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Edited by
Tadeusz Skorupski

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CONTENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

A	*Aṅguttara-nikāya*
AO	*Acta Orientalia*
AM	*Asia Major*
As	*Aṭṭhasālinī*
BEFEO	*Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*
BHSD	F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*
BM	*Burlington Magazine*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BSR	*Buddhist Studies Review*
CIS	*Contributions to Indian Sociology*
CPD	*Critical Pāli Dictionary*
CSSH	*Comparative Studies in Society and History*
CSLCY	*Chin-so liu-chu yin*, in TC, no. 1015
D	*Dīgha-nikāya*
Dīp	*Dīpavaṃsa*
EA	*Études Asiatiques*
EFEO	Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient
EJS	*European Journal of Sociology*
EI	*Epigraphia Indica*
ERE	*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1911
HJAS	*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*
HR	*History of Religions*
IASWR	Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions
IBK	*Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū*
IHQ	*Indian Historical Quarterly*
IIJ	*Indo-Iranian Journal*
IT	*Indologica Taurinensia*
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
JAS	*Journal of Asian Studies*
JHR	*Journal of the History of Religions*
JIABS	*Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*

JNCBRAS	*Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JNRC	*Journal of the Nepal Research Centre*
JPTS	*Journal of the Pali Texts Society*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JS	*Journal des Savants*
Kv	*Kathāvatthu*
Kv-a	*Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā*
MCB	*Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*
M	*Majjhima-nikāya*
Mhbv	*Mahābodhivaṃsa*
Mhv	*Mahāvaṃsa*
Mp	*Manoratha-pūranī*
MSMS	Monumenta Serica Monograph Series
Paṭis	*Paṭisambhidā-magga*
PTS	Pali Text Society
RH	*Revue Historique*
RO	*Rocznik Orientalistyczny*
S	*Saṃyutta-nikāya*
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
Saddhamma-s	*Saddhamma-saṅgaha*
SLJBS	*Sri Lanka Journal of Buddhist Studies*
Sp	*Samantapāsādikā*
SSAC	*Studies in South Asian Culture*
T	The Taishō edition of the Buddhist Canon in Chinese (vol. no.)
Th	*Theragāthā*
TMKFTCC	*Tao-men k'o-fa ta-ch'üan-chi*, in TC, no. 1215
TP	*T'oung Pao*
TC	The Taoist Canon, text numbered in accordance with the Harvard-Yenching Index to its titles
TTD	Tibetan Tripiṭaka, sDe-dge Edition
TTP	Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Peking Edition
UCR	*Univeristy of Ceylon Review*, Colombo
VBA	*Visva-bharati Annals*
Vin	*Vinaya-piṭaka*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*
WZKSO	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- (und Ost) asiens*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

Monk, Householder, and Priest; What the Three Yānas Mean to Newar Buddhists

David N. Gellner[*]

1. Introduction: why study Newar Buddhism?

My subject is the Buddhism of the Newar people of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. In this paper I want to try and explain how it works as a ritual and ideological system. My main argument is that the conceptual hierarchy of Three Ways—or Vehicles as they are conventionally translated—is central to this. An understanding of this conceptual hierarchy is essential if one is to understand Newar Buddhism. Those authors who have failed to understand it in the past have usually failed to do so for this reason.

The importance of Newar Buddhism can be summarized under two heads, historical and anthropological. Let us take the historical first. Newar Buddhism is a survival of north Indian Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. Newar Buddhists are the only Buddhists left whose sacred and liturgical language is Sanskrit (apart from a handful of priests in Bali). They are the only South Asians who follow Mahāyāna Buddhism. It was from Nepal that Brian Houghton Hodgson sent forth the Sanskrit manuscripts which enabled the Indological study of Mahāyāna Buddhism to begin. Sylvain Lévi went to Nepal in search of ancient Indian Buddhism. In his three-volume history of Nepal published seven years later in 1905 he declared that Nepal was 'India in the making' and that in the Kathmandu Valley one could see 'as in a laboratory' the conditions of the late first millennium CE in India.[1]

Now anthropologists tend to be sceptical—and I think rightly so—of scholars who study other cultures as representatives of something else, whatever that something else may be. They distrust anyone whose main motive for the study of

[*] Fieldwork was carried out for two years, 1982–84, in Lalitpur, thanks to a Study Abroad Studentship from Leverhulme Trust. This paper was first given in a lecture in Harvard, April 1988. It summarizes several themes dealt with in greater detail in my forthcoming book, *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual*.

[1] S. Lévi, *Le Népal, Etude Historique d'un Royaume Hindou*, 3 vols, Paris, 1905, repr. 1986, vol. I, 28 ff.

another society is the search for survivals, since this tends to undermine the attempt to understand it as it is today.

This then leads me to the second, more anthropological, reason for studying Newar Buddhism. As a complex ideological system it is worth trying to understand it in itself and on its own terms. It is especially interesting—and challenging—to us because it seems to go directly against every preconception we have about Buddhism. (By 'we' I mean 'we Westerners', and I include in that all those who have been educated by modern western means, wherever they come from.)

Did you think that Buddhism was a philosophy or an atheistic religion, or at least that it is indifferent to the existence of God or gods? Newar Buddhism requires its followers to worship numerous divinities at every level and in every religious context. Did you think that Buddhism was a system of meditation intended for monks (and possibly also nuns)? Ritual and worship are Newar Buddhism's most important activities and it has no monks or nuns, or so it seems at first sight. Did you think Buddhism was otherworldly, disdaining to involve itself in life-cycle rituals or in magical rites to overcome disease or drought? Newar Buddhism provides a full set of sacraments from the cradle to the grave—including a complex wedding ritual—as well as numerous apotropaic and curing rites. Did you think Buddhism was hostile—or at least indifferent—to caste and that it recruited its holy order from all classes of society? The Vajrācārya priests of Newar Buddhism are a hereditary group, part of a caste. Sylvain Lévi and Steven Greenwold have called them, with justice, Buddhist Brahmans.[2] In short, Newar Buddhism seems to go against all the received ideas we in the West tend to have about Buddhism. Some of these received ideas are wrong about all forms of Buddhism, or at least all pre-modern forms of Buddhism. Certain others of these ideas are right only about Theravāda Buddhism, but wrong for Mahāyāna Buddhism. One of the tasks of this paper is to explain how Theravāda Buddhism, on the one hand, and the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism of the Newars, on the other, can both be Buddhism.

Newar Buddhism has of course been studied in the past, mostly by those who have been interested in it for the first, historical reason.[3] Consequently there is a

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[2] S. Lévi, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 226; S. Greenwold, "Buddhist Brahmans", *EJS*, 15, 1974, 101–123.

[3] The standard work on Newar Buddhism is J. Locke, *Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in the Kathmandu Valley, Kathmandu*, 1980, and his recent article "The Unique Features of Newar Buddhism" in T. Skorupski, ed., *The Buddhist Heritage*, Buddhica Britannica Series Continua I, Tring, Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989, 71–116 is an excellent brief introduction. Other works which avoid the 'merely a survival' view are M.R. Allen, "Buddhism without Monks: the Vajrayana Religion of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley", *South Asia* 2, 1973, 1–14; *The Cult of Kumari, Virgin Worship in Nepal*, Kathmandu, 1975; "Girls' Pre-puberty Rites among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley", in M. Allen & S.N. Mukherjee, eds., *Women in India and Nepal*, Australian University Monographs on South Asia 8, 1982; D.N. Gellner, "The Newar Buddhist Monastery: an anthropological and historical typology" in N. Gutschow & A. Michaels, eds., *The Heritage of the Kathmandu Valley*, Sankt Augustin, 1987; "Monkhood and Priesthood in Newar Buddhism", Puruṣārtha, 12, 1989, 165–92, and other articles given in References and below; S. Greenwold, "Buddhist Brahmans", *EJS*, 15, 1974, 101–123; "Monkhood versus Priesthood in Newar Buddhism", in C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, ed., *The Anthropology of Nepal*, Warmister, 1974; T. Lewis, "The Tuladhars of Kathmandu: A Study of Buddhist Tradition in a Newar Merchant Community", PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1984. Good as an introduction to the history of the Kathmandu Valley, but weak on Buddhism, is M. Slusser, *Nepal Mandala*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982. An important work of narrow focus but superb scholarship is B. Kölver & H. Śākya, *Documents from the Rudravarṇa-Mahāvihāra, Pāṭan. 1, Sales and Mortgages*, Sankt Augustin, 1985. The standard ethnography of the Newars, but also thin on Buddhism, is G. Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal*, Paris, 1984. On the general ethnographic and political context of modern Nepal, see M. Gaborieau, *Le Nepal et ses Populations, Paris*, 1978.

persistent trend within Western writings about Newar Buddhism to see it *merely* as a survival. The fact that Newar Buddhism contrasts so strongly with Western preconceptions is then explained by Newar Buddhism's supposed corruption or degeneracy. My contention is that one must *first* understand Newar Buddhism on its own terms and only then use the understanding so gained to answer questions about Buddhist history.

Westerners in Kathmandu often tell the story of a foreigner who asks a Newar "Are you a Buddhist or a Hindu?" to which the Newar replies… "Yes". The foreigner's natural reaction is to assume that the Newar is confused and knows nothing about his own culture. The Newar often confirms this by saying something like: "Yes, I know little about it; there was a *paṇḍit* who really understood it, but he died twenty years ago". The foreigner concludes that the Newar carries on an ancient tradition which he does not understand. Over the generations the tradition has become corrupt, degenerate, and inauthentic. The Newars are seen as the inheritors of unique ancient urban civilization which they themselves are spoiling through ignorance. Paradoxically—or perhaps not so paradoxically—this is precisely the view of western-educated Newar cultural nationalists. In fact all modern-educated Newars seem to share this view, a reflex of the Westerners' image of the Newars as exotic and authentically traditional, and yet at the same time ignorant and inauthentic.

What I have tried to do in my study of Newar Buddhism is to get beyond these Eurocentric views, shared by Westerners and western-educated Newars alike, and understand it on its own terms. This does not mean that I am a total relativist: far from it. I do not think that once I have explained the traditional Newar Buddhist view, I can pack up and go home. (If I were really to restrict myself to presenting the Newar Buddhist point of view the most authentic way of doing it would perhaps be to clear the chairs, smear the room with cowdung, and make you all sit

on the floor and do the guru *maṇḍala* rite, the most basic ritual of Newar Buddhism.) What I do believe, however, is that until one has made the effort to understand Newar Buddhism as traditional Newar Buddhists see it, one will not be able to contribute anything to the analytical and historical questions implied in the perspective—Newar Buddhism as a survival—with which I began.

2. Context of Newar Buddhism

The Kathmandu Valley is an outstandingly fertile bowl-shaped Valley about 4,000 feet high in the Himalayan foothills. This has protected it from many of the vicissitudes which have affected the Gangetic plain. The Muslims invaded once in the fourteenth century but did not stay, and the British never conquered Nepal. Consequently the Kathmandu Valley has preserved old patterns of Indian culture—including Buddhism—in a way other more central areas have not. At the same time the Valley is not so far on the periphery that it could receive those cultural forms only in translation. Culturally—though not politically—the Valley has always been a full part of South Asia. This combination of cultural conservatism—typical of the periphery—yet authenticity—due to its proximity to the Ganges plain—accounts, of course, for the historical perspective on the Newars which I have referred to.

From the fifth century CE there is evidence of a flourishing Sanskritic culture in the Valley, supported by the Valley's extremely fertile soil and by its strategic position astride trade routes between India and Tibet. In what is known as the Malla period (c. 1200 to 1769) the Valley was dominated by three cities—Kathmandu itself, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur—each being the centre of a separate kingdom from the late fifteenth century until 1769, when they were all conquered by Prithvi Narayan Shah, ancestor of the present king.

Nowadays Newars constitute only about half of the population of the Valley. Many of them have migrated out of the Valley. They are now the main trading and shopkeeping caste throughout the hills of the modern state of Nepal. Inside the Valley they are still the majority in the three big cities and in the nucleated Newar villages which surround them. But in between there are now many hamlets of other castes and ethnic groups—in particular the Brahman and Chetri castes of the dominant Parbatiyās ('hill people'). And the conurbation of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, with its suburbs spreading out around the ring road which encloses both cities, is a modern mix of many different groups. The Newars have their own language, Newari, their own cultural practices, and they believe the Valley to be their homeland and that all other groups are immigrants there (simultaneously their

own caste myths of origin also posit outside origin for most of them, but at an earlier period). These factors keep the Newars separate from the rest.[4]

My fieldwork was conducted in Lalitpur which is well known to be the most Buddhist of the three cities. According to official figures given in the 1971 census, 32.5% of Lalitpur's population of 60,000 was Buddhist, compared with 24.5% of Kathmandu and 7.5% of Bhaktapur. Even using the official figures it is clear that Lalitpur is the most Buddhist and Bhaktapur the most Hindu city of the three. Kathmandu is somewhere in between. However the census operates on the same logic as the Westerner: are you a Buddhist, or a Hindu, or a Muslim? Only one answer allowed. One cannot say—as many Newars, particularly certain middle castes, do say when given the choice—"I am both Buddhist and Hindu" or "I am Buddhist, i.e. Hindu". In fact in most cases respondents—unless their name is Ahmad or Muhammed—are not even asked this question, but simply entered as Hindu.

Consequently it would be a mistake to assume on the basis of these figures that the religious life of Lalitpur is 32.5% Buddhist and 67.1% Hindu. In fact in many ways Buddhism is the dominant religion in Lalitpur. Thus the really big festivals of the city are essentially Buddhist, though Hindus observe them too. Examples are the Karuṇāmaya (Matsyendranātha) festival and the Matayā procession to all the *caityas* of the city. Most of the population of the city have Buddhist, i.e. Vajrācārya, family priests, not Hindu, i.e. Brahman, family priests. (In parenthesis, it is worth pointing out that this is where exclusivist logic seem to apply, though even here some families manage interesting combinations: for the purposes of carrying out the main auspicious life-cycle rituals, one may have only one hereditary family priest and he must be either Buddhist or Hindu; one cannot have both.)

Most families in Lalitpur, then, have Buddhist, not Hindu, family priests and the dominant idiom of most important festivals—at least those particularly associated with the city itself—is Buddhist. Nonetheless, the families with the highest social prestige (high-caste Śreṣṭhas such as the Amātyas and Rājbhaṇḍārīs) are strongly Hindu and the rituals associated with the royal palace at the centre of the city are Hindu. Furthermore, in the country as a whole, which is an officially Hindu kingdom, Hinduism is overwhelmingly dominant. Thus even within the city the ideological dominance of Buddhism and Buddhists is by no means easy or assured. *A fortiori* their political dominance of the local city council—achieved in recent (1986) elections—is strongly disputed.

[4] On Newar ethnic identity, see G. Toffin, *Société et Religion chez les Newar du Népal*, 585–93; D.N. Gellner, "Language, Caste, Religion and Territory: Newar Identity Ancient and Modern", *EJS*, 27, 1986, 102–48; D. Quigley, "Ethnicity without Nationalism: the Newars of Nepal", *EJS*, 28, 1987, 152–70.

The old city of Lalitpur is laid out in a grid pattern with the palace at the centre. High-caste Hindus claiming descent from the courtiers of the old Malla kings tend to live near the palace. Untouchables live outside the old city walls and are excluded from the water fountains used by 'clean' castes. (They are now free to disregard the traditional taboo on their having tiled roofs or three-storey houses, but they continue to live where they always have.) The Butcher caste is permitted to live within the city walls but is relegated to its own localities at the city's edge. Other castes tend to cluster in particular areas. The Buddhist sacerdotal caste, the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas, tend to live in courtyards adjacent to Buddhist monasteries (in Newari referred to honorifically using the Sanskrit word *vihāra*, or more colloquially as *bāhāḥ* or *bahī*). There are about 18 large monasteries and over 150 smaller monasteries in the city. They tend to be set back from the road in an enclosed courtyard, whereas Hindu temples are sited at crossroads for maximum exposure.[5]

Father John Locke's survey[6] revealed a total of almost 7,000 Śākya and Vajrācārya men as initiated members of monasteries in Lalitpur, out of an overall total of just over 15,000 in the Valley as a whole. Including women and uninitiated boys there may be 17,000 Śākyas and Vajrācāryas in Lalitpur, perhaps a fifth or more of the total population of the city. Together the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas comprise the holy order of Newar Buddhism. Only Vajrācāryas may be priests for others. There are about twice as many Śākyas as Vajrācāryas. Although all Vajrācāryas may be priests there were not, even in the past, enough Buddhist lay people or enough rituals to go round.

Nowadays, according to a survey I carried out of 144 Vajrācārya men over the age of 15, only 22% of Vajrācāryas actually practise as priests, and only a tiny 4.4% live from the priesthood alone. Other Vajrācāryas are mostly artisans, like Śākyas: in particular they are god-makers, silver- and goldsmiths, carpenters, and tailors. Some are successful traders or, especially in Kathmandu, civil servants and teachers.

Vajrācāryas are accepted as higher in status than Śākyas because of their priestly prerogative, but this is not a question of caste: they intermarry and interdine. All Śākya and Vajrācārya men must be members of a monastery. They become members by going through the rite of Monastic Initiation in that monastery at the

[5] On the Newar Buddhist monastery and its architecture, see J. Locke, *The Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal: A Survey of the Bāhās and Bahīs of the Kathmandu Valley*, Kathmandu, 1985, and D.N. Gellner, "The Newar Buddhist Monastery: an anthropological and historical typology".
[6] J. Locke, *The Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*, 515.

age of 3, 5, 7, 9 or 11.[7] Only sons of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas by Śākya or Vajrācārya mothers may be initiated. And one may only be initiated in the monastery of one's father. Consequently the membership of a Newar Buddhist monastery is defined by patrilineal descent and caste purity.

In ritual handbooks and in the liturgy, the ritual for joining a monastery is known as *pravrajyāvrata*, the Observance of Going Forth. Note that this uses the ancient term for the first ordination of a Buddhist monk, *pravrajyā*, Going Forth, but refers to the ritual as a whole as a *vrata*, that is as a temporary ritualized Observance or fast. In ordinary speech Śākyas and Vajrācāryas tend to call it *cūḍākarma*, 'tonsure'. Indirectly the rite is also known as *bare chuyegu*, which means something like 'making a Bare'. This is the name under which the ritual has become known in scholarly works. 'Bare' is the colloquial term for 'Śākya', also used by high-caste Hindus to refer slightingly to the combined Śākya and Vajrācārya caste. The word 'Bare' derives from the Sanskrit *vandya*, respectsworthy person, a term used in ancient India for Buddhist monks. Newar Buddhists know that it means 'monk'.

This ritual of Monastic Initiation lasts for four days. During it the Śākya or Vajrācārya boy is a monk. On the fourth day, a concluding rite takes place—sometimes in the monastery, sometimes in the boy's home, depending on local custom—and the boy renounces his monastic status and becomes a householder. Later he goes on to marry and earn his living as a householder. Yet he retains the status of monk. He receives alms as a monk once a year during the Pañcadān festival. He takes his turn for duties in the monastery. If for any ritual reason he has to shave his head, the whole of his head is shaved, leaving no top-knot, the symbol of householder status. He is addressed by other castes with the Newari honorific auxiliary *bijyāye* (from the Sanskrit *vijaya*). This honorific is used only to gods, kings, Brahmans, ascetics, and monks.

Many observers of Newar Buddhism have seen it as ridiculous. In a recent study, *Nepal Mandala*, which is in many other ways exemplary, Mary Slusser has charged Newar Buddhists with "making a mockery" of their religion with this rite of Monastic Initiation.[8] How can one be a married monk? How can monks be priests and Buddhist priests a hereditary caste? In order to explain how this is possible and, on its own terms, legitimate, a short historical digression is now necessary.

3. The Three Ways in Buddhist History

It is common knowledge that the Mahāyāna, 'Great Way' or 'Great Vehicle' Buddhism, used the doctrine of *yāna*, Ways, to explain its own relationship to the

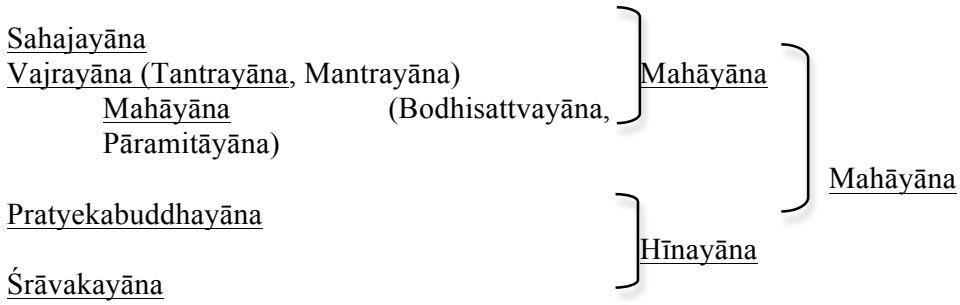
[7] On this ritual, see J. Locke, "Newar Buddhist Initiation Rites", *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 2, 1975, 1–23, and D.N. Gellner, "Monastic Initiation in Newar Buddhism", in R.F. Gombrich, ed., *Indian Ritual and its Exegesis*, Delhi, 1988.

[8] M. Slusser, *Nepal Mandala*, 296b.

Buddhism which went before it. The Mahāyāna did not reject earlier Buddhism but included it as a lower level within its own spiritual hierarchy.

All Buddhism had always recognized different types of enlightened beings: arhats who achieve enlightenment by following the teaching of a Buddha; Solitary Buddhas (*pratyekabuddhas*), who achieve enlightenment on their own and teach no one; and completely enlightened Buddhas (*samyak-sambuddhas*), who both discover how to achieve enlightenment for themselves and teach others. This hierarchy of arhat, pratyekabuddha, and samyaksambuddha the newly arisen Mahāyāna conceived in terms of three, hierarchically ordered Ways to enlightenment (*cf.* Tables I and III): the Disciples' Way leading to arhat-ship, the Solitary Buddha's way leading to Solitary Buddha-hood, and the Great Way leading to complete enlightenment as a Buddha. Now, the Buddha in his previous lives, when he was working his way towards enlightenment, was known as a Bodhisattva—so this way was also known as the Bodhisattvayāna, the Way of the Bodhisattvas.

Table I
The Different Ways of Newar Buddhism[9]



In the pre-Mahāyāna schools—including the Theravāda, the only one to survive today—the Bodhisattva is a retrospective and descriptive concept: it refers to a Buddha before his enlightenment. In the Mahāyāna it becomes forward-looking and prescriptive: every good Buddhist must strive to become a Buddha, to save all beings through teaching the Buddhist doctrine and by other merciful acts. In other words all Buddhists should strive to be Bodhisattvas.

As Buddhists of the other schools strove only to be arhats, not fully enlightened Buddhas, this was the origin of the charge by the Mahāyāna that they were selfish: they were supposedly only interested in their own, and not in others',

[9] Terms given in parenthesis are alternatives. Terms underlined are the ones generally used by Newar Buddhists. The broken line indicates that the Sahajayāna is sometimes considered to be a higher Way, above even Vajrayāna. The term 'Mahāyāna' has both greater and lesser applications. In its broader sense it includes what is otherwise opposed to it, the Śrāvakayāna. 'Hīnayāna' is not much used but is included here as it is well-known from the western literature on Buddhism.

enlightenment. This is of course a very partial and unfair charge from the Theravāda point of view.[10]

The idea of the Bodhisattva was a very fertile one because it united in one concept two sociologically very distinct things: first, the moral and soteriological ideal of Buddhist striving and, second, certain saints or divinities who could be petitioned by the Buddhist laity. Pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism had a very limited pantheon. It consisted of the Buddha himself, certain previous Buddhas, and a supporting cast of converted Hindu deities. Mahāyāna Buddhism developed an extremely elaborate pantheon, including numerous Bodhisattvas, the two most important being Avalokiteśvara (called Karuṇāmaya by Newars), Bodhisattva of compassion, and Mañjuśrī, Bodhisattva of wisdom. The laity was encouraged to petition these Bodhisattvas even for worldly goods; the Bodhisattvas, for their part, were said to be so meritorious and compassionate that they would grant the good in question. However, on a higher level the idea of reciprocity between Bodhisattva and worshipper is replaced by the idea that the worshipper earns the good by their own merit, since performing the worship of such a Bodhisattva is inherently meritorious.

At some time after the rise of the Mahāyāna—exactly when and how is a controversial matter—a new form of Buddhism arose, the Vajrayāna, or Diamond Way Buddhism. In one sense it aimed to replicate the logical movement by which the Mahāyāna had trumped what went before: so, just as the Mahāyāna incorporated but was superior to what it termed the Solitary Buddhas' and Disciples' Ways, so also the Vajrayāna incorporated and subordinated the Mahāyāna.

However, in another sense the relationship between Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna is not the same as that between pre-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism. This is why, on the diagram in Table I, Mahāyāna is shown as including Vajrayāna and not vice versa. Very briefly, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna became aspects of each other: Mahāyāna was the exoteric, public face of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna its esoteric inner truth, and—as a ritual system—its essential motor, the legitimation of priestly power. Thus, the Vajrayāna became a secret, specialized, and privileged path within the Mahāyāna, and not, or not merely, a later revelation working at the same level as the Mahāyāna.

It is possible to have Mahāyāna Buddhism without Vajrayāna Buddhism. There are examples, notably from Japan and Korea, and it was evidently practised thus in some times and places in India. In Nepal however and Tibet the two—Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna—seem always to go together. The Vajrayāna is the

[10] R.F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*, Oxford, OUP, 1971, 318–27.

secret path for the pious and the committed. The Mahāyāna preaches the doctrine of universal salvation openly to the greatest number.

One consequence of this double relationship between the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna is that the words are polysemic. At first sight this can be confusing. I have tried to sort out the meanings of 'Mahāyāna' in Table I. Where the Mahāyāna is based on scriptures known as *sūtras*, the Vajrayāna is based on tantras, hence it is also known as Tantric Buddhism. Devotional ritual had been present in Buddhism from the beginning. It was—and in Theravāda Buddhism remains—relatively austere and simple. With Mahāyāna Buddhism it received a great boost. But it required the Diamond Way for the development of an elaborate ritual system with thousands of possible permutations.

The Vajrayāna systematized the pantheon of the Mahāyāna into pentads. So there were now Five Buddhas and five Buddha-families into which everything else was classified. Much work on the history of Tantric Buddhism remains to be done.[11] It is clear however that new tantras were continuously composed which attempted to supersede those which had gone before. Each tantra teaches the worship of an esoteric deity. The searcher for enlightenment and/or supernormal powers is supposed to progress through all other forms of Buddhism, starting with the Disciples' Way and ending with the various philosophical teachings of the Mahāyāna, before proceeding to the realization of the ultimate esoteric deity from whom the tantra takes its name. This realization of the deity means meditation on the deity—a kind of ritualized trance—through which one becomes the deity and achieves identity with the ultimate reality or emptiness. Just as the hero of the Great Way is the Bodhisattva, so the hero of the Diamond Way is the *siddha*, an antinomian figure who rejects monasticism along with all other worldly conventions and achieves enlightenment here and now (*cf.* Table I).

Although there were many different stages in the development of Tantric Buddhism, two are particularly important for the study of Nepalese Buddhism. The first is the stage represented by the set of Five Buddhas and the Tantric version of that represented by the *Guhyasamāja-tantra*, what is called the Yogottara Tantra level in studies of Tibetan Buddhism. The second is the stage represented paradigmatically by the deity Cakrasaṃvara and his consort Vajravārāhī. In Newar Buddhism the gods of this level are esoteric gods. Other tantric divinities—particularly Vajrasattva and Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa—act as a kind of external face or exoteric version of the esoteric gods. It will be clear from this that correspondences are made between the gods of the different levels. As one receives

[11] The most recent and up-to-date attempt to write it, though still not making use of many unedited and unpublished manuscripts, is D.L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, London, 1987.

tantric initiations so one learns the secret identities of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas whom anyone may worship.

So far I have said nothing about that aspect of the tantras which most shocked the scholars who first worked on them and which has made them notorious—namely their antinomianism. The Tantric scriptures, especially the later ones, prescribe the breaking of taboos, particularly sexual and other purity taboos, as a means to achieve and demonstrate advanced spiritual states. This fact—once known—has had a very deleterious effect on the process of understanding of how Tantric Buddhism actually works. Few seem to realize that in a traditional society, where literacy is a minority accomplishment and study of the scriptures is carried on only by a minority of that minority, most of the priests—let alone the laity—are simply ignorant of the contents of these scriptures. Priests learn liturgies by heart, they know how to perform rituals, and often have a deep intuitive understanding of their own tradition. But only a tiny number are actually *paṇḍits*, that is to say, spend their time reading the original scriptures. Moreover *paṇḍits* spend most of their time reading and transmitting Mahāyānist texts—mostly Rebirth stories—for mass consumption, just like Theravāda monks. Consequently, although it is of course important for Western scholars to know and study the original scriptures, it is equally important to know how those scriptures are used. In Nepal they are used as the ultimate legitimators of ritual handbooks and a ritual system; but they are rarely read, and those who read them make no attempt to reconstruct ritual practice in the light of the scriptures.

The doctrine of the different *yānas* is, we have seen, a way for Buddhism to explain its own history to itself. It allows for subsequent revelations which improve on, while not displacing earlier ones. At one level the later and earlier *yānas* are opposed to each other. At the higher level the later *yāna* incorporates the earlier within itself and represents the whole. This, I would argue, is very similar to Dumont's theory of hierarchy expounded in the Postface of the revised edition of *Homo Hierarchicus*.[12] Dumont explains that just as at one level in traditional Christian thought man is opposed to woman but at a higher level man incorporates woman and refers to the species as a whole, so also pure is opposed to impure. This same hierarchical logic is at work in the relationship of different Ways to each other.

4. The Three Ways in Newar Buddhism

Now at last we are in a position to ask what these ideas mean to Newar Buddhists. A summary is presented in Table II. Table III shows the way in which the different ideals of the Three Ways are translated into practice. Of the different

[12] L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus, The Caste System and its Implications* (complete revised English edition), Chicago & London, 1980.

Ways which occur in canonical lists, known by the Newars too, these three are the 'operational' ones. Obviously, since the Solitary Buddha by definition teaches no one, his Way is of theoretical interest, but need not concern the anthropologist or sociologist.

Elderly Newar Buddhists refer to Theravāda Buddhism as Śrāvakayāna. This is entirely consistent with their Mahāyānist viewpoint. Theravāda Buddhism was introduced into Nepal in the 1930s.[13] Those Newars who became monks under the Maha Bodhi Society in India and then returned to Nepal were expelled by the Rana regime. But since 1951 they have become well established in the Valley. Some Newar Buddhists ignore them, including most practising Vajrācārya priests, but many carry on both traditional Newar Buddhism and support the Theravāda monks and nuns to some extent. The Theravāda movement in Nepal is the main—though not the only—conduit for Buddhist modernism in Nepal.

Table II
Summary of the different practices falling under
the head of the Three Ways (*yāna*) in Newar Buddhism.

The Way of the Disciples: (Śrāvakayāna)	monachism, ascetic rule-observance, worship of the Buddha.
The Great Way: (Mahāyāna)	worship of all the gods, fulfilment of hereditary householder duties, including festivals and life-cycle rites; acquiring merit through donations (*dāna*), cultivation of the moral perfections in accord with the ideal of the Bodhisattva.
The Diamond Way: Tantric (Vajrayāna)	worship of Tantric deities, taking Tantric Initiation (*dīkṣā*), acquiring magical powers and advanced spiritual states by strict rule-bound devotion to powerful deities or their exoteric manifestations.

The Three Ways are built into the structure of the Newar Buddhist monastery. Newars sometimes say that the shrine of the main Buddha image belongs to (or 'is') the Disciples' Way, the long hall on the upper floor belongs to the Great Way, and the Tantric shrine, located above the Buddha-image or over the main

[13] On the Theravāda movement in Nepal, see R. Kloppenberg, "Theravada Buddhism in Nepal", *Kailash*, 5, 1977, 301–21; R.C. Tewari, "Socio-cultural Aspects of Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal", *JIABS*, 6, 1, 1983, 67–93; D.N. Gellner, "Language, Caste, Religion and Territory: Newar Identity Ancient and Modern"; H. Bechert & J. Hartmann, "Observations on the Reform of Buddhism in Nepal", *JNRC*, 8, 1988, 1–30.

entrance to the monastic complex, belongs to the Diamond Way. The same structure is reflected in the ritual and iconography appropriate to each part of the sacred area.

The main focus of public ritual in the monastery, as well as the main focus of devotion from local people and pilgrims (often Tibetans), is unquestionably the Buddha image sited opposite the main entrance. In most cases it has the earth-touching (*bhūmisparśa*) gesture. It is considered to represent Śākyamuni, and is not usually addressed as Akṣobhya. In popular monasteries visited by many devotees numerous other subsidiary shrines may be set up, both on the ground floor and the first floor. These will be to Mahāyānist figures such as Tārā, Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara. Of the 363 monasteries of different sorts in the Valley only 31 do not have Buddha figures in their main shrine: they have Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara (20), Maitreya (7), Śaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara (2), Mañjuśrī (1), and Mahāvairocana (1).[14]

Table III
Soteriological ideals and social roles of the Three Ways.

Religious Level	*Soteriological Ideal*	*Social Role*
Disciples' Way	arhat (noble one)	monk (i.e. during Monastic Initiation)
Great Way	Bodhisattva (wisdom-being)	Practising Mahāyāna Buddhists; Vajrācāryas in their purely exoteric aspect.
Diamond Way	*siddha* (realized one)	Vajrācārya

The main Buddha shrine is worshipped in a manner reminiscent of royal Buddha images in Theravāda countries[15] with flowers, water, light, incense, fruit, and the waving of a yaktail. However, many of the devotional verses used in this context are Mahāyānist in inspiration (e.g. the *Dānabalena*), and others are Vajrayānist (e.g. the *Nāmasaṃgīti*).

The long first-floor room of the monastery is found only in larger establishments. In larger monasteries, such as Kwā Bāhāḥ and Uku Bāhāḥ in Lalitpur, it is known as *gumbā* (from Tibetan *dgon-pa*), because it has been done up in Tibetan style this century by traders returning from long periods in Tibet. The main divinity is Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara. The main ritual performances held here are Observances (*vrata*), especially the *aṣṭamī vrata* or *upoṣadha vrata*, a

[14] J. Locke, *The Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*, 516.
[15] H. Evers, *Monks, Priests and Peasants: A Study of Buddhism and Social Structure in Central Ceylon*, Leiden, 1972, ch. 4.

ritualized version of the Eight Precepts.[16] Unlike in the Tibetan version of the ritual, which is also conducted in the same place by local Newars ordained in one of the Tibetan traditions, the participants (mostly women) do not actually utter the Precepts themselves, but their content is built into the structure of the rite.

The Tantric shrine usually consists of a small curtained-off room, which only a senior functionary called the Cakreśvara (the seniormost Vajrācārya in monasteries with both Vajrācāryas and Śākyas) may enter. In front of it is also a long hall where rituals involving a number of people are held. There are regular monthly rituals involving the elders (*sthavira*, *āju*) of the monastery, yearly rituals established by endowment, as well as occasional rituals, such as those performed on the initiation of a new member of the monastery, a new Vajrācārya, or a new elder. The rituals performed before the Tantric deity necessarily involve the offering of meat and alcohol, offerings which are normally taboo before the Buddha shrine and during the course of an Observance. Likewise, the use of dance (*vajranṛtya*) and song (*caryāgīti*, *cācā mye*) are in order before a Tantric shrine, but not in the Śrāvakayānist or Mahāyānist context.

All clean castes (over 90% of the population) may approach the Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna divinities, make offerings and participate in rituals directed to them. Access to the Tantric divinity is much more restricted. Tantric Initiation (*dīkṣā*) is precondition of being an elder, for this reason. The foyer before the Tantric deity may be entered by some of those without Tantric Initiation, but only if they are of sufficiently high status or belong to the institution in question. Mediating between the esoteric and exoteric spheres are such deities as Vajrasattva and Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa who may appear outwardly, without consorts, and receive worship from all comers. Some monasteries have shrines to them on the ground floor.

Outside the monastery one can also identify different spheres in which one or other *yāna* is predominant. The yearly festival of Pañcadān is a clear assertion of monastic ideals, with all Śākyas and Vajrācāryas supposed by custom to beg alms in at least seven different places on the day. The twelve- or five-yearly festivals of Samyak in Kathmandu and Lalitpur are similar, although there the emphasis is on the perfection of giving, a Mahāyānist twist. The various rituals of the householder are viewed by Newars as being part of the duty of a Mahāyānist. Each high-caste lineage also possesses a Tantric shrine where regular rituals have to be performed (though this is very much on the decline today).

The Disciples' Way is not considered by Newars to be a system of ritual. Rather it consists of observing the rule of chastity and other rules of restraint associated

[16] J. Locke, "The Upoṣadha Vrata of Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara in Nepal", *L'Ethnographie*, 83, 1987, 159–89.

with the Ten Precepts. There are no permanent celibates in traditional Newar Buddhism. The Śakyas and Vajrācāryas, as already noted, are a caste of married part-time monks. Consequently, the practice of the Śrāvakayāna is contextualized. It is put in a ritual framework derived from the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna. Thus priests explain that the worship of the goddess Kumārī at the end of an Observance (*vrata*) marks the transition from the Śrāvakayāna to the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna. In other words, the perennial Buddhist practice of the Precepts—something Newar Buddhism shares with all forms of Buddhism—is placed in a framework of exoteric and esoteric ritual. Furthermore, in the life-cycle rituals which a Buddhist priest performs for his parishioners he has to make use of his Vajrayānist entitlement to summon and visualize divinities which will be worshipped by the householder and thereby sacrilize his family's progress through life.

It should be clear that there are two hierarchies in Newar Buddhism. There is a hierarchy of statuses from ordinary layman up to tantric priest. The tantric priests can only become an initiated Tantric priest by first becoming a monk and then a householder. Secondly there is a hierarchy of deities, with the higher deities being considered as the secret inner identity of the lower and outer ones.

To conclude this section let me quote what four relatively articulate Newar Buddhists said to me about the Three Ways. An old Śākya woman explained them as follows:

> "There are three Ways: the Disciples' Way, the Great Way, and the Diamond Way. There's also the Way of the Solitary (Buddhas). *Paṇḍits* say that one shouldn't mock others. All are the Buddha's teaching, whichever you practise. The Great Way is higher, though. The Disciples' Way is easiest because they only have to worship the Buddha, whereas in the Great Way there are Tārā and all the rest, and one has to read so many books. The [Theravāda] monks say that getting to the stage of being an arhat (*arhatpad*) is enough, but in the Great Way one has to attain the stage of complete enlightenment (*samyaksambuddhapad*). To reach that one has to be a Bodhisattva and fulfil the Ten Perfections. The monks say that all one has to do is meditate (do *bhāvanā*). That's all very well, but one has to attain the Four Trances (*caturdhyān*) and the Perfections too."

An old Śākya man said:

> "There are four Ways, Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, but I don't know Vajrayāna. Vajrācāryas have a special initiation for this [he meant, I think, the Consecration of a Vajra-Master]. Vajrayāna is the highest but what I practise is Mahāyāna."

He said this even though he had taken Tantric Initiation and was quite knowledgeable about Tantric Buddhism. There are two probable reasons why, nonetheless, he identified himself as practising Mahāyāna and not Vajrayāna. The first is that Vajrācāryas are particularly associated with the Vajrayāna (it could not survive without them) and so, as a Śākya, he thought of himself as practising the Mahāyāna. The second is that Vajrayāna is frequently associated with the practice of magic, healing, and supernormal powers. Ask about Vajrayāna and one often receives elaborate and hair-raising tales about nocturnal visits to powerful, but unpredictable, Tantric practitioners.

A *paṇḍit*, Asha Kaji Vajracharya, explained the Three Ways thus:

> "Śrāvakayāna [the Disciples' Way] refers to monastic practice (*bhikṣucaryā*), and this was preached by Lord Buddha at Sārnāth.
> Pratyekabuddhayāna [the Solitary Buddha's Way] is that practised alone.
> Mahāyāna [the Great Way] teaches the practice of the Bodhisattvas: Lord Buddha preached this on Gṛdhrakūṭa hill.
> And on Vajrakūṭa hill he brought to light Vajrayāna [the Diamond Way]. There are two types of Vajrayāna. The first is onefold (*ekākar*): this is for one who does not marry and lives alone. The second is twofold (*dvārākār*): this what is known as Tantrayāna [the Tantric Way] or Sahajayāna [the Way of Innate (Bliss)], in which a couple (*strīpuruṣ*) eat from the same plate. It is called Sahajayāna because they are united (*saṃjog juye*) and eat each other's polluted food. The practice of Sahaja is Tantric Initiation; that is why those who come to take it on their own are sent way [at this crucial point].

Guna Ratna Shakya, a disciple of the famous *paṇḍit* of Bu Bāhāḥ, Ratna Bahadur Vajracharya, explained it in this way:

> "There are four ways of doing pūjā:
> (i) focused on gods (*devatātmak*);
> (ii) focused on the five constituents (*pañcaskandhātmak*);
> (iii) focused on emptiness (*śūnyātmak*);
> (iv) focused on yoga (*yogātmak*).
>
> The first is the approach of those who believe gods are responsible for everything, bringing rain, causing illness, and (they also act from) fear of the god's punishment (*doṣ*). The second is the approach of the Theravāda, who do not worship gods but only the five constituents. The third is the approach which asserts that nothing exists, there are no gods; it is completely nihilistic (*nāstik*). The fourth is the approach which combines Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna, which combines (i), (ii), and (iii). It puts gods in front, analyzes all things as the five constituents, and realizes that all is empty (*śūnya*). This, combining

> emptiness and compassion (*karuṇā*), is the yogic way of worship and is called Vajrayāna."

Initially Guna Ratna had given a more light-hearted answer to my question, what is the difference between Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, which had puzzled both me and the others present. In the light of the above it should be easier to understand:

> "The Disciples' Way is like making noodles from flour. The Solitary Buddha's Way is making chapatis. The Great Way is like the repeated kneadings necessary to make *lākhāmari* [the magnificent and gigantic Newar wedding pastries]. The Diamond Way is like going into a sweetshop, mixing all the pastries they have, crushing them, eating them all, using everything and leaving nothing."

5. Conclusions

I want very briefly to present three conclusions. Firstly, something about the supposed antinomianism of the Tantric scriptures. The scriptures contain two ideals—One is the antinomian saint who observes no rules and is liberated here and now, the divine madman. The other is the learned, courteous teacher who realizes that all is non-dual and that rules are merely conventional, yet continues to act as if the distinctions they are based on are real because he feels such compassion for suffering creatures that he wants to lead them on the right path. The existence of this latter ideal shows that Tantric Buddhism was routinized, to use Max Weber's term, at a relatively early period. That is to say, institutionalized Tantric Buddhism like that of the Newars is very old. Newar Buddhism is a genuine inheritor, and not a deformation, of a type of Buddhism which is at least 8 or 900 years old.

My second conclusion also relates to this history. The form of Buddhism practised by the Newars drew its inspiration from great Buddhist centres in what are now Bihar, Bengal, Bangladesh, and Orissa. With their demise in the thirteenth century, Newar Buddhism turned in on itself. In its relation to them it was a little tradition compared to their learned monastic Great Tradition. Now—and no doubt then too—the local Śākyas and Vajrācāryas represent the Great Tradition vis-à-vis the Newar Buddhist laity. It is the practices of the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas which define what is traditional Newar Buddhist orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

These two terms Great and Little Tradition are very unfortunate and have often been criticized by anthropologists. In this context they are perhaps even more so, since they conjure up the idea of separate and separately legitimated traditions—whereas here we are dealing with three sets of practices which are ultimately legitimated by appeal to the same criteria. Unsatisfactory though these terms are, I nonetheless still feel compelled to use them, since I know of no better ones to label what I take to be an anthropological reality.

Finally—the conclusion of my conclusion—one has to distinguish between a scriptural doctrine and the way it is used. All Three Ways I have outlined in the practice of Newar Buddhism are conceived to be for the individual seeking enlightenment. The fact that all three, in spite of the different ideals envisaged in each, are focused on the individual was no doubt a factor enabling Buddhism to absorb Tantrism so thoroughly. However, we have seen that in practice Vajrayāna Buddhism is used for the restrictive secret face of Newar Buddhism, whereas Mahāyāna Buddhism is its public one. Although in theory the Vajrayāna is open to all—or at least all may aspire to it—in practice its stress on secrecy and initiation is used to exclude the low born and outsiders, to define patrilineages, and to maintain a caste monopoly of Buddhist monkhood and priesthood.