Waking History Up from the Chronological Nightmares: A Perspective from the Mediaeval Newari Historiography

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Flying Bullet of Time

It was the bright full moon of the autumn month of Kārtik about 1980 VS (1923 CE). The upper floors of the houses in the pre-electric Kathmandu were throwing out the flickering warm yellow light of the oil wicks.[1] In a house located in Bhimsensthan, a Brahmin in his sixties had just completed the *Tripurotsava*, a ritual of offering the 707 wicks' flame in memory of Śiva's victory over the demon Tripura. A little lower from the standing old Brahmin, an eight-year-old fatherless boy sat on a wooden plank. After the ritual, the Brahmin mumbled that on that very day, Jangabahadur had killed his uncle Chief Minister Mathvarsingh and hundreds of others to ascend to the seat of power. The Brahmin then recounted that, in 1942 VS (1885 CE), Jangabahadur's nephews had gunned down his two sons and a grandson. Many courtiers once loyal to the first Rana Prime Minister took refuge in the Lane (i.e. British Residency) or escaped to India. Since the Brahmin, Pandit Bhuvannath Pande, frequented the courtiers' households, his narrative was vivid and dynamic. The boy, the future historian Pandit Nayaraj Panta, listened attentively and derived a maxim: "the bullet, which

1 Versions of this paper were presented in several conferences. In particular, I have benefitted from the comments and suggestions made by the participants of the International Academy Conference on "Studying Documents in Premodern South Asia and Beyond: Problems and Perspectives", Heidelberg, Germany, 4–6 October 2015, and the Department of History Colloquium, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India, 7 April 2016.

Jangabahadur fired at Mathvarsingh, flew back to hit Jangabahadur's own offspring in 40 years."[2] The flying bullet was Nayaraj's vision of time that connected the two bloody episodes in Nepal's Rana family rule. The vision is so commonplace today that the Rana rule is portrayed singularly as a period of mindless massacres and dark conspiracies.[3] The flying bullet is a modern metaphor for the temporal logic of history. Nayaraj was a modern, albeit arguably someone "unperturbed by the West" (M. Panta 2065 VS: 3).

The image of the flying bullet affords us a perspective on how the modern historiographers have unleashed temporal violence on the way the past has been conventionally represented and understood in many societies. To the moderns, earlier forms of knowledge were inadequate or even deficient. This epistemic violence against the older enquiries is implicit in most modern enterprises and often takes this normative form: the present ways of knowing must be superior to the past ways since knowledge accumulates, builds on previous knowledge, and improves all the time. The present-bias prompts the modern historiographers to view older historical texts as products of an inferior set of practices when compared to their own *doxa*.[4] Indeed, such devaluation marks existing typologies of historiography. These schemes consign historical texts from different periods or different traditions effectively to sub-historical labels such as "chronicles", "annals" and "diaries". Similar arrogance of the moderns, in general, is also evident in the depreciative attitude of the academic historians towards mediaeval Newari specimens.[5] There is a deeper issue than a quarrel over taxonomy here.

2 N. Panta 2069 VS: 42–49. The incident was previously published in Nayaraj's preface to N. Panta 2019 VS.

3 All nationalist historians, from Baburam Acharya to Chittaranjan Nepali, have unanimously propounded this view for understandable reasons. Several generations of popular readership have reproduced the view. For instance, see a review of the English translation of Baburam's book, *The Bloodstained Throne* (Acharya 2013): *The Record*. 2014. "Game of Thrones." 16 May. http://www.recordnepal.com/art-letter/game-of-thrones/ [accessed on 5 June 2017]. The illusion of the peaceful progress, before and after certain rupture, is widely prevalent in Nepal, as elsewhere. The increase in the number of both systemic and inadvertent human deaths in the post-Rana period points to the contrary. The idea that violence has been increasingly contained by human societies has become somewhat respectable by the publication of *Violence and Social Orders* (North/Wallis/Weingast 2009).

4 The modern bias towards the present is pervasive in all scientific enquiries. In economics, for instance, it is reflected on the ideas of depreciation and interests.

5 Additional labels have been employed for the mediaeval Newari histories. However, these labels apprehend the nature of the material and textual composition only partially. For instance, they have been called *thyāsaphū* (concertina

The agreement about the relegated status of the mediaeval Newari histories among scholars on Nepal seems as complete as those that exist among the revisionist British historiographers about the specimens from the pre-16th century English historical texts. For instance, surveying mediaeval historiography, May McKisack underscored that the "chronicles" lacked "any glimmerings of historical imagination or any notion of historical criticism" (McKisack 1971: 233). Frank Fussner criticised the bourgeois chroniclers as "transitional figures, who drew upon the works of the great mediaeval chronicles without understanding the limitation of their own scissors-and-paste methods" (Fussner 1962: 230). An equally damning view was held by Fred Levy, who wrote,

> There was no conception of history writing as selective: a historian did not remake the past in his own image or in any other but instead reported the events of the past in the order in which they occurred. (Levy 2004: 168)

The revisionists in fact strove to supersede each other in condemning the art of mediaeval "chronicles". Thus, Arthur Fergusson argues that "innocently plagiaristic chronicles" were regressive moves for the development of historical thinking in Britain (Fergusson 1979: 7). Instead of stimulating historical thought, the chronicles may

> well have done more by their very popularity to stunt it by propagating a concept of history seriously limited in scope and by perpetuating the national mythology instead of providing an understanding of the past and its process of development. (ibid.: 10)

or "accordion" fold-out book) in view of their shape (Malla 1985: xii, G. Vajrācārya 2023 VS); *aitihāsik ghaṭanāvalī* ("a garland of historical events") in view of their entries (Raj 2056a ; G. Vajrācārya 2023 VS, 2025 VS: 109–114); *dhara:pau* (from *dharata* "a leaf of list") in view of their sequence (C. Vajrācārya 1105 NS); and, *aitihāsik ṭipoṭ* ("historical notes") in view of their episodic nature and appended dates (Raj 2056a VS). For the use of the term "chronicles", see Regmi 1966a and 1966b. I have termed these specimens variously as *aitihāsik ṭipoṭ* and *aitihāsik ghaṭanāvalī* (Raj 2056a VS, 2056a VS). It is telling that no attention has been paid so far to enquire into how these texts refer to themselves. For a preliminary exercise in this direction, see Raj 2012.

As David Womersley (2005) has argued, these dismissive statements were born out of a characteristically modern teleology of historical technique. The teleological view that the 16th century originated the modern ideas and techniques is wrong not only because it is arrogant, but also because it falsely portrays a "revolution" and misrepresents the textual specimens. On the first count, the standard wisdom suggests that the century saw the advent of three crucial historical techniques: the sense of anachronism, the adoption of a critical attitude towards sources, and an interest in causation. On the second, the standard depiction is that the historiography became secularised as history was steadily emptied of religious ideologies, for the better. Womersley shows that, although such a narrative is coherent, it is unable to explain the prominence of religious views in the lives of the very historians to whom the revisionists attribute the secularisation of the discipline (see below). Furthermore, he calls for a mature analysis of the content to appreciate the historiography of the "chronicles".

Not enough attention, I am afraid, has been paid even to the key problems of textual form. For instance, a key question such as how the rules of evidence vary in the mediaeval specimens in comparison to the modern historical texts, and why, has remained unaddressed. This is highly unfortunate. There has been a significant loss in the epistemic diversity of historiography the world over, making the practitioners of the discipline thereby poorer in terms of the choices in the forms and techniques available to them.[6] The loss, it seems, has also occurred in the number of ways time could possibly be imagined to have influenced the course of events, or in a variety with which events spread over a period could be related.

Relating Chronology and History

Etymology suggests that the term chronology is about the logic of time. The logic of time operates as past events are related on the basis of specific indices, such as reference numerals, time adverbs and grammatical categories of time. In practice, the logic manifests itself as both a temporal ordering of events, and a definite marking of the temporal relations among them. The former is relatively straightforward.

6 I have demonstrated such a loss in case of the history writing landscape in post-1950 Nepal (Raj 2014).

Episodes are first pegged on time, and then arranged in ascending or descending (vertical) order. Simultaneous events may demand a horizontal order. The latter demands a little imagination: events in the *ante-post* (before-after) relations may be bound by causality. Co-occurring events may have a common origin.

I will show below that early modern historiographers attempted universalising time, to relativise Europe's sense of its past, and its centrality in the world. But the same historiographers also inadvertently solidified the universal time line on which various civilizations, nations or societies are located. The global history of progress had teleology: all roads led to modern Europe. Recent writings, however, complicate the relationship between chronology and history. Historical time (in contrast to the idea of objective universal time as imagined in the natural sciences) reveals many dimensions relative to the scale of observation and unit of analysis. Sociologists tend to mark collective events without human agency as social time (Nowotny 1992; Cipriani 2013). Paul Ricoeur (1980) once proposed the notion of narrative time to solve the problem of the illusion of sequence in fictional texts. The narrative time in his view brings an uncritical temporality to the texts.[7] Philosophers and historians have held faith in the discontinuities laid over continuities over the *longue durée* (F. Braudel 1982; O.H. Braudel 2004). Gradually, ethnographers of various shades have sought to defy what they perceived as a linear model of time in historiography.[8] True to their post-colonial and post-modern origins, these studies have argued for organising global history in plural temporal orders (Hölscher 2013). In order to explain differing development in societies and their various statuses at the present, these societies are assumed to have different qualities and measures of time. In order to examine the millennia in a moment and vice-versa, a certain degree of mishmash of two or more chronological regimes ("diachromeshing") was sought. The purpose was to free cultures from the hegemony of homogenous and objective Time, which the modernists, like Hegel, proposed in their bid to write Universal History.

Nevertheless, visions of heterogeneous or plural times do not mean that chronology has become any less important for history. One might concede to the discontinuity between life (of individuals or societies)

7 For a fuller exposition, see Ricoeur1984–1988.

8 Lucian Febvre was the first to deconstruct the myth of historical continuity. The myth is hidden in what Louis Mink calls "the configurational comprehension of a story" (1987: 65).

and historical stories (Carr 1986). But the temporal logic remains highly relevant for historical narrative. That is despite Ankersmit, who suggests such an irrelevance by saying, "all that is of real importance in historical writing begins only once we have left time and chronology behind us" (Ankersmit 2012: 39). Chronology continues to be at the core of both the production and reading of historical narratives. The significance of chronology is at best hidden in the sense of a configuring component for both writing and understanding history (Jansen 2015). Usually, it is made obvious. A typical university-level first course on history, for instance, states that

> Chronological thinking is at the heart of historical reasoning. Without a strong sense of chronology—of when events occurred and in what temporal order—it is impossible for students to examine relationships among those events or to explain historical causality. Chronology provides the mental scaffolding for organizing historical thought.[9]

For school-going children, it is argued that chronology contributes to their sense of identity and helps them create a context for understanding the present. Further,

> In order to grasp and consider the 'big questions' of history, children need to establish in their own minds a chronology of events to enable them to make connections between them and see the wider implications of their studies in history.[10]

Before considering the debate on significance of time in history as concluded, it is worthwhile to reiterate the fact that non-narrativist historiography has existed in many literary societies in South Asia (such as in Orissa and Maharashtra) and East Asia (such as in Burma) until recently, and in many European cultures (such as in Italy) until the early modern period. A discussion on the relationships between chronology and history should therefore begin at the issue of what I would call the problem of narration. This is the 'ascent' from the particular to the general or from a case to a narrative. Of specific interest

9 http://www.nchs.ucla.edu/history-standards/historical-thinking-standards/1.-chronological-thinking [accessed on 7 June 2015].

10 http://www.history.org.uk/resources/primary_resource_1743_2.html [accessed on 7 June 2015].

is the way time, among other elements, figures in the emergence of narrative out of episodes.[11] Recent histories of medicine, for instance, draw our attention to the role of paper technology in the emergence of medical knowledge. Physical acts of rearranging and reordering of the case histories, through indexing and tabulation, have shaped medical epistemology (Hess/Mendelsohn 2010). Similarly, taxonomy, as a fundamental exercise of classifying types, has been seen as the first "epistemic virtue" of the 18th century in the development of modern scientific knowledge (Galison/Daston 2007).

The emergence of a narrative seems to consist of two intertwining movements. The first is the logical ordering of the cases. It is possible to imagine that episodes could be arranged in several ways, by topic, theme, place or agency. But it is the chronology that dominates in historical texts. The second movement in the development of historical narratives is explanation. Causal explanation, a favourite mode in political and economic histories until the 1980s, fell into disuse after the cultural turn. Most cultural historians, for example, agree with Carlo Ginzberg that humans have an innate "intuition for the incidental", and therefore a thick description is sufficient to an understanding of the past (Ginzberg 1999: ch. 2). Historians flirting with cultural anthropology or anthropologists navigating into cultural history consider the search for causality an outdated historical enterprise. Nevertheless, causality is making a comeback to history in the shape of non-determinate cultural factors for explaining differences in political economic change, or plausible political economic factors for explaining distinct cultural taste (Wong 2011).[12] The problem of narration has thus been solved in the narrativist historiography, an academically dominant method of history writing today, by overlaying two key constitutive elements in historical narratives: chronology and causal explanation. But societies, where these two elements are not dominant, seem to have circumvented the problem of narration by dealing directly with the problem of production of historical sense instead. Both chronology and causality do not serve in any fundamental way in their effort to make sense of the past.

11 The problem is at the core of any enterprise in assessing the state of historical knowledge (Rublack 2011).

12 For the former, Wong provides an example of the rural base of Chinese industrialisation, which is accounted for by the past cultural experience of markets in rural China. The dominant mix of the music genres available in a particular city strongly correlates with the specific political and economic structure, although the set of genres remains the same in the music shops across the globe.

Chronology in the Chātas

In mediaeval Newari histories, called Chātas, temporal logic plays out in several ways.[13] As I have discussed elsewhere, the Newari histories typically list events in discontinuous episodes. Each episode, in general, has the following structure:

> [Year] [Month] [Lunar half (*pakṣa*)] [Lunar day (*tithi*)] ["On this day"] [Topic] [Verb-Past] {How} [Finite Aspect]

Here, elements within [ ] are mandatory, while those within { } are optional. For instance,

> [सम्वत् ६८४] [माघ] [कृष्ण] [दशमीकुन्हु], [तवदेवर] [प्रतिष्ठायाङादिन] { } [जुरो] ॥
> On the 10th day of the Dark Half in the month of Māgh in the year 684, Tavadevar (temple) was consecrated. (*Śāntī-svasti-saphula*, fol. 4b)

> [सं ७८३] श्री ३ बुंग न्हवनस ष्वप्वया निक्क मवोनस्य यलया व पनतिया व जुक्क निक्कपनि खानाव बुंग [न्हवन यात] [जुलो]।
> In the year 783, during the bathing of god Buṃga, the *nikva* people were not invited from Bhaktapur. The Buṃga was bathed by gathering the *nikva*s from Lalitpur and Panauti. (*Buṃgadevayā Vaṃśāvalī*, fol. 13/Shakya 2007: 35)

> [सं ७८९] [भाद्र] [कृष्ण] [चतुर्थी] [श्रीविश्वेश्वर काशीसन वरंजेब बातसाहान] [कचिंगर थङ दिन] [जुरो] ॥
> On the 4th day of Dark Half in the month of Bhādra in the year 789, Aurangazeb, the emperor of Delhi, created trouble in Kāśī's Viśveśvar (temple). (Rājvaṃśī 2020 VS: 3)

13 On the structure and context of production of the Chātas, see Raj 2012. It is interesting to note that these Newari specimens flourished from the 14th century onwards, almost contemporary with another historiographical innovation in Europe (see below).

> [सं ८०६] [श्रावण] [कृष्ण], [एकादशी], बुधबार, [थ्वकुन्हु] [स्वर्ग्गस, वाद्य थाया थे] [घुनुनु डाओ] ॥
> On Wednesday, the 11th day of Dark Half in the month of Śrāvaṇa in the year 806, the sky thundered as if a drum was played. (Regmi 1966a: Appendix III, p. 26)

An ideal type of the Chāta entry consists of the bare particulars about when, what and how something happened. Other entries elaborate particular episodes. For instance,

> सं, ८०२ भाद्रपद शुक्ल ॥ एकादशी शनैश्चरबारकुन्हु, एन्दकिरि स्वाङा ॥ एन्दकिरि लुया गाक तिराककुन्हुं, बन्हिराजकुलस, झरेचाया क्काथ मि चोय धक, झरेचा ल्वातका बेलस, क्काथ मि चोय मरातका झरेचा खत दुंङाव, खतस चोंको ल्हाक जुरो, सि जुको छम्हं मसीक जुरो ॥
> On Saturday, the 11th day of the Bright Half in the month of Bhādrapada in the year 802, a peg for Indra was erected. In the evening of the full moon of the month of Indra, before the burning of the pyre of the dolls in the royal palace, the structure fell down on several people. No one died though. (*Thyāsapu A*/ Regmi 1966a: Appendix III, p. 20)

In some instances, the reference number for time is appended at the end.

> राजाया निगबलि खिचान, नयाव, तलखाचोस, बो जुको थेलकं ता था, थ्वकुन्हुन, पेन्हुकुन्हु, समस्तं, ङ्हथुया थें याङा, पाल जोतिराया, याकम्हं, जोतिराजं ॥ श्रीगंगाराणित्रिभयत्वं ॥ सम्वत् ६९९ माघ शुदि ५ ॥
> The sacrificial *niga* portion for the (deceased) King was eaten by a dog. The remainder was kept on the upper doorsill. The rituals on the four days after this day were conducted as per the custom. Jotirā(j) was on the duty, (so) Jotirāj was the conductor. (In the reign of) three-Rulers including Gaṃgārānī. On the 5th day of the Bright Half in the month of Māgha in the year 699. (*Khopajujupini Vaṃśāvalī*, fols. 5–6)

Crucially, the episodic entries do not exhibit any marker of relationship among them. It thus appears that each event is seen as fundamentally pegged down at a precise social time. In other words, the historical view in the Chātas is temporally discrete: an event appears as a bundle of the bare particulars hung on the nail of time. When I say that chronology is not the ordering principle of the Newari Chātas, I do not mean that the time dimension is absent in the event structure. As

the examples above show, it is steadfast. However, there is no effort on the part of mediaeval Newar historians to underscore temporal relations among the events. The resolute desire to tag every case firmly to its time is seen in instances where the scribe reproduces a planetary position chart alongside the event in question, or leaves the temporal marking space empty.[14]

Let me illustrate: the first basic movement towards a chronological ordering, i.e., the indications of *ante-post* or simultaneity relations are very feeble in the Chātas. I do not deny that in many specimens, such as in the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*, the cases are arranged in the ascending order of the time reference numbers for the worldly events (in contrast to the mythical ones). Many modern editors of these texts, such as D. R. Regmi, Śankarmān Rājvaṃśī and Aiśvaryadhar Śarmā, have in fact attempted to order these Chāta entries by the years, reigning Kings, or by topic (viz. *agnimaṭh*).[15] There are enough chronological inconsistencies in the Chātas to begin with. The *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* text, for instance, breaks down at three places: twice on account of chronology, and once on account of language. The discontinuity led Cecil Bendall to posit three "books", and Kamal P. Malla (1985) to assume a historical rupture during the reign of King Śivadeva. It is worth noting that this famous Chāta text was written in a single hand.

Temporal discontinuities found in many Chāta specimens cannot be explained away by attributing them to a scribal whim, scarcity of paper, exigency of the event, or the open-ended nature of the record keeping. For instance, in the Copenhagen manuscript, episodes dated 684 and 687 are followed by the ones dated 662 and 757.[16] Another Chāta, brought to scholarly notice by Maheśrāj Panta (2069 VS) recently, has an event dated 854 reported, then followed by another dated 669 (plate 1). It can hardly be surmised that the Chāta historians allowed carelessness while *deriving* cases, as they might be, from

14 An example for the former is Regmi 1966a: *Thyasapu H* (see his footnote, p. 111). Another example for the same is the Chāta published by G. Vajrācārya (2023 VS). The planet charts are on pp. 24, 27, and 35. For the empty time markers, see Regmi 1966a: *Thyasapu C*, p. 55.

15 Compare Regmi and Panta's editions for *Thyasapu A*; see also Regmi 1966a: *Thyasapu A*, M. Panta 2066a VS.

16 The Devanagari transliteration is as follows:
सम्वत् ६८४ माघ कृष्ण दशमीकुन्हु, तवदेवर प्रतिष्ठा याङा दिन जुरो॥ ॥ संम्व
त् ६८७ माघ शुक्ल, द्वादशि, बुधबार, थ्वकुन्हु श्री ३ तम्बलिगदेव, सुवण्णदिवरस, पूर्ण्णा, ध्वजा छाया दि
न जुरो॥ श्री २ महेन्द्रमल्लदेवन दयका जुरो॥ रामायन प्याखन दयक, तवभिमसेन बोय जुरो ॥
सम्वत् ६६२ चैत्र शुक्ल पूर्ण्णीस घटि ४ पंदु घटि २ तृतिया घटि ५४ पुन्हिस पेघरि दखुनु देओ क्रा
हा बिक्यातका ॥ ॥ सम्वत् ७५७ ज्येष्ठ… (*Śāntī-svasti-saphula*, fol. 4b)

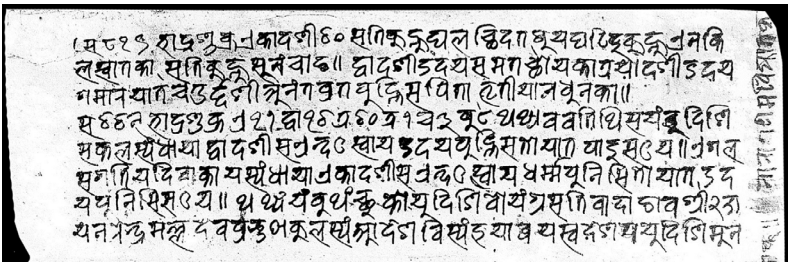

Plate 1: Page of a Chāta text, microfilmed as NGMPP A 1221/2, first published by M. Panta (2069 VS: 160). It reads:

स ८५४ भाद्र शुक्र एकादशी ६० सतिकुह्नु घलछि दत, बुय घटि दुकुह्नु एनकि
ल स्वातका, सतिकुह्नु सुनं चोङ॥ द्वादशी उदय समत छोयका त्रयोदशी उदय
श मारयात चतुर्दशी अनंतव्रत बुह्मिस पिता, तृतीया न धुनका ॥
स ६६९ भाद्रशुक्र, ए ५१ द्वा ५६ त्र ६० त्र १ च ३ पु ८ थथ्य वव तिथिस यंवु दिशि
सकल्यस्यं धाया द्वादशीस एन्दलृ स्वाय उदय पुह्मिस तो यात पादुस लृय ॥

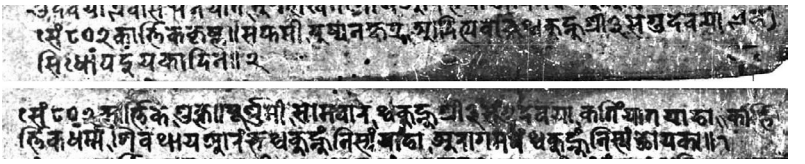

Plate 2: Extracts from a Chāta text, with entries marked with *2* (top) and *1* (bottom) at the end to indicate a reverse order, first published by M. Panta (2066b VS: 313–314).

some 'originals'.[17] In at least one instance, cases were marked for the reader to revert their wrong order. In the Chāta text made popular by Samśodhan-Maṇḍal, published by Regmi and now with the facsimile by Maheśrāj Panta, the writer marks the entries with numerals *2* and *1* to suggest that they should be read in a reverse order (M. Panta 2066a VS: 203 n. 26; plate 2). But in this specimen, too, cases are arranged without much regard for chronology. For instance, an incident dated 853 is located between two unrelated incidents dated 800 Bhādra and

17 I am using the verb "derive" for a reason. While there are indications that production of the Chātas involved a fair degree of copying, the copying is often not exact and done rather liberally. Compare the variants of the so-called *Nepālika-bhūpavaṃśāvalī* (Bajracharya/Michaels/Gutschow 2016) texts.

800 Āśvin.[18] To sum up, the mediaeval Newar historians were keen on time-indexing the cases, but they did so without being bound by temporal logic. Indeed, they did not choose to weave the episodes. They were not after narratives or stories. In other words, they chose not to notice the flying bullet of time in the past.

The non-narrativist leaning of the Chāta historians is also apparent from their complete disregard for explanation, causal or otherwise. For them, the fundamental elements of the event structure do not include the question "Why?" While attempts to explain the reasonableness of the past remain at the heart of the history writing enterprise for both modern and mediaeval narrativists, such efforts seem to be conspicuously absent among the Chāta historians. The absence of reasoning is so perfect that one could posit non-explanation as a common professional ethic of these historians. From this stance, a Chāta might read like an avalanche of discrete events. Readers are left to endure the events without being offered any help for making sense of them, let alone deriving useful lessons from them (plate 3). To be sure, there are generally no overt lexical markers of temporal relations among the events, such as "therefore", "hence", "thus", and "because". A universal disregard for chronological order in the Chātas also seems designed to challenge the readers for explanation. The Chātas are historical puzzles for readers to solve and explain. But while temporal sequence of the events is de-emphasized, co-occurrence is frequently noted in these histories, particularly when the events seem unlikely to be connected. For instance, the incident of a thunderbolt striking the Cāṃgunārāyaṇ temple, blood coming out in Kileśvara (Mahādeva) in the morning, a copper vessel having been found open in Gā:bahāl, and the inability to open an entrance door are all mentioned in a single episode.

> सम्वत् ६८५ जेष्ठ कृष्ण द्वादशी, अश्विनी, शनिश्चरबार कुह्रु, चंगुनारायणसके, मलं जुक
> सिजल, प्यलोड, चालाव, गालबाहाल तों, ॥ थ्वकुह्रु, कीलेश्वरस, हि लुव,
> प्रातस ॥ थ्वनलि, नियषुह्रुकुह्रु, प्रथमाषाढ कृष्ण संति बुधबारकुह्रु
> ताडखा, चालके, मजिसे चोग्व, प्रातस ॥ थ्वन ह्ङाह्रु, कुह्रु, एकादशी आ-
> दित्यबारकुह्रु, शान्तिहोम, दान, पूजाआदिन, याङादिन ॥

18 The Devanagari transliteration of the relevant portion is as follows:
सं ८०० भाद्रपद शुक्ल॥ त्रयोदशी…
स ८५३ माघ कृ ३ एलस सरन ओयाव चोङह्म पिलुभा मछिङाव पशुपति सरण ओङ
सम्वत् ८०० आश्विन, शुक्ल ॥ प्रतिपदा, सोमबार… (M. Panta 2066b VS: 308–309).

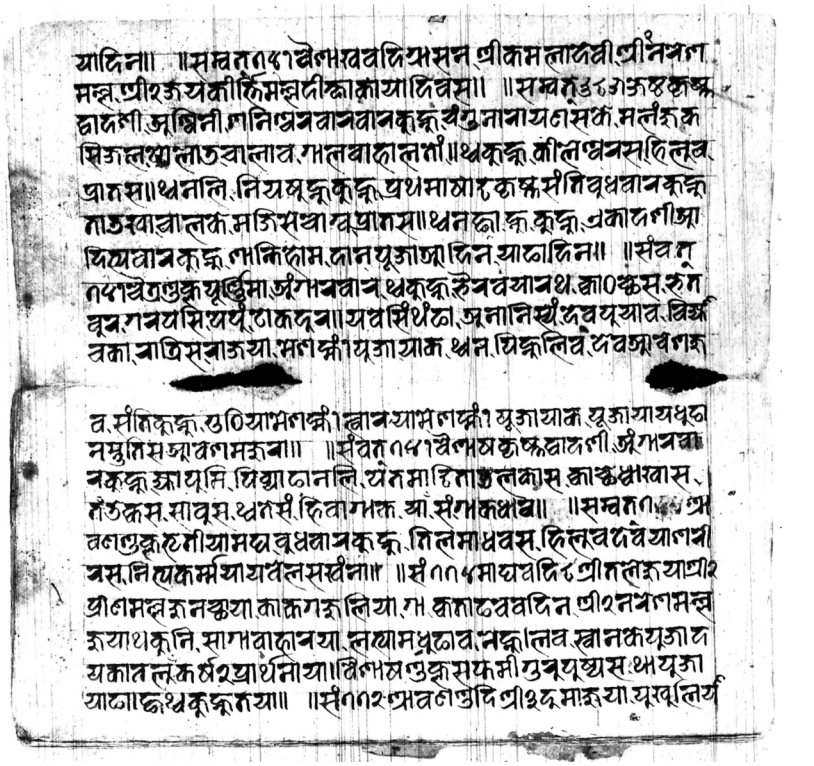

Plate 3: An avalanche of episodes. Page of a Chāta text kept at the National Archives, Kathmandu, microfilmed as NGMPP A 301/12. ©National Archives, Govt. of Nepal.

> On Saturday, the Aśvinī constellation, on the 12th day in the Dark half of the month Jeṣṭha in the year 685, a thunderbolt fell on the temple of Cāṃgunārāyaṇ and the copper vessel was found open in the monastery Gālabahāl. On this day, the Lord Kileśvar was found bleeding in the morning. On the 26th day after this, on Wednesday, in the Dark half of the month First Āṣāḍha, the padlock could not be opened on the following morning. On the fifth day thereafter, on Sunday, on the 11th day, pacifying *homa* and *dāna* rituals were conducted. (*Aitihāsik Ghaṭanāvalī*, fol. 7)

In another example, the suicide of an astrologer from Hauga: (Lalitpur), the death of the younger son of someone who cremated the astrologer, tears coming out of Buṃga, the death of a minister, and the sacrifice of a she-goat are hinted at as being connected.

> सं ७९३ पौष शुक्ल थ्वकुह्नु, सखमोदस, हतिग्लया जोसिचा छह्म चान्हस म्येस दुब्वोस्यं सिक जुरो ॥ मिन पेतनङ लिथे होस यङाव हरिकृष्ण जोसि जयकृष्ण जोसि नेह्म बाकायन ओक जुरो ॥ जिन्हु दु:खन चोङ छपरात तव जुरो ॥ थ्व हरिकृष्ण जोसिया मिलह्म काय जुरो सिक ॥ थ्व खपोया अभाग जुयि नीयह्नु न्हव बूंगदेव खोव जुरो॥ थ्व भोतया चौतारा सियकुह्नु नालाया भगवतीस्के चोरसं स्याकं हि मम्ह्युक खि म्हुक जुरो ॥
>
> In the bright half of the month Pauṣa in the year 793. On this day,[19] a young man of the surname Jośi of Hatigla burnt himself and died in the confluence of Saṃkhamoda. Harikṛṣṇa Jośi and Jayakṛṣṇa Jośi, the father and the son, performed the last rites of the dead man after taking his body out of the fire. The mourning was observed for ten days overlapping with the mourning of the other (?). The other dead was Harikriṣṇa's younger son. Twenty days before the death of the Khapo astrologer, the Lord Buṃga: had cried. (Similarly), a she-goat, which was being sacrificed at the Goddess Bhagvati in Nālā, exuded from its body the faeces and not the blood on the day the Bhota minister died. (*Thyasapu Bii*/Regmi 1966a: Appendix III, p. 86)

In the year 921, a wound was found at the right temple of Jamaleśvar; both the eyes and colours of the Rupini Tārā were gone; and Kirtimān Kāji was killed within the royal courtyard.

> शुभ सम्वत् ९२१ म्ति भाद्रव कृर्ष्ण ४ न्हुस जमरेश्वल देओलया जओ न्हकुस घाल जुयाओ चोङ देपास चोङम्ह रूपीनीतालाया दिष्टि निग्वर मदु, रंग छति मदयाओ चोङ, थ्व उपद्र भाद्रव कृर्ष्ण ६ न्हुस कर्तिमान काजि रायकु दुने पाराओ स्याक कुरथन री दामद्र पान्या काजि भारा दक्कदाक जुक सखुँपनि स्वपनि पेन्हु घिरे याका तल, थ्वया शान्ति मयाक जुर शुभ ॥
>
> On the 4th day of the Dark half in the month of Bhādra in the auspicious year 921, a wound was found at the right temple of the Lord Jamareśvar. The Rumini (?) Tara on its left had lost both her eyes and she was discoloured. That was the disaster. On the 6th day of the Dark half in the month of Bhādra, the minister Kartiman was slaughtered in the royal palace. Then the minister Damodar Pande and all others were prevented from coming out of the palace as if they were thieves (?). There was no proprietary ritual for this event. (Shakya 1125 NS: 60)

Examples could be multiplied, but it is clear that the mediaeval Newar historians unmistakably underscore the link between the natural and

19 The date is absent in the original.

divine events. The Chāta leaves you to speculate as to whether these events are connected causally.

To sum, the Chātas circumvent the problem of narration. They ignore the first step of ordering the cases logically. They also do not exhibit the second movement of attempting explanation. Instead, they defer narrativisation forever. By escaping from the lullabies of chronology, they seem to offer historical understanding in a way different from that presented by the narrative history. How distinct such an understanding is, and to what purpose it was reproduced for five centuries in Newar society is a separate enquiry worth making, but beyond the scope of this essay. In the rest of this essay, I will argue for the difference of mediaeval Newari historiography by contrasting it to the chronology-driven rise of the historical narratives in 16th century Europe. This is an argument by absence. By retelling my story of 16th century Europe, I claim that the rise of specific forms of historical narratives was possible due to circumstances specific to Europe. The contrast suggests that perhaps the grammar of the Chātas offers us a wake-up call from our chronological slumber.

Reading History

The story of the narrative movements in Europe, as Anthony Grafton (2007) has shown, can be engagingly told as the rise and the death of a genre of the *Ars Historica*, or the Art of History. I will focus on how these shifts were perceived by two key intellectuals in the 16th century transition between the mediaeval to the modern age in Europe, Francois Baudouin (1520–1573) and Jean Bodin (1530–1596).[20] In their attempts to develop a historical approach to universal law, both French jurists offered creative insights into how historical texts were read, and how they should be composed. Baudouin and Bodin freely borrowed ideas on the consumption and production of historical texts from their humanist predecessors, but incorporated many contemporary insights and were considered by their successors in later centuries as the authorities in the *Ars Historica* tradition.

Being jurists and French perhaps, their common interest was to historicize the canon of Roman law. Bodin, for instance, provided a

20 For the life and works of Francois Baudouin, also called Balduinus, see Kelley 1964 and 1970: 116–150. For Jean Bodin's life and philosophy of history, see Turchetti 2015.

historical critique of the study of the Roman law, arguing the absurdity of any attempt to establish principles of universal jurisprudence from the Roman decrees, which were altered in the course of time (Reynolds 1945: 2). As a preliminary step to that end, they sought to universalize history. True to the expanding frontiers of their 16th century world, their globalising aim was realised, in part, by bringing all knowledge regarding human, natural and divine affairs into the fold of history, as Bodin demonstrated in his books, the *Methodus* (1566) and the *Six Books on Commonwealth* (1576).[21] Such ambition also reflected their view of history, in which infinitude of great empires rose and fell, in contrast to the traditionalists' view in which only Four Empires fitted, and the centrality of the German nation was assumed.

Bodin saw three kinds of historical writings around him. The first class of writings spelled out discoveries and collected materials. This was travel writing. The second class, the chronicles, arranged things "in correct order" and "in polished form". The third by the "grammarians" attempted "eliminating errors in old books" (Reynolds 1945: 2). In the *Methodus*, Bodin wanted to report the findings of his assessment of existing histories both *artistically* and *logically*, and to *compress* the scattered and disjointed materials found (my emphasis). Bodin saw his task as opposed to that of the grammarians, who "gently" cleaned "the stains and spots from the old records", and had "with a steel pen so heavily glossed all books with worthless and, indeed, misleading notes that almost no image of the antiquity remains" (*Methodus*/Reynolds 1945: 8).

Like all the early moderns, Bodin and Baudouin had chequered relationships with Christianity. Baudouin was expelled from his birth town on the charge of heresy for his Calvinist leanings. He left the colours later. Bodin's fashionable brand of humanism was discordant with his rabid demonology. He believed that witches could physically remove the genitals of their male victims. Nevertheless, both artists of history, Baudouin more than Bodin, made the secular aspect of history more eminent than the divine dimension. For instance, the ancients saw the past as a text inscribed by God's hand, and the past, when rightly interpreted, was a dynamic hieroglyph of the divine purpose. In contrast, Bodin thought that time revealed no obvious signs of the divine hand at work. Hence, "the cult of God, religion, and prophecies grew

21 For Jean Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum congnitione* (1566), see Reynolds 1945. For Bodin's *Les Six Livres de la République* (1576), see Knolls 1606.

obsolete in the passing of centuries" (*Methodus*/Reynolds 1945: 14). History showed second-order rules, numerological and astrological, and endless change. Bodin firmly believed in a universal law that the world underwent a cycle in 496 years. His image of endless human frailty affected many of his readers. Gabriel Harvey, a *discourser* (a history teacher), underscored the idea of human mortality in his copy of Bodin's book (Grafton 2007: 177–178).

Why read history then? David Chrystraeus, a contemporary jurist, strove to cull *gnomai*, sententious maxims, from the "standards of actions" found in the histories of Thucydides. Similarly, Bodin wanted to gather "governmental form of states" from history (*Methodus*/ Reynolds 1945: 8), that is, the "universal principle of law" (*Methodus*/ Reynolds 1945: 2). Baudouin was more resolved. He was interested in historical lessons for governing worldly affairs. "Historical hypothesis," for him, "should yield a political thesis," i.e. a time-tested technique of governance (cited in Grafton 2007: 64). Taking their cue from many Renaissance humanists, both Baudouin and Bodin compiled records of human affairs, for it was where, in Bodin's words, "the best part of universal law" was hidden (*Methodus*/Reynolds 1945: 8).

The historical narrative of the human affairs comes about only when one establishes order and manner in historical events, i.e. their time sequence and their logical correlation. The former made chronology the thread with which one wove the events. The latter demanded critical appraisal of both historians' interests and plausibility of causes they attributed to the events. The historical understanding emerged when one read texts in a particular manner. Simply put, Bodin's prescription is as follows:

1. Read from brief general accounts to detailed narratives (universals to particulars), from stories of earliest times to recent centuries (chronological scheme), and while reading take aid of biographies, cosmography and geography (contextualize);
2. Appraise the reading materials critically. Do not believe all or discredit everything. Relate the background and training of the historian to his choice of topic. Make use of the official records to juxtapose the version (source criticism);
3. Make notes during such voluminous reading and arrange similar instances to aid the memory. Classify the entries (notes) under headings such as Forms of Control, Self-discipline, Familial discipline, and Civic discipline (thematic ordering);

4. Refute the ancient ideas of universe (the theory of Four Empires), the Golden Age (the theory of decadence) and the independent origin of races (the theory of centrality of the German nation); and
5. Indicate the temporal order in the texts. Clarify the obscure and intricate sequence of chronologies. (Reynolds 1945: 9, 14)

Both jurists strongly emphasised contextual readings. For instance, Baudouin wrote, "circumstances are to history what modes are to chant. For modes are like rules that give order and direction to harmony" (cited in Grafton 2007: 76). The compilation of the chorus of the dead may only be deciphered, in other words, by noting and making sense of their times. Similarly, Bodin argued for considering "sayings, deeds and plans in relation to the account of days long past" (Knowles 1945: 9). Instead of discussing "oratorically the exordium, the narrative, and the ornaments of words and gestures" as the rhetoric model of history reading did, Bodin called for a useful reading. In his view, reading history should enable us to interpret the present readily and to infer the future. It is thus clear that the historiography of both Baudouin and Bodin had chronology as a key to understanding history.

The early modern artists of history thus considered chronology the enabler for historical vision. Hence, like all writers of *Ars Historica*, Baudouin insisted that history had two eyes: chronology and geography (Grafton 2007: 32). The ancients too had realised its significance. But Giovanni Giovanno Pontano, who wove histories "out of older chronicles", discussed at great length the problem of narrating "simultaneous events without confusing the reader" (Grafton 2007: 21). Pontano's dilemma indicated that the 16th century historians faced the problems of narration, chronology and explanation in writing history more urgently than ever.

Production of History

Baudouin, and other aspiring artists of history in the 16th century, also collected old legal texts. But they viewed history as a compilation or as a "translation" of histories in the widest possible sense of the word. A history is, after all, a derivative text: a product of inter- or intra-textual derivation and inter- or intra-lingual translation (Fisher 2004: 4–8). Clearly, Baudouin faced problems of both arranging and interpreting them. His exchanges with the practitioners of ecclesiastical

history made him attentive to textual criticism, to a wide variety of topics (more than battle, politics, and the church, but also ceremonies, discipline, order and governance of the Church), to use evidence not only to establish the order of events, but also to recreate past social and cultural conditions. The ecclesiastical historians received from the jurist, in return, the art of discriminating primary from secondary sources. From the antiquarians, Baudouin added a new attentiveness to the manuscripts, and objects in order to examine their authenticity and exactness. He combined the historical texts with the "things that talk". In order to write a *Historia integra*, he wondered

> Why confine myself to books and parchments? Everywhere ancient statues and paintings, and inscriptions carved on stone slabs and coins, and woven in tapestries and coverings, provide us with historical materials of every kind. (Grafton 2007: 95)

Put differently, Baudouin arrived at the door of modern historiography by being aware of the limits of the testimonies of past authorities, and by arguing that history was a "reconstruction" that demanded every possible source of evidence, textual as well as material. Our modern historiographers, Baudouin and Bodin, also expected a mastery of a large number of disciplines, unlike Francesco Robortello (1516–1567) of a previous generation, who considered history a branch of rhetoric (Bolzoni 2001: 23–29). Although the stress on the utilisation of diverse sources was not absent even in the 15th century, as Angelo Decembrio's writings in the 1440s showed, the vigour with which Baudouin laid such stress was new (plate 4).[22]

Consequently, history became an exercise in inter-textual exegesis. Inter-textuality became a prominent feature in what Baudouin made of the compilation. Note-making was only the first step. From a juridical perspective, such notes became significant only when they were accompanied by explicit citation. The notes became rich when contradictory or equally plausible evidence is accorded the status of parallel texts, as footnotes. Thus, to contrast, Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), a

22 Decembrio (1399–1477) depicted the reading practices of historical texts in the princely court of Ferrara in the 1440s (Grafton 2007: 50–53). The portrayal shows that the study of history meant the reading of the material texts, both "austere and luxurious", of great ancient writers *and* subjecting them to historical and rhetorical criticism in order to differentiate the plausible from the implausible (see Ianziti 2016).

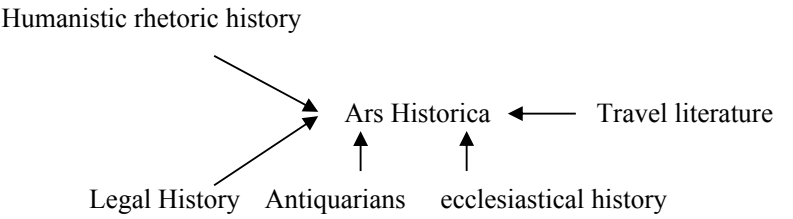

Plate 4: The Development of Baudouin's Art of History.

15th century Renaissance humanist, took a single source to write the history of Italy—the chronicles by the Villani family—except for controversial questions such as the origins of Florence.[23] Baudouin was, and sought from the artists of history, more cosmopolitanism in using the sources.

As Baudouin compiled the texts, he also began seeing the temporal layers. He made notes to highlight the specific context in which the texts had been written and promulgated, in order to avoid, in his own words, "the humiliating errors of chronology and interpretation" (cited in Grafton 2007: 69). Chronology in Baudouin's historiography serves, as in modern historiography, to locate various societies in the world (including the parts of the world that were being brought to the notice of the European intellectuals through burgeoning writings on long-distance voyages) along a global historical line. Thus, comparison between "modern Indian" and the "ancient and modern European" ways of passing on information became a justifiable enterprise. By undertaking such a comparative exercise, Baudouin pointed at the oral tradition of the Barbarians as being, or possibly being, the source of history for Europeans or the Turks. Orality, in this modern scheme of things, preceded literacy. The temporal logic did not, however, imply a straightforward supremacy or domination of Europe over other parts of the world. It was meant to locate Baudouin's own society at the most progressive point in the scheme. He brought the Romans, whom many Renaissance humanists and contemporary traditionalists thought of as divine, down to being as primitive as the "modern Americans".

A similar teleology informed Bodin's view of history, which was not a story of decadence, a slow funeral, or the march from light to darkness, but, if anything, the reverse (Grafton 2007: 169–170). Bodin reversed the ancient teleology, for like all early moderns, he was bewitched by the

23 See also, Ianziti 2012.

wonders of technology (the gunpowder, compass, and cartography) and felt that the modern age was far superior to mediaeval or ancient times.

Waking up from the Chronological Nightmares

Chronology, or the logic of time, is therefore at the core of the enterprise of writing and reading history in early modern Europe. The *Chronicle* by Eusebius of Caesarea, composed around the fourth century, continued to be read, annotated and updated throughout the next millennium. The Renaissance humanists embraced the Eusebian model of chronology in which the logic of time, as we have seen, was also a statement of Time being one of the fundamental aspects (the other being the logic of space as expressed in geography) of universal history. Events of all sorts, be they the rise and fall of empires or changes in the legal codes, were first conceived of as being located on the linear axis of time, whose direction was then found by applying specific rules to assess the events. Henricus Glareanus (1488–1563), for instance, thought that chronology reveals the order in the past. To use his metaphor, chronology is like the sun, without which the student of history has no way to orient herself (Grafton/Leu 2014).

The early modern artists of history carried the ancient tradition of chronography further, as, for instance, propounded in Livy's works, by moving beyond synchronisms, and beyond refining the tables, and well into unravelling the universal laws. Galeanus himself had used chronology to tie the events related to Roman history and not to history since the creation. The intensive attention made it abundantly clear that Livy's chronology was uncertain and problematic. The early modern artists of history thus took chronology as a central device to pursue critical readings of the sources, and to uncover the order in the past (Grafton/Leu 2014: 42–45). For Baudouin, the study of history yielded causality, with which one could comprehend the universal principles of governance. For Bodin, the study helped recover the reasons for a specific manifestation of the "genius" of a people. The temporal logic also informed the teleology of our early modern interlocutors. Baudouin synchronised the states of the ancient Romans with the modern Americans and placed orality and literacy on different temporal planes. Bodin believed in the progressive march of universal history.

Mediaeval Newari historiography did not accord chronology such a key role for understanding and producing historical texts. Although

every episode is pegged to a specific time, the information on that time appears only as one more bare particular (along with what and how) of an event, and not as an explicit marker of the temporal relations.[24] With a very weak ordering principle and near lack of explanation, causal or otherwise, the Chātas present us a unique opportunity of arriving at historical understanding without being accompanied by the usual lullabies of chronology. Non-narrative forms of history, like the Chātas, point us to a path of historiography not taken by narrativist historiographies. The narration became dominant in Europe as the mediaeval age paved the way for the modern period. The narrative dominance is an account of specific change in the relationship between Europe's opening up to the world and the forms of knowledge, as my stories of Francois Baudouin and Jean Bodin showed.

It may be speculated that the Newars' reason for writing histories free of chronological nightmares lies in the distinct value they attached to the past. The mediaeval Newar historians sought to shape their miserable present by reproducing the past ideals in a way not comprehensible to modern historians, whose investigation is often solely motivated by a desire to destroy the past by chronologising the present injustice. The Chāta historians and their readers perhaps see the cases as exemplars with which they engage analogically. The cases serve as the standards with which they strive to reproduce the past. The Chāta writers and readers in mediaeval Nepal were not unique in comprehending the use of history. It was common for ancient and mediaeval historians in Europe to believe in the ethical imperative for studying history. Even humanist chronologers like Glareanus said that one studied the past in order to find good examples to follow and bad examples to avoid (Grafton/Leu 2014: 9). However, the early modern artists of history soon started to have the nightmares of chronology, as they laboriously tired themselves in searching the order and relations in what essentially were fragments of deposited memory. In this sense, the Chātas and other mediaeval forms of history can help historians to wake up from the chronological nightmares, begin afresh by rediscovering the ethical and pragmatic programme in writing their histories, but not pass through the lullabies of the narrative. I am afraid these are, however, mere speculations and a fuller treatment of the purpose and effect of the Chātas on the mediaeval Newars is still due.

24 For the development of a new typology of historiography, by paying attention to the structure of the Chāta and other texts from South Asia, see Raj 2012.

Abbreviations

NGMPP	*Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project*
NS	Nepal Samvat
VS	Vikram Samvat

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