

Ethnicity, Kinship, Religion and Territory: Identifying Communities in South Asia

by Mark Pickett

This article focuses on the question of social organisation in South Asia, where the social system of caste makes the enumeration of people groups a highly complex task. Uniquely, in this continent, the demarcation of groups for mission purposes has given as much weight to barriers of acceptance as to barriers of understanding. But what principles have we used to determine a barrier of acceptance? Conventionally, kinship is regarded as being the most significant principle. Ethnicity and religion are also considered significant, but territory or the actual locality of a people is not. I wish to approach this issue by examining the Newar people who are the traditional inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley and in particular one Newar caste. This analysis of caste in a city of Nepal will expose the inadequacies of our typical approach to identifying peoples, and should make us more aware of the significance of territory and intercaste relations.

When our Lord commissioned his followers to make disciples they were to do that with regard to social organisation: they were to make disciples of the *nations* (Matt 28:18-19).¹ The way we define nations (Gk. *ethnē*) has a huge impact on the way we distinguish unreached people groups (UPGs) and may have a dramatic effect on the way we approach strategies to reach them. Although I think it is possible to over-emphasize UPGs, it is, nevertheless, important we get our sociology right on this issue.² To be inaccurate and imprecise is to lead to great differences in the way resources are allocated and churches are formed.

But how do we classify those groups? Is it possible for an individual to be a member of more than one group at a time? What is the relationship between such groups?³

Categorizing the Peoples of South Asia

In South Asia the sociological phenomenon of caste has been a particularly thorny one.⁴ In 2010 at the “Global Mission Consultation and Celebration:

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From Edinburgh to Tokyo,” a group of those working in the Hindu world acknowledged the ongoing “complexity of caste matters.” It is commonplace, in fact, among missiologists to regard the myriad of different societal units, usually referred to in English as “castes,” as discreet people groups, the vast majority of whom are unreached.⁵

Joshua Project (JP) uses two distinct principles for listing people groups.⁶ Outside South Asia, the ethnolinguistic principle is the only way people groups are distinguished on the assumption that *understanding* is the most significant barrier to the establishment of a church planting movement.⁷ Within South Asia, however, different principles are applied on the assumption that *acceptance* is the most significant barrier to the spread of the gospel, particularly when considering church planting movements (CPM).⁸ The difficulty that JP has with caste is demonstrated by the imprecise nature of the principle of acceptance. In one place “culture, religion and caste” are used in contradistinction to language.⁹ In another place in the same article caste community is mentioned alone. The writer asserts that “this is how people in this part of the world self-identify at the deepest level.”¹⁰

In another article on the JP web site, Luis Bush reported on the work of Indian members of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement, particularly that of Raju Abraham. Working with the data provided by the Anthropological Survey of India, the Indian members of the movement concluded that peoples of South Asia should be defined according to three or four characteristics: 1) they only marry among themselves (endogamy); 2) they see themselves as distinct from others; 3) others identify them as being distinctive; and 4) they share similar customs, food and dress.¹¹

Of the four characteristics delineated by Raju Abraham, the second and third are entirely subjective (in different

ways) and the fourth is as vague and fuzzy a criterion as one could possibly imagine, rendering it completely impracticable. Only the first, caste endogamy (i.e., the marriage circle), gives us the slightest hope of bringing clarity to the task. Indeed, this is what the Anthropological Survey of India argues, but I wish to demonstrate that even this criterion is problematic.¹²

For the Joshua Project, leaning on the definition of the AD2000 and Beyond movement, endogamy is the defining criterion of identity and therefore should be used as the primary principle in constructing a list of South Asian peoples. Accordingly, JP lists 2,599 people groups in India (3,487 in South Asia as a whole).¹³ In another article



on the JP web site (adapted from Bill Morrison), Luis Bush argues that the peoples of South Asia (identified as endogamous castes according to JP criteria) are further sub-divided by language, as such groups are often spread across language boundaries. According to this logic, the number of people groups is much higher, and consequently the need for engagement with the unreached in South Asia is much greater than it would otherwise seem.¹⁴

For the Joshua Project, then, endogamy is the primary principle in use for the categorization of South Asian peoples, with language constituting a secondary principle.¹⁵ But is such fragmentary analysis of South Asian

societies the best way to approach the task of identifying people groups for the purpose of church planting? The people group concept grew largely out of reflection on communities that were isolated and plainly distinct from those of their nearest neighbours.¹⁶ In India they are the *adivasis*, or “Scheduled Tribes.” These communities are usually distinct in multiple ways: they often occupy a distinct territory (often in hill country or forest), speak a distinct language, and follow their own distinct religion and culture. However, most societal groups of South Asia do not have such a distinct character.¹⁷ Most such groups, including both peasant and urban communities (often one and the same), live side-by-side with other groups, interacting with each other in complex ways.¹⁸

Understanding Caste

Probably the most complex social setting of the planet is that of South Asia, and sociologists have argued over its precise interpretation for decades. South Asian society, though modified and transformed by South Asia’s contact with modernity, still maintains much of its unique complexity, which is almost universally referred to as the caste system.

In the analysis of caste, we must begin by carefully choosing our terms. The English word caste comes from the Portuguese for “species”—*castas*. It has been argued, by some, that the use of such a foreign term prejudices the inquiry before we begin. They have called, therefore, for an abandonment of the word in favour of indigenous terms such as *jāti* and *varna*.¹⁹ There has been much argument over the relation of the terms *jāt/jāti* with *varna*. It is clear that the terms are not synonymous as there are no substantive caste groups that can be properly categorized as *varna*.²⁰

Caste society is usually looked at (by both foreign observers and many South Asians themselves) as essentially

a system of hierarchy, with Brahman Priest²¹ at the top and Untouchable Sweeper (Dalit) at the bottom.²² This approach to caste leads to an inevitable judgment on the caste system as being essentially prejudiced.²³ A careful look at the internal structure and intercaste relations of a group called the Pengu Dah in Nepal demonstrates, however, that certain assumptions about caste do not make sense of the ethnographic realities of Hindu communities. Any astute analysis of intercaste relations will significantly challenge the conventional wisdom on gospel work in this South Asian environment.²⁴ It is for such an analysis I now turn to a study of identity among the Newar people.

The Newars of Nepal

The modern state of Nepal is a landlocked country of twenty-nine million inhabitants sandwiched between the giants of India and China (Tibet). The Kathmandu Valley is a large fertile bowl situated at 1,350 metres (4,400 feet) in the middle hills of Nepal. The cities of the Valley gained wealth and prestige by their strategic location on the ancient trade routes between the North Indian plains and the Tibetan plateau. This led to the early flowering of an artistic, urban culture with a complex social system. The Newars are the descendants of those who created this culture.

The old cities of the Kathmandu Valley are models of compact settlement. As with all Newar settlements, though the cities are home to many farmers, they characteristically live in close proximity to each other and at some distance from their fields. Newar cities, then, are densely populated.²⁵ Lalitpur, one of these cities, is a most heterogeneous community of around 80,000 inhabitants.²⁶ Although a part of the modern nation state of Nepal, it still maintains many rituals that hark back to the days of the Malla kings (13th to 18th centuries AD/CE) and before, when the city was the centre of its own thriving kingdom. To some extent it

In defining the Newar, the principle that is usually invoked is that of language. This proves problematic as not all Newars speak the Newar language.

can be said that the social order of the city is hardly changed.

Four Principles for Establishing Newar Identities

In extending our discussion of South Asian people groups, we can expect the use of various principles to distinguish one group from another. I want to look at four principles that apply to the Newars and, in particular, to one endogamous Newar caste, the Pengu Dah. Two of these principles, I will argue, are weak and two are strong.

Ethnicity

The traditional heartland of the Newar (a.k.a. Newah) is the Kathmandu Valley situated in the foothills of the Himalaya. According to the latest published figures, the Newars total 1,245,232 or 5.6% of the population of the country.²⁷ The Newars occupy a unique place in the ethnic matrix of the country, and for the most part the identity of Newars is uncontested. But the question of how to *define* a Newar is a pressing one since no distinctive religion, festival or rituals are universally observed by them. The principle that is usually invoked is that of language, but that proves problematic as not all Newars speak the Newar language. Though they identify as Newars, large numbers have taken to speaking the national language, Nepali, especially those who have migrated to other areas of the country for trade.

The Newar language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and demonstrates an affinity with the languages of other groups along the foothills of the Himalaya that have migrated from the east in ancient times.²⁸ Most other aspects of Newar culture, however, have a strong South Asian affinity with peoples to the south, indicated by

their many loan words derived from Sanskrit. Due to these complexities, the Newars do not easily fit into any of Nepal's major societal divisions.

The dominant group of modern Nepal is that of the Indo-Nepalese Parbatiyā community, who make up 38% of the total population.²⁹ These are native speakers of the Indo-European Nepali language, and are descendants, at least to a large degree, of people who migrated to the Himalayan foothills from the south and west. Sociologically, therefore, the Parbatiyā are considered the majority community, the "nation" as opposed to the minority "ethnic groups." The Parbatiyā are divided into a simple caste system, with most lineages claiming upper-caste pedigree, Chetri (Kshatriya) or Bahun (Brahman). At the bottom of this system are a few small Dalit castes (formerly known as Untouchables).

The Madhesi groups of the Tarai (on the plains of Nepal contiguous with the plains of India), are distinct from the Parbatiya, and are divided into many more castes. They also demonstrate a kinship with groups over the border in India with whom they continue to maintain marriage relations.

A third major division of Nepalese society is that of the tribes speaking Tibeto-Burman languages from the middle hills. Unlike either the Parbatiyā or the Tarai groups, these tribes do not have a developed hierarchical social system but tend to be more egalitarian.

The Newars do not really belong clearly to any of these three major societal divisions. Though Newar language is Tibeto-Burman, their social structure is hierarchical and South Asian. But their hierarchical social structure is not equivalent to that of their traditional

near neighbours, the Parbatiyā. At first glance, they have the appearance of an ethnic group. The observant visitor becomes aware, however, that Newar society (if we can call it that) is characterized by great social and cultural diversity, quite unlike an ethnic group.

Studies of ethnicity have demonstrated that the phenomenon is essentially subjective.³⁰ The members of a group may conceive of themselves as constituting an ethnic group even though there is no such objective “reality.” Ethnicity, therefore, is relational in that “it is the outcome of an interplay between self-assessment and outside-assessment.”³¹ Curiously, however, for the Newar population as a whole, the sense of Newar ethnicity always seems to have been relatively weak.

I have concluded, on linguistic, cultural, and historical grounds, that the Newars constitute a people who originated in a migration of Tibeto-Burman speakers from the east, who settled in the fertile Kathmandu Valley.³² This population was augmented over the millennia by a regular influx of migrants from the south, who brought South Asian (Indic) culture and languages with them, to greatly modify the culture and language of the original settlers. At some point, however (and probably long before the Newars were absorbed into the modern nation state of Nepal in 1768–69), some of the new arrivals were not accepted as part of the Newar society. They were forced to live outside the city confines and had to beg and clean toilets to make a living. The quarters of these “Untouchables” can still be found today, but they may or may not be ethnically distinct. Though belonging to Newar society in the widest sense, their identity, from the point of view of the general Newar population, is still considered to be that of the outsider.³³ Furthermore, it is apparent that, far from being a throwback to some primordial self-assessment, Newar ethnic identity is one that has *grown* with the impact of modernity.³⁴

Not only has national identity in Nepal begun to lose ground to the competing claims of ethnic communities, but some of these groups, till now seen as monolithic, have begun to express just how little sense of community they feel and maintain. Among the Newars, as in India, intercaste relations have declined; but, intracaste solidarity has actually increased so one finds organised bodies representing many pan-Newar caste groups, thus emphasizing the significance of sub-groups rather than the Newar group as a whole.³⁵

Until recently, in fact, the principle of ethnicity has not really been significant to the Newars themselves in determining identity.³⁶ The inclusion of the Newars as a single ethnic group in the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities suggests that the JP identification of the Newars of Nepal as a single group is not entirely unwarranted.³⁷ The construction of Newar ethnic identity is, however, a recent phenomenon whose significance can mask other, more important principles to which I will now turn.

Kinship

Newar society demonstrates many of the features found in other caste Hindu societies throughout South Asia.³⁸ These include mutually endogamous castes and an interdependence of the castes for ritual and economic services. The centrality of the king and

the dominant caste (not a political reality at present, but still economically and ritually important) is another important feature that is beyond the scope of this paper but which I have dealt with in detail elsewhere.³⁹

Kinship is the most significant principle of social identification for people in South Asia. This becomes apparent with careful analysis of ethnographic work. I spent a number of years researching a little-known caste of artisans who call themselves the Pengu Dah (lit. Four Groups) in the city of Lalitpur, Nepal.⁴⁰ The Pengu Dah constitute a non-dominant Newar artisan caste. For the most part, they provide no ritual services to other castes, but the crafts for which they are justly famous are an important aspect of Newar culture.

When one asks a Newar to identify his caste his answer is always in terms of kinship.⁴¹ A Coppersmith, then, would immediately reply that he is a *Tāmrakār* (by far the most common surname, or *thar*, of the Coppersmiths) even if he no longer works copper himself.⁴² The phrase Pengu Dah simply means “The Four Groups” that happen to be Coppersmiths, Sweetmakers, Stonemasons and Carpenters.⁴³ A Coppersmith, then, or a Carpenter, would always identify himself by his *thar* (Table 1, below). He will not say that he is a member of the Pengu Dah.⁴⁴

Table 1. The Composition of the Pengu Dah

traditional occupation		coppersmiths	stonemasons (now wood carvers)	carpenters		sweetmakers
<i>thar</i>	honorific	<i>Tāmrakār</i>	<i>Shilpakār</i>	<i>Sthāpīt</i>	<i>Bārāhi</i>	<i>Rājkarṇikār</i>
	colloquial	<i>Tamvah</i>	<i>Lwahākahmi</i>	<i>Sikahmi</i>		<i>Marikahmi</i>

Table 2. Castes of Lalitpur

Thars are italicized. Traditional marriage circles (endogamous units) are in bold type. English equivalents are capitalised in keeping with South Asianist protocol. Note: The castes are listed according to the English alphabet at this point because to do otherwise would be to accept certain and, I believe, false, presuppositions about the caste system.

Bhatta: Brahman Priests at Shankamul temple

Carmakār (Kulu/Kul): Drum makers

Citrakār (Pū): Painters

Cyāmkhalah (Cyāme): Sweepers

Dyahlā (Pwah/Pwarya; Np. Pode): Sweepers, Fishermen

Kāpāli/Darsandhari (Jogi; Np. Kusle): Musicians, death specialists

Kāpāli/Darsandhari (Jogi; Np. Kusle): Tailors/muhāli (shawm) players, death specialists

Vādyakār/Bādikār (Dom/Dwā): Drummers, vegetable and curio sellers

Karamjīt (Bhāh): Mahābrāhman death specialists

Khadgi/Shāhi (Nay; Np. Kasai): Butchers and milk sellers, drummers

Maharjan (Jyāpu): (Like the Shresthas this, the largest caste, is not uniform)

Awāle (Kumhah): Potters and Farmers

Dāgol (Jyāpu): Farmers

Maharjan (Jyāpu): Farmers

Māli/Mālākār (Gathu): Gardeners

Mishra: Brahman temple Priests

Nakahmi/Lohakār (Kau): Blacksmiths

Nāpīt (Nau): Barbers

Pengu Dah (here I list the colloquial title first to avoid confusion)

Lwahākahmi (Shilpakār/Shilākār): Stonemasons, now mostly wood carvers

Marikahmi (Rājikarnikār/Halawāi/Haluwāi): Sweetmakers

Sikahmi (Bārāhi/Sthāpīt/Kāsthakār/Shilpakār/Sikahmi): Carpenters; chariot (*ratha*) builders (*Bārāhi*)

Tamvah (Tāmrakār/Tamot): Coppersmiths

Rajaka (Dhubya/Dhobi): Washermen

Rājopādhyāya (Bramhu/Dyahbhāju): Brahman domestic and temple Priests

Ranjitkār (Chipa): Dyers

Shrestha (Shesyah): Landowners, government ministers, civil servants and merchants

Amātya (Mahāju): Ministers

Joshi: Astrologers

Karmācārya (Acāhju): Shaivite Tantric priests; some internal division

Malla: descendants of Malla kings

Pradhān (Pahmay): Government Ministers

Rājbandāri (Bhani): Royal Storekeepers

Shrestha (Shesyah): Landowners, businessmen

Vaidya: Ayurvedic physicians

Tandukār (Khusah): Farmers, musicians

Vajracārya/Shākya

Shākya (Bare): Goldsmiths

Vajracārya (Gubhāju): Buddhist Priests

Vyanjankār (Tepay): Market Gardeners, farmers

By and large, Newars will use the vernacular identifier in reference to a member of a particular thar, e.g., Jyāpu of a Farmer, but prefer to use the Sanskrit title in address, in this case Maharjan or Dāgol (see Table 2 on the previous page).⁴⁵ In the case of the Pengu Dah (in which the four groups are four thars), the members of any one thar may have any of three or four different surnames. For the purposes of analysis, therefore, I have resorted, for the most part, to the vernacular in each case.

For a Newar, as for other South Asians, kinship is the most significant principle of identification. It is not the work of carpentry or the building of ritual chariots, therefore, that makes a person a Bārāhi—it is his identity as one of the kinship group that builds the chariot. Occupation is not the central issue—it is *relation*.⁴⁶ Lineage names are often a good way to establish an individual’s identity. Such names as Pwāhsyāh (Stomachache), Kwah (Crow), and Khica (Dog) are specific and easily verifiable. The Pengu Dah of Lalitpur, like most Newar castes, constitute an endogamous group in which the various lineages contract marriages between each other isogamously (i.e. between equals).⁴⁷

Relations between Newar castes, as in other caste societies, have been characterized as constituting a patron-client system. The relation between a patron and client in South Asia has traditionally been labelled a *jajmāni* relation. Such patron-client relations have been observed in many varied ethnographic settings, being first described by the American Presbyterian missionary William Wiser in 1936.⁴⁸ Patron-client relations in Newar society persist to this day even though the economic interdependency typically reflected by those relationships is a mere shadow of its former self.

The precise characteristics of a household’s *jajmāni* relations (which caste representatives are called to provide

ritual services) tell us very little of the household’s caste. For example, sometimes a family or lineage may change from calling for the services of a Vajrācārya Buddhist domestic priest to calling for a Brahman priest in performing life-cycle rituals. Such a change makes no difference to the beliefs of the household or to the marital prospects of that household’s daughters or sons, and the family is not thought to have converted or abandoned their caste. This is an important point as the significance of ideology, or what outsiders usually call “religion,” in the analysis of caste systems has, in my view, often been overrated.⁴⁹

There are two boundary markers, however, that *are* significant. Among the Newars, the so-called “Water line” is one of them. Those belonging to “clean” castes will not accept water from those below it.⁵⁰

Furthermore, traditionally the criterion of touch was the most basic division of the caste system. For older persons this continues to be very important. The Cyāmkhālāh and Dyahlā are considered polluting by all the other castes if they come into physical contact. Some castes (four in Lalitpur) are considered unclean, but not untouchable, by the majority of other castes who consider themselves clean. So a Maharjan, for instance, would not accept a cup of water from a Khadgi, but they would not consider themselves polluted merely by touch.⁵¹

Newar communities, therefore, can be divided into three significant groups according to considerations of ritual purity (Table 3, this page).⁵² It seems to me that these divisions are far more significant barriers to the spread of the gospel than others such as barriers to intermarriage or commensal relations (eating boiled rice together). The close proximity of the Newar people to each other presents little problem of physical distance. But barriers of ritual purity, often expressed territorially (most “unclean” and “untouchable” castes live in

their own neighbourhoods) mean that Newars on either side of those barriers have little meaningful social contact. This is as true between the “lower” groups as it is between them and those considered higher. This means that

Table 3. Major Divisions in Newar Society

<p>Touchable Clean (water-acceptable)</p> <p><i>Bhatta</i>: Brahman Priests at Shankamul temple</p> <p><i>Citrakār (Pā)</i>: Painters</p> <p><i>Karamjit (Bhāh)</i>: Mahābrāhman death specialists</p> <p>Maharjan (Jyāpu): Farmers</p> <p><i>Māli/Mālākār (Gathu)</i>: Gardeners</p> <p><i>Mishra</i>: Brahman temple Priests</p> <p><i>Nakahmi/Lohakār (Kau)</i>: Blacksmiths</p> <p><i>Nāpit (Nau)</i>: Barbers</p> <p>Pengu Dah: Artisans</p> <p><i>Rājopādhyāya (Bramhu/Dyahbhāju)</i>: Brahman domestic and temple Priests</p> <p><i>Ranjitkār (Chipa)</i>: Dyers</p> <p>Shrestha (Shesyah): Landowners, government ministers, civil servants and merchants</p> <p><i>Tandukār (Khusah)</i>: Farmers, musicians</p> <p>Vajrācārya/Shākya</p> <p><i>Vyanjānkār (Tepay)</i>: Market Gardeners, farmers</p>
<p>Touchable Unclean (water-not-acceptable)</p> <p><i>Carmakār (Kulu/Kul)</i>: Drum makers</p> <p><i>Kāpāli/Darsandhari (Jogi; Np. Kusle)</i>: Musicians, death specialists</p> <p><i>Khadgi/Shāhi (Nay; Np. Kasai)</i>: Butchers and milk sellers, drummers</p> <p><i>Rajaka (Dhubya/Dhobi)</i>: Washermen</p>
<p>Untouchable Unclean (water-not-acceptable)</p> <p><i>Cyāmkhālāh (Cyāme)</i>: Sweepers</p> <p><i>Dyahlā (Pwah/Pwarya; Np. Pode)</i>: Sweepers, Fishermen</p> <p><i>Dyahlā (Pwah/Pwarya; Np. Pode)</i>: Sweepers, Fishermen</p>

Khadgi Butchers, for example, would not normally have social interaction with other “unclean” castes. (Refer to Figure 1 below.)

Religious Tradition

Broadly speaking, Newars can be divided into two main religious traditions according to the orientation of their domestic priest (*purohit*).⁵³ Those that call the Buddhist Vajracarya priest to perform life-cycle rituals are termed *buddhamargi* (<Skt. *mārg*, way) while those who call a Brahman priest are *shivamargi*.⁵⁴ For most Newars, however, this distinction is hardly significant. It is not relevant to marriage or to commensality, nor does it bar anyone from participating in any festival. Among the endogamous

group of the Pengu Dah some lineages call the Brahman priest for life-cycle rituals and others the Vajracarya. For this reason a new bride may have to adjust to some differences in religious practice, if say her natal home called a Brahman priest but her marital home calls a Vajracarya.⁵⁵

The designation “Hindu,” then, is more useful as a *structural*, not a philosophical or “religious” term. Hindu people are those who live in a society that is structured according to kinship and kingship, i.e. the caste system. Religious tradition in itself, then, is not a barrier to social interaction; not even to intermarriage or commensality. They may worship Shiva, Krishna, the bodhisattva (Buddhist saint) Avalokitesvara, or even become devotees of

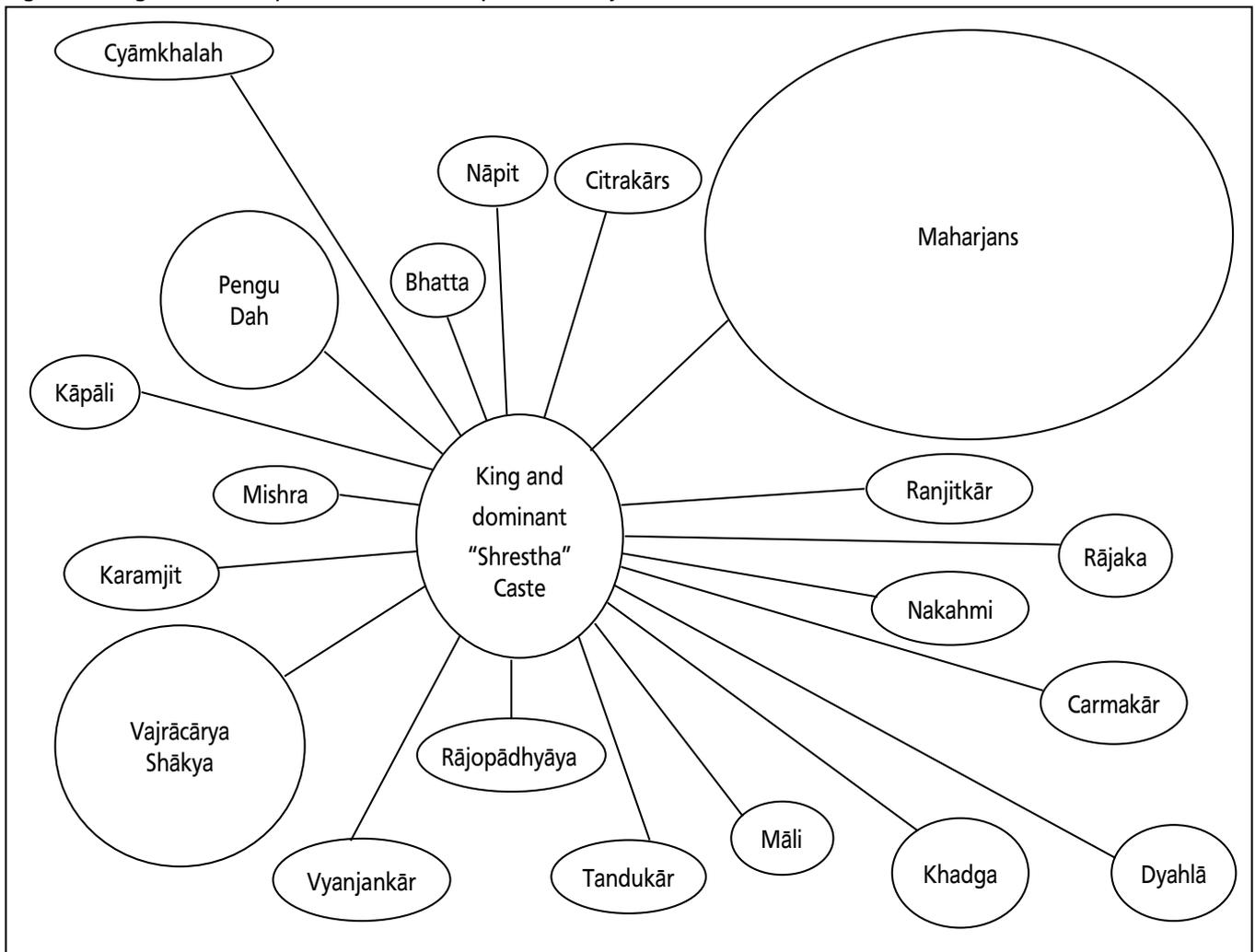
Yesu (Jesus) but no social rupture is inevitable.⁵⁶ Religious tradition, then, is a weak principle when it comes to Hindu identity. This is profoundly in conflict with the way that Hinduism is usually understood and has significant consequences for evangelism and church planting.⁵⁷ But there is yet one more principle that is significant in the determination of a Newar’s identity.

Territory

Much of the daily life of the Newar is lived within his urban locality or, in the hinterland, in his village. Each locality (*twah*) within the city to some extent constitutes, in microcosm, what the city is on a grander scale.⁵⁸

The locality, almost invariably, is characterised by a central square that is clearly

Figure 1. Diagrammatic Representation of Lalitpur’s Caste System



analogous to that of the city as a whole. The square, or in many cases, the monastery (*bābāh, bahi*) has its temples and its blend of religious and secular uses: farmers spread out their unhusked rice to dry; women wash the family clothes at the well; vegetable-sellers display their produce; men sit and talk politics; a post-partum mother gets an oil massage; and children climb on the temple guardians and play hide-and-seek.

We have already noted the strength of the lineage and the caste, and the way they spread throughout the city, and in some cases beyond. But, and this is significant, territory in some respects *transcends* Newar lineage or caste ties. Strong caste ties would be detrimental to the genesis and maintenance of city unity, for they emphasize loyalty to a sub-set of that city. The locality, however, can often cut right across the boundaries of these caste groups and has the effect of weakening caste solidarity.

Certain very important institutions exist within the locality which regulate much of the social and ritual interaction of its inhabitants. Foremost of these is the *guthi*, which functions typically as either a funeral association or temple worship group. Membership in the *guthi* is exclusive to a kinship group, a thar group, or more unusually to a multicasite group.⁵⁹ An analysis of the plethora of *guthis* belonging to the Pengu Dah leads me to conclude that the principle of *territory* is fundamental to the constitution of the *guthi*.⁶⁰

Musical ensembles are also found all over the city.⁶¹ Some ensembles are constituted as *guthis*, with strict rules of membership and duty towards the group, where others are constituted on a more ad hoc basis. There is clearly a significant difference between an ensemble that is a *guthi* and one that is not. Membership of the more ad hoc ensemble is somewhat fluid and, though caste and territory are significant principles in their organisation, there is little loss of status if one leaves and therefore little social control can be exerted. The

guthi, on the other hand, has traditionally exercised considerable social control.

Territorial organisations, however, do not have the power they once had because of the rising importance of organisations based on single castes, which pay scant notice to issues of territoriality. They emphasize the solidarity of the caste in a manner that transcends territorial boundaries. In recent decades, associations have been constituted among many of the thars of Lalitpur, analogous to organisations in India such as the All India Washermen's Federation. For the most part these associations have economic considerations at their heart, such as to fund awards for educational achievement.⁶²



Territory as an organising principle, therefore, no longer has the power it once had. The reasons for this are threefold: the demise of the city as the capital of an independent political unit; the migration of the city's inhabitants from the localities to outlying "suburbs" and further afield; and the developing sense of Newar identity as an ethnic group with the subsequent growth of solidarity of organisations based on single castes as sub-sets of that ethnicity. The traditional more or less integrated caste society, as a system, is also in decline due to the growing strength of the nation state and the impact of modernity.

Nevertheless, territory continues to be a strong principle of identity in traditional

Newar settlements. Lives are lived in local communities, made up usually of a number of castes. The multicasite community may not eat boiled rice together, or exchange brides with each other, but they do worship corporately and carry out practical work together to improve their neighbourhood.

Territory, I would argue, is much more significant when it comes to church planting than has hitherto been acknowledged. An individual is part of a local community that may worship together. That community may be multicasite and not a forum for contracting marriages or eating boiled rice together, but community it is.

Another Look at Barriers of Acceptance

We have noted four principles that are involved in South Asian identity: ethnicity, kinship, religious tradition and territory. Missiological categories, as we have seen, have tended to acknowledge the significance of ethnicity and kinship (though both rather simplistically), but have reflected sometimes a serious misunderstanding of religious traditions, and have treated territory as almost irrelevant. The inclusion of the Newars as a single people group in the JP list suggests that the principle of ethnicity is the only relevant principle when it comes to counting people "groups" for the purpose of evangelization (though acknowledging that Newars who have migrated to India or Bangladesh may be considered as distinct).

In India, however, the principle of kinship (and caste) has assumed overwhelming priority for the JP list. Certain people are assumed to belong to a single people group on the basis that they share a common name. Such are the Badhai, the name used by large numbers of Carpenters in India (and some of the Tarai in Nepal).⁶³ A promotional video recently released by a mission organisation tells us that "the Badhai are one of hundreds of Hindu tribes scattered across the Himalayas."

Careful research on the Badhai in accordance with the principles I have elucidated above, however, would lead one to conclude that almost everything in that sentence is false. Although the majority of Badhai, as far as I can find out, are Hindu, they are certainly not a tribe and probably none live in the Himalayas.

Moreover, until recently the Badhai have almost certainly not considered themselves as a single group. A quick survey of web sites that carry the name suggests there are a number of attempts to create a corporate identity for the Badhai. This may lead to more wide-scale intermarriage and have the effect over time of them becoming a quasi-ethnic community, which could lend the Badhai greater political clout among the many other caste groupings wishing to obtain political advantage. Further research is needed to discover whether such pan-Indian caste groupings are really that significant in the lives of their members. If they become overwhelmingly important, then the sort of groups that are identified in JP would make much more sense than they do at present.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I suggest that each of these four principles needs to be revisited missiologically. Ethnicity is not necessarily a barrier of acceptance since many caste societies are ethnically mixed. Winter suggests that ethnolinguistic groups are helpful identifiers for the purpose of mobilization and preparation for ministry. Though the Newars have not traditionally seen themselves as an ethnic group, they do have some sense of identity that lends itself to this purpose. But in the work of seeking to establish Christ-focused communities among all the peoples of South Asia, it is important that the principle of ethnicity is held very loosely as other principles are also important. Chief among these are kinship and territory.

As in other societies of South Asia, kinship is the primary principle of

T*erritory is another dimension that may not have been taken into account sufficiently in the enumeration of people groups in South Asia.*

Newar identity. It is only as a member of a particular lineage that an individual can prove his caste credentials (or family members, theirs) and thereby have any acceptable place in society.⁶⁴ Kinship is clearly an avenue of great potential for the spread of the gospel message; yet, the communication of the gospel *across* kinship boundaries should not necessarily be an issue. If kinship groups have no history of intermarriage, then they may not want to begin marriage relations solely on the basis that those individuals or families are now following Christ. That is a pastoral issue. Kinship boundaries themselves, however, are not a barrier to communication, religious discourse, or even to corporate worship, as is evidenced by the multicaste guthis and musical ensembles.

Hindus have not normally had much psychological dissonance in their devotion to a plurality of deities or philosophical systems. The adoption of a particular deity for personal devotion has not led to disruption of the social system and caste relations. On the other hand, the adoption of what is seen as a *foreign* religion, with the consequent repudiation of swathes of traditional life, and with both tacit and manifest rejection of the kinship group, has often caused great barriers to the further spread of the gospel message. Furthermore, the ethnographic reality among the Penga Dah of Lalitpur demonstrates that groups which call themselves Hindu but patronize a Buddhist priest can enjoy commensal and marriage relations with those who patronize a Hindu Brahman priest. Any religious dichotomy demonstrates the sledgehammer imprecision of attempting to slot people groups into mutually exclusive Hindu or Buddhist megablocs.

Territory is another dimension that may not have been taken into account sufficiently in the enumeration of people groups in South Asia. Traditionally, kinship groups have lived in a specific and tightly bounded locale. In that locale, they have relations with other kinship groups of two kinds: (1) those who constitute their caste with whom they intermarry, and (2) other kinship groups with whom they would not intermarry but with whom they have long-established economic and ritual relations. Relations with those of other neighbourhoods who share the same title (thar) or surname might be weaker than their relations with those in their immediate locale who do not. Often, then, the traditional locality, village or urban neighbourhood, constitutes a significant socio-people, to use Winter's terminology. This is a group which might provide a focus for ministry. Thus, the AD2000 and Beyond South Asia group's insistence on a community being defined by endogamy is woefully inadequate. Some communities, particularly those that inhabit an urban neighbourhood, have traditionally comprised a large number of endogamous castes. Nevertheless, this group of disparate endogamous castes functions in many ways as a single community.

Territory still constitutes something of a barrier to the acceptance of the gospel in South Asia. Traditionally, and still today for many people, life is lived out in a village, or the local neighbourhood of a city. Established city dwellers do not ordinarily have much to do with those who are from the outside. Luis Bush has suggested that castes may be divided by language. That would be true if people sharing the same title or surname were considered to belong to one and the same caste. Such people often speak a range of languages as they live across a

large swathe of territory in which various languages are spoken. If, however, across South Asia as is common in the Kathmandu Valley, people have a view of those from other places as *not* belonging, even if they do share the same title (thar or surname), then territory is a significant principle of identity. In such a case then, territorial boundaries themselves are a significant barrier to the acceptance of the gospel irrespective of language. So to come back to my assertion above (1), the 57,166,000 Yadavs of India and Nepal may not be one endogamous group but several, with fuzzy boundaries (the national border probably not being one of them). The same may be true for the 27,424,000 Bania and a host of other larger castes. This phenomenon must not be ignored in order to fit a given individual and his lineage into some procrustean bed of endogamous caste commitments.

The way we approach caste groups in South Asia will depend on our interpretation of caste. A few million people scattered across South Asia may have the same title and traditionally do the same job, but until recently they may never have considered themselves as a single people group at all. They have been part of many castes that have very little to do with each other, even though they share the same name and traditional occupation. Recent changes in caste have meant that such scattered caste groups with some sense of shared identity have started to regard themselves as a single group (as we saw in the case of the All India Washermen's Federation above). This does not seem to be widely accepted, though, as I noticed in a cursory survey of caste web sites that have evidently been set up for this very purpose.

Tribes are largely distinct societal groups that are much easier to identify. Because of their societal identification, they are easier to describe and it is generally easier to generate strategies for reaching them. Castes, on the other

hand, are not so distinct. They usually do not have a language discreet from the other groups around them. They share many characteristics with other groups in the locality. Traditionally, in constituting a society, individual castes situate in a locality with other castes. Those traditionally regarded as "Untouchables"—the Dalits—were a clear exception to this, for they were always considered as not belonging to the dominant societies and situated as outsiders. Perhaps for this reason they have often regarded themselves as belonging to a wider oppressed community, and it is this identity, among other factors, that has led to such widespread "people movements" since the nineteenth century.⁶⁵



I do wonder if categorical decisions regarding the identification of people groups in South Asia were overly influenced by considerations of India's Scheduled Tribes and Castes (Dalits) for whom ethnicity and caste closely coincide with religious tradition and territory. For the dominant peoples of South Asia, however, we must review the principles of ethnicity, kinship, religious tradition and territory and reshape our strategies for engaging these people with the gospel. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ It has become a truism that people do not receive the gospel merely as individuals. See the following for representative and influential arguments on this issue:

Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Rev. ed.; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), 70–71; Paul. G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Eugene A. Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith* (Rev. Ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1990), 202–206.

² This paper focuses on strategic issues relating to caste. I address ethical issues in "Caste-Sensitive Church Planting: Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle" *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 32 (3, 2015): 177–187.

³ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch outline four approaches to categorizing people groups that may all be useful for different purposes in "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader* (Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., 4th ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 531–46.

⁴ The South Asia region includes, for JP purposes, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and the British Indian Ocean Territory. The exclusion of Pakistan is presumably due to its cultural affinity to the neighbouring Central Asian states to the north and west. I think this is regrettable as other countries firmly in the region are also majority Muslim—Bangladesh and the Maldives—and significant numbers of Muslim minorities exist in most of the other territories. Furthermore, some of the JP literature explicitly includes Pakistan within the region (see e.g., Luis Bush, "Christ's Missional Challenge: 50 largest UPGs A Case Study for South Asia" October 8, 2012, n.p. [cited 11 July 2013.] Online: <http://joshuaoproject.net/assets/articles/south-asia-remaining-task.pdf>). The difficulty of defining the western boundary of the region is not just a missiologists' one as is demonstrated by the fact that the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) now includes Afghanistan (since 2007) and the UN Southern Asia region further includes Iran.

⁵ S. Kent Parks and John Scott, "Missing Peoples: The Unserved 'One-Fourth' World: Especially Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims," 3, [cited 26 June 2012.] Online: <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/10535>. See also "Statement from the Hindu Peoples' Task Force" Tokyo 2010, *Mission Frontiers* July/August 2010, 17.

⁶ The World Christian Database, upon which the JP list is constructed, uses only the former principle (www.worldchristian-database.org/wcd/). The JP list is constructed by supplementing the WCD data with other data gathered from the field.

⁷ "People List Methodology," 1 [cited 12.7.13.] Online: <http://joshuaproject.net/assets/articles/people-list-methodology.pdf>.

⁸ Here India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are explicitly included.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Luis Bush, "Clash in Worldview and the Peoples of South Asia," (1998), 5 [cited 15 July 2013.] Online: <http://joshuaproject.net/assets/articles/worldview-clash-and-peoples-of-south-asia.pdf>.

¹² See K. S. Singh, *Communities, Segments, Synonyms, Surnames and Titles*, People of India National Series Volume VIII, (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1996. This massive multi-volume work is the result of years of research by hundreds of ethnographers and demographers on the peoples of India. A quick scan of the introductory chapter of this volume shows how difficult it is to define a caste/jāti and how the listing of communities has been such a problematic project especially since the national censuses began in 1881. The fundamentally definitive characteristic of a community, according to the survey, is *endogamy*. This is, however, not at all straightforward as my research, below, demonstrates. The ASI, comparing census lists from 1881 onwards came up with a figure of 17,129 entries (avoiding repetition of groups that they considered to be one and the same though in different territories): *ibid.*, 8. When they then independently created a list of the Peoples of India (POI) it came to 4,635 communities: *ibid.*, 9. This includes 587 groups that they designate as "segments" but excludes "territorial units." They later added 48 more bringing the total to 4,683 communities: *Ibid.* Bush reports the POI figure to be 2,795 ("Clash in Worldview and the Peoples of South Asia," 5). It would seem that Bush is using data from the first edition counting major communities and significant segments of these communities separately, but not dispersed subgroups of the major communities located in different geographical areas. My thanks to H. L. Richard for helping solve this puzzle. See also H. L. Richard, "Community Dynamics in India and the Praxis of 'Church'" *International Journal of Frontier Mission* 24 (Winter) 2007: 185–94.

¹³ Again, it is not clear how this precise figure was arrived at but this is not

particularly problematic for my argument. Similarly, the Etnopedia web site gives a figure of 2,500+ peoples for India and 350+ for Nepal but it is not clear on what basis the figures were derived; n.p. [cited 7.9.13.] Online: http://en.etnopedia.org/wiki/index.php/Main_Page.

¹⁴ Luis Bush, "Christ's Missional Challenge," 1–2, [cited 3.10.13.] Online: <http://joshuaproject.net/assets/articles/south-asia-remaining-task.pdf>, citing Omid's research (Omid is a pseudonym for an expatriate researcher working in South Asia and providing Joshua Project with data on people groups in the region). In India alone, he reports, there are about 22,000 people groups.

¹⁵ About 6,000 of the 22,000 people groups have populations that are estimated to be lower than 100. Bush suggests this means they can be discounted, in which case a third principle (size) has also been introduced into the definition of UPGs.

¹⁶ As Paul Hiebert explains, it rests largely on a theoretical framework provided by British social anthropology, which was often "reductionist and explained all of the various spheres of human life in terms of social dynamics." Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 89.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 92. An issue of *Mission Frontiers* (vol. 32 no. 3, May–June 2010) responds to Hiebert's critique of people group strategy, with authors largely acknowledging that Hiebert has a point but not wanting to drop the concept as it is biblical and does still reflect the reality for many people.

¹⁸ I will not address the issue of the recent mass migration of people to the big cities that throws up another, also very important, set of questions.

¹⁹ I have used a simplified transliteration system in this paper. A number of names end with an "h" where this is a lengthened vowel.

²⁰ For a careful discussion of the issues here see Declan Quigley's masterful analysis, *The Interpretation of Caste* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). Quigley's argument is a reformulation of the work of Arthur Maurice Hocart, *Caste: A Comparative Study* (London: Methuen, 1950).

²¹ The initial capital is used by South Asianists to identify a member of a caste group that traditionally followed a particular occupation even if the individual or group concerned no longer does so.

²² Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Transl.

by M. Sainsbury, L. Dumont, and B. Gulati; Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1980). The work of Louis Dumont, the champion of this idealist theory, has the effect of reducing the ethnographic data to the level of ideology. For him the issue of whether castes are actual, discrete, substantial groups is irrelevant. But it is my contention that this is an important issue. If discrete caste groups are no more than a product of the sociological imagination, then the caste system, as Dumont asserts, may rightly be reduced to an ideology. Dumont's theory, then, is not powerful enough to explain how one can be a Brahman, i.e. a member of a particular kinship group, and yet not be a *brahman*, i.e. a practicing priest. Dumont's work leads one to assume that the two words represent coextensive semantic fields. Advocates of the contrasting materialist occupational theory of caste, such as Gerald Berreman, argue that caste is based simply on the occupations of the various groups that go to make up the society: Gerald D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*, 2nd. ed., revised and enlarged; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). According to him ritual status is a direct product of a person's economic status, which leads to a caste rank that is closely tied to occupation and in effect denies the unique status of South Asia's ideology. Neither of these theories are robust enough to account for the ethnographic data.

²³ Brad Gill's characterization of India (in an otherwise very helpful article) as "caste-ridden" is not unusual in this respect: "The Dynamics of Ethnicity and Globalization" *Mission Frontiers* 32 (3) May–June 2010, 8. According to Omid, the emic perspective is to be given priority above the etic, to use Kenneth Pike's terminology: "Why the Community/ Caste Focus is Needed in Support of Church Planting Movements, May 2013" n.p. [cited 3.10.13.] Online: <http://joshuaproject.net/assets/articles/using-caste-to-define-peoples-in-south-asia.pdf>. This is a philosophical choice that has profound implications and to which, again, I will return. At this point, suffice it to say that Omid believes he has the emic perspective and that this perspective is, first and foremost, a caste perspective. I want to argue that he is right and wrong at the same time and for the fundamental reason that caste is not the *only* principle by which South Asians identify themselves (as is in fact acknowledged even in JP literature). The caste system, and Hinduism more generally, is widely misunderstood and this has led to false conclusions about people groups and strategies to engage them with the gospel.

²⁴ *Caste and Kinship in a Modern Hindu Society: The Newars of Lalitpur, Nepal* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2014) is my book-length study of this community. The ethnographic data adduced in this article is described in detail in this book.

²⁵ It is important, however, not to exaggerate the city's density by isolating it from its hinterland which, though not so relevant for ritual purposes, is an important part of the city's traditional economy.

²⁶ The 2001 census puts the population of Lalitpur district (that is the urban area and a large number of villages that dot the Valley and hills to the south) at 136,200 of which Newars constitute 40.4%.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ M. Paul Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 17th ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International), 2013, n.p. [cited 16 July 2013] Online: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

²⁹ Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002, n.p. [cited 16 July 2013]. <http://cbs.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2012/Population/Caste%20Ethnicity%20Population.pdf>. The figure is closer to 30% when one deducts the Dalits from this group.

³⁰ See e.g., Claire Burkert, "Defining Maithil Identity: Who is in Charge?" Chapter 7 in *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom* (eds. David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and John Whelpton; Amsterdam: Harwood Academic), 1997.

³¹ Andreas Höfer, *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*, Khumbu Himal series 13 [2, 1979]: 25-240 (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner: 47).

³² Pickett, 2014

³³ Others, such as Khadgi Butchers, were accepted into society but regarded as unclean because of their occupation, and so had somewhat ambiguous status.

³⁴ The issue of ethnicity is not merely of academic interest. It takes on huge significance when one asks whether the Newars count as one of Nepal's "indigenous" peoples or not—a question of great political importance. The "indigenous peoples" movement of Nepal, organised under the umbrella of the Nepal Adivasi Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities) defines an indigenous people linguistically—those communities that speak a Tibeto-Burman language—so as to include the Newars but exclude all groups thought to belong to the dominant Indo-Nepalese Parbatiya and Madhesi communities, included Dalits: "Definition of Indigenous."

Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, n.p. [cited 16 July 2013.] Online: <http://www.nefin.org.np/list/Definition-of-Indigenous/5/94/4>. If the ethnic groups, or "nationalities" as the Federation calls them, had been defined *socially* the Newars would clearly have been excluded due to their caste-based social structure.

³⁵ More of this below. See C. J. Fuller, *Caste Today* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁶ Many authors have attempted to delineate a pan-Newar ranking of castes as if the castes represent sub-groups that extend throughout the entire Newar range, dividing horizontally into a ladder an otherwise united community. These are reviewed in Pickett, 2014, 46-48.

³⁷ The JP divides the Newars into three peoples on the basis of location (one each for Nepal, India and Bangladesh, with the vast majority being in Nepal, the others being migrants).

³⁸ See e.g., Diana L. Eck, *Banāras: City of Light* (New Delhi: Penguin India), 1993 (first published 1983 by Routledge and Kegan Paul), Adrian C. Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India: A Village and Its Region* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1960, and Jonathan P. Parry, *Caste and Kinship in Kangra* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1979.

³⁹ Pickett, 2014.

⁴⁰ The "h" in Dah is in fact not an English "h" but an extension of the vowel and usually represented in transliterated form as an "h" with a subscript dot.

⁴¹ It is polite to use the term thar (surname or title) rather than jāt, which is the term for caste used in common speech and may cause offence.

⁴² In South Asian studies the initial capital shows that the reference is to a caste rather than an occupation. Not all those who work copper are entitled to that name, so a copper worker who does not belong to such a lineage would be referred to as a copersmith (with lower case initial).

⁴³ Other artisan groups, such as Citrakār Painters, Ranjitrkār Dyers and Nakahmi Blacksmiths are not members of the Pengu Dah or of any other marriage circle for that matter but constitute endogamous castes in and of themselves.

⁴⁴ The very lack of an encompassing name for the group speaks volumes about its significance for a person's identity. What the person is asserting is his identity as a member of a particular lineage or group of lineages, not his membership of an endogamous caste

(though most of the city's inhabitants would know what caste they belong to once they know the person's thar).

⁴⁵ Vernacular titles are not always of Tibeto-Burman origin but may be so.

⁴⁶ It is possible, by eliciting the right information from an individual, to ascertain exactly whether they belong to a certain group or not. These criteria are based on the access to various shrines and temples that belong to the groups involved.

⁴⁷ In spite of this strong tendency to isogamy, however, there is a minor theme of hypergamy (i.e. marrying women "up") that begs for attention. It is notable that the majority of reported hypergamous unions of the Pengu Dah are with Shresthas. Hypergamy is a well-documented phenomenon among the Rājputs and Brahmins of north India. The Rājputs of north India constitute the dominant caste in many areas, in much the same way as the Shresthas of the Kathmandu Valley do. Unlike the Shresthas, however, Rājputs strongly favour hypergamous unions, a characteristic that tends to seriously compromise caste solidarity as, in this stylized representation, men of village A take brides from villages B and C but not D and E, men of village B take brides from villages C and D but not A and E, and men of village C take brides from villages D and E but not A and B.

⁴⁸ W. H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmāni System* (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing, 1936). Some have called for a complete abandonment of the notion of a jajmāni system citing that its misuse has led to much confusion. Nevertheless, as an analytic tool, the teasing out of relations between patron and clients can be most instructive. In this study I will keep the term jajmāni for this purpose while acknowledging that such a structure may not apply to all patron-client relations.

⁴⁹ The Newars do, however, share with other Hindus a concept of purity and pollution. This has significance in terms of their standing in the community but not to the extent that a ladder-like hierarchical diagram can be neatly constructed of Newar castes with Brahman at the top and "Untouchables" at the bottom. This is the common way that ethnographers and other social commentators have represented the caste system but, as you will see, is problematic. Hierarchy is *contested*. The ladder, as it is perceived by one caste, is different from that perceived by another. This is inevitable when such castes have no formal relations with each other.

⁵⁰ As such, then, those above the line are called "lah calay ju" (lit. water goes) and

those above the line refer to those below as “lah calay maju” (lit. water doesn’t go). This boundary is also expressed in the access to the services of certain ritual specialists, such as Brahman or Vajracārya domestic priests and Nāpit Barbers for purification.

⁵¹ The principle of marriage seems today to be almost as strong as it was in times past, which is how we can identify endogamous castes today. Without precise historical data, however, it is impossible to tell how strictly the rules of marriage used to be enforced. There seems to have been a relaxing of attitudes towards intercaste marriage even during the period of my fieldwork. Many intercaste marriages are now celebrated with full ritual, though whether this reflects changing attitudes towards caste or ritual or both is not clear to this researcher.

⁵² Viewed from the perspective of the vast majority of Newar society who consider each other to be clean.

⁵³ In India a religious tradition is usually called *sampradaya* but I did not come across this use in Nepal.

⁵⁴ David N. Gellner, *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 71.

⁵⁵ In my experience they seem to take it in their stride and certainly do not see it as a “conversion” from Hinduism to Buddhism in any way.

⁵⁶ H. L. Richard, “New Paradigms for Understanding Hinduism and Contextualization (including the H-scale for Hindu Contextualization)” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40 (July 2004): 316–20.

⁵⁷ I do not have data on the marriage customs of castes in India. However, participation in a sect and the question of marriage are very important and relevant issues. I would also expect that Hindu and Muslim identity does indeed throw up a serious social barrier that is rarely crossed. It may be that the Newars are an unusual group as Buddhism is still practised in a caste society whereas it was re-absorbed into the wider Hindu fold in India a long time ago. There are of course large-scale modern Buddhist movements in India and I have no data on them. Modern movements into Buddhism have largely been Dalit movements so I would expect that marriage circles in them have hardly changed, if at all.

⁵⁸ Levy calls the twah the “village in the city.” Robert I. Levy *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 182.

⁵⁹ It is an interesting fact that no Guthi exclusively represents the Pengu Dah as a whole. All one finds when one casts the net wider are multicaste Guthis.

⁶⁰ Membership of Guthis seems to have been more important as an indicator of one’s identity in the past than it is today. See Declan Quigley, “The Guthi Organisations of Dhulikhel Shresthas” *Kailash* 12 (1–2, 1985): 5–61.

⁶¹ These ensembles play music from either the *bājā* or *bhajan* traditions.

⁶² They also aim to limit the rampant inflation around weddings and similar events by establishing rules to prevent ostentatious displays of wealth but are not significant when it comes to considerations of kinship and marriage.

⁶³ It would seem that the Badhai are also referred to as Bārāhi in the ethnographic literature. Any suggestion that they are one caste with the Bārāhi of Lalitpur, however, would be met with an emphatic denial by the Lalitpur lineage, which is further evidence of the constructed nature of pan-Badhai caste identity.

⁶⁴ I have demonstrated in *Caste and Kinship in a Modern Hindu Society* that caste structures emerge out of the creative tension produced by the two antagonistic forces of kingship and kinship. Kingship is centripetal whereas kinship is centrifugal. Kinship boundaries need to be markedly unambiguous as a way of creating stability in this political climate. Notions of pollution and separation, therefore, are not the building blocks of the system but the derivatives of it. Traditionally in South Asia, social order was to be maintained by the regulation of social distinctions.

⁶⁵ A phenomenon that is ongoing; cf. Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford History of the Christian Church; Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008.

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