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

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

The author would like to thank the family of Karkot Man Tuladhar, Subarna Tuladhar, and Sanu Bajracharya for the always generous assistance they showed to me while I researched Buddhism in their community. My studies would not have been possible without the kind toleration and guidance of countless other individuals in Kathmandu’s Buddhist community and I thank the beloved Newar upāsakas. I am also grateful to acknowledge research funding from several sources: for 1979-1982, the Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Program; throughout 1987, the Faculty Fulbright Program; and in summer, 1991, a College of the Holy Cross Bachelor-Ford Fellowship. A final thanks to Gregory Schopen and Robin Lewis who offered helpful suggestions in the drafting of this manuscript.

¹ The norm of Buddhist pluralism is a striking feature in the tradition’s socio-historical profile. The Vinayas all show an early sensitivity to the greatly varying ecological, social, and cultural contexts that monks had to face. Recognizing this legitimate “malleability to contextual adaptation” helps explain the great differences in praxis seen even in the early sources. G. Schopen has begun to articulate this central historical variable, noting how the samgha must have adapted amidst varying societies and cultures, from tribal rain forest dwellers, to highlander nomadic pastoralists, to highly brahmanical societies. This is an emic Buddhist perception: a Vinaya distinction between situations in central places where the rules must be strictly observed (madhya-
Since exchange is the basis of social life (Murphy 1971; Harris 1989), studies of Buddhist cultural history must account for exchanges central to the tradition's community life and specify how cultural performances served this fundamental relationship. The general ideal is well-outlined in the monastic literature. The monastic community served the world through its example of renunciation and meditation (Wijayaratna 1989), by performing rituals (Gombrich 1971, 201ff; Lewis 1993b) and providing medical service (Zysk 1991). As preservers and transmitters of the Dharma, the saṃgha's duty was to attract the Buddhist lay community's merit-making donations by being spiritually worthy (Lamotte 1984); complementing this, monks were explicitly taught to seek out prasāditas ("dedicated sympathizers") and dānapatis ("generous donors") (Lamotte 1988, 78) so as to insure the Buddhist śāsana's existence amidst lay society.2

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

Indic Buddhism shows an array of evolutionary trajectories sharing common traits: stūpas as centers of community ritual (Lewis 1993c); yihāras as refuges for meditation, study, and material resources; saṃgha members who assume leadership of the community's ritual
deśa "middle country," i.e. the Buddhist homeland) and the far-off areas where less strict standards were tolerated (pratyahantajanapada, "frontier principalities") (Lamotte 1988, 8).

2. The specific benefits of being a generous Buddhist donor are extolled in a Pāli text: appreciation by everyone, loved by worthy individuals, renowned everywhere, fearless in any company, rebirth in heavenly realm (Lamotte 1988, 415). The literatures of all schools in all periods extol the great worth and rewards for dāna.
Yet Buddhism in practice so encompassed the elaboration of myriad distinctive lifestyles and cultures that even by Fa-Hsien’s time (400 CE) there was seemingly indescribable diversity: “Practices of the śramanas are so various and have increased so that they cannot be recorded.” (Beal 1970, xxix).

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

NOTES ON BUDDHIST FESTIVAL OBSERVANCES

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

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

3. An early 6-fold division of monastic specialization gives clear evidence for the saṅgha’s engaged orientation toward society: 1. instructors (dharma-kathika); 2. meditators (dhyānin); 3. folklorists (śūraśekathika); 4. sūtra specialists (sūtradhara); 5. Vinaya specialists (vinayadhara); 6. catechetics (mārkadhara) (Lamotte 1988, 149). Another specific designation often mentioned in inscriptions is the reciter (bhāṣaka), which also suggests popular service.
given by Śākyamuni that could be effective in repelling negative influences in any environment; in the Milindapañha, the laity are instructed to listen to the Dharma and make exertions to resist its decline (Dutt 1945a, 175). The Dighanikāya speaks of the upāsaka’s duty to, “Help others in increasing faith, moral virtues, knowledge, charity” (ibid., 169). An early proof text in the Pāli tradition is, again, the Sigolavāda Sutta, which specifically enjoins the layman to “maintain . . . the traditions of family and lineage; make himself worthy of his heritage; and he should make offerings to the spirits of the departed” (de Bary 1972, 43). Still other voices (quoted below) speak about the merit of spiritual celebrations in the presence of the Buddha’s relics. The early formulation called “the graded teaching”, (ānupūrvikathā) established punyalāna as the foundation for Buddhism in practice, while also legitimating a Buddhist community’s diverse cultural activity. The ānupūrvikathā are: 1. dāna/punya; 2. śīlavarga; 3. evils of pāpakāma; 4. value of renunciation; 5. Four Noble Truths (Lamotte 1988, 77). This hierarchy of legitimate, progressive activities defines a “syllabus” for advancing in spiritual attainment.

As punya provided the chief theoretical orientation in the Buddhist layman’s world view and ethos, dāna has always been the dominant, starting practice and life-long foundation of spiritual advancement. Merit-making remained the universal, integrating transaction of Buddhism in practice (Dargay 1986, 180), regardless of the respective intellectual elite’s orientation toward competing Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or Vajrayāna doctrinal formulations or spiritual disciplines. Punya has soteriological as well as practical, worldly consequences. Pali suttas urge all disciples, monastic and lay, to cultivate the five cardinal precepts (śikṣāpadānā) to maximize punya and so the course of spiritual advancement: 1. śraddā (“faith”); 2. śīla (“moral observances”); 3. tyāga (“generosity”); 4. śruti (“listening”); 5. prajñā (“insight”) (Lamotte 1988, 70). The Indic sources thus implicitly authorized festival possibilities through which Buddhists could accomplish the precepts: venerating images, taking precepts and fasting, arranging public recitations of sūtras, and encouraging meditation (Conze 1967, 47-55; Warder 1970, 191). It will be evident in this essay how all five cardinal precepts are amply encouraged during Gomā Dharma in the Kathmandu Valley.

The most constant expression of lay Buddhist-faith and generosity occurred through donations: dāna. Dāna’s “investment” is described
and celebrated in the vast jātaka and avadāna literature and in the
great Mahāyāna sūtras. The Mahāyāna fully sustained the early
framework with dāna as the foundation for householder bodhisattva
practice. Generosity to all beings is applauded, although the best
"puṇya return" accrues to gifts made to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and
the saṅgha. Passages in the sūtras discussing the pāramīs develop a
host of possibilities, emphasizing both the value of dāna to the in-
dividual, as an expression of kāraṇa, and its value as renunciatory prac-
tice (Dayal 1932, 165-193). Some texts make quite specific recom-
dendations to the laity on the best puṇya investments.⁴

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

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

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

⁴ The Punyakriyāvastu arranges the following hierarchy: 1. donating land to
the saṅgha; 2. building a vihāra on it; 3. furnishing it; 4. allocating revenue
for it; 5. assisting strangers; 6. tending the sick; 7. in cold weather or famine,
giving food to the saṅgha (Lamotte 1988, 72).
trated the attempt to actualize such ideals. The Pañcarakṣā is an early example of such traditions (Skilling 1992; Lewis 1994a).

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

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

BUDDHIST FESTIVAL TRADITIONS OF SOUTH ASIA

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

5. This state of Hindu-Buddhist competition has continued for at least 1500 years and endures in modern Nepal today. Another area in which Newar religious study provides insight on greater Indic history (Gellner 1992; Lienhard 1977), I will explore this topic in a future essay and further develop the argument that the destiny of Buddhist tradition was much less contingent upon doctrine and much more hinging upon competing modes of ritual service and the economics of monasticism.
parinirvāṇa are universal, although differing as to season (Swearer 1987); other more regional sacred events likewise mark the year (Strong 1992), as different communities were free to assign their own definitions for these “auspicious days.”6 These include: Śākyamuni’s descent from heaven where he preached to his mother, or events marking a key point in a bodhisattva’s life, be it Vessantara (Cone and Gombrich 1977), Avalokiteśvara, or the death anniversary of a local saint (Tambiah 1984; Strong 1992). Across Asia, local communities have domesticated stories of visits by buddhas or bodhisattvas, often explaining the ordering of the local pantheon and sacred geography through conquest and conversion. Hsuan Tsang also notes that Indic rituals performed at stūpas dedicated to specific early saints were based upon the individual monk’s (or nun’s) “school” or specialization (Beal 1970 ed., 180-81).

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

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

6. In China, the monastic tradition did not follow Indic precedents rigorously. See Welch 1967, 110. Welch does note several Chinese monasteries that did follow the Indic norm exactingly.
Āryāśāṅga Uposatha Vrata, a later Newar Mahāyāna tradition discussed below, elaborates upon this tradition and focuses the laity's bhakti upon Amogapāśa Lokesvara [Locke 1987].

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

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

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

7. Special ceremonies were developed by the community around the monastic initiations for novices (pabbajjā) and full monks (upasampadā). Along with the custom of adolescent, premarital short-term monasticism evolved in certain contexts—in Thēravādin Burma (Spiro 1970) and Thailand (Tambūha 1970) and in modern Mahāyāna Nepal (Céllér 1992)—there also developed the preference for initiation right before varṣā.
bi-weekly uposatha for the saṅgha, but for the lay community the emphasis is on a grander scale of merit-making, as the texts specify that dāna made on this day would be more fruitful than at other times (Dutt 1945b, 249). The post-varsā presentation of new robes by the laity—some traditions also evolved to have the laity sew them in special ways—likewise garners special karmic rewards.

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

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

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

Just as the vihāra was the institution that ordered and sustained the saṅgha’s communal life, so, too, were there institutions that advanced the Buddhist interests of the laity. Some inscriptions indicate the coordinated pious activities of craft guilds (śrenī); more common are the goṣṭhi—“assemblies, associations, fellowships” (Monier Williams 1956 ed., 367)—that coordinate large donations or regular rituals. These institutions are ancient, as the Pāli jātakas cite subscription plans among upāsakas (Rhys-Davids 1901, 886). Such groups were often formed to complete caityas or meditation caves, or for ren-
novation projects (Dehejia 1972; Kosambi 1965, 182). There are very old Newar gos̱thi traditions which organize regular rituals, pilgrimage, restorations, even shrine cleanings (Toffin 1975; Lewis 1984, 179-182). Another even more important aspect of Newar practice should be underlined: gos̱thiś hold collective properties, including money; most include some provision for increasing the group treasury by lending these funds at interest serially through the membership. Thus, gos̱thiś not only underwrote pious Buddhist practice: such institutions became important sources of community investment capital.

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

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

8. Symbiotically, great regional stūpas were pivotal in the social history of Buddhism: these monuments became magnets attracting vihāra building and votive construction, for local pūjā and pilgrimage. The economics of Buddhist devotionalism at these centers generated income for local sanghas, artisans, and merchants (Liu 1987), an alliance basic to Buddhism throughout its history (Dehejia 1972; Lewis 1993d). At these geographical centers arrayed around the symbolic monument, diverse devotional exertions, textual/doctrinal studies, and devotees’ mercantile pursuits could all prosper in synergistic style. The regional Mahācaitya complexes, with their interlinked components—vihāras with land endowments, votive/pilgrimage centers, markets, state support, etc.—represent central fixtures in Buddhist civilization. For local communities, such stūpas were also focal points in the yearly festival round, drawing Buddhists toward the sacred precincts. Empowered votive artifacts bought by the pilgrims at key Indic sites were likely used in the establishment of caityas and Buddha images in frontier settlements.
melodious, pure, and sonorous voice, and continues to sing ten or twenty ślokas. They in succession return to the place in the monastery... when... a Sūtra-reciter, mounting the Lion-Seat, reads a short sūtra... among the scriptures which are to be read, [is] the “Service in Three Parts”... by the venerable Aśvaghosha... from which its name is derived. (Takakusu 1896, 152-3)

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

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

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

Another example of Buddhist ritualism is the “bathing the Buddha Image” pūjā that commemorated Śākyamuni’s birthday in the month Vaiśākha. As found in the Kashmiri Nilamata purāṇa: “In the bright fortnight, the image of the Buddha is to be bathed with water containing all herbs, jewels, and scents and by uttering the words of the Buddha. The place is to be carefully besmeared with honey; the temple and stūpa must have frescoes, and there should be dancing and
amusements” (Dutt 1977, 14). This ritual spread across Asia (Lessing 1976).

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

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

The traditional designation of Buddhist sites specified first four, and then eight centers marked by monuments (Bagchi 1941; Tucci 1988). By the time of the Aṣokāvadāna’s composition, thirty-two pilgrimage
centers existed in the Gangetic basin visited by devotees (Strong 1983, 119ff). There was also a circuit in northwest India (Lamotte 1988, 335). Such religious travel had important economic effects, and local economies developed around the great caityas. By 400 CE, the world of Mahāyāna Buddhist pilgrimage had long transcended the Gangetic culture hearth to include stūpa sites in Khotan, Śrī Lanka, Śrīvijaya Java, Funan, and China. Monks, pilgrims, and traders traveled the same routes (Takakuśu 1896; Birnbaum 1989-90, 115-120).

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

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

The most extraordinary form of Buddha image veneration noted in numerous locations was the ratha yātā (“chariot festival”). The Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hsien noted that in Pataliputra, there were images of buddhas and bodhisattvas placed on twenty four-wheeled, five-story rathas made of wood and bamboo. Beginning on an aṣṭami day and continuing for two nights, the local vaiśyas are said to have made vast donations from specially-erected dwellings along the path; in Khotan, too, there was a fourteen-day event that was attended by the entire city,
for which each monastery constructed a different four-wheeled ratha (Legge 1965, 18-19). Although ratha yātrās are not held during Guṇlā, the greatest yearly festivals of Newar Buddhism are the ratha yātrās of Patan and Kathmandu dedicated to Avalokiteśvara each spring (Locke 1980; Owens 1988).

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

THE NEPALESE AND NEWAR BUDDHIST CONTEXT OF GUṆLĀ

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

9. There is some evidence that the name itself did not stem from the time period. Hsuan Tsang’s report of Śiśāditya’s Pañcavāraśika (Beal, 233) suggests that the name may derive from the view that five years’ wealth is expended in bestowing the necessary dāna. Other sources support this, implying that the festival could be done at any time by a donor with the requisites for feeding all the local samgha and others who were needy. The Sanskrit tale of Sānavāsa, a merchant who returns home and “celebrates a pañcavāraśika,” suggests this (Lamotte 1988, 207), as does a passage from the Harsacarita. (See Dutt 1977, 51). In both Patan and Kathmandu, five-year and twelve-year Samyaka dāna festivals (respectively) doubtless represent a continuity of this ancient custom (Sakya 1979; Lewis 1984; Lewis 1994b).
the natural focus of the local Buddhist year. Although no direct identification of Guṇḍā (ninth month) as varṣa exists, the activities in the Kathmandu Valley communities, the monsoon time of year, and the Pañca Dāna custom (discussed below) all invite the supposition that some historical association must exist. This section provides a minimal background sketch of modern Newar Buddhism necessary for appreciating the details of festival practice.

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

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

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

12. In accounts of Buddhist history generally, a socio-culturally informed depiction of Mahāyāna Buddhism in practice has been neglected. Such lacunae have been often noted and recent anthropological studies on Himalayan Buddhism have begun to illuminate northern Buddhism in practice (e.g. Ortner 1989; Holmberg 1989; Mumford 1989). On Newar Buddhism, the great Indologist Sylvain Lévi’s classic study of Nepal (1905-8) is still valuable. Important recent studies of the Newar Buddhist context are listed in the bibliography under Allen, Lienhard, Locke, Toffin and Owens. David Gellner’s monograph (1992) is a recently published landmark study.
Although little has been published on Nepalese Buddhism in the post-Lichchhavi period (900 AD-1200) or the Malla era (1200-1769), there is ample evidence of continuing archaic texts and artistic traditions (Macdonald and Stahl 1979; Slusser 1982). Unconquered by the Muslim or British empires that ruled South Asia, Kathmandu Valley civilization still preserves many ancient Indic traditions that endure in the distinctive urban society and culture of the Newars (Lienhard 1984), who speak a Tibeto-Burman language. This is true of both the Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions which are observed in rich multiplicity.

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

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

Like married Tibetan lamas of the Rnying-ma-pa order, the householder vajrācāryas take training and serve the community's ritual needs (Gellner 1989), with some among them specializing in textual study, medicine, astrology, and meditation. The Newari Ācārya-kriyāsamuccaya13 defends the evolved role of the householder ācārya as superior to the celibate monk according to Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna ideology that individuals should engage with their society and culture. This ācārya bodhisattva is similar to the textual bodhisattva Vimalakīrti:

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

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

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

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

GUMLĀ OBSERVANCES: ETHNOGRAPHIC PRESENTATION

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

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

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

---

14. In a remarkable final section appended around 1830 by a Newar vajrācārya pandit to the Sanskrit version of the Buddhacarita (Cowell 1969 ed.), Svayambhū is described as the last site visited by Śākyamuni before his parinirvāṇa. Another Mahāyāna source on the origins of this focal stūpa in Gumlā observances is the Svayambhū Purāṇa (Shastri 1894), a late text known only in Nepal and Tibet.
174; Riccardi 1979). Today, this hilltop stūpa over twenty-five meters in diameter is surrounded by five monasteries and quite regularly linked to the Buddhist festival year of Kathmandu City (Lewis 1984). It is also tied to all Buddhists in the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding regions through the twelve-year Kathmandu Samyaka festival (Sakya 1979; Lewis 1994b). Svaayambhu once had extensive land endowments traditionally dedicated to its upkeep (Sakya 1978) and in many respects the history of regional Buddhism is embedded in the layers of this stūpa’s successive iconography, patronage, and restoration. Thus, Svaayambhu is a chief point of reference for the Gumi festival as well for the upāsakas of Kathmandu City: living proximate to it is thought to be so great a blessing that Buddhists use the term puṇyakṣetra (“merit-field”) as a synonym for their valley.

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

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

15. The Nava Dharma or Nava Grantha are: Prajñāpāramitā; Gaṇḍavyūha; Daśabhūmi; Saṁādhīrśa; Lankāvatāra; Saddharma-puṇḍarīka; Lalitavistara; Suvarnaprabhāsa; Tathāgato-gūnyā (Hodgson 1874). No scholastic or philosophical tradition ordering these works has been discerned; more likely is their grouping for ritual purposes where they are arranged in the guru maṇḍala pūjā within the dharma maṇḍala, with Prajñāpāramitā at the center.
Although month-long text lecture series (dharmaśāna) by the Newar samgha were until the last decade common at important vihāras in Kathmandu, from 1979-82 only one such series was done during Gumiśā.

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

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

In every Newar Buddhist caste, leadership of the bājan’s devotional activities rotates through internal sub-groups. Every year a new senior leader (pālā) with his sub-group leaders are in charge of the actual performance of the bājan’s devotions, both during Gumiśā and for the other activities.16

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

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

18. The yearly schedule of Gumiśā activities in the Asan Tulādhar community actually begins before the month commences. For up to a whole month beforehand, the pālās organize informal instructional classes for younger members. The first required gathering occurs several days before the start of Gumiśā: the group employs the seniormost Vajrācārya from the neighborhood to perform a pūja to Nāsa dyahi (Śiva-Nātarāja), the deity whom Newar Buddhists must worship before devotional playing of any sort can officially
A standard day for the Asan bājan during Guṃlā goes as follows: a group of bājan drummers leave Asan just after sun-rise and proceed directly to the Swayambhū hilltop. Once they reach the great stūpa, they go around it once in pradakṣīṇā. After this, the group settles at a traditional site just north of the Amitābha niche. Others who left Asan after the bājan arrive for the next half hour. The pāḷās also arrange for the delivery of the extra drums, usually by employing a hired worker (most often still a member of the Jyāpu farmer caste) to carry them. Some stand around and talk, others make private devotional rounds, some may practice drumming. At a publicized time (1991: 6:30 AM), a group-gathering drumbeat is played on the nāykhim, and the head pāḷa takes roll to insure that all of the year’s pāḷa-committee households are represented. By this time, the Damāis have appeared and the bājan’s daily pūjā offerings, already prepared by the women of pāḷa-committee households, is distributed among those present. These items are offered at the shrines around the hilltop as the group processes.

The Swayambhū complex pradakṣīṇā begins by all present standing before the elaborate Amitābha shrine on the western side of the stūpa. As the pūjā plate is presented to the shrine attendant, the group stands, hands in “nāmākṣara,” and sings one or more of the standard Newar Mahāyana devotions: Daśabala Stotra, the Saptapāramitā Stotra, the Bandeṣṭi or the Bhadra-cari.20 Once the pūjā plate is returned, the

---

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

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

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

Bandeṣṭi is a dhāraṇa dedicated to Vajrāsalva and praises: Bodhisattvas Amoghapāsa, Lokanātha, and Samantabhadra; dharmadhātu caityas; the buddha consorts (Tārā, Māmakī, Locani, Padmanī); and the Saddharmapunḍarikā.

The full name of the Newari Bhadracari is the Sanskrit Āryabhadracaripramidhūnarāja, verses originally appended to the Gaṇḍavyūha (Beyer 1973, 478; translation 188-9). These ritually repeated lines date from the early centuries CE; the dhāraṇa verses praise buddhas and bodhisattvas,
group follows a route that completes a double pradakṣinā of the stūpa and then visits, in a clockwise order, all of the important shrines on the hilltop including: the Bka’ rgyud Tibetan gompa, Basundharā, the “Sikkimese gompa,” Hāritī Ajimā, and the tantric shrine Śāntipur. When this cycle is complete, the group returns to its “base.” After a short rest, the bājan again takes up the drums and cymbals, plays the assembly drumbeat and then launches into the prime instrumental composition played by Buddhist Guṇāṇā bājans: “Bhagavān Gvāra.” All Kathmandu bājans play this (Sakya 1971). On a good day, the group will have swelled to sixty or seventy with more late arrivals for the final pradakṣinā of the stūpa and the descent down the main stairs.

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

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

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

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

delineate offerings, confess transgressions, rejoice in merit, request teachings, and share the pūnya earned from personal devotion. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra, invoked in these texts, finds little other devotional attention in Newar tradition (Tuladhar 1986, 8-20).
The ability to play the drums and cymbals is one traditional measure of the culturally-accomplished Newar Buddhist layman. Likewise, each Newar caste’s musical performance of the bājan during Gūmlā reflects upon the sub-community’s status and solidarity. During Gūmlā, this is evident during the morning excursions to Svayambhū and on other outings discussed below. The Buddhist bājan remains a vibrant tradition, as there is still a core of Tulādhars—including many young men—who enjoy heartily rapping out drumbeats, clanging cymbals, and singing in praise of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities.

Svayambhū Jñānamālā Bhajan

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

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

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

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

*Household Devotions*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23. The steps are given here with the accompanying mantras: 1. om basudhe svāhā, taking the clay; 2. om vajra bhāvay svāhā, shaping the clay; 3. om arje vīrāje svāhā, putting oil in the mold; 4. om vajra dhātu garbhe svāhā, putting the clay in the mold; 5. om vajra kirti chedyā hūm phat svāhā, removing the excess clay; 6. om dharne dhātus garbhe svāhā, putting in a paddy grain; 7. om vajra mungarako hūm phat svāhā, covering up the paddy grain; 8. om vajra dharma rate svāhā, putting on extra clay to remove the image; 9. om supratisthata vajre svāhā, putting the image with others already made; 10. om mani sata dipte svāhā, after placing it. Tucci (1988 ed., 57-60) has given two other sets of mantras for this process based upon Sanskrit and Tibetan sources.
In some families, the dyah thēyegu is actually the work of a formal ritual called the lakṣacaitya vrata (Newari: luchidyah vrata), and as the name implies, 100,000 images must be molded to fulfill the vow made at the outset. At the end of the month, the sum of clay images is molded into a large three-dimensional maṇḍala and worshipped by the fasting family with a kalaśa pūjā performed by a vajrācārya. The entire mass having been consecrated with offerings, it may be used to build a family votive caitya or (more commonly) be taken out and deposited at a tīrtha along the Viśnumati River, along with offerings to the nāgas.24

**Special Community Observances During Gumlā**

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

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

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

25. The following four scrolls were displayed at vihāras visited by the Gumlā bājans: 1. Simhalasāratabhātu in Bhagawan Bāhā, Thamel; 2. Story of Kesa Chandra in Itum Bāhā (stolen in 1980); 3. Mahāsattva Rāja Kumār, Nārādevī courtyard; 4. Painting of Buddhist hells in Śri gha: Bāhā.
Although over twenty-five Kathmandu households own Samyaka images, in 1987 only three still chose to display them in public for Bahi Dyah Bvayegu. For the others, their images are now simply arranged upstairs where only family members and invited guests can view them and make offerings. Owners who elect not to display their images cite fear of thievery as the main deterrent. Even the few who still put out their Bahi Dyahs recount attempted robberies and the actual theft of many ornaments and smaller objects.

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

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

The visitation starts during the morning return from Swayambhū when the bājan visits the vihāras in the far uptown: Bhagawan Bahā

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

Some scholars, particularly art historians, have been unwilling to acknowledge the cultural consequences of these "art transactions." The language of art connoisseurship suppresses the reality of their data's path from Newar neighborhood, to thief, to smuggler, to American "collection." For example, "... [The painting] was last displayed in August 1967 on the occasion of bahādyah bvaegu... Then, like so many other Nepalese paintings it passed into a private collection" (Slusser 1987, 20). This scholarship of "pieces" does not acknowledge the problematic tradeoff-undermining living traditions in order to, purportedly, understand isolated objects. An excellent recent publication documenting this legacy is found in L. Š. Bangdel 1991.
(Bajracharya 1979), Chusya Bāhā, Musya Bāhā, Śrī gha: Bāhā, Nhu Bāhā, Jana Bāhā. Although the morning return that starts the day’s Bahī Dyah Svāyegu usually attracts more participants than a regular day during Gumlā (1981, 45), it is the afternoon-evening procession that draws the larger crowd (1981, 250), the maximum number of Tuladhār drummers (1981, 10), and the most hired Damāi musicians (1981: 3 trumpets, 2 clarinets). The only women who come along are very small girls brought by their fathers, mother’s brothers, or grandfathers. During this five-hour procession, the group in 1981 visited about 25 different vihāras, stopping approximately midway for a pālā-coordinated snack. In summary, the Bahī Dyah Svāyegu procession attracts the best musicians and is the time when Buddhist laymen join en masse to have darśan of and worship the greatest treasures of their city’s cumulative Buddhist tradition.

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

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

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

27. Hem Raj Sakyā (1979, 78ff) has noted an alternative derivation for this name: nadvā (that I never heard among Urāy in Kathmandu) that he relates to the navadāna of the Bodhisattvabhūmi. These are: 1. svabhāva-dānam; 2. sarvadāna; 3. duṣkaraṃ dāna; 4. sarvato-mukham dānam; 5. sat-puruṣadānam; 6. sarvakāraṃ dānam; 7. vighatārthikam dānam; 8. ihāmutra-sukham dānam; 9. Viśuddham dānam (Dayal 1970, 173ff). Another possible derivative usage preceding pañcādāna mentioned by Gellner (1987, 294) is puṇya-ja (“merit boiled rice”) that refers to the gift of khīr. Manandhar (1986, 141) lists paṇjārīm as an alternative rendering.
that is often decorated with guthi-owned Buddhist paintings or images to give paddy to any who appears.

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

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

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

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

28. For those versed in Vajrayāna symbolism, the khūr symbolizes bodhi-citta and the esoteric conviction that without the woman’s contribution of prajñā, enlightenment is impossible.

29. The Newar Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna norm does not proscribe liquor consumption as it is essential in tantric ritual. Many families feel ambiguity here, however, distinguishing ritual use from profane drunkenness.
day-long events, other householders can join in making their own dāna
to the sangha members who pass, sharing thereby in the great punya
generated.30 The Newar Pañca Dāna offering by a single family likely
has ancient precedents: a similar ritual is described by I-Tsing in the
Śrīvijaya region around 690 CE (Takaku 1896, 45-6).

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

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

30. See Lewis 1984, 252 for the curious permutations that govern the choice
of the special sangha recipients: the greatest dāna gifts are presented to the
first in line, not according to scholastic accomplishment or spiritual mastery.
This apparently has been true for over 150 years (Wright 1877, 36).
31. The alms round is now rare even in Theravāda countries (Spiro 1970;
Tambiah 1970). The only other occasion for this type of association in Newar
tradition is during each young vajrācārya’s initiation ceremony, the acārya
dikṣā. Before their installment into the vajrācārya caste, each must take up
the monastic life for four days, living on alms (Locke 1975). After this
period, the boys renounce the “Śrāvakayāna” and embrace the “Bodhisattva-
yāna” as householders pursuing the career of Vajrayāna ritual hierophant.
Each does so saying that the monk’s life is “too difficult” (Gellner 1988).

The Tibeto-Burman Tamangs living northwest of the Kathmandu Valley
also have a yearly one-day alms round by their householders monks (Holmberg
1984, 700). This custom could be in imitation of Newar Guṇlā practice.
first chant, "om nāmaḥ śri dipaṃkarāya" (Shakya 1979, 75). As Gellner has shown, the Newar understanding of Dipaṃkara is expressed in the popular story collection, the Kapisāvadāna. In these works, King Sarvānanda gives lavishly to the saṃgha headed by Dipaṃkara and is propelled toward buddhahood. Modern Newar upāsakas evoke this royal figure to frame their offerings' same purpose (Gellner 1987, 298).

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

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

32. The Mahāvastu recounts this same story, but the one who makes the vow to Buddhahood is the Brahman Megha (Basak 1963, I, lxviii)
33. Locke reports that Pañca Dāna in Patan, held on sukla āṣāmī two weeks earlier, is thought to commemorate a visit of Dipaṃkara Buddha to the Kathmandu Valley (Locke 1980, 234).
Hindu-Buddhist Relations During Guṇlā Dharma

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

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

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

34. Buddhist Newars perform a life-cycle rite for elders (“Būrā Jākwo”) that enhances their karma and establishes them in an exalted status at seventy-seven years old. This includes making a cow gift to a Brāhmaṇa as part of an otherwise purely Vajrayāna ritual ceremony (Lewis 1984, 299-307).
35. The Buddhist community specifies another festival for its mourning families to make a similar town circumambulation: Indra Jāṭrā, which falls soon after Guṇlā. Instead of making offerings to cows, however, the Buddhist families make offerings to stūpas and caityas, making their way around town to greet friends while making puṇya dedicated to the recently deceased.
Newar Buddhists do not join in celebrating this festival. Sāpāru in fact is very often the day chosen for Bahí Dyaḥ Śvāyegu by the Asan Urāy. (In 1981, the Asan bājan passed the royal palace area seemingly oblivious to the Gāi Jātrā crowds there.) According to local tradition, not only should Buddhists abstain from participating: they should also not even witness the processions for it is “Māra vala” (“Māra has come”). By identifying Hindu practice with the Buddha’s defeated foe, this polemic reflects a classical ideological assertion by which Buddhist tradition subordinates Hindu deities and observances. Most adult Buddhist lay folk know of this contention.

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

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

36. The samgha pūjāris in Jana Bāhā do perform a special pūjā petitioning Avalokiteśvara to intercede for any members reborn in the hells.
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: 
MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM AND SOCIETY

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

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

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

37. Often cited in the Mahāyāna literature is the seven-fold pūjā: 1. honor the Buddha; 2. serve the Buddha; 3. confession of misdeeds; 4. delight in good actions of beings; 5. invitation of buddhas to preach the dharma; 6. arouse the thought of enlightenment; 7. dedication of merit to all beings (Lamotte 1988, 433).
rations (Beyer 1973, xii). Through pūjā, vrata, chanting, bājan and bhajan, devotees conform to ideals set forth in canonical texts; though varying in style of cultural performance, all these rituals seek the compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas, planting karmic seeds fostering bodhi, and these blessings alter destiny both in this world and beyond. The meaning that Newar Buddhists place on their Guṇlā rituals finds clear expression in a popular story collection, the Janabahaṛiyā Bākhaṃ. This text recounts the salvation work of Avalokiteśvara primarily through refuge in bodhisattva rituals:

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

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

Hindu-Buddhist Competition and Boundaries
Newar Guṇlā Dharma tradition in Nepal gives insight regarding the later history of Indian Buddhism: once the tradition came to uphold and depend upon elaborate ritual events to unite the community, then proper form, procedure, and pollution-purity regulation also became Buddhist concerns. (This is quite evident, for example, in I-Tsing’s account.) Buddhist ritualists had to conform to the logic of brahmanical aesthetics and pūjā procedures, sanctioning one major avenue of assimilation. The developmental history of Newar Buddhism likewise illustrates this trajectory of Mahāyāna evolution: as an immense agenda of buddha and bodhisattva image veneration and temple life developed, Buddhist pūjā, yāṭrā, and samskāra evolved to adapt to the Brahmanical ritual context. To adopt the highest Indic standards of cleanliness and image purity, Buddhists thereby adopted Brahmanical ritual views, including caste reckonings of individual purity. In so doing, the tradition also imported an ongoing and increasing problem: the laity’s confusion between Buddhist and Hindu cults given identical
ritual veneration. To contend with this, the contestation traditions of Newar Buddhism are likewise instructive: to endure amidst a Hindu majority required the elaboration of sharp contradistinctive traditions such as those drawn up around the Cow and Kṛṣṇa festivals. (Many others endure in the Newar context [Lewis 1984, 468-481; Gellner 1992, 73-104].)

Lay Buddhism, Domestication, and Redistribution

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

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

38. This is true in Nepal today in the devolution of traditional Mahāyāna culture (Lewis 1984, 555-589), a situation also discussed by Mus (1964).
39. On the possible role of disease in Newar Buddhist history, we now know of the effects of a severe pestilence in the town of Kathmandu about 1724 recounted in the writings of Situ Panchen. See Lewis and Jamspal 1988, 199. The prevalence of disease in pre-modern societies should cause scholars of Buddhism to underline the importance of apotropaic ritualism in securing the tradition’s success (Lewis 1994a).
Guṇḍā Pañca Dāna traditions have evolved to ensure the essential contributions to this saṅgha. We have pointed out how this day of dāna is congruent with the modern Newar monastic initiation by alluding to the classical monasticism but ultimately affirming a Mahāyāna superiority. Newar tradition has domesticated Dipamkara Buddha imagery and stories to have him as witness and to legitimate the greatest yearly redistribution ritual. In Kathmandu until quite recently, Pañca Dāna was quite a lavish windfall for individual saṅgha members. Whatever else we might surmise about Buddhism's variegated history, the Newar Guṇḍā Dharma traditions point to the central propensity to ritualize spiritual ideals and to adapt buddha and bodhisattva traditions into the cultic and festival practices of specific localities. In Nepal, as in every other venue of Buddhism's successful missionization, rituals evolved to accomplish two crucial and related tasks: domesticate the sāsana and redistribute the laity's wealth to the saṅgha.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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


TODD T. LEWIS 349


Shukla, N. S. 1975. “The Qualities of an Ācārya on the Basis of the Ācārya-
kiyasanuccaya of Jagaddarpana.” Buddhist Studies in India. Ed. R. C.


the Pali Text Society 16: 109-182.


Heritage of the Kathmandu Valley. Ed. Bernhard Kölver and Siegfried

versity Press.

Spiro, Melfred. 1986. Buddhism and Society. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of
California Press.

Stablein, William. 1973. “A Medical-Cultural System among the Tibetan and

___________. 1978. “A Descriptive Analysis of the Content of Nepalese
Buddhist Pujas as a Medical-Cultural System, with References to Tibetan
Mouton. 403-411.

University of Hawaii Press. 75-118.

Acts of Offering in Buddhist Avadana Literature.” History of Religions
18.3: 221-237.

___________. 1983. The Legend of King Asoka. Princeton University
Press.

___________. 1992 The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Bud-
dhist in North India and Southeast Asia. Princeton University Press.

Books.

Swearer, Donald K. 1987. “Buddhist Religious Year.” The Encyclopedia of

Takaoka Hidenobu, ed. 1981. A Microfilm Catalogue of the Buddhist Manu-


