

SUKHĀVATĪ TRADITIONS IN NEWAR BUDDHISM

Todd T. Lewis

Introduction¹

In 1980, at the close of my second year of fieldwork, a vigorous middle-aged man — a leading merchant in the Kathmandu Buddhist community, beloved for his social activism and compassionate ways — began losing weight, and was diagnosed as having liver cancer. His death within two months was a blow to everyone who knew him. As we started out toward the *ghāt* in the procession behind the palanquin, stunned and saddened, a middle-age companion and neighbour paused, took off his hat, held up his hands in *añjali*, and said in Newari:²

Sukhāvātī bhūvanay lāi he mäh.
May he be reborn in *Sukhāvātī*.

This wish — that every Newar layman should express when a respected person dies — led me to seek other areas in which *Sukhāvātī* belief and practice is found in the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna traditions of the Kathmandu Valley.

Scholars of Buddhism (e.g. Chen 1973) have described the evolution of 'Pure Land' Mahāyāna Buddhism as a distinctive East Asian creation involving the transmission and domestication of Indic textual traditions, particularly those of the longer and short *Sukhāvātīvyūha sūtras* (Cowell 1969 ed.). These early texts outline a fundamental cosmology: through their extraordinary merit, highly advanced Bodhisattvas bring into existence distant heavenly rebirth realms throughout the universe, and become Buddhas presiding over them. Famous in the

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² 'Newari' is a modern English neologism for the Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Kathmandu Valley. There are two emic terms preferred by Newars: the colloquial *Newa*: *Bhāy* or the Sanskritised 'Nepāl Bhāṣā' that also expresses the old pre-Shah (before 1769) identity of *Nepāl* as the Kathmandu Valley only.

early literature was the *Abhirati* paradise of Akṣobhya Buddha in the east and the *Vaiḍūryanirbhāṣa* paradise (also in the east) of Bhaiṣajyaguru, the 'Medicine Buddha'. However, it was the focus on *Sukhāvati* ('Land of Bliss'), the western paradise established by Amitābha (or Amitāyus) Buddha, that came to dominate East Asian Buddhism: by the T'ang era, this tradition, oriented toward *Sukhāvati*, had become synonymous with 'Pure Land Buddhism'.

The texts also describe how one can contemplate the Buddha's image and repeat his name to secure rebirth in *Sukhāvati*, where successful spiritual practices will lead without fail to the individual's enlightenment (Kotatsu 1987; Zürcher 1987). Although surely an orientation shared by only a very small minority of Indic Buddhists, this line of development gained wide popularity in East Asia and has inspired a vast elaboration of ritual practice, doctrinal interpretation, and popular faith for the last 1500 years.

I did not expect to find any 'Pure Land Buddhism' when I set out for my research in Nepal, especially since scholars have long suggested that the Amitābha-*Sukhāvati* school's genesis was in northwest India or Central Asia (Kotatsu 1987: 90). But the aforementioned encounter at my friend's funeral indicated that Newar Buddhism might perhaps offer insights into Indic Mahāyāna practices associated with *Sukhāvati*. After introducing Newar Buddhism in its Himalayan context, this paper examines how *Sukhāvati* traditions have become domesticated there. Surveying epigraphic records, art and local texts, and drawing upon ethnographic research on modern rituals and contemporary Buddhists, this study is intended as a contribution to the understanding of the role of faith, death ritual, and paradise rebirth aspiration in the pan-Asian history of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Newars and Nepal³

Any scholar who has worked with Indic Mahāyāna texts or later Buddhist iconography knows of the plenitude of Sanskrit manuscripts preserved in the Buddhist and state libraries of the Kathmandu Valley. The discovery of these Nepalese manuscripts in the 19th century was a landmark in modern Buddhist studies; sent out to Calcutta, Paris and London by the indefatigable collector Brian Hodgson, the British Resident from 1820-43, these texts gave European scholars their first complete overview of Northern Buddhism's vast Indic literary heritage (Hunter 1896).

³ 'Newār' derives from the place name 'Nepāl'. There has also been a Newar diaspora to market towns throughout Nepal, the eastern Himalayan hills, to Tibet, and across South Asia (Gellner 1986; Lewis and Shakya 1988; Lewis 1993c).

Since Nepal was largely sealed off from the outside world until 1951, scholars have only recently recognised the value of Sylvain Levi's long-ago assertion (1905, I: 28) that other aspects of Buddhist culture there *besides texts* might provide insights into the faith's later Indic history, particularly its material culture, rituals, festivals, and historical processes.

Despite Newar Buddhism's slow decline, over three hundred Buddhist *viḥāras* (monasteries) still exist (Locke 1985; Gellner 1987), as do *vajrācārya* ritualists, Bodhisattva temples, *stūpas*, Mahāyāna festivals, tantric meditation *dikṣā* lineages, and *avadāna*-related pilgrimage traditions. Devout Buddhists still form a large proportion of the Valley's urban population and being Buddhist remains a vital marker of group identity (Gellner 1992; Lewis 1995). This rich cultural survival disproves the old assertion that Indic Buddhism completely died: the Newars in their small but vibrant oasis of tradition continue to practise Indic Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism (Lienhard 1984).⁴

Until the modern state's formation in 1769 'Nepal' referred only to a roughly 20-mile-diameter valley 4500 feet up in the central Himalayan foothills. Safe from military conquest but readily accessible to migrants, monks, and traders, Buddhism has existed there since Gupta times. Newar Buddhism is predominantly 'Indic', and through Nepal later Indic-Sanskritic Mahāyāna traditions were conveyed to Tibet; at times, too, Tibetan Buddhist influences have been strong (Lewis 1989b; Lewis and Jampal 1988). In the last four centuries at least, Nepalese Buddhism has had much in common with the domesticated forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism in modern Tibet and Japan — notably, a householder *saṃgha*, a special emphasis on death ritualism, and, most pre-eminently, devotion to the celestial Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Geography shaped the formation of Nepal as an independent state and its predominantly Indicised civilisation. The fertility of valley soils allowed for intensive rice and other crop cultivation; more lucrative were the earnings from trans-Himalayan trade, as merchants centred in the Valley could control the movement of goods from the Gangetic plains to the Tibetan plateau using the Valley as an entrepot (Lewis 1993c). The wealth derived from trade allowed the people of the Kathmandu Valley to import, domesticate, and reproduce many Indic

⁴ Scholarly discourse in Buddhist studies should adopt 'culture area' terminology and cease using 'Indian' as a scientific label for pre-modern phenomena. Projecting the modern state boundaries backwards falsifies historical representation since Buddhism endures continuously in South Asia outside the culture hearth zone up to the present: in the north in the Kathmandu Valley and Himalayas; in the far south, in Sri Lanka; to the east in Burma, Thailand, and at points along the Indian ocean. The tradition was also preserved long after the twelfth century in small communities lying in 'inner frontiers': e.g. Orissa (Das Gupta 1969) and in port town communities (Tucci 1931). The more heuristic geographical representation is that Buddhism did survive, on the frontiers of the Indic core zone, a definition of the historical situation that opens up important questions. To say that 'Indian Buddhism was extinguished' is poor methodology and, in terms of literal geographical fact, false.

traditions in a distinctive urban civilisation organised on caste principles and around both Hinduism and Buddhism. There have been Sanskrit *paṇḍitas* in Nepal for over 1500 years; equally long-established were Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries and *stūpas*, as well as wealthy aristocratic and merchant patrons.

The Newars also proved themselves exceptionally able artisans and craftsmen, adapting and domesticating Indic ideals into quite beautiful expressions of lost wax metal icons and stone sculpture, sacred architecture and painting. Over the past millennium they were employed in Tibet, and workshops in the Valley supplied the needs of the 'devotional supplies market' that went with the expansion of Buddhism across the Tibetan plateau (Lo Bue 1985, 1986; Vitali 1990). The literate élite of the Valley also found employment in the copying of Sanskrit manuscripts, for local patrons as well as for Tibetan scholars and their monastic libraries (Lo Bue 1988; Bajracarya 1980).

Three city-states — Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, Patan — came to dominate the Valley, although smaller towns and villages have given the polity a broad variation in settlement types (Gellner and Quigley 1995). After conquest by a Kṣatriya dynasty from Gorkha in 1769, state policies favouring Hinduism precipitated the decline of Buddhist traditions, although a great wealth of both devotional and cultural observance still survives. Today, with Kathmandu the capital of the modern state and a centre of contact with the outside world, this Valley is one of the most complex urban civilisations in Asia. A Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist culture is among its most unusual features.

Newar Buddhism

A short introduction to Newar Buddhism is necessary to situate the discussion of Sukhāvati traditions, although more in-depth treatments are listed in the bibliography. Most Newar Buddhists practise exoteric Mahāyāna devotionism, directing their devotions to *caityas* in their courtyards and neighbourhoods, and to the great *stūpas* such as Svayambhū (Locke 1986). They also express a strong devotion to the celestial Bodhisattvas and make regular offerings at temples and shrines dedicated to Avalokiteśvara, Mahākāla, and Tārā among others. Newar Buddhists participate periodically in special observances dedicated to these divinities — *pūjās*, *jātrās*, and *vratas* — which hold the promise of transforming their worldly and spiritual destinies (Locke 1987; Lewis 1989a). Most laity also worship other India deities: Gaṇeśa, Bhīṣen, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī in many guises, *nāgas*, etc. One strong belief is that worshipping all local deities is the Mahāyāna ideal (Gellner 1992: 75, 82).

The Newar Buddhist *saṃgha* is one of 'householder monks' (Gellner 1992) now limited to only two endogamous groups having the surnames *vajracārya* and *śākya*. These *saṃghas* still dwell in courtyards referred to as *vihāra* (New. *bāhā*) and undergo first (in local parlance) *śrāvaka*-styled celibate ordination, then Mahāyāna-styled initiation into the *bodhisattva saṃgha* (Locke 1975; Gellner 1988). Like married Tibetan lamas of the Nyingmapa order, they serve the

community's ritual needs, with some among them specialising in textual study, medicine, astrology, and meditation. David Gellner has aptly characterised Newar Buddhism as a religion in which conformity to prescribed ritual practices dominates, as against any singular doctrinal formulation (Gellner 1992: 3, 134). The great lay majority understand basic Mahāyāna doctrines from the *avadāna* and *jātaka* stories about the Bodhisattvas and their spiritual virtues (*pāramitās*) (e.g. Lienhard 1963; Lewis 1993b). In addition to compiling many recensions of these tales and telling them in public sessions, the *vajracāryas* perform for their community highly sophisticated Buddhist life-cycle rites and other rituals for festival and special observances (*vratas* and pilgrimages).

In terms of soteriological practice, the Newar Buddhist tradition also has an esoteric level: *vajrayāna* initiations (Skt: *dikṣā* or *abhiṣekha*; New: *dekhā*) that direct meditation and ritual to tantric deities such as Saṃvara, Hevajra, and their consorts (*yoginīs*). It is the *vajracārya* spiritual élite that pass on *vajrayāna* initiations to other high castes, including merchants and artisans; their training in Tantric meditation and ritual forms the authoritative basis of their ritual service for the community (Stablein 1976).

The Newar laity supports the local *vajracārya saṃgha*, which helps them, in return, to look after their spiritual destiny in this world and beyond. In their maintenance of this exchange and in their concern for *punya*, Newars closely resemble lay Buddhists in other countries. We now turn to examine how Sukhāvati traditions have been incorporated into the Mahāyāna culture of the Nepal Valley.

II

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF SUKHĀVATĪ TRADITIONS IN NEPAL

II.a Licchavi Epigraphy (464-900 CE)

Although one finds passing references to Nepal in earlier Indic literature, no epigraphic evidence has been found in Nepal before 464 CE when Sanskrit inscriptions attest to the Kathmandu Valley as a frontier zone ruled over by a *rājāvaṃśa* calling itself Licchavi (Riccardi 1980; Slusser 1982). Alongside various Hindu and high-ranking Brahmans there existed diverse Buddhist traditions, with the most mentioned *saṃgha* that of the Mahāsaṃghikas. Among over 200 recorded inscriptions, there are references to land-owning *vihāras*, *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*, and patronage by caravan leaders. A few hints of Vajrayāna practice are discernible, but Mahāyāna themes predominate: verses of praise are addressed to Śākyamuṇi and other Tathāgatas as well as to the Bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Samantabhadra, and, most frequently, Ārya Avalokiteśvara.

Turning to the theme of Sukhāvati, we find an inscription dated 610 CE from Patan that is one of the earliest epigraphic references to Amitābha in South Asia

(D. Vajracarya 1973: 98). Among a series of four *śloka*s on each of the four directional sides of a *caitya*, the east side text reads as follows:⁵

I praise Amitābha, the best, dispeller of illusion by the
light of great *prajñā* ;
The light, victor who lives in *Sukhāvātī* with Lokeśvara,
The destroyer of the fear arising in the world, bearer
of the lotus, and
Mahāsthāmaprāpta, the affectionate-hearted one.

The directional location of Amitābha on the *caitya*'s eastern side (Pal 1974a: 5), of course, does not agree with the later common convention of the *pañcatathāgatas* (Macdonald and Stahl 1979), but it does accord with Chapter XXIII of the Sanskrit *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* utilised by Hurvitz (1976: 407) that places *Sukhāvātī* in the East.⁶ The two *Sukhāvātī*-dwelling Bodhisattvas of the inscription, Lokeśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, are also mentioned in both versions of the *Sukhāvātīvyūha*.

II.b Licchavi Art

Several extant images from the Licchavi period, which can still be found and worshipped in the courtyards and temple precincts today, suggest that the aspiration for rebirth in *Sukhāvātī* was one element in the Mahāyāna cultural environment of early Nepal. There are several examples of what seem to be an Indic 'Sukhāvātī Triad' known from Kūṣāna Mathura (Huntington 1980): a larger Buddha flanked by somewhat diminutive Bodhisattvas, all attended by lotus-born votive figures (Pal 1974a: 22) (see Plate 1). Images of Amitābha are common among the earliest Licchavi sculptures; his place on all four sides of early *caityas* (unlike the later *pañcabuddha* shrines with four directional Buddhas) could conceivably point to a patron devotee's *Sukhāvātī* aspiration (particularly in Dhvaka Bāhā: see Pal 1974b: 27-8, 177). Amitābha is found in Avalokiteśvara's crown in Nepalese images from at least as early as 550 CE (Pal 1974b: Plate 8, 187-200).

Thus, from the earliest records of Nepal, we find art and inscriptional evidence of Mahāyāna Buddhists hoping for rebirth in *Sukhāvātī*. While these sources sustain the conclusion of *Sukhāvātī* orientation being one strand within early Mahāyāna Buddhism, it was by no means predominant, existing alongside other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the early Mahāyāna tradition.

⁵ I follow Riccardi's rendering (1980) of D. Vajracarya's (1973) compilation, except for identifying the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta and utilising Pal's (1974a) additional information on the inscription's context.

⁶ The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, usually rendered in English as 'Lotus Sūtra', has been the most influential Mahāyāna Buddhist text throughout Asia. In Kern's Sanskrit translation from a Nepalese recension of the text dated 1039 CE, *Sukhāvātī* is consistently located in the west (1963 ed: xxxviii, 178).



Plate 1: Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara with entourage and devotees on lotus flowers, from a Vihāra courtyard in northeast Kathmandu



Plate 2: Amitābha on the western side of a modern Newar *Stūpa* in Dagu Bāhā, Kathmandu

II.c Manuscripts in Newar Libraries

I have already alluded to the vast holdings of Sanskrit manuscripts copied and preserved by Newar Buddhists. A quick survey of manuscript lists reveals that among the most common Newar Buddhist *sūtras* preserved today are those that are prominent in featuring Sukhāvātī aspirations (Mitra 1971). The larger *Sukhāvātīvyūha* is in many *vihāra* libraries, as are other texts promising this rebirth destiny: the *Aparamitāyur Mahāyāna Sūtra*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Gāṇḍavyūha*, and the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*. There are also hundreds of *dhāraṇī* and *vraṭa* texts related to the deities of these *sūtras* (e.g. Takaoka 1981).

The question of how to define a Mahāyāna canon (Lancaster 1979) or relate the mere existence of texts in a particular place to the historical practices in that context remains a problem in Buddhist studies (Schopen 1993). From at least as early as the 15th century Newar Buddhism did define a canon called the *Navadharmā*:

Prajñāparamitā	Saddharmapuṇḍarīka
Gāṇḍavyūha	Lalitavistāra
Daśabhūmi	Suvarṇaprabhāsa
Samādhirāja	Lankāvātāra
Tathāgatagūhya	

The compilation of these nine texts, which ostensibly suggests the active scholastic command of a rather comprehensive representation of Mahāyāna philosophy, may in fact have been based mainly on ritual use: nine *sūtras* are needed for placement on the *dharmā maṇḍala* as part of the *guru maṇḍala pūjā*, a ceremony that frames almost every Vajrayāna ritual (Gellner 1991). Among these nine texts are several already cited that mention the promise of Sukhāvātī rebirth.

Another influential text in Nepal, the *Karaṇḍavyūha*, establishes a lineage connection between Śākyamuni, Sukhāvātī, and Amitābha, asserting that the paradise has endured with many names and Buddhas over myriad aeons (Mitra 1971 ed., 285-6). Finally, the still-later *Svayambhū Purāna*, a Sanskrit text of strictly local origin (although perhaps inspired by a Khotanese prototype (Brough 1948)), does not mention Sukhāvātī in its cosmological sections, but does refer to it in its tenth chapter. Here, the text recounts the history of king Guṇakāma and his relationship to his *siddha* teacher Śāntaśrī (also called Śāntikāra). After the former renounced his throne for an ascetic life, 'by constantly worshipping Svayambhū and Śāntikāra, the king obtained, after death, through his austerities and grace, rebirth in the blissful region named Sukhāvātī' (*Svayambhū Purāna* 10.197-8; my translation from Poussin 1893: 18). This text is often redacted in the subsequent Newari writings by Buddhist *paṇḍits* up to the present (Kolver 1985).

It is noteworthy that a common refrain in the Mahāyāna *sūtras* is that those who copy or expound upon a particular Mahāyāna text will be rewarded specifically with rebirth in Sukhāvātī (Schopen 1977: 182-88). Such promissory passages are found in many of the *sūtras* and *dhāraṇīs* found in the Kathmandu

Valley, e.g. the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, *Samādhirāja*, and the *Bhadracariprañidhāna*. In Nepal, where for centuries such manuscripts (including these Sukhāvati passages) were saved, copied, and stored, this scribal industry may well have been influenced by the hope for Sukhāvati rebirth. Despite the fact that the era of such scribal occupation is over, modern Newar scholars still make reference to Sukhāvati in their printed writings and ritual handbooks. Thus, it seems a reasonable surmise that scribes, *saṃgha* scholars, and commoners alike had an interest in the promise of Sukhāvati. In Nepal, too, the Buddhist orientation toward 'the western paradise' cannot be reduced to a single text or to the 'folk stratum' in society.

The rather eclectic contents of the 'Newar canon' and the widespread text-copying traditions confirm the impression given by art and inscriptions: for Nepalese Buddhists adhering to Indic Mahāyāna-*vajrayāna* traditions, the orientation for rebirth in Sukhāvati was but one among many other interests represented in the later tradition. This characterisation is supported by the modern data of Buddhist practice in the Newar community — to which we now turn.

III SUKHĀVATĪ IN MODERN NEWAR BUDDHIST PRACTICES

III.a Stūpa Veneration

Thousands of *stūpas* (or *caityas*)⁷ mark the urban environment of Newar settlements (Lewis 1994b). Most modern shrines show the later *pañcatathāgata* symbolism and place each Buddha according to a consistent directional orientation. Medieval and modern *caityas* invariably show Amitābha in the west (see Plate 2).

As elsewhere in the Buddhist world, a prominent hilltop *stūpa* dominates the local Buddhist landscape. Extant since Licchavi times, the 'Svayambhū Mahācaitya' to the west of Kathmandu city has been the focus of praxis for Buddhist devotees from throughout the Valley as well as the central Himalayan mid-hills and Tibet (Shakya 1978, Lewis 1989b). Hemraj Sākya has also recorded an oral tradition regarding the consecration of Svayambhū by Śāntikāra, the legendary *siddha* and original Newar *vajrācārya*: it says that 'Aparamita Tathāgata, dwelling in Sukhāvati, came to put into place the Mahācaitya's topmost gold umbrella and its *uṣṇīṣa* crest jewel (*cūḍāmani*)' (Shakya 1980: 526).

Svayambhū has remained a regular destination for pilgrimage and for making offerings at the many associated shrines and *viḥāras*. Today, its ambulatory has niches for the four Buddhas, their consorts, and for Vairocana, symbolic of the Ādi Buddha. Most Newar patronage at the great *stūpa*, and most *pūjās* conducted on the hilltop, are done before the Amitābha niche on the west side of the *stūpa*.

⁷ From antiquity, *stūpa* and *caitya* were used in Buddhist inscriptions and literature as synonyms. They are also used this way in this article.

This same preference pattern is clear in the morning *pūjā* offerings that every Buddhist household makes at neighbourhood *caityas*: if devotees leave offerings, these are set down before Amitābha, and rarely given to any other Tathāgata. For most Newar laity, this is 'just our custom'; several commentators have also given the reason for this preference: Amitābha is the Tathāgata of the current era, the Kali Yuga. This is a point to which we will return.

III.b The Avalokiteśvara Cultus

Besides *caitya* veneration, Newar Buddhism today is focused upon devotion to Avalokiteśvara, affectionately called Karuṇāmaya ('Compassionate-Hearted'), a celestial Bodhisattva who has been integrated into Nepal's devotional life in a variety of ways (Locke 1980). Most Newar images of Avalokiteśvara feature the classical Indic iconographic placement of Amitābha affixed on the crown. Close to images of Avalokiteśvara at major temples there are shrines for Tārā, reflecting the view, also known in Tibet, that both are emanations, from the right and left eyes, respectively, of Amitābha in Sukhāvati (Meiszahl 1967: 461).

Daily veneration of Avalokiteśvara is the most common devotional focus of Newar Buddhists. For most devotees the centre of Buddhist activity inside the old city of Kathmandu is the temple in the courtyard of Kanakacaitya Mahāvihāra, called Jana Bāhā in popular parlance. (For this reason, the colloquial term for the Bodhisattva is *Jana Bāhā Dyaḥ*, 'Deity of Jana Bāhā'.) Several important Sukhāvati traditions are articulated through rituals, icons, and texts associated with this shrine complex.

The *ratha jātrās* of Avalokiteśvara are the most important festivals in the Valley, the greatest overall being in Patan-Bungamati, and the greatest in Kathmandu City the one orchestrated for Jana Bāhā Dyaḥ. As will be noted below in a local myth, one reason for assembling a five-storey *ratha* and pulling it through the narrow city streets in spectacular fashion is to provide the house-bound and sick a chance for veneration that will enable them to be reborn in Sukhāvati.

III.c 'Sukhāvati Lokeśvara'

The veneration of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in Kathmandu has led *saṃgha* members to elaborate upon the nature of the divinity and develop myriad devotional practices. Most prominent are the traditions that specify 108 or 360 Avalokiteśvara manifestations. In Nepal this led to the articulation of an 'Avalokiteśvara cosmology', a theory that the whole of the Buddhist pantheon is in fact an emanation of Avalokiteśvara.⁸ The 108 images have been rendered in

⁸ These include Sṛṣṭikāntha Lokeśvara, Ādi-Buddha Lokeśvara, Amitābha Lokeśvara, Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara, Maitreya Lokeśvara, Samantabhadra Lokeśvara, Vajrapāṇi Lokeśvara, Mañjuḥṣa Lokeśvara, Kṣitigarbha Lokeśvara, etc. This totalising construction has also been noted for Tibetan devotional thought about Tārā (Beyer 1973). In effect, such Buddhist cosmologies mirror the Viṣṇu *avatāra* theology (Mus 1964).

devotional art often through sculpture, paintings, illustrated manuscripts, and in modern printed form. Common hand-copied texts used by both lay and *saṃgha* devotees are the *Lokeśvara Nāma 108 Stotra* or the *Avalokiteśvara Nāma 360 Stotra*, in which each of the names is listed for chanting in order. A printed book with line drawings of the 108 forms and stories associated with 35 of these emanations was published in 1979 by A. Vajracarya.

In each of these *Lokeśvara Nāma Stotras*, a 'Sukhāvati Lokeśvara' has been drawn and listed as part of the tradition (Shakya 1991: 31, 48). The rendition from the 1979 publication, a form which shows Lokeśvara seated with Tārā, is given in Plate 3 (see the discussion of the Tārā *vrata* below). This is a form that is *not* specified in the Pala-era iconographic sourcebook, the *Sādhanamālā* (Malleman 1948: 55) but *is* found in the Newari *Dharmakośasaṃgraha*. Another iconographic form of Sukhāvati Lokeśvara from Nepal is described as 'solitary' (Bhattacharyya 1968b: 404), as reproduced in Plate 4. No specific Newar *vrata* that I have encountered is dedicated specifically to Sukhāvati Lokeśvara, although his inclusion in paintings associated with the Bhīma Ratha Jaṅkwa (see III.e.3, below) may indicate a connection with this ritual.



श्री सुखावती लोकेश्वर्याय नमः॥ ८२ ॥

Plate 3: Sukhāvati Lokeśvara-Tārā
(based on A. Vajracarya 1979)



Plate 4: Sukhāvati Lokeśvara
(based on Bhattacharyya 1968: 404)

III.d A Local Text: Janabāhādyah Bākham

The *Janabāhādyah Bākham*,⁹ a Kathmandu-centred Newari-language text that was probably derived from an early modern *vaṃśāvalī*, is a story (*bākham*) told occasionally by public *vajrācārya* or *sākya* storytellers. The narrative explains the origin of Kathmandu's greatest Buddhist temple and *jātrā* at the time of Avalokiteśvara's manifestation from Sukhāvati. It also positions other sites in the local sacred landscape as having royal origins while ordaining specific Mahāyāna practices with Sukhāvati rebirth as the reward for devout observance:¹⁰

Maitreya Bodhisattva asked the Buddha, 'How did Avalokiteśvara, also called Janabāhādyah, who resides in Kathmandu, arise?'...

Sākyaśiṃha Buddha replied, 'Once there was a King Yakṣa Malla and through the efforts of that king's family, Śrī Karuṇāmaya came down from Sukhāvati *bhūvana* to help the people of Kathmandu...to build a *vihāra* at Kālmochan *tīrtha*...

[He said:] 'If those who are born in Nepal observe the *Guṃḷa Dharma*, if they show devotion to Svayambhū, if they play five traditional instruments at the *jātrās*, if they revere the *pañcatathāgatas*, if they perform the proper worship of Śrī Jyotirūpa Svayambhū Bhagavān...they will get the four fruits: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*, and be freed from all *pāp*. When they die they will be free from the fear of Yamarāja and go for rebirth in Sukhāvati *bhūvana*.

Having legitimated the monsoon-season, month-long Buddhist festival called *Guṃḷa Dharma*, a time for myriad devotional observances (Lewis 1993a), the *Janabāhādyah Bākham* then recounts a testimonial story describing how in the past local Buddhists did show such devotion and how Yama, Lord of Death, was 'cheated' by their devotional fidelity:

'Once Yamarāja sent his messengers to Nepal but found that as soon as the people stopped breathing they disappeared and went immediately to Sukhāvati by the favour of Avalokiteśvara. As a result, Yamarāja himself went to Kathmandu ... the King invited him to the palace where he was seated on the King's throne and worshipped... The King then summoned Vajrapāṇi who bound Yamarāja with a *mantra* after which the King presented a petition that he make the people of the country ever young, never to grow old, never afflicted by diseases, having long life. Yamarāja replied that this was not in his power to give, that the people suffered due to their *karma* which could not be erased.

⁹ The text is excerpted from John Locke's paraphrase translation (1980: 149-154). I have restored a few Sanskrit forms and made minor corrections to keep usages consistent with those in the article.

¹⁰ The modernist Theravādins in Nepal have spoken out against this practice, and most of the merchants I studied had given up all but egg sacrifices. The practice of *vajrācāryas* performing these rites is still found in Kathmandu's festivals (e.g. Annapūrnā Jātra and in Naradevi's Pañcare rituals (Lewis 1984: 394) and, as noted, in Patan. Some laity also derided the old and widely-heard *vajrācārya* apology: as one cynical middle-aged man once commented, 'If such ritual sacrifice leads to *Sukhāvati* rebirth, then why don't I sacrifice my mother and father?'

The King replied that until the request was granted, he would not release Yamarāja. The latter said, 'Nobody can grant this request, except for my *guru* Śrī Karuṇāmaya who lives in Sukhāvātī.' The King commanded Yamarāja to summon his *guru* and so Avalokiteśvara appeared out of the water at a local pond, with Amitābha on his head, one hand in *abhaya mudra*, the other holding a lotus...

'King Yakṣa Malla then built...a *vihāra* for Karuṇāmaya. When the *vihāra* was inaugurated, Karuṇāmaya then vowed, 'Whoever comes to this *vihāra* and does *pūjā* to me will be free from disease and have a full life. The sick who come to read a *dhāraṇī*...will be cured. In the next life they will come to reside with me in Sukhāvātī *bhūvana*... Hence you should also establish a *ratha jātrā*.' (Locke 1980: 151-3)

Linking Avalokiteśvara to this paradise, the story informs devotees that conformity to established Newar Buddhist customs, especially the extensive practices during the monthly Guṃlā festival (Lewis 1993a), can ensure their rebirth in Sukhāvātī.

III.e Newar Lay Buddhist Rituals

The enduring practices in Kathmandu Valley households contain numerous references to Sukhāvātī.

III.e.1 Pañca Dāna

Each year during Guṃlā, one day is dedicated for each household to make donations directly to members of the *saṃgha* who visit their homes on a 'begging round'. One common motive articulated by the donor householders is 'to be reborn in Sukhāvātī' (Lewis 1984: 368).

III.e.2 Tantric Buddhist Animal Sacrifice

Another reference to Sukhāvātī was made by scattered Newar *vajrācārya* priests and laity with regard to animal sacrifice. Newar Buddhists have long made blood offerings to certain members of their local pantheon and there are prescribed *pūjā* guidelines for the *vajrācāryas* who perform them. (They do not actually wield the knife, however (Gellner 1992: 124-5; Owens 1993).) What does Sukhāvātī have to do with the taking of animal life, a practice that contravenes many early Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna texts? It is found in the local *vajrayāna*-derived explanation for their ritual efficacy: before the animal is dispatched, the *vajrācārya* whispers a *mantra* into its ear so that, as one of my informants noted, 'It can go to Sukhāvātī'. The same priest also commented that, in Buddhist terms, it was a service to liberate animals from their rebirth state, and noted that the wick lamp placed on the animal's severed head laid before the deity is also said to symbolise this Sukhāvātī destiny. (Bruce Owens (1994) has noted the same comment made at the sacrifices that take place during the Patan-Bungamati festival.) This practice and justification has been much disputed in recent decades (e.g. R. K. Vajracarya 1981: p. n).

III.e.3. Burā/Burī Jaṅkwa or the Bhīma Ratha Jaṅkwa

This optional Newar rite for elders (*burā/burī*), performed since at least the fifteenth century, is done to mark the occasion of reaching the age of seventy-seven years, seven months, and seven days, etc. The rituals elevate the individual to a new, divine status, as expressed in the dramatic performance of children and grandchildren pulling the elder through the city in a decorated chariot. From this point onward, the elder is also relieved of adult religious responsibilities until death.

Burā Jaṅkwa rites generate blessings to assure both longevity ('strengthening the *āyur*') and excellent rebirth destiny ('*pāpa cut*') (Lewis 1984: 299-307, Gellner 1992: 198). The exertions highlighted below ultimately seek to provide sufficient merit so that the elder will be capable of rebirth in Sukhāvātī. Although this is not proclaimed explicitly in the formal chants or rituals, it does find expression by participating priests and patrons: Sukhāvātī rebirth for the elder is usually cited in the inscriptions on the art commissioned to commemorate the rites, and is an especially common motif in local Buddhist painting (e.g. Pal 1977: 186).¹¹

Burā Jaṅkwa rites include a repetition of all earlier life-cycle rites, the gift of a cow to a brahman (*go dāna*), and offerings to almost every beneficent being in the cosmos as laid out on a series of *maṅḍalas* (the *graha maṅḍala* and *pañca buddha* or *duṣo maṅḍalas* (R. Vajracarya 1981: 48-9)). The rituals take more than two days to perform and there are many kinds of offerings.¹²

The required founding of a *caitya* in the name of the elder(s) is the rite's final connection with Sukhāvātī. This is one of the most meritorious actions that a layman can perform, as recorded in classical Mahāyāna *sūtras* and in local texts (Lewis 1994b), and here it is done on behalf of the elder. (The *caitya* in modern practice can also be depicted in a painting or pressed as a repousse metal plaque (see Plate 5).) In public or private representation, the proper installation of any Newar *stūpa* involves *vajrayāna* ritual including the reciting of the *uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*. Classified as an emanation of Vairocana 'who resides in the womb of the

¹¹ Having performed the Jaṅkwa, men (but not women) are entitled to special cremation rites, with the body burned in a seated position. They are conveyed to the *ghāt* seated in a palanquin that resembles the *bhīma ratha* (Lewis 1984: 307). It is also expected that their cremation ashes will be moulded into sand *stūpas* and left at auspicious places by the family in the *śrāddha* rites performed throughout the year of mourning.

¹² The extent and detail of this life cycle observance is far too vast to be described here. An overview description is found in Lewis 1984: 299-307. Note that a man or woman who has 'completed all the life-cycle rites' has taken those for both mēn and women, becoming both genders like the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. In the yearly rites done at the major temples of the Valley, the Bodhisattva's androgynous nature is evident to those who know about the renewal ceremonies that include washing, repainting, and reconsecration rituals that include both genders' entire life cycle ceremonies (Locke 1980: 208-221). While the identification is clear through such symbolic analysis, I am not aware that any informant or text has ever developed this parallelism.

caitya', the goddess Uṣṇiṣavijayā who personifies the *dhāraṇī* must be established inside the new *burā jaṅkwa stūpa*.

Both the textual and iconographic traditions associated with the goddess are linked to Sukhāvati. The Sanskrit Uṣṇiṣavijayā *dhāraṇī* text notes that its origins were in Sukhāvati: the *dhāraṇī* is revealed by Amitābha there (Mitra (ed.) 1971: 263-4). The Newar iconography of the Uṣṇiṣavijayā image located within a *caitya* has not been found in India; but the goddess's solitary iconographic depiction goes back a millennium at least, as it is found in the *Sadhanamālā* three times (Bhattacharyya 1968b).¹³

The upper right hand of an eight-armed Newar sculpture shown in Plate 6 holds a lotus bearing Amitābha (Foucher 1905, II: 86). This form has been noted across the Mahāyāna Buddhist world (Chandra 1979). With reference to the Bhīmaratha rites, Lokesh Chandra cites a Tibetan text, the '*Rinbhyun* album', that may explain the origins of the Newar practice: it identifies Uṣṇiṣavijayā as one of the '*āyusādhana* deities...for prolonging life' (Chandra 1979: 14).

Given its role in Newar ritual and a reference from another Tibetan literary source about Svayambhū,¹⁴ I suggest that this image and its contextual *dhāraṇī* practice point back to an old death-time or after-death *dhāraṇī* recitation tradition that connected Sukhāvati rebirth to the Uṣṇiṣavijayā *dhāraṇī* practice that was begun (or renewed) through the *bhīmaratha* ceremonies. Chandra's terse summary of the Tibetan *Rgyud-sde kun-btus*, a minor Tantra, identifies Uṣṇiṣavijayā as one of three long-life deities 'who are auspicious at the end' (Chandra 1979: 1979: 15). This supports this hypothesis and suggests that the subject requires further investigation.

III.e.4. Death and After-death Rituals

We began this study by citing the proper Newar Buddhist pronouncement as cremation processions pass on their way to the *ghāṭ*. While the respectful, '*Sukhāvati bhūvanay lāi he mā*' is perhaps the context in which layfolk most commonly invoke Sukhāvati, it is but one of many other afterlife paradigms that Newar Buddhist tradition applies to the crisis of death. It is noteworthy that *Sukhāvati* is *not* specifically cited in the *maṅḍala* or *dhāraṇīs* associated with the

¹³ There is one example of Uṣṇiṣavijayā within a *stūpa* at the Biyun temple outside Beijing. The five-*stūpa* monument was built in 1748 (Anon 1993).

¹⁴ This is my speculative suggestion, as earlier treatments of Uṣṇiṣavijayā as art motif or in a textual passage have never been related to actual death-time Buddhist usage. At least in the Tibetan literature, a connection between Uṣṇiṣavijayā and death ritual is found: Taranatha records that the sage Vasubandhu died in Nepal, 'After reciting the Uṣṇiṣavijayā *dhāraṇī* backwards and forwards twice'. (This point was made by Pal 1977: 186). In modern practice, it is the *Durgatiparisodhana* recitation and *maṅḍala* that are now the norm. This is so much so that one leading Kathmandu *vajrācārya* ritualist does not even mention Uṣṇiṣavijayā or Sukhāvati in his book's long discussion of karma and Newar death rites (Lewis 1994a).



Plate 5: An Urāy family's private *Buḍa Jaṅkwa* repousse plaque with an Uṣṇiṣavijayā *Caitya*

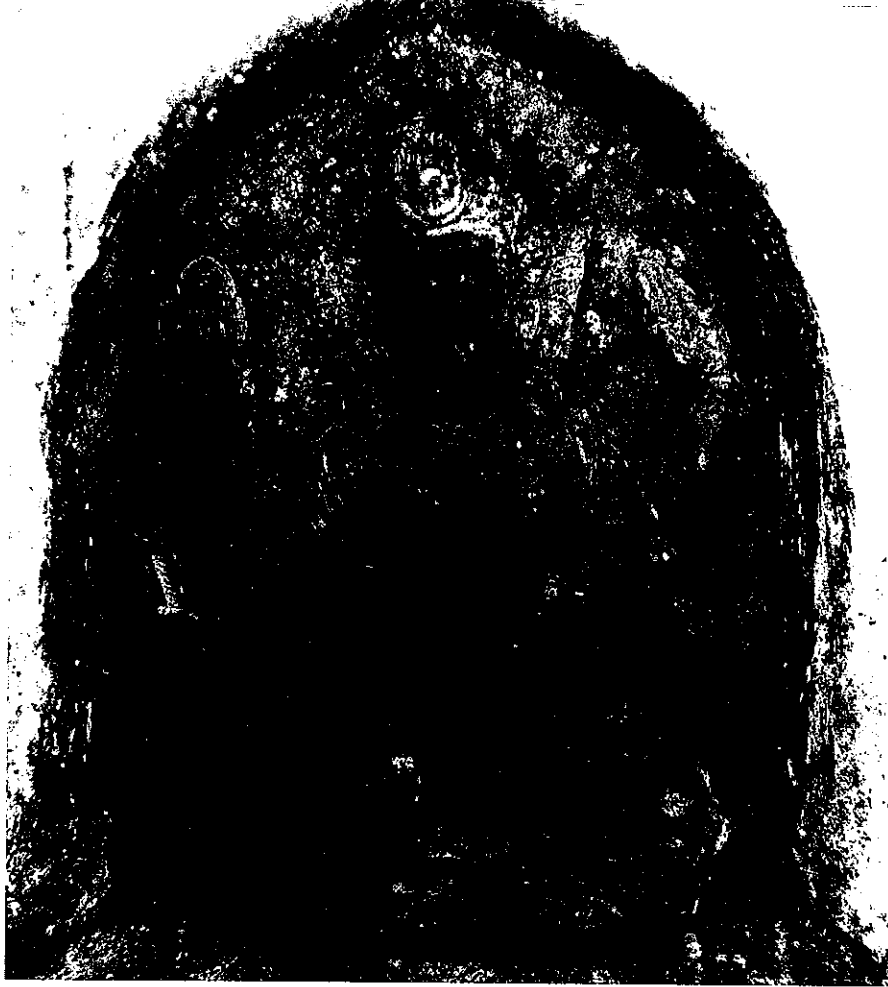


Plate 6: Newar Uṣṇīṣavijayā Sculpture showing Amitābha in the upper left hand, on a *stūpa* in Dhālisikwa Bāhā, Kathmandu

Durgatiparisodhana tantra traditions that dominate in after-death *vajrācārya* rituals (Vajracarya 1981; Lewis 1994a; Skorupski 1983; A. Vajracarya 1973; Gellner 1992: 128-179). Certainly there is no trace in modern Newar tradition of the sort of death-time *Sukhāvati* visualisation practices prescribed in the classic Pure Land *sūtras*.

For the mourning period, Newar Buddhists have retained but generally reinterpreted Brahmanical *śrāddha* practices, making *piṇḍa dāna* offerings to the dead. Across the Newar towns and cities and among different castes, this practice varies rather widely (Gellner 1992: 210-213). The Kathmandu high castes make *piṇḍa* offerings at the *ghāt* before cremation, and in the weeks and months following, even performing *śrāddha* on the kinsman's death anniversary for years afterwards (Lewis 1984: 314-336).

The Newars' assimilation of the Indic *śrāddha* emphasises *Sukhāvati*

ॐ नमः श्रीमदाय्यावलोकितेश्वराय

अथ लौकिकपिण्डविधानम् ।

(प्व पिण्ड थये विधि)

लौकिक पिण्ड थयेत फि लायेगु कंठ

○ गोलाये बो	चंत्य	मत
卐	卐	▽
○ धर्म	○ बुद्ध	○ संघ
○ 卐	○ 卐	○ 卐
○ वृद्ध पितामह	○ प्रपितामह	○ पितामह
○ 卐	○ 卐	○ 卐
○ स्वपिता	○ सुखावतीलोकेश्वर	○ विकर

(मण्डल)
○
卐

Plate 7: A Vajrācārya Priest's drawing showing the arrangement of implements and offerings for the *Śrāddha* ritual

Lokeśvara's witnessing of the ritual: the celestial Bodhisattva is asked to sit on *kuśa* grass and placed directly in front of the *vajrācārya* priest, as shown in Plate 7 (this is reproduced from a ritual guidebook, the *Piṇḍa Vidhānam* (A. Vajracarya 1973)). In the *laukikapīṇḍa* ceremony, Sukhāvati Lokeśvara witnesses the *guru maṇḍala pūjā*, receives offerings, and remains for the *Durgatiparisodhana dhāraṇī* recitations on behalf of the deceased. For the 'Sixteen *Piṇḍa* Rite', performed by riverside *tīrthas*, Sukhāvati Lokeśvara is similarly honoured (A. Vajracarya 1973). The *śrāddha* rite's instrumental orchestration is quite explicit: it seeks the Bodhisattva's compassionate, salvific actions on behalf of the deceased.

III.e.5 Mahāyāna Vratas

The *vrata* is another example of an Indic religious practice that has been adapted into later Mahāyāna Buddhism. That *vratas* date back many centuries in the Newar tradition is attested by the antiquity of manuscripts describing the proper forms of observance (Malla 1981). *Vratas* are special forms of *vajrācārya*-led worship services that focus devotional attention on an individual deity. Groups of individuals devote one or more days to making offerings, while remaining chaste, fasting, abstaining from certain foods, and maintaining a high state of ritual purity. All earn great amounts of *punya* and Newar tradition specifies a series of boons for each.

It is somewhat surprising that Sukhāvati is not mentioned in the most popular Newar *vrata* of Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara (Locke 1987).¹⁵ But in the appended story (*vratakathā*) of another Newar *vrata*, the promise of Sukhāvati is made as a reward for devotional acts dedicated to Tārā. The story closes with this resolution, as the heroine follows the advice of a sage who proposes that she perform a *vrata* to gain divine aid:

Hearing this from the sage, the female Brāhmaṇ climbed up the hill with enthusiasm to have a *darśan* of Ugra Tārā Vajrayoginī and thereafter went to the *Tārā Tīrtha*. On reaching the *tīrtha*, she bathed and offered *pūjā*, and said heartfelt prayers.

In answer to her prayers, the goddess Ārya Tārā took pity on the female Brāhmaṇ and appeared before her in green complexion and in *abhaya mudra* holding a flower in one of her hands. The female Brāhmaṇ fell prostrate on the ground before the goddess and offered her *pūjā* while chanting devotional songs. The goddess blessed her and vanished out of sight. The female Brāhmaṇ spent the rest of her life at this *Tārā tīrtha* living upon fruits and water nearby, meditating and observing the Ārya Tārā *vrata* and offering prayers to the *Triratna*. When she finally died she was transported to Sukhāvati *bhuvana*.

(Bajracarya 1980, translated in Lewis 1989a: 129)

¹⁵ The highest goal in the version presented by Locke cites the goal of the *vrata* as *anuttara samyak sambodhi* ('complete enlightenment') (Locke 1987: 174). The stories in this tradition even cite Lokeśvara 'coming from Tushita heaven' (p. 170).

This popular ritual thus asserts that devotion to the green Tārā, too, can secure rebirth in *Sukhāvati*.¹⁶

III.f. Sukhāvati in Religious Folksongs

The rich Newar cultural environment includes many song genres, including devotional hymns and compositions for the different instrument-playing groups, the older *bājans* and more recent *bhajans* (Lewis 1995).¹⁷ In the former, there are a few compositions that refer to Sukhāvati. In one old song that was until very recently sung by pilgrims while venerating Svayambhū (Lienhard 1984: 23), the verses connect veneration of Svayambhū to rebirth in *Sukhāvati*. It involves several themes developed in this study (old age, veneration of *stūpas*, the hour of death, and injunctions from the *Janabāhadyaḥ Bākham*):

Oh people, pay homage to the feet of the three jewels and show your devotion.

Days are never the same as long as life lasts for man.
Life flows on, impermanent. One who does not think of *dharma* in this life will afterwards go to hell.

Being subject to illusion, veiled by *māyā*, one's eyes do not see the *dharma*. Not thinking of the next world, not doing good to others, the hour of death approaches.

As a boy he plays; when middle-aged he does not reflect.
In old age, laziness enters. Separated from everything, he must leave. Love, friends, and wealth do not follow.

(Lienhard 1984: 24)

Svayambhū, the Light and *Dharmadhātu*, have condescended to come to the wonderful hill called Gopuccha.¹⁸ If you pay homage to this revered one, you will not need to endure hardships. He will lead his people to *Sukhāvati*...

Note that here the devotional practices at the Svayambhū *stūpa* are interpreted as expressions of non-attachment and insight, with homage to the *stūpa* decisive for Sukhāvati rebirth.

Another shorter song still sung during the Patan Avalokiteśvara festival provides an example of a disciple begging for the Bodhisattva's grace to help him reach Amitābha's paradise:

Oh Lokanātha, do save me soon!

¹⁶ Note that the Tantric goddess 'Ugra Tārā Vajrayoginī' directs the heroine to continue her devotions to Ārya Tārā.

¹⁷ My guess is that it is in the various song traditions praising 'Lokeśvara'nāth in Sukhāvati' that modern Newar laymen most encounter this conception of paradise.

¹⁸ The old name of the hillock where the Svayambhū Mahācaitya is located.

To you whose colour is like the dawn's, who bears Amitābha on your forehead, who give gestures of security and of granting a boon, who are Protector of the unprotected and hold in your hand the unfailing snare, to you I, a poor man, have come, full of hope...

O lord of the land Sukhāvati, glorious and endowed with beautiful auspicious marks! Behold, oh Lord: I bid you cast a kind look upon me and take me to Sukhāvati at that time [of death]!

(Leinhard 1984: 24)

Imported from India in this century, the *bhajan* style group has inspired Newar devotees to compose hundreds of Buddhist hymns to be sung with the harmonium, tabla, and cymbal orchestra. In surveying this still quite popular devotional area — which has induced many of the different groups that meet regularly to publish songbooks for their members (e.g. Shakya 1980; Kasa 1967) — the paucity of references to Sukhāvati is striking. Most of these simply refer to Avalokiteśvara as *Sukhāvatinātha* ('Lord of Sukhāvati'), although several do praise the Bodhisattva for 'leading living beings to Sukhāvati' (e.g. Kasa 1967: 26). The rarity of *bhajan* references is no doubt due, in part, to the strong influence of the Theravādin modernist movement (Kloppenbergh 1977; Gellner 1992: 321-8; Lewis 1984: 494-513); but it also conforms to the basic pattern evident elsewhere in modern Newar practice: Sukhāvati rebirth remains an unsystematically articulated goal, one of many associations linked to venerating the *stūpas* and Bodhisattvas of the country.

IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

From this survey of Nepalese Buddhist inscriptions, art, texts, and modern ritual practices, several summary observations can be made about the role of *Sukhāvati* traditions in the history of Indic Buddhism.

1. This study supports the conclusion of Gregory Schopen (1977) that there was no 'Sukhāvati cult' evident in Indic Buddhism and that 'hope for rebirth in Sukhāvati' had become by the fifth century CE a 'generalised religious goal'. Rebirth there did not become a universally-shared paradigm for understanding death in the Newar tradition, nor did it find consistent association with Avalokiteśvara or Amitābha in Newar *dhāraṇī* practice or in other rituals. Nor is Sukhāvati rebirth associated with these divinities alone.

2. Sukhāvati is mentioned in local texts that explain the origins of Svayambhū Mahācaitya as well as the largest Buddhist festival in Kathmandu and other central Buddhist rituals performed by the lay community. Sukhāvati aspiration is found in scattered devotional songs, and articulated as the reward for rituals that are performed faithfully and directed to Lokeśvara, Tārā, Svayambhū, and Uṣṇīṣavijayā. Sukhāvati rebirth provides a motive for making *stūpas* and a rationale for Buddhists performing animal sacrifice. Finally, Sukhāvati rebirth

supports the Newar performance of old-age and after-death rituals for kin elders. Coupled with the view of Amitābha as the Buddha who is the best refuge in the Kali Yuga, all these domesticated elements explain the overwhelmingly singular focus on Amitābha in the common gestures of *stūpa* veneration usually visible at Svayambhū and at the Valley towns' myriad votive *stūpas*.¹⁹

3. While there is no evidence of a separate 'Sukhāvati cult' in the history of Nepalese Buddhism, Sukhāvati as a rebirth aspiration may have motivated the copying and veneration of Sanskrit *sūtras*, although this surmise should find confirmation in the colophons of or passages from other medieval Nepalese documents. The Sukhāvati rebirth paradigm certainly cannot be described in any sense as a Newar 'folk tradition'; in fact it is quite the opposite in that it is the literate and ritual-performing Newar Buddhist elite that articulates it most often.

4. The nature of Sukhāvati belief and practice among the modern laity must be considered as part of the Newar case study in late Indic Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna culture.²⁰ Many Newars today regard the present era as a retrograde spiritual time: some use the Indic and originally non-Buddhist concept *Kali Yuga*. In my surveys of Buddhist merchants in Kathmandu, their most commonly reported view was that Sukhāvati rebirth is a distant and unrealistic possibility for most to hope for. As one man said to me, 'I cannot imagine that anyone living now has such a store of *punya*'. Is the rebirth destiny a place called Sukhāvati, or just a place characterised by *sukha*, 'happiness'? In my experience, as in Gellner's (1992: 131-2), Newar Buddhists gave disparate answers about how *nirvāṇa* and *Sukhāvati* differed. Despite references having been built into many enduring Buddhist traditions, Sukhāvati for most Buddhists today is a vaguely understood, distant hope and for many hardly more than a cliché.

5. The Newar traditions suggest that the emphasis on salvation through faith was always limited and ambiguous for Buddhist communities (cf. Dutt 1970; Gokhale 1980). Some ritualists and monk story-tellers certainly did emphasise this path, as they did in China and Japan (Prusek 1938); but many others apparently ignored (or reinterpreted) it as envisioned in the 'Pure Land *sūtras*', especially those who regarded true Buddhist realisation as *bodhi* on earth as well as those focused upon more Tantric paradigms (cf. Chappell 1977).

6. The Newar tradition suggests that one focal point for Sukhāvati belief has always been the crisis of death. We have noted narratives from the *Janabāhādyah Bākham* and in the *Tārā vratākathā* in which the Lord of Death, Yama, yields to the authority and grace of the Bodhisattvas (Avalokiteśvara, Tārā) for those who

¹⁹ Jan Nattier has noted that the Kali Yuga framework appeared only sporadically in later Buddhist Sanskrit literature, beginning with the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* in the Gupta era and finding most common usage in later Tantric literature (1991: 280-3). As noted above, this text and these Tantras are represented extensively in the Newar tradition.

²⁰ A description of the research methodology is found in Greenway and Lewis (forthcoming, 1996). An article summarising the patterns of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna belief in the Kathmandu merchant community is in press (Lewis 1997, forthcoming).

practise. Several popular songs also express this hope for grace as do the *śrāddha* rituals that compel Sukhāvati Lokeśvara to witness and act upon rituals performed on behalf of the dead. In this area the Newar tradition provides another example of how Indic Buddhism developed ritual practices for all individuals, including monks and nuns, who wanted to exert maximal effort in order to ensure the best possible rebirth destiny for their departed kinsmen (Schopen 1984). This concern for aiding kin in their rebirth destiny seems to have been an enduring area of Buddhist concern and ritual innovation.

7. Finally, Newar Buddhists also adopted Vajrayāna traditions that co-existed with the Sukhāvati-related rituals described above. More specifically, a Vajrayāna paradigm and praxis gained supremacy over a more esoteric Mahāyāna orientation. The 'Sukhāvati paradigm' provides another example of the incorporation-subordination process that Gellner has so clearly explicated (1992), in this case by the traditions of the *Durgatiparisodhana tantra*: these now dominate in the rituals performed by Newar *vajrācāryas* in the days, weeks, and months after death.²¹ In the history of Newar Buddhism, faith in the powers of freely-acting Bodhisattvas or devotion to Svayambhū Mahācaitya to pull one through to Sukhāvati was overlaid with a greater faith in the destiny-determining power of Tantric *dhāraṇīs*.²² Just as Sukhāvati Lokeśvara in the Indo-Newari *piṇḍa-dāna* rites is installed as an onlooker for the chanting of the *dhāraṇīs* from the *Durgatiparisodhana tantra*, the explicit ritual manipulation of death passage detailed in the later Vajrayāna traditions displaced earlier Mahāyāna solutions.

²¹ Is there a relationship between Tantric death ritual traditions in China/Japan (Teiser 1988: 107-112) and the unprecedented Buddhist innovations of East Asia that led monks and laity to retain the 'Sukhāvati paradigm' and develop death-time ritualism? Charles Orzech (1989) has indeed pointed out that the legacy of the *vajrayāna* in medieval China was rites for the salvation of *pretas*; these rituals employ *dhāraṇī* recitations, some of the texts state that they were revealed in Avalokiteśvara's Pure Land (p. 105), and the practices became central to the east Asian *avalambana* festival and the patronage economics of Chinese Buddhist monasticism: "These rites for the dead became the principal source of income for small hereditary temples, the most numerous kind of monastic institution" (p. 103).

²² Does the *nembutsu* belief and practice of later Japanese Pure Land (Dobbins 1989) represent a later confluence of these two: *dhāraṇī* practice within a Pure Land paradigm?

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