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GELLNER AND
QUIGLEY

CONTESTED HIERARCHIES

A Collaborative Ethnography of Caste
in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal



OXFORD STUDIES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
ANTHROPOLOGY

CONTESTED HIERARCHIES

*A Collaborative Ethnography of Caste
in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*



Edited by
DAVID N. GELLNER AND
DECLAN QUIGLEY



CLARENDON PRESS OXFORD

The urban civilization of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley provides a paradigm for the study of caste and Hindu kingship. In this innovative study six anthropologists, in a genuinely collaborative international endeavour, pool their knowledge of the three ancient royal cities of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, and the nearby settlements which once formed part of their respective kingdoms.

Contested Hierarchies opens with an introduction outlining the historical background and contemporary context of Newar society. In the central chapters of the book the social institutions of all the main caste groups—Hindu and Buddhist priests, patrons, artisans, farmers, and low castes—are given extended consideration. A comparative conclusion, which locates controversies about the Newars within wider theoretical debates over the nature of caste, demonstrates how the fundamental principles underlying all caste systems are particularly clearly exemplified by the Newar case.

Themes to emerge from the entire work include: the coexistence of competing representations of caste hierarchies; the importance of kingship and the symbolism of the exemplary centre; the relationship between the Hindu royal city and the villages in its hinterland; the salience of territorial affiliation, ties of kinship, and access to the services of ritual specialists as markers of identity and status; and the far-reaching social changes which have occurred in recent decades. Throughout *Contested Hierarchies* the contributors demonstrate the social and cultural continuities between India and Nepal.

The result is the most complete and rounded analysis yet of a regional caste system. This book, attractively illustrated by specially chosen black and white photographs, should appeal not only to students of Hinduism and South Asia, but to all anthropologists and comparative sociologists interested in the interrelations of politics, ritual, kinship, economy, and ideology in complex pre-industrial societies.

Jacket illustration: A high-caste Shrestha elder of Satungal in trance while carrying an old sword during the Muhant (Snp. Dcal) festival. He is supported by two members of his lineage. Photo by H. Ishii.

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2

Buddhist Merchants in Kathmandu: The Asan Twāḥ Market and Urāy Social Organization

Todd T. Lewis

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of Newar society in Asan Twāḥ, Kathmandu, and of the Urāy, a large merchant caste which has been prominent in the business and cultural life of Kathmandu for over 400 years. The ethnographic portraiture of Asan in Section 1 presents Newar bazaar society from shifting vantage-points and is intended as a contribution to Newar urban studies. Examining Newar society in terms of spatially defined urban units and with demographic measures is necessary to comprehend this market-place's diversity and, moreover, for grasping the human geography of the largest Newar cities today. In Section 2 the focus narrows to the Urāy and surveys the social institutions that organize the caste's public and private existence. A description of the inter-caste relations that so define the traditional life-style of these affluent Kathmandu lay Buddhists is the theme of Section 3. Section 4 is a short concluding section with reflections on the Urāy in the ethnohistory of Kathmandu as a Malla polity.

Several points of definition and orientation must be noted from the outset. The focal social group in this chapter is the Urāy. However, it is based upon research primarily concerned with the largest sub-group, the Tulādharas of Asan, Naradevī, and Jhwā Bāhāḥ (T. Lewis 1984). As noted below, all nine Urāy sub-groups intermarry so that defined by the exchange of women there is in fact only one marriage circle. None the less, patrilineage boundaries are important social markers, men are the primary public figures, and this essay on Urāy social organization is necessarily patrifocal.

1. Asan Twāḥ

1.1. Market and community

A place known to most Newars, Asan Twāḥ is the chief market in north-east Kathmandu, its centre a crossroads where six lanes meet.¹ Exceptionally vibrant, enlivened by intensive business activities, home to diverse castes and communities, Asan is one of the great Newar examples of a traditional Asian bazaar.²

Asan is one of the major markets in Kathmandu city, with Maru Twāḥ, Naradevī, and Indracok the only traditional centres of similar importance. Tulādhar, Śreṣṭha, and other *sāhujis* ('honourable merchants') who live there are predominantly middleman retailers. For sale in Asan is the largest range of merchandise available in modern Nepal.

Asan's central trade is in rice and edible oils from the Valley and hills, foodgrains and products from India (processed foods, hardware, electronics), and in consumer goods imported from the outside world, especially Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan. There are also many *sāhujis* who trade in goods produced by local artisans working in brass, copper, iron, stainless steel, cotton, and straw. A few entrepreneurs have ventured into the small-scale



PLATE 1. A quiet afternoon in central Asan Twāḥ, Kathmandu (1982). (T. T. Lewis)

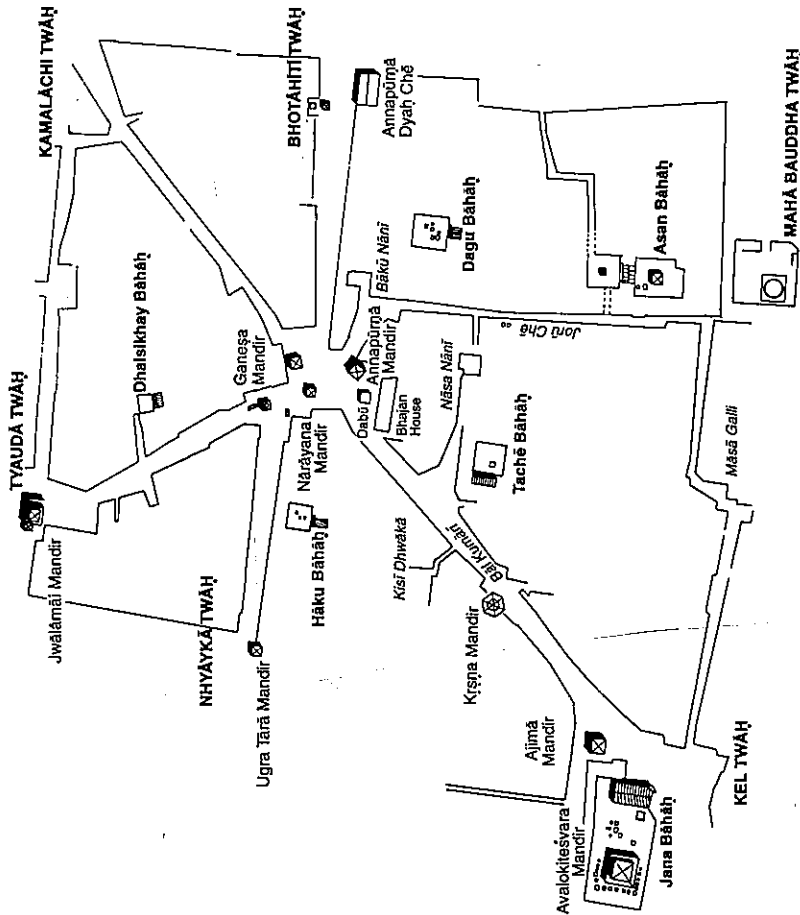


FIG. 2.1. Asan localities and landmarks

production of 'ready-made' clothing, umbrellas, and spectacles. The most successful Asan merchants have extended their businesses outside their old bazaar to modern 'supermarkets' and to New Road, a broad storefront street south of Asan built by Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer after the earthquake of 1934.

Asan Twāh's proximity to Kathmandu's wholesale grain market,³ the lower overhead costs of the resident shopkeepers, and the concentration of capital wealth available for family business ventures have kept its merchants at the forefront of Kathmandu's commercial life. The market's pre-eminence has recently waned somewhat, however, despite the Valley's increasing population and the import business as a whole developing exponentially in the last decade.⁴ Asan's dominance has also ebbed as new shopping centres have emerged and urban planners have changed the city's traffic flow in ways detrimental to the old bazaar.

Above and beyond its market, Asan is a residential neighbourhood with over 600 families of forty-two different castes. The variation in the living circumstances of residents is immense: some families live right on the major bustling lanes of the city; others live in courtyards which also vary greatly in size, from the largest *nani cok* (which may have over thirty houses) with large open areas, to the very small courtyards which are little more than small open gaps between houses. In Asan, wealth and family size do not always correlate with the quality of living conditions; the overall population density is very high, averaging over eighty people per acre (Thapa and Tiwari 1977: 21).

Due to its notable religious shrines and its lanes defining established procession-routes, Asan is also an important centre in Kathmandu's cultural geography. The large free-standing temple to Annapūrṇā that dominates its central hub is one of the most profusely patronized in town; this Tantric goddess receives offerings and gestures of respect from many in the multitudes who pass daily. Nearby is a popular Gaṇeśa temple and a street-level 'fish shrine' celebrated in local folk religion. Tachē Bāhāh, one of the 'eighteen Principal Bāhāhs' of Kathmandu, is well known to the city's Buddhist community. And in adjacent Kel Twāh is the most important Buddhist monument in Kathmandu, the two-roof temple of Avalokiteśvara in Jana Bāhāh that is visited by thousands daily.

Because of such landmarks, Asan's crossroads is a major ceremonial centre. All important festival processions in Kathmandu pass through Asan as do political demonstrations. (For the latter, shopkeepers often close their shutters, sometimes in support, at other times in fear of crowd chaos and looting.) At times, Asan's central hub is transformed into a primary stage for festival performances and this 'natural theatricality' built into Newar life is expressed literally: like most major neighbourhoods, Asan has its own large raised permanent stage, the *dabū*. Until recently, when not used for masked dances or

musical performances, Asan's *dabū* was the money-changers' site. Here then is a simulacrum for Newar 'high civilization': vibrant commerce directly tied to cultural performance, with the symbiotic relationship literally built into the living urban infrastructure.

Many Asan *sāhujis* have other careers besides tending their businesses. There are writers, poets, politicians, and cultural activists living in Asan who are leading figures in Nepal's modern life. Kathmandu's first free printing press began publishing down an old Asan alley and today there are many individuals active in local periodicals, magazines, and journals, including Newari newspapers.

The residential environments of Kathmandu vary tremendously. The urban space is broken up irregularly into a maze of major market lanes, narrow passageways, and courtyards. In some places, neighbours are all relatives of the same caste; in other areas, they are all strangers, some from different ethnic groups. The courtyard can be a shared space for work, play, and cultural theatre; or else it can be a mere passageway. A family's ground space environment can be relatively clean and sunny, or an enclosed mire.⁵ Buildings in Asan now rise to six and seven storeys to accommodate the rising population that has nowhere to build but upward.

Asan's buildings are an extraordinary montage of materials and styles, ranging from the indigenous design using brick façade, clay roofing tiles, with wooden beams and trim, to the European neo-classical style of the Rana era and the modern functional forms that use cement and corrugated iron. Compared to the other largest traditional Newar towns (such as Bhaktapur or even other parts of Kathmandu)—where kitchen gardens and trees are seen behind the houses—Asan's space has been very extensively built upon. Fewer buildings in the traditional style endure and Kathmandu's houses push higher than elsewhere.

There are ninety-six free-standing shrines in Asan, including seven Buddhist *vihāras* (monasteries) and roughly 280 images used for public devotions (Lewis 1984: 116–20). The goddess Annapūrṇā 'owns' two houses; these and over ten other buildings serve as evening rest-houses for pilgrims and the homeless.

Of all the Valley cities, Kathmandu has been the most exposed to outside cultures and peoples. The former walled boundaries have been long lost as the in-migrant population has occupied buildings erected on former paddy-fields (T. R. Joshi 1974: 245). (Lalitpur and greater Kathmandu are now one continuous urban settlement.) The people of Asan have altered their residences to adapt to these changing circumstances: residents have opened a myriad of small hotels and restaurants in the market area to provide services for the migrant labourers, pilgrims, tourists, and refugees who have come to the nation's capital.

Finally, Kathmandu's status as a satellite linked to international commerce networks is readily apparent in the large sample of global mass-market merchandise in Asan shops: personal amenities (pharmaceuticals, sweets, alcohol, illicit drugs), media technologies (computer, video, photocopying, and photographic), and publications (including English-language newspapers, magazines, and books). Thousands of new television aerials and satellite dishes pierce the Asan sky, filling the morning and evening living spaces with a mind-boggling pot-pourri of Nepali news and global programming. Of all the complex communities that exist across the Newar landscape, there are few places in the Valley today that can rival Asan's pluralism, its juxtaposition of ancient and modern cultures, its spectrum of personalities and possibilities.

1.2. Demographic portrait

It is useful to summarize the results of a demographic survey of shops, residences, and street-sellers in Asan that was done in 1981 and updated in 1987.⁶ First, there were 967 legally designated units, with the estimated Asan residential population (as defined in the Fig. 2.1 area, above) as roughly 4,400 individuals. The ethnic group breakdown on the household survey is shown in Table 2.1.

Asan's population has increased steadily since 1951. With most families having no other land elsewhere to expand to, the average living space per person has decreased due to inheritance divisions, and this despite houses having been rebuilt ever higher. Some brothers have divided their houses from the ground level upward, but many families have reached the minimum feasible width; increasingly, brothers now divide the father's house by floor levels. Only the richest few families who own land outside the old town walls have had the luxury of leaving Asan for more spacious quarters.⁷

Shopkeepers Shops are located on the ground floor (and the occasional second storey) of houses that line all the major roads of Asan. In the past, it was common practice for the family living above to have its business located below. But this pattern has changed somewhat in recent years: many families have divided street-level space to keep only part for the family business while renting

TABLE 2.1. *The ethnic identity of Asan residents*
(in percentages)

Newars tracing ancestry to Kathmandu	95
Newars tracing ancestry to Bhaktapur	1.2
Parbatiyās	3.0
Ethnic Tibetans, Buddhist	0.6
Ethnic Tibetans, Muslim	0.2
(N = 4,400)	100



PLATE 2. An Urāy shopkeeper enjoying his hookah. (T. T. Lewis)

a subdivision (or two) to others. This has occurred for three main reasons: rising land and rental values due to the sustained profitability of the market; families moving the business elsewhere; or sons leaving market trade for other pursuits.⁸ The practice of subdividing and renting out all available shop space has grown in recent years so that almost every ground-floor-area on all Asan's main lanes is now someone's shop.

Despite the subdivisions, the ethnic breakdown of shopkeepers has remained fairly constant in the 1980s. (Most new subdivisions between 1982 and 1987 were actually leased to relatives.) In Asan, then, outsiders have gained a limited

TABLE 2.2. *The ethnic identity of Asan shopkeepers, 1980/1987*
(in percentages)

Newars tracing ancestry to Kathmandu	85
Tibetans* (Buddhists—4.3%; Muslims—2.7%)	7
Parbatiyās	3.5
Indians	2.5
Newars tracing recent ancestry to Bhaktapur	2.0
(N = 402)	100

* The success of the Tibetans can be explained in part by the fact that as refugees they have little else but trade to support themselves; for some, their success in Asan is also related to their contacts with former Tibetan traders among the Newars.

business foothold more readily than a residential one. This should not be surprising: given that population increases in town have left most Asan families with insufficient residential space for themselves, there is little chance for outsiders to buy in.

In 1987 several additional changes were evident in the market-place compared to 1982: electricity was on almost always (in 1982 it was off every day); there were police stationed (in little blue kiosks) in every neighbourhood (due to a rising crime rate); Asan's tourist curio shops were in decline (1982: 14; 1987: 2); a great expansion in audio-cassette-sellers and video rental stores, and of individuals with video filming businesses; notable increases in Chinese goods, bottled cooking gas appliances, stainless steel, fish vendors. Especially striking was the great surge in women regularly working as shopkeepers (1982: 3; 1987: 15).

Street-sellers The movement of people and merchandise through the market-place is a continuing spectacle as street-sellers and shoppers add to the ethnic diversity of the bazaar. Most street-sellers do not have their homes in Asan, but spend the daylight and early evening hours on the public thoroughfares. Space on these streets is precious and sellers must struggle with competitors and police to maintain it. Although there is some seasonal and day-long variation, the survey data in Table 2.3 summarize a regular autumn weekday, giving an indication of the ethnic diversity of the market streets. Over the course of one year (1980–1), we counted over two hundred different foods and dozens of goods sold by itinerant sellers.

Summary portrait: Asan Twāh, a modern Newar community

As a residential neighbourhood, Asan has remained almost totally Newar, and internally its caste communities remain remarkably separate. In the daytime outsiders come to sell and buy, adding to the ethnic pluralism: some utilize

TABLE 2.3. *The ethnic identity of street-sellers, central Asan, 28 October 1980* (in percentages)

Newars		
Kathmandu Maharjans	10.0	} 46.5
Thimi Maharjans	17.0	
Kathmandu Nāpit	19.5	
Parbatiyā		30.8
Tamangs		18.0
Indians		4.7
(N = 92)		100

Note: On this same day, there were 25 Indian *sādhus*, 9 Theravāda monks, and 7 lamas who passed through the market. Tamangs serve mostly as porters. We also counted 157 tourists. In 1987 the only change in this data would be a substantial increase (300%?) in Indian street-sellers.

rented shop space, many more use the public streets to hawk foodstuffs and miscellaneous goods, while still others sell their labour to provide all sorts of transport. Also living off the money changing hands in Asan are the destitute, the occasional wandering holy men, and a few pickpockets.

Asan Twāḥ is a case study of a modern Newar market and of competing merchant communities divided on religious lines. Class differences further complicate Asan's society: with the contrasts introduced by differential levels of literacy, wealth, and widespread (if fragmentary) outside cultural influences (predominantly Western, increasingly Japanese), life-styles in the bazaar span a vast spectrum of possibilities.⁹

This backdrop of the bazaar's utter diversity—spanning centuries of evolutionary stages, multi-ethnic and multi-caste, culturally multidimensional (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam)—must not be lost sight of: there are computer programmers living alongside Tantric meditators, wealthy gold merchants who send their sons to America mixing in the streets with illiterate hill farmers who once in a lifetime come to visit the fabled capital; there are homeless destitutes, rickshaw pullers, Hindu holy men, international jet-setters, the occasional anthropologist. Some old women speak little Nepali and have seen little of the world outside their town; a few middle-aged men (and women) have been around the world and resided in New York, Moscow, Tokyo. Communal feelings run strong and few have forgotten the conquered status of the Newars.¹⁰ Although half the Kathmandu Valley today is non-Newar, most residents still tend to have few close non-Newar friends. There are very few violent crimes, but this may change as there are increasing numbers of heroin addicts in the capital, and a few are Asan sons.

In the waking hours, Asan's main pursuit is business. But amidst the myriad transactions, and somewhat hidden from view, Asan is also a residential neighbourhood sustained by a rich cultural and religious life-style.¹¹ The high Buddhist castes (Vajrācārya, Śākya, and Urāy) constitute roughly 50 per cent of local residents, compared to their combined 18 per cent reported for all Kathmandu (Greenwold 1974a). We now turn to the numerically dominant Buddhist group in Asan, the Urāy.

2. The Urāy

It should not seem surprising that merchants occupy a prominent position among Newar Buddhists, given their importance in the 2,500-year history of Indo-Tibetan and pan-Asian Buddhism. For many centuries, Newar mercantile families have occupied an influential niche among élites contesting for dominance in the Kathmandu polity (M. C. Regmi 1976a; Rose and Fisher 1970). This remains true in modern Shah-era Nepal, although today they must vie for influence with the greatest Indian trading families, the Marwaris¹² and

the most successful traders from across the Himalayan regions, particularly Manangis, Thakalis, Sherpas, and Tibetans (Füer-Haimendorf 1975).

The Urāy are high-caste Buddhist merchants found almost exclusively in Kathmandu.¹³ Modern Urāy explain their name as a derivative of *upāsaka*, a Sanskrit term meaning 'devout layman',¹⁴ and speak of their group's distinctly Buddhist self-identity in other areas: they eschew the 'Five Professions' prohibited in the early Buddhist texts (trade in weapons, animals, meat, wine, or poison) and uphold the ethos of non-violence in personal relations and ritual preferences.¹⁵ In addition to not eating beef and pork, Urāy also abstain from chicken eggs and meat, again citing a Buddhist textual source (Lewis 1984: 204). Pan-Newar 'caste logic' generally recognizes 'Urāy' as *vaiśyas* who rank as a high Buddhist caste just below the Śākya.

The names of some Urāy sub-groups suggest origins as artisan and mercantile specialists, as most refer to craftsman identity: Sthāpit (colloquially 'Sikaḥmi') carpenters, Kaṃsakār ('Kasāḥ') metal-workers, Tāmraḥ ('Tamoḥ' or 'Tamaḥ') bell-metal-workers,¹⁶ Śilpakār ('Lōḥkaḥmi' or 'Lwahākaḥmi') stone masons, Sikrīkār ('Āwā') tilers, Rājkarṇikār ('Marikaḥmi') confectioners, and Sindūrakār powder-sellers. Only the Baniyā ('Merchants') and Tulādhar ('Scale-Holders') lack names suggestive of specific craftsman origins. (These names of the Urāy sub-groups, along with their traditional tasks and Kathmandu neighbourhoods, are indicated in Table 2.4.)

Although Urāy origins as a caste cannot be discerned from known historical records, it is clear that group history is multi-stranded. The multiplicity of

TABLE 2.4. *Important aspects of Urāy sub-groups*

Honorific name	Non-honorific name	Twāḥ	Samyak task
Tulādhar	(Urāy)	Asan Naradevī Jhwā Bāhāḥ	distributing leaf plates cooking <i>pūjā</i> rice none
Kaṃsakār	Kasāḥ	Kel Twāḥ	preparing and serving condiments
Tāmraḥ	Tamoḥ	Maru Twāḥ Mahā Bauddha	playing <i>pātāḥ bājā</i> none
Baniyā	Banyā	Itum Bāhāḥ Jhochē	making <i>sākhaḥti</i>
Rājkarṇikār	Marikaḥmi	Maru Twāḥ	none
Sthāpit	Sikaḥmi	Thāy Maru Yetkhā Bāhāḥ	construction of viewing stand (discontinued)
Śilpakār/Śilākār	Lwahākaḥmi	Mahā Bauddha Yangāl	none
Sikrīkār (now: Tulādhar)	Āwā	Te Bāhāḥ	clay pot makers, clay saucer handlers (discontinued)
Sindūrakār	(Urāy)	Yetkhā Bāhāḥ	none

Note: Total Urāy population: 1,100 households (Greenwold 1974a: 103).

many separate clan deities (*digu dyah*) and the array of family Tantric deities (*āgā dyah*) support this view. Each Urāy family theoretically has both allegiances, but this network of ties between households and such shrines now represents only one intra-caste organizing facet overlaid with many others (as will be seen below).¹⁷

Urāy origins and avenues of assimilation were varied. Some Urāy lineages probably date back to Śākya or Vajrācārya males who did not undergo Buddhist initiations (and so fell one status level) and there were doubtless also children of mixed marriages between Śākya or Vajrācārya men and women of lower-caste groups (Greenwold 1974a: 110). Another likely avenue of assimilation was by men who were 'diaspora traders' (Curtin 1984) in India and Tibet (D. B. Bista 1978). The greatest of these trading families maintained a network of business offices across the Indo-Tibetan region and second marriages between such Urāy men and Indian or Tibetan women produced offspring who then, in rare cases, married into already existing Kathmandu lineages.¹⁸ There are still scattered examples of this practice today.

All nine Urāy groups today constitute a single marriage circle defined by participation in certain ritual and commensal activities. (These are discussed below.) Within this circle, however, there is a sense of internal stratification among Urāy: today lineages with surnames Tulādhar, Baniyā, Kaṃsakār, and Tāmrakār are the most highly regarded in Kathmandu. The special prestige of Tulādhar lineages is shown by the growing practice of other Urāy sub-groups now abandoning their older designations and giving 'Tulādhar' as their family surname. In recent decades, this tendency has increased the 'original' Tulādhar groups' sensitivity to their boundaries: Asan and Naradevī Tulādhar elders judge the legitimacy of others' claims to use their name by reckoning a family's membership in their oldest institutions, i.e. the Samyak Guthi and the Gūlā Bājā. (For a description of these, see below.)

Tulādhar ('Scale-Holder') as a sub-caste name may date back to the fifteenth-century rule of Jaya Sthiti Malla (Lévi 1905: ii. 232-6; Petech 1984) and is mentioned by the nineteenth-century writers (Wright 1877). The use of this name certainly indicates business origins, as sale by weight has been the norm for centuries. Some modern Tulādhar have suggested that there were two core Tulādhar groups: families with trading ties to Tibet and those still known by the name 'Baniyā'.

As shown in Fig. 2.2, there are three centres of Tulādhar settlement in Kathmandu city: Asan Twāh, Naradevī Twāh (Nw. 'Neta'), and Jhwā Bāhāh. The Tulādhar men of Asan, who contest their being rated inferior in status to any Urāy, are the largest and most diverse of the Urāy groups. Their elders reckon their boundaries carefully, despite pressure from 'reformers', and exclude Urāy from Jhwā Bāhāh from their number. The latter, who live around a major monastery north of Asan, are generally regarded as inferiors by the other

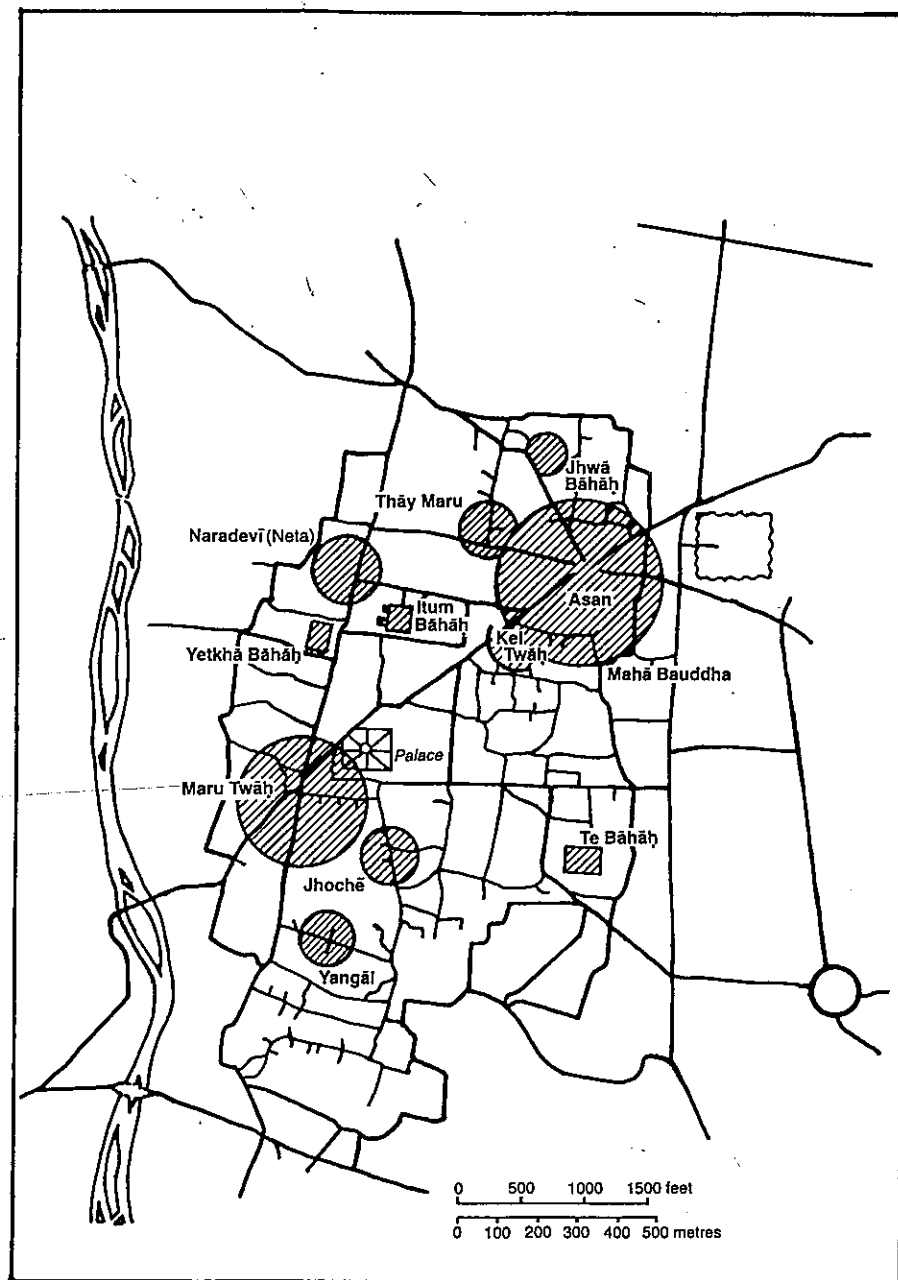


FIG. 2.2. The traditional centres of Urāy settlement in Kathmandu

two 'pure Tulādhar' groups. No one was sure of the reason, but there were suggestions that their small lineage included a half-Tibetan several generations back. All Jhwā Bāhāḥ Tulādhar share a common *āgā dyaḥ*.

The Naradevī Tulādhar, who are much fewer in number than the Asan Tulādhar and live in the north-west region of the old city, assert that their rank is slightly higher than the Asan group. Their lineages are strictly exogamous, claim descent from a common ancestor named Pati Sāhu, and worship the same *digu dyaḥ* but at least eight different *āgā dyaḥs*. There is considerable status rivalry between the Asan and Naradevī communities, despite—or rather precisely because of—the fact of extensive affinal ties between them. Indeed, much of the repertoire of Buddhist and Hindu cultural performances can be seen as orchestrated statements articulating these inter- and intra-caste 'patri-boundaries'.

Today, Tulādhar occupy quite a spectrum of influential positions in modern Nepal. Some of the largest import-export and construction companies are Urāy enterprises. This includes major operatives in the 'second economies'. Families that have long benefited from wealth and access to education have members who now occupy the highest echelons of power in government, international development service, and education. One could even chart an international network of Urāy sons and daughters living across the world.

2.1. Kinship

The Urāy kinship system conforms to pan-Newar patterns described so comprehensively by Toffin (1975a; 1984): patrilineal descent, a preference for patrilocal joint extended family residence, emphasis on the mother's brother (*pāju*) in relations with mother's kin, with status and power formally resting in the eldest males of the lineage. Women receive dowries while men (along with unmarried women over 35) divide the father's estate equally. The *phuki* is an important family unit, designating members united by patrilineage who perform special rituals (e.g. to clan deities and during Mohanī *pāyāḥ*) and together undergo pollution restrictions at times of birth or death.

For Urāy women, too, kinship relations conform to high-caste Indic norms. Women, like the men, must marry outside of their patrilineages that are traced back through at least seven generations.¹⁹ An urban woman's ties to her natal home (*thaḥ chē*) sustain an important though secondary centre throughout her life. Married daughters' husbands (*jilājā*) also have a ceremonial role to play on certain ritual occasions.

Upper-caste Newar women such as the Tulādhar live a much more secluded and circumscribed life compared to the Newar women in the Maharjan farming communities (B. Pradhan 1981). Urāy traditions observed in public places are almost completely male affairs, although women work behind the scenes in support and observe from balconies; they take a much more central

role in life-cycle rites and other ritual observances in both their husband's and natal households.

Divorce and widow remarriage have long been accepted, but both are very rare in Asan. The provision for a woman's securing divorce by leaving betel nuts on her pillow (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 37) has not been customary among Urāy within anyone's recollection *except* for the rare circumstance of a very young woman who is widowed.

We have already noted that the Urāy marriage circle is defined by the entire Urāy community of Kathmandu, constituting nine named patrilineal groups: Tulādhar, Kaṃsakārs, Baniyā, Tāmraḥkārs, Sindūrakār, Rājkarṇikār,²⁰ Sthāpit, Śilpakār, and Sikrīkār. Ideally, a marriage is arranged between children of equal economic levels and there is a vague preference to find partners within the same Urāy sub-group.

In the Asan Tulādhar community very few first marriages (1980–2: 4%) were consummated outside the Urāy sub-groups. Polygamy is now rare and is usually due to a first wife's infertility. Second marriages for men outside the Urāy marriage circle are acceptable if the woman is of sufficiently high-caste status; such unions threaten the husband's status only if he eats ritually significant food from this household. A second marriage most often necessitates setting up a second separate urban household and few today can afford the great expense.

Fictive kin relations (Nw. *twāy*) between unrelated friends, a custom noted among other ethnic groups in Nepal (Messerschmidt 1982), is encountered only very rarely in the Urāy context.

The social life of the Urāy is ordered largely by *guthis*, socio-religious associations that unite individuals to perform certain tasks which often have a religious goal or motive at base. The present discussion is restricted to the distinctly Tulādhar/Asan Twāḥ manifestations of these pan-Newar institutions and will focus on the major *guthis* that Asan Tulādhar participate in, with remarks about other Urāy groups added. The order follows the general importance and cross-caste inclusiveness of these important institutions.

2.2. Samyak Guthi

Samyak is the greatest Newar Buddhist festival, a three-day spectacle attended by the king, an occasion when all Newar Buddhist caste groups in Kathmandu take action and the entire field of Kathmandu Valley Buddhism (as seen from Kathmandu city) assembles. A multi-caste, city-wide *guthi* is responsible for orchestrating Kathmandu's Samyak observance once every twelve years (Sakya 1979).²¹ For their part in Samyak, each Urāy group (like every major Buddhist caste) has a role to play specified by local tradition. Asan Tulādhar must sew leaf plates (*jyaḥnā laḥṭe*) which are used for offerings presented to the Buddha

and the Newar *saṃgha*. The duties of other Urāy are: Naradevī Tulādhar cooks and ladle out rice; Kaṃsakārs serve accompanying foods (*ghāsā*); Tāmrakārs take out their *pāñcāḥ bājā* for accompanying the Svayambhū palanquin entourage (see below); Sthāpits construct wooden viewing stands (see Plate 4); Sikrīkārs supply clay pots [but in 1980: discontinued]; Baniyās of Itum Bāhā and Jochē serve milk and *sākhāṭi*, a brown sugar-spiced beverage.

Co-ordinated by an all-Kathmandu *guthi* created to supervise the task, for their part an Asan Tulādhar *guthi* was organized according to thirty-eight households. Each of these units, called a *kawaḥ*, is led by the eldest male, who is responsible for his group's participation. The eldest among the *kawaḥ* elders is the Tulādhar *tmāḥ thakāli*. He is responsible for the group's performance, keeps the *guthi* records, and serves as the ritual leader for all of the preparatory rituals. In this work he is assisted by others next senior in line, although much of the actual work may be delegated to elders' sons and grandsons. Such organizational principles for Samyak are in place today for all the major Urāy sub-groups involved.

As for other Urāy, membership in the Samyak Guthi has come to be regarded as the ultimate criterion for confirming membership in a 'pure-Urāy' lineage. In 1979 the Tulādhar group elders in Asan realized the need for an accurate census and so compiled a definitive membership list. The fact that Jhwā Bāhāḥ Tulādhar are not formally involved in this festival or in Gūlā Bājā (below) is given today as the reason for rejecting them as 'pure Tulādhar'.

The Samyak Guthi is also the basis for selecting the Urāy boy who must participate in another cultural performance connected with the king: the Kumār Pyākhā, a procession and dance performed three times during the yearly Mohanī (Np. Dasā) festival. Dancing as Kumār, the Indic deity of war and wealth, Urāy take part in the elaborate ceremonies in which the King of Nepal makes offerings to his lineage's guardian goddess Taleju at her Hanumān Dhoka temple.²² To perform this Tantric dance, the boy must receive special training from a Vajrācārya master and observe dietary restrictions. (Rituals at the end, too, suggest his possession by this deity.) For these performances, this Urāy group must assemble a *pāñca tāl bājā*, a musical group in which members sing while being accompanied by long horns (*pāñcāḥ*), cymbals (*tāḥ*), and a three-sided drum (*khodā*). (This *bājā* accompanies only the most important Newar deities.) Every five years, the Asan Tulādhar and the Kel Twāḥ Kaṃsakār communities assemble a list of eligible boys between the ages of 10 and 14 and choose one by lottery who must dance at five festivals.

The Samyak Guthi's role in organizing the Urāy community corresponds to the *deślā guthi* ('*guthi* of the locality') that is found among other Newar communities (see below, Ch. 8, Section 5), though it is not called this in Asan. In other neighbourhoods and for other castes in Kathmandu—Vajrācāryas (De Ācārya Guthi), Kaṃsakārs, Citrakārs, Mānandharas—this type of *guthi* has been able to work for the betterment of the local caste.²³ In the Naradevī Tulādhar community, for example, young activists gained the approval of the caste elders



PLATE 3. Accompanied by the *pāñca tāl bājā*, an Asan Tulādhar youth dances as the god Kumār. (T. T. Lewis)

to set up a six-*kawaḥ* structure to organize a yearly feast, make modern investments with *guthi* funds, and pursue programmes of community uplift for their poorer members. Perhaps the most active Urāy community group is that of the Kel Twāḥ Kaṃsakārs, who maintain an accurate, regularly updated census of members and at the yearly *ḍigu dyaḥ pūjā* feast note the deaths, births, and special achievements in the community.

It is perhaps because Asan Tulādhar are far more numerous than the Kel Twāḥ Kaṃsakārs that such *tmāḥ guthi*-based modernizations have not taken place. Except for the yearly Kumār performance and during the Samyak festival itself, the Samyak Guthi as a whole is not active in Asan. Another *kawaḥ* schema is utilized to organize a more active and equally important Urāy social unit, the Gūlā *bājā*.

2.3. Gūlā bājā

Asan Tulādhar, like many Urāy sub-groups,²⁴ are permanently organized to marshal their devotional energies for caste processions in which members play drums and cymbals with musical accompaniment (M. R. Allen, forthcoming). There are two periods each year for group-coordinated Buddhist musical

performances: (1) the month-long morning visitation of Svayambhū and other Buddhist centres during Gūlā (Lewis 1993d); and (2) the month of playing *dhāḥ* drums before the Annapūrṇā temple each night during the month of Kārtik.

For organizing the *bājā*, the Asan Tulādhar community was divided long ago into twelve groups (*kawaḥ*), each headed by a seniormost leader called a *pāhlāḥmha* (or *pāhlā*). Every year the responsibility for organizing and leading the *bājā* falls upon a different *pāhlāḥmha* and his *kawaḥ* according to a fixed cycle of rotation.

When a new *kawaḥ*'s turn arrives each year at the end of Kārtik, its own eldest member becomes the *pāhlāḥmha* and he will organize the heads of each household in his cell to do all that is necessary for the coming year's performances. In order of their occurrence, the main activities are:²⁵ teaching sessions for the young men on drum-playing and cymbal rhythm (before the month of playing begins); preliminary *pūjās* to Nāsaḥ Dyaḥ (Kasa 1963); providing the instruments and a plate of offerings for the daily morning trek to Svayambhū; organizing the Asan Tulādhar community-wide *nislāḥ* feast at the end of Gūlā; and the day-long visitation to the Buddhist deities (*bahi dyaḥ*) displayed all over the city (also near the month's end). The *bājā* system in Asan and Naradevī is very highly defined by traditional attendance-taking procedures and many *kawaḥs* keep ledgers to note fines for absences as well as to record required contributions.

Prestige and respect in the Urāy community are garnered by those displaying managerial skill. Serving well as the *pāhlāḥmha* is one domain in which this expertise can be demonstrated. Indeed, the *pāhlāḥmha* bears the full burden of arranging for all of the logistical needs in the *bājā*'s traditional performances for his year. This is very important 'community work', as the entire caste's devotional presentation for all Kathmandu to witness is in the hands of the designated *pāhlāḥmha*. To maintain the status of his own family and that of all Asan Tulādhar, the acting *pāhlāḥmha* will usually take care to fulfil this role conscientiously. He knows that his peers will not flag in criticizing his performance if he falls short.

The economic status and generosity of a *pāhlāḥmha* are also under public scrutiny when his turn comes since he (and other *kawaḥ* notables) must bear the burden of all costs in excess of the group's common fund. This dimension of the Gūlā *bājā* has led to recent difficulties when the less affluent have been unable to perform all the customary activities or contribute their own cash to cover the inevitable cost overruns. Moreover, some *kawaḥs* have declined in size while others have expanded, a fact that has meant that all Tulādhar in Asan do not bear an equal share in supporting the *bājā*. (Both Naradevī and Asan Urāy have rejected efforts by the now smaller *kawaḥs* to reapportion the membership boundaries.) Because of such problems, recent *pāhlāḥmhas* have organized a modern bank investment fund that can be added to by member

donations and hence generate interest income that may soon be sufficient to eliminate this economic hardship.

Each year, the *pāhlāḥmha* system of the Gūlā *bājā* defines the duties and monetary costs of an institution that is central to the Tulādhar's Buddhist devotionalism. Under this system, however, note how each urban household's maximum required participation in the *bājā* is really compartmentalized to being, at most, daily for one month every twelve years. (With the extended family as the unit of participation, it is possible for an individual to avoid involvement altogether if he is so inclined.)

While it is correct to say that the Gūlā *bājā* draws all Asan Tulādhar into a common, caste-defined set of devotional activities, this must be qualified by noting that on only one occasion each year, the *nislāḥ* feast during Gūlā, does the entire *bājā* population really assemble. Otherwise, the greatest turn-out on the full moon of Gūlā is only a few hundred and the usual *bājā* comprises only twenty or so men each day who gather to play devotional music together. Thus, the Gūlā *bājā* plays a central role in organizing male Tulādhar society, but only very rarely does it succeed in orchestrating unified large-scale participation. Like many Newar traditions today, the Asan Gūlā *bājā* endures for two reasons: first, because its organization still effectively disperses responsibility for performing the necessary tasks; and secondly, there is still a core of Tulādhar—including many young men—who enjoy heartily rapping out drumbeats, clanging cymbals, and singing in praise of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and other deities.

Finally, the role of the *bājā* in maintaining intra-Urāy hierarchy must be underlined. In Asan through the 1980s, young reformers have lobbied to have the Jhwā Bahāḥ men included in their Gūlā *bājā*, both to share in the economic/manpower burdens and since, as one middle-aged *sāhuji* said at a group meeting, 'Aren't they Buddhists, too, and therefore as followers of Buddha Dharma equal with us?' As of 1987, the consensus remained that the purity of Asan's patrilineages could not be compromised, despite considerable sympathy for these sentiments.

2.4. Digu Khyaḥ Samiti

Yearly worship of the *digu dyaḥ* (Np.: *kuldevatā*; K. B. Bista 1972) is one of the principal religious activities of Urāy patrilineal descent groups (*phuki*). These shrines, usually no more than specially demarcated stones, are characteristically located outside of the old city boundaries.

Oral accounts of *digu dyaḥ* history assert Urāy family origins outside Kathmandu city and recall the effects of Rana rule. Several Tulādhar elders recount their family origins in stories set in Visal Nagar,²⁶ a town their forefathers left (taking their *digu dyaḥ* with them) for Kathmandu after a terrible fire. The second bit of more recent historical information is common know-

ledge among most Urāy: just before the turn of the last century, the shrines of many different Urāy lineage *digu dyaḥs* were scattered at the edge of the Tundikhel, an open field that lies to the east of the town. Rana Prime Minister Bir Shamsher, who ruled from 1885 to 1901, seized these lands for new building projects and forced the Urāy to move their shrines to Pakanajol, an area north of the town boundaries. From that time, affected *phukis* performed their yearly *pūjās* at the shrines there. Over the years, however, squatters settled on this land, a trend which has been widespread around Kathmandu city since 1960.

This encroachment was tolerated until 1975, when several squatters resisted as Tulādhar families tried to gain access to their shrines. This spurred Asan leaders to take legal action through the courts, one of the few Urāy attempts of this kind. The protracted struggle culminated in a verdict that cut away most of the land given by Bir Shamsher, but allowed Tulādhar to secure a remaining small lot from further encroachment. To fight the case, Asan Tulādhar families joined with Jhwā Bāhāḥ families who also had their *digu dyaḥ* shrines moved there. After the decision, both groups followed the successful example of the Naradevī Tulādhar (cited above) and formed the Digu Khyaḥ Samiti ('Lineage [deity] Field Committee'). Thus, in this new and modern institution, the Jhwā Bāhāḥ Tulādhar have attained the inclusion which has been denied them, so far, in older ones.

Using modern managerial methods, the Samiti organizers—led by some of the most respected Asan businessmen—collected large and small contributions donated by every one of the 175 families concerned. The leaders divided these funds, totalling over 300,000 rupees, into a system of capital investment shares, with most of the cash used for building a revenue-generating office building on the collective land. By 1987 these had become a lucrative source of income for the group and beyond the cost of yearly *pūjās* and feasting, the Samiti treasurer distributed additional profit to each shareholder. Thus, the Tulādhar have created a new institution using modern fund-raising techniques to meet a traditional religious purpose. Although there are five Asan Tulādhar *phukis* that have their *digu dyaḥs* elsewhere (and did not join this group), the very successful Digu Khyaḥ Samiti has provided a striking example of the fruits of pan-Urāy solidarity.

2.5. Cremation *guthis*

Emblematic of Newar civilization being one of the most ritually orientated in the world (and especially among the rich who can afford to sponsor expensive performances), Urāy traditions are intricately organized around death. At this time of family crisis, when *karma* operates and the rebirth destiny of the deceased is at stake, these Urāy *guthis* provide group ritual insurance. This is an important concern, since proper rituals maintain high-class dignity while also

meeting the ethical imperative of performing all rites that lessen the danger of the departed one becoming a *preta* ('hungry ghost').

Urāy families have two alternatives for managing death and cremation. One is to 'go it alone' as an extended family and enter into a relationship with a Gwā family who will cremate the corpse for a fee. If the family remains independent in this way, it must also rely on close kin and friends to assist in making arrangements for the funeral procession. This can be risky as it assumes a measure of support that for various reasons may not be forthcoming when death strikes. (In 1981 roughly 20% of all Asan Tulādhar households had chosen this option.)

The other alternative is to be a member of an Urāy *guthi* in which all of the members (*guthiyārs*) share in the task of making arrangements and, in the most inclusive *guthi*, themselves cremating a dead member's body. Having *guthi* ties does entail a considerable yearly work burden, but every member can rest assured that when the occasion arises in one's own household, all funeral arrangements will be done properly.

Both types of Newar cremation *guthi* are found in Asan: the *sī guthi* and the *sanāḥ guthi*. In the *sī guthi* the *guthiyārs* arrange for all of the preparations of the cremation procession and then they fully cremate the body unassisted by Gwās. (This task can last up to ten hours.) Thus, the *sī guthiyārs* negotiate and pay for all of the costs of the cremation. Most funeral *guthis* in Urāy society also have a Vajrācārya household in its membership; it must send a *gurujū* to perform the last rites for the members in return for either 'coverage' by the *guthi* and/or a stipend.

The role of cremation *guthi pāhlāḥmha* rotates yearly on the basis of the separate household, and each year a special multi-day cycle of ritual and feasting marks the passing on of the duties that include taking possession of the roll book, the ceremonial brocade cloth that covers the corpse as it is carried to the cremation grounds, and other ritual items. Tulādhar *guthis* make provision for son-less widows to be members in the cremation *guthis*. They can pay a yearly fee and help at the yearly winter feast in return for 'coverage' by the *guthi*.

For the *sanāḥ guthi* (also called *bicāḥ guthi*), the *guthiyārs* also arrange for and join the procession to the burning grounds, but once the pyre is lit, their obligations for this day are over. Gwās then take care of the burning, dealing directly with a *guthi* representative. Although cremations are their speciality, Gwās are generally thought to be careless, even irresponsible, in carrying through the task of burning the corpse. (Some families will make special 'tips' to try to insure that the Gwās do everything properly.) Finally, the *sanāḥ guthiyārs* must also pay an early morning condolence (*bicāḥ*) visit to the bereaved family on the day after the cremation.

In Asan (1982) there are three *sī guthis* and two *sanāḥ guthis*. The irrelevance of 'pure-Asan Tulādhar' membership in these groups is also shown by the fact

that Asan Tulādhar have readily opened their *guthis* to the Jhwā Bāhāh Tulādhar. In the Urāy context, informants insisted that there is no special prestige associated with cremation *guthi* membership, nor is there any social stigma for those who are not in a *guthi*.²⁷ Only if the rites are not carried out in a style that is considered proper for the caste or the deceased will there be social repercussions.

The Asan cremation *guthis* have tended to be very durable institutions. One reason for this is the efforts Tulādhar have made to provide for the rising economic costs. The gold and other valuable donations made by bereaved families on behalf of the deceased are now usually removed after the last rites and sold, with the proceeds deposited into a bank account. The interest income from such accounts is used to supplement the *guthiyār*'s yearly contributions, pay for the group's yearly communal feasting, and offset the sum the *pāhlāhmha* must provide in case of a cash shortfall. Wealthy bereaved families now contribute considerable sums to the common fund during the mourning period. In the Urāy cremation *guthis*, the *pāhlāhmha* has full autonomy in handling the funds and may lend them out to another *guthiyār* for a year at interest. Even with these resources, being *pāhlāhmha* still entails considerable personal expense for the myriad incidentals.²⁸

2.6. Other *guthis*

In my survey sample of the Asan Tulādhar community. I discovered twenty-eight different *guthis* existing in 1982. This most certainly represents a substantial decrease from only two generations past since almost every family in my sample mentioned cases of *guthis* now lost due to the lack of landed income, personal interest, or both.

Many *guthis* were started by ancestors to orchestrate the continuation of religious activities, such as *vratas* (Locke 1987; Lewis 1989a) and the worshiping of specific deities on designated days (*āgā dyaḥ*, Bhīmsen, Tārā, etc.). Optional *guthi* membership rights usually get divided between brothers, like all other properties.

The popularity of such *guthis* in the Kathmandu Valley is explained by the security of the investment: Indic religious norms (Hindu and Buddhist) are very strict about not having anyone interfere with such tax-free endowments and prescribe grave future penalties for anyone, kings and ministers included, who would dare to seize properties dedicated to the worship of the deities (M. C. Regmi 1976a: 50). By setting aside land or properties whose proceeds are perpetually designated for religious observances, families put themselves in a position to retain reliable incomes that should not suffer due to state actions. As long as the costs of the *pūjā*, etc. are met, the head of the *guthi*, by rule, may keep the remainder. Given little evidence of official scrutiny, such *guthis* with their devotional origins represented fine investments indeed.

Many small Urāy *guthi* lands have been lost to tenants. Here the fragmentation of *pāhlāhmha* responsibility compounded the weakening of tradition: with each *guthiyār* having only a limited stake in keeping the group land(s), only rarely did anyone in a threatened *guthi* marshal the time and money necessary to contest the case in Nepal's legal system. Asan Tulādhar at times debate the 'Buddhist passivity syndrome' which some feel is the great flaw in Urāy character in the face of modern challenges.

It is important to note that many voluntary *guthis* are multi-caste associations that unite Newars for religious efforts, in contrast to the *guthis* cited above that serve to maintain caste boundaries and group hierarchies. In Naradevī, for example, there is a *guthi* for worshipping Śvetakālī: it has Śākya, Maharjan, Śreṣṭha, and Brāhmaṇ members. An Asan Bhīmsen *guthi* has a similar membership. *Guthis* work and new ones are still formed: the most recent established in Asan (1989) shares television reception lines from a commonly owned satellite dish.

2.7. *Bhajans*: Devotional music societies

The oldest devotional music played by Newar Buddhists is that of the Gūlā, Dhāḥ, and Pañca Tāl *bājās*, group traditions emphasizing processional drumming, cymbal-playing, and singing as offerings to the deities. In the later Rana period, the *bhajan* style of Hindu devotional music was popularized by Indian devotees, but soon Urāy began to play the instruments (tabla, sitar, harmonium, violin) and adapt the genre by composing myriad songs to the Buddhist divinities. Local neighbourhood orchestras, also known by the term *bhajan*, now organize such singing every night. (Some of Nepal's finest musicians on the violin, sitar, and harmonium have come from the Urāy community.)

When the large *bhajan* convenes, good, enthusiastically rendered songs of devotional praise to the deities ring out. As the Asan *bhajan* has grown in popularity, the modern *bhakti* ('personal devotion to a divinity') dimension of Mahāyāna lay Buddhism has been underscored and restated. The words and ethos expressed in the Newar *bhajan* capture the modern character of Urāy Buddhist devotionalism as no other cultural form today does. As one Tulādhar layman said to me: 'You can read the *sūtras* to find the Buddhist views of our tradition and you can study the mumbo-jumbo of the Vajrācāryas to understand our rituals. But if you want to discern the *rasa* ("taste") of our Buddhist Dharma today, you must listen to the *bhajan*.'

In Asan (1987), five *bhajans* meet regularly in public rest-houses. As with other organizations, the *bhajans* show a wide spectrum of variance as to their membership, nightly attendance, and musical preferences. By far the largest, the Asan Jñāna Mālā *Bhajan* has been most active in introducing modern practices into its framework. These include leadership by elected *bhajan* offi-

cers, an accounting system that publishes a yearly balance sheet, and printed songbooks. It is also an inter-caste group, including a few Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans, but still is dominated by the local Tulādhar musicians. In recent years, Tulādhar have turned to the *bhajan* to organize events such as special *pūjā* programmes and pilgrimage bus trips to India. The *bhajan thakāli* ('leader') has become one of Asan's civic leaders.

Finally, the growth of the *bhajan* indicates another area in which Indic culture has influenced modern Newar life. But despite using Hindi film melodies to buoy their Buddhist lyrics, the *bhajan* phenomenon exemplifies the perennial Newar adaptation of Indian culture: Urāy feel pride at taking the outward Indic form and translating it to create their own fine Buddhist songs, sung in Newari.

3. Inter-Caste Relations: The Tulādhar Perspective

In conforming to the norms and rules of a caste-organized society, the Urāy adhere to patterns of Buddhist social accommodation found throughout the centuries in India.²⁹ Social life in Asan is ordered by the principles of caste endogamy and commensality; the concern with pollution and purity is similar to that found throughout the Indian subcontinent (Harper 1964): cooked rice, drinking water, and the hookah can be accepted only from caste equals or superiors. The family home is similarly protected from outside pollution, with the kitchen hearth and the *pūjā* rooms (*pūjā kwathā*, *āgā*) the most-guarded ritual sancta where lower caste individuals are not allowed. The Urāy share largely congruent norms of caste perception with their high-caste Hindu neighbours in key areas: sources of pollution (menstruating women,³⁰ *bōdī* products, physical contact with Untouchables), sources of purity (e.g. flowing water, cow products,³¹ mantras), and a general sense of caste hierarchy.

3.1. Intercaste character of the Asan market

We have noted already that Asan Twāh is dominated by two merchant castes, the Tulādhar and the Śreṣṭhas. In the neighbourhood, however, a full spectrum of high- and low-caste Newar groups is present. Table 2.5 arranges these groups living in Asan in the order reported by Greenwold (1974a) in his survey of Kathmandu city. (Most of my informants in Asan agreed with the status ranking we have followed here, with the Urāy and Śreṣṭhas claiming superiority over one another.)

The Urāy have extensive relationships with many of these other caste groups and although inter-caste bonds have weakened in recent years, they are still discernible throughout the fabric of Urāy social life. Following Table 2.5, the most prominent inter-caste relationships are outlined from the perspective of the Asan Tulādhar.

TABLE 2.5. Caste breakdown of Asan residents (N = 968)

Buddhist castes	%	Hindu castes	%
Vajrācārya (62)	6.4	Upādhyāya Brāhmaṇ (1)	0.1
Śākya (39)	4.0		
Urāy:		Śreṣṭhas	
Tulādhar (342)	35.4	Karmācārya (10)	1.0
Kamsakār (52)	1.4	Rājbandārī (24)	2.5
Tāmrakār (16)	1.7	Pradhān (13)	1.3
Sthāpit (5)	0.7	'Sreṣṭha' (227)	23.5
	39.2		28.3
		Maharjan (56)	1.8
Citrakār (7)	0.7		
Mānandhar (16)	1.7		
Nakarmī (4)	0.4	Mālākār (7)	0.7
Khadžī (7)	0.7	Kāpālī (7)	0.7
		Rajaka (1)	0.1
Groups recently settled in Asan			
Tibetan Buddhists (6)	0.6	Kāyastha (10)	1.0
		Joṣī (13)	1.3
		Misc. Newars (12)	1.2
		Non-Newar Hindus (31)	3.5

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of legally designated ownership units; location indicates estimated religious preference on Hindu-Buddhist axis.

Brāhmanas

In my survey questionnaires, most Urāy stated that Brāhmanas are the topmost group in their declension of local caste society. Although they utilize Vajrācāryas for their regular household rituals and recognize them as their chief *gurus*, Tulādhar also resort to Brāhmanas in several ritual domains. Many have taken part in the popular Hindu ritual called *satya nārāyaṇa vrata* (Lewis 1989a) and have gone at times to story-telling sessions put on locally by different Newar Brāhmanas. Some Urāy also take part in the *ihī pūjā* life-cycle rites that are conducted by Brāhmaṇ ritualists. (The rite itself is mandatory for Urāy girls, but may be conducted by either a Brāhmaṇ or Vajrācārya.) Finally, for the *burā jākwa* old-age life-cycle rite, Buddhist Newars call a Brāhmaṇ to receive *godān* ('the gift of a cow').

Vajrācāryas

According to the rules of the town-wide Vajrācārya *guthi*, a layman should call only his designated family Vajrācārya priest for the regular round of yearly *pūjās* and individual life-cycle rituals (Lewis 1994b). Moreover, only this priest, who is most commonly called *guruju* by Buddhist laymen, may worship the family *āgā dyah*, an essential component of any major household ritual.

As a result of the great Urāy-Vajrācārya dispute (1923-53), the previous pattern of *jajmān* tenure which had allotted Vajrācārya families to Urāy households came to an end.³² Urāy bitterness with former *guruju*s was such that they

chose *en masse* to discard the old network of ties in favour of the few Vajrācārya families who supported their position. Although the fight was finally settled decades ago, the old *jajmān-guruju* pattern was never restored.³³ As a result, descendants from Vajrācārya families of Tachē Bāhāḥ (Asan) and Kwāḥ Bāhāḥ (in the north of town), still perform most ritual services for them.

For most Urāy, contact with the Vajrācāryas is in the person of their family's traditional *guruju*. Only through special programmes of public story recitation, or more rarely, by a layman reading modern texts published by leading Vajrācārya pandits, does this circle of contact expand. Urāy sense of Vajrācāryas being a *saṃgha* ('monastic community') is a fast-fading awareness. In my sample, few Tulādhar could name any Vajrācārya besides their *guruju* and perhaps one famous story-teller. This was especially true among the women.

Śākya

Many Kathmandu Śākya are goldsmiths and silver-workers and the Tulādhar interact with them in this capacity. Śākya are active in Buddhist devotionism and are members of optional *guthis* with the Urāy. They do have one ceremonial role to play for the Urāy: one of them may be invited to accompany a groom's party when fetching the new bride. At this time he is treated with special respect as a guest in the bride's home: perhaps drawing on this group's respected role as members of the *saṃgha*, the Śākya man fastens a bracelet around the girl's ankle as part of her farewell ceremonies.³⁴ Another minor and optional connection is that some wealthy Urāy merchants hire a Śākya woman to make a sweet called *catāmari* that is used in special rituals.

Joṣī

The family astrologer is the second most important cultural specialist for the average Urāy household (after the *guruju*). Many knowledgeable specialists who practise this art are from a Newar Joṣī lineage, a Śreṣṭha subdivision.³⁵ An astrologer is needed to draw up an individual's horoscope soon after birth; throughout a person's life, the Joṣī may act as an interpreter of good/bad fortune with reference to stars, planets, and timing *vis-à-vis* this document. Most commonly, the astrologer determines the date for any birthday and the exact auspicious moment (*sāit*) for commencing the key action in life-cycle rites. The Joṣī is also consulted on the suitability of marriage partners, regarding land and building purchases, and for assistance in solving rather mundane problems such as illness, lost articles, problem children, or legal disputes. Leading Kathmandu astrologers give over one hundred consultations each day.

Urāy relations with their astrologers are *ad hoc* and unregulated; one pays in rice and coin for any consultation. Though theoretically open to change, families in Asan rarely stray from their past associations. The family women in my

sample handled over 85 per cent of the Tulādhar conferrals and held significantly greater belief in this system compared to the men. We also noted no major difference between the way that Hindu Newars and Buddhist Newars relate to the astrological tradition: both go to the same Joṣī and have the same horoscope drawn up, as nearly everyone seeks to move in harmony with the heavenly tendencies.

Śreṣṭha

Śreṣṭhas and Tulādhar are roughly equal in number as residents and shopkeepers in Asan.³⁶ Prosperous shopkeepers and members of the Newar elite, the Śreṣṭhas are the economic counterparts of the Urāy, but they have generally been more successful at winning positions in government service. Asan Śreṣṭhas differ most from the Urāy in their adherence to Hindu cultural practices: calling a Brāhmaṇ priest for rituals, worshipping at Hindu shrines (but usually not Buddhist *stūpas*), and following the somewhat different Hindu festival cycle. Outside observers would rank these groups on an equal socio-economic footing, but both claim the other to be inferior. Except for the relatively rare friendship and an occasional common *guthi* membership, Urāy have little intimate social contact with Śreṣṭhas despite their living off common courtyards and lanes.³⁷

Today, Tulādhar-Śreṣṭha rivalry goes beyond economics and status: it reaches deep into primordial sentiments about Newar culture. Many Tulādhar regard the Śreṣṭhas as having been opportunistic in relating to Parbatīyā political dominance and look down upon their having abandoned Buddhist elements of 'true Newar culture' while adopting the latter's customs. Tulādhar point out many small differences between the two groups in terms of idiomatic language, household ritual, religious goals, and ethical standards.

Maharjan

The Urāy have especially complicated and interwoven relations with this farmer caste, who form the single largest Newar group in the Kathmandu Valley.³⁸ Some Maharjan farmers once had regular seller-buyer relationships with Urāy households for their vegetables, a practice that has given way to more impersonal street selling. Many Urāy also have ties to Maharjan neighbours and tenants. Most Urāy-Maharjan links have their origins in the *jhārā* customs once maintained by landlords over cultivators, traditions that date back to Malla times (U. M. Malla 1972). Under a form of tenancy called *rakam*, the latter were required to perform many kinds of service for the landowner in addition to farming his land (M. C. Regmi 1976a: 156; Webster 1983: 143). In return, the Maharjan tenant kept one half of the harvest and participated in many sorts of prebendal services with the landlord. The legal basis for enforcing this service is no longer extant, but the expectation of service, which is woven intricately into old Urāy customs, still exists. In modern times, mon-

etary payments and feast shares must be offered to secure the Maharjans' services.

Urāy call upon both male and female Maharjans to deliver offerings to distant shrines, to assist at the time of special feasts, and deliver messages (recalling brides from their natal homes, or daughters to their natal homes, or relatives at the time of a death in the family). As these relationships are often long-standing and cross-generational, they are frequently warm and friendly. (Bonds that have survived have done so because of mutual friendship and generosity.) In Naradevī, such enduring close relations between Urāy and Maharjans have sustained a Pācaray Guthi that organizes special masked dances each year: today, when the Maharjans who now dance the parts of the great Hindu deities come at the yearly feast of the *guthi*, they are placed in a higher position of honour than other members. As a result, the seating order—an expression of status—puts them 'above' the Tulādhar members. This status-reversal is a source of teasing by other Urāy.³⁹

In the Asan community, it is clear that the interdependency of Tulādhar landlords and Maharjan tenants has been breaking down rapidly. Many Maharjans have succeeded in weakening landlord dominance⁴⁰ either by claiming as their own the lands they once farmed as tenants or by refusing to turn over to the Urāy the proper grain payment. Some of the most common complaints in the Tulādhar community reflect these changes: 'their' Maharjans give reduced and substandard grain; they refuse to come when called to help, or if they do come, they come intoxicated; the Maharjans are now 'uppity'. The success of the Maharjans in land tenure disputes has been due to the unwillingness and/or inability of the Urāy to undertake the legal efforts necessary to enforce their prerogatives. In successfully claiming farmlands near the city, the Maharjans have gained some of the most valuable real estate in the Kathmandu Valley. Many have become wealthy so that quite naturally they refuse to come when called to do the menial tasks the merchant élite once depended upon them for.

The Urāy *guthis* have suffered from drastic cuts in their land endowment incomes and so many Urāy families have had to cut down the scale of their household religious observances. In Asan, over 20 per cent of the families have hired non-Newars as household servants to compensate, in part, for this breakdown. The growing economic independence among Maharjans proximate to Kathmandu town⁴¹ has taken a toll on Urāy culture, a trend that the Tulādhar deplore but have been unable to resist.

Gwās

This upper Maharjan sub-caste, as noted above, specializes in carrying out cremations at the burning grounds. Urāy families who are not members of a *sī guthi* or who have a *sanāh guthi* affiliation employ them to carry out this task in return for a cash payment.

Didi Aji

The Didi Aji, who is usually referred to simply as 'Aji', is the traditional midwife who usually comes from a Maharjan sub-caste or, more rarely, the Kāpālī caste. Before modern hospitals were available in Kathmandu, the Didi Aji would assist in the delivery of babies and in the postnatal care of the mother. Now that all Urāy babies are born in hospitals, the Aji's role has contracted to the rituals of birth pollution and to *jākma*, the first rice feeding. Families still employ an Aji to give the new mother and child their daily massage with mustard oil in the first months after the birth (see Plate 11).

Citrakār

According to G. S. Nepali, the Citrakār caste is descended from a union between an Urāy woman and a low-caste man (1965: 170). Though ranked lower than the Maharjans in terms of classical pollution-purity criteria, the few true artists among the Citrakār are highly respected by the Urāy because they paint the secret Vajrayāna deities used in esoteric rituals. Before doing so, they must receive an initiation which is normally open to Urāy and Vajrācāryas only.

The interrelations between Urāy and the painter caste Citrakārs have also declined greatly in recent times. Formerly the Pū, as the Citrakārs are nicknamed, used to whitewash house walls on a regular basis, paint ritual objects used in Urāy life-cycle rituals, repaint the household Lakṣmī shrine in preparation for her annual worship during the festival of Swanti, the Newar New Year festival, and treat skin rashes.⁴² Wealthy Urāy patrons would also commission the finest artists to paint frescoes on the outside house walls, an art form almost completely lost today. All of these services have declined as mass-produced and cheaper printed images have become readily available in the market while the Citrakārs have simultaneously moved into the lucrative field of commercial art and producing images for the tourist trade. With rare exceptions, the Citrakārs are now called only at the time of a wedding, when they repaint the ceremonial Pañca-Buddha entrance-way to every Urāy house.

Nāpit

The family barber (male or female) still finds a wide-scale business in many Tulādhar households, making regular rounds about every two weeks to cut nails with the sharp cutting blade, the *chalā*. The Nāpit's role as the men's regular hair cutter, however, has declined because of the popularity of Indian-style barber shops in Kathmandu that cater to style-conscious Newar men.

The Nāpit's hair-cutting service is still required for the monthly head-shaving that is obligatory for the chief mourner during the first year of mourning. Likewise, at the times when family purification is necessary (*samskāras*,

major feasts, etc.), the female Nāpit still comes to cut the family members' nails. (For those who prefer not to accept this service, the simple touch of the *chalā* is still ritually bestowed.)

Rajaka (Dhubyā)

Urāy relations with this Washer caste still endure but in a much curtailed form. When the older style men's *daurā-surumāl* ('pant-coat') outfit was the common dress, the Rajaka's washing, ironing, and creasing services were essential. In the last decade, however, the choice of western 'ready-made' clothing has become the near-ubiquitous fashion. For this reason, the Tulādhar have turned away from the Rajakas as their old ways are thought to be too rough for these garments. As a result, the women of the house must now personally wash most of the household laundry.

Kāpālī

This caste group of Newari-speaking musicians (traditional players of the *pañca bājā*) claim to be settled Gorakhnāthī *yogins* honoured by the Malla kings who gave them control over major public rest-houses and legal rights to receive certain offerings (Slusser and Vajracharya 1974: 210). Their history likely represents an archetypal case study of Newar society assimilating an entire Indian group over generations.

The Urāy Gūlā *bājās* used to employ Kāpālī oboe (*mavāhli*) players. Among themselves, Kāpālī families have established territorial rights to determine who receives a portion of every family feast in Asan as well as specified offerings of articles and foods prepared by a mourning family for its departed ancestors. On such occasions, the Kāpālī representative still comes to receive the group's due from the hands of the Urāy women.

Damāī

Although the Damāī, a low Parbatiyā caste group, are traditionally leather-workers and tailors in Kathmandu, they have broadened their economic activities to include professional musicianship playing western wind instruments (clarinets, flutes, trombones, tubas, etc.). For their services as musicians, Urāy hire Damāī to accompany their wedding processions and the Gūlā *bājā*. At such occasions, especially for feasting, Urāy are careful to segregate themselves from their Damāī accompanists.

Dyaḥlā

Before the building of the sewerage system in Asan in the early 1960s, Newar Untouchables (Urāy usually say 'Cyāmakhalah') used to clean out the toilets of bazaar residents and then sell the nightsoil to Maharjan farmers for their fields as part of the traditional ecological system.

Dyaḥlās now clean the public streets in return for payment by the city government. But individual families living on common courtyards still band

together and pay to have them clean this space regularly. When Dyaḥlā workers do come, Urāy parents still instruct their children not to get too close to the sweepers and never allow any physical contact with them.

Summary: Inter-caste relations in Asan

Although there are examples of less stringent Urāy adherence to classical Indic caste norms as compared to the Hindu Śreṣṭhas, it is still the case that the ideology of caste pervades the entire Newar urban community. Urāy women guard the purity of their homes and hearth according to a guest's caste just as rituals that have multi-caste participation are caste-segregated: Damāī musicians must not eat in the same line with Tulādhar Gūlā *bājā* members; and parents still insist on their children avoiding Untouchables. Just as the city space was traditionally laid out to conform with caste ranking, so are personal relationships 'distanced' according to rules governing acceptable status contact. In this realm, we can see clearly the extent to which high-caste Newars—Hindu and Buddhist—adhere to their Indic heritage of caste orthopraxy.

4. Concluding Ethnohistorical Reflections: *The Urāy and Malla Polity*

4.1. The Meaning of Samyak and Kumār Pyākhā

All the great Newar religious festivals can be analysed as cultural performances replete with layers of information regarding the polity's socio-political, religious, economic, and artistic history. A typology of Newar festivals could be created on the basis of the extent of movement through the city, the number of castes involved organizationally, temporal duration, etc., with the most significant reaching the royal palace and claiming the king's involvement. Our study of the Urāy points to two such cultural performances of the first order, Samyak and Kumār Pyākhā, that open up lines of ethnohistorical analysis (cf. Oppitz 1974). Given the dearth of research on the Malla era, the remarks here are of necessity preliminary and heuristic.⁴³

It would indeed be possible to organize a discussion of Kathmandu city's Buddhist history, its principal communities, and the local sense of religious geography by examining the structure and components of the Samyak festival. Samyak tradition assembles a microcosm of Newar civilization, from king to peasant labourers, artisans to priests, each with a defined role. The festival organizing process is itself dynamic: every twelve years, it is the occasion for certifying group boundaries, unifying each sub-group, and asserting the Buddhist tradition's cosmic order through a grand religious celebration. The religious geography of Kathmandu *deśa* is also articulated, drawing together

Newar Buddhists and all major deities (except Bunga Dyah)⁴⁴ from settlements across the Kathmandu and the Banepa Valleys. We have also seen how the social hierarchy of the local Buddhist lay community is very precisely reckoned for Samyak through the division of labour that organizes a mass ritual donation to the Buddhist deities and to the local Newar *saṃgha*, i.e. to Śākyas and Vajrācāryas.

In addition to the redistribution of wealth and the intensive cultural employment that occurs, this communal giving to the Newar *saṃgha* asserts the pre-eminence of Newar *guruḥ*, who sit alongside celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Yet again simultaneously, Samyak is also the most conspicuous occasion for patrons and devotees to spend their wealth for garnering merit (*puṇya*) while enhancing their prestige among peers through the display of immense, gilded images. For the Urāy especially, Samyak is the occasion when their Buddhist identity is emphatically asserted. During this festival, the Urāy are most clearly *upāsakas*, energetic and devout followers of Buddha, Saṃgha, and Dharma. The prominence of families with Lhasa trading ties—as former sponsors and active organizers—underlines the point that the wealth of this mercantile élite has largely underwritten the construction of many Kathmandu *vihāras*, *stūpas*, and temples (Lewis 1993a, 1993b).

The Samyak festival also reflects on the nature of the relationship that once existed between the Malla kings and local Buddhist traditions. On the first evening of Samyak, all the images from private homes and public temples are brought to the Palace, where they receive offerings from the royal family and the general public. Next day, all process to a field at the south-east of Svayambhū hill. Seated on a roofed observation platform [which in 1980 and 1993 was surmounted by a *stūpa*], the king then observes while the assembled deities and the *saṃgha* receive special offerings. Many royal symbolisms operate: gathering all deities from peripheries to the palace defines and blesses the royal palace as sacred centre; the royal family gives patronage in return for blessings (day 1), then acts as the pre-eminent lay devotee—along with hundreds of wealthy, image-bearing families—to join in a mass offering ceremony on day 2 that in theory includes every member of every Newar *saṃgha*.

Unlike other great Buddhist festivals that involve royal participation—Bunga Dyah Jātrā (Owens 1989), Indra Jātrā (Lewis 1984: 374–9)—Samyak has no well-known Hindu theory or gloss which explains the ritual for those who wish to define themselves as Hindus and justifies their participation in it. What endures reflects a Malla festival that orchestrates a strong statement of imperial support for every major Buddhist deity (except Bunga Dyah) and for every local *saṃgha*. In turn, the festival certifies the legitimation of the ruler through his actions as defender and patron of Buddhism. Samyak's ritual 'grammar' is strongly Buddhist: the king sits below a *stūpa* and the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas adhere to an ancient norm allowing no member of the *saṃgha* to

bow to a ruler,⁴⁵ similar to state-*saṃgha* procedures in South-East Asia (Tambiah 1976). These symbolic gestures of Buddhism's pre-eminence were the Buddhist constituency's 'price' for creating the grand spectacle conferring legitimacy on the monarch. The Samyak ceremonies were witnessed by thousands in Malla times, when the majority of the population was probably orientated toward Buddhist deities and the services of a Vajrācārya priesthood.

This is not to deny that the Malla palace's support for Buddhism was secondary to its competing Hindu-Brahmanical orientation. But Malla regard for Tibetan lamas (Lewis and Jamspal 1988) and their appointing Bhutanese lamas as caretakers of Svayambhū in 1673 (Aris 1980: 249) should be noted to offset any image of their being sectarian Hindus. The Kathmandu court thus occupied a middle position accepting the religious diversity of the Valley. But it is also certain that the Mallas did not go as far as conforming to the textual ideals of Buddhist kingship: there is no record that they ever engaged in any of the 'purifications of the *saṃgha*' that contemporaneous kings of Burma, Thailand, or Sri Lanka were instituting.

The royal cult to Durgā-Taleju provides another inter-religious study. Recall how the Urāy take a leading position among Kathmandu's Buddhist laymen: two groups dance as Kumār and Daitya in the service of the Kathmandu ruler's rituals to the goddess regarded as protectress of the ruling line. This is another simulacrum of exchanges in the local polity: by taking on the Kumār role, the Urāy express their alliance with the king and symbolically focus their religious power, derived from Vajrayāna tradition, towards the preservation of the Malla state; in return, the king acknowledges the Buddhists' high standing in society and the pragmatic power of their religious tradition. The special interdependence between Kathmandu royalty and Buddhist merchants is one key historical relationship that is evident in the surviving customs.⁴⁶

Nor should this analysis stop with 1769: the Shah dynasty has adopted Malla customs for Samyak and Taleju, as in their support of many other local Newar traditions that confer ritual protection on the Valley's monarch. In the Kumār Pyākhā as well, the Urāy continue to perform their ritual duty, despite the change in dynasty. Why? In recent times, there has been occasional government coercion when Urāy youngsters were loath to submit to the training and abstentions involved. For the community to suspend participation would be tantamount to disloyalty to the royal family.

The endurance of Kumār Pyākhā may also be read as an indication of enduring Urāy support for the modern state.⁴⁷ It is important to recall that a turning-point in the Valley's conquest was the disaffection of Kathmandu merchants for Malla kings who were unable to end Prithivi Narayan's blockade on trade (Stiller 1973); note that even under the hated Ranas, trade flourished and the Ranas acted on behalf of Newars in Lhasa (L. E. Rose 1971: 123; Upreti 1980). M. C. Regmi has noted (1976a: 70) that of all the venues in the Valley where the Shahs annexed Newar lands, Kathmandu was the least af-

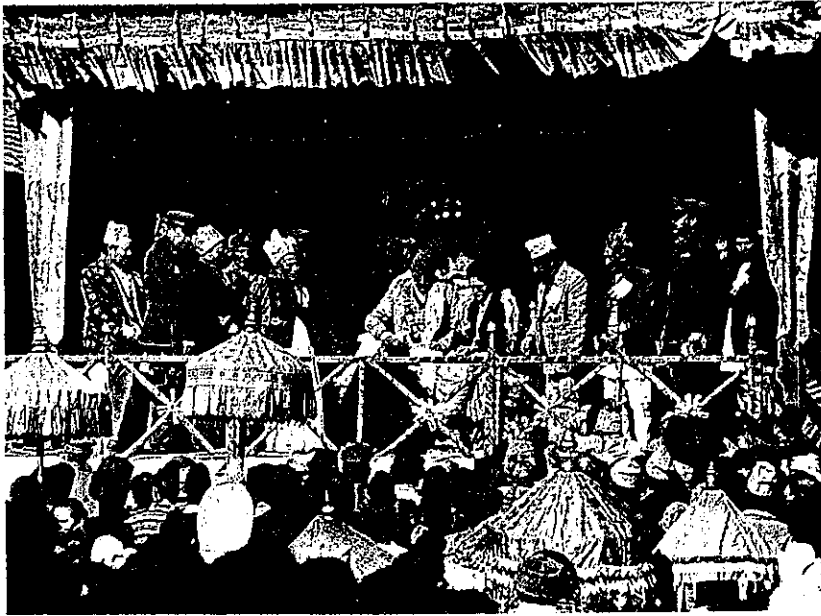


PLATE 4. The Samyak Festival of 1980: the King and Queen of Nepal witness the *dāna* and receive honours from the Buddhist elders. (The Queen did not attend in 1993; nor did the senior Vajrācāryas bow down to the King's feet in 1993, which had been considered controversial in 1980.) (Richard English)

fect, by a factor of *seven* compared to Lalitpur (4,751 *muris* versus 695). This points to an early *rapprochement* between the Urāy and Shah kings.

I suggest that despite areas of keen resentment against the non-Newar rulers, mutual interests and outward respect endured between the Urāy and the state. (In the early decades of this century, for example, several Urāy families of Asan were leading musicians and dramatists performing at the Rana court.) In the Taleju rites each year, the Urāy continue dancing as Kumār because their community still prospers by honouring a long-standing alliance with their polity's king.

4.2. The Urāy and Tibetan relations

A particularly characteristic element of Urāy group dynamics when compared with other Newar groups (found otherwise only among some Śākyas) was the practice of Urāy men living in Tibet and marrying Tibetan women. For the most part, the traders kept their twin families separated by the Himalayas,⁴⁸ but occasionally half-Tibetan females returned to Kathmandu, where they married Urāy boys and were absorbed into Urāy patrilineages. These female *khacarās* (from Nepali, 'half-breed goat') were absorbed with only minor status reper-

cussions, but *khacarā* sons were not of acceptable status for marriage to proper Urāy girls and were most unwelcome in Kathmandu, although some did travel there and settle.⁴⁹ The 'semi-permeability' of Urāy lineages with Tibetans, of course, is in distinct contrast with high-caste Hindu Newars, for whom such alliances were unthinkable. Here, then, is a major point of contrast between Hindu and Buddhist Newar merchant groups.

Recent studies of Tibetan records on the Kathmandu Valley in the Malla era (Lewis and Jamspal 1988; Lewis 1989c) help to explain the unique evolution of the Urāy as a separate caste only in Kathmandu, the Newar city most dominated by Tibetan traders. In Kathmandu, ties with Tibet were uniquely important. Malla Kathmandu *deśa*'s complex relationship between Newar kings, diaspora merchants, and Tibetan lamas developed in a three-sided, synergistic manner:

- (a) *Urāy diaspora merchants* firmly established Kathmandu on the periphery of the web of Tibetan monasticism (Miller 1960) through their patronage; standard merit-making motives for inviting great lamas to Kathmandu coincided with business interest in having sound relationships with the Tibetan government (Lewis 1989c).
- (b) *Newar kings of Kathmandu* profited handsomely from the success of Kathmandu merchant families trading in Tibet (M. C. Regmi 1971: 24–5; Toffin 1990); adherence to norms of Indic kingship motivated patronage of lamas; Malla royalty's belief in the saintliness and healing power of lamas was also evident (Lewis and Jamspal 1988).
- (c) *Tibetan lamas* valued the Kathmandu Valley as a religious centre, source of texts, as a venue for establishing satellite institutions, and as the territory of generous patrons.

In the regional context, then, the Malla kings had many reasons to support the Tibetan lamas in their midst while the rich and successful Urāy had motivations to underline their strong Buddhist character as a distinctive group boundary marker. Prestige and high social standing were derived from being Buddhist patrons, making donations to build and restore local Buddhist monuments, and associating with individuals of high spiritual pedigree. In late Malla times, Tibetan lamas were among the Valley's most prominent Buddhists, and local *gumbās* (Tib. 'monasteries') important landmarks. Perhaps Samyak also suggests elements of Newar Buddhist boundary maintenance *vis-à-vis* Tibetan lamas?

Thus, Urāy alliances with Tibetan wives and lamas, fundamental to their mercantile prosperity, life-style, and spiritual inclinations involved major deviations from the norms of Brahmanical orthopraxy; this Buddhist community was thereby out of step with the cultural tide that marked the later stages of the Malla dynasty and continued further with Shah–Rana rule. The Mallas were comfortable with this anomaly but the Shahs and Ranas did not emulate the Mallas' regard for Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, the logic of Urāy economy and

pluralistic culture, uniquely straddling both worlds, came to contradict the Brahmanical spirit of modern Nepal, a Hindu state. Consorting with Tibetans—who were seen as close to Untouchables in the state codes (Höfer 1979)—compromised one's presence at court and the 'purity of place' in high-caste residential areas of Kathmandu proximate to the Palace. The Urāy-Vajrācārya dispute hinged on the problem of Tibetan lamas compromising high-caste Newar Buddhist purity in Brahmanical terms (Lewis 1989c). This same contradictory tension also surfaced when Rana prime ministers insisted that Newar traders returning from Tibet perform Brahmanical purification ceremonies. As in many other spheres, the new state's formation caused a shift in Newar caste boundary maintenance and in ethnic group definitions (Levine 1987).

4.3. Defining factional lines in Malla polities

Relatedness always implies a universe of non-relations . . . contained in every opening outward is a tendency toward closure inward and in every bond a series of alienations.

Robert Murphy (1971: 154)

Lwāye nā ma phu ('Can't fight
Milay nā ma ju. Or unite.)

Newar proverb

Perhaps what discourages scholars of Newar civilization most is the complexity in diversity evident in the Kathmandu Valley's towns and villages. Each is its own case study, different in dialect, caste names, priesthoods, etc., and it is problematic to generalize beyond one's fieldwork. As the proverb above indicates, a factionalized social fabric is also self-evident to the Newars.

The foregoing presentation of Urāy social organization underlines the importance that Newars place in maintaining caste divisions: most Newar cultural performances today function to assert group exclusiveness and pride. In Malla times, caste groups were important actors in socio-economic-political discourse *vis-à-vis* royalty. *Deślā guthis* maximized on the logic of group representation and contestation in the royal court. As in Lalitpur (Slusser 1982: 124), *twāh* and caste leaders in Malla Kathmandu often became influential figures in the city-state, with religious affiliation—along Hindu-Buddhist lines—a central element in maintaining identity and loyalty among contending factions. Each side developed a broad array of priesthoods and institutions that competed for patronage and cultural employment across the social order—kings, merchants, and the masses. One simplified representation of the Kathmandu Valley's religious field in full ethnohistorical scope is shown in Fig. 2.3.

On the 'Hindu' side, the Malla dynasty retained ties to Mithila civilization (Bihar), especially through their recruitment of Brāhmaṇ priests and court

officials; their practice of entrusting the care of the Valley's most important Hindu shrine (Paśupati) to south Indian Brāhmaṇs is also diagnostic of their Indic/Hindu allegiance. Malla kings conformed to Indic norms of royal patronage by supporting all worthy religious traditions and several forms of Buddhism were the prominent focal points in their patronage. Still, Brāhmaṇs and Brahmanical traditions dominated the socio-legal order, Tantric Hindu Karmācāryas maintained royal cults such that Hindu priestly castes and temples claimed the chief loyalty of the élite who ruled Kathmandu *deśa* over the later Malla period.

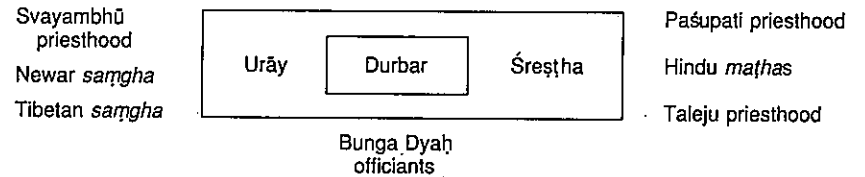


FIG. 2.3. Hindu and Buddhist constituencies in the Malla era

Arrayed alongside this 'Hindu' order were the Buddhist merchants, artisans, royal retainers with ties to established *saṃghas* and monasteries. (The 'religious field' here also extends beyond Newar ethnic boundaries: the northern foreigners from Tibet centred at Svayambhū and Bauddha mirror the southerners at Paśupati.) For the peasant masses who relied upon Vajrācāryas for most of their ritual needs and focused upon celestial Bodhisattvas for supramundane hopes (Gellner 1992), Mahāyāna Buddhism remained their chief refuge. The Newar kings of Kathmandu made outward peace with local Buddhism while blurring its boundaries; Urāy customs reflect the dramatic efforts by these later Malla rulers—and their successors—to secure the loyalty of the polity's Buddhist majority and to sustain the pan-Himalayan relationships conducive to enduring mercantile success that supported their kingdom.

Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who made my research in this neighbourhood so rewarding; special thanks to Labh Ratna, Nati Vajra, Sanu Raja, Suman Kamal, Siddhartha Man, Subarna Man, Hera, Double, and the children of Dagu Baha. I would like to thank Suman Kamal, Nirmal Man, and Siddhartha Man Tuladhar for reading this manuscript and making many helpful comments. The editors of this volume also made many useful queries, comments, and corrections that improved the final text. Finally, thanks go to Joel Villa of the Holy Cross Audio-Visual Dept., who printed the plates.
2. Figure 2.1 indicates this area and gives the major sub-neighbourhoods along with other internal locality names. Each lane radiating out from the crossroads has its own sub-neighbourhood name so that sometimes residents along these routes affix

- 'Asan' to the name of their locality (e.g. 'Asan-Kamalāchi'). (My initial research focused upon the area bounded by this linguistic designation.) One of these old thoroughfares leads directly to the royal palace at the centre of the old city, another to the city's major bus terminus.
3. The wholesale grain market used to be located right on the streets of Asan. Now it is in Mahā Baudha, an open space around a large *stūpa* on the eastern edge of town, just south of central Asan.
 4. Due to high Indian import duties on foreign-made goods, a large part of Kathmandu's import business is directed towards Indian buyers who smuggle their purchases from Nepal back across the very permeable border. In competition for this very lucrative trade and in other unofficial markets (i.e. 'secondary' or 'black market' economies), Newars have lost ground to other Nepali traders (Manangis, Sherpas) and to the most dominant players, the leading Indian diaspora traders, the Marwaris.
 5. This is a quality of Newar settlements noted by almost every commentator from Father Giuseppe (1801) onward. Epidemics due to traditional poor public health standards may have been an important factor in Newar civilization, as was the case elsewhere in the pre-modern world. A Tibetan visitor in 1723 reports a serious multi-year epidemic decimating the country in the hot season (Lewis and Jamsal 1988).
Modern Newars say that the town used to be much cleaner. The old sweeper system that relied on Untouchable labour ensured that the city streets were swept twice a day; now under city government control, only the main streets are swept once daily. Cows still roam the streets, another part of the old system of recycling waste. The older practice of people defecating in nearby rice paddy-fields has also ended as new buildings now occupy these locations. In 1987 a local association began a dramatic series of moves to reverse the public health situation and they began in Asan: young leaders ensured that new laws limiting street-selling were enforced, provided each shopkeeper with a waste-bin, and hounded residents to keep their house areas clean (*Himal*, 1988, 3). This initiative had dissipated by 1991.
 6. Information regarding house ownership was obtained by means of a house-to-house survey done by my Newar assistant Sanu Vajracharya and myself over a three-month period in the spring of 1981. Using land registry maps, we ascertained the caste identity of each map-designated resident unit. We also used our cross-Asan sample of households to determine that the average household size was 6.9 people. An in-depth census of Asan would render more exact results; funds and time were lacking for such a time-consuming and problematic task. Still, the point should be underlined: population and rudimentary demographic research are necessary for progress in studies on Newar society.
 7. This geographic separation, even if only one kilometre from the old quarters but outside the town walls, has often made families (especially women) feel uncomfortable at being cut off from their families and community.
 8. According to Nepalese law, shop space in the ground floor of the house can be separated from the house, divided in inheritance by brothers, or sold off outright. (The last is still a relatively rare occurrence and we found still fewer instances of settled Asan Newars selling off whole houses to non-Newars.) In 1982 the talk of

- Asan was a dispute among Tulādhār brothers: one wanted to sell off one-third of a small shop to his coheirs. For roughly 100 square feet, he was demanding two *lakhs* (200,000 rupees).
9. Asan is as pluralistic ethnically and culturally as any old bazaar in the world. Modern life continues to change in terms of shifting allegiance to business, family, and religious traditions. Especially visible among the prosperous are all sorts of mass media technologies; since 1986 television has also competed for free hours and limited resources. Such stimuli also vie with myriad older ties and commitments to one's kin and caste community. Some of the oldest traditional Newar observances are still kept in Asan families while in other households there are some individuals who want as little as possible to do with the old fashions. Urban life-styles among Asan residents thus include the possibility of *withdrawing* in an unprecedented way from traditional observances and into individualistic pursuits, a situation quite different from the Newar village. All told, Asan's urban life is so deeply layered and richly varied that residents *themselves* experience their city's impersonal qualities while accepting that outside their *twāḥ* their own society and culture can only be known in fragments.
 10. Parbatīyās are referred to routinely in Asan as *khēy* in Newari. This term is an informal Tibeto-Burman derivation from the Sanskrit term *khas*, an early ethnic group name common in the Sulej Himalayas later adopted as a surname across the northern frontier of India. This slang usage is in line with a host of traditional terms that Newars use to tease other castes.
 11. The relationship is more complex than merely noting that the market can afford to buy culture. In fact, both are interconnected on a multitude of levels: (1) With every *pūjā*, there is a feast; for every feast, a long shopping list, and hence a visit to the market; (2) half of the year's business profits in Asan come in the autumn month between Mohanī and Swanti; (3) *pūjā* should also be seen as a system of economic redistribution to priests, holy men, beggars, animals of the urban ecological niche. The overall impact of the vast Newar cultural repertoire is to intensify the volume of exchange and to extend the webs of family and caste interconnection.
 12. The important role of *vaiśyas* in South Asian history—from antiquity up to the modern industrialist Tatas—remains underrepresented in Indological historiography. There has been some scholarship concerned with merchants in South Asian history, especially Hazlehurst (1968), Gokhale (1977), Lamb (1959), Tambiah (1973), Fox (1973), and Khachikian (1966). Rhys-Davids (1901) is also a useful source. Curtin's (1984) extensive bibliography lists other Indian sources.
 13. In small Newar settlements across the Nepalese mid-hills, the surnames 'Tulādhār' and 'Udās' are encountered (Lewis and Shakyā 1988) and usually can be traced to children of marriages between Śākya and Vajrācārya men and non-Newar women. But there are no known marriages between the Urāy in the Kathmandu Valley and such 'out-Valley' lineages. It is interesting to note that the logic of Newar caste extends to such communities hundreds of miles from Kathmandu and not surprising that the Nepali term, not the Kathmandu one ('Urāy'), is used.
 14. Tulādhārs dislike the Nepali name for them—Udās—for it may also be translated 'sad'.
 15. The classical reference to the 'Five Prohibited Professions' is found in the Pali Canon (*Aṅguttara Nikāya*, i) and mentioned in various *jātaka* compilations, al-

- though modern Urāy informants did not cite any well-known passage. The Urāy and general Newar commitment to non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) in personal relations is striking, as violent crimes have been extremely rare in the history of Asan and Kathmandu. Non-violence in regard to lower life forms is also an Urāy characteristic and I have written elsewhere about a popular text featuring this teaching (Lewis 1993c) and touched upon the public health implications of this view (Lewis 1989b). In their ritual practices, especially regarding animal sacrifice, Urāy *ahiṃsā* may be a recent 'reform' that some Tulādharers today ascribe to the influence of Theravāda Buddhism.
16. Note that the Tāmrakār of Kathmandu are Buddhist and do not intermarry with Lalitpur lineages of the same surname who are mostly Hindu in religious orientation.
 17. My attempts to use the webs of *āgā dyaḥ* and *digu dyaḥ* connections for historical purposes have been unsuccessful, in large part because the shrines and records are subject to secrecy. Theoretically, the system points back to one apical ancestor, but as the first, then later family generations split, ornaments and images were divided.
 18. Here, Buddhist kinship and identity likely shielded *Dharmaśāstra*-based sentiments from group reckoning: no high-caste Hindu lineage would tolerate intermarriage with Tibetans, who as yak (= cow) meat eaters would have been scorned by Newar Hindu castes (Höfer 1979).
 19. In practice, few people can trace back even five generations in female lines of descent.
 20. According to Shepard (1985), this Kathmandu group may be anomalous in breaking town endogamy: some families have recorded marriages with Rājkarṇikār of Lalitpur, some of whom in Lalitpur today call themselves 'Tulādhar' through these connections. (Few in Asan knew of this side-bar in Urāy genealogy.) Through them (in quite small numbers), then, Kathmandu Urāy do in fact extend their marriage circle as well. As Gellner notes in a personal communication (1989), Kathmandu Rājkarṇikār may all be originally from Lalitpur. Moreover, 'Rājkarṇikār are not traditionally part of the Tulādhar *et al.* [i.e. Urāy], but due to their wealth and the fact that some Tulādharers *et al.* were traditionally Marikaḥmi, those originally Lalitpur Rājkarṇikār who have been a long time in Kathmandu have succeeded in getting themselves accepted as Tulādhar *et al.* Because of their traditional links with Lalitpur, which they have also maintained, the seemingly anomalous situation . . . came about. . . Perhaps permeation by other Newars, who can always be claimed *ex post facto* to be of the same status, is one kind of Hindu-acceptable permeation, whereas establishing unions with Tibetans is another Buddhist-influenced but Hindu-unacceptable permeation . . . Tuladhar *et al.* practise both, but Śreṣṭhas only the former.'
 21. Samyak draws all Newar Buddhists together with the nation's king to Svayambhū, where they make great stores of merit by worshipping the major Buddhist divinities of the Kathmandu Valley and feeding all males of the Vajrācārya and Śākya *saṃghas*. There is evidence that the Samyak *guthi* started around 1580 (Locke 1985: 288). The festival form is doubtless related to the textual grand ancient Indic *dāna* festivals called *pañcavārṣika* (Strong 1990; Beal 1970 edn. i. 232 and elsewhere in Hsuan Tsang). Up until forty years ago, individual families could sponsor a Samyak by meeting all the feasting and ritual costs and by constructing their own image of Dīpaṃkara Buddha and other accompanying icons. See the discussion in
- Section 4 regarding this festival and Kumār Pyākhā (below) as simulacra for reading the nature of Kathmandu as Malla polity united by imperial Buddhist ritualism.
22. These proceedings, closed to outsiders, act out a mythological understanding that is superimposed on the social/spatial order of Kathmandu City: Kumār, war deity of the heavens, is drawn from the peripheral Urāy; from central Maru Twāḥ, in like manner symbolic of the underworld's master, a Tāmrakār dancer incarnates Daitya; finally, the king completes the triple world's symbolism as the human realm's protector and worshipper of the goddess Taleju.
 23. I will return to this Urāy tradition in Section 4 to show how this dance and Samyak provide reference points for defining the contours of Kathmandu polity of the Malla era. Note here how Kathmandu is a different country, separate from Lalitpur and Bhaktapur; caste names, boundaries, history are unique to it.
 24. In 1982 only the Asan and Naradevī Tulādharers, the Kel Twāḥ Kāmsakār, and the Maru Twāḥ Tāmrakār still maintained the Gūlā bājā traditions. Among these, only Asan Tulādharers still played *dhāḥ* drums.
 25. Gūlā bājā musicianship and procedures are highly developed; for a fuller treatment of Gūlā activities, see Lewis (1993d).
 26. This pan-Newar myth is linked to the Bhatbhatini settlement several kilometres north-east of Asan (Slusser 1982: 364). The lack of any significant archaeological research in the Kathmandu Valley renders such folklore merely speculative. Locke has pointed out that many *digu dyaḥ* of Śākya and Vajrācārya families can be traced to Sankhu (1985: 517).
 27. In recent times, one sign of withdrawal from the old ways of socializing is resignation from the cremation *guthi* of one's forefathers and arranging for family cremations independently on a service payment basis. This is often encountered when brothers divide up their ancestral house because of a dispute: one will retain the *guthi* bond, the other will drop all ties and 'go it alone'.
 28. A brother who splits up from a single household will seek to postpone the *guthi*'s recognizing his separation since his household constitutes a new unit of membership. According to the rules, new family heads must be added immediately into the *pāḥlāḥma* rotation and serve next in that role.
 29. Due to the early debates in Buddhist circles on the attitude of the Buddha to caste, the association of Buddhist tradition with caste practices may seem irregular, but such a view is contrary to the history of the Indo-Tibetan tradition. In fact, there is no inherent incompatibility between Buddhist doctrine and a caste society. Although there is debate on the hierarchy of aspirant groups, with the Buddhists arguing for the superiority of the *bhikkhus* over the Brāhman and the Buddha over all *devas*, Buddhist traditions, especially on the popular story-telling level, clearly equate high-caste rebirth with good *karma* and the innate proclivity for advanced spiritual attainment. Likewise, those groups at the bottom, especially Chandalas, are looked down upon even by 'good Buddhists' in the Jātaka texts (Rhys-Davids 1901: 869).
- Portions of the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna tradition also accepted the fact of caste hierarchy among human beings (Stablein 1978: 532). Even in Tibet, untouchable-like groups were recognized (Gombo 1982). The social history of India has shown that once caste is the established basis of social life, kin groups had little choice but to enter society by joining with kin as a corporate unit. In Malla Nepal, had

- Buddhist devotees not conformed to proper high-class social practice (especially in terms of the appropriate pollution-purity rules), they would not have sustained residence in the cities ruled by kings using Brahmanical models in arranging and governing their kingdoms. In this and other areas, contemporary Newar studies should inform the wider field of Indian Buddhist history.
30. Urāy women do not undergo their monthly periods with the same rigorous restrictions as do Śreṣṭha women; nor do they observe the Tīj festival, as Śreṣṭha women may do.
 31. The Urāy do not touch cows reverently, as Hindu Newars do.
 32. See Rosser (1966). Urāy reverence for a Tibetan lama, especially their eating *prasād* from his hands, brought to a head the contradiction high-caste Buddhists attempted to maintain: Brahmanical orthopraxy versus ultimate allegiance to and respect for Buddhist holiness. Vajrācārya factions that opted to define themselves as upholding Brahmanical orthopraxy first, denying the fact of commensal relations with the Urāy, have to this day been ostracized by the Asan Tulādhar and have only lower caste *jajmāns* to serve.
 33. S. M. Greenwold's suggestion that Vajrācāryas really 'won the day' (1981: 101) has been so only symbolically: this dispute resulted in widespread cultural unemployment for most Vajrācārya lineages, undermined Urāy patronage of the Newar *saṅgha*, and created a rift that helped Tibetan lamas and Theravāda missionaries.
 34. There is variation across the Urāy sub-groups: Kaṃsakārs do not observe this custom; all Urāy send a bronze anklet (called *tuti bakī*) except for the Tulādhar, who send a silver bracelet (*kalyā*).
 35. The Joṣī caste is not the only one that can provide an astrological specialist, however. In Asan, several Vajrācārya priests and one Tulādhar layman in Asan were also casting horoscopes in 1982.
 36. In this context, note that I am lumping all categories of Śreṣṭha into one since, as Quigley points out in this volume (Ch. 3), internal subdivisional caste rankings are of importance only internally, not to outsiders.
 37. Urāy refer to all Śreṣṭhas using the derogatory 'Śeṣyaḥ'. In the same spirit, Śreṣṭhas challenge the pureness of Urāy lineages and tell a number of stories at their expense which end with the Urāy trying to explain his caste history with the rhyming exclamation: 'Chu dhāye, chu dhāye? . . . Urāy.' ('What to say, what to say . . . Urāy.')
 38. See Gellner and Pradhan's Ch. 5 below on the complex array of urban Maharjan communities.
 39. Interestingly, until recent years a Tulādhar dancer danced the masked part of Mahādeva, the chief deity in the drama.
 40. The Maharjans have also pursued agricultural innovations (rice varieties, chemical fertilizers) which have increased their yields dramatically—but the Urāy have not benefited because the landlord's share was fixed according to 1964 Land Reform standards (Webster 1983: 144).
 41. In Kathmandu, the community with the most evident expressions of cultural revival are the Maharjans. Some of the notable recent patronage events in the Buddhist community, e.g. Pañcadān, have been performed by Maharjans. The caste exclusiveness of the Vajrācārya leaders who are guardians of traditional Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism hinders the Newar *saṅgha* from attracting the support

- of this *nouveau riche* population. Theravāda institutions have been heavily patronized by the new Maharjan 'middle class'.
42. When people get a skin rash called *jala nāgā nyāyegu*, the folk treatment includes having a Citrakār paint two lions on the skin at the edges of the rash to arrest its spread.
 43. For the Kathmandu Samyak, there has been some preliminary documentation (Sakya 1979; Tulādhar 1979). Although the Samyak of 1980 was felt by its organizers possibly to be the last that the *guthi* could successfully undertake due to the immense logistical and financial requirements and the lack of interest among younger generations, it was held again in 1993, albeit one year late and with some rituals attenuated. My information on this festival comes from observations from both the 1980 and 1993 festivals. Research film (Lewis 1982) and video (Lewis 1994a) of the Kathmandu Samyak festivals are found in the Human Area Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. On the Lalitpur Samyak, see Gellner (1992: 181–5).
 44. The common explanation of this one deity's absence from the Kathmandu Samyak is his disapproval of the wastage of food in the rituals.
 45. A major controversy erupted in 1980 when a few honoured senior Vajrācāryas went forward to receive special gifts from King Birendra's hands, then prostrated at his feet. Vajrācāryas in the audience called out derisively at this breach of custom and still denounce these seniors years later for their betrayal of their *saṅgha* traditions. (This was not repeated in 1993.)
 46. There were several striking differences in the observances from 1980 to 1993. First, there was an ongoing narration describing the unfolding events by a master of ceremonies who spoke in both Newari and Nepali. Secondly, the Prime Minister attended the event along with a large foreign diplomatic entourage. Thirdly, King Birendra's engagement was notably more outgoing in 1993: unlike in 1980 when he quickly exited after the formal rituals concluded, he now walked into the crowded lines of deities for *darśan* and stayed to ask questions of the organizers about the festival.
 47. Seemingly implausible in the light of contemporary developments, this conclusion is in keeping with later Malla history which shows that contending Newar élites made alliances with non-Newars to further their own sub-group's intra-Newar struggles. Recall that Lalitpur requested that Prithivi Narayan rule over their polity and that Newar merchants conducted the trade of Rama Shah of Gorkha (Stiller 1973: 29).
 48. But these spatially separated worlds were merged after 1959, when many Tibetans fled Tibet with the Dalai Lama. Once the Kathmandu Valley became a prominent refugee centre, many Tibetan wives and half-Tibetan children of Urāy fathers showed up in Kathmandu and claimed the right to maintenance support and a share of the family's inheritance. Quite a number of Asan families have stories of domestic upheaval caused by such contingencies (Lewis 1993a).
 49. Further research should try to document life histories of this group and their role in local Tibetan Buddhism (Jest 1993). Today, several *khacarās* are prominent lamas in the Tibetan Buddhist world. It is my impression that a small community of these lineages has existed in Kathmandu for many centuries and that there has been intermarriage between the Urāy and other Tibetan settlers.