

the raja whether he had seen a woman on the trail. The Byas River raja replied that he had seen a woman traveling alone but that she had gone on up the trail. The soldiers did not believe him and asked if they could search the palaces to be sure she was not there. The raja agreed to this proposal, and they proceeded to look through all his rooms. As they neared the room in which the woman was locked, the raja said: "You can't go in there, because one of my daughters, who is pregnant, is inside." The soldiers did not believe him and demanded that he swear that the room contained only his daughter and not the woman for whom they were looking. The king was prepared to compromise himself (swearing falsely is considered locally to be an extremely grave offense against morality) for the woman's sake and swore accordingly. The soldiers took him to the trail and told him to swear on the sharp edge of a sword, which he did. The soldiers then returned in the direction from which they had come. After they were gone the woman continued on up the Bheri River to the site of what is now the village of Tarakot, although at that time there was no village there or anywhere else in Tichurong, which was then completely devoid of human population.

She had been pregnant when she fled her village, and she subsequently gave birth to her child, a son, while she was still living alone in what would later be called Tarakot. The boy grew up also on the site of Tarakot and looked after their gray cow, which he often grazed in the huge field around and above which Gomba village is now located. Through all these years the boy and his mother were the only inhabitants of the Tichurong area.

At that time there was a lake filled with milk near a large walnut tree on the site of Gomba village, and most of the area around the lake was covered by trees. While grazing the cow one day the boy saw seven goddesses²¹ in the form of angels who came there every day to swim in the milk lake. The boy intended to tell his mother about this, but each day he forgot about it by the time he reached home. One day he put a stone in his pocket so that when he took his clothes off that night the stone would fall out and remind him.²²

That night the stone did fall out, but when his mother saw the stone she was very upset because she thought he intended to kill her with it. She said: "I have suffered a great deal for you. All that I have done has been for your sake. And now you want to kill

me?" Her son told her that she was badly mistaken and that he had brought the stone home only to remind him to tell her about the angels he had seen bathing in the milk lake every day.

His mother was delighted to hear about the angels, and the next day she accompanied her son to the milk lake. They hid behind a bush and watched the angels descend from the sky and undress to bathe. The mother wanted her son to catch a goddess, preferably the youngest, because she always flew away last. She told him to catch the angel by touching her with a cow's tail which, being impure, would destroy her special powers.²³ After the angels had been swimming for some time, the boy removed all their clothes from where they had undressed, and when they got out of the lake and saw him they were embarrassed by their nakedness. They demanded their clothes back, but the boy refused to hand them over. They demanded them back again and this time he returned the clothes of the older angels but not of the youngest one. In this way he was able to get close enough to catch her.

The boy and his mother took her back to their house at the Tarakot site, but she would not say anything because she could not speak their language, which was Nepali. So the mother and son made many different kinds of bread and worshiped her with bread offerings. She was surprised by all this activity and said: "Tai kenan?" which in her own language meant "What are you doing?" From that time on the mother and son began to learn her language so that it eventually became their primary conversational medium. This is the language now called Kaike,²⁴ spoken today in Tarangpur, Tarakot, and Tupa but nowhere else in the world.

As time went by, the son and his angel bride had three sons. The eldest one brought them great happiness and was named Quay, which means "smiling" or "happy." Since it is considered good to have two sons, the second was named Jei, which in Kaike means "suitable." More than two sons is considered too many, so the third son was named Ging, which in Kaike refers to a proud person who upsets people.

The three sons grew up and continued to live in their valley, which was still occupied only by themselves, so that there was no one for them to marry. The only way to acquire wives was to go outside Tichurong to find suitable brides where other people lived and bring them back to Tichurong. Thus Quay went to the Jumla

area where he found the daughter of a high-caste Thakuri from Dailekh; Jei crossed over the Jangla passes out of Tichurong, descended to the Maikot region to the south and brought back a Magar girl; and Ging headed north to the area bordering Tibet and returned with a Bhotia girl (see fig. 1).

When the three brothers had all returned with their brides, Ging invited his two brothers and their wives to a feast. To provide meat he killed a cow, since his Bhotia wife had no restrictions against eating beef, but he hid the head and tail so that the others would not know what kind of meat they were eating. As it turned out the brothers discovered what he had done anyway and in retaliation placed him under a curse, which stipulated that his descendants should not multiply very greatly, but yet should not die out completely either. His descendants are called Ghartis,²⁵ and today the Gharti clan is, indeed, the smallest clan by far in Tarangpur. The three brothers were Thakuris (their angel mother fell outside the conventional caste categories, but their father would have inherited his mother's caste, presumed to be Thakuri since she fled from a Thakuri area), and by the marriage rules of that caste, intermarriage among the children of siblings would ordinarily be proscribed. But the father decided to make a rule that his sons' children could marry, so that their descendants would belong to three exogamous, intermarrying clans. Thus in addition to the Ghartis, Quay's descendants are called Budhas, and Jei's clan are the Rokayas.

The origin of the fourth major clan is different. One of the three sons was a shepherd who kept losing the same female goat every day, so one day he followed her when she wandered away from the rest of the herd. He discovered that she was giving her milk to a baby boy living in the hollow part of a bamboo tree near the present village of Tupa. He came home and discussed what he had seen with his family, and they decided to bring the baby home. The boy grew up and became the ancestor of the Jhankri clan. The Budha, Rokaya, Gharti, and Jhankri clans were of equal rank and married among themselves, the offspring belonging to the clan of the father. To this day Jhankris, unlike the other clans, do not eat she-goats, because it was a she-goat who fed their ancestor in the bamboo tree. They do eat he-goats.

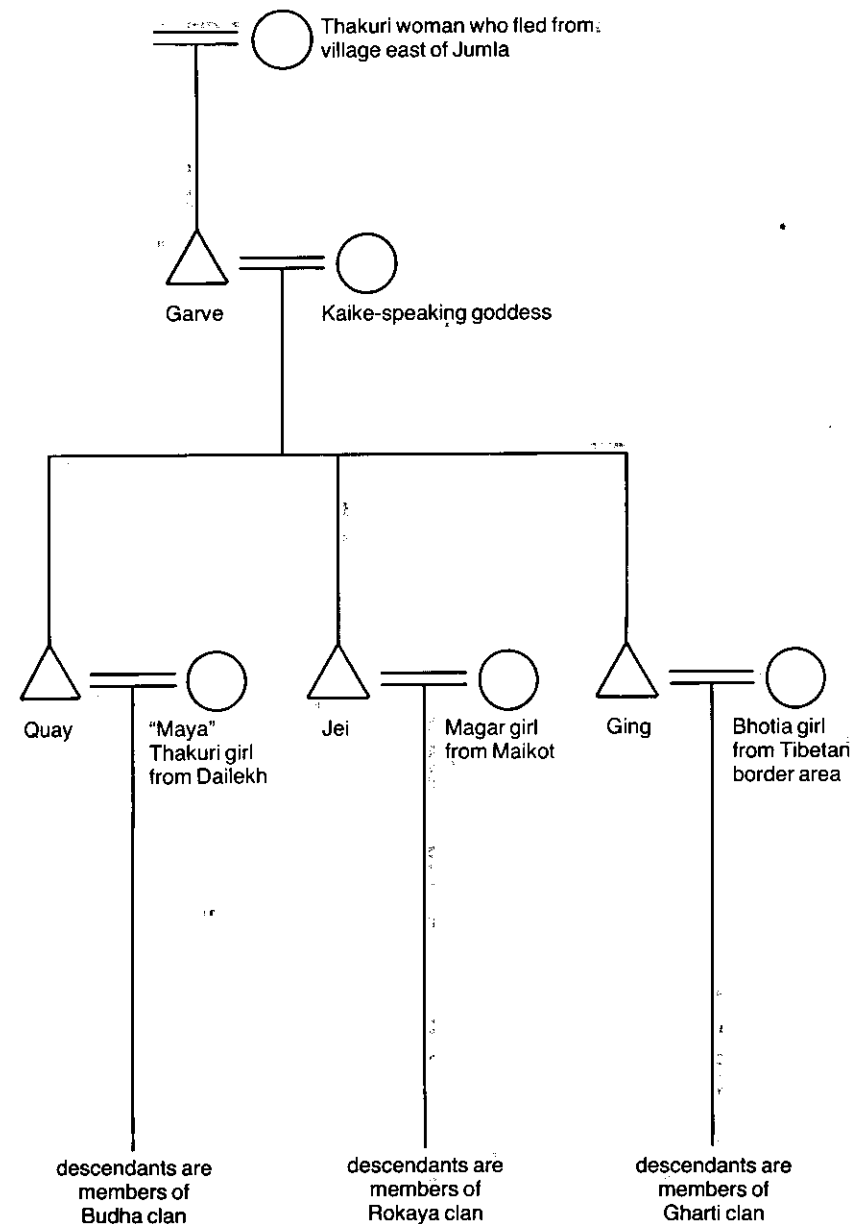


Figure 1. Origin of the Three Principal Clans in Tarangpur

Some more recent arrivals in the village have appropriated one or another of these ancestral clan names, so the clans are now further subdivided into lineages that may intermarry. For example, there are now two Jhankri lineages, Mapa and Topa. Mapa Jhankris are descended from the ancestor in the bamboo tree, while the origins of the Topa Jhankris are in Bhot. In Kaike and Tibetan, Topa means "above" and Mapa means "below"; these terms refer not to differences in social status but to altitudes of residents within a village—a terminological distinction common in Tibetan-speaking villages of west Nepal. Presumably, at one time there was such a terminological distinction in Tupa (no etymological connection with Topa), home of the greatest contemporary concentration of Jhankris.

Similarly, in addition to the "regular" Rokayas descended from the second brother, there are "three-eye" Rokayas who claim heroic origins. Once upon a time there was a wicked giant in Kola village. A Tibetan referred to now as the "three-eyed man" decided to do away with this giant, and so a contest was arranged in which their relative strength could be tested. To compare their power each had to swallow an entire male yak at once. Two yaks were produced, and the Tibetan swallowed his easily. He consumed the whole animal, but the giant's yak got stuck in his throat and he died on the spot. At that moment a third eye appeared in the Tibetan's forehead, like Siva's third eye, which appears when he's angry. Had the giant not died, the Tibetan could have burned him with his third eye. From then on the giant-slayer was respected as a king. He wore the fashions of the areas he visited, whether Tibetan or Nepalese, and the people of Gomba village imitated his clothes.

Different Budha lineages have multiplied in similar ways. The Palpali Budhas,²⁶ as distinct from the Budhas descended from the first brother, were originally of the Chhetri (i.e., Kshatriya) caste. In 1855, when Nepal was ruled by the first Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur (1846–1876), a minor war broke out between Tibet and Nepal. A soldier from Palpa, due south of Tichurong and only one day's walk from the Terai, came through Tarangpur on his way to war. He fell in love with a local girl, who became pregnant by him. When he returned from Tibet she had married another man, a member of the Budha clan. The soldier was angry and

threatened to kill him, but the man pleaded with him and said: "Don't kill me and I'll pass on all my fields to your son." The fields were Budha fields (all fields are associated with one or the other of the major clans who originally owned them, even if they are eventually inherited by a member of a different clan), so the soldier's son and his line became Budhas also, and his descendants are known as Palpali Budhas. But today they marry among themselves and are therefore distinct from the aboriginal Budhas.

There are a few other minor Budha, Rokaya, and Jhankri lineages which are prominent in one village or another in Tichurong, but they lack origin myths of the kind just recounted, and there is no need to become bogged down in further structural details at this point. The Lama families, for example, while visually indistinguishable from the rest of the villagers, form, like the Palpali Budhas, a largely endogamous group (see chap. 7 for a discussion of marriage classes). They generally call themselves "Budhas," although no one pretends that they are related to the primordial Budhas of the origin myth. There are also Bherba Budhas (so called because they at first lived in a section of fields called "Bher"), who are again distinguished from the so-called Arangba Budhas, the descendants of the ancestral Budha clan founder.

There is also an exogamous lineage of Thakuris (locally called "Thakula" to indicate the combination of high-caste origin and intermarriage with the Magar clans already mentioned), who emigrated from the Jajarkot region (several days' travel down the Bheri River) several generations ago. Since these Thakuris comprise a single exogamous lineage, they have always intermarried with members of the other Magar clans and hence are so thoroughly Magarized and absorbed into the society as to be indistinguishable from the rest of the villagers.

What is striking in all the myths is the unhesitatingly explicit and open acknowledgment of an ancestry that is so culturally and racially mixed. My census records from all Tichurong houses show that there is very little marriage into or out of the valley, and marriage with an outside group rarely occurs now or in the remembered past. Marriage of a Tarangpur Magar with a Bhotia would be unthinkable, for example, while marriage with a Thakuri or Magar from another part of Nepal would render the

offspring of such a union ineligible as a marriage partner for another Tarangpur villager. Even the mere rumor of an illicit connection between a Tarangpur woman and a Bhotia man was the basis for one of the most sensational scandals of recent times. Genealogies are not written down or even generally remembered beyond four or five generations (informants had never thought about it before, but guessed that approximately ten or eleven generations had elapsed between the time of the original ancestor of the three clans and the present), yet the greatest importance is attached to the purity of one's descent so far as it is known. Paradoxically, by their own account, the clans were conceived and executed from the outset on disparate cultural foundations. These different groups still exist, and even surround the clans today, but acknowledgment of common kinship with them would be preposterous at best and irremediably scandalous at worst.

The boundaries that divide Tarangpurians from these other groups are partly ecological and partly reflexes of an ingrown social structure, but more than mountain passes and marriage rules are involved. There are shared elements with Tibetan culture, most notably the perennial presence of Buddhism; with Hindu culture, in concerns with pollution and hierarchy (see chap. 7); and even with Magar culture elsewhere in Nepal, in the partial overlapping of clan names (Hitchcock 1965).²⁷

Whatever similarities exist between Tarangpur Magar culture and that of these other groups, it is emphatically the differences which matter most to the citizens of Tarangpur. Similarities are freely acknowledged, but differences are flaunted. From the Tarangpur point of view, the Thakuris to the west are in some sense "higher," the Magars to the south are of comparable status, and the Bhotias are "lower," although affinities exist in each case. Yet the rank of the three ancestral clans is unequivocally equal; the fact that one clan is descended from a Bhotia founder and another from a Thakuri does not in any way imply differential status today.

Thus the same persistent theme of cultural marginality suggested by both geographic and historical considerations is reiterated in these mythical origin stories. Whatever genetically and culturally mixed ancestry is historically involved, the myths charter (in the

old-fashioned Malinowskian sense) the contemporary intermediate ethnic position of these people. Tarangpurians see themselves, by birthright so to speak, as an indeterminate mixture between distinct cultural poles, their physical and cultural isolation attenuated at the same time by mediating links with a complicated, powerful, and diverse external world. The specific social relationships of the mythical past cannot be reconstructed any more than those of the historical rajadoms can be, but the empirical study of contemporary Tarangpur which follows confirms the cultural miscegenation of those myths.

TARANGPUR AND THE WORLD BEYOND

Tarangpur is culturally convoluted, geographically isolated, and socially ingrown. For example, 41 percent of the marriages in Tarangpur were contracted between spouses born there, another 44 percent involved spouses from three villages less than an hour's walk away, and all but one (a marriage with a constable in the newly established checkpost) of the remaining 15 percent were all with Tichurong-born-and-bred marriage partners. The three Kaik-speaking villages of Tarangpur, Tupa, and Tarakot, plus Gomba village are, taken as a unit, relatively endogamous. If someone lives in Tarangpur, he was probably born there or in a nearby village or at least somewhere in Tichurong; conversely, if someone is born in Tarangpur, he will probably die there or some place not far away.²⁸ The same is true of all the thirteen villages of Tichurong (the exceptions are primarily the low-caste, Nepali-speaking artisans, and secondarily, the occasional Tibetan refugee family); there is very little leakage into or out of this social system.²⁹

In Indian society, "the multiple interlacing of villages is primarily a function, not of polity or economy, but of jati and of family" (Mandelbaum 1970:114), but in Tarangpur just the opposite is true. The social structure is self-contained, but various trade and travel networks converge on Tarangpur, into, out of, and through which there is a large traffic of goods, accompanied by a concomitant flow of norms, values, and symbols. Despite the great distance

and rugged terrain which seal Tichurong off from most of the rest of the world; an astonishing movement of goods and ideas does flow on a north-south axis through the hub of Tarangpur.

The economy is the dynamic subsystem which lifts Tarangpur out of its isolation; it does not "determine" the features of other subsystems, but it is a good place to make an analytical start, because a whole series of complex social and cultural changes have followed in the wake of distinctive quantum shifts (quantified in the following pages) in and among various economic sectors. Answers to questions asked of the opaque past can be discovered for problems phrased in terms of the present. How, in such a physically inaccessible place, do such totally different traditions as Nepalese Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism simultaneously penetrate the peasant world of Tarangpur? What kinds of interaction link Tarangpur with the world beyond Tichurong? What are the mechanisms by which the people of Tarangpur model (or refuse to model) themselves on these two external cultural paradigms? How are ethnic borders maintained by such a mediating society? What kinds of transactions involve traffic out of, into, and through Tarangpur, and what status sets are manipulated in these transactions?

Only by understanding the whole series of transactions in which Tarangpurians are vitally involved can we understand the complexities of life in Tarangpur today and its place in interstitial Asia. Since all of Asia is changing, we will be able to clarify Tarangpur's changing role in the larger context by specifying the kind of transactional continuity that has persisted over time. Barth (1967:664) has described a way to study social change that can be built upon a transactional analysis:

Imagine a situation where you stand looking into an aquarium, and you observe a fish. A moment later you find yourself looking at a crab in the same place where the fish was. If you ask yourself how it got claws instead of fins, you are implying a certain kind of continuity; this is the same body, and it has changed its shape. If, on the other hand, you say to yourself that this is the same aquarium, you are specifying another kind of continuity, implying a set of constraints that leads you to formulate other hypotheses about the dynamics of change in this instance. Different specifications of the nature of the

continuity that ties two situations together in a sequence of change give rise to very different hypotheses about the mechanisms and processes of change. For every analysis, it is therefore necessary for us to make explicit our assertions about the nature of the continuity.

Barth goes on to say that we can handle change if we look at behavior as an allocation of time and resources, and observe new allocations as concrete events with systematic effects that may constitute change. If we look at the remarkable shifts in transactional patterns over the last forty years in Tarangpur, we will be able to specify the nature of the continuity that ties together the contrasting scenes of the past and the heterogeneous present, and hence understand the mechanisms and processes of changes described.

An analysis of transactions and exchange patterns will also provide perspective on a different set of problems: how a nation as internally diverse and fractionated as Nepal manages to hold together at all. The situation seems comparable to what the Indian historian D. D. Kosambi described for northern India during the first millennium B.C.: "The bond that held so heterogeneous a society together, that made it a society rather than a set of tribes, was not so much common ritual and common language as a whole aggregate of common needs satisfied by reciprocal exchange" (1965:120).

In Nepal there is no question of common ritual or language,³⁰ even within as small and compact an area as Tichurong. Marriott (1955) has shown that in India a village cannot be studied as an isolated unit; in Nepal, a culture cannot be studied as an isolated unit. Deeply ingrained, highly traditional, exceptionally pervasive intercultural contact is the basis for Nepal's sociocultural system.

The nature of Tarangpur's intercultural contacts will be dealt with in due course through an analysis of the village's transactions with the world beyond Tichurong. However multifaceted Tarangpur transactions may prove to be, they all grow out of an economy which rests, as chapter 3 shows, on a solid agricultural base.

invited to any special occasion, such as a marriage feast, at the patron's house. At such times they are given food for the whole family, plus clothes (sometimes new and sometimes old). Kamis often do additional work—in the fields or carrying loads—for extra income.

The Kamis are clearly the employees of the Magars; they not only perform artisan services for the Magars but also work in their fields and carry loads for them. Ritually, too, there is no question about who is higher. Kamis may not go into Magar houses at all, and they must sit a respectable distance apart while eating. At one level it is absurd to refer to relations between two such asymmetrically powerful parties as reciprocal. Yet these relationships are not like those with outsiders, either. Despite the asymmetry, a strong paternalistic bias gives the relationship a reciprocal tone unlike any of the modes which Sahlins (1965) differentiates.

It is remarkable, in the South Asian context, that all Kamis are trying to expand their business by acquiring more patrons in other villages on a *jajmani*, annual payment-in-kind basis. The Tailor family—newcomers compared to the Kamis—has only ten patrons and works for others on a piecework, catch-as-catch-can basis, but the Tailors much prefer regular patrons and envy the Kamis their large clientele. Thus the Kamis and Damais are trying to expand rather than contract their traditional *jajmani* business, and they are able to extract from the transactions that tie them to their patrons what they regard as a satisfactory bargain. While *jajmani* relations are beating a retreat in most of India, dissolving in a growing cash economy, in Tichurong they are still flourishing and expanding.

8

Summary and Conclusions: Ethnicity and Interaction

It is a complex notion that inspires the economic actions we have described, a notion neither of purely free and gratuitous prestations, nor of purely interested and utilitarian production and exchange; it is a kind of hybrid.

—Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*

All the first manned flights to the moon, including the initial landing on its surface, took place while I was in Tarangpur. My only source of information about them was a twice-daily English-language, ten-minute newscast heard (when reception was good) on the Japanese portable radio that belonged to a constable in the recently established border checkpoint. Tarangpurians were immensely curious about all this for their own cosmological reasons,¹ but perhaps their most engrossing observation was their comparison of Dolpo with the moon. Judged by the standards of a one-week lunar round-trip and live lunar television transmission, Tarangpur is a far more remote and inaccessible place than the back side of the moon.

Difficulties of transportation and, for most purposes, communication, render Tarangpur as isolated today as it has been for all the centuries since Mongoloid tribesmen first settled there. Tarangpur is a largely self-sufficient community, but the ways in which it is interdependent with the outside world are more important and more analytically intriguing than the ways in which it is self-contained.

Important social relations are maintained across the boundaries that separate the mountain peasants of Tarangpur from other kinds of people, and these relations are based on and depend upon

dichotomized ethnic statuses. Ethnic distinctions thus do not depend on an absence of social interaction but are, on the contrary, the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. In such a social system, interaction does not lead to the liquidation of ethnic differences through acculturation; cultural differences persist in spite of interethnic contact and interdependence (Barth 1969).

Virtually every biological and physical need could be satisfied from the resources available in Tichurong. But at indigenous technology levels, there is no local source of salt. Salt must be imported, and the most accessible salt is that mined in western Tibet. This salt is acquired from Bhotias to the north, who have in turn crossed over into Tibet and obtained it from Tibetans, who have brought it from its source. Thus salt is the crucial commodity which has triggered a series of transactions described here as circuits.

The trilingual setting of Tichurong has given the people there—especially those whose regular social and economic contacts with Nepali- and Tibetan-speakers render them most fluent—the linguistic tools to shuttle resources back and forth between the northern and southern borders of the country. The tricultural milieu provides the arsenal of appropriate behaviors for transacting between drastically different cultural zones. The perspective of cultural ecology developed in the preceding chapters considers not only the natural features of habitat but also—and especially—the relations between cultures, the superorganic setting (see Sahlins and Service 1960:49).

In an agrarian context, Tarangpur's ecological niche is a narrow and delicate one. But because of favorable climate and land/man ratios, the farmers of Tarangpur have been able to exploit their environment successfully and produce a net food grain surplus (consisting mostly of millet and buckwheat). Most families are able to feed themselves from what they produce on their privately owned land. Some surplus grain is exchanged for salt, which is then transported in small saddlebags carried by sheep and goats farther south to be exchanged for rice, which Tarangpurians serve on festive occasions.

Like anyone anywhere else in the world (or on the moon, for that matter), Tarangpurians have a limited number of resources

and a finite amount of time with which to utilize or ignore, destroy or develop those resources. At any point, the allocation of that time and those resources can be more or less accurately described; each such allocation is in part determined by choices made in the past and in part "canalizes" future choices. In Tarangpur, the allocation of time and resources has been changing over the last forty years, and the cultural implications of these changes, which have transformed the character of its links with the rest of the world, have been wide-ranging and dramatic. An examination of these changing time and resource allocations has provided insights into the direction in which Tarangpur is moving.

A declining salt market, brought about by a variety of local and international causes, resulted in a switch from the grain-salt-rice circuit to a second circuit involving both the movement of manufactured commodities against animals and the introduction of cash. Thus from a goods-goods-goods circuit, transactions were increasingly cast into a goods-cash-goods mode. The declining salt market (an economic consideration) and the increasing orientation toward Hindu areas, the source and inspiration of social and political power (cultural considerations) have combined to provide the constraints and incentives that have affected the ledger of value gained and lost, changed the strategic situation, and thereby canalized subsequent choices (Barth 1966:4).

Contact with burgeoning market towns of the Terai has brought in its wake traffic in manufactured goods for which there is a market both north of Tichurong and in Tichurong itself. Journeys to manufacturing cities of India, including the huge Asian entrepôt of Calcutta, have extended the economic frontier even farther, as trade has shifted from the first circuit to the second. The switch was gradual, but for any specific trader, it must be sudden. Since both commercial cycles take place primarily during the winter months, and since both follow routes that diverge from each other by and large, an unequivocal choice must be made between the two strategies. A man with adequate resources may pursue one or the other transaction circuit, but not both. Only a handful of traders still drive their grain- and salt-laden flocks north and south. The overwhelming majority sell their animals or woolen products in the middle hills, use the cash proceeds to finance the purchase of manufactured commodities in the Terai or India, carry them

north again in the spring when the passes to Tichurong are no longer blocked with snow and ice, sell them in Khasan and Bhot, and use the profits to buy more animals and/or wool, thus beginning the sequence of the next season's trading all over again.

Adoption of this alternative resource allocation has had important repercussions on the society and culture of Tarangpur. Intra-village relations are cast in egalitarian terms, but agonistic striving after wealth is a way of proving personal worth in a context of explicit, measurable financial and social inequality. The tension between ideology and behavior is seen in the pursuit of wealth, power, and prestige as a way of asserting, or perhaps confirming, claims of equality. In brief, Tarangpurians attempt to increase their command over resources and/or their control over persons.

The key to success in these efforts lies to the south, in the kinds of interactions that take place with the people one encounters in the second exchange circuit. The introduction of cash into the economy, with its potential for capital formation, has laid the basis for important symbolic, political, and structural shifts. The penetration of the economic frontier can be thought of as a kind of parameter or gauge along which continuity between past and present can be measured. The facts of ecological variation between zones persist, but they are exploited in novel ways and with novel consequences for the rest of the sociocultural system. The direction and movement of goods and symbols can be stated in terms of trade routes, which allow us to map these changes in terms of their ecological components: salt and Buddhism flow down the river; rice and Hinduism move up the river; and modernism (or a Hindu variant of it) comes over the pass.

The trend toward the second circuit and away from the first seems well established. The reasons are essentially economic, but they reflect changing preference schedules and self-images. The more preferences change, the more they affect economic decisions. Put another way, once basic economic decisions are made, for whatever reasons, the impact is felt in other, noneconomic spheres. As resources accumulate, further choices have to be made as to how they should be utilized. What distinguishes the second circuit from the first is the possibility of increased resources accumulating and compounding in a way that can never happen in the first cycle.

This difference can be illustrated diagrammatically, as in figures 7 and 8.

Charting the flow of goods and services in terms of the transactions in which the flow is embedded profiles the relative strength of changing values. The flow and counterflow of prestations consists not only of goods and services but also of ideas, including those about how societies ought to operate. Tarangpurians try to bring their own society into line with what they perceive to be the Hindu or modern model (or, in a Hindu kingdom, modernist Hindu), because this is the model most relevant to increasing social status and acquiring political power. In the south one learns how

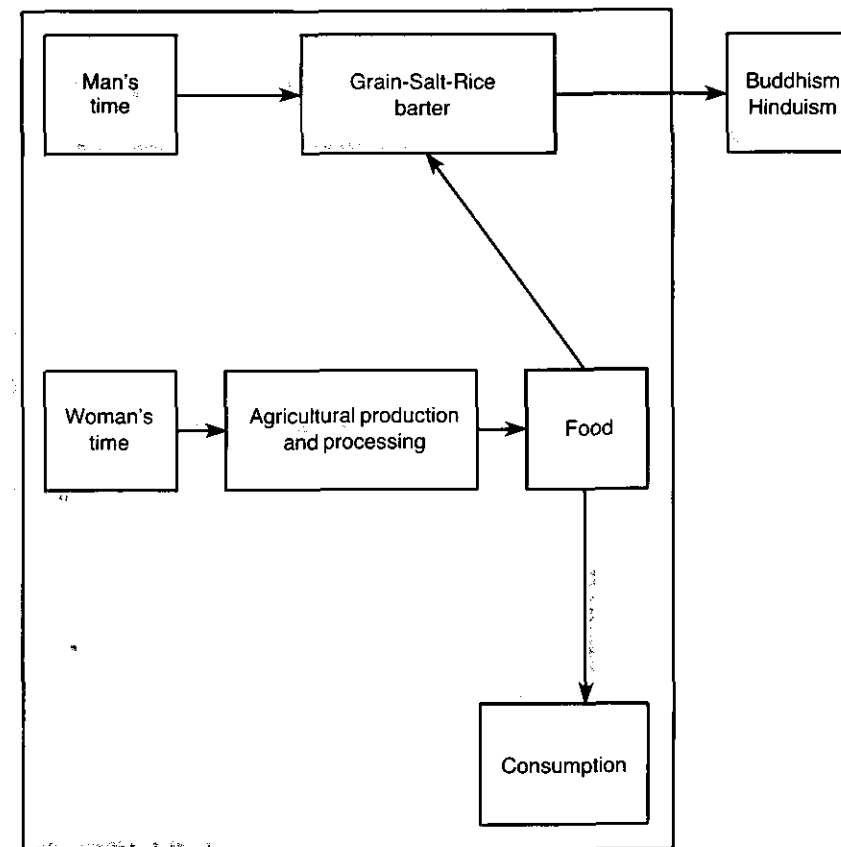


Figure 7. Diagram of the Grain-Salt-Rice Transaction Circuit

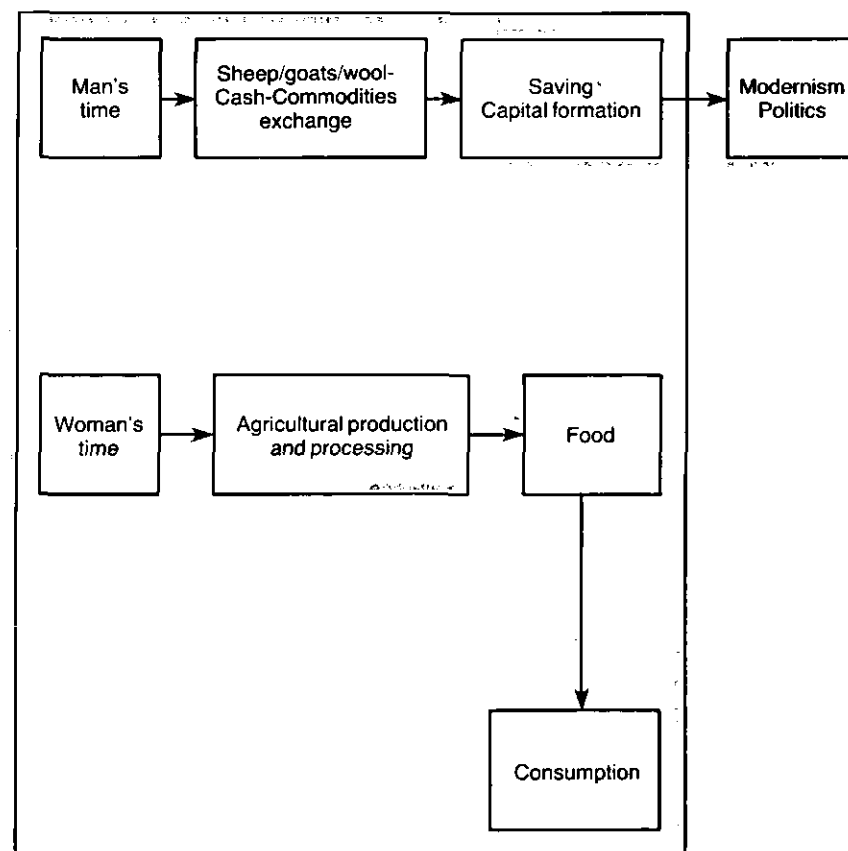


Figure 8. Diagram of the Livestock/Wool-Cash-Commodities Transaction Circuit

to deal with Hindu society on a stronger, if not equal, footing. Along with concepts of caste ranking come ideas of democracy and equality, which are acquired partly through political contacts in very recent years, but which have been absorbed through traditional economic contacts for a longer period of time.

These ideas directly affect the social structure. A few months before I arrived in Tarangpur there was a large meeting, the result of attempts to resolve a private quarrel. The dispute was resolved and the meeting concluded when—publicly, formally, and symbolically—the members of the two highest marriage classes voted to change their marriage rules and merge the two groups into a single

intermarrying group. Two of the compelling arguments leading to this decision were (1) that people in other, more progressive (i.e., Hindu) parts of Nepal do not have such cumbersome and backward marriage rules, and (2) that under the new laws, everyone is supposed to be equal anyway. Thus as a direct result of ideas that have been imported via the commodities circuit, Tarangpurians have consciously and deliberately altered a fundamental part of their social structure.

Like tribes elsewhere in South Asia, the Magars of Tarangpur live on the fringes of Hindu society, but unlike most of these other tribal peoples, they also live on the fringes of Buddhist society. The complex integration into the national society described for Tarangpur serves as a model to be tested against the general features of social and cultural change among other ethnic minorities along the salt-starved northern border of Nepal. The problem is not only the integration of an encysted ethnic minority into a complex society but also the mode of accommodation reached between two major systems. The symbol systems of two different great traditions compete for commitment, so that executing the transactional chain requires a double-edged, Janus-faced form of impression management—hence the present cultural heterogeneity of Tarangpur—of a society which is nominally Buddhist, strongly Hinduized, and still partly tribal.

Impression management blocks the flow of information at crucial junctures: hence the distinctive, almost exclusively economic links between the three regions. Since Hinduism and Buddhism are not undifferentiated entities but whole encyclopedias of meaning, the solution worked out between these two great traditions is syncretistic. (Having to juggle two great traditions simultaneously is a problem Indian tribals have not had to face.) This solution was stable as long as the requirements of ecological symbiosis remained the same, but economic shifts initiated changes in the social and cultural spheres which transformations in the national political system concluded. Forced to choose between Hinduism and Buddhism, Tarangpurians appear to choose Hinduism.

This does not mean that they import Brahmins and scuttle their lamas. Buddhism retains its important place because lamas retain their power to ease Tarangpurians through many of the crises with which they must deal, beginning with birth and ending with death.

But they no longer pour resources into religion by building or refurbishing prayer-walls or chortens, all of which are in a state of advanced disrepair. When I offered a sizable donation to help reconstruct the chortens at the entrances to the village (see map 5) if the villagers would come up with a similar level of support, I found no takers.

The preference is not one of one religion over another but a preference for politics over religion, because politics is inextricably bound up with the core of Tarangpur life—namely, the pursuit of power, status, and wealth. The key to securing these lies in the hands of the Hindu modernists—the national élite in Kathmandu and their functionaries in outlying areas, who are directly and explicitly attempting to integrate Tarangpur into modernist Hindu political and economic structures. There is no comparable pull from the north. Ironically, the mountaineers of Tarangpur look up to the lowlanders.

Rather than either “Sanskritization” or “Tibetanization,” a process of religious triangulation is under way. For the descendants of the few high-caste Thakuri families who settled and intermarried and were hence “Magarized,” the process is even more complex. The indigenous cult, centered on local mountain deities, has been overlaid with Tibetan Buddhism, and this in turn has been challenged by Hinduism. Formerly, villagers had two names: a Tibetan one given by a lama at birth, and a second Hindu name to use in interaction with Hindus. Now villagers often make a point of asking lamas to give their newborn infants a Hindu name in the first place, to avoid the bother and ambiguity of having to change names later. As in highland Burma, historically there have been three models to choose from,² but as national identity grows apace, the movement becomes less like a pendulum and more like that of an irreversible amalgamation—a process similar to what Bista (1982) has called Nepalization.

A frequently reiterated theme of this study has been that economic metamorphosis has been the entering wedge of cultural change. The transactional analysis has shown that in the past, as actors picked their way through a choice-laden system, the economy has been the leading sector in knocking a traditional society and culture off-center; in the future, that role will be assumed by the polity.

Such well-worn anthropological concepts as acculturation and assimilation do not deal adequately with situations as complex as this exchange network among culturally diverse segments in different social settings. This study has dealt with cultural contact and change but has emphasized the quality of interaction, the synapses of relationships that connect the local system to the larger ones which it links, not the billiard-ball movement and fact of contact itself. The problem has been to get at the distinctive kinds of interaction which characterize different cultural confrontations, the meanings these confrontations have for the actors in them, and the changes that ensue from such confrontations. To do all this, I have tried to trace out the material and ethnic transactions that connect Tarangpurians to one another and to the rest of the world. This process pinpoints the changes that are slowly but inexorably engulfing the people of Tarangpur, blurring and maintaining boundary mechanisms between them and the rest of the ever-approaching world beyond their valley.