



H O M A
V A R I A T I O N S

The Study of Ritual Change
across the *Longue Durée*

Edited by

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Homa Variations

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Newar Buddhist *Homa* Ritual Traditions

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INTRODUCTION

In addition to the wealth of Sanskrit manuscripts from their private and monastic archives, which provided the textual foundations of modern Buddhist studies, the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley likewise perform a rich repertoire of rituals also originating in later Indic Buddhism. Among them are a large variety of *homa* rituals done in a Buddhist modality, each with its specific details of performance and purposes. This chapter provides an overview of this Newar Buddhist tradition, including a complete outline of the ritual that was performed at Harvard (by the co-author of this chapter) at the outset of the "Homa Variations" conference at which a brief form of this paper was presented. It will first situate this central ritual tradition in the characteristically complex sociocultural matrix in which Newar Buddhism exists today,¹ discuss the basic features of the many extant variants, describe the details of practice, and then conclude with observations of how modern Newar Buddhists conceptualize the Buddhist identity of their *homa* practices.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The record of thousands of Sanskrit texts preserved in the Kathmandu Valley contain an archive that, when more fully studied, will clarify the emergence of Newar Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna tradition in the context of later Indic Buddhist history, a development that culminated and died out across the plains of the Indus-Gangetic region

itself. Just as Nepal is a direct descendent of the artistic traditions that were found to its immediate south in the later Pala-Sena regions, so too 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,² and the virtuosi in a small minority who were concerned with a great variety of Vajrayāna texts, doctrines, and meditation practices. Yet this tantric elite exerted a formative influence in the (re)shaping of Newar Buddhist culture, designing the rituals that were done in the Buddhist monasteries, their temples, and homes of their devotees. These Indic *vajrācāryas*, some monks, others free agent householders, served as gurus, healers, artists.

Texts highlighting Mahāyāna devotional 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 intended applicability to Buddhist communities in late antiquity; it is clear that the sanghas in early Malla Nepal had adopted this inheritance and continued to adapt it to their own sociocultural circumstances. On the popular, exoteric level, they focused on celestial bodhisattvas and the bodhisattva ethos, while its elite had absorbed tantric *sādhana* traditions, as some in the Newar sangha came to serve the householder community with rituals built on tantric theory as the core cultural system.

As this evolutionary trend unfolded in Nepal, it is also clear that there occurred a literal, "domestication of sangha" by the end of the Malla period (1200-1769), as the formerly celibate monastic sangha came to consist almost entirely of married householders. Further, 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 *Barē*³ in Newari, but who were divided into groups with the surnames *Śākyaabhiṣṭu* and *Bajrācārya*.⁴ The latter were regarded as higher in status and claimed the exclusive right to perform tantric rituals and initiations for the high caste elite in their community.

It now seems clear that the legal and cultural press of Malla rulers and their brāhmanical courts led both the sangha and the entire Buddhist population to live by caste laws and adopt ritual practices that conformed to the *dharmaśāstras*, that is, to Hindu religious and legal duties. By 1500, Buddhist elders and leaders seem to have transformed their traditions of monastic life and householder ritual activity, seeking to sustain the Buddhist elite's status as leading citizens, while also preserving the monastic land holdings. Just as Newar Buddhists continued to build new *stūpas*, monasteries, and images adorned in astonishing detail in wood, precious metals, and stone, so too did they skillfully craft intricate new cultural performances, drawing on Vajrayāna doctrines, techniques, and practices. Thus, the *bajrācāryas* skillfully applied the immense wealth of later Indic Buddhist texts, rituals, and spiritual practices to their new sociopolitical circumstances. *Homa* rituals, among the most ancient brāhmanical rituals known from the early Vedic period, had been already recast in Mahāyāna Buddhist form by the late Gupta era and are doubtless a case study in the history of Buddhists creatively and

wisely adapting to Hindu cultural hegemony. Their extensive development in the Newar Buddhist community in the context of early modern Hindu Nepal is doubtless due to the clear *outward* commonality with brāhmanical traditions.

While the Newar sangha in the later Malla era continued to have specialists whose focus was manuscript copying, it is evident that the performance of Vajrayāna rituals was 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. This pattern of development in ritual innovation may explain, in part, why Newar tradition lacks a strong scholastic dimension. What is carefully elaborated is the ritualism that expresses and interjects the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna worldview into every conceivable juncture: for relating successfully to deities, celebrating festivals, marking key moments in the individual's life. Lacking a tradition of formal philosophical inquiry by a scholarly elite, the center of Newar Buddhism lies in its pervasive orchestration of Vajrayāna teachings and the rituals that channel blessings, well-being, and—for those householders willing to practice—movement toward enlightenment.

Textual Sources for Newar Homa Rituals

Contributors to and inheritors of later north Indic Buddhism, Newar tradition accordingly preserves many aspects of this now-defunct religious world. A broad range of tantric texts are prominent in both the archives and current traditions in the Valley. Since most Buddhist tantras include sections devoted to the *homa* practice, it is not surprising that these are cited or relevant to tracing the history of this rite in Nepal.⁵ Authoritative texts for *homa* in the Newar tradition are the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, *the Vasanta-tilaka*, *the Hevajra Tantra*, *the Kriṣṇayamāri Tantra*, *the Samvarodaya Tantra*, *Kālacakra Tantra*, and the *Kriyāsamgraha* by Kuladatta.⁶

The Ritualists: Members of the Bajrācārya Sangha

The Newar sangha today is divided consists of two parts, Śākya and Bajrācārya. Males born into all of these families become Śākya and members of the Śākya sangha by obtaining the Buddhist ordination called *pravajya*. Additionally, those born into the Bajrācārya families become members of the Bajrācārya Sangha by obtaining the *acārya-abhiṣeka* after the *pravajya*. Thus, male children of a Bajrācārya family obtain the same first ordination as those who will remain Śākya, but then they alone do the second, the *acārya-abhiṣeka* in their father's home monastery. After obtaining the *acārya-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.⁷ Only a Bajrācārya man can perform the *homa* ritual in the Newar Buddhist community, either

alone or in concert with three, five, or more *bajrācāryas*. Thus, the *bajrācārya* sangha is defined as a group by the *homa*. Every new full member is taught to perform this key ritual at initiation, and each *Bajrācārya* boy must do the regular *Sahasra āhuti* [*homa*] rite himself in his own *Bāhā* (monastery) and then the *māmsāhuti homa* at a temple site associated with one of the eight mother goddesses (*aṣṭamātṛkā pitha*).

It will also be evident in this chapter that this ritual is woven into the fabric of Newar Buddhist life. We now turn to the characteristic forms this ritual takes today in the Kathmandu Valley and when and why *homa* is performed in Newar Buddhist settings.

OVERVIEW OF NEWAR TRADITION: NAMES AND TYPES OF *HOMA*

This outline of all major actions in the Newar Buddhist *homa* is based on the printed ritual guidebook entitled *Kalāsārcananādi Homa Vidhāna-Pustakam* that was edited by the Lt. Pandit Amoghavajra Bajrācārya,⁸ the greatest scholar-ritualist of mid-twentieth-century Nepal. This special master lineage holder in the Kathmandu sangha cites his primary source as a hand-copied manuscript⁹ that was dated 1530 C.E.

In conveying the parameters of this ritual tradition in Nepal, the diversity of forms, detail, complexity, and options is striking. The patron has many choices to make in these facets: but some performances of *homa* are "compulsory" parts of life-cycle rituals and other occasions according to modern conventions; on the other hand, other esoteric *homa* rituals can be done only by or for those who have tantric initiations.

A review of these various possible options is instructive to grasp the flexibility and depth of Newar Buddhist *homa* ritualism: the *homa* performed can be classed by the number of oblations (*āhuti*) to Agni made, ranging from the minimum of one thousand (*sahasra*, the most common by far), to those rare but more ambitious ceremonies that employ more than one *bajrācārya* priest and may entail from 10,000 (*dyuta-āhuti*) or even 100,000 (*lakṣa-āhuti*). Newar Buddhist *homās* are defined by the central objects to be burnt; most are based on one thousand or more oblations of ghee (*caru-āhuti*, *gr̥hta-āhuti*), but there are also those of an esoteric nature for which other items are central: the *māmsa-āhuti* (108 x meat), *śira-āhuti* (1 x head), or the *nara-āhuti* (1 x human offering). (These will be discussed below.) And then the *bajrācārya* priest can offer to do a *homa* that varies by elaborateness/length of time: either a general form, or a "long form" *homa*.

The *pit* (*kuṇḍa*) can also be modest or large, with a minimum of five unbaked bricks, the one arranged with thirty-two bricks, or the "half-deep fire pit" (*ardha-khāla yajñasālā*) in the 100,000 oblation rite. (In practice, construction can utilize more or less than thirty-two bricks.) When by a river, the rite can be done simply on sand, with only the symbol of the *agni-kuṇḍa* and the eight directional deities (see below) drawn in it. The *homa kuṇḍa* is popularly known as *yajñasālā* however it is built. In Newar usage, there is also the category of the "half deep *homa kuṇḍa*" (*ardha khāla yajñasālā*):

it is bigger and higher than the typical one and resembles a square-shaped well. To make this kind of *homa kuṇḍa* requires a special *pādashāpana pūjā* ("foundation ritual") that must be done beforehand. The same establishment rite must be done for any stone or metal square *homa kuṇḍa* that is fixed permanently, as can be found in many Newar monasteries and temples for the convenience of the community.

Finally, there is a Newar tradition that certain highly accomplished *bajrācārya* masters can do a *homa* just by marking the ground with *homa* symbol (*Agni Chinha*, the symbol of fire) and then do the *homa* ritual.

All types of Buddhist *homa kuṇḍa* will be made with bricks set in the pattern of the "swastika shape." A vajra is drawn in the center, and symbols of the eight directional deities are drawn accordingly around the *homa kuṇḍa*. In the case of the *ardha khāla homa* site's *kuṇḍa*, the icons of the deities are drawn. And in every *homa kuṇḍa* there will be a different "mouth" (Skt. *ostha*) of Agni that is understood to be extended in each direction. All *homa kuṇḍas* are demolished a few days after the ritual; Newar Buddhists regard the bricks used in *homas* to be auspicious for the construction of permanent buildings. In the case of the performance of the *lakṣa āhuti* and *ahorātra homas*, there must also be a *nāga pūjā* ritual done before disposing of the remaining ashes (*bhasmapravāha pūjā*) in a river.

WHEN NEWAR BUDDHISTS PERFORM HOMA

Since *homa* rituals are central to the lives of Newar Buddhists, the tradition as interpreted by the modern *bajrācārya* priests has identified moments in the individual life cycle, or occasions of religious donation, when they must be performed; there are also times when they are recommended, but not compulsory. The following norms and expectations do show some variation due to the individual family's caste and the patron's gender. The contexts of the various Newar *homas* can be cited here, without extensive commentary.

Occasion When Required by Tradition

Death and Mourning are major times when all Buddhists perform rituals to make merit for the deceased and insure that the dead go to auspicious destinies. Among most householders, *homa* is performed at the end of the initial, intense mourning and impurity period, on the twelfth day afterwards as part of the *Gṛha* (Skt. *gṛha-suddha*, *hastā-suddha*) rituals.¹⁶ Among the Śākya and Bajrācāryas, this ritual is done on the seventh day after the death; and on this day, the *homa* rites are done in two places: inside the house where the person died; and in the monastery (Ne. *bāhā*) where the household's patrilineage has membership. *Gṛha suddha* is believed to be effective for purifying the house and satisfying the needs of the deceased who now exists in the *antarābhava*, or intermediate state, between death and new rebirth. Newar tradition

holds that all beings exist as a *preta* (a being in the intermediate state between lives) for at least seven days.

Newar Buddhist mourning also entails a year of special *śrāddha* rituals done for the purpose of making merit for the dead. During each of twelve subsequent lunar months, on the monthly anniversary of the death, the family gathers for these rites done by the chief mourner and their *bajrācārya* priest. On the last of these months, that is, on the one-year death anniversary, a *homa* ritual is added to mark this moment.

Since it is regarded as the most distinguished Buddhist ritual, *homa* is often performed to mark the end of other cycles of ritual performances. This is the case for a one year of monthly Buddhist *vratas*, monthly *śrāddhas* at *tīrthas* mourning a dead person, at the end of the periodically held tantric initiations (*dikṣā*) into the practice of Cakrasamvara or Vajradevī,¹⁰ which are open to only the highest Buddhist castes (Urāy, Śākya, Bajrācārya); or upon the completion of a period of tantric meditative retreat (*Purāścaraṇa Cvanegu*), which is also only done by this elite.

Homa is also done at every step in the sequence of rites for the construction activity for the establishment of images, *caityas*, pilgrims' resthouses, and monasteries. After their formal consecration, a *homa* ritual should be performed to mark the yearly anniversary of these same structures, a ceremony Newars refer to as *Buśādan* (Skt. *varśabandhana*).

Homa must also be done as part of Newar Buddhist life-cycle rites. For example, *homa* is performed for members of the Jyāpu farmer class at the completion of the coming of age rite called *olā chonegu*. Similarly, it is done by the head priest who officiates at the initiation of a new cohort of *bajrācārya* novices in the rite of passage called *bare churyegu*. For families that perform any of the three late life celebration ritual called *Burā/burī Janko*, *homa* is a central ritual of the second day.

There are a number of Newar festivals that are the object of community or *guthi* celebrations, whose perpetual endowments underwrite specific rituals. Examples are the annual *homa* ritual in the Bhadrakālī temple done by *bajrācāryas* of Sabal Bāhā during the spring Pañcahṛ festival; and *māmsa āhuti homas* done by *bajrācāryas* of Jhvā Bāhā at the Indrayanī temple at Phushingh kyah on the full moon day of Lhurī. There are many other such customs at the temples of the eight mother goddess (*aṣṭamātṛkā*) throughout the Kathmandu Valley.

Optional Homa Ritual Occasions

The Newar Buddhist tradition regards the *homa* ritual as the highest form of ritual celebration, entailing the most effort and attracting the most prestige for the patrons. So although not required by tradition, individual families may opt for the family priest to add it to a variety of ritual celebrations. This includes the early *data karma* or life passage rites done by Buddhist householders such as the *cūḍā karma*, *vratibandhana*, and

vrātamokṣana.¹³ For *pāñi grahaṇa* or wedding rites among high caste Newar Buddhists, *homa* is a sign of prestige; for Jyāpu farmers, the most distinguished way of offering *piṇḍas* to the ancestors is the *bhīm-ka pyon thāyegu* mourning rite and this requires *homa*. For high caste Newar Buddhists who want to do the special *kriyā piṇḍa* rite, *homa* must be done.

Family and household rituals can be upgraded by including *homa*. This includes the *baṅ biyegu* or house protection ritual. The popular *sattva pūjā*¹⁴ is done at major shrines and when special needs arise, a *homa* ritual can be added to it; if so either the *saham* (1,000) or *ayuta* (10,000) version should be done. A fire ritual to appease or remove obstacles from planetary deities is another Newar variant. A ritual based on the *homa* procedures, but centered on water offerings (*jala-yajña*) not fire offerings (*yajña*), also exists to invoke the nine *nāgas* when there is a need to produce rain.¹⁴

Perhaps the most unusual *homa* ritual in the Newar tradition is that done twelve days after a dead cat or snake is found in one's house. For this, the offering place is circular and the *homa kuṇḍa* is made of five bricks arranged in a circle, not the usual square.

DESCRIPTION OF A STANDARD NEWAR BUDDHIST HOMA RITUAL

*Preliminaries.*¹⁵ The *homa* performance usually begins in the early morning; the *bajrācārya* priest(s) must fast until the completion of the ritual and there must be a patron family (*jaṅamāna*) who appoints members to attend to the *bajrācārya* and ritual set-up as bearer of offerings. The priest arrives with his usual ritual implements (*vajra*, *vajra-ghanṭha* [bell with vajra handle], *vajra makuta* [crown of Five Buddhas]); he also carries the special *homa* implements (*sulāpā* [special ladle with square shape], *catvā* [pointed ritual spatula], *dhova* [spoon ladle], *yamkhā ṅ* [tripod with ghee vessel with a hole for *kuṣa*-grass]).

The patron family is also expected to provide the essentials for offerings:

kalāśa [water vessel], ghee (clarified butter), *kuṣa* grass, *druva* grass, a bunch/bundle of pieces of *śāim* wood, 32 pieces of *śintā* wood, *Homapi* bundle,¹⁶ pure water,¹⁷ flowers, incense, lamp, chalk, *śinba* fragrance,¹⁸ husked rice, puffed rice, taste items (food, fruits, cow milk, liquor), ball of five-strand thread, *pañcagavya*,¹⁹ yogurt, "baniyā items,"²⁰ 32 kinds of grains²¹ (Skt. *vṛṣṭi*).

Most *bajrācāryas* have a printed list of these items, although many householders know them by heart.

The work begins with ritual set-up of the *homa kuṇḍa*, then a series of required preliminary rituals that set the stage for *homa* at the beginning, then close off the ritual—several hours later—to end the entire ceremony when completed. To denote the course of the *homa* ritual conveniently, the following abbreviations will be used for

the various "praxis units" according to which this and other Newar ritual traditions are assembled. The preliminary rituals are seven in number, including the *gurumaṇḍala pūjā*.²² After the *homa* ritual commences and ends with the last or *śeṣa ābuti* oblation, the *bajrācārya* will do the closing of all the preliminary rites and *homa* ritual, which is called *visarjana*.

ABBREVIATIONS OF RITUAL UNITS THAT COMPRISE THE NEWAR
HOMA RITUAL

Ābuti: Offering oblation to Agni in the *homa kuṇḍa*

Bajra. = Bajrācārya; all acts done by him unless noted

Pp = *Puspādi pūjā*: one complete *pūjā* procedure (in this order): Bajra. visualizes deity, invoking, requesting divine presence, request for *adhiṣṭhāna*, offering fragrance, cloth, flower, food, milk, liquor, light, popped rice, rice and a flower with water, money and rice; requesting the celestial Buddha Vajrasattva to grant of all *siddhis*.

Pp = *Pañcopacāra pūjā*: sequential offering five items: flower, incense, light, fragrance, food

[Pa. Lā. Gha. Stū. Ta. *śatākṣara*]: An abbreviation of specific set of rites (in order):

Pp (above) → *Lasyā* → *Ghantavādana* → *Stuti* → *Tarpaṇa* → *śatākṣara*.

Lasyā refers to showing *mudrās* (sixteen types of hand gestures²³); *Ghantavādana* stands for holding vajra and bell crossed at chest, then ringing bell and flipping vajra three times; *stuti* denotes chanting verse praise; *tarpaṇa* means flicking liquid from vase; and *śatākṣara* is chanting the Vajrasattva *dhāraṇī*, which has 100 syllables.

[Pā.Ā Dhū. Nī.] An abbreviation of set of rites (in order): *Padya* → *Abūḥana* → *Dhupa* → *Nirāñjana*

Padya stands for offering water from conch for feet, for cleansing mouth, and for *argha*; *dhupa* refers to inviting the deity using *dhupa* (incense); and *Nirāñjana* means removing any associated with the deity but unwanted enemies or problems

Bali: a set ritual, consisting of sections defined here:

Visualizing *amṛtakuṇḍali bali*: inviting *dikpala* deities using *garuda-mudrā*, *akāraṇadi-mudrā*, and the *digpala*²⁴-*mudrās*. After these gestures, there is the (aforementioned) *Pañcopacāra pūjā*, *Lasya mudrās* (above), *Ghantavādana*, *Stuti*, *Tarpaṇa*, offering materials (rice, flower with water), offering liquor and *Puspādi pūjā*.

THE ORDER OF THE SAHASRA ĀHUTI RITUAL

Mandatory Preliminary Rituals

- I. *Suryārgha* (or *gurupādārgha*); Paying respect to Guru Vajrācārya
- II. *Gurumaṇḍala Arcana*

Visualizing the unity of priest and patron (*parītmaparivartana bhāvanā*)
 water initiation
 affirmation of offering
 self-protection
 praising six perfections
 offering *ratna-maṇḍala* to Gurus
 sevenfold supreme offering (bodhisattva practice)
 satisfying directional deities

III. *Pañcagavya*

IV. *Sinhamu pūjā*

V. *Lankabalī*

VI. *Trisamādhi*

VII. *Kalāsādi Arcana*: Invoking the special deity²¹ into vessel (*kalāśa*), and so on

Homa Procedure

Bajrācārya Priest (hereafter Bajra.) touches *agni kunda* three times with *catvā* (= *Homa-kunda adhisthā nā*) *Jajamāna* asked to put *kusa* grass in the *svastikā* shape in the center of the *homa-kunda* (*kusa-āsana*)
Puspāndī-pūjā (hereinafter *PsP*) at the center of the *kunda* over *svastikā*
 Sprinkle water on the wood with conch; *Pañcopacāra pūjā* (hereinafter *Pp*) to the
 32 *śosīm* (32 pieces of a specific wood)
 Stack the 32 pieces of wood in specific shape in the *homa kunda*
 Small pieces *sintā* (a specific wood) placed in a clay pot. Pp to it
 Bajra. lights flame from lamp, places it under wood in clay bowl (= *Bhūta Agni sthāpanā*)

1. *PsP* to the flame in clay bowl; bit of each of 32 grains dropped in clay bowl flame
2. Bundle of *Sintā* (wood) lit from the clay bowl flame, then put into *homa kunda* to ignite it (= *Agni sthāpanā*)
3. Place a flower into the *homa kunda* fire
 (= *Samayāgni bhāvanā*; visualization of *samayā Agni*)

4. Bajra. shows *takkirāja mudrā*, lights incense, does *nirānjana*, offers water used for foot-washing and mouth purification, from conch to Samayā Agni
(= *samayā Agniābhavana*: Invoking Samayā Agni)
5. Sprinkle water from conch and *pañca-gavya* from bowl w/*durvā* grass
6. PSP offered to the Samayā Agni and eight directional deities (*dikpāla*)
7. Cooking ghee: *jajamāna* holds ladle; Bajra. touches ladle 108 times with ritual *catvā*
(= *grbha śodhana*)
8. *Jajamāna* holding ladle, asked to take black sesame seeds in his right hand, touch his body all over, put them in the cooked ghee in the ladle; then told to look for his reflection in it
9. Bajra. offers ghee from ladle three times to Agni
10. Bajra. touches all thirty-two grains in bowls and *catvā* and *sulāpā*
11. One piece of kuśa grass dipped in ghee to Agni
12. One piece Hombi²⁶ dipped into ghee to Agni
13. Each sample of thirty-two grains (each with mantra)
14. In *sulāpā*, place cow milk, wave it three times over *boma kuṇḍa*
15. First ghee added to *sulāpā*, then Pp on this
16. All poured down to Agni (= *Pratham Agni Āhuti*)
17. Bajra. does [*Pā. Lā. Gha. Stu. Tā. śatākṣara*]
18. Pours water from *kalāśa* to conch, then sprinkles it to Agni
(= *Jñāna Agni-agni bhāvanā*: visualization of Jñāna Agni + visualization of the union of Samaya Agni and Jñāna Agni)
19. *PāP* to Jñāna Agni
20. One piece of Hombi dipped into ghee
21. Sample of each of thirty-two grains (each with mantra)
22. Ghee added to *sulāpā*, then Pp on this
23. All poured down (= *jñāna āhuti*)
24. Offering *hojā-đojā*²⁷: *hojā* dipped in cow milk, *đojā* dipped in ghee; to Agni

Deity Pūjā

25. Bajra. does [*Pā. Ā. Dhu. Ni. Adhye. 1. anā*], then *snāna*, *dhāramaṇḍala* made, then offerings of red + yellow powder (*śinhā*), thread, flowers, food, fruit, cow milk, liquor, ending with lamp offering to deity
26. Offering sample of thirty-two grains
27. Ghee added to *sulāpā*, then Pp on this
28. All poured (= *devatā āhuti*)

29. Tāya[āpa: Bajra, pours water, does *pūpa-nyāsa*, then does [Pa. Lā. Gha. Stu. Ta]. Then chants mantra holding rosary in left hand, puffed rice in right hand
30. Puffed rice offered to deity
31. *Dakṣiṇā* offered to deity
32. Rice, water, flower offered to deity
33. *Satākṣara* chant
34. *Kāśyapastra* (red scarf) and *āhuti* affirmation (*samkalpa*) by *jajamāna*, then he hands it to the Bajra.
35. Bajra, ties on red scarf over one shoulder, offers *āhuti* one thousand times
36. Ghee added to *sulāpā*, then Pp on this
37. All poured down to Agni (= *sahasra āhuti*)
38. [Pa. Lā. Gha. Stu. Ta. ākṣara] to Agni

Bali Pūjā

39. Bajra, tells *jajamāna* to offer water from conch to big clay plate (*bali*) that contains many materials for offering
40. Bajra, shows *garuḍa mudrā*
41. *Jajamāna* offers water three times from conch to *bali*
42. Bajra, shows *ākarsanāi mudrā*
43. Bajra, offers flower, *Jajamāna* puts on *bali*
44. [Pa. Lā. Gha. Stu. ta]
45. Bajra, offers rice/flower/water in one hand; gives to *Jajamāna* to offer to *bali*, done four times but with different mantras chanted by Bajra. *Jajamāna* is told to pour cow milk [and/or liquor] on *bali* from container
46. *PsP* to *Bali*

Cakra Pūjā

47. *Jajamāna* does *Pp* to deities in all the directions

Śita-adhivāṣana

48. *Jajamānas* sit in row, eldest closest to Agni, youngest at end; all hold string from the *kalāṣa*; female *Bajrācārya* assists; Bajra, puts piece of flower from offering plate on the heads of each person in row; does *nirāṅjana: lobhā-Agni rakṣā*;
49. pour out *phala abhiṣekha* on each person's head

Kigatine

50. *Jajamāna* is asked to make a maṇḍala with white stone powder on the ground and to put ten flower pieces on it to do the Pp. to put flower and rice with water on it.
51. All *Jajamānas* offer rice, following Bajra.

Purna Abuti

52. Shows *garuḍamudrā*
53. Bajra. gives water three times from conch
54. Shows *ākaraṣanādi mudrās*
55. Puts bundle (clothes, various items supplied by *baniyā*: fruits, flowers, sweets, medicinal herbs, Saki, special incense, betel leaf) to Agni
56. *Hombi*
57. Offering most of remaining thirty-two grains
58. Ghee added to *sulāpā*, a piece of *pañcasutra* then Pp on this
59. All poured down (= *Purna Abuti*)
60. *Sulāpā* touched to heads of *jajamānas*
61. *Jajamāna* is asked for ash from *boma* (*yajña rakṣā*) and gets with *catuā*
62. *Jajamāna* holds *catuā* with ash, Bajra. takes *tikā* (*yajña rakṣā*) high on forehead for himself, then all get *tikā* for themselves
63. [Pa. Lā. Gha. Stu. ta. *ṣatākṣara*]
64. Bajra. chants of forgiveness for any mistakes in ritual
65. *Jajamāna* asked to offer curd offering to *kalatā*, and so on.
66. Bajra. receives *tikā* and gives *tikā* to all in attendance
67. All in attendance get *tikā*, give *dakṣiṇā* to Bajrācārya priest(s).¹⁴

Sesā Abuti

68. Bajra. Absorbs chief deity of *maṇḍalas* into self, visualizes Agni deity as earlier
69. Shows *garuḍa mudrā*
70. Offering *padya*, *argha*, *acamana* to *Abuti Sesā Abuti*
71. Remaining grains collected, put in common vessel, final offering to Agni
72. Remaining ghee added to *sulāpā*, then Pp on this
73. All poured (= *Abuti Sesā Abuti*) to Agni
74. [Pa. Lā. Gha. Stu. ta. *ṣatākṣara*]
75. *Viśarjana* Closing of Introductory Ritual
76. *Jajamāna* takes *vajra*, touches everything in ritual
77. The holy water from *kalatā* given to all (water initiation)

78. Everything now dismantled, spent offerings, ash thrown in a river, and bricks used by the participants. Some keep ash as *prasad* and use it medicinally on forehead daily or occasionally.

THE ESOTERIC NEWAR BUDDHIST HOMA

From the Newar Buddhist point of view, all types of *homa* performed by *bajrācāryas* are "tantric," since they require their practices associated with *sādhana*. This includes the most common *homa* performed in the Newar Buddhist community, which is the exoteric grain and ghee offering to Agni called *charu ābuti homa*. This *homa* takes place in the day time, everybody can participate in it as patron or observer, and worldly benefits can be expected from taking part. For this reason, the texts refer to this form as *laukika* or "worldly" *homa*.

Just as this community has an esoteric realm of practice that is open only to the highest caste Buddhist communities, there are *homa* rituals that can only be done by, and even only be seen by, those individuals with tantric initiation. (This is a small minority even among these high caste groups.) These esoteric rites are called the *Māmsa ābuti* ("meat oblation"), *Śira ābuti* ("head oblation"), *Nara ābuti* ("human oblation") *homas*, as well as in the *lokottara homa* that can be added to the *aborātra homa*. Each can be discussed further here.

Aborātra homa (lit. "day and night homa")

Performed in the home, it can be done for a whole day and whole night. In the daytime is the *laukika* (exoteric) form; only at night is the *lokottara* (esoteric) *homa* done. It must be performed in the course of the establishment or restoration rituals at Svayambhū or other major stūpas as well as at prominent *yogini* temples located in the Valley, especially those in the towns of Pharping, Sānkhu, Guhyeśvari, and so on.

Māmsa Abuti and Śira Abuti Homa

This offering of *māmsa Abuti* must be performed at tantric *piṭhas*, shrines that are usually situated at cremation sites along river banks or on hilltops.²⁸ As noted, this is the rite that must also be done by a young *bajrācārya* immediately after he assumes his full status through initiation.

This esoteric *homa* is also an integral part of the other tantric initiations in Newar Buddhist tradition. The *māmsa ābuti homa* is performed during the course of the *Cakrasamvara* initiation and the *Śira ābuti homa* is performed during the course of the *Vajravārāhī* initiation as the rite of *puṇā* or completion of the initiation. In the performance of the secret *Māmsa ābuti* and *Śira ābuti*, *bajrācāryas* limit access to initiates.

They sing *cāryagītis*¹⁰ at every main step in the ritual and these doubtless contain hints of the history of these practices in the earlier tantric tradition. Examples of the ritual use of these songs include when during the *Māmsa āhuti* the central figure of Samaya Agni is visualized, the priest sings a unique *cārya gīti* entitled "Trinilojana" by the Siddha Karṇapā; when in the course of the tantric *Sahasra āhuti* there are oblations given to Jñāna Agni, the *bajrācārya* sings a *cārya gīti* entitled "Jvalitavajrānala"; and when *Māmsa āhuti* is offered to the Jñāna Agni, the *bajrācārya* sings the *cārya gīti* entitled "Kolayi" from the *Hevajra Tantra*.

Both of these *homa* rituals must also be observed on the occasion of the establishment of a new or restored *āgam dyaḥ* (Skt. *āgama devata*), the tantric shrines located in the upper storey of Newar monasteries and found in the homes of Śākya, Bajrācāryas, and Urāy.

The objective of *Māmsa āhuti homa* is to have the priest and initiates participate in the visualization of their five *skandhas* (physical body, sensations, perceptions, habit energies, consciousness) being ignited and burned completely away into a state of emptiness (*śūnya*). It is the same principle underlying a tantric yogin burning the five *skandhas* through "caṇḍali yoga," a practice of *anuttara yogatantra*. Just as the Buddha said in the first noble truth that *pañca-upādāna-skandham eva dukkham* ("the five attached components of a human lead to suffering"), this practice as understood by Newar tradition seeks to end the fundamental components of a human being retaining their hold over us; it likewise accepts that since, as in the "Fire Sermon," all our senses "burn" into our awareness as if they are on fire, so does their esoteric *homa* ritual skillfully use this same fire as the basis of a spiritual practice to destroy, or burn off, attachment to the body.

The objective of the *Śira āhuti homa* likewise connects with the larger practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Just as in the *Mahābali arcana* yoga practice, the initiated yogin visualizes sacrificing his own sense organs as an offering to various deities, so in the *Mahābali arcana kriyā* practice the yogin visualizes sacrificing his or her own sense organs as an offering for various deities, as these are invoked into the fire of Agni. Because the five sense organs play a vital role for accumulating defilements, the tantric *homa* provides a time when initiates can exercise their practice promoting detachment. Similarly, offering one's five sense organs to other beings promotes the perfection of generosity for those on the bodhisattva path.

Nara Ahuti Homa

This *homa* is an essential part of the rites designed to affect an initiate's own death process. Soon after the death of a Bajrācārya, Śākya, or Urāy who has taken tantric initiation(s) and who has requested them, a *bajrācārya* priest performs tantric *utkrānti* rituals¹¹ and yoga proximate to the dead body. At the end of these tantric rites, a *sahama*

āhuti homa is performed using a large, round clay bowl. This whole ritual takes place around midnight. It is the completion ritual for the *utkrānti yoga*.

On the next morning this same round clay bowl (*agnikuṇḍa*) is taken with the funeral procession after the dead one's body has been placed on a bier and the body arranged in the seated position. At the cremation ghat, the corpse still in the seated position will be put over the pyre and another *homa* will be conducted. In the course of this final *homa*, the *bajrācārya* ritualist will instruct the chief mourner to put the first stick of firewood on the lap of the dead one¹¹ using the flame taken from the round clay bowl that served as the *agnikuṇḍa*. Here it is assumed that the dead human's body is being offered to Agni.

As *lokottara homa* is a higher and rare practice, initiates are taught not to make wishes for worldly benefits for taking part in this rite. The spiritual center is to use the outward gestures of *homa* to transcend habitual mundane conceptual patterns; by visualizing the burning up all of one's own flesh, head, and sense organs, the practitioner can burn out all of one's own defilements and attachments to mundane knowledge. To use this practice is to seek freedom from the defilements and to develop the supramundane knowledge that leads to the realization of Buddhahood. In this sense, Newar Buddhist teachers see *homa* as an important application of the ideal of *upāya kauśala*, a practice classified under *kriyā tantra* in the standard division of Vajrayāna traditions.

HOMA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BUDDHIST MONASTERIES AND SACRED OBJECTS

In the course of different stages in vihara construction, there must be Pratisthā ritual; for these, the "Daśa Agni" (ten types of fire) are visualized, one by one, then each receives a Ghṛta Āhuti (offering ghee) in the order shown in table 1.

In an Ayuta Āhuti (10,000) *homa* ritual, each Ghṛta Āhuti is offered after each thousand Caru Āhuti offerings. Thus, Ghṛta Āhuti is offered ten times in an Ayuta Āhuti *homa* ritual.

As part of the rituals consecrating images, *caityas*, other sacred objects, these objects must receive *daśa karma rites*, as if they are human in both male and female forms. From

Ten types of Homa Fire

i. Krodha agni	vi. Lohita agni
ii. Pāvaka agni	vii. Pramoha agni
iii. Maruta agni	viii. Tāpasa agni
iv. Kāma agni	ix. Amṛta agni
v. Mahendra agni	x. Yojaka agni

the Jāta karma stage to Pāṇigrahaṇa karma stage, *āhuti* is given to the Agni after the name of seven different agni following each karma stage.

CONCLUSIONS

Newar Hindu and Buddhist Homa Traditions. The co-existence of Buddhist and Hindu traditions was described in the earliest accounts of the Kathmandu Valley by Chinese pilgrims. Although these are vague beyond noting that temples to the great Hindu gods existed alongside Buddhist monasteries, it is certain that this small mid-montane Himalayan settlement was a periphery frontier of all Indic traditions, from Sanskrit texts to sacred art, from architecture to ritual practices. Just as the Indic arrivals changed over time to add to the cumulative culture, so did the shaping of innovative cultural forms from priests, monks, scholars, and pilgrims also become altered in the hands of the local Newar virtuosi. That a Hindu-Brahman cultural formation in Nepal has for many centuries co-existed with a Buddhist-saṅgha/virtuoso formation suggests that there were commonalities due to their mutual Indic origins, as well as reasons for their remaining distinct in local traditions of interpretation and praxis. *Homa* traditions are one case study in this complex religious field.

It is clear that Nepal preserves forms of brahmanical *homa* practice that may have nearly disappeared elsewhere in South Asia.¹¹ Although no in-depth study has been done to survey Newar Hindu rituals, what can be stated is that today the *homa* rituals are done by Newar Deo Brahmins who serve as the *purohitas* for Newar Hindus. These brahmins have no corresponding concept of the Newar Buddhist philosophical underpinnings such as Bhuta Agni, Jñāna Agni, Samya Agni, and so on. In the modern Newar Hindu *homa*, Agni is just a vehicle for the similar set of offerings made to the fire. As we have seen, the *bajrācārya* ritualist specifically invokes this deity from water into the fire; and his visualizing an entire *maṇḍala* into the fire itself is central to the Newar Buddhist practice today.

One other point of interest is the renown that the Buddhist *homa* practice has commanded outside the usual boundaries that separate Hindu householders (*Shresthas*) from their Buddhist neighbors. As mentioned above, *bajrācāryas* perform a special *gṛha suddha-bastatuddha homa* on the seventh or twelfth day after the death of a family member.¹² It has been true that for at least a century and likely longer that Hindu Newars call a *bajrācārya* to do this ritual that includes *homa*; it is thought to insure that the home is fully purified and that all living there are protected from any harm. Newar Deo Brāhmins do other *homas*, but not this one any more. Since Newar Hindu families want it, but neither of the Newar Hindu ritualists—Deo Brāhmins or Karmācāryas—do it, many Hindu families that can afford the expense call *bajrācāryas* after a death in the immediate family.

The procedures of early *homa* ritual (creating primal fire; offerings of grain and ghee into fire) may have been the root aspect of *homa* discipline. That the procedures of *homa* ritual differ from each other in later Hinduism and Buddhism reflects divergent developments in their philosophies as well as the needs of their respective householder communities. After three thousand years, this cultural divergence led to the identification of the source of their *homa* to be either a god or the tantric Buddhist masters, respectively. Today, both traditions regard *homa* performance as one of the vital instruments for achieving both worldly blessings for humanity as well as supramundane benefits for individual human beings.

Regarding Tantric Buddhism and Homa (Bāhya-homa)

Having presented the *homa* with attention to all its detail, and after noting the time and expense involved in the performance of this Newar ritual tradition, it is instructive to ask: Why did *homa* become part of the Indic Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna tradition that was exported to China, Japan, and Tibet? Here we provide the explanations prevalent from the history of the Newar Buddhist community.

The concept of *upāya-kautala* ("skillful means") is seen as underlying the integration of the Indic *homa* ritual technology into Buddhism in the same way that yoga discipline, mantra discipline, *ijyotib* discipline, *ayurveda* cultural forms were similarly adapted. The cause of doing what alleviates suffering and is useful for the welfare of all beings (Skt. *Sarva-prakāraṇam jakatohitāya*) is incumbent on those wishing to be bodhisattvas. To this foundation can be added a pillar of tantric philosophy: since what is bound by the *pañca-skandha* (five constituents of a human being) and material elements lead to beings' suffering, these same things, Agni—fire—can be used to foster release also.

APPENDIX I

NOTES ON VAJRAYĀNA SOURCES ON HOMA FROM NEPAL

The following works, with brief commentary, are known to be authoritative in modern Newar praxis. This section is necessarily impressionistic, drawing on Dr. Bajrācārya's examination of works related to the performance of a variety of *homa* rituals.

1. *Manjuśrīmūlakalpa*. In chapter 14 of this important work in local tradition are discussed the *Bāhya* or *Loukika homa*, including the places for performing the ritual, construction of the fire pit (*Agnikuṇḍa*), the types of wood and other materials to be used, number of oblations, the sources of the mantras, and the range of results obtained, from worldly to supra mundane.
2. *Gubyaśamāja Tantra*. Here also is treatment of the *Bāhya homa*, and especially the deity to be invoked, qualification of a person who will do *homa*,

purpose of *homa*, objects to be put in fire. The text uses *sandhya bhāya* in some places.

3. *Cakrasamvara Tantra* has four chapters that discuss the *Bāhya* and *Adhyātma (lokottara)-homa* rituals.
4. The *Vasanta-tīlaka* and its *tika* provide details of the *Adhyātmika homa*.
5. *Hevajra Tantra* has sections devoted to the *laukika-homa*, shapes and sizes of *homa-kunḍa* according to the purpose, materials according to the purpose, and the corresponding mantras.
6. *Kriṣṇayāmāri Tantra* and its commentary discusses the *laukika-homa*, also. It contains information on the shapes and sizes of *homa-kunḍa* according to the purpose of the rite, specific mental states to be formed according to the *homa's* purpose, and specific dates according to purpose. The commentary to this text adds information about the symbols to be written in *homa-kunḍa*, materials to be put in fire, the iconographic description of Agnideva, and mantra recitations.
7. *Samvarodaya Tantra*, chapter 23, contains a discussion of both the *lokottara* and *laukika-homas*. It has specific details of the *laukika-homa*: its purposes and flame types leading to various results.
8. *Kriyāsamgraha* by Kuladatta is a central reference in Newar tradition.¹⁰ Its discussion is primarily on the *Bāhya-homa* and details of the *homa* ritual associated with the establishment of sacred icons and monasteries (*pratisthā*).
9. *Kālacakra Tantra* and commentary *Vimalaprabhā* have extensive information on the shapes and sizes of *homa-kunḍa* for the *Bāhya homa*, symbols to be written in it, *homa*-ritual procedure, mantra *niyama* (rules for making mantra) and so on. The commentary contains various iconographic descriptions of *Samaya Agni* for visualization, invocations, and *pūjā* procedures for it, sources for Agni according to purpose, authority of *homa*, *visuddhi* (meaning of iconographic description) of *vaiṣṇavara* according to the purpose, techniques, and mantras for offering *āhuti* and so on.

NOTES

1. By 1850, this left only the local Tiberan *saṅghas* where Newars could seek ordination into celibate monastic life; from the twentieth century onward, modern Theravāda monastic traditions added to this diversity (Levine and Gellner 2005). Lewis and Bajracārya have recently authored a long chapter to begin the task of writing the history of Newar Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions. It will appear in the volume edited by David Gray and Ryan Overbey, *Tantra on the Move* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

2. Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 389.

3. From the Sanskrit term *Vande* or *vandana*, an ancient Indic term of respect for monks.

4. In this chapter, we follow the Newar tradition's usage of spelling the caste name as "Bajracārya" and the classical Indo-originating vajrayāna ritualist as *vajracārya*. There has for centuries been the preference for Buddhist Newars to write Sanskrit words as they are pronounced, not as in the written texts.

5. Symptomatic of the philosophical focus of modern Buddhist studies, there has never been a systematic study of Mahāyāna rituals or even *homa* as found in the major tantric works. See, e.g., Schopen 1991.

6. In Appendix I, there are notes on textual sources of *homa* found in archives reviewed by Dr. Bajracārya in Nepal.

7. New *bajracāryas* begin their priestly *acārya* career performing a *māmsā abhūti homa* at *pithas*, sites where a temple to the *aṣṭamārṣīkā* goddesses are found.

8. *Kalatrārcanādi Homa Vidhāna-Pustakam*, 2nd ed. (Kathmandu: Sankata Press, n.d.).

9. This source is not identified by its title by Amoghajāra, but only with a brief comment on page 21 of his book citing the manuscript's colophon: *Doṅgu kriyā śāṣṭhī Ne. Sam. 650 śālasa kwathubāhāya Bajracārya Śrī Lum Gopālanam evayā taigulīnam svayā prakāśa yānā*. "This ritual manual was copied by one Śrī Lum Gopālanam Bajracārya of Kwathu Bāhā [modern name, Kwā Bāhā of Kathmandu] in 1530 [C.E.]."

10. For those in the Manandhar caste (traditional oil pressers), this rite is done not only on the twelfth day, as well as on the forty-fifth day, as well as after the third, sixth, and twelfth months; for the Tandukar caste (traditional rice makers), it is only done on the twelfth and forty-fifth days.

11. Note that the *Kalacakra Tantra* calls for doing *homa* before the *diklā*; but Newar tantric practitioners always do it afterwards. This may reflect how this text is not as important in Nepal. However, there is an oral recollection of a senior *bajracārya* that the *Kalacakra* initiation was once done in recent times in Itam Bāhā, one of the eighteen main monasteries of Kathmandu city.

12. The sixth, seventh, and eighth life-cycle rites: Passages of life.

13. The *saptavidhanattarapūjā* ("sevenfold supreme offering") for which patrons make 108 or 1,008 offerings of seven substances, and the *vajracārya* priest summons the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to receive them.

14. Regarding the symbolic associations of water and fire in Indo-Iranian ritual, see Holly Grether, "The Ritual Interplay of Fire and Water in Hindu and Buddhist Tantras," in this volume.

15. What follows is the tradition that is normative for Kathmandu city, based on the authoritative text published by Amoghajāra. There are slight variations in *homa* performance in Patan and Bhaktapur.

16. Eighteen types of wood sold especially for *homa*, tied up in ready-made small bundles.

17. From a clean, flowing river.

18. Red and yellow powder, used for putting *tikas* on icons, *pūjā* equipment, people.

19. Five cow products: milk, ghee, yogurt, dung, urine.

20. Fruits, flowers, medicinal herbs, sweets, *saki root*, special incense, betel leaf.

21. Although it is called "32 grains," the ingredients also include fruits such as sugar cane, *amba* ("Himalayan fruit"), and pomegranate.

22. The details of these common Newar Buddhist rituals are described in Locke (1980) and Gellner (1992). The normal order is: *śūrya arghya*, *gaurāmandala*, *pañcagavya*, *śūbhama pūjā*, *laṅkabhāṭī*, *trisamādhi*, *kalasa archan pūjā*, then the commence of the *homa* proper.

23. Mudras are done in order: *Binā, Vamā, Mr̥ṅg, Muraṅ, Lāṅyā, Mālā, Gītā, Nṛtyā, Puṣpā, Dhūpā, Dipā, Gaṇḍā, Adāṭa, Rāṣa, Sparśa, Dharmadhātugarbha*.
24. Indra, Yama, Varuna, Kuvera, Agni, Nairṭi, Vāyu, Isana, Brahmā, Pṛthivī, Surya, Candra, Nāga, Aśura, Yakṣa.
25. For the Harvard ritual on October 1, 2010, this deity was Mañjuśrī. It could be any bodhisattva on other occasions.
26. Eighteen types of wood dipped in Ghee, placed one by one in fire kuṇḍa (each with mantra) in text, not done today; replaced by step no. 20.
27. *hojā-dojā*: pair of objects made of flattened rice, boiled rice, or fried wheat grains, solid and oblong in shape.
28. At this time, all in attendance who wish *tika* from the priest can come forward to receive the *tika*; giving *dakṣiṇa* (payment) is customary in return.
29. The *māṃsā āhuti homa* is also called "*piṭha māṃsāhuti homa*" in local parlance.
30. Tantric songs which originate with the supposedly spontaneous expression of awakening by early figures known as the *Mahāstūddhas*. See, recently, Jackson (2004).
31. It is believed in Vajrayāna that one who passes away practicing "*utkrānti yoga*" successfully will obtain *arupavacara bhūmi* (the "formless realm"), from where final emancipation is possible. On the basis of this idea, "*utkrānti yoga*" is performed by a bajracārya for the deceased.
32. More technically, proximate to the navel, where the *nirmāna cakras* is located.
33. Michael Witzel, "On the History and Present State of Vedic Tradition in Nepal," *Vasudha* 15 (1976): 17-39; see also Witzel 1992.
34. This is popularly known as the "*Ghasu-Jagya/yajña*" in Newari.
35. For this article, Prof. Bajracārya consulted the *Kriyāsamgraha* manuscript, with the colophon date of N.S. 783 (1662 CE), now in the library of Subhṣa Bajracārya, in the Pakanajol neighborhood of Kathmandu.

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Preface

IN OCTOBER 2010 a conference entitled "Homa Variations: From Vedic to Hindu and Buddhist" was held at Harvard University. For three days, a dozen scholars presented their work as it relates to the *homa* ritual. Over the course of that time, about two dozen others were in attendance as well. One of the high points of the conference was the performance of a Newari *homa* by Naresh Bajracharya, one of the conference participants. Following the conference, additional papers were solicited to provide greater depth to this collection.

Contributors

Naresh Man Bajracharya is the founding Chair of the Central Department of Buddhist Studies at Tribhuvan University and was the first Nepali appointed as Professor of Buddhist Studies. In addition to completing his PhD in Buddhist Studies at Delhi University in 1998, Bajracharya is also a tantric lineage holder and one of the leading priests in the Newar Buddhist sangha of Kathmandu. Author of many articles and books on Newar Buddhism, he was a Fulbright Scholar in Residence at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2009-10. Professor Bajracharya over the last decade has played a pioneering role in introducing the discipline of Buddhist Studies to Nepal and in revitalizing the spiritual traditions of Newar Buddhism across the Kathmandu Valley. He is currently engaged in organizing the construction of a Vajrayana Monastery in Lumbini. In late 2024, he was appointed Vice Chancellor of Lumbini Buddhist University in Lumbini.

Nawaraj Chaulagain is Assistant Professor in religious studies at Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois, where he teaches courses such as Religions of the World, Hindu Religious Traditions, Asian Religious Practice, Islam from Mecca to Malcolm X, and Peace & War in the Modern World. His research interests include Hindu kingship rituals, yoga and meditation, and comparative religions and literature in South Asia. He is particularly interested in the questions of how religions and politics intersect and interact, and how they influence the ways people construct their religious worldviews.

David B. Gray is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University. His research explores the development of tantric Buddhist traditions in South Asia, and

their dissemination in Tibet and East Asia, with a focus on the Yoginītantras, a genre of Buddhist tantric literature that focused on female deities and yogic practices involving the subtle body. He is the author of both *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: A Study and Annotated Translation* (2007) and *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: Editions of the Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts* (2012).

Holly Grether currently serves as an Assistant Teaching Professor at Montana State University. Her teaching interests include Buddhism, gender and religion, and theories of sacrifice. She received a PhD in Religious Studies from University of California, Santa Barbara, with specializations in South Asia and History of Religions. Under the tutelage of David Gordon White, her dissertation traced historical origins of various elements of *homa* sacrifices in South and Central Asia. Other research interests include religions of the Silk Road, Hindu and Buddhist tantra, religion and law, and ritual studies.

Georgios T. Halkias obtained a DPhil in Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford and is currently an Assistant Professor at the Centre of Buddhist Studies, the University of Hong Kong. He specializes in Tibetan and trans-Himalayan Buddhism and history and has held research posts and fellowships in the United Kingdom (Warburg, SOAS, and Oxford), Germany (Ruhr University), and Japan (Otani-ha Foundation). His publications include *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet. With an Annotated Translation and Critical Analysis of the Orgyen-ling Golden Short Sukhāvāṭīryūba-sūtra* (University of Hawai'i Press) and several articles on Tibetan and Central Asian Buddhism, Himalayan history, and interdisciplinary studies of religion.

Todd Lewis is the Murray Distinguished Professor of Arts and Humanities in the Religious Studies Department at the College of the Holy Cross. His primary research since 1979 has been on Newar Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. He is the author of many articles on this tradition, co-author of *World Religions Today* (5th ed., 2014), and editor of the new course book *Buddhists: Understanding Buddhism Through the Lives of Practitioners* (2014). His most recent translation, *Sugata Saurabha: A Poem on the Life of the Buddha by Chittadhar Hridaya of Nepal*, received awards from the Khyentse Foundation and the Numata Foundation as the best book in Buddhist Studies published in 2011.