William S. Sax

Divine Kingdoms in the Central Himalayas

Introduction

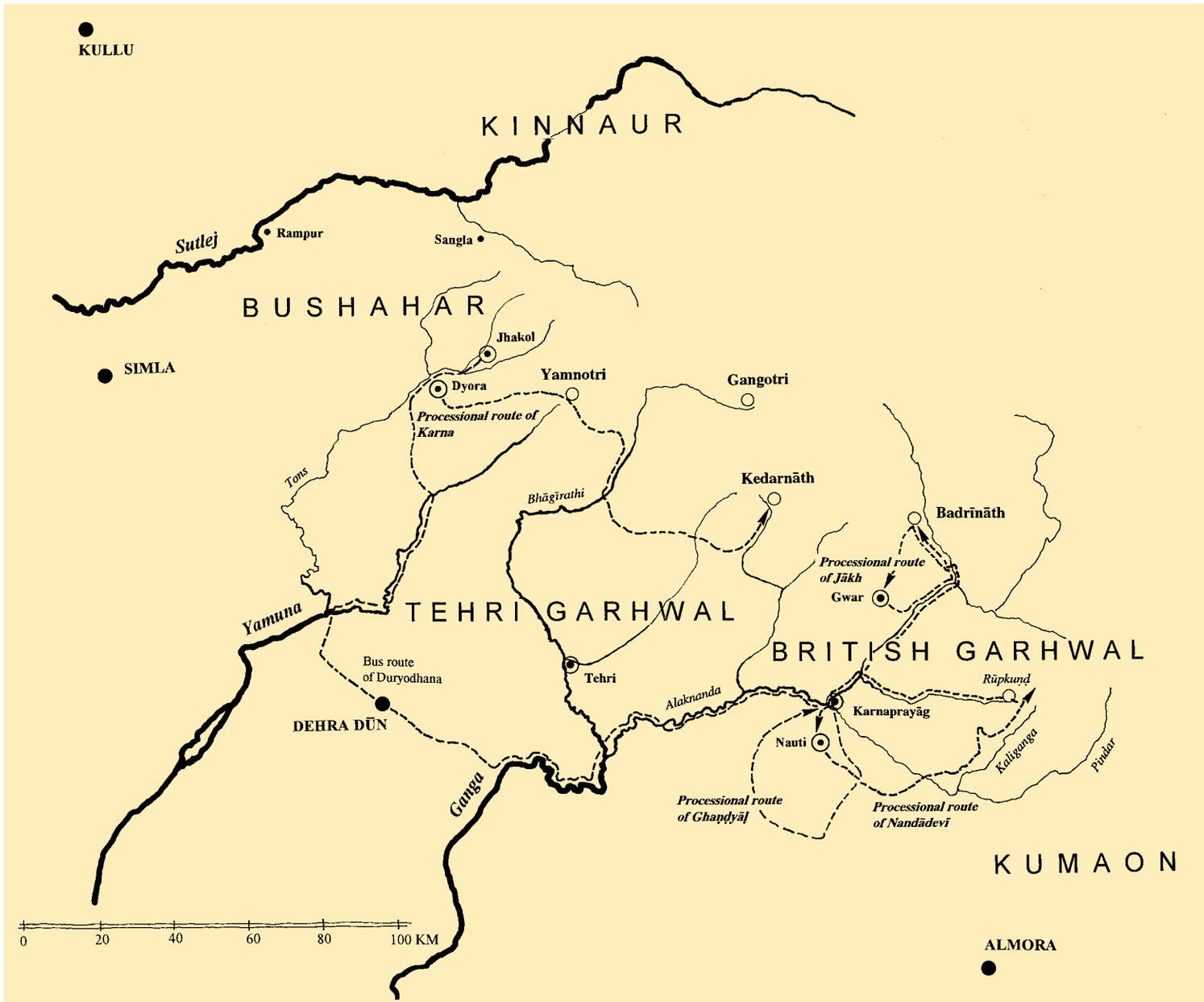
A salient aspect of folk religion in Garhwal is the number and frequency of divine processions. Travelling in this part of the central Himalayas, one frequently sees the palanquin of a god or goddess being carried by devotees from one place to another along the rugged mountain trails. The palanquins are beautifully decorated, and the processions include drums, horns, and other indices of power and rank. In their various ways, all of these processions are related to sacred places: the termini of the journey may be temples, festivals, holy rivers or mountains, and often the gods and their worshippers regard the procession as a form of pilgrimage.

Over the last twenty years I have participated in many such divine processions, from the vengeful journeys of Bhairava to the devotional pilgrimages of Jākh and Ghaṇḍyāḷ, and from the Royal Progress of Nandā Devī to the militant processions of the divine kings Karṇa and Duryodhana. In this paper, I describe and analyse all of these processions, raising a number of issues at several different levels.

One issue has to do with the vexed category of "divine kingship," which is a confused and confusing topic of study, partly due to the fact that nearly all studies of what is called divine kingship have focused on human kings with divine attributes. To a secular western scholar, the notion of a god-man is self-evidently ideological and contradictory, and this ambiguity constantly surfaces in the scholarly literature on divine kingship. The problem is compounded for scholars of Hinduism because, as Galey (1990) puts it, most twentieth-century studies of kingship fail to acknowledge the importance of polytheism, the relationship between kings and gods, or the fact that territorial control is often predicated upon relationships to particular sacred places. In this essay I shall attempt to analyse the mutual relationships of kings, gods, and especially kingly gods to one another, through a close examination of their respective sacred places. I am able to avoid some of the contradictions of the study of divine kingship because in most of these cases, there is no ambiguity: these divine kings are gods, not men.

Another issue concerns the description and analysis of sacred places generally. Scholarly work in this area constantly threatens to be vitiated by the categories of analysis employed. On the one hand, many social scientists (e. g. Bhardwaj 1973, Sopher 1968) tend to ignore the specifically religious dimensions of sacred places. In failing to raise issues of religious power and experience, such studies also fail to describe their object adequately, much less analyse it. On the other hand, specialists in the study of religion persist in using transcendental and non-empirical categories – especially the category of "the sacred" itself – to describe and analyse their object. This use of transcendental categories reflects a wider tendency to make a rigid distinction between politics and religion, even in the work of leading scholars in the field like Heesterman, Dumont, and Stein.[1] The idea of a rigid dualism between "sacred" and "profane" as originally propounded by Durkheim (1965: 52–54) and subsequently elaborated by Eliade (1957: 10–14; 1969: 63–64, 133) has been convincingly

1 Stein 1977. For this problem, see the studies of Schnepel 1995 and 1997; also Inden 1990: Chap. 5



The central Himalaya from Kinnaur and Bushahar to Garhwal and Kumaon, including processional routes of Jākh, Ghaṇḍyāl, Nandā, Devī, Karṇa and Duryodhana. Drawing Niels Gutschow

demolished by both J. Z. Smith (1987) and Brian Smith (1987). Nevertheless such a dualistic conception of religion in general, and "the sacred" in particular, continually threatens to mislead us into thinking that sacred places in India can or should be understood in transcendental terms, as "rents" or "tears" in the fabric of an essentially profane universe, where "the sacred" "erupts" or otherwise manifests itself (see e. g. Parry 1983, Ray 1983, Singh 1993). Such an approach does not help us to understand how sacred places are related to empirical human lives.

In the light of these difficulties, I attempt in this paper to steer a

middle path between the materialism of social science and the transcendentalism of religious studies, by attending closely to the practices that inform the divine processions that are my object. Specifically, I will focus on three types of practices: those having to do with kinship, with territory, and with divine power. This seems an appropriate goal for an anthropologist, whose primary data are neither the speculations of the theologians nor the statistical regularities of the survey, but rather participation in, and observation of, practice.

Practical Kinship

The cult of Bhairava

Since 1996 I have been studying a Bhairava cult in the eastern districts of Garhwal. When I first visited the region in 1977, I noted the large number of Bhairava shrines and temples, and assumed that they were direct outgrowths of the so-called "Great Tradition". But I was mistaken: this god has little to do with the Bhairava of the shastras. He is a local deity, whose origin and activities are closely tied to the adjacent society and landscape. His sacred places consist exclusively of numerous shrines *(thān)*, nearly all of which are small domestic sites, although some are more widely known.

Many of Bhairava's priests come from the low castes, and his worship is prevalent amongst them. Indeed, I first conceived of this research as an investigation into the religious practice of the lowest castes. Subsequently I discovered that Bhairava's cult is truly ubiquitious, and that his shrines, rituals, and priests can be found in every local caste. Nevertheless, the cult has strong associations with the Scheduled Castes, and this is why it took me a few weeks to discover how widespread it was: the upper castes were reluctant to acknowledge their involvement with the cult.[2]

Bhairava's cult spreads mainly through women, especially low-caste women who bring the god from their natal residences *(mait)* to their marital residences *(sauryās)*, where they establish new shrines for him. Garhwalis often say that one of the distinctive practices of low-caste women is to bring their natal deities along with them to their marital home, something that is frowned upon by the upper castes.[3]

Occasions for the extension of Bhairava's cult – whether by women or men – have chiefly to do with matters of justice and affliction. If a powerful person exploits or abuses someone less powerful, and the victim cannot obtain justice by conventional means, then he or she will go to Bhairava's *thān* and "lay a curse" *(ghāt ḍālnā)* on their oppressor. The curse takes a form something like this: "Oh God, if I sinned, then punish me! But if X has done wrong, then strike them!" If the oppressor subsequently experiences misfortune, he or she may visit an oracle *(pūch / pūchvārī / pūchvārin)*, a religious specialist who is possessed by a spirit or deity and diagnoses problems while in trance. Patients normally visit more than one oracle in order to cross-check their diagnoses, and if the oracles consistently interpret the patient's problem(s) as a deity's punishment, the treatment often consists of establishing a new shrine to appease him (or her).[4] The paradigm case is a young, low-caste bride – the weakest member of the weakest section of society – who is mistreated in her husband's home, flees to her ancestral *thān*, and curses her tormentors. According to local stereotypes, "Low caste women will curse you just for looking at them crooked", and a plausible argument could be made that a pervasive fear of Bhairava mitigates some of the worst abuses of people (especially women) from the Scheduled Castes. An example will serve to illustrate the pattern.

A low caste woman named Shanti married and had three children. Some years later her husband died, and after that his first wife (Shanti's elder co-wife) died, leaving Shanti to care for her two step-children as well as her own three children. One day her deceased husband's younger brother Manori accused her of neglecting her step-children. She argued with him, then returned to her natal village, went to Bhairava's *thān*, and cursed him for making a false accusation. Fourteen years later Manori's granddaughter Seema, then about nine years old, began to suffer stomach pains. Medical doctors were unable to provide a diagnosis, and the pains continued. Seema's father Chandravir consulted several oracles, and determined that the curse from fourteen years ago had finally taken effect. Manori Lal and his son Chandravir established a shrine for Bhairava in April 1997. I was present for the entire ritual, during which the god was summoned, the ghost of Shanti (who had long since died) was exorcised, and Seema's pains ceased.

Other cases of Bhairava's affliction also reveal much about social dynamics; about tensions and jealousies within the families of the lower castes. But such negative emotions exist among the higher castes as well. In an extended oracular session I observed in November 1997, the oracle was a well-known *pūchvārin*, a high-caste Rajput woman, and most of her fourteen clients that day were also Rajputs. They brought a number of complaints – runaway children, land disputes, spirit possession, failure of cows to give milk – and she made a variety of diagnoses, including poison administered by jealous neighbours. But the most common diagnosis was family disunity, and accordingly the most common "prescription" was collective worship.

2 In many cases, Bhairava has become attached to a high-caste family because of their past mistreatment of people from lower castes.

3 See Sax 1990 and 1991. This is not the case everywhere in India. For example, high-ranking noblewomen in Rajasthan often bring their family goddesses with them to their marital homes (Harlan 1992).

4 This is of course a much more complicated process than my description implies. Oracles must first be consulted and their diagnoses confirmed, priests retained, money and material for the worship gathered, the rituals performed, etc.

The local farmer Śambhu Nāth is possessed by the deity Bīr, on the morning of the first day of Ghaṇḍyāl's jāt. When possessed, he flagellates himself with a pair of iron fire tongs.

If the quarrelling family could be induced to unite in order to worship the god, the problem would cease.

Collective worship requires that absent family members, or those who reside in distant places, must return for the ritual. This is particularly important in Garhwal, where many men join the army and others go to the plains of north India, in order to gain employment. Thus, when there is a major ritual for Bhairava, the seniormost males of the family return home, perhaps for the first time in years. They come to participate in the ritual, even though they often profess complete ignorance of, or even skepticism about, the tradition. But skepticism or belief is not important here: what is important is family unity, and in this regard the requirements of the cult clearly take precedence over individual beliefs.

Bhairava rules no divine kingdom, but rather unites and defines a particular territory in terms of what we might call the practice of kinship. This is kinship conceived, not as a set of rules and idealised statements such as are found in anthropological kinship diagrams, Hindu legal treatises, or modern secular courts, but rather as a form of mundane practice within the family: the management of relationships within the domestic unit. It is kinship as lived rather than as theorised, and consequently it is far from ideal, and includes greed and jealousy, curses and abuse. A low-caste bride is mistreated by her husband or his relatives, so she flees to her parents' village to ask the god for justice, her last defence against an unjust world. A family is quarrelling internally, it suffers as a result, and its malaise can be cured only by collective worship of the god. And so Bhairava's cult spreads, his sacred *thān* are established in more and more households, and an increasing number of villages come under his influence. The proliferation of shrines might be seen as a cure, but it might just as accurately be understood as a symptom.

In the introduction, I said that an adequate description and analysis of the sacred places discussed in this essay could only be achieved by taking account of practices relevant to kinship, territory, and divine power. I have begun to illustrate what I mean by kinship practice, and I will discuss the issue of territory below. But what about religious power?

The relevant term here is *siddhi*, frequently used to characterise the activities of Bhairava and his priests, and the quality of his rituals. As Garhwalis understand it, *siddhi* is not a transcendental category. It is a form of power constantly active in the human world, and not radically or ontologically opposed to it, as is postulated of "the sacred" in the works of Durkheim, Eliade, and their latter-day followers. In short, it does not depend upon a sacred/profane dualism, and indeed *siddhi* normally manifests itself in terms of eminently practical concerns. Myths of origin of Bhairava and similar deities tell how he avenged low-caste persons who had been abused, rescued their daughters sold into slavery, embarassed exploitative high-caste women, or broke the chains of low-caste men imprisoned for their refusal to submit. Those who have established Bhairava's shrines in their own homes and lands tell of how he cured diseases, reunited families, found lost valuables, identified criminals, caused cows to give milk, and took revenge on evil-doers. These are mundane issues and practical matters: soteriological concerns are simply irrelevant to the cult of Bhairava. What is relevant is *siddhi*, a form of divine power that has visible and practical effects. Certain priests and oracles have better access to *siddhi* than others, certain places contain greater quantities of it than others, and certain rituals have more of it than others.

In October 1997, I participated in a four-day ritual at one of Bhairava's main cult centres along with Darpal Lal Mistari, a guru, or ritual expert, of the Carpenter caste, and my personal teacher. Although gurus like Darpal do many different kinds of ritual work, their most public and dramatic function is to summon the gods by singing and playing the *huḍakī*, a two-headed drum that is well-known in the central Himalayan region. Because the main purpose of such rituals is to please the gods, it is essential that they attend the performance, dancing in the bodies of human beings whom they temporarily possess.

The success of the ritual and the abilities of the guru are judged primarily by the number of deities who attend and the vigor of their dancing, a kind of ambience that is summed up in the term *siddhi*. Bhairava's rituals normally take place at night, and on the morning following the first night's ritual, several people asked me what I thought of it. I replied that I was favourably impressed. "Gurūjī" had successfully summoned Bhairava, who had blessed the sponsor of the ritual. My interlocutors responded by sadly shaking their heads, muttering that there had been no *siddhi* the previous night. Darpal took this as a personal affront, and on the second night he gathered his powers and put on a performance that, as everyone later agreed, had sufficient *siddhi*: over a dozen persons were possessed. This energetic gathering of deities, all dancing in the bodies of "possessed" humans, is called an *akhaḍa* (Hindī *akhāḍā*), literally a "gathering of renouncers," and for local persons it is perhaps the most persuasive evidence of Bhairava's *siddhi*. In such gatherings, the god himself dances before one's eyes, and local people say that to doubt the reality of the divine presence is foolish, and contrary to the evidence of one's own senses. It can also be dangerous. Many stories are told of people who poked fun at the gyrations of someone in trance, only to be punished by the god for their skepticism by having their faces permanently "frozen" in the act of laughing.

As dawn breaks, the niśān or "sign" of the deity Ghaṇḍyāḷ is raised, while several participants fall into trance.

The pilgrimage of Ghandyal

The procession of the deity Ghaṇḍyāḷ shares certain important features with Bhairava's cult. In his 1984 procession, which occurred after a hiatus of thirty-two years, the god went on a meandering, month-long pilgrimage *(tīrtha yātrā)* from his temple in Khand village in Kandarsyum *paṭṭī*[5], to Karnaprayag at the confluence of the Alakananda and Pindar rivers for a ritual bath, then returned. The procession itself consisted of drummers, followed at some distance by Rajputs bearing *pañcagavya*[6] to sprinkle along the path (thus purifying it), live coals, a bell, basket, whisk, rod, second bell, more *pañcagavya*, a two-headed drum, cymbal, single-headed drum, conch shell, rice, incense, and trumpet. Finally came the god's "sign" *(niśān)*, a bamboo staff perhaps six metres long with a cross piece near the top, from which were suspended a beard-like yak-tail whisk and a flower garland, all surmounted by a small golden parasol, with a red-and-white cloth banner perhaps nine metres long trailing out behind. The effect was rather anthropomorphic, like a bearded giant with a flowing cape.

Ghaṇḍyāḷ's procession had its quotient of *siddhi*, which manifested primarily in the divine incarnation *(avatāra)* Śambhu Nāth, a married farmer from the nearby village of Tile who was possessed by the god Bir. On the night before the pilgrimage began, he went into trance at 9 p. m. and ran all the way to Khand – a five or six kilometer journey involving a very steep descent down a cliff – in the dark, barefoot, dressed only in a pair of cotton shorts. During the night's dancing he remained in trance, often beating his naked back with a pair of iron fire tongs. Next morning a large crowd gathered near Ghaṇḍyāḷ's storehouse *(bhaṇḍārā)* in a field above the village. In addition to Śambhu Nāth, about twenty persons were possessed by various deities, a goat was sacrificed, and the crowd's excitement culminated when the god's sign was lifted to meet the rays of the rising sun. Similar scenes of collective elation occurred on 25 December, when the god concluded his journey with the sacrifice of a buffalo and six goats on Ghaṇḍyāḷ Peak at an elevation of 11,000 feet.

The route of Ghaṇḍyāḷ's return from Karnaprayag to Khand was largely determined by the places of residence of his *dhyāṇī*s, the village daughters of Khand who had married and were now living elsewhere with their husbands. The goal was to visit as many of these village

5 *Paṭṭīs* are traditional territorial units, analogous to the parganahs of north India. See below for further discussion of their significance.

6 *Pañcagavya*, the five "purifying" products of the cow (milk, butter, curd, dung, and urine).

The culmination of the Ghaṇḍyāḷ jāt on 25 December, 1984. The god's niśān is clearly visible on the mountaintop.

daughters' marital homes as possible, and the route traversed the four *paṭṭī*s of Kandarsyum, Chandpur, Dhaduli and Bachansyum, which constitute the effective limits of the marriage networks of the Khand villagers. Upon arrival at some village, each family would offer Rs. 1 or 1.25 to the god, but the *dhyāṇīs* would give much more: Rs. 5 or 10 or even 20, as much as they could. This was called a *kar* or "tax," and was obligatory for those *dhyāṇīs* to whose marital homes the god was making his first visit. Elderly *dhyāṇīs* who were being visited for a

second time did not have to pay the tax. When he left a *dhyāṇī's* village, the god would turn around (that is, the bearers of his sign would rotate it 180 degrees), so that he could take a "last look" at her.

The powerful emotions connected with family and kinship, and particularly with the vulnerable plight of the outmarried daughter, were brought home to me on the first morning of Ghaṇḍyāḷ's pilgrimage, when we passed a young woman with a load of grass, sitting by the side of the road and weeping bitterly because, although she was a *dhyāṇī* of Khand, the god was not going to visit her marital village, with which the pilgrims were currently having a dispute. This prompted one of them to say, "if we fail to take the sign to some *dhyāṇī*'s village and she weeps, then Ghaṇḍyāḷ will punish us.[7] The *dhyāṇī* will curse us. Ghaṇḍyāḷ himself says 'If you don't take me to a *dhyāṇī*'s village, and I cry, my tears will split the earth'. We don't have to go to the village of a father or a son, but we certainly must go to the village of a *dhyāṇī*."

The procession of Jākh

Both Ghaṇḍyāḷ and Bhairava traverse the marital homes of their *dhyāṇīs*, thus uniting and defining particular territories through the medium of outmarried women. This is also true of the deity Jākh, who emerged from his temple in Gwar village near Gopeshwar in District Chamoli during the month of Asauj in 1996 after a hiatus of thirty-six years. He went on a six-month procession *(dyorā)*, through a number of remote villages as far as the Bhotiya village of Mana, always staying on the true right bank of the Alakananda River. The true left bank is called *paswāṇ phāṭ* , "the region of the Paswan (Rajputs)", and is associated with a separate deity (also named Jākh!) with whom there are some longstanding disputes.

The god's entourage consisted of a priest *(pūjārī)*, four oracles *(dhārī)*, one *jāgarīya* to manage the nocturnal rituals, two storytellers *(bhān)*, two drummers *(aujī)*, one Brahman to read Sanskrit prayers *(pāṭhārthī paṇḍit)*, and eighteen masked dancers *(pātra)*.[8] Jākh was also accompanied by the village deity *(bhūmyāḷ)* of Gwar, and the fierce local goddess Chandikā. Once again the god's route was determined by the residences of his *dhyāṇīs*, and the goal of the journey was to visit the marital villages of all of them. As in the pilgrimage of Ghaṇḍyāḷ, *dhyāṇīs* were required to "give *bhātā*," that is, to feast the god and his entourage, if it was his first visit, and once again this was called a "tax." At the conclusion of the six-month procession, the god's officers invited all those who had feasted them to the culminating festival at Gwar. *Dhyāṇīs* and their guests from throughout the area converged on the small village in March 1997, where there was a night-long performance featuring several masked dances, between which the storyteller would recapitulate the route that Jākh had taken, how well the people had treated him, what excellent goats they had offered him, the names of influential men in each village, and the amounts of the largest cash offerings. This would be repeated by "Narada", a comic dancer and master of ceremonies made up to match the local stereotype of a "barbaric" Tibetan, with tangled yak-hair locks, torn and filthy pyjamas, etc. After each masked dance, Jākh would possess his oracle, who would embrace the dancer and tearfully bid him farewell until the next procession, several decades hence. The night's performance culminated in the manifestation of the lion, in which two masked dancers don a lion costume and are "possessed" by the lion who, according to the stage directions for the drama:

roars very loudly, causing an earthquake with his tail. He eats meat and loves blood. His moustache weighs one *śer*, and his tail weighs one-and-a-half *śer*. When he sees deer and mountain goats, he comes to the battlefield and leaps upon the deer. Jākh forbids him to do this, and offers him a goat instead, which pleases the lion. Then the god Jākh is happy and bids the lion farewell, saying "You must come wherever my curse (*doṣ*) falls."

When this episode was performed in 1997 the audience was very enthusiastic, with many commenting that it was a highly convincing (and frightening) performance, one that proved that Jākh was an exceptionally powerful deity.

Although there are important differences between the cults of Bhairava, Ghaṇḍyāḷ, and Jākh, we can discern important similarities among them. To begin with, all of them are fueled, so to speak, by *siddhi*. In other words, peoples' faith in the cult, and their enthusiastic participation in it, is justified and reinforced in terms of the divine power that, according to them, regularly manifests itself in cult rituals. This power manifests itself primarily as possession by divine agents, but also as superhuman feats of clairvoyance, healing, and the like. People say that if there was no *siddhi*, they would no longer participate in these rituals.[9]

Second, all three of these gods are subaltern deities associated with subordinate groups. Bhairava is thought of as a renouncer, and his songs, chants, and spells abound with terms drawn from the Nāth sect of yogis. The ritual implements found in his shrines always include the fire-tongs and trident of a yogi, and in his fiercest form, as Kachya – a god who is greatly feared, especially by the higher castes – he has strong affinities with the left-handed Aghori sect. He lives in a

7 Literally, "the god's *doṣ* will come." A *doṣ* is a divine sanction resulting from the god's displeasure, a kind of "ontological disease" (Cf. Sax 1991; Zimmermann 1979: 12).

8 These were Nārad, Vedī / Vaidā, Karṇa, Lāṭī / Luṭā, Nathu Pāṇḍe, Brahmacārī, Nār Siṃh, Ḷaḷkar, Śer, Hiraṇ-Cītal, Rām, Lakṣmaṇ, Sītā, Īśvar, and Kṛṣṇa. It is difficult to make the number of characters add up to eighteen: perhaps the number is associated with the number of books (*parvan*) in the Mahābhārata. For more on the deity Jākh, see Sax 2002, Chap. IV.

9 It might well be objected that this is sheer (religious) ideology, and that rather than study false consciousness of this sort, we should be analysing the social relations that give rise to it. To such an objection one can only reply that, before performing any sort of analysis, one first has to accurately understand indigenous categories of description and experience. To be human is to possess human subjectivity: materialist analyses that dismiss this subjectivity as somehow 'false' are thereby dismissing the humanity of their subjects.

Pilgrims on the Royal Progress at the end of the rainy season in 1987. One can see several parasols signifying the lineages of the "Twelve-Place Brahmans", who are believed to have accompanied the original king of Garhwal when he came to Garhwal from Western India.

"house of filth" *(malīc kā koṭhā)*, is smeared with ash, wears a loincloth *(langoṭī)* made of stone, and tends a fire *(dhunī)* in a cremation ground, where he wears the shrouds and eats the flesh of the dead. Ghaṇḍyāḷ is primarily associated with Rajputs, but they are *khaśa* Rajputs of particularly low status. "*Khaśa"* is a vexed term, and its application to certain Rajput and Brahman castes in the Central Himalayas has not gone unchallenged[10], but that debate need not detain us here. Suffice to say that whatever the historical origins of the category, it has real social force in this region, and the followers of Ghaṇḍyāḷ are widely regarded as *khaśa*. The four *paṭṭīs* in which the deity wanders are (with the exception of certain parts of Chandpur) fairly remote, with few roads or schools, and little political clout. The people of Kandarsyum in particular are belittled by other mountain folk for their archaic dress and speech, and their "backward" ways. Ghaṇḍyāḷ's priests were from the *pajāī* and *bheḍā* castes, explicitly regarded by everyone (including themselves) as *khaśa* Rajputs.

The only royal association in the cult is the claim advanced by some that the deity is not Bhīma's son Ghaṇṭākarṇa (as one might suspect from the name Ghaṇḍyāḷ), but rather Bābrik, another character from the Mahābhārata. Bābrik was a warrior who would have opposed and defeated the Paṇḍavas, but was tricked by Kṛṣṇa into sacrificing himself at Kurukṣetra before the great war began. In return, Kṛṣṇa acceded to his request and placed his head atop a large pole, from where he was able to watch the war. Bābrik is unknown in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata, but well attested in the folk traditions of India, with examples from Telengana (Subba Rao 1976: 272–73), Kurukṣetra (Cunningham 1970: 99), Nepal (Anderson 1971: 128), Tamil Nadu, and no doubt elsewhere.[11]

Some of Ghaṇḍyāḷ's followers identify him with Bābrik, probably because his sign looks so much like a human head set atop a pole. The identification of Jākh with Bābrik is explicit: according to an old manuscript kept by his low-caste drummers, he was originally known as king Jākṣpati (hence the name *jākh*), and ruled in southern Tibet *(hūṇa deś)*. The rest of his story is clearly a variant of the Bābrik myth. For our purposes, the most important thing to be noted is that Bābrik is a subordinate figure. In most variants of the myth he is not represented as a king, but rather as a matchless warrior. Indeed, the point of his story is that he sacrificed himself to those paradigmatic kings, the Pāṇḍavas and their ally Kṛṣṇa. Certainly there are royal elements in his cults and mythology, as there are in those of Ghaṇḍyāḷ, but though they strain toward kingship, they do not and cannot attain it. Although Ghaṇḍyāḷ and Jākh are more prestigious gods than Bhairava, like him they remain subordinate gods associated with subaltern groups.

The most significant feature shared by the three cults, and the one on which I wish to focus here, is that they are organised in terms of kinship, with their cults and sacred places spreading primarily through the medium of their respective *dhyāṇīs*. As I have argued elsewhere at length (Sax 1990, 1991), one of the primary effects of ritual practices requiring the participation of the *dhyāṇī* is to emphasize and reinforce the continuing relationship of a married woman to her natal family, *despite* the elite, textual tradition which insists that a daughter is irrevocably transformed by marriage and "cut off" from her natal kin. In other words, these cults foster the unity of the extended family, and they do so by requiring the presence, not only of the *dhyāṇī*, but also (especially in the case of the Bhairava cult) those members of the family who, for one reason or another, reside elsewhere.

The royal progress of Nandā Devī

There is yet another cult that unites family and territory by means of a ritual procession: that of the goddess Nandā and her Royal Progress *(rāj jāt)*. I have described this elsewhere (1991) as the longest and most difficult pilgrimage in India, and so it is. But it is important to

10 Atkinson 1974 [1882]; Berreman 1972 [1963]; Joshi 1990. The latter scholar has questioned the extent of *khaśa* influence in Garhwal, and suggested that the entire problem may have been "overstressed" by Atkinson and others.

11 For more details on Bābrik, see Sax 2002, Chap. 4; also Hiltebeitel 1988: Chap. 15 (and references therein), and Hiltebeitel 1995.

understand that the root metaphor for this arduous and spectacular journey is not pilgrimage. Rather, the journey is understood as the escorting of a married daughter from her natal place to the home of her husband (i. e., as the *vidāī* of a *dhyāṇī* from her *mait* to her *sauryās*). Nandā Devī is the daughter of Garhwal, and so her natal place is, in effect, any village where she is worshipped. She is married to Lord Śiva, and so her marital home is Mt. Kailash. Once every year she is summoned by her human relations/devotees, who feast and worship her, then place her in a palanquin and carry her back to her husband's home, just as they would do for a human daughter. And just as the goddess is summoned home for her annual festival, so the married, human daughters of the village are summoned back at least once a year, to participate in Nandā's festival.

When a human woman returns to her natal village for a festival, she is reunited with her sisters, and married women cherish these meetings because they do not often get a chance to visit their sisters, living as they do apart from each other in the homes of their husbands. During her periodic Royal Progresses, Nandā Devī also has the opportunity to meet with her sisters. In 1987, the Nandā Devīs of four separate *paṭṭīs* joined the main procession at different points as it wound its way up the mountain. When these goddesses met, they would possess their devotees and call out emotional greetings to each other, while their palanquins raced back and forth along the terraced fields in great excitement. Male bearers of the palanquins insisted at such times that they were dragged by the goddesses' power.

In these ways, the cult and pilgrimages of Nandā Devī unite families, and once again they do so by appealing, not to the official definition of kinship according to which women are cut off from their natal kin, but rather to kinship practice. In practical terms, a woman's ties to her natal kin are not and cannot be severed by the act of marriage. Moreover, relations between wife-givers and wife-takers are in practice difficult, and no doubt this had something to do with the way in which a dispute during the 1987 Royal Progress was understood. In one sense this was a dispute between two rival priestly factions for control over the form of ritual associated with the pilgrimage, and especially over whether or not animal sacrifice would be performed (Sax 1991, Chap. V). But many pilgrims also understood it as a typical manifestation of rivalry between the goddess's natal and affinal relations. The faction of priests living higher on the mountain was thought of as her affines, while the other faction, which lived lower on the mountain, was regarded as her natal kin (*maitīs*, a term that includes all those co-resident in her natal place).

The cult and pilgrimages of Nandā Devī have much stronger royal associations that those of Bhairava, Ghaṇḍyāḷ, and Jākh. Her large, periodic procession is called the Royal Progress *(rāj jāt)*, and unlike the smaller, annual processions of Nandā Devī that traverse only one or at the most two separate *paṭṭī*s, it traverses and unites several *paṭṭī*s. In some of her myths of origin, the goddess Nandā was the deified human daughter of the king of Chandpur, whose fort is said by some historians to have been the original capital of Garhwal (Dabaral n. d.: 317). The Royal Progress begins in Nauti village, near the ruins of that fort. It seems likely that Nandā Devī was transformed into the goddess Rājarājeśvarī when the Pamwar dynasty shifted from Chandpur to Srinagar (Saklani n. d.:154). She was also the royal goddess of the kings of neighbouring Kumaon, a status she achieved after Kumaon's successful defeat of Garhwal in about 1670, when the victorious king Baz Bahadur Chand took her image from Badhan fort and installed it in his own capital of Almora (Sax 1991: 167–68). As Schnepel points out, the power of goddesses such as this who are stolen or moved from one capital to another is co-terminous (and associated) with the realm of particular rulers (1995: 153). In other words there is a strong link between the goddess's *śakti* and the king's *kṣatra*. This explains why these myths and stories are still invoked by local groups in order to enhance their power by establishing a connection with local kings. For example, the priests of Badhan from where the image of Nandā Devī was taken by Baz Bahadur Chand were members of the faction referred to above as Nandā's affines, and they call the goddess "Rājarājeśvarī" in order to stress her royal associations, while the Brahmins of Nauti (the natal faction) call themselves Royal Preceptors *(rājgurū)*, since a Nautiyal priest was traditionally the king of Garhwal's domestic priest.[12] In 1987, opening ceremonies of the Rāj Jāt were attended by two classificatory "mother's brothers" of the king. But despite these tenuous associations, the cult of Nandā Devī cannot truly be said to be a royal cult. It would be more accurate to see it as comprising a set of related cults located along a spectrum, from the local level (in the form of village festivals and the annual "small pilgrimages" that are confined to particular *paṭṭīs*), to the regional level (in the form of the Royal Progress which unites all of the *paṭṭīs* of Chamoli), but excluding the level of the kingdom, since Nandā Devī is not widely worshiped in Tehri Garhwal and no one from the westernmost parts of the old kingdom attends the Royal Progress.[13]

As in the other cults described above, Nandā Devī's power manifests itself primarily through human oracles, who address her devotees and attempt to solve their problems.[14] In addition, the Royal Progress provides some extraordinary indices of the goddess's divine *śakti*. These

12 Nautiyals sometimes quote the adage "The king's guru is the people's god *(rājā kā gurū, janatā kā devatā)*", but usually not when anyone else is listening!

13 Repeated but unsuccessful attempts by Nandā Devī's "Chief Minister" Devaram Nautiyal to involve the goddess's priests from Almora in the Royal Progress can be seen as failed attempts at creating a "supra-national" level of integration, between Garhwal and Kumaon.

14 In the Royal Progress of 1987, each faction had its own oracle, who supported its position. This did not however result in any cognitive dissonance for participants, who were quick to assert that their own oracle was genuine, while that of the opposing faction was not.

The "mystery lake" of Rūpkuṇḍ, seen from above. Normally the lake is frozen, but during the Royal Progress in 1987, the ice had melted. Note the pilgrims and their birchbark parasols on the shore of the lake.

Opposite
Pilgrims climbing from Pātar Nacauṇyāṃ to Kailavināyak Pass. The peaks of the Great Himalayan range are visible in the background.

include the famous "mystery lake" of Rūpkuṇḍ, which is surrounded by hundreds of human skeletons that are believed to be those of a party of pilgrims from centuries ago, who disregarded the goddess's rules and were destroyed by her, as well as a four-horned ram, born expressly to lead pilgrims on the long and difficult journey. The fact that Nandā Devī's devotees can even perform such a difficult pilgrimage – more than 250 kilometers, over an 18,000-foot pass, barefoot, and at the end of the rainy season – is also regarded as proof of her power. During the 1987 pilgrimage, she was believed by the lowlanders (the natal faction) to have been responsible for certain catastrophes that befell their opponents during the course of the pilgrimage (Sax 1991: 197–98). For me, the most extraordinary sign of Nandā Devī's power occurred on the first day of the pilgrimage. For several preceding months, the region had been in the grip of the worst drought in decades, and this was locally regarded as a sign of Nandā Devī's *doṣ* – what I have come to call, following Zimmermann, an "ontological disease" – that was the proximate reason for conducting the Rāj Jāt. The area had not seen a drop of rain for months, and on the morning of the first day it looked as though the pattern would continue. But within minutes of emerging from Nandā Devī's temple, the entire party was soaked to the skin by a fierce rainstorm that blew up out of "nowhere".

Territorial Practices

King Karṇa

I have argued that the sacred places of Bhairava, Ghaṇḍyāḷ, Jākh, and Nandā Devī, and the movements that define them, cannot be understood without reference to the practice of kinship. The pilgrimages and processions that define the sacred places of these deities are closely associated with a basic level of social organisation, the family. Next I will describe and analyse the divine kingdoms of Karṇa and Duryodhana in Rawain, in the upper basins of the Tons and Yamuna rivers. In this case, too, the gods' processions and sacred places should be understood in terms of practice, but here the practice relates to territory rather than kinship, and it articulates a higher level of social organisation, that of the *paṭṭī*. Indeed, what I will call "divine kingdoms" are in many instances co-terminous with a particular *paṭṭī* or *paṭṭīs*. Much of the endemic conflict and violence among the notoriously "turbulent and refractory" (Saklani 1987: 44, 174 ff.) people of this region is related to inter-*paṭṭī* rivalry. The reason that *paṭṭī*s figure so prominently in the organisation of cults and conflict apparently has to do with the pre-colonial history of the region. According to the early commissioner Traill (1828: 178), the *paṭṭīs* of Garhwal have been reorganised many times, and many of them take their names from nearby forts. It seems likely that their respective traditions and rivalries ultimately stem from the time when Garhwal was not unified, and consisted of a number of forts or *gaḍhi* (hence the name *gaḍhvāḷ*, "land of forts"), in more-or-less continual conflict with each other.[15]

The people of Singtur *paṭṭī* near the upper reaches of the Tons River regard Karṇa as their divine King. They refer to him as a king (*rājā karaṇ* or *karaṇ mahārāj*), and the social organisation of Singtur is based upon his kingship, as are local understandings of the landscape. In the Mahābhārata, Karṇa mediated between the opposing sides because he was at one and the same time the unrecognised brother of the Pāṇḍavas, and the faithful ally of the Kauravas. Likewise, Singtur is divided into two sub-regions, respectively associated with the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, and once again king Karṇa mediates between them, since his temple is located in the geographical and ideological centre of the district. The Paṇḍavas *(pāṃsyā)* dwell in the

15 I suspect that many kinds of cultural variation within Garhwal are correlated with *paṭṭī* boundaries.

Pilgrims climbing from Śilā Samudar, "the ocean of rock", to their ultimate goal of Homkuṇḍ, at the culmination of the Royal Progress in 1987

lower, downstream half of Singtur, while the Kauravas (*ṣāṭhī*, *ṣaṣṭhī*)[16] live in the higher and wilder regions. Within Singtur, each of the sub-districts is again divided in two, and king Karṇa's temple is located where all four land divisions come together, in the village of Dyora in the "Middle Land" *(mājī thok)*. This pattern is repeated on a larger scale, with the residents of Singtur *paṭṭī* collectively classed as *pāṃsyā* while residents of the *paṭṭīs* of Panchgain and Adaur, adjacent to but higher than Singtur, are *ṣāṭhīs* ruled by Duryodhana.

The local caste system is relatively simple, consisting of Brahmans, two Rajput castes (aristocratic Rawats and warrior *khūnds*), Naths or carpenters *(mistarī)*, Das musicians, and the lowest caste of Kohlis. Distinctions among these castes are expressed in daily religious actions centred on the divine king. Every day, Karṇa's metal image inside the temple is worshipped by a Brahman priest. The priest must be a member of the highest local Brahman sub-caste of Nautiyals, who reside near the temple. Very few of these priests live outside the village, because the god will not allow them to do so, and many stories are told of the misfortunes that befell those who defied his orders by accepting employment elsewhere. Chief Ministers or *vazīrs*[17] are drawn from the aristocratic Rawat caste of Rajputs, and the office tends to be hereditary. The clarified butter required for king Karṇa's daily worship is provided by a Rajput patron, normally from one of the lower-ranked warrior sub-castes.[18] The temple fire is tended by a Nāth, who is also the god's messenger. Das drummers play thrice daily for the god. Kohlis are excluded from this daily routine, except when they are required to provide wood for special offerings by their Rajput masters. Caste distinctions thus find concrete expression in the daily rituals for Karṇa, while still finer distinctions occur during periodic festivals. In these ways, Karṇa is constituted a king at least in part by the actions of his subjects.

In addition to king Karṇa, there are several other deities inside the temple, including Śalya, Karṇa's charioteer from the Mahābhārata, and two goddesses, one of whom, known as Reṇukā or "the Maiden of Nagarkot," was brought from nearby Nanai village at some time in the past. King Karṇa's oracle compared this system to the sun circled by nine planets, and when I asked why the goddess had come from

16 Here the Kauravas are believed to have been sixty in number, not 100 (cf. Zoller 1990)

17 This Perso-Arabic term is used by cults throughout the region to denote a god's chief executive officer. The districts of neighboring Bushahar state were managed by hereditary *vazīrs* in the early 19th century (Tobdan 1990: 130–31).

18 See Zoller 1993: 227–29.

Nanai, he answered that Karṇa had "established his kingdom here and brought other local gods under his sway." This type of socio-spatial organisation parallels the "central-peripheral, 'royal' models of intercaste relationships" that Raheja (1988) finds to be of such importance in Pahansu, and that Marriott (1976) has claimed are typical of Kṣatriya transactional strategies.[19]

There are other reasons, too, why Karṇa is regarded as a king. He settles local disputes, and is resorted to during times of drought, because he is believed to have the power to bring rain. Other neighbouring deities such as Duryodhana and Mahāsu are also believed to possess this power, and cross-culturally it is perhaps the most widely distributed characteristic of divine kingship. Certainly it is prominent in the Hindu tradition.[20] In the Mahābhārata, Karṇa's generosity was legendary, and in Singtur as well, local folklore tells of his magnanimity. Normally when deities in this region go on tour, they demand (some would say they extort) money from their worshippers, but Karṇa distributes wealth during his processions. In the late 1980s, when he went to the regional headquarters of Uttarakāśī for a scriptural recitation, he gave away eleven cows and some gold, and sponsored a public feast for pilgrims. In sum, Karṇa is a divine king in virtue of his kingly actions: defense of territory, adjudication of disputes, control of rain, beneficence.[21] The tiny, remote central Himalyan *paṭṭī* of Singtur is truly a divine kingdom, and the royal nature of its divine ruler is well summed up in the chant recited by his drummers at the end of his daily worship:

"All the gods are awake, and the maiden from Nagarkoṭ.
The music is playing, the priest is worshipping with food, with wealth.
Hari Haridvār, Badri Kedar, the Gaṅgā and the Bhāgīrathī,
the five Pāṇḍavas, the sixty Kauravas, the great and powerful Paraśurāma:
all worship the son of the sun, the prince of the sky,
the king of three worlds, the son of Kuntī.
They offer gold and milk-giving cows to the virtuous king.
May your dominions grow, may your temple grow!
May your lion-skin throne be rich!"[22]

Duryodhana's realm

Upstream from Singtur, in the *paṭṭīs* of Panchgain, Adaur, and Barasu, another divine king rules. The people from Singtur say that he is Duryodhana, arch-villain of the Mahābhārata and, for most Hindus, a symbol of evil. In the god's own territory, opinion is divided as to his identity: a traditionalist faction acknowledges that he is indeed Duryodhana, and a reformist faction insists that he is Someśvara, a form of Śiva (Sax 1998a, 1998b). But whatever the god's identity, he rules as a divine king in much the same way as does king Karṇa in Singtur. He goes on royal tours throughout the region, and wherever he halts, the villagers offer their finest animals and grain, their milk and butter, to the god and his priests. King Karṇa's subjects tell how they suffered for years at the hands of Duryodhana and his followers. Their high-altitude herdsmen were forced to offer the finest of their flocks as annual tribute, until one year five brothers defeated Duryodhana's followers even though they were vastly outnumbered, thereby ending the custom.[23]

A third deity from this region who qualifies as a divine king is Mahāsu, whose cult and peregrinations are more extensive than those of Karṇa or Duryodhana.[24] There are in fact four Mahāsu brothers, one of whom resides permanently at the cult centre in Hanol on the banks of the Tons, while the other three perpetually circulate in nearby regions. Others have studied this cult more extensively than I (Ibbetson and McLagan 1919, Sethi 1968, Sutherland 1988), and in this paper I only reproduce comments made about Mahāsu by Karṇa's *vazīr* (see below).

These gods' royal natures are shown most clearly by their territorialism. Concern for territory is a fundamental aspect of Hindu kingship (Lingat 1973: 212), and is exemplified in the history of this region, which is punctuated by confrontations, skirmishes, and outright battles between competing gods over each other's territory. Typically, these conflicts occur when one deity attempts to penetrate the realm of another. A few examples will suffice to establish the pattern.

In the 1970s, some people from Sankari village (which lies within Duryodhana's territory – see map on page 193) invited Karṇa to come and be worshipped and feasted along with his priests, in return for which he would give his blessings. Some of Duryodhana's followers got wind of the visit, stopped Karṇa at the border of Singtur, and refused to allow him to proceed. Karṇa's followers retaliated by preventing Duryodhana from going on his biennial journey to Kanyasini village via his traditional route, through Kalap in Singtur. They also arranged a more elaborate revenge. One party stayed at Karṇa's temple, where a number of local deities were gathered. A second party went and destroyed the rough bridge across the Supin River to Kalap that had been made by the shepherds of Duryodhana's *vazīr*, Sundar Singh. He had been grazing his flocks near Kalap, and his retreat was now cut off. They took a goat from his workers by force, slaughtered it in the name of Pokkhu (a well-known local deity associated with Karṇa), and ate it then and there. Then they forced Sundar Singh's

19 Karṇa's position at the centre is also reminiscent of Gesick's (1983) summary of the distinctive features of Southeast Asian kingship.

20 "A brahmana associates rain and law: rain and order, disorder and drought go together (Śat. Br., XI, I, 6, 24). Later, in the legend of Triśaṅku (or Satyavrata, above) as in that of Devāpi, the rule of an illegitimate sovereign is signalled by drought. In the Jātakas, the king is rainmaker, and there is an appropriate royal ritual" (Dumont 1962: 60). For more comparative data on the topic of divine kingship, see Feely-Harnick 1985.

21 It must be noted that in many respects, Karṇa is also a yogi (Sax 2002, Chap. 6).

22 *jāge saval saṇjā, nagarkoṭ kanyā*
rāg saṇjā, bhog saṇjā, dhan kī pūjā
hari haridwār, badrī kedār, gaṅgā bhāgarathī
pāñc pānḍav, ṣāṭh kaurā, baḍā śakti pharasarām
siri sarjkā rājkvāṃr sāgal māṃ,
tīn talāī ko rājā suraj gā kuntī ko jāī
savāsan manas, dhinālī gāṃv, dharmī rājā
rājbaḍhe, chatravās baḍhe
siṃhāsan ko dhanī!

23 I have transcribed and translated this "folk epic," and hope to publish it separately along with extensive commentary.

24 Zoller defines deities in western Garhwal – especially the Tons valley – as divine kings "exercising both divine and royal power" (1990: 148). He apparently includes Mahāsu in this category, since he refers in the same article to Mahāsu's "dominion" (1990: 162).

herders to march ahead, while they followed behind, slaughtering and eating goats along the way. By now the gods waiting at Karṇa's temple had joined them, and there was such a commotion that "even the sheep were dancing." A few days later, Sundar Singh came to Singtur, demanding restitution. Karṇa's followers admitted that he had been wronged, and they repaid him two goats for every one of his that had been slaughtered. In return, he paid a penalty of Rs. 1000 to king Karṇa for "making too much noise" while travelling through the god's dominions, and they gave Duryodhana permission to begin using the old route via Kalap to Kanyasini once again (as long as he kept quiet). When I interviewed Karṇa's *vazīr* Rajmohan Singh Rangad in April 1997 during a harrowing taxi ride from Naitwar to Purola, he told me that a quarrel was again brewing between the followers of Karṇa and those of Duryodhana. Apparently the old grounds of contention had never been resolved: residents of Sankari were still trying to invite Karṇa to their village inside Duryodhyana's domain, and Karṇa's followers still objected to Duryodhana travelling through their *paṭṭī* on his journeys.

In the same interview, the *vazīr* told me of a similar quarrel between Karṇa and Mahāsu over territory, that had been resolved only a month earlier:

"In the old days, Mahāsu didn't enter Karṇa's domain *(kṣetra)*, nor did Karṇa enter Mahāsu's. But this created problems, and when Mahāsu was going to Bhitari village, his people took him along the main road to Naitwar, through Singtur *paṭṭī*. They said 'Look, times have changed, and anyway the government made this road – no one is able to prohibit us from using it.' And we didn't do anything about it, because the times have indeed changed and we can't stop others from using a public road. We asked King Karṇa what we should do, and he told us that times were changing and we shouldn't fight. He said that he would show Mahāsu his *śakti*. We were worried that if we didn't ask the deity what to do, he might give us a *doṣ*, because we were obliged to do something about this incursion into his domain. He might say 'My subjects are doing nothing, they're letting outsiders into my territory'. So out of fear, we kept asking the god what we should do. And he kept saying 'Don't fight. Times have changed. I myself will fight, with my own *śakti*. I'll take care of this problem.'

So we prepared Bharat Nath (Karṇa's messenger) of Dyora (where the main temple is located). We bound the turban of the god's watchman on him, and we tied a sash with the god's silver medallion on him, like a policeman. King Karṇa empowered four pouches of rice with his mantras, and we sent those with Bharat Nath too, telling him to take them to Mahāsu in Bhitari village. All the local people showed up, in order to decide what they should do. They decided to summon the entire domain, to inform the people in Bangan that King Karṇa's rice had come, along with his messenger. They didn't know what to do next; they were all frightened by Karṇa's messenger.

In the meantime, King Karṇa showed them a bit of his *śakti*. One of their quartermasters *(bhaṇḍārī)* went crazy. They took him to Mahāsu in Bhitari once or twice but it didn't help. I don't know if he's been cured by now, or not. Anyway they reckoned that things might get worse and that King Karṇa might give them more curses *(doṣ)*. And when we went to Karṇa, he told us that he had given them a small indication of what could happen to them, but that if there was a compromise, there would be no further problems. However if they didn't compromise, then who knows ...?

So they assembled, and decided that they should go to Karṇa's domain, to his temple, and resolve the matter there. Otherwise there would be a fight. They sent us a letter announcing that they would come to Dyora on the thirtieth solar day of Phalgun (late March), 1997. They asked all the people of the domain to assemble there, and said that they wanted to resolve this argument. Then all of us from Singtur gathered. We wanted to meet in Naitwar, because that's where the disputed road is located, but they wanted to meet in Dyora, at King Karṇa's temple. They said that otherwise, he might not agree. So we all went to Dyora. All the main people from each village in Bangan were there: Jagat Singh Rawat the advocate from Bangan, and others. And all the important people from Singtur were there, including Makkhan Singh Negi, who has just recently become the chairman of our headmen's council.

The two gods had a discussion with each other. It went on for at least two hours. They became very angry; so angry that we thought there was going to be a battle right then and there. Neither of them would give an inch. In the end, as a gift to Mahāsu, King Karṇa revoked his prohibition *(dān svarūp meṃ pratibandh haṭhā diyā)* on Mahāsu travelling via that road. But not before Mahāsu's followers begged him to accept Karṇa's gift, saying that they were compelled *(mazbūr)*, that times had changed, that the road had now been opened to them, and that henceforth there would be no restriction on Mahāsu travelling in Karṇa's domain, nor on Karṇa travelling in Mahāsu's domain."

The agreement was duly written and signed, and some months later the *vazīr* showed me copies of it.

Before proceeding, it is worthwhile to note the strategies employed here. In the old days, Mahāsu's entourage used to scramble along a

very rough path above the river bank opposite Miya Gad at the border of Singtur in order to reach the village of Bhitari without passing through Singtur *paṭṭī*, but now there is a government road that is much easier to use. From a legal point of view, Karṇa has no right to prohibit Mahāsu from travelling on a public thoroughfare. His subjects could however make a lot of trouble, a fact of which Mahāsu's followers were certainly aware. King Karṇa made a virtue of necessity by cleverly re-defining his compulsion as a generous gift, while Mahāsu gained a foothold in Singtur at no significant cost. In telling me of these events, Karṇa's *vazīr* emphasized over and over that times had changed, and that this amicable resolution proved it, because in the old days such a dispute would certainly have led to violence.

No doubt material interests were at stake here, but the primary bone of contention was the territorial integrity of the *paṭṭīs*, which are ruled by divine kings with administrative responsibilities, judicial authority, and rain-making powers. Their divine *śakti* is regarded by supporters and opponents alike as a crucial determinant of their acquisition and retention of royal authority. This is not an abstract territorialism of maps and measurements, nor is it the faded remnant of a once vital royal cult. It is a territorialism that arises out of the exigencies of practice and the strategic imperatives of endemic conflict.

Now we can begin to draw some comparisons between the processions and pilgrimages of these various deities; between the types of movement and the categories of sacred space defined by them. They form a series, with regular variations in the nature of the god, his clientele, and the scale of the journey. At one end are the journeys of Bhairava, who is thought of as a yogi, whose clientele are predominantly low caste, and whose journey routes are of limited scope, determined largely by the residences of his *dhyāṇīs*. Next come Jākh and Ghaṇḍyāḷ, who are thought of as protective elder brothers with limited royal associations, and whose followers are primarily Rajputs. Their journey routes are also determined by the residences of their respective *dhyāṇīs*, but more extensive than those of Bhairava, corresponding the wider marriage networks of the Rajput castes. Next come the processions of Nandā Devī, who is conceived of as a daughter-goddess, whose followers are primarily from the upper castes, whose journeys (especially the periodic Royal Progress) cover an extensive region and have strong royal associations, though they still do not constitute a divine kingdom. And finally come the journeys of Karṇa and Duryodhana, who are thought of as divine kings, whose followers include all castes living in their respective territories, and whose royal processions create and maintain their divine kingdoms. The differences can be summarised in the form of a chart, as below:

DEITY	RELATION	FOLLOWERS	JOURNEY
Bhairava	yogi	mostly low-caste	domestic sub-regional
Ghaṇḍyāḷ	brother	mostly Rajput	domestic
Jākh	brother	mostly Rajput	sub-regional
Nandā Devī	daughter	Rajput Brahman	quasi-royal regional
Karṇa	king	all castes	royal, regional
Duryodhana	king	all castes	royal, regional

There are many variables here, and one might analyse the series from several angles. But in order to keep this essay of manageable size, I would like to concentrate on one question: why is it that divine kingdoms have flourished in one particular corner of Garhwal but not elsewhere? One might suggest a functional hypothesis: that the cults and journeys are determined by the economic base. The full-fledged, though small, divine kingdoms of Karṇa and Duryodhana are found in Rawain in the upper Tons and upper Yamuna basins, where the economy is predominantly pastoral. This area is characterised by inter-*paṭṭī* rivalry, and particularly by quarrels over grazing rights and the theft of productive assets, viz., livestock and women.[25] What is important to note here is that the cults function to integrate society precisely at that level, the level of the *paṭṭī*. The other cults are located in British Garhwal, where the economy is relatively more dependent upon a "money-order economy" (Bora 1996) of cash remittances from family members in paid employment in the North Indian plains. Maintenance of family unity is crucial in this local economy, and the cults function to integrate society precisely at that level, the level of the family. The rather faint royal associations of the cults of Ghaṇḍyāḷ and Jākh may be explained as "survivals" from an earlier period when pastoralism was more important in the local economy, and indeed the cults of Jākh and Nandā Devī, with their stronger royal associations, are associated with high-altitude regions where pastoralism is of greater importance.

Such a hypothesis might begin to account for some of the differences isolated above. But it immediately raises two further questions. The first of these has to do with the status of the *dhyāṇī*. Why is she central to the organisation of the lower-level cults and their sacred places? Normally she is more economically important to her affines than to her natal relations, which goes far to explain the local custom of

25 Tales recounted in the local song genre of *paṃvārā* also have chiefly to do with such disputes. One example of the genre is the story of five brothers mentioned above. Others I have translated include Dilvī Daṭhyāṇ, Dale Singh Jaḍiyāṇ, and a local version of a song made famous by the Garhwali recording artist Narendra Singh Negi under the title of Tilottā. These all end with the deaths of one or more warriors *(khūnd)*, who are then immortalised in the *paṃvārā*, which is often named after them.

brideprice (see Sax 1991, Chap. 2). But the lower-level journeys are organised around *dhyāṇīs*' natal places. One might argue that the *dhyāṇī* has greater economic importance in an agricultural than in a pastoral economy, and that these processions reflect a competition between natal and affinal families for her labour during crucial agricultural periods. But the economic differences between Rawain and British Garhwal have chiefly to do with the predominance of pastoralism in the former area and the "mail order economy" in the latter. I have not even attempted to measure the relative importance of agriculture in the two regions, but it is probably comparable. Moreover, my (admittedly impressionistic) feeling is that overt competition for the *dhyāṇī's* labour is more common in Rawain, where brideprice is still normative and married women's visits to their natal villages are more frequent and prolonged.[26] But the greatest problem with such a "base-superstructure" explanation is that it is entirely structural: it leaves out the historical forces that have shaped Garhwal and its culture. An economic explanation is not in itself incorrect, but it must be supplemented by a historical one.

The history of Garhwal may briefly be recalled. In ancient times, it consisted of a number of independent chieftains who each ruled from a small fortress or *gaḍhi*. These small chiefdoms – traditionally numbered at fifty-two – were first consolidated by Ajaypal Pamvar in the thirteenth century. In 1790, invading Gurkhas from Nepal conquered the neighbouring kingdom of Kumaon, and fourteen years later they defeated the Pamvar dynasty of Garhwal and killed the reigning king Pradyuman Shah in a battle at Dehra Dun. In 1815 the British defeated the Gurkhas and reinstalled Pradyuman Shah's son, Sudarshan Shah, as king of the new state of Tehri Garhwal, which consisted of the Western portion of the former kingdom, the eastern portion being subsequently administered by the British.

As far as we know, throughout this long period no external authority has ever managed to establish effective control over the "turbulent and refractory" people of Rawain in the northwestern corner of the erstwhile kingdom: neither the Pawar dynasty, nor the Gurkhas during their brief rule, nor the British. Even the Government of India is regarded with far more hostility and suspicion than elsewhere in Garhwal. The history of the area is punctuated with riots, rebellions, and a general unwillingness to submit to any external authority. The later kings of Garhwal, perhaps despairing of ever bringing these remote, rebellious valleys under royal control, even granted judicial powers to local deities (Ravat 1991: 15). As a result, the tendency toward divine kingship, associated perhaps with a pastoral economy, remained unchecked, and reached its fullest development here (Saklani n. d.:132–139). Meanwhile, the eastern portions of Garhwal remained under royal or imperial control, first by the kings of Garhwal, later by the Gurkhas and the British, and latterly by the Government of India. In these regions, divine kingship did not develop.

It might be useful to compare divine processions in the adjoining region of Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, as well as the famous Dassehra festival in Kulu. I have not undertaken this research, but preliminary investigations are suggestive. In Kinnaur "every pargana has its own deity,"[27] and the region is well-known for its complex array of divine processions; indeed the custom is perhaps more developed there than anywhere in the central Himalayas. These movements are understood, not as royal processions, but as visits of kinsfolk to each other (Raha 1979). In other words, divine kingship has not developed, and the form of processions has remained at the sub-regional level. It seems likely that divine kingship did not develop here as it did in neighbouring Rawain – that is, as rule by itinerant deities – because there was already a divine human king on the throne of the little kingdom of Bushahar, of which Kinnaur was part.[28] Bushahar was in this respect more typical of Hindu kingdoms elsewhere in India, in which kings had semi-divine status. According to Bajpai, Kinnaur was brought under the domination of Bushahar in the late 17th century (1981: 58–59), but there is some ambiguity about the relationship between local gods and the king. As recently as 1997, practically everyone with whom I spoke in the Kinnauri town of Sangala told me that the imposing fortress in nearby Kamru was both temple and residence (they did not distinguish between the two) of the King of Bushahar, and that royal installations still take place there. They also told me that the fortress was the first capital of Bushahar, and that its presiding deity, Kamru-Badrinath, defeated a series of local gods (cf. Tobdan 1990: 127). Kamru-Badrinath is still occasionally taken out on procession: does the style of that procession reflect his subordination to the king of Bushahar, or does it evoke memories of a long-forgotten divine king?

The great Dassehra fair in Kulu in honour of the state deity Raghunāthjī is perhaps the best-known example of a travelling deity in all the Himalaya. The image of Raghunāthjī came to Kulu during the reign of Jagat Singh (1637–1672). According to local oral traditions, this king was implicated in a Brahman's suicide, and his sin could only be removed by bringing the image of Raghunāthjī from Oudh.[29] The image was stolen by a Brahman priest, who eventually brought it to Jagat Singh's capital.

There Jagat Singh formally conveyed his realm to the god by placing the image on the *gaddī*, and henceforth the Rājās of Kulu regarded

26 For discussions of brideprice and female visiting, see Fanger 1987, Sax 1990, 1991

27 Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States 1910: Part A, Chap I, C., p. 5. 27.

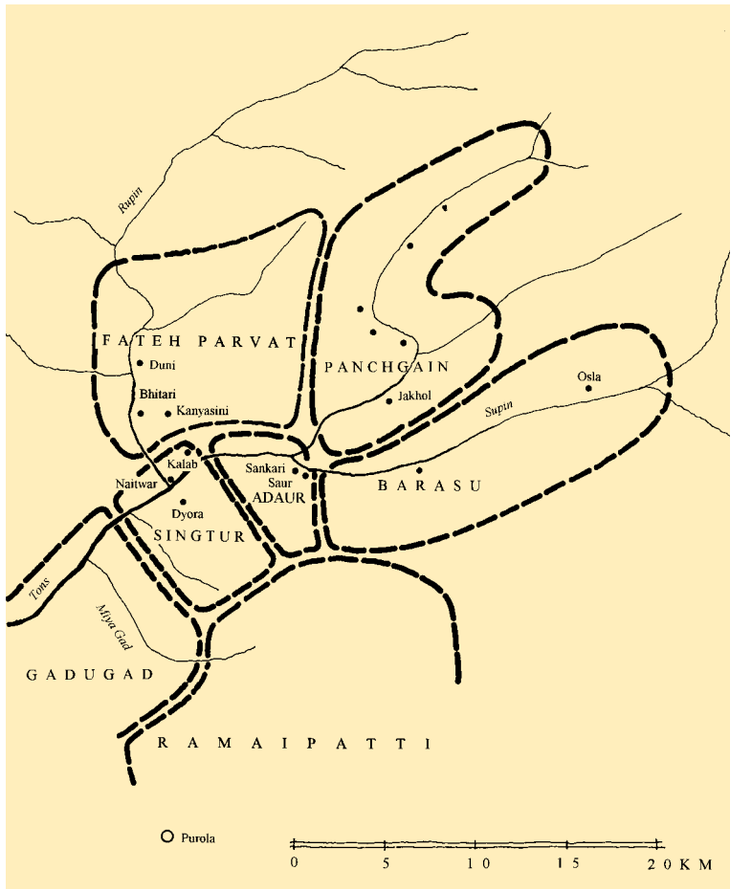
28 "The person of the Bashahr Raja is considered to be semi-divine and is worshipped by a considerable portion of his subjects, more especially by those who live in the remote parts of the State" (Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States 1910: Part A, Chap I, B., p. 5).

29 Vogel says that "Oudh" probably means "Ayodhya."

themselves as only the vice-regents of Raghunāth (Rāma), and as ruling only in his name (Hutchinson and Vogel 1986: 108).
The well-known congregation of deities during Dassehra thus reflects and defines relations of dominance and subordination: local deities do a pilgrimage to the state god. In Bushahar state, there was a festival called "Udyapan Jag" (*sic*) held once every hundred years during the royal period at the temple of the state goddess Bhīmakālī, which was attended by all local Hindu deities.[30] Thus in these two districts of Himachal Pradesh, complex systems of divine processions seem to be expressions, not of divine kingship, but rather of divine subordination. The forms of movement must of course be understood differently according to their respective contexts: visits to relatives in the one case, pilgrimages to a source of divine power in the other. But in all cases, the style of movement defines relations of domination and subordination: wife-givers to wife-takers, kings to gods, gods of dependent districts to gods of superordinate districts, and so forth. And in this hierarchical sacred geography, the shrine of the state deity ranks above all others.

Conclusion: a hierarchy of values

Throughout this essay I have argued that the "sacred" aspects of these central Himalayan religious cults cannot be understood without taking practices into account. The way in which Bhairava's cult spreads, the routes taken by Ghaṇḍyāḷ and Jākh, the songs and rituals of Nandā Devī, the public confrontations of Karṇa and the other divine kings of the Western Himalaya – all of these have to do with kinship and territory, not as imagined or theorised, but as practised. Divine power is among the most important and highly valued aspects of these cults, but it must be understood in terms of society, politics, kinship, and territory. It exists only in a human context: women who need shelter, families who need cash, farmers who need rain.
Any adequate description of these cults and processions must therefore recognise both that "the sacred" is an important dimension of them, and that this term can only be understood in the context of human practice, rather than as a transcendental category. But what of the practices of the gods themselves? The divine kings of Rawain, Karṇa and Duryodhana, also have their gods, and these are the great gods of Hinduism. When Karṇa and Duryodhana go on pilgrimage, they visit the pre-eminent local sacred places, Badrinath and Kedarnath. Their pilgrimages, like their processions, are clearly related to society and politics, and particularly to Rawain's gradual integration into the wider society.



Divine kingdoms in the upper basin of the Tons river: delineation of the territories (paṭṭi), of Karṇa (Singtur) and Duryodhana (Adaur, Panchgain and Barasu).
Drawing Niels Gutschow

The first of Karṇa's two pilgrimages to Kedarnath occurred about twenty years ago, when it was decided that he would no longer accept animal sacrifice. Someśvar's first (and so far only) pilgrimage to Badrinath occurred in the early 1980s, as an attempt by the reformist faction to persuade the god's other followers to follow Karṇa's example and renounce animal sacrifice along with certain other customs.[31] In both cases, the pilgrimage is a declaration of orthopraxy, in effect an undertaking to renounce certain objectionable practices. It also functions as a means of encouraging orthopraxy: when the followers of Karṇa and Duryodhana have arguments about issues of religious observance, these pilgrimages are inevitably cited, with critics asking how a god could possibly engage in such-and-such a practice after performing a pilgrimage to Badarinath or Kedarnath.
There are two points to be made here. First of all, the motivation for these pilgrimages is not transcendental. It has to do with honor and

30 Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States 1910: Part A, Chap I, C., p. 5. 28.

31 It is noteworthy that Karṇa's pilgrimages to Kedarnath, which is known as "the land of asceticism" *(tapobhūmī)* were done on foot, with great difficulty, through a wild mountain landscape, while Duryodhana's followers chartered a bus for their pilgrimage to Badrinath "the land of enjoyment" *(bhogabhūmī)*.

prestige, and with the practical benefits that will flow from greater integration into North Indian society. As long as the people from these remote valleys are regarded as backward hillbillies, they have little prestige in the outside world, and consequently fewer opportunities. By the same token, orthopraxy (including the cessation of animal sacrifice) is the *sine qua non* for cultural integration, and in terms of traditional Hindu kingship, orthopraxy would include the acknowledgement of a divine overlord. No Hindu king was ever autonomous: each had his royal deity, with important state rituals to acknowledge this dependency (Inden 1990; Patnaik 1972). In Garhwal, as in the adjacent kingdom of Bushahar, the king himself was regarded as a kind of alter ego of the state deity. In Garhwal, that deity was Badrinath, and the king was styled *bolāndā badrī*, "the speaking Badrinath."

When Karṇa and Duryodhana go on pilgrimage to Kedarnath and Badrinath, they are bypassing the nearby rulers of Garhwal and Bashahar and going straight to the top. They do not travel to pay court to local kings, but go directly to the great gods of Hinduism. Like Hindu kings elsewhere, they thus acknowledge the gods Śiva and Viṣṇu as their personal deities, as the ultimate sources and guarantors of their power. As Dumont wrote long ago, society organises itself with respect to its most fundamental values, and in India, those values are religious. In other words, every Hindu kingdom is a divine kingdom.