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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF BUDDHIST RITUALISM: A MAHÂYÂNA AVADÂNA ON CAITYA VENERATION FROM THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

I. Introduction

Most Buddhists who took refuge in the trîratna were not monks or intellectuals but farmers, artisans, or merchants. Throughout its expansive missionary history, Buddhist tradition engaged the enthusiastic devotion of the householder classes through its inclusive hierarchy of teachings interlinked with a large repertoire of ritual practices. Buddhism attracted ascetics and intellectuals with myriad meditative regimens and vast doctrinal discourse; yet it also cultivated the great lay majority with simple teachings and devotional practices while meeting their specific pragmatic needs through ritual.

This study approaches popular Mahâyâna Buddhism through a study of rituals at cāityas or stûpas, drawing upon a Newar Buddhist text and ethnographic research from the Kathmandu Valley.1 The Mahâyâna-Vajrayâna traditions and a Hindu-Buddhist culture make Nepalese culture (until 1768, a term designating the Kathmandu Valley only) in many respects an enduring link to pre-Islamic South

1 The author would like to thank the Fulbright Fellowship program for support of the research underlying this study. Special acknowledgement goes to Subarna Man Tuladhar, Mani Gopal Jha, Labh Ratna Tuladhar, Robin Jared Lewis, and Gregory Schopen for their helpful readings of the translation. This article is dedicated to the memory of Karkot Man Tuladhar, an exemplary Newar Buddhist gentleman.

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Asia. Over the last decade, research on Newar Buddhism has begun to document this frontier “island” of South Asian Buddhism.

In South Asia through the Pāla era, Buddhism comprised many coexisting spiritual approaches spanning Hinayāna and Mahāyāna (Dutt 1962: 176, 216). Its broad culture centered in viharas supporting intricately conceived yet flexible disciplines aimed for the spiritual progress of both monks and laity. The historical enterprise of Buddhism comprised many mansions, each normative, with multiple traditions and multipraxis. The freedom engendered by Śākyamuni’s sanctioning autonomous, geographically-demarcated saṁghas made Buddhist history the cumulative product of numerous independent schools, institutions, and individuals (Lamotte 1988: 549). The diffuse definition and location of doctrinal authority in Buddhist communities—including the toleration of dissenting formulations—shaped the tradition’s multi-variant history (Davidson 1989). Requirements for a monastic lifestyle were set forth rather definitively, with the Vinaya providing a clear standard for the monks’ institutional and communal life (Wijayaratna 1989; Prebish 1975).

Scholarly discourse in Buddhist studies should utilize “culture area” terminology and cease using “Indian” as a scientific label for pre-modern phenomena. Projecting the modern state boundaries backwards falsifies historical representation since Buddhism endures continuously outside its cultural hearth zone up to the present in South Asia: to the north, in the Kathmandu Valley and Himalayas; to the far south, in Sri Lanka; to the east, in Burma, Thailand, and points along the Indian Ocean. (The tradition was also preserved far past the twelfth century in small communities lying in inner frontier “islands”: Orissa (Das Gupta 1969) and in port town communities (Tucci 1931).) To say that “Indian Buddhism was extinguished” is poor methodology and, in literal point of geographical fact, false. The more heuristic historical-geographical representation affirms that Buddhism did survive up to the present on the frontiers of the original Gangetic core zone. This redefinition of the historical situation opens up important perceptions such as seeing the reality of the later pan-Buddhist diaspora community that linked Central Asia, Tibet, mainland Southeast Asia, Indonesia. The international monastic/mercantile network is evident in the accounts of Chinese and Tibetan monks.

Recent studies have been published by Allen, Gelner, Greenwood, Lienhard, Lewis, Levy, and Locke. See the bibliography.

Ron Davidson’s article on scriptural authority (1989) is an excellent and wel-

sāṁgha’s designated responsibilities for propagating the dharma (recitations of Buddhavacana) and serving the lay community (public preaching and private instruction) were defined, by contrast, in very generalized terms, leaving the field open to broad interpretation.

The Mahāyāna tradition’s explicit recognition of legitimate, multi-level presentation of the dharma is expressed throughout the sūtra literature. Both the Prajñāpāramitā literature and Madhyamaka writings establish two levels of truth as the foundational framework of dharma discourse. The deconstructionist frame, while intellectually enabling the worldly conventional, is itself bracketed by “a strong foundationalist” assertion of worldly and religious conventionalities (Jackson 1989: 584).” In the realm of provisional truth, the Buddha’s (and bodhisattvas’) “skill in means” in addressing the exact concerns and abilities of their audiences legitimated the tradition’s textual multivocality, responding to a multiplicity of individual spiritual levels. The Saddharma-pundarīka expresses this quite explicitly:

I proclaim for their sakes a variety of teachings
I am always considering in my own mind
What I can do to bring the living beings
To extend the unsurpassed way
And speedily accomplish their Buddhahood.

(Quoted in Pye 1978: 59)

By establishing successive levels of legitimate religious understanding and practice for both laymen and monks, and by articulating many areas in which the sāṁgha could directly serve local communities, the Mahāyāna tradition engaged a large spectrum of society. Farmers, traders, and artisans had places in the great spiritual enterprise; householders’ ritual offerings to temple-dwelling celestial Bodhisattvas as well as to their ritualists and teachers in the attending sāṅghas sustained the tradition. By the Pāla period in northeast India...
India (c. 750–950), this sort of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna culture was predominant (Dutt 1962: 389). It endures intact (though in slow decline) in the contemporary Newar community, evolved to the point that ācāryas in the samgha perform a vast repertory of rituals, including a Buddhist version of dharmasāstra samkārās (Lewis 1993a), homa pūjās (Gellner 1992), the niṣṭā pūjās for temple-residing bodhisattvas (Locke 1980), and bodhisattva ratha jātiras (Owens 1989). One case study in the successful historical emergence of Buddhism is its adaptation of universal teachings to stūpa making and ritual veneration.

II.

Caitya Veneration in Mahāyāna Buddhist Practice

For all Buddhist schools, the stūpa became a focal point and the singular landmark denoting the tradition’s spiritual presence on the landscape (Dallapiccola 1980; Harvey 1984; Snodgrass 1985). Crossroads where four highways meet are the ideal site for the stūpa (Dutt 1945b: 250). From antiquity, stūpa and caitya were used in Buddhist inscriptions and literature as synonyms. Foussin (1987: 284) has noted that a Dharmagupta Vīṇāya commentary suggested the existence of a technical distinction between shrines with relics (stūpa) and shrines without (caitya). I-Tsin indicates another Buddhist definition: “Again, when the people make images and caityas which consist of gold, silver, copper, iron, earth, lacquer, bricks, and stone, or when they heap up the snowy sand, they put into the images or caityas two kinds of sariras: 1. The relics of the Great Teacher; 2. The Gāthā of the chain of causation.” The Gāthā is:

Ye dhammā hetuprabhāvā hetus tuṣāṇā tathāgato hy avadatt
Tekāṁ ca yo nirodha evaṁ vādī mahaśravāmanāḥ

This verse was also commonly inscribed on clay votives throughout the Buddhist world.6


7 See note 20.


And when the body of the Exalted One had been burnt up, there came down streams of water from the sky and extinguished the funeral pyre ... and there burst forth streams of water from the storehouse of waters [beneath the earth], and extinguished the funeral pyre ... The Mallas of Kushinara also brought water scented with all kinds of perfumes ... surrounded the bones of the Exalted One in their council hall with a lattice work of spears, and with a
rampart of bows; and there for seven days they paid honor, and reverence, and respect, and homage to them with dance, and song, and music, and with garlands and perfumes ... 

A prominent Hinayana sutt theme is the celestial wonders visible at caityas. As Nagasena explains in the Mulindapana (IV,8,1):

Some women or some man of believing heart, able, intelligent, wise, endowed with insight, may deliberately take perfumes, or a garland, or a cloth, and place it on a caitya, making the resolve: 'May such and such a wonder place!' Thus is it that wonders take place at the caitya of one entirely set free (Rine-Davids 1963: II, 175).

The subsequent elaborations on stupa's ritual in Buddhist history are extensive: a "power place" tapping the relics' Buddha presence (Schopen 1987: 196) and healing power; a site to earn merit through veneration (Lamotte 1988: 415); a monument marking the conversation and control of naga and yaksha (Bhats 1973: 48-9). Only the Theravada Vinaya omits instructions to monks on how to construct and make offerings at stupa (Bareau 1962; cf. Schopen 1989), and the archaeological record shows that stupa were frequently built in the center of vihara courtyards (Seckel 1964: 132-4), often by monks themselves (Snellgrove 1973: 410), a custom still ubiquitous in Nepal. I-Tsang's account illustrates the monastic focus on stupa in the sangha's communal life.

In India priests perform the worship of a caitya and ordinary service late in the afternoon or at the evening twilight. All the assembled priests come out of the gate of their monastery, and walk three times around a stupa, offering incense and flowers. They all kneel down, and one of them who sings well begins to chant hymns describing the virtues of the Great Teacher ... [and] in succession returns to the place in the monastery where they usually assemble. (Takakusu 1982 ed.: 152)

In the Mahayana schools, the stupa came to symbolize other ideas: of Buddhahood's omnipresence (Snellgrove and Skorupsky 1977):

Whereas the stupa in the earlier tradition ... is the sign and symbol of a Buddha's departure into final nirvana, the mandala by contrast represents the continual activity of Buddhahood on behalf of living beings ... In later Indian Buddhist tradition, the stupa was adapted to this newer symbolism ... with the great stupas of Nepal with the eyes which look toward the dome and with cosmic Buddha manifestations enshrined at the points of the compass ... Thus the later stupa, like the mandala ... as the center which a deity sits enthroned, is the sacred sphere of beneficent activity. (Snellgrove and Skorupsky 1977: 13)

9 A modern Tibetan explanation of stupa symbolism further expands this multiplicity by relating them to the trika theory of Buddhahood: Buddha images represent the nirmanakaya, texts the sambhogakaya, stupa the dharmakaya. All are said to be upaya for Buddhists who seek both puuya and prajna. Offerings to the dharmakaya yield the greatest puuya (Rinpoche 1990).

Gregory Schopen has shown that the stupa/caitya cult was well established by the time of the Mahayana's emergence. The first Ma-
hāyāna sūtras (e.g. Saddharma-puṇḍarīka; Prajñāpāramitā) clearly seek to redefine and reinterpret the caitya’s origin and higher meaning, the Mahāyāna equivalent of the Biblical “new wine in old bottles”. What characterizes the key difference between Hinayāna and emerging Mahāyāna lineages was the loyalty devotees were urged to show, respectively, to either stūpas enshrining Buddha’s bodily relics or stūpas marking sites where sūtras revealing Buddhasākāra were taught or venerated (Schopen 1975: 168–9). It is the latter that for the Mahāyāna is the most prestigious and most potent for earning the greatest merit. A Gilgit text dramatically describes how even modest stūpa building is infinitely superior to making lavish material offerings of other sorts (Borner 1988).

The Saddharma-puṇḍarīka also places great emphasis on making and venerating caityas. Its exalted, utopian vision of Buddhist civilization features a landscape dominated by these monuments:

There are also bodhisattvas
Who, after the Buddha’s passage into extinction,
Shall make offerings to his relics.
Further, I see sons of the Buddhas
Making stūpa shrines
As numberless as Ganges’ sands,
With which to adorn the realms and their territories,
Jeweled stūpas to the lovely height . . .
Every individual stūpa shrine
Having on it a thousand banners, . . .
So that the realms and their territories . . .
Are of a most refined beauty. (Hurvitz 1976: 10)

The Lotus exalts gem-encrusted stūpas,10 stūpas of immense size, and musical veneration at the monuments (ibid., 39). The most valued stūpa is one encasing the Lotus itself and those in this category should be decorated with and called a “Seven-Jeweled stūpa.” The text asserts that all who make stūpas achieve the Buddha Path (ibid., 39) and that those who worship the “Seven-Jeweled” are close to complete enlightenment (ausarasesmākakarambodhi). Chapter Eleven, dedicated to the appearance of a jeweled stūpa, depicts Śākyamuni instructing followers to build stūpas wherever the devotees to the Lotus dwell: “Wherever these good men and good women sit, or stand, or walk, there one should erect a stūpa, and all gods and men should make offerings to it, as if it were a stūpa of the Buddha himself (ibid., 254).” These places, bodhimaṇḍa vaktavyaḥ “Platforms of the Path” (ibid., 255), mark sites where the Lotus has been stored, read, recited, interpreted, copied, or practiced; they are equated with the sites where Buddhas have achieved enlightenment, taught, and passed to parinirvāṇa.

One final and recently-noted dimension to stūpa veneration was a votive/mortuary aspect (Schopen 1987): certain Buddhists, especially monks (Schopen 1989), apparently had their own ashes deposited in small votive caityas, often arranged close to a Buddha relic stūpa (Schopen 1991a; 1991b; 1992a). These structures perhaps established a means for perpetual puṇya-generation for the deceased. The caitya creation in the Śrīyuga Bherī Avaddana may perhaps be related to this custom and other Tibetan Buddhist mortuary traditions using cremation ash and bone.11

10 X. Liu has shown how the paraphernalia of Buddhist stūpas, shrines, stūras, and temple building itself contributed significantly to overland Indo-Chinese trade by Kushan times (Liu 1988: 100). Of particular importance were the offerings of (Chinese) silk and the (Indian) seven jewels—gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, pearl, red coral, agate— including the building of “seven-jewelled stūpas.” These were described as the best of offerings. (p. 97) The caitya in the Śrīyuga Bherī story is transformed into a “jewelled caitya.”

11 Eva Dargay’s study of popular Buddhist practices in Zanskār (Western Tibet) includes the construction of a small stūpa using cremation ashes and bones; this and other typical lay rituals after death (image making and text copying) have a three-fold purpose: “… to let the previously deceased attain to the path of liberation; to purify the defilements of the living ones; and to ensure the future prosperity and power of one’s dynasty” (Dargay 1986: 87). Other Tibetan areas also preserve this cultic use of monks’ and layfolk’s cremon remiains (Schopen 1992). Schopen’s speculation on the congruence between stūpa and tīrtha is supported by the living Newar Buddhist traditions: Avaddana tales link tīrthas to Buddhist saints and the conversation of nāgas (Lewis 1984: 62); Newar texts specify the necessity of Buddhist stūpas being established at proper tīrthas; and the performance of Buddhist śrāddha rituals can involve the dispersal of ashes at such venues in the first year of mourning (Lewis 1984: 325–330; 388–389).
Centered in practice upon the doctrine of upāya, Mahāyāna Buddhism cultivated cultural multivalence that converges literally and figuratively at stūpas. Asanga’s *Bodhisattvabhumi* lists ten progressive ritual practices at caityas. The Khotanese Book of Zambasta links stūpa veneration to the cultivation of pāramitās (Emmerick 1968: 157). The Vajrayāna tradition also utilized the stūpa as a mandala and a model for visualization meditation. In the Nepalese-Tibetan Vajrayāna traditions, these directional points also have esoteric correlates in the human body itself. Thus, it is with these myriad understandings that Buddhist virtuosi as well as others at all levels of aspiration have circumambulated stūpas.

Symbiotically, great regional stūpas were pivotal in the social history of Buddhism: these monuments became magnets attracting vihāra building and votive construction, for local pīṭā and pilgrimage. The economics of Buddhist devotionalism at these centers generated income for local sāmyghas, artisans, and merchants (Liu 1987), an alliance basic to Buddhism throughout its history (Dehejia 1972; Lewis 1993d). Thus, stūpa veneration was the most important activity that unified entire Buddhist communities, especially (since 1-Tsang’s time) on full moon and eighth lunar days. At these geographical centers arrayed around the symbolic monument, diverse devotional exertions, textual/doctrinal studies, and devotees’ mercantile pursuits could all prosper in synergistic style. The regional Mahācāturya complexes, with their interlinked components – vihāras with land endowments, votive/pilgrimage centers, markets, state support, etc. – represent central fixtures in Buddhist civilization. Our text contributes to the centripetal forces that drew Buddhists toward such caityas’ sacred precincts.

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12 Asanga’s list of ten Mahāyāna rituals requires the resort to a caitya, with or without relics (Poussin 1987: 281–282).

13 This is the place where the vision of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*’s “ekāyana” would be manifest. For over the past fifty years, the harmonious merging of Tibetan Buddhists with Nepalese Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna devotees has been visible at Swayambhū, the great hilltop stūpa (Bechert 1992: 186). The supreme importance the tradition accorded to their caityas complexes is reflected in the extreme karma penalties incurred from disrespecting, damaging, or destroying them (Schopen 1987: 208).
and to all Buddhists in the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding regions through the twelve-year Samyaka festival (Shakya 1979; Lewis 1994b; Bechert 1992). Swayambhū once had extensive land endowments traditionally dedicated to its upkeep (Shakya 1978) and in many respects the history of regional Buddhism is embedded in the layers of this stūpa’s successive iconography, patronage, and restoration.

The other great stūpa of Nepal is Baudhā. In recent years, Baudhā has become the focal monument of resident Tibetan Buddhists and there are Tibetan literary sources that link its founding to the introduction of the Dharma to Tibet (Levi 1905 (II), 7; Snellgrove 1967: 98–9; Downman 1973). Local traditions record the establishment of a great stūpa in the present location northeast of Kathmandu City dating from Licchavi times and there is a Newari origin myth as well (Levi 1905 (II): 7–8; Slusser 1982: 277).

In the Kathmandu Valley, other stūpas exist in great numbers and they remain the main venues for daily public Buddhist observances. There are large stūpas that mark the old directional boundaries of Patan and Kathmandu. In courtyards, at riverside tīrthas, and around temples in most Newar settlements, there are also thousands of more modest family votive caiṭiyas. The ubiquity of caiṭiyas here can be illustrated by the Ahan Tol neighborhood in Kathmandu, where a survey of all free-standing religious shrines (numbering over 300) revealed that one half were caiṭiyas (Lewis 1984: 116).

There has been a succession of caiṭiya styles in Nepalese history. Most so-called “Aśoka caiṭiyas” come in a variety of shapes and sizes, most very worn from devotional ablutions and whitewashings. Stūpas dated to the Licchavi period (such as those published by Pal 1974: 16) from Dhawāka Bāhā, Kathmandu depict standing Buddhas and Bodhisattvas surmounted by small stūpas, indicating early Mahāyāna influences. Since the nineteenth century, the commonly-preferred design features seated directional Buddhas surmounted by a stūpa, with some also adding the particular bodhisattva “sons” standing beneath. In a recent study, over eight standard designs are still recognized today (Macdonald and Stahl 1980: 144).17

16 The most common Newari name for this stūpa complex is Khāṭī. Slusser discusses this and alternative usages (1982: 277).
17 These forms as pictured differ from the classical eight styles associated with the early eight pilgrimage places of ancient Indic Buddhism. See Tucci 1988: 21–23.

Mention must also be made of Newar cast-metal stūpas. Nepalese artisans were famous across the Himalayan region for their skills in lost wax casting, including stūpas and other images (Bue 1985; Bue 1986; Heller 1986). The most notable among them are the Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya caiṭiyas made for the elderly’s jāniṇa samakāra (Pal 1977) and the Samyaka caiṭya that is required for sponsorship of the greatest Newar dāna patronage ceremony (Shakya 1980).

Still other Newar caiṭiyas are small and usually impermanent in nature. There are sand caiṭiyas laymen mould by riversides to make merit, most commonly for certain eraddha pāṭīs, but also at the time of eclipses, and during the special Newar month of Gumi. Another ephemeral Newar caiṭya is made of clay that laymen fashion using special molds. These miniature clay images can be used for building the interiors of permanent monuments as well as for disposal by the riverside. This practice, called dyah thāye (Newari: “making the deity”), requires the use of black clay; observed during Gumi, the final votive assemblage must be empowered by special rites of merit dedication (Lewis 1998a). Several vratas also require the manufacturing of these images (Lewis 1988a) and the Śrīga Bhērt Avadāna can be read aloud as part of these observances. (See discussion of the lakṣaṇa-caiṭya in the next section.)

Finally, Newar Buddhist make evanescent basma caiṭiyas with relic ashes at riverside tīrthas following the cremation rites (cf. Dargyay 1986: 182–5). Vajrācārya ritualists also make a “durgatiparirodhana caiṭya” to fix in place the dhāraṇī in a Buddhist piṇḍa ritual of mourning; symbolizing the text’s presence as witness. The relic tradition of the Śrīga Bhērt perhaps can be related to the already-cited ancient tradition of merging cremation relics with molded sand or miniature clay caiṭiyas and clay-inscribed dhāraṇīs, a custom once ubiquitous in South Asia (Schopen 1985; Schopen 1987: 1988f.) and still...

IV.
Notes on the Text, Newar Contextual Application, and Buddhist Themes

Compiler: Badri Ratna Bajracharya

Suffering declining patronage, Hindu state discrimination, and anti-Mahayana missionizing by the revivalist Theravadin monks (Kloppenberg 1977; Tewari 1983; Lewis 1984), the Newar Buddhist sangha has struggled to survive over the last century. The author, a Kathmandu Vajracharya by birth and religious training, has been a prominent force seeking to overcome these circumstances by establishing a school for training young Vajracharya men, giving public lectures, and by organizing a host of traditional ritual programs in stūpas and other pilgrimage sites, including sahyāpūpas initiations. He has published mythical booklets to support each of these, including the text translated here.

This booklet represents a literary rendering of Bajracharya's most renowned local role as Kathmandu's storyteller extraordinaire. Whether in one of the town's viharas or in the Kāṣeṇavālapa, the great public assembly building from which Kathmandu derives its name, Badri's sessions in the 1980s drew many hundreds to hear his dramatic, multi-vocalic, and clearly elucidated doctrinal presentations as he read from and expounded upon popular avadānas and jātakas. The simple language of the printed story and the repetitions clearly illustrate the storyteller's expository manner.

Notes on the Text and the Compiler's Introduction

The compiler in his introduction notes his source as the Sanskrit Citavimsatī Aavadāna, one of the popular collections of Mahāyāna-style stories preserved in Kathmandu Valley vihāra libraries (Mitra 1882; Takaoaka 1981: 2). Separate texts containing this story alone exist in Newar collections, and the versions show plot and character variations (Novak 1986).

To introduce the text, Bajracharya recounts the basic teachings of the Svayambhū Purāṇa, the creation story of the Kathmandu Valley as a Mahāyāna Buddhist hierophany. While the Purāṇa represents itself as spoken by Śākyamuni Buddha, its content reaches back to earlier world ages and a succession of previous Buddhas. It reveals the creation of Nepal as a center of Mahāyāna hierophony and finally recounts how a civilization was arranged around it by the Bodhisattva Manjūśrī. The compiler merely outlines this sequence to show that the Svayambhū stūpa (the enduring site of this hierophony) and the distinctive musical veneration described in the text date from an earlier world era, the time of Newar - and simultaneously Mahāyāna - origins. This is domestication par excellence, and even this purāṇa itself was likely imported from Kathots (Brough 1946). He also thanks his patrons, a Newar farming family with the surname Maharjan, who sponsored publication in memory of the husband's parents. The father's portrait, blowing on his wooden flute, adorns the first page, illustrating the typical scenario of lay memorial merit-making underwriting a new recension of a Buddhist text.

Language and Translation

The twenty-four-page printed text is written in simply-constructed modern Newari, with Sanskrit used sparingly for Buddhist terms. Not surprisingly, the style is that of a storyteller, with intermittent resort to re-quot ing dialogue, a device that enhances the dramatic oral effect. The printed text is quite remarkable in this genre for its fairly consistent transliterations, especially in the faithful renderings of Buddhist terms. The translation below aims to capture the story-

20 Moulded miniature stūpas were also made as empowered souvenirs for pilgrims who visited great stūpas. Such votive traditions are evident in studies of Central Asia (Taddéi 1970), Tibet (Tucci 1932), Nepal (Lewis 1998c), India (Desai 1986), Burma (Mya 1961), Thailand (Griswold 1965), and Śrīvijaya (O'Connor 1974, 1975; Sukutno 1984; Lamb 1984). The modern Thai enthusiasm for amulets is a survival of this tradition (Tambiah 1984).

21 This starting point is typical of many of the modern books, regardless of the subject matter. For another example of this, see Slusser 1982: 420–21.
teller's effect; the paragraph breaks in the translation generally match those in the book.

Finally noted must be the insertion of two short devotional additions to the printed work. The first is a one-page Sanskrit poem, "Stotra in Praise of the Eight Caiityas," that reveres the usual eight body relic caiityas of ancient India (Tucci 1988: 23) as well as dhāraṇī caiitya sites. The second is the one-page insertion of a devotional hymn that can be sung by a musical procession. Although Bajrācārya's introduction does not refer to either, both are clearly appended to assist devotees wishing to use the book as they perform their ritual veneration at the Swayambhū stūpa.

Summary of the Narrative

In tracing the outline of the account, distinctive themes emerge regarding the Mahāyāna Buddhist adaptation to later South Asian society. The story begins with Śākyamuni, but in the characteristic embedded avadāna style turns quickly backward in time by invoking the age when Vipaśyī Buddha lived. It is he who tells the focal story.

The story recounts the multiple-lifetime destinies of a royal couple, with the devoted moral aspiration of the queen linking her fate in samsāra to her husband the king. The latter, due to the bad karma earned from his avid hunting and despite his wife's forcefully eloquent moral instruction on ahimsā, dies and is reborn: first in purgatory and then as a buffalo fated to be, in literal karmic retribution, cruelly killed by wild beasts. After the death of her husband, the queen (the text tersely reports) commits sāti. But she is reborn as Rūpavatī, a daughter in a pious Brāhmaṇa family. This high caste rebirth is a reward for her moral character.

Rūpavatī's bond to the former king also endures when she matures, refuses marriage proposals, and acquires that very buffalo to herd. One day she is visited by a Bodhisattva named Supārṣaṅga who reveals to her the workings of rebirth destiny and gives her instructions that she follows exactly when her buffalo meets its violent end: she buries the bones in a sand caiitya and uses one horn to offer water to the caiitya while blowing on the other.

This "five-fold" pūjā sets off a cosmic transformation reminiscent of the Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta and also quite typical in the Mahāyāna texts: a jeweled, light-emanating caiitya descends from the sky, merges with the sand caiitya, and causes an entire caiitya complex to appear on the spot. Equally miraculous, a lad emerges from the buffalo horn and after the reunion he reveals how his former wife's

22 Regarding evidence for the emergence of distinctive religious stūpa Buddhist ritualism and book stūpa ritualism, see Schopen 1976. The Sanskrit text printed here is the same as that published by Bagchi (1941: 233) and was also extant in Chinese.

23 This practice mentioned in a Buddhist text seems anomalous, especially here so soon after an eloquent statement on ahimsā. Yet one quite unavoidably must point out that this avadāna supports the logic of widow immolation: without the Queen committing sāti, the entire transformation and miraculous Bodhisattva hierophany cannot take place. Other examples from the later avadānas literatures must be surveyed to evaluate this aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhism's domestication in later Indian society. There were apparently opposing opinions regarding suicide across the Mahāyāna literature, with avadānas illustrating both views (Ku 1991: 157ff.; Yün-hua 1966).

24 Supārṣaṅga is not listed by the standard iconographic sources: the Sādhānāmāla (Bhattacharya 1966; Bhattacharya 1959), Mallem (1970), or Getty (1988). Monier-Williams (1899) lists a reference only to the Jānakamāla. The XIV of this work contains a tale of Supārṣaṅga the ship captain who acts as a bodhisattva navigator who guides seagoing merchants through a great storm (Sperry 1971: 124–134). His "Act of Truth" (Brown 1972) saves the ship and crew.

25 The term used in the text is paścimapāda pūjī. In Newari usage it refers to five offerings: flowers, incense, light, balm, food (Lewis 1984: 199). This magical stūpa apparition is a motif in other Mahāyāna avadāna traditions. Also quite influential in Newar Buddhism (as was the case in other parts of India) is the local contextualization of the "Mahāsaṅgīta and Tīrggīs story. In the Susarṇaprabhāsubhāsī, the tale is revealed in the following way:

Gaṅgāmā Buddha, wandering about in the region of the Pancaila with his disciples, arrived at a beautiful spot in the woods. He asked Ananda to prepare a seat for him, and said that he would show them the relics of the great bodhisattvas who had performed difficult feats. He struck the ground with his hands, and a stūpa made of gems, gold, and silver rose up. Buddha directed Ananda to open the stūpa. It contained a golden sarcophagus covered with pearls. Ananda saw some bones, which were as white as snow and the white water lily. All paid obeisance to the relics. Buddha then told the story of the hero...

(As summarized by Dayal 1933: 182)

This avadāna has also been domesticated at a caiitya southeast of the Kathmandu Valley, a day's walk from the capital. The story, called "Mahāsaṅgīta Rāja Kumār," is often depicted on Newar vihāra frescoes and also in a recent comic book.
merit transferred to him secured his release both from purgatory and from his buffalo destiny. In thanksgiving, he then worships the jeweled caitiya, chants praises to Tārā, reads sūtras, and blows the buffalo horn. The story ends more happily yet when the couple again returns to the kingdom’s throne and promotes this style of caitiya veneration.

The Text’s Context and Concluding Buddhological Observations

The predatory opening lines of the Śrīga Bherī āavadāna set forth the text’s clear message: veneration of caityas employing a musical procession yields a good destiny for oneself (fortune in this life, next rebirth in a noble family) and for departed relatives. No evil destinies will befall the deceased if the rite is done in their name(s). The text asserts that going for refuge at a caitiya leads to a purified mind, attaining bodhi, securing rebirth as Indra; the building and maintenance of stūpas yields even greater merit still.

The special significance of this story is in the series of linkages asserted between the Mahāyāna bhakti orientation and caitiya veneration: the karma forces released are especially amplified. More striking still is the display of powers by the celestial bodhisattvas (Tārā, Supārṣaga) in connection with caitiya veneration. A curious feature of the āavadāna is that the relics interred in the stūpa are those of a mere buffalo, not a saint; but even these, when shaped into the archetypal Buddhist sañcara and worshipped, yield a wondrous hierophany and miraculous individual destiny.

The Newar compiler asserts in the introduction that the old custom based upon the text was for devotees to venerate all stūpas in the Kathmandu Valley with buffalo horn-playing bājans for a full month twice each year. In the Kāli Yuga, he continues, Newar Buddhists

27 The same kinds of rewards are recounted in the Khotanese Pradakṣīṇa Sūtra (Bailey 1974), a text not found under this name in Nepal.

28 Unlike the āavadānas (especially the Anandaavatara) analyzed by Strong (1979), the core story here does not contain a prabhāsana (a vow for enlightenment) for Buddhahood or saint’s status, but for more mundane results. In the framing narrative, however, Śākyamuni asserts that caityas worship can yield these spiritual attainments.

29 These months are the mid-summer Gûnâ and the fall Kacchâli. The small Buddhist community in the former capital Bhaktapur still organizes morning Gûnâ bājans processions that visit all stūpas within the town. These are led by devotees blowing buffalo horns (Levy 1990; Toffin 1984).

now merely visit only Svayambhû with such a procession during only one month, Gûnâ (Lewis 1988c). Today, in fact, the Kāli Yuga in Nepal has eroded the horn-blowing tradition so that veneration in this style is sponsored mainly by families in the first year of mourning and usually by widows.

The regular performance of Śrīga Bherī caitiya veneration is now made by a special vihara guñjâ at Svayambhû: several young boys circumambulate the Svayambhû hilltop complex each morning during Gûnâ. Their service is usually contracted for by families at the start of the month in a short ceremony dedicating the merit to the deceased. The full moon day of Gûnâ is usually chosen for the family to accompany the musical procession.

The Newar contextual adaptation of the story involves its use in other, optional observances. Newar upāsaka also observe a custom called lakṣaçaitiya (“100,000 Caiyas”): as the title implies, families would a vast number of miñature caityas over a given period and celebrate the completion with a special ritual (Pañ 1977; Lewis 1984). An old tradition still recalled in Newar texts utilized this story as part of a larger two-day lakṣaçaitiya vrata.

A final point on the domestication of Mahāyāna Buddhism: although some philosophical texts establish the radical individualism of karmic operation and the superiority of the renunciatory lifestyle over the domestic householder, this Mahāyāna āavadāna suggests that the celestial bodhisattvas’ powers are available to reunite husbands and wives in their sāmāra destiny, a theme also found in early Hinduāna literature as well. The Śrīga Bherī text and its enduring Ne-
war practice suggest that this was yet another hope and aspiration devout Buddhist householders brought to their building and veneration of stūpas.

V.
Translation

Srūga Bheri (The Buffalo Horn Blowing Tale)

So I have heard: Once Lord Śākyamuni was dwelling on Mount Grūḍhakūṭa in Rājagṛha city accompanied by 1300 fellow Bhikṣus, Bodhisattvas and Mahāsattvas.

At that time also the gods and human beings all gathered there to listen intently to the discourses delivered by the sage of the Śākya clan, Lord of the world.

From the audience, Śāriputra then arose and went close to the Tathāgata, knelt down before him with folded hands, and said, "O Lord! Be so kind as to tell me about those who were liberated unfaithful to her, not even in thought. Blessed One, we both want to live together in this way, in this life and in our future lives." The wife expresses the same opinions (Wijayaratna 1969: 169). This same view is expressed in the Buddhacarita through the speech of Śākyamuni's wife Yasodharā:

He does not see that husband and wife are both consecrated in sacrifices, and both purified by the performance of the rites ... and both destined to enjoy the same results afterwards ...

I have no such longing for the joy of heaven, nor is that hard even for common people to win if they are resolute; but my one desire is how he may beloved may never leave me either in this world or the next ... (Cowell 1969 ed.: 88)

But the hope for multi-lifetime relationships in sāmaśīna was not universally encouraged in the Buddhist literature, however. The author of the Śikṣākomāṃsapaṇḍita, for example, derides the view, quoting the Ugraśītta-paripṛcchā (Bendall and Rouse 1971: 83):

"The Bodhisattva in the presence of his wife must realize three thoughts ... She is my companion for passion and dalliance, but not for the next world; my companion at meat and drink, but not for the fruition of the maturing of my acts. She is the companion of my pleasure, not of my pain ... Three other thoughts are these: that a wife must be regarded as an obstacle to virtue, meditation, and to wisdom. And yet three more: she is like a thief, a murderer, or a guardian of hell."

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through caitya worship performed along with the playing of musical instruments, including the buffalo horn."

Upon hearing this, Tathāgata Śākyamuni said to Śāriputra within the hearing of all the gods and human beings in the audience, "Verily, Verily, O Śāriputra! Emancipation obtained through caitya worship, performed with the blowing of buffalo horns, is illustrated in the following story:

In the distant past, the King Suvarṇapakṣenu and his queen Hiranya-
vati lived happily in the city of Suvarṇavati. The King had five sons from his queen Hiranyavati, namely: 1. Puspakṣenu 2. Ratnakṣatu 3. Śāryakṣenu 4. Dipakṣenu 5. Chandrakṣenu. The oldest son Puspakṣenu once went to his parents, paid them compliments, and asked for permission to go to Bandhumati city for listening to the discourses delivered by Viśaṇu Buddha. With their permission, he left Suvarṇavati city for Bandhumati city.

Upon reaching Bandhumati city, Prince Puspakṣenu went to see Viśaṇu Tathāgata at a monastery. Kneeling down before Viśaṇu Buddha, Prince Puspakṣenu said, 'O Lord! Please tell me of those who were liberated through caitya worship performed while playing musical instruments, including the buffalo horn.'

Hearing this from the prince, the Buddha said, 'The month of Śrā-
vaṇa is considered holy for caitya worship accompanied by music. For this, the month of Kārtikī is equally holy. During these two months, after ritual bathing in the morning, if one circumambulates caityas or viśaṇu playing drums, cymbals and blowing horns, one will accumulate good fortune and religious merit here in this life and be reborn hereafter in a noble family. If one circumambulates the caitya blowing horns and offers gifts in the name of a dead one, that one will avoid bad destinies and be reborn in a family of noble birth. And if a person seated in front of a caitya seeks refuge in the Trīrāṇa with a purified mind, that one will attain supreme enlightenment or be reborn hereafter in heaven to attain the title of Indra, King of Gods. Similarly if one whitewashes a caitya with lime, decorates it with flags and garlands, and worships with a fivefold offering (pārcopacāra pūjā), that one will accumulate a great deal of religious merit. O Prince! Please be attentive and let me now proceed to tell you how once one person was liberated through horn playing:

Once there was a king named Simhakṣetu who ruled the city of Śaśi-
paṭṭana. The King had no consideration for the lives of other living
beings and every day visited the forest to hunt with his bow and arrow many different wild birds and beasts such as deer, tigers, and bears.

Unable to bear the daily sight of her husband taking the lives of wild birds and beasts in the forest, Queen Sūrakṣaṇī said to her husband one day, “Oh my Lord! Let me make a request of you. Please give up hunting the wild birds and beasts in the forest. Mind you! The wicked deed of taking the lives of living beings will subject you to a great deal of suffering in your future births. [She quoted the verses:]

Ahimsā is the best among knowledges,
The greatest of all teachings.
Ahimsā is the best among virtues,
The greatest of all meditations.

[Sūrakṣaṇī continued:] If men say they earnestly seek salvation, they should be non-violent in body, mind and speech toward all living beings. My Lord! If you so wish, you may pronounce the names of the Triratna seeking refuge, worship a caitya while saying prayers and circumambulating, give liberally to the Bhikṣus, the Brāhmaṇas, the Ācāryas, and show compassion to many suffering ones. By so doing, your happiness here and hereafter will be assured.”

Hearing this from the queen, the king replied, “Darling! What’s this you are saying? Don’t you know that one born in a royal family can take pleasure in hunting wild birds and beasts in the forest?”

Having listened to the king’s attitude, the queen still tried her best to convince him but could not stop him from hunting in the forest.

After a certain time, the king passed away and Sūrakṣaṇī received such a mental shock at his death that she immolated herself on his husband’s funeral pyre. Because of his wicked deed of so often hunting the wild birds and beasts in the forest, the king was consigned to purgatory and was afterwards reincarnated as a buffalo in the same city of Śaśāpata. But Queen Sūrakṣaṇī as a result of her meritorious deed of sparing the lives of the living beings and of being chaste and faithful to her husband, was reincarnated as a woman in a certain Brāhmaṇa family in the same city of Śaśāpata.

The Brāhmaṇa couple became very glad when she was born to them. They celebrated the name-giving ceremony of the baby girl in accordance with their custom. The name of Rūpacavi (meaning “Beautiful One”) was given to the child because she was very beautiful.

The baby was brought up with proper care and gradually she grew up like a lotus in a pond. When Rūpacavi became a mature girl, her father gave her the job of tending a buffalo in the forest.

Rūpacavi every day tended her buffalo, cleaned his shed, and took great care of him.

Because Rūpacavi was beautiful, many people came to propose marriage. Her parents discussed this and said to her eventually, “O Rūpacavi! Now you have come of age. People have come to us asking for you in marriage. Do you want to marry?”

Receiving a reply from her parents, the daughter said, “Dear Father and Mother, I do not want to be married. Please do not insist on it. I prefer staying unmarried here and devoting myself to you. I will not marry.”

Hearing this from their daughter, they gave up the idea of giving their only daughter in marriage and she stayed at home unmarried.

One day Rūpacavi was in the forest as usual tending her buffalo. While she was sitting under a tree looking at the many-hued blossoms, listening to the sweet birdsongs, and smelling many colorful sweet-scented flowers, a Bodhisattva named Supārṣaṇa, emanating brilliant light from his body, descended from the sky and stood before her. He said, “O Rūpacavi! The buffalo you are tending was your husband in your previous birth. In his former existence, he hunted many birds and beasts in the forest. As a result of this, he is now reborn as a buffalo. For his past wicked deeds, the buffalo will be killed and devoured by the birds and beasts of the forest. O Rūpacavi! If you wish to assist the husband of your previous birth to attain a good destiny, collect the mortal remains of the buffalo after it is killed and devoured by the birds and beasts of the forest, then deposit them inside a sand caitya. One of the two horns of the buffalo may be used for offering water to the caitya and the other horn may be used as a trumpet at the time of circumambulating it.” Having said this to Rūpacavi, Supārṣaṇa Bodhisattva disappeared miraculously.

Then Rūpacavi also remembered the facts of her previous birth and took greater care of the buffalo by taking it to the forest and feeding it nutritious grasses.

One day as usual, Rūpacavi was sitting under a tree while tending her buffalo. After eating grass the buffalo wandered off to drink water from a stream in the forest. At that time in an instant, tigers and lions came to attack the buffalo and tortured it to death. Then the
tigers, lions, bears, vultures and other birds devoured its flesh, leaving only the bones and two horns behind.

[At just this same time] Rūpavatī heard a strange sound made by the buffalo and then it did not come back as usual from the stream. Very much agitated, she went to the stream looking for the buffalo but did not find it. Instead, she saw only the dead animal’s bones and two horns left behind. At the sight of the buffalo’s bones and horns, Rūpavatī wept. Taking them affectionately in her arms, she said to herself, “What Supārṣaṇa Bodhisattva prophesied has come true.” She then returned home with a tearful face and related to her parents all that had happened to her in the forest that day.

Upon hearing Rūpavatī’s story, her parents comforted her, saying, “Enough, enough! Do not mourn the death of one buffalo very much. We will buy a new buffalo.”

In response to her parents, the daughter cried, “Oh Mother and Father! No buffalo can be like the one that has been killed. You may buy a new buffalo but the new one cannot bring peace and consolation to my mind.” The parents retorted, “Grieve no more over the dead one. It is of no use because the dead cannot be brought back to life. Get a hold of yourself!”

Then Rūpavatī went again to the streamside, collected all the pieces of bone, and buried them in a sand caitya, all as advised by Supārṣaṇa Bodhisattva. She next used one of the two horns of the buffalo for offering water to the caitya and the other for playing while circumambulating and while performing a pañcapacāra pūjā. She regularly worshipped the caitya in this way. One day during her caitya worship, while Rūpavatī was offering water with one of the horns and blowing the other, a bejewelled caitya appeared in the sky emitting radiant light in all directions. She was surprised and with folded hands turned to the sky in great reverence.

Then the caitya that appeared in the sky descended down to the earth and merged into the sand caitya in which the bones of the buffalo were buried. When the bejewelled caitya entered the sand caitya, the sand caitya was transformed into a bejewelled caitya.

Because of the presence of the caitya there, stone walls and other masonry constructions came into sight by themselves around the caitya to give it a look of a high-walled courtyard. Doorways and festoons also appeared, just as plants possessing different flowers and fruits started growing all around.

This is not all. From the horn of the buffalo which was used for blowing, a person came out who grew instantly into a young man. At that sight of the individual springing from the horn, Rūpavatī became very much surprised and said, “Who are you and where did you come from?”

Turning to the Brāhmaṇ lady, the person who emerged from the horn said, “How could you not recognize me, O faithful woman! You liberated your husband through your conjugal fidelity and pious charitable acts. O Rūpavatī I have been able to come out of the horn, liberated on this day. It is all due to your accumulation of punya. Have you not known that in our former existence I was the king of this city and you were my queen Sūrakṣaṇī? Although you tried to prevent me from going to the forest to hunt birds and beasts, I insisted upon doing so. As a result of these wicked deeds, I was consigned to purgatory, subjected to great suffering. Ultimately I was reborn as a buffalo. Now I am liberated through your pious meritorious worshiping of a caitya accompanied by buffalo horn playing.”

Upon hearing this from the person emanating from the horn, Rūpavatī said, “Oh! How fortunate I have been! As a result of the pious act of this caitya worship I have been able to end the separation and join my husband.” Jubilant, they both circumambulated the caitya. Then the person emanating from the horn pronounced the name of goddess Tārā and remained seated before the caitya. He recited prayers from a holy text while blowing on the horn. The whole of Śaśaṭṭāṇa city echoed with the sound produced by the horn. The citizens of Śaśaṭṭāṇa city heard the pleasant sound of the horn and assembled there.

All those who gathered around the caitya were taken aback to see Rūpavatī seated beside a handsome person and so they asked her who he was. At that time within the hearing of all, Rūpavatī related the whole story of how Supārṣaṇa Bodhisattva had prophesied strange events, how they had lived in their previous births as King Sīnḍhake-tu and Queen Sūrakṣaṇī in Śaśaṭṭāṇa, and what had happened in front of the sand caitya.

The people assembled there became very glad after hearing this and realized that the person emanating from the horn and the Brāhmaṇ lady were formerly their king and queen. Both of them were taken to the city in an elaborate, joyful procession. Then the person
emanating from the horn was given the name of Bhadra Śrīnga and was enthroned as the king of the city.

Then King Bhadra Śrīnga and Queen Rūpinsvati ruled over the city of Śaśiṣṭhāna happily. One day King Bhadra Śrīnga invited the citizens to his palace to tell them the story of how his queen helped him be delivered from his sufferings in purgatory by her pious and charitable devotional actions and how he eventually succeeded in ascending to the throne of Śaśiṣṭhāna for the well-being of the people.

King Bhadra Śrīnga and Queen Rūpinsvati lived happily for many years. King Bhadra Śrīnga made it widely known to his countrymen how his wife delivered him from his sufferings in purgatory. He preached and propagated the significance and sanctity of caitya worship and reigned happily over the country.

This is what was told to Prince Puṣpaketu by Vipaśī Buddha. After hearing this from Vipaśī Buddha, Prince Puṣpaketu returned to Suvarṇapura and relayed to his parents the same story told to him by Vipaśī Buddha.

Upon hearing the story from his son, the King Suvarṇadatta happily ruled over the country and performed the proper worship of caityas. And this was told to Bhikṣu Śāriputra by the Lord Śākyamuni on Mount Gṛddhakūṭa.

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**Figure 1:** Free-standing Caitya.

This style shrine, with directional Buddhas surmounted by a small stūpa, has been the most popular in the Kathmandu Valley over the past two centuries.
Figure 2: Veneration of a Cāitya
Print showing Buddhist women offering morning pūjā to a neighborhood cāitya.

Figure 3: Asoka Cāitya
Photograph of Asan Vihāra, Kathmandu, showing the distinctive “Asoka Cāitya” shrine in the courtyard, directly facing the main shrine room (kavāhpāh dyah). (Photograph by the author)
Figure 5: The Šrūgabherī Transformation Scene
Line drawing made from an old framed painting located in a Svayambhū resthouse. The painting depicts the moment of the king's re-incarnation through the former wife's performance of the pûjās specified in the text. (Drawing by Joy C.Y. Lewis)
Figure 6: Gumla Buffalo Horn Bajan
Drummers, cymbal players, and horn blowers circumambulate Svayambhū, domesticating the Śrīṣa Bheri Avadāna each year during the month of Śrāvaṇa. (Photograph by the author, 1991)

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