outdoor patient counters, transport ambulance service when distances are great and journey difficult.

8. A counselling programme may be introduced to advise the aged employees how to adjust themselves in their changed circumstances.

9. NGOs should be encouraged by every means when they wish to help eradicate problems of ageing in Nepal.

10. Social security planning must immediately be done.

References


place, a group’s tradition (Sanskrit and Nep. Parampara), more or less constantly, shapes the religious attitude and behaviour of its members.

From the viewpoint of form, religious tradition is a Continuum of belief, knowledge, practices and skills of a group which is called Parampara by the Hindus, Buddhists and Jainas (2). It undergoes changes and developments due to the influence of external (historical and environmental) factors and of the human actors. It is determined by the psycho-social character (ethos) of the ethnic or social unit, too. From the viewpoint of content, religious tradition is the treasure containing the original intuitions (religious experience) and their theoretical (weltanschauung, doctrines, ethics...) as well as practical (cultus) expressions.

Hinduism, Buddhism and many ethnic traditions (Nep. Loka-parampara) are so complexly interwoven in the central Himalayan region that any intellectual inquiry relying only upon the classical study or upon petty ethnography is bound to mislead; or, at most, it may offer only a partial and fragmented picture of the reality. Empirical study of the cultic practices of smaller social units (e.g. family, clan, caste group, ethnic, community-settlement or Basti etc.) should not be neglected while focussing on the over all religious tradition. The ground reality in Nepal and elsewhere in and around the Himalayan region demands a new, interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion. I would insist on the combination of classical scholarship with anthropological investigations.

A common Nepalese home religiousus lives a pluricentric religious life. Each family has its exclusive cult shared by all the members known as Kula-Davata (deity of the lineage). Some caste groups (e.g. Kami) have their own specific cult along with that of lineage which is supposed to be the tutelar and guiding deity (e.g. Vishvakarma of the Kami or blacksmiths). Each compact territory, where diverse communities have settled, has its own local cult shared by all the families, caste groups, individuals and

ethnoses despite their differences in other cults and even in their racial or ethnic belonging. Each ethnic group has its own tradition and major cults of tutelar deities, ancestors, primordial preceptors etc. (3). Most interesting of all, it is very common to find individual persons being specifically devoted to a particular deity or superhuman entity of his/her choice. Alongside the cults of family, caste, locality (Basti), ethos and classical pantheon, one chooses a god or goddess or a superhuman entity or even a group of such entities for his/her private and intimate worship. Such cults are called Ishita Devata (‘friend god’) (4).

The exclusive cults of smaller units (family, caste, ethnios, locality) help to maintain cohesion, identity and the “little’ traditions within the broad frame of the Himalayan sub-civilization. The cults of locality or community-settlement (Basti) provide the meeting ground for the peoples of diverse ethnolinguistic origins, different families and caste groups. The intimate cults of individual persons facilitate mystico-contemplative realization of the singles. The contemporaneity of all these cults is the unique feature of the religious culture of Nepalese people. The larger Hindu (in some areas, Buddhist) identity is not an exclusive and substantial reality of a certain group or of a certain majority in the Nepalese context. Especially, the Hindu identity is that broad frame of reference which links all the indigenous cults and insulates the whole, but it does neither completely unite nor create a common or unique ‘type’.

Most varied traditions have been combined in the formation of Nepalese religious culture which is unique and perhaps one of the rarest examples of ethno-religious pluralism. Majority of the people observe a complex, syntetic and highly localized religicuity rather than a religion in the conventional sense. The magico-religious tradition of the Nepalese majority, rural households with agro-pastoral occupation, has been also called “popular Hinduism”. Magical and shamanic elements of many ethnic traditions (provenient from Tibeto-Burmese ethnolinguistic origins and, in some details, akin to those of central
and northern Asian people) have been blended with the classical Hindu/Buddhist (i.e. Indo-Aryan) traditions.

Local natural environment has played dual role in the religious history of Nepal. First, it has relatively isolated Nepal from the rest of Indian subcontinent and thus spared the alteration in its spiritual and intellectual climate, unlike in India, due to alien subjugation and pressures. Second, it has helped in binding different magico-religious elements and shaping the overall character of the ethnoses living within the Himalayan environment.

A distinct organic spirituality reflected through the cosmobiological symbolism (animals, plants, rivers, mountains, etc.) is to be found commonly among all ethnoses and groups despite many differences. Except the Muslims, a few Christians and Theravada Buddhists, all socio-religious groups in Nepal (the Hindus, Mahayani and Vajrayani Buddhists, and all ethnic traditional groups) have cosmobiological symbolism referring constantly to the natural elements characteristic of the Himalayan area. These "indigenous" groups share many symbols and refer to the same elements found in the local physical environment. It is obvious that a long process of adaptation (amongst the cultures in the common environment, and between the single cultures and the environment) has been traversed by these groups.

There are also groups and traditions which have not developed within the local eco-system. These have not undergone the long process of adaptation within a specific and distinct natural environment like that of Himalaya. Therefore, these groups maintain a more or less clearly visible separation from all the "indigenous" groups and traditions. Such extra-indigenous traditions do not possess equally vigorous cosmobiological symbolism referring to the natural elements found in the local physical environment. Their symbolism is more of an ethico-personalistic type (5). They refer to celestial, non-immergent and non-figurative reality without any link to the local environment. The Muslims (2.7% of the population, originally immigrants from the Indian plains), the Christians (around 30,000, immigrants, expatriates and a few neo-converts of which the majority belonging to several Protestant churches), and the Theravada Buddhists (exact figure unknown, recently introduced in Nepal) are the extra-indigenous groups in Nepal: it is also noteworthy that almost all of them are concentrated in the urban areas.

According to the official sources, Hinduism (obviously, including most of the ethnic traditions of the Himalayan mid-lands and plains) is practiced by the majority (89.5%) Buddhism (5.3%), Islam (2.7%), Jainism (0.1%) and others (2.4%) are also said to be the religious traditions practiced by the Nepalese populace (6). These data are seriously questioned by many as not only too inaccurate but also tendentious. Many ethnoses, Buddhists and the Jainas share the popular Hindu cults (e.g. Siya, Vishnu, Sakti, Ganesh, Dhaitya etc.). It is being objected that the cultic commonness has led to the inclusion of many socio-religious groups within the category "Hindu" while actually not being "Hindu" strictly (7).

Religion of the State

Nepal has been big or small, compact or fragmented, in different historical periods (8). The last unification process undertaken by the Gorkhali King Prithvi Narayan in mid-19th century, was the decisive one. It brought together many different ethnoses and territories never accomplished by any other central power in the Himalayas before. The Gorkhali unification was a politico-military annexation of a number of peoples and lands along the central mountains, valleys and hills of the Himalayan region. It was a forceful defensive insulation of a multi-ethnic area aimed to avert the subjugation by the then alien "high" powers (i.e. India-based Muslims and British).

The Gorkhali conquerors were not people of a single ethnic/ caste group but the Gorkhali elites, i.e. Brahmins and Kshatriyas (Nep. Bahun-Chhetri), were a distinctly Indo-Aryan
ethnos and orthodox Hindus (9). So were most of the conque-
red rulers of all those reigns in the Himalayas, including the
Malla kings of Kathmandu valley. The Gorkhali campaign had
nothing to do with the so-called "Hindulization" or "Sanskriti-
zation". The Hindu factor did not dictate internal politico-mili-
tary process but it played the central role in mobilizing all
Nepal's indigenous groups against the waves of Muslim and
Western conquests which have done so much to alter the spiri-
tual and intellectual climate of the Indian subcontinent. Due to
the Gorkhali politico-military shrewdness, favoured by its
geographical position, Nepal has been the only country of what
one might call "South Asia left to herself, to preserve and de-
top the tendencies inherent in the region, its cultures and
religions..." (10).

Numerous ethnic traditions lived together, interacted and
underwent changes following their contacts with the others
and having been insulated by the Hindu regimes. What has been
existing in Nepal can be called a multilateral interactive sys-
tem of ethno-social organizations. Present-day Nepal's nation-
state is a formalized political version of that system. The pro-
cess of formalization was initiated even before the Gorkhali
conquest, by the earlier Hindu regimes. The Gorkhali unification
fortified that. Gradually, effective centralization of power and
subsequent projection of a distinct nationhood started to take
place by the end of last century and proceeded throughout this
century. It has been always accompanied by the Hindu identity
of the region which left each ethno-religious group to undergo
its own course freely. The projection of Hindu nation-state has
also been a result of the historical compulsion of self-legitimacy
by a small power (Nepal) vis-à-vis its own heterogeneous subjects (11).

After the recent political change, the new constitution of
the Kingdom of Nepal has re-affirmed its Hindu character; 
Nepal's state is declared to be a Hindu state (12). Unlike in
the past, many raised their voices in opposition to the Hindu
state. Among the dissenting voices, the most prominent were
the neo-Buddhist groups based in the urban areas and the
far left political circles.

According to the constitutional provision, Hindu festivities
are national, Hindu sacred places (also the Buddhist ones) are
national patrimony and the Hindu culture is to be promoted and
safeguarded by the state. The religious minorities are free to
profess and practice their own cult, but propagation of their
faith and conversion of the others is strictly prohibited (13). This
 provision does not make any difference to the majority Hindu
and Buddhists who do not practice propagation and conversion
of the others; but it is bound to antagonize the Muslim and
christian minorities for whom propagation and conversion are
doctrinally sanctioned and pious acts. The ultra-democrats and
the far leftists of Nepal consider this to be a limitation imposed
upon the fundamental human rights, or a clean chit to the feudal
residues. Nevertheless, vast majority of the people and politi-
canalysts defend the Hindu state. For the rest, who can say
what would have been the inter-ethnic and inter-communal sit-
sation in Nepal today if the strictly monotheistic and exclusivist
Islam or Christianity or rigidly ethical Theravada Buddhism were
to be the dominant force instead of the all-inclusive, permissive,
shapeless and centreless Hinduism?

Note and References:

(1) See J. wach, Sociology of Religion, Univ. of Chicago, 1971
(12th). pp. 54 . f f, for the "Natural" grouping.

(2) "Tradition" in the Nepalese context is derived from the Sans-
krut original term Parampara which means "uninterrupted
series", "due arrangement in succession".

(3) The cult of Garapa Baba among the Magars (a group in mid-
western and western hills of Nepal, belonging to the
The cult of *Buddha Suhha* among the *Kiratis* (a larger ethnic group inhabiting eastern hills, belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic family) are two widely known examples. Even the people of other ethnic/caste venerate these patron deities if they happen to live in the same area.

(4) An *Ishta Deva* is “handpicked” by an individual at any moment of his/her life under the influence of others or following his/her own “special” experience (dreams, events, visions, etc.). The cult may coincide with the family or group cults, but usually it is a separate and parallel cult. It is not contraposable to any other cult, i.e., of the family, group or locality. An individual may “choose” a cult of an ethnic group or locality other than his/her own.

(5) In my “Il mondo della maschera: saggio antropologico Sul Simbolismo magico-religioso della maschera,” ECDP-HeLiopolis, 1988, part III, a detailed discussion on the cosmo-biological and ethico-personalistic symbolisms has been attempted.


(7) Most of the traditional Nepalese refer to Buddhism as *Buddha marga* (“Buddha’s way”), as one among many other “ways” such as *Saka Marga* (*Sivite Way*), *Vaishnava Marga* (following Vishnu) and so on. Nobody in the past conceived the religious tradition in terms of “religion”, “Hinduism”, “Buddhism”, “Jainism”, “ethnic” etc. Only the foreigners, subsequently, the native moderns (the “educated” ones) have started to use such terms and categories in the last few decades. This certainly has an adverse impact upon the socio-religious equilibrium. The protest by neo-Buddhist and ethno-political organizations, in the recent period, against the Hindu state is closely linked with the insertion and permanence of such “new” social terms and categories.

(8) The kingdoms of *Kirati* (900 B.C. – 200 A.D.) and of *Licchvi* (200 A.D. – 800 A.D.) were stretched well beyond the valley of Kathmandu and Bagmati river basin.

(9) The term *Gorkhali* (meaning “those of Gorkha”) originally denoted only the inhabitants of Gorkha, a small hill reign in the central Nepal from where the Nepalese unification campaign was launched. Later all the peoples of central midlands, who contributed in the campaign, were known as *Gorkhali*. They were *Baha Chhetri* (orthodox Hindus and Indo-Aryan ethnics), *Gurung, Maghar, GhaTi, Gharti* etc. (Tibeto-Burmese ethno-linguistic groups loosely connected with the Hindu archipelago); and, *Sarki* (coppers), *DamaI* (tailors) and *Kami* (blacksmiths) – all of these occupational castes are Indo-Aryan ethnics practicing Hinduism.


(11) See, R. Burghart, The Formation of the Conceptual Nation-State in Nepal, in: *JOURNAL OF ASIAN STUDIES*, vol.XLIV, no. 1, 1984, pp. 191-125, for detailed discussion. Majority of the citizens of the Republic of India are Hindu whose support to any regime in Nepal is crucial. The Hindu elites of India have always cherished the Hindu state in Nepal since India is a secular and “free-for-all” country while Nepal is the only Hindu country in the world.

(12) Despite a long debate among the protagonists of the recently and successfully organized popular revolt against the absolute monarchy, at the end almost all agreed to maintain the Hindu state. The Hindu state was declared by late King Mahendra (father of the present monarch) in 1962. That move served two political purposes: first, a tacit legitimacy was obtained from the India rulers who were not very happy with the late king for his abrupt dissolution of the parliamentary multi-party system; second, the quiet and conservative people of Nepal were appeased by recognizing explicitly their religious tradition even at the political levels. Through the traditionalist move, the then king secured
political vantage. The new democratic leadership, which humili­lated the monarchy recently (Spring 1990), however, continued with Hindu state while curbing almost all the political powers of the king. See, Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047, 1990, part I, art. 4: 1.


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