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Vajrayāna Traditions in Nepal

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Introduction

The existence of tantric traditions in the Kathmandu Valley dates back at least a thousand years and has been integral to the Hindu–Buddhist civilization of the Newars, its indigenous people, until the present day. This chapter introduces what is known about the history of the tantric Buddhist tradition there, then presents an analysis of its development in the pre-modern era during the Malla period (1200–1768 CE), and then charts changes under Shah rule (1769–2007). We then sketch Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism’s current characteristics, its leading tantric masters,¹ and efforts in recent decades to revitalize it among Newar practitioners. This portrait,² especially its history of Newar Buddhism, cannot yet be more than tentative in many places, since scholarship has not even adequately documented the textual and epigraphic sources, much less analyzed them systematically.³ The epigraphic record includes over a thousand inscriptions, the earliest dating back to 464 CE, tens of thousands of manuscripts, the earliest dating back to 998 CE, as well as the myriad cultural traditions related to them, from art and architecture, to music and ritual.

The religious traditions still practiced by the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley represent a unique, continuing survival of Indic religions, including Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna forms of Buddhism (Lienhard 1984; Gellner 1992). Rivaling in historical importance the Sanskrit texts in Nepal’s libraries that informed the Western “discovery” of Buddhism in the nineteenth century (Hodgson 1868; Levi 1905–1908; Locke 1980, 1985), Newar Vajrayāna

tradition in the Kathmandu Valley preserves a rich legacy of vernacular texts, rituals, and institutions.

*Historical Background: Licchavi (459–780 CE)
and Post-Licchavi Eras (900–1200 CE)*

Beginning with Sanskrit inscriptions dating from the fifth century CE, the large mid-montane Himalayan Valley called “Nepal” has been a vibrant cultural center where both Hindu and Buddhist traditions have flourished. What is called “Nepal” today is the modern nation-state that was formed after 1769, when the Shah dynasty of Gorkha district expanded across the region, conquering the Valley city-states and making Kathmandu its capital.

The earliest cities and religious monuments of this Valley were built by people who were ruled by those calling themselves *Licchavis*. They were progenitors of the Newars, the earliest attested ethnic group of the Valley, whose name derives simply from the early place name of the Valley. Newars speak a non-tonal Tibeto-Burman language called “Newari” in the Euro-American world, but referred to by Newars as *Nepāl Bhāsā*, using Sanskrit terminology, or *Newā: Bhay* in the spoken vernacular, or *Newā* in the latest fashion. This language has been thoroughly influenced by Sanskrit vocabulary, especially in the technical terms imported from the Indic traditions.

This Valley from its first historical records was a Himalayan trade and pilgrimage center, and later a refuge for Buddhist monks (and others) migrating north, especially in the wake of the rapid decline and fall of the great monasteries in the Gangetic Plain following the Muslim conquest of North India. By this time, monasteries in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan became centers of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna culture. Even before this time, and increasingly afterward, Tibetan monk-scholars visited Nepal⁴ to obtain initiations, Sanskrit manuscripts and, in some cases, to confer with Nepalese *paṇḍitas*. There have been many Newar Buddhist scholars from then until the present day who read and utilize Sanskrit, making it an important literary and religious language for the indigenous elite. Some notable *paṇḍitas* and poets up through the modern era also composed works in Sanskrit. Manuscript veneration, archiving, and copying grew in importance. Tibetan historical and hagiographic sources provide additional information about this outpost of Indic Buddhism, its history

over the last millennium, and the diffusion of traditions in both directions, that is, between the Kathmandu Valley and centers of Tibetan civilization.

The Newar saṅgha elite's familiarity with Sanskrit, and especially the use of Sanskrit mantras and religious terminology, explains the existence of the many hundreds of Buddhist manuscripts rendered in a Sanskrit–Newari format.⁵ While the virtuoso ritualists, adepts, and scholars used Sanskrit texts to guide their ritual practices, tantric meditations, musical compositions, or philosophical studies, they also redacted relevant Indic works into their own language and composed treatises in it as well.

The earliest attested historical records⁶ for the Nepal Valley begin in mid-fifth century CE in the Sanskrit inscriptions by kings who titled themselves Licchavi. These indicate that Nepal was part of the northeast Gangetic Plain cultural region. Rendered in high Sanskrit and Brahmi script, they record the existence of a hundred settlements (mostly villages [*grāma*]), a caste-ordered society, and twenty named *goṣṭhī*, which are social institutions dedicated to specific, often religious, purposes.⁷ Licchavi society was ruled by Hindu kings who are recorded as supporting brahmins and temple institutions, as well as Buddhist *vihāras*. There is only one inscription⁸ that may contradict the terse report by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, around 640 CE, that these traditions coexisted harmoniously, with sanctuaries located side by side.

The Licchavi inscriptions also reveal continuity and connections between the Nepal Valley and the traditions of monasticism and patronage that originated across the Gangetic Plain going back to the time of the Buddha. Among over two hundred recorded inscriptions, there are references to monks and nuns enjoying support by prominent local merchants and caravan traders.⁹ The only saṅgha specifically mentioned is that of the Mahāsamghikas.

These inscriptions also indicate an early formation of Mahāyāna culture. Monastic precincts reveal verses of praise addressed to Śākyamuni and other Buddhas, as well as shrines to the celestial bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Samantabhadra, and—most frequently—Avalokiteśvara. The names of thirteen *vihāras* are cited. The Buddhist donative formulae found in the Valley are similar to those at sites across South Asia, including the practice of monks making offerings for the welfare of their parents.¹⁰ Also cited are donations of stūpas, images, and lands to *vihāras*, in several instances by nuns, as in the name of one text, the *Kinnari Jātaka*.

Unusual for ancient Indic Buddhist monasticism, however, was the custom of monks in Nepal's Licchavi monasteries being assigned

responsibility from the maintenance of law and civic order in settlements built around the monasteries and on lands donated to them.¹¹ If a criminal (thief, adulterer, murderer, etc.) under monastic jurisdiction is apprehended, one inscription allows “the noble community of monks” residing in the prominent Śivadeva Vihāra to take possession of the miscreant’s “house, fields, his wives, and all his wealth. . . .”¹²

The presence of the term *śākya-bhikṣu* likely indicates that there was a Mahāyāna presence in the early saṅgha.¹³ The term *vajrayāna* is found only once and in fragmentary form in the known corpus of inscriptions during the reign of the powerful Amshuvarman (ruled 605–631), but it is on a shard that allows no scope for serious speculation. The term *Vajradhāra* is found in a long hymn praising Śākyamuni and a group of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas.¹⁴ A recent study of the Licchavi inscriptions has suggested the presence of a “Sukhāvātī cult” in ancient Nepal. However, the evidence is merely a hymn praising Śākyamuni with a group of bodhisattvas; but this may be read just as a term of praise, not as the name of the cosmic Buddha of the later Vajrayāna cosmology.¹⁵

The conclusion about this period for this study is that Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley seems to have been typical of the culture area of north-east Indian Buddhism of the late Gupta period. It was a location where Mahāyāna Buddhism was established, and where the development of a widespread Vajrayāna tradition, by 700 CE, was not yet evident.

After the Licchavi era, there are no epigraphic records for another four hundred years, a curious lacuna. Historical data so far discovered¹⁶ comes exclusively from art objects and the colophons of texts that have survived and that modern textual scholars have culled for basic information (Petech 1958; Petech 1984). With this record still being assembled, to date there has been no comprehensive effort to analyze in a systematic manner the vast archival holdings of texts extant in the various libraries, much of which has been microfilmed or, more recently, digitally scanned; nor have art historians, much less scholars of Buddhism, assembled or comprehensively analyzed the cumulative set of material objects that can illuminate the Buddhist culture that produced these expressions.

Tibetan Sources on Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism

The Tibetan sources contain accounts of eminent monks and *siddhas* from the lowlands (e.g., Atiśa in 1041; Jñānakāra in 1054; Vanaratna c. 1425) who

transited Nepal to reach points in Tibet, as well as a series of Tibetans who traversed Nepal to reach the great centers of Buddhism in the Gangetic region (e.g., Marpa in 1065; Rwa Lotsava in 1076; Khyrin po in 1090; Dharmasvāmin in 1226–1234 and 1241–1242). While the number of Tibetans traveling south declined greatly after 1200, Tibetan monks and *siddhas* continued to visit Nepal from this time onward into the Malla era, and then right up to the present.¹⁷

What is clear from the existing accounts is that tantric teachers in the Kathmandu Valley were sought out as charismatic and authoritative masters of major Vajrayāna traditions, and that they gave tantric initiation to whomever they felt worthy. Ron Davidson has concluded that the *mahāsiddha* Marpa received his major teachings in Nāropa's lineage from Newar and Indian masters resident in the town of Pharping, located in the southwest of the Kathmandu Valley, in the eleventh century (2005, 146); he also highlights other credible Tibetan sources that have Sanskrit texts being translated into Tibetan in the Kathmandu Valley with Newar Sanskrit Buddhist pandits involved (126). In exposing the history of the career of the southern Tibetan Ralo Dorje drak (1016–1072), Davidson also provides a wealth of new information on Newar Buddhism then, as found in Patan: a depiction of this city as a Buddhist paradise, “a residence of scholars and *siddhas*” (130); the spiritual guidance granted to Ralo from a Newar householder named Kunda Bhāro, who was both a *Bajrācārya* and “a titled aristocrat with landed estates . . .” (141). The Newar master¹⁸ bestowed on him tantric teachings centered on Vajravārāhī and Vajrabhairava; he also gave him the initiation of the *vajra* and *vajra*-bell. Empowered to perform rituals, Ralo became the family ritualist of a prominent Newar merchant named Chandra Bhadra.

This account's image of Kunda Bhāro's monastery is clearly “a lay-based institution,” with the presence of wives and family figuring in the account. Indeed, this type of institution has also been shown in a palm leaf manuscript translated by K. P. Malla for Ukū Bāhā in Patan that describes how monastery funds must be allotted “for the children and wives of the monks . . .” (1990, 18).¹⁹

The Ralo biography also states that a Newar named Mandzu-lingpa was the abbot at Nālandā in this era, for Ralo studied extensively with him when he ventured to the famous Indian monastery and took ordination (Davidson, 138). Once additional Tibetan sources are brought into this arena, the medieval history of Newar Buddhism will be clearer still.²⁰

What is certain is that the Kathmandu Valley had become a major regional center of the late Indian Buddhist world, and Vajrayāna traditions—texts, art objects, and ritual practices such as initiation rites—crossed through the ethnic lines of Newars and Tibetans. There were Tibetan monasteries at Svayambhū and Bauddha where the celibate monastic traditions continued, institutions where Newars interested in this spiritual path could be ordained. Thus, after the Indian Buddhist holy land was lost for teachers and pilgrimage, Himalayan Buddhists now had to organize their own Buddhist societies based upon their inheritance of the Indic cultural resources.

Evidence from the Textual Archives

The genres the extant texts can shed light on the history of post-Licchavi Buddhism. Over the last 150 years, these collections were spread across the world, from Kathmandu to Japan, from India to Europe; to date, there has never been a systematic examination of the totality of attested texts. For its heuristic value, we offer here (and document in Appendix 1) an analysis of the colophons surveyed by Petech (1958). The number of early, extant Sanskrit texts copied by Newars found in Sakya, Tibet, is noteworthy, a confirmation of active religious exchange that also included art and artisans (e.g., Lo Bue 1985, 1988; Petech 1958, 99). A thoroughgoing aggregate accounting of the Buddhist texts copied in the Valley would provide one means to assess the popularity of “working texts” over the time span from 998 until 1479 CE.

What do these works provide as evidence for surmising the nature of the formative era of Newar Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna culture? There are the expected narratives concerning the life of the Buddha, the *Lalitavistara* (extant 1036 CE), as well as collections of rebirth stories such as *Avadānakalpalatā* (1302 CE), and the *Mahākarmavibhaṅga* (1410 CE). Some of the great works explicating the nature of cosmic Buddhahood that are attested include the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (1039 CE, 1065, 1066, 1082, 1093), *Gaṇḍavyūha* (1166 CE), *Kāraṇḍavyūha* (1196 CE) and the *Ārya-Amoghapāśa-Sūtra* (1360 CE). Another major text emphasizing the bodhisattva life was the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (1078 CE).

What were the works of which the most copies were made? These would be the great, earliest works of Mahāyāna philosophy, *Prajñāpāramitā* (998 CE, 1008, 1015, 1069, 1071, 1093, 1120, 1148, 1164, 1165–2, 1166, 1200, 1246, 1253, 1284, 1395), and then the important

AQ: Since all other figures are cited in the text, it is necessary to cite Figure 3.1.



FIGURE 3.1 Buddhist text from the library of a Newar householder.

All images in this chapter have been photographed by Todd Lewis.

pan-Asian work of ritual protections, the *Pañcarakṣā* (1063 CE, 1138, 1140, 1155, 1192, 1247, 1282, 1374, 1384, 1386, 1389, 1470, 1476, 1479). Both of these works have been the object of a recent study by Jinah Kim (2013) on the illustrated Buddhist manuscripts of Pāla-era India and Nepal. Kim shows that the Vajrayana tradition was being grafted into the local textual scribal traditions with tantric images inserted into these venerable, and central, philosophical and apotropaic texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Other texts focusing on mantra recitation were the *Ārya-Uṣṇīṣavijāya Nāma-Dhāraṇī* (1099 CE), the *Vasundhārā Dhāraṇī* (1123 CE, 1429), and the *Nāmasaṅgīti*. The *Kriyāsamgraha*'s presence was found after 1216 CE (then, 1217, 1252).

The extant Buddhist tantras were, in order of the dates in their colophons: the *Mahāmanthāna Bhairava Tantra* (1180 CE, 1084), a *Sādhanaśamuccaya* (1216 CE), the *Vajrāvalī* (1220 CE, 1429), and the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra-pañjikā* (1297 CE). There are also many Hindu tantras in this collection,²¹ giving a clear indication of the pluralistic context in which Buddhism developed. However many problems there are in interpreting this record of extant texts,²² they do help to establish what constituted the general shape of the textual corpus that the Malla-era Buddhists had in circulation among their scribes and archives.

*Historical Narrative: Early Malla
Nepal to 1495*

The Kathmandu Valley has always been shaped by its regional and geographical contexts, as well as its connections to centers of civilization in regions in every direction. What is certain is that the regional formation of Buddhism was undergoing significant innovations amidst profound political changes. The great centers of Indic Buddhism to the south were fallen or in steep decline, as travel to remaining outlying Buddhist sites across North India was risky. Only with the triumph of the Mughals (1526–1857) would stability and prosperity in the subcontinent leave the Himalayan region in peace. To the north, the polities of central Tibet were also changing, sometimes violently, under Mongol interventions; highland Buddhist institutions accrued growing secular power, organized by monastic networks loyal to lineages begun by great scholars. The Gelugpa school eventually consolidated central power by the seventeenth century.

In Nepal, the long silence of inscriptions ends with all the markers of major political formation and cultural activity. A group with the surname Malla consolidates power in the foremost city Bhaktapur; the rise of other major unified settlements, notably Patan and Kathmandu, is also clearly attested. Ancient sanctuaries from the Licchavi period endured: the Svayambhū stūpa on its western hill, the Paśupati temple to Śiva, and the Chāngu Nārāyan temple on its eastern hill. These small city-states possessed Buddhist *vihāras*; their urban spaces were built around monastic courtyards, with palace precincts ornamented with temples to the great gods of the Indic pantheon and brahman officials, their boundaries walled and pierced by gateways.

The rule of Bhaktapur king Sthiti Malla (1367–1395) consolidated power, especially in the aftermath of invasions and natural disasters, and is reputed in later histories to have done so, in part, by enhancing the Hindu factions in Newar society. His grandson, Yaksha Malla (1408–1482), decided to divide his realm among three sons, and henceforth determined that his descendants would be Malla kings ruling from the three small city-states: Bhaktapur, the most Hindu city; Patan, the most Buddhist city; and Kathmandu, mixed but more Buddhist than Hindu, and with a profusion of Buddhist merchants.

A major trauma to Newar civilization occurred in 1349 CE, when the Kathmandu Valley suffered a destructive raid by the Bengali Sultan, Shams ud-Dīn. After looting the precious metals and temple-monastic

treasures, the invaders committed atrocities and set the cities ablaze; the great Buddhist center, the Svayambhū stūpa, and the great Paśupati Śiva temple were also plundered and desecrated. Thus, in the next centuries, Newar civilization had to be materially restored, and at just the same time, its Buddhist cultural foundations—with Buddhism to the south fallen—needed to be redefined.²³ Three texts reflect just this new development, and remain central to the formation of the Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna Newar Buddhist culture that endures until today.

Gopālarājavamśāvalī

Centered on the history of kings, this text was compiled during the reign of Jayasthiti Malla (1382–1395), probably by his court astrologer in Bhaktapur (Vajracarya and Malla 1985). It covers events that occurred from 1057 to 1389 CE. This text, written in an unpolished Sanskrit, records significant events, such as the invasions of the country, intrigues by local petty-rulers, and major buildings constructed under royal patronage. It is also interspersed with reports about down-to-earth happenings in the realm, from famines to epidemics, earthquakes to unusual weather, weddings to staging of court dramas.

While it is at times difficult to recognize names of places and people based on modern usage, the *Gopālarājavamśāvalī* is a key source of Kathmandu Valley history. The author's individual voice sometimes breaks through, but the content seems to have been subjects that were of interest to the royal palace of Bhaktapur: mainly concerned with the kings, their courtiers, and their sponsorship of building projects and religious donations.

One of the *Gopālarājavamśāvalī*'s main interests is the donations to the Paśupati temple of Śiva, a protector of their realm, and its mention is recurrent. Also indicative of the nature of Jayasthiti Malla's religious identity are entries noting his donations to and his wife's going in a great procession to worship Viṣṇu at the Chāngu Nārāyana temple (Vajracarya and Malla 1985, 162), and together performing a *Lakṣmī vrata* and taking tantric initiation from a brahman in 1379. There are also records of ritual offerings made to Svayambhū and at the Bungamati Lokeśvara festival. The text notes in one place that the king “is like an incarnation of the virtuous Rāma” (133); in another his scribe pronounces that “He was an incarnation of Buddha, blessed with the grace of Svayambhū in the Kali Yuga, as well as an incarnation of the eight *Lokapālas* . . . of all sentient beings”

(131). Such was the reality of Malla royalty situating themselves amidst the two Indic religions in their realm. Another text composed in the Valley at about this time (Uebach 1970, 13–15), the Śaivite *Nepālamāhātmya*, contains a section about pilgrimage to Svayambhū, and makes the following observation, “Monks live there who have left their descendents and relatives and enjoy the bliss of knowledge [*jñānānanda*], and who are dedicated [only] to beholding the Buddha” (Brinkhaus 1980, 281).

Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha

A text in verse that was created in Nepal by a Newar pandit in the Malla era, the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* is based on the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, a Sanskrit Mahāyāna text written almost a thousand years earlier. With Newar traditional opening and concluding chapters (I and XIX), the unknown author reframes the text and introduces themes such as the Ādi Buddha that resonate with those in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*. As noted in Tuladhar-Douglas’s treatment of this Newar text,²⁴ the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* features seventeen central tales²⁵ recounting a series of compassionate exploits of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, with other nested tales inserted; it is a “retelling” of the earlier work, “adapted for a different historical context, using the skillful means best suited to its own time and place” (2006, 116). Large portions of the *Bodhicaryāvatara* are also inserted in two chapters; the salvific work of Avalokiteśvara in the hells and among non-humans is the focus of separate chapters, covering all domains in the Buddhist wheel of life: hells, hungry ghosts, asuras, yakṣas, animals (including worms in sewage), heavens, and the human domain, including students! The narrative arrangement as stories inserted that suddenly switch into frames to hear from previous Buddhas and visit pure lands is a feature that makes it consistent with the Buddhist cosmology in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* (see later discussion in this chapter).

Mahāyāna doctrines highlighted include the *pāramitās*, the supreme rewards of donations to the saṅgha, and the possibility of rebirth in Sukhāvatī. A recurring theme is the practice of the six-syllable mantra, the *ṣaḍakṣarī vidyā*, as “the essence of Avalokiteśvara,”²⁶ as is the practice of other “methods and *samādhis*, . . . *dhārāṇīs*, *vidyās*. . .” There is also the recurring promotion of one particular ritual, the *uposatha vrata*. This is a distinctively Newar ritual and ritual genre, unknown elsewhere in the Buddhist world in its form, designed to be performed by householders on

the Buddhist holy days. It is still the most common householder ritual in the Newar Buddhist tradition.²⁷

Devotion to Mahāyāna sūtras, especially the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, is especially lauded, as is the meritorious act of building stūpas and organizing chariot festivals. The text ends with verses exhorting the power of *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* recitation to help in securing worldly prosperity, including its ability to bring good luck, protect children, safeguard ocean voyagers, promote political stability, and ensure rainfall. This text²⁸ has doubtless been the basis of local Buddhist masters composing many local adaptations of Avalokiteśvara narratives, and these characteristically laud and promote the performance of this aforementioned *uposatha vrata*. The most important of these drawn from this text is the *Simhalasārthabāhu Avadāna*.

Of special note for reckoning the inter-religious history of the later Malla and succeeding eras are chapters introducing, and subjugating, the Hindu gods. In the third chapter, the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* conveys a cosmology that identify all reality as, in fact, the body of Avalokiteśvara, with all the gods emanating from it: Maheśvara from the eyes, Viṣṇu from the heart, and so on.²⁹ It later has Śiva ask the bodhisattva just how they should act given this reality, and he assigns them and all the Indic divinities realms and tasks. They also are told that in the Kali Yuga, Avalokiteśvara will reside in the Formless Realm, Brahmā will rule the Realm of Form, and Viṣṇu will rule the Realm of Desire, whereas Śiva will be worshiped only by “deluded people.” The celestial bodhisattva then exhorts all the deities to help the unhappy and confused people, and to inspire them by taking up the path to realization.

Another chapter has Avalokiteśvara provide spiritual guidance to Bali, the demon who was trampled by the dwarf *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Engagement with the major Hindu gods includes having Śiva and Pārvatī ask for religious instruction, an encounter that ends with Avalokiteśvara predicting their future attainment of Buddhahood. This subordination of Hindu deities and traditions is especially significant in understanding the text’s context, and its role as a resource for Newar Buddhists in framing their relationships with Hindu kings over ensuing centuries, a topic we will revisit.

Svayambhū Purāṇa

Another strand in the development of post-Licchavi Buddhism was a tradition that made the strong claim that the Kathmandu Valley itself is a sacred

Mahāyāna land made habitable by tantric *siddhas*. The formative text for subsequent Newar Buddhism is one that is usually titled *Svayambhū Purāna*.³⁰ It is a fully Newar text that has over one hundred attested copies extant today, the earliest dated back to 1558.³¹

The content of this text is central to defining the Newar Buddhist tradition for at least the past five centuries. Asserting its origins as the discourse of Śākyamuni during a visit to Nepal while sitting near the great stūpa, this text recounts the Buddhist origins of the Valley as a hierophany of the ultimate reality or Ādi Buddha, whose presence is indicated by a flaming, jeweled lotus in what was then a lake. The text asserts that this site was subsequently visited by a series of Buddhas of former ages of the world. What is the most significant in the Newar reading of this account is that this lake was finally drained by the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī³² who arrives “from Mahācīna”³³ to manifest the Kathmandu Valley by cutting open the southern enclosing mountains with a cut of his sword. Having opened this newly fertile, divine land to settlement by his disciples, he instructs them in modes of living and religious practice. Later in the text, after other interventions in Nepal and India, he is said to leave his mortal remains in the Valley, while his divine form returns to Wutai Shan, in China.

Several of the final chapters recount the visits of various Indic *siddhas* to the Valley.³⁴ The text relates the narrative of Dharmasrīmitra, a scholar-professor at the great monastery Vikramaśīla, who was famous for his lecture on the central mantra in the *Mañjuśrī Nāmasaṅgīti* (Figure 3.2). But one day when advanced seekers asked him about the text’s “inner meaning,” he could not answer and set off to seek the assistance of Mañjuśrī at Wutai Shan in China. When he broke his journey early on to rest in Nepal, Mañjuśrī (also called Mañjudeva) discerned his quest and appeared to him as a farmer who had yoked a lion and tiger to plow his fields. When Dharmasrīmitra asked him for directions, Mañjudeva told him he would give them to him in the morning and offered him shelter.

While lodged in the house of the plowman, who is also referred to in this text as “Bajrācārya Mañjudeva,” Dharmasrīmitra overhears the master explain the inner meaning of the *Mañjuśrī Nāmasaṅgīti* to his two wives. When he begs Bajrācārya Mañjudeva for an initiation into the practices associated with the text’s mantra, his wish is granted. He is initiated into the *dharmadhātu maṇḍala*, is taught the bodhisattva vows, and has the *Mañjuśrī Nāmasaṅgīti*’s mantra explained to him in full.

Mañjudeva then commands that Dharmasrīmitra return to Vikramaśīla and promises to visit him one day to ascertain the nature of his spiritual



FIGURE 3.2 Malla-era stone sculpture of Nāmasaṅgī, Jana Bāhā.

understanding. When Mañjudeva comes there disguised as a beggar, Dharmaśrīmitra first ignores him, and later claims that he had not noticed him. As a result, he goes blind; even after repenting, he remains blinded as the fruit of his bad karma, but is told that his “eye of *prajñā*” can reveal all things. From this time, presumably due to subsequent attainment, his name is changed to Jñānaśrīmitra.

A second key figure in the later *Svayambhū Purāṇa* is Śāntaśrī. He at first is described as a monk who later took initiation as a *Bajrācārya*, then concealed the flame of Svayambhū and erected a stūpa over it. Afterward, he erected a stūpa on a nearby hill to enshrine the remains of Mañjuśrī. As a result, the land was blessed and was very auspicious for the observance of dharma and tantric practice. When an evil king arose and sought his guidance, Śāntaśrī taught him to honor the local holy sites, especially the two great stūpas, and to perform the *uposatha vrata*. When a famine arose, Śāntaśrī performed a *nāga* ritual using *sādhana* and maṇḍala to cause rainfall, ending the Valley’s suffering. After this, he was also known as Shantikar Ācārya. Later, he renounced entering final nirvāṇa, and sat



FIGURE 3.3 *Bajrācārya* and patron.

suspended in the state of *vajrayoga samādhi*, residing in a cave near the Svayambhū stūpa, where he still stays hidden in a refuge from which he will re-emerge to aid humanity when the Dharma declines in the world.³⁵ (See Figure 3.3.)

The *Svayambhū Purāṇa*,³⁶ thus, is a work simultaneously of Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna Buddhism, Newar ethnic origins, and a narrative of Newar Vajrayāna legitimacy. Like many *Purāṇas* devoted to the Hindu gods, the text contains long sections denoting how a series of local sites became sacred Buddhist places, at river *tīrthas*, mountains, caves, and other notable places.

The details of precisely when and why the Mañjuśrī legend was first localized in the Kathmandu Valley are unclear, although further study of the cross-named figures in the text might provide a basis for a more precise reckoning of its composition. A refocusing of Buddhist identity on the Valley is likely related to the closing down of the once-thriving silk routes that linked Buddhist traders and pilgrims, as Islamic states spread and Muslim diaspora merchants came to dominate these lucrative mercantile networks linking India to central Asia, and points beyond. Nepalese Buddhist monks, merchants, and monasteries, once connected to this international world of Indic Buddhism, were cut off from it.

The old centers of authority, both the institutions and the charismatic teachers, were in disarray. Facing this, the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* invokes a Mahāyāna pattern of revelation centered on Mañjuśrī to identify Newar home territory as a sacred zone that dates back in time, even before Śākyamuni. No need to travel a whole year to reach and return from China's Wutai Shan—the Kathmandu Valley now offered a similar realm of revelation, sanctity, and access to the great bodhisattva's grace.

These texts as a whole present the emergence of Newar Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna tradition in the context of later Indic Buddhist history, spanning the Indus-Gangetic region. Just as Nepal is a direct descendent of the artistic traditions that were found to its immediate south in the later Pāla-Sena regions, so do its texts reflect this former connection: the mass appeal of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the form of popular devotion to celestial bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Tārā (S. Dutt 1962, 389), and the virtuosi in a small minority concerned with a great variety of Vajrayāna texts, doctrines, and meditation practices. Yet this tantric elite exerted a formative influence in the new Buddhist culture, designing the rituals that were performed in the Buddhist monasteries, their temples, and the homes of their devotees. These Indic *Bajrācāryas*—some monks, others free agents—served as gurus, healers, and artists.³⁷ Their presence is evident in the literal handiwork of the many extraordinary illustrated manuscripts created in Nepal in this period (Kim 2013).

Texts highlighting Mahāyāna *bhakti* teachings are among the earliest attested in the Valley, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*; significantly, each contains chapters concerned with Buddhist *pūjā* and its rewards. Their concern with ritual signifies their applicability to Buddhist communities, and it is clear that the saṅghas in early Malla Nepal had adopted this inheritance. They focused on celestial bodhisattvas and the bodhisattva ethos, while its elite absorbed tantric *sādhana* traditions, its saṅgha serving the householder community with rituals built on tantric theory as the medium.³⁸ Collections of *jātaka* and *avadāna* were made that redacted the heroes to be bodhisattvas, not Śākyamuni, in line with the local domestication of the Mahāyāna tradition.³⁹

The establishment of Buddhist temples to these bodhisattvas in the new Newar cities created the need for an attending priesthood and the development of proper ritual procedures to order the community's connections to them. The welter of ritual guidebooks that were copied and composed in subsequent centuries and survived in the Kathmandu Valley

collections bears witness to this extensive development of rituals in the Newar tradition.

By the time that the Valley's polity had developed into three city-states, a common central Buddhist tradition had developed around each city's localizations of the celestial bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Figure 3.4). Begun first in the earliest center for "Red Avalokiteśvara" in the small town of Bungamati, the kings in Patan wrested this tradition into their domain; decades later, the kings of Kathmandu found that its Buddhist pandits had located another native Avalokiteśvara image, this one white, outside its own town walls. Based on the Indic texts containing narrative traditions about this bodhisattva, such as the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* and *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*



FIGURE 3.4 Stone sculpture of Avalokiteśvara, late Licchavi era.

discussed earlier, Newar scholars melded the textual precedents with site-specific legends. What probably began as a cult to a local rain god in the Licchavi era developed as the localization of the most popular universal Buddhist divinity (Locke 1979; Owens 1989). While the exact historical unfolding of this remains unclear, what is clear is that in the towns of Patan, Bungamati, and Kathmandu, and then in other leading Newar towns, temples, priesthoods, land endowments, and festivals became focused on this divinity.

The early Malla kings in each polity made religious connections and participated in these Buddhist traditions, despite the fact that they and their Brahmanical courts came to control the political life of the Valley and established temples to the major Hindu gods. They saw the wisdom in joining in the devotions with their Buddhist majority populations, and the Buddhist leaders seem to have accorded them legitimating gestures in return. The saṅgha leaders of the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition also developed original ritual practices that they invented to manage the temple-centered festivals, and applied them to other areas of life as well, especially individual Buddhist life cycle rites, a topic to which we will return.

Historical Narrative: The Era of the Malla Three Kingdoms (1482–1768)

As the Valley fissured politically after 1495, the three petty kingdoms/city-states were ruled by Malla who, though related, went into battle with each other periodically, and competed jealously among themselves for prestige. This often was contested in acts of conspicuous religious piety, especially at the major temples and stūpas that remained common focal points of devotion.

With its wealth growing from profitable trade with the Mughal Empire to south, and central Tibet to the north, Newar civilization underwent a cultural efflorescence. The abundance of wealth garnered in this era underwrote the cultural vitality evident in the later Malla era (1495–1768). Newar artisans and builders created magnificent art and architecture across the Kathmandu Valley (Pal 1974; Slusser 1982); local writers composed treatises, poems, and dramas, while manuscript copyists were so employed as the establish one of the greatest archives of literature in Asia, especially in libraries of Sanskrit manuscripts (Burnouf 1844; Hodgson 1874).⁴⁰ Hindu and Buddhist elites contended to express the nature of local

religious identity; constructions and restorations soon became abundant in the now extensive historical record. The Newar religious revitalization that followed was certainly rooted, in part, in the Newar elite's wish to install religious sanctuaries for deities—Hindu and Buddhist—whose roles would be to protect the Kathmandu Valley's sacred territory and its citizens, and to show its leaders as pious devotees.

The same vitality and prosperity were applied to other cultural domains as well. Hindu and Buddhist Newars—kings, priests, merchants, and commoners—maintained an almost continuous yearly round of festival observances for their society. Likewise, their priests arranged complex rites to mark all significant events in an individual's lifetime: from conception to long after death, in celebration and in mourning, rituals have long been integral to the Newar lifestyle.

The context of the formation of Newar Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna tradition up to the present day occurred in petty kingdoms that were evolving to be more inclined toward the various forms of “Hindu” culture, as brahman officials, new Hindu temples, Rāmāyana theatrical performances,⁴¹ tantric ascetics, and Indic law were in the ascendancy and foremost in royal patronage (Slusser 1982; Bledsoe 2004).⁴² This development was certainly related to the migration of brahmins, pandits, and other virtuosi from the Hindu kingdom of Mithilā located to the south, in what are today the northern portions of Bihar and Bengal. This region had influenced the Nepal Valley, both for good and for ill, since 900 CE (Slusser 1982, 45–56), but as it came under the sovereignty of Muslim states, refugees moved north into Nepal, where independent Hindu states remained. Cultural forms and practices found in Malla Nepal show this unmistakable effect, most clearly in the use of Mithilā language at court, as well as in the import of theater traditions and poetry that have been preserved in the Valley archives.⁴³ Just as the political landscape changed and the new independent Malla rulers needed legitimation, these migrants provided the cultural expertise to shift the religious character of the Kathmandu Valley more toward Hindu rule and brahmanical traditions.

There is a wealth of materials that suggest how brahmanical orthodoxy, caste norms, and new assertions of Hindu identity were being articulated in the newly independent Malla royal courts of Bhaktapur, Patan, and Kathmandu. At the palace centers of these city-states, each Malla king proclaimed his allegiance to Śiva-Paśupati in the ancient temple located on the upper Bāgmati River, and to Viṣṇu at the ancient center in Chāngu



FIGURE 3.5 Statue of Bhupatindra Malla.

(Figure 3.5). The various rulers made repeated donations, as recorded in the *Gopālarājavamśāvalī*.

Another Malla innovation was to adopt Talegu, a form of the goddess Durgā favored in the Mithilā culture area, as their own family protector deity. In each capital one can still see their large, ornate palace temples that towered over the old city landscapes; each had active, well-supported Hindu priests who performed a regular cycle of rituals, most extensively during the fall festival of Dashara/Dassain. Spatially as well as figuratively, all citizens in the city were placed under her protection, and this, in the Indic ritual imagination, entails obligations. Prominent groups seem to have been obliged to take part in this new devotional enterprise, including

two Buddhist merchant castes, the Tulādhars and Kansakārs. Each community was required to supply ritual dancers and horn players (respectively) when the annual rituals for Talegu were being performed in the palace, a relationship that informants thought went back to the Malla courts. While it is uncertain when Buddhist householders in Kathmandu were first required to take part in this worship of the Mallas' protectress, the practice continued into the twenty-first century.⁴⁴

The second case study is Newar *Bare* caste and its relationship to the Malla royal courts through the cult of the royal *kumārī* (Allen 1975). It was only from these communities that prepubescent girls could be recruited to serve as living embodiments of the goddess for a host of palace rituals.⁴⁵ Whether these tasks of serving the palace were taken as a burden or an honor, the attempts to integrate the Buddhist community into a Hindu cult and court were inevitably dissonant to the Buddhist community at large.

In addition to expressing their identity as a Hindu state protected by Śiva and Taleju, the Malla-era redacted *purāṇas* reflect the sectarian direction of this era. As the Vaiṣṇava tradition grew in significance through the Malla period, influenced by movements in Bihar and Bengal (Brinkhaus 1987, 78–79), these provided a counter myth to the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* about the Vajrayāna-infused Buddhist religious identity of the Kathmandu Valley itself. Attested to have been extant in 1504 CE, but with its first articulation thought to be centuries earlier, are stories about Kṛṣṇa and his son, Pradyumnā, in the Kathmandu Valley. Accounts extol the sanctity of the Bāgmati River, and relate that demons dammed up the river, forming a lake; after his son slew a demon guarding the dam, Kṛṣṇa then released the river, breaking open the demon dam with his discus.⁴⁶ When the demon Virāda tries to resist, several accounts have Kṛṣṇa pinning him down by placing Śivaliṅgas on his body. Additional episodes relate, in standard *purāṇa* form, how holy places in the region's established religious geography came to be (Brinkhaus 1987, 10).

The other Hindu texts composed in Nepal in the Malla period that recount this story—*Nepālamāhātmya*, *Himavatkhanda*—are strong evidence of Malla royalty attempting to consolidate a more orthodox Hindu identity.⁴⁷ The former text contains three passages that express the classical mode of religious contestation in South Asia: the ontological acceptance of other divinities, but under the higher, totalizing reality of one's own

ultimate reality.⁴⁸ The *Nepālamāhātmya*'s mention of Valley pilgrimages⁴⁹ directs Śaiva devotees to visit Buddhist shrines, particularly Vajrayoginī in Sankhu, a “Kāruṅikeśvara” temple in Patan, and then Svayambhū. Yet these places are overlain with a superior, preexisting, presence of Śiva, a sage in this text states to the Buddha, “This country was created by Śiva . . . in this the best of lands, at the confluence of the Vāgmatī and the Maṇimatī, honor Śiva’s dharma and erect a liṅga . . . and he did set up the *liṅga Kāruṅikeśvara* [there] . . .” (Brinkhaus 1970, 277).⁵⁰ As Horst Brinkhaus pointed out, this text belies the cliché popular in earlier scholarship, and omnipresent in popular literature about it, that religious harmony and syncretism is the timeless record of inter-religious relations in the Kathmandu Valley.

The Malla palace and court dramas give strong testimony of the primary religious focus there being Hindu, in a formulation that is largely Vaiṣṇava in content, but with Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu always, in the end, being subordinated by Śiva and Devī. Not only were court-affiliated playwrights active in writing and staging over forty known dramas, records indicate that several Malla kings penned their own dance dramas (Malla 1982). A few attested plays that enact the very narratives of Hindu gods making the Kathmandu Valley from the new texts just discussed.

While the religious figures who offered theological innovations are as yet unknown, their effects are clear in these dramas as well as in new texts, such as the *Nepālamāhātmya*, which declares in one place, “with a positively martial spirit” (Malla 1982, 7) that Viṣṇu and Śiva are identical, and also introduces a story of Viṣṇu declaring that a brahman sage (*muni*) named Nemi should now be the protector (*pāla*) of this sacred Valley, explaining the origin of its name place: Ne[mi]-pāla → Nepāl. Paintings illustrating aspects of this story were made in Hindu *mathas* in Bhaktapur, and were on display in rest houses and other movable media.

This attempt to insert another foundation into Newar civilization, as we will see, was not an anomaly; but it indicates how brahman *paṇḍitas*, patronized by the royal courts, challenged the Buddhist cultural world and the Buddhist community, subtly contradicting their definition of the Newar homeland. Other paintings dating to this time also suggest the subordination of Buddhist reality to Hindu theology, which found expression in the paintings of the incarnations of Viṣṇu, with the Buddha shown among the group of ten.

Another action that can be read in terms of contestation with local Buddhism was the Malla rulers' continuing support for Śaivite Hindu ascetics, the Nāthas. A group that may have its roots in the ancient Pāśupata and medieval tantric Kāpālīka orders (the latter are attested in late Licchavi Nepal), they mark their distinct identity by their practice of slitting their earlobes to accommodate the large earrings that are worn after initiation, and hence the Nāthas are also known as Kānphaṭas ("split ear"). The Nātha texts recount that the yogin Gorakhnātha, a pupil of the tenth-century sage Matsyendranath, and identified as an incarnation of the god Śiva, wandered across regions of India, gathering converts and granting initiations.

The popularity of Gorakhnātha and his order in Nepal reached a pinnacle at the time of Yakṣa Malla (1428–1482), when images of his foot imprints were placed at sites across the Valley, and his yogis were recipients of prominent royal donations, such as ownership of the great rest house in the central city called Kāṣṭamaṇḍapa, the building from which Kathmandu gets its name. This Nātha presence was at the center of a tradition of overlaying a tantric Śaivite identity over every Buddhist sacred center in the Kathmandu Valley. Exponents proposed a new history of the Buddhist bodhisattva of Bungamati-Patan and identified the deity previously known as the Red Bunga-dyaḥ-Avalokiteśvara with the Nātha yogin Matsyendranāth (Locke 1973), backing this claim with a new backstory of his local settlement.⁵¹ This relabeling and assertion of subordination were extended by Yaksha Malla to the Kathmandu realm, as the Jana-Baha Avalokiteśvara became "White Matsyendranātha." This Śaivite challenge was extended to many sacred sites that had the name "-nātha" appended to them: "Paśupati-nātha," "Svayambhū-nātha." This suffix and the name Matsyendranātha are usages that Newar Buddhists resisted, and most still do not use them to this day.

Finally comes the issue of Hindu law and ritual orthopraxy. In the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*, there is a recurring expression, noted from the Bhaktapur court, that the Mallas were "adherents of the *Dharmaśāstra*" and were inspired by the norms of Rāma. Just as the new Taleju temples provided a new superior vertical place for Durgā in the Newar city, the Mallas enhanced the horizontal order of their society with gradations in their expectations of proper caste observances, and brahmanical purity orthopraxy, moving from the center outward. In the Newar walled towns, the ceremonial area of the palace and brahman-dominated court became

the purest sector of the domain, just as, moving outward, the town walls constituted a pollution boundary, beyond which the very lowest castes, rendered “unclean,” had to dwell.

The Emergence of a Malla Vajrayāna Buddhist Counterculture

Malla cities in the Kathmandu Valley expanded their boundaries and were enriched by new constructions in architectural monuments, and in expressions of religious art in every medium. The record suggests that Newar Buddhists were confronted by lavish new Hindu temple constructions and partisan cultural innovations, and so undertook their own revitalizations to counter expressions of Hindu superiority, while conforming to their new cultural expectations in their caste norms.

It was primarily Buddhist merchants and artisans who through their patronage took actions to defend their Buddhist identity and tradition. They built dozens of new Buddhist monasteries that came to define the expanding city spaces, employed Buddhist *Bajrācāryas* to adapt rituals to mirror those favored by the local Malla court, and celebrated with new vigor the festivals—long established and newly created—to express their Buddhist identity. Exactly who the Newar Buddhist leaders were in the early Malla era who composed and “trans-created” new texts and traditions remains largely unknown, but we can attempt a rough sketch of their innovations in literature and material culture. This dialectical opposition pattern may not yet completely explain why the two new Newar Buddhist texts were composed, but it makes understandable why they were accepted, read, and copied, and why they formed the basis of a new localized vital Buddhist identity. The major counter-Hindu/pro-Buddhist elements in these two texts bear summarizing in Table 3.1.

Thus, with these texts Newar Buddhist masters and leaders pushed back in their own ways to assert what to them was the natural order of the religious field, placing the Buddha and the Buddhist cosmos in the superior position, admitting the great gods of Hindu theism as part of the world of beings in *saṃsāra*, but in a clearly subordinate position. Images that have never been attested to elsewhere in the Buddhist world drew on, or were inspired by, both of these texts. The following four icons—cast in metal, sculpted in stone, and painted in hanging scrolls—depict the major

Table 3.1

<i>Svayambhū Purāṇa</i>	<i>Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha</i>
Kathmandu Valley and pre-Valley lake, the site of cosmic Buddha hierophany of Ādi Buddha	Avalokiteśvara cosmology, in which all Hindu gods are merely emanations
Relics and grace of imminent celestial bodhisattva Mañjuśrī	Submission of Śiva and Pārvatī to take refuge in Buddhist refuges
Gaṇeśa and the <i>nāgas</i> assist Mañjuśrī in draining the lake	Defines Kali Yuga as one in which Śiva will be worshipped by deluded people
Founding <i>siddha</i> still in existence, providing means to control <i>nāgas</i> , rain, and life in Valley	
Newar homeland blessed, very auspicious for the observance of dharma and tantric practice	Lauds <i>uposatha vrata</i> as central Buddhist rite, a local tradition
Newars are descended from Mañjuśrī's disciples, hence innately, primordially Buddhist	

AQ: Please provide titles for Tables 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4.

landmarks in the Newar Buddhist landscape and express a clear vision of Buddhism's religious preeminence:

1. *Śākyamuni's return to Lumbini* (Figure 3.6): As the sage travels by road to reach his home territory and the place of his birth, the entourage forms that includes the usual monks, but also has the Hindu gods Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, and others attending to him as protectors and acolytes.
2. *Śrīstīkantha Lokeśvara* (Figure 3.7): A depiction of the revelation found early in the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* that portrays Avalokiteśvara as the ultimate reality, denoting Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the entire pantheon as emanations.
3. *Mañjuśrī drains the Lake* (Figure 3.8), creating the Kathmandu Valley; as in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*, this moment depicts Gaṇeśa and the *nāgas* cooperating in the enterprise.
4. *Hariharihārivāhana Lokeśvara* (Figure 3.9):⁵² An Avalokiteśvara superiority myth based on the story of a battle between Garuḍa and a *nāga* leads to the former calling upon his lord Viṣṇu to save him; hearing



FIGURE 3.6 Buddha Returns to Lumbini.

this, the *nāga* calls upon his lord, Avalokiteśvara, to whom Viṣṇu submits. An icon shows this resolution, with the bodhisattva atop Viṣṇu, who rides Garuḍa, above the *nāga*. The vertical placement, with feet each lower bring, makes a clear statement about Buddhist superiority.

This array of imagery, combined with the new texts, provides the dialectical reply of Buddhists to the Malla Hindu depiction of the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, Śiva as supreme reality, of Kṛṣṇa as the real actor who drained the lake that opened the Valley, and of Matsyendranāth as the real identity of Avalokiteśvara. Each has remained popular in the Kathmandu Valley until the present day.

There were two Malla-era vortexes of interaction wherein the Vajrayāna Buddhists expressed their relationship with the theistic Malla kings. Both caused the palace officials and kings to make major commitments to attend and be patrons of their major Buddhist constructions, rituals of renewal, and festivals. Given that the majority of the population then was almost certainly strongly supportive of Buddhism, and that their own wealth was drawn in a major way from the taxes on Tibetan traders, who



FIGURE 3.7 Śṛīstīkantha Lokeśvara.

were almost all prominent Buddhists in their city-states, the Malla kings had every reason, religiously and materially, to show inter-religious support. This pattern is evident in two major events that recur periodically in Kathmandu, where wealthy merchants, Vajrayāna rituals and Buddhist *paṇḍitas* staged dramatic public interactions.



FIGURE 3.8 *Mañjuśrī Drains the Lake.*

Samyak

One major festival that links the Newar saṅgha to Malla royalty is *Samyak*, likely a survival of an ancient Indic tradition called *pañcavārsika*. Noted by Chinese pilgrims across the central Asian and Indic world, this special event entailed kings joining with merchants to make extraordinary offerings to the monks and their monasteries every five years (*pañca-varṣa*). In Kathmandu, the entire Buddhist community organizes by caste and neighborhood to perform the myriad tasks involving the procession of large, human-occupied Buddha images, the feeding of the saṅgha members from the entire Kathmandu Valley, and, in Kathmandu, the personal appearance of the king (Figure 3.10). Here, then, was a classical scenario that played out across the Buddhist world: a king was given special recognition and legitimation by the Newar Buddhist saṅgha leaders, in return for his patronage and recognition. In Kathmandu, the festival is now celebrated every twelfth year, as well as whenever individual families step up to sponsor their own *Samyak*, at substantial cost. These individual *Samyak* festivals could be done at any time. While one text suggests that this tradition goes back to 1312,⁵³ what is clear is that wealthy individual sponsors were numerous in the late Malla era and onward. In effect, then, Buddhist merchants and their *Bajrācārya* priests of Kathmandu regularly compelled



FIGURE 3.9 *Hariharivāhana Lokeshvara.*

the kings to witness and contribute to their Samyak events, over forty times since 1500 (Shakya 1979, 67–69). This festival of display and donation still exists as a major celebration in Kathmandu⁵⁴ and Patan.

Patronage and Restoration at Svayambhū

The record of patronage and restorations at Svayambhū provide a focal point for considering the nature of Newar Buddhism under Malla rule and in its pan-Buddhist context in this era. Just as the analysis of the Malla-era monastery (*bāhā*) will show it as a total architectural creation mirroring the historical Mahāyāna to Vajrayāna development of



FIGURE 3.10 Samyak images of Dipankara Buddha.

the tradition, so can the cumulative expression of the later renovations and adaptations to this great stūpa do so as well, leaving it today, as it has been for the past 500 years, a statement of tantric Buddhism. The Mahācaitya also has been a site where the Tibetan and Newar traditions have intersected, most notably whenever the monument has been damaged by invaders or lightning, or when the central pillar inevitably rots and needs replacement. With the studies by F. K. Ehrhard (1989, 1991) on the Tibetan sources, and Alexander von Rospatt (2009) on the Newar records, the intricate and ad hoc negotiations for each intervention to this stūpa, averaging once every fifty years, offer insight on the state of local and regional Vajrayāna traditions, as well as the communities that step up to engage in the costly, but prestigious, enterprise. During the period of the Three City-States after 1595, up until 1758, the Malla kings granted permission only to Newars from Kathmandu to renovate the stūpa. The inscription recording the staging of the 1605 restoration authorized by Śivasimha Malla of Kathmandu (ruled 1583–1620) expresses the manner in which Newar Buddhists cooperated with the king, who is made to officiate at the rituals of reinvigoration and dedication. When the work was initially completed, the king celebrated by making offerings to brahmans and sponsoring *homa* sacrifices, but lightning struck the stūpa and destroyed the upper portions, an event interpreted as an act of jealous wrath on the part of the Vedic god Indra. Praising the king's repetition of the necessary work up to the completion of the rites, as directed by the leading *Bajrācāryas*, the dedicatory inscription states: "Then, though kings think themselves capable of many works, even acting together they are not able to build a stūpa, which is the auspicious Embodiment of the Method [*vidhitānum*]. This one, which is four-faced and supremely auspicious, with its parts all bejeweled, was suddenly Self-Born all at once, because of Śivasimha."⁵⁵ The Newar Buddhists' relentlessness brought the ruler along the path of Dharma in their greatest festival, and in renewing their greatest monument from this time, until the end of the Shah dynasty.

Buddhist Building Initiatives

Newar Buddhists welcomed the independence of their city-state and the success of their own kings. They built up the areas between the two former towns, uniting them into one through the construction of new monastery courtyards linked by new lanes that met in neighborhood open centers,

each equipped with temples dedicated to Gaṇeśa, rest houses, performance stages, and stūpas paid for by their own family or caste contributions. The Newar saṅgha's population by this era established a central organization of major and branch monasteries living within the city walls.

The later Malla era is marked by the building of many new *vihāras*, as the wealth coming into Nepal from regional trade, especially trade with Tibet, underwrote both royal and Buddhist merchant patronage. While again the records for this remain largely unanalyzed *in toto* since John Locke's landmark documentary study (1985), the number of branch *vihāras* built since 1500 far outnumber those built before; there was, in fact, a surge in the construction of small branch monasteries, and expansions of existing *bāhās*, both upward and with fine arts embellishments, all under the patronage of the Newar upper class. Several examples⁵⁶ in Table 3.2 suffice to show the pattern.

The question that follows from these records is, inevitably, why the expansion? Now from the very beginning of Buddhism, the making of

Table 3.2

Main Monastery	Branch Monasteries	Date founded
Kwā Bāhā		1206
	Chusyā Bāhā	1648
	Hāku Bāhā	1650
	Jyoti Bāhā	
Takse Bāhā		1490
	Dagu Bāhā	1683
	Tekan Bāhā	1650
Lagan Bāhā		1380
	Wanta Bāhā	1486
	Ta Bāhā	1486
	Khālā Chen Bāhā	1676
	Kacā Bāhā	1678
	Na Bāhā	1690?
Tadhan Bāhā		1044
	Cidhan Bāhā	1539
	Pinche Bāhā	1590
	Pyukhā Bāhā	1546



FIGURE 3.11 Wooden gong being struck in Itum Bāhā.

monasteries (such as Itum Bāhā, Figure 3.11) as refuges for monks and nuns, supporting their spiritual practice, is praised by the Buddha as the “best of gifts.” This factor was doubtless well known in medieval Newar Buddhist culture. But a sudden increase in building branch monasteries could also have been related to an expansion in the saṅgha, such as to accommodate a rising monastic population in the form of wives, children, and patrilineage expansion.

It is clear that the final, and literal, “domestication of the saṅgha” occurred by the end of the Malla period, as the saṅgha by this time consisted almost entirely of married householders.⁵⁷ Being a Newar “monk” was no longer a voluntary association, but came to be defined—for all—by birth into endogamous castes that were known collectively as *Bare*⁵⁸ in Newari, but that were divided into groups with the Sanskrit surnames *Śākya* and *Bajrācārya*.⁵⁹ By 1850, this left only the local Tibetan saṅghas as communities into which Newars could seek ordination into celibate monastic life; in the twentieth century, modern Theravāda monastic traditions added to this diversity.

The legal and cultural press of Malla rulers and their brahmanical courts led both the saṅgha and the entire Buddhist population to conform to brahmanically normative caste laws. Acting in unison as a group was ideal for impression management outwardly, and to promote conformity

within the caste. Their elders and leaders transformed their traditions of monastic life and householder ritual activity, including extensive monastic landholdings.

The Development of “Buddhist–Brahman” Ritualism⁶⁰

Just as Newar Buddhists built new stūpas, monasteries, and images adorned in astonishing detail in wood, precious metals, and stone, so too did they skillfully craft new cultural performances, drawing on Vajrayāna doctrines, techniques, and practices. They inherited an immense wealth of later Indic Buddhist texts, rituals, and spiritual practices, and they applied them to the new sociopolitical circumstances.⁶¹

It is, in our view, essential to return to the sociocultural context of the later Malla cities to understand the distinctive pattern of evolution that determined the characteristics of Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism. In the city-states ruled by the Malla kings, to have access to the palace had great importance for nearly everyone: for merchants wishing to sell to the royal stores, supply building materials to palace builders, armaments to the army, or metal to the mint; for talented individuals hoping to offer their services (as scribe, advisor, ritualist, artist) in the palace; for access to officials in charge of land registry, for dispute resolution; and to promote one’s networking for influential friends—all this entailed relationships with high caste officials, and especially court brahmans. Thus, to succeed as this perennial arrangement swerved toward greater observance of the norms, axioms, and expectations found in the ancient *dharmasāstra* represented a challenge to Newar Buddhists.

Once they began appointing a *Bajrācārya* as “palace *rājguru*,” a person who guided the court in dealing with its Buddhist citizens, as well as in its involvement with prominent Buddhist rituals and restorations, the Malla rulers may have also, intentionally or not, gained an avenue of effecting their cultural goals among their entire polity, working through the *Bajrācārya* community networks that formed across their Kathmandu saṅghas. The promulgation of new rituals and practices to ensure good standing for the Buddhist priests at court could well have exerted a strong influence on how the Buddhists would react to conform with, and subtly resist, the Malla’s theistic activities.

This was best done by those known to be “from good families,” groups that made it plain that they adhered to acceptable standards of food choices

(with whom they ate, with whom they didn't); it required publicly recognized standards of symbolic cleanliness, and expressions of ritual refinement in the brahman-defined Indic mode.

While the exact historical factors that led Newar Buddhists to develop a set of *saṃskāras* in concordance with those in the brahmanical *dharmaśāstras* remain obscure, the fact is that only in Nepal did this development occur, as there is no textual or traditional Buddhist “press” elsewhere for Buddhists to organize their lives on these terms. Thus, the cause for these *dharmaśāstra* innovations must be of local origin and part of the Malla polity's matrix of new cultural ideals and social expectations. A large succession of rites created by *Bajrācārya* masters came to be universally performed for Newar Buddhist householders, with a clear and dual social function: to define their having high caste status while also sustaining strong Buddhist identity. Malla-era ritual *Bajrācārya* masters masterfully created standard brahmanical rites, such as the *homa* fire sacrifice (Figure 3.12), but in a Vajrayāna Buddhist modality. This means that householders sit for life cycle and worship rituals that use Buddhist ritual objects and call on the powers of the Buddhist cosmos, performed by members of the Buddhist saṅgha. Aligning their community in outward conformity with the ideal brahmanical life marked by *saṃskāras*, these virtuosos skillfully created an alternative identity using ritual, one that did not confirm its core theistic beliefs and yet did follow Buddhist tradition in generating worldly benefits and good karma.

A prominent example of this process is evident in the Ihi ritual of “Symbolic Marriage” for young girls, an Indic rite of passage. In the brahmanical performance, girls long before menarche are “married” to Viṣṇu, using the *byāh* fruit as symbolic of the deity. In the Buddhist reworking of this ritual, the girls are infused with *bodhicitta* (“the thought of



FIGURE 3.12 Painting with a *Bajrācārya* performing a *homa* ritual for patrons.

enlightenment”) symbolized with the same *byāh* fruit. They are now on the path to human marriage, while also affirming their Buddhist identity.⁶²

While the Newar saṅgha continued to have specialists whose focus was manuscript copying, it is evident that the performance of Vajrayāna rituals were also of special interest to some who called themselves *Bajrācāryas*. Ritual priests in early Malla Nepal had the texts needed to devote themselves to adapting Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna religious understandings and ritual technology to every human context: to build temples, hold festivals, and serve the needs of Buddhist families (Figure 3.13). This pattern of development may explain why Newar tradition seems to lack a strong philosophical/scholastic dimension.

What is carefully elaborated is the ritualism that expresses and interjects the Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna worldview into every conceivable juncture: for relating to deities, celebrating festivals, moving an individual through his lifetime, seeking the best afterlife destiny, and reaching nirvāṇa. Lacking in philosophical inquiry, the “genius” of Newar Buddhism lies in its pervasive orchestration of Vajrayāna rituals and teachings, which channel blessings, well-being, and—for those householders willing to practice—movement toward enlightenment.

For Newar *upāsakas* (devout laymen), their expression of distinct Buddhist identity was primarily effected via adherence to this ritually



FIGURE 3.13 *Bajrācārya* performing a house foundation stone ritual, dedicated to local *nāgas*.

centered lifestyle, support for their saṅgha, showing devotion to Mahāyāna saviors, and having faith in the *siddhas* who discovered the highest path. Ritual linked Newar householders to the saṅgha, and Newar Buddhism successfully adapted to the cultural milieu of small states ruled by Hindu kings. The maximum development of such Buddhist rituals for non-Bare Newars was accomplished for the Urāy,⁶³ a grouping of upper castes in Kathmandu. Since their mercantile activities brought them in regular contact with the royal courts, their moral and ritual lives had to conform to orthoprax brahmanical practices. To sustain their social connections with these rulers, protect their wealth, and express their high social status, the wealthy Urāy subjects depended, in part, on their demonstrations of ritual purity in an Indic framework, even if in a Buddhist modality. Among other Buddhists, they were generous, if at times ostentatious, patrons, sometimes competing with kings and Tibetan nobility to build or renovate major monuments.

Shah Era (1769–2006) to the Present: Vajrayāna and the Newar Saṅgha

Newar Buddhism suffered a serious decline with the conquest of the Valley in 1769 by a royal lineage of *parbatiya kṣatriyas* from the neighboring region of Gorkha. This led to further massive transformations in Kathmandu Valley society, as the divided polity of medieval city-states became the single capital region of the new nation. The modern Nepalese nation stretches across 500 miles of mountainous terrain, and the new rulers began far-reaching changes in many spheres.

The Shah royal court was established in the palace of the former Malla kings of Kathmandu. They wanted to secure the loyalty of Newar Buddhist merchants by supporting their trans-Himalayan trade. But they also sought to legitimate their rule based primarily upon their adherence to Hindu law shaped by the *dharmasāstras*; their patronage favored brahmans, Hindu temples, and related traditions; and their court propounded the doctrines that the Shah king was an incarnation of Viṣṇu who ruled a country protected by Śiva in the royally patronized temple of Śiva-Paśupati.

Shah policy took specific measures to undermine Newar Buddhist institutions, sanctuaries, and landholdings. It became increasingly difficult for the cultural life fashioned under the Newar Malla in the medieval

era to still be celebrated, and it was Buddhist religious traditions that suffered the most precipitous decline. Today there is no widespread doctrinal understanding of the most common rituals still performed. Few *Bajrācāryas* grasp even the most basic underlying philosophic assumptions or relate to the rituals beyond the procedural level of proper order and mantra recitations. Nonetheless, many of these traditions are so deeply embedded in Newar life that they continue to survive. Even though many observances have been lost in the last century, the vast cumulative tradition of Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna ritual remains one of the most distinctive characteristics of Newar culture.

Buddhism in modern Nepal was affected by the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by the Shah dynasty, hill *chettris* (Skt. *kṣatriyas*) who had unified the petty kingdoms across the middle hills, whose own state was found in the town of Gorkha. The Shah's partisan support of Hindu traditions, and their disestablishment of land tenure and other Malla laws that supported Buddhist monasticism and culture, undermined the material culture of Newar Buddhism on every level. By the end of the Rāṇā period (1846–1951), a century when a *kṣatriya* (Nep. *Chetri*) caste family seized control of the state, reducing the Shah kings to mere figureheads, discrimination against Newar language and rituals reached its peak.⁶⁴

The anti-Rāṇā movement for democracy in Nepal and anti-colonialist struggles in India throughout the first half of twentieth century brought new ideas into the Kathmandu Valley, and these affected the religious awareness of the Newar public. Newars, disenchanted with their older Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna traditions, helped bring a few leading Tibetan teachers to teach; they also underwrote the establishment of reformist Theravāda Buddhism in modern Nepal. Influenced by “Protestant Buddhist” groups such as the Mahābodhi Society in Calcutta, the newly imported Theravāda movement commented strongly against the older traditions of Vajrayāna ritual practice. Its exponents also offered clear philosophical expositions and accessible meditation practices (*vipassanā*) that appealed to many in the Newar middle class. Thus, just as a century of harsh rule favoring Hindu traditions had weakened the economic and educational foundations of traditional Newar tradition, the Theravādin reformists entered the marketplace of religious traditions in the Kathmandu Valley to draw away followers and patrons from the older Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna Buddhism maintained by the Newar saṅgha.⁶⁵ We will return to discuss the current state of the Newar Buddhist religious field in the final section of the chapter.

Newar Tantric Buddhism since 1950

Our portrait of Newar Vajrayāna tradition in the modern era uses the emic, or indigenous, categories that are used to define the tradition across the Buddhist world: the *triratna*, or “Three Jewels.” As prelude to this exposition of the Newar Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna understanding of the Buddha, Dharma, and saṅgha, we introduce the context, the contemporary Newar Buddhist community.

Organized in castes, the contemporary Newar Buddhist community combines a householder saṅgha and laity. Masters in the former serve the majority in several areas: as spiritual master teaching meditation; as priests performing rituals; as doctors using herbs and mantras to promote community health; as astrologers conjuring the best time for marriages and other events. The saṅgha of the Śākya caste do not serve as priests for other groups, only for their own monasteries; only *Bajrācāryas* do rituals for patrons. In the past thirty years, very few Śākyas or Bajrācāryas engage solely in ritual service, having other sources of livelihood.⁶⁶

The Newar laity community is ordered by caste communities, and is divided by religious loyalty, as indicated by choice of family priest. This social ordering is indicated in Table 3.3. The last name of each is titled after their traditional professions. Today, these names are rarely indicative of occupation, as there have been many new possibilities opened by modern education, especially in government service, development work, or the tourism industry.

The Three Refuges in Contemporary Newar Tradition

At the start of every ritual performed by a *Bajrācārya*, he performs a preliminary ritual called the *Guru Maṅḍala Pūjā* that has the patron take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and saṅgha. Characteristically, the meaning of these refuges can be understood in both the mundane and supramundane senses.

Buddha

The dominant conception of the Buddha is that of later Indic tradition: cosmic Buddhahood ordered by the three bodies of the Buddha schema; this conception finds universal expression in the Vajradhātu stūpas that possess

Table 3.3

Buddhist Castes	DUAL	Hindu Castes
Bajrācārya		Brahman
Śākya		Karmācārya
Urāy		Śreṣṭha
(9 sub-groups: Tuladhar, Tamrakar, Kansakar, etc.)	Jośī (astrologers)	(sub-groups: Pradhan, Maskey, etc.)
Citrakār (painters)	Jyāpu (farmers)	
Manandhar (oil pressers)	Nau (barbers), Kasai (butchers), Dhobyā (washermen), Damai (tailors)	Jogi (householders and former ascetics)
	Chamkala (sweepers)	

the *pañca buddhas*, with four iconographically distinct forms placed in a regular directional, with the fifth (Vairocana) understood as dwelling within.

The Newar understanding about the nature of ultimate Buddhahood, as codified in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*, can be summarized under a variety of themes expressed in this text. The manifestation of Buddha reality is conveyed in the concept of the Ādi Buddha, or *dharmakāya* Buddha. This reality explains the life of Śākyamuni as an incarnation of the Dharmakāya; the tradition understands Buddhahood as the self-realization (“*svayambhū*”) of Śākyamuni, who attained enlightenment through his own efforts. As with the image of the text’s teaching of a lotus manifested on the great lake, so, too, is Buddhahood present in the soiled waters of *saṃsāra*, an abode of *nāgas*. Just as this Valley was created by the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, it naturally became a realm where bodhisattva practices were cultivated. This identity, with its shrines encoding this understanding, was established and shaped in the religious landscape by a tantric master, an *ācārya* named Śāntikāra, as recounted in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* discussed earlier.

Other texts call this exceptional realm “*Nepāla maṇḍala*”; Newar tradition, thus, is rooted in the view that primal Buddhism existed in this Valley long before Śākyamuni.

Dharma

As is normative for traditional Buddhists across Asia, the understanding of Dharma is founded in moral practices and making merit through ritual offerings and pious donations. What subtle teachings the great philosophers taught in the monasteries or whatever theory of reality gifted Newar ritualists based their practices on, for most Newars “doing Dharma” has meant completing the ritual acts that tradition prescribed. This is seen in the legacy of popular stories in Newar culture that teach the law of karma and its effects.

A central view of Dharma is a conception of the universe that recognizes and reveres the living presence of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other enlightened beings (*siddhas*, *yoginīs*) and invokes their blessings. Newar Buddhists chant mantras and sing hymns of praise dedicated to them, as handed down from their tradition. For those who are most devout, including the *Bajrācārya* ritualists and those possessing initiations, following the “dharma” also implies access to a series of potent cosmic powers gifted to humans by these Buddhist saints in the form of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras.

The primary focal points of dharma practice in Newar tradition are *caityas* representing the cosmic Buddha, and images of bodhisattvas, with Avalokiteśvara by far the most important (Figure 3.14). These beings are present in this world, so immanent that they answer petitions from devotees with compassion in this world.

The typical Newar Buddhist also views these great beings not as abstract realities, but as having been established in the Kathmandu Valley landscape, with temples serving as their homes. Sacred landscape surrounds them, as mentioned already regarding the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*; the entire landscape of the Kathmandu Valley was made sacred as a manifestation of the ultimate reality, the *dharmakāya* of the cosmic Buddha. Most family stūpas found in monastic and family courtyards are in their form symbolic of this, with the greatest center of Newar Buddhism the stūpa on Svayambhū hill.⁶⁷

The bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara has also become a locally established divinity at two great centers where temples have been built in Patan and Kathmandu. In the latter case, an image signifying the bodhisattva’s local manifestation was found just outside the old town walls to northeast;



FIGURE 3.14 Modern stūpa based on the directional Buddhas in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala.

and this revelation led to a temple being built in Jana Bāhā, and an elaborate annual ritual cycle and chariot festival. Another instantiation of this bodhisattva's wish to be present in Nepal is associated with the towns of Bungamati and Patan; in the legends associated with the two temples in these towns, the bodhisattva is brought to the Valley from Kāmarupa (Assam), by emissaries skilled in tantric ritual. Here, too, there is an even more elaborate annual ritual cycle and a chariot festival that is held to honor this bodhisattva. It is significant that Newar Buddhists commonly use place names to refer to these celestial bodhisattvas: Bunga Dyaḥ (“the deity of Bungamati”) for the latter, Jana Bāhā Dyaḥ (“the deity [*dyaḥ*] of Jana Bāhā”) for the former.

This sense of localized divinity applies even to the previous incarnations of the future Buddha, whose exemplary lives were lived out locally. There was Mañicūḍa, a king who gave his life to assist those suffering from an epidemic in a distant land, whose kingdom existed in the vicinity of the old town, Sankhu. Then there was Prince Mahāsattva, among the most famous incarnations of the future Buddha, who sacrificed his life to save a litter of tiger cubs on a hillside outside the town of Dhulikhel, done to perfect his commitment to giving and bodily renunciation.

Newar Buddhists also admit the presence of other divinities that exist that are not strictly Buddhist; while the Buddhist pantheon is supreme, these other beings are powerful and deserve respect, and so they, too, are worshipped. As we have seen, the fact that bodhisattvas are called *dyaḥ*, just as the gods Gaṇeśa and Śiva are, is an important marker of religious perception. The Newar Buddhist understanding of “living according to the Dharma” entails the obligation to respect all divinities in their Valley through ritual service.

Saṅgha: The Logic of Ritual, the Arc of Valley Vajrayāna History

Unlike the monastic institutions of Tibet that fostered in-depth philosophical inquiry and vast commentarial writings, Newar monks produced few original contributions to Buddhist scholarship.⁶⁸ The Newar saṅgha's special focus was the performance of rituals drawing upon the deities and powers of the Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition. Like married Tibetan monks of the Nyingmapa order, the Newar *Bajrācāryas* came to serve the community's ritual needs, with some specializing in textual study, medicine, astrology, and meditation.

Lifelong ritual relations link householders to a family *Bajrācārya* priest, colloquially called *guru-ju* in colloquial usage. The ritual services provided are vast in scope, and the variations include Buddhist life-cycle rites (*saṃskāras*),⁶⁹ fire rites (*homa*), daily temple rituals (*nitya pūjās*), mantra-chanting protection rites, merit-producing donation rites, chariot festivals (*ratha jātras*), and tantric initiations (*abhiṣekas*). Some of these cultural practices were noted 1,500 years ago in India. For example, the ways Newars worship at stūpas today—with offerings and accompanied by drums and musical instruments—are similar to devotional scenes depicted at Sanchi. Another example is visible daily in Kathmandu's Itum Bāhā, where one can still see the ritual of marking time by a Śākya ritualist rapping on a wooden gong, a monastic custom noted in pre-Gupta India. In addition, during the Buddhist holy month of Gunlā, householders make offerings to a large, hand-copied *Prajñāpāramitā* text that is placed in a monastery, continuing “the cult of the Mahāyāna book.”⁷⁰ In these and many other traditions, Newars continue the cultural practices of later Indic Buddhism.⁷¹

Newar Monasteries: An Architecture of Vajrayāna Monasticism

More than three hundred *vihāras* (Buddhist monasteries) are in existence today in the Kathmandu Valley, the architectural form reflecting the evolution of Newar Buddhism as a Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna tradition. Each has two names; one is in Sanskrit, the other in the Newar language.⁷² The *vihāras* are categorized as the *mu-bāhā* (“main monastery”), each with satellite *kacha-bāhās* (“branch monasteries”). The large cities also have a much smaller but similar set of monasteries called *bāhi* and these, too, have *kacha-bāhi*.⁷³ But all Newar *vihāras* have a title that includes “*Mahā Vihāra*.”⁷⁴

In some *mu bāhās*, the saṅgha is made up only of Bajrācāryas; in others, there is a joint saṅgha of Bajrācāryas and Śākyas. In still other *bāhās*, there are only Śākyas in the saṅgha, who are independent from the Śākyas of the *bāhis*. In *bāhis*, the saṅgha is composed only of Śākyas.

Across the Newar settlements in the Kathmandu Valley and in some cities across Nepal,⁷⁵ the *vihāra* is a four-sided monastic building, built around an open courtyard. It is a brick and wooden structure, usually of two stories. Their foundation, walls, and pillars are brick; doors and windows are made of wood, many with intricate carving. Wooden struts

support clay-tile roofs. Defined by a ground floor plinth that is a foot or more above it, the courtyard is laid out with oiled bricks. Most have shrines known as *vajradhātu caityas*⁷⁶ installed at the center of the courtyard. Many *vihāras* have other caityas located there, the donations of local families.

The typical Newar *bāhā* has a main entrance that is ornamented by a tympanum; there are niche shrines immediately inside, containing images of the monastery guardians Gaṇeśa and Mahākāla. Opposite the entrance, and across the courtyard, is the main shrine building, which has two or more stories (Figure 3.15). On its ground floor is the *kwāpa dyaḥ*, usually an image of Akṣobhya or Śākyamuni Buddha, which is flanked by images of his two great human disciples, Maudgalāyana and Śāriputra. The tantric shrine above can only be reached by indoor stairs. This is the *āgama*, a ritual room open only for adults who have received the appropriate Vajrayāna initiation. There are usually elaborate woodcarvings adorning its outside windows, including another tympanum.

Only members of the *saṅgha* of each *vihāra* are allowed to enter into the ground-story shrine to perform rituals, but all individuals can view the *kwāpa dyaḥ* from outside when the doors are open. All *vihāras* in the Valley have been renovated periodically, but due to the decline of monastic landholdings and the prevalence of theft of the artistic masterpieces



FIGURE 3.15 Lagan Bāhā, with Avalokiteśvara temple and votive caityas in courtyard.

from them, few monasteries in the Valley still possess well-maintained and intact architecture.

Newar monastic architecture reflects the cumulative history of Indic Buddhism: a foundational, ground-level center to revere Śākyamuni and his disciples, in the *kwāpa-dyaḥ* icon and *caityas*; the presence of Mahāyāna-style *caityas* and maṇḍalas in the courtyard; and the final level, in the upper-story secret chamber, a Vajrayāna image and space for initiation-based *sādhana* practices open to initiates.

The Social Organization of the Newar Saṅgha

It has already been mentioned that *vihāras* are categorized according to the type of saṅgha that has its lineage located in the *vihāra*. Architectural differences are matched by differences in the saṅgha membership of those inhabiting them. The Newar saṅgha is divided into two parts, Śākya and Bajrācārya. Males born into these families become Śākya and members of Śākya saṅgha by obtaining the Buddhist ordination called *pravajya*; those born into Bajrācārya families become members of the Bajrācārya Saṅgha by obtaining the Vajrayāna initiation called the *ācārya abhiṣeka* after the *pravajya*.

The saṅgha of that *mu-bāhā* is also popularly known as a *bajrācārya saṅgha*. A few *mu-bāhās* are mixed, consisting of male Bajrācāryas and Śākya-bhikṣus as their members. All monasteries referred to as *bāhi* have saṅghas that consist of Śākya-bhikṣu caste members only. The Bajrācāryas are colloquially called “Gubhāju”; Śākya-bhikṣus affiliated with of *mu-bāhās* and *bāhās* are known as “Bare”; and the Śākya-bhikṣus connected with the *bāhi* are known as “Bikṣu Bare.” “Guruju” is the generic term used for all men in the Newar saṅgha.

Each saṅgha is organized according to age seniority and possession of tantric initiation. In some *vihāras* the first five, in some the first ten, in some the first twenty, and in some the first thirty saṅgha members are referred to as *sthāvira* (“elders”). Any male wishing to be promoted to the *sthāvira* rank must take the Cakrasaṃvara initiation. The use of this term thus shows the centrality of tantric tradition in the Newar. After a *sthāvira* dies, the eldest qualified junior member of that saṅgha is promoted into this rank. In the case of the Bajrācārya saṅgha, the seniormost *sthāvira* in each monastery is called *cakreśvara*. The senior-most *cakreśvara* in a city is regarded as *mūla-cakreśvara*. The committee of *sthāviras* in each *vihāra* is authorized to make decisions for its own saṅgha.

For the past two centuries, and likely for some back to early Malla times, some saṅgha members of each *vihāra* married and had children. In the twentieth century, wives of Śākya and Bajrācāryas are also regarded as Śākya-bhikṣuṇīs and Bajrācāryas, respectively. In practice up to the present, Śākya-bhikṣus of one monastery prefer to arrange marriages with Śākya-bhikṣuṇīs of other monasteries. Similarly, male Bajrācāryas of a monastery prefer to arrange marriages with female Bajrācāryas of other monasteries.⁷⁷

It is mandatory for the male children of Śākyabhikṣus to take Buddhist ordination in their respective *vihāra*; otherwise they forfeit their right and ability to worship in the monastery shrine.⁷⁸

Tantric Buddhist Ordination and Ācārya Initiation

Ordination is one of the main monastic activities in Newar Buddhist communities. It takes place as needed, that is, when there are enough young men who want to complete this passage of life ritual. In some *vihāras*, the saṅgha elders organize the ordination program; in others, an individual family will organize it when its sons come of age. A team of the *sthāviras* gives the ordination and then, typically, an *ācārya-abhiṣeka* initiation follows. Male children in both Śākya and Bajrācārya families become the members of their saṅghas by obtaining the *pravajya* Buddhist ordination (Figure 3.16). It has been well documented by scholars, entailing first (in local parlance) a *śrāvaka*-styled celibate ordination (usually taking four days), then Mahāyāna-styled initiation into what is referred to as the “bodhisattva saṅgha” in which they obtain release from Vinaya rules of celibacy.

Male children of Bajrācārya families obtain this same first ordination, but then do the second, the *ācārya-abhiṣeka*, in their father’s home monastery. After obtaining the *ācārya-abhiṣeka*, the new Bajrācāryas are trained in performing the most common ritual, the Buddhist *homa*, and from that time afterward they are empowered to perform it for patrons.⁷⁹ From this point onward, Bajrācāryas can follow their own inclination to pursue knowledge of other forms of ritual practice, including competency to do life-cycle rituals, make *maṇḍalas* of colored powder by hand with molds (Figures 3.17 and 3.18), or pursue tantric initiations.

Family Ritualist and Clients System

Each Bajrācārya family, until recently, had a circle of followers for whom its adult, initiated men performed rituals. The Buddhist family priest



FIGURE 3.16 *Bajrācārya* boy holding monastic staff and bowl, during *pravajya* ordination.



FIGURE 3.17 *Bajrācārya* makes maṇḍala with colored powders.



FIGURE 3.18 Making a Basundhara maṇḍala with a mold.

would come to homes at both happy (birth, marriage, etc.) and sorrowful events (sickness and death). Most of the major Buddhist practices are observed in the presence and under the guidance of the family Bajrācārya priest. At present, this Buddhist priest's work cannot suffice with a head of household's need to meet his family's material needs and the costs of education. Most Bajrācāryas have given up their priestly profession, as have their followers. Today, Newar householders depend on a small number of individuals who still know and understand the old traditions. The former *jajman* system now is largely defunct.⁸⁰

Regular and Tantric Rituals in Newar Monasteries

A daily ritual takes place in every Newar Buddhist monastery.⁸¹ Each member of the saṅgha performs the particular monastery's routine by rotation. The full traditional daily ritual takes place thrice in a day, at morning, at afternoon, and at evening, for the main shrine (*kvāpa-dyaḥ*). But today, only a few monasteries observe the thrice-daily ritual strictly. Saṅgha members used to recite several Mahāyāna sūtras and praising verses (*stotras*) jointly in all monasteries daily, and only a few still do so today. Most do this twice in a month; one on every eighth day of the bright half of a month (*śuklapakṣa aṣṭami*), and the other on every full moon day. Further,

an esoteric ritual, the *ca:re pūjā* or *aumṣī pūjā*, is conducted on the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the dark half of a month (*ca:re/aumṣī tithi*) for the secret shrine (*āgam dyaḥ*) in every monastery.

The yearly monastic observance is called *Samvarodaya Parva*, an esoteric ritual, observed on the waning tenth day of Paush month (*Paush Kṛṣṇa Dashami*). This ritual commemorates the accomplishment (*sādhana*) of Hevajra-Nairātmyā by the legendary *ācārya* Mañjudeva, who protected the Nepal kingdom in the past, as recounted in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*.

Each active Newar monastery holds a collective member assembly once in a year. At these gatherings, the *sthāvira* membership is updated and a feast is held.⁸² In Kathmandu, there are eighteen *mu-bāhās* (main monasteries), and these are grouped into three divisions according to their location in the city: uptown (northern), midtown, and downtown (southern). Each group conducts its regional assembly, known as *Puiṃ Ācārya Guthi*, once a year. During the *Puiṃ Ācārya* gathering, the newly ordained saṅgha members of each monastery will gain formal entry into the regional assembly. Similarly, they will be registered into the *De Ācārya Guthi* (“Country Ācārya Assembly”).⁸³

Finally, all saṅgha members unite to conduct a city assembly once a year, known as the aforementioned *De Ācārya Guthi*. The yearly assembly is conducted for two days. The first day is observed at the Shantipur tantric temple atop the Svayambhū stūpa hill; the next day it takes place in the home monastery of the eldest *thayepas* in the city. In an assembly closed to all outsiders, the senior-most *Bajrācāryas* perform a series of rituals, especially the *cāryagṭi* (Figure 3.19). It is followed by *dāna* given by the householders living proximate to the *bāhā*. Finally, the chairmanship of the local saṅgha is passed over to the next *Bajrācārya* according to a system of rotation through member families. On the final day, it is noteworthy that the entire assembly is served buttered-salt tea in the Tibetan style. Usually, it is a small group of *Bajrācāryas* and *Urāy* who undertake the responsibility for preparing and serving this tea.⁸⁴

Newar Vajrayāna in Modern Practice Buddhist Castes and Tantric Understanding

Particularly striking in the Newar tantric tradition is the acceptance of caste categories in ritual reckoning. The ritual texts avow that birth into a Śākya caste family is a necessary prerequisite for entry into the Newar



FIGURE 3.19 Senior *Bajrācārya* perform cāryagīti dance.

saṅgha and that rebirth into a particular human group reflects karmic retribution.

When the courts of the later Malla rulers shifted toward the cultural tide supported in the royal courts, which seem to have come under greater Hindu influence, administered by brahmans at court and the rule by Hindu law (*dharmaśāstra*), this affected the Buddhist community. To get along in business, foster political ties, and sustain “respectful” social status, the Newar Buddhist were pressed to observe pollution and purity norms to a degree found nowhere else in Asia. The Newar ritual masters seem to have made the best of this situation, adapting Mahāyāna principles and Vajrayāna practices to create new rituals that conformed to brahmanical temple practices and their long-established high caste *saṃskāras*, rites of passage.⁸⁵ Some, if not all, of the monasteries had their monks marry and reckon their sons to be in a monastic patrilineage, thereby closing off ordination as “monks” only to their male descendants, a pattern that continues to the present day. It is easy to imagine how changing the details of practice to ensure the survival of the Dharma, what the Mahāyāna tradition would celebrate as *upāya-kauśalya*, would have been a conscious ideal in the minds of ancient Buddhist monastic leaders.

Vajrayāna Life-Cycle Rituals

There are a host of ritual texts dating back over a century that outline to a great extent Buddhist life-passage rituals. These were composed to utilize the powers of Vajrayāna practice by its *Bajrācāryas* for the benefit of the Newar people. In this pre-modern context, what the Newar masters were doing was a form of medieval “engaged Buddhism,” skillfully adapting the faith to new times, using ritual practices in ways that applied the *triratna* to meet the daily life needs of a pre-modern community. In short, these *Bajrācārya* masters harnessed the powers of tantra to better the lives of practitioners, both in terms of curing diseases and maximizing worldly protections, and the new rituals provided Newar Buddhists with expressions of “cultural capital” that allowed them to flourish in the Hindu kingdoms of Malla and then Shah rulers.

The elaboration of Buddhist ceremonies in this community is truly immense: one widely used procedural handbook (Vajracarya 1980) on rituals lists over 120 “major” *pūjās*. The vast orchestration of such performances apparently goes far beyond the repertoire of Buddhist monks in

the last phases of Buddhism in the Gangetic Plains. Whenever this began, and given the paucity of understanding of the last phase of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the Pāla-Sena Kingdoms, it is difficult to know as yet just how many of the later Newar practices (purity practices, caste norms, ritual procedures, etc.) were adopted from points south, and which were of purely local origination.

Another twentieth-century ritual guidebook, the *Nepāl Jana Jīvan Kriya Paddhati*, comments on the background of the life-cycle rites that Newar *Bajrācāryas* still practice (Lewis 1994). In them, there are patterns of regularity: most life cycle and other rituals can be broken into core “units” that tend to be assembled in consistent structural patterns. This cumulative ritual tradition is so vast that even the best of priests must refer to ritual texts to do all but the most common *pūjās*. From the first passages of this text, the application of core Vajrayāna concepts is apparent. Conception is described in terms of tantric physiology, and the priest’s *sādhana* is often cited as the basis for the rituals performed. Generation of *amṛta prasād* (“ambrosia”) through the *sādhana*s that are part of the *Bajrācārya pūjās* became integral to a “medical-religious system” (Stablein 1978) that linked priests to laymen.

In the context of the brahmanically maintained Hindu traditions that gained increasing support in both the Malla palaces and among certain influential groups, Buddhist Newars have also combined many non-Buddhist strands of Indian culture with their own, fashioning both continuities and divergences from the classic Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna ideals.

The Newar Buddhist *saṃskāras* outlined in the *Jana Jīvan* manual closely follow the classical paradigms of Indian brahmanical tradition (Pandey 1969), marking the key points in a person’s life with Vajrayāna rituals that both empower and remove forces that threaten an individual’s transition, while eliminating any incurred pollution. These Buddhist *pūjās* follow many ancient brahmanical ritual procedures, but have been transformed with alternative Buddhist gestures (*mūdras*), incantations (mantras, *dhāraṇīs*), and meanings. We mention only several central traditions of ritual practice, like the narrative texts discussed earlier, that reflect the main outlines of Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism.

The *Guru Maṇḍala Arcana* Ritual

The *Guru-Maṇḍala-Arcana* (Figure 3.20) is a very common and popular ritual procedure, practiced early in the morning each day by *Bajrācāryas*



FIGURE 3.20 *Bajrācārya Chini Kaji performing the Guru-Maṇḍala-Arcana ritual.*

and Śākyas in their monasteries. *Bajrācārya* priests also perform the *Guru-Manḍala-Arcana* for their followers at the start of all rituals: in happy and as well as sorrowful occasions, from birth to death, as part of most rites and life-cycle rituals. It is performed at home, in the cremation grounds, and at all places. Every Newar Buddhist ritual commences with the *guru-manḍala-arcana*.⁸⁶ To follow its content is to grasp the fundamental terms of understanding the Newar Vajrayāna tradition.

The ritual begins with a salutation to one's gurus and ends with *lokapāla-bali* ("offering oblations to guardian deities"). It consists of a series of the ritual steps like taking a holy bath, purifying the body, overcoming all obstacles, discarding all non-virtuous deeds, protecting oneself, and reminding the disciple of cultivating the six perfections (*pāramitās*) along with their fruits, and the attainment of *samyaksambodhi*, complete enlightenment. To this end, the ritual falls into four modes, sacrificing one's own body, speech, and mind, as summarized here in four stages.

Pūjā Saṃkalpa: (Pūjā Materials on an Offering Plate)

Assemble a *pūjā* plate that contains water, flowers, incense, lamp, *tika* (red and yellow powder), food (rice, sweet, fruits), drinks (like cow's milk, spirits), and a thread-garland. All *pūjā* materials represent the five essential elements: earth, water, light, air, and space, and all of these denote the five sensual objects: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. The *pūjā* material denotes not only the totality of sensual objects but also all that the five sense organs can perceive, that is, through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, respectively.⁸⁷ Essential equipment by the ritualist include the set—bell, *vajra*, and rosary—that is utilized in relation to the *pūjā* plate and follower(s).⁸⁸ The *pūjā saṃkalpa* means to take a vow to sacrifice sensual objects; it is done to show the individual's strong determination to sacrifice all sensual objects for spiritual blessings.

Ratnamaṇḍala Niryātana: Offering the Ratnamaṇḍala to the Gurus

The *Ratnamaṇḍala* refers to the totality of creation, following an early Buddhist assumption about the world's cosmology.⁸⁹ The *Ratnamaṇḍala* is considered very holy and precious, like a jewel. The offering of it to the Gurus is regarded as the highest honor and sacrifice. A Buddhist disciple who has been initiated in the Vajrayāna esoteric practices devotedly offers

the *Ratnamaṇḍala* to the Gurus daily in gratitude for what he or she has learned from all the Gurus. It is also offered to the Gurus when seeking higher levels of tantric Buddhist practices. Offering the *Ratnamaṇḍala* shows great faith in one's Gurus. Similarly, the offering indicates dedication to lifelong Buddhist learning and practice.

Saptavidhānuttara Pūjā: *Sevenfold supreme offering*⁹⁰

There are seven steps in this supreme offering. This is not an ordinary but supreme offering because it is performed only by those beings who wish to become a Buddha in the future. The seven steps of the offering are as follows:

1. *Vandana*: reverent salutation to the Three Jewels—all Buddhas, Dharma, and saṅgha—by body, speech, mind;
2. *Pujāna*: offerings for all the senses;
3. *Pāpadeśanā*: confession of demeritorious actions in body, speech, and mind and vowing not to repeat them;⁹¹
4. *Anumodana*: expression of appreciation for all virtues possessed by the *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, bodhisattvas, and the buddhas;
5. *Adhyeṣaṇa*: requesting all bodhisattvas to turn the wheel of law in the future, taking future rebirth;
6. *Bodhicitta-utpāda*: causing the altruistic mind to arise, cultivating the *pāramitās*, seeking an enlightened mind;
7. *Puṇya-Pariṇamana*: dedicating the merits, accumulated by doing the above six steps of supreme offering, to become a Buddha in the future and for the welfare of all sentient beings. Thus, the goal of this rite is to make people strongly seek the ultimate goal in life: to become a Buddha for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Lokapāla Bali-Arcana: *Offering oblations to Protective Deities*

In Tantric Buddhism, *Bali-arcana* means sacrificing one's own sensual organs and offering objects related to each sense, an act that has the spiritual benefit of dispersing attachments in the individual's mind.⁹² The second meaning is to sacrifice/dedicate oneself and one's worldly objects for the welfare of other living beings. Offering oblations to guardian deities means offering worldly objects to all the sentient beings who are around him- or herself, putting into action the vow earlier to become a Buddha for the welfare of all the sentient beings.⁹³

Rituals for Elders

Newar Buddhists do large-scale rituals to strengthen the life force and make massive quantities of merit for their elders when they reach certain ages. At the age of 77 years, 7 months, and 7 days, the family will do the *bhīma ratha jamko*, which includes a small chariot procession for the elder, and for which a *Bajrācārya* will chant from the *graha māṭṛkā* section of the *Graha Sādhana* text. He will then perform an elaborate pūjā on a graha *maṇḍala*. At 80 (or 88) years, 8 months, and 8 days, there is the *devaratha jamko*, for which the *Bajrācārya* does a special ritual dedicated to the Buddhist earth goddess Basundhārā. Finally, when an elder reaches 90 years, 9 months, and 9 days, families do the *Mahāratha Jamko*, which features the *Bajrācārya* priest doing a ritual on the *maṇḍala* of Uṣṇiṣavijāya, the goddess who resides within the stūpa (Figure 3.21). As it is typical to have a painting or repoussé metal image made for use in these special life-cycle occasions, many are found in the museum collections of Newar art.

Death Rituals

As is true elsewhere in Asia, the Newar Buddhist tradition provides strong responses to the dead. The actions taken for the dead by the Newar *Bajrācāryas*, including a host of mantras and *dhāraṇīs* chanted immediately afterward, and during the Newar Buddhist *śrāddha* rituals, are also based on the *Durgatipariśodhana Tantra*. There are some rites done immediately after death, including the drawing of a *maṇḍala* on the floor near the place of death, which directly steadies the mind of the dead person to go on to a next life in good realm (*sadgati*) as soon as possible. There are other rituals that make merit (*puṇya*) and cause it to be dedicated (*puṇyapariṇāmanā*) to the name of the dead. The family *Bajrācārya* acts and utters the common sentiment that this merit be accumulated so that the dead individual “may get eternal happiness in the realm of Sukhāvātī.” Later the family offers items owned by the dead to the *Bajrācārya*, in part to lessen the attachment of the deceased individual’s consciousness to its former residence, and also to make another meritorious donation to a saṅgha member. Both help the dead one (sometimes referred to as a *preta*) to pass out from the intermediate state, and go on to its next life.

In the aforementioned ritual guidebook for modern *Bajrācāryas*, the *Nepāl Janajīvan Kriya Paddhati*, there appears an explanation and outline



FIGURE 3.21 Metal sculpture of a stūpa, with the goddess Uṣṇiṣavijāya.

of the Newar Buddhist life cycle rituals. It details the extensive agenda for Newar *Bajrācārya* ritualists who perform Buddhist *śrāddha* rituals for their *jajmans* before cremation, to end the initial mourning period, every month on the lunar death anniversary date during the first year of mourning, then yearly on the death anniversary date. During this ritual, male heads of households don Buddhist sacred threads for the only time in their lives, make *piṇḍa* (rice ball) offerings, and, at the conclusion of the rite, deposit all offerings either at a riverside *tīrtha* or in a monastic depository.

What is striking, and apparently not dissonant to Newar Buddhist minds over many generations, was the fact that this ritual—even in modern ritual guidebooks—adopts Vedic terms and assumes a Vedic after-life metaphysic. What is remarkable, and evidence of Nepal's creative ritual tradition, is how the modern Newar Buddhist *śrāddha tradition* has been meshed clearly with the tantric text that otherwise guides Newar Buddhist death rites, the *Durgatipariśodhana*, and the worship of a form of Avalokiteśvara also unique to Nepal, Sukhāvātī Lokeśvara.

Yet it is difficult to ignore the congruence with the brahmanical construction of the *śrāddha*'s instrumental purpose of the "Ten *Piṇḍa* Rite." As presented in the *Nepāl Janajīvan* text:

Why do the *dasa piṇḍa*? On the 1st day, *piṇḍa* is for the head; the second day for the eye; the 3rd day for the nose; 4th for the ears. On the 5th day, for the heart; 6th for hand; 7th for stomach; 8th for sense faculties/ organs. On the 9th day for the leg; 10th day for hair, nails. If the ten are completely done, [the dead one] will be complete in manifesting [new] body parts. (Bajracarya 1973, 28)

What is abundantly clear, despite this formulation, is that this Newar Buddhist *śrāddha* is not a classical brahmanical rite in any significant sense (Figure 3.22). This Newars' ritual assimilation uses the doctrines and vocabulary of Vajrayāna Buddhist mantras, utensils, and framing rites (such as the *gurumaṇḍala pūjā*). It makes merit by building *caityas* and has the family dedicate it to the dead. It draws upon the ideal of Buddhist universalism by offering nourishment and merit to any other hungry ghosts. The Kathmandu rite documented in this study emphasizes the role of one of the 108/360 manifestations of Lokeśvara, Sukhāvātī Lokeśvara, which is prominent in Newar tradition. This celestial bodhisattva is asked to sit on *kuśa* grass and is placed directly in front of the *Bajrācārya* priest; he



FIGURE 3.22 *Bajrācārya* performing a Buddhist Shradha ritual. The householder wears a Buddhist “sacred thread.”

witnesses the *guru maṇḍala pūjā*, receives offerings, and remains for the various and long *Durgatipariśodhana dhāraṇī* recitations on behalf of the deceased. For the “Sixteen *Piṇḍa* Rite,” performed at riverside sacred sites, Sukhāvati Lokeśvara is similarly honored. The *śrāddha* rite’s instrumental orchestration is quite explicit: it seeks this bodhisattva’s compassionate, salvific actions on behalf of the deceased.

Here again, evidence regarding the singular Newar Buddhist practice suggests that strong cultural and political forces were at work in Malla Nepal that led to *śrāddha* practice being adopted by most Newar Buddhist castes.⁹⁴ In pursuit of this originally brahmanical desideratum, Newars spend vast time and resources on their *śrāddha* rituals. Thus, this Buddhist tradition plays to both sides of the Indian question of whether one’s destiny is based strictly upon the individual’s own karma from past and present lifetimes, or whether rituals can overrule this and manipulate rebirth destiny. Like most Indic religious systems founded on the doctrine that the cosmos is governed by karmic law, Newar tradition naturally looks to death as the critical time when causal mechanisms operate. It is not surprising that the very highly ritualized Buddhism of the Newars has applied Vajrayāna ritual expertise to this time as well.⁹⁵ So proficient were their after-death tantric rituals in the popular imagination that until recent times most otherwise high-caste Hindu Newar families regularly called *Bajrācāryas* to perform their death rites.

Vratas

The *vrata* is a package of practices devoted to a particular deity focused on a maṇḍala, a ritual form common to the Indic traditions. The main Buddhist *vratas*⁹⁶ are focused on Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Tārā, Vasudharā, Dharmadhātu, Lakṣacaitya (100,000 clay caityas), Mahākāla, and so on; the main contents of Buddhist *vrata* entail following the eight moral precepts (*aṣṭaśīla*), a discourse on ten misdeeds, a recitation of narratives from the *vrata-kathā* (from sūtra, *jātaka*, *avadāna*), and making meritorious *dāna* (offerings). Followers observe a day-long *vrata* on a particular date, according to the deity, under the guidance of priest. It is observed either once a year or once a month for a year or two years (or more). *Vratas* are observed in residence courtyards, residences, monasteries, *tīrthas*, and other pilgrimage sites.

Buddhist Temple Visits and Pilgrimage

Visiting *vihāras* and temples is a frequent and central practice. Many people visit temples and monasteries near their residence daily. Every eighth day of waxing half of each month and full moon day are considered the most auspicious days for these visits. People visit stūpas/*caityas* and monasteries systematically for the holy month of Gumlā.

There is also a tradition of devotees visiting all the Valley's main bodhisattva temples for a month of Kārttika. Occasionally people plan a pilgrimage program of visiting all the monasteries in a city on a single day, singing devotional songs while accompanied by musical instruments and makings offerings. There are also pilgrimage practices directed to the conjunction of rivers (*tīrtha*), natural wells/ponds, hills, mountains, and so on. Taking a meritorious bath in the conjunction of sacred rivers, or in the waters of natural wells or ponds, is the one of the ritual objectives of Newar Buddhist pilgrimages. A *Bajrācārya* priest leads the group, narrating the history and legends, including those in the *Svayambhū Pūraṇa*. Pilgrims receive moral precepts in the holy places and may observe *vrata* rituals while at the sites, too.

Saptavidhānuttara Pūjā

This “Seven Element Ritual” is a very popular Newar householder practice, one that conjoins meditation and ritual offerings. It is performed for any

Buddhist deity, but is most popularly directed to *caityas*, and bodhisattva images such as Avalokiteśvara or Tārā. Performed in monasteries, temples, or private residences, the ritual involves setting up either 108, 360, or 1,000 of the following:

1. begging bowls filled with rice (*gulupa*, *piṇḍapātra*);
2. ghee lamps (*deva*;) with wicks;
3. water bowls with water colored by saffron (*tiṃca*); and
4. simple wheat-powder sculptures (*torma*).

The central ritual focuses on a water jar (*kalaśa*) surrounded by the eight auspicious symbols (*aṣṭamaṅgala*) that symbolize the eight bodhisattvas.⁹⁷

The purpose of this *pūjā* is to take refuge in Triple gems, offer sensory objects, confess misdeeds with vows not to commit them again, rejoicing in the good deeds of *śrāvakas*, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas, and finally, requesting that the latter not enter *nirvāṇa*, but remain in *saṃsāra* for the welfare of living beings. Those doing the ritual then take a bodhisattva vow to seek Buddhahood in the future; the *Saptavidhanuttara pūjā* reaches completion after all are given the bodhisattva initiation (*abhiṣeka*).

Homa Pūjā

Newar Buddhist fire sacrifice, or *homa*, is a type of *pūjā* that has many varieties (see Figure 3.23). It is an adaptation of the Vedic ritual practice that has been thoroughly reshaped and redefined to express Buddhist metaphysical concepts and religious goals.⁹⁸ Newar rituals are sometimes performed along with *homa pūjā*, and it is considered the most prestigious form of offering by Newar Buddhists. In some cases *homa pūjā* is compulsory, at other times optional.

Sūtra Patha, or the “Cult of the Book”

Chanting and listening to *sūtras* like the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* or the *Pañcarākṣa Sūtra*, a meritorious deed mentioned in many Mahāyāna *sūtras*, is a traditional Newar Buddhist practice. On full moon or *aṣṭamī* days, many *Bajrācārya* priests sit at major monastic shrines to read these *sūtras* and allow householders to hear them chanted. Many give small



FIGURE 3.23 Modern *homa*.

offerings to have the text itself touched to their heads. Sūtras are also read on special occasions, such as at different phases in the dedication of a *caitya*/stūpa, the construction of monastery, or for birthday celebrations by honoring family members.

These Newar texts have been written using North Indian-derived scripts, the earliest on palm leaves (*tāra patra*), and then from the seventeenth century onward on layers of paper made from the *daphne* plant. In the latter form, the texts were written on stacked rectangular pages, some with gold letters on dark blue pages; others are in the format of a folded book (*thyā sāphu*). Many texts are interspersed with finely rendered miniature paintings (Kim 2013).

Hārītī Pūjā

A ritual widely done by *Bajrācāryas* and householders today, this reflects how Newar Buddhist tradition has long incorporated the goddess Hārītī into the local pantheon, with temples housing her icon found adjacent to major stūpas and monasteries such as Tha Bāhi. As recounted in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, Śākyamuni Buddha transformed the *yakṣī* Hārati

from being a killer of children to being their protector. In the Newar tradition, Hārītī's identity overlaps with that of the smallpox goddess Ajimā. The *Bajrācāryas'* priestly veneration of Hārīti takes the form of, and draws upon, their *sādhana* with this reformed *yakṣī*. Drawing on Vajrayāna techniques, the *Bajrācāryas* cultivate power and seek prosperity for living beings, an example of Newar ritual as a working of *upāya*.

Virtuosi Traditions in Newar Vajrayāna *Hnikam: Daily Newar Buddhist Practice*

As the name implies,⁹⁹ this is a daily practice limited only to Bajrācārya, Śākya, Urāy, and some in the Citrakār artist community. It is the first formal entry point into Vajrayāna spiritual practice. It is also a marker of Buddhist adulthood, as well as a mark of social status. The timing of young people receiving this varies by group.

In the case of the householders in the Urāy and Citrakār castes, the family elders usually organize *hnikam biyegu* (“*hnikam* giving [program],” or initiation) for a group of male and female children. Usually *hnikam* is given immediately after the boys complete their *kayeta-pūjā* rite and girls complete their *ihi* and *bahra-pikāyegu*. If it is not done then, it is usually taken before marriage. But more recently, a growing number wait to take it until after marriage.

The ritual entails the family's *Bajrācārya* priest and his wife (*gurumā-ju*) coming to their home. First, the priest couple performs a long ritual in the secret room (*abhyantar*) where the people who have not received *hnikam* cannot enter. With the recipients fasting, the eldest woman of the house welcomes the couple there with a special ceremonial welcome called *lasa kus*.¹⁰⁰ After the usual *gurumaṇḍala* ritual is done, the family priest instructs the initiates to draw a *ratnamaṇḍala* on a bronze plate¹⁰¹ and continues with the *pañcābhiṣeka*, which is initiation into worship practice of the five Buddhas, each conveying one of the five *jñānas*.

Following this is the *mantra abhiṣeka*, when the *guru-ju* whispers the mantra softly into their ear of the young men, *gurumā-ju* (his wife) doing so for the young women. Before this, however, an assistant priest collects each person's new 108-bead rosary so that the main *Bajrācārya* can purify them with a mantra. Only then does he whisper the *hnikam* mantra to each initiate, handing back each rosary to the recipient (Figure 3.24). After receiving the mantra and rosary, the initiates show their respect by touching the *guru-ju's* and *gurumā-ju's* feet with their forehead (*bhāgi-yāyegu*)



FIGURE 3.24 *Bajrācārya* reveals the mantra to a disciple.

and giving a donation that consists of clothes (*lam-pa*), pots (*thalabala*), and money. This particular payment to the *Bajrācārya* priest and his wife is called *mantra dakṣiṇa*.

Hnikam initiation ends with the group receiving and consuming the *vajrayāna prasād* called *gokudahana*.¹⁰² The next two days, the new *hnikam* practitioners must go the home of the *guru-ju* and *guru-mā* to have *hnikam* practice and mantra enunciation checked. The expectation is that this *hnikam* practice will be done every morning throughout life.

The time at which the eligible Buddhist caste groups take this step into daily practice varies by the group's own traditions. In the case of the *Bajrācārya* community, the male children get their *hnikam* initiation after the end of their *pravajya* four-day ordination, and they abandon their monastic robes for the householder's life and then receive their *Bajrācārya abhiṣeka*. The members of this group receive their *hnikam* in the course of this initiation. Their home monastery's *cakreśvara* and his wife, the senior-most *Bajrācārya* couple of the monastery, grant them *hnikam* within the precincts. From the next day onward, the new *Bajrācāryas* practice it and have their method checked. As for the female *Bajrācāryas*—who are not given *pravajya*—they do get a separate *hnikam*

initiation. Families organize *hnikam biyegu* ceremonies for them, either in the home monastery complex or in their home, where the family priest conducts the ritual.

In the case of Śākya boys, since they take only the *pravajya*, their family's Buddhist priest can organize the *hnikam biyegu* for their male and female children a few days or a few years after their caste-specific initiation. The family priest and his wife grant the *hnikam* to them in the home monastery complex or in their home.

One noteworthy practice associated with the Newar *hnikam* tradition unfolds at the death of an individual. At the end of the *Gha:su* rite—on seventh day after death in Bajrācārya and Śākya communities, and on the twelfth day after the death in Urāy and Citrakār communities—the *hnikam mantra* is “returned” to the family priest from the dead who had *hnikam*, in a short ritual called *hnikam litatayegu* (“returning the *hnikam*”).¹⁰³

In recent years, some individual *Bajrācārya* priests and new Newar Buddhist organizations have been organizing *hnikam* initiations outside the normal family priest relationship.

Dekka: Tantric Initiation

Śākyas and Bajrācārya used to undertake several initiations and train in several Vajrayāna practices. At present, some members of the Newar saṅgha take the initiations associated with—in order of modern frequency—Avalokiteśvara, Cakrasaṃvara (Śrī-Heruka; see Figure 3.25), Vajravārāhī, and Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa (Acala), and Mahākāla.¹⁰⁴ *Cakrasaṃvara trisamādhi*, *caṇḍalī-yoga*, *Candamahāroṣaṇa trisamādhi*, *balyarcanā yoga*, *śmāsāna yoga*, and *utkranti* yogas are all still practiced under strict rules of secrecy. All these initiations are now still taken by a very few Śākyas and Bajrācāryas, as well as by individuals in the Urāy community of Kathmandu, who have long been admitted into these initiations and practice the meditations in their own family shrine rooms, their household *āgamas*.

A summary of recent initiations bestowed by a leading *Bajrācārya* master of Kathmandu is given in Table 3.4.

Despite the impracticality of surveying for this information, the number of living Newar Buddhists who possess Vajrayāna tantric initiation today by active *Bajrācārya* masters can be estimated to around 1,500 in Kathmandu, 1,000 in Patan, 500 in Bhaktapur, and 100 in Kirtipur. This would represent less than one percent of high-caste Newar Buddhists.

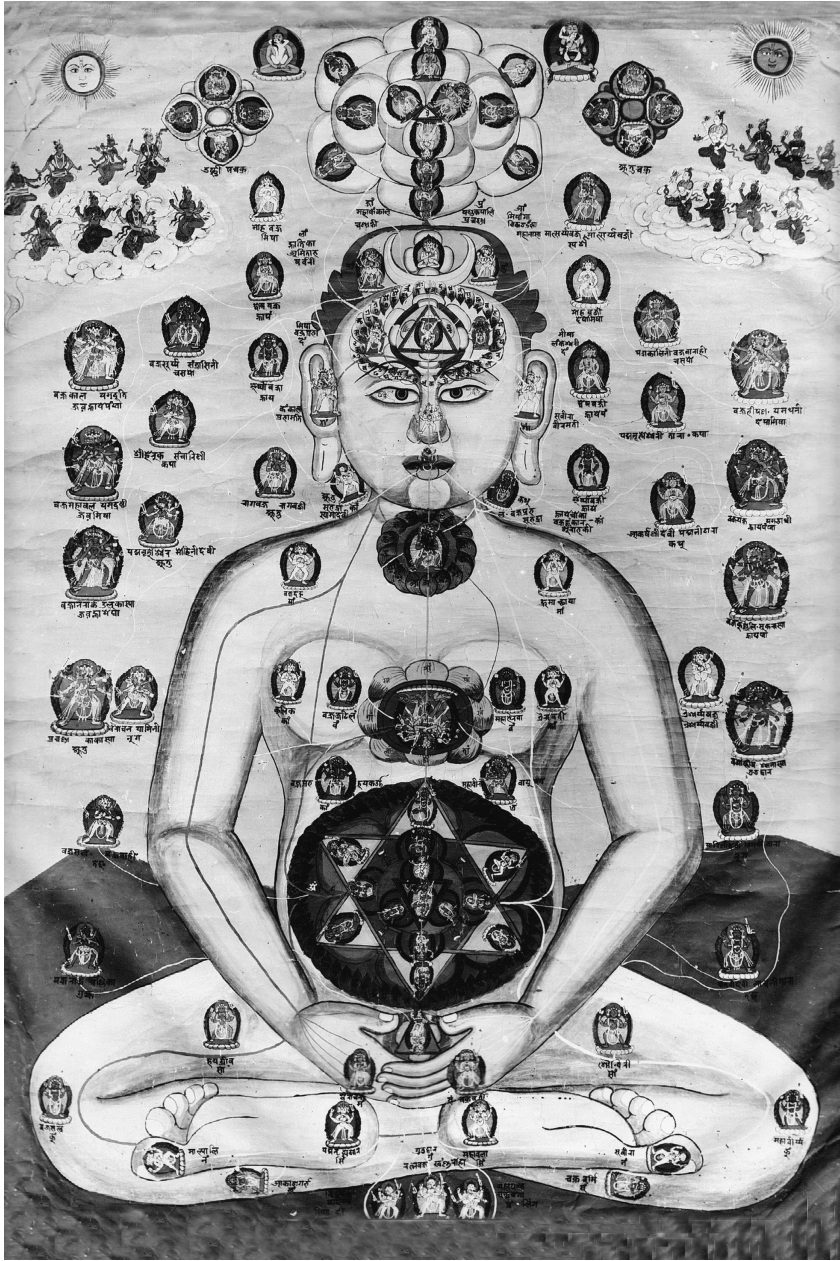


FIGURE 3.25 Print from large glass negative for initiates of Cakrasamvara.

Table 3.4

Restricted Empowerments/Initiation	Public Visualization Meditation of Training
2011 Pañca abhiṣeka in Kathmandu	2011 Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara, Svayambhū- Kathmandu
2008 Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara in Bhaktapur, Patan, and Kathmandu	Saptavidhānuttara Dhyāna, Patan
Cakrasaṃvara in Bhaktapur	2010 Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara, MD, USA
Vajravārāhi in Bhaktapur	2008
Candamahāroṣaṇa, Patan, Bhaktapur	Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara, Bhaktapur, Kirtipur
2007 Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara, Kathmandu, Patan	2007 Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara, Kathmandu
Cakrasaṃvara, Kathmandu, Patan	Saptavidhānuttara Dhyāna, Kirtipur, Bhaktapur
Vajravārāhi, Kathmandu and Patan	2006 Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara, Patan
Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa, Kathmandu	Saptavidhānuttara Dhyāna, Kirtipur

Puruścaraṇa Cvanegu

“*Puraścaraṇa*” (New. *puruśan*) is a Vajrayāna practice that enhances an individual’s spiritual power and understanding, usually in a retreat site (Figure 3.26). It was a central practice in medieval Indic Vajrayāna tradition.¹⁰⁵ Passed down from teacher to disciple as an advanced and secret practice, men¹⁰⁶ undertake it for three different reasons.

First, it is a compulsory practice for the renovation of Buddhist figures such as the *kvāpa dyaḥ* (the main shrine in a monastery), the *vajrayāna āgam dyaḥ* (secret shrine in a monastery), and *yoginīs* like Vajrayoginī and others. In this case, this entails very secret rituals and *jāpa yoga* practice.¹⁰⁷ The time duration or the number of days for *puruśan* depends on sacrality of the objects to be renovated and the preference of the *upādhyāya guru-ju*, the director for the renovation ritual. The people who undergo the practice of *puruśan* are not allowed to see or talk to others outside the circle of initiation until the end of the retreat. After the completion of the *puruśan*, those completing it go to a *tīrtha* at midnight without letting others know; afterward, they bathe and make offerings

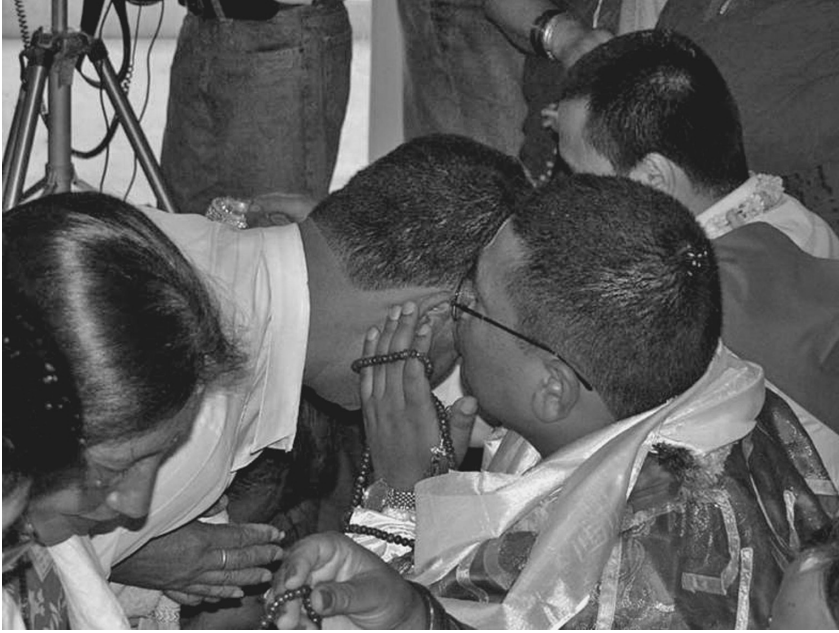


FIGURE 3.26 *Bajrācārya* practice of doing a *Puraścaraṇa* (New. *purūśan*) retreat, Naresh.

to *caityas* made of sand (*baluka-caitya*) and the local *nāgas*, who are represented by sand icons. After completing other necessary rituals, they finally fill special jars with river water and bring them into the venue where the *nyāsa pūjā* for the renovated image will take place. The water jar will be brought at the same night. This is the sacralized water jar in which the *nyāsa* will be inserted.¹⁰⁸

The second occasion for going on *purāsan* is when a leading *Bajrācārya* teacher needs to prepare for the extraordinary empowerment rituals that he must do to initiate new *Bajrācāryas* into positions of spiritual authority, such as their becoming *mulācārya*, *upādhyāya*, *karmācārya*, or *dighācārya gurujus*, as well as for the main sponsor (*mu-jajman*) in an upcoming tantric initiation.

Third, *purāścaraṇa* can be a private, personal practice. It is done in an isolated place like a home or monastery *āgama* shrine, or in a mountain cave. This practice includes both ritual and yoga. The duration depends on the person and the master who is guiding the practitioner. When done, this individual *purāścaraṇa* practice is ended with a *homa* ritual.¹⁰⁹

Legendary and Modern Nepalese Bajrācāryas

Śāśvat Vajra

There once dwelled in Mantrasiddhi Mahāvihāra a *Bajrācārya* named Śāśvat Vajra.¹¹⁰ One winter day he was sitting in the sun on his rooftop after getting an oil massage. Just then, a large cloud mass came floating by up in the sky, cutting off his sunlight. When Śāśvat Vajra looked up, he saw that the clouds had remained stationary. He then left the *vihāra* and went to the open field in the Tundikhel, to try to bring the cloud down. By means of a secret ritual utilizing his *mantrasiddhi*, he succeeded in bringing the cloud to earth and then saw Mahākāla inside it. Śāśvat Vajra then worshipped Mahākāla with a hymn of his own composition. Once he discerned that this deity always moved between Tibet and Kāśī, he made Mahākāla a promise to stop in this very place during his travels in the future. Once the *pūjā* was complete, Mahākāla blessed Śāśvat Vajra, ascended skyward, then disappeared. The temple to Mahākāla still standing today was built on this location.¹¹¹

Surat Vajra

Surat Vajra was a Buddhist priest. He went, one time, to Lhasa in Tibet, and one day when he was having tea with a great lama of that city, he silently emptied his cup on the floor. He filled the cup and again threw away the tea. Surprised, the lama asked the reason for his strange behavior. Stranger still was the explanation of Surat Vajra. He told the lama that his house in Nepal had caught fire and was burning at that moment, so he was extinguishing the flames.

Lest it should offend his guest's feelings, the lama said nothing just then, but he had misgivings and made a note of the day and time. As soon as his guest was gone, the lama dispatched a messenger to Nepal to verify the truth of Surat Vajra's statement. Months later, the messenger returned to Lhasa and reported to the lama that Surat Vajra's house had actually caught fire at the time noted by him, but thanks to a timely rain, it was saved. The lama could hardly believe the report, but now he was filled with jealousy over the power and knowledge that the Nepalese priest possessed.

When the lama heard that Surat Vajra was preparing to return to his own country, he thought of harming him in some way. He sent word privately to

Nepal, saying that Surat Vajra had died on his way home from Lhasa. The lama then ordered that no boatmen should give passage to the Nepalese priest across the Brahmaputra River. Meanwhile, Surat Vajra took leave of his friends in Lhasa and departed. When he arrived at the river and found that no one would take him across it, he threw a sheet of cloth on the water. Then, to the amazement of the boatmen, he stood on it and crossed the Brahmaputra.

Frustrated to find Surat Vajra equal to this situation, the lama became even angrier; overtaking the homeward-bound priest, he challenged him to a contest of knowledge. Faced with the determined lama, Surat Vajra asked him what sort of contest he proposed. The lama replied that both of them should change themselves into sparrows and perch upon stalks of wheat growing near the roadside. The heavier would be declared the loser. Surat Vajra agreed. At once, both men became sparrows and alighted in a nearby wheat field. To his chagrin, the stalk upon which the lama-sparrow perched was weighed down heavily, while the other, upon which perched the Nepalese priest, was not even slightly bent. Then to show that his burden of bad karma was far less than that of the lama, Surat Vajra changed himself in the next moment into a pigeon. And yet the stalk of wheat still did not bend under him.

Seeing this, the lama becoming enraged, changed himself the next moment into a hawk, the enemy of all pigeons, and then swooped down murderously toward Surat Vajra. But seeing this attack, the pigeon flew into a cave and regained his human shape. Meanwhile, the lama changed himself into a snake and slithered inside. Cornered, Surat Vajra invoked the goddess Guhyeśvarī and she gave him a sword with which he cut the snake to pieces.¹¹²

After this, the priest resumed his journey without further trouble. But on his arrival in Kathmandu, Surat Vajra learned that he had been reported as dead; since his family had completed all the last rites for him, he could not go home. So to let his family know that he had not really died, he removed his shoes and sent them to his former house. Then he went to the Guhyeśvarī temple and was never seen again.¹¹³

Śrī Siddhiharṣa Bajrācārya

Śrī Siddhiharṣa Bajrācārya (New. Babukaji Guruju; Figure 3.27) (1879–1951), of Surata Śrī Mahāvihāra (New. Takshe Bāhā) in northeast Kathmandu, was an expert in Sanskrit, Buddhist philosophy, and tantric ritual, especially *caryāgītī*. He was a lineage holder in the Cakrasaṃvara Yoga, and one of the first to publish the important Newar Buddhist ritual text, the *Gurumaṇḍalārcana*. Like many Buddhist masters, Babukaji studied Sanskrit



FIGURE 3.27 Siddhiharṣa Bajrācārya.

with a brahman pandit, Gangadatta Sharma of Kathmandu, and took Buddhist teachings from the Patan master Kula Man Bajrācārya. Making his career as resident expert in the Vir Library Archive in Kathmandu, this scholar worked with a long list of visiting scholars, beginning with Sylvain Lévi of France, and including such noted scholars as Guiseppe Tucci of Italy, professors Rosambi Sokaki and Kawaguchi of Japan, and scholars Hariprasad Shastri, Benatosa Bhattacharya, Rahul Sankrtyayana, and P. C. Bagchi of India.

Pandit Ratna Bahadur Bajrācārya

Ratna Bahadur Bajrācārya (New. Ratna Bahadur Pandit; Figure 3.28) (1892–1956) was a member of the saṅgha of Yaśodhāra Mahāvihāra (New. Bu Bāhā)



FIGURE 3.28 Ratna Bahadur Bajrācārya.

in Patan. He was noted for his work in Sanskrit and local epigraphy, and in Buddhism from Pandit Kulaman Shimha Bajrācārya of Patan, who was his maternal grandfather. At the age of fourteen, Ratna Bahadur visited Tibet in association with his father's business; during his ten years there, he studied the Tibetan language and then sūtras and tantras with Tibetan lamas. After the great earthquake of 1934, he performed the rituals for the extensive renovations of Patan's Avalokiteśvara-Karunamāya and Kumbheśvara temples. Ratna Bahadur Gurujū went on tantric retreat (New. *puraśan*) in Rishisvar (New. *Tamana*)¹¹⁴ and practiced *utkranti yoga* there. This death practice he later taught to thirty-four Bajrācārya and Śākya disciples for a month¹¹⁵ in this same place; every evening he taught about the *Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra*.

Throughout his life he preached to audiences in various places across Nepal, most often during the summer Buddhist holy month, Gumlā,¹¹⁶ and at the Dharmodaya Pathashala, an institution he founded where Buddhism could be taught. Ratna Bahadur Guruju gave public lectures on Buddhism regularly throughout his life. These included programs based on the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* in Kutī, a town on a major trade route to Lhasa, just over the border in Tibet; on the *Navakhanda sūtras* (“Nine Texts”)¹¹⁷ in a private residence in Patan; on the *Prajñāpāramitā* for another group in Patan; on the subject of tantra (“*tantrātmaka rahasya*”) in Ikha Chen, Patan; on the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*, in Tanga Bāhā, Lalitpur, a series that lasted three years; on the *Aśokāvadāna*, held in Nah tva neighborhood, Patan; on the *Lalitavistara* in Bu Bāhā, Patan; on the *Nāmasaṅgīti* in his own monastic residence (*bāhā*). He performed initiations for individuals in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* in his residence. His most famous foreign scholar was Rahul Sanskritayan, who studied with him for three months. This extraordinary scholar is reputed to have said, “Pandit Ratna Bahadur Bajrācārya is a true Gem (*ratna*) of Nepal.”¹¹⁸

In addition to his work in the Department of Nepal Bhasa and Tibetan in the Vir Library, Ratna Bahadur Guruju was a long-serving president of the scholarly institution the Sanskrit Maṇḍala. He compiled a trilingual dictionary of Newari-Sanskrit-Tibetan. His main scholarly work was in doing translations from Sanskrit into Newari and writing treatises in the local vernacular. These modern publications included the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (published 1958), the *Mahāyāni Nityācara vidhi* (1962 [NS 1083]), the *Ye dharma Gatha* (1972 NS 1093), a *Nityācāra vidhi* (NS1102), the *Āryanāmasaṅgīti* (NS1113), and he worked on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Bodhisattv āvadānakalpalatā*, and the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (all unpublished). According to local tradition, he is said to have also completed partial translations into Newari of the *Daśabhūmīśvara Sūtra*, the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*, the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*, the *Vrihat Svayambhū Purāṇa*, the *Aśokāvadāna*, and the *Jātakamālā*.

His unpublished ritual manuals include the *Sahasrāhuti vidhi*, *Daśakarma Vidhi*, *Dikṣā vidhi*, *Āryabhadracārigāthā*, a *Cakrasaṃvara Samādhi*, *Triskandha Papadeśana*, *Pañcarakṣa*, *Samvarodaya Tantra*, *Karavīra Tantra*, *Tārā Pūjā Vidhi*, the *Kriyāsaṃgraha* (partial edition), and the *Mañjuśrīpārājikā*. Those published include the *Guru Maṇḍala Arcana Vidhi* (NS 1069), an *Āryagrahamātrkānāma Dhāraṇī* (NS 1080), and the combined *Yogāmbara Samādhi and Kalāsapūjā* (NS 1099). Additional books on Buddhist thought were the *Puṇyagrāduta* (NS 1068) and the

Bauddha Prathama Sikṣā (NS 1092); unpublished manuscripts bear the titles *Śrīstikrama*, *Bodhicārya*, and the *Śrāvakācārya Nirdeśa*. Later Newar scholars based many of their writings on those of Ratna Bahadur Guruju.

Amogha Bajra Bajrācārya

Popularly known as Amogha Guruju (Figure 3.29), he was born in 1910, and was a member of the saṅgha in Hemavarṇa Mahāvihāra (New. Gam Bāhā) in Kathmandu. His training in Buddhism began when he was five years old when he completed his initiation into the saṅgha; it continued when he received the Cakrasaṃvara initiation from his father at the age of fourteen, just after his marriage. His training also included Sanskrit study, the *Kriyāsaṃgraha*, *vajragīti*, and *vajranṛtya*. Around the age of twenty, he studied the *jātakas* and other Buddhist texts with the Kathmandu pandit Siddhiharsha Bajrācārya (Bābukaji Guruju). Studies with Pandit Dambarudeva focused on astronomy and Āyurveda. At age twenty-seven, he learned Vāyu Yoga from a reincarnate Tibetan teacher



FIGURE 3.29 Amogha Bajra Bajrācārya.

(*tulku*). At age twenty-nine, he learned and participated in Gaṇacakrapūjā under the Guhyaharṣa Bajrācārya, the Guruju of Takṣa Bāhā. At age thirty-nine, after completing the tantric pilgrimage called *purva-sevā* at Cakrasaṃvara-maṇḍala sites across Nepal, Amogha Guruju initiated seventy-five disciples in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and from this time he continued to teach Vajrayāna rituals and Yoga practices to many disciples and performed *utkranti yoga* to benefit the dead. At the age of forty-five, he became the Sthāvira (Cakreśvara), the most senior in his monastery, Hemavarna Mahāvihāra. At the age of fifty-nine, Amogha Guruju renovated the main shrine room of his monastery, performing the major rituals as the *Mūlācārya*. At the age of sixty-one, he participated as the *karmācārya* ritualist in the *ahoratra homa pūjā* that occurred in course of the renovation of the Vajrayoginī temple in Pharping. Amogha Guruju also performed the main rituals for the renovation of many temples in the Kathmandu Valley. Among these were the tantric rituals for both the ground floor and tantric shrine rooms at Ca Bāhā, Kathmandu; for the Carumati Vihāra's main shrine in Chabil; for the temple for Phulabari Guhyeśvari in Deopatan; and for the roof of the Hārītī temple at Svayambhū. At sixty-six, he was the *mulācārya* who performed an *ayuta ahuti homa* ritual for the royal initiation of King Birendra. Takawaka, a Japanese Buddhist priest, studied extensively with Amogha Guruju; he sponsored and accompanied Amogha Guruju on pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites in India and Japan. He passed away in 1979.

Amogha Guruju's publications on Newar Buddhist ritual practices established standards in terms of language, methodology, and procedure that unified practices in Kathmandu. His main publications include *Māragharṣaṇa* (a chapter from *Lalitvistara*) NS1074; *Catrisamvaradi Catu sasthi samvara stotram* NS1076; and in *Nepal Bhasa Sahit Dānagatha* NS1086; *Āryatārā stotra Arthasahit*, 1095; *Durgatipariśodhana kalpoddessa*, 1095; *Saptavarapustakam*, 1096; the *Guru maṇḍala arcana pustakam*, NS1101, second edition; the *Piṇḍavidhāna*, NS1094; the *Kalaśārcana vidhi yajñā vidhana*; and a Newari introduction to the *Aṣṭottaraśata Lokeśvara Paricaya* (1979). Amogha Guruju's transmission of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* established this lineage as the major tantric lineage in twentieth-century Kathmandu.

Pandit Divyabajra Bajrācārya

Pandit Divyabajra Bajrācārya (Figure 3.30; 1920–2000) of Kanakacaitya Mahāvihāra (Jana Bāhā), Kathmandu, was a master of Sanskrit, Pali, and



FIGURE 3.30 Pandit Divyabajra Bajrācārya (in white) and senior-most city Bajrācārya Anandamuni at a ceremony organized at the school for Buddhist priests founded by Pandit Badri Ratna Bajrācārya (at far left) in 1980.

Āyurveda who taught many students, including Pali to Theravāda monks and nuns, as well as Sanskrit to Newar saṅgha members. Divya Guruju's scholarly specialization was Buddhist philosophy, and he gave many lecture series on various Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools of thought. Noted programs were on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* at Pyangatham in Patan; on the *Prajñāpāramitā* in Hiraṇyavarṇa Mahāvihāra, Patan; and on the *Abhidharmakośa*, *Vicitrakarṇikāvadāna*, and *Aṣṭasahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* in his home monastery. Divya Bajra received a Cakrasaṃvara initiation at Mulaśrī Mahāvihāra (Mu Bāhā) in Kantipur from Guhyaharṣa Bajrācārya of Takshe Bāhā, one of the renowned *ācāryas* popularly known as Sanukaji

Guruju. It is said that the initiation was conducted with a special focus on him and thus was more advanced than the ritual usually conducted. He was noted for his articulation of the key contrast between the Theravāda and Vajrayāna traditions—“The Theravādins see *duḥkha* (suffering) everywhere; Vajrayānists see *sukha* (happiness) everywhere . . .”—and seeing his own Vajrayāna tradition as having arisen to give householders the chance to fully practice Buddhism.¹¹⁹

Divya Guruju’s articles and books have been well received by Newar readers, especially Mahāyāna works that he translated from Sanskrit into vernacular Newari. His major published works were editions of the *Bodhicāryāvātāra Catustava*, *Prajñāpāramitā Piṇḍārtha*, *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, *Nirvedhābhāgīya*, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, *Guhyasamājatantra*, *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, and *Ācāryācandrakīrtikṛta Guhyasamājatantrapradīpoddyotanatikā Ṣaṭkoti-vyākhyā-sahita*. His own treatises included the *Nava Sūtra Saṃgraha*, *Dharmasaṃgrahakośa*, *Prathama Dhyāna*, and the *Pañcarakṣā Kathāsara*.

Pandit Badri Ratna Bajrācārya

Pandit Badri Ratna Bajrācārya (Figure 3.31; 1946–) is one of the renowned living masters of contemporary Newar Buddhism in Kathmandu. A saṅgha member of Mantrasiddhi Mahāvihāra in Kathmandu, Badri Guruju from a young age began his training in ritual performances from Paramasiddhi Bajrācārya and Motiratna Bajrācārya, and began serving patrons from the age of eleven. He also learned Sanskrit from Buddhist and brahman pandits. In course of learning Sanskrit, he was given the name Bajri Ratna by his brahman teacher. He also studied rhetoric with a brahman teacher, Muralidhara Bhattarai, and astrology with another brahman pandit from Janakpur. He also studied Āyurvedic medicine.

Badri Ratna’s expertise as a ritual master continued with training in sand-maṇḍala construction from his maternal uncle Macapaju Bajrācārya. He learned the *vajragīti* (Vajrayāna Buddhist song) from Guru Paramānanda Bajrācārya. He learned the *vajranṛtya* (Vajrayāna Buddhist dance) and *pañcatala* (playing Vajrayāna musical instruments) from Guru Siddhi Ratna Bajrācārya.

Badri Guruju was a lineage disciple of the afore-mentioned Amogha Bajra Bajrācārya. He was greatly inspired by Pandit Amogha Bajra due to his expertise in Buddhist philosophy and yoga, and his mastery of ritual. This teacher kindly accepted and trained him for an extended period in the

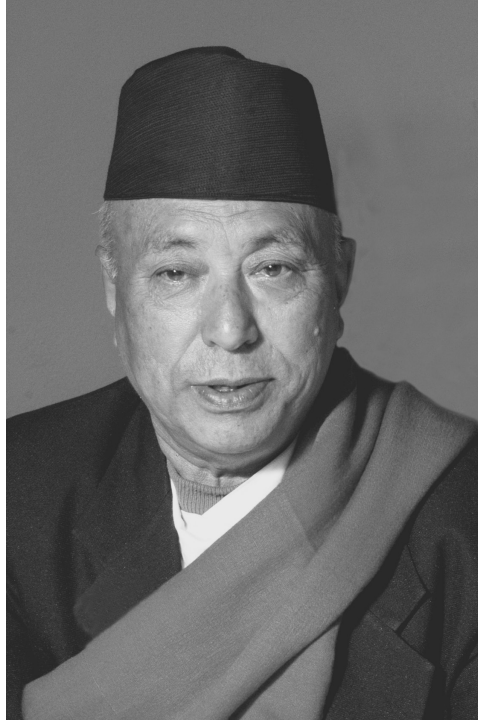


FIGURE 3.31 Pandit Badri Ratna Bajrācārya.

master-disciple lineage of Cakrasamvara Yoga, and then later in the fields of Kriyā-tantra, Caryā-tantra, and Yoga-tantra.

After his marriage, Badri Guruju and his wife Asamaya Bajrācārya obtained the Consecration of Ārya Avalokiteśvara, Cakrasaṃvara, Vajradevī, and Acala from Guru Anandamuni Bajrācārya of Kathmandu. After Asamaya's death, he married Tirthakumāri Bajrācārya of Patan.

Badri Guruju continued his spiritual development by going on a series of pilgrimages (called *pīṭha-sevā* or *pūrvā-sevā*) to various Vajrayāna Buddhist sites in Nepal under the training of the Kathmandu Buddhist guru Bhajuratna Bajrācārya. He was given many special mantras and learned the *tri-samādhi* (yoga) of Acala from this same teacher. He later took initiation in the *tri-samādhi* practice of Cakrasaṃvara from Amoghajra Bajrācārya. He also was initiated in the *dharmadhātu* mantra practices by Sakalananda Bajrācārya.

Over the past three decades, Badri Guruju has transmitted the consecrations he received—to Avalokitesvara, Cakrasaṃvara, Vajradevī, Acala, Dharmadhātu, and Vajradhātu—to hundreds of his Newar disciples

belonging to Bajrācārya, Śākya, and Urāy castes. He has also transmitted the traditions of Cakrasaṃvara-samādhi, Acala-samādhiyoga, Dharmadhātu-samādhi, Vajradhātu-samādhi, Caṇḍālī-yoga, Balyārcana-yoga, Śmāśāna-yoga, and Utkranti-yoga to a select few disciples.

Badri Ratna has for decades been a prominent ritualist in major public rituals dedicated to the renovation of images and temples. These included the renovation of Khadga Yoginī in Sankhu, and the restorations at the great stūpa, Svayambhū. He also performed as well the essential secret rites at these sites as well. He is the recognized master of the secret *gaṇacakra-pūjā* in the traditions of the *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Hevajra*, *Mahāsaṃvarodaya*, and *Kālacakra Tantras*, and has performed these rites across the Kathmandu Valley.

Dedicated to the preservation and revitalization of his own tradition, Badri Guruju has edited more than fifty Buddhist ritual instruction manuals; the publication of these works brought uniformity in ritual performance among Kathmandu *Bajrācāryas*. He has also translated into Newari from Sanskrit many Buddhist narratives from the *avadānas*, *jātakas*, and *vrata* texts. This focus on popular literature has been lifelong, since from the age of fifteen he walked across the region's villages and cities to recount the tales of the future Buddha's previous lives. Large crowds will assemble to listen to his riveting, theatrical, renditions of these tales. Badri Guruju also worked to establish images of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, *Prajñāpāramitā*, and stūpas to help people to develop their faith and moral practices.

To address the decline in the doctrinal understanding and ritual competence evident among the *Bajrācārya* ritualists in late twentieth century Nepal, in 1980 Badri Guruju established a Nepalese Buddhist ritual training center named the Bajrācārya Adhyana Maṇḍala. He trained young Bajrācāryas and a few of Śākya in the performance of rituals, making sand maṇḍalas, astrology, preaching, and so on, according to his own vision of the future. Hundreds attended, and he enlisted other *Bajrācārya* pandits such as Divya Guruju (see earlier discussion) to teach them Sanskrit. This work continued more in a more organized and formal manner in 1990, when Badri Guruju introduced the same training at the Mahendra Sanskrit University in Kathmandu, which later added a Department of Buddhist Philosophy through his leadership.

Badri Guruju also established nearly half a dozen other Buddhist organizations to continue and preserve Newar Buddhist traditions of Nepal. He was honored for this work by His Majesty's Government of Nepal

with the *Dhanavajra Rastriya Pratibha Puraskar* and *Gorakha Daksinabahu* awards. He has visited India, Bhutan, South Korea, and the United States. At the behest of the king of Bhutan, he performed funeral rites after the death of the late royal priest of Bhutan, Lama Dilgo Khentse Rimpoche. In order to participate in the Buddha's birthday celebrations, he visited South Korea; he also visited the United States in 2003 as the main Newar master to perform rituals and bestow the first Newar Buddhist Vajradhātu initiations in America, as part of the "Circle of Bliss" Exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum.

Conclusion: Nepalese Vajrayāna Buddhism in Contemporary Nepal

The Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition in South Asia crossed or blurred the lines of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions, probably as early as 500 CE in South Asia, affecting in subsequent centuries traditions across the region in many dimensions of belief and practice. Whether it really had its origins, as some of its texts suggest, on the peripheries of society and settlement, or among ascetics and others who ignored the caste system and Dharmaśāstra norms of gender, or was formatively influenced by Chinese alchemy traditions (White 1998), what is clear is that a new Buddhist lineage of discourse, yoga practices, and textual writing formed within its Mahāyāna monastic communities (Wedemeyer 2012).¹²⁰ It was the tantric Buddhist traditions that, by 1000 CE, when Buddhism was in decline in many regions, dominated in a new reformation of the tradition in the Pāla-Sena region of North India, as well as in Orissa and Nepal, where it then was adopted and underwent further development in Tibet (Davidson 2003, 2005).

By 1100, it seems clear that Buddhism in Nepal was in the midst of a process of reformation and domestication centered on Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna traditions that were being imported by Indic masters, and adopted by circles of both local and Tibetan practitioners.¹²¹ As Jinah Kim has shown for the history of manuscript illumination found in North India and Nepal (2013), tantric paintings were inserted into *Prajñāparamitā* texts, and their placement reflects the conceptualization of the text as maṇḍala: Is this material cultural pattern a simulacrum for how the Pāla–Sena–Nepal Vajrayāna tradition was grafted into Mahāyāna monasticism?

The records of Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley after 1000 show that tantric initiation had become, as it is today, the carefully guarded possession of the elite groups in society: kings, priests (brahman and Bajrācārya), merchants, and virtuoso artists. It is certain that tantric traditions captured the imagination and shaped the elite's belief systems among Buddhists in Nepal. The thousands of ritual texts in the Kathmandu Valley archives far outnumber works devoted to philosophy, signifying the comparative scale of its popularity. Newar Buddhists for centuries have regarded mantras and *dhāraṇīs* as capable of giving extraordinary abilities to individuals by giving them access to great cosmic powers. The stories of the *siddhas* and *yoginīs* in the tantras recount how individuals seeking the experience of enlightenment also gain a host of supernormal powers (*siddhis*), from telekinesis to clairvoyance, from healing to harming enemies at a distance. It is natural that those with political power sought to use this exceptionally potent "classified" knowledge. Initiation into Newar Vajrayāna practices in later centuries, and certainly by the later Malla era, excluded members of the lower castes, since the saṅgha had, as we have seen, hardened into membership by birth only. So while there is a rhetoric of anomic philosophical belief in Vajrayāna Buddhism, directed to nirvāṇa-seeking individuals, the tantric Buddhist traditions in Newar society seemed to have been, since the Malla era, the cultural possession of the Kathmandu Valley's elite, both Hindu and Buddhist.

By 2015 in Nepal, the monarchy is finished, new avenues to wealth are being found, Kathmandu is staggering under an urban population growth rate that is the highest in Asia, and global media are affecting the knowledge horizons of Newar Buddhists. With hill in-migration, the Newars are now a minority in the Valley once dominated by their civilization. It is not surprising that different norms regarding hierarchy and status have been introduced, and that the singularity of traditional Newar Buddhism faces a host of challenges. Simply stated, the world that sustained the Vajrayāna tradition in the urban centers of the Kathmandu Valley since the Malla "Three Kingdoms" is no more.

Amidst contending Buddhist traditions in 2015 and the breakdowns of urban life in the Kathmandu Valley, the future of Newar Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism is difficult to anticipate with any precision. Some challenges come from other Buddhist traditions. Present since the early twentieth century, Theravāda reformers introduced celibate monastic traditions in the Valley. At first their Newar exponents directly attacked the

Newar Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna traditions, winning many prominent householders, but alienating others. As one tract by an early Newar who took ordination fulminated:

The Five Buddhas, Apāramitā, Karuṇāmaya, Tārā, Heruka, Cakrasaṃvara, Vajrasattva, etc. . . . these are all personified representations of metaphysical knowledge and ideas. The so-called teachers who made such representations on canvas or stones, instituted intricate rituals, and indulged in all kinds of luxuries such as meat, fish, wine, women [*sic*] which are specifically prohibited by the eight precepts. All of their rituals were for the purpose of fulfilling their selfish ends and are totally opposed to the fundamental principles of Buddhism. . . . Read and recite this mantra to this god or goddess and you will get all of these benefits, but reciting this secret mantra or showing the image to others in initiation and such and such bad things will befall you, saying such things to the innocent and ignorant believers is nothing more than casting dust in their eyes. (Dharmaloka 1959)

But by the 1960s confrontational incidents and anti-Vajrayāna publications subsided. The modernist Theravāda tradition has made *vipassanā* meditation a widespread experience in Newar society; but negative perceptions of the Theravādin movement as it has developed have also hindered its acceptance.¹²² For different reasons, the expansion of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism in the Valley during this same period¹²³ has not reached many more Newar Buddhists. Here, again, there are social and cultural obstacles, not the least of which is language. Despite intermittent attempts to connect Newar Buddhists with prominent Tibetan teachers, this tradition remains outside the purview of most.

What is now clear is that the deep attachment Newars feel for their distinctive and venerable cultural traditions (festivals, life cycle rites, etc.)—which require the performance of Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna rituals and the presence of *Bajrācārya* ritualists—has also worked to preserve the older Buddhist tradition. Thus, the displacement of the older tradition by a successful missionary Theravāda movement has not played out as its exponents (or the scholars tracking its development) had projected.

Perhaps in response to the leadership of women in the Theravāda movement, or a result of growing education and awareness of the demands women are making globally for greater participation in public life, Newar

women have sought and won acceptance in Newar Buddhist ritual life in areas that hitherto had been closed to them. Young unmarried girls in castes with traditional processional music groups (*bājans*), playing drums and accompanying percussion instruments, now commonly take part side by side with the boys, some as prominent members. A more surprising innovation has been the formation of recitation groups consisting of the wives of *Bajrācāyas* (*guru-mās*), who began training in 2005; 108 now gather to do public recitations of the *Pañcarakṣā*. A third marker of a growing assertiveness among Newar Buddhist women is a trend for individual women to take the tantric initiations (von Rospatt 2011a).

A number of new Buddhist organizations are endeavoring to conserve, promote, and reform Newar Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna Buddhism: The Nagarjuna Institute of Exact Methods was founded in 1980 as a center of Buddhist learning intended to serve the needs of and promote the traditional Buddhism that is indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley’s Buddhist communities. Its founder, Min Bahadur Shakya, forged ties between Himalayan Buddhists, bringing together both Newar and Tibetan tradition lineages. As one of its early pamphlets stated, “For reinstatement of the glorious traditions and lineage of Nepalese Buddhism we have to seek the support from the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.”¹²⁴ Accordingly, and with the initial support of Taiwanese Buddhist organizations, the Institute organizes a variety of meditation courses led by Nepalese and Tibetan Masters who have taught Mārgakrama (*Lam Rim*), *Pūrvagata Caryā* (*Ngondro Practice*), *Avalokiteśvara Sādhana*, *Bodhicitta Bhāvana*, and *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*. The Institute conducts classes on Buddhist doctrine, engages in translation projects, and publishes texts in Nepali, English, Sanskrit, Nepal Bhasa, and Tibetan. It periodically hosts seminars and symposiums on Tibetology and Nepalese Buddhist studies.

Founded in Patan in 1988 with support by members of the Shishin-kai Organization of Japan, the Lotus Research Center has sought, as its website states, “to preserve and promote Buddhist culture of Nepal Mandal,”¹²⁵ through programs bringing together Nepali intellectuals, “local gentry,” and both national and international scholars to promote research, seminars, conferences, and educational training. It regularly publishes a journal, prints new editions of sacred Buddhist scriptures, and is building a digital archive of resources on the cultural heritage of the Nepal Mandala. The Lotus Research Center launched Lotus Academic College for Buddhist Studies in 2007, providing postgraduate courses on Buddhist Studies. It has received support from patrons from Taiwan and Korea.

In Patan, the training of informed *Bajrācāryas* has been undertaken by a new group, the *Bajrācārya-pūjāvidhi-adhyayana Samhiti* (Committee for the Study of the Bajrācārya Rituals), and led by Buddha Ratna Bajracarya of the great monastery Kvā Bāhā. The Committee offers periodic ritual training courses to young men, as well as training to young Bajrācārya women, regarding their role as ritual assistants. It has been active as well in organizing large *vrata* gatherings, as elsewhere, in series at important holy sites.

In Kathmandu, two Bajrācāryas have emerged as leaders in revitalization efforts. The first is Yagyamanpati Bajracarya, who has since 2004 offered classes to householders on Vajrayāna tradition, discussing the purposes and philosophical meanings underlying the rituals, taught from his home in Iku Bāhā classes in tantric yoga practice based on Cakrasaṃvara visualization, and the chanting of tantric songs. His students, primarily educated Śākyas, Bajrācāryas, and Urāy, formally organized the *Bauddhadarshana-dhyayana-puca* (“Buddhist Teachings Study Group”) that holds regular classes on these subjects.

The second Kathmandu center of revitalization in Kathmandu was initiated by Naresh Man Bajracarya (co-author of this chapter), the first Newar Bajrācārya to also complete a PhD degree in Buddhist Studies, who has established several organizations to address different needs in the local Buddhist community. The Tri-Ratna Kosha (“Triratna Fund”) provides scholarships to students studying Buddhism and recognizes the great past Newar masters (discussed earlier). He also established, with Korean support, the Nepalko Bauddha Dharma Saṃgha in 1996 to organize Bare Chuyegu initiation programs for the hitherto excluded male children of inter-caste marriages in Kathmandu and Narayanghat. The concomitant founding of a new Newar saṃgha, a “Jina-saṃgha,” and the dedication of a building as its own *vihāra* have not resulted in an active monastic center or meritorious offerings by the community. Dr. Bajracarya also founded the Traditional Nepalese Buddhist Association,¹²⁶ the first international Newar organization, with branches in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, and Maryland (USA). It has organized lectures on Vajrayāna belief and practice as well as retreats dedicated to *Saptavidhānuttara* Meditation, *Acala abhiṣeka*, and *trisamādhi* yoga, *Cakrasaṃvara-Vajravārāhī abhiṣeka*, and *Caṇḍālī-yoga*. Programs—open to all individuals, irrespective of their caste—that have offered lesser forms of tantric initiation, such as the six-syllable Avalokiteśvara *abhiṣeka*, and have attracted hundreds of Newars from across the Valley, as well as Westerners.¹²⁷ Its branch in the United

States has begun to schedule *vratas*, *caitya* making, and other rituals to coincide with visits by Naresh Bajracarya, for the first time internationalizing Newar Buddhism. Seeking to demonstrate the bodhisattva ideal, this organization also collects funds to hold periodic free health clinics, and the distribution of medicine, food, and clothing. Since 2011, Dr. Bajracarya has also focused on building a distinctively Newar monastery in the international monastic park in Lumbini.¹²⁸

Perhaps the most surprising development to emerge in recent years is a resurgent interest in the priestly performance of, and householder participation in, common Vajrayāna rituals. The attempts by prominent *Bajrācārya* ritualists in Patan and Kathmandu to make accessible authoritative ritual guidebooks for their entire communities was brought out of the medieval hand-copying era by the technology of the printing press after the Shah restoration of 1951. Many of the leading *Bajrācārya* whose lives were sketched in the preceding section quickly took advantage of the new technology. With the revolution of 1991, among the cultural changes that ensued was opening the former Hindu/brahmanical monopoly on personnel and content at Mahendra Sanskrit College to Buddhist thought and ritual study, leading to a surge in young students and the publication of new textbooks to standardize their educations. These efforts represented an attempt to meet the increasing criticism by Newar householders who regard the venerable, ritually dominated Newar Buddhism as poorly presented, philosophically opaque, and spiritually lacking. Especially in Kathmandu,¹²⁹ the younger *Bajrācāryas*, aware of these complaints and infused with a sense of Newar cultural restoration, have sought to reform the traditional status quo by upgrading and highlighting the Buddhist elements in the life-cycle rites, stressing a “revised standard edition” of the major rituals in their repertoire.¹³⁰ The press and expectation is that instead of mumbling mantras carelessly or passing over ritual text instruction to “explain the Dharma” at certain points in the *pūjā*, the *Bajrācārya* take the time to utter precise *stotras* and instruct the disciples on why—philosophically, morally, and spiritually—they are doing the ritual. This has carried over into tantric initiations as well, in consecrations that were often done for the raw sense of empowerment, but conveyed little of the purpose or deeper Buddhist meanings.

Certain venerable traditions have been revived for renewed attention by householders led by activist *Bajrācāryas*. The practice of the *sapta-vidhānuttara* ritual, detailed earlier, performed at prominent holy



Buddhist locations in the Valley, has grown dramatically in all the above-mentioned revitalization groups; several sponsors have even organized this ritual as part of a pilgrimage to sacred sites such as Lumbini, and in India. Naresh Bajracarya and his association have introduced new forms of traditional practice uniting Buddhists across the Kathmandu Valley: a *Nāmasaṅgīti* festival and a restructured Pañcadāna Festival to reinvigorate the day of donations made to the Newar saṅgha held during the holy month of Gumlā. The division between the major cities in the Valley that once led to their isolation from one another culturally and in the work of Vajrayāna Buddhist teachers has declined as well.¹³¹

The underlying strength of the older Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna tradition is its thorough integration into Newar lifestyle, urban space, and family life. The cultural nationalism that pervades Newar communities in the Valley—the expression of which has risen since the 1991 revolution—finds its ongoing expression in remaining faithful to the venerable and distinctly Newar traditions. The vibrancy of the centripetal draw of Newar Buddhist identity has led, in recent years, to an increase in the number of upper-caste Newar individuals who are eligible and eager to take Newar tantric initiation. This interest, though found in only a small part of the Buddhist population, reflects the interest to connect on a deep level with the traditions of spiritual practice created centuries ago by Newar *Bajrācārya* masters.

What is certain is that, as the Buddha taught, life is always in transition, and so is the Newar tradition of Vajrayāna Buddhism today. The Theravāda and Tibetan competitors, the traditions they have introduced, and the passing from the scene of the *Bajrācārya* elders who resisted modernization have all opened up space for younger Newar Buddhist religious leaders—among *Bajrācāryas* and Śākyas—to adapt their Mahāyāna–Vajrayāna tradition to the rapidly changing world around them. Their number is relatively small, but they are attracting disciples and wealthy patrons from their own community. Newar Vajrayāna revitalizers are discovering for themselves the great richness in texts and ritual found in their venerable traditions; and they are finding that the educated, prosperous householders in their cities are eager to both explore their Buddhist heritage and support initiatives to recover its vibrancy. Less conservative in regard to gender roles and caste ideology, groups in the Newar Buddhist community today are seeking to find compelling new interpretations of Vajrayāna tradition as a foundation on which to center their lives.

APPENDIX I

Dated Buddhist Texts from Medieval Nepal

Date	Text	Other Information	Source
998	1,008 verse pp	Skt Text in Sakya Tibet, from Patan	Petech Medieval Hist Nepal, 40
1008	1,008 pp		"
1015	1,008 pp		"
1036	Lalitavistara		"
1039	Saddharmapuṇḍarīka		
1045	Catuṣpīṭhanibandha	Padmacakramaha-vihara?	p 41
1056	Saddharmapuṇḍarīka	Skt Text in Sakya, Tibet	43
1063	Pañcarakṣā	Copied in Patan	44
1065	Saddharmapuṇḍarīka	Cambridge Lib, copied?	"
1066	Saddharmapuṇḍarīka	Cambridge Lib, copied?	"
1069	1,008 pp	Skt text in Nor, Tibet	"
1071	1,008 pp	Asiatic Soc of Bengal	"
1078	Bodhicaryāvatāra-pañjikā	Patan	"
1082	Saddharmapuṇḍarīka	Cakavati Mahavihara?	46
1084	Sekanirdeśapañjikā	Buddhist? "Śrī Vajra" in colophon	48
1093	Saddharmapuṇḍarīka	Patan copy	
1093	1,008 Pp	Patan copy	
1099	Ārya-Uṣṇīṣavijaya Nāma-Dhāraṇī	Dhulikhel	
1123	Vasundhārā- Dhāraṇī	?	55
1120	1,008 pp	Patan	
1121	Nāmasaṅgīti	?	
1138	Pañcarakṣā	found in Sakya, Tibet/c=?	60
1140	Pañcarakṣā	Patab	61
1141	Mitapadāpañjikā	Dakshina-Vihara, Patan	
1143	Nāmasaṅgīti	Sakya, Tibet, copied in KTM	
1148	1008 pp	?	63
1155	Pañcarakṣā	Ananda Mahavihara/ c=?	
1164	1,008 pp	?	
1165	1,008 pp	"Gandigulma"	64
1165	1,008 pp	KTM	65
1166	1,008 pp	?	66

(continued)

Date	Text	Other Information	Source
1166	Gaṇḍavyūha	?	66
1173	Dharma-samuccaya	Citra-Vihara c=?	67
1180	Śrī Mahāmanthāna Mahābhairava Tantra	?	71
1184	Manthāna Bhairava Tantra	?	73
1192	Pañcarakṣā	?	75
1196	Kāraṇḍavyūha	Patan	76
MALLA			
ERA			
1200	1,008 pp	Nor, Tibet	
1216	Sādhana-samuccaya	?	84
1216	Kriyāsaṃgraha		
1217	Kriyāsaṃgraha	?	
1219	Vasundhārā Ṣoḍaśakalpa		
1220	Bajrāvalī-Nāmamaṇḍopāyika		
1246	1,008 pp	Patan	87
1247	Pañcarakṣā	?	88
1252	Kriyāsaṃgraha-pañjikā	?	
1253	1,008 pp	?	88
1257	Kāraṇḍavyūha	?	90
1282	Pañcarakṣā	fr Zva-lu, Tibet	96
1282	Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra	Sakya, Tibet	96
1283	8,000 pp	Sakya, Tibet/ c=KTM	96
1284	1,008 pp	Sakya, Tibet/ c=Patan	97
1297	Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra-pañjikā	?	98
1302	Avadānakalpalatā	?	“
1360	Ārya-Amoghapāśa-Sūtra	?	125
1371	Mudrārākṣasa	Patan	125
1374	Pañcarakṣā	Patan	
1375	Mudrārākṣasa	Patan	126
1384	Pañcarakṣā	?	132
1386	Pañcarakṣā	?	
1389	Pañcarakṣā	Vacca Vihara	134
1391	Kāraṇḍavyūha	?	
1395	? pp	Bktpur	137
1392	Nāmasaṅgītiṭippanī	Navakot	139r
1410	Mahākarmavibhaṅga	KTM	155
1429	Bajrāvalī	Patan	
1470	Pañcarakṣā	?	
1476	Pañcarakṣā	KTM	
1479	Pañcarakṣā	Ktm	165
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Summaries of Texts copied in Nepal (998–1479 CE)

Pañcarakṣā: 14

Saddharmapuṇḍarīka: 6 early

Kāraṇḍavyūha: 3

Nāmasaṅgīti: 3

Tantras:

Mahāmanthāna [Mahā]bhairava Tantra (1180)

Sādhanasamuccaya (1216)

Bajrāvalī (1220)

Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra-pañjikā (1297)

Ritual Texts:

Kriyāsaṃgraha: 3

Dharani Texts:

Ārya-Uṣṇīṣavijaya Nāma-Dhāraṇī (1099)

Vasundhārā- Dhāraṇī (1123, 1429): 2

Narratives:

Lalitavistara (1036)

Saddharmapuṇḍarīka (1039)

Gaṇḍavyūha (1166)

Kāraṇḍavyūha (1196)

Avadānakalpalatā (1302)

Notes

1. In this chapter, we use the locally standard “Bajrācārya” (Sanskrit *vajrācārya*) to refer both to the caste name of the Newar Buddhist sangha priests as well as their religious role.
2. A larger, more comprehensive co-authored book on the history and practices of Newar Buddhist traditions is in preparation by the authors.
3. Due to a variety of reasons—the country’s limited access to Westerners until 1951, the impact of the negative impressions expressed by noted scholars, the sociology of Western Buddhist Studies toward canonical traditions, and the resulting academic preference for Tibetan studies over all Himalayan traditions—progress in the study of Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley has been very slow.
4. Numerous textual accounts assert that Tibetan monks began visiting the Valley after the first missionization of Tibet by monks from the Gangetic Plains. *The Blue Annals* (Roerich 1996, 41–42) record that the monk gSal –Snan, an emissary to King Khri-Sron-lde-btsan, visited Nepal in 755.

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5. For copying these works, Newar literati devised over ten calligraphic scripts, especially for manuscripts used for ritual “book *pūjā*” purposes: *Newā Lipi* since the ninth century, and *Raṅjana* since the fourteenth century.
6. An inscribed sculptural fragment of a more recently discovered image has been assigned an earlier date by Tamot and Alsop (2001), back to the Kushan era. They assume it to be of local production. An accidental find lacking in archaeological context or scientific dating, this sole artifact is insufficient for assuming direct ties with the Kushans.
7. Newar society still is ordered by these institutions called *guthi* in local parlance (Toffin 1975).
8. Located on a pillar in a village outside Patan, and composed by a poet named Anuparamena who is addressing the *Mahābhārata*, it reads: “Repudiated by false thinkers and logicians as well as the Saugatas, who are surrounded by evil, the three Vedas find in you, the Lord of the widespread word, refuge as a river finds refuge in the ocean” (Riccardi 1980, 272). This represents, of course, only one data point, the view of one person.
9. There is one instance of the term *bhoṭṭa* used that could mean Tibet or any people of the Himalayan highlands. Newar trade and artistic ties with Tibet are asserted in certain historical records only as early as 1000 CE (Lewis 1997). Chinese records report an imperial expedition sent to the Gangetic Plains in 648 to avenge a diplomat’s mistreatment, but there is nothing in the Licchavi inscriptions mentioning the Chinese in the Kathmandu Valley.
10. Riccardi (1980, 280n65).
11. Examples of similar duties are also assigned to residents of Hindu temples called *maṇḍalis*.
12. Riccardi (1980, 272). The name of this *vihāra* is both peculiar and puzzling.
13. Schopen (1979, 2000).
14. Riccardi (1980, 273).
15. Acharya’s study (2008) represents a useful, critical re-evaluation of the key epigraphic sources for ancient society in the Nepal Valley, and on its earliest records of Buddhism there. What undermines this new consideration of primary data, however, is a series of tendentious analytical positions taken on the basis of a single data point in the service of this revisionist conclusion. Examples of this practice include the conclusion that there was a “Mahāmuni cult” implied in one inscription or that the teaching of the *pāramitās* was present, although the term is not, in fact, found. Most problematic is the uncritical, undefined use of the word “cult.” It is especially questionable historiographical method to move from one epigraphic reference to Sukhāvātī—that includes only a single, simple mention to attendant celestial bodhisattvas—and then link this to the extant texts found many centuries later in Nepal’s Buddhist archives. Together these cannot establish the historical presence of the “Sukhāvātī cult” in ancient Nepal. This is so not least because one cannot assume that the mere existence of a text found in

- the library proves that it was a working text or the basis of a “cult” in a Buddhist community.
16. There have been only three archaeological research programs ever undertaken in the Kathmandu Valley: in 1965 (S. B. Deo 1968), 1984–1986 (Silvi and Verardi 1984, 1986, 1989), and 1987–1988 (Khanal and Riccardi 2007). Finds in the last include objects of pre-Licchavi material culture similar to Kushan finds to the south and west. One terracotta seal closely resembles those found across south Asia; it shows a large stūpa surrounded by four smaller ones, and with the standard “*Hetu* . . .” couplet summary of the Buddhist Dharma.
 17. Preliminary inquiries into the impact of Tibetan sources, teachers, and institutions on Newar Buddhism are found in Decler (1994–1995), Lewis and Jamspal (1988), and Lewis (1989, 1996). The paucity of systematic or published studies in the Tibetan sources still make any firm conclusions on this issue little more than conjecture.
 18. Decler’s article on this subject (1994–1995) does not match Davidson’s, especially in providing the detailed information about the Newar teacher.
 19. These are important data points, highlighting both John Locke’s (1985, 187–188) and Theodore Riccardi’s (1980) insistence that householder monk monasteries might go far back in Newar Buddhism’s history, just as they were known in ancient Kashmir at the time of the writer Kalhana (1148 CE), as reported in his historical work, *The Rājatarāṅginī* (Stein 1979, 73–74). The recent study on family matters in Indian monasticism by Shayne Clarke (2014) casts doubt on many assumed historical patterns in South Asian Buddhist history. In one place in this ground-breaking monograph he writes, “. . . mainstream Buddhism itself is starting to look surprisingly and increasingly like what we see in later Mahayana Buddhism in Nepal, for instance” (155).
 20. Dan Martin has discussed a text by Sakyā Pandita, who wrote around 1232 CE about a Newar *siddha* named “Ka-ru-dzin” who “had his *siddha*-hood dissolve” (1996, 26); a story collection from about 1260 CE recounts that a *siddha* of this name was bested in a display of *siddhi* powers by Rinchen Zang-po; yet a third source, Chag-Lotsaba, writing in 1260, has the same Newar become possessed, “put a meditation hat on his head, stuck some bird feathers in it, dressed in fur, and made the announcement at Bsamyas, ‘I am Padma [Sambhava],’ and taught innumerable wrong teachings” (26–29).
 21. Hindu tantras appearing in this assembly are the *Nīśvāsākhya Mahā-Tantra* (extant 1056), *Tattvasadbhāva Tantra* (1097), *Pratiṣṭha Tantra* (1134), *Kālottara Tantra* (1168), *Vāmakeśvara Tantra* (1388), the *Gupta-Kālī Tantra* (1400), a *Guhya-Kālī Tantra* (1406), and the *Netrajñānārṇava-Mahātāntra* (1419).
 22. There are questions about the “Buddhist” versus “Hindu” identity of many tantras and the problem of overlapping genres (i.e., many ritual texts have narratives in them, and then narrative texts can in places introduce ritual practices; see, for example, Wedemeyer 2012). The question still remains, of course, of

what a “working text” did in society or what it was used for in context. The two most numerous attested works here are cases in point: the *Prajñāpāramitā* was used, and copied, not to be read for meaning so much as to be the object of *puṣṭa pūjā* (“book ritual”), an Indic practice still extant in the Valley to this day. Similarly, with the *Pañcarakṣā*, Buddhists place a copy inside their houses for the protection its mere presence offered to the building and its inhabitants.

23. The lack of many monuments definitively attested to being in existence before the fourteenth century can be attributed to the profound destructiveness of this invasion, about which the *Gopālarājavarṇasāvalī* reports that the invaders lit and kept fires going for five straight days.
24. While the work on the text itself makes an important contribution to Newar Buddhist studies, Tuladhar-Douglas’s treatment of its era of composition, and many other historical conclusions, are too often insufficiently documented to be convincing. The proposition that the composition and acceptance of a single text, or group of texts, are sufficient to explain the changes in any Buddhist tradition in history is simply not tenable. “Tradition” includes much more than texts that few can read, and the historical imagination of change cannot ignore the scope of ritual, institutional economics, and patrons. In the case of Nepal, all attempts to reach a clear understanding of Buddhism in the Malla era are highly speculative until the large corpus of inscriptions from the Valley are analyzed. One attempt to define the breadth of variables in a Buddhist anthropology of a given society is found in Lewis (1997).
25. The summary depends on the synopsis in Tuladhar-Douglas (2006). One looks forward to his fulfilling his intention (36n6) to publish a scholarly translation of this work.
26. Curiously, Tuladhar-Douglas’s summary of Chapter XVI has this mantra bestowed by what he characterizes, without clarification, as “an *upāsaka Buddha*” (2006, 24).
27. On these traditions in general, see Lewis (2000). On the modern practice of the *uposatha vrata*, see Locke (1989).
28. But even this text does not capture the full richness of the Avalokiteśvara traditions extant in the Kathmandu Valley.
29. This is an image displayed in Nepal from the time of the Patan king Shrinivāsa Malla (c. 1670). In Chapter XVI, the cosmological totality of Avalokiteśvara is conveyed by the claim that there is a world system in each pore of his skin.
30. The term “*Svayambhū Purāṇa*” is found only in the first folio of most extant mss. The term is not found in the earliest archived text and even in the last colophon, where usually a text’s title is usually mentioned. In the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*, in fact, each chapter ends with as follows: “*Svayambhūbhattarakoddese . . . such and such . . . patala samāptam.*” If the *Purāṇa* title is a later imposition, it is consistent with the pattern of Newar Buddhist sites and texts being marked by Hindu-devoted elites as in fact Hindu in essence. The cultural influences

of the brahmanical literary traditions in Malla Nepal remain almost completely unexamined in modern scholarship.

31. According to preliminary studies, there are five different recensions in Sanskrit (Levi 1905, 1: 210), three in Newari (Shakya 1977; Brinkhaus 1987). The eight-chapter version was translated into Tibetan. A useful, recent publication based on a Newari version, with English introduction and chapter summary, is found in Shakya and Bajracarya (2010).
32. Most manuscripts of the text call this figure “*mañjudevācārya*” who in some texts is the *nirmāṇakāya* incarnation of Mañjuśrī.
33. This account states that Mañjuśrī came to Nepal from “Mahā-Cīna,” that is, China. This clearly reflects the Nepal Valley Buddhist elite’s assimilation of the remarkable pan-Asian awareness of the cult of Mañjuśrī that formed and was associated with the northern Chinese holy mountain Wutai Shan. So strong was this recognition, and the pursuit of visionary experiences there, that monks from across India undertook the arduous journey on the silk routes to make their pilgrimages to this mountain in Shanxi Province. Recent accounts highlight this trans-regional connection between India and China (Sen 2004). The same paradigm of Buddhist territorial definition in this form is found in Khotan, which led Brough (1948) to speculate about a connection between these two centers. Decler (1998) more cogently argues that both Nepal’s and Khotan’s accounts were likely based upon common Indic narratives.
34. The summary that follows is based on Shakya and Bajracarya (2010, 33–50).
35. Using Tibetan sources skillfully to decode the identity of the *siddhas* cited in the *Svayambhū Purāna*, Hubert Decler (1998) has connected the Dharmaśrīmitra narrative, his revelation of the *Nāmasaṅgīti* text, and its related tantra to propose a new understanding of the text’s historical composition. A well-known *siddha* by the name of Buddhaśrījñāna undergoes a similar experience to that found in Nepalese text, an episode demonstrating how tantric meditation is infinitely more valuable spiritually than scholarship. He found a master and gained initiation in the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, and the maṇḍala of Mañjuśrī. So this story in the text is really about “the introduction of Vajrayana tradition into the Kathmandu Valley, and of the Yoga Tantras and Anuttara Father Tantra in particular” (1998, 17). Decler then turns to the second major figure, Śāntaśrī or Śāntikara. Again he finds a congruent story in Tāranātha’s history concerned with Vāgīśvara-kīrti, a noted Bajrācārya master who was an accomplished resident at Nālanda and Vikramaśīla, and a specialist in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*. Hubert Decler’s conclusion untangles many of the knots for interpreting of the *Svayambhū Purāna*, noting that its chief task was to authenticate the central Vajrayāna lineages in their formulation before their arrival in Nepal. It does so, he concludes, “by establishing the source of the transmission for the chief Vajrayana lineages of Father Tantra and Mother Tantra, i.e. by pointing in the direction of their common origin: the prestigious Buddhist University of Vikrama-shila, where

- both Dharma-shri-mitra (alias Buddha-shri-jnana) and Shantikara Acarya (alias Vagishvara-kirti) hailed from” (1998, 18).
36. The study of Newar Buddhism has been vexed with the failure of several generations of scholars to publish reputed inscription collections from Nepal, critical editions or translations of this and other texts, and many other materials related to these central sources for studying the history of this tradition.
 37. Groundbreaking work on the sociocultural and political context of tantric traditions in post-Gupta India by Ron Davidson (2002) has greatly advanced scholarly imagination of this era and of the Vajrayāna tradition’s formation. As he notes frequently in this monograph, however, much remains to be discovered to enable confident historical assertions. As Gellner noted after this work’s publication (2004), *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* omits the Kathmandu Valley from his case studies or analysis. Some discussion of Newar Buddhism is found in Davidson’s subsequent volume, *The Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (2005). The lack of an as yet clear understanding of Vajrayāna tradition in the Gangetic Plains makes it impossible to analyze the Newar domestication of this tradition with certainty.
 38. As Robert Miller noted, “This responsibility may be thought of as community service. Thus, (the [Mahāyāna] monk) rejects complete release from the cycle of existence, choosing instead to return again and again in the world in order to aid others in attaining release. . . . Since the layman is unable to pursue enlightenment directly, the sangha . . . is obliged to find a means by which he can pursue it indirectly” (1961, 430).
 39. By far, the most common manuscript genres in Newar Buddhist literature created from this era onward were the popular narratives (*jātakas* and *avadānas*) and ritual texts. “Folklorists” in the Newar *sangha* collected, redacted, and “trans-created” (to use Kamal Prakash Malla’s apt term) the classical tales from the *Jātakamālā*, *Avadānaśataka*, and *Mahāvastu*. Some were extracted to stand alone due to their popularity such as the *Siṃhalasārthabāhu Avadāna*, the *Maṇicūḍa Avadāna*, and the *Vīrakūśa Avadāna*; such texts have been used up to the present day by *pandit*-storytellers who attract audiences for evening tellings during the Newar Buddhist monsoon holy month, *Gumlā*.
 40. The new English translation of Burnouf’s (2010) work is a major contribution to Newar Buddhist studies. While the excellent French scholar worked on what he thought was the texts’ pertinence to Indian Buddhism, his translations and analyses are valuable for their insights on the Newar Buddhist tradition.
 41. One indication of the spread of the importance of this textual culture, and of Rāma as a ruling idea, is the number of sculptures of Agastya in the Valley dating to the Malla period. This archetypal *ṛṣi* and sage is found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and is associated with the expansion of Hindu tradition (e.g., Bolon 1991).

42. Only in Patan did Buddhist leaders consistently secure strong political power. Even there, however, its later Malla kings built impressive new temples to Hindu gods such as Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa.
43. Brinkhaus (1987, 113ff).
44. If the required duties that endured into the twentieth century for the royal cult of Taleju date back until this period, two Buddhist merchant castes, the Tulādharas and Kansakāras, had to supply ritual dancers and horn players (respectively) when the annual rituals for Taleju were being performed in the palace (see Lewis 1995, 52–53, 69–70).
45. It is far beyond the scope of this chapter to expand on the treatment of this complex Newar tradition. In modern times, Newar *śākta* priests, Karmācāryas, do the main rituals associated involving the royal *kumārī* with the cult of Durgā-Taleju; but there are also Buddhist *Bajrācāryas* associated with the palace that perform exoteric and esoteric rituals involving her. The antiquity of these connections remains uncertain. There is also a Newar Buddhist tradition of having virgin girls, also called *kumārīs*, selected from saṅgha families, and they take part in Newar monastic rituals. Here, the girls are considered the human representation of *prajñā*, just as Mahāyāna scriptures symbolized this salvific insight, or wisdom, anthropomorphically as the goddess Prajñāpāramitā. There are only a few Newar monasteries that still have an affiliated *kumārī* today. Their presence is part of the *thasihna-pūjā* and the secret esoteric *ahoratra homa* ritual. As part of the latter, the *kumārī* is expected to make predictions about the future.
46. Even the often copied, Nepal-composed *Śrīmat-Paśupati Purāṇa*, a text that is primarily dedicated to the narrative of how Śiva as Paśupati came to the KTM Valley, contains this account (Brinkhaus 1987, 7).
47. Major figures from the Sanskrit *purāṇas* written in India are found in these stories, as brahman authors in the Valley composed texts that drew from the classical tradition: the sage Nārada is described as coming to Nepal, narrating previous events and coaching the gods to victory over the demon; Garuda appears to render help in ensuring the success of the Valley creation; and Kṛṣṇa establishes and worships liṅgas in the Valley. The texts describe the Himalayan foothills landscape, and that the ancient mountain and temple at Chāngu Nārayan is Kṛṣṇa's abode.
48. The Buddhist version of this formula is found in the texts discussed earlier, and is a subject to be revisited in the next section.
49. They are mentioned in chapters XV, XVI, and XXVI of this work.
50. This text engages with the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*, noting that “the *deva*” Buddha came from Mahācīna and that the site is to be visited. In this case, there is no attempt at enfolding this site into the Śaiva sacred order.
51. The accounts have him come from Kāmarūpa, Assam, to save the Valley from a famine induced by a drought caused by Gorakhnātha, who had captured the Valley's rainmaking *nāgas*. The establishment of a temple in Patan, and the

- annual celebration of the yearly festival in that Malla capital, is likely part of this innovation (see Slusser 1982, 365–380).
52. Shakyā (1993) has published a *caryagita* dedicated to this form of Avalokiteśvara, noting that it is attributed to the composition of a *siddha* named Advayavajra (978–1053 CE) in Nepal.
 53. *Gopālarājavamaśāvali* (Vajracarya and Malla 1985, 145). Interestingly, the royal patron was the invading Malla king from the Western Nepal, who also made offerings to Bunga-dya, the Avalokiteśvara of Patan and Bungamati, as well as Śiva-Paśupati.
 54. Though in twentieth-century Kathmandu, records indicate that the celebration has been done only once every twelve years. The royal participation in this Newar Buddhist event was continued by the Shahs until the demise of King Birendra in 2001.
 55. The elegant translation is found in Bledsoe (2004, 238).
 56. The data is all derived from Locke (1985). A systematic culling all of his work, with that in other sources—primarily the Malla inscriptions—is an obvious desideratum for starting to discern the institutional history of Newar Buddhism.
 57. A comparative study of “married monks” is especially need for Buddhist historiography. Recent studies by Shayne Clarke (2009a, 2009b, 2014) on Vinaya passages concerned with monastic celibacy have indicated that the early saṅgha’s boundaries were more complex than hitherto imagined. The modern Japanese saṅgha’s transformation into a married patrilineage community is well documented, the result of nineteenth-century political dictates. A more proximate comparison might be with the married Nyingma-pa Tibetan lineages still present across the rural Himalayan peoples. It may of course be the case that the Newar transition to a married saṅgha is *sui generis*.
 58. The term *bare* derives from the Sanskrit term *vande* or *vandanā*, an ancient Indic term of respect for monks.
 59. Locke (1985, 317) once noted a case of a brahman, Dhanajaya Upādhyāya, who was ordained in Lagan Bāhā “five generations ago,” during the Shah era.
 60. While the term “Buddhist Brahmins,” coined long ago by Stephen Greenwold (1974) for their modern successors, neglects some crucial portions of their identity, when considering Newar Buddhist rituals, their service today is indeed brahman-like.
 61. Richard Widdess, in a study of Newar tantric dance tradition (*cacā*; Skt *caryā*), has identified what is likely the general pattern across various cultural elements in Kathmandu Valley Vajrayāna Buddhism: “The assumption that Newar *cacā* is a living continuation of the Indian *caryā* . . . can be reconstructed, three phases can be distinguished: Phase I: the ‘Indian Buddhism phase,’ during which the *caryā* genre developed in India, and which came to an end with the disappearance of Buddhism from North India around the fourteenth century. Phase II: the ‘Newar Buddhism’ phase, where *caryā/cacā* became absorbed into the ritual

- practice of a priestly caste . . . Phase III: the ‘revival’ phase, in progress at the present day, where *caryā/cacā* has also become a non-ritual art-form” (2004, 8).
62. On this ritual, see Lewis and Emmrich (2012)
 63. See extensive treatment in Lewis (1995).
 64. Newar writers were arrested for publishing in any language other than Nepali, the national language. Chittadhar Hridaya, while imprisoned for publishing a short poem on his mother’s death, composed his greatest work, *Sugata Saurabha*. See Lewis and Tuladhar (2011).
 65. The most important study on this movement is found in Levine and Gellner (2005). The authors’ prediction that the Theravada reform movement would eclipse traditional Newar Mahāyā-Vajrayāna Buddhism has yet to be seen.
 66. One old and important specialization the Newar sangha of Shākyas and Bajrācārya has long undertaken is fashioning jewelry, ornaments, and Buddhist images.
 67. In the Newar Buddhist geography, there are no special ritual ties accorded to the Bauddha stūpa that towers over the north-central Kathmandu Valley, and which for the last 600 years has been recognized in the Tibetan religious world as a pilgrimage destination of great power (Dowman 1982; Ehrhard 1990). Reputed to be a Licchavi monument originally founded by King Manadeva, Newars have their own term for this site—Khasti—but neither Kathmandu nor Patan Buddhists visit it as part of any of their extant traditional community practices.
 68. What is striking, especially amidst all the texts stored and copied in the Kathmandu Valley, is the near total absence of Vinaya texts in the Newar archives, a striking contrast with their presence in the Tibetan textual tradition. As Funayama Tōru of Kyoto University has noted (in a talk at the Harvard Buddhist Studies forum, December 9, 2011), we usually understand that Mahāyāna Buddhists did not have their own monastic code (*vinaya*) throughout the history of Indian Buddhism. On the other hand, medieval Chinese Buddhists widely held the idea of Mahāyānavinaya (*dasheng lü* 大乘律) in the sense of a text/texts based on bodhisattva precepts (*bodhisattvaśīla*, *pusa jie* 菩薩戒), as is clearly evident from Chinese Buddhist catalogs. Is this idea a result of a Chinese misunderstanding? Naturally this question is also concerned with the Sinification of Buddhism. In this talk, Dr. Funayama explored the significance of Mahāyāna precepts with a special focus on the *Scripture of Brahma’s Net* (*Fanwang jing* 梵網經) and pointed out that this well-known apocryphal sutra played a critical role for the establishment of the term *dasheng lü* in China. Further, he wanted to verify that basically the same idea, if not entirely identical, is found in the Skt. *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the most significant text for bodhisattva precepts in India. It seems true that early Yogācārins in India had strong aspirations for the composition of a special vinaya for bodhisattvas—the book of bodhisattva precepts—as an equivalent of the orthodox vinaya and that such an intention was more emphasized by the composition of the *Scripture of Brahma’s Net* in China.

69. NMB prefers not to see Buddhist rites as “versions of Hindu *saṃskāras*.” In his view, “*saṃskāras* are natural phenomena; both Hindu and Buddhist practitioners have accepted them and developed ritual in their own mode.”
70. On this topic in late Indic Buddhism in NE India and Nepal, see the new study of illustrated manuscripts by Jinah Kim (2013).
71. Claims that “Indian Buddhism died out” defy geography and ignore the unbroken and ongoing survival of Newar Buddhism.
72. Śrī Ratnaketu Mahāvihāra is a Sanskrit name of a *vihāra* that is located in a north-eastern neighborhood in Kathmandu city. It is popularly known as Jhwā Bāhā in local (Newari) language, but this name is not a translation of the Sanskrit.
73. This second type of monastery, most of which are located outside the city limits of the major settlements, doubtless points to a formerly important division in the history of Newar Buddhism. Several theories have been proposed, but nothing definitive has been determined.
74. For example: a *mu-bāhā*: “Śrī Ratnaketu Mahāvihāra;” a *bāhā*: “Śrī Śantighat Caitya Mahāvihāra;” a *bāhi*: “Sthavirapatra Mahāvihāra;” a branch *bāhā*: “Gunakara Mahāvihāra.” For a comprehensive listing, see Locke (1985); follow-up observations are found in a recent study by Owens (2014).
75. See Lewis and Shakya (1989).
76. Most have directional Buddhas, but there are great, creative variations in the Valley’s sculptural tradition. On this topic, see the exhaustive documentation by Neils Gutschow (1997).
77. Two different family lineages of the same monastery can also marry each other. In recent decades, it has been accepted that Bajrācāryas and Shākya-Bhikṣuṇīs can intermarry.
78. In most Newar *vihāras*, it is mandatory for the male children of Bajrācārya men to take *ācārya abhiṣeka*. (In some *vihāras* it is optional.) A Bajrācārya man who receives *pravajya* ordination but does not take the *ācārya abhiṣeka* falls to the rank of Shākya-bhikṣu.
79. New Bajrācāryas begin their *ācārya* career performing *maṃsa ahuti homa* at *piṭhas*, where a temple to the one of the *aṣṭamātrka* is found.
80. This breakdown was precipitated due to community disagreements and feuds dating back to the 1920s. On this, see Rosser (1966) and Lewis (1995).
81. For a thorough documentation of this ritual tradition, see Sharkey (2001).
82. Nowadays only a very few monasteries are following the traditions.
83. The usage until today reflects the state of the Valley’s politics in the late Malla period: each major city was a separate country (Skt. *deśa*; New. *de*).
84. This tradition certainly suggests historical ties between the Newar Buddhist saṅgha and the Tibetan Buddhist world. While there is no reported memory of what this relationship was among the Newar saṅgha members living today, it is interesting to note that in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European accounts of the Kathmandu Valley, the authors report this tea custom, as well as

what they understand to be Newar Buddhist monks wearing red woolen robes. Tibetan accounts of the lives of eminent lamas include their receiving great veneration by local householders and even kings; some give initiations to local Newars. On this nascent field of study, see Lewis (1988, 1999), and Bogin (2013, 54–57, 100–103).

85. The musical analogy is useful here: with the complete change in ritual paraphernalia, ritual utterances, shrine focal points, and esoteric symbolisms, the pre-modern *Bajrācārya* masters of ritual changed the “key” of the brahmanical score to express their Buddhist identity, while allowing their disciples to conform outwardly with high caste practices.
86. In the context of the Newar *guru-maṇḍala-arcana*, the term *guru* denotes all the Buddhist teachers in the broadest sense: the Buddhas, the Dharma (Buddha’s teachings), and the saṅgha (Buddhist monks, nuns, and priests). It also acknowledges Vajradhara, the Buddha who symbolizes the *dharmakāya* (“doctrinal body”) of all past, present, and future Buddhas. The term *maṇḍala* specifically refers to the body, speech, and mind of oneself. The term *arcana* means sacrifice. So it can be said that the *gurumaṇḍala-arcana* means sacrificing one’s own body, speech, and mind to the totality of teachers—the Buddha, Dharma, saṅgha, and Vajradhāra—with the ultimate objective of the attainment of enlightenment.
87. Regarding the sense organs, ears and their object sound cannot be represented by any visible object, so a bell represents the sense organ ears, the object sound, and relation between the two.
88. Thirdly, the bell and *vajra* symbolize skillful means and wisdom, and also, respectively, compassion and wisdom. The holding the bell in the left hand and the *vajra* in the right hand symbolizes that one should employ both compassion and wisdom. Finally, crossing both hands in the cross-hand gesture holding each symbolizes the union of compassion and wisdom. Ultimately, the union of compassion with wisdom produces the thought of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*).
89. There are levels of air, fire, water; seven types of sea; and four great/primary islands (Skt. *mahādvīpa*) in the four directions, as well as four small/secondary islands (Skt. *upadvīpa*) in the four intermediate directions; three main mountains at the center, surrounded by seven mountains; also eight types of jewels in the eight directions. It also includes the moon on the right and the sun on the left.
90. This early Mahāyāna ritual is mentioned in chapter 2 of Shantideva’s *Bodhicāryāvātāra*.
91. Confession is nuanced in its listing: first are the ten non-virtuous deeds committed by oneself. But one also confesses the ten non-virtuous deeds committed by others that one might have encouraged or approved.
92. Benefits of all above-mentioned practice, as mentioned in a Newar commentary: Doing this visualization will gradually minimize committing sinful acts. Faced with engaging in misconduct, the individual will remember that one’s

sensual organs and sensual objects have been sacrificed often in daily practice, and so one can be detached from them, the root-causes for attachment (*trene*) and hatred (*ghrina*). The effect is gradually to lose individualistic thoughts, self-centered ideas, and to promote focus on life's duties, and dedication to others. You will not forget your ultimate aim of your life (i.e., to be a Buddha, the enlightened one).

93. The *Bajrācārya* accomplishes this through visualization on the air-maṇḍala, likewise fire-maṇḍala: visualize three skinless skulls situated on an oven; upon the oven, is a skinless skull like a bowl. Imagine that you have put your sensual organs and the respective sensual objects inside the skinless skull and then boil them up completely. Now the skull is full of foods transformed to be ambrosia, though made of each of the five sensual organs and their respective objects. After this, invite all the guardian deities, along with their kin from all directions, and ask that they partake in this “food,” and so become satisfied and happy.
94. This may well represent the Newar saṅgha's economic adaptation in parallel with the patterns of Newar brahman ritualists who subsist mainly through death-time gift giving. It is important to note that *śrāddha* rituals are one of the chief occasions for laymen presenting *dāna* to the *Bajrācārya* saṅgha.
95. Newar *śrāddha* is consistent with the trans-regional tradition of cultural adaptation that characterizes Buddhism tradition from its origins. In East Asia, Buddhist ritualists designed rites to satisfy families and monastics who wished to keep faith with their Confucian ancestor veneration obligations. They papered over the inevitable contradiction between ancestral spirits residing in graves and altars, and the Buddhist doctrine that holds that rebirth is inevitable, and occurs after no more than 49 days after death. Buddhism could not have survived opposing this central part of the diffuse tradition of popular East Asian religion, and made their grounds available to families to establish their ancestral shrines. The Newar Buddhist inter-cultural milieu in South Asia has been, in some ways, different: ancestor afterlife tradition was defined by brahmins, not Confucians. But the same traditional ethos informed this adaptation by the Nepalese *Bajrācāryas* from Malla times onward—skillful means, compassion, doing the needful to preserve the Buddhist Dharma—and is clearly discerned below the surface of conformity. It need not obscure that fact that it may well have been in the economic interest of the Newar “householder monks” to compose an elaborate program of tantric Buddhist *śrāddha*, since they have enjoyed, until today, regular employment in the performance of these rites.
96. See Lewis (1994) and chapters of Lewis (2000) for a fuller treatment of this popular Newar Buddhist devotional practice.
97. As usually depicted in Newar paintings, these are Gaganaganja, Khagarbha, Kṣitigarbha, Maitreya, Mañjuḥṣa, Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, and Viṣkambhin.
98. The authors are preparing a documentary and analytical study of Newar Buddhist *homa* ritual (Bajracarya and Lewis, forthcoming)

99. The term *hnikam* means “daily” and “regular.”
100. The senior woman greets the honored guests at a place where the floor/ground has been marked with a *svāstika*. At the entry point, she pours onto each person’s head a small assortment of auspicious items (flowers, rice, small fruit), dropping the mix from a large container. Each individual has this done three times, then the women of the house lead them in, with the first guest grasping a proffered key and other objects as they move into the now auspicious space.
101. Couples share one maṇḍala plate; individuals have their own. This is a special plate called *thayebhu* or *kayembhu*.
102. Lit: *go* = cow, *ku* = dog, *da* = elephant, *ha* = horse, *na* = human meat. This tradition derives from the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*.
103. NMB has speculated on the meaning: “The idea behind the returning the *hnikam* is that as the distillation of *prajñā*, the mantra is eternal like the Adi Buddha, and should not therefore go to immolation with the dead body.”
104. William Stablein’s memoir (1993) includes an account of his initiation in this tantra back in 1973, with noted Kathmandu *Bajrācārya* Jog Muni Bajrācārya. Information on the general principles and practices of Newar tantric initiation is found in Gellner (1993).
105. As summarized by Wallis, “Both *puraścaraṇa* and *ādikarma* denote a series of ritualized activities performed at the initial stage of a formalized practice. Though activities vary somewhat from community to community, they generally involve such exercises as mantra recitation (*jāpa*), daily ablutions (*snāna*), oblations (*homa*), meditation (*dhyāna*), devotional worship of *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* (*pūjā*), maṇḍala offerings, and occasional alms begging. These are carried out under a vow (*vrata*), during an extended period of training. The execution of both the *ādikarma* and the *puraścaraṇa* follows formal initiation into a cult, but precedes the performance of advanced ritual practice” (2003, 7–8).
106. Women cannot undertake the *puraścaraṇa* retreats.
107. It is practiced after the *ksama-pūjā* and before the *nyāsa-likāyegu-pūjā*. These rituals are the Vajrayāna practice that involves taking out the *nyāsa* (life) and transmitting it into a jar that contains water and other materials required for the purpose.
108. NMB writes, “I had played a role as the *karmācārya* in the renovation of the massive vajra and the *dharmadhātu* maṇḍala constructed at Svayambhū in the 1990s. At that time we practiced *purusan* in the tantric Santipur cave shrine on the north side of Svayambhū hill.”
109. NMB notes, “After finishing my PhD, I practiced *purusan* for a week under the guidance of Badri Guruju in the *āgam* of the Bijyeśvari Temple and completed it with *maṃsāhuti homa*.”
110. The identity of this legendary figure in the Kathmandu Buddhist tradition could possibly be related a Śāśvatavajra, a famous tantric scholar practitioner (active in the twelfth century) who wrote one of the Cakrasaṃvara commentaries preserved in the Tibetan canon.

111. Translation from B. Bajracarya (1979).
112. This story implying the superiority of the Newar master is contradicted by another story told by Hodgson's *Bajrācarya* pandit Amṛtānanda implying the opposite: "It is said that Shankara, a Śivamārgī, having destroyed the worship of the Buddha and the scriptures concerning his doctrine in Hindustan, came to Nepal, where he also effected much mischief; and then he proceeded to Bhot. There he had a conference with the grand Lama. The Lama, who never bathes and . . . disgusted him to the degree that he started to revile the Lama. The Lama replied, 'I keep my inside pure, although my outside be impure; while you carefully purify yourself without, but you are filthy within'; then he drew out his whole entrails, and showed them to Shankara, then replaced them. He then demanded a reply . . . Shankara, by virtue of his yoga, ascended to the heavens; the lama perceiving the shadow of Shankara's body on the ground, fixed a knife in the place of the shadow; Shankara then fell on the knife, which pierced his throat and killed him instantly. Such is the legend or tale that prevails, and thus we account for the fact the Buddhamārgī practice of Tibet is purer, and its scriptures more numerous, than ours" (Hodgson 1874, 48).
113. As summarized by Lall (1968, 55–59), and adapted from informant retellings.
114. A pilgrimage place in the southwest of the Kathmandu Valley is also called "Dāman" (Manandhar 1986, 85).
115. That is, from full moon day of the month of Phalgunā to full moon day of Chaitra.
116. On *Gumlā*, see Lewis (1993a).
117. Also called the *Navavaipulya Sūtras*. These are the texts that form the nine texts in the *Dharma maṇḍala* for many Newar rituals, with the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* in the central position (Locke 1989).
118. Oral recollection by Badri Baajracarya, August 2011.
119. TL interview with Divya Bajrācārya, May 1, 1994.
120. Note that what the "Buddhist monastic community" in this era means is far from certain, as Shayne Clarke has made clear. His comments about how the Newar "married sangha" tradition may be less out of the Indic monastic mainstream than once thought are pertinent to attempts to imagine the social locations of tantric Buddhism: ". . . mainstream Buddhism itself is starting to look surprisingly and increasingly like what we see in later Mahāyāna Buddhism in Nepal, for instance" (Clarke 2014, 155).
121. It is important to be clear in this discussion that "Newar" derives from the name of the Valley, also known as "Nepal"; anyone who settled and assimilated in this region—from north, south, or elsewhere in the montaine region—could become "a Newar." Just as many individuals over the centuries were drawn to this idyllic Valley, and who "stayed on" to learn the language, marry into the established society, and participate in the local culture, so was "Newar Buddhism," especially in this era, shaped by a variety of religious teachers,

meditation practitioners, scholars, and others who set down roots, found patrons, and built institutions. Some like Atiśa and Dharmasvamin are well known; but doubtless many others are yet to be identified, especially those from Tibet in later centuries.

122. On this movement, see Levine and Gellner (2005). The Theravāda movement itself has been divided due to scandals involving the early generations of ordained monks, the separation of prominent monks seeking their own set of outside donors, dominance of the movement by high-caste Newars, and the tensions between the monks and the respected *anāgārikas*.
123. Since 1980, there has been a vast increase in the building of Tibetan monasteries throughout the Kathmandu Valley. This has been driven, in large part, by the in-migration of Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman adherents (Sherpa, Manangi, Tamang, Gurung, etc.) from across Nepal resulting from the Maoist civil war. Wealthy individuals have pulled their wealth into the Valley and constructed upward of 100 new monasteries in the last two decades.
124. Pamphlet, The Nagarjuna Institute of Exact Methods (1993).
125. See <http://www.lrcnepal.org>. Accessed February 27, 2015.
126. In Newari: *Nepal Paramparagar Bauddha Dharma Sangha*
127. These initiatives to open up have been cautious, only moving the caste exclusiveness of Newar Vajrayāna to be slightly less hierarchical.
128. See <http://vajrayanivihar.org.np/index.php?page=static&sid=2>. Accessed March 4, 2015.
129. It should be noted that the rituals of Patan and Kathmandu do have enduring differences. The pre-modern variations between monasteries and ritualists within cities reveal how independent the Malla era traditions were, a pattern of autonomy in the saṅgha that has characterized Buddhist from its earliest days.
130. There have been hundreds of new ritual manuals and philosophical booklets published over the last decade, many adopting the traditional practice of having mourning families support the costs of publication as a meritorious act in memory of their loved one.
131. As von Rospatt has noted (2011a, 22), Naresh Bajracarya has begun to offer initiation to the practice of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra* in Patan and Bhaktapur, cities where a lineage of practitioners had apparently ceased.

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