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## Contributions to the Study of Popular Buddhism: The Newar Buddhist Festival of Guṃlā Dharma

Buddhist monasticism arose to provide refuge and support for renunciates seeking enlightenment, but the tradition survived by building multifaceted relationships with lay patron communities that provided for the monks' subsistence. Solidifying the loyalty of a cross-section of society's economic classes, Buddhism evolved to espouse the basic foundations of spiritually-centered civilization. Centered on high moral standards and attuned to daily life, local Buddhist traditions encompassed a broad range of intellectual discourse and ritual performances. Over the first millennium, the saṃgha's role developed as monks taught a variety of audiences, provided ritual assistance, and participated in a yearly festival agenda, adapting to myriad local traditions in the process.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The norm of Buddhist pluralism is a striking feature in the tradition's socio-historical profile. The Vinayas all show an early sensitivity to the greatly varying ecological, social, and cultural contexts that monks had to face. Recognizing this legitimate "malleability to contextual adaptation" helps explain the great differences in praxis seen even in the early sources. G. Schopen has begun to articulate this central historical variable, noting how the saṃgha must have adapted amidst varying societies and cultures, from tribal rain forest dwellers, to highlander nomadic pastoralists, to highly brahmanical societies. This is an emic Buddhist perception: a Vinaya distinction between situations in central places where the rules must be strictly observed (*madhya-*

Since exchange is the basis of social life (Murphy 1971; Harris 1989), studies of Buddhist cultural history must account for exchanges central to the tradition's community life and specify how cultural performances served this fundamental relationship. The general ideal is well-outlined in the monastic literature. The monastic community served the world through its example of renunciation and meditation (Wijayaratna 1989), by performing rituals (Gombrich 1971, 201ff; Lewis 1993b) and providing medical service (Zysk 1991). As preservers and transmitters of the Dharma, the saṃgha's duty was to attract the Buddhist lay community's merit-making donations by being spiritually worthy (Lamotte 1984); complementing this, monks were explicitly taught to seek out *prasāditas* ("dedicated sympathizers") and *dānapatis* ("generous donors") (Lamotte 1988, 78) so as to insure the Buddhist *śāsana*'s existence amidst lay society.<sup>2</sup>

Guided by a missionary ethos, Buddhist monks and laity adapted practices to diverse ecological, linguistic, and cultural circumstances. Inclusive and practical, this tradition spread across Asia as a rich multi-stranded fabric, carefully adapted to the logic of local life. Future ethnographic studies and textual historical research is needed to provide the data for understanding the diversity of Buddhist domestications and the transcultural logic of Buddhism's global adaptations. This process of applying the universal Buddhist teachings and textual norms to the logic of local life includes human contexts as diverse as settled farming villages, nomadic pastoralists, and urban communities. The "genius" of Buddhism is evident, in part, in its acceptance of pluralism, especially in its many textual voices; it is also found in the accommodation of multipraxis while still retaining a strong center that could "re-form" indigenous ancestral religions.

Indic Buddhism shows an array of evolutionary trajectories sharing common traits: stūpas as centers of community ritual (Lewis 1993c); vihāras as refuges for meditation, study, and material resources; saṃgha members who assume leadership of the community's ritual

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*deśa* "middle country," i. e. the Buddhist homeland) and the far-off areas where less strict standards were tolerated (*pratyantajanapada*, "frontier principalities") (Lamotte 1988, 8).

2. The specific benefits of being a generous Buddhist donor are extolled in a Pāli text: appreciation by everyone, loved by worthy individuals, renowned everywhere, fearless in any company, rebirth in heavenly realm (Lamotte 1988, 415). The literatures of all schools in all periods extol the great worth and rewards for *dāna*.

life.<sup>3</sup> Yet Buddhism in practice so encompassed the elaboration of myriad distinctive lifestyles and cultures that even by Fa-Hsien's time (400 CE) there was seemingly indescribable diversity: "Practices of the śramaṇas are so various and have increased so that they cannot be recorded." (Beal 1970, xxix).

This study fills in a small portion of the mosaic regarding the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna calendrical orientation. Grounded in a preliminary overview of ancient Indic practices and comparative precedents, it documents and analyzes the Mahāyāna Buddhist observances still undertaken during the summer festival month of Guṃlā Dharma (or just Guṃlā), a yearly time of intensive observances for the Newar Buddhist community of the Kathmandu Valley.

### NOTES ON BUDDHIST FESTIVAL OBSERVANCES

Among the many positions represented in the Pāli Nikāyas, there is one (doubtless monastic) voice that would regard the rich festival life of ancient and modern Buddhist countries as a wrong turn. Passages from the *Samyutta* (V. 4) defining the "Stream-Entering" stage declare "belief in the efficacy of rituals" (*silabbata-parāmāsa*) as detrimental (Dutt 1945a, 181). This puritanical virtuoso voice is echoed in one portion of the well-known *Sigolavāda Sutta* where Śākyamuni preaches restraint from attending dramatic performances (Dutt 1945a, 170). Yet such references, which have been used to posit a pure, antiseptic "primitive" tradition, must be connected to a context of very advanced laity and monks, a group never constituting more than a small minority in any Buddhist society. The judgment thus was not a blanket proclamation regarding society at large or in opposition to other textual views.

Many other early textual discourses present rationales for activities that make positive contributions toward serving the tradition and the Buddhist community: texts note simple mantras or textual passages

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3. An early 6-fold division of monastic specialization gives clear evidence for the saṃgha's engaged orientation toward society: 1. instructors (*dharmakathika*); 2. meditators (*dhyānin*); 3. folklorists (*tiraścakathika*); 4. sūtra specialists (*sūtradhara*); 5. Vinaya specialists (*vinayadhara*); 6. catecheticists (*mātrkādhara*) (Lamotte 1988, 149). Another specific designation often mentioned in inscriptions is the reciter (*bhāṇaka*), which also suggests popular service.

given by Śākyamuni that could be effective in repelling negative influences in any environment; in the *Milindapañha*, the laity are instructed to listen to the Dharma and make exertions to resist its decline (Dutt 1945a, 175). The *Dighanikāya* speaks of the *upāsaka*'s duty to, "Help others in increasing faith, moral virtues, knowledge, charity" (*ibid.*, 169). An early proof text in the Pāli tradition is, again, the *Sigolavāda Sutta*, which specifically enjoins the layman to "maintain . . . the traditions of family and lineage; make himself worthy of his heritage; and he should make offerings to the spirits of the departed" (de Bary 1972, 43). Still other voices (quoted below) speak about the merit of spiritual celebrations in the presence of the Buddha's relics.

The early formulation called "the graded teaching", (*ānupūrvikathā*) established *puṇya/dāna* as the foundation for Buddhism in practice, while also legitimating a Buddhist community's diverse cultural activity. The *ānupūrvikathā* are: 1. *dāna/puṇya*; 2. *śīla/svarga*; 3. evils of *pāpa/kāma*; 4. value of renunciation; 5. Four Noble Truths (Lamotte 1988, 77). This hierarchy of legitimate, progressive activities defines a "syllabus" for advancing in spiritual attainment.

As *puṇya* provided the chief theoretical orientation in the Buddhist layman's world view and ethos, *dāna* has always been the dominant, starting practice and life-long foundation of spiritual advancement. Merit-making remained the universal, integrating transaction of Buddhism in practice (Dargyay 1986, 180), regardless of the respective intellectual elite's orientation toward competing Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or Vajrayāna doctrinal formulations or spiritual disciplines.

*Puṇya* has soteriological as well as practical, worldly consequences. Pāli *suttas* urge all disciples, monastic and lay, to cultivate the five cardinal precepts (*śikṣāpadāni*) to maximize *puṇya* and so the course of spiritual advancement: 1. *śraddhā* ("faith"); 2. *śīla* ("moral observances"); 3. *tyāga* ("generosity"); 4. *śruta* ("listening"); 5. *prajñā* ("insight") (Lamotte 1988, 70). The Indic sources thus implicitly authorized festival possibilities through which Buddhists could accomplish the precepts: venerating images, taking precepts and fasting, arranging public recitations of sūtras, and encouraging meditation (Conze 1967, 47-55; Warder 1970, 191). It will be evident in this essay how all five cardinal precepts are amply encouraged during Guṃlā Dharma in the Kathmandu Valley.

The most constant expression of lay Buddhist faith and generosity occurred through donations: *dāna*. *Dāna*'s "investment" is described

and celebrated in the vast *jātaka* and *avadāna* literature and in the great Mahāyāna sūtras. The Mahāyāna fully sustained the early framework with *dāna* as the foundation for householder bodhisattva practice. Generosity to all beings is applauded, although the best “*punya* return” accrues to gifts made to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the saṃgha. Passages in the sūtras discussing the pāramitās develop a host of possibilities, emphasizing both the value of *dāna* to the individual, as an expression of kāruṇa, and its value as renunciatory practice (Dayal 1932, 165-193). Some texts make quite specific recommendations to the laity on the best *punya* investments.<sup>4</sup>

It was for regularizing *dāna* presentations and valued *punya*-making that monks and laity doubtless developed standard ritual procedures and calendrical norms. Orthoprax rituals evolved that complemented meditation and study; employing medical terms, specific rituals were seen as compassionate action (Stablein 1973; 1978) that could achieve specific results for suffering humanity. (For the Mahāyāna writers, ritual (pūjā) was quintessentially an expression of *upāya*, a disciplined act that aids the spiritual destiny of all beings, self and others [Pye 1978, 58-9, 98].)

Buddhist rituals include spoken words and simple deeds. The *paritta* of the Pāli Canon are one early manifestation (Skilling 1992); the earliest Mahāyāna elaboration is on the bodhisattva’s ritual service emphasizing dhāraṇī mastery (Dayal 1934, 267-69). These long mantras can be spoken to protect both the speaker, the saṃgha, and entire settlements. Resort to these formulae was one of the divisions in Buddhist medicine (Zysk 1991, 66). Later Buddhist ritualism furthers the foundations of spiritual practice and provides infusions of good karma and radiant auspiciousness for towns, residences, and at moments of individual life-cycle passage or crisis.

Ritual service dominated mature Indic Buddhism in its missionary program. This is clear in early East Asian Buddhist history, where cumulative dhāraṇī traditions were instrumental in the successful missionization of China (Strickmann 1989). Myriad other Buddhist householder rituals evolved to insure the regular performance of such mantra recitations that both expressed and, through recitation, orches-

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4. The *Punyakriyāvastu* arranges the following hierarchy: 1. donating land to the saṃgha; 2. building a vihāra on it; 3. furnishing it; 4. allocating revenue for it; 5. assisting strangers; 6. tending the sick; 7. in cold weather or famine, giving food to the saṃgha (Lamotte 1988, 72).

trated the attempt to actualize such ideals. The *Pañcarakṣā* is an early example of such traditions (Skilling 1992; Lewis 1994a).

The concern shown by the saṃgha in the early Vinayas to please the sensitivities of local society, especially monarchs and rich merchants (Schopen 1992a), suggests that ritual service was always a part of the saṃgha's mission. Monastic rituals and *dāna* "events" sponsored by notable individuals likely set precedents for later traditions (Beal 1970 ed., xxxvii). The wider Mahāyāna rationale for later Buddhism's luxuriant ritualism is succinctly expressed in the guru maṇḍala pūjā, which includes the repetition of the three refuges, six pāramitās, the bodhisattva vow, and the eightfold path (Gellner 1992). This trend toward ritual service continued in great elaboration with the Vajrayāna (Skilling 1992; Lewis 1993b).

In South Asia, including Nepal, it was the competing brāhmaṇa priesthood and the distinctive kṣatriya-enforced caste-ordered society of South Asia that shaped Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna ritualism. The later Buddhist adaptation of pollution-purity norms, formal life-cycle rites (saṃskāras), procedures for image veneration, and calendrical organization all represent, within the faith, the *upāya* of helping the lay society survive amidst the subcontinent's Hindu cultures. Likewise, later Buddhist mantra collections for pūjā, a Buddhist *homa*, Buddhist saṃskāras (Lewis 1993b), Buddhist *vratas* (Locke 1987; Lewis 1989a) and festivals, ideals of Buddhist royalty (Reynolds 1972; Gokhale 1966), etc. all reflect the Indic cultural context<sup>5</sup> and the Buddhist ethos of adaptation.

## BUDDHIST FESTIVAL TRADITIONS OF SOUTH ASIA

Like other great world religions, Buddhism shaped cultures that ordered time through regular yearly festivals. Some festivals orchestrated the reliving of classical Buddhist events *in illo tempore* (Eliade 1959, 70): celebrations of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and

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5. This state of Hindu-Buddhist competition has continued for at least 1500 years and endures in modern Nepal today. Another area in which Newar religious study provides insight on greater Indic history (Gellner 1992; Lienhard 1977), I will explore this topic in a future essay and further develop the argument that the destiny of Buddhist tradition was much less contingent upon doctrine and much more hinging upon competing modes of ritual service and the economics of monasticism.

*parinirvāna* are universal, although differing as to season (Swearer 1987); other more regional sacred events likewise mark the year (Strong 1992), as different communities were free to assign their own definitions for these “auspicious days.”<sup>6</sup> These include: Śākyamuni’s descent from heaven where he preached to his mother, or events marking a key point in a bodhisattva’s life, be it Vessantara (Cone and Gombrich 1977), Avalokiteśvara, or the death anniversary of a local saint (Tambiah 1984; Strong 1992). Across Asia, local communities have domesticated stories of visits by buddhas or bodhisattvas, often explaining the ordering of the local pantheon and sacred geography through conquest and conversion. Hsuan Tsang also notes that Indic rituals performed at stūpas dedicated to specific early saints were based upon the individual monk’s (or nun’s) “school” or specialization (Beal 1970 ed., 180-81).

Each fortnight on the new and full moon days, all early Indic saṃgha members had to recite the pratimokṣa, a summary of the community’s Vinaya regulations. This recitation came after any transgressions were confessed (*ālocanā*) in private to the monk’s superior. *Uposatha* became the regular occasions to review, correct, and certify the proper standards of monastery discipline (Prebish 1975; Wijayaratna 1989). (Based upon the Indic lunar calendar [Das 1928], *uposatha* includes the overnight of the full-moon and no-moon period, hence each can span two solar days each month [Lamotte 1988, 70].)

Emphasizing the fundamental interdependence between saṃgha and lay community, householders were encouraged to visit their vihāras on the *uposatha* days to make offerings (*dāna*). On these *uposatha* days, devout lay folk (*upāsakās*) have the regular opportunity to observe eight of the ten monastic rules while residing continuously on the vihāra grounds. (The frequent lay observance of fasting after mid-day led to their being commonly referred to as “fasting days” [Beal 1970 ed., lxxiv].) In many places across India, *upāsakas* donned white robes while living under their extended vows (Dutt 1945a, 176). Another common *uposatha* custom was for lay folk to remain in the vihāra to hear monks preach the Dharma. Thus, the lunar fortnight rhythm clearly dominated the early Buddhist festival year: each year’s passing had the absolutely regular succession of *uposathas*. (The

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6. In China, the monastic tradition did not follow Indic precedents rigorously. See Welch 1967, 110. Welch does note several Chinese monasteries that did follow the Indic norm exactly.



*Āryāṣṭaṅga Uposatha Vrata*, a later Newar Mahāyāna tradition discussed below, elaborates upon this tradition and focuses the laity's bhakti upon Amogapāśa Lokeśvara [Locke 1987].)

The Indic Buddhist calendar also utilized the eighth lunar day (*aṣṭamī*) of each fortnight as another auspicious time for pious actions and vow-taking. In the Pāli canon (*Mahāvagga* II, 1), as in I-Tsing's time, these also were called "fasting days." *Aṣṭamī* seems to have been the common day chosen for the early festivals outside the vihāras: *aṣṭamī* of Jyeṣṭha is also mentioned (around 400 CE) by Fa-Hsien as the day when a great *ratha yātrā* is celebrated in Pāṭaliputra (Legge 1965, 79; Dutt 1977, 39). These, too, have remained focal days for Newar Mahāyāna festivals and special Guṃlā observances. Hsuan Tsang records that there were also three months each year—Phālguna, Āṣāḍha, Kārtika—when Buddhists observed "long fasts" (Beal 1970 ed., 180), another Guṃlā custom that is now nearly obsolete.

Meshed with the lunar month system, the most prominent yearly Indic Buddhist observance was the monsoon rain retreat called *varṣāvāsa* (Pāli: *vassa* or *vassāvāsa*) (Dutt 1962, 54). Dating from pre-Buddhist śramaṇas and adopted by Śākyamuni, the rain retreat practice required by the Vinaya curtailed monks' mobility outside the monastery and encouraged meditation and study for its three-month duration (Wijayaratna 1989). In most of South Asia, this period coincides with the slack agricultural season (between planting and harvest); it was likewise a time for intensive lay devotional exertions, as it is until today in Thailand (Tambiah 1970, 155). Hsuan Tsang notes that the time for retreat in India could be either Āṣāḍha, 15 to Āśvina, 15 or Śrāvana, 15 to Kārtika, 15 (Beal I, 72-3), a variation allowed in the Pāli Vinaya (Warren 1922, 412). His account also suggests that monks could alter the time for retreat to suit local conditions: in Bāluka (Central Asia) monks retreated during the winter-spring rainy season (Beal, 38).

Special ceremonies for *varṣāvāsa* came to mark the beginning<sup>7</sup>, formal ending (*pavāraṇā*), and new robe donations (*kathina*) to monks who completed the retreat. The *pavāraṇā* ceremony is much like the

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7. Special ceremonies were developed by the community around the monastic initiations for novices (*pabbajjā*) and full monks (*upasampadā*). Along with the custom of adolescent, premarital short-term monasticism evolved in certain contexts—in Theravādin Burma (Spiro 1970) and Thailand (Tambiah 1970) and in modern Mahāyāna Nepal (Gellner 1992)—there also developed the preference for initiation right before *varṣā*.

bi-weekly *uposatha* for the saṃgha, but for the lay community the emphasis is on a grander scale of merit-making, as the texts specify that *dāna* made on this day would be more fruitful than at other times (Dutt 1945b, 249). The post-*varṣā* presentation of new robes by the laity—some traditions also evolved to have the laity sew them in special ways—likewise garners special karmic rewards.

*Pavāraṇā*, the day marking the completion of the rain retreat, became the year's merit-making landmark for the early community (Beal, xxxix), a tradition that endures across South and Southeast Asia (Tambiah 1970, 154-160). Ancient Indic caitya veneration recounted by I-Tsing on this day in 690 CE exactly resembles the city-wide Newar Guṃlā rituals, especially *Mātaya* in Patan (Gellner 1992, 218-9).

[On the *Pavāraṇā* day] the assembly should invite a preceptor to mount a high seat and recite a Buddhist *sūtra*, when lay devotees as well as priests throng together like clouds of mist. They light lamps continually, and offer incense and flowers. The following morning they all go out round villages or towns and worship all the *caityas* with sincere minds. They bring storied carriages, images in sedan chairs, drums, and other music resounding in the sky, banners and canopies hoisted high . . . At this time, laymen present gifts . . . (1896, 87)

All Buddhist lineages applaud the great *punya* accruing to those who build vihāras. Ancient texts (Lamotte 1988, 72) and modern belief (Spiro 1986, 458; Tambiah 1970, 147ff; Welch 1967, 210ff) assert this as the greatest possible *dāna*. There are indications that ancient yearly festivals were established locally to celebrate each shrine's anniversary of dedication, and these became thereby its yearly "birthday" when donor families should refurbish, clean, and ritually renew it (Beal, xxxix). (This is a widespread practice in the modern Newar Buddhist community [Lewis 1984, 394].)

Just as the vihāra was the institution that ordered and sustained the saṃgha's communal life, so, too, were there institutions that advanced the Buddhist interests of the laity. Some inscriptions indicate the coordinated pious activities of craft guilds (*śreṇī*); more common are the *goṣṭhī*—"assemblies, associations, fellowships" (Monier Williams 1956 ed., 367)—that coordinate large donations or regular rituals. These institutions are ancient, as the Pāli *jātakas* cite subscription plans among *upāsakas* (Rhys-Davids 1901, 886). Such groups were often formed to complete caityas or meditation caves, or for ren-

novation projects (Dehejia 1972; Kosambi 1965, 182). There are very old Newar *goṣṭhi* traditions which organize regular rituals, pilgrimage, restorations, even shrine cleanings (Toffin 1975; Lewis 1984, 179-182). Another even more important aspect of Newar practice should be underlined: *goṣṭhis* hold collective properties, including money; most include some provision for increasing the group treasury by lending these funds at interest serially through the membership. Thus, *goṣṭhis* not only underwrote pious Buddhist practice: such institutions became important sources of community investment capital.

Stūpa veneration constituted the earliest ritual focus for both monks (Schopen 1987; 1989; 1991a,b,c) and laity. Rules and regulations for their establishment and maintenance doubtless followed, as did the custom of celebrating the monument's foundation "birthday." For all Buddhist schools, the stūpa became a focal point, the singular landmark denoting the tradition's spiritual presence on the landscape (Dallapiccola 1980; Harvey 1984; Snodgrass 1985; Lewis 1993c). Buddhist writers advanced many understandings of stūpas, but for present purposes let us observe that stūpas marking events associated with the tathāgata(s) were the natural sites for Buddhist festivals of remembrance and veneration.<sup>8</sup> I-Tsing's recounting of a ritual at an Indian vihāra around 685 CE shows the centering of traditional celebrations at caityas:

The . . . priests perform worship of a caitya and the ordinary service late in the afternoon or at evening twilight. All the assembled priests come out of the gate of their monastery, and walk three times around the stūpa, offering incense and flowers. They all kneel down, and one of them who sings well begins to chant hymns describing the virtues of the Great Teacher with a

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8. Symbiotically, great regional stūpas were pivotal in the social history of Buddhism: these monuments became magnets attracting vihāra building and votive construction, for local pūjā and pilgrimage. The economics of Buddhist devotionism at these centers generated income for local samghas, artisans, and merchants (Liu 1987), an alliance basic to Buddhism throughout its history (Dehejia 1972; Lewis 1993d). At these geographical centers arrayed around the symbolic monument, diverse devotional exertions, textual/doctrinal studies, and devotees' mercantile pursuits could all prosper in synergistic style. The regional *Mahācaitya* complexes, with their interlinked components—vihāras with land endowments, votive/pilgrimage centers, markets, state support, etc.—represent central fixtures in Buddhist civilization. For local communities, such stūpas were also focal points in the yearly festival round, drawing Buddhists toward the sacred precincts. Empowered votive artifacts bought by the pilgrims at key Indic sites were likely used in the establishment of caityas and buddha images in frontier settlements.

melodious, pure, and sonorous voice, and continues to sing ten or twenty śloka. They in succession return to the place in the monastery . . . when . . . a Sūtra-reciter, mounting the Lion-Seat, reads a short sūtra . . . among the scriptures which are to be read, [is] the "Service in Three Parts" . . . by the venerable Aśvaghosha . . . from which its name is derived. (Takakusu 1896, 152-3)

Once the making of Buddha images became accepted (Dehejia 1989, Lancaster 1974), their construction, consecration, and upkeep must likewise have entailed ritual observances. I-Tsing makes the fundamental case for their role in Mahāyāna Buddhism:

There is no more reverent worship than that of the Three Jewels, and there is no higher road to perfect understanding than meditation on the Four Noble Truths. But the meaning of the Truths is so profound that it is a matter beyond the comprehension of vulgar minds, while the ablation of the Holy Image is practicable to all. Though the Great Teacher has entered Nirvāṇa, yet his image exists, and we should worship it with zeal as though in his very presence. Those who constantly offer incense and flowers to it are enabled to purify their thoughts, and also those who perpetually bathe his image are enabled to overcome their sins . . . receive rewards, and those who advise others to perform it are doing good to themselves as well as to others . . . (Takakusu 1896, 147)

Such were the sentiments that by Gupta times legitimated the full elaboration of Buddhist ritual and festival traditions, and this historical observation is matched by texts such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that laud precisely these activities. As we have seen in I-Tsing's account, Buddhist pūjā was practiced by entire vihāras in conjunction with the lay community and by individual monks with their private icons. He mentions detailed procedures, including image-bathing rites with anointed water, repainting, polishing; accompanied by music, the icon would then be reinstated in the temple, with offerings of incense and flowers. The water used for this ritual is likewise described as medicinal (Takakusu 1896, 147).

Another example of Buddhist ritualism is the "bathing the Buddha Image" pūjā that commemorated Śākyamuni's birthday in the month *Vaiśākha*. As found in the Kashmiri *Nilamatapurāṇa*: "In the bright fortnight, the image of the Buddha is to be bathed with water containing all herbs, jewels, and scents and by uttering the words of the Buddha. The place is to be carefully besmeared with honey; the temple and *stūpa* must have frescoes, and there should be dancing and

amusements” (Dutt 1977, 14). This ritual spread across Asia (Lessing 1976).

I-Tsing underlines the immense *puṇya* earned by Buddhist *pūjās*: “The washing of the holy image is a meritorious deed which leads to a meeting with the Buddha in every birth, and the offering of incense and flowers is a cause of riches and joy in every life to come. Do it yourself, and teach others to do the same, then you will gain immeasurable blessings” (Takakusu, 151-2). A popular Khotanese Mahāyāna text concurs, stating that to make a buddha image is to guarantee rebirth in Maitreya’s era (Emmerick 1968, 321); in another verse, worshipping an image is said to be equal in merit to worshipping the Buddha himself, as both emanate from the dharmakāya: “Whoever in my presence should perform merits, or whoever should produce faith equally before an image, equal will be his many, innumerable, great merits. There is really no difference between them” (Emmerick 1968, 201). Thus, many Mahāyāna sūtras, in agreement with the Pāli *Parinibbana Sutta*’s description of relic veneration, laud as especially meritorious offerings of incense and flowers to images, encouraging the presentation with musical accompaniment. Sites identified with bodhisattvas were also centers of Mahāyāna worship: “Whatever Bodhisattvas for the sake of bodhi have performed difficult tasks such as giving, this place I worship” (Emmerick 1968, 163).

Travel to venerate the stūpas and caityas marking important events in the Buddha’s life also defined early Buddhist pilgrimage (Lamotte 1988, 665; Gokhale 1980). This meritorious veneration of the Buddha’s “sacred traces” (Falk 1977) was organized into extended processional rituals. The development of pilgrimage traditions shaped the composition of site-coordinated biographies of Śākyamuni (Lamotte 1988, 669; Foucher 1949) and likely did so for some of the *jātaka* and *avadāna* compilations. Such texts promised the laity vast improvements in their karma as well as such mundane benefits as rewards for undertaking pilgrimage. The Chinese reports on the notable sites visited seem to rely on such texts for the information provided; their accounts also give clear testimony to the sense of the wide-ranging benefits (*puṇya*, blessings, health, etc.) that the pilgrim accrued.

The traditional designation of Buddhist sites specified first four, and then eight centers marked by monuments (Bagchi 1941; Tucci 1988). By the time of the *Aśokāvadāna*’s composition, thirty-two pilgrimage

centers existed in the Gangetic basin visited by devotees (Strong 1983, 119ff). There was also a circuit in northwest India (Lamotte 1988, 335). Such religious travel had important economic effects, and local economies developed around the great caityas. By 400 CE, the world of Mahāyāna Buddhist pilgrimage had long transcended the Gangetic culture hearth to include stūpa sites in Khotan, Śri Lanka, Śrīvijaya Java, Funan, and China. Monks, pilgrims, and traders traveled the same routes (Takakusu 1896; Birnbaum 1989-90, 115-120).

Relatively little is known about the history of regional Buddhist pilgrimage traditions in India. The Chinese accounts give a sense of a regular sequence, roughly guided by a clockwise *pradakṣiṇā* path (Lamotte 1988, 665). If modern customs reported in the ethnographic literature (e. g. Keyes 1975) have ancient precedents, then *upāsakas* from localities likely organized group outings, read from the textual guidebooks, followed the lead of local guides in visiting the many places linked to Śākyamuni's biography. There were probably seasonal preferences for visiting certain sites, such as being in Bodh Gāya for the full moon in Vaiśākha, when Śākyamuni's birth, nirvāṇa, and *parinirvāṇa* were celebrated. Hsuan Tsang notes a festival of bathing the Bodhi tree at Gāya (Beal II, 117; cf. Strong 1983, 125-127), of ascending a nearby mountain overnight before the *dāna* presentations are made after *varṣā* (Beal II, 115), and the belief that circumambulating the tree secures power of knowing former births (Beal II, 124).

Another Mahāyāna festival focused on the "cult of the book" (Schopen 1975). According to the early *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, veneration of the Buddha's Dharma was vastly superior to worshipping his bodily relics. A section of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* describes the superior ritual in which a Mahāyāna text is venerated (Kern 1884, 96) (and in the Chinese version is carried on the devotees' heads [Hurvitz 1976, 82]). As will be seen, such traditions are still evident in the Newar Guṃlā observances.

The most extraordinary form of Buddha image veneration noted in numerous locations was the *ratha yātrā* ("chariot festival"). The Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien noted that in Pataliputra, there were images of buddhas and bodhisattvas placed on twenty four-wheeled, five-story *rathas* made of wood and bamboo. Beginning on an *aṣṭami* day and continuing for two nights, the local *vaiśyas* are said to have made vast donations from specially-erected dwellings along the path; in Khotan, too, there was a fourteen-day event that was attended by the entire city,

for which each monastery constructed a different four-wheeled *ratha* (Legge 1965, 18-19). Although *ratha yātrās* are not held during Guṃlā, the greatest yearly festivals of Newar Buddhism are the *ratha yātrās* of Patan and Kathmandu dedicated to Avalokiteśvara each spring (Locke 1980; Owens 1988).

The early texts also mention an extraordinary quinquennial festival called *pañcavārsika* (Strong 1987, 91-97; Strong 1990), *pañcavārsika pariṣad* (Beal I, 50), or *mokṣa* by the Chinese pilgrims (Beal I, 214). Although there is no clear consensus as to its origins (e. g. Lamotte 1988, 66; Edgerton 1953), *pañcavārsika* was clearly a time when vast royal donations were made to the saṃgha, other deserving ascetics, brāhmaṇas, and the destitute. The Chinese accounts and the *avadāna* citations point to the custom of a king giving all material goods he owned to the saṃgha, followed by his ministers buying it all back with gold from the treasury. There are a number of these celebrations in Central Asia and India, several during the autumnal equinox. *Pañcavārsika* was also a time for displaying extraordinary images or renowned relics during festivities organized by kings and merchants, while witnessed by a huge social gathering. This “Five-Year Jātrā” was the most dramatic single cultural performance that contributed to the saṃgha’s material existence.<sup>9</sup>

## THE NEPALESE AND NEWAR BUDDHIST CONTEXT OF GUṂLĀ

According to Newar Buddhist tradition, the *pūrṇimā* (full moon) of Guṃlā commemorates the day Śākyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment and defeated Māra. The two weeks surrounding this day are thus

9. There is some evidence that the name itself did not stem from the time period. Hsuan Tsang’s report of Śilāditya’s *Pañcavārsika* (Beal, 233) suggests that the name may derive from the view that five years’ wealth is expended in bestowing the necessary *dāna*. Other sources support this, implying that the festival could be done at any time by a donor with the requisites for feeding all the local saṃgha and others who were needy. The Sanskrit tale of Śānavāsa, a merchant who returns home and “celebrates a *pañcavārsika*,” suggests this (Lamotte 1988, 207), as does a passage from the *Harṣacarita*. (See Dutt 1977, 51). In both Patan and Kathmandu, five-year and twelve-year *Samyaka dāna* festivals (respectively) doubtless represent a continuity of this ancient custom (Sakya 1979; Lewis 1984; Lewis 1994b).

the natural focus of the local Buddhist year.<sup>10</sup> Although no direct identification of Guṃlā (ninth month) as *varṣā* exists, the activities in the Kathmandu Valley communities, the monsoon time of year, and the Pañca Dāna custom (discussed below) all invite the supposition that some historical association must exist.<sup>11</sup> This section provides a minimal background sketch of modern Newar Buddhism necessary for appreciating the details of festival practice.<sup>12</sup>

The riches from trans-Himalayan trade, the fertility of valley soils, and relative political isolation all endowed the Kathmandu Valley (until 1769, the defining area of all “Nepāl”) with the ability to support a rich, artistic, and predominantly Indicized civilization. Although mentioned in passing references across earlier Indian literature, no epigraphic evidence has been found in Nepal before 464 CE when Sanskrit inscriptions attest to the Kathmandu Valley as an Indic frontier zone ruled by a *rājavanśa* calling itself Licchavi. Diverse Hindu and Buddhist traditions existed in close proximity (Beal II, 80-81), with the most mentioned saṃgha that of the Mahāsāṃghikas. Among over 200 recorded inscriptions, there are references to caityas, land-owning vihāras, bhikṣus and *bhikṣuṇis*, and patronage by caravan leaders. A few hints of Vajrayāna practice are discernible, but Mahāyāna themes predominate: votive praises are addressed to Śākyamuṇi and other tathāgatas as well as to the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Samantabhadra, and, most frequently, Ārya Avalokiteśvara (Pal 1974).

10. The Newar lunar month is divided into a waxing fortnight, including the full moon day (*punhi*), is indicated by the suffix *thva* (hence, “Guṃlāthva”), and a waning fortnight, indicated by the suffix *gā* (“Guṃlā-gā”). As promoted by the modernist Theravāda movement (Kloppenbergr 1978; Tewari 1983), most Newar Buddhists have also adopted the Buddha Jāyanti festival (in mid-spring), which offers an earlier and contradictory date for commemorating these same events. For a summary of the Newar Hindu festival year in Bhaktapur, see R. Levy (1990).

11. As the rain retreat is an inauspicious time for weddings in Theravāda countries (Spiro 1970; Tambiah 1970), so, too, is Guṃlā an inauspicious month for Newar weddings.

12. In accounts of Buddhist history generally, a socio-culturally informed depiction of Mahāyāna Buddhism in practice has been neglected. Such lacunae have been often noted and recent anthropological studies on Himalayan Buddhism have begun to illuminate northern Buddhism in practice (e.g. Ortner 1989; Holmberg 1989; Mumford 1989). On Newar Buddhism, the great Indologist Sylvain Lévi’s classic study of Nepal (1905-8) is still valuable. Important recent studies of the Newar Buddhist context are listed in the bibliography under Allen, Lienhard, Locke, Toffin and Owens. David Gellner’s monograph (1992) is a recently published landmark study.



Although little has been published on Nepalese Buddhism in the post-Licchavi period (900 AD-1200) or the Malla era (1200-1769), there is ample evidence of continuing archaic texts and artistic traditions (Macdonald and Stahl 1979; Slusser 1982). Unconquered by the Muslim or British empires that ruled South Asia, Kathmandu Valley civilization still preserves many ancient Indic traditions that endure in the distinctive urban society and culture of the Newars (Lienhard 1984), who speak a Tibeto-Burman language. This is true of both the Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions which are observed in rich multiplicity.

The former city-states of the Valley—Bhaktapur, Patan, and Kathmandu—all evolved in parallel form according to the *caturvarṇa* model, though differing in details of their caste nomenclature. Caste defines the social order and dominates socio-cultural discourse with Hindu or Buddhist identity a boundary marker at the highest levels.

The Newar Buddhist community consists entirely of house-holders (Locke 1985; Gellner 1992). The saṃgha has for centuries married and now a two-section endogamous caste group with surnames Vajrācārya and Śākya maintain the “monastic traditions.” They still inhabit dwellings referred to as vihāra (New. *bāhā*) and over three hundred vihāras exist in the Valley today (Gellner 1987). This domestication evolved centuries ago, as no vestige of fortnightly uposatha endures and Vinaya texts are rare in Newar manuscript collections (Takaoka 1981; Novak 1986; Mitra 1971 ed.). For over five centuries, however, Newars desiring the classical celibate monastic discipline could take ordination in the local Tibetan vihāras (Lewis and Jampal 1988; Lewis 1989c).

Like married Tibetan lamas of the Rnying-ma-pa order, the householder *vajrācāryas* take training and serve the community’s ritual needs (Gellner 1989), with some among them specializing in textual study, medicine, astrology, and meditation. The Newari *Ācārya-kriyasamuccaya*<sup>13</sup> defends the evolved role of the householder *ācārya* as superior to the celibate monk according to Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna ideology that individuals should engage with their society and culture. This *ācārya* bodhisattva is similar to the textual bodhisattva Vimalakīrti:

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13. Tibetan version in the Tanjur is entitled *Vajrācāryakriyāsamuccaya* (Shukla 1975, 129).

The real teacher is he who apart from other qualities, does not live like a monk, does not shave his head and puts on good clothes and beautiful ornaments. Amongst other qualities of a teacher are counted his knowledge about purificatory rites, his kind disposition, pleasing humor, maintenance of all the *ācāryas*, insight into the art of architecture and in the science of mantras, skill as a profound astronomer . . . and his capability to select an auspicious plot for the construction of a *stūpa* and for the installation of the idol of the Buddha. (Shukla 1975, 127-8)

The Newar Buddhist spiritual elite still passes on vajrayāna initiations (Skt. *abhiṣeka*; New. *dekka*) through *guru-chela* ("teacher-disciple") lineages. Only those born as *vajrācāryas* may take formal initiations into the householder *saṃgha* as each male must be ritually empowered to be eligible to perform basic rituals for laymen (Gellner 1988). The traditional line of this *abhiṣeka* is in the main *vihāra* (New. *mū bāhā*) of the patrilineage. The folklore about great Newar tantric masters describes special retreats called *puraścaraṇ cwanegu* undertaken to build upon this foundation to pursue spiritual insight and supernormal powers. As only select groups may take the esoteric vajrayāna initiations, the Newar Buddhist tradition is formally two-tiered, with only high-caste *Vajrācāryas*, *Śākyas*, and *Urāy* (merchant and artisan subcastes) eligible for the *dikṣās* that direct meditation and ritual to tantric deities such as *Samvara*, *Hevajra*, and their consorts.

Most Newar Buddhists, including all from the lower castes, participate exclusively in the exoteric level of *Mahāyāna* devotionism. They direct their devotions to *caityas* (especially the great *stūpas* such as *Svayambhū*) and make regular offerings at temples dedicated to the celestial *bodhisattvas*. Lay folk created hundreds of voluntary organizations (New. *guthi*, from Skt. *goṣṭhi*), some with land endowments, that have supported devotional practices for centuries. Buddhist institutions and devotions in Nepal have been underwritten by *guthis* since Licchavi times (Riccardi 1979).

Despite the anomaly of a caste-delimited *saṃgha*, Newar Buddhist laymen closely resemble co-religionists in other countries. They support their local *vajrācārya saṃgha* who, in return, help them look after their spiritual destiny in this world and beyond. A vast and complex web of ritual relations link laymen to their *vajrācārya saṃgha* who perform life cycle rituals (Lewis 1993b), festival *pūjās*, textual recitations, healing rites, site consecration ceremonies (Gellner 1992; Slusser 1982, 420-1). We now survey the specific observances of the *Gumlā* festival to note how spiritual service exchanges (*dāna*), fun-

damental to all Buddhist communities, have been domesticated in the Newar community.

### GUṂLĀ OBSERVANCES: ETHNOGRAPHIC PRESENTATION

As was common throughout Asian history, merchants and artisans are prominent among Newar Buddhist laymen and have been the major patrons of stūpas and vihāras across the Kathmandu Valley. Like all Newar Buddhists, they have formal ties to the Newar saṃgha through their family *vajrācārya purohit*: the ritual traditions that came to define Newar Buddhist identity involve frequent yearly and life-long resort to this *purohit*'s pūjās.

But Kathmandu Valley Buddhism has for a millennium been an international phenomenon: one segment among Newar Buddhists has for centuries sustained alliances with Tibetan Buddhism (Lewis, 1989; Lewis and Jamspal 1988; Lewis 1993a; Lewis 1994a); more recently (since the 1920's), another faction has helped transplant Theravāda modernism from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Kloppenbergs 1977; Tewari 1983; Lewis 1984). The Urāy merchants of Kathmandu (who derive their name from the Sanskrit *upāsaka*) have been leaders in supporting both of these camps as well as in performing the special devotions that define the greatest Newar Buddhist festivals. Based upon continuing research among one prominent Urāy subcaste, the Tulādharas ("Scale Holders"), this section describes the many aspects of Guṃlā as it is celebrated in Kathmandu's old bazaar.

We must at this juncture introduce the focal point of Valley Buddhism and Guṃlā celebrations in Kathmandu city: Svayambhū Mahācaitya.<sup>14</sup> The Mahāyāna history of Nepal, claiming origins in earlier *yugas*, recounts Svayambhū's origins—and the entire Nepal Valley's establishment—as the product of Mahāyāna hierophony and the compassionate actions of bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. The epigraphic evidence is that "Svayambhū Mahācaitya" was founded in the Licchavi period (400-879 CE) in the early fifth century (Slusser 1982,

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14. In a remarkable final section appended around 1830 by a Newar *vajrācārya* pandit to the Sanskrit version of the *Buddhacarita* (Cowell 1969 ed.), Svayambhū is described as the last site visited by Śākyamuni before his *parinirvāna*. Another Mahāyāna source on the origins of this focal stūpa in Guṃlā observances is the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* (Shastri 1894), a late text known only in Nepal and Tibet.

174; Riccardi 1979). Today, this hilltop stūpa over twenty-five meters in diameter is surrounded by five monasteries and quite regularly linked to the Buddhist festival year of Kathmandu City (Lewis 1984). It is also tied to all Buddhists in the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding regions through the twelve-year Kathmandu Samyaka festival (Sakya 1979; Lewis 1994b). Svayambhū once had extensive land endowments traditionally dedicated to its upkeep (Sakya 1978) and in many respects the history of regional Buddhism is embedded in the layers of this stūpa's successive iconography, patronage, and restoration. Thus, Svayambhū is a chief point of reference for the Guṃlā festival as well for the *upāsakas* of Kathmandu City: living proximate to it is thought to be so great a blessing that Buddhists use the term *puṇyakṣetra* ("merit-field") as a synonym for their valley.

#### *The Month-long Guṃlā Activities*

The saṃgha members of a few large vihāras recite Buddhist texts each day during Guṃlā. There is an old practice of reading out the entire *Nava Grantha* (Nine Tomes) distinctive to Newar Buddhist tradition.<sup>15</sup> Throughout Guṃlā, many *vajrācārya* priests go in early morning to read sūtras at the most frequented centers of Newar Buddhism: Kanakacaitya Mahāvihāra (colloquially, "Jana Bāhā"), Svayambhū, and Śāntighata Mahāvihāra (Śrī gha: bāhā). They most often recite texts that confer protection (e. g., *Pañcarakṣā* [Lewis 1994a] ) and, at a layman's request, chant protective mantras which are sealed by his touching a leaf of the text to the person's bowed head. For this service he receives a small payment in money and/or rice.

Among Newar lay folk, there are several *guthis* (Skt. *goṣṭhi*) organized for the purpose of text recitation daily during Guṃlā in Jana Bāhā, Asan Bāhā, and in Urāy courtyards. The most common text chosen is the *Mañjuśrī Nāmasaṃgiti* (Bajracarya 1991; Davidson 1981; Wayman 1985). To accommodate those who go to Svayambhū individually or with the Guṃlā *bājan* (see below), the *tutaḥ bvanegu* ("sūtra recitation") begins about the time the *bājan* returns to the bazaar, i.e. about 7 AM, or else is done in the evenings.

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15. The Nava Dharma or Nava Grantha are: *Prajñāpāramitā*; *Gandavyūha*; *Daśabhūmi*; *Samādhirāja*; *Lankāvatāra*; *Saddharmapūṇḍarika*; *Lalitāvistara*; *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*; *Tathāgatagūhya* (Hodgson 1874). No scholastic or philosophical tradition ordering these works has been discerned; more likely is their grouping for ritual purposes where they are arranged in the guru maṇḍala pūjā within the dharma maṇḍala, with *Prajñāpāramitā* at the center.

Although month-long text lecture series (*dharmadeśanā*) by the Newar saṃgha were until the last decade common at important vihāras in Kathmandu, from 1979-82 only one such series was done during Guṃlā.

Offerings of pleasant sounds at stūpas and before images of the buddhas and bodhisattvas are advocated in many Mahāyāna sūtras. Generations of Newar musicians have responded with devotional fervor to the Mahāyāna's resounding encouragement of such ritual celebrations. The *bājan*'s morning serenade reminds city Buddhists each morning of it being Guṃlā (Lewis 1989b).

The *bājan* is best defined as a "music playing group" and there are many *bājan* forms in Newar culture (Wegner 1986; 1987; 1988), each with the religious purpose of adding a musical component to devotional processions. During Guṃlā, the Tulādhar Guṃlā *bājan* plays two kinds of portable drums, the *nāykhim* and the *dhāḥ*, and two kinds of cymbals, the *tāḥ* and the *chusyā*. In modern times, the group has employed low-caste Damai musicians who play the melody lines using Western instruments: clarinets and trumpets.<sup>16</sup> The master of the *tāḥ* cymbals, who leads the *bājan*'s playing, is the role of highest musical expertise since he signals the other musicians and leads the orchestra in playing together.

In every Newar Buddhist caste, leadership of the *bājan*'s devotional activities rotates through internal sub-groups.<sup>17</sup> Every year a new senior leader (*pālā*) with his sub-group leaders are in charge of the actual performance of the *bājan*'s devotions, both during Guṃlā and for the other activities.<sup>18</sup>

16. High caste Newars traditionally never played the flute or other wind instruments because these connote low caste status; until recent decades, they used to employ Jyāpus (agriculturalists, ranked as śūdras in caste lists) who still play (among themselves) a variety of flutes and maintain many other old musical traditions.

17. The Newar procession tradition defines every major institution in local Buddhist organization (Lewis 1984; M. Allen, n. d.) and orchestrates all important "cultural performances" (Singer 1972, 70). Newar Buddhist merchants today form eight different kinds of devotional processions.

18. The yearly schedule of Guṃlā activities in the Asan Tulādhar community actually begins before the month commences. For up to a whole month beforehand, the *pālās* organize informal instructional classes for younger members. The first required gathering occurs several days before the start of Guṃlā: the group employs the seniormost Vajrācārya from the neighborhood to perform a pūjā to Nāsa dyah (Śiva-Nātarāja), the deity whom Newar Buddhists must worship before devotional playing of any sort can officially

A standard day<sup>19</sup> for the Asan *bājan* during Guṃlā goes as follows: a group of *bājan* drummers leave Asan just after sun-rise and proceed directly to the Svayambhū hilltop. Once they reach the great stūpa, they go around it once in *pradakṣiṇā*. After this, the group settles at a traditional site just north of the Amitābha niche. Others who left Asan after the *bājan* arrive for the next half hour. The *pālās* also arrange for the delivery of the extra drums, usually by employing a hired worker (most often still a member of the Jyāpu farmer caste) to carry them. Some stand around and talk, others make private devotional rounds, some may practice drumming. At a publicized time (1991: 6:30 AM), a group-gathering drumbeat is played on the *nāykhim*, and the head *pālā* takes roll to insure that all of the year's *pālā*-committee households are represented. By this time, the Damāis have appeared and the *bājan*'s daily pūjā offerings, already prepared by the women of *pālā*-committee households, is distributed among those present. These items are offered at the shrines around the hilltop as the group processes.

The Svayambhū complex *pradakṣiṇā* begins by all present standing before the elaborate Amitābha shrine on the western side of the stūpa. As the pūjā plate is presented to the shrine attendant, the group stands, hands in "nāmaskāra," and sings one or more of the standard Newar Mahāyāna devotions: *Daśabala Stotra*, the *Saptapāramitā Stotra*, the *Bandeśi* or the *Bhadra-cari*.<sup>20</sup> Once the pūjā plate is returned, the

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begin (Ellingson 1990). The *bājan* group then proceeds to the *pālā*'s house where the first official drumming is ceremonially begun and all take *prasād* from the pūjā, and then the group is served a snack of beaten rice, meat, and other vegetables, plus *aylāh*, "distilled spirits."

19. This description is of a typical day in 1981; in this as in many other devotional activities among the Tulādhars, the individuals involved have a wide range of acceptable alternatives they can introduce. Minor variations from this description occur, based upon the leadership of that year's *pālā* committee.

20. These texts have been reproduced in many modern published devotional texts in Kathmandu. The *Daśabala* ("Ten Strengths") celebrates the ten powers of the Buddhas (e. g. Shrestha 1983).

*Bandeśi* is a dhāraṇī dedicated to Vajrasattva and praises: Bodhisattvas Amoghapāśa, Lokanātha, and Samantabhadra; dharmadhātu caityas; the buddha consorts (Tārā, Māmakī, Locanī, Padmanī); and the *Saddharma-pundarika*.

The full name of the Newari *Bhadracari* is the Sanskrit *Āryabhadra-caripranidhānarāja*, verses originally appended to the Gaṇḍavyūha (Beyer 1973, 478; translation 188-9). These ritually repeated lines date from the early centuries CE; the dhāraṇī verses praise buddhas and bodhisattvas,

group follows a route that completes a double *pradakṣiṇā* of the stūpa and then visits, in a clockwise order, all of the important shrines on the hilltop including: the Bka' rgyud Tibetan gomba, Basundharā, the "Sikkimese gomba," Hārīti Ajimā, and the tantric shrine Śāntipur. When this cycle is complete, the group returns to its "base." After a short rest, the *bājan* again takes up the drums and cymbals, plays the assembly drumbeat and then launches into the prime instrumental composition played by Buddhist Guṃlā *bājans*: "Bhagavān Gvārā." All Kathmandu *bājans* play this (Sakya 1971). On a good day, the group will have swelled to sixty or seventy with more late arrivals for the final *pradakṣiṇā* of the stūpa and the descent down the main stairs.

On the way down and back to town, the group is careful to move in a clockwise manner around any shrine or stūpa it passes. The older generation knows that different compositions and drumming riffs should be played at different points along the route back to town, but such strict details are not usually followed these days.

A key stop on the way back is at Bijesvārī, a *yogini* temple prominent in the Newar Vajrayāna tradition. Here the *bājan* pauses for *darśan* and, if desired, individual pūjā. Some of the elderly Urāy men from the Asan community come out to meet the *bājan* only here where the final group attendance record is noted. After crossing the river and entering back into town, all the *bājan* proceeds to the Jana Bāhā Avalokiteśvara temple for *pradakṣiṇā*, exits around the Kel Tol Ajimā temple just outside the entrance, then goes around the three main temples (Annapurṇā Devī, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa) in central Asan.

To complete the morning procession, the group proceeds to Asan Bāhā for a *pradakṣiṇā* of the tall Asoka Caitya there, navigates the alleys for a closing *darśan* of Śivā Nāṭarāja (Newari: *Nāsa dyah* [Ellingson 1990]) outside Ta Che Bāhā, then returns to the *pālā*'s house where it plays a closing drumbeat. The *pālā* takes the drums for safekeeping and the *bājan*'s daily round is complete.

The Guṃlā *bājan* provides a rich and satisfying devotional channel for Newar Buddhists who value the old musical traditions and who wish to venerate the sacred caityas, vihāras, bodhisatvas, and deities who protect their locality (Hārīti, Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu, and Śiva-Nāṭarāja).

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delineate offerings, confess transgressions, rejoice in merit, request teachings, and share the *puṇya* earned from personal devotion. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra, invoked in these texts, finds little other devotional attention in Newar tradition (Tuladhar 1986, 8-20).

The ability to play the drums and cymbals is one traditional measure of the culturally-accomplished Newar Buddhist layman. Likewise, each Newar caste's musical performance of the *bājan* during *Guṃlā* reflects upon the sub-community's status and solidarity. During *Guṃlā*, this is evident during the morning excursions to Svayambhū and on other outings discussed below. The Buddhist *bājan* remains a vibrant tradition, as there is still a core of *Tulādhar*s—including many young men—who enjoy heartily rapping out drumbeats, clanging cymbals, and singing in praise of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities.

### *Svayambhū Jñānamālā Bhajan*

Before leaving Svayambhū, we must visit another musical expression of Buddhist devotion prominent there: the *Jñānamālā Bhajan*. Until the later Rana period (1846-1950), the *bhajan* style of devotional music was practiced only by Hindu devotees in the Kathmandu Valley. Newar Buddhists have in this century also incorporated this type of musical playing into their own tradition, taking up instruments (*tabla*, *sitar*, *harmonium*, *violin*) and composition style imported from India. Once the Buddhists learned the instruments, they soon composed songs to their divinities and formed groups that now organize regular devotional singing.

*Bhajans* play each night in many city neighborhood rest houses, after many shops have closed and they are open to all who wish to join in. Composed of many Newar Buddhist castes from all over Kathmandu, the *Jñānamālā Bhajan* at Svayambhū must be noted for many men also participate there and contribute financially. The *bhajan* plays in the rest house adjoining the main stairs at the hilltop several hours each morning on all important days of the lunar year and daily during *Guṃlā*.

A typical playing session begins with offerings to the gods of the *bhajan* site, a hymn to *Nāsa dyah*, *Gaṇeśa*, and then moves to "Govinda," in which all of the important gods' names are recited and during which a conch is blown. The balance of the morning's songs are devotional hymns to the great Buddhist divinities (*Avalokiteśvara*, *Śākyamuni Buddha*, *Basundharā*, etc.). The conch is blown again to signal the last sequence of hymns as an oil wick lamp is lit and shown to all of the *bhajan* house deities. (This offering light is called *ārati* after it is offered to the gods.) The men hold their fingers close to the



flame, then touch them to their eyes and foreheads. A final salute to Nāsa dyah ends the playing.

When the large *bhajan* convenes, enthusiastically-rendered songs of praise and supplication abound. As the *bhajan* has grown in popularity, it has emphasized the bhakti dimension of Mahāyāna lay Buddhism. This trend also reflects the extent of Indian influences on modern Newar life, a fact that is illustrated by the popular use of Hindi film melodies for new *bhajan* songs. However, Newar *upāsakas* feel pride in their adaptation of this musical genre but with songs of their own composition with Buddhist content. (New compositions are still being composed.) The words and ethos expressed in the Newar *bhajan* capture the spirit of modern Newar devotionism. As one Tulādhār layman said to me: “If you want to seek the *rasa* (taste) of our Dharma, you must listen to the *bhajan*.”

### *Household Devotions*

Individual families may call a *vajrācārya* priest into their homes for the daily reading of privately-owned Buddhist texts. The families pay him a daily stipend and then make a special offering at the end of the month. The traditional ideal is that every text in the household collection should be read during Guṃlā. Where texts are still read, for most Urāy families it is a mechanical ritual not attended to for content since few Vajrācārya readers (or laity) can understand the Sanskrit or archaic Newari.

Several generations ago, especially devout individuals would retreat to a vihāra for the entire period to meditate, study, and fast (Locke 1980, 235). Today, some individuals try to set aside during the month a period for modest textual study or more extended periods of meditation. Another type of ritual observance is abstention from different foods which is sealed by a vow at the beginning of the month. Urāy laymen may choose to avoid meat, onions, garlic, and/or alcohol for the entire month. Several informants asserted that some individuals used to “fast” for the entire month, but I saw no evidence of this practice in Kathmandu.<sup>21</sup>

Many families light the fixed votive lamps around the caityas in their local town vihāra every night during Guṃlā. Although the wealthiest neighbors were the most active, every family usually contributes oil to the wick lamps there. On the main days of Guṃlā—full moon and

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21. Gellner 1987, 359.

eighth days (*aṣṭami*)—the lamps are also lit at sunrise as well. Family offerings to the main vihāra shrine (Newari: *kvāpāḥ dyaḥ*) are more elaborate and individuals make a greater point than at other times in the year to do *pradakṣiṇā* of the caitya complex in the courtyard. In a Kathmandu *bāhā* courtyard where I lived in 1982 and 1987, the early evenings throughout Guṃlā were alive with devotions and socializing by most who lived nearby.

Guṃlā is also the special season for families to participate in *vratas* dedicated to the bodhisattvas. As Locke (1987) and I (1989a) have published separate accounts of several of these one- or two-day long periods of fasting, ritual, and textual recitation, no further remarks on these traditions will be made here, except to note that observing the *vratas* is one of the most demanding forms of Newar devotional observance.

After a purificatory ritual for the family at the start of the month (which may involve the abstention from meat and alcohol), individuals sit together each morning to make as many caitya images as they can using special black clay and small molds. Women are usually the most active in the usually indoor and private work of *dyaḥ thāyegu*;<sup>22</sup> their role here complements the mens' participation in the public *bājan*. (Menstruating women, however, must abstain from this task.)

There are a variety of molds, but most are of caityas of varying sizes. To make an individual image according to "high Buddhist standards"—a tradition known only to Urāy, Śākyas, and Vajrācāryas—entails a twelve-step process marked at each turn by a mantra recitation.<sup>23</sup> Each image also gets a grain of rice that gives *jīva* (life) to it.

22. The Newar use of this term *dyaḥ* (Skt. *deva*) here for caityas and images (and in other traditions, as below) matches the Khotanese Mahāyāna tradition as recorded in the *Book of Zambasta* which also uses the epithet "deva" to refer to buddhas and bodhisattvas (Emmerick 1968).

23. The steps are given here with the accompanying mantras: 1. *om basudhe svāhā*, taking the clay; 2. *om vajra bhāvay svāhā*, shaping the clay; 3. *om arje viraje svāhā*, putting oil in the mold; 4. *om vajra dhātu garbhe svāhā*, putting the clay in the mold; 5. *om vajra kirti chedaya hum phat svāhā*, removing the excess clay; 6. *om dharmā dhātu garbhe svāhā*, putting in a paddy grain; 7. *om vajra mungaratko hum phat svāhā*, covering up the paddy grain; 8. *om vajra dharmā rate svāhā*, putting on extra clay to remove the image; 9. *om supratisthata vajre svāhā*, putting the image with others already made; 10. *om mani sata dipte svāhā*, after placing it. Tucci (1988 ed., 57-60) has given two other sets of mantras for this process based upon Sanskrit and Tibetan sources.

In some families, the *dyaḥ thāyegu* is actually the work of a formal ritual called the *lakṣacāitya vrata* (Newari: *luchidyah vrata*), and as the name implies, 100,000 images must be molded to fulfill the vow made at the outset. At the end of the month, the sum of clay images is molded into a large three-dimensional maṇḍala and worshipped by the fasting family with a *kalāśa pūjā* performed by a *vajrācārya*. The entire mass having been consecrated with offerings, it may be used to build a family votive caitya or (more commonly) be taken out and deposited at a *tirtha* along the Viṣṇumati River, along with offerings to the *nāgas*.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Special Community Observances During Guṃlā*

In several Kathmandu vihāras, there is a tradition of *vajrācāryas* exhibiting gold-lettered *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. (The text itself is read each morning and evening.) Characteristic of early Mahāyāna tradition (Schopen 1975, 168), this “cult of the book” is seen each Guṃlā morning: saṃgha members cover the large text in brocade, and to receive blessings lay folk make an offering for the privilege of a short *darśan* and having one leaf of the manuscript touched to the forehead. Viewing is supposed to confer health and protection.

For five days after the middle of Guṃlā, the owners of notable Buddhist images (in most cases, Dipaṃkara Buddha) display them in public, usually in the ground floor area of their houses. The saṃghas of some vihāras also display images, texts, and art that they own and some also hang out long scroll paintings that illustrate the important *avadānas* emphasized by Newar tradition.<sup>25</sup> This period of display is the time when Mahāyāna Buddhists set out in public their non-tantric religious treasures in what was once the greatest yearly Buddhist display. Such “cultural performances” (Singer 1972, 67ff) invariably draw large crowds who come for daily pūjā and *darśan* throughout the period.

24. The *dyaḥ thāyegu* rituals I observed in Newar homes closely conformed to the guidelines in the *Lakṣacāitya Vrata* text (New. *luchi dyaḥ*) translated by Tissa (1974). Not all Kathmandu families who make these images do so as part of the *lakṣacāitya vrata*.

25. The following four scrolls were displayed at vihāras visited by the Guṃlā *bājans*: 1. Simhalasārtabāhu in Bhagawan Bāhā, Thamel; 2. Story of Kesa Chandra in Itum Bāhā (stolen in 1980); 3. Mahāsattva Rāja Kumār, Nāradevi courtyard; 4. Painting of Buddhist hells in Śrī gha: Bāhā.

Although over twenty-five Kathmandu households own Samyaka images, in 1987 only three still chose to display them in public for *Bahi Dyaḥ Bvayegu*. For the others, their images are now simply arranged upstairs where only family members and invited guests can view them and make offerings. Owners who elect not to display their images cite fear of thievery as the main deterrent. Even the few who still put out their *Bahi Dyaḥs* recount attempted robberies and the actual theft of many ornaments and smaller objects.<sup>26</sup>

Even with the vast reduction in scale, *Bahi Dyaḥ Bvayegu* provides an opportunity for the Asan Buddhist community to experience the grandeur of its highest art traditions, visit the town's viḥāras, and recognize the prestige of its greatest lay patrons. This yearly spectacle shows the classical role of merchants as leaders among *upāsakas* who underwrite local Buddhist tradition and draw together the community through their pious display of wealth.

The display attracts a day-long procession by Guṃlā *bājans* that visit many of the displayed deities in uptown, midtown, and downtown Kathmandu. Many caste groups form processions to make the rounds for *darśan* across the important landmarks in the entire city's Buddhist geography.

The visitation starts during the morning return from Svayambhū when the *bājan* visits the viḥāras in the far uptown: Bhagawan Bāhā

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26. In this domain, contact with international art networks has had a clear detrimental effect on Newar Buddhist culture. The "security provisions" that local groups have put in place to safeguard temple art from thieves have often distorted the original architectural-artistic order of the shrines and limited the laity's contact with their sacred icons: images and paintings must be locked away from everyone. This commoditization has corrupted the communities from within, too: the temptation for an impoverished *pālā* to sell off *guthi* art has been another cause for loss and breakdown. The display of empowered Buddhist treasures has been a fundamental mechanism of Buddhist cultural transmission since antiquity, and thievery has seriously undermined this in the Kathmandu Valley (Sassoon 1989).

Some scholars, particularly art historians, have been unwilling to acknowledge the cultural consequences of these "art transactions." The language of art connoisseurship suppresses the reality of their data's path from Newar neighborhood, to thief, to smuggler, to American "collection." For example, ". . . [The painting] was last displayed in August 1967 on the occasion of *bahidyah bvayegu* . . . Then, like so many other Nepalese paintings it passed into a private collection" (Slusser 1987, 20). This scholarship of "pieces" does not acknowledge the problematic tradeoff: undermining living traditions in order to, purportedly, understand isolated objects. An excellent recent publication documenting this legacy is found in L. S. Bangdel 1991.

(Bajracarya 1979), Chusya Bāhā, Musya Bāhā, Śrī gha: Bāhā, Nhu Bāhā, Jana Bāhā. Although the morning return that starts the day's *Bahī Dyaḥ Svāyegu* usually attracts more participants than a regular day during Guṃlā (1981, 45), it is the afternoon-evening procession that draws the larger crowd (1981, 250), the maximum number of Tuladhar drummers (1981, 10), and the most hired Damāi musicians (1981: 3 trumpets, 2 clarinets). The only women who come along are very small girls brought by their fathers, mother's brothers, or grandfathers. During this five-hour procession, the group in 1981 visited about 25 different viḥāras, stopping approximately midway for a *pālā*-coordinated snack. In summary, the *Bahī Dyaḥ Svāyegu* procession attracts the best musicians and is the time when Buddhist laymen join en masse to have *darśan* of and worship the greatest treasures of their city's cumulative Buddhist tradition.

On the thirteenth day of the waning moon near the end of Guṃlā is Pañca Dāna,<sup>27</sup> when all but the poorest Buddhist laymen open their storerooms and engage their kitchens for the purpose of making offerings to saṃgha members who come to receive alms in their households. Vajrācāryas and Śākyas from the city of Patan also come to Kathmandu as their town's Pañca Dāna day is held several weeks earlier (Gellner 1992).

On this day, the bazaar streets become crowded a bit more than usual as Vajrācāryas bearing bags for offerings make their way from house to house. Individuals do so either on an individual basis or for their entire viḥāra. (If the latter, they must carry a large brass bowl and wear a special cap.) Most lay Buddhists give five measures of paddy for group collections and two to individuals.

There are a number of small *guthis* in Urāy neighborhoods whose endowment is for the purpose of making *pañcadāna* offerings to the saṃgha. One *guthiyār* (member) stays in a store-front or rest house

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27. Hem Raj Sakya (1979, 78ff) has noted an alternative derivation for this name: *nadām* (that I never heard among Urāy in Kathmandu) that he relates to the *navadāna* of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. These are: 1. *svabhāva-dānam*; 2. *sarvadānam*; 3. *duṣkaram dāna*; 4. *sarvato-mukhaṃ dānam*; 5. *sat-puruṣa-dānam*; 6. *sarvākāraṃ dānam*; 7. *vighātārthikam dānam*; 8. *ihāmutra-sukhaṃ dānam*; 9. *Viśuddhaṃ dānam* (Dayal 1970, 173ff). Another possible derivative usage preceding *pañcadāna* mentioned by Gellner (1987, 294) is *puṇyajā* ("merit boiled rice") that refers to the gift of *khir*. Manandhar (1986, 141) lists *paṃjarām* as an alternative rendering.

that is often decorated with *guthi*-owned Buddhist paintings or images to give paddy to any who appears.

In many courtyards where Buddhists live, householders decorate their house walls with paintings hung from first-floor windows. Some families distribute rice from large bowls placed outside the front door while others invite their closer saṃgha acquaintances or family *purohit* to come upstairs where their *bahi dyaḥs* and other images are displayed and the offerings are more elaborate.

When the saṃgha member enters the room, he immediately sits on the straw mats arranged for this purpose. A woman of the house offers purificatory water to his right hand and applies a red *tikā* to his forehead, *prasād* from the house's morning bodhisattva pūjā offerings. Depending on the family's preference for that year, the household's designated ritual leader will present the *vajrācārya* with various food-stuffs and gifts: although the name *pañca dāna* ("five gifts") implies a set number of offerings, many more possibilities exist (R. K. Bajracarya 1980, 100-1). Paddy grains presented in an offering bowl (*pinda pātra*) are one essential donation. Other grains such as de-husked rice, wheat, soybeans, chickpeas may be donated; gifts such as fruit, sweets, and money are also made.

*Khīr* (rice pudding; Skt. *kṣīra*) is another indispensable offering and it is served on a leaf plate. For the Urāy, this acceptance of cooked rice signifies social equality with the *vajrācāryas*, an issue of contention in recent years in the caste context of the modern Hindu polity of Nepal (Rosser 1964; Lewis 1989c). The reason Newar householders give for presenting this is that they are imitating the textual figure Sujāta, the woman who gave *khīr* to the Buddha on the eve of his enlightenment.<sup>28</sup> Buddhist lay folk also offer *aylāḥ*, distilled spirits, to the Vajrācāryas they know.<sup>29</sup>

Newar Buddhists also have "Special Pañca Dāna" traditions as well: a single family makes offerings to the entire Newar saṃgha, including a parcel of land and a vihāra, with a portable image from Svayambhū brought down as witness. This can be done on the appropriate day during Guṃlā or at another auspicious time during the year. For these

28. For those versed in Vajrayāna symbolism, the *khīr* symbolizes *bodhicitta* and the esoteric conviction that without the woman's contribution of *prajñā*, enlightenment is impossible.

29. The Newar Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna norm does not proscribe liquor consumption as it is essential in tantric ritual. Many families feel ambiguity here, however, distinguishing ritual use from profane drunkenness.

day-long events, other householders can join in making their own *dāna* to the saṃgha members who pass, sharing thereby in the great *puṇya* generated.<sup>30</sup> The Newar Pañca Dāna offering by a single family likely has ancient precedents: a similar ritual is described by I-Tsing in the Śrīvijaya region around 690 CE (Takakusu 1896, 45-6).

Other aspects of Pañca Dāna must be considered in the context of cross-cultural Buddhist studies. On this day, householder *vajrācāryas* and *śākyas* take up the occupation of begging, the classical occupation of the celibate monk.<sup>31</sup> Here, as in the modern Newar saṃgha initiation, a connection is made with the classical Indic norm and the Mahāyāna claim that the bodhisattva's life need not be bounded by celibate monasticism. Thus, each year the *vajrācāryas* reiterate the implicit claim that they are Buddhist masters as worthy as bhikṣus to receive *dāna* that produces great *puṇya* for the giver.

Another connection made in the Newar Pañca Dāna tradition is with Dipaṃkara Buddha. This former Buddha, before whom Śākyamuni began his bodhisattva career and who was popular across Asia as "Calmer of Waters," protector of merchants (Coedes 1971, 21), has in Nepal been adopted according to later Mahāyāna Buddhist cosmology: as the embodiment of the Ādibuddha's power and the *dharmakāya*, sharing this manifestation presence with Svayambhū Mahācaitya (Shakya 1979, 75). There is a yearly spring festival to Dipaṃkara in Kathmandu (where he has the colloquial name "Cakan Dyaḥ" [Lienhard 1985] ) and his images are requisite for the great Samyaka festivals. Newar tradition has also domesticated Dipaṃkara as their special figure who receives and witnesses great *dāna* ceremonies. At the time of presentations to the saṃgha, individuals receiving *dāna*

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30. See Lewis 1984, 252 for the curious permutations that govern the choice of the special saṃgha recipients: the greatest *dāna* gifts are presented to the first in line, not according to scholastic accomplishment or spiritual mastery. This apparently has been true for over 150 years (Wright 1877, 36).

31. The alms round is now rare even in Theravāda countries (Spiro 1970; Tambiah 1970). The only other occasion for this type of association in Newar tradition is during each young *vajrācārya*'s initiation ceremony, the *acārya dikṣā*. Before their installment into the *vajrācārya* caste, each must take up the monastic life for four days, living on alms (Locke 1975). After this period, the boys renounce the "Śrāvakayāna" and embrace the "Bodhisattvayāna" as householders pursuing the career of Vajrayāna ritual hierophant. Each does so saying that the monk's life is "too difficult" (Gellner 1988).

The Tibeto-Burman Tamangs living northwest of the Kathmandu Valley also have a yearly one-day alms round by their householder monks (Holmberg 1984, 700). This custom could be in imitation of Newar Guṃlā practice.

first chant, “*om nāmaḥ śri dipaṃkarāya*” (Shakya 1979, 75). As Gellner has shown, the Newar understanding of Dīpaṃkara is expressed in the popular story collection, the *Kapisāvadāna*.<sup>32</sup> In these works, King Sarvānanda gives lavishly to the saṃgha headed by Dīpaṃkara and is propelled toward buddhahood. Modern Newar *upāsakas* evoke this royal figure to frame their offerings’ same purpose (Gellner 1987, 298).

Modern Urāy and Vajrācāryas understand the connection between Pañca Dāna and *punya* explicitly. As one Vajrācārya said, “Dīpaṃkara Buddha provided a great service to humanity by establishing Pañca Dāna.<sup>33</sup> The devout can make great *punya* that protects households, rescues beings from bad fates, and may secure a high rebirth state, even Amitābha’s paradise, Sukhāvati, for those who give generously.” As one layman stated during a recent Pañca Dāna: “Just as one paddy grain given here sprouts and produces a great harvest, so will the good effects of this *dāna* produce good fortune for the householder.” This analogy has been recorded throughout the modern Buddhist world (Moerman 1966, 159; Gombrich 1971), as it has been since antiquity (e. g. Takakusu 1896, 45-6).

In conformity with another popular text domesticated into Newar practice, individuals sponsor veneration of Svayambhū by a special *bājan* during Guṃlā. In keeping with the text’s narrative describing the reuniting of a married couple in their next existence through performing a special ritual before a caitya, mourning families sponsor similar offerings. The regular performance of *Śṛṅgabheri* caitya veneration is now made by a special vihāra *guthi* at Svayambhū: several young boys circumambulate the Svayambhū hilltop complex playing buffalo horns each morning during Guṃlā. Their service is usually contracted for by families at the start of the month in a short ceremony dedicating the merit to the deceased. The full moon day of Guṃlā is usually chosen for the family to accompany the musical procession. (See Lewis 1993c for a translation of this text and a discussion of its Nepalese domestication.)

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32. The *Mahāvastu* recounts this same story, but the one who makes the vow to Buddhahood is the Brahman Megha (Basak 1963, I, lxviii)

33. Locke reports that Pañca Dāna in Patan, held on *śukla aṣṭami* two weeks earlier, is thought to commemorate a visit of Dīpaṃkara Buddha to the Kathmandu Valley (Locke 1980, 234).



*Hindu-Buddhist Relations During Guṃlā Dharma*

The peak season for Newar Mahāyāna devotionalism coincides with two distinctively Hindu festivals, and the Buddhist community's interaction with these events must be factored into the full understanding of Guṃlā Dharma's Nepalese Buddhist domestication.

Only Hindus observe the distinctly Newar festival called *Sāpāru* or *Gāi Jātrā* (Cow Festival) which is held in all major Newar towns on the first day after the full moon in Śrāvaṇa. According to the local history, the Newar king Pratāp Malla (ruled 1641-1674) established this one-day observance to assuage his queen's grief after the death of her son. To demonstrate the ubiquity of death and grief in the world, all households in which a death occurred were summoned to pass in a procession by the palace. This royal history is also the reason, say informants, for the appearance of male "jokers" in the processions: to lighten the burden of mourning they are free to satirize anything, and dress as women, clowns, or performers.

The festival's religious roots lie in the belief that dead individuals must cross many rivers to reach the realm of death ruled by Yama. According to pan-Indic traditions, cows are of invaluable assistance in this journey. Both Hindu and Buddhist Newars act on their belief that making a gift of a cow (*godāna*) to a brāhmaṇa insures this service to the departed.<sup>34</sup> With this purpose in mind, Hindu families in mourning dress up one or more sons in cow costumes and complete a procession throughout the town.<sup>35</sup> Some may also lead a real cow who has been groomed and garlanded. The women of the house extend the meritorious service to cows by taking a position along this route near their homes to make food offerings to all the other "cow groups" which pass. The spectacle draws crowds all along the route and especially at the royal palace.

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34. Buddhist Newars perform a life-cycle rite for elders ("Burā Jākwo") that enhances their karma and establishes them in an exalted status at seventy-seven years old. This includes making a cow gift to a Brāhmaṇa as part of an otherwise purely Vajrayāna ritual ceremony (Lewis 1984, 299-307).

35. The Buddhist community specifies another festival for its mourning families to make a similiar town circumambulation: Indra Jātrā, which falls soon after Guṃlā. Instead of making offerings to cows, however, the Buddhist families make offerings to stūpas and caityas, making their way around town to greet friends while making *puṇya* dedicated to the recently deceased.

Newar Buddhists *do not join* in celebrating this festival.<sup>36</sup> Sāpāru in fact is very often the day chosen for Bahī Dyaḥ Svāyegu by the Asan Urāy. (In 1981, the Asan bājan passed the royal palace area seemingly oblivious to the Gāi Jātrā crowds there.) According to local tradition, not only should Buddhists abstain from participating: they should also not even witness the processions for it is “Māra vala” (“Māra has come”). By identifying Hindu practice with the Buddha’s defeated foe, this polemic reflects a classical ideological assertion by which Buddhist tradition subordinates Hindu deities and observances. Most adult Buddhist lay folk know of this contention.

Hindu-Buddhist competition is also evident during the yearly festival dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭami (Kṛṣṇa’s Eighth Day). Although in modern times Newar Hindus of Kathmandu have fallen away from a stronger Kṛṣṇa devotionism that marked Nepal’s pre-modern era, this two-day spring festival is still the occasion of the yearly palanquin festival to “the Dark Lord.” The local custom for Hindu groups is to display devotional pictures of Kṛṣṇa and other Hindu deities outside of homes and at prominent public places. At the Annapūrṇā temple rest house in northeast Kathmandu (Bhotahity), for example, local Hindu shopkeepers hang over 100 pictures, almost all of which are from the orthodox Hindu pantheon: Lakṣmi, Śiva, Gaṇeśa, and, most commonly, scenes from the life of Kṛṣṇa.

But in another courtyard, the same Hindu pantheon is present, but about half of the paintings are Buddhist: as part of their Guṃlā devotions, prominent Buddhist families set up competing displays alongside their Hindu neighbors. In yet other courtyards, the content is almost completely Buddhist in subject matter: in 1981 we found a series of paintings in one courtyard depicting: *Mahāsattva Rāja Kumāra Jātaka*, Tārā, Mañjuśrī, the *Śṛṅgabherī Avadāna*, Avalokiteśvara, and tantric deities. Yet another display was totally Buddhist, presenting the *Siṃhalasārtabāhu Avadāna* and the life of the Buddha in framed lithographs. There were also other framed deities from the Mahāyāna pantheon.

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36. The *saṃgha pūjāris* in Jana Bāhā do perform a special pūjā petitioning Avalokiteśvara to intercede for any members reborn in the hells.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS:  
MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM AND SOCIETY

We have surveyed a host of Mahāyāna observances held each summer by Newar Buddhists in Nepal: music-enlivened devotional processions and pūjās given to images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, stūpas, local deities; daily pilgrimage to Svayambū; presentation of *dāna* offerings to many vihāras; intensive sūtra or dhāraṇī recitations; special occasions to present *dāna* to the saṃgha, including events involving extraordinary munificence; ceremonies (pūjā) generating *puṇya* for the recently dead; public and private recitations of the dharma from Buddhist literature; Mahāyāna *vratas* orchestrating many (of the above) activities; special *avadāna*-related rituals; cults to Mahāyāna sūtras; displays of treasured, empowered Dipaṃkara images shared with the community. In Newar Guṃlā Dharma, one sees a broad sample of Indic Mahāyāna traditions in practice.

Conforming to the desiderata of the five cardinal precepts and the classical Mahāyāna seven-fold worship,<sup>37</sup> the ritual traditions of Guṃlā Dharma have clearly been crafted and accumulated to serve the devout's seeking both practical blessings and final salvation (cf. Dargyay 1986, 179-80). Indeed, the Newar evidence suggests the importance of ritual traditions expressing and shaping Buddhist history, while orchestrating exchanges insuring the local saṃgha's maintenance. Buddhism has always been engaged in this domestication process. As John Strong has recently noted, "Buddhism, as it is popularly practiced, consists primarily of deeds done and stories told, that is of rituals that regulate life both inside and outside the monastery, and of legends, myths, and tales that are recalled by, for, and about the faithful" (1992, xi). With the addition of dhāraṇī (or *paritta*) recitation as the "practical religion" and contextualizing these attributes within a nexus of community exchange, this description aptly describes the nature of surviving Mahāyāna tradition in the Newar context.

The traditions of Guṃlā Dharma allow further characterizations of Mahāyāna Buddhism in practice: it has been primarily through ritual that individuals express Buddhist identity and seek their spiritual aspi-

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37. Often cited in the Mahāyāna literature is the seven-fold pūjā: 1. honor the Buddha; 2. serve the Buddha; 3. confession of misdeeds; 4. delight in good actions of beings; 5. invitation of buddhas to preach the dharma; 6. arouse the thought of enlightenment; 7. dedication of merit to all beings (Lamotte 1988, 433).

rations (Beyer 1973, xii). Through *pūjā*, *vrata*, chanting, *bājan* and *bhajan*, devotees conform to ideals set forth in canonical texts; though varying in style of cultural performance, all these rituals seek the compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas, planting karmic seeds fostering bodhi, and these blessings alter destiny both in this world and beyond. The meaning that Newar Buddhists place on their Guṃlā rituals finds clear expression in a popular story collection, the *Janabāhādayaḥ Bākhaṃ*. This text recounts the salvation work of Avalokiteśvara primarily through refuge in bodhisattva rituals:

If those who are born in Nepal observe the *guṃlā dharma*, if they show devotion to Svayambhū, if they play five traditional instruments at the *jātrās*, if they revere the *pañcatathāgatas*, they will get the four fruits: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa* and be freed from all *pāp*. When they die they will be free from the fear of Yamarāja and go for rebirth in Sukhāvati bhuvana. (Vajracarya 1972, 6)

In practice, the Mahāyāna—like the Hīnayāna—has held up the Dharma as the path that “shows the lay folk the way to heaven.” It was not sublime philosophical exegesis nor meditative rapture but ritual acts directed to heavenly rebirth that inspired the practice of most Buddhists throughout history.

### *Hindu-Buddhist Competition and Boundaries*

Newar Guṃlā Dharma tradition in Nepal gives insight regarding the later history of Indian Buddhism: once the tradition came to uphold and depend upon elaborate ritual events to unite the community, then proper form, procedure, and pollution-purity regulation also became Buddhist concerns. (This is quite evident, for example, in I-Tsing’s account.) Buddhist ritualists had to conform to the logic of brahmanical aesthetics and *pūjā* procedures, sanctioning one major avenue of assimilation. The developmental history of Newar Buddhism likewise illustrates this trajectory of Mahāyāna evolution: as an immense agenda of buddha and bodhisattva image veneration and temple life developed, Buddhist *pūjā*, *yātrā*, and *saṃskāra* evolved to adapt to the Brahmanical ritual context. To adopt the highest Indic standards of cleanliness and image purity, Buddhists thereby adopted Brahmanical ritual views, including caste reckonings of individual purity. In so doing, the tradition also imported an ongoing and increasing problem: the laity’s confusion between Buddhist and Hindu cults given identical

ritual veneration.<sup>38</sup> To contend with this, the contestation traditions of Newar Buddhism are likewise instructive: to endure amidst a Hindu majority required the elaboration of sharp contradistinctive traditions such as those drawn up around the Cow and Kṛṣṇa festivals. (Many others endure in the Newar context [Lewis 1984, 468-481; Gellner 1992, 73-104].)

*Lay Buddhism, Domestication, and Redistribution*

Although there are few historical sources available for reconstructing the exact nature of the Newar saṃgha's evolution to its present householder and caste-defined Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna form, (with periods of crisis<sup>39</sup> hypothesized to explain the departure from the classical norms), what is clear is the reworking of earlier celibate monastic customs, as David Gellner has so brilliantly demonstrated (1992). Guṃlā month seems to have been a part of this development in several respects. The rainy season period has become a time when the community forgoes marriage ceremonies and focuses on Buddhist practice (textual study, meditation, construction, pūjā), in conformity with aspects of the classical *varṣāvāsa* ideal.

Certain Guṃlā Dharma practices highlight other transformations evident in the domestication of Newar Mahāyāna Buddhism. The emphasis on textual ownership and recitation by the modern saṃgha underlines their place as heirs and holders of the spiritual powers cultivated by the Mahāyāna. Conducting bodhisattva rituals and transmitting meditation traditions (tantric and non-tantric) became the right of certain Newars lineages exclusively. Esoteric Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna initiations in Nepal are now, as in traditional Tibet, open only to those of high birth status who can give the necessary *dāna*, making the tradition—in part—a commodity. Thus, a high-caste saṃgha now holds the monopoly right to mediate the Mahāyāna pantheon to the laity through the rituals of veneration, protection, and initiation.

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38. This is true in Nepal today in the devolution of traditional Mahāyāna culture (Lewis 1984, 555-589), a situation also discussed by Mus (1964).

39. On the possible role of disease in Newar Buddhist history, we now know of the effects of a severe pestilence in the town of Kathmandu about 1724 recounted in the writings of Situ Panchen. See Lewis and Jamspal 1988, 199. The prevalence of disease in pre-modern societies should cause scholars of Buddhism to underline the importance of apotropaic ritualism in securing the tradition's success (Lewis 1994a).

Guṃlā Pañca Dāna traditions have evolved to ensure the essential contributions to this saṃgha. We have pointed out how this day of *dāna* is congruent with the modern Newar monastic initiation by alluding to the classical monasticism but ultimately affirming a Mahāyāna superiority. Newar tradition has domesticated Dipaṃkara Buddha imagery and stories to have him as witness and to legitimate the greatest yearly redistribution ritual. In Kathmandu until quite recently, Pañca Dāna was quite a lavish windfall for individual saṃgha members.<sup>40</sup> Whatever else we might surmise about Buddhism's variegated history, the Newar Guṃlā Dharma traditions point to the central propensity to ritualize spiritual ideals and to adapt buddha and bodhisattva traditions into the cultic and festival practices of specific localities. In Nepal, as in every other venue of Buddhism's successful missionization, rituals evolved to accomplish two crucial and related tasks: domesticate the *śāsana* and redistribute the laity's wealth to the saṃgha.

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40. This largesse was formerly so great that the Vajrācāryas had to hire farmers to carry their gift loads home.

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