gestures routinely enacted in households across the country, and more than any other ritual in the annual calendar could suggest that the royal family participated in the practices and values normative to ordinary people. Dasai rituals also celebrated the king of Nepal not as the inheritor of the Kathmandu traditions of monarchy, but rather as the descendant of the Shah dynasty from the midwest hill town of Gorkha.

Moreover, where the other rituals of the king's annual calendar tended to feature the king as an individual, Dasai ritualizes families. Many of the Dasai rituals celebrated the king's relationship to his relatives—both his Shah ancestors and his living

family members—and had extended beyond blood kin to include political relationships. In other words, Dasai had rhetorically framed state representatives and royal subjects as members of the king's extended "family." The Dasai holiday thus presented the king not just as a devotee or family man, but as the patriarch in chief to the nation. Because its core rituals were organized around a lineage-specific, patriarchal model of monarchy, however, Dasai posed certain unique challenges to the interim government's program of ritual cooptation over the course of 2006 to 2008. Regarding Bhoto Jatra and Indra Jatra, the logistics of replacing the king had been quite clear: wherever the king had appeared in the past, the government would simply send the prime minister in his place. When it came to Dasai, however, the situation became murky. The rituals of Dasai had symbolically collapsed affairs of state with affairs of the Shah family, and so before any given ritual could be appropriated, the government needed to decide if that particular ritual featured the king in his role as the center of sovereignty and the head of the state, or if it involved the king as a private individual celebrating a holiday with his family. In other words, Dasai required the interim government to distinguish between the roles of the king as a private person and as a political figurehead—roles that the institution of monarchy itself purposefully conflates.

In the end, the interim government appropriated for the prime minister most of the Dasai ritual actions of the king. In the process, however, some of those ritual actions stopped making much sense. For example, while it had made sense for the Royal Nepal Army to stand with its royal commander in chief to ceremonially greet a ritual tribute from the royal dynastic home, it made very little sense for the nationalized Nepal Army and the prime minister to ceremonially greet a bundle of leaves from the small town of Gorkha. In other words, in the contexts of previous ritual replacements, it had been the palace or the king's supporters who had resisted the interim government, but now in the case of Dasai it was the logic of the rituals themselves that hampered the government's policy of replacement. Examining Dasai thus provides a particularly interesting point from which to interrogate some of the limitations, specific difficulties, and drawbacks to the interim government's otherwise generally successful policies for removing the royals from royal rituals.

DASAI FOR NON-ROYALS

Before trying to explain how the king celebrated Dasai—and what it meant for the interim government to challenge his right to do so—it will be helpful first to explain how Dasai is celebrated by non-royal families, because royal Dasai rituals can generally be seen as elaborations, expansions, or extensions of non-royal Dasai rituals and would all have been locally understood in that context. (In fact, what makes Dasai

remarkable as a political ritual is its scalability—the ease with which ritual gestures can be adapted to different levels and sizes of social groups.) While of course it is impossible to capture all the nuance and variety of Dasai observances from region to region, caste to caste, family to family, or even year to year within the same family, it is nevertheless possible to identify a general schedule to Dasai and a set of practices many Nepalis consider normative or typical for each day of the holiday.¹

Dasai is Nepal's largest, longest, most widely celebrated holiday, falling in the second half of the Nepali month of Asoj (normally early to mid-October). It altogether spans approximately two weeks, culminating on Vijaya Dashami (“Victorious Tenth,” also commonly known as “Tika Day”), and concludes with technically four days but in practice as much as a week of traveling and socializing. Many schools, businesses, and government offices close for nearly a month, from the few days before Vijaya Dashami through the four-day-long post-Dasai holiday of Tihar. This countrywide break is longer than any other school or business holiday in the year, making Dasai central to the experience of the annual flow of time in Nepal.

Dasai is quite a complex holiday, not least because it combines two different idioms of celebration—one centered around goddess worship and one centered around family relationships—and these two registers of practices sometimes have very little overtly to do with one another. The ostensive reason for the holiday is to celebrate the goddess Durga in her many forms, with each of the first nine days of the holiday (the “Navaratri,” technically “nine nights”) devoted to a separate form of the goddess, and the tenth day (Vijaya Dashami) honoring Durga’s victory over the buffalo demon Mahish. The holiday very much exceeds this mythological basis for its purpose, however, and in practice it serves at least as much as a celebration of family and patriline as it is a celebration of the victories of the goddess.² Major rituals of the first nine days center around the home and the male head of household, and the climax of the holiday on Vijaya Dashami is not goddess worship but rather the exchange of blessings among family members.

Dasai officially begins on the day after the month’s new moon, and on that first day families establish a small room or corner of a room to serve as the “Dasai house” (*Dasai ghar*), the ritual center for the household for the duration of the holiday. This *Dasai ghar* is usually a small altar or mini-temple that will contain at minimum a representation of the nine forms of the Goddess, a representation of the god Ganesh (often as a betel nut or coconut), brass pots filled with water, and crucially, a planting of *jamara*. *Jamara* is a small, dense patch of sprouts, usually barley but sometimes corn, planted and cultivated in a dish in the *Dasai ghar*. The seeds for the *jamara* are planted on this first day, so that the sprouts will be two to three inches high in time for Vijaya Dashami a little over a week later, and until the last day or so they are kept away from sunshine so that they will look distinctively lanky and yellow-green. Once

the Dasai *ghar* has been established, the male head of the household will perform *puja* rituals every morning throughout the holidays, and women are often barred from entering the ritual space (sometimes even from looking at it or being near it). This arrangement illustrates the heightened importance of patriarchy and patriline at Dasai: whereas for the rest of the year women are the primary caretakers of their households' deities and ritual life, for Dasai the family's daily religious observances are undertaken by the most senior male.

Even though the first day of Dasai is ritually significant and does mark the beginning of the holiday period, it is low key. All the rituals for setting up the Dasai *ghar* tend to be done early in the morning, and people continue in their daily routines for that day and the next several days, though many individuals and families visit local goddess temples during the week. The activities of Dasai do not begin to intensify until the seventh day, Phulpati ("Flowers-Leaves"). On this day, families typically worship the goddess Laxmi in the form of a *bel* fruit and then collect a set of leaves to represent the plural forms of the Goddess (from as few as three up to as many as nine varieties, including variously a banana leaf, a sugar cane stalk, flowers, a ginger plant, and so forth). These leaves are formed into a bundle and then placed in the Dasai *ghar*. Phulpati is the last day when people spend much of their time going about their normal routines, and the day on which people who are live apart from their relatives travel back home. Thus, Phulpati is the first time when the holiday begins to noticeably shift the rhythm of daily life.

The following two days after Phulpati—the "Great Eighth" (*maha-ashtami*) and the "Great Ninth" (*maha-navami*)—are the days that inaugurate the full-out holiday, when people drop all other activities to worship the goddess and spend time with their families. At some point over those two days, most often during the intervening night (the "Black Night," or *kal ratri*), most Hindu households conduct some sort of animal sacrifice. Ideally, people sacrifice a black, uncastrated male goat, but due to holiday demand these goats become quite expensive, and many families sacrifice an uncastrated male goat of some other color. Poorer families unable to afford a goat may instead sacrifice chickens or ducks, and some families who are very poor (or who are for various reasons reluctant to perform a live sacrifice) can substitute eggs. Many families make their sacrifices at home, taking care to save some of the neck blood to spray on the wall of their Dasai *ghar*, but some families take their goats to goddess temples and let the priests do the sacrifice for them.

The tenth day, Vijaya Dashami, is for most people the center and highlight of the holiday. On this day, patrilines convene so that senior family members may confer blessings on junior family members. In the morning, at the time preannounced by the government as the optimally auspicious astrological moment (*sait*), the male head of the household worships in the Dasai *ghar* and blesses himself (or receives a

blessing from a family priest). He will tuck some of the barley-sprout *jamara* over an ear or into his hair, and he will mark the center of his forehead with a *tika*, a damp smudge of bright-red powder mixed with yogurt and uncooked unbroken rice (*akshata*). Then he will go to the household's main living area to initiate the family's blessing giving. As the head of household, he will bless everyone junior to himself in order of each person's status in the patriline, placing a red *tika* smudge on each person's forehead, depositing a few sprouts of *jamara* on the person's head (either over the person's ear or tucked into the hair), and giving the person a verbal blessing and gift of money. Thus, the head of the house might give his blessing first to his wife, then he and his wife together might bless their sons and their wives, any daughters living at home, and their grandchildren (all in descending age/gender/marital order). Then the member of the household with the next-highest status (such as the eldest son) would give blessing to everyone junior to him or her, and so on, until everyone in the household had blessed or been blessed by everyone else in the household, with the blessing always transmitted from people of higher status to people of lower status.³

Once blessings have been completed within the household, people then begin a major program of visiting all the relatives and close family friends they can manage during the following week. On Tika Day itself, people generally confine themselves to visiting their closest relatives (their maternal grandparents, for example, or their in-laws or siblings). But in the days to come, younger people may spend all day every day traveling between the houses of aunts and uncles, cousins, neighbors, family friends, and so forth, while the senior members of the family may stay home most of every day blessing and feeding an endless stream of guests. Dasai is thus above all else a time to reinforce social bonds by honoring and spending time with one's extended family and social network. As Nepal's population has become more mobile in the past few decades (and particularly as people have increasingly migrated toward the cities), there is now annually a major reverse migration back to people's native or ancestral homes for Dasai. People tend to feel very strongly that they need to "go home" for Dasai, to reinforce their ties to their families and to their ancestral places of origin.

ROYAL DASAI

In the years prior to the interim period, the Shah family had celebrated Dasai annually in ways that paralleled the celebrations of non-royals in broad terms, but that departed from those celebrations in certain key ways that highlighted dimensions in which the royal family was not just another Nepali lineage. Through these practices, Dasai rhetorically announced the Shah family as the first family of Nepal: a family

not categorically different from all others, but one that celebrated the holiday (and was celebrated through the holiday) on a larger scale than any other. The various Dasai rituals also asserted a variety of different social identities for the king—most notably as a member of the royal house of Gorkha, and as the patriarch in chief of the government and the nation—and it purposefully blurred the lines between family/lineage identities and political identities.

Dasai also drew attention to the complex ways in which Nepal's assorted palaces served as different kinds of “houses” for the royal family. From the late nineteenth through the early twenty-first century, the Shahs lived at Narayanhiti Palace (first in a sprawling white Rana-era mansion and later in more modern constructions within the large compound). The Shahs owned dozens of royal properties across the country, though, ranging from modern royal retreats to assiduously kept medieval structures to the crumbling remnants of palaces built by long-gone dynasties across the Himalayan foothills. These disparate palaces were, in different senses, each “home” to the institution of monarchy, and hence each one was a potential location for the celebration of Dasai. Several ancient properties maintained Dasai rituals celebrating long-vanished monarchies,⁴ but three palaces hosted major ritual observances explicitly on behalf of the Shah family: Narayanhiti Palace, where the king actually lived; Hanuman Dhoka Palace, the premodern Malla palace in Kathmandu that continued to serve as the Shah family’s ritual center after they moved to Narayanhiti; and the royal palace in Gorkha, the dynastic home of the Shahs. Royalty was thus dramatized annually in these various palaces, with a variety of rituals forging rhetorical relationships between the monarch and his various “homes.”

The Royal Dasai Ghar and Phulpati

The Shah family, like most Hindu families in the country, had a Dasai *ghar*, but unlike most Hindu families in the country, the Shah Dasai *ghar* was neither constructed by the king as patriarch of his family nor was it housed at the royal family’s actual residence at Narayanhiti. Rather, on the first day of Dasai, priests from Narayanhiti Palace would set up the Shah family’s Dasai *ghar* within Hanuman Dhoka Palace in Old Kathmandu,⁵ preparing a small structure near the temple of the Shahs’ patron goddess Taleju and planting a large quantity of barley seeds for *jamara*. The palace priests would return to tend the Dasai *ghar* each morning throughout the first nine days of the holiday. While the construction and maintenance of this Dasai *ghar* established the royals as “typical” in that they had a Dasai *ghar*, it simultaneously marked them as special: not only did they have multiple residences, but they also had their own phalanx of priests to manage it for them. Unlike most family patriarchs, the king was too important to handle the minute management of his family’s rituals.

The analogous-but-special status of the king was further demonstrated through the seventh-day festivities of Phulpatti. On the day prior to Phulpatti, a team of hereditary royal retainers in Gorkha would sacrifice a sheep and perform puja to a *bel* tree.⁶ The following morning, they would collect nine different types of leaves from the forest surrounding the Gorkha palace and assemble them into a bundle to form the *phulpatti*. They would then carefully wrap the *phulpatti* up and send it to Kathmandu (a distance of some 90 kilometers, or 56 miles). Purportedly, in the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah this trip was made by teams of runners, with Gorkhali runners carrying the leaf bundle to a halfway point (at Jivanpur in Dhading district), where they would hand it off to a team of runners from Kathmandu, who would carry it the rest of the way. Despite the fact that many newspapers continue to report that the leaf bundle is still hand-carried to the capital, in actual fact it has always in recent decades been transported from Gorkha to Kathmandu by car or motorcycle.⁷

Once the Gorkha *phulpatti* arrived in Kathmandu, two things would happen. First, a team of priests from the king's staff at Narayanhiti Palace—headed by the king's chief religious advisor, the Chief Royal Guru—would convene at Hanuman Dhoka and then form a procession that would also include members of the Hanuman Dhoka Museum administrative staff, musicians, a group of female singers, an enormous red parasol, and the ceremonial Guruju-ko Paltan military regiment. This group would walk about a half-mile to a courtyard in the nearby neighborhood of Jamal, halfway between Narayanhiti and Hanuman Dhoka, to await the actual arrival point of the *phulpatti*. At Jamal, the priests would receive the *phulpatti*, perform a brief *puja* ritual, and then process back to Hanuman Dhoka to install the leaf bundle into the royal *Dasai ghar* (Fig. 6.1).

At the same time that the *phulpatti* was arriving in Jamal and being escorted to Hanuman Dhoka, a military review would simultaneously begin in the army parade grounds at Tundikhel, perhaps a quarter-mile south. Here, the king would appear in military uniform, accompanied by his family, the top leaders of the government, and the military top brass. The king would present colors to two regiments, and riflemen ringed around the Tundikhel would put on a precision firing display. Then several cannons would be fired, officially heralding the arrival of the royal *phulpatti* (and theoretically signaling to people living in earshot that they too should put leaf bundles into their own *Dasai ghars*).⁸ This event, referred to as Phulpatti Badai ("Salute to the Flowers/Leaves"), presented an opportunity for the king to appear as both head of the government and head of the army, and it was generally far better attended than the priestly procession. Following the military review, the king and queen would then be driven from the army parade grounds at Tundikhel to Hanuman Dhoka Palace to witness the actual installation of the Gorkha leaf tribute in the royal *Dasai ghar*. Once the king and queen arrived, a few rituals would be performed in the outer



FIGURE 6.1 *Phulpati* from Gorkha being welcomed at Hanuman Dhoka Palace, October 2010.

The ritual is being performed in front of the stone coronation platform (visible at right). The priest furthest foreground (right) is Raghu Nath Aryal, former assistant royal priest, who transferred to Hanuman Dhoka Museum and advised the president after 2008. The tall slender man mostly obscured by the furthest left priest is Dinnanath Bhattacharai, the Hanuman Dhoka employee who gave Dasai *tika* to the prime minister in 2007. (Photo by author)

courtyard (right in front of the stone coronation platform) and then the *phulpati* would be carried into the inner courtyard to the Dasai *ghar* itself. An army officer would sacrifice a male goat, the leaf bundle would be installed, the king and queen would have the opportunity to worship in their Dasai *ghar* and receive *tika* and *prasad*, and everyone would then disperse.

The ritually straightforward but logically complex observances on Phulpati day rhetorically accomplished several things for the monarchy. First, the performers of royal Phulpati took a common ritual observance (the collection of up to nine types of vegetation, and the installation of those leaves into a Dasai *ghar*) and embellished it into something suitable for the country's first family: having teams of priests collect the leaves in a different city, transporting the leaves half the length of the country, and greeting their arrival with a formal display by the national army. Second, the physical movement of the *phulpati* itself linked together the contemporary monarchy with two sites denoting its historical legitimacy, namely the Shah dynasty's original palace at Gorkha and the Kathmandu palace appropriated by the Shaha from the Mallas.⁹ Moreover, because Phulpati involved both a priest-oriented series of

rituals and a military ritual, the king was able to assert his royalty in two different registers through two different sets of idioms on the same occasion. Phulpati thus helped produce and sustain for the king both a technocratic, militarist identity and a Sanskritic, religious identity.

Animal Sacrifice

During Dasai, a significant number of rituals would also be performed at palaces not inhabited by the royal family and without any members of the royal family actually present. They were nevertheless performed on the royal family's behalf and financed under the national budget or through Narayanhiti Palace's discretionary spending and were thus part of the state-supported annual reproduction of monarchy. Two sets of animal sacrifices were directly connected to the Shah dynasty, one conducted at Hanuman Dhoka Palace in Kathmandu and one at the *durbar* in Gorkha. At both of these locations, animals were sacrificed by the dozen. In Kathmandu, the ideal was 54 male goats and 54 male water buffaloes (for an auspicious total of 108 animals) to be sacrificed on the "Black Night," while in Gorkha there was at least one animal sacrifice per day, culminating in a "Black Night" sacrifice of 27 water buffaloes. These sacrifices were overseen by government-employed priests, and in Kathmandu they were performed by members of the national army. The meat from the Kathmandu sacrifices was considered to belong to the king: some was sent to Narayanhiti Palace for the royal family's consumption, while the remainder could be distributed to (or claimed by, in recent years when the palace took little direct interest) collateral royal relatives or top members of the military.¹⁰ These sacrifices are recognizable elaborations of non-royal Dasai sacrifices. Whereas an ordinary family would sacrifice one animal and consume its meat within the household, the royal family required an extravagant number of animals killed, resulting in vast amounts of meat that could reinforce social relationships far beyond a single household.

Not all the animal sacrifices performed at palaces directly honored the ruling Shahs, however. Rather, a number of animal sacrifices and related Dasai rituals continued to be held in uninhabited palaces, many of which nominally belonged to the Shaha but which upheld the memories of local preconquest rulers. In Patan and Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley, in Phalabang in Dang district, in Kaskikot north of Pokhara, and in Isma in Gulmi district, local populations and local officials continued to conduct Dasai rituals in what remained of their pre-Shah royal palaces, performing and upholding idioms of monarchy centuries after the last local king had been present. In many of these cases, these Dasai rituals were presided over by descendants of local dynasties or the descendants of their royal priests, and often the tutelary deity of the local lineage would be the focal point of the observance (Kalika

in Kaskikot, Ratannath in Phalabang). These various long-uninhabited palaces thus remained active ritual spaces, and the rituals they hosted highlight the importance of Dasai to the regional assertion of royalty, as well as the capacity of rituals to sustain the social performance of kingship.¹¹

Administering Tika

In contrast to the animal sacrifices and assorted lead-up rituals, the occasion of Vijaya Dashami (“Victorious Tenth,” or “Tika Day”) centrally involved the living Shah king himself in the ritual proceedings and would provide an opportunity to assert a variety of the king’s social relationships. Vijaya Dashami also shifted the venue of ritual activity from uninhabited symbolic palaces to the kings’ modern residence and administrative center, Narayanhiti.

From at least the 1970s onward,¹² the royal family would begin the day on Vijaya Dashami by giving and receiving *tika* within the immediate family. In the morning, a delegation of palace priests would go to Hanuman Dhoka to worship at the royal Dasai *ghar* and retrieve the barley-sprout *jamara* planted there. They would bring back this *jamara* (and assorted *tika* and *prasad* materials) to Narayanhiti Palace, where they would administer *tika* to the king.¹³ This *tika* blessing was annually scheduled to occur at a maximally auspicious moment (*sait*), determined in advance by the royal astrologers based upon the king’s unique astrological chart.¹⁴ The king and queen would visit the dowager queen(s)—in particular, Mahendra’s widow, Queen Ratna, who lived in her own residence in the southeast corner of the Narayanhiti Palace compound—and the reigning king and queen would receive *tika* from the Shah family’s matriarch(s).¹⁵ Following these two exchanges where the king received blessings, he would switch roles and become the blessing giver. The king would begin by giving *tika* to his immediate family members (the queen, his children, his grandchildren), then the queen would give *tika* to the children and grandchildren, and so on down the line of the immediate family.¹⁶ Then the king and queen would offer *tika* to the Shah extended family. During Birendra’s time this would have been a fairly extensive group, including the king’s sisters and younger brothers with their spouses and children, the king’s aunts and cousins. Following the palace massacre, it would have been a far smaller and quieter affair, but still crucially important for Shah family solidarity.

Had the Shah family been any other family in Nepal, their *tikas* for the Vijaya Dashami day might well be over at this point, or they might have spent the rest of the day visiting close relatives’ houses (such as, perhaps, the queen’s birth relatives). But the royal family kept a different routine. Starting a little before noon, custom dictated that the upper leadership of the government would come to Narayanhiti

Palace to receive *tika* from the king: the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, the cabinet, the Speaker of the House, the head of the army, and so forth. Next, it was expected that anyone well placed in the government's central bureaucracy would also come to the palace to be blessed by the king.¹⁷ This procedure inscribed the king into a ritual relationship with government leaders analogous to that of a senior male birth relative and thus constructed relationships within the state apparatus as though the government were in fact a large family. Dasai thus performed a stability and inevitability of the political order, as though government were natural, biological, and hierarchical like families—or rather, like Dasai asserts families to be.

Following the royal blessing of the government, the south gates of Narayanhiti Palace would be opened (at around 2 or 3 p.m.) to anyone from the general public who cared to come. The king, queen, and crown prince would spend as many as seven to eight hours continuously administering *tika* to hundreds or thousands of their subjects (plus the occasional tourist), and people would wait many hours in line to have this personal interaction with one of the royals. As palace staff remember, people particularly wanted to receive *tika* from King Birendra in the 1990s, and by the end of Birendra's reign, the Dasai lines were so long that King Birendra would spend much of the following week with his elbow wrapped in athletic tape, overstressed from reaching out so many times to place *tika* on someone's forehead.¹⁸ Though the royals would from time to time take a brief break, the palace would remain open until the last person standing in line had been blessed. For many people living in Kathmandu, this access to the royal family at Dasai was of tremendous sentimental importance, and several people I talked to during my research proudly displayed to me the official photos of themselves receiving their Dasai *tika* from the king (Fig. 6.2).¹⁹ Receiving *tika* from the king at Dasai capitalized rhetorically on the lineage-based principles of the Vijaya Dashami blessing rituals and positioned the king and queen as the symbolic relatives of every single one of their subjects. (In fact, many people would have to forgo blessings from their actual biological kin in order to stand in line for hours at the palace.) This ritual of Dasai performed the king as being quite directly a “father” of his nation.

Visiting Goddess Temples

Following the major holiday of Vijaya Dashami and its marathon of *tika* giving, the final obligation of the royal family was to worship at local temples to different incarnations of the Goddess. This final dimension of the royal family's Dasai rituals is again an extension of non-royal rituals: most Hindu Nepalis visit at least one goddess temple during Dasai, and some people visit temples daily during the holiday. But the royal visits to local goddess temples departed from non-royal temple visits in both scope and formality.

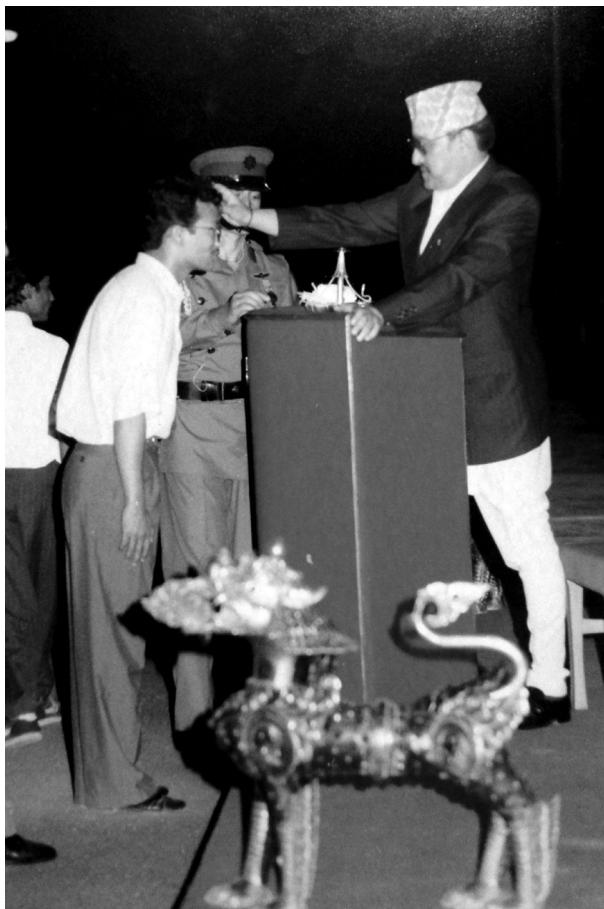


FIGURE 6.2 King Birendra giving Dasai *tika* to Mangal Krishna Manandhar, future head of the Indra Jatra Planning Committee, October 1999. (Photo from the personal collection of Mangal Krishna Manandhar)

The king and queen (sometimes accompanied by their children) would visit goddess temples on two different occasions during Dasai. First, on the eighth day of Dasai, the king and queen would visit Kathmandu's nine most prominent local goddess temples on the same day.²⁰ In preparation for this royal tour, the army would first clear each temple, and one army general would be stationed at each temple in advance of the royal couple to ensure each site's security and honor the importance of the royal visit, with the army chief attending the first and last temples of the program.²¹ The king and queen would be driven in a palace sedan to each site and would take as much time as they wished worshipping each goddess. These visits not only aligned the monarchy with the various deities and power centers of the Kathmandu Valley, they also reinforced the king's relationship with the leaders of his army, and

in some ways similar to the Phulpati military review knit together the king's military roles and relationships with his overtly religious roles and relationships.

Finally, the monarchy had quite recently developed the tradition, starting in the mid-1990s, of paying a visit to the Navadurga ("nine forms of Durga") temple in the city of Bhaktapur in the southeast corner of the Kathmandu Valley on the last official day of Dasai, Kojagrata Purnima. This annual trip to Bhaktapur began as part of King Birendra's support for the campaign to rebuild and revitalize the city as a center for traditional architecture and artisanship, and King Birendra had personally patronized the renovations of the Navadurga temple. The staff of the Navadurga temple then began inviting the king and queen to come annually to do *puja* during Dasai, the most potent time for goddess worship. Since it would be strange to add a tenth temple (and one in a separate city no less) to the more established nine-temple tour of Kathmandu, a separate visit was arranged to provide an official finish to the Dasai holiday week. While in some senses the monarchy's connection to the Navadurga temple was consistent with the observances of Dasai more generally, this royal visit to Bhaktapur was actually a new tradition, one that reinterpreted the Nepali king's traditional role as temple patron. In the case of this particular temple, the king was not financing a temple construction or refurbishing it out of his own piety, but rather he was participating in a broader community revitalization project funded largely through nongovernmental organizations and dependent upon international interests (including the German government and the World Heritage Foundation). Thus the new tradition of the king's worship at Bhaktapur's Navadurga temple celebrated the king not just as a devotee of the goddess but as a patron of Nepal's ongoing and complicated efforts at "development."

THE ARMY AND THE ROYAL DASAI

In addition to drawing the traditions of the royal family together with those of the government and the non-royal citizens of the country, the rituals of Dasai also repeatedly brought together the monarchy and the army, two institutions that were long understood to be mutually supportive and perhaps even mutually dependent. While the Nepali military was a part of the performance of the monarchy in many different ritual and ceremonial situations (see Fig. 2.3), there are certain ways in which Dasai in particular drew out the unique symbolic, ceremonial, and social relationships between the monarchy and the military.

Historically, the Shahs had several reasons to be close to the military. First, in the earliest years of the Nepali nation Shah kingship was reliant on military conquest, and Prithvi Narayan Shah was an able and active general. Even after the Shah kings had stopped being military men by training or profession, however, they continued

to be *related* to the upper leadership of the army. Shah younger sons and illegitimate children often pursued army careers, while during the Rana regime in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the entire upper leadership of the army was from the Rana family (and hence closely related to the Shah kings by marriage). In the post-Rana period, the king became the Commander in Chief of the Army and routinely appeared in public in military uniform; Crown Prince Dipendra underwent army training and qualified as a parachutist. The army leadership continued to be dominated by Ranas, Shah cousins, and a handful of other well-placed elite lineages (such as the Thapas²²) in the twentieth century, and perhaps on the strength of these biological and marital relationships, the army leadership frequently mixed socially with the royal family. Most notably, the army leadership annually hosted the king at a black-tie dinner party on his birthday. The practice of having the king give *tika* to the leaders of the army at Dasai was thus a statement of close social (sometime actual biological) relationship, placing the daily leaders of the military forces in the ritualized hierarchy of the king's kin/political relationships, and in turn asserting the king's status as not only the only person who could mobilize troops but also the ceremonial patriarch of all the forces.

In public, the army was part of the pageantry of nearly every royal ritual. All the local Newar rituals tied to the monarchy (including Indra Jatra and the chariot festival of Machindranath) involved the army's eighteenth-century ceremonial regiment, the Guruju-ko Paltan, and rituals where the king was actually present generally had substantial numbers of army personnel present, both in ceremonial roles and for security. In addition, several of the king's annual ceremonial appearances were explicitly army occasions, notably Ghode Jatra (a horse festival and military show), Phulpati Badai, and Army Day (which falls on the religious holiday of Shiva Ratri). Phulpati Badai and Army Day in particular are notable in that they both involve a military review marking a day that is otherwise religiously significant. For both events, the king would begin the day by presiding over a display of the military's personnel, hardware, and abilities, and then he would leave the military parade ground to observe or perform an explicitly Hindu ritual at one of the centuries-old sites of monarchial authority (Hanuman Dhoka in the case of Phulpati, Pashupatinath Temple in the case of Shiva Ratri). Through these ceremonial occasions—specifically through the fact that the king participated in *both* the military review and the religious rituals—the monarchy was able to perform a dual identity: one militarist and modernist, and one self-consciously traditionalist, religious, and archaic. The king, through these twinned ceremonies, was marked as king simultaneously by the idioms of limousines, fancy military uniforms, and aides de-camp on the one hand, and walking processions, red cloth parasols, *dhoti*-clad brahmins, incense, and mantras on the other.

Phulpati and Army Day thus serve as excellent examples of the ways distinct, apparently unrelated practices could be “stitched together” through the presence of the king. The army’s artillery has nothing to do with a red cloth parasol, the cavalry has nothing to do with a Shiva *linga*, generals have nothing to do with priests—except for the fact that these objects and people were oriented through annual practices around the person of the king. Events such as Phulpati thus demonstrate the ways in which Nepal’s monarchy was not constructed as a monolithic, homogenous social office: rather, the force and persuasiveness of the monarchy rested on the blending together of the king’s plural social roles and relationships, often by combining the ceremonies of religious professionals with the ceremonies of nonreligious specialists, such as military professionals. By visually pairing the king first with the leaders of the government/military and then with teams of priests—by showing the king as both the head of the modern army/bureaucracy and the descendant of Nepal’s centuries-old monarchies—rituals such as Phulpati argued that the modern king could comfortably inhabit and represent both Nepal’s past and Nepal’s present.

It is not the case, however, that a secular military was simply appropriated into priestly rituals at Dasai. Rather, the military itself also performed overtly religious rituals—with and without the royal priests—over the course of the year and at Dasai in particular. Each regiment of the army possesses a set of cloth flags on a pole—the regimental colors, which were bestowed on the regiment by the king during Dasai—venerated throughout the year as a representation of Durga, and each regiment has a Hindu priest attached to it to do *puja* to the colors on behalf of the regiment. This religious activity would culminate in the annual celebration of Dasai: regiments would have Dasai *ghars* of their own, and regimental priests would celebrate Phulpati, thereby appropriating and deploying lineage-oriented symbolism within the army itself, to suggest that the military was like a family. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, regiments posted in Kathmandu would hold a major annual animal sacrifice in the Kot courtyard (which had been the site of the 1846 coup, which brought the Rana family to power), and each officer was expected to contribute at least one animal to be sacrificed to his regimental colors. Once the animals had been dispatched, a high-ranking army officer then dipped his hands in a basin of the animals’ blood and marked each flag with a pair of bloody handprints.²³ While the practice of requiring officers to pay for large numbers of sacrificial animals seems to have been suspended, the yellow banners that serve as regimental standards continue to bear blood-colored handprints into the present. The treatment of the regimental colors represents a deeply ingrained but publicly little-acknowledged remnant of Nepal’s “Hindu state,” even in the years after the proclamation of secular democracy. Dasai thus allowed the army to play out its internal social relationships and endorse a Hindu orientation beyond its roles supporting the king’s activities.

ROYAL DASAI RITUALS IN HISTORY

While it is difficult to conclusively locate a point or time period of origin for royal Dasai practices, it seems likely that Dasai was practiced in caste Hindu communities in the middle hill (*pahadi*) regions of Nepal prior to unification, and that it was celebrated as a political ritual in multiple pre-Shah principalities. There are numerous pre-unification non-Shah palaces across the country where Dasai rituals continued to be upheld into the modern period, in ways that are often idiosyncratic and do not match centralized Shah traditions. It is possible that these communities (including Patan, Bhaktapur, Kaskikot, Phalabang, Argha, and Isma²⁴), which were once ruled by their own *rajas*, began celebrating Dasai during the Shah period and for some reason chose to stage rituals in abandoned royal buildings, but it seems far more likely that these Dasai observances date to the periods when local *rajas* ruled in each palace. If so, these Dasai celebrations would represent high levels of local ritual inertia—evidence of people's inclinations to uphold ritual observances long after the disappearance of the focal point of those observances. Moreover, given that clearly cognate holidays existed across Indian royal courts (such as Dossehra in Orissa or Dasara in Mysore, over 1,500 miles away from Kathmandu²⁵), dating back to the pre-Shah era, it seems plausible that state-level Dasai in Nepal developed as part of a broader heritage of practices shared across the Himalayan foothills and the broader premodern Indian subcontinent.

More important for present purposes, however, is the fact that Dasai played a key role in the political integration of the unified, postconquest Nepali state. From the nineteenth into the early twentieth century, Dasai was the primary annual practice through which the central government ritualized control over its peripheral territories. Shah regional deputies (*subba*) received *tika* from their superiors and then administered it at the village level, integrating and subordinating local power relationships and nondominant ethnic groups into the centralized state.²⁶ Soldiers were deployed across the country to enforce Dasai celebrations during the Rana period, and “when Athparia Rais in Dhankuta refused to celebrate the festival . . . two leaders of this protest were shot.”²⁷ Dasai was also crucial for the administration of the central government, providing the occasion for the practice of *pajani*—a tradition particularly crucial during the Rana period, when it served as “une sacralisation du centralisme autoritaire du régime.”²⁸ *Pajani* was the event at which the head of the government (or, at the lower levels, his deputies) would appoint, reconfirm, promote, or fire every civil servant and military officer in the government’s employ, and it was always scheduled for the week of Dasai.²⁹ This meant that the king’s practice of blessing representatives of the government and military on Vijaya Dashami was not just a vague, empty gesture of symbolic relationship but a potent gesture

interwoven with the practical staffing of the entire state apparatus. The king asserted himself through Dasai as the apex of a hierarchical system of not just deference but actual employment, structured along lines of patronage.

After the fall of the Rana regime in the mid-twentieth century, state-level Dasai underwent a few changes. *Pajani* was discontinued, and soldiers stopped patrolling the hinterlands to ensure appropriate celebration. Dasai nevertheless remained a core practice integrating the central state, particularly under King Mahendra's *panchayat* program. Dasai continued to be deployed to integrate local leaders into the national government: not only did national leaders have to receive *tika* from the hand of the king himself, but up until the 1990 People's Movement, regional or local political leaders were expected to receive and dispense *tika*, thereby extending the political hierarchy from the center out to all peripheries. In Dang (the future home of the Maoist insurgency), the local *panchayat* leader would receive *tika* on Vijaya Dashami not only from his bureaucratic superior but also from a priest in the former local royal palace, while in Argha the head of every household was expected to go on Vijaya Dashami to receive *tika* from the local government administrator (the *talukdar*).³⁰ Dasai was particularly useful to the *panchayat* ideology of the 1960s and 1970s because of its ethnic valences: as perhaps the paradigmatically middle hills (*parbatiya*) Hindu holiday, it matched the nationalist ideology being embraced and enforced by the central state. In this regard, Dasai performed the nation exactly as King Mahendra envisioned it under his *panchayat* system: as an integrated, hierarchical, ethnically and religiously homogeneous system with the king at the top/center—a system that also extended out to every village to bring the country into a single whole.

The mandatory participation of local politicians in Dasai blessings was suspended after the dissolution of the *panchayat* system in 1990, and so the political valences of the holiday softened somewhat in the last two decades of the monarchy. Those political valences were never unimportant, however. The top leaders of the government and military continued to come to Narayanhit right up until Janandolan II in 2006 to be blessed by the king, for example, and many of the minority ethnic movements that flourished after 1990 encouraged people to discontinue Dasai practices as a rejection of traditional Kathmandu-centric forms of nationalism and power.³¹

Beyond this, as much as Dasai mattered for the construction and assertion of the Nepali state, it also may have been personally meaningful for King Gyanendra. Gyanendra is, according to accounts of those who know him personally, a highly devout man, very serious about Hindu worship, and particularly diligent about making blood sacrifices to Hindu goddesses. Not only would Dasai likely resonate with his personal religiosity, Gyanendra treasured the historic legacy of the Shah family, and he had a particular affinity for his family's ancestral palace at Gorkha—so

much so that during his half-decade reign he went to Gorkha to stay and worship at the Gorkha palace more times than his brother Birendra had gone in the preceding thirty years, and he made a point to celebrate part of his first Dasai as king in Gorkha³²—and so it is likely that the holiday celebrating the dynasty's roots in Gorkha had particular importance for him. Dasai also includes the tradition of allowing the general public into the palace for *tika* from the monarch. Gyanendra (despite his overwhelmingly negative media image) has been described by his staff and advisors as having been far more interested in interacting personally with “the people” than his predecessors, and he was the first king of Nepal to plunge into crowds to “shake hands and kiss babies” (much to the chagrin of his security detail).³³ So even though Gyanendra’s Dasai *tika* giving at Narayanhiti Palace never attracted quite the same crowds as his brother’s, it is probable that Gyanendra appreciated having people come to receive his blessing. This means that it may well have been a poignant personal blow to see his Dasai rituals, too, come under attack.

DASAI 2006

In 2006, Dasai fell at the beginning of October, nearly six months after the April revolution. In the intervening months, however, the king had appeared in public only a handful of times (each time for the performance of one of his royal ritual responsibilities), and while he had remained sequestered in Narayanhiti Palace the interim government had been gaining traction. By the time Dasai arrived, several royal rituals had already been observed since the revolution, and the interim government had already established its first-phase response to these events: the king would be allowed to participate as he had in previous years, though members of the ruling parties and especially current members of the government would not appear publicly with him, and the king’s activities would receive the least possible official notice and press coverage.

Accordingly, in 2006, royal Dasai rituals received grudging official permission to continue, tempered with an attempt to separate the government as best as possible from any official state ceremonies. Animal sacrifices were conducted as usual, and the king and queen visited the requisite goddess temples according to past protocol. Phulpati was celebrated basically as usual in 2006, though to date I have located no press coverage acknowledging it. Based on the somewhat vague recollections of organizers (taken together with an understanding of the government’s more general policy at the time), it appears that the Gorkha Durbar dispatched the leaf-bundle tribute as usual; when it reached Kathmandu, the *phulpati* was greeted by the usual procession of palace priests and escorted to Hanuman Dhoka. The army too offered a standard but somewhat muted review

program to celebrate the leaf bundle's arrival. King Gyanendra did go to Hanuman Dhoka as usual—but since he had been demoted from being Commander in Chief of the Army, he was disinvited from the Tundikhel review beforehand. No high ranking member of the government appears to have attended either Hanuman Dhoka or the review, and neither event received wide press coverage.

Where Dasai 2006 significantly changed—and, more importantly, demonstrated the government's emerging resistance to past traditions—was on Vijaya Dashami, Tika Day. The king still received blessings from the palace priests (with *tika* and *jamara* from the Dasai *ghar* at Hanuman Dhoka), and he still blessed his own family in the palace. He also offered his blessing to any member of the government and the general public who wanted it—though attendance at the palace was unusually low. Few bureaucrats came to be blessed, and not a single ranking member of the parliament or administration attended. In addition, far fewer members of the general public showed up for the king's blessing than in many past years. Even the army chief (who did go) decided to attend the palace in civilian dress rather than military uniform,³⁴ suggesting there was pressure to sever institutional ties between the military and the palace, even if individual officers still held relationships or attachments to the king. The only people who showed up at Narayanhiti Palace in droves were those retired government leaders (particularly from the time of Gyanendra's own direct administration) who by virtue of being out of office could be seen at the palace without fear of professional repercussions and were thus prepared to risk advertising their allegiance to the king.

Perhaps to underline his resistance to palace-centric Dasai traditions, Prime Minister Koirala not only did not come to Narayanhiti to be blessed by the king, but he left Kathmandu altogether and spent the holidays instead with his relatives in his hometown of Biratnagar.³⁵ There, he received blessings from his aunt and older sister-in-law and served in turn as patriarch not just to his junior relatives but to a significant number of government officials, Nepali Congress party members, and some people from the general public, who showed up at the Koirala house on Vijaya Dashami in a minor parallel to the traditional attendance at the palace. Koirala's Dasai celebration reflected the growing rift between the administration and the palace and the increasing momentum behind the premiership. No longer was the prime minister even notionally dependent on a relationship with the king for anything. By denying the king the opportunity to give the prime minister a blessing, Koirala denied the monarchy the opportunity to reproduce any kind of hierarchical position over the premiership. While the king was still permitted to offer his blessings to those who volunteered to take it, no longer would he be able to serve ritually as the patriarch of the government, and no longer would anyone employed by the state be required or even encouraged to seek it.

By the time Dasai came around again in 2007, the political situation had shifted dramatically and the government had been implementing its new policy toward royal ritual for nearly five months. This meant a new status quo was firmly in place for once-royal rituals: in place of the king, the government was sending Interim Prime Minister G. P. Koirala to all public rituals and ceremonies, and the prime minister's office was doing its best to block the king from attending events in any parallel or unofficial capacity. By the time of Dasai, the new protocol was already tested and established, and it was clearly understood on all sides that the king would be replaced at public ritual events by the prime minister as "head of state." The question for Dasai 2007, therefore, was not *whether* the prime minister would replace the king, but *how*.

The actual execution of the administration's policy during Dasai raised some rather thorny issues, however, insofar as royal Dasai rituals had long blurred the boundaries between family rituals and state rituals. This blurring was of course neither accident nor oversight. Rather, it was part of the basic logic of kingship, which conflates political power with family, lineage, and biological processes. Up until the Janandolan in 2006, the royal family was *both* a family *and* the source of the government's sovereignty, and so major events in the royal family were also major events in the life of the state: births, weddings, deaths, birthdays, lineage holidays. Dasai in particular conflated celebrations of the Shah lineage with celebrations of the state, positioning the king as patriarch in chief to the nation. This ideology was staged by having the king administer *tika* to all high-ranking members of the government, as well as by having state resources expended to bringing a leaf-bundle tribute from Gorkha and then arranging for the national army to welcome its arrival.

Now, though, it was suddenly complicated to determine when the prime minister (as "head of state") should take over from the king, and when the royals should be left alone to celebrate a family holiday. Clearly it would be strange for the prime minister to visit Dowager Queen Ratna to receive her blessing on Tika Day, and clearly it was now inappropriate for the king to appear as the head of the army for the Phulpati military review, but there were several practices in between where there was quite a bit of ambiguity. For example, was the barley-sprout *jamara* in the Dasai *ghar* at Hanuman Dhoka grown for the king as a member of the Shah family or for the king as the head of state responsible for blessing all of the government's ministers? If the former, then the barley sprouts should just be sent privately to Gyanendra at Narayanhit Palace. If the latter, then it should be sent officially to the prime minister.

Interestingly, it does not seem to have been seriously considered that perhaps barley sprouts ought not be grown in a renationalized historic property of the

Department of Archaeology, or that the *phulpati* should no longer be sent from Gorkha: instead, as in the previous adjustments of royal ritual, the interim government appears to have been committed to the idea that all the rituals performed in the past ought to continue to be performed—but that they should be adjusted to excise the king. Thus the only two options under consideration for Dasai were whether the king should be allowed to participate in some abbreviated or privatized form of the various rituals or whether all the king's roles should be performed by the prime minister. Accordingly, the rituals of Dasai were largely upheld in 2007. The Kal Ratri animal sacrifices were performed at Hanuman Dhoka as usual, for example: 108 goats and buffalo were purchased by the Guti Samsthān and sacrificed in the courtyard adjacent to the northern Taleju temple. Presumably these sacrifices could go unchallenged because although they were tied to the monarchy, the king himself was never present, giving the government no opportunity to act directly against him—and the government had relatively little political will to address monarchy practices peripheral to the actual behaviors and entitlements of the king.³⁶ The Dasai holiday rituals were, however, crucially altered and contested at three points when the king was supposed to be present: the reception of the *phulpati* tribute in Kathmandu, the administration of *tika* blessings to members of the government, and the final visit to Navadurga temple in Bhaktapur. In these three events—and the continuities that were permitted amidst the alterations—the ambiguities of Dasai became clear, as did multiple levels of accommodation and resistance between the interim government and the palace.

Phulpati

On Phulpati day in 2007, the main ritual gestures were performed much as usual. The leaf-bundle tribute was dispatched from Gorkha, it was welcomed in Kathmandu by a procession that took it to Hanuman Dhoka, and the occasion was marked by a military review at the army parade grounds. However, rather than having the king as the single figure uniting the various ceremonies, in 2007 the observances were split between the king and the prime minister. Prime Minister Koirala appeared at the military review, the far more public portion of the day's events, and the ceremony that had previously emphasized connections between the monarchy and the military—connections that the interim government continued to criticize, and that the military leadership was now at pains to downplay and deny. Thus, it was Prime Minister Koirala who appeared on the army parade ground, surrounded by representatives from his cabinet and the leaders of all the security forces. He presented colors to two regiments, and he observed the precision firing display. Unlike the king in past years, however, the prime minister appeared at the

event in civilian clothes rather than in a military dress uniform. After all, Koirala had no military background himself, and the interim constitution had left the ultimate leadership of the army ambiguous: it had stripped the king of his role as commander in chief, but it had not named a new commander. The staging of the Dasai military review for 2007 thus suggested not an army led by its commanding king, but a working partnership between a civilian government and the military leadership.

Meanwhile, as the military was saluting the arrival of the *phulpati*, the leaf bundle itself was making its way to Hanuman Dhoka, where it would be greeted by the king and queen. King Gyanendra and Queen Komal had been brought to Hanuman Dhoka discreetly in a dark sedan to witness the installation of the tribute into the Dasai *ghar* and to worship at the *ghar* as they saw fit. The royal couple stayed at Hanuman Dhoka for some forty minutes and then returned to Narayanhiti Palace.³⁷ The fact that they were permitted this visit suggests that the interim government considered the Dasai *ghar* a Shah family ritual space, and saw the visit as too private to be of any threat to the government. (After all, the general public can easily witness the military review and the parade bringing the leaf bundle to Hanuman Dhoka, but they are not allowed into Hanuman Dhoka itself during the *phulpati's* installation.) Both the military review and the *phulpati* installation attracted rallies, however. At the army parade grounds, the prime minister was greeted by a vocal but peaceful group of Maoists protesting his participation in a ceremony upholding the Hindu state. At Hanuman Dhoka, the royal couple was greeted by a small group of Maoists demonstrating against the continued existence of the monarchy—and also by a small group of pro-monarchy supporters waving flags and chanting slogans in their support.³⁸ All the ritual steps were completed, but they were examined and in several quarters explicitly approved or disapproved in ways they would never have been during the years when the monarchy was institutionally stable.

Tika Blessings

By the time of Vijaya Dashami—the *tika*-giving day—it was clear that even though the king would be offering *tika* at Narayanhiti Palace, the entire current government would be boycotting the event, down even to low-level civil servants, and that all active politicians and bureaucrats would be receiving blessings instead from the prime minister at his official residence. However, even this was not sufficient for the top-level political leadership. The prime minister's office issued a directive, giving notice that not only would the prime minister be offering *tika* to government officials and the public from his official residence in Kathmandu but he would take the priest-administered blessing from the Dasai *ghar* at Hanuman Dhoka. In other words, instead of having palace priests worship in the royal Dasai *ghar* and bring

back barley sprouts for the blessings of the royal family at the palace, the palace priests were now expected to reroute their labors to the prime minister instead.

This plan to take over the king's initial blessing from the Shah's ancestral *Dasai ghar* was officially based on the premise that since the government paid for the *Dasai ghar*, its contents, and the now-uninhabited palace that housed it (Hanuman Dhoka, a property of the Department of Archaeology), then the *Dasai ghar* itself was a "state" *Dasai ghar* and not the private property of the king. This was, confusingly, in direct conflict with the apparent rationale for allowing King Gyanendra and Queen Komal to go to Hanuman Dhoka three days previously on Phulpati, though by this point in the king's demotion, the switch may just have been a personal snub. The problem with the plan, however, was that—unlike most other rituals where the government had been positioned to control or influence the procedures and personnel involved—the blessing from the Hanuman Dhoka *Dasai ghar* was annually carried out by the priests employed at the palace. These priests were men who were appointed based on their ancestors' historical associations with the royal family: men who did not directly answer to the government and who did not want to cooperate in any move that contributed to the takedown of the institution of monarchy.

To address this difficulty, the government invited the top-level palace priests (the Bada Rajguru, the Nayab Rajguru, and the Mul Purohit) to come to Hanuman Dhoka a few days in advance for a meeting.³⁹ The first two insisted that they were only ever present when the king received his blessing at the palace—which is to say, they were not the people who retrieved the barley sprouts, and not the people who actually administered the blessing, and furthermore they had no intention of adjusting their roles in order to administer a blessing to the prime minister. The Mul Purohit apparently demurred that although he *was* the one who gave the king the actual blessing, he was not the person to bring the barley sprouts from Hanuman Dhoka to Narayanhiti, since he didn't handle anything outside of the palace; also, since he didn't handle anything outside the palace, he too claimed that it was not his responsibility to go to the prime minister's residence. The government did apparently secure a promise from the three men that *some* priest from the palace would come on the morning of Vijaya Dashami to take care of the necessary ritual duties, and that this priest would be qualified and willing to administer the state blessing to Koirala.

On Vijaya Dashami, a palace priest dutifully showed up at Hanuman Dhoka.⁴⁰ He put on his ritual white-cloth *dhoti* and performed the requisite worship sequence, but then the priest "changed his clothes and immediately hurried back to the palace,"⁴¹ leaving the government in the lurch. There were (probably) no barley sprouts and official blessing on the way to the king, but neither were there barley

sprouts and an official blessing on the way to the prime minister. This created something of a panic at Hanuman Dhoka, as the government administrators present scrambled to salvage some kind of official blessing for the prime minister in the absence of the expected palace ritual specialist. Fortunately for the government, however, the administrative office of Hanuman Dhoka had a trained brahmin priest on the staff, Dinnanath Bhattarai, who had originally applied to the Narayanhiti Palace priesthood and been denied. Bhattarai was not on the Hanuman Dhoka staff as a priest, though: he was a low-level office functionary, on hand to run errands or fetch tea. He did freelance as a priest in his spare time, however, and he had done some minor priestly jobs at Narayanhiti Palace when they needed extra hands.⁴² He was not ideal, but he was basically qualified to serve the role, and he had the advantage of being present and willing to do so.

So Bhattarai collected some barley sprouts from the Dasai *ghar*, together with an offering of uncooked rice and some red *tika* powder, and got into the car that had been sent by the Home Ministry to take the palace priest to the prime minister's residence. Bhattarai was then driven to the premier's residence and ushered into an upstairs receiving room where the prime minister was waiting with an aide. Bhattarai presented his barley sprouts and rice to the prime minister and gave him a *tika* blessing. Then Koirala directed his aide to give the priest some money as an offering. The aide pulled out a thousand-rupee note (an extraordinarily generous amount of money for a priest to receive⁴³), and Bhattarai returned to the waiting car to be driven back to Hanuman Dhoka. It seems probable that the prime minister had no idea that Bhattarai was a last-minute stand-in for the palace priest who had refused to come.⁴⁴

Over the course of the rest of the day the prime minister's official residence was open to both members of the government and the general public to come for *tika*. The members of the government duly attended; few members of the general public came, whether from lack of publicity or because they simply had not built up a habit to even consider visiting the prime minister during Dasai. To the displeasure of the interim government, Narayanhiti Palace, too, opened its doors for public blessings, but no one from the ruling government or active military attended, and the showing of general citizens was modest. The old order was not entirely overturned, but Tika Day had expanded the prime minister's role yet again and ascribed to him a new identity. Not only was the prime minister the powerful executive head of the government, the ceremonial head of state, and the individual blessed by the Kumari to rule the country for the coming year, he was also now suggested to be the patriarch of the government and the nation. The state-endorsed ideology had shifted, even if the practices crafting that ideology were not entirely systematically reworked.

Visit to Bhaktapur

In the past, the king's last-day visit to the Navadurga temple in Bhaktapur had been a low-level public appearance, and since it had been instituted scarcely a decade earlier by King Birendra and simply upheld by King Gyanendra, it was not an especially noteworthy part of the king's calendar. But in 2007, the prime minister's office decided that this temple visit was a state function, and so the prime minister ought to go to Bhaktapur in the king's place.

For the occasion, the government arranged the highest-level special security for the prime minister's motorcade. They also coordinated for a crowd of government employees and Nepali Congress party activists to stand outside the temple, to cheer the prime minister and welcome him with music.⁴⁵ Inside the temple, however, in the lower courtyard, the priests and caretakers of the temple sat in sullen silence as the prime minister and his entourage made their way upstairs to the goddess's second-floor sanctum.⁴⁶ No one attempted to stop the prime minister, however, and he worshipped the goddess undisturbed. Koirala exited the temple and stood on the steps to be photographed waving at the crowd, wearing a prominent *tika* and a flower garland (usually given as a symbol of welcome). The prime minister then returned to his motorcade and was driven back to his official residence.

As soon as the prime minister arrived home, someone sent word to Narayanhit Palace that the state visit to the temple was completed, and King Gyanendra got in his own car to go to Bhaktapur. The king was traveling with what was described later as "general security," suggesting that Gyanendra's trip to Bhaktapur had been sanctioned by the Home Ministry and that the police were cooperating with the palace. Moreover, someone in the Kathmandu municipal office had notified Maoist street leaders to expect the king to leave the palace that day, indicating that the Home Ministry was well aware of the king's program.⁴⁷ Based on this information, as soon as the king and queen left the palace, youth cadres from the paramilitary YCL gathered to shout anti-king slogans in the middle of the street near the village of Timi—a location just before where the Kathmandu/Bhaktapur road splits into two, thus effectively blocking both of the king's possible routes to the Navadurga temple. The royal motorcade drove straight into the protest, and a few bricks were thrown at the king's car. The security team managed to squeeze through the crowd before anyone was injured, but the YCL protestors persisted in clogging the roads for another hour or so, possibly in the hopes of intimidating the king on his return or preventing him from leaving Bhaktapur at all. Eventually, the local traffic police in Timi contacted the Kathmandu police, who sent a team of riot personnel to disperse the Maoist youths' demonstration.⁴⁸

When the king and queen eventually arrived at the Navadurga temple, the government-organized welcome for the prime minister had dispersed (or perhaps

been purposefully dispersed), and there was almost no one on hand to greet the royal couple. The temple's priests and caretakers, however, stood and applauded the royals as they entered the courtyard, and took the opportunity to chat briefly with the king.⁴⁹ The king and queen went upstairs and worshipped Navadurga in her sanctum, and returned back downstairs. After waiting a few minutes in the courtyard for their motorcade to obtain security clearance from the traffic police, the king and queen were driven back to Narayanhit Palace.

In some ways, this moment resembled the double visit of prime minister and king at Indra Jatra the month before, when the king showed up at the Kumari House some two hours after the prime minister to insist upon receiving his own blessing. But at Indra Jatra, the king's visit had been clearly subversive. It had been planned and executed without the advance knowledge or permission of the interim government, it had allowed the king to receive a blessing the government didn't want him to have (ostensibly authorizing another year's reign), and it had infuriated the prime minister. This visit at Dasai, however, does not seem to have constituted such an act of resistance. The visit to the Navadurga temple was not nearly as central to the ideology of the monarchy as the Indra Jatra *tika* from the Kumari, and so from the outset the stakes were far lower. Also, once the king arrived at the Navadurga temple, his supporters were not powerful local leaders, but quite minor temple functionaries. Most importantly, however, it seems that the interim government had known about and sanctioned the king's intended visit in advance—and had probably even coordinated the king's security.

This invites the question: why would the interim government have permitted the king to shadow the prime minister like this? It is possible that government leaders simply did not wish to expend the energy to stop him, but there is another intriguing possibility. It is entirely possible that the interim administration actually allowed (maybe encouraged) Gyanendra to go to the Navadurga temple for the express purpose of creating an opportunity to embarrass him. The government (or the political parties) had obviously worked to stage “the people welcoming the prime minister,” and the press dutifully reported that “hundreds of people” had cheered Prime Minister Koirala as he inserted himself into the ritual role of the king. By contrast, not only was there no crowd at the temple waiting for the king, but his route was clogged with Maoist protestors, who had been tipped off by Home Ministry employees, imperiling not just the king's schedule but possibly his safety. In other words, it is entirely possible that the interim government *wanted* King Gyanendra to visit the Navadurga temple because it could give them an opportunity to engineer a publicity stunt. Since one of the purposes of royal rituals was to show “the people” to the king and the king to “the people,” it would be politically beneficial to arrange a ritual event in which “the people” could be clearly shown to prefer the prime minister to

the king. Such an event could go a long way toward further undercutting the monarchy and authorizing the interim government's political program.

By the time of the last day of Dasai in 2007, the interim government had not really needed to act especially decisively against the king. Its position was already clearly ascendant: it had already captured control of the state apparatus and had already demonstrated that it could take any practice or prerogative away from the king that it exerted itself to do, including the most traditionalist rituals of the royal calendar. Yet not only did the administration feel obliged to act against the king at Dasai, it also found several of its initiatives frustrated, despite its decisive advantages. The palace priest refused to bless the prime minister (even though the palace was supposed to cooperate with the government, and even though the staff of the palace had nominally been nationalized into the government's civil service), and for Phulpati and for the giving and receiving of *tika*, it turned out to be awkward to insert the prime minister in the king's place. Dasai rituals had, after all, blurred the boundaries (or perhaps denied the existence of boundaries) between the king's political life and family life, his public persona and his private self, in ways that confounded the efforts to simply transfer those rituals to someone else.

Dasai rituals, like all the other royal rituals, put forward arguments about the social position of the king: that he was the scion of the Shah dynasty, that he was a devout worshipper of goddesses, that he had a privileged relationship with the army, and that he stood as patriarch to the government and to his subjects more generally. Together with the other rituals, privileges, and routine practices of the monarchy, Dasai formed part of the complex web of practices that constituted royal office. This plurality of interrelated roles and identities had created a density of meaning for the office of monarchy—rendered it rich and compelling, nuanced and “real”—and it was the very complexity and diversity of royal practices that had helped render the person of the king himself socially unique, that argued that he was uniquely necessary to the proper functioning of government and society. For example, in the case of Phulpati, it was only through the person of the king that there was any plausible relationship between a bundle of leaves collected in Gorkha, a procession of priests to a property belonging to the Department of Archaeology, and a precision military display. Royal practices were a more or less integrated system only insofar as they were all directed toward the king. But when the interim government sought to unmake the monarchy and disconnect the person of the king from the practices that had rendered him king, the basic logic of the system began to deteriorate. The various royal practices did not have coherent relationships to one another outside of the monarchy or the person of the king. The practices of Dasai were upheld, but it stopped being clear who should perform them or why they should be performed at all.

7

Conclusion

IN THE YEARS since 2008—when the constituent assembly dissolved the monarchy and dismissed the former king and queen from the palace—there has continued to be change and adjustment within the Nepali state. There have been six separate administrations in six years, headed alternately by the Maoists, the moderate UML, the Nepali Congress, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who presided over a nonpartisan government to oversee national elections in 2013. Narayanhiti Palace was opened as a public museum in February 2009, and senior statesman Girija Prasad Koirala died in March 2010. The Maoists became sufficiently mainstream that Chairman Prachanda has become nearly as well known by his birth name (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) as by his *nom de guerre*, and both he and Maoist second-in-command Dr. Baburam Bhattarai have served terms as prime minister. The country continues at time of writing to be governed under the 2007 Interim Constitution, since the 2008 Constituent Assembly and the more recently elected 2014 Constituent Assembly have still, at the time of writing, been unable to finalize and ratify a new foundational document.

After nearly a year of voluntary isolation at their mountain retreat, Gyanendra and Komal Shah returned to their private residence in downtown Kathmandu, where they have generally maintained a low profile. While the Home Ministry monitors their movements, they are not under house arrest, nor has there been any effort to expel them from the country. They have traveled abroad on a few occasions for social and family reasonsⁱ while maintaining their primary residence in Nepal. The

former king has appeared at occasional public ritual functions at the invitations of organizers (often royalists), but he has been blocked by the government from participating in any of the rituals formerly important to the performance of the monarchy, and so his ritual activities have been confined to either single-occasion commissioned rites (*yagyas*) or a handful of appearances at calendrical rituals that the Shahs had not previously frequented. The former royal couple upholds some of the old palace practices at their private residence, however: they open their gate to the public on Vijaya Dashami and on Gyanendra's birthday, so that anyone interested can walk up the driveway to receive *tika* or wish the ex-king well (Fig. 7.1). They thus appear interested in defending or rebuilding the last vestiges of royal position through ritual, but have had limited ability to do so, and so for most of the year, the Shahs maintain their privacy at home.

In the post-2008 absence of a king, the ritual performance of the state has fallen into new hands. Prime Minister Koirala notably seized the public ritual roles of the king in 2007, but the premier actually performed this function for only a single year (or single annual cycle of practices). Following the 2008 elections, the new Constituent Assembly amended the interim constitution to add a presidency to the structure of the national government in order to split the executive and ceremonial leadership. In one sense, this was a restoration of a previous balance of power. The 1990 Constitution had allocated executive leadership to the prime minister and

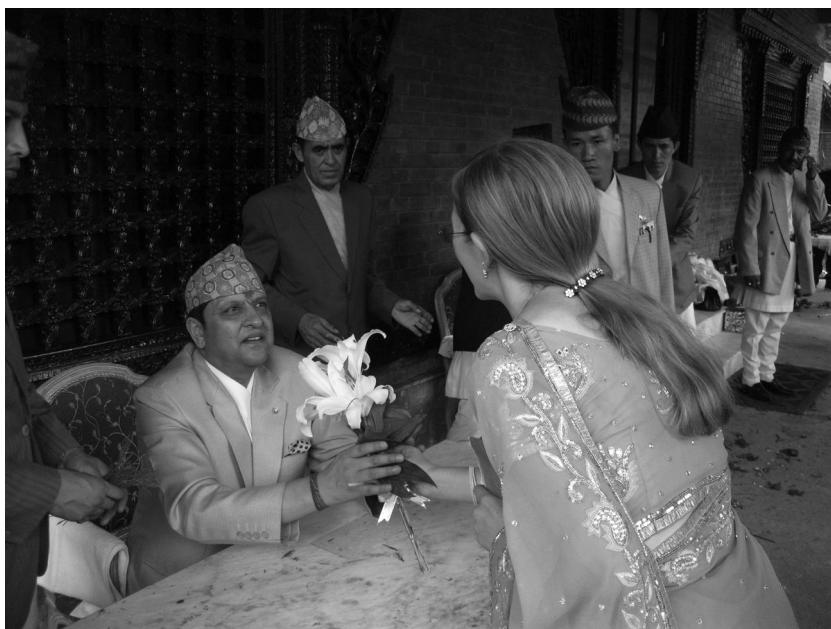


FIGURE 7.1 Author greeting ex-King Gyanendra at his house on the occasion of his sixty-third birthday, July 2010. (Photo by Bryan Mocko)

ceremonial leadership to the king, but then the king had seized both in 2005, and the prime minister had seized first one and then the other over the course of the interim period. The new arrangement in 2008 once again disaggregated the two roles, but this time, in the absence of the king, the new president would take the role as ceremonial head of state. The duties of the president would primarily include the ceremonial roles that the king used to uphold, and that the prime minister had only lately appropriated: the president would swear ranking members of government into office, receive credentials from diplomats, entertain foreign heads of state, and perform state rituals. The presidency would not entirely substitute for the monarchy, however, for not all of the ceremonial idioms of kingship would be transferred to him: he would not, for example, appear on the national currency or command the army. The creation of the presidency thus represented an important new configuration of the Nepali state.

In early July 2008, the Constituent Assembly elected as Nepal's first president Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, the general secretary of the Nepali Congress. Dr. Yadav had enjoyed a moderately distinguished political career (including serving as Minister of Health in the 1990s), but he had never had a major national profile and had not played a prominent part in the politics of the interim period. The elevation of a relative unknown allowed the new presidency to have a fresh start, unencumbered by the controversies and histories a more famous figure would likely have brought. Dr. Yadav has also proved a good choice as a representative of a "New Nepal": as an ethnic Madhesi, born and raised in Nepal's southern plains, his election clearly refuted the univocal *panchayat*-era vision of what it meant to be authentically or paradigmatically Nepali, yet he has remained a staunch advocate of a single and unified Nepali state in a time when Madhesi ethnic separatist demands have flourished.

Once the Constituent Assembly elected Dr. Yadav, though, neither it nor the cabinet paid much attention to the new presidency, and so determining the precise content and contours of the office fell largely to the new president and his staff. In deciding which events to include on the president's calendar, significant debate arose within the president's office regarding how to bring his ceremonial mandate as head of state into line with the declaration that Nepal is to have a secular government.² At least two of the president's key advisors have advocated a more American-style interpretation of secularism, whereby state figures and practices ought to be forcibly separated from religious matters. These advisors believe that the president should minimize and phase out overtly religious obligations as efficiently as he can. At least one of the president's other advisors, though, has advocated an approach to secularism more similar to the official policies of India, according to which the state should honor and uphold all the major traditions of its people equally. This advisor holds that the president ought to actually expand his religious responsibilities and

involvements to include not just Hindu ceremonies from different regions of the country but Buddhist, Muslim, and indigenous practices as well. In line with this recommendation, President Yadav has chosen not only to celebrate the central-hill-focused festivals he inherited from the king, but also to prominently observe the Madhesi holiday of Chhat. The general course that has been adopted by the president to date, however, has been something of a blend between these two approaches, and his preferred pattern appears to be to uphold any ritual practice important to large numbers of people, and to begin quietly discontinuing formerly royal practices whenever he can do so without exciting major opposition.

According to this strategy, all of the major reinforcement rituals examined in the preceding chapters have continued to be performed into the present. President Yadav duly observes a jewel-studded vest every summer, receives a blessing from the Kathmandu Kumari every fall, and a few weeks later stands in front of the national army while a bundle of leaves from Gorkha arrives in the capital. These rituals have continued to adjust in subtle ways to the new system of power, though, and have shifted in some interesting and important ways since the 2006–2007 period most important to this book. The smoothest adjustment has been at Bhoto Jatra, which continued to serve as a testing ground for new government configurations of power by providing President Yadav's first public appearance in 2008. Dr. Yadav was sworn into office on July 23, three days before Bhoto Jatra was scheduled to take place (a circumstance that hinted that his inauguration might have been fast-tracked because the government needed a representative for the coming ritual). For Bhoto Jatra, President Yadav appeared at the ritual in the king's place, attended by a full complement of representatives from the government, and most notably flanked by the new vice president to his right and caretaker-Prime Minister G. P. Koirala on his left.³ The main gestures of the ritual were completed without incident: the president received *prasad* from Rato Machindranath, gave the deity an offering of coins, and observed the *bhoto* being displayed. The smooth performance of Bhoto Jatra performed a smooth transfer of power to the president in 2008, and it has continued to reinforce the president's status every year since. President Yadav attends Bhoto Jatra annually, usually accompanied by the vice president and the prime minister. The president is the central ritual actor, however, and so there is no rivalry expressed between the premier and the president. The switch from royal to presidential head of state has been broadly accepted by the organizers and local observers, and so Bhoto Jatra has settled easily into a “new normal.”

If Bhoto Jatra organizers and participants have accepted the post-monarchy situation with equanimity, the same has not been true of Indra Jatra. The organizers of Indra Jatra were more hostile to the transition than perhaps any other group not formally connected to the palace, and while organizers had grudgingly allowed the

prime minister to attend Indra Jatra during the interim period, they had not allowed him to replace the king completely, and in the post-2008 period people connected to Indra Jatra have continued to resist and resent the government while obliquely supporting the former king, Gyanendra. This led to a series of conflicts during the festival and allowed Indra Jatra to remain a site of contest for several years longer than any other once-royal ritual occasion.

In September 2008, for the first Indra Jatra after the legal dissolution of the monarchy, the Indra Jatra planners seized an opportunity to profoundly embarrass the new government. The newly elected Maoist administration under Prachanda had just been formed a few weeks earlier, and the Indra Jatra planners feared that the Maoists would pursue an aggressive campaign to defund religious events and prevent important government representatives from attending.⁴ So they decided to stage a strike to compel the support of the new government for their tradition. (Obstructionism is a favorite and frequent idiom of Nepali political action, but this kind of “strike” is very rare in religious contexts.) The Indra Jatra planners had noticed that no provision had been made for a modest animal sacrifice that in the past had been provided by the palace—one goat and one water buffalo, to be killed in Hanuman Dhoka at the beginning of the festival. Rather than raise the issue in advance and potentially secure a small financial settlement, however, the Indra Jatra planners waited until the final day of the chariot procession. They set everything up and placed the Kumari in her chariot as usual, but then everyone stopped, announcing that they could not continue because the government had failed to support their festival. The sudden ritual shutdown would need to be resolved urgently: by tradition, the Kumari is not allowed to leave the chariot until her route has been completed, and that year she was just four years old; moreover, the president was already dressed and sitting in his office waiting to be called for his first blessing. The top bureaucrat from the Guti Samsthān went in person to plead with the Indra Jatra organizers, offering to go to an animal market and purchase them a goat and a buffalo out of his own pocket if they would just get the procession started, but to no avail.⁵ Eventually, the government arranged for the Indra Jatra planners to meet with the new Maoist Finance Minister, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. The planners insisted that Bhattarai go on television to apologize for the government’s lack of support for the festival and guarantee its future support—which Bhattarai did. Finally, the local organizers authorized the chariot to begin its route. President Yadav (after waiting half the night) finally came for his blessing at around 3 or 4 a.m.⁶ Because the incident was so embarrassing to the new Maoist administration, the Maoists have subsequently been neutral or even friendly to religious practices (which, now that Nepal is officially not a Hindu state governed by a monarchy, they feel comfortable classing as “cultural practices” to be upheld).

In the post-monarchy years, the Indra Jatra planners and the Kumari House have also maintained some contact with the former king. Though the Shahs were still in retreat in Nagarjun Forest in 2008, in 2009 the Kumari House invited Gyanendra to come to be blessed by the Kumari after the official *tika* had been administered to the president. He duly came, discreetly arriving well after 10 p.m., after most devotees had long since gone home. In the following year, 2010, the staff of the Kumari House attempted something bolder. They organized a function during Indra Jatra that would bring together all the retired Royal Kumaris still living, and they invited Gyanendra to come as the chief guest. The Home Ministry, which had generally been granting Gyanendra permission to attend public functions as he wished, rejected this particular request and denied the ex-king any kind of security provision for the event. Gyanendra stayed home and the event's organizers conducted the main function at the Kumari House without him—but then when the main program was completed, they took all the retired Kumaris in private cars to the former monarch's private residence for a semi-official visit. When the government discovered this, it revoked Gyanendra's security provisions to go be blessed by the current Kumari on the last day of Indra Jatra, which they had previously consented to (provided that the visit was a discreet late-night visit like the previous year). It was even rumored that the Home Ministry threatened to blockade the entrance to Gyanendra's private residence on the final night of Indra Jatra. Gyanendra declared that he would refrain from attending the Kumari, but in retaliation against the government, the Shahs sent Paras, the former crown prince, to the Kumari House for a flashy, public visit—not at a politely late hour, but at just after 9 p.m., less than an hour after the president's own visit, when the square was still thronged with people.⁷ The government was not in the habit of monitoring Paras Shah's movements in the way they continued to monitor his father, and they had not been asked to provide security for his transport, and so there was no way for them to have either predicted or prevented his sudden desire to be blessed by the Living Goddess. The ex-royal family was thus able, for one more year, to claim its relationship to the Kumari in the face of stringent government disapproval.

Thus, Indra Jatra continued to be an occasion for contest and debate about the relationships between political leaders, the government, the ex-king, and ritual traditions long after the conclusion of the interim period. Eventually, however, even the Indra Jatra planners and the staff of the Kumari House seem to have acquiesced to the new system, and I have no evidence that any member of the ex-royal family has come to the Kumari House or attended any part of Indra Jatra since 2010. In 2011, I did witness someone leaving the Kumari House late at night with a large platter, which might have been a "carry-out blessing" on its way to the former king's private residence, but I have no conclusive evidence that this was the case. In any event, at

the time of writing Indra Jatra no longer seems to be a robust site of resistance against the post-monarchy government, and the Shahs appear to have accepted this.

In the post-interim period, Dasai has not been nearly so contested as Indra Jatra, nor as straightforwardly normalized as Bhoto Jatra. Its various traditions have continued to be negotiated and revised, but in less contentious ways than have typified Indra Jatra. Dasai has, though, provided continuing specific challenges to the government for the same reasons it had during the interim period—namely, that Dasai celebrated kingship in ways that have proved difficult to translate directly into non-lineage, non-Shah state practices. Dasai's wide variety of rituals have been handled in a few different ways by the president and post-interim government, but in general the arrangements that were worked out during the interim period continue to the present. For example, Phulpatti traditions have largely been maintained according to the pattern set by and for Prime Minister Koirala in 2007. The staff of Hanuman Dhoka still sets up a Dasai *ghar*, and the Gorkha palace still sends the auspicious *phulpati* to Kathmandu.⁸ When the *phulpati* arrives, there continues to be a public military review, which is now overseen by President Yadav—always in civilian rather than military dress. President Yadav does not go to Hanuman Dhoka for the actual installation of the *phulpati* into the Dasai *ghar*, nor does any other ranking member of the government or military. This means that the priest-based procession and the installation ceremony at Hanuman Dhoka have dropped significantly in prestige: while in 2010 the event was attended by the Secretary of Culture, there has been no truly major political figure to come to Hanuman Dhoka at Dasai since 2008.

For the day of *tika*, a far more interesting arrangement has been reached. The president has (unsurprisingly) taken over the official role of blessing giver in chief for the nation. In the morning, the semi-official priest on the staff of Hanuman Dhoka performs a ceremony at the Hanuman Dhoka Dasai *ghar* and brings *jamara* to bless the president at his office. Top-level members of the government and army come to be blessed by the president around noon (including, according to my own observations in 2010 and 2011, the prime minister, the vice president, and members of the cabinet). At approximately 1 p.m., the gates are then opened to the general public. There has been a tent set up on the front lawn so that people do not have to wait long in the sun, and President Yadav himself stands at a podium on the building's front steps administering blessings to anyone from the general public who cares to come (Fig. 7.2). A photographer snaps photos of each person being blessed, which are available for purchase in downtown Kathmandu in the following weeks, and the president's staff has handed out small boxes of sweets and snacks to people as they leave.

What is more surprising is that since 2009, when Gyanendra returned from his self-imposed exile, the former king too has offered public blessings—which means that he still spends the day of Vijaya Dashami much as he did when he was king. He



FIGURE 7.2 President Ram Baran Yadav giving Dasai *tika* to the public on the steps of the presidential mansion, October 2010. (Photo by author)

devotes the morning to exchanging blessings within his family. He goes to Narayan-hiti to pay his respects to and be blessed by his stepmother Ratna at her private quarters within the former palace compound and then returns to his private residence, Nirmal Niwas, to bless his immediate family. (I assume that the *tika* and *jamara* come from a family Dasai *ghar* that the ex-king arranges for privately at his own expense, and that he receives a blessing from one of the priests traditionally affiliated to his family; however, I have been unable to determine the precise locations or persons involved.) In the early afternoon, many members of past royalist governments and the old palace staff come to be blessed. Then, at approximately 3 p.m., the gates are opened to the public and people are organized by his security guards into a long line in the driveway.⁹ Gyanendra and Komal sit in chairs in front of the door to their house and bless everyone in their turn. There are no snacks at the ex-king's house, nor is there a tent to shield visitors from sun or rain, but there is a professional photographer who snaps photos of every person receiving *tika*, which can be purchased at the photographer's store the following week (just as during the monarchy period). What is perhaps most interesting about the new rival *tika* tradition is that Gyanendra's private residence is on the same street as the president's official residence, perhaps a quarter-mile walk away along the main street in the neighborhood of Maharajgunj. This means that it is quite easy for anyone interested to go straight from one event to the other.

The government and the ex-royal family have thus settled into an amicable, if symbolically somewhat disjointed, new Dasai tradition. There has, however, been one year when Dasai rituals needed to be significantly re-examined and revised. In October 2011, the fourth Dasai since Gyanendra had left the palace, it came time for an additional royal ritual to be performed during the holiday: a ritual sword exchange (*khadga sarme*). This was not an annual tradition; rather, every six years, the king was supposed to exchange swords during Dasai with a dancer incarnating one of two prominent local gods, alternating between Pachali Bhairab and Bhadrakali (resulting in a twelve-year cycle between each god's individual participation). The sword that the king handed the deity would be kept at the god/goddess's temple for twelve years, and the sword handed to the king by the deities would be kept at the palace. The very fact of trading and endowing swords held militarist overtones that were uncomfortable for the president, given the difficulties the post-monarchy government has experienced in negotiating civilian control over an integrated (national/Maoist) army. The ritual moreover suggested a royal theology not easily transferrable to the presidency: that the king and the gods were in some sense empowering or "recharging" each other. In 2011, then, when it came time to perform a sword exchange for the first time since the king's departure, the government and the president were uneasy about simply sending the president in the king's place.

The first step the government took was to explore popular support for the ritual—presumably wishing to avoid a public relations disaster like the one it endured during Indra Jatra 2008. Thus, toward the end of August 2011, the president made a statement to the press, announcing that he did not want to perform the sword exchange ritual during Dasai, but that he would do it if the government ordered him to. The government then waited for any objections or protests from the local populace. When they received nothing, the president announced again in late September that he was reluctant to do the ritual, though he would do it if the government forced him. When there was still no significant outcry against the potential change, the government waited until the last minute and then quietly did not perform the sword exchange.¹⁰ Four days later, the president left on a state visit to Qatar, without first visiting the Navadurga temple in Bhaktapur, thereby ignoring a second former royal tradition in the same week.

What was remarkable about Dasai 2011 was that the president and the government seem to have decided to cancel two different rituals outright: the sword exchange and the official visit to the Navadurga temple. This could theoretically have always been one solution to royal ritual practices—to cancel them—but it was the one solution that never seemed to have been seriously entertained previously. Indeed, at no point had anyone in the interim government proposed canceling Bhoto Jatra or Indra Jatra, or recommended not constructing a Dasai *ghar*. The only

major question in play from 2006 to early 2008 had been who should participate in the rituals that would definitely be performed.

In part, the reluctance to simply cancel royal rituals may have reflected a widespread Nepali cultural appreciation of and investment in rituals—what Philippe Ramirez describes as a local “logique de continuité.”¹¹ But upholding royal rituals made political sense as well. By transferring rather than canceling the king’s ritual responsibilities, the interim government in effect publicly demonstrated the king’s nonnecessity. If they had simply canceled royal rituals during the interim period, they would have actually upheld the argument implicit in royal rituals: that only the king, by virtue of being the king, could perform certain kinds of actions (that only the king could observe a *bhoto* or inaugurate the Kumari’s chariot procession), and that without the king there could be no ritual. In other words, eliminating a ritual would be tantamount to conceding that the king was an entirely unique social being, who might be dismissed but who could never be replaced. By keeping the rituals, however, and merely substituting the “head of state” for the king, the interim government argued instead that the king was neither unique nor irreplaceable—that the government and local cultural traditions could continue intact with or without a king. This argument, and the way it was crafted in ritual contexts, was fundamental to the success of the peaceful and thorough demotion of the king: it arrested the reproduction of monarchy and prevented the king from continuing to be the king during his lifetime or passing the office to his son after his death. (Indeed, one implication of the disconnection of the king from his reinforcement rituals is that the office will never be able to be transmissible subsequently through succession rituals. It is possible that Gyanendra, Ratna, Komal, or Paras Shah will be given state funerals upon their deaths, but inconceivable in the present arrangement of state practices that a new Shah male would be enthroned afterward.)

It was thus fundamental to the process of unmaking the monarchy that the interim government scrupulously upheld reinforcement rituals while excluding the king from their performance. Now in the post-interim/post-monarchy period, however, the government has already won the argument over the necessity or non-necessity of the king, and so it no longer needs to doggedly uphold every former royal ritual. It is difficult to predict the future course of the government or to extrapolate from one example, but it seems entirely possible that Dasai 2011 signaled the beginning of a new phase in the government’s handling of ex-kings’ ritual duties—that the government and the president will begin strategically determining which rituals they want to uphold and which rituals they want to dispense with. Over time, this may result in a gradual process of streamlining or systematization, whereby rituals that are most consistent with the ideology of electoral, party-based, popular sovereignty will be retained and those that most strongly

suggest lineage-based or divinely ordained sovereignty will be gradually sidelined or eliminated.

If this shift happens, however, it will be gradual and significantly removed in time from the handover of the more technical instruments of power. It would therefore be a mistake to assume that a transition of state power represents or instantly creates a wholly new or wholly coherent system—that in this case a unified, consistent system of practices centered around a king was replaced by a unified, consistent system of practices centered around a president. On the contrary, many of the practices that had sustained the monarchy had little in common with one another besides the fact that they all involved the king, and the complex of practices now sustaining the presidency is even more scattered and convoluted. This suggests both that social offices are messy, conglomerate affairs, and (more specifically) that following Nepal's revolution of 2006, the interim government had been more focused on dismantling the monarchical system than on constructing a new, internally coherent system to replace it.¹² The strategy had been to surgically remove the king from the (often upheld) practices of kingship rather than to stop the practices of kingship altogether or invent a new system.

This approach was adopted primarily because the transition was being organized not by the radical revolutionaries who had a utopian vision for the future but by moderate career politicians and bureaucrats—people acculturated into valuing procedures *qua* procedures and not necessarily worrying about all the ideological implications. Granted, the more ideologically driven Maoists provided a core impetus to the process; at almost every turn they were still sending protestors into the streets to demand not just the demotion of the king but an end to the Hindu state and the cessation of government participation in religious rituals. But for most of the interim period, even after they joined the government, the Maoists were unable to control government policies at the top, and they were not staffing the offices that were orchestrating the alterations of royal practices. That meant that the policies of the interim government were primarily formulated and implemented by people who were less interested in creating a new world order than they were in undercutting and ultimately eliminating a rival political institution. These were people who worried not about political philosophies but about political protocols, and who wanted to stick as close to “business as usual” as they could while accomplishing their overall goals.

They were also people who worried more about practical opposition than theoretical inconsistency, and who would prefer not to make enemies that they didn't have to. If the hereditary priests of Gorkha wanted to keep sending a bundle of leaves to the capital every year (thus performing their own importance in the history and culture of the country), and if people in the city of Patan wanted to gather together to look at a jewel-studded vest, it would be easier to allow them to do so than to stop it.

Institutions and systems of practice that have emerged organically over the course of centuries cannot be wholly destroyed or replaced quickly (if indeed at all) without massive political will and perhaps even violence, and such radicalism in its turn is likely to invite opposition. By contrast, across Nepal's basic bureaucratic system, there was a desire to minimize both force and opposition while working against the continuation of the monarchy, and so from the prime minister's office to the Home Ministry to the Ministry of Culture to the Guti Samsthān, everyone was willing to accept the continuation of any once-royal ritual practices—as long as they could be performed without the king. This created the paradoxical situation of radical change being effected by pragmatic bureaucrats, and dramatic contests being staged in the contexts of conservative rituals.

Even though the transitions of state-level ritual have not always tightly tracked the transitions of technical government administration, observing the negotiation of regime change in Nepal in the context of ritual practices demonstrates that ritual must be seen as not a sideline to or a window dressing on real political power, but rather as a mode of political action in itself. It is not the case that royal rituals covered up who the king really was or what his political role really was; rather, rituals helped position the king in society as the kind of person who could occupy and perform certain kinds of roles. Royal rituals had been perhaps the single most predictable and visible way in which the institutions and individuals supporting the monarchy had “worked on” the person of the king and marked him as a special social being—key practices that helped authorize all the king’s other political roles. The king was allowed to live at state expense in a huge palace compound, greet diplomats, sign laws, and head the army in large part *because he had been designated as the king*—designated as the kind of person who was authorized to take on those roles, through the rituals of his succession and the rituals that later reinforced his status, rituals that had woven the king into a network of privileged relationships with members of the government and military, deities, and important places. Once the opponents of the monarchy wanted to remove the king from those positions and roles, they were able to do so by mobilizing and reconfiguring those rituals to stop the king from reproducing his kingliness.

It is of course not the case that ritual usually serves a radical political force, though. In most circumstances, rituals are confined to reproducing or finessing (rather than reshaping, inventing, or eliminating) a social reality, and so rituals are generally conservative forms of action. Reinforcement rituals in particular tend to reaffirm rather than challenge the status quo, and in a smoothly running political setup, state rituals will quietly reinforce the existing order without much (if any) notice. But the interim period of Nepal provided an unusual context—a context in which the existing political order was being actively scrutinized and challenged—and in that context rituals

became not quiet, passive means to reinforce the existing order but volatile, potent ways to question and challenge the shape, nature, and existence of kingship and the state itself. The result was an extraordinary refashioning of the performance of the Nepali state.

It would nevertheless be a mistake to conclude that everything has changed in Nepal, however. It is true that the transition has significantly altered the contours and imaginings of Nepal's government; it has altered the identity of many (though certainly not all) of the people at the top of the government and the idioms through which they claim power. It has not in any way, however, altered the day-to-day running of government offices, the administration of state resources, or the provision of services (or, more usually, the *promise* of services) to the people of the country. In other words, the transition away from the monarchy has involved institutional shifting and reconfiguring, but it has primarily altered the performance and representations—the semiology—of the state, and not the state's routine functioning. This means that it can be fairly claimed both that on the one hand Nepal's political situation and government have changed fundamentally, and on precisely the opposite hand, that Nepal's political situation and government have hardly changed in the slightest.

In the time leading up to and then throughout the interim period, it became common to blame King Gyanendra for everything that was wrong in the country. It was an article of faith for many in the parties, the media, and the general public that once the monarchy was gone the country would be automatically improved—that the nation would overnight become a “New (*naya*) Nepal.” Once the monarchy has been dismantled, however, that optimism about total change proved unfounded. By 2008 and 2009, that slogan of “New Nepal” began to be turned to ironic use: whenever something turned out to be just as predictably irritating or dysfunctional as it always had been (the electricity had shut off, the buses were overcrowded, Kathmandu was facing water shortages), people would bitterly comment, “That’s the ‘New Nepal’ for you (*yo naya Nepal ho!*).”

This disappointment grew out of a conflation between the performance and imagination of the state on the one hand and the daily practical administration of infrastructure and resources on the other. Based on this conflation, people (not just in Nepal) have routinely presumed that changing the top representative of a state would change the ways the government operated and the ways citizens obtained government services. But the day-to-day running of the government—at the level most people encounter it—is and always has been determined less by the government’s national-level representation than by local office culture and working habits. The Nepali government has been slow, ineffective, and frustrating not because it had been connected to the king, but because of a pervasive office culture: because the staffs of government offices routinely defer to their superiors; deflect inquiries to

other offices; deny access to places, people, or documents on principle; and spend substantial amounts of time drinking tea. This is not a state of affairs that could be altered by removing a single person from government, even the person at the top of the entire hierarchy. This is a state of affairs that could only be changed by a systemic shift in office politics and procedure at every level of the bureaucracy.

The transition away from monarchy has therefore not produced the kinds of changes in the country that many had hoped for, but that does not mean that it has been unreal or inconsiderable. Rather, the observer simply needs to be clear about what kinds of changes have proved possible, and the registers in which those changes have proved relevant. The most important implications of the dismantling of the monarchy lie in the re-envisioning and re-presentation of the character of the country and the identities of the people qualified to represent it. This change in representation, in the semiology of the state, has been effective and extraordinary. It has allowed the country to be represented by a Madhesi doctor rather than a hereditary Shah and has promised the future possibility of representation by non-Hindus, non-Nepali speakers, or women—anyone in the country able to reach the top of party politics. This has not changed the process of getting a driver's license or coordinating the school system, but it has significantly altered what the nation of Nepal can be imagined to be.

AFTERTWORD

On April 25, 2015, after the present volume had gone to the publisher, Nepal was struck by a devastating 7.8 earthquake—an event that triggered upwards of three hundred fifty smaller quakes over the next several weeks, including a 7.3 earthquake on May 12 and four earthquakes above 6.0.¹ The devastation (in human and material terms) has been enormous and it will take years if not decades for the people of Nepal to recover and rebuild. Among other impacts, the disaster has affected the people and spaces important for several of the “reinforcement rituals” mentioned in this volume, and while it will take many months to determine exactly how the earthquakes might change local religious culture and practice, a few initial reports are possible as of July 2015.²

Fortunately, I have to date not heard reports of any casualties among the people interviewed for this project or among key participants in the rituals discussed in these pages, likely because Kathmandu and Patan were only moderately affected. One of the Indra Jatra dancers who performs the Lakhe demon, Laxman Ranjit, lost his wife in the earthquake, however, and is recuperating from a broken leg. There are doubtless other people connected with these rituals who, though they survived, have similarly sustained injury and lost loved ones, and some (especially Newar families who inhabited traditional homes in Old Kathmandu and Old Patan) who have lost their homes, but in general people in Kathmandu and Patan remained safe.

The Kathmandu Kumari, her house/temple, and her staff were unscathed by the initial April 25 earthquake. The Kumari House was damaged in the May 12 earthquake, however, and for some time, pending repairs to cracks in the structure, the goddess was brought down to a tent in the inner courtyard, and she was also briefly relocated to a different building, even though it is unprecedented to bring the Kumari out of the Kumari House other than on a designated ritual occasion. The goddess’s chariot for Indra Jatra was unharmed in its storage location within the Kumari House, and while several of the structures in Hanuman Dhoka were damaged (including

the steps where the government dignitaries generally stand), there is no reason to expect this year's Indra Jatra to be significantly different from usual.

The historic buildings of Kathmandu and Gorkha (as elsewhere in the country) have sustained significant damage. The white watchtower erected by Bhimsen Thapa in 1832 collapsed, killing 180 people. The portion of Hanuman Dhoka Palace constructed by Prithvi Narayan Shah lost its top stories, and several structures within the Hanuman Dhoka Palace compound and its surrounding temple complex collapsed entirely. The coronation platform and the courtyard where the national *Dasai ghar* is staged survived intact, however, and the Taleju temple on the north side of the palace survived (though one of its gates was damaged). The two major Bhairab images near Hanuman Dhoka Palace that are worshipped during Indra Jatra are intact.

At the time of writing, the Gorkha palace is standing, but its main structure and its iconic Gorakhnath Temple have been badly damaged. Ganesh Prasad Bhattarai, the current chief administrator of Gorkha Durbar Herchaha Adda, reports that the historic palace could collapse at any time, and that it would need to be rebuilt from the foundations up in order to be safe. Given the pressing needs of the country in the coming years, it would be surprising for this building (which celebrates the deposed dynasty) to receive a high priority for funding on this scale.

Bhoto Jatra has been significantly delayed this year. Machindranath was already in his chariot when the earthquakes happened, since this is the year the chariot is rebuilt entirely new in the town of Bungamati and then pulled on a far longer than usual route. (This special version of the chariot procession happens every twelve years.) When the April 25 earthquake happened, the chariot was in Sainbu, about halfway between Bungamati and the Kathmandu–Patan Ring Road. The chariot and the Machindranath statue were undamaged, but the chariot could not be pulled farther until a *kshema puja* could be arranged. Such a *puja* had in fact just been performed to resolve the inauspiciousness of the April 25 earthquake when the May 12 earthquake then happened, damaging the chariot. Finally, in late July (after minor earthquakes continued to add damage), Machindranath's priests removed the god's image from the chariot so that the entire structure could be rebuilt from scratch. Once this is completed, the chariot is expected to skip most of its route and be pulled straight from Sainbu to Jawalakhel for Bhoto Jatra, hopefully by the end of August.

Following Bhoto Jatra, however, there will be something of a ritual problem. The Machindranath Temple in Bungamati (to which the image is brought until time for its winter bath) was entirely destroyed in the earthquakes. (Indeed, for several weeks teams of workers coordinated by the Nepal police had to sift through the debris to find the *bhoto*.) While the god will still be brought back to Bungamati, it is still under discussion how to house him until his temple is rebuilt. In the words of one of the people sifting through the rubble, "*deuta kaha rakhne bhanne samasya chha*"—“Where to keep the god is [going to be] a problem.”³

By the time you read this book, the Nepal earthquake will probably have faded from the international media, but the reconstruction efforts will likely be ongoing. Please reach out to the people of Nepal as they continue to rebuild their lives and their cultural heritage.

Appendix A

**PROCLAMATION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
(MAY 18, 2006)**



This House of Representatives hereby proclaims that it has sovereign powers for the exercise of all powers until the formulation of other constitutional arrangement, in order [to] take responsibility to move ahead in the direction of full-fledged democracy and to abolish the autocratic monarchy having institutionalized the achievements of the present people's movement, while safeguarding the achievements of the 1990 people's movement[], and as the sovereign authority is exercised through this House of Representatives, further proclaims the following declaration:

I. CONCERNING LEGISLATIVE

- 1.1 All the Powers regarding legislature of Nepal shall be exercised by the House of Representatives. The procedures for [] making laws shall be as specified by the House of Representatives.
- 1.2 The House of Representatives shall, as per necessity, specify the procedures for moving to the path of Constituent Assembly.
- 1.3 Summoning of the session of the House of Representatives and its prorogation shall be as follows:-
 - (a) The session shall be summoned by the Prime Minister and be prorogued by the speaker on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.
 - (b) If, during the prorogation or recess of the House of Representatives, one fourth of its members existing for the time being, make a submission to the speaker that it is expedient to convene a session or meeting of the House of Representatives, the Speaker shall fix the date and time for such session or meeting with fifteen days.
- 1.4 The House of Representatives shall frame and enforce the [regulations] of the House of Representatives.

2. CONCERNING EXECUTIVE

- 2.1 All the executive powers of Nepal shall be vested on the Council of Ministers. “His Majesty’s Government” shall be referred as “Government of Nepal” from now onwards.
- 2.2 Persons who are not the members of the House of Representatives can also be nominated in the Council of Ministers.
- 2.3 The Council of Ministers shall be responsible towards the House of Representatives. The Council of Ministers and the ministers shall collectively, and for the works of their ministries, individually be responsible towards the House of Representatives for the works of their respective [m]inistries. All the executive organs including the administration, army, and police shall be under the government that is responsible towards the House of Representatives.
- 2.4 The regulations of the allocation of business and transaction of business of the Government shall be adopted by the Council [o]f Ministers, and presented to the House of Representatives.

3. CONCERNING ARMY

- 3.1 The title “Royal Nepal Army” shall be changed to “Nepal Army.”
- 3.2 The [e]xisting provision regarding the National Security Council is hereby repealed. There shall be a National Security Council under the chairpersonship of the Prime Minister in order to control, use and mobilize the Nepalese Army.
- 3.3 Chief of the Army Staff of the Nepalese Army shall be appointed by the Council of Ministers.
- 3.4 The existing arrangement of Supreme Commander of the Army is hereby repealed.
- 3.5 The decision of the Council of Ministers on mobilizing the Nepalese Army shall be tabled to and endorsed by the special committee assigned by the House of Representatives within 30 days.
- 3.6 The organization of the Nepalese Army shall be inclusive and national in nature.

4. CONCERNING RAJPARISHAD [THE ROYAL COUNCIL]

The existing provision of Rajparishad has been repealed. Necessary business being performed by the Rajparishad shall be as provided by the House of Representatives.

5. CONCERNING ROYAL PALACE

- 5.1 The power to make, amend and repeal laws regarding the succession to the throne shall be vested on the House of Representatives.
- 5.2 The expenditure and facilities of His Majesty shall be as decided by the House of Representatives.
- 5.3 The private property and income of His Majesty the King shall be taxable pursuant to the law.

- 5.4 A question over the acts performed by His Majesty may be raised in the House of Representatives and in court.
- 5.5 Existing Royal Palace Service shall be made a part of the civil service.
- 5.6 The security arrangement for the Royal Palace shall be as made by the Council of Ministers.

6. THE EXISTING PROBLEM REGARDING CITIZENSHIP IN THE COUNTRY SHALL BE PROMPTLY RESOLVED.

7. THE EXISTING “NATIONAL ANTHEM” SHALL BE CHANGED BY MAKING ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT.

8. NEPAL SHALL BE A SECULAR STATE.

9. MISCELLANEOUS

- (a) All the state organs and bodies shall exercise their powers as having been conferred by being [I]oyal to House of Representatives and,
- (b) Specified officials holding public office shall take oath of office from the House of Representatives in the specified manner. Officials who refuse to take such oath of office shall be relieved of their posts.
- (c) The legal arrangements of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990) and other prevailing laws, with this declaration, shall be void to the extent of inconsistency.
- (d) Any difficulty that may arise while implementing this declaration shall be removed by a decision of the House of Representatives.
- (e) There shall be a committee in the House of Representatives for the purpose of sub-clause (c) and (d) above.

English-language text as issued by the Government of Nepal (with grammar improved for this volume by the author, at points indicated by brackets). Sourced from the archive of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (<http://www.un.org.np/unmin-archive/?d=official&p=peace>), last accessed May 12, 2015.

Appendix B

LIST OF FORMAL INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN THIS
RESEARCH (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

2

Interviewee	Position/reason for interview	Date(s)
Narahari Acharya	NC leader; first prominent member of NC to advocate abolition of monarchy	February 26, 2010
Ram Mani Acharya	Director, Patan branch of Guti Samsthān, 2008–2010	Sept. 24, 2010
Raghu Nath Aryal	Former Deputy Raj Purohit; then-staff member Hanuman Dhoka	August 23, 2010 October 12, 2010
Laxminarayan Banmala	Priest of Bhaktapur's Navadurga Temple	May 14, 2010
Dinanath Bhattarai	Staff at Hanuman Dhoka (retired); freelance priest	October 4, 2010
Madhav Bhattarai	Deputy Raj Guru, 2001–2008	July 6, 2010 Sept. 21, 2010
Sharada Prasad Bhattarai	Chief priest of Gorkha Durbar	July 22, 2010
Bal Krishna Dahal	Aide to G. P. Koirala	October 8, 2010
Purushottam Dahal	Former head of government press service	March 1, 2010
Sthaneswor Devkota	CDO of Kathmandu, 2006–2007	June 30, 2010
Modaraj Dotel	CDO of Kathmandu, 2007–2008	August 20, 2010
Saujanya Joshi	Private secretary to Crown Prince Dipendra	September 7, 2010

Interviewee	Position/reason for interview	Date(s)
Uddhav Karmacharya	Priest of Kathmandu Taleju temple	Sept. 13, 2011
Rebati Raman Khanal	Principal Secretary under Birendra; member of Rajparishad in 2001	April 30, 2010
Sarbendra Khanal	Head of Kathmandu police during interim period	October 9, 2010
Sujata Koirala	Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister 2008–2011; daughter of G. P. Koirala	June 4, 2010
Chet Bahadur Kumbar	Private secretary to King Birendra	May 23, 2010
Dr. Govinda Kusum	Home Secretary (at time of interview); Secretary of Administrative Affairs (2006–2008); committee to inventory Narayanhiti Palace	August 5, 2010
Gen. Gajendra Limbu	Palace Military Secretary 2003–2006	June 18, 2010
Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat	Interim Finance Minister (2006–2008); several-time past Finance Minister; senior leader, Nepali Congress	March 23, 2010
Umesh Mainali	Interim Home Secretary (2006–2008)	June 13, 2010 June 25, 2010
Krishna Bahadur Mahara	Long-time Maoist spokesman; interim government spokesman and Minister of Communication (2007–2008)	July 15, 2010
Tirtha Lal Maharjan	Head of Jyapu Samaj, 2007	October 9, 2010
Jaya Ram Manandhar	Director, Narayanhiti Palace Museum; long-time palace staff member	April 20, 2010 May 20, 2010 May 24, 2010
Jit Manandhar	Secretary of the Raj Parishad (retired)	September 14, 2011
Mangal Krishna Manandhar	Head of Indra Jatra Planning Committee	August 23, 2010
Mangal Siddhi Manandhar	Interim Minister of Education (UML)	September 4, 2011
Madhav Kumar Nepal	Chairman of UML (retired); post-interim prime minister	October 24, 2011
Lekhnath Neupane	Maoist student leader and street protest organizer	September 9, 2011
K. P. Sharma Oli	Deputy Prime Minister during interim period (UML)	September 16, 2010
Raj Panday	Director, Kathmandu branch of Guti Samsthan (2006–2008)	October 21, 2010
Ramesh Nath Panday	Foreign Secretary during Gyanendra's direct rule (2005–2006)	September 20, 2010

Interviewee	Position/reason for interview	Date(s)
Ramesh Prasad Panday	Chief Royal Priest (Raj Purohit) at time of palace massacre	August 23, 2007
Purushottam Paudel	Head of Patan branch of Guti Samsthan (2006–2008)	September 28, 2010
Ananda Pokharel	CDO of Patan (2006–2008)	August 27, 2010
Prahlad Pokharel	Private secretary to interim Home Minister (2006–2008)	October 6, 2010
Mitha Ram Pudasaini	Senior administrator, Hanuman Dhoka	July 24, 2010
Taranath Ranabhat	Speaker of the House of Representatives (1999–2006); palace massacre investigator	October 7, 2010
Dr. Keshar Jung Rayamajhi	Chairman of Rajparishad at time of palace massacre	March 5, 2010 March 30, 2010
Gautam Shakya	Staff member of Kumari House; liaison between Kumari House and <i>gutis</i> , Kumari House and government	October 13, 2010
Preeti Shakya (with Renu Shakya)	Royal Kumari, 2001–2008 (with her mother)	May 31, 2010
Amik Sherchan	Deputy Prime Minister during interim period (Janamorcha Party)	October 22, 2010
Hirakaji Shrestha	Home Ministry, Internal Management Section	October 4, 2010
Jaya Ram Shrestha	Ministry of Culture liaison to Indra Jatra <i>gutis</i>	September 13, 2010
Sushil Shrestha	Narayanhiti Palace staff, now Narayanhiti Palace Museum staff	July 2, 2010
Krishna Prasad Sitaula	Interim Home Minister (2006–2008); senior leader, Nepali Congress	April 26, 2010 June 10, 2010
Hem Raj Subedi	Senior administrator, Guti Samsthan central office	September 3, 2010
Anit Thapa	Security officer, Kumari House	May 12, 2010
Bhekhy Bahadur Thapa	Foreign Affairs Minister (2003–2004); <i>panchayat</i> -era government minister; past Nepali ambassador to United States, India	June 7, 2010
Chandra Bahadur Thapa (“Sagar”)	Former in charge of Maoist YCL, current member of Constituent Assembly	September 10, 2011

Interviewee	Position/reason for interview	Date(s)
Chiran Shumsher Thapa	Palace press secretary under Birendra; deputy chief of Gyanendra's household prior to direct rule	June 24, 2010
Gen. Pyar Jung Thapa	Chief of Royal Nepal Army, 2002–2006	June 8, 2010 July 9, 2010

Appendix C

GLOSSARY OF NEPALI TERMS WITH DEVANAGARI-SCRIPT EQUIVALENTS

Aakash Bhairab	आकाश भैरव
abhishek	अभिषेक
Ananda Pokharel	आनन्द पोखरेल
annaprasan	अन्न प्रसन
Arya Ghat	आर्य घाट
Asoj	असोज
Baburam Bhattarai	बाबुराम भट्टराई
Bada Raj Guru-ju	बडा राज गुरुजु
Bajhang	बझाङ्ग
Basanta Shrawan	बसन्त श्रवण
bel	बेल
Bhadau	भदौ
bhairab	भैरव
Bhaktapur	भक्तपुर
Bhimsen Thapa	भीमसेन थापा
Bhimeshwor	भिमेश्वर
bhoto	भोटो
Bhoto Jatra	भोटो जात्रा
Biratnagar	बिराटनगर
Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev	वीरेन्द्र वीर विक्रम शाह देव
Chauni	छाउनी
Chetri	चेत्री
Chitwan	चितवन

dakshina	दक्षिणा
Dakshinkali	दक्षिणकाली
darshan	दर्शन
Dasai	दशै
Dasai ghar	दशै घर
daura suruwal	दौरा सुरुवाल
dhoti	धोति
Dipendra	दीपेन्द्र
Dolakha	दोलखा
durbar	दरबार
Durga	दुर्गा
gaddi arohan	गद्दी आरोहन
Girija Prasad Koirala	गिरिजा प्रसाद कोइराला
Gorkha	गोर्खा
Gorkhali	गोर्खाली
Guruju ko Paltan	गुरुज्यु को पल्टन
guti	गुठी
Guti Samsthan	गुठी संस्थान
gutiyar	गुठियार
Gyanendra (Bir Bikram) Shah (Dev)	ज्ञानेन्द्र (वीर विक्रम) शाह (देव)
Hanuman Dhoka	हनुमान ढोका
Indra Jatra	ईन्द्र जात्रा
Jamal	जमल
jamara	जमरा
Janandolan	जनआन्दोलन
janata	जनता
Jawalakhel	जावलाखेल
Jung Bahadur Rana	जंग बहादुर राणा
Jyapu	ज्यापू
Kal Ratri	काल रात्रि
Kalmochan Ghat	कालमोचन घाट
Kaski	कास्की
Kathmandu	काठमाडौँ
katto (khuwaune)	काट्टो (खुवाउने)
khadga sarne	खड्ग सर्ने
Komal (Rajya Laxmi Devi) Shah	कोमल (राज्य लक्ष्मी देवी) शाह
kot	कोट
Krishna Janmashtami	कृष्ण जन्माष्टमी
kriya	क्रिया
Kumari	कुमारी
Kunwar	कुंवर
Lamjung	लम्जुङ्ग
linga	लिङ्ग
lingo	लिङ्गो

Machindranath	मच्छिन्द्रनाथ
Madhesi	मधेसी
Maha Shiva Ratri	महा शिव रात्री
Maha-Ashtami	महाअष्टमी
Maha-Navami	महानवमी
Maharajdhiraj	महाराजधिराज
Mahendra	महेन्द्र
Mahish	महिष
Malla	मल्ल
Manandhar	मानन्धर
Mangal	मंगल
ModaraJ Dotel	मोदराज डोटेल
murdabaad	मुर्दाबाद
Nagarjun	नागार्जुन
Narayanhiti	नारायणहिटी
Narendradeva	नरेन्द्रदेव
Navadurga	नवदुर्गा
Navaratri	नवरात्री
Newar	नेवार/नेवा:
pahad	पहाड़
pajani	पजनी
panchayat	पंचायत
Paras	पारस
parbatiya	पर्बतिया
parijit	परिजित
Pashupatinath	पशुपतिनाथ
Patan	पाटन
phulpati	फूलपाती
Phulpati Badai	फूलपाती बढाई
Pokhara	पोखरा
Prachanda	प्रचण्ड
prasad	प्रसाद
Prithvi Narayan Shah	पृथ्वी नारायण शाह
puja	पूजा
raja	राजा
rajabhishek	राज्याभिषेक
Ram Baran Yadav	राम वरण यादव
Rana	राणा
Royal Council (Raj Parishad)	राज परिषद्
sait	सैत
Shakya	शाक्य
Shree Panch	श्री पाँच (/श्री ५)
Shree Teen	श्री तीन (/श्री ३)
Swayambhunath	स्वयम्भुनाथ

Swet Bhairab	स्वेत भैरव
Taleju	तलेजु
Tihar	तिहार
tika	टिका
Timi	ठिमी
Tribhuvan	त्रिभुवन
Tribhuvan Sadan	त्रिभुवन सदन
tula daan	तुला दान
Tundikhel	टुँडिखेल
Vijaya Dashami	विजय दशमी

NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911–1915); Arthur Maurice Hocart, *Kingship* (London: Oxford University Press: H. Milford, 1927). Also of importance to early theories of kingship and monarchy-dominated political systems was Karl Marx's concept of "Oriental despotism." For an account of impacts of the idea of Oriental despotism on theorizations of Indic politics, see Brendan O'Leary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental Despotism, Historical Materialism, and Indian History* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1989).

2. Barbara Crosette, "Birendra, 55, Ruler of Nepal's Hindu Kingdom," *New York Times*, June 3, 2001, 2.

3. For two examples of this exoticization and implied evolutionary model, see Jonathan Gregson, *Massacre at the Palace* (New York: Talk Miramax Books, 2002) and Baburam Bhattarai, *Monarchy Vs. Democracy: The Epic Fight in Nepal* (Noida: Samkaleen Teesari Duniya, 2005).

4. Michael Hutt, *Nepal: A Guide to the Art and Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1995, 19. The image (a standing Vishnu "now installed in the modern Ramachandra temple across the river Bagmati from Pashupati") depicts Vishnugupta (r. 630 C.E.) flanked by his sons. Hutt notes that "[n]ever before had a ruler dared to inhabit the form of a god: others had been portrayed as servants or vehicles (the Garuda at Changu Narayan, which may represent Manadeva, is the best known example) and it may have been what Slusser calls this 'unparalleled audacity' that brought about the downfall of Vishnugupta and the complete restoration of power to the Licchavi kings" (19).

5. Ronald Inden, "Ritual, Authority, and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship," in *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, J. F. Richards, ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison South Asian Studies, 1978), 28–29.

6. Jose Merquior, *The Veil and the Mask: Essays on Culture and Ideology* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

7. See among other works Clifford Geertz, *Negara* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Jan Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Stanley Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Maurice Bloch, *Ritual, History, and Power* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone Press, 1989); and Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973). For an overview of theoretical approaches to ritual in general, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

8. The question of the centralized or decentralized nature of early Indic states has been most systematically tackled by Hermann Kulke in *The State in India, 1000–1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *Kings and Cults* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1993). Perhaps the most interesting approach to the question of state centrality in premodern South Asia is Stanley Tambiah's notion of the "galactic polity" outlined in *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), while the uses of literary evidence in analyzing kingship are analyzed by David Shulman in *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985). The role of Indic kings relative to systems of resource extraction was central to Burton Stein, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

9. Pamela Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Georg Berkemer et al., *Sharing Sovereignty* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2003); Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Iqtidar Sidiqui, *Authority and Kingship under the Sultans of Delhi* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2006); and Uwe Skoda, "State Rituals After the Abolition of the State," in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 783–811.

10. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

11. Nawaraj Chaulagain, "Hindu Kingship: Ritual, Power, and History" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2012).

12. On the supposed vulnerability of Hindu kings, see particularly Heesterman, *The Hollow Crown* and Shulman, *The King and the Clown*.

13. Geertz, *Negara*, 13.

14. See particularly Stein, *Peasant, State and Society*; Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*.

15. There has long been an implicit traditional/modern dichotomy in the academic study of South Asian kingship. Scholarship on South Asian kings to date has overwhelmingly focused upon textual and archaeological evidences for precolonial kingship practices, and there has been relatively little attention to monarchy in more recent contexts. A few notable counterexamples, though, where contemporary monarchy practices are the center of the discussion include Skoda, "State Rituals After the Abolition of the State"; Daniela Berti, "Ritual Kingship, Divine Bureaucracy, and Electoral Politics in Kullu," *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* (2006), 39–61; Elizabeth Conzelmann, "A Royal Ritual of Mandi State," *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* (2006), 14–38.

16. These observations emerged from dozens of informal conversations in various locations in Nepal, primarily in the Kathmandu Valley but also in Gorkha (a historic seat of royalism and more recently a major Maoist stronghold), as well as in Kaski and Chitwan districts. I have also

confirmed my hypothesis with friends who have lived and worked further afield (including in Lamjung, Helambu, and Humla). This contrasts to the dominant understandings of Nepalis living in Kathmandu, who generally presume that “rural people” outside the capital were more loyalist.

17. For example, Hem Raj Subedi, chief administrator for the Guti Samsthān, recalled at one point an occasion when he observed elderly people near Kirtipur following behind the king, scooping up the dust in the road he had tread on and placing that dust in their hair.

18. Roy Rappaport, “The Obvious Aspects of Ritual,” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, Ronald L. Grimes, ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 433. Emphasis original.

19. Berti, “Ritual Kingship, Divine Bureaucracy, and Electoral Politics in Kullu,” 39.

20. Personal communication from Silje Lyngar Einarsen.

21. Frederique Marglin, *Wives of the God-King* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

22. Conzelmann, “A Royal Ritual of Mandi State”; Berti, “Ritual Kingship, Divine Bureaucracy, and Electoral Politics in Kullu.”

23. It is worth noting that there is no single word in Nepali that directly corresponds to the English term “ritual.” There are, however, a handful of Nepali-language terms—including *chaad*, *parba*, *jatra*, *puja*, and *utsav*—that are variously recognizable as subsets of the English term “ritual,” and when I explained my research in combinations of these terms my project was immediately recognizable to Nepali interlocutors.

24. Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103.

25. Peter Winn, “Legal Ritual,” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, Ronald L. Grimes, ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 553.

26. Rappaport, “Obvious Aspects of Ritual,” 428.

27. *Ibid.*, 433.

28. This understanding advances a semiological understanding of ritual, following Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Annette Lavers, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

29. Smith, *To Take Place*, 104.

30. David I. Kertzer, “Ritual, Politics, and Power” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, Ronald L. Grimes, ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 348.

31. Though I diverge from their terminology, this is essentially similar to the point made by Humphrey and Laidlaw’s claims regarding the “meaninglessness” of ritual in *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

32. They write that “the very ways in which persons in unison are mobilized and synchronized in social formations . . . Through them the meaning of things is turned into the shape of things. The shape of things is graspable through the senses, as is the case of icon and emblem. Yet in the latter instances these shapes still are largely external to the human body, to the source of emotions and feelings. But the shape of things in living formations is grasped by living through them.” (Don Handelman and Lea Shamgar-Handelman, “Holiday Celebrations in Israeli Kindergartens,” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, Ronald L. Grimes, ed. [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996], 305.)

33. This discussion represents an extension of Bruce Lincoln’s argument in *Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), which primarily addresses authorized speech, to include a wider array of symbolic social action.

34. Catherine Bell, *Ritual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79.

35. Bell, *Ritual*, 83; Bloch, *Ritual, History, Power*, 45.

36. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

37. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

38. For an important discussion of creating the appearance of compliance, see Lincoln, *Authority*, 4–7. For a theorization of the ritual roles of audiences, see John J. MacAloon, “Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies,” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, Ronald L. Grimes, ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 378–392.

39. This is often downplayed in theories of public ritual and particularly causes problems for strictly Marxist theories, where ritual is understood as a tool of enforcing compliance with existing power relationships. Certainly compliance is one possible outcome of political ritual—perhaps the result of optimally successful political ritual—but communication is inevitably more complicated than this, particularly when the medium is visual, symbolic, or otherwise open-ended and underdetermined.

40. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), 38.

41. In the context of the American presidency, for example, succession rituals occur on a purposefully predictable four-year cycle. Thus (barring the premature death of a president in office) its succession rituals of election and inauguration are highly regular in their timing. This regularization of time is so rigid that a single person may undergo two inaugurations, suggesting that his (or her) office may be understood to “expire” and require a resumption of authority. Regardless of the timing, the purpose of the succession ritual remains the same: to conclude the tenure of the old officeholder and to announce the new tenure of a new/renewed officeholder. It is important to note in this context that rituals are not uniquely the province of “traditional” modes of politics. Where monarchies might have decades to ritually groom a future king, electoral offices need to be transferrable on a far shorter timescale, and so may actually prove *more* dependent upon rituals of political succession to keep an office separate from and durable beyond any individual president, parliamentarian, mayor, or similar.

42. First laid out by Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); later embraced and elaborated by Victor Turner in works including *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969).

43. Change and variation are indeed inevitable aspects of routine ritual and may be fruitfully analyzed for the micropolitics of the people staging the ritual. An excellent example of this sort of analysis can be found in Michelle Gilbert’s work on an annual Ghanaian royal ritual: “Aesthetic Strategies: The Politics of a Royal Ritual,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 64 (1994), 99–125.

44. Emma Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (London: C. Hurst, 2003).

45. For a full list of formal interviews, see Appendix B. All interviewees are identified by their real names, for which I gained permission in each interview.

CHAPTER 2

1. The monarchy was also useful for decades to the government of India (both independent India and the British colonial government that preceded it). For simplicity, however, most of the following discussion will focus on dynamics internal to Nepal.

2. The foundational literature on Nepali politics and administration prior to 1800 can be found in the work of historian Diliraman (D. R.) Regmi. See particularly *Ancient Nepal*

(Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969), *Medieval Nepal* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965–1966), and *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983). Other key sources on the preconquest period include Richard Burghart, *The Conditions of Listening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); M. C. Regmi, *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963–1968); William Tuladhar Douglas, “Washing Your Neighbour’s God: Royal Ritual in 14th Century Nepal,” in *Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil*, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Pascale Dollfus, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44–72; Bledsoe, “Written in Stone”; Mary Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

3. Mahendra Malla, for example, was described in an inscription as “an enemy-slayer, an embodiment of Siva, who delighted [brahmins] and deities with his gifts and sacrifices” (Bledsoe, “Written in Stone,” 238). There were even a number of Sanskrit texts produced or reproduced at the relatively poor court in Gorkha, a few of which are on display at the Gorkha museum.

4. All three temples continue to be active ritual sites, despite the collapse, departure, or incorporation of their respective monarchies. Author investigation of Kaski and Gorkha; see also Gisèle Krauskopff, “Rencontre des Déesses et des Dieux du Lieu: Le Dasai et les changements de pouvoir a Phalabang (Salyan),” *Célébrer le pouvoir: Dasai, une fête royale au Népal*, Gisèle Krauskopff and Marie Lecomte Tilouine, eds. (CNRS Editions: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme de Paris, 1996), 167–207.

5. On Malla-era urban culture and royal ideology, see particularly Slusser, *Nepal Mandala*, and Bledsoe, “Written in Stone.”

6. The chief historian of Prithvi Narayan Shah’s life is Ludwig Stiller. See *The Rise of the House of Gorkha* (New Delhi: Manjusri Pub. House, 1973) and *Prithwinarayan Shah in the Light of Dibya Upadesh* (Kathmandu: Himalaya Book Center, 1968).

7. M. C. Regmi, *Imperial Gorkha* (Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 1999); Kumar Pradhan, *The Gorkha Conquests* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

8. Pradhan, *Gorkha Conquests*, 105.

9. Giuseppe da Rovato, *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (New Delhi: India Offset Press, 1970), 15. Rovato was a Jesuit missionary living in the valley at the time of the Gorkhali conquests.

10. Stiller, *Rise of the House of Gorkha*.

11. In the most bizarre regency, Rana Bahadur abdicated the throne, went temporarily into exile in British India, and then returned to Kathmandu to rule on behalf of his own infant son. For details on this period, see Ava Shrestha, *Regency of Bahadur Shah* (Kirtipur, Tribhuvan University, 1976); for an analysis specifically of the role of the queen mother during the early regencies, see Ganga Karmacharya, *Queens in Nepalese Politics* (Kathmandu: Educational Publishing House, 2005) and Prakash Raj, *Queens of the Shah Dynasty in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Nabeen Publications, 1997).

12. For more detailed accounts and analyses of nineteenth-century politics in Nepal, see in particular John Whelpton, *Kings, Soldiers, and Priests* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1991) and *A History of Nepal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); D. R. Regmi, *Modern Nepal*; and Rishikesh Shaha, *Modern Nepal: A Political History 1769–1955* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990). A collection of primary-source documentation from the period of Bhimsen Thapa’s rule to the rise of Jang Bahadur Rana can be found in K. L. Pradhan, *Brian Hodgson at the Kathmandu Residency, 1825–1843* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2001).

13. During this period, he was known by his birth name, Jung Bahadur Kunwar. He changed the unimpressive Kunwar to the more aristocratic/royal “Rana” following his rise to power, but it

is clearer to refer to him throughout this discussion by the more well-known “Rana.” For an intimate picture of the political situation of the 1840s and Jung Bahadur’s rise to power, see the primary documents (mostly correspondences from British residents of the period back to their superiors) compiled by Ludwig Stiller in *Letters from Kathmandu: The Kot Massacre* (Kirtipur: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 1981).

14. The discussion that follows examines the Rana system of rule from more of a synchronic than diachronic perspective. For chronological histories of the Rana period, see Adrian Sever, *Nepal Under the Ranas* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Pub. Co., 1993); Kashi Mainali, *Political Dimensions of Nepal, 1885–1901* (Kathmandu: R. Mainali, 2000); and Purushottam Rana, *Sri 3 Haruko Tathyā Vṛttanta* (Kathmandu: Bidyarthi Pustak Bhandar, 2002). See also the several works of Pramode Shamshere Rana, including *Rana Intrigues* (Kathmandu: R. Rana, 1995); *A Chronicle of Rana Rule* (Kathmandu: R. Rana, 1999); and *Ranashasanko Brittanta* (Kathmandu: R. Rana, 2004).

15. The double-monarchy system of the Rana period highlights the intriguing capacity within Nepali politics to have multiple monarchies coexistent.

16. For a photo of King Prithvi Bir as a child surrounded by numerous Ranas all wearing copies of the Shah crown, see Sever, *Nepal Under the Ranas*, 170. Regarding Rana linguistic conventions, see M. P. Koirala, *A Role in a Revolution* (Lalitpur: Jagdamba Prakashan, 2008), 29. Bruce Owens makes a note that not only did Ranas attend and endow the Machindranath festival, but Juddha Shumsher Rana (r. 1932–1945) personally displayed the *bhoto* at least one year (“The Politics of Divinity in the Kathmandu Valley,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1989, 312). See Chapter 4 of this volume for more discussion.

17. For detailed chronology and analysis of the political situation in the mid-twentieth century, see in particular Sanu Bhai Dangol, *Palace in Nepalese Politics* (Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1999) and Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1977). For more on the rise of the Koirala family, see Rekhabahadur Bhattarai, *B.P. Koirala Ra Samkalin Nepal* (Biratnagar: Gangadevi Bhattarai, 2007); M. P. Koirala, *A Role in a Revolution*; G. P. Koirala, *Simple Convictions*, translated by Kanak Mani Dixit (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 2007).

18. Regarding the political transitions and difficulties of the 1950s, see especially Dangol, *Palace in Nepalese Politics*.

19. Dangol, *Palace in Nepalese Politics*, 63–67. There are also a number of primary documents, including correspondence between Nehru and Tribhuvan, included as an appendix in M. P. Koirala, *A Role in a Revolution*.

20. Not coincidentally, both the form and the rhetoric of the *panchayat* as a “guided,” “indigenous” democracy borrowed heavily from the autocratic “democracies” that had recently been created in Pakistan and in Egypt. For a sympathetic account of King Mahendra’s vision, see Harsha Bahadur Budamagar, *Sri 5 Mahendra* (Kathmandu: Kaji Madusudan Raj Rajbhandari, 2004).

21. Specifically, there were six class organizations for peasants, laborers, women, veterans, students, and college graduates. In practice, the class organization for students came to serve as party proxies.

22. One former palace insider who wished to remain anonymous reminisced about going to the movies with King Mahendra. He claimed that after King Mahendra had settled his family members and guests in the theater to watch the show, he slipped out to confer with (and pay) the ticket takers and food vendors to report criticism or rumors of political opposition.

23. See L. S. Baral, *Autocratic Monarchy: Politics in Panchayat Nepal* (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2012).

24. Sudhindra Sharma, “The Hindu State and the State of Hinduism,” *State of Nepal*, Kanak Mani Dixit and Shastri Ramachandaran, eds. (Lalitpur: Himal Books, 2002), 22–38: 26.

25. This played out in a variety of policies, though more in the realm of state practices than outright legislation. Out of nineteen state holidays observed in the second half of the twentieth century, for example, thirteen are Hindu festivals, and all the state-recognized Hindu festivals are drawn from the middle-hill *pahadi* region; “those of the Tarai Hindus are only considered to be local holidays” (Sharma, “The Hindu State and the State of Hinduism,” 29).

26. On the role of Radio Nepal in the promotion of Mahendra’s vision, see Pratyoush Onta, “Promoting Panchayat: Radio Nepal, v.s. 2017–2022,” in *The Social History of Radio Nepal*, Pratyoush Onta et al., eds. (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2004), 165–175.

27. Nepali history, for example, would be taught as the story of how the Shah kings had unified and protected the country, and the royal family would show up in alphabet primers. On the ideological valences of *panchayat*-era education, see Pratyoush Onta, “Nepal Education: Finding a Ray of Hope,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35(47), (2000), 4093–4096; and “Ambivalence Denied: The Making of *Rashtriya Itihas* in Panchayat Era Textbooks,” *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 23(1), (1996), 231–254.

28. Personal communications from Bruce Owens, Ted Riccardi, and Kath March.

29. For more on the Janandolan specifically, see William Raiper and Martin Hoftun, *Spring Awakening: An Account of the 1990 Revolution in Nepal* (New York: Viking, 1992). For accounts of the period that followed, see Martin Hoftun, William Raiper, and John Whelpton, *People, Politics & Ideology: Democracy and Social Change in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1999); Michael Hutt, ed. *Nepal in the Nineties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Gellner et al., eds., *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997); David Gellner, ed., *Resistance and the State: Nepalese Experiences* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2002); Krishna Hachhethu, *Political Parties of Nepal* (Lalitpur: Social Science Baha, 2006), “Transition to Democracy in Nepal: Negotiations behind Constitution Making,” *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 21(1) (1990):91–126, and *State of Democracy in Nepal* (Kathmandu: International IDEA, 2004); Lok Raj Baral, ed., *Nepal, Political Parties, and Parliament* (New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2004) and *Election and Governance in Nepal* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005); Dhruba Kumar, ed., *Domestic Conflict and Crisis of Governability in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Center of Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 2000).

30. Several palace insiders with whom I spoke confirmed that this was the post-Janandolan consensus, though it was described most clearly by Crown Prince Dipendra’s secretary Saujanya Joshi.

31. For an excellent analysis of this dynamic, see Mahendra Lawoti, *Looking Back, Looking Forward* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007), 8–21.

32. Deepak Thapa, ed., *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2003), 391. It is worth nothing that the demands were issued just days before the deadline, so there was no reasonable expectation of their fulfillment.

33. For accounts of the rise of the Maoist movement, see Thapa, ed., *Understanding the Maoist Movement*; Deepak Thapa, *A Kingdom Under Siege* (Kathmandu: The Printhouse, 2003); Michael Hutt, ed., *Himalayan People’s War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). A brief but trenchant account of the government weaknesses leading to the Maoists’ success can be found

in Lawoti, *Looking Back, Looking Forward*. The persuasiveness and cultural practices of the Maoists are analyzed in Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival, and Maoist Rebellion in Nepal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), and a helpful practical statement of the Maoists' ideology and organizational structures as of 2005 can be found in *Nepal's Maoists: Their Aims, Structure and Strategy*, Asia Report No. 104 (October 27, 2005), International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/nepal/104-nepals-maoists-their-aims-structure-and-strategy.aspx>, last accessed July 21, 2014).

34. The gender dynamics of Maoist recruitment are analyzed in Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival, and Maoist Rebellion in Nepal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

35. In at least one rural district the Maoist curriculum included teaching the English alphabet with a mnemonic beginning "A is for apple, B is for bomb" (personal communication from Miranda Weinberg).

36. Author interview with Maoist spokesman and politburo member Krishna Mahara.

37. This was apparently a longstanding facial habit, as even when Prince Gyanendra was studying at Tribhuvan University in the 1960s, he was nicknamed "Mr. Toos" (Mr. Sourpuss) by his fellow students (personal communication from Dinesh Rajbhandari).

38. Sharada Adhikari, *Rajyarobhanko Ek Barsha: Sri 5 Maharajdbiraj Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Devbata Rajyarohanpachiko Sachitra Bibaran* (Lalitpur: Vinod Bahadur Amatya, 2002).

39. In later years, this move was widely decried as "illegal" or "unconstitutional." In fact, even if it was autocratic, it was entirely legal and constitutional, given the breadth of the wording of the 1990 Constitution.

40. "Royal birthday celebrations at various places," *Kathmandu Post*, July 8, 2003, 1, confirmed in interview with Nepali Congress leader Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat. Despite boycotting the prime minister's party, prominent leaders including G. P. Koirala, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and Ram Chandra Paudel still went to Narayanhiti Palace to felicitate the king on his birthday, indicating that the mainstream parliamentary parties were still fundamentally loyalist.

41. A high-ranking palace official told me during informal conversation that the suspension of communication technology was specifically intended to prevent outcry from Kathmandu's human rights organizations.

42. Interview with Interim Home Secretary Umesh Mainali.

43. On the assumptions guiding the palace and military about the army's capability, see Rhod-erick Chalmers, "State Power and the Security Sector" in *Nepal in Transition*, Sebastian von Eisie-del et al., eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 58–80.

44. W. A. Sunil and Deepal Jayasekera, "Farcical municipal elections intensify political instability in Nepal," World Socialist Website (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2006/feb2006/nepaf16.shtml>, last accessed January 29, 2015).

45. For a detailed, if wildly polemical, account of the movement, see Kundan Aryal and Upendra Poudel, *Jana Andolan II: A Witness Account* (Kathmandu: Informal Sector Service Centre, 2006). The fact that the Ring Road protests were disproportionately composed of organized Maoists (and did not just represent a spontaneous outpouring of outraged locals) was confirmed for me by then organizer of Maoist activities in Kathmandu, Chandra Bahadur Thapa ("Sagar").

46. "Invincible people power," *Kathmandu Post*, April 22, 2006, 1; Aryal and Poudel, *Jana Andolan II*.

47. Author interviews with Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Sitaula and UML Chairman Madhav Kumar Nepal.
48. Aryal and Poudel, *Jana Andolan II*, 18.
49. Anirban Roy, *Prachanda: The Unknown Revolutionary* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 2008), 13–146.
50. “House moves Constituent Assembly poll,” *Kathmandu Post*, April 29, 2006, 1.
51. House Proclamation 5.1, 5.4. For the full proclamation text, see Appendix A.
52. For an excellent ethnography of the organizational culture of the Young Communist League, see Dan Vesalainen Hirslund, “Sacrificing Youth: Maoist Cadres and Political Activism in Post-War Nepal” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Copenhagen, 2012).
53. Interim Constitution 45.1 (a–c). This same section further stipulates that no one shall be permitted to be a parliamentarian if he/she had been “against the people’s movement” (45.2). A full English text of the Interim Constitution is available at <http://www.un.org.np/node/10500> (last accessed January 29, 2015).
54. Interim Constitution, “Preamble.”
55. Interim Constitution, “Part 23: Transitional Provisions,” article 159.
56. Author interview with UML Chairman Madhav Kumar Nepal. In fact, though, the prime minister’s status as head of state would not be technically enshrined in the constitution until an amendment passed in December 2007.
57. For one of the few systematic opinion polls conducted in Nepal during the interim period, see Sudhindra Sharma and Pawan Kumar Sen, *Nepal Contemporary Political Situation—IV: Opinion Poll Report* (Kathmandu: Interdisciplinary Analysts, 2007).
58. “Saddam hanging widely condemned by Nepalis,” *Kathmandu Post*, December 31, 2006, 1.
59. Interview with Hem Raj Subedi.
60. Kulvindra Phuyal, “Yasari Garyo Durbarle Bhimeshwor ma Kshema Bali,” *Janaranjan Sapthahik*, 13 Jet 2064 B.S. (May 27, 2007): 1. For this article, *Janaranjan* journalists apparently followed a car from the palace to Dolakha that contained staff and materials to handle the royal *puja*. Confirmed by site investigation and interviews conducted by Devendra Neupane in 2010.
61. The dismal election of 2006, under the king’s direct rule, was for municipal rather than national seats.
62. Interviews with Maoist street leaders Leknath Neupane and Chandra Bahadur Thapa (“Sagar”).
63. For an indictment of the royal family’s financial dealings and resistance to the nationalization of royal property, see Diwas Guragai, “Golmal Hisabkitab: Abhilekh Chaina, Raja Birendra Ra Unka Pariwarko Chal Sampattiko” *Nepal Magazine*, 4 Asoj 2066 B.S. (Sept, 20, 2009), 22–26.
64. Author interview with Interim Home Secretary Umesh Mainali; Jagat Nepal, “Purva Raja ra Sitaula,” *Nepal Magazine*, Asar/Shrawan 2065 [2008], given to author in manuscript form.
65. Author interviews with palace staff members Jaya Ram Manandhar and Sushil Shrestha.
66. Author interviews with head of government inventory team Dr. Govinda Kusum and Interim Home Secretary Umesh Mainali.
67. Which is to say, they were real gems (author interview with Dr. Kusum). There continue to be rumors that Gyanendra kept the actual crown, but if he did, he replaced it with an incredibly valuable facsimile. King Gyanendra did request to keep the crown, but the cabinet categorically denied his request, and he appears to have complied.

CHAPTER 3

1. See Chapter 9 of Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism* (Waterloo, Canada: Ritual Studies International, 2010). For another set of reflections on the ways rituals can fail, see also Ute Huskin, ed. *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failures, and the Dynamics of Ritual* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

2. *Ibid.*, 200.

3. *Ibid.*, 204.

4. Barbara Myerhoff, “Death in Due Time,” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 395.

5. The following narrative of events particularly reflects the account given in then-Military Secretary Bibek Shah’s memoir *Maile Dekheko Darbar* (Kathmandu: Yeti Publications Nepal, 2010), supplemented by the variety of book-length treatments of the massacre, the personal recollections of palace staff members I collected in interviews, press accounts (particularly from *The Kathmandu Post* and *Himal* magazine), and my own recollections from being in Kathmandu at the time.

6. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 196.

7. Author interviews with Jaya Ram Manandhar and Mitha Ram Pudasaini.

8. Jagat Nepal, *Girijaprasad Koiralaka Aaphno Kura* (Lalitpur: Jagdamba Prakashan, 2010), 158.

9. I have debated whether to use the English term “coronation” or “enthronement,” as both reflect key gestures of the ritual (seating a new king on a throne and placing a crown on his head). I have opted for “enthronement” because it mimics the Nepali term for the ritual, *gaddi arohan* (“seating on the throne”).

10. At least in recent memory. As noted in Chapter 2, most members of the Rana family wore imitation crowns during their rule. Since 1951, however, there had been only one crown used, and it had only been worn by the king.

11. Shah, *Maile Dekheko Darbar*, 31–32.

12. The enthronement of a shaven-headed king was anomalous: normally a new king would not participate in any mourning rituals for his predecessor, including shaving his head.

13. Shah, *Maile Dekheko Darbar*, 33.

14. This provides an interesting example of what Bruce Lincoln calls “corrosive discourse”: “those sorts of speech which are not only nonauthoritative, but downright antithetical to the construction of authority, given their capacity to eat away at the claims and pretensions of discourses and speakers who try to arrogate authority for themselves: gossip, rumor, jokes, invective; curses, catcalls, nicknames, taunts” (*Authority*, 78).

15. Personal photograph from the collection of Nayab Rajpurohit Raghu Nath Aryal.

16. Shah, *Maile Dekheko Darbar*, 34.

17. Dipendra’s desire to marry Devyani reportedly caused a rift between the crown prince and his parents. Those who consider Dipendra the shooter cite this tension as the motivation behind the massacre. Devyani herself left for Delhi following the shootings and has never since lived in Nepal. She married a man from one of the former royal families of India in 2006.

18. Shah, *Maile Dekheko Darbar*, 35.

19. Most Western observers think of scapegoats and assume the ritual’s purpose was forcing the brahmin to absorb and then carry away the “sin” of the dead king. Nepalis generally find this interpretation bewildering. Instead, many explain that stigma attaches to *katto*-eating brahmans because they accept food and gifts on the eleventh day after death, a profoundly inauspicious and

polluting time. Many Nepalis also believe that the *katto* brahmin loses his caste because the dishes he has to eat incorporate ashes, bone, or brain matter from the dead king. Ramesh Prasad Pande, the Chief Royal Priest (*rajpurohit*) who oversaw the rituals in 2001, insisted to me that this was not the case—though he would not likely have confided such a controversial practice to me. For a discussion of nonroyal but culturally cognate eleventh-day Hindu death customs, with specialists referred to as “mahabrahmins,” see Jonathan Parry, *Death in Banaras* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

20. This concern with remuneration has generally been interpreted by Western commentators as a failure of the *katto*—that by being commodified the ritual was violated or cheapened. See particularly Amy Willesee and Mark Whittaker, *Love and Death in Kathmandu* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004). However, every Nepali I asked insisted that material compensation was fundamental to *katto* and that there was nothing wrong with the brahmins’ expectations/demands. People rather saw the fault lying with the stingy palace and/or government.

21. Author interview with palace staffer Jaya Ram Manandhar.

22. Myerhoff, “Death in Due Time,” 407.

23. Winn, “Legal Ritual,” 556. Winn gives the example of the Miranda warning, which creates the reality of an arrest.

24. Photocopies of the documents signed during these events are included in an appendix in Bhupendra Rai, *Shahavamshako Patanma: Sallabhakar Parishadko Bhumika* (Kathmandu: s.n., 2008).

25. I raised this possibility repeatedly in interviews with members of the Royal Council, all of whom either looked bewildered or immediately insisted “*hudaina*”—“that’s not possible” (author interviews with Dr. Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, Keshav Prasad Upadhyaya, Chet Bahadur Kunwar, Rebatin Raman Khanal).

26. This was not relevant for appointing Dipendra, however, as the comatose prince could hardly issue orders for his father’s funeral. Instead, the palace staff organized Birendra’s funeral without any formal order or authorization from anyone.

27. “*Gaddi khaali raakhnu hudaina*.” This was repeated verbatim (and emphatically) by several Council members I interviewed, notably Rebatin Raman Khanal and Keshav Prasad Upadhyaya. This insistence reflects a strong institutionalized discomfort with any interregnum. The interregnum is of course a problem for any hereditary system. It was solved in England and France by automatic legal succession, and in one African context by having a chief’s daughter temporarily take his place pending the installation of his son (Meyer Fortes, “Ritual and Office,” *Religion, Morality and the Person: Essays on Tallensi Religion* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987], 84–109). Nepal seems not to have developed any solution to interregnum besides the haste of the Royal Council.

28. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 200.

29. According to the Palace Military Secretary of the time, Prime Minister Koirala had urged King Gyanendra not to order postmortems on the grounds that it was clear what had happened, and by the time of the investigation the bodies were already cremated (Shah, *Maile Dekheko Darbar*, 26).

30. An English-language version of their summary report can be found at http://nepalresearch.com/politics/background/committee_report.htm (last accessed February 1, 2015).

31. For example, the official summary claims that Dipendra entered the room “with no expression on his face”—which has been used in some conspiracy theories as evidence that

the real shooter wore a Dipendra mask (Aditya Shrestha, *The Dreadful Night* [Kathmandu: Ekta Books, 2001], 51).

32. The palace staff organized the succession rituals in a literal manner according to a handwritten document, maintained by the Chief of the Royal Household, that recorded the precise arrangements made for royal funerals and coronations of the past (interview with former palace master of ceremonies Jaya Ram Manandhar). In 2008, this document may have been warehoused in the Palace Secretariat when the building was converted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some Narayanhiti Palace documents were subsequently sent from the Foreign Ministry to the National Archives, but none have been catalogued, and it is difficult to know what might be where.

33. Mariana Kropf, “Katto Khuaune: Two Brahmins for Nepal’s Departed Kings,” *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 23 (2002), 56–84, 66.

34. Morbidly, the coffin used to transport Tribhuvan from Switzerland back to Nepal continues to be on display in the Hanuman Dhoka Palace Museum.

35. Kropf, “Katto Khuaune,” 66–67, citing accounts from the state newspaper *Gorkhapatra*.

36. The first son of the king was titled *yuva-raj-adhiraj* (“youth-king-of-kings,” colloquially pronounced “*yubarajdiraj*”), in imitation of his father’s title *maha-raj-adhiraj* (“great-king-of-kings”), while the first son of the crown prince was titled *nava-yuva-raj-adhiraj* (“new-youth-king-of-kings”). By contrast, other sons of the reigning king were *yuvaraj*, while the king’s brothers, brothers-in-law, or male cousins were *kumar* or *adhiraj-kumar*, distinguishing the direct succession lineage from collateral lines.

37. Interview with palace priest Raghu Nath Aryal.

38. Despite the efforts of some publications to refer to him as “King Dipendra,” he generally continues to be referred to as “Crown Prince Dipendra,” reflecting his performed rather than his legal/technical status.

39. The other two dynastic abnormalities were Girvan Yuddha (r. 1799–1816)—who succeeded as his father’s junior son—and Prithvi Bir (r. 1881–1911), who succeeded his grandfather. At 53, Gyanendra was almost twenty years older than his father Mahendra had been at succession. He was actually older than any but two of his predecessors had been at their deaths.

40. I informally heard that there was a seminar held at Tribhuvan University in mid-2001 (prior to Paras’s formal designation) that drafted a proposal for a national referendum to *elect* a new crown prince, on the grounds that it would be “democratic” and—implicitly—that *anyone in the country* would be better than the heir presumptive.

41. The British monarchy, for example, went through a vulnerable period at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, from George III through the early reign of Victoria—a period that included decades of madness, a profligate regent, and the succession of a teenage girl—but was still able to survive.

42. See Chaulagain, “Hindu Kingship” and Michael Witzel, “The coronation rituals of Nepal, with special reference to the coronation of King Birendra in 1975” in *Heritage of the Kathmandu Valley*, Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels, eds. (Sankt Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftverlag, 1987), 417–467.

43. In the words of a propaganda piece published in honor of Birendra’s consecration, “Coronation is an important national festival. Because this ceremony marks the emergence of a new wave of nation-building, the country will become enthused with a new spirit, a new vigour and a new inspiration to work for national development” (Krishna Aryal, *Monarchy in the Making of Nepal* [Kathmandu: (Aryal), 1975], 99).

44. For an excellent first-hand account of Mahendra's consecration, see Duncan Forbes, *The Heart of Nepal* (London: R. Hale, 1962), 107–113.
45. *Ibid.*, 112–113.
46. Francis Hutchins, *Democratizing Monarch* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 48–49.
47. *Ibid.*, 51–53.
48. *Ibid.*, 54.
49. *Ibid.*, 57. Hutchins's Nepali friends suggested this was a shrewd way to encourage intellectuals to leave the capital to become teachers, rather than stay as dissidents.
50. Author interviews with palace priests Madhav Bhattacharai and Raghu Nath Aryal.

CHAPTER 4

1. Bhoto Jatra does not seem to be held in particular reverence by local Nepalis, many of whom share my sense that the ritual is “peculiar.” Rather, many Nepalis of my acquaintance (including my research assistant) consider Bhoto Jatra somewhat silly, and when I attended Bhoto Jatra in 2010 someone nearby pronounced loudly: “People come, people watch, people leave—what’s the point of it all?” (“*Manchhe aauchhan, herchhan, jaanchhan—ke ni ke?*”). This remark elicited apparently sympathetic snickering.

2. A kumari is a young girl who is designated as a living incarnation of the goddess Taleju. For more on kumaris and their relationship to the monarchy, see Chapter 5.

3. A substance that has been rendered holy by being offered to a god, then distributed to devotees. Common forms of *prasad* include red powder, flowers, fruit, and uncooked rice.

4. A bare listing of the events of the annual ritual cycle fills some eighteen pages of Owens, “The Politics of Divinity in the Kathmandu Valley,” 385–402.

5. This contrast between ornate, chaotic early festivities and regimented *bhoto* viewing prompts Owens to begin his treatment of Bhoto Jatra, “The climax and best known part of the jatra is, in fact, one of its least interesting aspects” (Owens, “The Politics of Divinity,” 235).

6. It is worth noting that there is also a royal sword carried during several parts of the Indra Jatra celebration and that swords were used in ritual contexts during Dasai in many places in Nepal.

7. Owens, “The Politics of Divinity,” 210–211. Owens notes that many people insisted that the Bhaktapur sword bearer actually touches the eyes with the sword, though his observation was that the sword bearer merely sanctified the paintbrush used to paint in the deity’s pupils.

8. In addition to the figures specifically mentioned here, Machindranath also is party to several other interlocking relationships of higher-than-human figures who variously participate in or are referenced in his ritual cycle. For example, multiple figures participate in/constitute the chariot itself: each chariot wheel is considered to be a separate Bhairab, a small model of the Swayambhu *chaitya* is always placed in the chariot’s spire, and the chariot’s main shrine is ornamented with Buddhas and with the vehicles of the four major Hindu gods. Machindranath also has a ritual relationship with the Shiva *linga* at Pashupatinath, outside his annual chariot festival, indicating a further “networking” of key Kathmandu Valley deities. On Shiva Ratri, Machindranath wears a particular bone ornament in Shiva’s honor, while at Kartik *puja* the Shiva *linga* at Pashupatinath wears a Vajracarya crown in Machindranath’s honor (John Locke. *Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal* [Kathmandu: Sahayogi Prakashan, Tribhuvan University, 1980], 260, 270).

9. Locke, *Karunamaya*, 50. The account by Chag Chos-rje-dpal (“Dharmasvamin”), who lived in Nepal from 1226 to 1234, seems to clearly describe the unusual statue: “In Nepal, in the Vihara of Arya Bu-kham, there is an image of Avalokitesvara self-created from a sandalwood tree; he was five years old [in appearance?] and his color is red” (translation from the Tibetan by George Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin [Chag Lo Tsa-Ba Chos-Rje-Dpal]: A Tibetan Monk Pilgrim* [Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959], 54–55, adapted by Christian Wedemeyer).

10. These were kings from the Khas Malla dynasty, Jitari and his nephew Ripu, who ruled several valleys to the west of Kathmandu. They each also worshipped the *chaitya* at Swayambhu and made offerings at the Shiva *linga* at Pashupatinath (Douglas, “Washing Your Neighbor’s God,” 51).

11. It is probable that the king in question, Sthitiraja Malla, who would eventually consolidate the entire Kathmandu Valley under his rule, was neither local nor from an established royal lineage and so sought alternate forms of legitimacy (including military conquest and ritual performance). According to the *Gopalaraja Vanshavali*, Sthitiraja Malla bathed Machindranath for the first time in 1370, some ten years before fully consolidating his military victories in the valley. In 1387, he is recorded to have bathed the deity with his three sons, whose succession he was presumably seeking to ensure (Locke, *Karunamaya*, 301; Horst Brinkhaus, “The Descent of the Nepalese Malla Dynasty as Reflected by Local Chroniclers,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 [1991], 118–122).

12. Locke, *Karunamaya*, 306–307.

13. *Ibid.*, 323.

14. Locke points out that the Malla-era chronicle accounts have very little description of the festival proceedings at all and that there are scattered references to a “Jawalakhel jatra” that may well have involved the *bhoto* showing. It is therefore entirely plausible that Bhoto Jatra was practiced but not mentioned in the records (Locke, *Karunamaya*, 330). There are a number of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts that do mention the *bhoto*, but generally in ambiguous, apparently ill-informed, or otherwise confusing ways, and so the absence of references to the king is by no means definitive evidence that he was not present. These accounts include Giuseppe da Rovato, *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (New Delhi: India Offset Press, 1970 [1786]), 3; William Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul* (New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1963 [1811]), 193; unpublished Hodgson papers collected at the British Library (cited by Locke, *Karunamaya*, 295); Daniel Wright, *History of Nepal* (Calcutta: Susil Gupta India, 1958 [1877]), 34–35; Henry Oldfield, *Sketches from Nepal* (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1974 [1880]), 333–334; Sylvain Levi, *Le Nepal* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1908), 46; and Percy Brown, *Picturesque Nepal* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), 109–110.

15. Percival Landon, *Nepal* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1928), 213. Even this reference is somewhat ambiguous, however, as Landon often also uses the term “Maharaja” to refer to the Rana premier instead of the Shah king.

16. While Bhoto Jatra itself ran smoothly, the chariot did fall that year, and many contemporary residents of Patan insist that the chariot thereby predicted the massacre.

17. Based on the annual coverage of Bhoto Jatra in *The Kathmandu Post*. Paras was heir to the throne for only an handful of Bhoto Jatras, and since Crown Prince Dipendra had attended the ritual sometimes but not always, it is unclear whether or not any particular meaning might be attached to Paras’s absence.

18. Personal communication from Bruce Owens. This ritual specialist, Kapil Muni Vajracharya, happens to be the focus of Kesang Tseten's 2005 film about the chariot procession, "On the Road with the Red God."

19. Christophe Emmrich, "All the King's Horses, and all the King's Men": The 2004 Red Mat-syendranatha Incident in Lalitpur," *Indologica Taurinensis* 32 (2006), 46.

20. A few interviewees indicated that there had been half-hearted discussion of sending the prime minister in the king's place as early as 2006 but that the administration was hesitant to take quite such a radical step. As Patan CDO Ananda Pokharel put it, during the first year of the interim period "[s]quishing (*michna*) that practice would have been too hard."

21. Author interview with Mangal Siddhi Manandhar.

22. Author interview with Ananda Pokharel.

23. Maoist street leaders Lekhnath Neupane and Chandra Bahadur Thapa ("Sagar"), as well as policy-level leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara, all insisted in interviews with me that the Maoists did not realize in advance that their rally would disrupt the king's program.

24. "Maoists capture army grounds," *Kathmandu Post*, June 3, 2006. Confirmed in interviews with Maoist street leaders Lekh Nath Neupane and Chandra Bahadur Thapa ("Sagar").

25. In fact, the Maoist leaders were intensely aware of and concerned about their negative public image and worried that disruptions at their first major above-ground rally would cement the impression that they were unable to participate responsibly in mainstream politics (Author interview with Chandra Bahadur Thapa ["Sagar"]). Hirslund explains in "Sacrificing Youth" that the Maoists have maintained an organizational culture that includes a disciplined leadership structure and that cadres are socialized to respect and respond to their leaders.

26. Gyanendra himself was not present at the meeting. It appears that the main participants in the meeting were the CDOs of Kathmandu and Patan, the head of the Kathmandu police, and the palace military advisor; these men then discussed plans with Gyanendra's secretaries, Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan and Sagar Prasad Timilsina, who in turn had direct discussions with the monarch.

27. Quoted (in translation) from author interview with Patan CDO Ananda Raj Pokharel, who was paraphrasing the king's message to the meeting. That Gyanendra did indeed insist on attending Bhot Jatra in 2006, and that he did so because he considered Bhot Jatra a necessary act of his kingship, was confirmed in my interview with Sthaneswor Devkota, CDO of Kathmandu at the time and another participant in the security consultations at the palace.

28. I have received differing reports on whether the queen attended or not, with one press account reporting that she attended, at least one organizer insisting she stayed home, and most people not mentioning her either way. This lack of consensus suggests to me that her participation was not important or notable enough to strongly influence people's memories of the event.

29. Subedi claimed in an interview with me that the only times in his long career when the Guti Samsthan had direct contact with the prime minister's office all regarded issues surrounding the dissolution of the monarchy.

30. I have not been able to determine if the question of Bhot Jatra was raised officially in the cabinet or if it was decided informally between Koirala and his close advisors. There are no publicly available open records of cabinet proceedings, and the two members of the 2007 cabinet whom I asked about this did not remember.

31. Author interview with Koirala aide Bal Krishna Dahal.

32. Author interview with Purushottam Paudel, who was then the head of the Patan branch of the Guti Samsthan.
33. Author interview with Hira Kaji Shrestha, staff member at the Home Ministry, Internal Management Section.
34. Author interview with Patan CDO Ananda Pokharel.
35. Interview by Devendra Neupane with the youth leaders of the Jyapu Society.
36. “Home Affairs,” *Nepalese Perspective*, June 19, 1965, 3.
37. “Newsline,” *Kathmandu Post*, December 21, 1999, 1; *Kathmandu Post* front-page feature photo, December 31, 1999.
38. An excellent example is the full edition of *Nepalese Perspective* published for Queen Ratna’s birthday, August 20, 1966.
39. “HM opens polio eradication camp” and “Celebrations mark king’s birthday,” *Kathmandu Post*, July 11, 2003. For an extended narrative account of King Gyanendra’s birthday celebrations in 2004, see Sepideh Bajracharya, “A Country of Hearsay and Rumor: Kings, Strongmen, and Rumor in the Urban Nepali Political Imaginary” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2008).
40. Author interview with retired Nepali ambassador to the United States and Canada, Bhekh Bahadur Thapa.
41. Author interview with palace priest Raghu Nath Aryal. In fact, the king’s weight in gold and silver was generally considered far too lavish for an ordinary birthday, and most years a token amount of the precious metal would be placed in a jar of cow dung from the royal cow herd. The small piece of gold or silver would then be gifted to the senior palace priest and the cow dung distributed to the other priests for use in rituals.
42. Bajracharya, “A Country of Hearsay and Rumor,” 144–146.
43. Author interview with palace staffer Jaya Ram Manandhar.
44. *Ibid.*
45. “Govt, diplomats snub king’s party: Former top panchas present; Students, youths demand ban on B’day bash” *Kathmandu Post*, July 7, 2007, 1.
46. “A birthday of bouquets, boycotts and brouhaha,” *Kathmandu Post*, July 8, 2007, 1, confirmed in interviews with Maoist street leaders Chandra Bahadur Thapa (“Sagar”) and Lekhnath Neupane.
47. This is my informal impression from conversations within the Kathmandu Valley in the few weeks surrounding the event.
48. Author interviews with Patan CDO Ananda Pokharel and Koirala aide Bal Krishna Dahal.
49. Author interview with Tirtha Lal Maharjan, who was then the head of the Jyapu Society.
50. *Ibid.*
51. I do not now recollect whether the program was *Jire Khursani* or *Tito Satya*, both of which are weekly satire shows. To date, I have not been able to access archives of either show to determine which show aired the episode, or what exact date it aired.

CHAPTER 5

1. “Putting the nation on display” was accomplished particularly through the arrangement of space. All top members of the government and many international diplomats would stand on the steps of Hanuman Dhoka Palace, able to look out and see all the proceedings and the thousands of spectators. They were in turn able to be seen by those spectators as standing in apparent

solidarity behind the king, rather in the manner of a choir standing around/behind a soloist. Unlike other major Nepali festivals/rituals, Indra Jatra *presumes* tourism. For most rituals and festivals any tourists present simply wander around with all the local participants, but during Indra Jatra there is a special viewing area designated for tourists. Police and local volunteers invariably attempt to escort foreigners to this viewing area, and some years the Kumari's chariot has been pulled an extra distance across Durbar Square to offer tourists a better view of the goddess.

2. For an analysis of the festival as the three-part simultaneous celebration of Indra Jatra, Kumari Jatra, and Bhairab Jatra, see Gerard Toffin, "The Indra Jatra of Kathmandu as a Royal Festival," *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 19(1), (1992), 73–92.

3. Indra is a divine figure with roots back to the Vedas, and he is a recurring figure in classical Indic mythologies. See Jan Gonda, "A Note on Indra in Puranic Literature," *Selected Studies* 6 (1991), 222–261.

4. In some versions, the people spontaneously let Indra go as soon as they realize his true identity, though this version does not explain the procession for the dead. For a longer account of this narrative see Michael Baltutis, "The Festival of Indra" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 2008).

5. Bhairab has been worshipped widely in Nepal since at least the first millennium CE, and there is some evidence that there was a Kathmandu festival associated with Bhairab early in the Malla period (approximately fifteenth century), long before an "Indra Jatra" is attested. For more on Bhairabs, see Milan Shakya, *The Cult of Bhairava in Nepal* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008); David White, "At the Mandala's Dark Fringe," in *Notes from a Mandala*, Laurie Patton and David Haberman, eds. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 200–215; Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam, "Bhairava and the Goddess," in *Wild Goddesses in India and Nepal*, Axel Michaels et al., eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 253–297; Saphalya Amatya, *Sri Aakash Bhairabnath* (Kathmandu: Sri Aakash Bhairavnath Mandir Jirnoddhara Samiti, 2002).

6. While there are several young girls worshipped as goddesses in the Kathmandu Valley, all of whom are variously referred to as kumaris (including the Patan Kumari, discussed in the previous chapter), the unspecified phrase "the Kumari" colloquially refers only to the Royal Kumari of Kathmandu. Other kumaris generally need to have their location specified (e.g., the Patan Kumari, the Bhaktapur Kumari).

7. For more on the complex dynamics of street protests in Nepal, see Genevieve Lakier, "The Spectacle of Power: Coercive Protest and the Problem of Democracy in Nepal" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2014).

8. For a discussion of the roles of spectators in the staging of rituals, see MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies."

9. Or more properly, the most diligently worshipped of a few tutelary deities. The Shahs also maintained ties with Gorakhnath, the patron of Gorkha—though they rarely worshipped him in person unless visiting Gorkha itself—as well as an image of Bhagawati, whose image Prithvi Narayan brought with him from Nuwakot and established in a temple in the northwest side of Hanuman Dhoka palace complex.

10. There is an extensive literature on the relationship of South Asian Hindu kings to particular gods. For examples of tutelary deities worshipped by non-Shah kings across what would become Nepal, see the essays compiled in Krauskopf and Lecomte-Tilouine, eds, *Célébrer le pouvoir*. For one interesting parallel to the tutelary goddess of the Shah kings in a radically different part of the continent, see Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*. One example of how kings could manipulate the tutelary relationship can be seen in the case of one Indian dynasty that

legally transferred their kingdoms to their tutelary deities, then ruled as regents on the god's behalf (Conzelmann, "A Royal Ritual of Mandi State"). An interesting case of the vulnerability of kings to tutelary deities (or to the priests of their tutelary deities) can be found among the Valabha Vaishnava kings of Rajasthan, where tutelary deities were quite mobile and could "quit" kings they found unacceptable (Norbert Peabody, "In Whose Turban Does the Lord Reside?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33[4], [1991], 726–754.)

11. Part of the Malla kings' succession reportedly hinged around the proper transmission of secret mantras from king to heir, resulting in crises of legitimacy after the untimely death of some monarchs (Owens, "The Politics of Divinity in the Kathmandu Valley," 303).

12. Most of these stories describe the king playing cards or dice with the goddess, until either the king angers the goddess by making an inappropriate overture or the king's wife becomes jealous. Once the relationship becomes thus unworkable, the goddess then retreats into the form of a little girl, who cannot then be sexually available to the king. One telling can be found in Bikram Hasrat, *History of Nepal as Told By its Own and Contemporary Chroniclers* (Hoshiarpur: Research Institute Book Agency, 1970), 59–60.

13. John Mellowship, *The Enchanted World of Kumari* (Kathmandu: Pilgrims Publishing, 2007), 126–127. It is worth noting, however, that Nepalis often find tantric interpretations of the Kumari silly or even offensive. Gautam Shakya—a member of the family that cares for the Kumari—dismissed out of hand the idea that the king's gifts to the Kumari mimicked a marital relationship. It would seem that in recent years there has been no local emphasis on the possible tantric overtones of the king/Kumari relationship.

14. For more on ritual incongruity, see Smith, *To Take Place*, 109–110.

15. Some of the accounts of this conquest (such as Daniel Wright's *History of Nepal* [1877]) credit Prithvi Narayan's success to the inattention of celebrating soldiers and the overwhelming drunkenness of the populace. The latter seems entirely possible, given the popularity of Swet Bhairab's fountain of alcohol.

16. *Padmagiri Vamshavali*, translated in Hasrat, *History of Nepal*, 90–91. Some later accounts, such as Daniel Wright, *History of Nepal* (1877) and Henry Oldfield, *Sketches from Nepal* (1880), include the self-enthronement but do not mention the Kumari.

17. See for instance Baltutis, "The Festival of Indra," 316.

18. "When the new Monarch meets the new Living Goddess," *Kathmandu Post*, September 2, 2001, 1.

19. No king in recent memory has contested the selection made by the Kumari House's representatives (author interview with Gautam Shakya, Kumari House liaison to the government).

20. For an account of these various institutions see Michael Allen, *The Cult of Kumari*, 2nd ed. (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1996).

21. This memorandum lists the six official auspicious times of the Jatra, including "Ban Yatra" and the raising of the pole. I received a photocopy of the official letter in 2010, which had been issued by the Ministry of Culture; Michael Baltutis reports that a similar document was circulated in 2005 via the Guti Samsthan.

22. Loss of land grants is not a problem unique to Indra Jatra, but the Indra Jatra *gutiyars* are particularly dissatisfied about it, and this forms a distinctive element of their interactions with the government.

23. Several of the Indra Jatra *gutiyars* insisted to me that there is one *guti* that has been receiving 12 rupees per year from the government since the Malla period. NRs 12 is approximately US\$0.15.

For comparison, at the time of Indra Jatra 2010, a bus ride from my apartment to Hanuman Dhoka cost NRs 14, and a meal at a restaurant cost NRs 200–500.

24. Interestingly, Henry Oldfield recorded in the late nineteenth century that local *gutis* felt victimized by the government: apparently the prevailing narrative at the time was that the Malla kings had supported the *gutis* and the Shah kings did not (*Sketches from Nepal* vol. 2, 289–290). The present grousing about government indifference would thus seem to reflect a long-continuing narrative, featuring shifting antagonists.

25. This resulted in a rather startling interview with one member of the Kumari House staff, who insisted that the Kumari House had never actively supported the king or paid attention to politics, and that the Kumari House would always be open and willing to offer a state *tika* to whomever the government decided to send.

26. The staff of the Kumari House has unfortunately refused to discuss precisely how they were in contact with the palace or the king, while their contact point within the palace, Sharada Prasad Pradhan (the Chief of the Royal Household for decades) passed away shortly before I began my main research. My account here is therefore based on speculations from other members of the palace staff and the interim period head of the Kathmandu Guti Samsthan rather than the direct participants.

27. Author interview with Sthaneswor Devkota.

28. Baltutis, “The Festival of Indra,” 314–315. While the Maoist rally during Bhoto Jatra a few weeks earlier had apparently coincided with the king’s program unintentionally, by the time of Indra Jatra the Maoists had developed a policy of staging protests every time Gyanendra left the palace—possibly based on the surprising impacts their rally had had on Bhoto Jatra (author interviews with Maoist street leaders Lekhnath Neupane and Chandra Bahadur Thapa [“Sagar”]).

29. For reasons obscure to me, it is considered a very strong form of political protest—a censure or insult—to publically display black-colored flags or banners to a Nepali public figure. Normal protests or rallies generally feature red flags and banners, occasionally white, green, or blue. Black flag protests are reserved for extreme opposition.

30. Baltutis, “The Festival of Indra,” 314.

31. The Maoists run a tight institution, or in Hirslund’s words, “a hierarchically organized movement that prides itself on its vertical lines of integration” (“Sacrificed Youth,” 19). Given that NMM was a Maoist affiliate and that the Maoists had a demonstrate-against-Gyanendra policy in place, it is very likely that the NMM’s activities were part of a well-planned and well-executed overall strategy.

32. To date, I have only received accounts of this meeting from the government side: CDO Modaraj Dotel, municipal in charge of police Sarbendra Khanal, and Kathmandu Guti Samsthan *hakim* Raj Pokharel, all of whom insisted that the meeting consisted of friendly debate, discussion, and gentle persuasion. I suspect, however, that the local representatives and *gutiyars* felt pressured or even coerced into following the government’s program.

33. Translated from author interview with Modaraj Dotel. Dotel repeatedly expressed strong gratitude to the local *guti* representatives for submitting gracefully to the interim government’s changes to their Jatra.

34. Author interview with Modaraj Dotel, CDO of Kathmandu.

35. Baltutis, “The Festival of Indra,” 315.

36. Author interview with Sarbendra Khanal, Kathmandu superintendent of police during the interim period.

37. Author interviews with Sarbendra Khanal and Umesh Mainali (the police superintendent and interim Home Secretary respectively).

38. Author interview with Raj Panday, head of the Kathmandu branch office of the Guti Samsthan.

39. Author interview with Koirala aide Bal Krishna Dahal, confirmed by author interview with Raj Panday, head of the Kathmandu branch office of the Guti Samsthan.

40. Author interviews with eyewitnesses Raj Panday (head of the Kathmandu branch office of the Guti Samsthan) and Uddhav Karmacharya (head priest of the Kathmandu Taleju temple). Everyone I have spoken with insisted that this was the Kumari's own initiative. This was the last year of her tenure, and she was eleven years old at the time. She thus was mature enough to make a calculated decision and had been Kumari for long enough to plausibly have developed a sense of the appropriate ways to bless different kinds of devotees. Unfortunately, Preeti Shakya (the Kumari at the time) proved too shy to give a good interview, even after her retirement, and declined to tell me how or why she alternated hands that night.

41. Author interviews with Koirala aide Bal Krishna Dahal, Guti Samsthan *hakim* Raj Panday, and Kathmandu Taleju temple priest Uddhav Karmacharya.

42. Author interview with Raj Panday, *hakim* of the Guti Samsthan's Kathmandu branch office.

43. Author interview with Uddhav Karmacharya, head priest of Kathmandu Taleju temple.

44. Baltutis, "The Festival of Indra," 315, confirmed by Koirala aide Bal Krishna Dahal.

45. Author interview with Interim Home Secretary Umesh Mainali.

CHAPTER 6

1. This account is primarily based upon my personal experiences among upper-caste families in the Kathmandu Valley, augmented by personal conversations and interviews with contacts in Gorkha and Kaski. Basic overviews of standard vernacular practice can additionally be found in Lynn Bennett, *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), as well as Gisèle Krauskopf and Marie Lecomte Tilouine, "Introduction : un rituel dans tous ses états," in *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, Gisèle Krauskopf and Marie Lecomte Tilouine, eds. (Paris: CNRS Editions: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme de Paris, 1996), 9–45.

2. In arguing for the equal or greater importance of lineage rituals over goddess worship in understanding Dasai, I am departing significantly from the analyses of many other scholars who have examined the holiday and its political valences. Throughout the essays of Krauskopf and Tilouine's *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, for example, scholar after scholar emphasizes goddess worship as the key to interpreting all Dasai rituals. An important exception to this is Susan Hangen, who prioritizes the exchange of *tika* as the center of the holiday in "Boycotting Dasain," in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal*, Mahendra Lawoti and Susan Hangen, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 121–144. One possible reason why many scholars have de-emphasized the family-oriented features of Dasai most salient to many Nepalis' experiences of the holiday is that the goddess-oriented features of Dasai are the emphases of canonical literary materials. Gerard Toffin, for example, in "Histoire et anthropologie d'un culte royal népalais" (*Célébrer le Pouvoir*, 49–101), explains Dasai through an analysis of the *Devi Mahatmya*. In addition, emphasizing goddess worship heightens the resemblance of Nepali traditions to culturally cognate Indian celebrations. See, for example, Sudeshna Bannerjee, *Durga Puja* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2004); Hillary

Rodrigues, *Ritual Worship of the Great Goddess* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003); Skoda, “State Rituals After the Abolition of the State.” It is important, however, to attend to the uniquely Nepali dynamics. Most Nepalis consider the family-based *tika* exchange as the core of the holiday, more so than the complex worship of Durga. Additionally, many Indian holidays had important ties to local monarchies, but none operated in precisely the same way as the Nepali Dasai. In Mysore, for example, the central royal ritual featured the king imitating Rama by shooting an arrow, a gesture that bears little resemblance to the major rituals, mythologies, or ideologies of the Nepali context (Swami Sivapriyananda and Gajendra Singh Auwa, *Mysore Royal Dasara* [New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1995]; Hayavadana Rao, *The Dasara in Mysore* [Krauskoppf & Tilouine’s *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, 1927]).

3. Lynn Bennett claims that some households begin with the children and then move up to the adults (*Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters*, 162); in my personal experience in Kathmandu, I have only known people to start with the high-status adults and work down in the age/gender/status hierarchy to get to the children last. Susan Hangen observes that among some *janajati* ethnic groups, which tend to be less rigidly hierarchical in all their social structures than high-caste Hindus, *tikas* are purposefully administered on an egalitarian or randomized basis (“Boycotting Dasain,” 127).

4. These various practices are recounted in wonderful detail in the various essays of Krauskoppf and Tilouine, *Célébrer le Pouvoir*. These accounts are crucial for understanding the ways that Dasai rituals, like Machindranath’s ritual cycle, could sustain the assertion of monarchy in the absence of a monarch himself and after the kingdom had been folded into united Nepal. The Dasai activities in uninhabited palaces have upheld the sociopolitical status of local royalty in a diffuse manner that floated free of living, historically specific rulers.

5. In recent years, this team of priests was headed by the Nayab Raj Purohit, Raghu Nath Aryal—a brahmin born in Gorkha to one of the five main Gorkhali lineages that have been serving as priests to the Shah kings since the sixteenth century.

6. Neither of these ritual actions is generally performed by or for non-royals (author interview with Sharada Bhattarai, priest at Gorkha palace).

7. See for example from October 2010 *Nepal Mountain News*: “The Fulpati carriers come on foot from Gorkha to Kathmandu via Dhading district” (<http://www.nepalmountainnews.com/cms/?p=6391>, last accessed January 21, 2015). The *Gorkhapatra* similarly reported in 2010 that the *phulpati* was hand-carried, though by 2014 it correctly reported motorized transport (<http://www.trn.gorkhapatraonline.com/index.php/69-life-style/13167-fulpati-sent-to-hanumandhoka-from-gorkha-durbar.html>, last accessed January 21, 2015). I ascertained the actual transport of the *phulpati* through personal observations in 2010 and 2011, as well as conversations with the *phulpati*-gathering team and the motorcyclist who made the trip in 2011.

8. In practice, everyone I know simply puts their leaf bundles into the Dasai *ghar* early in the morning or based on their own convenience, and not with reference to the Hanuman Dhoka proceedings. No one I spoke to unconnected to the palace knew that there was a cannon shot supposed to signal a national auspicious time (*sait*).

9. There are some indications that there may additionally have been a *phulpati* tribute sent to Kathmandu from Nuwakot, the site from which Prithvi Narayan Shah staged his military campaign against the Kathmandu Valley and later used as his summer palace. There is a fleeting reference to *phulpati* being fetched from Nuwakot by Kathmandu priests in a footnote in Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Bihari K. Shrestha, “Les Rituels Royaux de Dasai à Katmandou,”

Célébrer le Pouvoir, 156, and one Hanuman Dhoka employee mentioned a car being sent from that site to Nuwakot to retrieve *phulpati*, but he was unwilling to elaborate or allow me to join the expedition.

10. Information about the practices at Hanuman Dhoka and Gorkha Durbar was obtained from Raghu Nath Aryal Mitharam Pudasaini, and Sharada Bhattarai. For a helpful essay specifically detailing Dasai practices in Gorkha in the 1990s, see Gunter Unbescheid, “Dépendance Mythologique et Liberté Rituelle,” *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, 103–151.

11. The majority of the essays of *Célébrer le Pouvoir* examine examples of these locations across Nepal where “royal” Dasai rituals are staged in the absence of an actual monarch. See particularly Gisèle Krauskopff, “Rencontre des Déesses et des Dieux du Lieu,” *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, 167–207.

12. To date, I have only obtained personal accounts of the royal *tika*-giving practices through word of mouth, which means that I only have information from living memory of palace staff; it is likely, however, that the Shah family had similar private traditions for far longer.

13. I have received conflicting reports as to whether the palace priests gave *tika* to both the king and the queen, or if they simply gave *tika* to the king, who then blessed the rest of his family. I have also heard one version in which the royal *tikas* were initiated by the Queen Mother. This variability in claims is probably primarily due to the fact that this is a very private family ritual (and so had few direct witnesses to corroborate information, all of whom would be bound by the palace’s culture of secrecy), but it also suggests that the royal family is structurally different from other families in ways that makes it challenging for non-royal Nepalis to speculate as to who should bless whom in what order.

14. Author interviews with palace priests Raghu Nath Aryal and Madhav Bhattarai. Once the *sait* was designated, the king’s personal auspicious moment for receiving *tika* was then announced by the government as the national auspicious moment for giving *tika* within families. This conflated king with nation: what was auspicious for His Majesty was by definition auspicious for everyone else. Interestingly, most people I have spoken to who were not connected to the palace never knew that the nationally announced *sait* was based on the astrology of the king. Several people to whom I mentioned this fact were actually rather upset to learn that their families had been inserted into royal practices and ideology in this way.

15. This program suggests the importance of generational hierarchies during Dasai that compete with (as well as complement) gendered hierarchies. It would be interesting to compare Shah patterns of *tika* giving/receiving to non-royal families where the most senior male of the family is one or two generations junior to the most senior female. I am also not clear how the Shah family pattern of *tika* giving may have differed between 1972 and 1980, when King Birendra would have had two living paternal uncles, who would be reckoned by standard Nepali kinship as being his “little fathers” (*saanobua*). In a non-royal family, these men would be senior to their nephew, but in the royal family it is possible that primogeniture trumped generation and the king (as eldest son of the eldest son) would outrank his father’s brothers.

16. I am not clear specifically where in the palace compound the family *tikas* would have taken place. It is possible that all the Shah family *tikas* were conducted in the dowager queen’s residence, but also possible that the family could have moved to the Narayanhiti main building or (in Birendra’s time) the king and queen’s private quarters, Sri Sadan.

17. Personal communication from retired civil servant Surendra Sijapati.

18. Author interview with Chiran Shumsher Thapa, secretary and advisor to King Birendra.

19. Up until the end of the monarchy, photographers with offices in Durbar Marg would stand by the royal family and snap a photograph of each person as they came through the line. People could then go to the photo shop the following week, locate their own photo on the huge board of royal Dasai pictures, and order prints of their own. Among my interviewees, upper-level palace staffers and members of the Raj Parishad almost uniformly had large prints of these Dasai pictures framed/mounted and prominently displayed in their living rooms.

20. Author interviews with palace secretary Chiran Shamsher Thapa and retired Chief of Army Staff Gen. Pyar Jung Thapa.

21. Author interview with Gen. Pyar Jung Thapa, former Chief of Army Staff.

22. It is not accidental that during Gyanendra's tenure, the Chief of Army Staff, Pyar Jung Thapa, was brother-in-law to Kamal Thapa, the prominent royalist who became Home Minister during the king's 2005–2006 direct rule. The Thapas are one of the lineages of courtiers that followed the Shahs from Gorkha.

23. Brown, *Picturesque Nepal*, 115–119. This account is echoed in Levi, *Le Nepal* (55) and Oldfield, *Sketches from Nepal* (345).

24. The Dasai celebrations in Kaskikot I note based on my own observations; for discussions of the other examples, see Krauskopff, “Rencontre des Déesses et des Dieux du Lieu” and Marie Lecomte-Tiloine, “Les Dieux-Sabres: Etude du Dasai dans une capitale sans roi (Isma),” *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, 243–280.

25. Regarding Orissa, see Skoda, “State Rituals After the Abolition of the State.” Regarding Mysore, see Sivapriyananda, *Mysore Royal Dasara*; Rao, *The Dasara in Mysore*.

26. Philippe Sagant explores the dynamic of Dasai as an imperial ritual with specific reference to the conquered Limbu people in “Dasai et le Double Pouvoir Chez les Yakthumba,” *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, 283–314.

27. Hangen, “Boycotting Dasain,” 127.

28. Krauskopff and Lecomte Tiloquine, “Introduction,” 33.

29. Accounts seem to vary as to whether the *pajani* happened just before Dasai, in the early days of the holiday, or on Vijaya Dasami itself with the administering of *tikas*; it is also possible that the *pajani* confirmation for different levels/branches of the government occurred at different times during the holiday week. Oldfield claimed in the mid-nineteenth century that the *pajani* happened a week prior to Dasai (though it is unclear whether he realized that Dasai technically begins more than a week before Vijaya Dashami). Sylvain Levi, at the beginning of the twentieth century, put the *pajani* on Vijaya Dashami itself. Perhaps the solution to divergent accounts can be found in the introduction to *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, which claims that during the Rana period a list was published on the first day of Dasai announcing postings, and a *darbar* was held on a later day the same week to ceremonialize the appointments (Krauskopff and Lecomte Tiloquine, “Introduction,” 31–34).

30. Krauskopff, “Rencontre des Déesses et des Dieux du Lieu,” 194; Philippe Ramirez, “Luttes d’Influence dans l’Empire de la Deesse,” *Célébrer le Pouvoir*, 209–241, 227–228.

31. See Hangen, “Boycotting Dasai” and Lecomte-Tiloquine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival, and Maoist Rebellion in Nepal*, 148, for discussions of anti-Dasai efforts by various *janjati* groups.

32. Lecomte-Tiloquine, *Hindu Kingship*, 234. Interview with Sharada Bhattachari, hereditary priest at the Gorkha palace.

33. Specific wording drawn from author interview with Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, who served in Gyanendra's first appointed cabinet; information about security detail from author interview with Gen. Pyar Jung Thapa.

34. "Dashain sidelights," *The Kathmandu Post*, October 5, 2006, 2.

35. Koirala's staff claimed to me that it was his habit to travel to be with his senior female relatives on Dasai, and they rejected my suggestion that this trip had anything to do with resisting the king. However, in past years when he was in high office, it would have been part of his duty as prime minister to appear at the palace for Vijaya Dashami. Even if he were following a travel tradition established in years out of office, his failure to be in Kathmandu at the time of Dasai 2006 when he was again the premier would have been a snub to the king.

36. The government did make a token objection, however (probably at Maoist behest), against the expense of the sacrifices—an expense *The Kathmandu Post* placed for Dasai 2007 at Rs. 10.5 million (some US\$100,000) ("Guthi Sansthan spent Rs 10.5 m on Dashain rites," *Kathmandu Post*, October 27, 2007, 2).

37. "PM takes Fulpati salute," *Kathmandu Post*, October 19, 2007, 1. Confirmed by Hanuman Dhoka administrator Mitha Ram Pudasaini.

38. "PM takes Fulpati salute," *Kathmandu Post*, October 19, 2007, 1. Kathmandu CDO Modaraj Dotel also noted the conflicting protests for this occasion in an interview with the author.

39. Interview with Hanuman Dhoka employee/priest Dinanath Bhattarai, confirmed in broad contours by Assistant Royal Guru Madhav Bhattarai and Kathmandu CDO Modaraj Dotel. The fourth main priest, the Nayab Raj Purohit, may have already begun subtly distancing himself from the palace, for indeed he was the only one to obtain government employment in the post-monarchy period, working first at Hanuman Dhoka and subsequently as an advisor to the president.

40. I have not determined precisely who this was; likely one of the lower-ranking palace priests.

41. Interview with Dinanath Bhattarai.

42. For example, Bhattarai went annually to Narayanhiti Palace during the nine days of Navaratri to do recitations in the royal *puja* hall. He also operated the ritual water clock for Crown Prince Dipendra's coming-of-age ritual (*bratabandha*) and did one of the many concurrent Vedic fire rituals following the royal massacre (interview with Dinanath Bhattarai).

43. Typically priests receive relatively small amounts of money as *dakshina*—in my experience between 10 and 100 rupees, depending on the situation and the affluence of the donor. Certainly nothing close to Rs. 1,000.

44. In a meeting with the author in 2011, two members of Koirala's personal staff who wished to remain anonymous recalled that "a palace priest" had come to his residence at Dasai.

45. "PM, king visit Navadurga temple," *Kathmandu Post*, October 27, 2007, 1, confirmed by priests at the Navadurga temple in 2010. The enthusiastic display was only slightly marred by the presence of a drunk man who stood in the crowd yelling anti-Koirala slogans.

46. Personal communication from Laxmi Narayan Banmala, priest at Navadurga temple.

47. Author interview with Maoist leader Chandra Bahadur Thapa ("Sagar"), who was then YCL in charge, and Sarbendra Khanal, the Kathmandu district in charge of police.

48. Author interview with Chandra Bahadur Thapa ("Sagar"), who was YCL in charge.

49. Personal communication from Laxmi Narayan Banmala, priest at the Navadurga temple.

CHAPTER 7

1. They have gone to India to attend a wedding, for example, and to Thailand to visit their son, former Crown Prince Paras, who has been living in Bangkok in recent years. Both his parents came to visit him when Paras suffered a heart attack in 2013 that left him in a coma for two weeks. He recovered, however, and has apparently returned to an active lifestyle, having been arrested twice subsequently by Thai police for drug possession.

2. Personal communications from Hari Sharma and Raghu Nath Aryal, advisors to the president.

3. Despite the fact that the April 2008 elections had given the Maoists a parliamentary majority, they would not finalize administration negotiations until August. Thus, Koirala remained in office through the summer pending Prachanda's inauguration. It is not clear to me whether Prachanda would have attended Bhot Jatra had he been newly in office at the time, but I suspect not.

4. Personal communication from Mangal Krishna Manandhar.

5. Author interview with Hem Raj Subedi.

6. Author interview with Hem Raj Subedi, administrator for the Guti Samsthan.

7. This was according to my own observations, and information received from Mangal Krishna Manandhar, head of the Indra Jatra Planning Committee.

8. The Dasai *ghar* was for several years handled by Raghu Nath Aryal, former assistant royal priest, then a staff member at Hanuman Dhoka and an advisor to the president. Aryal has subsequently immigrated to the United States, however, and I do not know who has taken his place. For several years, the *phulpati* had been sent in a car belonging to the Gorkha museum; in 2011, however, owing to mechanical difficulties with the car, the *phulpati* was dispatched by motorcycle.

9. The ex-king started this tradition in 2009 when he was first back in Kathmandu, and while the crowd the first year was relatively small (there having been little or no advance publicity), there were massive crowds in 2010. In 2011, however, the crowd was significantly smaller, suggesting that perhaps many people had only wanted to come once out of curiosity to see the ex-king and his house and did not intend to make an annual pilgrimage.

10. There was never any official word on whether the ritual would happen or not—even on the morning of the scheduled day. I called various contacts repeatedly, and all anyone could say was that they did not expect it to happen. (Which, indeed, it didn't.)

11. Ramirez is specifically addressing the continuity of once-royal rituals celebrating the deposed monarchy of the Nepali territory of Argha: “les descendants des prêtres royaux, perpétuent le culte en vertu d'une logique de continuité. La dynastie locale a été demise, mais le service de la Déesse continue” (“Luttes d'Influence dans l'Empire de la Déesse,” 212). One Nepali friend with whom I was discussing my research, when faced with the question of whether one could just cancel a once-royal religious obligation, responded with puzzlement, “Well, of course you have to do it—it's a ritual. You can't just cancel” (Personal communication, in English, from Daxika Bhandari).

12. This likely accounts for the strategic differences between Nepal's interim administration and more revolutionary governments, such as those following the French or Russian Revolutions, both of which attempted to break continuity with the past by engineering new rituals of state and new rituals for civil society. David Kertzer foregrounds these examples when he asserts in Chapter 8 of *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988) that revolutionary regimes consistently create new rituals rather than adapt and retain old ones. See also Michael

Walzer, *Regicide and Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

AFTERWORDS

1. Information accessed on July 31, 2015, from the Government of Nepal's National Seismological Center website: <http://www.seismonepal.gov.np/index.php?action=earthquakes&show=recent&page=3>
2. Many, many thanks to the intrepid Devendra Neupane for making most of these on-the-ground inquiries on my behalf.
3. Direct quotation from the field notes prepared by Devendra Neupane.

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