

TREADING THE FRONTIERS OF HINDUNESS: YOGI NARAHARINATH IN  
20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY NEPAL

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This work analyzes the major writings of Yogi Naraharinath (1913/15-2003), the Nepali leader of the Nāth Sampradāya, an order of yogis present both in India and Nepal. His work is located at an important moment in the tradition of the school: its re-contextualization as a politically active Hindu nationalist voice in post-colonial South Asia. Analyzing affinities and divergences with the previous history of the school (particularly fluid in its boundaries, and peripheral to brahmanical orthodoxy), I highlight how his engagement with social work, historiography, and ritual activism reveals a composite intellectual process that defies any easy dichotomy between pre-modern modes of learning and modern suggestions. Extensive use of the practice of Sanskrit etymology (typical of the *śāstric* tradition), elements of the postcolonial nationalist understanding of science, and notions representative of the Nāth school's tradition of yoga are all co-present, mostly in political function. Additionally, looking at the lives of his closest disciples, I point to dissonances in the ways his message is received and embodied in their daily lives, opening the question of whether Hindutva-influenced cultural projects in Nepal may be analyzed as parts of a single political phenomenon or, instead, whether they are better understood as a cluster of existential projects variously located on a spectrum between the two opposite poles of militant Hindu nationalism and interreligious dialogue.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eloisa Stuparich was born in Trieste, Italy. She has received a *Laurea Triennale* (B.A. equivalent) and *Laurea Specialistica* (MA equivalent) at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, Italy. She was awarded a Ph.D. in Asian Literature, Religion and Culture, specializing in South Asian religions, by Cornell University in 2016.

To my grandparents, Romano and Albina Pribaz

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Yogi Naraharinath, the leader of the Nepalese branch of the Nāth Sampradāya, is an important cultural icon in 20th century Nepal, acclaimed as an *avatāra* of the yogi-saint Gorakhnath by his disciples, but barely mentioned in scholarly literature on South Asian religious movements. Controversial among political activists who fought for multi-party political representation in Nepal, Yogi Naraharinath pursued throughout his life the project of preserving Nepal as a uniquely Hindu monarchy, modeled on a notion of Vedic *dharma* that he regarded as the primordial religion of the Himalayan region. The present work, by no means an exhaustive overview of his publications, is a first step towards locating Naraharinath and his fellowship in the landscape of contemporary religious activism, raising the question of how his participation in the world of Hindu nationalism, both in Nepal and in India, informed his self-understanding as a yogi and as a scholar.

This work tackles two main questions. First, it overviews an instance of Hindu political involvement that is located not at the center of the struggle for independence in India—as it was the case, for example, for Vivekanda, Aurobindo, or Gandhi—but in a country that, formally, had remained an independent kingdom throughout colonial times. Though the house of Gorkha had never been completely shielded from British influence, the idea that the Nepali monarchy, embodying superior bravery and uncontaminated attachment to its religious heritage, was a haven of Hindu traditionalism in a sea of forced Westernization, provided much rhetorical material for the self-representation of the monarchy, particularly during the Panchayat period between 1960 and 1990. This, in

turn, reflected on the national role assigned to religious figures such as Naraharinath, *mahant* of a major Nāth institution in the Kathmandu Valley. Whereas Indian yogis, such as, for example, the Nāth leadership of Gorakhpur represented by Dijvijayanath, Avaidyanath and, currently, Adityanath, found themselves wrestling for power in the post-Independence world of the Indian electoral system, Naraharinath was still part of a structure of relationships between the king and his yogis that was set in place from the very beginning of Shah rule in 1768. How does this reflect on Naraharinath's understanding of his tradition? Which continuities can we envisage between his role in 20<sup>th</sup> century Nepal and the textual and ritual roots of the Nāth Sampradāya? How does it differ from the Indian case?

To set a background to answer these questions, we can notice here that the Hindu–Buddhist interface of Nepal—where Hinduism, encountering the world of China and Tibet, is emphatically associated with the Parbatiya ruling elite—presents some differences from other areas in India, where Hindutva rhetoric is adapted to the regional identities of other castes. Thomas Hansen, for example, has highlighted how, in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena's take on Hindutva was “vernacularized” in the idiom of Maratha valor, a discourse that, in region, resulted much more powerful and effective than the agitation of Ayodhya (Hansen 1996). In Gujarat, on the other hand, the Hindu mainstream has been represented by a middle-class that looks at capitalism and neoliberalism as a tool for upward social mobility (Desai 2011), a phenomenon that can also be analyzed as a case of “subnationalism,” presenting the mercantile ethos as a privileged path towards development (Bobbio 2012). But even cultural enclaves that we would expect to favor alternative conceptions of social policies have been targeted by

localized versions of Hindu nationalism. This is evident, for example, in the adaptation of Hindutva among some groups of Dalits, through discourses that emphasize pre-existing icons, such as Ambedkar, or Eklavya, Drona's *sudra* disciple in the Mahabharata (Narayanan 2009).

Naraharinath's version of Hindu nationalism, instead, is more dependent upon the ethos of the local Bahuns and Chetris—the two constituencies that considered themselves as the true representatives of Hindu *dharma* in Nepal. This notion, as I will discuss in chapter 2, was generated from a process of gradual Hinduization of the nation-state that was legally codified by Jang Bahadur's *Muluki Ain*,—before becoming a grammar of self-representation for the Shah monarchy, which discursively projected it onto Prthvi Narayan's *Divya Upadesh*. From the ethos of Chetri martial culture, Naraharinath adopts the ideal of the “brave Gorkhali,” but he also absorbs much from the heritage of the Bahuns: his engagement with the *Śukla Yajurveda*, particularly, is representative of the particular brand of Vedic culture that was predominant among the Nepali brahmanical communities, which, with the exception of the Bhaṭṭha brahmans from South India, followed the *Mādhyandina* recension of this specific Veda (Witzel 2016).

We can look at Naraharinath also as a case of Hindutva-influence on the Prabatiya community of the Himalayan region. His participation in the organizational structures of the Sangh Parivar is attested, but he does not, however, present himself at the forefront of the communalist movements in India: much of his work is in Nepal, where he activates himself as a ritual specialist (organizing public *homas*) and as a *paṇḍit* devoted to the promotion of Sanskrit learning. To what degree, then, can his fellowship be considered a group of militant Hindu nationalists? To which features of Hinduness are his disciples

attracted, and why? The core of my research is devoted to answer these questions, problematizing the idea of a homogenous commitment to nationalism among the yogis of Naraharinath's ashrams.

In my writing, I make large use of two words: "resonance" and "dissonance." For the first, I am indebted to Kathinka Frøystad's study of Hindu-Muslims relationship in Kanpur, UP, which has convincingly pointed out how the boundaries of political discourse shift quite rapidly when new form of Otherness become relevant in the public imagination. Concerned not with the organizational structures of Hindu nationalism, but with the general populace that vote for the BJP, Frøystad highlights how messages presented by political actors become relevant only when they finds themselves in resonance with pre-existing notions of the public, thus disrupting the possibility of analyzing political utterances as self-contained statements homogenously accepted by the recipients. In the case of Kanpur, for example, pre-existing ideas on the "essential nature" of Muslims and Dalits, embedded in speech practices, paved the way for the reception of controversies such as the one on the Babri Masjid or on reservation policies (Frøystad 2005).

For the concept of "dissonance" I have been inspired by Kalyani Devaki Menon's ethnography of women of the Hindu right, which offers an in-depth view of their activities, motivations, and self-representations. A central argument of her study is that Hindutva's success at recruiting new constituencies is also due to its capacity of accommodating people whose beliefs are not completely aligned with the mainstream, but whose daily life are positively entangled in the social networks of the Sangh Parivar. This can often result in selected transgressions to the normative constructions of the

national and gendered subject—resulting in dissonances that may be or may not be accommodated by the norm (Menon 2010).

The insights of these analyses can also be applied to Naraharinath's work and its reception by his fellowship, which presents some examples of surprising fluidity. More scholarship, in fact, is needed to understand how differential receptions of Hindutva have affected individual members of specific religious movements. In studying Hindu nationalism, historians have traced its roots to the cultural tensions of the late colonial period, anthropologists have documented its embodiments in the daily activities of the Sangh Parivar, and sociologists have analyzed the rise to power of the BJP by analyzing its electoral constituencies, but Hindutva has mostly not been considered an area of inquiry pertaining to the study of individual ascetic lives. And for good reasons: as a form of political identity that does not necessarily require specific forms of religious affiliation, scholarship on Hindu nationalism may be pursued through numerous case studies outside of the domains of the renunciants' orders. There is something distinctive, however, in looking at the writings of a figure such as Yogi Naraharinath: as a member of one of the most eclectic and heterodox *sampradāyas* of South Asia, how did he reconcile his nationalist commitment with the deep past of his religious school?

An argument for scaling down the scope of inquiry at this level of micro-history had already been advanced by Sumit Sarkar (1997), who warned against the dangers of reading all forms of post-colonial political action as solely informed by the supposed rupture brought about by colonialism, and has been more recently picked up by Gilles Tarabout in his foreword to a collective volume on some "cultural entrenchments of Hindutva" (Berti et al. 2011), where, reflecting on the capacity of radical nationalist

movements—in India as elsewhere—to appeal and influence a variety of people outside their immediate enclaves, he advocated a focus on "figures of mediation between Hindutva organizations and local people" (Tarabaout 2011:xii), pointing to an important paradox that would emerge out of such studies:

"With the focus shifting from organisational affiliation to political opposition, passing through forms of convergence, it becomes increasingly evident that the mediators involved in at the local level may not necessarily be members of nationalist organisations themselves, and that the influence of the Parivar is the result of a complex interaction with diverse, if not antagonistic, stakes. Indeed, national pride, religious reform, cultural chauvinism, and the ethnicisation of difference are not its property, and are not necessarily the outcome of its policy. The very fact that forms of resistance may share similar values and tactics, despite the paradox it may represent, necessarily leads to a nuanced appreciation: while, on the other hand, such convergence may ensure the ideological influence of Hindutva as a set of values, on the other, it also entails a dilution of its organisational impact." (Tarabaout 2011:xii)

Understanding Hindutva's "dilution" is key to read the lives of Naraharinath and his devotees: while Naraharinath himself actively participated in the *sammelans* of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) from the 1960s to the 1980s, even producing a particularly vitriolic example of communalist apologetics in 1988, much of his work, such as his poetry on his Himalayan travels, his reflections on the Nāth patron deities of Nepal, or his explanations of the *Koṭi Homas*, resonates with Hindutva themes without constituting a piece of VHP propaganda per se. His style, a web of Sanskrit quotations, Nepali poetic prose, and Hindi didactic explanations, often lends itself to be read as an example of pan-Indic sapiential literature: a generic call to moral virtue by an erudite man with a taste for Sanskrit sayings. And thus, as I will show with regard to his exhortation to "social

service," his message has been received by some of his followers, who have interiorized selected Hindu nationalist stances without having ever been active in the cadres of the Sangh Parivar.

Daniela Berti has aptly noted how the "cultural entrenchment" of Hindutva—a notion that she articulates on the basis of Michael Billig's concept of "banal nationalism", the informal spread of nationalist feelings through routine symbols and speech habits (Billig 1995)—is often advanced by actors that are not necessarily invested in Hindu nationalism as such, but respond to its cultural suggestions through a variety of everyday practices: "Hindutva influence may work through the mediation of people who deny any strong commitment to the Hindutva programme or who may even be radically opposed to it" (Berti 2011:2)—which leads to the difficulty, widespread in contemporary political parlance, of distinguishing the so-called "soft" Hindutva—as an expression of mild nationalist feelings—from the enactment of violent assertions of Hindu communalism.

In the case of religious institutions, the clash between political interests and devotional sensibilities may be quite stark. In the case of the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission studied by Maya Warrier, for example, most of the devotees were not particularly enthusiast of the L.K. Advani's public homage to their Mata, upholding a conception of *sevā* very different from the one promoted by the RSS (Warrier 2003). Sometimes, resistance may be not ideological, but rather motivated by practical reasons. Peter van der Veer's approach to the study of sadhu politics in Ayodhya, for instance, privileges a case study that reveals how the lack of participation of some of the local orders in the *Rām-janma-bhūmi* movement was prompted not by lofty doctrinal considerations, but by local alliances and personal interests in the management of the

pilgrimage sites (1997). Sadhu politics have also been studied by Lise McKean in her investigation of Hindu nationalism throughout a broad network of ashrams: highlighting how monetary and political interests were paramount in shaping the ideological orientations of many a religious leader, she focused on the development of the Vishva Hindu Parishad as a key moment in the politicization of Hindu religious institutions (McKeane 1996).

Studying Hindutva resonances in Nepal, however, requires a separate set of analytical tools. The VHP is not formally represented in the country, though, as we will see in chapter 3, the Vishva Hindu Mahasangh, to whose constitution Naraharinath contributed, may be considered its organizational offspring (Bouillier 1997).

Convergences with Hindutva rhetoric, however, have been prominent in the ideology of the Shah monarchy, particularly during the period of "indigenous democracy", the partyless Panchayat system, from 1960 to 1990, when calls to national Hindu unity were discursively inscribed in the very foundation myth of the nation, that is, Prithvi Narayan Shah's constitution of Nepal as a "true Hindusthan" (*asal Hindusthan*).

As I will overview in chapter 2, there is little, in history, that would support this view of Nepal as a unified Hindu kingdom, and resistance, in the form of indigenous ethnic activism, Buddhist reform movements, and, later, a Maoist-inspired armed insurrection, has been a notable part of the political life of the country throughout the last century. The collapse of the monarchy in 2006 was a major blow not only to conservative forces in Nepal, but also, indirectly, to their nationalist counterparts in India. In relation to the “*Virāṭ Hindū Mahāsammelan*” held in Gorakhpur in 2006, attended by thousands of people, Subhash Gatade observes:

“The participants included many leaders of the Sangh Parivar, but there was a significant presence of the local sadhus as well, and more than five hundred delegates from Nepal. (...) The congregation not only called for 'declaration of Nepal as Hindu State and restoration of monarchy there, but also resolved for the construction of a grand temple in Ayodhya, “liberation” of the Kashi and Mathura shrines, and a ban on cow slaughter. It also criticized the Indian Government's stand on Nepal and said no political party was taking Maoists' activities seriously. The Mahasammelan also deliberated on the 'pathetic' condition of the Hindus in Nepal and the alleged activities of the ISI of Pakistan, which was 'spreading its network to create disturbance in India'. (Gatade 2011:119).

In this state of affairs, Nepal provides an excellent background for investigating Hindutva at its very frontiers: institutionally peripheral to the organizational structure of the Sangh Parivar, the Himalayan region has nonetheless occupied a central place in the symbolic imaginary of Hindu nationalism, embodying the "last Hindu kingdom" of the world (*ekmātra Hindu-rājya*) against the forces of secularism that are thought to imperil the Hindu soul. In these pages, I use the notion of "frontier" in two distinct but interrelated ways. The first, in the most obvious and literal sense of the word, refers to Nepal as a place of cultural contact between the Indo-Aryan and the Tibeto-Burman cultural sphere, where various forms of Buddhism and shamanism are still represented among many communities of the hills and among all the groups of the higher mountain ranges. As we will see, this geographical contingency offers an interesting flavor to Naraharinath's thought, particularly in relation to his understanding of the origins of mankind.

The second import of the word is derived from William Fisher's ethnography of the Thakalis, which investigated the patterns of cultural adaptation and resistance of this

community to the cultural norms of the Hindu rulers, showing a mutable and inconsistent oscillation between Sanskritization and ethnic revival, without any clear teleology toward either side:

“The periphery of a category or an identity in the process of becoming is perhaps better captured by the concept of frontier rather than boundary. Whereas boundaries serve to indicate the bounds or limits of anything, whether material or immaterial, and represent an enclosing, a shutting in, a fixed and specifiable limit, frontiers are zones of transition or “tracts of indefinite nature” between groups, regions, and so forth. Frontiers are like an indeterminate zone where Wittgenstein's “family resemblances” overlap. My concern in this study is not with discovering or demarcating boundaries but with understanding the nature and consequences of the search for them, the attempts to turn frontiers into boundaries.” (Fisher 2001:189-90)

The school to which Naraharinath belonged, the *Nāth sampradāya*, offers an almost paradigmatic example of these dynamics: against the fluid nature of the broader Nāth world—providing instances of hybridity with all forms of religious movements: from the Buddhists to the *tāntrikas*, the *vaiṣṇavas*, the *vedantins*, but also the *nirguṇis* and the Muslims—the “Pan-Indian Association of the Yogis of the twelve Panths of Renouncers” (*Akhil Bhāratvarṣiya Avadhūt Bheṣ Bārah Panth Yogī Mahāsabhā*), whose highest positions tend to be occupied by right-wing political figures, has tried to regulate the whole Sampradāya under a single authority, controlling its various institutions, and supporting yogi politicians affiliated to the BJP.

In the first part of Chapter 2, by means of a review of the literature on the Nāth Sampradāya, I will overview this historical transition, pointing to long-term processes of Sanskritization on the one side, and, on the other, to a deep history of political involvement of yogis in some Himalayan kingdoms, among which Gorkha is the most

important example. In the second part of Chapter 2, I will review how the idea of Hinduness as a political category developed throughout the history of the Gorkhali kingdom, from a single mention in Prithvi Narayan Shah's deathbed teachings to the restoration to power of the Shah monarchy in 1951, when Naraharinath appeared on the public scene.

Chapter 3 aims at providing an introduction to Nahararinath's public life, based on the data that were made available to me by his immediate disciples in the ashram he founded, as well as on some references to his public activities in secondary sources. It does not constitute a full-fledged biography, as many more questions are left open, and would have necessitated a different set of materials to be answered: what was the exact nature of his relationship with the monarchy? Who advocated for his imprisonment in the Eighties, and on which grounds? Which relationship did he entertain with the VHP leaders in India, and in which terms? Given the reticence of his disciples to talk about these matters, and the silence of the printed accounts on these details of his political life, my presentation of Naraharinath's life is confined to publicly accessible sources.

Even so, the available data reveal some traits of Naraharinath's life that are of interest for understanding the socio-cultural location of the Nath school in 20<sup>th</sup> century Nepal. First, his success was mostly due to his ability to integrate his image as a yogi with broader ideas appealing to larger sections of society, such as the ideal of the *karmayogi* (a very flexible concept, which may include ascetics as well as householders) and that of the *paṇḍit*, bringing about a re-interpretation of the concept of *sāadhanā* and *tapas*, an engagement with yogic literature in Sanskrit to promote the acceptance of the Nāth tradition within the parameters of general Sanskrit scholarship, and an emphasis on

the sacred history and geography of Nepal to foster national pride.

Chapter 4 examines Naraharinath's engagement with the names of Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath, founders of the tradition. Tying Gorakhnath's name to the defense of the cow (*go-rakṣa*), and to Gorkha as a polity especially endowed with the mission of defending the "cow-dharma" (*go-dharma* in *Jaya Gorkā*, *dhenu-dharma* in *Vaidika Siddhānta*), Naraharinath embeds his political project of Hindu activism in the very linguistic structure of his country (still called Gorkha, as per the pre-1951 court tradition), and of his own *sampradāya*. This intellectual move is interesting at several levels. First, in attributing to Prithvi Narayan Shah, as the paradigmatic Gorkhali king, a full-fledged conception of Hinduness as a political value, he projects on 18th century Gorkha concerns that are clearly derived from a 20<sup>th</sup> century status quo, as I will show in his reading of the *Divya Upadeś*. Second, in elevating Gorakhnath to the rank of national deity and patron of the Gorkhalis, he creates a counterpoint to the role that this yogi-deity plays in India. While, in the *maṭha* of Gorakhpur, Gorakhnath is presented as one of the many Hindu sages that have graced the Indian subcontinent with their spiritual power, in Naraharinath's reading, precisely because of his name, Gorakhnath is the ultimate patron of the Hindu nation. More considerations from *Jaya Gorkhā* will highlight how ideals of bravery, self-reliance, but also fertility and family-values, are paramount to Naraharinath's conception of the Gorkhali polity.

The second part of chapter 4 will take into consideration Naraharinath's writings on the other founder of the Nāth tradition, Gorakhnath's guru, Matsyendranath. He, unlike his disciple, is not considered a role-model of yoga practice, as his most notable legends see him fallen into erotic debaucheries in a mythical "Kingdom of Women" in

Kāmarūpa, Assam, from where he is rescued by his wise, steadfastly chaste disciple. Matsyendranath's importance in Nepal, however, rests on a different mythical cycle, the coming of the young deity from Kāmarūpa to Kathmandu to end a drought that is threatening the very life of the Valley's inhabitants, an event commemorated in a yearly chariot festival in Lalitpur. Building on a 17<sup>th</sup> century text composed for such tradition, Nilakantha Bhatta's *Matsyendrapadyaśatakam*, Naraharinath, once again, employs etymology to make a point on Hinduism in Nepal.

The geological development of the Kathmandu Valley, absent in Nilakantha's poem, are amply discussed in Naraharinath's introduction to provide evidence of just why the rain-god of Patan is named after a *matsya*: the fish, we are told, is the eldest of all aquatic animals and was originally present in the lake that, once upon a time, filled the spot that is nowadays Nepal. He also lists some inscriptions, which do not seem intended to specifically reinforce this argument, but rather to provide authoritative credentials on the author's scholarship and to weave together two modalities of knowledge that, in the battle for modernization in Nepal, the reader could have taken to be in contrast to each other: puranic lore, on the one side, and history, on the other. Science and history—a central concern of postcolonial Hindu nationalism—surface then in Naraharinath's prose through the medium, again, of etymology, providing an example of hybridity between postcolonial lexicon and Naraharinath's self-understanding as a Sanskrit *paṇḍit*.

Chapter 5 deals with the very core of his political vision, the re-elaboration of the ideal of the *sādhu* through the lenses of "social service" (*samāj sevā*), a main theme of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century public Hinduism. Naraharinath, developing a lengthy discourse on the necessity of "altruistic *sāadhanā*" (*parārtha sāadhanā*) against the "selfish *sāadhanā*"

(*svārtha sādhanā*) of the solitary spiritual aspirant, exhorts his followers to stand up against the corruption of mores and the defilement brought about by the spread of *mleccha-dharma* in the Hindu world. This passage, absolutely essential to understand Naraharinath's vision, reveals a conceptual framework that positions him as a figure of transition between the world of *viśvavidyālayas* devoted to the pursuit of Sanskrit learning and the more politicized figures of the VHP spokespersons: if, on the one side, his reliance on *śāstric* materials is the structuring framework of his message, transfiguring the here and now of his call to action onto a mythical sphere of atemporality, his interpretation of these passages is wholly informed by the developments and understandings of *sevā* that had become commonplace in the last two centuries-- particularly by Vivekananda's emphasis on active, politically involved social service, a notion centrally coopted by the RSS in their justification of Hindu militancy. That Naraharinath's vision of political involvement, at least at the time of *Vaidika Siddhānta*'s publication in 1988, was not much different from the RSS's conception of Hindu self-assertion, can be appreciated by "*Your house is on fire*" a brief poem that outlines why and how it is important for all Hindus to take up arms.

As we move from theory to practice, however, we can see how the reception of his call to "social service" among his fellowship was more complex and context-sensitive than *Vaidika Siddhānta* would let us envisage. If Hindu nationalism—a privileged path to social recognition—was indeed a theme in the lives of the yogis that I have interviewed, dissonances, even in the form of overt violations of Naraharinath's anti-*mleccha* vision, keep informing the daily conduct of some of his followers. Chapter 5 will thus conclude with the biographies of some notable members of Naraharinath's social circle,

highlighting how the translation of Hindu social action into more irenic projects is an open-ended project that may engage creatively with the received tradition of the Nath yoga.

Chapter 6 overviews Naraharinath's vision of national religion in global history. The first part overviews his engagement with the Veda, which, in contrast to the variety of ritual traditions associated with the brahmanical groups of Nepal, he wants to present as a central symbol of national unity. A verse from the *Śukla Yajurveda*—originally related to the year-long *aśvamedha* sacrifice—is presented as a “Vedic national prayer” for the well-being of the Hindu nation. At the ritual level, nationalist overtones are also present in the performance of the *Koṭi Homa*, the fire oblation of ten millions *gāyatrīs*, which becomes an occasion to reinforce conceptions of ritual purity in the territory, to foster social collaboration, but also to provide yet another example of hybridity with the idiom of “science”, here represented by the claim that the *Koṭi Homa* purifies the environment. Vedic rituals, however, are not a part of the Nāth tradition, opening the question of how, exactly, they may be understood in the context of the tantric history of the school. Building on Ima Mata's account of her experience of the homa, I will suggest that the *puraścāraṇa*, a tantric *homa* that was still part of the Nath ritual practices in Ratannath's mandir during Naraharinath's life, can be considered as an element that provided a bridging point between the Nāth tradition and the new interests in the Veda advanced by Naraharinath.

The second section of chapter 6 presents an overview of Naraharinath's reflections on the origins of mankind in its relationship with dharma. In particular, we will see how he argues for a Himalayan origin of humankind, placing at the beginning of

human evolution the *yeti* or *van-mānche* (“forest-man”), a figure of the shamanic folklore of Nepal, read, however, within the framework of a Hindu civilization. The relationship of Buddhism to Hinduism is also, from his perspective, one of derivation: considering Pali a derivative of Sanskrit, his conception of history, rooted in the myth of a Vedic past, sees Buddhism as a subset of Hinduism, claiming the Buddha as one of the Hindu sages of the national past. A political move for neutralizing the protests of Buddhist activists against the anti-conversion policies of the Panchayat regime, his view is representative of official discourses of Hindu nationalism under king Mahendra, as we will see from a letter of the Nepali monarch to the RSS. Atypical, instead, is Naraharinath’s understanding of Australia: bringing to its extreme consequences his vision of Vedic Hinduism as the original religion of mankind, he attributes a Vedic nature to the Australian *ādivāsis*—the aboriginal people whose practices are discursively appropriated as an example of Vedic culture at Mukti Gupteshwar Mandir, to whose foundation he contributed. This intellectual move, I suggest, represents a new moment in the ideological development of Hindutva: from a quintessentially nationalist movement, concerned with the politics of the homeland, to an alternative way of reading global history and international relations.

This work concludes with a reflection on the role of upper caste rhetoric and scholarly self-representation in the panorama of Hindutva, noting that the Sanskritic tone of Naraharinath’s style stands out as a marked form of linguistic archaism. Chapter 7 will therefore raise the question of the relationship between *kṣatriya* ethos and brahmanical elements in Naraharinath’s understanding of the militant Hindu, suggesting that it is precisely this unresolved co-presence of different registers—the martial, the ascetic, and

the scholarly—that makes for the potential disruption of Naraharinath’s vision of Hinduness into more irenic construction of *mānav dharma*.

CHAPTER 2  
TURNING FRONTIERS INTO BOUNDARIES: NĀTH YOGIS FROM SIDDHAS TO  
HINDUS

*The Hindu meditates in the temple, the Muslim in the mosque,  
the Yogi meditates on the supreme goal, where there is neither temple nor mosque.  
Gorakh Bāṇī 68-69*

*On the temples of the gods mosques have been built.  
On the tīrthas there is foulness.  
Still, you are sleeping. Why precious time is wasted?  
Wake up! Hindu! Wake up!”<sup>1</sup>  
Yogi Naraharinath*

The paradox of the Nāth yogis' concern with the Babri Masjid of Ayodhya had already been captured quite precisely by David White in his landmark study of the tradition of alchemy and yoga, where he commented on the involvement of Avedyanath, *mahant* of the Nāth *maṭha* of Gorakhpur, in the *Rām Janmabhūmi Mukti Samiti*:

“As anyone familiar with Hindu sectarian theology knows, this is highly ironic. For whereas Rāma, the "boy scout" of the Hindu pantheon, is the god whose adherents have historically constituted the "right wing" of Hindu religious belief and practice, the Nath Siddhas have (...) long figured among the most "left-handed" (*vāmacāra*) sects of all Hinduism.” (White 1996:347)

This tension between the sectarian history of the *Sampradāya* and the politics of its contemporary leaders has been also noticed by non-academic observers. Commenting on Adityanath's pronouncements in 2014, when he exhorted his followers to convert Muslim girls to Hinduism by means of forced marriage, an anonymous article published by *Tehelka* expresses outrage at the misrepresentation of the Nāth tradition in the

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<sup>1</sup> Your house on fire” in *Vaidika Siddhānta*, (Y. Naraharinath 1988:40)

<sup>2</sup> Gorakhnath, whose first inscriptional references date to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was never part of the Udasin

following terms:

"To understand Adityanath's aggressive politics, it is significant to consider the deviation that arose in the ideology and ethics of the Gorakhnath math. Today, the math has grown antagonistically distant from the original concept it was founded upon. The math was established by a social reformer, Mahant Gorakhnath, in the 11th century. Gorakhnath was a follower of Udasin Panth. Prominent reformer and poet Kabir's affection for Gorakhnath had drawn him to the math right before his death. The philosophy that prevailed in the math had touched Kabir's heart. Even today, Kabir's couplets are inscribed on the walls of the math alongside Gorakhnath's edicts.

"The direction in which Adityanath is taking the math is completely opposed to its fundamental philosophy," says Manoj Singh. "The math, which was founded on the concept of nirguna (that god is beyond manifestation) today houses idols of almost every Hindu god and goddess linking it to the sanatani tradition. He claims to lead the Gorakhnath sect, yet intentionally avoids quoting Gorakhvani, because it contradicts his actions.

Gorakhnathis are a popular sect in north India as well as large parts of Nepal. Yogis clad in black and saffron, who go door-to-door seeking food in the streets of Purvanchal and Bihar, belong to this sect. Ironically, most of these Gorakhnathis chanting Gorakhvani and begging on the streets are Muslims. But now they are unwelcome in the math. The Hinduisation of the math began in the 1940s. The then mahant, Digvijaynath, joined hands with the Hindu Mahasabha and went on to become its president. In 1948, he was charged with involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate Mahatma Gandhi and was jailed. The math was now steadily turning into a temple. His successor Mahant Avidyanath progressively continued with the process. In 1962, Avidyanath entered politics. Since then, the math has been interfering in Gorakhpur politics at every level." ("The yogi and his tricks", 2014, Sep 22, *Tehelka*)

Although this account is inaccurate in several ways,<sup>2</sup> it signals, precisely because of its hyperbolic emphasis on the shared ground between yogis and Muslims, the central tension implied in understanding the history the Nāth Sampradāya: thoroughly peripheral to whatever definition of Hinduness may be assumed as normative, Nāth yogis are today among the most outspoken proponents of Hindutva politics. In what follows, I will overview extant studies on the Nāth Sampradāya, highlighting how the identity of the school was constantly re-elaborated over the centuries, culminating in its contemporary Hindu incarnation.

*Buddhists, Kaulas, and Muslims: locating the Nāths in the South Asian landscape*

"Who calls you Hindu, hit him! Muslim also is Nāth.  
(...) We are born neither Hindu nor Muslim. Follow the six *darśana*, Rahmān.  
We are intoxicated with God. He who has killed somebody has to stay away.  
He who takes the name of Allāh will be like the Prophet, by Allāh."  
from *Mohammad Bodh* in *Śrī Nāth Rahasya*<sup>3</sup>

To talk of the re-elaboration of a school's religious identity may suggest the presence of a few elements implied in such a discussion, namely, a) the school itself, as a more or less bounded institution, b) a former or "original" identity characteristic of the school, and c) a later or "new" identity the school transits to. In the case of the tradition of the Nāth yogis, none of these elements is easily recognizable: the Nāth world coalesces

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<sup>2</sup> Gorakhnath, whose first inscriptional references date to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was never part of the Udasin school and most probably did not personally found the *matha* in Gorakhpur. Kabir's attitude towards the yogis was rather complex, as he incorporated in his worldview only selected features of Nāth yoga. There is much fluidity, however, between the verses attributed to Gorakhnath and those attributed to Kabir, particularly in contexts of *bhajan* singing.

<sup>3</sup> Vilāsnāth Yogī 2005: 525-526, quoted in Bouillier 2010:573

into a more or less organized ascetic order only gradually. Bifurcated into two parallel segments of celibate ascetics and yogi householders (with a certain porosity between the two), it never completely loses its chaotic composition as a universe of very different local branches, sectarian orientations, and ritual customs. Furthermore, the proximity of the yogis to the Buddhist *siddhas* and *tāntrikas* of medieval India, as well as their intimate interactions with the Muslims in more recent times, prevents any clear-cut definition of their sectarian identity.

The use of the name “Nāth,” though a suffix for initiatic names of various sorts at least since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, is first used to denote a specific order of ascetics only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Mallinson 2011:3), although references to *yogis* and *siddhas*—all possible epithets for the forerunners of the order—go back to the medieval period. The cohesion of the school at any time is uncertain, as there has been a great degree of variability in the lists of the twelve (or eighteenth) branches (*panths*) that today constitute the organizational principle of the tradition (Bouillier 2008:32-35, Briggs, 1938:75). Furthermore, the first references to such lists are only found as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Sikh and Muslim sources (Mallinson 2011:9).

The prehistory of the school has been investigated in the context of two different milieus that first display some elements of later Nāth literature: the lists of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist *siddhas* and tantric Kaula literature. Dasgupta has been the first to systematically inquire into the relationship between the Nāth yogis and the Buddhist *siddhas*, close to each other both at the doctrinal level and in their sectarian genealogy (Dasgupta 1969). Most notably, the notions of *śūnya* (“emptiness, “void”) and *sahaj* (“innate”) are clearly of Buddhist origin, stemming from the tantric milieu of Northeast

India, and constitute an important feature of later Nāth literature, particularly when reinterpreted in the context of the specific yogic soteriology of the school, centered on the inner realization of the mystical unstruck sound (*anāhata nāda*) heard in meditation by the practitioner. The integration of the notions of void (*śunya*) and innate (*sahaj*) in yogic praxis is evident, for instance, in the *Gorakh Bodh*, a vernacular text on yoga, where they are intertwined with the symbology of light and sound that structure the inner experience of meditation (Offredi 1991:160). Furthermore, we find that the names of the two main gurus of the Nāth tradition – Matsyendra and Gorakṣa – are also present in the list of the Indo-Tibetan siddhas, though Dasgupta concluded that the identification of the Nāth teachers with the Buddhist siddhas was a later phenomenon, prompted by the general air of similarity between the practices of Śaiva yogis and those of the siddhas. (Dasgupta 1969).

Building upon Dasgupta's argument, David White studied extensively the lists of three main streams of medieval esotericism: the Indo-Tibetan *siddhas*, the *siddha* alchemists (practitioners of mercury-transmutation, *rasāyana*) and the Nāth *siddhas* themselves, arguing that the identification of Gorakh, Mīna and other Nāth yogis with the Siddhācāryas of similar names was part of a broader appropriation of a mythical tradition of divine *siddhas*. Between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this process was catalyzed by the appearance in West India of a historical figure called Gorakhnath (whose teacher Mina was not the same as the Matsyendra/Luipa of the Tibetan lists), who began a process of institutionalization of various religious orders of tantric descent. (White 1996:90)

The other element that places the Nāth yogis at the periphery of Hindu orthodoxy is their connection with the *śākta tāntrikas*. Textually, we know of an ascertained

association with Kaula tantrism in the earliest stratum of Nāth literature, although later texts, considered more canonical, distance themselves quite explicitly from the erotic elements of antinomian tantrism, and Gorakhnath's role in the tradition has been read by scholars, headed by White (1996), as a reformation of its most transgressive elements. A few texts attributed to an author named Matsyendranath, such as the *Kaula-jñāna-nirṇaya*, the *Akulavīratāntra*, and the *Matsyendra-saṃhitā* represent a transitional phase between Kaula tantrism and later Nāth yoga, but the historicity of their author, though accepted by early scholarship (Bagchi 1934, Karambelkar 1955) has been regarded as problematic by later studies (Dyczkowski 1988, White 1996).

Some features nonetheless persist in the Nāth world, particularly in the cult of the goddess Bālāsundarī, who represents the *kuṇḍaliṇī* as well as the esoteric patroness of the secret initiatory rituals, though this cult is downplayed for the sake of good reputation. Nonetheless, the very existence of texts such as the *Śābaracintāmaṇi*, a manual for the performance of black magic —also published by Naraharinath in 1997—testifies to the continued interest in the quest for supernatural power that characterizes the Nāth tradition. The image of the “sinister yogi”, amply documented by White (2009), reproduces in fact the stereotype of the dangerous but powerful tantric magician:

“Down to the present day, yogis are called upon as exorcists, driving away disease and evil spirits with their traditional tool: spells, amulets, salves, blood, red ochre, threads, earrings, drums, ashes, fire-tongs, peacock feather fans, and so on. As is so often the case, they are also notorious for using the same powers to destructive ends in the practice of black magic and sorcery.” (White 2009:232).

These features have always been perceived as rather uncomfortable elements—at least in the context of their public self-representation—and Nāth literature has mostly

shunned away from antinomian tantrism toward a more sanitized doctrinal tone that emphasizes yogic asceticism and celibacy, in the Sanskrit texts, and a form of *nirguṇa* devotion, in the vernacular poems. Yoga treatises attributed to Gorakhnath, such as the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* and the *Gorakṣaśataka*, have been dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, though exact dates and authorship are difficult to ascertain, and some texts may even be a production of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when, Mallinson suggests, the yogi order started to coalesce as a distinctive group (Mallinson 2012:263). Importantly, the transition from tantra to yoga, in the context of Nāth literature, implied a rejection of sexual practices and transgressive rites, as symbolized by the famous legend of Gorakhnath rescuing his guru Matsyendranath from the “Kingdom of Women” in which he was indulging in endless love-making (Gold A. 1992: 265-301, White 1996:236-40, Munoz 2011:109-27).

This reformation facilitated the adoption of some element of Nath yoga into the mainstream: as Christian Bouy has argued, by the eighteenth century the Nāth literature on yoga had gained orthodox reputation, to the point that several passages from texts like *Gorakṣaśataka*, *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* and *Khecarīvidyā* made their way into the Vedantic works of the canon of the 108 *Upaniṣads* (Bouy 1994). Charlotte Vaudeville has studied instead the relationship of the Nāth yogis to *vaiṣṇava bhakti* in Maharashtra, observing that Jñāneshvar, the author of the *Jñāneśvarī*, was originally a Nāth yogi who embraced *vaiṣṇava bhakti* as part of a general shift toward “nominal” Vaiṣṇavism in Maharashtra (Vaudeville 1987). Similarly, Muñoz has discussed the confluence between the Nāth-panth and the Dattatreya *sampradāya* in the Rajasthani cycle of the local hero Goga, the *Śrī Goga Mahāpurān* (Muñoz 2010).

As for the vernacular texts, particularly the *Gorakh Bāṇī*, *Gorakh Bodh* and *Gyān*

*Tilak*, the works of Barthwal (1936), Dvivedi (1966), Vaudeville (1993) and Offredi (2002) have stressed the continuity between the Nāth yogis and the *nirguṇis*, particularly Kabir, although, again, the fluid nature of this literature makes it difficult to date these works with any precision: many of the poems signed with the name of Gorakhnath throughout North India may be later attributions, and the date of the principal collection of "sayings" that goes under his name, that is, the *Gorakh Bāṇī*, may possibly date to the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century, though it was probably altered in the process of transmission from manuscript to manuscript (Lorenzen 2011:21). The format of these poems is usually the *dohā*, that is, a couplet meant to function as a proverb or folk saying, mnemonic and concise. Karine Schomer has highlighted the stylistic continuity between the *dohās* of the Buddhist siddhas and those of the Sants, seeing the transition between the two groups as mediated by the Nāths (Schomer 1987:69-71). The poems attributed to Gorakhnath, however, are of a quite different sort than those of the *siddhas*, the erotic element of *sahaj* tantra being replaced by a new ethos of ascetic restraint.

Another neighboring socio-religious formation in the Nāth sectarian landscape, the one constituted by Islam, is also significant and well-documented. Indeed, the historical development of the Nāth school as a recognizable sect in North India is contemporary to the development of Sufi fraternities and, as Carl Ernst suggests, yogis and Sufis could also interact at the level of commensality, as the Nāths did not have the same restrictions of orthodox society and could partake of meals at Sufi guesthouses, which were open to all (Ernst 2005:23). From the perspective of external observers, Sufis and yogis would also present important similarities in the outward appearance of their ritual premises: they both practice burial (as opposed to the standard cremation of Hindu

praxis), and the tombs of Sufi saints, just like the *samādhis* of Nāth yogis, are focal points of worship for laymen in search of powerful supernatural blessings. In fact, in contemporary Uttar Pradesh, the Nāths are abandoning the practice of burial in favor of cremation precisely to avoid potential confusion in a climate of heightened communal tension (D. Gold 1999:82).

The most apparent overlap between Sufis and yogis is evidenced by the fact that the chiefs of Nāth monasteries are designated with the Persian term *pīr*, the title of Sufi teachers. Although Ghurye suggests that this intercultural adoption was a defensive technique against Muslim persecution (1964:139), it seems more likely, as discussed by Ernst, that it constitutes an instance of “acculturation by yogis to selected Islamic norms” (Ernst 2005:24). In fact, the yogis seem to have had no reason to fear Muslim principalities. On the contrary, the work of Goswami and Grewal (1967) documents the generous patronage that the Mughal rulers extended to the yogis in Punjab from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, endowing the Nāth establishment of Jakhbar with substantial land grants so that they “may remain occupied with praying for the permanence of the Everlasting Dominion,” as one of the grants says (Goswami and Grewal 1967:116).

Textually, the *Gorakh Bāṇī* is rather eclectic in talking of the yogis' socio-religious coordinates, either placing them outside of both the Hindu and the Muslim fold, or privileging one or the other side in selected contexts. Besides the famous *śadbī* 68 quoted at the beginning of this chapter, we thus find that:

"The Hindu says Rām, the Muslim says Khudā, the Yogī says *alakh*, where there is neither Rām nor Khudā"<sup>4</sup> (*sadbī* 69)

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<sup>4</sup> *Hindū ākhê rām kō, musulmān khudāī | jogī ākhê alakh kō, tahā rām achê na khudāī* (Barthwal 1947:25)

"By birth [I am] a Hindu, in mature age a Yogi and by intellect a Muslim. O kazis and mullahs, recognize the path accepted by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva."<sup>5</sup> (*sabdī* 14, translated by Lorenzen 2011:21)

"A true Dervish is one who knows [how to find the divine] gate, Who inverts the five breaths, Who stays conscious day and night, That Dervish truly belongs to the caste of Allah."<sup>6</sup> (*sabdī* 182, translated by Lorenzen 2011:22)

This variety of positions leads David Lorenzen to conclude that "It is clear that Gorakh and Kabīr rejected both Islam and Hinduism, as commonly practiced, and sought to construct a religious identity that allowed them to straddle both religious traditions—to somehow be both Hindu and Muslim and neither, all at the same time." (Lorenzen 2011: 20). Sociologically, data from the British census and from Briggs' ethnography suggests that being a yogi and a Muslim were not mutually exclusive identities:

"Out of the thirteen principal Nath sub-orders described by Briggs, one, the Rawal or Nagnath order, located in the Punjab, consists of Muslims despite being originally derived from Shiva. Two of the six minor sub-orders, the Handi Pharang and the Jafir Pirs, are also Muslim in composition, as their names suggest; although they are Kanphatas and undergo the customary initiations, the Hindu yogis do not eat with them. The 1891 Indian census, which listed all yogis under the category of "miscellaneous and disreputable vagrants", gave figures indicating that over 17 per cent of yogis were Muslims, though by 1921 the proportion of Muslims had fallen to less than 5 per cent. It is difficult to interpret these figures without more knowledge of the social context, but they are still an interesting index of continuing existence of Muslim yogis in recent times; it is impossible to tell whether they were originally yogis who became Islamised, or

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<sup>5</sup> *utpatti hindū jaraṇām jogī akali pari musalmānī | te rāh cīnhō ho kājī mullā brahmā bisn mahādeva mānī* (Barthwal 1947:6)

<sup>6</sup> *darves soī jo darkī jāṇaiṃ | paṃce pavana apūṭhām āṇē \ sadā sucet rah din rāti | so darves alah kī jāti* (Barthwal 1947:61)

Muslims who were drawn into the ranks of the yogi orders.“ (Ernst 2005:38)

As a further example, Ratannath, the yogi-saint of the *maṭha* of Dang in Nepal, studied by Bouillier (1997), is said to have traveled extensively throughout the “realm of the Badshah,” that is, Mughal India, where he performed a series of miracles that earned him the worship of the Muslim overlords, and he is probably related to the Sufi saint Ḥājī Ratan of Bhatinda (Punjab). Moreover, the title of the head of the Chaughera monastery, the *pīr* who ritually embodies Ratannath, and his dervish-like conical hat also suggest a Muslim stratum in the constitution of his figure. However, whereas the stories of his magical deeds in Muslim lands are portrayed in colorful images on the walls of the *maṭha* for the pilgrims to see, a more aggressive episode of Ratannath's life is recorded in an oral version only. In this tale, the yogi is said to have successfully induced the goddess of the shrine of Devi Patan to kill Aurangzeb, since the Mughal emperor was annoying him with the request of being initiated into the Nāth *pūjā*, which Ratannath denied quite forcefully: “Tu ne dois faire ma *pūjā*, tu es un *rākṣas* (“demon”), tu es musulman” (Bouillier 1997:71).

More than *pūjās*, the Muslims incorporated from the Nāth world important doctrinal elements, such as yogic techniques and spiritual metaphors that got integrated into Sufi literature, as represented, most interestingly, by the “cross-cultural *sādhanā*” (2002:330) studied by Thomas Dahnhardt with regard to a Hinduized branch of the Naqshbandī Sufis, who drew substantially from yoga suggestions. Dahnhardt's study is a detailed account of the spiritual heritage of a branch of the Mujaddidī order, founded by the followers of Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (d. 1780) in the area of Delhi, particularly open to giving initiation to Hindus without the necessity of conversion to Islam. In the

late nineteenth century, a Hindu disciple, Ramcandra Saksena, became *khalīfa*, recognized teacher, thus birthing a syncretic Hindu-Sufi branch of the order: central to his teachings, we find a conception of the subtle centres (*'ilm-i laṭā'if*) that is clearly derived by the *cakra* mapping of Tantric yoga (Dahnhardt 2002:262).

On the other side, Nāth yogis also borrowed from Islam, as evidenced, for example, by the *Mohammad Bodh* studied by Veronique Bouillier, a passage that prescribes a specific practice for Muslim yogis during the month of Ramadan, now featured in the *Śrī Nāth Rahasya*—a manual of Nāth liturgies—published by Yogi Vilasnath in 2005. I will quote here only a very brief excerpt from Bouillier's translation of this long and interesting document, endowed with the playful, irreverent tone characteristic of some Nāth literature, particularly in its vernacular expressions:

"Who calls you Hindu, hit him! Muslim also is Nāth. In the puppet made of the five elements [*panctattva kā pūtlī*] plays the Invisible One [...]  
We are born neither Hindu nor Muslim. Follow the six *darśana*, Rahmān. We are intoxicated with God. He who has killed somebody has to stay away. He who takes the name of Allāh will be like the Prophet, by Allāh. [...]  
[Whatever] the face or the appearance of the Lord, He takes all forms. The veil which screened has opened. Look to whom you want, the guru of the Hindus, the *pīr* of the Muslims. All are *fakīrs* of Bābā Ādam. Burn a Hindu stretched out, bury a Muslim stretched out. In between make the seat of a Śrī Nāth. If one of them stands up, give him two kicks. There are one hundred and eighty thousand sons of Brahmā and Mohammad took the name of Mṛtak Nāth (the Lord of death)." (Y. Vilasnath 2005: 525-526, quoted in Bouillier 2010:573)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Here and in the following excerpt, I use Bouillier's own English translation of this passage from her article in French, published online on her account at academia.edu.

We can here observe an explicit effort at combining the idiom of selected features of Islam with Hindu elements—religions, however, to be transcended by the yogi, thought to triumph over both Hindu and Muslims practitioners. The *Mohammad Bodh*, in fact, is not a doctrinal piece, but rather a ritual manual, and, like all Nāth tantric acts, it promises practical results, regardless of whether one chooses a Hindu or a Muslim holy man for its completion:

"Where you do your *sāadhanā* (practice, meditation), install an image of Gorakhnāth, a statue or his footprints or a *kalaś* [pot] in the name of Śrī Nāth. During the Ramadan month, every day, after having worshipped Sri Nāth, recite the *Mohammad Bodh*. Seat, say the mantra appropriate to your posture, then the *Gorakṣa gayatrī*, then recite the *Mohammad Bodh* nine times. Then say the *guru mantra* one hundred eight times.

On the thirtieth, the day of Mīthī Id [sweet Id or Id al-Fiṭr, the last day of the Ramadan], recite the Bodh only three times. Also this day give food and clothes as *dakṣiṇā* to a faqīr or a Śrī Nāth. Give to the poor and to all living beings.

This way, having said the *Mohammad Bodh* altogether seven hundred eighty six times [the numerological equivalent to the *Basmala*, the formula 'In the Name of Allah'], you shall obtain what you desired." (Y. Vilasnath 2005: 526-527, quoted in Bouillier 2010:568).

This piece is particularly interesting (especially because of its recent publication by Vilasnath, the *mahant* of the Nāth temple in Haridwar and secretary of the *Mahāsabhā*), but cases of Muslim participation in the Nāth world have been many. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, the tradition of singing Nāth *nirguṇ bhajans* was traditionally upheld by a caste of Muslim singers, leading to the popular perception that the performers, styled in turbans and named with titles such as Gorakh Baba and Kabir Das,

were yogis from Gorakhpur (Henry 1991:222) On this background, the communalization of politics promoted by the Nāth leadership of Gorakhpur is all the more significant, as it entails not only a misrecognition of the sectarian history of the Sampradāya, but also, more immediately, of the local traditions of yogi-Muslim integration characteristic of Uttar Pradesh. The first strategy for achieving control over the social landscape of the Nāth yogis has been a form of bureaucratization. After the state registration of the Nāth Sampradāya in 1932 by Digvijaynath, a series of new rules has attempted to discipline the persona of the Nāth yogi in a way more agreeable to current Hindu tastes: we thus find that all Nāth yogis must be issued a Nāth identification card to be legitimate members of the order, that the consumption of alcohol and cannabis is prohibited, and the practice of *haṭha-yoga* is enjoined (Bouillier 2008:25-32).

As a further step, the participation of yogis in the electoral politics of democratic India has been phrased in the language of Hindu nationalism. On 27 January 1948, three days before Gandhi's assassination—reports a document of the "Commission of Inquiry into Conspiracy to Murder Mahatma Gandhi"—Digvijaynath held a meeting of the Hindu Sabhā at Connaught Place in Delhi, exhorting his followers to murder the Mahatma and other “anti-Hindu elements” (Jha 2012). According to popular opinion, the gun used in the assassination was actually supplied by authorities of the temple in Gorakhpur (Dubey 2012). As already noted, Digvijaynath's successor, Avaidyanath, who became mahant in 1969, was among the most active organizers of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 (White 1996, Bouillier 2008), and Adityanath, his current successor, has been known ever since as an instigator of anti-Muslim riots in the district (Engineer 2003, Gatade 2011).

The contemporary Hinduization of Nāth identity has also been discussed under the broad umbrella of Sanskritization, connecting Nāth traditions to more standardized Hindu cultural models. As Daniel Gold observes, this process has taken different forms for celibate sadhus and ascetic householders in the Sampradāya. While in pre-modern times the adoption of elite practices was shaped by the princely ideals of Rajput culture, nowadays the models more suitable for getting integrated into mainstream society are the two divergent images of the detached renunciate or the respectable householder, quite different from the stereotype of the rough, fearsome warrior-yogi that once constituted the norm in pre-colonial India. A reliance on publishing programs that embrace a more Sanskritic tone, a middle-class ethos that integrates vernacular aspects with a wider Indian religious sensibility, and organizational efforts at the level of caste association are today common features of the Nāth world in North India (Gold 1999:81-82)

In this context the participation of Nāth yogis in aggressive varieties of Hindutva politics may be read as an instance of continuity with two main threads that have characterized the Sampradāya throughout its history: its ideal of the fearsome warrior yogi that, as Gold observes, “may find new life with resurgent Hindu nationalism” (Gold 1999:81), and its tantric emphasis on worldly power. As noticed by White, in fact, the goal pursued by the Nāth leadership in Gorakhpur is “a sociopolitical power that is the macrocosmic homologue of the power the tantric practitioner gains over his bodily microcosm, and by extension over the entire universe, through his violent (the *haṭha* in *haṭha yoga*) antinomian practice.” (White 1997:348). What differentiates the contemporary yogi-gangs from those of pre-modern India is that, while the latter were fighting at the level of local loyalties, modern Hindutva leaders aim at phrasing the

politics of communal riots as broader narratives of the Hindu nation. Yogis, in fact, have often participated in the political vicissitudes of their territories both as warriors and as advisers to kings, though this was never understood to be a defense of Hinduism against internal or external threats, but a matter of personal alliances, with prominent gurus associating themselves with specific kings. Studies that highlight the proximity of the yogis to the royal courts, particularly in Nepal, can thus set a further background for the study of the Nāth Sampradāya.

### **Nāth yogis as *rājgurus***

The works on Nāth legends of Ann Gold (1992), Daniel Gold (1999), David White (2009) and Adrian Muñoz (2010) reveal the conceptual proximity between yogic power and kingship: tales of famous yogis, such as Bhartrhari, Caurangi, Gopi Cand, Gehla Rawal and Ratannath, all present a man of royal descent as the ideal candidate for yogahood, implying the superiority of the Nath guru over the princely disciple and depicting kingship as a powerful symbol of worldly attachment. The ethnographic study of Veronique Bouillier reports how royal dignity is understood to apply to the yogis: the title of Mahārāja is added to their names after full initiation into the order, some of their processions, such as that of the yogis of Caughera (Dang, Nepal) are modeled after a royal parade (Bouillier 1997), and the chief of the *maṭha* of Kadri (Karnataka, India), a Nāth monastery historically essential to the institutional identity of the *sampradāya*, is attributed the title of *rājā* in a ritual of *abhiṣeka* (Bouillier 2008:136-37).

Veronique Bouillier has also contributed much to our understanding of the relationship between yogis and kings in the Himalayan area, highlighting how the

foundations myths of Dewalgarh, Champawat, Almora, Doti, Jumla, and Dang all present the first king as disciple of some yogi, whose temple is established in close proximity of the palace (Bouillier 1989:198). Such dynasties are often credited with a civilizing role, with brahmanical overtones, but relying on the charisma and power of the yogi for its continued welfare. The case of Ratannath at Caughera is a representative example: king Ratna Parikshaka becomes Gorakhnath's disciple Ratannath during a hunting expedition in the forest, where the great yogi has disguised himself as a deer. Injured by the king's arrow, Gorakhnath forgives him and grants him the kingship of the territory that he covered running as a deer. The arrow will be kept at the monastery of Caughera for six months annually, the other six months staying with the king. As Bouillier observes, Ratannath's temple and *matha* have always enjoyed royal patronage, benefiting from land grants to sponsor Ratannath's worship for the "praise of the State" (Bouillier 1993:40).

It is important to notice, however, that figures of yogis, while central to the Himalayan royal houses, were also received with some suspicion, particularly within Newar society. If we look, for example, at the collection of Newari folksongs published by Sigfried Lienhard, we can see that depictions of yogis can be rather unflattering: in one song, a "cursed, wicked little" yogi is portrayed as seducing a girl, abducting her from her family, much to the desperation of her mother (Lienhardt 1984:54), while, in other songs, the option of becoming a yogi is seen as a desperate escape from romantic disappointments (Lienhardt 1984:37 and 60-61).

If Nāth yogis were indeed endowed with some important ritual functions in the Kathmandu Valley, such as the performance of a tantric *cakrapūja* (Bledsoe 2004:265), it was only following Prithvi Narayan Shah's territorial expansion in 1789 that

Gorakhnath's tutelage was formally extended to the whole of Nepal. Though his worship never took deep roots among the conquered ethnicities, it was faithfully continued by the Shah dynasty after its relocation from Gorkha to Kathmandu. The story is well-known, and constitutes a central moment in the myth of origin of the house of Gorkha as the dynasty ruling Nepal:

"One day, young Pṛthivīnārāyāṇ Śāh, who would later lead the Gurkhas in their successful conquest of the Kathmandu Valley in 1768, chances upon Gorakhnāth, who is meditating in a cave. Gorakh sends Pṛthivīnārāyāṇ Śāh back to his palace to bring him a present (prasād) of yogurt, from his mother. When the boy returns, Gorakh instructs him to hold the yogurt out to him in his cupped hands. Gorakh then draws the yogurt into his mouth, attempts to spit it back out into Pṛthivīnārāyāṇ Śāh's hand, and tells him to eat it. Pṛthivīnārāyāṇ Śāh however opens his hands and lets the yogurt fall on his feet. Gorakh then explains to the boy that had he eaten his prasād, the yogurt he had spat out, he would have become a universal emperor. But because he has let the yogurt fall on his feet, he will only conquer the earth as far as his feet will carry him." (White 1997:311)

Veronique Bouillier has also discussed the assistance provided to the Gorkhali king by Bhagavantanath, a yogi from the kingdom of Sallyan in south-west Nepal, who makes contact with Prithvi Narayan in 1763. He offers to the young king his services as a spy and advisor, taking advantage of his status of *sādhu*, which allows him to move freely across the kingdoms of the hills. He thus arranges the marriage between the crown prince of Sallyan and the Shah princess, securing Sallyan's neutrality for Gorkha's territorial ambitions. At the climax of the conquest of the Valley, the *Yogī Vaṃṣavalī* studied by Bouillier presents a typical example of the Nāth hagiographic genre. When the king is about to attack Kirtipur, the last Newari stronghold to fall, Bhagavantanath identifies an

obstacle in the protection accorded to the town by its tutelary Bāgh Bhairav: he meditates two nights on the deity and orders the king to attack only when a partridge he has sent flying to the temple could actually perch on its roof. (Bouillier 1991:11)

The relationship between Bhagavantanath and Prithvi Narayan was both political and personal, phrased in *guru-siṣya* terms, but with the attribution of monarchical dignity to Bhagavantanath. The letters the king wrote to his guru present all the conventional formula of religious respect: military success is attributed to the yogi's *āśīrbād*, his strategic advice is understood as his order, *hukum*, and the formula *aphno pavamaha*, at your feet, is used when the king addresses himself to him. Some donations the guru receives are consonant with his status as a renouncer: he is made *maṇḍali*, chief of all the yogis of Nepal (with the right to levy a special tax on certain groups) and given a substantial amount of rupees as *bheṭi*, religious gift, but:

“Prithvi Nārāyaṇ goes even further in integrating Bhagavanatanāth into his network of political alliances. It is his wish that he become a vassal king. He offers him, as he would to a victorious king, the trophies of the defeated king of Kirtipur: his banner, sceptre, fly-swatter and drum, his male and female slaves, his daughter, the princess Jamunā and finally his throne (cf. the letters of Rana Uddip, IPS 454, and Bir Samser, IPS 466). Bhagavantanāth refuses the throne: “I don't need a throne. That which you wish to give to me, give it to the princess Vilās Kumāri (Yogī Vaṃśavalī: 87). He goes back to Sallyan with the gifts he has received.” (Bouillier 1991:12)

We can here clearly see the interplay between ascetic and royal power: the king relies on the yogi's help, both in an institutional way (his network as ascetic connects Gorkha and Sallyan) and in virtue of the magical powers he is attributed (the conquest of Kirtipur is credited to the success of his meditation). The yogi is thus placed in the distinctive position of being at the same time superior to the king—as his guru—and

integrated in the same logic of power relationships that the king entertains with his vassals—as *maṇḍali* and recipient of the royal insignia of the defeated king of Kirtipur. This privileged position of the Nāth yogis in the nascent Nepali state marks an important difference with the situation of the yogis in the Gangetic plain and in Rajasthan. In fact, after the era of yogis' power in Jodhpur represented by Man Singh's deference to his guru Devnath (D. Gold 1992, 1995), the colonial takeover seems to have implied a disruption of royal patronage for the yogis, classified in the census of 1891, as noted in Briggs' passage quoted above, under the unflattering heading of “miscellaneous and disreputable vagrants.” In Nepal, in contrast, Nāth yogis maintained a certain degree of authority over the lands under jurisdiction of their monasteries.

In Bouillier's reading, the presence of yogis' temples in peripheral areas of Nepal, such as those of the Tharus, mediated between tribal societies and local dynasties with Rajput genealogies, fostering some degree of "hinduization"—which she understands as a certain familiarization with the yogi-deities of royal families endowed with Rajput genealogies and brahmanical connections:

“Une hindouisation s'est opérée par l'intermédiaire des Yogīs qui va de pair avec la diffusion du modèle politique de souveraineté, le service du dieu entraînant la soumission au roi. Il est certain que les ascètes sont les plus aptes à opérer cette diffusion de l'hindouisme dans le mesure où ils se font les propagateurs d'un mode d'accès direct au divin; les populations tribales ont pu s'initier au sacré hindou sans voir leur approche barrée par la conception brahmanique de la pureté et de la hiérarchie.” (Bouillier 1997, p. 181)

The application of term "hinduization" to the Himalayan area before 1768, however, is not straightforward, as it is only in relatively recent times that "Hinduness"

has become an explicitly political category. In what follows, to set one more level of comparative background for Naraharinath's work, I will discuss the gradual coming into existence of Nepal as a "Hindu kingdom."

### *Ek mātra Hindu Rājya*

All accounts of the genesis of Nepal, emic and etic alike, tend to start their narrative not from the birth of the new state in 1768, when the new king entered Kathmandu, but from its conception in the mind of the young prince. This occasion is portrayed by Prithvi Narayan himself, in his *Divya Upadesh*, in the following terms:

"From Chandragiri's top I asked, "Which is Nepal?" They showed me, saying, "That is Bhadgaon, that is Patan, and there lies Kathmandu." The thought came to my heart that if I might be king of these three cities, why, let it be so. At this same time these two astrologers said to me. "O King, your heart is melting with desire." I was struck with wonder. How did they know my inmost thoughts and so speak to me? "At the moment your gaze rested on Nepal, you stroke your moustache and in your heart you longed to be king of Nepal, as it seemed to us." "Will this come to pass?" I asked. "You, oh Prince, have held at all times great respect for cows, Brahmins, guests, holy men, the gods and goddesses. Also in our hands lies the blessings of Saraswati. You will one day be King of Nepal." (Stiller 1989:39)

This association of kingly power with symbols of brahmanical orthodoxy (cows, and Brahmins, but also Sarasvati) significantly echoes the ideal of the monarch as guardian of the social order in the kingdom—phrased as Hindu, for the first time in Nepal, precisely in the *Divya Upadesh*. Nepali historians writing under Shah, however, particularly during the Panchayat era, have read the story through the lens of twentieth

century Nepali nationalism, attributing to the Prithvi Narayan (as “father of the nation” responsible for its “unification”) feelings of “patriotism,” the desire to maintain the people of Nepal “happy and prosperous” and to keep high “the banner of freedom and cultural heritage,” particularly due to his “foresight” of potential foreign invasions, which resulted in Nepal being “for a long time the only independent Hindu state in the world” (Leve 1999:59-60). Internalized by many Nepalis through textbooks and official discourses, these readings say little about eighteenth century Gorkha or Kathmandu, but provided the framework for constructing a Hindu Nepali identity that would attempt, unsuccessfully, at becoming hegemonic.

As for the bare facts of the genesis of Nepal, when Prithvi Narayan ascended to the throne of Gorkha in 1743, this was one of a series of petty kingdoms that had emerged from the dissolution of the Khasa empire in the fifteenth century in the western and central hills, the so-called *bāisī* (“twenty-two”) and *caubīsī* (“twenty-four”) statelets of the Karnali and Gandaki basin respectively, Gorkha belonging to the latter group (Whelpton 2005:23). Income from lands constituted the basis of royal power, and the king was considered the owner—in patrimonial terms—of the land over which he ruled, his *muluk* (Burghart 1984:103). According to a complex system of tenurial possession, he could endow religious figures (such as brahmans, ascetics, or temples) with permanent donations of land (*bīrtā* or *guṭhī*), or retribute courtiers and soldiers with the right to enjoy a land's revenue (*jāgir*), to be renewed annually on an occasion called *pajani*, a system that ensured the dependency of these actors on the king himself.

In terms of ethnic composition, the inhabitants of the *caubīsī* and *bāisī* states – called Parbatiya (“those of the hills”) in post-unification Nepal – descended partly from

the Khasa (a group of the Indo-European family that settled in the Himalayas west of Kathmandu around 1000 BC, and reached the Karnali basin early in the first millennium AD), and partly from some Rajput refugees fleeing Muslim besiegers in the 14th and 16th century. As far as the ruling class was concerned, the local aristocrats, called Thakuri, often gained Rajput status by means of forged genealogies composed by local Brahmins—themselves, often, endowed with dubious ancestries from the Gangetic plain. Assimilation with indigenous groups had also occurred, and some Tibeto-Burman elites could also claim Rajput descent when convenient (Whelpton 2005:10-11). A third social segment of the Parbatiya was constituted by families ritually defined as *kṣatriya* warriors (the Chetri caste). Collectively, the Khasa/Parbatiya upper castes, who will come to constitute the political elite under the Shah monarchy, are known as Bahun-Chetri (“brahmins and *kṣatriyas*”). Lower and Untouchable castes, such as the Kami (blacksmiths), Sarki (leather workers) and Damai (tailors), constituted around 20 percent of the total population, while Tibeto-Burman groups tended to get integrated at the middle level of the hierarchy, provided that they avoided physical contact with the Untouchables (Whelpton. 2005:32). The language of the area, then called *Khās Kurā* (“Khas language”) or Gorkhali, was an Indo-European language close to the Hindi of the Gangetic plain and was later imposed, in a heavily Sanskritized version, as the national language of Nepal, that is, modern standard Nepali.

The failed attack to Nuwakot, launched by Prithvi Narayan right after his coronation in Gorkha, marks the first attempt of the Gorkhali king to gain the upper hand over the other important constellation of kingdoms in the area, the Kathmandu Valley, particularly attractive because of its agricultural fertility and its strategic position on the

trade routes to Tibet. In contrast to the rural landscape of the hills, Nepal—as the Valley was then known—presented a long history of urban culture that had flourished at least since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, connecting the kingdoms of the Gangetic plain with Tibet and China. From 1200 to their downfall under Gorkhali attack, the cities of the Valley, Kathmandu/Kantipur, Patan/Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur/Bhadgaon (with the addition of Banepa in a more peripheral position), had been the courts of a series of monarchs with the title of Malla, who claimed, like their Khasa neighbors, Rajput ancestry.

Unified until 1482, the Malla kingdom then split in the three city-states of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. Though in perpetual strife with each other, and occasionally invaded by raiders from the outside, the urban centers of the Valley maintained a high degree of economic stability that allowed the development of a sophisticated culture, excelling in architecture, craftsmanship, literature and music. Aesthetically, in addition to local styles, the Malla courts were open to the new fashion trends enjoyed by the Mughals (Whelpton, 2005:34), and experimentations with new artistic and devotional suggestions were particularly evident, for example, in 17<sup>th</sup> century Lalitpur. The peoples of the Valley were quite diverse, but all characterized by some versions of a Tibeto-Burman language known as *Nepāl Bhāsā*, which borrows from Sanskrit in ritual contexts, but is thoroughly unintelligible to untrained speakers of *Khās Kurā* in its colloquial formations. Beside the local tantric priests, *śaiva* or Buddhists, Maithili brahmins also constituted a substantial presence at court, and Maithili language enjoyed a distinguished position.

The population of the Valley was structured in a caste hierarchy at least from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The *Buddhamārgī* Śakyas and Vajrācāryas, who considered themselves non-

celibate Buddhist monks, headed a pool of lay Buddhist patrons, mostly traders. The *Śivamārgī* Rājopadhyaṅya and Karmācārya, who understood themselves to be brahmins, performed the ritual functions for the *kṣatriya* (including the royal family) and other middle class groups such as the Śreṣṭha. The sectarian affiliation of the agricultural castes (such as the Jyāpu and Maharjans) is more unclear: for Whelpton (2005:31) the distinction between *śaiva* and Buddhists is irrelevant at this level, while Gellner suggests that all families may be classified on one side or the other depending on the ritual specialists they call to perform their rites of passage (Gellner 1992:53). The lowest strata of the hierarchy are classified instead in Water-Unacceptable and Untouchable castes—for example, the Khadgis (butchers) and Poda (sweepers), respectively.

All these constituencies understood themselves as different, though interrelated, societies, and the notion of a common “Newariness” was to become relevant only much later, in response to the practices of the Gorkhali rulers. In fact, the socio-political landscape that Prithvi Narayan encountered upon attacking the Valley was highly fragmented and he could easily take advantage of the rivalries between the city-states, which, initially, did not perceive him as a major threat. As Whelpton points out, non-Newar involvement in the Kathmandu Valley was recurrent: the Khasa had participated in local politics since the early seventeenth century, and the Malla rulers believed they could exploit personal alliances with the Gorkhali against each other. A brief moment of united resistance occurred in 1757, but it was soon followed by attempts to reach separate accommodations with the invaders (Whelpton 2005:37).

Minor expeditions from Mir Kasim of Bengal (1763) and the East India Company (1767) —both summoned by Jaya Prakash Malla to help him maintain control over

Kathmandu—got easily defeated by the Gorkhali king, who had invested in excellent weaponry for his troops and had motivated the soldiers with the promise of land grants. On 25 September 1768, runs a probably spurious story, Prithvi Narayan entered Kathmandu during the culmination of the Indra Jatra, the main festival of the city, taking the place of a fleeing Jaya Prakash in his ritual function as recipient of the blessing of the Kumari, the Newari child-goddess. Regardless of whether such symbolical act occurred or not, from 1768 year the Gorkhali monarch was indisputably in charge of Kathmandu, and national histories date to this year the “unification” of Nepal. In 1771 he obtained the title Bahadur Shamsher Jung from the Mughal emperor (already disempowered by the British) and, by his death in 1777, he had expanded his *muluk* up to Sikkim. The model of kingship he inaugurated, though preserving some Newari acts of ritual empowerment, presented nonetheless a marked discontinuity with his Malla predecessors.

As Anne Mocko observes, after becoming king of Kathmandu, Prithvi Narayan adopted many aesthetic symbols of power from the Malla, such as the stone coronation platform in Kathmandu’s Hanuman Dhoka palace, the flag of the king of Bhaktapur and the Newar palace complex of Basantapur Durbar. Furthermore, he engaged in the worship of all ritual figures considered central for Newar kingship, such as the Kumari, Pashupatinath, Svayambhunath, and Rato Machindranath. Nonetheless, his preference for residing in spartan military camps, rather than in his newly conquered Malla-styled palace, could be perceived as a cultural change from the habits of the previous dynasty. From the social point of view, his reliance on advisers, administrators, and priests from Gorkha, at the expense of local figures, marked him off as an outsider to the peoples of the Valley (Mocko 2012:56).

In a famous passage, quoted by virtually all accounts of Nepal under the Shah, the king thus exhorts his successors:

“If my brothers soldiers and the courtiers are not given to pleasure, my sword can strike in all directions. But if they are pleasure-seekers, this will not be my little painfully acquired kingdom but a garden of every sort of people. But if everyone is alert, this will be a true Hindustan (*asal Hindustan*) of the four *jats*, greater and lesser, with the thirty-six classes. Do not leave your ancient religion. Don't forsake the salt of the king.” (Stiller 1968:44)

The broader implications of what Prithvinarayan's *asal Hindustan* may have meant in 18th century South Asia have been discussed by Richard Burghart in an article that articulates the development of the notion of being a “Hindu” in the political discourse of Nepal. The category “Hindu”—points out Burghart—was relevant to the political imaginations of the petty kingdoms of the Himalayas at least from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Muslims of the Gangetic plain provided a reference of “inverted dharma” (*ulṭā dharma*) against which the rustic rulers of the hills could assert cultural superiority: claiming to be Rajput from the plains, they distinguished themselves both from the hill-men (by virtue of their aristocratic origins from the more civilized plains) and from the Mughals (by the fact of being uncontaminated non-Muslims). Hindu kingship, in this context, did not necessarily imply the absence of non-Hindu subjects in the territory, as long as the monarch was consecrated according a *vaiṣṇava* or *śaiva* ritual and was responsible for implementing a ban on slaughtering cows and slaying brahmins, rules that appear to have been widely respected in the pre-modern Himalaya (Burghart 2008:263).

The clearest case of a king who thought of himself as being sovereign over a community of Hindus was that of Harihar Sen of Makwanpur, in the late seventeenth century, who adopted the unusual title of Lord of the Hindus (*hindupati*). The only other instance of a South Asian ruler who styled himself as self-consciously Hindu was Shivaji, probably responding to a Muslim discourse on rulership as the duty to “protect the faithful,” rephrased in Hindu terms. That, as Burghart observes, Muslims and aboriginals also lived in Makwanpur nuances Harihar's position as a king, since its title identifies him with the majority, but not the totality, of his subjects. Ongoing conflicts with neighboring Muslim principalities would characterize the history of Makwanpur for the next two generations, events recorded on a copper inscription in a temple as “the vow of the dispute between the Hindus and Muslims.” (2008:265). When conflict was structured along religious lines by other actors, however, such as in the all too frequent skirmishes between different sectarian orders, the Himalayan terminology used to define the opponents did not reference any “Hindus,” which leads Burghart to conclude that the institution promoting a Hindu-Muslim dichotomy in eighteenth century Makwanpur was only Harihar Sen's state apparatus.

With this background, we can thus return to the *asal Hindustan* of Prithvinarayan's *Divya Upadesh* to inquire in which ways, if any, a project of “Hinduization” was implicit in his death-bed teachings. Burghart contrasts here two senses in which the word “Hindusthan” is used in the text. In a first sense, it refers to a country, that is, “a place with its people,” which “exists independently of those who rule it” (2008:266), such as in the following passage:

“Maintain a treaty of friendship with the Emperor of China. Keep also a treaty of friendship with the Emperor of the Southern Sea. He has taken the plains.

He will realize that if Hindusthan unites, it will be difficult, and so he will come seeking places for forts.” (Stiller 1968:42)

In a second sense, however, the word “Hindusthan” is used in a more ideologically charged way, such as in the reference to the “true Hindustan of the four *jats*, greater and lesser, with the thirty-six classes” in the above-quoted passage. Burghart reads this use of the term (which clearly ties the idea of Hindusthan to a set of moral principles, summarized by the insistence on not pursuing pleasure, “being alert”, not leaving one's “ancient religion” and not forsaking “the salt of the king”) as a reference to a brahmano-centric conception of social order and caste relationships: “A real Hindusthan is one in which *dharma* figures as the ordering principle. It can have *musalman* and *firengi* subjects; but it requires a ruler who is entitled to enforce the socio-cosmic order—the four *varna* and the thirty-six *jat*—by means of the five punishments” (2008:268).

According to Lauren Leve, however, Burghart's reading would be based on a misquotation of the passage translated by Stiller: where Stiller has “four *jats*, greater and lesser, with the thirty-six classes” (Stiller 1986:44), Burghart has “four *varna*, greater and lesser, with the thirty-six *jat*” (Burghart 2008:26). The misreading, though probably unintentional, is significant, since it reflects the Hindu nationalist reinterpretation of the *Divya Upadesh* discussed in detail by Leve (1999) with regard to Panchayat era historiographies, which upheld the notion of Nepal as a nation comprising a hierarchically ranked plurality of communities under the banner of a common Hindu organizing principle.

The conceptual shift that made possible a nationalist reinterpretation of Prithvi Narayan's words required a rereading—even a rephrasing—of the letter of the text. In later accounts, in fact, Prithvi Narayan's statement will be remembered as “My kingdom is the garden (*phulbari*) of the four varnas and thirty-six castes.” (Leve 1999:41), which Leve discusses as the “*phulbari* metaphor” of the Panchayat regime. The departure from the actual phrasing of the *Divya Upadesh* is twofold. First, the words “*jāt*” and “*varna*” are inverted, and the reference to the four “*varnas*” subsumes more clearly the plural groups of the kingdom into the fourfold hierarchy of the classical brahmanical model. Second, the metaphor of the “garden of all sorts of people”—used by Prithvi Narayan to indicate what his kingdom should *not* become—is recast in positive terms to depict Nepal as a place where the thirty-six *jats* (read now as subdivisions of the four *varnas*) coexist in harmony. Leve's treatment of this conceptual shift is accurate and compelling:

“In contrast to Prithvinarayan's phrase “*car jāt chattis varna*” the expression “*car varna chattis jāt*” is popularized in the nineteenth century to refer to the whole social subjectry of the Gorkha empire. Since this time, it has meant something like “Hindus and ethnic groups” [literally, the four *varna* (categories of caste Hindus) and the thirty-six (other) species of (other ethnic) peoples], and it denotes the whole, national caste system, used a synonym for “the people” (Hofer 1979). In this way, caste becomes both hierarchically and horizontally integrating at once. Compared to this, “*car jāt chattis varna*” is a much less inclusive concept that refers to a much more fragmentary and limited type of estate, where the notion of “nation” in any modern sense is absent.

In the passage above, it is not clear exactly whom Prithvinarayan meant when he spoke of “the four *jāts*... with the thirty-six classes,” but we can be reasonably certain that he did *not* mean the totalizing Hindu social universe that the phrase “four *varna* and thirty-six *jāt*” would later come to represent. We know that by “the thirty-six classes,” the king was most likely referring to an elite group of families who made up the Gorkhali

elite and who played important roles in his military and administration (Stiller 1992:19). But by “the four *jāt*” he *may* have meant the four Sanskrit *varna* – Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras – as scholars like Parish have assumed, or the four social classes who served in the Gorkhali army – Thakuri, Khas (Chhetris), Magars, and Gurungs – a list he enumerates shortly thereafter, or another quadripartite classification the referent of which is unknown today. But the confusion of the two phrases, the attribution of a Hindu nationalist consciousness to Prthivinarayan Shah, and the attempt to project the modern ideal of a socially unified territorial population – i.e., a nation – back in time is part of the manufacture of “evidence” for the claim that the people of Nepal have always shared an overarching, common Hindu identity, and thus that religion is, and has always been, the synthetic force beneath and behind the “Nepali nation.” (...) For Prthivinarayan, a flower garden of all *jāts* was the result of bad government and moral decadence, which would inevitably lead to the loss of all or part of his hard-won empire (Leve 1999:75-6).

That Prithvi Narayan's understanding of ethnic diversity in his newly conquered kingdom was not the same as that of the advocates of Nepali Hinduness in the twentieth century comes as unsurprising, but the question remains of how the various *jāts* and *varnas*—and their mutual relationship—were understood by the Gorkhali king. Stiller points out some difficulties in understanding what Prithvi Narayan may have envisaged as desirable policies of internal governance: we do not have foreign accounts of this period, sources from Nepal are mostly concerned only with issues of military expansion, and Prithvi Narayan's premature death at the age of fifty-three, only six years after the seize of Bhaktapur, left him little time to implement whatever he may have believed to be appropriate in terms of social organization (Stiller 1968:58).

After his death, the increased power of the courtiers, *bhārādārs*. weakened the monarchy considerably. The chaos at court was brought to an end, in 1846, by the rise to power of Jang Bahadur Rana, who staged a coup to sideline the monarchy and proclaim

himself prime minister with the right to pass down the titles to his family members through a system of agnatic succession. If in the years between Prithvi Narayan's death and Jang Bahadur's coup elaborating on the religious identity of the territory was not much of a concern for the court, the policies of the new minister marked a more defined transition to an explicit articulation of Hindu power relationships.

At the time of Prithvi Narayan, in fact, the “Emperor of the Southern Sea,” that is, the East India Company, was already threatening enough to be mentioned in the *Divya Upadesh*, but by the time of Jang Bahadur the primarily economic goals of the British had morphed into a more ambitious project of colonial domination. In this conflictual context, the codification of a set of laws to be applied throughout the territory under Rana sovereignty had a double rationale: to articulate the political identity of Nepal and to pose as a humanist to the British by implementing, at least in outward appearances, some reforms of what the Europeans perceived as questionable practices, such as punishment by mutilation and the performance of *satī* (Burghart 2008:271). The double talk implicit in Jang Bahadur's enterprise has been successfully captured by Burghart: if on the one side he emulated the British, on the other, talking to his fellow Gorkhalis, he evoked religious sentiments, a notion of divine kingship and, importantly, a strong idea of Hinduness as characteristic of Nepal. A quotation from a code on religious endowments of 1866 expresses eloquently how, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the vague Hinduness of Prithvi Narayan's *Divya Upadesh* had crystallized into a more explicit ideology of Hindu sovereignty:

“We have our own country, a Hindu kingdom [*hindu rajya*], where the law prescribes that cows shall not be slaughtered; nor women and Brahmans be sentenced to capital punishment. It is a holy land where the Himalayas, the Basuki Kshetra, the Arya

Tirtha, the refulgent Shri-Pashupati-Linga and the Shri Guhyeshvari Pitha are located. In this Kali Age this is the only country where Hindus rule." (2008:271)

This new Hindu self-consciousness entailed that all ethnic and occupational groups of the territory underwent a formal scheduling into a single hierarchy structured on the blueprint of a pre-existing Parbatiya understanding of caste relationships. At this regard, Burghart, examining the formation of the notion of nation-state in Nepal in an influential article of 1984, points how the *Muluki Ain* can be read as a step toward the assimilation of the tribals to a newly defined Hindu state through the conflation of two political domains that had hitherto been separate: the *deśa*—that is, a ritually auspicious area centered on the king and his tutelary deity—and the *muluk*, the tenurial possession of which he is landlord (*mālik*), encompassing different *deśas*. In the case of Prithvi Narayan, his *deśa* was centered on the Bhavani temple and Gorakhnath cave at his royal palace in Gorkha, but in conquering the Kathmandu Valley, Makwanpur and Vijaypur, he also continued the worship of their deities when these *deśas* became part of his *muluk*. While some basic rules—such as the ban on cow-slaughter—were implemented in his *muluk* also, there was a general sense in which other *deśas* were entitled to the observance of their own customs (*deśācāra*). In the *Muluki Ain*, instead, Jang Bahadur conflated the two realms by subsuming all the different castes and tribes of the *muluk* in one single hierarchy.

András Hofer, in his exhaustive study of the *Muluki Ain*, describes the ways in which the multifarious social landscape of Nepal was congealed into a code upholding concerns of ritual purity, although this document was mostly confined to the fields of administrative and personal law, with some room for autonomy of local traditions in

terms of civil law. In remote areas, such as the northern Himalayan frontiers, the actual implementation of the letter of the code was even more unlikely, and the *Muluki Ain* was mostly irrelevant to the local populations. In spite of these foreseeable limitations, the *Muluki Ain* constitutes a milestone in the process of nation-building in Nepal, and deserves some attention here. Hofer points out several potential sources for the elaboration of the Ain: the *dharmasāstra* (though only sporadically referred to), Kautilya's *arthaśāstra* (to which it appears related in character), possibly Mughal and/or British administration, and, perhaps, Jayasthiti Malla's sistematization of castal relationships four centuries earlier. However, none of these influences can be explored fully, since the document itself is mute on its sources. In Hofer's view, customary law and previous legislation constituted the bulk of the rules of the *Ain*, though amendments and corrections were also introduced (Hofer 1979:3-4).

The categories of people to be integrated into the structure comprised three groups with pre-existing castal hierarchies (besides the Parbatiya, the Newars and the population of the Terai), and a series of ethnic groups that did not present internal castal organization, such as, for example, the Bhote (Tibetans) and the Sherpa. A first distinction was thus made between "Cord-wearer" (Tagadhari), which comprised various high castes of the Parbatiya, Newar and Indian communities, and all the others, defined as "Alcohol-drinkers" (Matwali). The Matwalis were further subdivided in "Non-enslavable" and "Enslavable" groups: the former (including, for instance, the Magar and Gurung) enjoyed the right to serve in the army, while the latter (comprising, for example, the Bhote and the Tharu) did not. Collective transitions from "Enslavable" to "Non-enslavable" status, however, were possible and did in fact occur (Gellner 2007:1823)

Below the Alcohol-drinkers, the ranking of higher and lower castes at the bottom of the hierarchy was based on the possible transactions of food or water among different groups: lower castes can accept cooked rice (*bhāt*) and water from higher castes, but higher castes would be polluted by accepting *bhāt* or water from lower castes. Furthermore, we have two sections of “Water-unacceptable” (*pāni nacalnyā*) groups: those who can be touched and those who cannot. In the category of Water-unacceptable but Touchable groups we find, for instance, the Newar butchers, the Kusle (a caste of yogi householders stemming from the Nath tradition), the Muslims (Musalmān), and the Europeans (Mleccha), while examples of Water-unacceptable and Untouchable groups comprise blacksmiths, leather workers, tailors, sweepers, fishermen and scavengers of either Newar, Parbatiya or Indian provenance. The habit of exchanging or not water and physical contact among these different groups, of course, predates the *Muluki Ain*; what is distinctive about its redaction is that, for the first time, an effort is made to spell out explicitly the relative position of groups that share the territory of the Gorkha empire with the Parbatiya and Newar, but do not, in fact, belong to their caste hierarchies. The tribal groups that today comprise the so-called *janajātis* are included at the middle of the hierarchy, as Alcohol-drinkers that could be either recruited in the army or enslaved. The treatment of ethnic communities in remote areas, however, and the description of tribes who maintained some distance from the others, is neither accurate nor complete, as the *Ain* was mostly concerned with peoples who had significant interactions with the caste population (Hofer 1979:128).

The acknowledgment of legal status to tribal customs was nonetheless an important theme of the *Ain* and had in fact a specific designation: *thiti bāndeḷ* “to fix the

custom,” which often constituted the outcome of a process of interaction between the tribals and the court, whereby some ethnic groups petitioned for being granted certain exemptions in terms of social norms. In some cases the *thiti bāndej* operated in the direction of tribal autonomy (as when the Limbu defended their right to collective tenure of their land), in others, such as when the Magar of Piuthan requested the legalization of an increased caste hierarchy, it served as a tool of voluntary Hinduization, often affecting not an entire ethnicity, but a segment of it, already alienated from previous customs, pressuring for recognition of some degree of acculturation to elite practices. In some cases (as, for instance, the Chetri of Rara in West Nepal), upward re-classification even entailed a transition from the status of Alcohol-drinkers to that of Cord-wearers (Hofer 1979:154).

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, overviewing some cultural changes throughout the Rana age, noticed in particular that the practice of ascribing land rights and social privileges to high-ranking men of peripheral areas fostered the Hinduization of the elites of tribal society, which adopted some cultural symbols of the rulers, such as Hindu deities and myths (now integrated in local folklore and tribal genealogies), pilgrimages to Hindu sacred spots, brahmanized rituals, and increasingly crystallized social hierarchies, with the elites trying to emerge as a high-caste group. (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997:432). This process, however, was dishomogenous and inconsistent, as it can be best exemplified by counter-examples of ethnicities, such as the Sherpas, that looked at Tibetan Buddhism as their paragon of high culture (Ortner 1989).

The Tamang also represent an interesting case, as their very constitution as a unitary group is the product of state definitions: the largest Tibeto-Burman group in

Nepal, they are composed by a varieties of peoples that differ from each other by language, clothing styles, and songs, suggesting different origins. Though the word “Tamang” was already in currency in Tibetan parlance as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, other designations, such as Murmi, Lama, Bhotia or Bhote, Ishang and Sain were more frequent. Holmberg (1989) reads the formation of Tamang ethnic identity as a response to Hindu classificatory schemes: in spite of the accusation of beef eating, which could have been a condition of untouchability, the Bhote were classified in the *Ain* as *cokho* (pure/clean), though Enslavable Alcohol-Drinkers. This first classification paved the way for the later unification of these groups under a common label, but only in 1932 a proclamation of the central government will make Tamang an official category, superseding Bhote and Lama (Hofer 1979:147-48). As David Holmberg observes, the Tamang's affiliation with lamaism was interpreted as potential resistance to the Gorkha state, but the degree of hostility varied considerably, with hill-dwelling Tamang closer to Tibet enjoying more recognition than those of the Kathmandu Valley (1989:28-29).

The Hinduization promoted by the *Muluki Ain* can therefore be best understood as the gradual consolidation of a framework of elite practices, bureaucratic institutions, and new avenues for upward social mobility, resulting in an uneven integration of the population to the social and cultural norms of the ruling elite. For Hofer (1979:156-7), the new legislative tools of the Rana state did not aim at implementing a form of top-down cultural repression, rather, it *a posteriori* sanctioned instances of cultural change that were already underway. The major change that the *Ain* produced in terms of cultural transformation can perhaps be defined as a redefinition of the collective epistemology of social relationships in the territory under Gorkhali jurisdiction: the idea of a general

classificatory scheme, flexible as it may have been, ordering the relative status of different communities was certainly a novelty in the fluid ethnic geography of Nepal.

With the restoration to power of the Shah monarchy on 1951, after 105 years of Rana domination, Nepal will witness a third phase in its constitution as a Hindu kingdom: Hinduness being now understood as a central symbolic feature of Nepali nationalism, enshrined in the constitution of 1963 and heavily contested by activists auspicing a secular state. It is at this juncture that Yogi Naraharinath, heir of the long tradition of Himalayan *rājgurus*, will come to the forefront as "defender of dharma" (*dharma-rākṣin*) to uphold the ideal of an eternally Hindu state.

CHAPTER 3  
THE TAPAS OF HISTORY: LIFE AND WORK OF YOGI NARAHARINATH

*Encountering Yogi ji*

For the contemporary visitor of one of his ashrams, the first acquaintance with Yogi Naraharinath is mediated by a big poster that features his picture along with a condensed summary of his work, making sense of his cultural significance through a list of achievements. The text has been composed as recently as 2012 by Ima Mata, a female disciple who has risen in prominence in the last two decades as one of Yogi Naraharinath's foremost followers. Charged with wordy strings of Sanskrit compounds, the combined effect of the picture and the language conveys enough for locating Yogi Naraharinath in socio-religious coordinates that most Indian and Nepali Hindus would recognize, but that are unusual in Nāth praxis. We can therefore start from this document to understand which features of their guru's life resonated as significant for his disciples and which cultural parameters are relevant for the purposes of the present work.

First, the poster is headed by an invocation (defined as a *mantra*), composed by Naraharinath himself, which helps us draw the framework of his work:

*Oṃ, Svasti, Gauḥ Śrīḥ Śivau Vedāḥ Pañcādevāḥ Pañcabuddha Sarve Devāḥ  
Śrīvāgīśvarī Vijayate!  
Oṃ Namaḥ Śivāya*

Immediately, after the syllables of auspicious introduction (represented by the graphic symbols for the *oṃ* and the *svastika*), we find an element absolutely central to Naraharinath's understanding of *dharma*: the cow (*gauḥ*), here—quite uniquely—put in the first position, before the names of the gods. That cows are central in Yogi

Naraharinath's world would not come as a surprise to a devotee visiting his ashrams: these institutions present themselves formally as *gōśālās* and ask for donations for the cattle, rather than for the temples.

*Śrī* can be read either as Lakshmi's name or as the honorary prefix to the divine names that follow, here graced by a *visarga* not quite required by the rules of *sandhi* but contributing to increase visually the Sanskrit aura of the mantra for the vernacular reader. The name that follows is particularly interesting, because the use of the dual *Śivau* (*Śiva* and *Śivā*) shifts the attention from the brahminical purity of the sacred cow to a dimension of cosmological significance first theorized by the *tantras*, the unity of *Śiva* and *Śakti*. The Veda appears explicitly, however, in the next word, but followed by the pairing *Pañcādevāḥ* and *Pañcabuddha*, meant to establish a parallel between the canonical five deities of brahminical worship (*Viṣṇu*, *Śiva*, *Śakti*, *Sūrya*, *Ganeṣa*) and the five Dhvani-Buddhas of the Vajrāyāna tradition (*Amoghasiddhi*, *Amitabhā*, *Ratnasambhava*, *Akṣobhya* and *Vairocana*): though mostly irrelevant for a Hindu person from India, this element would make sense, however, to a visitor from the Newar community, who would be accustomed to seeing representations of the five Buddhas at the corners of the *stūpas* and around the doors of local Newari Buddhist houses. This co-optation of Buddhist elements, which represents an example of what Gellner has phrased “domination by subordinate inclusion” (Gellner 2005:770) of Buddhism, will be, as we will see, a major theme of Naraharinath's work.

The second line localizes the cult, since it is dedicated specifically to the goddess *Vāgīśvarī* (“The Lady of Words”), the tantric name of *Sarasvati*, attested both in *śaiva-śākta* and Buddhist meditational manuals. Her significance in Naraharinath's life does not

rest in her status as a goddess of learning per se, but rather in the presence of her temple on the holy ground of the ashram of Devghat, which he founded in the location he had chosen as his *tapo-bhūmi* in the jungle. The choice of this location, at the *saṅgam* of the Narayani and Kali Gandaki rivers, coincided in fact with the discovery of a dilapidated Vāgīśvarī temple, which he restored. With the last invocation, *oṃ namaḥ śivāya*, arguably the best known mantra for exoteric Hindu praxis, we are brought back to a territory familiar to all Hindus.

This unusual combination of divine names reveals a very different religious idiom from the one that we would expect from a Nāth yogi—cows, Veda, Sarasvati and Buddhas are creatively combined to render a picture of religious praxis definitely outside of the conventions of tantric yoga. This departure from the Nāth tradition is also reinforced by Naraharinath's attire in the poster picture, reproduced just under the *mantra* heading, which distinguishes him from other figures of *sādhus* through the adoption of a more straightforwardly nationalist aesthetics. Most notably, he wears a *bhoṭo*, the double-breasted garment fastened on the chest by string tiers, a shirt that constitutes the traditional Nepali dress and that was already outmoded in favor of Western fashion during Naraharinath's time, except for formal occasions. The *bhoṭo* would be perceived as an unusual choice, since Nepali yogis, like the Indian ones, either style themselves in loose-fitting ochre robes or wear a simple *dhoti*. The same holds true for the headdress: while the traditional custom for a yogi would be a turban (or no headdress at all), here Naraharinath is sporting a ochre hat shaped as a *ṭopi*, the men's cap traditional to both the Bahun-Chettri and Newari communities in Nepal, but decorated, in his case, by a *Oṃ* symbol on the front.

Though marking Yogi Naraharinath's ascetic status through their ochre color, both the *bhoṭo* and the *ṭopi* disrupt the expected image of the gruff and disheveled *sādhu*, disciplining his figure within the more domestic parameters of a traditional householder's garb and emphasizing his self-identification as a Nepali. Furthermore, the photo does not show any *rudrakṣa* beads, nor—significantly—the *nāḍ sinḡī* or *janeu*, the sacred whistle that marks one's first initiation into the Nāth order, this being possibly hidden under the *bhoṭo*. The *kuṇḍals* (the heavy earrings inserted through the thick of the ears upon full initiation) are thus the only element that identify Yogi Naraharinath as a member of the Nāth Sampradāya or, as most laymen would say, a *Kānphaṭa* (“split-ear”) *jogī*, a designation that the yogis of Nepal generally find demeaning and oppose vehemently.

Any possible idea that Yogi Naraharinath could have been just another *jogī* begging on the street, however, will be definitely removed as soon as the person contemplating the poster starts to read the text listing his intellectual achievements, poetical talent and organizational abilities:

“Yogi Naraharinath. *Śāstrī*. Having the knowledge of the Veda as his ornament; gem among the poets; skilled among the poets; extemporary poet; great poet; teacher of *dharma-śāstra*, teacher of *sāṃkhya-yoga*, teacher of *āyurveda*.”<sup>8</sup>

Besides these titles in classical branches of knowledge we find achievements in modern scholarship (“Archeologist. Writer of history. Publisher of history. Knowledgeable in languages in hundreds of scripts”)<sup>9</sup>, just before a presentation of his ritual activity (“Performer of 45 *lakṣahomas*. Performer of 129 *koṭi-homas*. Performer of

<sup>8</sup> *Yogī Naraharināthaḥ | Śāstrī | Vedavidyālaṅkāraḥ kaviratna-kavikovid-kavikānta-kavibhūṣaṇa-āśukavi-mahākaviḥ dharmasāstrācāryaḥ saṃkhyayogācārya āyurvedācāryaḥ |*

<sup>9</sup> *purātattvavedī | itihāsa-lekhakaḥ | itihāsa prakāśakaḥ | śataśolipibhāṣājñāḥ |*

5 *śiva-yāga.*)”<sup>10</sup> Only then we get one epithet that contextualizes him within the Nāth school (“Devoted to Śiva-Goraḥṣa”),<sup>11</sup> followed by a list of phrases that, now standard among his devotees when praising him, points to his qualities of character (“Lifelong student. Lifelong pilgrim. Lifelong practitioner of yoga. Lifelong volunteer. Lifelong philanthropist.”)<sup>12</sup> Further, we are told that he was “devoted to the peace and benefit of the whole world, *brahmacārī* from childhood and practitioner of the path of truth.”<sup>13</sup> The expression *brahmacārī* from childhood (*ābala*) is here a technical term, and not just another generic praise, since it designates somebody who has become a renunciant in his childhood or adolescence and has never gone through a stage of married life. In Nepal, where many people may choose some form of renunciation later in life, and where most yogis are actually married, with a somewhat hybrid status between temple-keepers, gurus and householders, yogis who have always been celibate are particularly rare and are the only ones eligible to assume certain roles, such as becoming *mahant* of a main temple, or *pīr*<sup>14</sup> of the Ratannath *mandir* in Dang. Again, this detail would distinguish him from other yogis that our visitor to the ashram would be familiar with.

What comes next becomes more specific, because it evokes a well-defined Vedic background for his biography: “Purified by millions and millions of repetitions of the *gayatrī*, mother of the Veda. Of the *gotra* of Bharadvāja, of pure *mānava* conduct. Having Bharadvāja, Āngirasa and Bṛhaspati as his three *pravaras*. Learned in the *Mādhyandīnīya* branch of the *Śukla Yajurveda*. Learned in the *Īśāvāsyaopaniṣad*.” Both

<sup>10</sup> 45 *lakṣahomakṛt* / 129 *koṭihomakṛt* / 5 *śivayāgakṛt* /

<sup>11</sup> *śivagoraḥṣabhakta*

<sup>12</sup> *ājīvana vidyārthi* / *ājīvana padayātrī* / *ājīvana yogābhyāsī* / *ājīvana svayamsevak* / *ājīvana paropākaraparāyaṇaḥ* /

<sup>13</sup> *viśvaśānti-viśvakalyāṇa parāyaṇa* / *ābālabrahmacārī satyapathacārī* /

<sup>14</sup> The symbolic chief of the temple, a position, to be renewed yearly, that embodies the founder Siddha Ratannath

*gotra* and *pravara* (the former designating the endogamic clan within one's caste, the latter indicating the ancestors to be mentioned during a sacrifice and to determine marriage eligibility) are terms mostly relevant for brahmin householders, while Nāth yogis are identified instead by their *panth*, one of the twelve branches in which the whole of the order is subdivided. A lay reader, however, would not necessarily be informed about the policies of self-identification of the yogis and may therefore not notice this deviation from the usual Nath praxis: he or she would grasp that the figure presented here is a *paṇḍit*, rather than a member of an esoteric tantric lineage.

As for the word *mānav*, this is reminiscent, of course, of the *Mānava-dharma-sāstra* or *Manu Smṛti*, but, while the word “*Mānava*” in the *sāstra* is clearly a patronymic derived from the name Manu, to the general Nepali reader this reference is not immediate and *mānav* is more often understood in its ordinary meaning of “human”, the normal usage of the word in Nepali and Hindi (such as in the phrase *mānav ādhikār*, “human rights”), conveying therefore the idea of a dharma for, or inherent in, humanity itself. As we will see in relation to Yogi Naraharinath's notion of *mānava dharma*, this linguistic ambiguity may, in fact, be used as the basis for suggesting that a *sāstric* version of dharma is coterminous with human morality as such.

The inclusion of Yogi Naraharinath in the world of brahmanical scholarship is reinforced by two references to specific texts: the *Śukla Yajurveda* and the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*. The *Śukla Yajurveda*, in the context of contemporary Bahun-Chetri ritual praxis, is the source of the *Rudrāṣṭādhyāyī*, colloquially called *Rudrī*, a compilation of eight hymns to Rudra from the *Yajurveda* that is often celebrated as *pūjā* to Śiva in

special occasions—a reference that contextualizes Naraharinath within the parameter of orthodox Bahun-Chettri ritual praxis.

This emphasis on brahmanical elements in the representation of Naraharinath—definitely different from the tropes of Nāth hagiographies that I have overviewed in the previous chapter—raises a series of questions on the Sanskritization of the Nāth Sampradāya, on the public persona of the Nepalese yogis, and on the intersection of different domains of knowledge: Sanskrit scholarship, on the one side, ritual expertise, on the other, but also history and archeology. If our visitor, eager to learn more about the intellectual project behind this unusual figure, approaches Shrishnath, Naraharinath’s successor to the mahantship of the ashram, he would be told that the core of his teachings, his “*siddhānt*,” in local parlance, was that mankind originated in the Himalayas, and that his life-long tapas was to investigate this history (*itihās*) and preach (*pracār-prasār garnu*) the original Vedic Hindu dharma. Blessing the visitor with a pinch of *vibhūti* from the *akhaṇḍa-dhūni* kept perpetually alive in Naraharinath’s room, Shrishnath would then direct him to get the *darśan* of the *kuṇḍa* where Yogi ji celebrated his famous *koṭi-homa*.

### ***Biographical data***

As for the hard facts of Naraharinath’s life, his disciples are generally reticent to comment on specific events of his biography, but they can provide a couple of documents that cover his public engagement, mostly with celebratory purposes, written by two of his admirers: the article *Kirtir yasya sa jīvati* (“One who has fame, lives on”) in the *Yogī Naraharināth Abhinandanda Grantha* (“Celebratory collection on Yogi Naraharinath”)

written in 1997 (with Yogi ji still alive) by Swami Prapannacarya, one of the current leaders of the *Viśva Hindū Mahāsaṅgha* (discussed below), and the booklet *Yogī Naraharināth* by the yogi-householder Kashinath Yogi, published in 2010.

Swami Prapannacarya gives B.S. 1969 (1913) as the date of birth for Balvir Singh Thapa, while Kashinath Yogi reports it to be B.S. 1971 (1915). They both agree that he was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of *Phalgun* (February-March), from Gauri Devi and Lalit Singh Thapa, in Lalu, a village belonging to the Kalikot district in the Karnali region (Prapannacarya 23, Yogi 11). This is a remote mountain area in Western Nepal, culturally close to the Indian Himalaya, with a predominantly Bahun-Chetri population. Prapannacarya emphasizes his mother’s influence on his early upbringing, thus reminding of Naraharinath’s own emphasis on the importance of maternal education (*mātr-śikṣā*) for national character building, while Kashinath Yogi mentions a figure called Yajñaprasad Acharya as Naraharinath’s childhood’s teacher. At the age of eight (Prapannacarya) or nine (Yogi), a talented boy who had quickly learned the alphabet, Balvir Singh received his *upanayana* and met his future guru. Kashinath Yogi’s account of this event is more congruent with the Nath hagiographical style, while Prapannacarya’s report is more formal.

For Kashinath Yogi: “at the age of nine, wandering away from his birthplace, the village of Lalu, having come to Jumla, at Cauhancaur Bazar, he stayed in the mandir [of] Candannath [and] Bhairavnath.” There he meets his guru “a *sādhu*, a split-ear (*kān-cirā*) *bābā*, *mahant*, *śivdarśanī*,<sup>15</sup> Yogi Chipranath”, who, understanding that he has met a worthy boy, gives him instruction in the path of yoga as well as knowledge (*vidyā*), keeping him in the Bhairav mandir for three years. At the age of thirteen, the guru

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<sup>15</sup> “having the appearance of Shiva”, that is, dressed in *śaiva* attire.

formally requests the boy from his parents, and brings him to Devi Patan<sup>16</sup> in India, to instruct him in *guru-mantra* and *yoga* for three more years, after which he initiates him in the Satyanath *panth*<sup>17</sup> with name Naraharinath. Since the disciple wants to study Sanskrit, and there are no schools for this at Devi Patan, he asks his guru's permission to go somewhere else. He is then, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, sent to the *Sarasvatī Saṃskṛita College* in Khanna, Ludhiana, a school supported by donations (Yogi 2010:11-12).

Kashinath Yogi takes his delight in describing the state of indigence under which Naraharinath completes his education: he has only one meal per day, two sets of clothes to wear, and, since there is no electricity, he traps some fireflies in a transparent jar to make light for his nightly studies. He spends his small allowance to buy school supplies, and, to quench his hunger, he sometimes picks wild fruits from local fields. Having graduated from the school with the title of *śāstri*, he returns to his guru in Devi Patan, He departs again, however, wandering to pilgrimage places and meeting with other *sādhus* and learned men, until he settles down in Varanasi at the local Nath *maṭha*, the *Gorakṣaṭillā* (Yogi 2010:13-15). In B.S. 2000 (1943-44), being immensely respected among the local *sādhus*, he is selected as secretary (*saciv*) of the *Yoga-pracāriṇī*<sup>18</sup> association of the *sampradāya*. (Yogi 2010:16).

According to Prapannacarya, instead, the young Balvir Singh first leaves his family home to enroll in the Siddh Chandannath Languge School (*Siddha Candannāth Bhāṣā Pāṭhaśālā*) of Jumla. The principal of the school is a native of Udaypur, *mahant*

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<sup>16</sup> where the important Nāth temple of Pateshvari Devi is located, a place related the Ratannath mandir of Caughera, from where the yogis lead a yearly procession to Devi Patan.

<sup>17</sup> One of the twelve panths of the Nath order

<sup>18</sup> a publishing house

Kshipranath, who says, Prapannacarya, had moved to Jumla attracted by the natural beauty (*prākṛtik saundarya*) of the place. Impressed by the boy, and thinking that he could become “a living image of Guru Gorakhnath” (*Guru Gorakhnāth-ko pratimūrti*), Kshipranath initiates him in the *sampradāya* with name Naraharinath, for “the defense of the eternal Vedic Hindu dharma, Hindu culture, and Hindu nation” (*sanātana vaidika hindu-dharma, hindu-saṃskṛti, hindu-rāṣṭra-ko rakṣā*) (Prapannacarya 1997:24).

Whether this was Kshipranath’s own phrasing of the instruction he was imparting to his pupil, Naraharinath’s understanding of it, or perhaps Prapannacarya’s wording, it is impossible to ascertain. The tone of this account, however, is consistent with Naraharinath’s own nationalist leanings and reflects Prapannacarya’s social status: the Swami is in fact an important member of the Hindu Vishwa Mahasangh and seems more invested than Kashinath Yogi, a yogi-householder, in extolling Naraharinath’s intellectual achievements in a Hindu nationalist perspective. If his report is accurate, we can observe that the Nāth institutions in which Kshipranath operates already present a high level of Sanskritization.

Prapannacarya states in fact that after completing his education at the Siddh Chandannath Language School, Naraharinath moves with his guru at *Gorakhnāth Mṛgasthalī Siddhācala*, the main Nāth *maṭha* in Kathmandu, where he studies the *Laghukaumudī*, the *Amarakośa*, the *Caṇḍī*, the *Gītā*, and other books with Kshipranath. From there, he moves to the *Yogāśrama* of Mayapuri in Haridwar, to study at the *Yogāśrama Sanskrta Vidyālaya* founded by Purnanath, where he studies *vyākaraṇa* and *darśana* with *mahāmahopadhyāya* Dravyesh Jha, and *vyākaraṇa*, *kāvya*, and *sāhitya* with *paṇḍit* Jñaniram Shastri.

Between 1935 and 1936, we find him in Varanasi, at the *Gorakṣaṭilla Maidaginī*, where he studies with Yogi Shankarnath Falegrahi and with *mahāmahopadhāya* Harihara Kripalu. The syllabus here includes the *Siddhānta Kaumudī*, the first *āhnika* of the *Mahābhāṣya*, and the *Brahmakāṇḍa* of the *Vākyapadīya*. Afterwards, he travels in the company of other sadhus and reaches Lahore, where he enrolls at the *Lahore Prācyā Vidyāpīṭha* to study Mammaṭa's *Kāvya prakāśa*, the first half of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Kadāmbarī*, and other "philosophical subjects" (*dārśanik viśaya*) with *mahāmahopadhyāya* Mādhava Bhaṇḍāri and Keshevdev Gauda.

In 1938, he passes the *śāstri* examination at the *Sarasvatī Saṃskṛta Mahāvidyālaya* in Ludhiana, where he has studied *sāhitya* and the six *darśanas* with Vishvanath Prabhakar, winning all the competitions in *śāstrārtha*, *kāvya*, and composition of *nibandha*. Thirsting for more, he moves to Haridwar again, to study the Veda at the *Kāḍī Viśvavidyālaya*, whose vice-chancellor (*upakulapati*), Jagdev ji, is a scholar of the Ārya Samāj. This takes Naraharinath as his favorite student, and teaches him famous *sūktas*, *anuvākas*, *kaṇḍikās* and mantras from the four Vedas, while other teachers instruct him in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa*, *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*, *Tāṇḍyabrāhmaṇa*, and *Gopāṭhabrahmaṇa*. He passes the exam for the title of *Vedālaṅkara* in 1940, but his quest for knowledge has not yet come to an end. He travels again, to visit the library of the *Motināth Saṃskṛta Vidyālaya* in Rawalpindi, the library of the *Raghunāth Saṃskṛta College* in Jammu and Kashmir, and other libraries in Multan and Peshawar for the purpose of studying the Śaivāgama (Prapannacarya 1997:24-25).

Kashinath Yogi describes the course of events that brought him to be selected as the next *mahant* of Mrigasthali, the position being vacant.<sup>19</sup> Since the mahantship of Mrigasthali was a religious foundation (*guthī*) funded by the royal house since the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah, and oversaw by the Prime Minister since the time of Jang Bahadur Rana, it was customary that the *mahant* be appointed under recommendation (*siphāris*) of the minister, with “royal seal” (lit. “red seal”, *lālmohar*) from the king. The person formally in charge of appointing a new *mahant* is thus the then prime minister Padma Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, who in B.S. 2003 (1946-47) asks Digvijayanath, the *mahant* of the Gorakhnath *maṭha* in Gorakhpur, to assume the leadership of Mrigasthali. Digvijayanath refuses, saying that it would be difficult for a person to hold the mahantship of two different locations, and suggests to Padma Shamsher the name of Naraharinath, residing in Varanasi at the time—a Nepali skilled in the path of yoga (*yogakram-mā kauśala*) and celibate since childhood (*bālbhramacārī*). Naraharinath is then summoned to Mrigasthali to talk with Padma Shamsher, and replies to his request expressing a concern for the scarcity of “*pūjā* items etc.” (*pūjā sāmagri ādi*) in the temple.<sup>20</sup> The minister assures him that he will receive help in this regard, and on the day of *Śivarātri* of B.S. 2003 (February 1947), with the *lālmohar* of king Tribhuvan, Naraharinath becomes *mahant*.

Prapannacarya does not discuss the events leading to Naraharinath’s appointment, but simply states that after studying the *Śaivāgamas*, Naraharinath decides to turn his path

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<sup>19</sup> According to Prapannacarya’s account, the previous *mahant* must have been Kshipranath himself, as no other yogi is mentioned in connection with the *maṭha*. Bholanath Yogi (personal communication) says that the *mahant* was indeed Kshipranath/Chipranath.

<sup>20</sup> Since the performance of the Nāth *pūjā*, at Mrigasthali as elsewhere, is not particularly expensive, requiring for the most part only ghee and flour, Naraharinath’s words can be read as a formulaic way of negotiating the terms of funding for his appointment, thereby requesting an increase with respect to his predecessor.

into that of a *karmayogi*, “for the rights and the benefit of the whole *Oṃkāra* family, along with the advancement of the *Gorakṣa-sampradāya*.” (p. 25): keeping in mind the *śloka* from the Rāmāyana “*api svarṇamayī laṅkā na me lakṣmaṇa rocate / jananī janmabhūmiśca svargādapi garīyasī*”<sup>21</sup> Yogi ji returns to do *sevā* in Nepal. After listing several names of other Swamis and learned men that had chosen to stay in India to live more comfortably, Prapannacarya states that Yogi ji phrased his commitment in this way: “The dishonor that I face in my maternal land (*mātrī-bhūmi*) is my honor. The dishonor made to me by my country (*deśa*), is my great honor. The jail of my country is the birthplace (*janmabhūmi*) of Lord Krishna for me.” He also quotes a verse of a song of the vernacular poet (*jana-kavī*) Keshar Dharmaraj Thapa: “Don’t cry Mother, I’ll wipe away your tears,” to state that Naraharinath, following the emotion of the song, came back to Nepal. “This”—he says—“was the good fortune of the only Hindu nation of the world (*viśva-ko ek mātra Hindu-rāṣṭra*).”

The notion of the *Hindu-rāṣṭra* lies at the very core of Yogiji’s political commitment, and Prapannacarya mentions how, in 1950, he founds an organization called *Karmavīr Mahāmaṇḍal* “with the main goal of protecting the Vedic Hindu religion and serving the nation.” He does not elaborate, however, on the specific activities of the organization, displaying in this the same reticence of Naraharinath’s disciples. Some information on it is nonetheless available from secondary sources, as Naraharinath’s role in the Gorkha disturbances of 1960 is the only mention that he receives in the literature on Nepali history.

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<sup>21</sup> “Even if Lanka is made of gold, oh Lakṣmaṇa, I don’t like it. One’s mother and place of birth are even better than heaven.”

Between the founding of the *Karmavīr Mahāmaṇḍal* and the Gorkha incident, however, he spends ten years traveling throughout the country, collecting historical inscriptions, and observing local customs. This experience—commemorated in Naraharinath’s book *Śikhariṇī Yātrā*, published three decades later, in 1992—blurs the boundaries between the wanderings of a *rāmtā jogī*, the paradigmatic itinerant ascetic,<sup>22</sup> and the fieldwork of a historian-cum-anthropologist:

“Which dharma? How many deities? Which arts? Which crafts, which governance? Which ethics? Which scripts? Which inscriptions? Which common language? How? How was the origin of the Vedic nation? How the arrangement of the kingdom? How the kings and the people? How the whole world? May all people know!” (ŚY 32)

The subtle shift between the ascetic and the scholarly level of the travel is best captured by the commentary to a verse of *Śikhariṇī Yātrā* written by Naraharinath’s disciple Shrishnath:

“The greatest pleasure is in the object of one’s personal search.  
The day that the limit of *tapasyā* is reached, that is success.  
For some, worldly objects will be a great pleasure.  
For me, this robe (*kanthā*) is sweet and the path is broad (ŚY 1).

*Kanthā*, in Sanskrit, means “ascetic robe”, and this is probably the meaning it has in Naraharinath’s verse, but Shrishnath, in his Hindi translations, glosses it as *itihās-kī kanthā*, perhaps having in mind the Nepali *kanthā garnu* (“to memorize”), thus reading *kanthā* as a learning process. This ambiguity is present in Naraharinath’s own language:

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<sup>22</sup> The interplay between itinerancy and settled monasticism in the Nath tradition has been explored at length by V. Bouillier (2008), who has argued that, though the permanency of the *sampradāya* rests on its monastic network, the value attached to itinerancy is paramount, and tales of personal wanderings figures prominently in the self-representation of yogis.

his travels are styled as *tīrtha-yātrā* (“travel to *tīrthas*”)<sup>23</sup> or *pād-yātrā* (“travel by foot”), which both signify forms of pilgrimage, and paying homage to distant deities, investigating the history of their places, or getting acquainted with the customs of the local people are all possible goals.

Naraharinath presents himself as traveling with many friends on some occasions, but often he is alone, relying on the food provided to him by the villagers of the places he visits.

“Somewhere there were students with me: Kahar, Ghana, Lakshmi, Bal!  
Somewhere Tek, Krishna, Nayan, Ratan, Bhoj, Dhakan,  
In other places also there were hundreds of friends,  
Somewhere alone, for a long time, research was done” (ŚY 41)

A crucial event is recorded for the day after the *pūrṇimā* of the month of *Śrāvaṇa* (July-August) of 1957, during his travel to Mt. Kailas, where he reports an encounter with the *yeti*, or *vān-mānche* (“forest-man”), which he deems to be the original inhabitant of the Himalaya. Reportedly, he sights the abominable man while on the Western bank of the *Śivagaṅgā* river, with a group of other thirty-four people. This encounter will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5, in relation to Naraharinath’s reflections on the origins of humankind.

The most significant insight that Naraharinath gains from this travel is that the Himalaya is the source of the Vedic civilization:

“From where did our origin (*maulīkatā*) come? Where is the place of origins (*mūlasthalī*)?

Languages, ornaments, clothes, culture, crafts, models, styles—from where?

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<sup>23</sup> a *tīrtha*, “crossing place,” is a place of soteriological significance that is visited as a pilgrimage destination.

In which [place] are the lands of the different clans (*thar*)? How did the Tharu, who live below, come to be?

The Veda, the Himal is eldest. This Kailash is witness of all.” (ŚY 34)

The notion of a primordial Vedic religion originated from the Himalaya is the core of his political commitment, and informs his vision for Nepal, characterized by a conservative, even primordialist, project in a world undergoing major changes and ridden with social conflict. In what follows, I will therefore briefly overview the historical events that led to the Gorkha incident of 1960.

The first party that had expressed the democratic tendencies of Nepalese society was the Praja Parishad, founded in 1939 to fight against Rana hegemony, whose founding members were all sentenced to death for their activities in 1940, with the exception of Tanka Prasad Acharya: as a brahman, he could not be executed but was sentenced to life in prison (Whelpton 2005:67). Meanwhile, in India, the training in political activism developed during the *svarāj* movement at the Benares Hindu University inspired Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala to organize a Nepali Congress, founded in 1946 in Benares with other Nepalese expatriates (Tripathi 2011). The party soon merged with some survivors of the Praja Parishad, electing Tanka Prasad Acharya (still in prison) as its nominal chairmen, with B.P. Koirala as acting chairman. In 1950, this political entity merged with a third voice of political dissent: the Nepal Democratic Congress formed by C-Class<sup>24</sup> Ranas in Calcutta, now becoming the Nepali Congress (Mitra et al. 2004:279).

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<sup>24</sup> According to system of classification put in place to regulate the succession of Rana prime ministers, there were three categories of Ranas: A-class, B-class, C-class. The first group was constituted by sons of legitimate high-caste wives, while the other two were formed by children of lower caste wives and concubines within the Rana family.

Though officially committed to non-violent methods, the party organized a fighting force with students and former Gurkha soldiers from the British army, with the goal of staging a revolt against the Ranas and giving de-facto power to the king, hereto a figurehead in the hands of the prime minister. The conspiracy was uncovered and the king decided to escape. In November 1950 he sought shelter at the Indian embassy, from where he flew to India, leaving behind at the palace his three-year-old son Gyanendra. Military skirmishes around the Indo-Nepali border soon ensued, with the Nepali Congress volunteers fighting against the supporters of the Ranas. The Indian government, though maintaining diplomatic relationships with the Prime Minister, covertly permitted the activities of the Nepali dissidents, until mass surrenders and defections of government troops marked a new position of power for the insurgents. Massive anti-Rana demonstrations welcomed a British delegation in Kathmandu, and after prolonged diplomatic efforts of the Indian Congress, the Rana Prime Minister agreed to recognize Tribhuvan as de facto ruler, along with a coalition cabinet composed of Ranas and representatives of the other political parties. February 15, 1951 marked the end of more than a century of Rana dominance in the country, putting an end to their privileges of agnatic succession that had been instituted by Jang Bahadur in 1846. (Whelpton 71-72).

The political equilibrium of this nascent democracy, however, was highly unstable. Conservative forces, particularly those tied to the Ranas, organized their own party to advance their positions. The first organization thus constituted, the Gorkha Dal, became the center of a violent confrontation in April 1951, when B.P. Koirala, fearing a coup, arrested its secretary-general Bharat Shamsheer Rana and shot to death one of the Gorkha Dal armed supporters— palace guards of the Ranas— that were attacking his house in

revenge. In 1952, Bharat Shamsher Rana formed a new party, the Gorkha Parishad, again constituted for the most part by Rana supporters (Whelpton 2011:87).

A schism in the Congress further destabilized Nepali politics, as Dilli Raman Regmi's Nepali National Congress, born from a group of dissidents within B.P. Koirala's party in 1950, sided with the Communist Party of Nepal and the Praja Parishad to protest against the new government. The members nominated by King Tribhuvan to the advisory board were, in fact, all from Koirala's Congress or independents, with no representation of the other parties. After an incident in which a protester was killed by the police, Koirala stepped down from his position, leaving power to Tribhuvan. The king then appointed as prime minister Matrika Prasad Koirala, B.P.'s half-brother, more willing to accept royal authority. Due to disagreements internal to the party, M.P. was expelled from the Congress in 1952, brief military clashes ensued, and Tribhuvan, counseled on this by Jawaharlal Nehru, re-assumed full power in 1952 (Whelpton 2011:88).

The inability of the political parties to reach an agreement, and Tribhuvan's own inexperience at balancing the situation, halted the development of an interim administration and the drafting of a constitution. In 1953 B.P. Koirala set up a new party, the Rashtriya Praja Party, his brother M.P. got reappointed as prime minister, and another splinter faction of the Congress, the Leftist Nepali Congress, merged with B.P.'s new group. In 1954, a coalition with M.P.'s party was formed by the Praja Parishad and Regmi's Congress, thus aligning with the moderate element of the Koirala family previous radical voices of Nepali politics. In 1955, under the regency of crown prince Mahendra, ruling on behalf of his ailing father, M.P. stepped down from the government due to disagreements internal to his party (Whelpton 2011:89).

With the death of Tribhuvan in 1955, the balance of power shifted more and more towards the royal palace. After a brief period with a new council of advisers, in 1956 Mahendra chose Tanka Prasad Acharya as prime minister, with a well-defined anti-India agenda and a number of royal favorites in his cabinet. The bone of contention of the struggle for democracy—a constitution—started to seem as a very distant dream when T.P. Acharya declared that the elections promised for 1957 would be held only for a parliament, not for a constitutional assembly, implying that the content of the constitution would be drafted by the royal palace itself. This pronouncement made him unpopular both with the Congress and with his own party members. In 1957, Bhadrakali Mishra, from a dissident Congress group, became the new president of the Praja Parishad, and Acharya's government resigned in July (Whelpton 2011:91).

A new organization, the United Democratic Party, probably funded by Mahendra, rose to prominence in 1955, with K.I. Singh, a radical militant of the insurgency of 1951, as new prime minister, this time with an anti-China rhetoric. His announcement that the 1957 elections were to be postponed, along with his attempt at imposing Nepali language in the Hindi-speaking schools of the Terai, quickly made him lose support, and his government was also dissolved. In the same year, the Congress, the Praja Parishad and the Nepali National Congress—allied in a so-called United Democratic Front—began a *satyagraha* for elections to be held within six months. Singh's United Democratic Party, the Gorkha Dal, and some smaller groups opposed this deadline, envisaging February 12, 1959 as a more realistic date. Mahendra suggested voting in 1959, but on the anniversary of Tribhuvan's return, February 18. The Congress, noticing the poor support received by

their *satyagraha*, accepted the king's proposal. They were to be, at any rate, parliamentary elections, with no plans for a constitutional assembly (Whelpton 2011:92).

Though a Drafting Commission was formed, the constitution promulgated was, in fact, the product of Mahendra, assisted by a British constitutional lawyer. It provided for a Lower House (or House of Representatives) of 109 members and an Upper House (or Senate) of 36 members, half appointed by the Lower House and half appointed by the king. The wording of the document enabled the king to override all organs of government except the Supreme Court, making it legal for him to impose his will on other actors. Six days after the promulgation of the constitution, elections were to be held (Whelpton 2011:93).

In spite of the multiplicity of political organizations vying for votes, only three parties had a clearly recognizable political identity: the Communist Party, the center-left Nepali Congress (advocating the development of heavy industry with Indian capital, along socialist guidelines), and the right-wing Gorkha Parishad (supporting the monarchy, drawing its base mainly from Thakuri and Chetri castes). The Congress won with 37 per cent of the votes, due to a nationwide network of support. On May 27, months after the elections, B.P. Koirala was finally invited by Mahendra to form a government, and he set himself to work on three major reforms: the abolition of the tax-free *birta* system of tenurial possession of the Ranas, the abolition of the *rajyauta* system, under which former rajas could maintain control of their territories paying an annual tribute to the government, and the nationalization of the country's forest, hitherto personal property of the king's brothers (Whelpton 2011:93-96).

It is at this juncture that Naraharinath's public engagement begins, siding with the right-wing royalist faction. John Whelpton mentions in fact that the Karmavir Mandal, which he reports being funded by Mahendra himself, "encouraged the *rajyauta* chiefs to resist abolition of their fiefdoms and was also involved in disturbances in Gorkha in October 1960 (Whelpton 2011:98). Kashinath Yogi reports that in the month of *Kārtik* (October-November) B.S. 2017 (1960), the Koirala government arrested Naraharinath while he was addressing his followers in the *bazar* of Jumla and brought him to Hulaksar in Dailekh, sparking the protests of his followers. The Praja Parishad of K.I. Singh also protested, and Naraharinath was moved to Biratnagar. His books were seized by the government and, brought to Singh Darbar<sup>25</sup>, destroyed in consequence of a fire that erupted there in 1973 (Yogi 2010:34-35).

We may here pause to reflect on this political choice, asking which circumstances led Naraharinath to side the king. The first factor to be considered is the deep history of mutual engagement between yogis and Himalayan monarchs, as overviewed by Veronique Bouillier in her study of the monastery of Caughera, for the Dang region (1997, 1998), and of the *Yogī Vamśavāli* that outlines Bhagavantanath's support to Prithvi Narayan Shah, for Gorkha (1991). In both cases, spiritual and temporal power worked in symbiosis, and the royal endowment of land to the *maṭhas*, the *guthī*, implied that a part of the king's sovereignty was devolved the yogis. This delegation of power had important consequences on both sides: the king could rest assured that the *nitya-naimittika pūjā*<sup>26</sup> for the welfare of the kingdom was always faithfully performed, and the yogis enjoyed patronage, revenues from the land grants, corvée labor (*rakam*) from their

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<sup>25</sup> The former Rana palace, used by the government after 1953.

<sup>26</sup> Ordinary and extraordinary (lit: perpetual and occasional) worship

tenants, and the right of jurisdiction upon the territories under their control. This was particularly true in Dang, where the monastery held considerable power since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century (although conflict with the state over matters of fiscal management and land tenure occurred quite often) and the practice of *rakam* survived even the democratic reforms of 1951 (Bouillier 1998:227).

Besides material interests, however, the relationship between the monarchy and the yogis was also of ritual nature. The *mahant* of Mṛgasthali—in our case, Naraharinath, who held this position throughout the time of Tribhuvan, Mahendra and Birendra—enjoyed ritual superiority in regard to the king, as signified by the fact that he could mark the monarch's forehead with the ritual *ṭikā*. In doing so he symbolically perpetuated the first act of blessing that Gorakhnath bestowed upon Prthvi Narayan before his conquest of the Kathmandu Valley, and continued the tradition of reverence that the Gorkhali king instituted towards his guru Bhagavantnath. He was not, however, the only religious figure to have ritual prerogatives in connection with the palace. The Newari priest of the goddess Taleju was also traditionally bound to give *dikṣā* to the king (Toffin 1986, 1993), and brahman *rājgurus* had always been an essential part of the royal entourage (Whelpton 1991).

This institutional relationship did not always translate into a smooth alignment of between the king and his priests,<sup>27</sup> but it is here important to notice that, among the Shah

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<sup>27</sup> In 1799, for instance, Rana Bahadur Shah's grief for Kantavati, a brahman widow he had illegitimately married and later died of smallpox, was remembered as "wholly inappropriate for a king," as Mocko (2012:59) euphemistically phrases it: he famously tortured to death the doctors who had failed to save her life, smashed the images of the gods who had not answered his prayers, and retired into voluntary exile in Varanasi. Besides being one of the best-known episodes of Shah family history, Rana Bahadur's romance dramatically highlighted the tension between the role of the king as protector of a brahmanical version of *dharma* (of which the ban on the remarriage of widows was an integral part) and the actual proceedings of human life in the royal palace.

rulers of post-1951 Nepal, Mahendra was the one most invested in augmenting his power by catalyzing the influence of religious figures. His sponsorship was particularly veered towards individuals that he believed to be endowed with supernatural powers, or that enjoyed general popularity as religious teachers. Sanu Bhai Dangol, in his discussion of Mahendra's rule, observes that the king established a privileged connection with several astrologers and *tāntrikas* that performed esoteric rituals on his behalf and that foresaw that he would maintain his position only by the use of force. As for figures that did not have powers of divination, but held considerable respect among conservative groups, he selected as protégées *paṇḍit* Somnath Sigdel<sup>28</sup> and *paṇḍit* Padam Prasad Bhattarai, leaders of two different factions of brahmans, sponsoring a *Koṭi Homa* with the former and a *Rudra Mahāyajña* with the latter. For the same reason he also restored numerous temples and shrines, thus earning the sympathies of those who looked at the Hindu heritage as the basis of national religiosity (Dangol 1999:189-194).

As for Naraharinath, Dangol defines Mahendra's relationships with him as one of "misutilization" [sic], reporting that the king supported the Karmavir Mahamandala for political gain against the Nepali Congress (Dangol 1999:194). We can here observe that Mahendra's conservative agenda—backed up by the Bahun-Chetri sections of the population, invested in the promotion of a Hindu national identity, and inimical to the democratic reforms that the secular Congress envisaged—was indeed aligned with Naraharinath's political preferences. As I will overview in the next chapters, however, their conception of royal power differed on one substantial point: if Mahendra capitalized on the rhetoric of sacred kingship, whereby the Nepali king was the embodiment of

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<sup>28</sup> Somnath Sigdel (1884-1972) was a famous Sanskrit scholar, particularly well known in the field of *kavya* (Pradhan 1984:56). He will subsequently cooperate with Naraharinath in the foundation of the *Bṛhad Ādhyātmika Pariṣad*.

Vishnu, Naraharinath never used this image to extoll the monarchy. On the contrary, he regarded the king as a necessary power, but always dependent on Gorakhnath's blessing for his continued power, and he looked at the broader constituency of the Gorkhalis, as brave warriors and enlightened citizens, as the ultimate force in the defense of *dharma*.

In 1960, however, in consequence of B.P. Koirala's attempted reforms, Naraharinath, his followers, and the right-wing Gorkha Parishad had reasons to fear that the very institution of the Hindu monarchy was being weakened. The most detailed treatment of the events is the one offered by Joshi and Rose, who discuss the anti-Congress protests in Gorkha:

“The principal party implicated in these disturbances by the government was the Karmavir Mahamandal. Originally a socioreligious organization, this organization had been transformed into a political party on the eve of the 1959 general elections. The Karmavir Mahamandal, whose political program aimed at the reinstatement of Nepal's ancient religious and cultural traditions, could not have chosen a better place than Gorkha to launch an agitation against the Nepali Congress government. Leaders of the Karmavir Mahamandala had often decried the institutions of parliamentary democracy and elections as alien to the history and culture of Nepal, and had upheld the appropriateness of a benevolent absolute monarchy, extolling the superior virtues of the traditions and policies of the Shah dynasty over those of contemporary political parties. The party's financial and political support came from the traditional aristocracy throughout the country. In their emphasis on religious and economic conservatism they were akin to some of the Gorkha Parishad leadership, though the latter party had expressly committed itself to democracy. It is thus probable that the Karmavir Mahamandal was able to enlist the support of the Gorkha Parishad, at least unofficially, in its agitation in Gorkha against the Nepali Congress government.” (Joshi and Rose 1966:360-61).

Joshi and Rose mention the difficulty in ascertaining the course of events of the agitation, due to contradictory reports. Opposition to the Nepali Congress in Gorkha—a stronghold of Bahun-Chetri conservatism—had always been widespread, and was further radicalized by the propaganda of the Gorkha Parishad and the Karmavir Mahamandala. A main reason of dissent was constituted by the regulations on the conservation of forests introduced by the Nepali Congress, imposing restrictions on the customary harvesting of bamboo and fuel wood from local woods, while the Congress, on the other hand, advanced its counterpropaganda against the Gorkha Parishad representing it as a party of landlords and exploiters, showcasing itself as siding with the peasants.

The disturbances started when Naraharinath incited the population of Gorkha to protest against the policies of the Nepali Congress. Indra Adhikari reports that Naraharinath spread rumors in Gorkha “that the NC government intended to confiscate their property, impose taxes on personal material such as heads of goats and tails of pigs and so on. Declaring himself as a re-incarnation of Saint Gorakhnath, he exhorted the people to rise up in arms against a “sinful” government.” (Adhikari 2015:90)

There were, however, different versions on what happened in Gorkha. The government emitted a communiqué on October 28, saying that the leaders of the Karmavir Mahamandal “had been abetting destructive activities in the district in collusion with local landlords and other feudal elements,” (Joshi and Rose 1966:362) in consequence of which some members of the organization were arrested, and the documents of the party office were seized. On October 23, under the Security Act, a curfew was imposed in Gorkha, and two days later

“a crowd of 3,000 persons armed with sticks, *khukris*, and swords surrounded the government offices. The efforts of the Bada Hakim and other officials to pacify the mob

failed, and gunfire was resorted to when the demonstrators began hurling stones at the police, injuring eleven of them. The government communiqué made it clear that it had no alternative other than to take strict action against those who opposed the constituted authority and sought to overthrow the legal government by force. Seven persons were reported to have been killed and six injured.” (Joshi and Rose 1966:362)

B.P. Koirala, in an interview with the journalist Haridev Sharma, reads the role of the Karmavir Mahamandal in Gorkha as thoroughly orchestrated by the king:

“Q: What is the story of Yogi Naraharinath? Why did you arrest him?

A: The King wanted to create problems for us by disrupting law and order situation, and for the same purpose he enlisted the services of Yogi Naraharinath. His party was known as Karmavir Mahamandal. The King financed this group to create trouble for us. There were law and order disturbances in two or three districts. In one district it was a serious affair. The police had to open fire and eight people were killed. Then I started undertaking a tour, explaining our position. So that also failed. We arrested Naraharinath and caught hold of his papers and correspondences which had incriminating evidence of his link with the palace, I made a statement in the press at that time I was in Bombay for the Nepalese Students’ Conference that Naraharinath has been arrested and sent to Jail.

Q: The King was there in Nepal at that time?

A: No, the King was in England on a state visit. He had already decided to stage a coup. But he was apprehensive whether we would be able to retaliate, whether we had our men and arms. Unfortunately, we did not have; if we had even 500 men with arms, the King would not have dared take such action against us.” (Tripathi 2011:56-57)

The National Democratic Front, instead, reported that the police, following an order from the government, had fired on a peaceful demonstration, continuing to shoot even after the crowd was trying to disperse. It also denied that there was any evidence of

Naraharinath's acting on behalf of the king, and considered the resort to violence to be unjustified. (Joshi and Rose 1966:362)

There was, also, uncertainty on Naraharinath's whereabouts. According the Inquiry Committee sent by Nepali Congress, he had arrived in Gorkha on October 2, and stayed there for the whole duration of the disturbances. The National Democratic Front, instead, claimed that he had left on September 28, one month before the incident. (Joshi and Rose 1966:361-362)

Tribhuvan Nath discusses the nature of evidence of Naraharinath's connection with Mahendra:

“Evidences deposed by the government officials of Gorkha revealed that in a number of public speeches, Yogi Narahari Nath told his audience that the King had given him a donation of Rs. 500. A copy of the letter that claimed to have received from the Military Secretary to the King was found on a search of his person, and produced by local officials as evidence before the Commission.” (Nath 1999:33)

Sanu Bhai Dangol quotes a similar report of the *Weekly Rastrapukar*:

“A few days before the scandal of 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1960, the government traced from Yogi Narahari Nath a letter. It was a letter written by General Sher Bahadur Malla, the then Military Secretary to the King, written under the command of him (the King). In the letter, Malla had asked Yogiji to contact the King for launching agitation in Gorkha. The letter brought dissension between the King and Prime Minister B.P. Koirala. (Dangol 1999:195)

The “Gorkha incident” proved to be a major turning point in Nepalese politics, putting an end to the first experience with democracy in post-1951 Nepal. On 15 December 1960, Mahendra ordered the arrest of B.P. Koirala, dismissed the Government,

and dissolved the Parliament. Quoting the Royal Proclamation of 15 December 1960, Anirudha Gupta reports that:

“The King accused Koirala’s government of (1) misusing “authority in a manner designed to fulfill the party interest only,” (2) paralysing the administrative machinery, (3) incapacity, (4) imperiling national unity and (5) pursuing economic measures “undertaken? on the basis not of scientific and factual analysis but [in] the pursuance of purely theoretical principles...” The king further stated that, as the congress Government had worked against the interests of the nation and of democracy, he assumed to himself direct administration of the country “till such time as may be required for the installation of an alternative arrangement.” Thus, after a brief interval of parliamentary rule, the King’s personal regime was reimposed in Nepal.” (Gupta 1993:159-60)

With all ministers in prison (with the exception of Subarna Shamsheer, who was out of the country at the time), there was no immediate political opposition to the royal takeover, and most public figures decided to side with Mahendra.

However, after securing the support of Jawaharlal Nehru, a guerilla force of 3000 thousand Congress militants in India launched raids across the border, and India imposed an economic blockade in September 1962. With the outbreak of the war between China and India, negotiations resumed, and Subarna Shamsheer stopped the raids. The compromise proposed by Mahendra was the so-called “Panchayat democracy”—a system based on the election of village or town councils (*pañcāyat*), whose members would in turn choose representatives at the district level. The representatives of the districts would then nominate the majority of the members of the *Rāṣṭrīya Pañcāyat*, a national legislature body, which also included “class organizations” (such as “peasants”, “youth” or “workers”) and royal nominees. The powers of this organ, however, were extremely limited, which allowed for an unrestrained exercise of power for the monarch, a state of

affairs that lasted until 1980, when Mahendra's son, Birendra, would introduce direct elections to the Rastriya Panchayat. (Whelpton 2011:100-101)

The establishment of the Panchayat system had important consequences for the religious life of the country. First, it is at this time that Nepal starts to be consistently referred to as *ekmātra hindū rājya*, the “only Hindu kingdom (of the world)”, and the constitution specifies that the king must be “an adherent of Aryan culture and the Hindu religion,” a provision that will remain in place up to the constitution of 1990. Second, religious conversions are forbidden, though it is possible to “revert” to Hinduism for Nepali people who have embraced other faiths. The status of South Asian religions other than Hinduism, most notably Buddhism (but, in theory, Sikhism and Jainism too, though these are underrepresented in Nepal), is problematic: they are considered a sub-set of Hinduism, and therefore accepted as possible practices, but, precisely because of this inclusion, their potential to differ from the ideology of the Hindu Panchayat is neutralized (Gellner 2005). Naraharinath, in describing this group of Indic religions, refers to them as the Omkar Parivar, to contrast them with *mleccha* traditions that are not marked by the use of the syllable Om,

Kashinath Yogi, reading the Panchayat system as a positive intervention of the King, mentions that Naraharinath's acted as an advisor to Mahendra in establishing it:

“In Nepal, after the Gorkha incident of that time, there was another time of change in the country. Since the government of the then king *Śrī Panc Mahārājādhirāja* Mahendra Vīr Vikram Shāh, to do political leadership of the Panchayat democracy according to the rules of the *śāstras* for advancing the progress of Nepal, in the month of *Maṃsir* [Nov-Dec] of the year 2017 [1960], had asked the advice of Yogi Naraharinath-*jjū*, Yogījī gave to *Śrī Panc*<sup>29</sup> Mahendra advice and guidance according to the Veda, the Purāṇa, the Five

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<sup>29</sup> “Five times *Śrī*”, the standard honorific title for the king

Principles of Conduct (*pañcaśīla nīti*), the *Raghuvamśa Mahākāvya*, and the *Rām-rājya* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and since *Śrī Panc* Mahendra announced the Panchayat democracy, the fact that he gave to the King good advice and guidance clearly shows that he always wanted the well-being of the king, of the country of Nepal, and of the people of Nepal.” (Yogi 2010:41)

The nature of Naraharinath’s advisory role to the king is not specified in any of the accounts, but we know that from this moment his interests will revolve around three interconnected trajectories: establishing institutions of Sanskrit learning, founding organizations for the promotion of “Hindu dharma”, and celebrating *Koṭi Homas*. In almost all of these enterprises, we will find Mahendra as sponsor and guest of honor.

Between *Chaitra* 1 and 7, B.S. 2022 (March 14-20, 1966) he holds the *Bṛhad Ādhyātmika Pariṣad* (“Great Spiritual Assembly”) in Tulsipur, Dang (Naraharinath 1972:6). Prapannacarya reports that Mahendra is the chief guest (*pramukh atithi*) and “protector” (*saṃrakṣaka*), and Somnath Sigdel is chairman (*adhyakṣa*). Treasurer (*koṣādhyakṣa*) for a long time is Sharada Shamsheer Rana (Prapannacarya 1997:27), who was “adviser of education” in the Royal Councilors’ Government of 1952-53 and son of the former Rana president, Mohan Shamsheer Rana (Joshi and Rose 1966:105). Naraharinath states that the announcement of the committee on the *Pariṣad* was established through the king and took one month to be published (Naraharinath 1972:6), suggesting that Mahendra’s involvement was not merely ceremonial.

After the first meeting, a second one is held on the week of *Baishak* 27, B.S. 2023 (May 9, 1966), this time in Kathmandu, to do an evaluation of the previous conference. In B.S. 2023, *Phalgun* 17-20 (February 28-March 4, 1967), a third meeting is held in

Janakpur. The fourth is held in the week starting on *Māgh* 1, 2024, (January 15, 1968) a Devghat. Naraharinath comments:

“Having disseminated in the country and abroad (*deś-vidēs*) a vast discussion and consciousness of spiritualism (*ādhyātmavād*) through the activity of the above-mentioned great conferences (*mahā-sammelan*) and centers (*kendrīya*), several branches and sub-branches opened. But *śreyāṃsi bahuvīdhnāni!*<sup>30</sup> Having overcome some obstacles in the middle, on *Bhādra* 10-12, 2028 (August 26-28, 1971), the fifth conference was held at the *Kāṣṭha-maṇḍapa*.<sup>31</sup> Until today, the center and branches have been working normally.

Now it is desirable to spread the all-pervading spiritual knowledge in a special way. To achieve the main part of this noble purpose with the other parts of the work, the monthly magazine *Viśvātmadarśana*, the mouthpiece of *Bṛhad Ādhyātmika Pariṣad*, has been published in its first issue on the day of national unity *Prithvī Jayantī*.<sup>32</sup> We hope that through *Viśvātmadarśana* the peaceful message of *Viśvātmadarśana* “*ātma khalu viśvamūla*”<sup>33</sup> may be given in the world.” (Naraharinath B.S. 2028:6-7)

Another conference organized by Naraharinath and inaugurated by Mahendra is the *Vidvat Pariṣad* (“Assembly of learned ones”) of *Baiśākh* 2023 (April-May 1966), again with Somnath Sigdal as chairman, particularly organized to bring together Nepali *paṇḍits* (Prapannacarya 1997:28). This conference seems to be a Nepalese echo to the *Vidvat Pariṣad* organized by the *Viśva Hindu Pariṣad* at the Kumbha Melā of the same year (January 1966), and discussed by Christophe Jeffrelot:

“Despite its poor representativeness, the meeting in Allahabad was intended to be a kind of parliament and repository of Hinduism. A subcommittee was designated to

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<sup>30</sup> “in the best, many obstacles”

<sup>31</sup> the wooden pavillion at the center of Kathmandu, after which the city derives its name. Since the pavillion itself is too small to host a conference, the reference is probably a formal way to say “Kathmandu.”

<sup>32</sup> The birthday of Prithvi Narayan Shah

<sup>33</sup> “the self indeed is the root of the universe/ of everything”

‘elaborate a code of conduct suitable to promote and strengthen the Hindu *samskars*’ (H.V., 30 January 1966:2). This Vidvat Parishad then met to simplify the rites of purification, to give an official status to five principal festivals of the Hindu calendar, and above all to elaborate the much-vaunted code of conduct. Significantly, the process was accomplished in reference to Christianity and Islam:

‘Christians and Muslims generally observe in a strict and scrupolous manner certain rules of religious conduct. Every Christian and Muslim, moreover, possesses outward symbols indicative of his religion. The Parishad as felicitously arrived at a ‘code of conduct’ which is suitable for all sects and beliefs. It has declared that the *pratashnan* [sic] (morning ablutions) and the *ishwarsmaran* (the reciting of the name of god) would constitute the minila rules of conduct. (H.V., 11 June 1967:14)’

Beyond these efforts to enact a code of conduct, the VHP also sought to establish its central authority over an entire religious network which was scattered through monasteries and temples. Priests were thus called upon at the Prayag assembly to make these latter places centres for the ‘propagation of dharma and sanskriti’ (H.V., 30 January 1966:15).” (Jaffrelot 2010:231)

It is important to notice, however, how Prapannacarya’s account reads the *Vidvat Parishad* held in Nepal not on the background of Sangh Parivar activism, but more specifically, as a form of continuity with the tradition of Sanskrit learning that Naraharinath had inherited from his teachers during his youth studying at the various *viśvavidyālayas* in India:

“First, while staying in India, Yogī jī had taken a deep dive into the Gaṅgā of knowledge from experts like *mahāmahopādhyāya* Dravyesh Jha, *mahāmahopādhyāya* Hari Kripalu, *mahāmahopādhyāya* Madhav Bhandari, *upakulapati* Jagdev, *śāstrārtha mahāratha* Shankarnath Falegrahi, *ācārya* Vishvanath Prabhakar, *paṇḍit* Jñānirām etc. Now, with the intention of taking a deep dive into the Gaṅgā of *śāstrīya* knowledge with Indian learned men together with Nepali learned ones, Yogī jī organised a *Vidvat Parishad*. This was the first *vidvat* conference of Nepal in the fast paced age of the 21st

century. This conference happened in the month of *Baiśākh* of the year B.S 2023 [April-May 1966]. Except Padmaprasad Bhattarai, *nyāyaratna*, teacher of *navya-nyāya*, *darśanālaṅkāra*, almost all famous Sanskrit experts (*vidvat*) of Nepal of the time were present in the *vidvat* conference of Dang.” (Prapannacarya 1997:27-28)

That the boundary between *paṇḍits* and advocates of Hindu nationalism is rather blurred appears clear from Prapannacarya’s report (1997:28), which mentions, next to a *mimāṃsācarya* named Subrahmanya Shastri, the presence of Swami Karpatri, the controversial *sādhu* of the *daṇḍi* order, here mentioned as founder of the *Rām-rājya Pariṣad*, an organization that:

“called for a ban on cow slaughter and the sale of alcoholic beverages, advocated the rural system of barter (*jajmānī*) rather than cash economy, and sanctioned the replacement of Western medicine with Āyurveda. Society was to function smoothly according to the immemorial *varṇāśrama* model, but lest it be supposed that this did not offer something for everyone, the manifesto recommended that sweepers, Chamārs, and other Untouchables be assigned “high posts” in sanitation departments and in the leather and hides industry. (Lorenzen 1995:273-74)

Prapannacarya does not elaborate on the proceedings of the *Vidvat Pariṣad*, but he suggests that this conference had, in fact, political overtones: “as far as I understand the smell of politics had entered even in this conference.” (Prapannacarya 1997:28).

An engagement that more clearly illustrates the overlap between the Nepali Hindu rhetoric of the Panchayat period and Hindutva activism in India is provided by Naraharinath’s attendance to at the meetings of the the *Viśva Hindū Saṅgh* (or *Mahāsaṅgh*), an organization that Veronique Bouillier has discussed in one of her articles:

“les cadres du Mahasangh ne r cuse pas le qualificatif de “fondamentalistes” qui, disent-ils, a  t  d natur  car que veut-il dire d’ autre qu’ un “retour au fondement”,   la source m me de l’ hindouisme, dont le temps a terni le puret .” (Bouillier 1997:88)

The genesis of this movement is intimately connected to the history of the Indian *Viśva Hindū Pariṣad* in India. In the month of *Phalgun* of B.S. 2036 (1980), Naraharinath is reported participating at the VHP meeting in Allahabad/Prayag, which, curiously, is said to be inaugurated by the Dalai Lama instead of the king:

“The news that the inauguration of the meeting would be done by the lotus-hand of *Śrī pañc Mahārājādhirāja* Birendra was printed in all newspapers of India. Due to some unforeseen circumstances, the inauguration of the *Viśva-hindū-pariṣad* [at] Prayag was done by the *Rāja dharmaguru*, the Dalai Lama. At the summit, there were around three and half *lākhs* of people. The program lasted for three days with great show. At this summit, many people, many pilgrims had come from Nepal to bath in the *tīrtha* of Prayagrāj. But did Yogi Narharinath travel there as an [independent] pilgrim or because of an invitation? This was unknown. He was present at the summit.” (Prapannacarya 1996:30)

His participation seems to have important consequences, as he takes leadership of a future *Viśva Hindū Mahāsaṅgha*. Prapannacarya reports that a few months after the summit in Prayag, the Indian press started to publish that another summit would be held at Birganj under Naraharinath’s leadership. The conference took place in the month of *Caitra* (March-April) of B.S. 2036 (1981), inaugurated by king Birendra.

“Delegates from twenty-two countries were invited. Among them there Lanka, Germany, Japan etc. The Indian Ambassador was also present there. Delegates from 14 regions and 75 district of Nepal had participated. Scholars, politicians, artists, journalists, teachers, students, workers, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Ārya Samājīs, Kṛṣṇā Praṇāmīs etc, all the Oṃkār Parivar had actively participated. But heavy rains and thunderstorms at

night had caused safety problems. In spite of such disastrous natural conditions and other problems, as a result of the continuous effort of a stubborn, indomitable Yogī jī, now the *Viśva Hindū Mahāsaṅgha* has been successfully opened almost 25-30 national branches in the international field.” (Prapannacarya 1997:31)

As studied by Gerard Toffin (2011, 2012), the Krishna Pranamis mentioned in the account are a *nirguṇi* school of Krishnaite devotion, derived from the teachings of Prannath (1618-94), a Gujarati guru that rejected the caste system, brahmanical ritualism, and image worship. They also share some ground with Islamic devotion, and their sacred text, the *Tārtam Sāgar*, presents many Urdu words. The school is attested in Nepal since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, both among Newar and Parbatiya groups, and has suffered much persecution during the Rana period, when many of its members got imprisoned for their anti-brahmanical views. After 1951, however, they have been regarded as an accepted branch of Hinduism, and now they regard themselves as Hindus. (Toffin 2012) However, although they share with the VHM an emphasis on *sevā* and a concern with the care for the cow, being particularly active in the promotions of *gośālās*, their integration into the mainstream of Hindu orthodoxy has not been seamless, and Toffin interestingly reports how Naraharinath advanced accusations against the Krishna Pranamis sect:

"The former accusations concerning the Pranāmīs during the Rana period because of their links with Islam, their deviant forms of Hinduism, and the fact that their texts were written in vernacular languages, not in Sanskrit, have also to be taken into account. Interestingly, in the eyes of many Hindus, this heterodox background has induced a major conflict with Yogi Naraharinath, the leading Nepalese Hindu nationalist previously mentioned [in reference to the Gorkha disturbances and to participation in the VHM]. The Yogi blamed the Krishna Pranāmīs for the destruction of a Shiva temple on the outskirts of Dharan city (Sunsari district, in the *tarai*). The accusation provoked great emotion within the Pranāmī brotherhood. The Pranāmīs objected to this attack and

defended their case. According to them, the Shiva temple, situated on one of their parcels of land, collapsed naturally from lack of restoration. A commission was appointed by the royal palace in Kathmandu to establish the truth. Finally on Kārtik, 11 ghate 2033 B.S. (1976 AD), the commission exonerated the sect. This decision largely contributed to definitively reincorporating Pranāmīs within *sanātana dharma* in Nepal." (Toffin 2011:177).

Veronique Bouillier reports the following as the programmatic statement of the VHM at Birganj:

“We, Nepalese are proud to say that the Kingdom of Nepal stands even today as the bedrock of this eternal [Hindu] religion. I do think that there can be no Hindu, who would not wish in his heart of hearts that Nepal, the only symbol of Hindu Glory in the whole world, should prosper.” (Bouillier 1997:89)

The most important meeting of the VHM is the second, which follows a period of heightened activity for the VHP in India. It is held between March 24 and 28 in 1988, in occasion of the *vratibandha* of the Crown Prince, with 1500 delegates from 26 countries and 7000 observers, and it is largely sponsored by the monarchy: the king presides the inauguration, the queen the conclusion, and they both receive privately the religious leaders. This time, however, Naraharinath is not at the forefront of the leadership: in the same year, two journalists have been arrested for having published an interview to Naraharinath, in which he was expressing views critical of the king. Though he is not personally prosecuted, he distances himself from the VHM (Bouillier 1997:91).

"In 1987 the Amnesty International published its special report on human rights violations in Nepal with a focus on the arrest of journalists like Harihar Birahi and Keshab Raj Pindali and legislators like Rup Chand Bista and Gobinda Upreti in 1986. The two above-mentioned journalists were arrested and detained under the Public

Security Act for publishing an interview with Yogi Narahari Nath, a religious activist, criticizing the King for coming too much under the influence of his wife to the detriment of the interests of the state. But nothing happened to the Yogi himself." (Shaha 1993:154)

Meanwhile, Naraharinath has already established himself as an advocate of Sanskrit learning through different venues. In 1972 Naraharinath he devoted his energies to the task of establishing a *Nepala Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya* in Beljhundi, Dang. Prapannacarya reports that local people, both of Tharu and Parbatiya origins, donated land for the enterprise, allowing Naraharinath to put together 5000 *bighā*<sup>34</sup> of local land (Prapannacarya 1997:27). The history of the university, however, was marked by difficulties. Renaming it *Mahendra Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya*, Naraharinath was to ask an acceptance permit from the king's administration, which assured it. However, during the process of the permit being approved, Mahendra died, and his son Birendra inherited the throne. Yogi Naraharinath petitioned the new king and ministers, but Birendra's cabinet did not approve the permit, and according to Kashinath Yogi (my only source of information on this topic):

“since selfish followers made false backbiting about Yogī jī, alienating the king too, with the pretext that he had asked the permit for the Sanskrit university without discretion, the government of that time, without any law, forcefully imprisoned Yogī jī, and the innocent Yogī jī stayed in a difficult prison, in hardship. This was in B.S 2029 [1973] or B.S 2030s [1974-5]” (Yogi 2010:63).

Kashinath does not name the people who pressed charges against Naraharinath, but states that Yogi ji was in and out of prison three or four times in this period, until he

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<sup>34</sup> measure of land, five-eighths of an acre

sought shelter in India, staying at the Puranath *Akhaḍhā* in Delhi to “take rest” (*viśrām linu*). Consequently, continues Kashinath:

“The king of that time [Birendra] sent some men to call him and since Yogī jī had faith in the learned men of Nepal, the call of *dharma*, and towards the nation, not being able to forget the country, he returned back to Nepal around the year 2036 [1979-80], and stayed—blessed be the nationalism of Yogī jī!” (Yogi 2010:46)

Prapannacarya, instead, does not even mention the imprisonment, saying simply that Naraharinath had to leave the country, and describing his troubles as a form of *tapas*:

“the news about the undetermined future of the *Nepāla Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya* could be read or heard, in gossip and in newspapers. One day Yogī jī had to leave not only Dang but also Nepal and take shelter in India. (...) But then finally a day arrived to make *tilāñjali* [an oblation of water and sesame seeds, i.e. “to bid goodbye”] to Dang Beljhundi. Abandoning his house, field, 5000 *bighās* of land, his horse, and all his property, barefoot, empty-handed, Yogī jī for several months went wandering for Varanasi, Delhi, etc.. Without eating, without drinking, even without rain in the heat! It is difficult to say if to Mother Nepal will ever be born another son doing such *sādhana* and *tapas*.” (Prapannacarya 1997:28)

In B.S. 2028-2029 (1972-73) he established another institution of Sanskrit learning, the *Sarayū Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya*, in Bicchiya,<sup>35</sup> Girijapur, in India. The subjects of study reportedly included *sāhitya*, *nyāya*, *vyākaraṇa*, *veda*, *vedānta*, *jyotiṣa*, *tantrāgama*, *purāṇa-itihāsa*, *saṃkhya-yoga*, English, and others. At its peak, the university held around 500 students, though few were preparing for the title of *śāstri* or *ācārya*. Prapannacarya’s account reports the difficulties encountered in running this school: a scholar from Lucknow University was invited to spend some time at the institution, and

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<sup>35</sup> Prapannacarya reports that this is the name of land at the border between India and Nepal, near the river Sarayu (1997:28).

within a week twenty-five more teachers came to be appointed. However, “due to the poor financial conditions of the University, salaries could not be distributed regularly. And teachers started to leave. Meanwhile because of the indolence of the committee, there was no provision of meals. Therefore the students, too, started to leave. Only few teachers were left.” (Prapannacarya 1997:30). Soon after the university shut down.

The third avenue of his Hindu activism in Nepal, the celebration of the *Koṭi Homas*, fire-sacrifices centered on the repetition of the *gāyatrī mantra* ten million (one *koṭi*) times, is the one for which he is most often remembered, and the one in which he will continue to be active until his death. Ima Mata’s poster, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, gives the number of such ritual performances as 129, Kashinath Yogi mentions 139, while Prapannacarya states that Naraharinath had planned to perform 108 *Koṭi Homas*, but only succeeded in performing around 70, of which he lists 55 locations in Nepal and 14 in India.

Prapannacarya further says that the motivation for the rituals was “to purify the polluted land and environment” and that the first celebration was in the year B.S. 2036 (1980) at Birganj (Prapannacarya 1996:31). Kashinath Yogi’s report has a more international vision of these events, reporting them to be performed “for the welfare of the nation (*rāṣṭra kalyāṇ*) and world peace” (*viśva śānti*), and mentioning Sri Lanka, Japan, and Australia as *Koṭi Homa* locations.

Kashinath Yogi’s account is probably incorrect, as Bholanath Yogi reports that Naraharinath did indeed plan a *Koṭi Homa* in Japan, specifically to purify the environment polluted by the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but was unable to realize the project due to difficulties in fundraising and in finding participants willing to

stay there for the duration of the ritual.<sup>36</sup> As for Sri Lanka, we have records of a travel there in 1979 to participate in a *Viśva Hindū Sammelan* (Naraharinath 1985, Prapannacarya 1996:36), but with no mention of a *Koṭi Homa*. In Australia, Naraharinath did indeed travel, in 1995 (Prapannacarya 1997:36) and again in 1999 to establish a temple in Sydney, but no *Koṭi Homa* is reported.

One of the last places in which the *Koṭi Homa* is celebrated is particularly significant, as it becomes Naraharinath's own personal ashram in Devghat, in the region of Chitwan. Devghat's status as *tīrtha* is due to its being located at the saṅgham of the Narayani and Kali Gandaki's rivers, with an important burning *ghāt* on the riverbank, thus falling in the well-attested category of river-*tīrthas*, but acquired further lustre in the last decades because of Naraharinath's effort. Narrating the foundation of the ashram, established there in 1996, Kashinath Yogi reports that an ashram dedicated to the sage Vasiṣṭha was found in the jungle next to Devghat, along with a cave of Gorakhnath.<sup>37</sup> The main trace of the "ashram" is a *mūrti* of the goddess Vāgīśvarī and various artwork, found while he was researching the place around the month of *Māgh* (January-February) in B.S. 2052 (1996). He then starts the worship of the Devī, thus establishing the temple now known as Vāgīśvarī mandir. (Yogi 1997:60)

The place soon becomes the center of a controversy, as it conflicts with the establishment of a Medical College in the same location. Kashinath Yogi reports the problem as follows:<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was indeed a period of deep exchange between Japan and Nepal. In addition to Japanese interest in reviving the Buddhist pilgrimage site of Lumbini, which was greatly developed with Japanese funding, Japan was the largest single donor in the field of "development" (Whelpton 2005:134)

<sup>37</sup> that is, a place where Gorakhnath is supposed to have performed *tapas*.

<sup>38</sup> Shrishnath's account of the foundation of the ashram and the ensuing conflict with the Medical College

“Right in that place, clearing the jungle, the Congress Party of the time decided to establish the B.P. Medical College, of about 100 *bighā* of land, and had already built two or four buildings, but Yogī jī, [said that] that place had been since ancient times a sacred ground (*deva-sthal*), and that, since there was an ashram of the *Ṛṣi* Vaśiṣṭha and a temple of the goddess Vāgīśvarī, now too, it must be kept just as sacred ground, the forest must also be protected, and the Medical College can be built at another appropriate location of the same district. The Congress, saying that it would not let go of the sacred place, didn’t listen, and so Yogī jī went to the Supreme Court and appealed according to the rules; with a definite verdict of the Supreme Court the plan of the Congress was nullified. The Medical College moved elsewhere. That place has always remained a divine land (*devobhūmi*), there have been several *yajñas*, *havanas*, [and] *pūjās*, and has been made into a religious locality (*dharmika-sthal*) after Yogī jī made the announcement and proclamation that he had renamed that very place “Yogī Naraharinath *āśram*” and put there a photo of himself (Kashinath Yogi 201:61).

Devghat will become the center of Naraharinath’s commemoration after his death, being managed by his closest disciple, Shrishnath, and represents Naraharinath’s personal institution, which, in the typology identified by Veronique Bouillier, may be called a *nījī* (“personal/private”) *maṭha*, as opposed to the *pañcāyatī maṭhas* that belong to the Nath Sampradaya in an institutional, collective way (Bouillier 2008). A good illustration of this latter typology in Nepal is offered both by Mrgasthali in Kathmandu, located in the important pilgrimage area of Pashupatinath, and by the Ratannath Mandir in Caughera, Dang: since Naraharinath was *mahant* of Mrigasthali, and cooperated with the yogis of Caughera,<sup>39</sup> his network spanned throughout all the main Nath institutions of the country, but his influence was mostly maintained in Devghat, which, under the management of

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corresponds to Kashinath Yogi’s account.

<sup>39</sup> Besides celebrating a *Koṭi Homa* on the premises of the Ratannath Mandir in B.S. 2046 (1989-90), he also involved the local yogi Prabhatnath, with a passion for painting, in the publication of *Śikhariṇī Yatrā*, putting him in charge of the illustrations. Nowadays, the *maṭha* has a small museum of Prabhatnath work, among which there are a few portraits of Naraharinath.

Shrishnath, continue to represent the ways of living of his “*siddhānt*”: the care for the cow, but also an insistence on Sanskrit learning and *śuddhi*, primarily conceived as abstinence from smoking, drinking, and eating meat.

On February 25, 2003 (*Phalgun* 13, 2059), Naraharinath breathed his last, in his room at Mrigasthali. Ima Mata and Shrishnath were present throughout the days leading to what they define his “absorbition into brahman” (*brahmalīn*), achieved in *padmāsana*. In their account, the state of affairs of the country had plummeted him into despair, to the point that, in contrast with his lifelong preaching of “social service” as the main duty of a yogi, he counselled them to retire into a hidden cave to meditate, because nobody would have listened to their teachings anyway. They did not take his words literally, however, and, each in his own way, they maintained the habits of social engagement they had practiced for most of their lives as disciples.

He was buried in the courtyard of Mrigasthali, and a bronze statue was soon placed on his tomb (*samādhi*). Since Shrishnath returned to Devghat, and Ima to Lamjung, the duty of taking care of his *samādhi* —and of the room which he had inhabited—fell on a rather peripheral figure that had take upon herself to carry out this task: Timila Mata, a female renunciant of Newari origins, who had attended to him in his last days at Mrigasthali. At the time of my fieldwork, a controversy was underway regarding the content of the closets in Yogi ji’s room, allegedly locked “by the government” (*sarkār le*). The precious shelves were said to contain hundreds of Naraharinath’s writings, books and letters, but nobody, not even Narinath, the new mahant of the *maṭha*, had the power to have them opened. As a result, Timila Mata’s vigilance in Naraharinath’s room was considered necessary by his other disciples, who did not want to leave the materials

unattended for fear of their being plundered or set to fire. Due to my lack of access to these documents, my work in the following pages will focus on some materials that Shrishnath and Ima Mata provided to me from their respective ashrams, along with other booklets and pamphlets that I collected in the library of the Ratannath's mandir in Caughera and in the Muktigupteshwar Mandir in Sydney, Australia.

## CHAPTER 4

### HISTORY, SCIENCE, AND *NIRUKTI*: RETHINKING THE NĀTH GURUS

To understand the conceptual relations between Naraharinath's affiliation with the Nāth school and his self-understanding as Sanskrit scholar, political leader, and historian, we can start from a letter written to king Gyanendra five months before his death, shortly before the final collapse of the Shah dynasty itself. In this unpublished document, a request for the renewal of royal sponsorship, Yogi ji articulates most clearly his understanding of Nepali history and explicates the relationship that he envisages between Gorakhnath, founder of the Nāth tradition, and the Gorkhali monarchy:

“Date: Vijayadaśamī, Tuesday  
2059/6/29/3 [October 15, 2002]

Hindu Emperor Five-times *Śrī Mahārājādhirāja*  
Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev,  
Narayanhi Royal Palace, Hindu Capital, *Kāṣṭamaṇḍapa*

Dear King,

*atha gorakṣanāthasya kṛpārjita-sadbalaḥ |*  
*prthvīnārāyaṇaḥ samrāt digjayeṣumitiṃ baudhada ||*

By grace of Shiva's incarnation Gorakshanath, Prithvinarayan Shah, having achieved the strength of truth, the strength of good people (*sajjan*), the strength of the true *śāstras*, achieved the title of Emperor (*Samrāt*). “*Samānta-saṃsthāḥ sakalā nareśaḥ*” – “All Rājas and Mahārājas of the Earth stayed in the condition of vassals.” From that

time, there was the tradition of writing “*Śrī Śrī Śrī Gorakhnāth*” in all the seals of the King of Gorkha. Prithvi Narayan, assigning everywhere royal endowments (*guthī*) to Gorakhnath, initiated the practice of regular and occasional worship, recitations, feasts, pilgrimages, assemblies, which continued without disruption until the reign of Five-times Śrī Mahendra. Now, the *Guthī Samsthān*,<sup>40</sup> having clutched all kinds of *guthī*, has brought about the destruction of the dharma. During the reign of Five-times Shri Birendra, having promulgated a royal decree saying to continue the custom of the royal *guthīs* and interrupted *guthīs* like before, though this was given by the handwriting of Chet Bahadur Kunwar to the employees of the *Guthī Samsthān* of that time, as of today, the *Guthī Samsthān* has not given (anything) yet. I request for that too to be immediately returned. If that is not returned, I request to take leave from my office today. As upon Your will!

I request the literal implementation of this request letter submitted by the Honorable Yogi Naraharinath.

Petitioner  
Yogi Shrishnath”

It was grace of Gorakhnath—reminds Yogi Naraharinath—that blessed Prithvi Narayan Shah with the right to rule Nepal, making him and his successors, as expressed in the very salutation to Gyanendra, Hindu emperors (*Samrāt*). Such a title, implies the argumentation of the letter, entails the duty for the king to maintain the funding of religious institutions (*guthī*) for preventing the decay of *dharma* (*dharma lopa*) witnessed during the rules of Mahendra and Birendra: Gyanendra is exhorted therefore to return to orthopraxis and protect Hindu religious institutions through appropriate action. To read this last cry for economic sponsorship as Yogi Naraharinath's swan song as a religious leader would, of course, be simplistic: social policies, ritual activities, and educational interests constituted his concerns in ways that cannot be reduced to the monetary

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40 The official organ responsible for the management of religious endowments

dimension of royal patronage. This late document, however, can be taken here as a starting point because it reveals, in succinct but precise fashion, the broader perception of history that underlined Naraharinath's engagement with the social developments of his country: a myth of origin staunchly and self-consciously Hindu, a perception of dangers befalling social order, and a dependence on royal patronage as an essential dimension of *dharma*.

An important point to be noticed, however, is that in this letter the ultimate authority is said to be Gorakhnath, and not Gyanendra: an interesting feature of Naraharinath's political vision, particularly in the light of the complex conception of kingship that marked the Shah dynasty. From one point of view, in fact, the monarch was said to be empowered by the first act blessing that Gorakhnath had bestowed to the Prthvi Narayan before his military campaign in the Kathmandu Valley—as overviewed above. This was not, however, a consecration of Shah family *ad aeternitatem*: a version of the myth, particularly popular during Gyanendra's rule, specified that since the yogurt that Gorakhnath the yogurt he spat on the prince, his *prasād*, had fallen upon his ten toes, the Shah dynasty would have only continued for ten generations—and Gyanendra was indeed the tenth successor to the throne (Thapa 2005:20). For the royal palace, however, the institution of kingship was upheld not only by the blessing of Nāth yogis, but in a variety of ways that all contributed to sacralize the persona of the king. First, a Newar idiom of tantric ritual empowerment inherited by the Malla predecessors, the *dikṣā* of the goddess Taleju, also fulfilled the function of providing divine *śakti* to the king (Toffin 1993). Second, in the Malla grammar of divine kingship, the king was also considered to be an *avatāra* of Vishnu, as signified, for example, by the iconography of the *śeṣas*, the

twining snakes framing the throne like in *vaiṣṇava* iconography. As Anne Mocko has convincingly overviewed, this form of divinity was not a matter of belief in the godly character of the Shah people, but a consequence of ritual empowerment sustained by a complex repertoire of ceremonial acts that the king was expected to sponsor, preside, and perform. In fact, after the 2006 takeover of the political parties over the monarchy, the most successful strategy to “demote” Gyanendra to the rank of commoner was precisely to alienate him from his traditional ritual functions, such as for example, his participation in the Indra Jatra and in the chariot procession of the Kumari (Mocko 2016).

It is therefore important to notice that references to these other dimensions of kingship are conspicuous for their absence in Naraharinath’s prose. The king, more than as a god, appears to us as Gorakhnath’s disciple—a view consistent with the many stories of Nāth gurus and kingly disciples noted in chapter 2. But how does Naraharinath understand the political role of the Nāth founders? And what are the conceptual structures of his religious and nationalist vision? To better understand these questions, we may turn to a comparative analysis of Naraharinath’s reading of the names of Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath against the background of the Nāth *sampradāya*, on the one side, and of his reading of the history of the Nepal, on the other.

### ***Gorakhnath: the Lord of the Cow***

The many legends of Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath, the two semi-mythical founders of the Nāth school, have been amply investigated by scholars such as David White (1996, 2003, 2009) and Adrian Muñoz (2010), who have studied different versions of their tales, reflecting local traditions, intersectarian influences, and esoteric

doctrines often specific to a particular time and place. Although Muñoz (2011) has proposed to see these legends as part of a “threefold canon” made of vernacular poems, Sanskrit treatises on yoga, and hagiographical narratives (2011:110), the canonicity of their contents is in fact rather fluid: the same motif may appear with different meanings in various tales, and the same figure may appear as hero in rather different circumstances.

The name of Gorakhnath, however, is always understood as related to the cow (*go*). Although Mircea Eliade had proposed that the name Gorakhnath may in fact be etymologically related to *ghor-* (mud, slime, ordure), or from *ghor-* (intense, terrifying), with reference to his ascetic austerities (1969:309), most stories understand the syllable *go* as “cow”. The most famous version explains his name by reference to his miraculous birth: Matsyendranath, as a wandering yogi, blesses a barren brahman woman with some empowered ash to be eaten with milk. Skeptical, she throws the ash in a heap of cow-dung, where, twelve years later, Matsyendranath finds a young yogi, whom he will make his disciple (White 1997:188).

According to White, however, before being applied to the Nāth guru, the name Gorakh belonged to a cowherd deity in eastern India, who was then Buddhized into a Vajrayana figure among the Indo-Tibetan siddhas, and later assimilated to the historical yogi Gorakhnath, around which the early Nāth order coalesced. According to a 19<sup>th</sup> century report quoted by White, Gorakhpur, the toponym etymologically related to Gorakhnath, has a central place in this re-elaboration, as it is the place where the yogi assumes his new name. The account is particularly interesting, as it mentions Nepal as a country where the worship of the deity Gorakh is already widespread, thus suggesting

that a deity with this name was already celebrated in Nepal before the Nāth order came into existence:

“Gorakhnath... discovered at the site of the present [Gorakhnāth] temple a shrine sacred to the god Gurakh or Gorakh, who appears to have been a deity of great fame in the Nepal country; and having devoted himself to the service of this deity, practiced the greatest austerities. He... took the name of Gorakhnath or servant of Gorakh. Shortly after his death... members of the [ruling Satāsi] family establish[ed] themselves near the shrine, from which the town they founded took the name of Gorakhpur.” (Alexander 1881:371, 436 quoted in White 1996:109)”

That the name of Gorakh would particularly suit a cowherd was not lost to early Nath literature, though, distancing itself from the prosaic, literal import of the word, the *Gorakh Bāñī* endows it with esoteric meanings that point to the practice of yoga:

“Oh Gorakh! Oh cowherd (*gopāl*)!

He milks and drinks [from] the cow of the sky (*gagan gāī*), oh!

Churning the buttermilk, he drinks the immortal juice.

Having got the experience, he lives on! [Refrain] (...)

3. This *gāyatrī* cow, is in the courtyard of our house,

I got it from the circle of the sky, oh!

Our family kept it,

Once brought, she is always tied, oh!

4. Without ears, tail and horns,

without colour is this cow, oh!

By grace of Machindra, *jatī* Gorakh said;

There she stays, being brought, oh!

(GB 21, my translation of Barthwal 2003:213-214).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Gordan Djurdjevic translates the verses as follow: “Gorakh is a cowherd. / He drinks the milk of the cow in the sky. Churning the curd, he drinks the juice of immortality / And lives without fear. [Refrain] (...) 3. This *gāyatrī* cow, which I brought from the circle of the sky, / Is at the door of my house. / My family is attached to it / And I have tethered it permanently. 4. This cow is without ears, tail and horns / And without

The cow, here, is a symbol of ultimate reality, and Pitambardatt Barthwal, in his commentary, glosses it as “experience of brahman” (*brahmānubhūti*), stating that the buttermilk to be churned are the illusory objects (*māyika vastu*), the *rasa* is the *amṛta*, the sky is the *brahmarandhra*, and the family attending to it are the *indriyas* (Barthwal 2003:213-214). This word-by-word analysis may or may not be relevant to the listeners of these stanzas, who may typically read them as instances of *ulṭabāṃsi* (“inverted speech”) or *sandhyā bhāṣā* (“twilight language”), subverting the normal logic of language to suggest esoteric meanings, but it is nonetheless clear that Gorakh is here understood to be a cowherd only in a figurative sense.

Naraharinath’s literary engagement with the name of Gorakhnath provides a very interesting point of departure both from the Nāth myths and from the linguistic practices of the *Gorakh Bāṇī*: Gorakhnath, as “protector of the cow” (*go-rakṣa*) is etymologically assimilated to Gorkha as a nation (and hence to the ideal of the brave Gorkhali warrior), but also, echoing Hindutva passions, to a crusade of the cow-castes (*go-jāti*) against beef-eaters.

### ***Gorakh, Gorkha, and go-rakṣa in Naraharinath's poetic prose***

“Here, on the waterbank of the Gorkha kingdom, lies *Gorakhmaṭhī*, there, at *Gorakhṭilla* Girinagar lies *Gorakhśikhar*.

Here, *Gorakhḍibbi* water with fire, as a flame got inflamed, There on the river Sarayu of the Gorkha dynasty, lies Gorakhpur.

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colour. / The ascetic Gorakh spoke through the mercy of Machindra: There I remain absorbed [in meditation]. (Djurdjevic 2005:282-3)

On the bank of Alaknanda Mandakini there is this cave of Gorakh. There, toward the Gorkha village Kuru, there is the well of Gorakh. Here *Gorkhapatrā*, and Gorkha people in the whole world, Gorkha language, the friend of all happy Gorkhalis.

The Gorkha *jāti* became famous in the whole world for its qualities. Magnanimous, devoted to the defense of all *cow-jātis* (*go-jāti*).

Devotion and power was granted [to it] by Shiva manifest, Guru Goraksha.

This Gorkha lies on a group of mountains, and in Darjeeling as well.”

From *Gorkhā jātikō nityapāṭha* (“Daily Prayer of the Gorkha *Jāti*”) in *Jaya Gorkhā* (Y. Naraharinath B.S. 2041:246)

Naraharinath's *Jaya Gorkhā*, a nationalist pamphlet advocating the unity of all Nepalis under the banner of a common language, religion, and ideal of bravery, is an example of how the specific form of Hindu nationalism advocated by the Nepali monarchy during the Panchayat era was built upon a combination of local historiography (centered on the myth of the glorious kingdom of Prithvi Narayan Shah), Bahun-Chetri religious influences (for the cultural centrality assigned to cows, Vedic utterances and *varṇāśrama* rules), and resonances from Hindutva nationalism. *Jaya Gorkhā* is not, however, a piece of government propaganda per se: its author's self-understanding as a religious specialist, not an ideologue of the monarchy, is apparent throughout the text: references to the king are present but not prominent, and gods, yogis, and sacred cows enjoy a more exalted status than the royal family. The subject-matter of the text is, in fact, the Gorkhali citizen as a subject, considered personally responsible for upholding the ideal of the Gorkha nation as a model for the whole world.

Interestingly, political argumentation of the socio-historical variety is kept at a minimum: as a rule, poetry exceeds factuality and even when facts are mentioned (such as the Treaty of Sugauli), they become an element of emotional significance, embedded in a grander epic narrative that is, foremost, a call to action: the Gorkha *jāti* must preserve the traditions, customs, and glory of the Gorkha nation. From this point of view, Naraharinath's voice is reminiscent of some instances of Indian nationalism under colonial domination: the nation, before being imagined as an historico-geographical reality, must be conjured up in the mind of the would-be patriot as an object of adoration, devotion, and love—the language of *bhakti*. However, if the Indian nation could be thought to be imperiled by an enemy that was clearly an outsider to the subcontinent, the case of Nepal is different: what Naraharinath considers as a threat is the fratricidal war that is weakening the Gorkhali ethos: that is, ethnic activism for representative democracy.

In what follows, I will discuss three words that are recurrent throughout his prose: Gorakh, thought to be an *avatāra* of Shiva and patron of the Gorkhali (thus fulfilling a role much more prominent than India), Gorkha, both as a *jāti* and as a polity, and *gorakṣa*, that is, the defense of the cow. I suggest that the etymological play between these three words is central to *Jaya Gorkhā*: Naraharinath, underlining their lexical derivation, can uphold the ideal of the Gorkha *jāti*, under the auspices of Gorkhnath, as a preserver of Hindu orthodoxy in the broader transnational context, including the communities in the diaspora. This attention to language as a main locus of political argumentation is indicative of his idiosyncratic position as a yogi who thought about

himself also as a *paṇḍit* and a historian, a novelty both in the Nāth world and in the socio-cultural landscape of Nepal.

### ***Gorakh***

The quotation above reveals a first geographical framework of Naraharinath's understanding of the world in which he is operating: of the places he mentions, only one, “*Gorakhmaṭhī*” on the riverbank of the Gorkha kingdom, is in Nepali territory. It is not completely clear which place exactly he has in mind: it may be either the Gorakhnath cave in Prithvi Narayan Shah's palace in Gorkha, or the *maṭha* of Mrigasthali behind Pashupatinath, which is close to the riverbank of the Bagmati. By Naraharinath's time, the word "Gorkha" could designate three different domains: 1) the town of Gorkha, where Prithvi Narayan Shah's palace is located, 2) the region around the town itself, ruled by the Shah dynasty before the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley, and 3) all the territories conquered by Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors. The first place mentioned here can thus be either in the town of Gorkha, or in Nepal as the kingdom of the Gorkhali king.

The other locations, however, are clearly in India: the place “Girinagara” is in all likelihood a Sanskritization of Girnar in Gujarat, where, in fact, there are five peaks, among which one named after Gorakhnath (Briggs 1938:119). *Jvāla* corresponds to Jwalaji, one of the tantric *pīṭhas* associated with the fall of Sati's limbs (here, her tongue), in Kangra (Himachal Pradesh): *Gorakhḍibbī* (“Gorakh's box”) is a water source in the Jwalaji compound, where the water seems to be “boiling” from an underground reservoir of gas, which can be lighted into a flame by the Nath *pujāris*

for the curiosity of the visitors. Local lore associates the place with the name of Gorakhnath, saying that the ancient yogi begged there with his disciple Nagarjun. (Bouillier 2008:36). The third place, instead, is the stronghold of contemporary Nath politics, the *maṭha* of Gorkhnath in Gorakhpur: the name of the city itself, of course, is associated with Gorakhnath or, more precisely, as noted above, it was probably the shrine of a cowherd godly figure called Gorakh or Gurakh, who was worshiped by the yogi who named himself (White 1996:109). The cave (*gupha*) mentioned in the second stanza is probably the one near Paharpani in Uttarkhand, which is on the riverbank of the Alaknanda, one of the tributaries of the Ganges. As for Gorakh's well near Kuru, this may be a locality in Uttar Pradesh, in the district of Varanasi. These references, all playing on the name of Gorakhnath, at the very beginning of *Gorkha jātiko nityapāṭha*, are revealing, as they point to the intimate connection that Naraharinath envisages between the *Gorkhā jāti* and the broader Nath network of sacred palces. The importance of the town Gorkha as a conceptual center in this extended geography, however, is made clear on the very first page of *Jaya Gorkhā*, featuring a photo of Prithvi Narayan Shah's palace, with the description:

“Place of the *avatāra* of Guru Gorakhnath, homeland of the Gorkhā *jāti*, the *Kailāskūṭa* palace of Gorkha, is the center of the unity of the nine crores Gorkha of the world.” (*Jaya Gorkhā* in Naraharinath B.S. 2041:238)

The expression “nine crores Gorkha of the world” is arguably taken to include not only the inhabitants present in the country, but also those that, for one reasons or another, are abroad, either for work or, as Gurkha mercenaries, serving in the British

army. For all them, we are told, the Shah palace in Gorkha, where Shiva manifested himself as Gorakhnath, is the “center of unity.” The relationship between Gorakhnath as *avatāra* of Shiva and the Gorkha palace is particularly apparent in the well-known of the yogi's blessing to the future conqueror of the Kathmandu Valley,

“Manifested from the cave of the Gorkha palace, when the *avatāra* of Shiva Gorakhnāth, guru of the Gorkha *jāti*, gave him a gift of curd, the Gorkha Emperor Prithvinarayan, to protect the *dharma* from the *mleccha*, for the victory of the *dharma*, at the age of 20, having taken coronation in the great, historical, pure *muhūrta* of Rāmanavamī, by the will of the brave, martial Gorkhalis of the 4 *varṇas* and 36 *jāti*, initiated his expansion to the East...” (*Jaya Gorkhā* in Naraharinath B.S. 2041:250)

What is interesting here is the interpretive framework superimposed on the narration: the ruler is blessed with kingship for “the victory of the *dharma*” and particularly for “protecting the *dharma* from the *mleccha*”. *Mleccha* (“barbarians”) was a word first used in the Veda to indicate the tribals, but by the 20<sup>th</sup> century it had come to be employed for people perceived as outsiders from the subcontinent. In Nepal, *mleccha* was used in the legal codes to indicate the Muslims and the Europeans (Hofer 2004). That Naraharinath did not have in mind the local ethnic groups when he thought about the *mleccha* is also confirmed by the mention of the 4 *varṇas* and 36 *jātis* said to support the king: in the nationalist discourse of the Shah dynasty, particularly during the Panchayat period, the expression “4 *varṇas* and 36 *jātis*” was the standard expression to reference the anthropological variety of Nepal, albeit through the lenses of the Parbatiya caste system. The implication here, therefore, is that the *mleccha* from

whom Gorakhnath, as an *avatāra* of Shiva, asks Prithvi Narayan Shah to protect the *dharma* are the Muslims and the British.

If we compare this passage with Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Divya Upadeś*, we can see that the teachings of the Gorkhali king are not an immediate source for Naraharinath's reading. Both groups of foreigners are mentioned in the *Divya Upadeś*, but not as *mlecchas*. The British are “the emperor of the Southern sea”, in a much-quoted passage of the *Divya Upadeś*:

“This country is like a gourd between two rocks. Maintain a treaty of friendship with the emperor of China. Keep also a treaty of friendship with the emperor of the southern sea (the Company). He has taken the plains. He will realize that if Hindustan unites, it will be difficult, and so he will come seeking places for forts.” (Stiller 1968:42)

Though they are clearly seen as a potential enemy, this is not on the basis of *dharma*. The Muslims, also, are a foe, but not as a religious group, and they are listed among other possible invaders, such as the kings of the *Chaubisi* and *Baisi* and the Magars. Furthermore, Prithvi Narayan Shah is concerned with their military elites, but he is willing to interact with Muslim artisans:

“Kasim Khan attacked Makwanput, but I defeated him with 120 men with khukaris, and took the equipment of his men. Hardy Sahib came to attack Sindhuli Gadhi with three or four companies. I defeated him also and his flintlocks. Three mussulmen came from Lucknow seeking to enter my service. They came to Nuwakot. They repaired rifles. These three mussulmen were artisans. I made them adjuntants: Sekhjar, Bar Mama, Bherakasim; and they gave my men training.” (Stiller, 1968:46)

The mission of protecting the *dharma* from the *mleccha* that Gorakhanath, as an *avatāra*, entrusts to Prithvi Narayan Shah is thus Naraharinath's interpretation. Interestingly, the account of the empowerment offered by Gorakhnath, just described here, is followed by another description of a divine intervention, which, instead, is present in the *Divya Upadeś* itself: Prithvi Narayan Shah performs worship for some time at the gate of a temple, and one night he sees, in a dream, a seven or eight-years-old maiden, bearing a sword in either hand. He asks her who her father is, and she answers that she is the daughter of the Rana pujari. She gives him her swords and an *āraśi* to swallow, promising that all his wishes will be thus fulfilled. After the dream, he consults his astrologers, who tell him that he has received the *darśan* of the goddess. (*Jaya Gorkhā* in Naraharinath B.S. 2041 240-1; *Dibya Upadesh* in Stiller 1986:40-41). However, this passage, in *Jaya Gorkhā*, is contextualized differently than in the *Divya Upadeś*. In the original version, the king continues:

“At this moment I presented incense, lights, flags, and a feast. For the permanent worship I added seven buffaloes and seven goats and the income from Borlang Ghat and the ridge near the Ghat. This same hour I took my leave, travelling without pause until I camped at Simalchaur Chautara. My intention was to take Nuwakot, but to outward appearances I went to Kinchyat for farming and digging irrigation channels (...)” (Stiller 1968:41)

This account, in the *Divya Upadeś*, is then followed by more considerations on his military strategy. In Naraharinath's *Jaya Gorkhā*, instead, we are immediately brought back to Gorakhnath and the Gorkhali people:

"having obtained the grace of Gorakhnath, Kālī, Mahiṣāsūramardini, Durgā, and all other gods and goddess, the help of the unity of all the Gorkhali people, after Prithvi Malla, Prithvīnarayan, having achieved the *dharma-vijaya* of the Gorkha kingdom, the eldest in the world, said to the Gorkha jāti "*vayaṃ rāṣṭre jāgryāma purohitāḥ*" for the defense of the dharma in the world and from the age of 9 to the age of 52 years, day and night he endlessly walked ( ...)" (Y. Naraharinath B.S. 2041:251)

This departure, I suggest, is fundamental: it brings back the narrative to Gorakhnath, heading all other deities, and juxtaposing again his name to that of the Gorkhali people supporting the king. The passage also attributes to Prithvi Narayan Shah a full-fledged conceptualization of the role of Gorkha as a defender of *dharma*, up to the point of having him exhort his people with a Vedic quotation. Gorakhnath is thus presented not only as an *avatāra* of Shiva, but also as specifically tied to Gorkha and to the defense of the *dharma*.

In Indian accounts of the importance of Gorakhnath's temples, the centrality of this specific form of the divine for the nation is, of course, less prominent. If we move from Gorkha to Gorakhpur, just a few miles across the border between India and Nepal, we may see how Gorakhnath's sacred place is endowed with meanings relevant for the nation in a very different way. In *Hindū Viśva*, a publication of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, Avaidyanath, as mahant of the Nath *maṭha* in Gorakhpur, introduces his discussion of the spiritual and cultural importance of Gorakhnath's temple in the following way:

“Our *ṛṣi-maharṣi* and *yogi-sādhaka*, who could see the three times, from a very ancient time have made venerable the land of their birth, the land of their deeds, and the land of their practice with their renunciation and *tapas* and with the benefit of the world. These pure places, temples and sites of *tapas* have become centers of our land-

of-faith from a very long time in the form of the invaluable heritage of our Hindu dharma-culture. From their *darshan* the dirt of the mind is washed, pure thoughts arise, and the mind gets peace. By doing *darshan*, *puja* etc of the venerable figures established in the temples, the *bhāv* of the worshipper gets a strong impulse and a divine purity. The divine power of the great men connected [to them] stays pervaded in the temples for a very long time. Although it [the divine power] is not on the worldly earth from the supreme point of view, *maṭhas* and temples are not less valuable for us. Where, on the one side, religious, historical and social events of the past are celebrated, right there, temples are also supremely useful and excellent means to keep tied on the pure thread of unity the men and women of various idioms, different customs, ways of life and culture that live in different regions. (...) The background of the *maṭhas* and temples in alleviating the feeling of division of north and south and in creating a feeling of unity in diversity has been long memorable. The Hindu *dharma* has this specificity, that it reverts all things as the supreme Lord. (...)” (Avaidyanāth 1983:9)

The register of the passage, so far, is consistent with a general idiom of lay *bhakti* and national unity. And unlike in *Jaya Gorakhā*, where Gorakhnath is an active patron of the king, here the yogi is one among many examples of Hindu sages of the past. The emphasis is on the temple's capacity to purify the visitors' mind and, at the same time, to foster a feeling of unity in the country, connecting people of different regions and minimizing the divisions between north and south:

The Gorakhnath mandir in Gorakhpur is an instance of such a place, where the great yogi Gorakhnath has practiced *yoga-samādhi*. At the time in which he purified this place with his venerable spiritual grandeur, this was a forest region. In the holy presence of the divine personality of Srināth ji [i.e. Gorakhnath], the whole environment became spiritual. His teachings, full of blessings, awakened in the immovable beings of here a dynamic spiritual consciousness, and his veneration started

to be performed here in the form of Shiva Goraksha. The story of his divinity spread in different direction from one (person) to the other. Through the power of his personality, an ashram for worshipping started to be developed spontaneously and by his grace disciples started to advance on the path of spiritual awakening at an astonishing pace. Different ashrams and centers of spiritual reverence got established. In this way, the center of Gorakhpur became the main center of several small centers of *yoga-sādhana*.” (Avaideyanāth 1983:9-10)

The tone of this discussion reveals a tendency toward inscribing the Nāth temple within a broader configuration of Hindu places, in a pan-national perspective. As Christiane Brosius discussed in regard to the political *yātrās* of the BJP, building upon the sacred geography of the land, and especially upon the significance of the pilgrimage routes, is a fundamental strategy to endow the map of the nation with affective significance, transforming it into a homeland, able to counteract the feeling of displacement that a merely cartographic gaze upon the national territory would provoke. She distinguishes three main strategies against which the spatial practices of the BJP are built: 1) the notion of sacred land, derived from the ritual practice of pilgrimage and from cosmological maps, 2) colonial spatial representations (scientific maps and picturesque landscapes), and 3) Hindutva ‘counter-maps’ (Brosius 2005:137).

The *rathyātrās* of the BJP, along with their video representations, are an example of how such representational strategies may be harnessed to political ends. In the case of Nath temples, however, the process of inscribing them in the national landscape is not completely straightforward. Although Nath yogis, as wandering ascetics also relying upon landed monastic establishments, have a robust sense of their networks, sacred geography and pilgrimage routes (particularly reinforced by the institution of the

*jamāt*, a group of yogis designated to travel throughout the Nath network, overseeing its main monasteries, Bouillier 2008), their sacred places—unlike, for example, the *sapta purī*, the “seven cities” that constitute the most exalted pilgrimage destinations of the subcontinent—do not constitute a pan-Indian pilgrimage route for the unaffiliated laymen. Rather, Nāth temples in pre-colonial India were mainly of local significance, often associated with specific (usually low) castes, although, for some of these shrines, a process of brahmanization entailing the appropriation of some temples by high-caste priests and the sanskritization of their deities can be witnessed already in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, enhancing the supraregional importance of such temples (Sharma 1996). Avaydyanath's words, on this background, can be read as a further attempt at making the Nath temples an element of the mainstream sacred landscape.

In Nepal, on the contrary, the special importance assigned to Gorakhnath in the milieu of Prithvi Narayan's kingdom, makes for a privileged space of Nāth geography, where Naraharinath can envisage a necessary relationship between yogis and national interests. As we will see, the cave in Gorkha is the *mūlasthalī* of the Gorkha *jāti*, a place of national belonging even for those that are abroad. Because of this intimate relation between Gorakhnath and the Gorkhali, all laymen, in a way, are affiliated to the tradition of Gorakhnath—his temples are a national icon, and are not meant to foster feelings of detachment, as in Avaidyanath's account of Gorakhpur, but allegiance to Gorkha. If Avaidyanath looks at the Sanskritized model of the pacified Hindu sage for his reading of the figure of Gorakhnath, Naraharinath, instead, is deeply rooted in a nationalist tradition of patriotic pride and martial commitment.

## *Gorkha*

To understand Naraharinath's concern with national space—geography as a cognate to history—it is important to remember that discussions of the glorious military past of the Nepali kingdom were part and parcel of Panchayat era official historiography, as exemplified in that central element of nation-building that is the textbook culture of public schooling. As overviewed by Pratyoush Onta, the main historiographical rhetoric was one of so-called *bīr* ("brave") history: building upon the British recognition of the martial valor of the Gorkha soldiers (mostly of Magar and Gurung ethnicity), bravery was the central category of nationhood, and the *bīr purus* ("brave man") was presented as the paradigm of ideal citizen (Onta 1996:224-5).

The most celebrated hero of *bīr* history was Balbhadra Kunwar, who, in 1814, led a strenuous resistance against the Company troops of General Gillespie in the effort of defending the fort of Nalapani, near Dehradun, in the early stages of the Anglo-Gorkha war. The soldiers of Balbhadra Kunwar, deprived of their water supplies by the British, lost the fort in the end, but the exceptional resistance and valor of the Gorkhals, including women and children supporting the troops, greatly impressed the British. Balbhadra's story, as Onta discusses, is ubiquitous in Panchayat textbooks, the single most referenced story told to reinforce the ideal of a national history (*raṣṭrīya itihās*) among the Nepalis. On this background, the Treaty of Sugauli, which marked the end of the Anglo-Gorkha by yielding to the East India Company the territories beyond the Mechi and Mahakali rivers, was perceived as a moment of national loss, as it represented the failure of Balbhadra's fighters against a foreign power. Rune Bolding Bennike, in his overview of representations of "imperial landscape" in Panchayat era

textbooks, has observed that stories of Prithvi Narayan's conquests and battles were central to the telling of the national Nepali past in Panchayat textbooks, stressing the theme of national independence just as the country was more and more reliant on foreign aid.

"A range of subsequent stories (...) maintain a distinction between a bordered Nepali nationality (*Nepali rāstriyata*) that match the contemporary geographical extension of contemporary Nepal, and a Greater Nepal (*Viśal Nepal*) referring to the Gorkha Empire at its greatest extensions just before the Anglo-Gorkha war in 1814." (Bennike 2015:63-64)

Naraharinath displays great emotional distress at the loss of territories beyond the Mechi and Mahakali rivers to the British, but, in his case, the language the national indignation is also associated with anti-*mleccha* feelings that are fused with the history of the swaraj movement in India:

***"The original land [mūlasthalī] of the Gorkha jāti.***

Under the leadership of the king of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah, twelve thousand soldiers conquered the three cities. After having annexed Nepal [i.e. the Valley] in Gorkha, the Nepali also, having become Gorkhali, made the *digvijaya* in all four directions; this can still be found in the golden pages of the history of Nepal.

The Sugauli Treaty of the year 1872 B.S., which was only proposed, is a lie, a deceit. It does not have the royal seal and has not been signed by the king and it is not acceptable to us, the nine crore Gorkhalis. It is a mere proposal. The proposal has not been approved yet. The two employees, namely Gajaraj Mishra and Chandrashekhar Upadhyaya appointed as delegates for discussing the Sugauli Treaty, were not authorized to decide on behalf of Himali great Gorkha kingdom to squeeze down four folds into a small piece, to be confined within Mechi and Mahakali Rivers, and to be

satisfied with remaining landlocked. But even if the *firaᅅgī* played a trick, bribed the two, and repeatedly recited the same false letter to give it an impression of truth, in the end, all these were nullified by themselves and in the midnight of August 15, 1947 AD at Lal Qilla in Delhi, the *firaᅅgī*, about to go away, surrendered India in the hands of Nehru. During this event, in a resignation letter unpublished until the year '99 [?] written by the *firaᅅgī*, it is said: “We are leaving this land of India, as we have acquired after fighting with four forces: the Gorkhas, Sikhs, Mugals [sic] and Marathas. May they all regain their territories and rule.” According this wording, Jinnah made Pakistan. The Sikhs are still fighting. Marathas could not unite, hence got disheartened. The Gorkhali were not in agreement with each other, hence they are not able to regain the territories cut out from the great Gorkha kingdom before the fraudulent Sugauli Treaty and unify the Gorkha nation. All the Hindus, Hindusthani and Gorkhali, came together with the Mahatma Gandhi saying “Get aside, foreigners, Hindustan is ours”, they brought men, and the *firaᅅgī*, hearing Subhash [Chandra Bose]'s roar “*Calo Dillī*” [Let's go to Delhi], left India and went away—the eyes which saw this are still alive.

Today, we nine crore Gorkhas must unite and recite by nine crore voices the slogan, “Return our territories prior to the fraudulent Sugauli Treaty!”

Jaya Gorkha!” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:255)

Naraharinath's account presents two main points of departure from the conventions of national history described by Onta. First, against the Panchayat practice of referring to the nation as Nepal (with the anachronism of attributing to Balbhadra Kunwar exclamations such as “Jaya Nepal”), he privileges the name Gorkha, thus tying more intimately his words to the era of Prithvi Narayan Shah, on the one side, and, I suggest, to Gorakh and *go-rakᅣa* as his two others conceptual frameworks, on the other. Second, by presenting the occasion of India's Independence as a possible moment for re-appropriating the territories lost with the Treaty, he embeds the history of Nepal in the narrative of the Indian nationalist movement which, as we will see, he understands as

essentially Hindu nationalism. From this broader perspective, the Gorkhalis are not different from the Sikhs and the Marathas: all these groups are for him prominent examples of anti-*mleccha* resistance. If they have failed, it is just because of their internal disunity. The agenda of *Jaya Gorkhā* is thus explicitly programmatic: the Gorkha must reunite, be brave, and defend the Hindu dharma. As we can see in the next passage translated here, language, kinship and dharma are the three pillars around which to build such a shared identity.

“Mother's education in mother's tongue

Those who know the "mine-ness" and greatness of one's mother-tongue, mother-land and mother are called humans [*mānava*]. (...) more than golden Lanka, one's mother and motherland are even greater than heaven. In this changing world, who doesn't take birth? Who doesn't die? But fruitful is the birth of one whose birth enables the elevation, the progress of one's lineage, country and *jāti*. If a brave one, of firm determination, girdles his waist and thrusts his *khukhuri*<sup>42</sup> in the land of action, in front of him the vast earth will seem like a small altar in the courtyard of his home. The boundless ocean too will seem like the small canal of a field. The inaccessible hell will seem as big as a small plot. The inaccessible great Mount Sumeru will be like an ant mound. Just like a single bright sun illuminates the great earth, so a single bright powerful brave brightens up the whole world. This single cow-saver (*go-rakṣaka*) brave Gorkha *jāti* can defend the world. The bravery of the Gorkha *jāti* is renown in France, Britain, Germany, China, Japan, Israel, etc. In the golden page of world-history the *khukhuri* of the brave Gorkha shines brightly. (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:248)

The protection of the cow (*go-rakṣa*)— presented in this passage as the very etymology of the name Gorkha—is central at this regard, as it can be understood not just as a generic remainder of the sacredness of cattle in brahmanical orthodoxy,

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<sup>42</sup> the curved knife typical of Nepal, the iconic weapon of the Gurkha soldiers and a symbol of national bravery

but also, more importantly, as a reference to the symbolic status of Gorkha in upholding, preserving, and militarily defending Hindu orthodoxy from the attack of groups who do not revere the cow. Although the Gorkha mercenaries that have been fighting in the British army can hardly be said to have the defense of the cow as one of their priorities, for Naraharinath, conceptually, the martial engagement of the Gorkha warriors is never disjointed from their role as *go-rakṣaka*. This, in turn, can be seen as a reflection of their role as defenders of *dharma*, and an upbringing in an orthodox Gorkhali family, reinforcing the pre-eminence of the national language, is an essential part of national character-building:

“But a brave one—educated in his heart and his mind, together—is raised in the language of Gorkha, first by a brave mother, in her own mother-tongue, then by a well-wishing thoughtful father, and finally by a guru aware of the importance of the country, *jāti*, and *dharma*. If these three, or even just one or two among these three, are negligent and careless, it will be the opposite. Therefore, mother, father and teacher from the rite of *garbhadhān* until twenty-five years of age should pay attention step by step, providing to sons and daughters care, guidance, the sixteen rites, initiation, education, insight, discernment, and protection, and then marry them off with the rites of engagement. But those who want to serve the country, *jāti* and *dharma* for their whole lives, staying unmarried since childhood as *brahmancāri* and *brahmacāriṇī*, should not be forced to marry. Doing this would be harmful to society. History is witness.”

(Naraharināth B.S. 2041:248)

A model of conduct based on the *varnāśrama* dharma is thus presented as a positive solution for structuring family life. With the exception of those who want to pursue a celibate lifestyle for the benefit of the country, all others are exhorted to procreate to increase the number of Gorkhali warriors in the world. The family, in this passage, is

taken as the fundamental structure for the development of a national consciousness and any attempt to limit the number of births is considered a loss:

“The family planning run nowadays by hidden enemies is harmful to human life. The *jāti* of Gorkha should not do this. This is an admonition. If a population which is reaching from 1 *arbud*<sup>43</sup> to 2 *arbud* has no use for family planning, the heinous act of family planning by Gorkha, with only nine crores, is the heinous act of making childless the Gorkhali. May Gorkha not commit this big sin of extinguishing its *gotra*. Limited by an untimely castration, it cannot advance the work of the power of father and mother. Strength, intellect, knowledge, courage, life: having all [these] diminished, being like dead though still alive, breathing like a dry bellow, it eventually dies. Such a corpse cannot do any work of power and devotion [*śakti* and *bhakti*], and cannot protect the country, *jāti* and *dharma*. It will only be a burden for society and a burden for the earth. If the enemy presses at the borders and comes, it will fold hands and surrender the country. Having become a slave (*gulām*), it will give its salutation (*salām*). If it is struck, it dies. Because of such senseless beings who enslave the country and cannot recognize their own benefit, there will be the ruin of the *jāti*. Having built such hell while still alive, they stay in their own house as somebody else's servants.

Thus, the Gorkha *jāti*, not doing family planning, should follow the *varṇāśrama* system according its *svadharma* and keep propriety in society.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:248-49)

The apparent focus of the article is on the inappropriateness of family planning, introduced in Nepal in the sixties and implemented during the Panchayat era as a visible public health program, with a capillary presence of workers in the villages promoting different contraceptive options (Robinson and Ross 2007:369-70). However, in consequence of the cultural gulf between staff and villagers, inadequate clinics, and limited information, the results of family planning, expected to significantly curb the

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<sup>43</sup> one hundred millions

population growth, ended up to be minimal (Whelpton 2005:140). In Naraharinath's opinion, contraception is as an attack to the virility of the Gorkha *jāti*, which would thus become *aputāli* “childless”, a word charged with the negative notion of not having legitimate heirs.

“The average human life is one hundred years and, for 25 years, one is to acquire knowledge keeping *brahmācārya*, for 25 years to follow the condition of householder, for 25 years, in the state of *vanaprastha*, to serve others by giving initiation, instruction etc, for 25 years, having done the *sādhanā* of otherworldly benefit, to obtain the supreme state: (...) in not forsaking the vedic dharma there will be a natural family planning, without harming any body parts. This is the happy family of the Gorkhali. This is the *jāti* tradition of the Gorkhali *jāti*. It should do this and be a model for others. This is natural. That is corruption. (...) may no man or woman of the Gorkha *jāti* do that family planning. This is an admonition. The brave warriors who die in the war for *dharma* go straight to heaven. Those who win, rule. "*Ladḍus* in both hands."<sup>44</sup> Those who abandon the war of dharma and step back go to hell alive. Knowing this, the brave Gorkha warriors waving an unsheathed *khukhuri* in both hands go dancing on the heads of their enemies. They haven't learned to step back and fold their hands [in supplication]. Their brave self-reliant mothers haven't taught them so. The Gorkha obtain this instruction in Gorkha language from a Gorkhali mother. Just like the Pandavas obtained it from their mother Kānti. Just like Shivaji obtained it from his mother Jijabai. Just like Prithvi Narayan Shah obtained it from his mother Candraprabha. Just like Nahar, Kehar, Abhiman and Dhaukal<sup>45</sup> obtained it from their mother Shuraprabha. Having done so, may the lineage of Gorkha continue to obtain this knowledge in one's mother-tongue, from brave self-reliant mothers, until the moon, sun and earth exist. Jaya Gorkha! “ (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:248-49)

The mother tongue, that is, the Gorkhali language, is here explicitly recommended as a means of conveying a proper education. The tension between the Gorkhali

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<sup>44</sup> A proverb that means “There is a benefit either way”

<sup>45</sup> Four soldiers in the army of Prithvi Narayan Shah

language and the other languages of Nepal is not made explicit, but it was in fact a controversial topic during the Panchayat regime. As discussed by Onta, the National Education Planning Commission had recommended the government to make the teaching of Nepali language compulsory for all classes in all schools, with the hope that the other languages of the country would become extinct and greater national unity would be achieved through monolingualism. (Onta 1996:217-18) In Naraharinath's passage, the Gorkhali language is considered the mother tongue of all the people of Nepal, other idioms are not referenced, and the only two words in the text that are not in Nepali language are *gulām* (slave) and *salām* (salutation), in Urdu. This can be understood as an indirect but clear reference to the enemy of which a potentially coward Gorkhali could become a slave: the Muslims. Furthermore, the very presence of this reference, along with the insertion of Shivaji (and his mother Jijabai) among the paradigmatic heroes sorted out as examples of bravery, reveals that Naraharinath's conceptual framework is not limited to the national space of Nepal but looks at the broader formation of Hindu nationalism in India as an extended cultural sphere relevant to the Gorkhali. The most powerful idiom for discussing this transnational Hindu unity can, again, be seen in articulated around the notion of the defense of the cow:

### ***Go-rakṣā***

"Intelligent, strong, martial, *tapasvi* warriors roaring in the forest, fearless, became like a lion. By these very Gorkhas all the earth is protected. May protection be made eternally, until the sun and silver moon exist!

May the ruler of all the people be wise and religious! May the nation be stable, with peace and prosperity as its main qualities! May all have clothes and food, and do good farming, all together!

May all the world be peaceful, healthy, and devoted to the *śrutipatha*! The same *khukuri*, providing somehow both safety and pleasure, giving fear to the enemies of the cow-dharma, it's famous in the whole world."

From *Gorkha jātika nityapāṭha* ("Daily Prayer of the Gorkha *Jāti*" Naraharinath B.S. 2041:257)

The sacrality of the cow in brahmanical orthodoxy is a well-known theme: slaughtering cows is a *mahāpātaka*, one of the great sins that do not admit expiation, the gift of a cow (*go-dāna*), particularly to a brahman, is one of the most auspicious gifts, and the ritual feeding of cows is part of the observances of almost all castes (Batra 1986). Although beef-eating in ancient India is attested in the Veda, in the *Brāhmaṇas*, and it is referenced in the examples provided by Panini's grammar, it seems to have already been controversial at that time, and the practice disappeared in the following centuries, partly because of new religious considerations, and partly because practices of livestock breeding changed with increased urbanization (Doniger 2009:150-1). Evidence for beef-eating in the Vedic period is one of the main bones of contention in the controversy between scholars and Hindutva leaders on the representation of India's past.

In pre-colonial India, protecting cows was indeed an implemented practice:

"Foreigners who traveled to India in the sixteenth century report the worship and protection of the cow. There is evidence of institutions to look after old and infirm cattle (*goshalas*) from the same period. Some Muslim rulers, like Babar and Akbar, seem to have imposed a ban on cow slaughter in Delhi to forge unity between Hindus and Muslims. Both Maratha and Sikh rulers defined their kingship in terms of the protection of the cow. It is therefore not surprising that the first agitation against cow slaughter under colonial rule took place in the Punjab after the British victory over the Sikhs." (Van der Veer 1994:90-91)

The theme of cow-protection came to be charged with political meanings already in the early phases of the formation of Hindu nationalism. Dayananda Saraswati's *Gokarūṇānidhi* (1881), for example, is one of the first articulations of the defense of the cow as an act of cultural resistance. On this point, the Ārya Samāj found itself aligned with the Sanātana Dharma organizations, which, though in disagreement with the Ārya Samāj on most other points of ritual praxis, found a common value in the defense of the cow. In 1888, a decision of the High Court of Allahabad not to outlaw the ritual slaughtering of cows by Muslims outraged the concerned Hindu factions: “Consequently, the British and the Muslims came to be seen as allied beef-eating barbarians determined to insult the deepest religious sentiments of the Hindus.” (Van der Veer 1994:92)

A song from Gujarat, in 1911, from the repertoire of an orphanage run by the Ārya Samāj to “rescue” orphans who had been converted to Christianity by a local missionary, eloquently illustrates how by this time cow-slaughter had already become the central metonymy for foreign domination:

“If, o Father, you do not save us we shall lose our religion; for the want of a handful of grain, the children will become Christian cow-killers; the limited children of India, who are protectors of the cow, will turn into cow-killers: (...)” (Hardiman 2007:47)

The problem of cow-slaughter, however, was less important within the official discourses of the secular strand of Indian nationalism. In 1949-50, the secularist and traditionalist factions debated within the Constituent Assembly on the legal status of cow slaughter. The result was rather ambiguous: Article 48 of the Constitution recommended the prohibition of cow-slaughter as a “Directive Principle” to guide the states. However, certain states, like Kerala, refused to restrict the practice, and a judgment of the Supreme

Court in 1958 limited the scope of the law in other states. (Jaffrelot 1996:205). The ambiguity of the Congress toward prohibiting cow-slaughter became an easy target of criticism for the most radical factions of the Hindutva groups. In 1966 a *Sarvadalīya Gorakṣa Mahābhīyan Samiti* was founded, announcing a *satyagraha* for cow-protection, pooling together members of the VHP, RSS, Bhārat Sādhu Samāj, Ārya Samāj, Hindu Mahāsabhā and Rām Rājya Pariṣad. The organization launched a protest that culminated in some agitations in front of the Lok Sabha, but did not achieve its ultimate objective of outlawing cow-slaughter and rejected all compromises offered by the government. As a main point of critique against the secularism of the Congress, the emphasis on cow-protection became one of the main electoral strategies of the Jana Sangh (Jaffrelot 1996). The BJP inherited the legacy of the movement and made the ban of cow-slaughter, now with definite anti-Muslim communal implications, one of the main points of its political agenda, particularly in the 1990s, when a new symbol for anti-Muslim mobilization was needed after the end of the *Rām-janma-bhūmi* movement (Noronha 1994).

Cow-protection in Nepal, instead, had always been a central concern of the monarchy: all Shah kings implemented the ban of cow-slaughter and took measures as to ensure the availability of pasture and fodder for the cattle. However, some non-Hindu ethnic groups did slaughter cows, sometimes “accidentally,” pushing them from a cliff, or deliberately, as an act of protest against the central kingdom: “The northern Magar say that they used to kill cows especially at times when they had trouble with the government in Kathmandu: they attacked, as it were, a symbol of the state rather than the state itself.” (Michaels 1997:86)

In the 19th century, cow-slaughter could (and was) punished by sentencing to death the wrongdoer, often with extremely cruel methods. The *Muluki Ain* of Jang Bahadur Rana formalized a series of rules to protect cows from being slaughtered, although, as Michaels observes, the specific details of such regulations distinguished between “intentional” and “negligent” killing, thus perhaps providing a gray area of ambiguity for some accidental butchering (Michaels 1997:90). Although the death-sentence was later changed into life-imprisonment and, more recently, into 18 years of incarceration, the ban on slaughter remained central to the monarchy and was looked upon with admiration by Hindu nationalists in India.

As Subhash Gatade observes, the relationship between Hindutva groups in India and the Nepali monarchy was political and ideological at the same time. From the practical point of view, the World Hindu Federation (*Viśva Hindū Mahāsaṅgha*) took an active interest in organizing meetings between Nepali and Indian delegates to discuss potential threats to the Hindu monarchy in Nepal, particularly in the context of the Maoist insurgency. At this regard, we may also observe the central role played by the Nath leadership in Gorakhpur, particularly in the person of Adityanath (Gatade 2011:136). Ideologically, Nepal served as a role model for the project of nation-building of the Sangh Parivar, providing a framework of policies that were considered desirable by the leaders of saffron politics in the subcontinent:

“For the Sangh Parivar and its affiliated organizations, Nepal was the only nation in the world where the 'one nation, one people, one culture' was already in place. The monarchy in Nepal had made religious conversion an offence and the slaughter of the official national animal, the cow, could be punished with 18 years of rigorous imprisonment.” (Gatade 2011:136).

It is important to notice, however, that, in Naraharinath's view, the ultimate subject responsible for implementing the protection of the cow was not the monarchy per se. Rather, it was the broader constituency of all Gorkhalis, assigned with the task of acting as defender of the dharma through the symbolical medium of the cow. In this, Naraharinath was more radical than the king: according to the report of one of his disciples, he advocated the death-sentence for those who committed *go-hātya*, personally observed a three-days fasts for each cow (naturally) passed away in his ashram, and considered the main ashram he founded, the one in Vagishvari at Devghat, as a *gośāla*, that is, a cow shelter. Looking at the Gorkha mercenaries as the best suited defenders of cows was clearly not possible on the facts of history alone. Although the kingdom of Nepal was projected to the world of the Sangh Parivar as a positive model of orthodoxy, as opposed to India's secularism, the very independence of the Himalayan kingdom had been preserved through important compromises and extended collaborations with the British. As Axel Michaels observes:

“if you look at the details of [the Nepali rulers'] legal measures against cow slaughter, there is a remarkable gap between claim and reality. And it is also rather ironic that only a few years after the promulgation of the Ain, Gurkha regiments joined the British army to beat down the Great Mutiny of 1857 since this was caused by the rumour that the ammunition for the newly introduced Enfield rifles, which had to be cracked with one's teeth before loading, was greased with cow or pig tallow.” (Michaels 1997:98)

For Naraharinath, however, the intimate relationship between Gorakh, Gorkha and *go-rakṣa* was embedded in the very lexical derivation of the words, and by employing etymological argumentation to uphold the ideal of Gorkha as a transnational protector of Hindu dharma, Naraharinath uses his position as a Sanskrit specialist to

respond to new epistemological practices of 20<sup>th</sup> century South Asia. He thus ascribes to himself a political role *as rāṣṭriya-guru*, “national teacher,” blending together different spheres of knowledge, such as history, politics and Sanskrit etymology—a praxis also apparent in his treatment of the other guru of the Nāth school, Matsyendranath.

### ***Matsyendranath: the Lord of the Fish***

Naraharinath’s reading of Gorakhnath’s guru Matsyendranath is another example of creative reinterpretation, in political function, on the basis of etymology. Like in the case of Gorkhnath, the understanding of this figure in Nepal, central to the ritual life of the Valley, presents some interesting local specificities that make him quite different from the Matsyendranath of the Indian mythological cycles. Nilakantha Bhatta's *Matsyendrapadyaśatakam*, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit poem composed for a major event in the ritual history of the Malla kingdom, offers to Yogi ji an important canvas on which to weave his reflections. But, before delving into the specific features of Naraharinath’s reinvention, we may here set a historical background by analyzing Matsyendranath’s history, first in its textual expressions and then at its fundamental juncture in 17<sup>th</sup> century Lalitpur.

Compared to the legends of Gorakhnath, the cycle of Matsyendranth presents more variants, all of which endeavor to provide an explanation for his unusual name. In the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*, a 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century tantra, Bhairava-Matsyendranath, identifying himself both as supreme divine principle and as the teacher who conveys sacred knowledge to humanity, says that he took the form of a fisherman (*dhīvara*) to rescue a *śāstra* that, thrown in the ocean by Skanda, had been swallowed by a fish: "I am that

fisherman, oh Devī. Assumed the state of a Kaivartta [fisherman], I then caught the fish, having made a net of *śakti*" (16.35).

However, most Nāth legends explain this name by stating that he overheard Shiva imparting yoga teachings to Parvati on the sea-shore while he was captive in the belly of a fish (White 1997:223), thus distinguishing between Shiva as the teacher and Matsyendranath as the disciple. Some versions, such as the *Matsyendra-saṃhitā* studied by Csaba Kiss, combine the motif of the fisherman with that of the residence in the belly of the fish: Matsyendranath is born as a low-caste fisherman, later swallowed by a big fish (Kiss 2010:12). Though the most frequent versions all present some variations on this theme, other interpretations, with a *vaiṣṇava* undertone, are also reported. Thus, in the Rajasthani cycle of the local hero Goga, Kavi-Narayana is born out of Brahma's semen in the belly of a fish in the ocean, where he overhears Shiva's teachings to Parvati and receives the god's instruction to seek for Dattatreya's initiation on the mountain of Badrinath. Kavi-Narayana, given birth by the fish on the sea-shore, is adopted by a fisherman, who raises him lovingly throughout his childhood. However, moved by compassion by the sight of a fish caught by his father, one day the boy decides to become a renouncer and retires to perform austerities in Badrinath, where he finally receives Dattatreya's initiation. (Muñoz 2010:69)

Though the name of Kavi-Narayana provides a *vaiṣṇava* tone to the story, there is in fact no attempt to connect the aquatic residence of the divine creature with the mythology of Vishnu's *matsya avatāra*. This connection occurs only in Jñāndev's commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the *Jñāneśvarī* (late 13<sup>th</sup> century). In this text, the author traces his lineage to Gorakhnath (White 1997:95), disciple of Matsyendranath,

who is here considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu as fish (*matsya*) (Muñoz 2010:78). The *Jñāneśvarī* can be read as a Nāth text colored by *vaiṣṇava bhakti*: a fundamental tenet of its doctrines is the *kuṇḍalinīyoga*, but this is here said to be “shown by Śrī Mahāviṣṇu” (Kiehnle 1997:179). This interpretation, however, is definitely minoritarian in the broader Nāth world. Nowadays, in the standard identification of the Nava Nāthas with more general divine figures,<sup>46</sup> Vishnu is represented by a yogi named Santoshnath, while guru Matsyendranath is considered the embodiment of the cosmic principle of *māyā*.

Naraharinath’s literary engagement with the names of the two Nāth gurus provides a very interesting point of departure from all these different variations on the mythology of the two founders. Reflections on the history and geography of Nepal, absent in all these tales, make their way into his understanding of the significance of the names of the Nāth guru, with some peculiar results: Matsyendranath, as a symbol of the fish that once inhabited the lake of the Kathmandu Valley, offers a rationalist, almost scientific perspective on the cult of Bungadya-Macchindra, the monsoon-garantor of the Newari communities of Nepal.

### ***From Bungadya to Matsyendranath: new poetics in the cult of the rain-god***

In reinterpreting the figure of the *dādā-guru* of the Nāth tradition, Naraharinath finds indeed a precedent in the local tradition of the cult of Bungadya, a local rain-deity who became identified as Rato (“Red”) Matsyendranath only in the 17th century: considered crucial for the regular beginning of the rain season in the Valley and, until the political transition from monarchy to democracy, in assuring the welfare of the kingdom, the festival of this particular deity has always attracted the attention of all social sectors,

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<sup>46</sup> the representation of the Nine yogis as Hindu gods, in the posters that circulate in contemporary ashrams.

from the king to the commoners. Matsyendranath's *jātrā*, which parades a chariot fifty feet tall across a complex procession starting from the Newari town of Patan (also called Lalitpur) in April, extends for several weeks and is preceded by an even longer period of preparation, featuring festival-related activities for over eight months. It engages all segments of Newari society and, after the Shah conquest, part of the Gorkhali as well, involving over one hundred ritual events. Its climax is the "showing of the *bhoṭo*," a jeweled shirt that makes its yearly appearance to a massive crowd celebrating on that very day the beginning of the monsoon.

When not paraded in procession, the deity resides in two different temples, one in Patan (from the winter solstice to the conclusion of the *jātrā* in late spring), the other in Bungamati (hence the name Bungadyaḥ, "the deity of Bunga"), except for once every twelve years, where he stays in Bungamati all year-round. The popularity of his cult has originated a series of other temples dedicated to divinities similarly called Lokeśvara-Matsyendranath, each also endowed with a local name.

Traditionally, there are four other Matsyendranaths in the Kathmandu Valley, the "Lokeśvaras of the four places", though there is some disagreement on the legitimate members of this list, with five candidates. Only three of them, the Rato Matsyendranath of Patan and Bungamati (the Bungadyaḥ under consideration here), the Seto ("White") Matsyendranath of Kathmandu (locally called Janmadyaḥ), and the Minanath of Paṭan (Cakwadyaḥ) are thought about as Matsyendranath and have great *jātrās*, while Naladya of Nala and Cobahadya (or Ādinath) of Chobar are usually called with their village names and are mostly of local significance.

The names Avalokiteśvara, Karuṇāmaya, Lokeśvara and Matsyendranāth do not exhaust Bungadya's identities: as Tuladhar-Douglas (2005) has argued in his study of the late-medieval history of Karuṇāmaya, this deity was also thought about as Amoghapāśa, and his Buddhist priests, the Vajrācāryas and the Pānjus, use also other names, structured according to various levels of secrecy: this phenomenon, which Tuladhar-Douglas defines as “polynomasia,” is a feature typical of many Newar temples, where the interplay between “outward” and “inner” identities separates the secrecy of tantric cults from the public ceremonies, and allows the preservation of multiple ritual traditions at a single shrine.

This anthropological complexity is coupled by an equally rich history. The earliest reference to “Bungadyaḥ”—the “god of Bunga,” that is, the agricultural hamlet of Bungamati—is contained in the *Gopālarājajavaṃśavalī*, a Newari chronicle dated to the reign of Jayasthiti Malla (1328-95) which attributes to king Narendradeva and his *ācārya* Bandhudatta the institution of the *jātrā*, the chariot procession, of Bugma Lokeśvara. The same text also records that king Balārjunadeva (9th or 10th century) donated to the deity his crown. A miniature painting of a figure of Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara called Bugama Lokeśvara is then found in a manuscript dated to the 11th century, but we have no other references until the 13th century, which is instead particularly dense with records: the Tibetan monk Dharmasvāmin witnessed the worship of Bungadyaḥ in 1226, and in the period between 1287 and 1334 there are records related to some Khāśiya Malla kings, who invaded the Valley and paid their homage to Bungadyaḥ and Svayambhūnāth by performing a bathing ceremony in the spring. As Tuladhar-Douglas has argued, the spring ritual was probably tied to the ritual

calendar of the Khāsiya court, while the court of Bhaktapur performed a procession in the late spring (Tuladhar-Dougals 2006:135).

Occasional records of patronage are available also in the 15th and 16th century, but the main turning point in the history of the cult occurred in the 17th century, in correspondence with the reign of Siddhinarasiṃha Malla and of his son Śrīnivās Malla, a period that had been first investigated by John Locke (1980). As Locke discusses, the Nepali chronicles (*vaṃśavalīs*) record that Siddhinarasiṃha added a storey and golden decorations to the temple and built a garden in the royal palace which he divided into three parts dedicated respectively to Taleju, Degutale and Matsyendranāth. However, the so-called Wright *vaṃśavalī*, a 19th century compilation from earlier chronicles, written by a Vajrācārya of Mahabauddha Baha in Patan and published by Daniel Wright in 1858, notes that during the *ratha* of 1656 a child who had just received his rice-feeding ceremony got possessed and expressed his displeasure, thus highlighting some tensions in the history of the cult (Locke 1980:305). Another intervention dating to this period is the introduction of the custom of having two brahmans seated on the chariot of the festival (Locke 1980:303) and, after Siddhinarasiṃha's retirement to religious life in 1661, the royal interference in the ritual life of Matsyendranath was continued by his son Srinivas: a *guthi* was established in 1662 for the *āratī pūjā* at the temple, followed by yearly records of patronage of various sorts. An especially interesting inscription, which highlights the terms of the pluralistic religious agenda of Srinivas Malla, is recorded in the *Bhāsā vaṃśavalī* for the year 1672, when, after donating to the deity a golden *toraṇa* and a door, the king placed on it a Sanskrit inscription "which said that the yogis call the deity Matsyendranath, the Saktas call him Sakti, the Buddhist call him Lokeshvara and his

true form is Brahma. The chronicles do not say which temple the inscriptions was placed on, and the inscription seems to be lost” (Locke 1980:307).

Of the two temples of the deity, at Bungamati and Patan, the latter was probably built during the time of Srinivas Malla, since there are no references to it before 1652. By establishing this alternative residence for the deity in his own capital, the king managed to have the annual festival beginning there: while before that time the deity resided in Bungamati throughout the year, now he was to spend six months in his capital and six months in his original village. To this period also date the composition of the *Matsyendrapadyśatakam*—the first text to call the deity “Matsyendranath”—commissioned by the king to a brahman from Varanasi: Nilakantha Bhatta.

John Locke has proposed that the identification of Bungadyah-Karuṇāmaya with Matsyendranath may have been actively operated under the influx of the Nāth yogis present in Nepal. To support this hypothesis, he pointed to two sets of evidence for a possible pre-history of Matsyendranath in the Valley before Srinivas: the presence of the Nāth Sampradāya in Nepal since the early Malla age and the circulation of a series of tantric manuscripts attributed to an author called Matsyendranath, along with local lore pertaining to a Nāth siddha called Lopi, Lopipāda or Lopinātha, the alternative Tibetan name for the siddha Matsyendranath. On the basis of these materials Locke hypothesized a lost branch of the Nāth Sampradāya, associated with Matsyendranath but not with Gorakhnath, to whom, he suggests, the author of the *Matsyendrapadyśatakam* may have also belonged. An initiatic Nath affiliation for Nilakantha, however, is unlikely: he does not sign himself with a Nāth name, as it would be customary for a yogi, although he does display a certain knowledge of yogic terminology in his composition.

A different explanation has been proposed by Gerard Toffin. On the basis of a version of Matsyendranath's story rendered into modern Newari by Āśā Kaji Vajrācārya from a lost *Maṇi-ratna-mālā*, he argued for a Dumezilian interpretation of the deity, which in his view synthesizes all the three functions of magico-religious sovereignty, military royalty and productivity, corroborated by the specific social status of the three persons credited with having brought the deity into Nepal: the *ācārya* Bandhudatta, king Narendradeva and the peasant Ratna Cakra, who end their lives merging into the body of the mūrti: the priest in his right foot, the king in the left, and the farmer in his seat. However, noting that the population of the Malla age was probably more complex than this tripartite structure, Toffin concludes that the Malla court, as a Hindu power in the midst of a mostly Buddhist population, decided to co-opt the most important divinity of the Valley to legitimize its supremacy: by associating to the king the figure of the Buddhist priest and of the farmer, both representative of the predominantly Buddhist population of the Valley, the story established the alliance between the Hindu monarch and the population of Patan, precisely when the deity received a new Hindu name and his ritual was reshaped by creating the custom of having brahmins seated on the chariot.

In a similar fashion, David Gellner (1996) emphasized a straightforwardly hostile anti-Buddhist agenda: as Hindu rulers in the midst of a predominately Buddhist populations, he proposed, Siddhinarasimha and Srinivas accepted the main Buddhist cult of the area, that is, Bungadya's festival, but encapsulated it in a Hindu framework. Srinivas' golden window in the royal palace, depicting Lokeśvara emitting all the gods, but encompassed by *vaiṣṇava* iconography above and below the main image, would suggest, he argues, that both the deity and the king himself—who would be framed by

this very window in his public appearances—are thus assimilated to “the same high Hindu god, Viṣṇu.” (1996:141) As for his identification with Matsyendranath, whom he reads as “a form of Śiva”, he follows Locke in attributing to the local branch of the Nāth yogis the responsibility for the re-naming of Bungadya, adding that, probably, their association with the kingdom of Gorkha, raising in prominence at that time, may have motivated Srinivas to support their claims, expressing “a paternalistic attitude to Gorkha through the guru-disciple relationship of the kingdoms’ respective patron-saints.” (1996:142)

Gellner’s interpretation of Siddhinarasimha and Srinivas as agents of an aggressive hinduization, however, is problematic: Siddhinarasimha’s regulations with regard to the Buddhist monasteries of Lalitpur, rather than an attempt to refashion the city in Hindu terms, were a normal intervention expected by the Buddhist themselves, particularly in case of internal disagreement. We know in fact of an opposition in seventeenth century Lalitpur between the *saṃsārika* (tantric householders) and *nirvāṇika* (liberation-oriented renunciators) factions of Newar Buddhism, with the former gaining the upper hand with Siddhinarasimha (Bledsoe 2004:218-221). Gellner’s own reference to an unpublished inscription on the above mentioned golden window, showing that it was donated by a Buddhist goldsmith to the king, is also at odds with any hypotheses of anti-Buddhist persecution: as Gellner himself admits, “the correspondence which the window postulates between king, bodhisattva, and Hindu god, could be encouraged by loyal Buddhist subjects.” (1996:141).

Tuladhar-Douglas, in fact, argued that the image of the golden window representing Lokeśvara was in fact based on the Buddhist *Guṇa-karaṇḍa-vyūha*, thus

suggesting an intimate relationship between Srinivas' self-representation and the local Buddhist priesthood (2006:160). Furthermore, he also drew attention to an epithet of Avalokiteśvara in the second chapter of the *Guṇa-karaṇḍa-vyūha* (II.140), where the bodhisattva is praised as *matsyādyambujajantūnām* “the reassurer of oceanic creatures such as fish” (2006:181), concluding that:

“This is clearly a reference to the term Matsyendranāth. An initial explanation is that the process of adding a Nāth name to in order to accommodate the Śaiva Nāths had already taken place. This explanation seems unlikely to me; the most obvious objection is that in a work where Śiva himself is a missionary working for Buddhism, why would the authors have accommodated to Śaiva Nāths? More interesting is the possibility that the Newar tradition of Matsyendranāth being a Buddhist *ācārya* is reflected here. It is sometimes assumed that this claim on the part of the Buddhists only develops after the Śaiva Nāths gain some influence in the rituals of and is a reaction to a pre-existing mythology in which Matsyendranātha has always been Śaiva. Here, however, we see evidence to the contrary. Vanaratna, according to the inscription recorded by Alsop and Pal (1985:236–7), had close contact with marginal ascetic groups such as kuśalis and yogis, the latter of which may have been Nāths. It is a matter of speculation whether the Nāths of Vanaratna's day were as eclectic as he himself appeared to be; by the 15th century, whatever Buddhist Nāth (or proto-Nāth) lineages may have existed would almost certainly have been extinct. While it is therefore impossible to assess the reaction of contemporary Nāths in Nepal, in the 15th century was already known as Matsyendranāth.” (2006:181)

Though suggestive, however, his evidence seems inconclusive: a single reference to the piscine bodhisattva, without any clear indication of his being related to the Nath guru, may imply perhaps a shared mythical substratum, but does not constitute a solid proof that the deity was worshipped as Matsyendranath before the time of Srinivas. The first text in which the name of Matsyendranath is referenced as such is the

*Matsyendrapadyśatakam*, where the deity, called *mahāyogī* and referenced along Adinath and Gorakhnath in the first verse, is clearly put in relation to the Nath school. Though, as all authors have observed, the presence of Nāth Yogīs in the history of the Kathmandu Valley is attested since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as evidenced by Madana Rāmavarddhana’s inscription, mentioning “Gorakha”, in 1382 and by Jayasthiti Malla’s donation of the Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa to the yogis (Bledsoe 2004:106), their function within the political project of Siddhinarasimha and Srinivas seems more specific.

The role of monastic institutions in promoting transregional networking has been discussed by Indrani Chatterjee, who has highlighted how monastic initiatic lineages functioned as transregional networks to be tapped for diplomatic and military resources:

“Connections between monastic communities, residential dormitories and laymen's associations and lineages between the Himalayan and the Gangetic worlds brought together three features of monastic geographicity. First, both donors and recipients originated from widely separated and varied territorial/geographical sites—or 'all four directions' (of an imaginary compass), as a favoured epigraphic phase put it; second, rather than personal biographies, they were tied together by a common tradition or name of teachers, and third, they were linked by monastically led, or monastically sponsored and authorized, militas.” (Chatterjee 2013:42)

Since the institutional network of the Nath school spanned throughout the larger circuits of North India (Bouillier 1991), transregional networking, more than the anti-Buddhist hostility proposed by Gellner and Toffin, may have been a main motivation for the Malla kings: in the important Nath monastery of Caughera (Dang), *pardeśi* (“foreign”) seems to have become at a certain point a virtual synonym for “celibate” (Bouillier 1997, p.138), and 17th century inscriptions of the Valley attests that resources were allocated for sponsoring *paradeśi* ascetics on festive occasions, at the exclusion of

the religious figures settled in Nepal with local income (Bledsoe 2004:268-69). Srinivas' patronage of the Nāth yogis, and his commissioning the redaction of the *Matsyendrapadyāsatakam*, could be key in creating new avenues for the Malla kings to connect to a broader institutional landscape, without necessarily implying a forced Hinduization of the local customs. Furthermore, the superimposition of Sanskrit aesthetics upon a local cult can perhaps be best understood as an "attempt to be local while remaining assertively global", as Pollock (2006:328) remarks in regard to Jayapratapa Malla's inscription of 1655, where the king of Kathmandu celebrates himself and his lineage through lengthy Sanskrit compounds "in the best cultural fashion of the Sanskrit cosmopolis" (Pollock 2006:328).

Another indication of the importance of transregional circuits in the cultural sphere of 17th century Lalitpur is also provided by Nilakantha's own signature, in the colophon of the *Matsyendrapadyāsatakam*, as a *dakṣiṇātya* (southerner) *ācārya* residing in Varanasi: as discussed by Rosalind O'Hanlon, the migration of *dakṣiṇātya* pandits to Benares was especially frequent in the 16th and 17th centuries, exemplifying that "interconnectedness" that Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997) sees as characteristic of the early modern era in South Asia (O'Hanlon 2010:201).

As for the content of the poem, the one hundred verses in honor of Matsyendranath written by Nilakantha represent an example of Sanskrit devotional literature located at the intersection of Nath culture and the *mahātmya* genre of Sanskrit eulogy. The first verse makes reference to the Nath *paramparā* of the mythical origins of the school by praising Matsyendranath as Adinatha Lokeśvara, followed by a reference to the name of Gorakhnath. The conflation of Matsyendranath with Adinatha,

however, is not typical of the Nath legends. Rather, Adinath, "the Nath of the origins", is usually identified with Śiva and this identification has become nowadays canonical, as reinforced, for example, by the diagram representing the Nava Nāthas as incarnations of specific deities in posters displayed in temples and in images in publications. At this regard, it is interesting to note that Adinath is also the name of the "Matsyendranath" of Chobar—though we don't know if this identification was already established by Nilakhantha's time, the choice of this epithet at the beginning of the poem may perhaps be a reference to the deity of Chobar. Gorakhnath is mentioned next, with no particular emphasis, departing again from Nath conventions, which usually praises Gorakhnath, rather than Matsyendranath, as the true guru of the tradition.

The poem starts praising the compassion of the deity towards his devotees (verse 2), but defining him as *yoga-yukta* (harnessed by yoga) (verse 3), and identifying him as creator, preserver and destroyer of the world (verse 4): a common trope of the *mahātmya* genre, which assimilates to the *trimūrti* any object of reverence. The first section of the text (verse 5 to 40) focuses on the appearance of the deity, describing the divine beauty of all his body parts, from his crown to his toes, though it is clear from verse 6, where the god is referenced as "established in the middle of Nepal *maṇḍala*" and "going around in his chariot in the spring", that the poet is not praising Matsyendranath in his generic form, but specifically as the deity paraded in Lalitpur's festival. Verse 7 has an almost vedantic overtone: the deity is praised as awakening the thought "Who am I?" in the minds of his devotees, but the devotional element is preponderant: he is the one who, when pleased, fulfills the four *puruṣārthas* and removes the evil of the devotees who take refuge in his chariot (verse 8 and 9), he is an *avatāra* whose only duty is to have compassion for his

*bhaktas* (verse 10), his compassion removes even the fear of death for those who have taken refuge in him (verse 11). His *bhaktas*' songs to him are a means of purification for the afflicted ones, and his gaze, having removed sorrow, makes people regard the forest as their home (verse 12).

The description, however, is interspersed with references to Nāth doctrines: at verse 18, for example, the authors blends the motif of the *kuṇḍalas* (earrings) adorning the ears of the god with the Nath doctrines of the *kuṇḍalinī* and of the *anāhata nāda*:

"May the awareness of the unstruck sound always arise. This pair of ears of yours shines with the beautiful coils of the great kuṇḍalī, oh Matsyendranāth!" (Naraharināth, 1964:6)

His figure is clearly presented as that of a yogi: his gaze is unfalteringly directed to the beautiful tip of his own nose (verse 19); his *ajñā cakra* wins over *rāga* and *dveṣa* (verse 20); his *recaka* (out-breath), *pūraka* (in-breath) and *kumbhaka* (breath-retention) correspond to the emanation, destruction and preservation of the world, respectively, (verse 21); he is constantly engaged in *japa* (verse 23); his tongue, upward, always tastes the nourishment made of consciousness of the one-thousands petal lotus (verse 24);<sup>47</sup> and he observes *mauna*, except when teaching to his *bhaktas* (verse 25).

The telling of the myth of his coming to Nepal, however, reflects the local tradition of Bungadya's mythology: the deity is brought by king Narendra and his *ācārya* Bandhudatta to end a drought, in form of a bumble-bee, then honored with a chariot festival.

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<sup>47</sup> a reference to the yogic practice of khecarī mudrā, meant to drink the dripping of the nectar from the sahasradala-cakra

Though, in the larger corpus of Nath literature, the *Matsyendrapadyaśatakam* is definitely a minor text, unknown to most yogis, the very existence of a textual Sanskrit tradition on Bungadya produced from within the parameters of a Nath mythological tradition (loose and fluid as this may be) offers Naraharinath a first standpoint from which to comment on the deity with some degree of sectarian authority: as a Nath yogi commenting on a Nath text, he finds himself in the position of talking about this particular deity in ways that his sole ritual standing would not immediately allow. His ritual functions as *mahant* of Mrigasthali, in fact, though important in other celebrations, such as the king-sponsored *Gorakhnāth Jayantī*, do not feature prominently in Matsyendranath's *jātrā*, which is, instead, a Newari Vajrāyāna's affair: a minor act of worship in Matsyendranath's temple, the so-called *cakrapūjā*, featuring the sacrifice of a sheep, represents nowadays the only active engagement of the yogis in the ritual cycle of the deity, one that is also performed in other tantric temples of the Valley.

### *Historicizing the fish—Matsyendranath in the Valley's lake*

Naraharinath's re-discovery of Nilakantha's text constitutes therefore a serendipitous avenue for him to engage with this important festival in a more active intellectual fashion: as we will see, however, his intervention as publisher of the old poem, far from being an act of archival philology, highlights 20<sup>th</sup> century concerns that definitely override Nilakantha's voice.

In introducing this text, in fact, Naraharinath does not start from the theme of Matsyendranath, but from a discussion of the origins of the Himalaya from the origins of the earth, thus embedding what is to follow in a framework of cosmic time. His

quotations, though weaved together as a seemingly seamless sequence, are from different sources, the *Manu Smṛti*, the *Taittirīya Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The de-contextualization of the quotation from its source is particularly apparent in the case of the verse from the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The original says *sthāvarāṇam himālaya*, “among the immovable beings, the Himalaya” and is taken from the famous list in the tenth *adhyāya* where Visnu identifies himself with different examples of people, beings, and qualities, sorting out the most excellent item in each category as an embodiment of himself. Here, instead, the *pada* is translated as “Among the immovable beings, Himāl is the eldest” thus departing significantly from the letter of the original. To an untrained reader, however, the sequence of quotations may seem a coherent quotation, taken fully from the same source

*Apa eva sasārjau* | In the beginning just water sprang forth. *adbhyaḥ pṛthvī* | From water, earth was emitted. *Sthāvara jajñire tasyām* | On earth, the first immovable beings took birth. | *sthāvarāṇam himālaya* | Among the immovable beings, Himāl is the eldest. *Jyeṣṭhatvāt tuṅgottarā* | Because it is the eldest, it is the highest. (Naraharināth 1964:ka)

These initial quotations are selected to provide a Sanskrit background for a discussion on the Himalaya as the most pristine place on earth, centered around two main points: the Himalaya is the origin place of humankind, and ancient Vedic literature is connected to it. Naraharinath's understanding of this development rests on a combination of *sāṃkhya* cosmology (the reference to the *prakṛiti*, in Sanskrit *śṛṣṭīkramaśaḥ prakṛtyā*) and a geographical gaze on the Nepali landscape. The reference to the nine *khaṇḍas* alludes to the puranic cosmology that structures *Bhāratvarṣa* in nine parts (*khaṇḍas* or *dvīpa*), but the name *Himavat-khaṇḍa*, although it is here understood as one of such divisions, is derived instead from the *Himavat-*

*khaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa*, where *khaṇḍa* means instead “chapter” or “section” of the *purāṇa*. Alongside these Sanskrit references, however, the prose also uses vernacular phrases (such as *ḍāṃḍā kāṃḍā*, “hill and knots”) thus almost echoing the discourse of a Nepali textbook:

“In the earth, which is made of nine *khaṇḍas*, the *Himavat-khaṇḍa* stands erect, unbroken, from the East to the Ocean. It is the middle part between the Brahmaputra and the Sindhu. Humankind first appeared in the Himālavī. The pristine Vedic literature is Himāli. According to the sequence of the origin from *prakṛti*, water decreased and earth increased. First hills and knolls emerged. Then emerged the lowlands of the valleys. Settlements moved downward.” (Naraharināth 1964:ka)

Immediately after this description, arguably concerned with the prehistory of the Valley, we are soon brought back to historical time, with the Himāli kingdom (*apāḍrāj*) being described in its extension. *Jāveśvara* is not explained in terms of time and space, and the reader is probably supposed to understand that this was Nepal’s original extension, at the time of the first appearance of *Himavat-khaṇḍa* on earth. The times of Rana Bahadur and the Sugauli Treaty, instead, would be familiar to an educated Nepali reader, as they are part of the more recent history of Nepal discussed in textbooks. Interestingly, there is no discussion of the transition from *Jāveśvara* to Rana Bahadur, and the reader is almost left with the impression that the Sugauli treaty marks the first moment in which the territory of Nepal is reduced:

“Our Himāli kingdom extended far, up to *Jāveśvara*.

Also during the time of Raṇa Bahādūr, the valiant grand-grandson of Pṛthvī, it was up to *Tiṣṭhā*, *Kāṇḍā*, *Gaṅgā*, *Digarcā*. Because of the Sugauli Treaty, today it is left only up to *Mecī*, *Mahākālī*, *Mustāṅg*, and *Lumbinī*. But even only within this, there are many valleys in the middle of the region of the *Cārkhola*, *Ilām*, *Kanakā*, of the

Saptakauśikī region, of the Bagmatī region, of the Saptagaṇḍakī region, of the Rāptī region, of the Karṇālī Bhadra region, and of the Mahākālī region.” (Naraharināth 1964:ka)

Next, the reference is to the hydrological developments of the geography of Nepal. As John Whelpton reports, geological studies of the Himalayan range have argued that:

“the rise of the Mahabharats and the Siwaliks temporarily dammed some of the rivers flowing south towards the Ganges, forming lakes in the valley and also in the Kathmandu Valley. The Kathmandu Valley may have dried out only 100,000 years ago, by which time its shores were almost certainly inhabited. The mythical account of the draining of the Valley by Manjushri (Buddhist version) or Pradyumna (Hindu version), like the similar myths encountered all along the Himalayas, could just conceivably represent an oral tradition dating back more than 3000 generations. It is, though, more likely that the myth-makers simply drew their conclusion from the lie of the land” (2005:6).

We find an echo of this in Naraharinath’s prose as well, with a meticulous listing of locations:

“Bordering the Himālaya, the valleys of the Mahābhārata mountains, from Jhāpā to Kailālī and Kañcanpura, are the Terai. After the water of the sea flowed below the Cūre pass that had been cut, when the water masses blocked by the Cūre and Mahābhārat drained out due to accidental causes such as longterm snowfall, excessive rain, and earthquakes, etc, there appeared Phidimtār, Rumjātār, Kathmandu, Vaṭṭār, Śalyāntar, Rāgināśaṭāra, Pokhara, Vāmī, Māmḍī, Ḍhoracaur, Tipṛikoṭ, Rgm, Aśī, Siṃjā, Rārā, Pāmḍī, Sāṃpyā, Chānnā, Dipāyal, Jvarāyal, Svarāḍ, Puracaumḍī, Vāravanaḍāla, Surkhet, Daṅg, Deukhurī, Vaghaura, Navalapura, Citaun, Makvānpur, etc.” (Naraharināth 1964:kha)

Next, we find a discussion of the various riverine civilizations of the area, again with some considerations on hydrologic resources:

“In the west, the longest and most abundant water is in the Karnālī. In the East, the longest and most abundant water is in the Aruṅ river. The civilization of the Karnālī and the civilization of the Aruṅ are the most ancient ones. After this, comes the Gaṇḍakī civilization. And then come all other civilizations. The Kanakā Valley and the Kathmandu Valley are surrounded only by the Mahābhārata mountain range. The water of the main Himāl is lost behind, on the right and on the left. Both are lowlands of the Mahābhārat. In both there is little water. In Kathmandu there is even less water than in Ilam. Had there been no Śivapurī, Phulcokī, Candrācal, Mahādevpokharī, Maṇicūd, Nāgārjun, Dahacok mountains, in Kathmandu there would not even be this amount of water. Because it is in the North, from Śivapurī comes some abundant water. In big mountains, there is big water, in small mountains, there is small water. In places with no mountains, there is no water. Since there was not much water there, the Kathmandu valley did not widen up very much. Among the Saptamatī, in the Bagvatī there is some abundant water. In this, there are the dams of Kacchapācal Cobhār, Liddhācal Mṛgasthalī Kailās, and Gokarṇācal: had not there been applied such *tribandha*, it would have opened up deeply and there would have been no fertile soil. There wouldn't have been so much agriculture. It would have been all hills and knolls like Nuvākoṭ and Cautārā.

On the top, had there been no tri-dams, namely Kachhapachal Chovar, Liddachal Mṛgasthali Kailash and Gokarnachal, the depth of the valley would have increased more and alluvial soil would have washed off. Agriculture would not have been so easy. The place would be hills like Nuwakot and Chautara.” (Naraharināth 1964:kha-ga)

At this point, following this discussion on geography, hydrology and agronomy, we are also reminded, not much differently than in the above mentioned passage from Whelpton’s *History of Nepal*, how the memory of such geological developments is also recorded in people’s lore:

“But in the *Paurāṇik* doctrine there is another thing. In the *Nepālamahātmya* of the *Paśupati-purāṇa*, it is said that a blow of the cakra of Kṛṣṇa broke through the boundary of the Bāgvatī. According to the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, a blow of the sword of Manjuśrī broke through the obstruction of the *nāgas*. In people's oral tradition (*janaśruti*), Uṣā, the splendid daughter of King Bāṇāsura [“asura of the forest”] of Caitalaṅ-Citalaṅ, used to navigate the lake of Nepal in a boat made of rock. There are various hearsay like this.” (Naraharināth 1964:ga)

The authors' comment on the tales is marked by a certain ambiguity: the transition back to a naturalistic perspective is colloquial, almost dismissive of the stories' naivete: “whatever other things might be...” (*aru kurā je jayi bhaye pani...*)

“Whatever other things might be, generally the lake would have opened because of natural rules and it was a lake for a long time. Even now there is fog above the level of water during the rainy season, and below it during the winter. It is also possible that it closed and opened up several times.” (Naraharināth 1964:ga)

Only at this point, after having been instructed on the geological history of Nepal in a scientific idiom, the reader is finally brought closer to the topic at hand, that is, Matsyendranath:

“In any big reservoir of water there is fish. The tortoise, the alligator, the elephant, the horse, the rhinoceros, etc. are aquatic creatures. In valleys, ancient huge bones can still be retrieved in pieces from the underground. In proximity of water reservoirs, on the riverbank, there is the abode of the *barāha*.” (Naraharināth 1964:ga-gha)

The reference to the *barāha* is significant, as this specific divine form is particularly popular among several communities in Nepal. As Marie Lecomte-Tilouine observes in her study of this cult among the Magars, the *barāha*, though also generally associated with Viṣṇu's *avatāra* of the scriptural tradition, is more often worshipped in

popular cults in its aspect of aquatic animal, or associated with the notion of the domestication of the territory, the ancestors, agriculture, and the mountains. His feminine form, Bārāhī, is also worshipped in different regional variations, and, particularly at the East of the Kali Gandaki and in some instances of the Kathmandu Valley, she is often understood to be associated with a fish, coupled with a fish-god, or as a fish goddess herself. Incidentally, the temple of one form of this goddess, at the time of Lecomte-Tilouine's fieldwork, was in charge of a Nāth yogi, who had inherited the ritual functions from a brahman *pūjārī* (Lecomte-Tilouine 1993:51). This reference can therefore be read as an echo of Magar lore, possibly mediated by Nāth involvement in local rituals.

Naraharinath's emphasis, however, is more on the Sanskrit-puranic aspect of this deity, and considerations on the fish as an aquatic animal are pooled back into the theology of Visnu's avatars:

“Among the ten *avatāras* of the omnipervadent Viṣṇu the *avatāra* as fish is also said to be the eldest. According the *paurāṇika* doctrine, in the sequence of the appearance of humankind, the order of the ten *avatāras* is as follows:

(...)

*matysaḥ kūrmo varāhañca narasiṃhotha vāmanaḥ |*  
*rāmā rāmañca rāmañca buddhaḥ kalkī cate daśā ||”*

(Naraharināth 1964:gha)

At this point of the introduction, we have two levels of discourse: the fish as an aquatic animal in the original lake of Nepal, and the fish as Vishnu's avatara. Both function as background for the etymological definition of the word “Matsyendra:”

“It is regarded as this. That one who is the greatest and most powerful among everybody else, there is a custom to consider this most prominent one as king. Just like

the King of the *devas* is called “Devendra,” in the same way the King of the *matsyas* is called “Matsyendra”. (Naraharināth 1964:gha-ña)

There follows a list of puranic sources on the story of Matsyendranath, in a bibliographical tone that provides, also, the publishing house of some of the work. Thus equipped with references, the reader is then led into the core of the discussion, that is, Naraharinath’s reinterpretations of Matsyendranath’s cult in the Valley:

In Kathmandu, there is the cult of *Sveta-matsyendra* (“Seto Machindra” [White Macchindra]) and in Patan of *Rakta-matsyendra* (“Rātā Machindra” [Red Matsyendra]). This is the worship of the White and Red Matsyendra as having the essence of *soma* and *sūrya*. In the hands of the statue of the image of Matsya, in *tribhaṅga* [three-bent] pose are represented full-blown lotuses. Sometime in one hand, sometime in two hands. Thus, the association between the lake, the lotus, the fish and *soma-sūrya* has been established.” (Naraharināth 1964:ña)

We can already see how geology (the lake), astrology (the sun and moon), and ritual (the cult of Matsyendranath), are combined. The central point of the argument is now introduced, providing a naturalistic explanation for the cult of Matsyendranath:

“The Kathmandu valley used to be a lake. In a lake, there are fish, lotuses, and *kumuda* [red-lotus]. At sunrise, the lotus blooms. At moonrise, the *kumuda* blooms. The disk of the moon is white. The disk of the sun is red. Since the kings of Mānagr̥ha (Māṅigla = Maṅgalbajār) Lalitpur Patan, Mānadeva etc, are said *sūryavamśī*, the worship of the sun is especially observed. Since the kings of Kailāskūṭa Viśālnagara (Hāṃḍigāūṃ Ḍaṭhuṭol), Jiṣṇugupta etc, are said *somānvayabhūṣaṇa*, the worship of the moon is observed especially. The history of the twofold image-cult of *Raktamatsyendra* and *Śvetamatsyendra* and of other image-worship is mysterious. The sun has a northern course [*uttarāyana*] and a southern course [*dakṣiṇāyana*]. Correspondingly, for *Rātomatsyendra*, there are rites and worship for six months in Buṅgamatī, in the south,

and six months in Patan, in the north. The sun is also called *āditya*. *ādityā dvādaśa proktāḥ* | The names of the 12 *ādityas* of the 12 months are Mitra, Mādhava etc. Mādhava is also the name of the spring, of Vaiśākha, and of Viṣṇu. (...) That is, all people worship Matsyendra according their language.” (Naraharināth 1964:na-ca)

The introduction concludes with a few references to dated inscriptions—royal donations to the deity—and finally, to the *Matsyendrapadyaśatakam* itself.

These pieces of information do not advance in any way the author’s claim, but, in the same way that geo-hydrological references echoed scientific discourse, datable references resonate with the discipline of history, thus concluding the discussion in a historiographical tone.

Geographical and historiographical echoes appear here as the most prominent element of Naraharinath’s prose, reminding the ways in which “science” and “history” had received the attention of Hindu reformers in colonial India. Under British domination, in fact, in response to Orientalist representations of India as a-historical and a-scientific, a variety of indigenous discourses was deployed to buttress the notions of a) a glorious Hindu past, later decayed due to foreign invasions, and b) the inherently scientific nature of Hindu "spirituality".

As Gyan Prakash (1999) has documented, science, in the context of anti-colonial nationalism, functioned as a central idiom of power, necessary for the project of nation-building precisely because of its cultural authority as a feature of colonial domination. Its adoption in the context of indigenous revivalism entailed the creation of specific cultural narratives, best understood as translations of the colonial grammar of power into the project of a distinctive Hindu modernity, among which the myth of a Vedic science—inaugurated by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883)—was the most

characteristic. Interestingly, the idea of a pristine indigenous science, located in an original past and then lost because of cultural decadence, made for a discontinuity within the formation of a nationalist consciousness. If the archaic was the only locus of truth, and the modern nation had to be shaped in the image of an imagined ancient past, then past and present were to be understood as disjoined: everything from the past could be re-appropriated for the modern nation through a creative process of translation, but the irruption of such otherness in the present provoked a fundamental estrangement:

“the irruption, rather than the progression, of ancient Hindu science into the present estranged the modern nation. The contemporary nation, reflected in the mirror of the archaic, could not but emerge disfigured and distorted. It was from this estrangement and distortion, from an experience of loss, that modern India had to be refigured as a form of translation.” (Prakash 1999:91)

Thinkers as Bakimchandra Chattopadhyay (1938-94), whose position within the development of Indian nationalism has been characterized by Partha Chatterjee (1986) as the “moment of departure” in the articulation of a nationalist discourse, dependent upon European categories in its conception of power and material progress, but relying upon the ideal of an original Eastern spiritual superiority, identified in the drafting of an emic Bengali historiography one of the main keypoints of a patriotic agenda precisely because he located in the past a reservoir of knowledge that could be re-activated in the present for the sake a reformation of Hinduism suited to the times. Science, however, stood in an ambiguous relationship to religion. The wording of his essay “Mill, Darwin and Hinduism”, in which he argued for the superior rationality of the idea of the *trimūrti*, as opposed to the Christian belief in a creator God, exemplifies how “science,” in the

context of an anti-colonial nationalist project, is understood both as a mark of European colonial power and, at the same time, as a universal mode of cognition that, for Bankim, is better embodied by Hinduism than by Christianity (Prakash 1999:58).

This ambiguous centrality of science in the politico-religious discourse has been inherited by contemporary Hindutva discourses. As discussed by Meera Nanda, the myth of a scientific Vedic past is essential to the educational policies promoted by the BJP, construed on the idea that India must develop its sciences and design its education to conform to an innate, unique and unchanging essence embodied by Vedic science (2003:106). History, at this regard, occupies an equally central place in the cultural landscape of Hindutva. As pointed out by Sumit Sarkar, specific representations of the Indian past—in a communalist perspective—are so crucial to the politics of the Sangh Parivar that textbooks and academic research have become a main bone of contention in the heated politics of the last decades (Sarkar 2002). Echoes of this attitude are also present in Naraharinath's discourse, but with a difference. Unlike India, where, as emphasized by Gyan Prakash, the ideal of a glorious Hindu nation was to be conceptualized as located in the archaic past, to be re-transposed onto the present—with Mughal rule and British colonialism signifying a rupture in the national history—the case of Nepal, in Naraharinath's vision, did not present such a discontinuity: Gorkha, not directly subject to British rule, could be conceptualized as eternally Hindu, never conquered by the *mleccha*.

The myth of an unbroken eternal Hinduness local to the country made for a language more inclined to the preservation rather than the reformation, of local cults. Unlike Dayananda's inclination to read “science” only in the Vedas, in Naraharinath's

world even more contemporary elements, such as Matsyendranath's *jātrā*, the chariot festival of the rain-god of Bungamati and Patan, could be read through the lenses of some sort of scientific knowledge, which, in the specific case of Bungadya's cult—a central symbol of “Newariness” in the Kathmandu Valley, as revealed by Kesang Tseten's documentary<sup>48</sup>—also entails an appropriation of elements located at the periphery of both Parbatiya Hindu orthodoxy and the version of “Hindu modernity” that has become mainstream in post-Independence India. In fact, if Homi Bhabha emphasizes how hybridity can function as an act of resistance and subversion, Naraharinath's coupling of science and history with quotations from the *Manu Smṛti*, *Upaniṣads* and *Bhagavad Gītā* in the context of Bungadya's cult can be understood, instead, as an attempt to nullify and dilute the cultural difference of the traditions of Newar Buddhism represented by Matsyendranath's *jātrā*.

The importance of this chariot festival for timely rain in the Valley, welfare for its inhabitants, and stability for the monarchy has been observed by Bruce Owens in his study of Matsyendranath's cult. An important dimension that emerges from his study is that this specific ritual is also a privileged pathway for the tantric Buddhist priests of the Valley to convey ritual empowerment to the king—that is, the chariot festival is a symbolic medium of politics (what Owens calls the “politics of divinity”). Interestingly, the ritual power of the Buddhist priests, the *pānjus*, is markedly different from the brahmanical model, and represents therefore an enclave of cultural specificity that highlights the otherness of the tantric Newars from the brahman priests:

“The king's devotion to Bungadya, in so far as it is mediated by the priests, is mediated by Buddhist *pānjus*. It is the *pānjus* who preside over the protective sacrifices at

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<sup>48</sup> On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath, 2007

which the king, as *jajman* [sponsor of the sacrifice], plays the role of sacrificer (...)  
Though the *pānjus* may be in a state of relative purity while performing these rites, they cannot claim the status of purity which the Brahmin preserves throughout his life, for they consume meat and drink alcohol. They are therefore closer to the status of the king than the Brahmin, and the oppositions between pure and impure, status and power, priest and king, are weakened.” (Owens 1989:315)

Naraharinath’s discussion of Matsyendranath does not mention the dimension of tantric impurity of the ritual and of its priesthood: the hybrid rhetoric of history, science and puranic knowledge does not make reference to its Buddhist substratum. In fact, this move may be read as part of a broader Sanskritization of Newari rituals by the Gorkhali monarchy that can also be observed, for example, in the case of the replacement of the Newar Bhairav with the Vedic Indra during the Indra procession in Kathmandu:

“the cultural conflict between Newar and Nepali Hindu plays itself out not simply through political or economic means and not simply through religious rhetoric, but through a replacement of one royal deity by another—the Newar Bhairav for the Hindu Indra—a replacement whose extant metonymic relations to the Newar Jyāpu [the peasants] signal and reinforce the shift in dynastic power.” (Baltutis 2009:31)

The *Matsyendrapadyaśataka*, by itself, already represented a first step in the Sanskritization of Bungadya into Matsyendranath, and with Naraharinath’s commentary we can witness a further Hinduization of the conceptual framework encompassing the deity through the “new” disciplines of history and geology that Naraharinath presents as essential parts of Hinduness. Another important dimension of his worldview for a Hindu nation, social service, will be the object of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5 SĀDHANĀ AS SAMĀJ SEVĀ

The tension between renunciation and worldly involvement is one of the critical points of re-elaboration in the life of Hindu movements in the last two centuries, when the ideal of social service started to be brought to the center of public Hindu life with a political, anti-colonial function. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then notion of *sevā* was centered on two interconnected elements: worshipful service to the deity, particularly in *saguṇa bhakta* contexts, and devotional service to one's guru. This latter meaning is the most relevant for the Nath tradition: though the practice of *pūjā* to Gorakhnath enshrined in Nath temples may also be understood as a form of worship to a deity, it is most characteristically understood as a form of *guru-pūjā* to Gorakhnath,<sup>49</sup> divinized teacher of the tradition, as evidenced by the ritual homage to his *mūrti* paid by blowing the *nād siṅgī* or *janeu*, the ritual whistle also used to greet one's guru in the morning and evening salutations.

The idea of actively engaging in charitable acts toward others has indeed a few precedents in some Nāth stories and the term “*paropakāra*”, central in Naraharinath's thought, is explicitly used at least in the tale of Gorakhnāth rescuing Caurangināth (Munoz 2010), although in these materials a yogi's charity is always expressed in individual acts of graciousness toward devotees with whom he is especially pleased, not in a sustained ideology of social service. In fact, Kamala Nayar and Jaswinder Sandhu (2007), in their study of the *Siddh Goṣṭ*, a Sikh poem styled as a dialogue between Guru Nanak and the Nāth yogis, highlight how this text represents the yogis as renunciates

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<sup>49</sup> Besides the *pūjā* to Gorakhnath, or to other divinized yogis locally relevant, the Nath temples may also perform worship to other deities, most notably Bālāsundarī and Bhairava. Though these ritual acts may also be technically considered *sevā*, they have a distinctively tantric genealogy, and do not have the affective overtones of personal *sevā* typical of personal *bhakti* in *saguṇa* contexts.

living outside society, to whom Guru Nanak preaches the value of spiritual devotion in the context of social involvement, consistent with the ideal of threefold seva of the Sikh tradition: *tan* (physical), *man* (mental) and *dhan* (philanthropic) (Nayar and Sandhu 2007:87). The dialogue provides a framework for the yogis to spell out explicitly the value of solitude as a means for achieving spiritual perfection:

“Away from the stores and highways,  
we abide in the woods among the plants and trees.  
Our food is fruit and roots;  
[to live like this] is the wisdom spoken of by the wise ones.  
We bathe at sacred pools and attain fruits of peace,  
so that our minds are free from filth.  
Gorakh's disciple Loharipā says,  
this is the way of yoga. (SG 7, in Nayar and Sandhu 2007:119)

In fact, although in practice Nāth yogis, particularly householders, have always lived in the midst of society, often serving specific social purposes such as chasing away locusts and bringing rain through their magical presence (Gold 1999), Nāth literature does not present an elaboration of the conception of *sevā* comparable to the one present in the Sikh tradition, and Naraharinath's writings are the first document from the Nāth Sampradāya that argue for a social engagement of the yogis. This discontinuity with the classical sources is important, as it highlights how Naraharinath's reading of his Sanskrit sources is mediated by modern reinterpretations already “in the air” of Hindu nationalism: the application of *karma yoga*, *paropakāra*, and *sevā* to the realm of politics, a specific product of the development of the reformist movements of the late colonial era.

By Naraharinath's time, considerations on the necessity of social engagement for sadhus had already become common in other schools, particularly in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian nationalism. Andrew Fort, for example, building on Wilhelm Halbfass' (1988) reflections on the “Europeanization” of the Indian thinkers of colonial India, highlights how representatives of neo-Vedānta, particularly Swami Vivekananda and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, made room for the ideal of social service by intertwining Western ideas of charity and Vedantic notions of cosmic unity, though an explicit ideology of philanthropy was definitely not present in traditional Sanskrit sources, which instead present the ideal sage as a detached ascetic, benefiting others only through teachings and blessings (Fort 1998:171-185).

An exception to this trend was Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), definitely the least interested in politics among the neo-Vedāntins discussed by Fort, who considered social service a legitimate enterprise in the context of a lay life, but mostly for the spiritual aspirant who finds himself incapable of self-inquiry or devotion (Fort 1998:141-5). Avadhut Bhagwan Ram (1937–1992), the best-known representative of the antinomian sect of the *aghoris* in contemporary Varanasi, can here be taken as another important example in which instances of social *sevā*, such as healthcare to lepers, have been interpreted as a spiritual practice without any connections to a specifically Hindu nationalist agenda (Gupta 1993).

Swami Vivekananda, instead, was the first to use the concept of *sevā* as "organised service to humankind" (Beckerlegge 2000:60) and strove to integrate Vedānta metaphysics and the principles of charity borrowed from the missionaries into a social and political conception of *karma yoga*, drawing on the two themes of “*sevā*” as selfless

service and “*sāadhanā*” as spiritual penance for the sake of social and political project. The nationalist re-elaboration of *sevā* he established was later appropriated by the RSS. As discussed by Gwilym Beckerlegge, Keshav B. Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, absorbed the idea of social service from earlier movements such as those of the Ārya Samāj and of the Ramakrishna Mission, but reinterpreting it as a task of “character-building”, rather than as philanthropy. Madhav S. Golwalkar, as second leader of the RSS, also made explicit reference to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as forefathers of the RSS' commitment to *sevā*, but with a more definitely Hindu nationalist twist, proposing “a refinement of his forefathers' teachings, wishing to substitute 'our people' for 'man', when he argued that serving humanity was too wide an aim and one that in the past had encouraged inaction among Hindus.” (Beckerlegge 2004:119)

L.K Advani's words at the National Executive Meeting of the BJP in September 2005 can here be quoted as a standard example of how the language of service is in fact the main tool for legitimizing the activities of the RSS:

“The RSS is a nationalist organization whose contribution to character-building of millions and towards inculcating in them the spirit of patriotism, idealism and selfless *service* of the motherland has been incomparable. It is this organization that has inspired tens of thousands of public-spirited persons to *serve* the nation through the medium of politics. Those in the political field and those who are *servicing* the society in other fields have to function with unity and trust like a family to ensure that the country secures its rightful place in the comity of nation.” (quoted in Jaffrelot 2007:192, emphasis added)

The activation of this rhetoric in the immediate experience of the people engaged in the Sangh Parivar, of course, varies greatly. If, on the one side, the “character-building” activities of the RSS are the main way in which anti-Muslim violence penetrates the everyday life of culture (Mathur 2008), on the other, dissonance, even in the form of open

critique to Sangh policies, can easily be traced in the multiplicity of positions upheld by individuals active in various Hindu nationalist organizations, often in disagreement on what would could be a righteous course of action (Menon 2012). Naraharinath's followers do not differ much from the Indian *sevaks* at this regard: while the potential for political violence was clearly apparent in *Vaidika Siddhānta*, Naraharinath's booklet exhorting to *samāj sevā*, if we look at the actual lives of his immediate followers we see that their understanding of their social engagement as yogis is in fact dependent on a more complex juxtaposition of their guru's teachings on their concrete existential predicaments. In what follows I will therefore introduce Naraharinath's text, paying attention to his rethoric, in the first part, and the lives of three of disciples, in the second section, highlighting dissonances, as well as affinities, with his original message.

### *Sādhanā as social service—a text*

Naraharinath's understanding of *sādhanā* can here be analyzed through a reading of the first part of *Vaidika Siddhānta*. In spite of its title, this booklet does not deal with the Veda, nor with any established doctrine (*siddhānta*), rather, it is a composition of different texts, some in Sanskrit, some in Hindi, advocating social engagement as the utmost duty of a spiritual person. It starts by evoking a generic praise of *paropakāra* “benefiting others”, contrasting it with the “selfish (*svārtha*) *sādhanā*” of the man engrossed in seeking his own liberation, but gradually it shifts its emphasis to the ideal of the warrior ascetic, to climax in the end with a call to war against an enemy that is implied, but rests undefined. However, published in 1988, at the peak of the *Rām-janm-bhūmi* movement, it resonates clearly with anti-Muslim rhetoric. Paying attention to the

prose of this text is significant, as it reveals the basic conceptual structures in the making of Naraharinath’s brand of Hindutva apologetics—a rephrasing of political action in scriptural terms, meant to excite feelings of enthusiasm and commitment by conforming to epical models, and a de-historicization of the present, transposed on a plane of mythical atemporality.

The first section is in Sanskrit, offering a series of verses aimed at providing an etymological definition of “*sādhu*,” the moral guidelines that must inform the conduct of the spiritual adept, and some mythical examples. The second section, in Hindi, builds upon the same subject partly translating the Sanskrit verses, partly expanding on them with further explanations. Though preserved in written form, it maintains a strong oral character and may have been written for a speech (*pravacana*). The difference between the two parts is a matter of tone: while the Sanskrit verses underline etymologies, maxims and myths in a didactic voice (with the exception of verse 9, which has exclamation marks)—recalling the *subhāṣita* genre of traditional literature, collections of aphorism, maxims and quotations for moral and spiritual exhortation—the Hindi text highlights much more the exclamations and the “you” (*tum*), thus activating the implications of the Sanskrit sayings in the immediate experience of the reader or listener. I present here the translation of the Sanskrit section (“*Sādhuḥ*”) followed by the translation of the Hindi (“*Definition of sādhu*”), noting in the footnotes the source of each quotation.

### “*Sādhuḥ*”

“*Rādh*” (to achieve) “*Sādh*” (to accomplish) – “success”. The *sādhu* achieves (*rādhnoti*), accomplishes (*sādhnoti*) a work for another. It is not the *sādhu* who is called *sādhu*; the *sādhanā* is called *sādhu*. (1)

A *sādhu* is a *sādhaka* for others (*parārthasādhaka*). A *sādhanā* for oneself is easy to obtain. “*Rādha*” and “*sādha*” are “success.” Also, “*rāadhanā*” is “*sādhanā*”. *Rādhu* is *sādhu* and *sādhaka*. *Radhutā* and *sadhutā* are the qualities. (2)

Saying “*sādhu*” (*sādhuvāda*) is saying “*thanks*” (*dhanyavāda*). The origin of the *sādhu* is the quality of being good (*sādhutva*). By each *sādhu*, the *sādhana* of the benefit of the world must be done. (3)

He is indeed considered a *sādhu*, he is properly determined.<sup>50</sup> In *sadbhāva* (being true) and *sādhubhāva* (being good) it is used “*sad*” (true/good)<sup>51</sup> (4)

*Sādhus* do not just speak with their throats. Action only is excellent. The man endowed with action, he is wise indeed. And *sādhus* do not wish gratitude in return. (5)

Mother is Pārvatī Devī, father is Maheśvara Deva. Relatives are all human beings. Homeland (*svadeśa*) is the threefold-world. (6)

(...)<sup>52</sup>

*Sādhu!* You have accomplished the sacrifice embodying the supreme Brahman, pure and awakened! You have destroyed the impurities of the false impressions! There remains the work for the benefit of the world! There is no selfish purpose in the exertion for the tradition, you have the nature of sandalwood. Wake up even more! In the ways of the world today, *dharma* is depraved. (8)

With the heart excited by the taste of the inebriant liquor of otherworldly joy, the yogi wishes for something else than the taste of savoring the sour sauce of worldly travel.<sup>53</sup> (9)

The yogi carries the succession of states of wakefulness, dream, deep sleep, and the fourth like a variegated necklace of gems strung together on one thread of awareness.<sup>54</sup> (10)

An incorporeal state in the body, equal to a lotus in pure water, the great yogi stands in the middle of society (as if) established in a dream. (11)

There are two sayings of Vyāsa in the eighteen Purāṇas: benefiting others counts for merit, afflicting others counts for sin.<sup>55</sup> (12)

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<sup>50</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 9.30b

<sup>51</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 17.26a

<sup>52</sup> verse 7 is corrupt

<sup>53</sup> *Mahārthamañjarī* 62 (Muktabodha Digital Library)

<sup>54</sup> *Mahārthamañjarī* 61 (Muktabodha Digital Library)

For the benefit of others, clouds give rain, for the benefit of others, rivers flow, for the benefit of others, trees give fruit, for the benefit of others the good ones go ahead. (13)

Rivers do not drink their own water, nor do trees eat their own fruit. Clouds do not rain for themselves – the origin of the good ones is for the benefit of others. (14)

The good ones have devoted their efforts to the benefit of others.<sup>56</sup> Liberated through the worship of action, you must perform the action of *dharma* that is enjoined, even if attending to the world.<sup>57</sup> (15)

Performing actions, indeed, one should desire to live one hundred years.<sup>58</sup> By action, indeed, Janaka and the others achieved success.<sup>59</sup> (16)

Dadhīci gave his own bones to Surendra through an action for the benefit of the class of the *Ādityas*.<sup>60</sup> He lives in an embodiment of fame.<sup>61</sup> (17)

Visvāmitra, Vaśiṣṭha and the others, Vālmīki, Vyāsa and Nārada, Vandā, Śrī Ramdās etc, Bhiṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, etc. Cāṇakya, Viṣṇuśarmā and the others experts of *rājadharmā*, ṛṣi Paraśurāma and others went to battle in defense of *dharma*. (19)

Thus hundreds of thousands of *sādhus*, having descended in the battlefield in defense of *dharma*, are illustrious for having done their duty at the proper time. (20)

By the *muni* Manu is said: whenever doing the defense of *dharma*, weapons must be taken by the class of *dvijas* where *dharma* is impeded.<sup>62</sup> (21)

In front, the four Vedas, behind, a bow with arrows, this is *brāhma*, this is *kṣātra*, from curse or from wound. (22)<sup>63</sup> This is the announcement of Droṇācārya reported in the

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<sup>55</sup> *Mahāsubhāṣitasamgraha* 3587 (Gretil)

<sup>56</sup> *Bhatṛhari: Śatakatraya* 1.74

<sup>57</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 3.20a

<sup>58</sup> *Īśa Upaniṣad* 2 / *Śukla Yajurveda* 40.2

<sup>59</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 3.20b

<sup>60</sup> Reference to the myth in which Indra asked the ṛṣi Dadhīci for his spine to make a weapon to kill Vṛtra.

<sup>61</sup> Perhaps a reference to the Param Vir Chakra, a military decoration of the Indian Army that represents Indra's *vajra* made of Dadhīci's bones.

<sup>62</sup> *Manusmṛiti* 3.348a

<sup>63</sup> *Mahāsubhāṣitasamgraha* 0224 (*agrataścatur o vedān pṛṣṭhataḥ saśaram dhanuḥ / ubhābhyāṃ ca samartho'haṃ śāpādapi śarādapi //*) (22) In front, the four Vedas, behind, a bow with arrows, I will be successful either by curse or by wound. (Implying that brahmans' power is to curse and kṣatriyas' power is to wound)

Mahābhārata. (23) Students having their ideal in Hakītaka<sup>64</sup> are known as defenders of the *dharma*. Teachers having Varatantu<sup>65</sup> as their ideal are known defenders of the earth. (24)” (Naraharināth n.d. [*Vaidika Siddhānta*]:3-5)

### “Definition of *sādhu*

A *sādhu* who has only the name or the form of *sādhu* is not called a *sādhu*, but rather the *sādhana* is called *sādhu*. One who does *sādhana* has the name of *sādhu*. If there are name, form and work, then there can be perfume in gold.<sup>66</sup> Thus, for a *sādhu* it is necessary to be a *sādhaka*. There are two kinds of *sādhana*. One is the selfish *sādhana*, the second is the altruistic *sādhana*. The selfish *sādhana* cannot be called *sādhu* either. Selfish *sādhana* is easy to find everywhere. One who does altruistic *sādhana*, the *sādhana* of benevolence, the *sādhana* of the world and of the higher world, the *sādhana* of the benefit for others, his name is *sādhu*. Just that *sādhu* is called *mahākula*, *kulīn*, *ārya*, *sabhya*, *sajjan* and *sādhu*.<sup>67</sup> Among the 84 lakhs of living beings in the world, those who exercise benevolence are all *sādhus*. One's mother is Parvatī Devī, one's father is Maheśvara Śiva, all the human beings of the world are one's brothers and sisters. The three worlds are one's homeland (*svadeśa*), there is no such thing as "abroad" (*videśa*), the magnanimous one, *mahātmā*, who has such holy feeling, who has such broad vision, is called *sādhu*.

After having spent precious time wandering in the effort and exertion of serving the pleasure born from the heart, the riches born from wealth, the king protector of the fool earth and these very people, that *sādhuness* too earned only the infinite mental affliction of being despised, (but) now, one who comes out, having abandoned that concern for his purpose and for his selfishness, saying “I will do the *sādhana* of benevolence with

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<sup>64</sup> Haqiqat Rai (1724-1741) was a Sikh student in Punjab. While in school, he had a fight with some Muslim classmates who made despising comments on the Hindu gods. He insulted the prophet Muhammad in return and, for this, was sentenced to death by the local Qazi.

<sup>65</sup> Reference to the story of Varatantu and Kautsa, told in Kālidāsa's Raghuvamśa: Varatantu, the guru, refuses to accept a dakṣiṇā from his pupil Kautsa, believing that teaching cannot be repaid by wealth. At Kautsa's insistence, however, he gets enraged and asks for fourteen crores of golden coins, one crore for each branch of knowledge he has taught Kautsa, unable to pay, begs this sum from king Raghu, who does not have so much, but is willing to wage battle to Kubera to plunder the money for Kautsa. Kubera, frightened by the prospect of fighting, produces a divine rain of golden coins in Raghu's storeroom, which will even exceed the price to be paid to Varatantu.

<sup>66</sup> Perhaps a reference to *Cāṇakya Nīti* 9.3 (*gandhaḥ suvarṇe phalamikṣudaṇḍe nākari puṣpaṃ khalu candanasya | vidvāndhanaḍhyaśca nṛpaściraṅyuh dhātuh purā ko'pi na buddhido.abhūt | No perfume in gold, fruit in the sugarcane, flower of sandalwood, wealth for a learned man, long life for a king: at the beginning, nobody was the counselor of the Creator.*)

<sup>67</sup> Mahākula and kulīna were originally designations for tantric adepts, while ārya and sabhya are Vedic epithets for the properly cultivated dvija. Sajjan and sādhu, both meaning “good one,” are words of general parlance, the former typically used for pious laymen, the latter for celibate ascetics.

altruistic concern, the meditation of the supreme Śiva and the sādhanā of the benefit of the whole world” – he too they call him a sādhu.

One whose work is lawful, he should be considered a sādhu too. The *sadbhāvana* or *sādhu bhāvana* (true/good disposition) too is called precisely *sat*, *sādhu* or *sant*. Also the act of thanking (*dhanyavād*) saying “sādhu sādhu” is called precisely *sādhuvād*. *Sādhuvad* too is a development of the *sādhu-ness* of *sādhu*. At this time also the sādhu ought to do *sādhanā* for the benefit of the world. Because the origin and the development of the sādhu has been for the sādhanā of benevolence – *sadhnōti parakāryamiti sādhuḥ*. That is, one who does the sādhanā of altruistic work, he is called a sādhu. Clouds give rain for the benefit of others. Trees produce vines, medicinal herbs etc for the benefit of others, thus *sādhus* and *sants* too go ahead precisely for the benefit of others. Even staying seated for the benefit of others they do sādhanā. That world-purifying tradition of 88 thousands *ṛṣis* and *munis* exists today too. Now the time has come to make it particularly active.

Hey sādhu! You have performed the sacrifice of the sādhanā of the pure awakened Brahman, by which, washed the dirt of the impressions of your former lives, you are already purified. Now the course of your individual sādhanā got completed. Now only the sādhanā of the benefit of the world is to be done. You do not have even a bit of selfishness. For removing the sorrow of the poor sorrowful ones you have taken this birth. Today Kāmadhenu is sorrowful, Mother Earth is sorrowful. *Dharma* is sorrowful. All the world is sorrowful. That pure altruistic watercourse of the Vedic *ṛṣis* and *munis*, make it flow again! Show the move forward! Everybody will follow behind you. *Mahājanā yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ*<sup>68</sup> | *Nānyaḥ panthā vidyate ’yanāya* | Another path is not seen. Thus we do the awakening of the sādhu. No work ever came from the non-sādhu. Then, having become sandalwood, transform into perfumed sandalwood everything around. May all the bad smell of the world be removed, may the good scent be diffused. By continuing to do benevolence for a long time you got tired, you got asleep, but now dawn has come. Raise up! Wake up! Gird your loins! Gather people! Bring all together, go, go forward! The destruction of the dharma is happening! Save the dharma! *Dharmo rakshati rakshitāḥ* |

If we defend the dharma, then the dharma will defend us. Mahātmās too, with the self wholly restrained, who have obtained the supreme stage, having renounced to the bliss of Brahman in the world of Brahman for the benefit of the world, come on earth! Social enjoyment (*bhukti*) is superior to individual liberation (*mukti*). Therefore, even if you

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<sup>68</sup> That which is followed by the great ones, that’s the path.

have proceeded to *jñānakaṇḍa* after being liberated by *karmakāṇḍa* and *upāsanakaṇḍa*,<sup>69</sup> having done and having caused to do the circumambulation of the worship of the *dharma* of action for all the world, stand up in the field of action! Because the command of the Veda is: wish to stay alive one hundred years performing actions! Precisely by action Sanaka, Janaka and the other *devarṣis*, *brahmarṣis*, *vaiśyarṣis* and *śūdrarṣis*<sup>70</sup> obtained all their accomplishments. For benevolence the *rājarṣi* Dadhīci gave to Indra all his bones, today he is still alive in an embodiment of glory. Also *rṣis* and *munis* learned in *rājadharmā*, such as Viśvāmitra, Cāṇakya, Viṣṇuśarmas, Ramdas, Bandas etc., having descended in the field of battle, showed the path. Hundreds and thousands of *sādhus* and *sants* of this kind, having risen in the battlefield of the defense of their own *dharma*, have become guides on the path. Golden history is witness. Those magnanimous ones are accomplished and illustrious. Manu too, the *rājarṣi* of the Satyayuga, has said: when *dharma* is opposed by *adharma*, at that time for the twice-born brāhmana, kṣatriya and vaiśya it is imperative to defend the *dharma* by taking up arms. *āpatkāle maryādā nāsti*. (In times of distress there are no limits). In times of non-distress it is appropriate to abide by one's own *dharma*. In the Mahābhārata, the declaration of Droṇācārya is of this sort: in front of us, there are the four Vedas, on our back, an arch with its arrows, with us there is *brāhmaśakti* and *kṣātraśakti*, by curse or by wound, in both ways, we are ready in the fight of the world. Today, again, the call of Droṇācārya must be done. A guru like Varatantu, a disciple like Kautsa Haqiqata Ray (teacher and student) are immortal in the history of the defense of *dharma*. Also a fighter in the struggle for independence such as Swami Śraddhānanda is a recipient of devotion. Having taken inspiration from these, society of sādhu, wake up! *Uttishtha jāgrha* / It is not time to sleep. Benefiting others is merit, afflicting others is pain. In the 18 Puranas, Vyasa ji has only two words: the sādhanā of benefiting others is sādhu-ness. Long life to sādhu-ness!"

(Naraharināth n.d. [*Vaidika Siddhānta*]:4-7)

These two passages, taken together, offer an example of Naraharinath's typical rhetorical strategy: a *pravacana* in Hindi is presented as a translation-cum-commentary on some Sanskrit materials, either original or taken from well-known sources. The issue of authorship is important here: the continuous reference to mythical models contributes,

<sup>69</sup> The three sphere of religious activity classified by Vedic exegesis: ritual activity (*karma*), gnosi (*jñāna*) and, a later addition, worship (*upāsanā*).

<sup>70</sup> Devarṣis, Brahmarṣis and Rājarṣis are three well-known classes of rṣis discussed in the smṛti, respectively of divine, brahmanical and royal origins. Vaiśyarṣi and Śūdrarṣis (with the exception of Kavaṣa Ailūṣa, the "śūdra rṣi" known in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa), seem instead an abstraction prompted by the desire to include all four varṇas in this discourse.

in fact, to de-personalize the text so that Naraharinath's personal juxtaposition of verses from several sources assimilates his own thoughts to the quotations. In the case under analysis here, de-emphasizing the personal authorship of the speech serves the function of tying the here and now implied by the historical context of the text to a background of myths and language that present itself not only as eternal, but also of ultimate cosmic significance:

“Clouds give rain for the benefit of others. Trees produce vines, medicinal herbs etc for the benefit of others, thus *sādhus* and *sants* too go ahead precisely for the benefit of others. Even staying seated for the benefit of others they do *sādhana*. That world-purifying tradition of 88 thousands *ṛṣis* and *munis* exists today too. Now the time has come to make it particularly active.”

(Naraharināth n.d. [*Vaidika Siddhānta*]:5)

References reminiscent of the Veda are particularly useful to this end since, unlike historical models, they offer examples rooted in the very core of what is presented as an a-temporal dimension of cultural existence. However, though the names of Janaka, Sanaka and Dadhīci are present in the Veda, the stories associated with them are generally known to the public not directly from the *śruti*, but through the medium of the epics and the Purāṇas – if not from contemporary booklets of mythical tales in modern languages. This aspect differentiates Naraharinath's approach from the more radical stance of the Vedic reformism of Dayananda Sarasvati: unlike the “return to the origins” of the Ārya Samāj, if *Vaidika Siddhānta* aims at evoking the Veda as a textual root of religious authority, it does so only in a very fluid manner, activating memories of a pristine Vedic past only insofar as these are already present in cultural materials familiar to the public. In fact, references to the *smṛti* outnumber here the Vedic names.

Let's now return to the beginning of the passage translated above to look more carefully at how Naraharinath treats the Vedic references he does use, which differs from that of classic commentators. In fact, although Naraharinath's discussion of *karma* as a category of spiritual life has a precedent in the Veda, the meaning he assigns to this term is different from the original. The central reference is here the famous second verse of the Īśa Upaniṣad: “*kurvann eveha karmāṇi jijīviṣecchataṃ samāḥ | evaṃ tvayi nānyatheto 'sti na karma lipyate nare ||*”<sup>71</sup> Here (verse 16), Naraharinath takes the first half of the mantra, cuts out its second part, and pastes it with Bhagavadgītā 3.20b: *karmaṇaiva hi saṃsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ*.<sup>72</sup> *Karman*, however, in the context of the Vedic *saṃhitās*, means “ritual action”: Mahīdhāra, the sixteenth century author of the *Vedadīpa-bhaṣya* on the Śukla Yajurveda, glosses *karmāṇi* as “*agnihotrādīni niṣkāmāni muktihetukāni*”<sup>73</sup> Śankara also reads *karman* as “*agnihotra* etc.,” though (forcing the text) he reads differently the general meaning of the verse: while Īśa Upaniṣad 1,<sup>74</sup> prescribes the path of knowledge for the *saṃnyasin*, Īśa Upaniṣad 2 indicates the path of *karman* for those who are incapable of renunciation.<sup>75</sup> Although a thorough discussion of the relationship between sacrifice and renunciation in the Īśa Upaniṣad is definitely outside the scope of this work, it is important to note that Naraharinath's reading of the spiritual significance of *karman* distances itself both from Śankara's idiosyncratic commentary and from its literal meaning of “sacrifice:” for him, *karman* means action, and (in the text

<sup>71</sup> Just by performing karman one should desire to live one hundred years. For you, there is no other way than this. Karman does not stick on a man.

<sup>72</sup> By action, indeed, Janaka and the others achieved success.

<sup>73</sup> The Agnihotra etc, without desire, for the sake of liberation. (Śāstri, Jagadīśalāl (ed.). 2007 [1971], p. 605)

<sup>74</sup> *īśāvāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ yat kiñca jagatyāṃ jagat | tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasya sviddhanam ||* Enveloped by the Lord is all this, whatever it is in the world, the world. Through what is left, enjoy! Don't wish for anybody's wealth.

<sup>75</sup> *pūrveṇa saṃnyāsino jñānaniṣṭhoktā dvitīyena tadaśaktasya karmaniṣṭheti*

under consideration here) particularly military action. In this, he follows an understanding of *karman* that, after becoming standard in the epics, has entered common usage. The “Vedic doctrine” of *Vaidika Siddhānta* is thus defined by projecting back on a single verse of the Yajurveda later ideas, not through direct engagement with the tradition of exegesis of the *śruti* either in the *pūrva-* or *uttara-mīmāṃsā*.

Instead, the locus classicus for discussing the spiritual value of *karman* as action is, of course, the Bhagavadgītā. In addition to the four quotations in the section translated here,<sup>76</sup> Naraharinath will also choose the line *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam* (“yoga is skillfulness in actions”), from BhG 2.50, as a relevant verse in the definition of *yoga* offered in a later section of *Vaidika Siddhānta*. It is interesting to note that while the status of the Veda is highlighted in the very heading of booklet (*vedo'khilo dharmamūla*, “the whole Veda is the root of *dharma*”), along with the first words of the Īśa Upaniṣad translated above, the title of the Bhagavadgītā is not even mentioned in the text and the names of Kriṣṇa and Arjuna do not have a place in Naraharinath's *pravacana*. The reason for this may perhaps be traced in the potentially *vaiṣṇava* tone of the Gītā: as a resident of his ashrams has pointed out to me, Naraharinath used to positively contrast the *śaiva* branches (such as his own Nāth Sampradāya) to the *vaiṣṇavas*, the latter being regarded as less pristine than the former in virtue of the fact that Śiva's name, and not Viṣṇu's, is known in the Veda.<sup>77</sup> This does not mean that the authority of the Bhagavadgītā is altogether rejected, but in Naraharinath's speech the emphasis is shifted away from Arjuna's moral scruples, mentioning instead more straightforwardly determined

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<sup>76</sup> BhG 9.30b and 17.26a at verse 4; 3.20a at verse 15; 3.20 b at verse 16.

<sup>77</sup> A curious development of this point was his rejection of the customary invocation “Hari Om” before chanting Vedic mantras, deeming it a later *vaiṣṇava* interpolation. (Yogi Devnath, personal communication).

characters such as Droṇa, who, in fact, is named. Furthermore, in the context of the Mahābhārata, Kriṣṇa incites Arjuna to fight on the basis of a theology much different from the one espoused in *Vaidika Siddhānta*: while in the Bhagavadgītā the encompassing framework is *bhakti* to the personal god, in Naraharinath's discourse the *sādhu* is exhorted to fight for defending an impersonal *dharma* with no obvious devotional implications. Even when the gods are named (Mother is Parvatī Devī...), they are not presented as the recipients of the subtle results of the action in the same way Kriṣṇa is in the Bhagavadgītā, rather, the *sādhu* is called to war because this a superior form of *sādhanā*, because he must feel compassion for the “poor sorrowful ones”, and – especially – because *dharma* is engendered. To see how Naraharinath envisaged the defense of *dharma*, we can now turn to the poem "Your house is on fire" from *Vaidika Siddhānta*. Written in Hindi, this brief poem can here exemplify Naraharinath's view on the theme of “destruction of *dharma*:”

### **"Your house is on fire**

The throat of Mother Cow is being slit, Hindu virgins are snatched away. On the temples of the gods mosques have been built. On the *tīrthas* there is foulness. Still, you are sleeping. Why precious time is wasted? Wake up! Hindu! Wake up!

The country's own style of clothing, ornaments, and language<sup>78</sup> are being destroyed. Food, songs, and thoughts<sup>79</sup> are being defiled. The destruction of civility and culture<sup>80</sup> is happening. You, laying down, are sleeping, even today. Wake up! Hindu! Wake up!

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<sup>78</sup> The choice of these words is due to alliteration: *bheṣa*, *bhūṣa*, *bhāṣa*

<sup>79</sup> *bhojan*, *bhajan*, *bhāvana*

<sup>80</sup> *sabhyatā* and *saṃskṛti*

All your goddesses and gods are endowed with arms and weapons. Your enemies too, are endowed with modern weapons. But how sad! Even now you are shy to take in hand a stick! They are buried in dark storehouses. Wake up! Hindu! Wake up!

There is no instruction and initiation<sup>81</sup> of the *ṛṣis*. There is no neutral examination and self-scrutiny.<sup>82</sup> There is no renunciation, *tapasyā* or endurance. There is no defense of the Motherland. Yet, you are not girdling up yourself. Wake up! Hindu! Wake up!

On your body there is no hair-tuft or sacred thread.<sup>83</sup> Even when mother and father die, there are no sons or daughters who do the triple ablutions. There is no [following of] the pure conduct of one's own *gotra*. Your conduct too is not your friend. So you are not a vessel of anybody's faith. [= nobody trusts you] Wake up! Hindu! Wake up!

In the country there is bad conduct, corrupted conduct. An uproar is going on because of the daily acts of violence of the party of demons.<sup>84</sup> Even the defenders of the life and property of people are being voracious. People in search of refuge are crying at your door. Hey Kumbhakarṇa!<sup>85</sup> Hindu! Even now you are sleeping? Hindu! Wake up! Wake up!

Having thrown disunity between brothers, having thrown a looting in the treasure of Hindutva, having thrown the *kālakuṭa*<sup>86</sup> of chaos in archeology and history, having thrown a sale of religious conversions<sup>87</sup> on a cheap price,<sup>88</sup> having thrown the net of a foreign, alien, heretic, fraudulent rule; spears and darts are killing Hindus before time. Hey Hindus, dead though still in life! Even now you are sleeping?  
Hindu! Wake up!! Wake up!!

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<sup>81</sup> *śikṣā dikṣā*

<sup>82</sup> *niṣpakṣa parīkṣā ātmasamīkṣā*

<sup>83</sup> *śikhā-sūtra*, the symbols of brahmanical status.

<sup>84</sup> *dasyu-dal*

<sup>85</sup> demon of the Ramayana

<sup>86</sup> the mythical poison produced by a poison produced at the churning of the ocean

<sup>87</sup> *dharmā-parivartan*

<sup>88</sup> reference to the alleged practice of missionaries, saying to bribe people into conversion

Raise up, arms in hand, may the cow be the defense of the dharma. Give fearlessness, may military power<sup>89</sup> be an instruction in *dharma* for those who are afraid. Take up the protection of the *varṇāśrama*, take the initiation of the *ṛṣis* and *munis*. *Sādhus*, *sants*, good householders, having got together, may there be a defense of Hindusthān.

Hindu! Wake up!! Wake up!!

Get up! Wake up! Take up all the arms!

Bear weapons that can be thrown! And may all people have clenched hands.

Protected by weapons, the thought of *śāstra* rises up.<sup>90</sup>

A Hindu without weapons, arms and *śāstra* is not for good."<sup>91</sup>

(Naraharināth n.d. [*Vaidika Siddhānta*]:40-41)

The text, interestingly, does not mention explicitly the opponents of *dharma* against which Naharinath exhorts his followers to take action, but the elements mentioned as the main challenges to Hindu integrity suggest three conceptual poles: Islam (the mosques built on the temples), Christianity (the “sale” on religious conversion), and globalization (the “destruction” on the style of clothing, language, food, songs). The solution to the problem, according to these verses, is clear: Hindus must conduct an armed resistance against the “foreign, alien, heretic, fraudulent rule.” The concrete enactment of social engagement in Naraharinath’s fellowship, however, did not entail such militaristic consequences, but resolved into a variety of individual paths that placed strong notions of Hindu identity at the very center of the devotees’ existential projects, but with different ideas on what constitutes an appropriate course of action. In

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<sup>89</sup> *kṣātra*

<sup>90</sup> word-play on *śastra* (weapons) and *śāstra* (religious treatises)

<sup>91</sup> *uttiṣṭha jāgṛhi gṛhita samasta-śāstrāḥ kṣepyāstramābhara bhavantu janāṃśca musthā | śastreṇa rakṣita udeṭi hi śāstracintā śāstrāstraśāstrarahito na hitāya hinduḥ ||*

what follows I will draw a sketch of the understanding of *samāj sevā* among three important devotees of Naraharinath, drawing from oral accounts of their life during my fieldwork in 2012-2013.

*Sādhanā as social service – three yogis*

*Ima Mata*

For Ima, the best known female devotee of Naraharinath, social service in the idiom of Hindu nationalism did not entail any concrete engagement with the “others” threatening Hinduness, but implied, instead, a life of asceticism in a social network spanning several ashrams, among which Naraharinath’s Vagishvari specifically, and the village of his family of origins, in Lamjung. We may thus turn to her account of her life, to see how embracing Naraharinath’s ideal of Hinduness represented, for her, a privileged path to social recognition.

Ima, a celibate 39-years-old woman ascetic, narrates her story with plenty of hagiographical motives, beginning before her birth. Her father, a poor brahman from Lamjung, has become a sadhu. Wandering around the pilgrimage places of Nepal, he ends up in Svargadvari, where a guru makes a prophecy for him: he must get married, as he will get a daughter who will become famous. He decides, therefore, to return to the life of a householder and, after marrying a woman from a compatible brahman family, has a son who dies soon after birth. Ima is born next and, a few months later, her mother also dies, though still perfectly healthy: the fontanel on her head cracks and opens

spontaneously, so that her soul leaves her body in an upward direction.<sup>92</sup> After losing his wife, her father resumes his itinerant lifestyle as a wandering sadhu, and Ima childhood's is spent in a series of ashrams throughout Nepal, sometimes with him, sometimes working as a servant girl for female renunciates her father entrusts her to. From the years spent with him, she remembers one place in particular, the ashram titled to the R̥ṣi Vyāsa at Damauli, where she first met Naraharinath, who instructs his father in proper conduct by insisting that he stops smoking. Naraharinath's influence on her life is enormous. Considerations on whether or not she should go to school, for example, are determined by his suggestions and, since he considers secular education, particularly in English, to be detrimental to spiritual growth, his father retires her from school. The decision, however, does not sadden her, because, she says, she had never been interested in worldly matters anyway.

A turning point in her life occurs when she is 15-years-old. She has a desire to keep the *Svasthānī Vrata* (a month-long vow observed mostly by women in Nepal, which implies a very restricted diet of one simple meal per day and the daily recitation of a chapter of the story of Svasthānī), but her father forbids her to do so, on the pretext that she is still too young to undergo the prolonged fasting, although he is probably just unable to afford the purchase of new clothing required for keeping the ritual observances of the vow. Unwilling to lose this chance to prove her ascetic capabilities, however, Ima goes to the riverbank, sits there in meditation, and immediately falls into *samādhi*. Her father comes looking for her, with the intent—she says—of beating her, but when he approaches her, a huge *nāga* emerges from the sand of the riverbank and wraps around

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<sup>92</sup> This unusual death can be read as a reference to the rise of the *kuṇḍalinī* in the psycho-physical complex of a yogi, as the latent energy is supposed to rise upward through the spinal cord and reach the fontanel, where the one-thousand-petalled *cakra* is said to be located.

her, to the astonishment of the malicious old man unable to understand his exceptional daughter. After this divine intervention, the path to sadhiness is open for Ima: her father allows her to perform the *Svasthānī Vrata*, a relative buys a new garment for her, and she feels reassured that future austerities would not receive any opposition.

When she is around sixteen years of age, however, her father dies, and various members of her extended family try to arrange her marriage. She stubbornly refuses, saying that her wish is to live as a maidservant of holy people in an ashram, and that she would drown herself into the river were she forced to lose her celibacy. Her relatives, the tale continues, have her jailed in the local police station for a few days, where the intervention of a compassionate official, who advocates for her right to a religious lifestyle, grants her the freedom to return to an ashram of female renunciates.

Finally free to pursue her ambitions, she writes a letter to Naraharinath, whom she has venerated as her guru since her childhood, asking for permission to join him in his own ashram in Vagishvari. To her surprise, he accepts her immediately, and she moves there, planning on intensifying her religious practices and on performing *guru-sevā* to him. The years spent in Vagishvari are tough: soon, she undertakes the vow of subsisting only on grass juice, with the intention of keeping it for a full year:<sup>93</sup> though this extreme form of fasting earns her a great reputation as an ascetic, it also weakens her health, and she barely has enough energy for tending the cattle and performing the daily work expected of her in the ashram.

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<sup>93</sup> This vow (which reminds of the grass soups reported in the hagiographies of the Tibetan yogi Milarepa) is a rare observance kept by some sadhus in Nepal: the juice is extracted from tender low grass by means of being pestled in a mortar, a procedure that requires several hours of work for distilling a single glass of juice. In addition to this liquid (believed to be nutritious because it is the substance of the same grass that sacred cows would eat), milk, ghee, and honey are also allowed, as these are considered items of ritual significance that would enhance the spiritual purity of the practitioner.

Furthermore, her decision to spend the hours before dawn in meditation upsets some ashram dwellers, who believe she should spend her time more productively. Naraharinath intervenes, defending her right to perform her *sādhanā*. As for her fasting, however, he forces her to resume a diet of solid food after nine months, when her health has deteriorated to the point of risking her life. Though grateful for what she considers a paternal intervention against her stubbornness, Ima, however, does not attribute the origin of her illness to her poor diet, but, rather, to demonic influences that have attacked her: a possession session organized with the help of Shrishnath confirms this point, revealing that she has accumulated impurity for having slept in the same clothes that she has used during her menses. After this incident (and in addition to adopting a *phalāhāri*<sup>94</sup> diet as prompted by Naraharinath), she becomes extremely intransigent on issues on ritual purity: besides observing all the rules of untouchability—permanent (caste-based) or temporary (due to childbirth, death or menstruation)—she refuses to wash the dishes of unknown visitors and to touch clothes of uncertain provenance.

Her life in the ashram becomes more difficult during Naraharinath's absence, when he participates in religious gatherings elsewhere. It is during this time that she grows close to Shrishnath, whom she considers an elder brother and a confidant in matters of ascetic life. Their proximity, unsurprisingly, attracts the gossip of some local people, who accuse her of improper behavior. Professing her innocence, as a proof of her purity, she curses

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<sup>94</sup> *Phalāhāra* (“eating fruit”) is a mild form of fasting that householders frequently observe on prescribed days, such as Shivaratri or the fortnightly Ekadashi fast in honour of Vishnu, but many sadhus take it up permanently as a form of ascetic austerity. Foods allowed for phalaharis include fruit, as the name of the practice imply, but also milk, ghee, honey and potatoes (also considered a fruit). As potatoes are the cheapest and most fulfilling item in the list, potfuls of fried potatoes usually become the staple meal of those who observe this restricted diet.

the main accuser to die within six months, a prophecy, she points out, that comes to pass exactly at the expected time, when the man loses his life in a car accident.

At any rate, valuing her ascetic reputation more than her friendship with Shrishnath, she leaves Bagishvari and sets out for Lamjung,<sup>95</sup> reaching Durāḍāḍa, her father's village, where some family members still reside. It is 1994. After a few nights hosted by her relatives, she takes refuge in a small Shiva temple overlooking the valley, facing the hills of Gorkha where Gorakhnath's main temple in the palace of Prithvi Narayan Shah is located. She spends her time in meditation and worship, sleeping near the *Śivaliṅga* of the shrine and accepting only *phalāhāra* food when spontaneously offered by the villagers. These, however, do not seem to particularly favor the presence of an unmarried 19-years-old girl residing alone in their village shrine, and the food is scant. Unable to walk and work due to lack of physical nourishment, Ima reports staying for hours and hours in meditation, deepening her ability to stay in *samādhi*.

It is during one of these meditations that she suddenly sees Naraharinath, who informs her that she is to see him very soon. Surprised by the apparition, she gets ready to travel to Bagishvari to meet him, but as soon as she sets out of the temple premises, she sees a group of yogis approaching her from a distance: it is her guru, accompanied by a couple of yogis from Dang. They have come to Lamjung, he explains, to find a place to celebrate a *Koṭi Homa*. She, of course, proposes that he celebrates it right there, so that her *tapo-bhūmi*<sup>96</sup> may become an “historical place” (*aitihāsik sthān*). The enterprise, however, is not easy: several brahmans are needed to perform the ritual oblations, and many more people must perform *sevā* and provide funding over a three-months period for

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<sup>95</sup> A Bahun-Chhetri region of Nepal, next to Gorkha

<sup>96</sup> The place, considered empowered, where an ascetic has performed austerities.

the ritual to come to completion. Initially, the response of the locals is quite cold, as they are reluctant to commit to such a significant expenditure of time and resources. Their lack of support prompts her to launch into a passionate harangue on the merits of Naraharinath (now presented as an *avatāra* of Gorakhnath himself) and on the rarity of such a unique opportunity to gain the blessings of an authentic Vedic ritual being performed in the humble premises of their tiny village. He, in turn, states that the best place to hold the *Koṭi Homa* is definitely the *tapo-bhūmi* of the excellent *brahmācāriṇī* (celibate woman), and that he would not consider holding it anywhere else. The combined effect of Naraharinath's commanding presence and Ima's oratorical ability wins over the minds of the villagers, who finally yield.

A purification of the ritual premises soon ensues: a shop of liquor and cigarettes located on the way to the temple is removed (after much yelling from Naraharinath) and all villagers are instructed to switch to a vegetarian diet and to quit smoking and drinking. This particular is significant, since it highlights not only a ritual concern (meat-eaters would not be allowed to make oblations into the fire), but constitutes one of the main points of Naraharinath's reformism: vegetarianism and teetotalism are the very language of upward social mobility in the reformation movements of Hindu nationalism, particularly in the context of the *śuddhi* movements promoted firstly by the Ārya Samāj and then adopted as normal praxis of Hindutva politics among the tribals. As Susan Bayly has documented for colonial India, the traditional language of purification was adopted even by reformists that saw themselves as harbingers of modernity: indeed, the condition from which the “depressed castes” were encouraged to emancipate themselves was thought about mainly as one of impurity, and the dominant paradigm in the rhetoric

of low-caste social amelioration was shaped by the idea that conformity to higher standards of purity for the low castes would have strengthened the nation as a whole:

“proponents of 'uplift' schemes often expressed themselves at the same time in terms which took for granted an idealised opposition between pure and impure, propriety and impropriety, cleanliness and uncleanness. These concerns implicitly affirmed notions of twice-born or high-caste purity and dominance. The only new element here was that such 'modern' representation of dharmic order generalized Brahmanical notions of rank and hierarchy into an impersonal rhetoric of nationality and public obligation.” (Bayly 1999, p. 179-80)

Ima reports that Naraharinath's insistence on these concerns was one of the major points of his preaching, not only to low castes and tribals, but also—perhaps particularly—to brahmans who had abandoned their traditional ways in favor of an indulgent adoption of foreign customs (*mlecchācāra*). During the time of my fieldwork, most families in the village consumed meat quite frequently (mostly goat and chicken), though they admitted it was an inappropriate practice, and regarded vegetarianism as a sign of a correct spiritual orientation. Besides the brahmans, Ima's village is also home to a few families of Kami, Sami and Sarki (who are regarded as untouchable, and have their houses at the outskirts the main hamlet) and to some Gurung families (residing more uphill). These people, according to Ima's report, did not participate in the fire oblations, though they were allowed to observe the *homa* without touching the ritual items.

The participation of low caste people in Naraharinath's rituals elsewhere, however, is a moot point: while Bholanath Yogi from Dang states that Naraharinath actually encouraged their participation, and that the celebration of the *Koṭi Homa* was a communal endeavor particularly meant to make accessible to everybody Vedic rituals normally restricted to an elite, Ima maintains that her guru allowed low caste participants

in the rituals only rarely, under pressure from others, and only at the condition that they “reform/improve” (*sudhārnū*). Asked to what exactly they should improve upon, she mentions, besides their consumption of meat, alcohol and cigarettes, the fact of not taking a ritual bath (*snān*) in the morning and of not performing regularly some *pūjā* in their houses. These last two points are particularly revealing, as they loosely correspond to the two elements that the Viśva Hindu Pariṣad has singled out as the distinctive marks of Hinduness at the *Vidvat Pariṣad* held at the Kumbha Melā of 1966 (mentioned here in chapter 2 for Naraharinath’s participation in it): the *pratasnān* and the *īśvara-smaraṇ* (Jaffrelot 2005:321)

This parallel, more than of Ima's politics, speaks of how the VHP's standards of conduct are shaped by brahmanical models, particularly in terms of ritual purity, even when they purport to represent the variety of sects supposed to gather into a common Hindu pool. Rhetorically, Ima maintains that brahmans who fail to follow these rules would also be regarded as *śudra*, though, in practice, access to her temple is allowed to high-caste meat-eaters who may or may not have performed their ritual ablutions in the morning, but is denied to all untouchables in principle. A time when she made an exception for an especially pious Dalit woman, she says, allowing her to eat the *prasād* of the temple, the old untouchable lady passed away the very next morning.

Besides reinforcing the awareness of ritual purity in the village, the celebration of the *Koṭi Homa* is the most important event in Ima's life, as she is finally able to enjoy Naraharinath's daily presence for three full months at her own residence. Taking advantage of this opportunity, she asks him to further instruct her in the practice of yoga, a request that results into a painful boot camp of ascetic discipline. After spending all day

working around the ritual (mainly cooking meals and assisting the brahmans and yogis), she spends the evening listening to her guru's teachings (which end between 11:00pm and midnight), and at 3:00am she is briskly woke up by her guru to practice seated meditation in *padmāsana*, her legs aching for the prolonged stiffness.

After the performance of the *homa*, Ima's status improves considerably. Donations of food become more regular and she starts to be sought out for blessings and for helping the villagers to celebrate *pūjās* on special occasions. Her main area of competence, however, appears to be her meditation, and in a few occasions she is observed to stay in *samādhi* for two full days. Women from the village take care of her at that time, dropping water in her mouth as she is still unconscious of her surroundings. Though some people are skeptical of her claims, many begin to be interested in the possibility of tapping into her ascetic power. In particular, she says that she can answer the questions of her devotees through prophecies that come to her in *samādhi*. Among her first cases, to a man who is relocating to Kathmandu, she suggests not to buy a specific house, but he does so nonetheless and meets an untimely death falling from its terrace. To others, she suggests how and when to apply for jobs, get married, and procreate: her prophecies, she says, never fail to come true, and the number of people seeking her advice increases steadily.

Her role in the village, however, exceeds these dimensions of mundane concerns, and she acts, more importantly, as a preserver of tradition: she insists with the villagers that they keep a vegetarian diet, do not drink and smoke, and, particularly, that they do not abandon their culture for the sake of *mleccha* habits – the crux of Naraharinath's teachings. Although her first years in Lamjung are spent in relative isolation from her

guru's network, she still keeps seeing him in occasion of ritual celebrations and *dharma* gatherings in the area, and he instructs her to encourage the participation of other women in such activities as a means of strengthening national pride. In Lamjung, she phrases her presence there through the language of *samāj sevā*: she oversees the organization of community celebrations (such as Śivarātrī, pilgrimages, fasting days, and recitations of *dharma* stories) and acts as the main instructor for women to keep their ritual observances. Following Naraharinath's insistence on the superiority of social service (*parārtha sadhāna*, “practice for others”) over personal endeavors (*svārtha sādhanā*, “practice for oneself”), she relaxes her asceticism and gradually abandons her *phalāhāri* diet, so as to have more strength in her increasingly public responsibilities.

In the late Nineties, and throughout the Maoist uprising, she sees herself as the person responsible to preserve Nepali culture (*Gorkhāli saṃskṛti*, in Naraharinath's phrasing) in the village, and she makes a point of always wearing the *colo*, the traditional double-breasted garment of the Nepali Parbatiyas, not only against Western fashion, but also against the *salvār kamīz* that has become the dress of choice for women of her generation. Furthermore, she prides herself of her knowledge of Sanskrit (which, she says, has come to her through her *sādhanā*, not through formal training) against the increasingly Westernized education of the villagers. What is the point, she would often tell them, of reading a newspaper? Why not spending one's time memorizing a Sanskrit *stotra* instead?

In fact, the press is not essential to keep updated on the news: the younger generation migrates to Kathmandu in search of better schools and job opportunities, and who can afford it migrates to Western countries. Cell phones keep ringing with calls from relatives in Kathmandu, Australia, Saudi Arabia and the US. And when the principal of the village

school is murdered in a confrontation with the Maoists, everybody understands that the age of *Gorkhāli saṃskṛti* may in fact be close to an end. Her social service, however, is not over yet. People still call her to seek her blessing and advice for mundane prosperity. And she keeps leading the women of her village—now mostly the eldest, the only ones who have not migrated to Kathmandu or somewhere else—in pilgrimage trips to the ashrams of her childhood, such as the birthplace of Ṛṣi Vyāsa at Damauli, keeping high the saffron flag with the *om* symbol that has reached her temple from somewhere in India, the very *bhagvā dhvaj* of Hindutva politics that Naraharinath has imported to his ashram from India.

She advises the youngest ones, on their visits back to the village, not to convert to *mleccha dharma*, a religion, she says, that is as recent as Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification of Nepal, and one developed by people with selfish interests for their own personal aggrandizement. Rather, she suggests, they should practice yoga and learn the Veda, and, if no place is available for them to do so, she will employ the income of her many donations to build a guesthouse near her temple, so that, finally, the place of the celebration of Naraharinath's *Koṭi Homa*, her own *tapo-bhūmi*, may become an “historical place” of Nepal. In 2013, time of my fieldwork, her project was close to completion: a toilet with a shower, a luxury she had never enjoyed before, was being built with money allocated by the *Guṭhī Saṃsthān*<sup>97</sup> for the development of the temple premises, and a few sadhus from other ashrams were planning on visiting her place, attracted by the fame of her past austerities. Her favorite guest, however, was a teenager yogi from Vagishvari, the ashram she had left twenty years before, Shrishnath's disciple, who, people said, was in the process of becoming a “second Naraharinath.”

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<sup>97</sup> The official organ responsible for the management of religious endowments.

The visitor that enters the ashram of Vagishvari at dinner time, in the darkness of the evening, could perhaps mistake Naraharinath's first potential successor to the mahantship of Mrigasthali for a member of Shiva's *gana*, just emerged from the nearby cremation ground of Devghat: the dark body smeared in ashes and consumed by fasting, a piece of ochre robe tied as a loincloth, an abundant measure of *rudrākṣa* beads around the skinny arms and neck, and the thick black thread of the Nāth ritual whistle crossing his chest. Definitely an exotic appearance if compared to Naraharinath's more sedate composure (normally clothed in the traditional *bhoṭo*, the preferred shirt for a Nepali nationalist), the young yogi, nonetheless, takes seriously his scholarly responsibilities: if our visitor is to meet him at a time when he is not working in the kitchen or tending the cattle, 19-years-old Devnath would either be reading from a Sanskrit text, often Bhartrihari's *Vairāgya-śataka* (“One hundred verses on detachment”), or lecturing the less erudite menials of the ashram on some topic of dharmic importance.

His story mirrors, in many ways, that of Ima, but places him more clearly at the center of sectarian responsibilities as a member of the Nāth Sampradāya. Born a brahman and named Pramod, Devnath comes, like Ima, from a very impoverished Parbatiya family. His father works as a servant in the ashram of Vagishvari, under the supervision of Shrishnath, sweeping the courtyard, growing the orchard, and tending the cattle. As a child, Pramod was entrusted to some relatives, who provided for his education in exchange for his work as a servant in their house. Continuous mistreatment, however, motivated him to run away in his teens, to seek refuge in the ashram where his father was working. Though he was not allowed to reside there permanently, he could listen to Shrishnath's teachings, participate in the *pūjās*, and develop a sense of what a yogi's life

would be. In particular, he says, he appreciated the vegetarian lifestyle of the ashram, so different from the corrupt meat-eating habits of his foster family, and the value placed on Sanskrit education.

The moment of sudden realization occurred when, in meditation one day, he had a vision of Naraharinath, already passed away before he could meet him personally, who instructed him to learn more about Nāth practice. Profoundly touched, he sought the advice of Shrishnath, who decided to make him his disciple. The task, however, was not straightforward. To initiate the boy, Shrishnath himself had first to be recognized as a guru in the Sampradāya by taking *darśanī dīkṣā*, the second step in one's initiation as Nāth yogi, which entails the painful ordeal of cutting through the thick of the ear to insert the ritual earrings. Since the guru administering this initiation is, as a rule, not the same who has given the first one (the *aughar dīkṣā* in which the yogi is given the ritual whistle), Shrishnath had never wanted to take this second step, as he regarded only Naraharinath as his guru. To accommodate Pramod in the Sampradāya, however, Shrishnath decided to go to Gorakhpur and find a yogi willing to act as *darśanī* guru. On the same day his initiation was completed, he gave *aughar dikṣa* to Pramod with the name Devnath.

The young boy soon became the focus of attention of everybody in the ashram: though made to work tirelessly with the cattle, in the orchard, and in the kitchen, arrangements were also made so that he could take classes in grammar and classical philosophy in a nearby Sanskrit school. His main strength was his oratorical ability: already in high-school he had distinguished himself winning competitions in the art of delivering speeches, *pravacana*, and now, for lack of a better audience, he exercised

himself either with me or with other visitors in the ashram, with the ultimate goal of becoming, one day, a *rāṣṭra-guru* (“guru for the nation”) as Naraharinath had been.

The motivation for investing in Devnath by providing for his initiation and education had come to Shrishnath precisely from such considerations. As he had always considered himself too uneducated to compare with his guru, and he had maintained a low profile after Naraharinath's death, choosing to keep alive his memory in the ashram of Vagishvari rather than participating in the politics of the Sampradāya at Mrigasthali or in Gorakhpur. Devnath, however, had revived his hope that a new wave of preaching could be possible. The main goals of his potential candidature to the leadership of Mrigasthali were 1. to reform (*sudhāṛnu*) the ashram by putting an end to the habit of drinking and smoking initiated by the current *mahant*, and 2. to revive Naraharinath's ideal of Nepal as a Hindu kingdom, possibly supporting the return of the monarchy.

Blissfully ignorant of Indian politics, but confident of being able to fulfill his guru's expectations, Devnath enthusiastically embraced his Sanskrit classes and work in the ashram, although he added to his religious persona an ascetic turn that reminded closely of Ima's ambitions, but was quite different from Naraharinath's style. While Naraharinath had the habit of taking two or three meals per day, Devnath decided to stop eating salt upon initiation, became *phalāhāri* a few months later, and, during the time of my fieldwork, adopted for some time the grass-juice diet that Ima had undertaken twenty years before. The discrepancy between Naraharinath and his successor was not just a matter of nutrition, though, but reflected a different conception of a yogi's role.

As I have pointed out in reference to the passage of *Vaidika Siddhānta* translated above, Naraharinath used to contrast the “selfish (*svārtha*) *sādhanā*” of the spiritual

aspirant seeking his own liberation with the more praiseworthy endeavor of the “altruistic (*parārtha*) *sāadhanā*” of the socially engaged sadhu, as exemplified by his own speeches and ritual activities for the public. Devnath, though aware that “social service” was what was expected of him as a follower of Naraharinath—and definitely seduced by the fame that could come from his speeches—also nursed the desire to achieve *mokṣa*, the ultimate state of liberation from the ties of earthly existence, that he had internalized from his Sanskrit learning.

During our discussions on yogic life in the first part of my fieldwork, at the end of 2012, he always expressed the opinion that a yogi's concern had to be solely to detach oneself from the snares of mundane existence and that his possible “social service” was mostly acting as a model for others to do the same. His outlook, however, changed toward the last part of my fieldwork, in 2013, when he returned to Nepal from a few weeks at the Kumbhamelā in Allahabad, where he had the chance of interacting extensively with yogis from Gorakhpur, Haridwar, and other locations in North India.

“What would you do,” he would ask me, “if you were disallowed to practice your religion in your own country?” Puzzled by the inquiry, I tried to explain that it would be very unlikely for any religion to be outlawed in Europe in the immediate future and that, anyway, I could not see how this could ever be the case for his religion in Nepal. In addition to these new concerns on the legal status of Hinduism in South Asia, the pilgrimage site of Devghat, hitherto a fantastic stage for his reenactment of Shiva's ascetic feats, was now regarded as a place with a problematic history where, he said, Muslims had destroyed Hindu temples to make room for mosques. Though no ruins were available to provide evidence for his claims, a new word, “*kaṭṭarpanthi*”

(“fundamentalist”), had meanwhile entered the vocabulary he would use to proudly describe himself. If *mokṣa* and *tapas* were still sometimes mentioned as goals, the mahantship of Mrigasthali had become a more immediate concern, and *samāj sevā*, now, seemed to imply more politicized responsibilities than the solitary penances he had envisaged before. This new role, of course, was anticipated as burdensome: “you see”, he commented while walking the road to Ima's ashram one day, barefoot after having renounced his slippers as an act of *tapas*, “one day we will be on this street in a big car, won't we? But we shouldn't have greed for it, we must be detached.” Then he looked up at the mountains of Gorkha, just above Gorakhnath's temple in the old Shah palace, “I'd like to go there and do *tapas*, to achieve *samādhi*, what else can one desire after that?”

When my fieldwork ended in 2013, Devnath's fate within the *sampradāya* was still undecided, but, at the time of this writing, I have received the news that he has been appointed *mūl pujāri* (the main priest in charge of Gorakhnath's worship) at Mrigasthali, a position that can indeed pave the way to his future *mahantship* of this important *maṭha*. If and when the appointment as *mahant* is confirmed, he will have the responsibility and the opportunity to present Naraharinath's *siddhānta* to a broader fellowship of sympathizers, not only the renunciants of the *maṭha*, but also those that are part of the general laity. To understand the centrality of social service in the lives of this broader constituency, with may now turn to an important yogi householder, Bholanath Yogi.

### *Bholanath*

The third case under consideration here is a yogi in a quite different sense, as he did not enter the Sampradāya by initiation, but by birth, being a member of an important

family of yogi householders, marked by the title “Yogi” as a surname, connected to the temple of Caughera in Dang, one of the biggest Nāth institutions in the country. In fact, Yogi householders are a notable part of Nāth society both in India and in Nepal, in sizable communities recorded since the beginning of the ethnography on the Nāths (Briggs 1938:47-61). The story of how a specific caste came into being is often unflattering, portraying some affair of a guru with a female disciple, but preserving the memory of the prestige of some celibate Nāth of the past (Gold 1999:145). The two modes of transmission, initiation and birth into the caste, are both legitimate ways of Nāth succession (D. Gold 1999:73-74), and an affinity between Nāth householders and Nāth sādhus can be seen at several levels. Although in practice many yogi-householders are peasants with little or none yogic aspirations, there is a sense in which they partake as a group of the magical reputation attributed to the more powerful ascetics. We thus see that in the past they were often granted lands in villages because they were thought to be able to bring rain and chase away locusts (A. Gold 1988, p. 48).

Bholanath Yogi, however, a well-educated man in his fifties, does not have any magical reputation. Instead, he is famous in the area as the principal of the local school, as a landlord of quite extensive possessions, and, especially, as a committed philanthropist who runs a shelter (also called *ashram*) for orphaned and abandoned children, and a hospice for elderly people who do not have a family to provide for them. Both in the school and in the kids' shelter, his mission is to inculcate in the minds of the younger generations the value of *samāj sevā*, and the teenagers of his *ashram* are instructed to somehow give back to others what they have received.

A poster in his ashram displays the famous saying from BhG 2.50, *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam* (“yoga is skillfulness in actions”), also quoted in Naraharinath's *Vaidika Siddhānta*, and he definitely sees a continuity between his role as a yogi and his activities as a social worker. Naraharinath, he says, was a main source of inspiration. Regarding him as defender of tradition (*dharma-rakṣin*) and revolutionary reformer (*krantakāri*) at the same time, Bholanath, unlike Ima, firmly believes that Naraharinath had always disregarded concerns of ritual purity for the sake of fostering social amelioration in Nepal. He admits, however, that some of his practices are in contrast with Naraharinath's ideas. The choice of providing an English education to his students, for example, conflicts with the higher value that Naraharinath assigned to Sanskrit learning, but he compensates for this by memorizing, each morning, a Sanskrit *stotra* of spiritual significance. Furthermore, though the *ashram* serves occasionally a dish of meat to the children, he and his immediate family do not partake of it.

Besides his role as a social worker in Dang, Bholanath is also active at the international level, where he sometimes participates in conferences on yoga organized by transnational organizations of Hindus. He is familiar with Westerners who wish to explore yoga practice and serves as their liaison to other gurus when they come to visit Nepal in search of spiritual teachings, but he is also happy to interact with Christians or secular-minded foreigners who come to volunteer in his *ashram*. All religions, he believes, are equally valid when followed in a spirit of tolerance. His daughter, Minakshi Yogi, was in fact engaged in sort of interfaith project—a school research on what the Bible says on child-marriage, a problem of Hindu culture that she passionately wants to solve by providing better education to the parents of the child-brides. For Bholanath and

Minakshi, yoga, and the Nāth Sampradāya specifically, are rational forms of culture in which instances of ignorance— as they see child marriage—should not have a place.

One of the major features of their self-presentation is the emphasis on the language of reason and science in their understanding of Hinduness. The Nine Nāths, for example—the nine mythical yogis at the origins of the order that are now reinterpreted as Hindu gods—are, for Bholanath, natural and metaphysical principles: sky, wind, light water, earth, materiality, vegetation, the cosmic illusion, and the supreme consciousness. Human perfection is to be achieved by the practice of yoga, which is not strenuous *tapas*, but a well-balanced disciplining of one's vital functions. And, if in his community in Dang his role entails empowering his students to become well-informed citizens of a globalized world, as a Hindu, he feels he has something to contribute to other countries by making accessible to everybody the treasures of his culture.

A characteristic feature of Bholanath's identity as a yogi is his engagement with primary sources of the Nath tradition. This distinguishes him from Ima, who bases her knowledge of Sanskrit mainly on popular *stotras*, used as daily prayers. Bholanath, instead, is mainly interested in Sanskrit treatises on yoga. For instance, during my stay in Nepal, I read under his guidance the *Yogasārāvalī* published by Yogi Naraharinath, a text on *layayoga* that discusses classical elements of Nāth practice such as *nādānusandhana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *nāḍīśuddhi*, *bandha*, *kumbhaka*, the mantra *haṃsa-soham*, the state of *unmanī*, *khecarī mudra*, *yoganidrā*, *nirvikalpa samādhi*, and *prāṇa-praveśa* into the *brahmarandhra*—a standard expression of ascetic literature, representing yoga practice as a path to *mokṣa*:

*brahmarandhragate vāyau girau prasraveṇa yathā |  
yadāyaṃ śṛṇute nādaṃ tadā mukto na saṃśaya || 26*

When the vital winds are gone to the *brahmarandhra* like streams in a mountain, when this *nāda* is heard, one is liberated, no doubt.

Though liberation (*mokṣa*, *mukti*) was not a goal on which Bholanath was actively working, since social engagement was the dimension of religious life that claimed most of his time, it was nonetheless a notion in the readings he pursued, and the ideal of the detached yogi striving for spiritual perfection was still an important coordinate of his understanding of Hinduness, thus highlighting how the re-elaboration of *sādhana* proposed by Naraharinath does not translate into a complete obliteration of the ascetic vein of the Nāth tradition.

#### ***Social service and social esteem – Hinduness as a path to recognition***

The cases presented here highlight, I think, an important dimension of the social dynamics of “service,” that is, its being a tool for achieving a form of recognition. Ima had her status acknowledged in Lamjung only after two elements had been set in place: 1) Naraharinath's celebration of the *Koṭi Homa* in her *tapo-bhūmi*, an act that emphasized the importance of ritual purity (a key point of her religious attitude, especially after her illness) as a fundamental aspect of Nepal's Hinduness, and 2) her ability to present her prophetic meditations as a socially useful activity, applying to her *samādhi* the language of *parārtha sādhanā* used by Naraharinath. Furthermore, she could present herself, mainly because of being the disciple of a conservative guru, as a custodian of Hindu culture against the Westernization of Nepal's customs, thus embedding her own ascetic idiosyncrasies into the grander narrative of the nation. The gradual “socialization” of her spiritual practice represents thus not only an increased set of responsibilities, but also a

greater degree of public esteem, which culminates in the recognition of her temple as an “historical place” of Nepal.

Devnath's case could have been similar: from an economically subaltern background like Ima, he was nonetheless able to put to use his brahmanical birth by embracing Naraharinath's model of the Sanskritized yogi who serves society through his *pravacanas*, although the exact significance of his role changed as he moved from the restricted space of Vagishvari to the more radicalized milieu of the Nāth network at the Kumbhamelā. If in the first phase of his ascetic career he regarded social service as a duty to be fulfilled mainly by providing an example of detachment and by instructing others in spiritual matters, after his exposure to the Islamophobic stances of the Indian yogis he started to see himself as a defender of Hindu *dharma* against a potential enemy. Though a certain tension between his pride as an ascetic and the seduction of worldly prestige was present from the very beginning, the latter model exacerbated it.

Bholanath, instead, mainly because of his more important economic resources, was able to adopt the language of social service in a way that gave more value to his globalized education and manners. Though still proud of being a Hindu, he considered this identity less tied to the politics of ritual purity and Sanskrit learning than Ima and Devnath did. His self-understanding as an important member of society was nonetheless still phrased by the ideal of *samāj sevā* derived from Naraharinath's teachings and the social esteem he enjoyed rested amply on his reputation as a yogi philanthropist.

This diversity in the conceptions of Hinduness that these three disciples exhibit clearly depends on the three different landscapes they inhabit: for Ima, the restricted space of the brahman village in Lamjung, where Muslims and Christians (considered two

synonymous words) are a metonymy for the propagation of a general *mleccha-dharma* that is, in the end, only a generic designation for any departure from her strict standards of brahmanical purity and ritual observances; for Devnath, the broader institutional space of the Nāth Sampradāya, where the rhetoric of Hindutva empowers him to regard himself as a defender of a religion imperiled by a violent enemy; and, for Bholanath, the upper-middle class of an educated elite of Nepalis that view themselves as Hindu in a globalized transnational context. Though all three present themselves to larger society through the medium of Naraharinath's conception of social service, and achieve a measure of recognition in virtue of their ability to do so, the content of their Hinduness is, in fact, profoundly different. Ima's insistence on ritual purity, built upon Naraharinath's understanding of social reformation, is definitely secondary for Devnath, who places a higher value on the ideal of *mokṣa*, first, and on the defense of *dharma*, later. In turn, both understandings get dissolved in Bholanath's vision, in which a modernized outlook rephrases *samāj sevā* in terms of philanthropy.

The literature on Hindutva politics in India, particularly through the lenses of gender, caste stratification, or Hinduism in the diaspora, can offer more examples of how the motivation for engaging in the nationalist activities of the Sangh Parivar is often correlated to the felt need for an increased recognition: a heightened sense of masculinity for young men from disenfranchised backgrounds (Hansen 1996, Banerjee 2005, Anand 2007), an acculturation to the mainstream for marginalized castes (Narayan 2009), and an international legitimation of “Hinduism” in multicultural contexts where globalization is “perceived as an uneven process of marginalisation and exclusion.” (Hansen 1996:603)

The recognition that Ima, Devnath and Bholanath achieved by phrasing their yogic lives through the language of social service provided by Naraharinath can also better understood through Axel Honneth's analysis of social recognition as a tripartite dynamic movement from “love” (in the generic sense of family affections and intimacy), “rights” (the legal acknowledgment of one's agency as an autonomous rational subject capable of moral decisions) and “solidarity” (the constitution of a “community of value”: in this case, the shared ground of their affiliation to the Sampradāya). As all of them constitute their identities as Hindus by moving, without disruption, from the realm of their family values (brahman for Ima and Devnath, yogi-householder for Bholanath), to that of the state (Nepal as a distinctively Hindu nation, as phrased by Naraharinath), to that of the community of value (the broader world of Nāth yogis).

Dissonances, however, continue to remain embedded within the very fabric of religious life that underlie such a project. As Devaki Menon notes in her ethnography of women in the organizations of the Sangh Parivar, norms and ideas of Hindu nationalism are often selectively transgressed when they do not conform to the moral self-understanding of the participants, particularly in regard to violence. In the case of Naraharinath's fellowship, we may see that the very reception of his ideal of “social service” may be interpreted in ways that make room for radical disruptions of the original message, to the point that, as in the case of Bholanath, providing English instruction and engaging in interfaith cooperation with the Christians—something that Naraharinath definitely did not advocate—are embraced as examples of social service.

Furthermore, the ideal of *sādhana* as individual yogic discipline, signified by Devnath's *śaiva* attire and ascetic aspirations, by Ima's states of *samādhi*, but also by

Bholanāth's interest in yoga treatises, continue to survive in the figures of Naraharinath's disciples even as they perform their chosen role of socially engaged Hindus. These elements are fundamental: none of the yogis overviewed here, in fact, followed Naraharinath because of his nationalist commitment, rather, they became attracted to his figure because of what they regarded as essentially moral teachings.

As Devaki Menon notes, the motivation to engage in Hindu activism often rests on feelings of social responsibility that are congruent with the specific background, beliefs and interests of the women involved, challenging the idea of a monolithic ideology equally embraced by all the actors involved. Although the fear internalized by widespread ideas on the danger provoked by Muslims and Christians in the nation motivates militant commitments, presented as a form of self-defense and personal empowerment, the notion of *sevā* as a form of moral, humanitarian commitment is also present in the daily lives of the women overviewed in Menon's ethnography (Menon 2010). Similarly, the notion of *yoga* is also a fundamental element of the contemporary self-understanding of Hindu nationalism (McKean 1996), but, again, its political dimensions are not always relevant, and are often de-activated in contexts that look at the practice of *yoga* as form of self-healing:

“very often, these types of discourses on yoga are not directly related to politics. Those who believe that yoga manifests a Hindu identity and serves it use diverse tactics to shape discourses and diffuse practices that pertain to nationalist positions. Furthermore, notions of health and healing are often used to move away from formal politics to embrace medicine.” (Hoyez 2011:146)

In the case of the three yogis overviewed here, the theme of asceticism, represented by yoga, intersects with the theme of Hinduness in ways that are not reducible to a solely

political dimension. This is particularly clear in the case of Ima Mata, who enacts her ideal of social service through her states of *samādhis*: though the Nation is paramount in her self-presentation, and her identity as a Hindu represents her pathway to public life, the very process of “socialization” that she undergoes is a gradual absorption of ideals from Naraharinath’s example, mediated by the affection and respect that she felt for him, rather than by a conscious, explicitly political commitment. Devnath, likewise, was initially attracted to ascetic life as form of self-realization, and felt the greatest enthusiasms for texts, such as the *Vairagya-śatakam*, but also the *Upaniṣads*, that pointed to spiritual freedom, rather than to political empowerment. If Sanskrit, for him, was the “Mother of all languages”, as he would say to explain his love for it when questioned, this was not because he had in mind an alternative version of Indo-European linguistics against which he wanted to prove the superiority of his civilization—he was simply repeating the notions that he had been taught by his teachers. The idea of an eternal language, of cosmic derivation, still resounding in the *śrutipaṭha* and *yajñas*, was, for him, a magnetic pole of attraction that provided a dimension of transcendence, as well as aesthetic pleasure, to his life as a student, as a yogi, and as a Nepali. His interiorization of Hindutva’s suggestions was a later consequence, not the reason, for his initiation into the Nāth Sampradāya

## CHAPTER 6

### MAN(U)'S DHARMA

In the previous chapters I have analyzed some rhetorical strategies of Naraharinath's work, pointing out how the new political situation in which he participated—the twofold world of Hindu nationalism in Nepal and in India—let him continue to engage with the tradition of Sanskrit learning that he inherited from the *viśvavidyālayas* of his youth, but at the same time led to some significant discontinuities with the sources of the Nāth tradition. Another dimension of Naraharinath's scholarly interest, unusual both for the practices of the Nāth *sampradāya* and for Sanskrit scholarship, is his investigation of the history of mankind in its relationship to *dharma*. This topic is crucial in the intellectual climate of the 20th century Nepal, as it bears on the central question of how to understand Nepali Hinduness: while ethnic activists looked to anthropology, understood as the study of Nepal's cultural diversity, in order to further the political recognition of religious pluralism, the historians of the *Purṇimā* collective argued for Nepal's primordial Hindu identity. Naraharinath participated in this intellectual milieu with characteristic creativity: he argued for a Himalayan origin of mankind on the basis of personal observations during his travel to Mt. Kailash (borrowing from the shamanic lore of the Tibeto-Burman ethnicities in regard to the figure of the *yeti*), subsumed Buddhism under the heading of an eternal Vedic *dharma* (working from a quintessentially Nāth ontological paradigm), and placed a Vedic ritual of kingship, the *Koṭi Homa*, at the very forefront of his political project. In what follows, after a brief overview of the public religious climate during the Panchayat period, I will discuss Naraharinath's vision of *mānav dharma*, pointing out some important conceptual

bridges that mediated between pre-existing elements of the Nāth heritage and the new political stances advocated by Naraharinath.

*Hindu tolerance or Hindu assertion? Questioning dharma in Panchayat Nepal*

After Mahendra's coup of 1960, the official rhetoric of the monarchy on matters of religious freedom was one of ambiguity. "Tolerance" was envisaged for practitioners of non-Hindu faiths, but Hindu *dharma* was centrally located as the structural pillar of the political system, and how to draw the boundaries of the Hindu community was a matter of heated debate. The metaphor of the *phulbari* "flower-garden" of different *jāts*—which, as we have seen, was presented as initially laid down by the "father of the nation" Prithvi Narayan Shah—acknowledged social and cultural diversity, but only reading the different communities as *jāts* of Hindu society. Concerns on whether some of these *jāts* did not wish to regard themselves as Hindus was apparent, for example, in a letter that Mahendra addressed to the RSS in occasion of his missed visit in Nagpur in 1965,<sup>98</sup> where in typical Panchayat fashion he moved between the two poles of "tolerance" for others, and the essentially Hindu identity of all Nepalis:

"Religion is the supreme principle of human life. It is under the inspiration of religion that great deeds have been done since the beginning of creation. Religion is the basis of welfare in human society. This is why Nepal is today an independent and sovereign Hindu Kingdom. She being the only declared Hindu Country in the world, it is natural for all of us to take pride in her as Hindus. But though a Hindu Kingdom—tolerance of, and respect for, other religions being an integral and indivisible part of the highest teachings of the Hindu Religions—no discrimination is whatsoever made in dealings with any citizen in our country on religious grounds. (...)

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<sup>98</sup> Golwakar had personally invited Mahendra at a RSS rally in Nagpur. The king accepted, but later backed off due to widespread criticism of the press, which led him to conclude that his visit would cause friction with the Indian government (RSS:1965)

It has now become necessary to make adjustments in giving a practical shape to the basic tenets to the Vedas. The future of Hindu Society rests upon it. Hence, it has become the duty of all Hindus to pay attention to this. Today, we shall be able to protect and advance our nation and national Society only if all of us cease to have any shyness or scruples about calling ourselves Hindus and march forward to protect, strengthen and develop Hindu society as also to revitalize Dharma. It has become absolutely necessary for all Hindus to realize this truthfully for the welfare of Mankind. (Mahendra Bir Bikram Shaha Deva, quoted in RSS 1965:18-20)

Against this rhetoric, a popular intellectual voice was that of Dor Bahadur Bista, regarded as the “father of Nepali anthropology” (Fisher 1997). Bista did not go as far as claiming that the shamanic and Buddhist groups of Nepal constituted an altogether different religion, still regarding “Hinduism” as a possible catch-all term to describe the conglomeration of practices of India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but he regarded the introduction of the caste system in Nepali society—the crux of Panchayat Hinduness—as a later import that had only climaxed in the nineteenth and twentieth century (Bista 1991:34-54). Superimposing on the history of the Himalayan region a dichotomy between “India” and “Nepal” that is only typical of the post-1951 set-up, he aimed at reading *bāhunvād*, the much despised “brahmanism” of the Panchayat period, as a foreign import from India:

“the current nature of Nepali society is such that the groups with positive elements of value systems in their social and collective practices, are increasingly excluded from the mainstream of society and their values are endangered as another, essentially alien, culture becomes more pervasive. This other culture, the culture of fatalism, includes values and institutions that are inherently in conflict with development.” (Bista 1991:2)

“Nepal’s problems follow from certain attempts at the Indianization of its culture. Nepal’s strengths have always been in the indigenous qualities of its various ethnic groups. The attempt to follow the Indian model has often overwhelmed and suppressed these qualities, substituting them with something which is incongruent with its own culture and ultimately defeating progressive adaptation and change.” (Bista 1991:8)

More sophisticated approaches have highlighted how envisioning Nepal’s diverse ethnic groups through the rubric of caste was in fact a more complex phenomenon, often prompted by the ethnic communities themselves: sometimes striving for acculturation to the norms of the Parbatiya’s political elites, sometimes resisting them (Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton 1997); sometimes looking at Tibetan Buddhism as an alternative cultural model (Ortner 1992, Holmberg 1996); and often oscillating back and forth between Hinduization and ethnic revivalism (Fisher 2013). Nevertheless, Dor B. Bista’s perspective constituted a broadly shared sentiment, leading to huge sales of his first book, *People of Nepal* of 1967. His motivations in introducing anthropology as a discipline in Nepal highlight the progressive aspirations that many held during the Panchayat regime, since he very explicitly connected the study of anthropology to a future-oriented existential perspective that he saw embodied in the quest for “development”:

“I began to think very seriously whether anthropology was a useful discipline for a country like ours. If it was, it had to be applied, related to development, and also closely connected with sociology, because we had no need to have sociology as a separate field as in the West and anthropology could not do all the work towards development alone. It had to be future-oriented. Just field ethnography would be of absolutely no use.” (Fisher 1997:27)

On the other side of the debate, we find the historians of the *Pūrṇimā* collective, a group founded in the 1940s by Naya Raj Pant, a Sanskritist disillusioned with the system of British-sponsored Sanskrit colleges, who turned to work on Nepali inscriptions to counter the vision of local history hitherto represented by the above-mentioned “Wright *Vamśavālī*. Mahesh Raj Pant explains the project of this group of scholars in the following way:

“In the second issue of *Pūrṇimā*, which was published in the third quarter of 1964, Naya Raj Pant wrote a paper in which he convincingly demonstrated that the caste system was not introduced by the fourteenth century king Stithirāja Malla, as the nineteenth century *Vaṃśāvali-s* have credited him with, but had existed long before, to which fact even the earliest documents bear witness. (...)

Those documents when studied revealed that in the Newar kingdoms there were besides the local Dyaubhājū, not only the Brahmins from Tirhut and South India, but also the Gayāwār and Bengalese from the plains and the Nepali-speaking Purbiyā, Kumāi and Jaisī as well.

The serialisation of documents concerning Brahmins in the Newar kingdoms coincides with a movement away from the received view in Nepal that largely blames the Brahmins for being instrumental in the suppression of the ethnic communities. These days two words, *bāhumbād* and *janajāti-s*, are frequently used to denote the traditional structure and the ethnic communities respectively, and those Newars who view themselves as one of the ethnic communities are no less vocal than others in opposing *bāhumbād*.

Here I do not wish to enter into the question whether the Brahmins were significantly engaged in suppressing *janajāti-s* or not, but I cannot help pointing out that Newars have, since the beginning of the recorded history, been a community divided into many castes and identifiable as a linguistic community to the same degree as Nepali-speaking Parbates, whom Newars call Khay, which means Khas.” (Pant 1996:34-35).

How does Naraharinath locate himself among these cultural trends? In reading his introduction to the *Matsyendrapadyaśataka*, we have already noted how he inserts the idiom of the scientific investigation in Nepal (in the case of Matsyendranath, geology) within a discourse framed by the practice of *nirukti*, thus combining the tradition of Sanskrit scholarship with new epistemological suggestions. In the case of his understanding of the “origins” and “development” of humankind (particularly in Nepal, but with global implications, as we will see), the co-existence of these two idioms remains unsolved: in *Śikhariṇī Yātrā* he builds upon an element of the shamanic lore of the Tibeto-Burman communities to argue for an Himalayan origination of the human race, in *Vaidika Siddhānta*, instead, he relies solely on brahmanical sources, arguing for the universal application of a *śāstric* version of *dharma* rooted in the Veda.

In both cases, although the primacy of the Veda is left unexplained, he shares Naya Raj Pant’s interest in proving the ancient roots of Hindu *dharma* in the region and, from description, he seamlessly moves to prescription: any deviation from the primordial truth of the Veda is seen as an example of moral decadence. His position resonates strongly with the official stance of the Panchayat period, that exhorted citizens not to forsake *dharma*, seen as a central component of social renewal, national unity but also, more universally, moral development. Another section of Mahendra’s speech in 1965 can here illustrate how the concern with the preservation of *dharma* was rhetorically linked not only to national interests, but also to broader goals of “salvation” for “mankind”:

“Today, Dharma or righteousness is the only key to the salvation of mankind. This is why Nepal has adopted the Panchayat System based on Hindu traditions and policy. Its principle aim is the spiritual development of the individual, which is the only way to the realization of the basic values of life. To this end, the system wants to put

everybody on the path of Dharma by developing in him an awareness of his duties, responsibilities and rights” (RSS 1965:20)

“It is not a matter of joy that today there are signs of weakness in the Hindu Society. Today the Hindu is not as firm as he should be in his convictions. The Hindu religion is the most ancient religion of the world. It has its own supreme knowledge of the texture of creation (...) Unfortunately for all of us, humanity today is faced in the direction of destruction and is entangled in mutual hatred and conflict. The higher thoughts of Hindu Dharma alone can extricate man from this fearful situation. The propagation of the right knowledge of this Dharma is the crying need of our time.” (RSS 1965:22)

To foster this project, however, a specific vision of what constitutes mankind was called for, and Naraharinath took upon himself to investigate the origins of the human species as a first step towards a full-fledged theorization of “human dharma.”

***Mānava: locating the origins of mankind***

The publication of *Śikhariṇī Yātrā* in 1992 is an important moment of Naraharinath’s intellectual career, as it condenses much of his work throughout the previous decades. Besides the poem *Śikhariṇī Yātrā* itself, a celebration of his Himalayan wanderings during the 1950s, the volume also collects other materials, such as the above mentioned *Jaya Gorkhā*, *Vaidika Siddhānta*, *Vaidika Rāṣṭrīya Prārthanā*, along with a series of photographs from different contexts: his guru Chipranath, himself, Shrishnath, but also various *Koṭi Homas* that had by then been celebrated, temples around the countries, and photos of inhabitants from non-Prabatiya communities (such as the “Sherpa girl,” “Magar lady,” etc). The part that deals with the origins of mankind, from the *yeti*, is presented before the poem *Śikhariṇī Yātrā* proper, and is meant to represent an important moment of his travels. That this passage was central to Naraharinath’s

understanding of history, and not merely an anthropological curiosity, is confirmed by Shrishnath, who, in explaining his guru's teachings, reports that counteracting Darwin's version of human evolution—arguing for a Himalayan origin of mankind—was one of the central points of Naraharinath's *siddhānta*.

Naraharinath's reflections, as noted in chapter 2, are prompted by the encounter with the *yeti* on the day after the *pūrṇimā* of the month of *Śrāvaṇa* (July-August) of 1957, when after having bathed in the *Mansārovar* lake of Mt. Kailash, he travels with other thirty-four people, most of whom— though traveling on horseback—are exhausted. The place, covered in snow, is magnificent, and the *haṃsa*, the divine royal goose of Sanskrit lore, is reportedly seen flying in the area. Naraharinath, singing a song to himself, is walking ahead of the others when he suddenly sees the “terrible ice-man” (*bhīmakāya himamānava*), who is often talked about (*bahurcarit*) by other travellers, but whom he had never met before. The creature, furry and with long arms, leaves soon after, displaying more difficulty in walking downhill than in walking uphill.<sup>99</sup> Naraharinath concludes that this being, which he calls interchangeably *yeti*, *vān-mānche*, or *hima-mānava* (with sub-categorizations of different *jātis* within the species), is the progenitor of mankind, in a line of evolution that includes mythological beings of Sanskrit lore, along with local Nepali demons and ethnic groups:

“In the course of development (*vikās kram*) of the human race (*mānav jāti*), the first of all is the *hima-mānava*, and right after [there are] the *hima-puruṣa*,<sup>100</sup> the horse-headed *kiṃpuruṣa*,<sup>101</sup> the long-eared forest-man (*vanmānuṣa*),<sup>102</sup> the shaman of the forest

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<sup>99</sup> a common trope of reports on the *yeti*

<sup>100</sup> *Hima-mānava* and *hima-puruṣa* (ice-man) are technically synonyms in Sanskrit, but he uses them as two different evolutionary stages of the same creature.

<sup>101</sup> Mythical horse-headed creatures of Sanskrit lore

<sup>102</sup> The Indian name for the Nepali *vān-mānche*, a yeti-like creatures of the shamanic lore of the Tibeto-Burman groups

(*vanjhākrī*), the shaman of gold (*sunjhākrī*),<sup>103</sup> the solitary (*phitāi*), hidden (*chopā*) *sokpā*,<sup>104</sup> *Raute*,<sup>105</sup> *Kusūṇḍa*,<sup>106</sup> and the water-man (*jalmanuṣa*), and the other *jātis* that have no village, house, agriculture, or stable abode. It is not accounted for in the national census and does not have citizenship rights. Such *mānavas* are almost everywhere in the *Himavat-khaṇḍa*. Especially in the section of the *Kailās Mānasa*.<sup>107</sup> The count of each *jāti* among them is also manifold. Some are vegetarians. Some are carnivorous. (...) To researchers that investigate the traces of the human origins (*mānavī sṛṣṭi*), it is desirable to do an investigation of all these *jātis*. From them, clear light could be shed on the origins (*utpatti*) and evolution (*kram vikās*) of the intelligent human race of the world (*buddhijīvī viśva-mānav jāti*).” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:29-30)

Naraharinath’s publication also includes the testimony of a man that claims to have received instruction from the *vān-mānche*:

“I was born in the Sagarmatha Area, (...) My name is Phanindra Prasad Upadhyaya Niraula. My *gotra* is *Bharadvaja* (...).

At the age of 8, right after my *Vratibandha*, on the *śukla purṇimā* of the month of *Jyestha* [May-June], someone took me away while I was sleeping with my brothers and kept me in a cave in the jungle. I don’t know in which direction from home. I don’t know how to find my way back [there]. I am kept in a dark cave. [The man was] taller than people. Covered in gray fur. Wearing no clothes. He would leave early in the morning and come after nightfall. I was given roots and fruits to eat. After giving me *tantra*, *mantras*, *jyotiṣa*, medicinal plants, the *ḍhyaṅgro*<sup>108</sup> and the *ḍamaru*<sup>109</sup> to play during treatment of the sick and afflicted people, at the night of the ninth day, saying “it will be fine”, I was left back at my home like when I was taken away.

In the morning, my mother examined me and found some bruises of thorns on my shoulders. I was given a bath and I got fine. After that, I have been serving the

<sup>103</sup> *Jhākrī* is the general term to denote Tibeto-Burman shamans, though each ethnic group has its own set of terms for various figures of healers and spirit-possessed ritual specialists.

<sup>104</sup> Demon of Nepali lore.

<sup>105</sup> A Tibeto-Burman population of the hills

<sup>106</sup> A tribe living in the South West of Kathmandu

<sup>107</sup> Mansarovar Kailash

<sup>108</sup> A shaman’s drum

<sup>109</sup> Two-headed drum used in *śaiva* worship

sick according to what the *vān-mānche* had said. (...) Time and again he preached to help others. (...) With whatever I understood, now *sevā* is done. I have been doing it all my life.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:30-31)

Niraula’s passage is a typical account of abduction and shamanic initiation, prevalent among the Tibeto-Burman groups of the hills. Larry Peters, who has studied the various categories of liminal creatures described in such reports, highlights a certain fluidity between different categories: the *ban-jhākri* (shaman of the forest), the *ban-mānche* (called *van-mānus* in India, “forest-man”), and the *yeti*, of which there are various typologies, differing in size, appearance and habits—the different *jātis* to which refers Naraharinath. All of these beings are said to live in forests, mountains, and particularly in caves, where they kidnap young candidates (generally between the age of seven and twenty) to initiate them into shamanism. Reports of encounters with these creatures are biographically central for the *jhākris*, representing their painful initiations into their new life as healers. Culturally, the frontier of Tibeto-Burman shamanism appears fluid on two sides: with Tibet, where traditions of *yeti*-like creatures, still part of the local lore, date back to the Bon past, and with *śaiva* practice, as some of these beings are said to be followers of Shiva, shamans may engage in pilgrimages to selected *śaiva* temples, and in some versions of the origin myth of the first *ban-jhākri*, he is said to have received his *śakti* from Shiva. (Peters 1997)

Naraharinath’s integration of this mythology in his understanding of global history, localizing the origins of the human race in the Kailash area, is particularly significant, as it presents a creative twist on the official national historiography of the Sangh Parivar, creating a specifically Nepalese version of historical anthropology. In fact, although it is consistent with the “Out of India” theory that wants to trace the origins of

the so-called Aryan peoples from the ancient South Asian civilizations—widespread among Indian archeologists (Bryant 2001)—it does look at the Himalaya, and not at the Indus Valley (Humes 2001), as the cradle of the Hindu civilization. Beyond the concern with the Indus Valley, in fact, Hindu nationalist historians have also been interested in local histories, and, as Daniela Berti has documented, it is precisely in these more remote domains of small-scale historiography that Hindutva organizations have been the most active at the grassroots level. The ABISY,<sup>110</sup> for example, the historiographical offspring of the RSS studied by Berti, has developed a broad network of local branches through India, sponsoring, organizing, and publishing historical and anthropological work on the history of the different regions it covers, often—and this is the crucial point of its regional entrenchments—in collaboration with actors interested in studying local lore without being necessarily invested in the broader political claims that the RSS leadership of ABISY aims at advancing:

“an RSS organisation such as the ABISY has identified the Aryan issue in this region as the potential element for involving local people in its cultural activism. Their aim is to show how local culture is nothing but the cradle (if not the birthplace) of Vedic and Aryan culture. Hindutva organisations assume that Aryans and Vedic civilisation originated in India and that the theory of an Aryan invasion is but a myth invented by Westerners in order to legitimate their own colonial claims (...) this burning issue, which has been provoking a concerted and vigorous reaction amongst many Indian and Western academics, “fits in well” with the cultural and geographical context of the Kullu region.” in fact, along with the common idea that Himachal Pradesh is situated at the periphery of mainstream Hinduism — which is often used by the local elite to explain its cultural specificity — this Himalayan state is a suitable “imagined landscape” (Eck 1999) for supporting ABISY’s rereading of the local past in the light of a “pan-Indian” textual repertory.”

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<sup>110</sup> *Akhil Bhāratīya Itihās Sankālan Yojnā* (“Pan-Indian Plan/Committee for Collecting History).

Both features of the ABISY's historiography in Himachal Pradesh—the special place of the periphery and the imagined landscape of sacred lore—are also present in Naraharinath's reading of the Himalaya, which is endowed with affective and aesthetic meanings, and, at the same time with historical significance:

“I am alone, [but] the whole earth is my beautiful house,  
out of love for the Himāl, the heart has chosen a corner place,  
there sprang up all Vedic things, headed by the Veda,  
rivers, stones, local clans, and other witnesses too.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:97)

The notion of being a “witness” (*sāchī*) is central here. This word—also applied to the Kailash, as noted above, and as I will discuss in the next section, to Ashoka's inscriptions—is crucial: the Himalayan inscriptions mention what nowadays are considered “Hindu” gods, hence we know that in ancient times Hindu *dharma* was represented in the region. Shrishnath, commenting on this specific verse, states that “rivers, stones, etc” are to be considered witnesses because they are endowed with inscriptions (*abhilekha*), statues (*mūrtikalā*), plates (*patra*), and “innumerable other historical materials” (*asamkhya aitihāsik sāmagri*). The question of whether there could be a pre-Vedic period not attested in written sources is not raised, and Naraharinath considers the deviations from brahmanical practice that he observes throughout his travels as a form of “forgetting” one's previous *kula-dharma*:

“Of those who have another custom (*par kar*), where was their family (*kul*)?  
Have gone, have come, so many clans! And they have had exchange.  
Without knowing the course and rules of the *purkhā* [ancestry],  
their offsprings have gone!

On strange paths, in this way, families have been taken aback.”

(Naraharināth B.S. 2041:98)

Shirishnath comments more explicitly: “Some people, having forgotten the establishment and customs (*stithi rīti*) of their ancestors, have embarked on other paths. In this way, having forgotten their *kula-dharma*, some families have been destroyed.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:98). An illustration to this verse, a painting by Prabhatnath, represents in fact a group of people playing a game of cards in front of their house, while another man in the distance is performing his ritual ablutions at *sandhyā* (the sun in the image is either raising or setting), and a youthful Naraharinath is scribbling something on his notebook, seated under a tree. This vignette, juxtaposing the gamblers to the pious man and the yogi, is meant to represent the theme of “moral decadence” of the country, but this is not the only way in which the theme of “forgetting” one’s previous dharma may be understood.

With regard to people who explicitly advocate the otherness of their religious practice, as the Newars that Mahesh Raj Pant, in the above-quoted passage, mentioned as “no less vocal than others in opposing *bāhunbād*,” Naraharinath also envisages a process of decadence from the pristine Vedic purity, and bringing people back to Sanskrit sources is indeed a major theme of his activism, particularly through the performance of the *Koṭi Homas*. If we look at the status of Buddhism in Naraharinath’s discourse, especially in *Jaya Gorkhā* and *Śri Lankā Saṅkalpa*, we can see how a concern with the challenge potentially posed by Buddhist activists is apparent throughout his preoccupation with *dharma*.

### *Dhammo hi dharma*

To better understand how he conceives the relationship between Buddhism and Hindu culture, we can start here from the passage on Buddhism in *Jaya Gorkhā*. These pages are particularly representative because they highlight two of the main coordinates of his intellectual approach: the centrality of language, as etymology, in establishing relations between the nature of things, and the role of inscriptions in attesting the presence of an eternal *dharma* in the subcontinent.

The section titled “*Dhammo hi dharma*” of *Jaya Gorkhā*, starts with the following proposition: “*Dharma* indeed is *dhammo*” (*dharma nai dhammo ho*). Immediately after this statement, there are a few passages that juxtapose a Sanskrit and a Pali version of the same phrases:

“*Eṣa dharmah sanātana. Eṣa dhammo sanntano.* (This eternal dharma)  
(...) *Brahmaviṣṇumaheśvarāḥ. Buddha dharma saṅgha. Bamma Visnu Mahesarā. Buddha Dhamma Saṅghā.* (Brahma Viṣṇu Maheśvara; Buddha, Dharma and Sangha)  
*Buddhaṃ Śaraṇaṃ Gacchāmi. Buddhaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi.* (I go to refuge to Buddha) *Dharmaṃ Śaraṇaṃ Gacchāmi. Dhammaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi.* (I go to refuge to Dharma) *Saṅghaṃ Śaraṇaṃ Gacchāmi. Saṅghaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi.* (I go to refuge to Sangha)” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:252)

The strategy is unusual: the vernacular version of the Sanskrit words is meant to establish a parallel between the two domains of knowledge, implying that they are ultimately equivalent, even positing that the three figures of the *trimūrti* and the Triple Gem could be considered parallel forms of trinities—an argument by lexical derivation, on the one side, and a move similar to the one, noted in chapter 2, that equated the Pañcadeva with the Pañcabuddha, thus structuring the experience of the devotees within

parallel sets of divine figures. A more traditional point, however, is made soon after, when he lists the Buddha among the ten *avatāras* of Viṣṇu—thus following a puranic tradition that may have originated between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century AD (Doniger 1976:188)—and when he quotes from the *Śiva-mahimnā stotra* to discuss the ultimate convergence of all religious paths:

“*Rucīnāṃ Vaicitryādrjukuṭilanānāpathajuṣām /  
Nṛṇāmeke āgamyastvamasi payasāmarṇava iva*”<sup>111</sup>

You, oh *īśvara*, are the only the goal, the center, of all humans set on different paths, crooked or straight, through the differences in interests.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:252)

The discussion keeps flowing as a composition of Sanskrit quotations and Nepali explanations, providing further examples of the same idea:

“*Muṇḍe muṇḍe matir bhinnā kuṇḍe kuṇḍe navam payah / Muṇḍe muṇḍe matir bhinnā kuṇḍe pānī*. The water raining from the sky is the same. But because of different wells on earth, there are qualities of different forms. *īśvara* is one. But since the reflection (*pratibimba*) of *īśvara* is reflected in vessels of different qualities [and] forms of nature, he seems different. Nonetheless, in the eyes if the wise ones, *īśvara* is one. *Ātma khalu viśvamūlam*. [The Self is the root of everything]” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:252)

He then quotes again from the *Śiva-mahimnā-stotra*, followed by a list of the *aṣṭamūrti* (“eight forms”) of Brahman:

“You are the fire, you are the sun, you are moon, you are the air, you are the fire, you are the water, you are the space, you are indeed the earth and you are the Self—thus

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<sup>111</sup> “For the men devoted to various paths, straight or crooked, according the variety of their interests, you are the only goal, just as the sea for the waters.

the sages carry limited words about you. But here we do not any thing that you are not.”<sup>112</sup>

Everything indeed is *brahman*: the earth, the water, the air, the Self, the sky, the fire, the moon, the sun—in the world these are its eight manifested forms.<sup>113</sup>

(...) The one whose great eight embodiments (*aṣṭamūrti*)—earth, water, air, the *ātman*, sky, fire, moon, sun—are diffused in the world under different names—they are the one *īśvara*. They look separate according to the different vessels, (...) Even one same fire can be of different forms and combustible materials. Like in Muktinath *dhām*, there is a white *jalajvāla*, a yellow *sthalajvāla*, a blue *śilājvāla*. In the same way, the inner soul is the same no matter how many names it has.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:252)

The passage seems didactic, meant to popularize his notion of *dhamma*—brought up in the title, but not yet discussed in its doctrinal specificity—through puranic notions that are familiar to all Hindus: the list of the ten *avatāras*, which may or may not include the Buddha according to its different versions, and the *Śiva-mahimnā stotra*,<sup>114</sup> arguably one of the best known *stotras* to be recited at *śaiva* pilgrimages and celebrations. The latter, in particular, offers an almost Vedantic tone to Naraharinath’s discussion, which opens the important question of how to reconcile the equivalence of *ātman* with *brahman* within Buddhist doctrinal parameters. Although we may expect that the question is left unanswered, he will offers, instead, a clear point of view on the place of *brahman* in Buddhist thought, but only after having defined *dharma* and having provided Ashoka’s

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<sup>112</sup> *Tvam arkastvaṃ somastvaṃ asi pavanastvaṃ hutavahastvamāpastvaṃ vyoma tvam dharanīrātmā tvamīti ca | Paricchinnāmeva tvayi pariṇatā bibhratu giram na vidyastat tattvaṃ vayamiha tu yat tvaṃ na bhavasi |*

<sup>113</sup> *Sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma | Kṣiti-jala-pavanātman-vyomā-vahnīndu-sūryā-jagati vitata-rūpā mūrtayo ‘ṣṭau hi yasya |*

<sup>114</sup> According to Keshav Regmi, the *Śiva-mahimna-stotra* was a favorite travel reading of Yogi ji. The hymn is mainly based on puranic understandings of Śiva, but presents a better Sanskrit than the average *purāṇa*.

inscriptions as an example of *dhamma-līpi* that, once more, are presented as “witnesses” (*sāchī*):

“Dharma is supporting and nourishing.<sup>115</sup> “Precisely this dharma they call it rules, regulations, laws etc. In Sanskrit there are "dharma-writings" (*dharma-lipi*). In Pālī Pākṛt [sic] there are "dhamma-writings" (*dhamma-lipi*). The Buddha has said this *dhamma* is eternal<sup>116</sup> “. The beloved-to-the-gods Aśoka has also called the worldly laws and customs “*iyam dhammalipi*”. The *Aśoka-lipi* found in various parts of the *Bhāratkhaṇḍa* are the witness of this.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:25)

Having equated Aśoka’s inscriptions to a proof of eternal *dharma*, he then discusses the Buddha’s thoughts:

“Regarding the Lord said *tattvamasi*,<sup>117</sup> the Buddha (said): "Some say that God exists, some say he doesn't. But for me this doubt isn't solved by what others say, I will ascertain whether He is or is not by myself, through *tapasyā*, meditation, *samādhi*, intellect and wisdom." —having said this, he set out to find out if God exists. And he set himself to the work of awakening others who are asleep. *Savvaṃ duḥkhaṃ duḥkhaṃ duḥkhaṃ / savvaṃ khaṇikaṃ khaṇikaṃ khaṇikaṃ / savvaṃ sunnaṃ sunnaṃ sunnaṃ /*” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:253)

The moment of Sanskritization of this thought is crucial, as Naraharinath explicates his equation of *dharma* and *dhamma* within the framework of the *Manusmṛiti* and the Veda:

“Everything is suffering (*duḥkha*). Everything is impermanent (*kṣaṇika*). Everything is void (*śunya*). *Śunya* is *kham brahm*. The Veda refers to *brahm* as *kam* [bliss] *brahm kham* [space] *brahm*. *Kham*, *ākāśam*, *śunyaṃ*, *sunnaṃ*, *brahma*, *īśvara* is one.” (Naraharināth B.S. 2041:253)

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<sup>115</sup> *dhāraṇam poṣaṇam dharma*

<sup>116</sup> *esa dhammo sanantano*

<sup>117</sup> “you are that”, one of the Vedantic *mahākāvyas* (Chandogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7)

The reference to a Vedic *kham brahm* echoes *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.1, where *brahman* is glossed as *kham* (space):

“*pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṃ pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate |*  
*pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate |*  
*khaṃ brahma |*  
*khaṃ purāṇam |*  
*vāyuraṃ kham |*  
*iti ha smāha kauravyāyaṇīputraḥ |*  
*vedo 'yaṃ brāhmaṇā viduḥ |*  
*vedainena yad veditavyam || BrhUp\_5,1.1 ||”<sup>118</sup>*

Patrick Olivelle translates the verses as follows:

“The world there is full;  
The world here is full;  
Fullness from fullness proceeds.  
After taking fully from the full,  
It still remains completely full.

‘*Brahman* is space. The primeval one is space. Space is windy.’ This was what the son of Kauravyāyaṇī used to say. This is the Veda. Brahmins know it. And by this I know whatever one must know.” (Olivelle 2008[1996]:72-73)

The term *śunya* does not figure in the passage, but the equivalence of *śunya* and *kham* could be suggested by the fact that both words refer to an empty space and, in the later mathematical speculation, they both came to designate the number zero after Aryabhata, the 5<sup>th</sup> century astronomer, used the word *kha* “empty space”, to designate a numerical “place” where a digit could lodge. The term was thus subsequently adopted to

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<sup>118</sup> GRETIL database

refer to an “empty number” when a clear notion of zero started to emerge (Kaplan 2000:43). Naraharinath’s reading, postulates an equivalence of *kham-brahm* with *śunya* to present the Buddha as a *brahma-jñāni*:

“The Buddha is not a *nāstika* saying that there is no God. He is a knower of *brahm*, saying: *Svayaṃ grahiṣyāmi* [I’ll grasp it by myself]” (...) The explanation of the Veda is the *Manu Smṛti*. The exposition of the Vedic dharma is indeed the *Manusmṛti*, the rules of Manu, the first king. The offsprings of Manu and all the people who observe the *mānav dharma* propounded by Manu are *mānav* (human). (...) The *pañcaśīla* are not in opposition to the Veda. The word "Buddha" itself is not un-vedic (*avaidika*). Derived from *budha*, the word "Buddha" is also (present) in the Veda, the Eldest of the world (*jagajjeṣṭha*). The Buddha is said an *ātma-jñāni*, *brahma jñāni* who has the knowledge of the Lord as knowledge of the Self. (...) He gave such teaching on the unity of the human being and *īśvara* in its aspect of pure, awakened, spotless, formless light. Nowadays, due to the teachings of others (*parakaragata-śikṣā*), this tradition got interrupted.”

(Naraharināth B.S. 2041:253)

This “interruption” in the tradition, one that he attributes to a lack of good teachers, is the second way of “forgetting” one’s tradition, after the theme “moral decadence” that, as we have seen in *Śikhariṇī Yātrā*, was represented, for example, by gambling. More than the other, this discussion has profound political implications. In fact, the full import of Naraharinath’s reference to Buddhism can be best understood in light of the restrictions on religious conversions promoted during the Panchayat period, according to whose official discourses, Buddhism was a branch of Hinduism, but could be practiced only by castes traditionally born in it, while conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism was forbidden, though Hinduizing one’s practices was possible, and was in fact a widespread practice for upward social mobility for Newar Buddhist families.

As phrased by David Gellner:

“This 'domination by subordinate inclusion' was not seen as problematic by the older generation of Buddhists accustomed to the play of inclusion and exclusion between Buddhism and Hinduism. They were used to the discourse of commonality and its stress on the ‘unity’ of Buddhism and Hinduism. Some would even present themselves as Hindus in certain contexts if this was politic or advisable. Most of the younger generation of activists were not at all happy about this official stance on Buddhism, however. They saw it as part of a plot to absorb and eventually extinguish Buddhism. As evidence they cited the gradually declining figures for Buddhists in the census, and the way in which Buddhism had to fight for separate recognition. They did not like having to cooperate with Hindus or having to present a united front with Hindus in order to get government assistance or in order simply to be allowed to develop, and tap into, foreign sources of support for Buddhism (which were, and were perceived to be, substantial). There was some justice in their charge that conversion into Hinduism was condoned and even encouraged by the state, whereas conversion in other directions was strictly forbidden.” (Gellner 2005:17-18)

Protests culminated in June 1990, when, on the eve of the new constitution, thousands of Buddhist campaigned for a secular (*dharma-nirapekṣa*) document that would guarantee Nepal’s status as a multi-religious (*bahu-dharmik*) country, along with its being “multi-ethnic” and “multi-lingual”. It is important to notice that Pali, in this contested religious landscape, is a revolutionary idiom of ritual practice, representative of the new wave of Buddhist thought that was introduced in Nepal only in the 20th century, and was often embraced as a reaction to the more familiar Sanskrit and Newari liturgies that had been characteristic of local Vajrayana Buddhism. This form of Theravada public engagement has been studied at length by Lauren Leve, who has overviewed its development in the Rana period, after the restoration of Shah power, and particularly in the Panchayat period, when it functioned as a form of resistance to the state.

As Lauren Leve has observed, in fact, following its revitalization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Theravada Buddhism became increasingly appealing to middle-class Newars that felt marginalized by the Hindu orthodoxy of the Gorkhali political class. Reformulated according the interpretation of the International Theosophical Society and the Sri Lankan middle class, Theravada Buddhism, with its anti-hierarchical stance and its championship for ethnic languages and cultures, offered to urban, educated Newar Buddhists a grammar of revivalism against the perceived decline of their own Buddhist traditions:

“Thus, Theravada Buddhism reemerged in twentieth-century Nepal as a semi-articulated Newar Buddhist resistance to the Gorkhali state-building project. I say "semi-articulated" to emphasize that although the conditions of possibility for the movement grew out of this cross-fertilization of local ethnic repression and transnational Buddhist growth, the first people to espouse Theravada Buddhism in Nepal were not politically motivated in any straightforward way. They acted on the belief that Theravada offered a new vitality and a true path to salvation, albeit with the knowledge that change was anathema to the state. Living in Kathmandu at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Theravada devotees understood that their practices and precepts challenged the socio-political status quo. But when Newar householders donned monastic robes, they were not only rejecting the Hindu identity imposed by the state and incorporating themselves in a religious body with a clear ethnonationalist agenda; they were also committing themselves to a life of precept and preaching that promised ultimate liberation for all humankind.” (Leve 2002:841)

On this background, Naraharinath’s Pali quotations can be read as an answer to the challenge advanced by the Buddhist converts, one played not only in the domain of ideas, but, more radically, in the domain of language. For Naraharinath, the etymological derivation of Pali from Sanskrit carries an important political consequence: the prakrit is

a derivative idiom, indebted to its parent language, and the religious practices that are associated with it are therefore more or less legitimate variations of an original Vedic *dharma* (“Hindu” as well as “*mānava*”) that he associates with the use of Sanskrit.

This attitude represents an important form of divergence from the tradition of *śāstric* scholarship of which Naraharinath presents himself as an heir. The Buddhists, even when expressing themselves in standard Sanskrit, were nonetheless always considered outsiders to the world of brahmanic orthopraxis. Although in the early medieval period the contours of the groups classified as *nāstika* or *āstika* (concepts that could be interpreted with some variation at different times) were often more flexible than the late medieval differentiation between Vedic *āstikas* and Buddhist and Jaina *nāstikas* discussed by Nicholson (2010)—the argument that the Buddhist teachings were, after all, just a vernacular expression of Vedic orthodoxy and of the *Manu Smṛiti* would have been anathema in all scholarly circles.

The intellectual move of equating *śūnya* with *brahman* is thus particularly noteworthy in the light of Naraharinath’s sectarian affiliation as a Nath yogi. If a representative of brahmanical orthodoxy such as Shankara, but also *nyāya* figures such as Udyotakara and Udayana, had all devoted great intellectual effort to debate against Buddhist philosophical tenets, the equation of *śūnya* and *brahman* was, instead, commonplace in yogic literature. The *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpika*, for instance, a text located at the very transitions between the praxis of the Indo-Tibetan siddhas and the later yogis affiliated with the name of Gorakhnath (Muñoz 2010)—describes the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* in the following terms:

*rāja-yogaḥ samādhiś ca unmanī ca manonmanī /  
amaratvaṃ layas tattvaṃ śūnyāśūnyaṃ paraṃ padam // HYP\_4.3 //*

*amanaskaṃ tathādvaitaṃ nirālambdaṃ nirañjanam /  
jīvanmuktis ca sahajā turyā cety eka-vācakāḥ // HYP\_4.4 //*<sup>119</sup>

“Royal yoga, concentration, beyond-mind, the mind-beyond-mind,  
immortality, dissolution, reality, emptiness, non-emptiness, the supreme state,  
no-intellect and non-duality, un-supported, unstained  
liberation-in-life and innateness and “the fourth” – express the same.”

The same text also includes an explicit equation of fullness (*pūrṇa*) and  
emptiness (*śunya*):

*“antaḥ śūnyo bahiḥ śūnyaḥ śūnyaḥ kumbha ivāmbare /  
antaḥ pūrṇo bahiḥ pūrṇaḥ pūrṇaḥ kumbha ivārṇave // HYP\_4.56”*<sup>120</sup>

“Innerly empty, outwardly empty, like an empty pot in the sky.  
Innerly full, outwardly full, like a full pot in the sea.”

This idea definitely became standard in the language of the Nāth school, and we  
can find a description of the ultimate reality as *śunya* in the very first verse of *Gorakh-  
bāṇi*:

*Basatī na sunyaṃ sunyaṃ na basatī agam agocara esā  
Gagan-sikhar mahi bālak bolê tākā nāva dharahuge kêsa* (Barthwal 2003:21)

“The Inhabited is not Void, the Void is not Inhabited  
It is inaccessible and mysterious.  
At the summit of the sky, a child is speaking.  
What kind of name could it be given?” (Djurdjevic 2005:203)

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<sup>119</sup> GRETIL database

<sup>120</sup> GRETIL database

This equation of fullness with void, and the systematic reversal of rational categories of analysis represented by the *Gorakh-bāṇī*, represents a distinctive feature of the Nāth tradition, one that challenges the possibility of locating the school within the philosophical spectrum of the six *darśana*, as famously captured by the phrase *dvaitādvaita-vilakṣaṇa* “unmarked by either dualism or non-dualism.” If this trait may be read as a quintessentially anti-intellectual perspective, it is also the conceptual center around which the sectarian fluidity of the school may be said to pivot. That, among the various *sampradāyas* of South Asia, the Nāth order is the one most marked by a lack of sectarian boundaries, as overviewed in chapter 1, is not only an anthropological trait, but also a reflection of this anti-doctrinal tendency: since no analytical categories may be said to apply to the ultimate reality, all and any representations thereof may be accepted: from Viṣṇu to Bhairava, from Brahman to Allah. If the *Gorakh-bāṇī* characteristically shuns form all forms of institutional worship, other texts, such as the *Śrī Nāth Rahasya* published by Yogi Vilasnath and studied by Bouillier (2008, 2010), include ritual performances to the tantric child-goddess Bālāsundarī as well as the Muslim-inspired *Mohammad Bodh* discussed above. Furthermore, contemporary praxis identifies various deities with the Nine Nāths of the early tradition, now represented in posters as *avatāras* of Hindu gods.

This flexibility in representing the ultimate is an important trait of the Nāth school. In fact, a yogi’s ultimate goal is not the union with a specific deity, or the realization of a well-defined kind of salvific knowledge, but, rather, the enactment of the inner potential of divinity and immortality that is said to be latent in the yogi’s own body. Definitely tantric in its genealogy, this feature has functioned, at the same time, as a

grammar of acculturation to various religious trends that presented themselves to the yogis: *nirgunis*, *bhakta*, Sufis, and, more recently, “Hindus”. None of these frameworks is definitive, and a yogi’s practice is always, at least notionally, inwardly centered. As illustrated by Bouillier, in fact, the most distinctive ritual praxis of the Nāths is not the external worship of Gorakhnath, but the *pūjā* to an object called *pātra-devatā* (the “jar-god”) that contains the symbols of Nāth status itself: the *nād śiṅgī*, the *kuṇḍals* and the *rudrakṣa* beads. An “affirmation of community”, as she says (2008:63), this auto-referential form of worship can also be read as an indication of a “transtheistic” tendency—to use Paul Tillich’s definition of one of three possible varieties of stoicism (2000[1952]:9), which scholars have occasionally attributed to Buddhism (Rigopoulos 372) and Vedānta (Sydnor 2012:118 and 126).

Though the concept of “transtheism” has not yet received any definitive formulation,<sup>121</sup> we may use it here, in its basic etymological import, to suggest a form of religious inclination that wants to “transcend” both the theism of *bhakti* and Buddhist practice as an atheist form of practice. Following Tillich’s usage, we can also read it as a doctrinal mode that locates the potential for inner realization solely within the person—a staple of South Asian religious movements since at least the *Upaniṣads*, but one that is particularly prominent in the Nāth yogis’ typical association with yoga as a non-intellectual and non-devotional discipline of self-divinization:

“*Gurudev Śambhu* is the God within the body.

Ātman is the highest God.

I do not know how to worship Him.

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<sup>121</sup> Kenneth Schmitz and Paul O’Herron, for example, use it in reference to Nietzsche, Marx, Comte as “proponents of the third phase in the development of the rejection of God: it is not simple atheism, or even anti-theism, not is it merely post-theism; it is meta- or trans-theism. (2011:293)

Doing constant *pūjās* to other Gods

We die in vain”<sup>122</sup> (*Gorakh-bāṇi*, pad 9, translated by Djurdjevic 2005:268)

At this regard, Naraharinath displays, once again, affinities with the deep history of the Nāth tradition, on the one side, and divergences, on the other. If his notion of *śunya* as a functional equivalent for *brahman* is indeed rooted in the doctrinal heritage of the school, the implications of such equivalence are not the same. For the *Gorakh Bāṇī*, the import of this realization is spiritual liberation, the destruction of the petty categories of rational knowledge that prevent from seeing the truth, while, for Naraharinath, it has a political meaning. When he finds himself in Sri Lanka, for example, we can find him saying that the island is populated by “30 *lākhs* Śaiva Hindus” and “one crore Bauddha Hindus”, whose languages, including “Sinhali (...) Tamil, Tulu, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Hindi etc...” have all Sanskrit as they matrix (*mūl*). In fact “*śaiva*, *bauddha* and all Hindus of all other *sampradāyas*, related in reciprocal sweetness, are all firm by means of the common *vaidika sānātana mānava dharma*.” (Naraharinath [B.S.] 2042 21). A corollary of this position, in his vision of political engagement, is that a return to the practice of the Veda, as understood as a source of rituals and of *mantras*, would be beneficial to humankind in Nepal just as abroad.

### *Vedic resonances*

Before Dayananda Saraswati’s engagement with the Veda in a reformist perspective, for many a Hindu, both in Nepal and India, the *śrutipaṭha* had been not so

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<sup>122</sup> *gurudev syābh dev sarīr bhūtariye | ātmām uttimt deva tāhī kī na jāṅê seva || ān dev pūji pūji imahī mariye ||* (Barthwal 64)

much a text with its content, as a phonic experience endowed with sacred potency—the domain of brahmanical recitation for ritual purposes. At the time of Naraharinath’s *Koṭi Homas*, although the scholarly study of Vedic exegesis typically required further studies elsewhere, generally in Varanasi<sup>123</sup>--there were five distinct traditions of Brahmins performing Vedic rituals, which Michael Witzel lists as:

“the Newari-speaking Rājopadhyāya; the Nepali-speaking Pūrbe, who immigrated in the last centuries before the Gorkha conquest (1768-1769 C.E.), the Kumaî; the Newari- and Maithili-speaking Maithila; and the Bhaṭṭha from South India, who serve at the Paśupatināth temple. Except for the Bhaṭṭhas, all are followers of the *White Yajurveda* in its Mādhyandina recension. It could therefore be expected that all these groups, with the exception of the Bhaṭṭhas, would differ from each other in language and certain customs brought from their respective homelands, but that they would agree in their (Vedic) ritual. However, this is far from the case. On the contrary, the Brahmins of the Kathmandu Valley, who have immigrated over the last 1,500 years in several waves, constitute a perfect example of individual regional developments in this border area of medieval Indian culture, as well as of the successive, if fluctuating, influence of the “great tradition” of Northern India.” (Witzel 2016:371)

Different understandings of ritual culture were central to the mutual distrust between Prabatiya and Newar priests, as it has been noted by Gerard Toffin, who

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<sup>123</sup> A common Nepali proverb goes: “for justice go to Gorkha, for knowledge go to Kashi.” At the time of my fieldwork, a small *paṭhaśāla* for Nepali brahman boys was still operating on the premises of the Nepali Pashupatinath mandir of Varanasi. Like many other temples, the main *tīrtha* of Pashupatinath near Kathmandu has its own aliases in other places, which can be considered its equivalents on a smaller scale. The Pashupatinath of Varanasi is located at Lalita *ghāt*, in a wood-carved temple in Nepali style, locally known as the “Nepali mandir,” which caters to the Nepali community of the city. An interesting line of research, that seems still unexplored, would ask how the customary movement of Nepali people to Varanasi—for education, political exile, or *Kaśivās* (the ritual waiting for death in Varanasi)—has inflected the development of Nepali Hindu nationalism, on the one side, and the democratic engagement of the Nepali Congress politicians, on the other. That pre-existing ritual practices were still relevant in the 20th century is illustrated, for example, by the fact that B.P. Koirala happened to be enrolled as a student at the BHU of Varanasi during the swaraj movement, and met Gandhi there, because his grandfather was in the sacred city performing *Kaśivās* (Tripathi 2011). Naraharinath, who was there around the same time, resided instead at the *Gorakṣaṭillā*, the local Nāth *maṭha*, functioning, at the time, as a publishing house of Nāth literature, in a section of the city far removed from the hustle and bustle of the BHU campus.

observed that Parbatiya brahmans regard with suspicion the *Karmācāryas* and *Rājopādhyāya* of the Newar community, practitioners not of the Veda but of esoteric tantric rituals. Conversely, for the same reason, the tantric priests of the Kathmandu Valley view themselves as heirs of a more sophisticated urban culture (Toffin 1997). Naraharinath’s engagement with Vedic fire-oblations, on this background, aimed at presenting to the general Hindu public the notion of the Veda as a symbol of primordial national unity. To capture this aspect in a Vedic quotation, he specifically chose *Yajurveda* 22:22, which he translated into Nepali as a *Vaidika Rāṣṭrīya Prārthanā* (“Vedic National Prayer”):<sup>124</sup>

“O Brahman, may in the *rāṣṭra* a brahman be born, refulgent of brahman, may there be born a royal hero, skilled in archery, piercing, with a great chariot; a milk-giving cow, a sturdy ox [lit: an ox that carries], a swift horse, a wise woman, a son, respected on the chariot and skilled in the assembly, to this *yajamāna*; may Parjanya give us rain to our heart’s content, may plants ripen, may secure possession be ours.”<sup>125</sup>

The verse, in the context of the *Śukla Yajurveda*, is meant to be uttered during the performance of the *Aśvamedha*, the year-long horse-sacrifice that was a major ritual of kingship in Vedic times (Stutley 1969), where *rāṣṭra* meant, in fact, the realm of the king sponsoring the ritual. Naraharinath, instead, presents it under the heading *Hindurāṣṭra-paricayo Devadeśo Himālayaḥ Devabhūmi Bhārata Evaṃ Ādhyātmika Nepāla Vaidika-Rāṣṭrīya-Prārthanā*<sup>126</sup> (“Confederation of the Hindu-nation, Country of the Gods, Himalaya, Land of the Gods, Bhārata and Spiritual Nepal—Vedic National Prayer”).

<sup>124</sup> For example: *Śikhariṇī Yātrā* p. 257

<sup>125</sup> *ā brahman-brahmaṇo brahmavarcasī jāyatāmā rāṣṭre rājanyaḥ sūru iṣavyo ‘tivyādhī mahāratho jāyatām doghrī dhenurvoḍhānāḍānāśuḥ saptiḥ purandhiryoṣā jiṣṇū rathesṭhāḥ sabheyo yuvāsya yajamānasya vīro jāyatām nikāme nikāme naḥ parjanya varṣatu phalavatyo na oṣadhayaḥ pacyantām yogakṣemo naḥ kalpatām* (Śāstri 2007[1972])

<sup>126</sup> {Naraharināth B.S. 2041:257}

Significantly, the Nepali translation of the passage was put to music, thus re-interpreting in a vernacular form the dimension of “sonality” (Wilke and Moebus 2011:139) of the original, which, recited according to the patterns Vedic chanting, is perceived as markedly different from the language of prose.

The *Koṭi Homa*, with its repeated utterance of the *gāyatrī* in the sacred fire, also constituted a sonic experience, and provided, at the same time, a framework for drawing boundaries of national belonging, bringing into the public mainstream a fire sacrifice, that had hitherto been performed only under royal sponsorship. Before its re-elaboration into a public ritual, the *Koṭi Homa* was in fact one the *śānta* (“pacifying”) ritual acts that a king could perform to ensure the well-being of the country—particularly, as Ronal Inden notes, to ward off inauspicious influences during the rain season (Inden 1985:36) Records of royal *Koṭi Homas* are also available from Cambodia, and their performance, requiring a non indifferent expense of resources, can be also be read as demonstration of royal grandeur (Quaritch Wales 1971 [1931]).

According to Bholanath Yogi, it was precisely the fact of having made accessible to the general population this elitist ritual performance that made Naraharinath a “revolutionary” (*krāntakāri*) religious leader. It is important to notice, however, that Naraharinath’s interest in fire-rituals must be read within the context of a broader re-thinking of Vedic matters that had developed after Dayananda Saraswati’s first experimentations with Vedic revivalism: the notion of an inherent scientificity of such rituals, along with an attempt to provide a rationalist explanation for the system of the four *varṇas*, gradually moved out of the Ārya Samājī circles—which initially did not regard themselves as either nationalists or Hindus (Zavos 2001)—to become a vehicle of

Hindu national self-assertion (Prakash 1999, Nanda 2003). If, on the one side, foreign domination had to be rejected, on the other, demonstrating “scientific” elements already present in the atavic past of the Veda fulfilled the function of legitimizing Hinduism within the parameters of the British Raj:

“Dayananda’s revivalism inaugurated a specific combination of stigmatization and emulation of the threatening ‘Other’. (...) His effort was to dissuade the British from changing Hindu customs by law, as well as to dissuade Hindus from admiring the West and/or converting to Christianity. This was best done by arguing that what fascinated Hindus about the West existed already, deeply buried, in their own ancestral traditions. Dayananda’s interest was thus to emulate the West in order to more effectively resist its influence.” (Jaffrelot 2007:9-10)

According to Prapannacarya’s account, Naraharinath studied with an Ārya Samājī scholar in Punjab, Jagdevji, but only as late as 1938, after having already received training in a plurality of other institutions. His seamless movement from one domain to the other opens an important question on the mutual relationship between *sanātana dharma* as a symbol of orthodoxy in colonial India (Zavos 2001) and Ārya Samājī institutions. As Jennifer Saunders has suggested, the divide between the iconoclastic Ārya Samāj, ritually devoted to the performance of *havans*, and the *sanātana dharmī*, defending a Hindu orthodoxy that wanted to continue the worship of *mūrtis*, became less prominent over time:

“both movements softened their stances on certain issues, so that Sanatanis in general became less entranced in maintaining their position on women and the caste system, and the Arya Samajis were less insistent on separating themselves from other Hindu practitioners.” (Saunders 2011:54)

This opened the path for some instances of *śrauta* rituals being performed within

a broader Hindu context—not in their traditional settings, but as public performances meant to educate the population on some values considered paramount for the nation: science, social collaboration, and patriotism. In his study of *śrauta* rituals in Maharashtra, Timothy Lubin (2000) has highlighted how the *yajñas* performed under the auspices of Ranganath Krishna Selukar in the 1980s and 1990s centered on three elements: the tradition of the *āhitāgni*<sup>127</sup> brahmans, the local tradition of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* (particularly in relation to the figure of Dattatreya), and the Ārya Samāj, represented by some preachers who attended the rituals to speak on the value of the Veda to the audience. The general public that supported Selukar with donations and attended the *yajñas* was generally untrained in the performance of *śrauta* sacrifices and saw this ritual performance as a complex form of *pūjā* to the gods. In fact, Selukar himself emphasized the theme of Hindu devotion—but also social involvement and patriotism—as a positive Vedic dimension expressed by the *yajña*. Following its Ārya Samājī influences, however, the theme of “science” was also present, as proposed in the essays produced by one of his followers to explain the rituals:

“Noting that the layout of the ritual space involves precise measurements in three dimensions, he proceeds briskly to find here ‘scalars, vectors, tensors,...symmetry, group theory and set theories, ...space-time curveture [sic], ...reletivistic [sic] quantum mechanics, ...space-time motion statistics, and dynamics, ...elevated, spherical coordinate system,” and so forth (using the English words in the Marathi text; all of those quoted occur in just one paragraph). (Lubin 2001:310).

Again, we can see that an anxiety in proving the scientific nature of the rituals goes hand in hand with a commitment to national pride, looking for an intimate

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<sup>127</sup> Those who have established a personal ritual fire in their houses and are devoted to its perpetual upkeep.

correspondence between Vedic knowledge, rituals, and modern science.<sup>128</sup>

Comparatively, Naraharinath's claims are more modest, and his notion of "science" (*vijñān*) in the Vedic rituals does not imply quantum physics, but only the idea—central to the revivalism of the *śrauta* ritual from the time of Dayananda Saraswati (Lubin 2010)—that *yajñas* bring about rain, health, and environmental purity through the combined effect of the *mantras* and the purifying smoke. Purifying—that is—not only in a physical, material sense, but also in the form of a moral uplifting of the community participating in the oblations, thus re-educated on matters of ritual purity. For this reason, in the case of Maharashtra, a boycott of the sacrifice was called for by an "Anti-Sacrifice Action Committee" (*Yajña Virodhī Kṛtī Samitī*), which accused the performers of reinforcing the preeminence the brahmans at public expense (Lubin 2001:311)

Interestingly, the themes of science and history got intertwined with reflections on caste in one of the comments published in the commemorative volume of the *Koṭi Homa*, a publication reporting reflections of *homa*'s participants, in Nepali. In a section titled "The four varṇas, why?," a contributor named Ekraj Sharma elaborates on the four castes as follows:

"So far, scientists have discovered four blood groups in humans, why not believe

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<sup>128</sup> We can note here that nationalist claims for an Indian origins of mathematics are often related to the rhetoric of the "Out of India" theory and to the identification of the Indus Valley civilization with the early Vedic people. A modern instance of the genre is, for example, Vedveer Arya's *Indian Contributions to Mathematics and Astronomy* (Arya 2014), which combines some correct observations on the history of mathematical speculation in Indian sources with unsubstantiated claims on the datation of ancient texts. The unfortunate effect of this kind of publications is to obfuscate the understanding of the non-specialist public on the rich Indian history of mathematic, geometry, and astronomy, which does indeed present many scientific achievements. Between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Keralese scholars such as Madhava, Jyesthadeva, and others developed important mathematical techniques related to calculus, with some possible degree of transmission to Europe via the Jesuits (Almedia et al. 2001, Joseph 2009). As Joseph observes, ascertaining direct transmission is often a complex issue, as some elements have developed independently in different places, and communication between different cultures prompted collaborative intellectual projects and expanded the repertoire of scientific questions being explored (Joseph 2009: 199-203).

that the *varṇāśrama-dharma* was a model to keep the four groups safe, each in their own place? The arrangement of [their] conduct was made to each group from their blood constitution and conduct of purity, eating habits, pastimes, and behaviors. This was *varṇāśrama*. There was a conception of this arrangement. From this reasoning (*tarka*), doesn't our trust in our sages, instead of disbelief, increase? We live within our history; hiding history, opposing history, is self-opposition, it is to oppose oneself. It is human nature not to oppose oneself, only to oppose others. The *itihāsa*, *veda*, *purāṇa*, *veda-vedānta* are our *darśana*. It's us. In them the reflection of our past appears. Let's see how we used to be!" (Suvedī, Nārāyaṇa. n.d:76)

We can see here how a rationalization of the *varṇa* system is presented in the idiom of science (by means of a parallel with the four blood types), but also with an interest in presenting the traditional branches of knowledge as central to a national self-understanding of the past. Naraharinath's own contribution to the volume, instead, privileges the present as referent, but only insofar as this is understood to be the time of protecting and preserving the national heritage. This account, which does not directly reference the *homa* being celebrated, but is nonetheless published in the commemorative volume, reveals how the *Koṭi Homa* materials, for Naraharinath, were also an occasion for presenting his vision for the country—a moment of politics articulated around the performance of the fire sacrifice:

“The duty of Nepal

1. Let's prohibit vice and fashion (*phesan*),
2. Every person should be always, in all ways, everywhere, active in doing good deeds,
3. Let's stay firm in our attire, style, language, songs, food, civilization, culture and religion,
4. In a country of 36,000 villages, let's develop every village equally,

5. Let's give only to Nepali citizens the right to develop mineral materials,
6. Let's spread to everybody the knowledge of agriculture, animal husbandry, together with all other skills regarded as necessary,
7. Let's never keep dry any fertile region,
8. Let's put an end to landslides and to forest fires,
9. Let's increase cattle fodder, āyurvedic medicines, wild herbs, roots, fruits and flowers, and let's grow trees such as *pippals*, *śāmis*, and *bês* that will hold landslides,
10. Let's produce electricity from every spring by small power plants and use the electricity produced,
11. Let's increase the production of textile products like wool, cotton, flax, silk, jute, glass fiber, nylon, polyester, acrylic, etc. and use it judiciously,
12. Let's make the nation the mother of all rivers by increasing the arrangement of paths to every lake and pond, on the right, left, all around, to channel drinking water,
13. Let's develop the construction of huts and domestic businesses in every village.
14. Let's divide the twenty-four hour schedule into three divisions and use eight hours to develop physical health, eight hours for physical work and the remaining eight hours to develop strength of mind,
15. Let's not keep unproductive even a single moment,
16. Let's produce fuel, fertilizers, and biogas from raising animals,
17. Let's prohibit instruction in foreign scripts, language, culture, civilization and religion,
18. Let's produce in the country all that the country needs,
19. Let's keep all kinds of wealth of the country within the country itself,
20. Let's not allow foreign merchants to enter and reside in the country,
21. Let's get back all the wealth that has gone abroad and apply an embargo on foreign import,
22. Everybody should keep a record of their property and contribute to its administration,

23. Let's organize free justice, education, healthcare, and defense,
24. Let's legally protect the constitution and the laws that are beneficial to society,
25. Saying *āyādalpataro vyayah / mitam bhunkte amitam karma krivā*,<sup>129</sup> let's not make useless the *arthaśāstra*, let's spend less than earned, let's work hard, let's eat in moderation, let's not waste,
26. Having made unanimous the word, the thought, and the path of the king and people, let's protect the sovereignty of the country,
27. Everybody should read pure (*śuddha*) history, geography, etc.,
28. Let's adhere to the *Divya Upadeś* as much as possible,
29. Let's defend *dharma* through *yoga*. *Yoga* indeed also defends knowledge. Therefore, let's exercise in and popularize *yoga*." (Suvedī, Nārāyaṇa. n.d.:2-3)

The last point of the list is significant, because it is the only reference to the specific heritage of Naraharinath's own *sampradāya*: the practice of *yoga*. In fact, his focus on the Veda as the center of a Nāth yogi's ritual life is a dissonant choice on the background of the history of the *sampradāya*, usually quite scornful of brahmanical scriptures:

“*Kāzi* and *mullas* interpret *Kuran*,

and *Brahmins*, the Vedas,

*Samnyāsīs* are lost in pilgrimages.

[No one] has found the secret of the *nirvāṇ pad*.”

(*Gorakh Bāṇī*, *sabdī* 96, translated by Djurdjevic 2005:231)

If we look again at Ima's experience of the *homa*, however, where she was instructed to see the repetition of the *gāyatrī* as a form of *japa*, we can notice that the idea

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<sup>129</sup> “An expense smaller than what has come, eats in moderation, having worked without limit.”

of combining mantra-meditation and fire-oblations has indeed a precedent in the tantric *homa*, performed by the yogis in the context of *puraścāraṇa*. *Puraścāraṇa* (“preliminary worship”) is the practice of repeating a mantra a fixed number of times for making it “perfected” (*siddha*), that is, capable of bringing about the desired results. The Nath school has inherited this practice from its tantric origins, and now it is commonly performed to perfect a mantra in the context of yogic *sādhana*, such as Gorakhnath's mantra, or a mantra of the Devi: while Gorakhnath's mantra is mostly used to enhance one's capacity for *samādhi* and one's detachment (*vairāgya*), *śākta* mantras can be used for more specific and pragmatic purposes. Nowadays, only the latter are deemed tantric by contemporary practitioners, while a *puraścāraṇa* of Gorakhnath's mantra is considered a yogic practice devoid of the potential stigma of black magic that is attached to tantric acts. The ritual pattern is the same regardless of the sectarian genealogy of the mantra: after a set number of repetitions performed over a period of days or weeks, often keeping a vow such as *phalāhāra*, the ten percent of the whole number is repeated in a ritual fire, each utterance performed with an oblation of grains, ghee and incense, followed by the formula *svāhā*—the same pattern used in Vedic rituals: for example, after 1 *lākh* (100.000) repetitions of Gorakhnath's mantra, the practitioner would perform a *homa* with 10.000 repetitions of the same mantra followed by *svāhā*. Only after the celebration of this ritual the *puraścāraṇa* is believed to be successfully concluded.

Although many yogis admittedly do not devote much of their energy to such time-consuming meditations, the practice was still alive in Dang during the time of Naraharinath: a fireplace to celebrate a *homa* is still present behind the temple, though the last person to use it consistently was, reportedly, Prabhatnath, the elderly yogi-painter

that we have mentioned for his illustrations of *Śikhariṇī Yātrā*, a man well-known in the area for his piety. Reflecting on this ritual substratum of the *sampradāya* gives us a chance to better assess the implications of Naraharinath's innovations: if, on the one side, the idea of turning to the Veda as a conceptual source of religious authority was a novelty in the Nāth milieu, on the other, the long-standing tradition of tantric *homas* provided a bridging point between Naraharinath's brahmanical leanings and the ritual landscape of his contemporaries, who could perceive the communal *Koṭi Homa* as not thoroughly different from a common Nāth practice. In fact—and somehow paradoxically, given its lower-middle caste vernacular character—the Nāth tradition could be the one best positioned for advocating the celebrations of rituals centered on fire oblations. While more brahmanically orthodox orders of ascetics, such as the influential order of the Dasnāmi, lose, along with their caste, their *adhikāra* (ritual right) to celebrate sacrifices after ordination, this is not the case for the yogis, who can freely celebrate any tantric ritual, provided that they acquire the necessary initiation from a guru. Though transition from outward to inner sacrifice is a major theme of South Asian asceticism, both in India and Tibet (Bentor 2000), and it is surely present in the Nāth conception of yoga as an internalization of the external tantric praxis, this aspect is not particularly emphasized in the concrete practice of contemporary yogis. These, instead, have a rich tradition of ritual activities, as exemplified, for instance, by the sizable collection of liturgies published in 2004 by Vilasnath, the *mahant* of the Nath *maṭha* of Haridwar (Bouillier 2008:17). Naraharinath, however, moved more and more towards brahmanical models of ritual praxis, and his worldview at the end of his life, when he traveled to Australia to collaborate to the foundation of a temple in Sydney, was markedly different from

Vilasnath's eclectic ritualism, being informed by a conception of Hinduness located at the intersection between Vedic textuality and *śaiva* devotionism.

***Global myth-dreams***

*kaṅgarū-sahitā gāvah praśāntāḥ*

May the cows be peaceful, together with the kangaroos

*Aṣṭrālikāyāṃ vihaṅgamadr̥ṣṭi, 5*

The narratives that Naraharinath developed for Mukti Gupteshwar Mandir, a temple that Birendra established in Sydney, Australia, for a community of Nepali and Indian expatriates, represents a very unusual example of hybridity between South Asian mythological elements and modern suggestions of the Hindu diaspora. The construction, in the suburban area of Minto, is centered on an underground *sancta sanctorum* understood to be a “cave” which hosts the thirteenth *jyotirlinga*, the last addition to the twelve “*lingas* of light” of the Indian subcontinent. According to explanation provided by the leadership of the temple, the place has been chosen following an “arrow” that points towards the Southern hemisphere from the temple of Somnath, the *jyotirlinga* mandir in Gujarat. An essential part of the mythology of this Australian *linga* is centered on the notion that this specific continent is located at “mouth of the snake” (*nāga*), a representation of the magnetic fields around the earth, and is the land towards all continents are drifting at the present time. According this vision, the present age represents the early stage of the time of cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*)—reversing a process of northern drift that occurred at the beginning of the present cosmic cycle

(*sriṣṭi*). The Australian *liṅga* is thus called *yajamāna mūrti* ("host *mūrti*"), since it will welcome all other continents at the end of time.

Although Naraharinath, in nationalist fashion, did not particularly favor the migration of Nepali people in Westernized countries, he contributed nonetheless at the foundation of this temple, and specifically composed for the Sydney expatriates an example of puranic literature, the *Muktigupteśvar Śrī Śiva-dharma Mahāśāstra*. The volume, published posthumously, has a mysterious origin: *paṇḍit* Prem Mishra, the chief priest of the temple, reported that the text was composed by Yogi Naraharinath himself ("Yogiji was the *śāstra!*"), while the website of the temple reports that it was "compiled from a very ancient manuscript written in Bhojapatra [Himalayan birch-leaf]." The text itself, in 7996 *śloka*s, does not present any form of peculiarity if compared with South Asian ritual manuals: it is filled with descriptions of ritual observances, purification rites, *varṇāśrama* rules, warnings against the corrupting effect of the Kaliyuga on human society, exhortations towards *mukti*, and prescriptions of *śaiva* worship. It does not refer to Australia specifically, but it is consistent with the religious character of Mukti Gupteshwar, centered on a combination of brahmanical orthodoxy and *śaiva* devotion: the *liṅga* is worshipped through *abhiṣeka* and the *Rudrāṣṭhādhyāyī* is recited daily, but more accessible *śaiva stotras*, such as the *Śiva-mahimnā-stotra*, may be also played through the sound-system for the pleasure of the visitors.

Accordingly, Naraharinath's self-representation in the context is suggestive of the world of brahmanical priesthood: the *Mahāśāstra* presents his photo under the heading of "Spritual World-Teacher" (*ādhyātmika jagad-guru*), not as a Nāth yogi, but as *paṇḍit*: instead of the *bhoṭo* and the *ṭopi*, here he wears a simple *dhoti*, and instead of the *nād*

*śiṅgi*, he wears the sacred thread of a *dvija*. The *kuṇḍals*, in the picture, are faintly visible, and—if in his ashram in Vagishvari he was clearly recognizable as a Nepali, here his attire marks him as an example of a pan-Indian sage.

The most interesting document for our understanding of Naraharinath's vision of Australia is the *Aṣṭrālikāyāṃ vihaṅgamadr̥ṣṭi* (“Vision of the panorama in Australia”), an unpublished poem that composed on occasion of his travel to Australia, provided for the purposes of this research by *paṇḍit* Prem Mishra. The composition builds a conceptual symbiosis of Vedic culture and Australian indigenous lore, praising the *ādivāsi-jana* of the continent as endowed with knowledge of the *Rudrī* and with a cult of nature that is, also, a true worship of the *āṣṭa-mūrti* of Śiva, which also make them akin to the Japanese:

“7. *ādivāsijanā śāntā gaṇānāntvādi-pāṭhinaḥ |*  
*prakṛtipūjakāḥ sarve agnir-devetidevatāḥ ||*

May the aboriginal people be peaceful, who recite *gaṇānāntvā* etc. (i.e. the first *ādhyāya* of the *Rudri*), having deities such as *Agni deva*.

8. *varuṇo devatetyādi samudra-nada-pūjakāḥ |*  
*latā-tr̥ṇādipūjāste vṛkṣa-parvata-pūjakāḥ ||*

worshipping sea and rivers such as *Varuna*,  
they worship creepers, herbs, etc, worshipping trees and mountains

9. *naukā-śilādi-pūjāśca sarvaprāṇi-gaṇārcakāḥ |*  
*aṣṭamūrter-virāṭasya śivasya hi sadārcakāḥ ||*

they worship boats, stones, etc, honoring all groups of beings,  
doing the true worship of Śiva, indeed, who appears in the eight forms.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> In *Jaya Gorkhā* he lists the *mūrtis* as “earth, water, air, the *ātman*, sky, fire, moon, sun”

10.

*jāpāna-janavat-sarve ṛṣi-pitṛ-samarcakāḥ |*  
*kṛṇvanto viśvam-āryaṃ hi yathārya ṛṣayah purā ||*

All, like the people of Japan, worship the Ṛṣi and ancestors, making the noble world, indeed, the city of the ṛṣis, like the Aryas.”

(*Aṣṭrālikāyāṃ vihaṅgamadrṣṭi*, unpublished)

The most interesting feature of this poem is its very existence, as it is virtually the only Sanskrit composition that deals with the Southern hemisphere (and the “Southern Polar Star” *dakṣiṇasya dhruva*, v. 4) and it builds upon the Australian lore of the temple in a very creative way. The peculiarity of the temple, in fact, is its being a conceptual liaison with the world of the Australian aboriginals, who are presented as akin to Hindu culture in virtue of their oral tradition. *Paṇḍit* Prem Mishra points out equivalences between the Hindu practice of meditation in a cave (*guha*, *gupha*), and the cave-rituals of the local aboriginals, such as the Ayers Rock at Uluru, whose photo is displayed in the shrine of the Devi within the temple. Snakes are also taken as a symbol of Hindu-aboriginal fraternity, but with a “scientific” take: they are not only a common aboriginal motif that may remind of the Hindu *nāgas*, but also as a representation of the magnetic fields around the earth, whose “mouth” is said to be “right around Australia”.

This conceptual move shows two interrelated processes: on the one hand, an effort to re-contextualize a Hindu community outside of the Indian subcontinent by sacralizing the new landscape through a combination of local lore and Indian myths; on the other, the attempt at phrasing its foundational mythology in “scientific” terms that strive to sound appealing to a modern Western-educated audience. Inscribing the *liṅga* within mainstream South Asian mythology, but reinterpreting it in the light of an eschatological worldview that places Australia at the very center of the dissolution of the

current cosmic age, Naraharinath's vision of Mukti Gupteshwar can thus be seen to mediate the tension between the idea of the unique sacrality of the Hindu homeland and the global ambitions of middle-class Hindu devotees in a diaspora context. This cross-cultural symbiosis of religious symbols is not so much theorized, as embedded in a specific framework of ritual practice (the *jyotirlinga* in the Australian "cave") and in a creative process of myth-making (the *yajamāna* continent welcoming the other "drifting" continents at the end of times, placed at the mouth of a magnetic "snake," and inhabited but pristine Vedic Aboriginals).

A suggestion that we may find useful to understand this specific example of "hybridity" (Homi Bhabha's famous rubric for examples of post-colonial cultural projects phrased against a unitary notion of identity) is Kenelm Burridge's phrase "myth-dream," a notion that he applies to the process of mythopoesis in his study of cargo cults in some Melanesian communities. Myth-dreams, advanced by charismatic leaders at crucial historical moments of transition and cultural crises (such as the arrival of Europeans in the Melanesian lands) are new visions of the world that rests at the interplay between myth, history, and the existential concerns of the communities involved (in the case studied by Burridge, cargo interpreted through the mythical structures of local lore and the new moral ideal of the "new man" in Melanesia). A way of assimilating the new, fascinating but threatening, with the old and reassuring, they are new cultural elements composed by:

"a series of themes, propositions, and problems which are to be found in myths, in dreams, in the half-lights of conversation, and in the emotional responses to a variety of actions, and question asked. Through this kind of intellectualization myth-dreams become 'aspirations' (Burridge 1961:148)."

In the case of Naraharinath, the moment of diaspora in Nepali national history is captured by the installment of a last *jyoriṅga*—an unexpected addition to the canonical list of twelve—in a new land that finds itself at the very center of a *coincidentia oppositorum* of past and future: still inhabited by pristine Vedic people living a pre-historical life of nature worship and orality, it is also the continent of the end of times, the last geographical residence for representatives of that *sanātana* Hindu dharma that he considered originated from Mt. Kailash. The aspirational element captured by Burrige is also present in Naraharinath’s worldview: far from passively adapting to the new conditions of life abroad, the Hindus clustering around Mukti Gupteshwar are exhorted not only to maintain their *mānav dharma*, but also to read the Australia context in the light of his notion of a primordial, and universal, Hinduness. This move represents a profound shift in the ideological development of Hindutva: from a quintessentially nationalist movement, concerned with the politics of the homeland, to an alternative way of reading global history, channeling the historical and political imaginary of post-colonial South Asian nationalism into the broader landscape of international affairs.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

This work has analyzed the political vision of Yogi Naraharinath by paying attention to the relationship between his conception of *dharma* and the doctrinal and ritual tradition of the Nāth Sampradāya. Naraharinath's work is located at an important moment in the history of the school: its re-contextualization as a politically active Hindu nationalist voice in post-colonial South Asia. Analyzing affinities and divergences with the previous history of the school (particularly fluid in its boundaries, and peripheral to brahmanical orthodoxy), I have highlighted that his engagement with social work, historiography, and ritual activities reveals a composite intellectual process that defies any easy dichotomy between pre-modern suggestions and post-colonial re-elaborations. His public persona, an important cultural icon of Hindu nationalism in twentieth century Nepal, combined the image of the yogi with that of a *paṇḍit* and of a historian, challenging the stereotype of the gruff, sinister tantric practitioner that was often associated with the Nāth tradition.

Balivir Singh Thapa, born in 1913 or 1915 in the Bahun-Chetri milieu of Western Nepal, enters the ascetic order of the Nāth yogis in his childhood and is instructed by his guru Chipranath/Kshipranath to pursue further studies by traveling to several institutions of Sanskrit learning. His formative years coincide with the last decades of the British Raj, and themes from the discursive formations of incipient Hindu nationalism, particularly expressed through the idiom of "social service" (*samāj sevā*) and Vedic revivalism, enter the repertoire of his religious and political ideas. In 1947, at the request of prime minister

Padma Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, he is appointed to the position of *mahant* of Mrigasthali, the most important Nāth institution in the Kathmandu Valley. After assuming this position, he begins a series of travels throughout the Himalayan region, exploring historical inscriptions and acquainting himself with the multifarious anthropological reality of Nepal, a region located at the very frontier between the Indic and the Tibeto-Burman cultural spheres. His commitment to national uplifting, historiographical work, and political activism is phrased through the language of patriotism, and particularly through ideals of Gorkhali bravery discursively embedded in the narrative of the Hindu *rājya* “unified” by the “father of the nation” Prthivi Narayan Shah (1723-1775).

At the heart of his political commitment we find an assertive and conservative notion of *Hindu-rāṣṭra*, dramatically expressed on occasion of the anti-Congress demonstrations of 1960, when Naraharinath leads a protest against the government in Gorkha. Violent clashes ensue, and king Mahendra takes advantage of the collapse of law and order under prime minister B.P. Koirala to end the first Nepali experiment with multiparty democracy, reestablishing monarchical control through the form of the so-called “partyless Panchayat democracy.” Naraharinath finds himself ideologically aligned with the royalist position, but upholds a conception of national pride centered not around the king as embodiment of Vishnu’s kingship, but around the *dharmic* mission of the Gorkhali citizens under the patronage of the tutelary deity Gorakhnath,

Naraharinath’s stance, in an important instance of continuity with the tradition of Sanskrit scholarship, assigns to language, in the form of etymological derivation, the central task of proving the nature of things, and the intimate linguistic relationship

between Gorkha, Gorakhnath, and *go-rakṣa*, the defense of the cow, provides a structural framework for his political vision. History and science, two new idioms of post-colonial nationalism in South Asia, make also their way into Naraharinath's discourse, in very important ways. The very names of the two founder-gurus of the Nāth tradition, Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath, are discussed so as to make room for a reference to the inherent rational nature of the Hindu tradition, a recurrent theme of Hindutva apologetics.

Naraharinath's involvement in the world of Hindu nationalism is in fact one of the central avenues of his public engagement: he participates in some of the meetings of the Vishva Hindu Parishad in India and personally organizes similar events in Nepal under the auspices of the Vishva Hindu Mahasangh, a VHP organizational offspring. In the 1980s, however, he distances himself from the VHM and dedicates himself more and more to the celebration of public *Koṭi Homas*, ritual events intended to bring about an environmental and moral regeneration of the Hindu citizenry of Nepal. He understands his socio-political engagement as a form of selfless *sādhanā*, and he preaches to his followers and disciples that being engaged in altruist social work is the essential duty of an ascetic life. This point leads to some interesting results: while, writing in the late 1980s, his appeals to *samāj sevā* resonate clearly with communalist themes, even with militaristic overtones, the reception of his message among his Nepali disciples foster more complex responses, that spans the gamut from hardcore ascetic ventures, to conservative brahmanical standpoints, to cross-cultural interreligious projects. These processes may be read as a dissolution of the more extreme Hindutva suggestions and, following recent scholarship on figures of mediation between political Hindutva and smaller-scale localized cultural project, we may be led to question the very boundaries of

Hindu nationalism. In this work, I have thus noted that agents understanding themselves under the rubric of Hinduness, often prompted by a quest for social recognition, are not always motivated by communalist political sentiments.

In fact, Naraharinath's own understanding of the relationship between *dharmā* and human history, at a closer look, appears more multifaceted and complex than his involvement in the "Gorkha disturbances" may suggest. An element from the shamanic tradition of the higher Himalaya, the *jhâkris'* lore on the *yeti*, is so central to Naraharinath's conception of the development of mankind that his own version of human evolution is centered on it. Furthermore, if his reading of Buddhism as a derivative form of Vedic *dharmā* is clearly a problematic political stance for the Theravada activists of 20<sup>th</sup> century Nepali, it also represents the outcome of a metaphysical reflection coherent with the deep history of the Nāth *sampradāya*, which dissolves the tension between the Vedantic notion of "fullness (*pūrṇatā*) and the Buddhist tenet of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) in a heterodox anti-intellectual move. The world of tantrism, too, can be seen as lurking behind his ritual activity, as the tradition of *homās* in the context of tantric *puraścāraṇa* provides another bridging point between Nāth history and the Vedic revivalism of the *Koṭi Homa*.

But the most unique feature of Naraharinath's thought is one unusually placed in an exocentric relationship with the Indian subcontinent. In the last years of his life, called to consecrate a newly constructed Hindu temple in Sydney, Naraharinath travels to the Southern hemisphere with an ambitious mythological toolbox: a conception of Australia as the eschatological *yajamāna* continent that will welcome the rest of the earth at the end of times, located at the "mouth" of a "snake" that is Shiva's *nāga* as much as the planet's

magnetic field, and graced by the presence of a supernumerary *jyoriṅga*. Here, in this new land that offers hopes of peace and financial stability to Hindu expatriates leaving behind the contested political world of South Asia, Yogi ji wants to see a new piece of evidence for the myth of an original global Hinduness: the culture of the Australian “*ādivāsis*” endowed with sacred caves, mythical snakes, and an oral culture that, for him, is nothing other than the Veda.

In 2003, surrounded by loving disciples in the peaceful compound of Mrigasthali, Yogi Naraharinath, in typical yogic fashion, achieves *bramaṅ* (“dissolution into *brahman*”) while seated in *padmāsana*. But his last moments are far from blissful: king Birendra’s democratic concessions have implied the dissolution of the Panchayat system he had advocated, and, at a time of political conflict marked by an armed insurrection, the continued bickering of the newly empowered political parties does not instill much hope for peace in the country. Furthermore, a little more than one year before his death, Naraharinath has to endure the gruesome news of the massacre at the royal palace, where king Birendra and his immediate family had been murdered on June 1, 2001. Officially, the culprit was an intoxicated crown prince Dipendra, but conspiracy theories blaming Birendra’s brother Gyanendra, the new heir to the throne, spread as quickly as his unpopularity. Naraharinath will not live to see Gyanendra’s demotion in 2006, prompted by a moment of successful alliance among the political parties in anti-monarchical function. Nor will he witness the final eviction of the king in 2008, the final moment of demise of the Shah dynasty: leaving behind faithful Shrishnath, Ima Mata, and many lay sympathizers that identify with his worldview, Naraharinath passes away in what, formally, is still a Hindu kingdom. And another event that he is spared to witness is the

*Kālo Budhvar* (“black Wednesday”) of the following year, August 30, 2004, when a mob, reacting to the news of twelve Nepali workers murdered by an Islamic terrorist group in Iraq, rampage against the Muslim population of Kathmandu with incendiary violence, physically assaulting several people, and bringing about the devastation and profanation of their mosques, houses, and shops. The police do not intervene, king Gyanendra expresses no sympathy for the victims, and the rioters identify themselves as a Nepali branch of the Shiv Sena.

Naraharinath’s immediate disciples do not take part in the riot, but the conceptual framework that make possible *Kālo Budhvar* is consistent with the rhetoric of Hindu power that has structured the development of the Nepali state in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As noted by Megan Adamson Sijapati, the condition of possibility of *Kālo Budhvar* rested precisely in the categorization of Muslims as an alien minority in a kingdom representing a Hindu majority (Sijapati 2011). Naraharinath’s own language was not structured on this binary: he did not define the non-Hindu groups as a minority outside of the Hindu majority. This would have still implied an acknowledgement of their existence as a separate form of religious community. Rather, he envisaged all non-Hindus as deviant splinter groups that had “forgotten” their pristine Vedic *dharma*, and that it was always possible to re-convert to orthodoxy. But, to this end, the voice of the *paṇḍit*, of the yogi, and of the historian overlapped with that of the Gorkhali soldier active in the defense of *dharma*.

*Armed words: re-enchanting the world through ornate speech?*

At the time of this writing a debate has been stirred in Europe by the publication of Philippe-Joseph Salazar's *Parolee Armées: Comprendre et combattre la propagande terroriste*, an analysis of ISIS propaganda and of the West's responses to it. An interesting feature of this publication is that Salazar is not a political analyst, but a professor specialized in the study of classical Arabic rhetoric. We may thus pause here to ask whether his work may also offer us some suggestions for a comparative reflection on Naraharinath's style—and whether the present work, a reading of a political leader by a student of South Asian religions, may constitute a possible way of looking at Hindutva's Himalayan frontiers.

The claim advanced by Salazar after two years of examining printed and audio-visual materials of the Islamic State is that its success at recruiting young supporters in Europe, America, and Australia—sometimes talented students with intellectual ambitions—is largely based on its ability to employ a rhetoric of erudition: a high register coupled with an aesthetic style derived from the tradition of Quranic recitation, beautified by figures of speech, quotations from the sacred text, complex argumentations of theological apologetics, and military appeals in ceremonial style. Starkly different from the colloquial, workaday register of contemporary mass-media—which Salazar condemns as an example of rhetorical weakness—the ornate voice of the Caliphate attracts youngsters in search of religious transcendence, military deeds, and self-immolation. Sounds and images, combined in a dimension of sonality and aesthetics, contribute to re-enchant the world of those who feel dissatisfied with the banal, ordinary dimensions of their lower-middle class lives in the suburbs of the West:

“La prouesse esthétique du Califat est d’avoir compris que, pour attirer ceux qui ne comprennent pas la langue de la conversion (l’arabe), la combinatoire des sons and des images est une stratégie efficace. Leur force persuasive d’étrangeté et de rupture est séduisante: elle ouvre sur un autre univers, qui semble être hors répétition, hors banalité, hors quotidien. Elle réenchante le monde.” (Salazar 2015:131)

“Estrangement” and “rapture:” two outcomes of poetics (the strength of language being considered just as important as the power of arms), but also fruit of the displacing effect of the archaic and arcane idiom of the sacred text. Can we draw here a parallel with the Naraharinath of *Vaidika Siddhānta* and *Jaya Gorkhā*? Partly, and the similarities are here as significant as the differences. Although, as we have seen, its potential for violence was dissolved in the plurality of responses of his disciples, Naraharinath’s literary style combined the aesthetics of heroism and patriotism with the voice of Vedic exegesis, Sanskrit epics, and poetical embellishment—not unlike the style of the Caliphate, that locates itself at the intersection of warrior-aesthetics, Quranic erudition, and oratorical prowess. Those who lost their lives in the Gorkha protests of 1960 could surely see their death being discursively embedded in Naraharinath’s praise of the roaring Gorkhalis in *Jaya Gorkhā*, and the ideal of militant *sadhanā* of *Vaidika Siddhānta*, in its juxtaposition of communalist passions and cosmic time, provided a mythical paradigm for militant Hindus who perceived their homeland as inflamed by the different “fires” of Islam, Christianity, globalization, and secularization.

The gendered aspect of this dimension of Hindutva has been amply discussed: Sikata Banerjee, for example, has highlighted how, in spite of the differences between various Hindutva organizations, models of masculinity are always central, especially represented by the image of the righteous Hindu soldier and the warrior-monk (Banerjee

2005). Dibyesh Anand has further discussed how sexual anxieties about the stereotype of the “effeminate Hindu” are central to Hindutva’s call to action against the Muslim population—leading to widespread sexual violence in the Gujarat riots of 2002 (Anand 2002). The image of the nationalist *sādhu*, of course, has a partial precedent in the image of the warrior ascetic. In fact, members of different ascetics orders throughout history did indeed fight (as mercenaries for local potentates) on many occasions, and sometimes also engaged in freelance plundering (Lorenzen 1978). Clearly, however, mercenary employment and extortion are not the conceptual axes around which contemporary Hindu *sevaks* wish to associate with the image of the warrior ascetics. Rather, the background for the cultural icon of the *sādhu*-patriot, whose ascetic discipline could be presented as a source of strength and virtue for the defense of the Motherland, is the romanticized account of the Samnyāsī Rebellion by Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s, *Ānandamaṭha*, “which transposed the unorganized violence of the Sannyasis into a liberating utopia, resisting all occupants, whether Muslims or British. (Bouillier 2003:48). But if this prototypical image of Hindu patriot is, after all, modeled on vigor of the *kṣatriya*, what is the national function of the *brahman*? What is the place of scholarship—a central key of Naraharinath’s self-representation—in the patriotic ethos?

Examples of Sanskritic register in the landscape of contemporary Hindutva have been observed and discussed less than its vernacular expressions. If a generic reference to the Sanskrit heritage of the country is always present, Naraharinath’s sustained effort at placing primary sources at the very forefront of the political discourse has been rather unique. Shubh Mathur, in her ethnography of RSS activities, has definitely noted how, among their many ambitions, Hindu *sevaks* also aim at providing an “intellectual”

(*baudhik*) dimension to Hindu society, up to the point of characterizing the RSS as a “cultural” organization (Mathur 2008). This, however, is often pursued through speeches, publications, and audio-visual materials in the regional languages, without the substantial investment in Sanskrit and Vedic recitations that characterized Naraharinath’s life.

Naraharinath’s oratorical style, veering towards the most archaic Vedic formulations, reflects his vision of national culture: arms and books are both equally essential, as “the meditation on the *śāstras* increases when protected by *śāstra*.”<sup>131</sup> The relation between the two spheres is not one of interdependence, praising the priestly-intellectual and the political-military functions are related but separate, but one of convergence: the *sādhu* engaged in *parārtha sādhanā* is exhorted to be both militarized and learned, combining in his own person the prerogatives not only of the yogi, but also of the *brahman* and of the *kṣatriya*. Devnath’s later radicalization as a learned yet militant brahman-yogi is a fitting example of this plural commitment. But why is this dimension particularly prominent in Naraharinath’s style?

At this regard, an important dimension to be noticed is the environment in which he operates, which was not the Nāth Sampradāya per se, but the broader domain of lay Hindu society in Panchayat Nepal. In the decades following the restoration to power of king Tribhuvan, and particularly after Mahendra’s coup of 1960, the notion of the Hindu character of the nation was intimately tied to the understanding of Hinduness prevalent among the Bahun-Chettri political elite, and the vast majority of civil servants, bureaucrats, school teachers and university professors were of brahmanical caste from Parbatiya communities, followed by Chettri and high-caste Newars. As noted above, *bāhunvād* (“bāhunism”) from *bāhun*, the Nepali vernacular designation for Parbatiya

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<sup>131</sup> *śāstreṇa rakṣita udeti hi śāstracintā* (Naraharinath n.d. *Vaidika Siddhānta*:42)

brahmans, was the word used to refer to high-caste hegemony by political activists for multiethnic representation. It perpetuated a long-standing tradition of brahmanical presence at the Gorkhali court, but it also represented a new phenomenon: the tying of instances of brahmanical praxis, taken as the standard of upper class Hindu conduct, to the narrative of the Hindu nation-state. Other demographic constituencies, particularly the Tibet-Burman groups, distanced themselves from this model by looking at various combinations of Buddhism, ethnic revival, and shamanism (and we can note here that Maoism, imported from China, was also ethnically marked in the direction of the Magar groups closer to the borderland).

The textual materials of the Parbatiya priestly castes, however, are not very rich in martial suggestions. If Prithvi Narayan's *Divya Upadesh* does indeed constitute a treasure-trove of military wisdom and strategic advice, this is precisely because the interest of the king, who thinks about himself as a Rajput, rather than as a *paṇḍit*, is military conquest and not the pursuit of *dharma*. As I have noted in chapter 3, Naraharinath's reading of Prithvi Narayan as a champion of Vedic Hinduness represents an explicit deviance from the original *Divya Upadesh*. However, in *Vaidika Siddhānta*, Naraharinath makes explicit that the separate roles of the *brahman* and the *kṣatriya* are to be coupled together in times of distress, that is, when *dharma* is imperiled. At this regard, the most iconic example of fighting sage is Drona, born from a brahman and an *apsara*, and teacher of martial arts to the Kaurava and Pandava brothers—a character that, significantly, combines in himself the powers of a *brahman* and of a *kṣatriya*:

“Manu too, the *rājarsi* of the Satyayuga, has said: when *dharma* is opposed by *adharmā*, at that time for the twice-born *brāhmana*, *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya* it is imperative to defend the *dharma* by taking up arms. *āpatkāle maryādā nāsti*. (In times of distress there

are no limits). In times of non-distress it is appropriate to abide by one's own *dharma*. In the *Mahābhārata*, the declaration of Droṇācārya is of this sort: in front of us, there are the four Vedas, on our back, an arch with its arrows, with us there is *brāhmaśakti* and *kṣātraśakti*, by curse or by wound, in both ways, we are ready in the fight of the world. Today, again, the call of Droṇācārya must be done." (Naraharinath n.d. *Vaidika Siddhānta*:6)

Naraharinath's synthesis of the priestly and the martial ethos in a unified discourse—condensing, that is, the *brahman* and the *kṣatriya* in the single figure of the militant Hindu—produces a discourse marked by a certain tension between two codes of conduct that were not meant to be simultaneously performed by a single individual: ritual scholarship and warfare. An unintended consequence of this dual rhetoric is its being prone to multiple, discordant interpretations—the “dissonances” that I have overviewed in relation to *samāj sevā*. These interpretations need not be understood as a misunderstanding of Naraharinath's words, or as a form of overt contestation: in some cases they may be legitimate, literal readings of the quotations he presents.

Let's see two instances of ambiguity. *Ātmakhalu viśvamūla*, for example, is a ubiquitous maxim in his writings, almost a slogan throughout his publications, as noted in his own description of the agenda of *Viśvātmadarśana*, the magazine that he established for the *Bṛhad Ādhyātmika Pariṣad*, discussed here in chapter 2. In itself, the phrase resonates with the strong emphasis on the notion of *ātman* typical of the *Upaniṣads*, and it is congruent, in fact, with the ascetic tendencies of Ima and Devnath, but also with Bholanath's interest in soteriological treatises. Naraharinath, instead, uses the sentence in the context of the Hindu *sammelans* and *pariṣads*—communal, social occasions that are meant to reinforce a public commitment to *dharma* as a nation. Much as in the case of

Vivekanda's re-elaboration of Ramakrishna's teachings, however, the superimposition of political notions upon a time-honored framework of ascetic detachment is never completely conclusive: the possibility of disrupting the newer, socially engaged interpretation for the sake of the former, contemplative aspect of *saṃnyāsa* remains present in the very language of the Sanskrit quotations.

A second point that is easily prone to different readings is the relationship between Hindu dharma and other religions:

*“Rucīnām Vaicitryādr̥jukūṭilanānāpathajuṣām |Nṛṇāmeke āgamyastvamasi payasāmarṇava iva |” 7.b*

For the men devoted to various paths, straight or crooked, according the variety of their interests, you are the only goal, just as the sea for the waters.

Although Naraharinath uses this verse in a passage that subsumes Buddhism within the framework of Vedic dharma, the *stotra* itself makes room for a plurality of paths, that “crooked or straight” (*r̥ju-kūṭila*), all lead to same goal—without any indication, in the letter of the text, that the boundaries of acceptability are drawn by conformity to Vedic models. *Śiva-mahimna-stotra* 7a, which Naraharinath does not present, lists the Veda along with other traditions, thus suggesting that the Veda is one among several possible options, the others being *sāṃkhya*, *yoga*, the *Paśupati-mata* (i.e. the doctrine of the Pāśupata, among the earliest antinomian *śaiva* sects) and the *vaiṣṇava-[mata]*—a representation of what the author of the *stotra* saw as the competing idioms of his time. The Veda is not privileged as compared to other paths—if anything, the *stotra* cautions against the performance of Vedic rituals motivated by dubious goals:

*kriyādakṣo dakṣaḥ kratupatiradhīśastanubhṛtāmṛṣṇāmārtvijyam śaraṇada sadasyāḥ suragaṇāḥ|*

*kratubhramśastvattaḥ kratuphalavidhānavyasanino dhruvaṁ kartuḥ*  
*śraddhāvidhuramabhicārāya hi makhāḥ||21||*

“You, giver of refuge, who are used to always bestow the fruits of sacrifice, destroyed the sacrifice in which Dakṣa, skilled in sacrificial action and chief of all embodied creatures, was the sacrificer, the ṛṣi had [i.e. were assigned the function of] the priesthood, and all the gods were participants. Indeed, sacrifices [done] for *abhicāra*<sup>132</sup> are harmful to the faith of the sacrificer.”

As we have already seen in chapter 6, Naraharinath worked instead within a framework of ultimate Vedic equivalence, expressing a positive appreciation for the traditions of the Australia only insofar as he could attribute to the Aboriginals the worship of deities such as Agni, Varuna, and Shiva—in addition to the recitation of the *Rudrī*. Ganesh Oli, however, another follower of Naraharinath, offers a different phrasing of the same theme, writing from New Zealand. His book *The Nath tradition: a Philosophical Analysis* is a brief overview of different aspects of the Nāth school (seen as “based on Vedic and Upanishadic foundation”), and is dedicated to Yogi Naraharinath, but also to an unnamed friend that is “a student of Anthroposophy and the Teachings of Rudolf Steiner”, and “to the Maori people of yesterday, today and tomorrow of New Zealand. (Oli 2004:n.p.). The work also contains a brief biographical mention of Naraharinath, clearly based on Prapanancarya’s account, where Yogiji is praised as a “venerable sadhu (...) a great country lover who spent a mythical life of mystery (...) a philosophical emperor who traveled thousands and thousands miles on foot with the message of National Unity and Cultural and Religious Integrity” (Oli 2003:63). The book cover, however, does not mention Hinduness as the encompassing framework, but,

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<sup>132</sup> enchantment, sorcery, or magical empowerment

perhaps in reference to Naraharinath's phrase *mānav dharma*, states that the author follows neither "Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity nor Islam but Human Culture."

A similar understanding of religious pluralism, as we have seen in chapter 4, was characteristic of Bholanath Yogi and his daughter Minakshi, but was even more pronounced in the lifework of Chintamani Yogi, Bholanath's brother, who, unfortunately, was not present in Dang at the time of my fieldwork to be interviewed. Though not a direct disciple of Naraharinath, Chintamani was nonetheless part of his social circle: a graduate of the *Mahendra Saṃkṛta Viśvavidyālaya* that Naraharinath founded in Dang, he was also a member of the committee organizing the funeral rites and the memorial *samādhi* for Yogi ji. He is now an important figure of interfaith activism in Nepal, associated with the international United Religious Initiative (URI), and, in addition to a variety of efforts in the field of education, he also organized a rally in solidarity with the Muslims in response to *Kālo Budhvar*.

We can thus locate the various elements of Naraharinath's lifeworld—from *Vaidika Siddhānta* to Chintamani—along a spectrum that has a militant notion of Hindu nationalism, on the one side, and an transnational model of interreligious recognition, on the other. Emphasizing the fluidity of the continuum between these two poles is crucial to understand the different avenues of Hindu activism in contemporary South Asia, which cannot be reduced to a facile dichotomy between Hindutva and its critics. This spectrum-model is also characteristic of the engagement of the Sangh Parivar with some networks of "indigenous religions" at the global level. The World Council of Ethnic Religions (WCER), for example, an organization devoted to promote exchange and solidarity between non-Abrahamic religions (such as forms of neo-paganism and indigenous

traditions), presented the same ambiguity: on the one side, it hosted among its most vocal members a figure such as Koenraad Elst, the famous Hindutva enthusiast from Belgium whose writings inspired Anders Breivik's attacks in Norway (Nanda 2011), on the other, it also functioned as an arena of expression for European neo-pagans that, though looking with nostalgia at the pre-Christian past of their region, did not share the violent anti-Christian and anti-Muslim sentiment that characterized some WCER meetings (Srtmiska 2012). Perhaps because of this lack of consensus on its agenda, the organization is now defunct, being replaced by ECER (European Congress of Ethnic Religions) a new entity that, nonetheless, has not completely severed its ties with Hindutva. In fact, the ECER website mentions with appreciation an "International Conference Gathering of the Elders of Ancient Traditions and Culture" that was presided by none other than Mohan Bhagwat, the *sarsanghcalak* of the RSS,<sup>133</sup> for an International Center for Cultural Studies (ICCS) founded in Nagpur in 1994 to promote Hindu-pagan networking and exchange. Understanding which ideas of religious kinship, citizenship, and global history are constituted at the intersection of the Hindu-neopagan interface would require further research on the social and historical imaginary that these organizations promote, a task all the more important considering the risks that an exclusionary worldview based on forms of religious-ethnic nationalism would entail for contemporary Europe.

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<sup>133</sup> <http://ecer-org.eu/report-of-the-4th-international-conference-gathering-of-the-elders-of-ancient-traditions-and-cultures/>

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