

# Conquering Navarātra: Documents on the Reorganisation of a State Festival

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## Introduction

The Navarātra, in Nepal commonly known as Dasaī, is styled in Sanskrit sources as the paradigmatic festival of the warrior/royal estate<sup>1</sup> and has “eclipsed any other single event as the most prominent ritual of kingship across India” (Fuller 2004: 108). It is celebrated during the bright fortnight of the autumn month Āśvina and, on a smaller scale, in the spring month Caitra. It stages the worship of the warrior goddess Durgā, her battle with and victory over “Buffalo Demon” (Mahiṣāsura). In royal Nepal as elsewhere, it was the prime calendric occasion to celebrate a conception of rule according to which the sovereignty of a human king is shared with and derives from his *śakti*, “might” or “regal power”, manifest in royal goddesses (see Gupta/Gombrich 1986). During Navarātra, these goddesses are worshipped as Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī, the “killer of Buffalo Demon”. They are, at least to some extent, identified with each other, and their relationship with the ruler is renewed. To phrase matters crudely, the divine battery running the realm gets its annual check-up and is recharged.

When Nepal became a larger territorial state under the Śāha kings from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, one of the measures in the project of building a Hindu state was to make the diverse ethnic groups living in the conquered territories celebrate Hindu festivals, and Navarātra first and foremost among them (Krauskopff/

1 The conventional hierarchical grouping of festivals and *varṇas* has Śrāvaṇa Pūrṇimā, featuring the annual renewal of the sacred cord (*yajñopavīta*), as the festival of Brahmins, Navarātra that of the Kṣatriyas, Dīpāvalī that of the Vaiśyas, and Holī that of Śūdras (Kane 1958: 200).

Lecomte-Tilouine 1996: 12–14). In the Śāha and Rāṇā periods, “[t]he state attempted to propagare a basic and minimal Hinduism: respect for the cow ... and participation in Dasain” (Gellner 2005: 770). Apart from groups thus ‘hinduised’, there were also those who had already celebrated Navarātra before the advent of Śāha rule. Various royal houses had previously reigned over the conquered territories, including the Malla dynasty rule of the three city kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley, the historical Nepal. The present contribution will concentrate on, but not be limited to, the Śāhas’ cooptation of Malla Navarātra rituals. In expanding their overlordship from their petty kingdom of Gorkha, the new rulers in one way or another adopted the Navarātra celebrations of these royal houses, but not without introducing changes to them. Indeed the creation of the Nepalese state involved a thorough reshuffling of royal rituals of both conquered and conquering kings.

### **Texts on the Royal Navarātra**

It has often been admitted that on-the-spot observation faced limits when it came to the Navarātra rituals carried out for the king of Nepal, performed as they were in seclusion (e.g. Krauskopff/Lecomte-Tilouine 1996: 29; Lecomte-Tilouine/Shrestha 1996: 153). All the more regrettable, then, is the fact that the study of texts written by and for the actors involved is still a largely missing complement<sup>2</sup> to anthropological studies and earlier accounts of European missionaries, travellers, office holders and Sanskritists, inasmuch as an extensive textual tradition on the royal Nepalese Navarātra exists.

Besides the historical documents which are the focus of the present contribution, many other categories of text can be drawn on. In Sanskrit digests (*nibandha*) references to the calculation of timings, ritual speech and action etc. have been accumulated from other Sanskrit works. They provide the authoritative framework on which actual procedures can be based or by which it can be legitimised. Handbooks (*vidhi/paddhati* etc.) guide the specialists and lay out the ritual step by step, at least as far as priestly action is concerned. They can be bilingual and either short or more extensive. Diaries (*ghaṭanāvālī*, New. *chāta/thyāsaphu*), mostly written in the Late Malla period, above all record the auspicious timings (*muhūrta*, Nep. *sāita*) calculated for certain

2 One exception is Chaulagain 2013.

central elements of actual court performances. They note, moreover, adaptations of the Navarātra rituals owing to external factors, such as the overlap of a period of impurity or other unusual circumstances. As Y. Raj elaborates in this volume, the diaries usually lack narrative structure and just present the “bare particulars about when, what and how something happened” (Raj in this volume, p. 137), whereas the dynastic chronicles (*vaṃśāvalī*) recount historical incidents related to the festival within a more elaborate narrative framework (see Raj 2012). Finally, there are inscriptions, often bilingual, which are usually set up in public places to record endowments for initiating, organising and financing the rites.

These groups of texts are interrelated and the boundaries are not always clear-cut. Digests can work as templates or as reference points for the handbooks. Diaries sometimes tend in the direction of handbooks, and sometimes of chronicles, while the latter in turn may directly draw on diaries.<sup>3</sup> Certain types of documents (such as royal edicts) share features with inscriptions, though material (paper vs. more durable material) and repository sites (offices, homes and archives vs. public places) differ. They for instance use the same verbal frames, such as the eulogy of the king (*praśasti*) at the beginning or the eschatocol at the end. Cross-referencing between inscriptions and documents is very common. In the Śāha period, the issuing of a royal deed on copperplate (*tāmra-* or *tāvāpatra*) usually went along with issuing the same text as a paper document bearing the royal seal (*lālamohara*), both being part of a single validation procedure.<sup>4</sup> Authorised copies of inscriptions were made, as is, for example, the case in a grant of land made by King Gīrvāṇayuddha in VS 1856 (1799 CE) to finance worship of the “thrice venerable Mahāmāyā, presiding over the Navarātra” (*navarātrādhiṣṭhātrīśrīmahāmāyā*) at Gorkha. The copperplate of the grant is attached to the door of Kālikā’s sanctum at Gorkha palace

- 3 This is the case in a section on the history of Patan in the famous Buddhist *vaṃśāvalī* written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the entry of NS 767, the second day of the dark half of Jyeṣṭha (*Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī* I, p. 104). This passage constitutes a Nepali rendering of a passage which exists in a *chāta* text in Newari (private ms.) and in a Sanskrit version kept in the Hodgson collection (British Library MSS Eur Hodgson, vol. 27, item 10, *Rājapadavī*, 74–88). A closer comparison of the three textual versions and their (sometimes significant) variants must be reserved for another study.
- 4 A *lālamohara*, issued in 1807 (VS 1864) to Badhuvā Nagārci (NGMPP DNA 13/31), which concerns an endowment for the upkeep of two banners (*niśāna*) and three long trumpets (*karnāla*) offered to Degutalejyū, is an example. The attending copperplate in possession of the Nagārci in charge of the *nagarā* drum at Hanumandhoka has been transcribed by G. Vajrācārya (1976: 267–269).

(D. Vajrācārya/Śreṣṭha 1980: 277–280), while a certified copy, made in VS 1960 (1903 CE, NGMPP K 120/20, along with a preceding note microfilmed as K 120/21), was sent from Gorkha palace to the Guṭhī Bandobasta Aḍḍā, the office then responsible for the management of *guṭhīs*.

The aforementioned texts disclose information about the prescribed ritual procedures and bear witness to the *in situ* performances. Of course, they do not testify to what was ‘really’ going on; rather, they represent what was expected to occur or is reported as having happened. In them one encounters an official version of events. Elite perspectives, primarily those of priests and patrons (i.e. Brahmins and kings) are privileged. Still, different texts have different perspectives and address different readerships. Placing them into dialogue with each other may allow one to read beyond their actual content.

The present paper is a preliminary exploration of what documents are able to tell us about royal Navarātra practices. “Documents” are here conceived pragmatically as all official paperwork produced in the Śāha period. This paperwork is in itself an inhomogeneous collection, comprising various types of charters, letters and files (see the introduction to this volume). The corpus under scrutiny is the one microfilmed under the NGMPP. More specifically, I will focus on what these documents, in dialogue with other texts, are able to disclose about the process of the Śāhas’ adoption—or let us call it more fittingly in the present context, ‘conquest’—of defeated kings’ Navarātra rituals.

## **Dasaī, Warfare, and Victory**

The nexus linking Navarātra/Dasaī with conquest, victory, and warfare lies at hand. In the Nepalese case, they are intertwined in various ways. Victory can be achieved on the occasion of Dasaī. Thus, according to the Śāhas’ dynastic chronicles, rule over Ligligkot, the last fort before the conquest of Gorkha, was assumed by the founding king, Dravya Śāha, on a Vijayadaśamī, the tenth day of the festival, though not by military force, but by winning a race.<sup>5</sup> Sanskrit texts declare that to march against one’s enemies on a “Victorious Tenth” when the moon is in the lunar mansion of Śravaṇa brings victory and peace (Kane 1958:

5 See e.g. *Goraḥṣasāhavaṃśa* 1.64–75; Hasrat 1970: 102; for a discussion, versions and further references, see Lecomte-Tilouine 2009: 96–97.

190), though Vijayadaśamī is more well known as the day on which the season of warfare is ritually inaugurated.

Navarātra is a textually endorsed period during which a reigning king's powers are regenerated or a new ruler is inaugurated (Krauskopff/Lecomte-Tilouine 1996: 26–28). Corresponding practices are also attested for the Nepalese Malla dynasty. According to the 14<sup>th</sup>-century *Gopālarājavamśāvalī* (fol. 54), Jayasthiti Malla, coming from the south, entered Bhaktapur on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the bright half of the month of Āśvina in NS 474 (1354 CE), i.e. on Mahānavamī. Furthermore, as diaries, handbooks, and court protocols attest to, the Malla kings received an initiation (*dīkṣā*) on Vijayadaśamī.<sup>6</sup>

Victory can be achieved not only on the occasion of the Navarātra festival, but also through performing the attending rituals. I touch on the topic of *khadgasiddhi*, dealt with more elaborately elsewhere (Zotter 2016a, 2016b), only briefly here. *Khadgasiddhi*, “success of the sword”, is known as one of the special powers (*siddhis*) attained through Tantric practice. It featured centrally in the Mallas' royal Navarātra rituals. In the palaces, a sword was set upon the 8<sup>th</sup> (*khadgasthāpanā*), received sacrifices on the 9<sup>th</sup> (*khadgabhoga*), and was paraded on the 10<sup>th</sup> (*khadgajātrā*) day of the festival. It was in the course of that procession that both the king and the Mother Goddesses protecting the realm were empowered with *khadgasiddhi*.

Swords as attributes of the Goddess and the king, and as instruments in sacrifice and war, were similarly important for the Śāhas and their Gorkhālī army, as epitomised in their royal seal (*lālamohara*) depicting a sword and bearing the legend *śrīdurgā bhavānī*. Narratives about the dynasty give expression to the pan-Indian topos of a founding king receiving a conquering sword from a goddess or an ascetic

6 Diaries quote the 10<sup>th</sup> of the bright half of Āśvina as the lunar date of the *dīkṣās* of the Bhaktapur kings Jagatprakāśa Malla (1655 CE, NS 775), Jitāmītra Malla (1676 CE, NS 796), and Bhūpatindra Malla (1688 CE, NS 808) (D.R. Regmi 1966: 54). These dates are confirmed in a court protocol relating to the said *dīkṣās* (NGMPP B 515/28), which also mentions earlier Bhaktapur kings' *dīkṣās* on the same lunar day (Trailokya, Jagajjoti, and Nareśa together with Kīrti Malla), but without giving the year. For Kathmandu, there are entries on princes' *dīkṣās* on Vijayadaśamī in 1676 CE (NS 796, probably of Pratāpa Malla's three sons) and of King Bhāskara Malla in 1708 CE (NS 828; G. Vajrācārya 1966). For an incomplete handbook, see NGMPP A 442/30, micro-filmed as *Khadgajātrāvidhi* (fols. 96–117 extant, covering rituals from Navamī to Daśamī; fol. 117a: *iti śrīśrījujyā dīkṣāyā khāarakuthiyā vidhiḥ samāptaḥ*, “Thus ends the procedure [carried out] in the *khāarakuthi* [i.e. ‘thatched room’] for the *dīkṣā* of the twice venerable kings”). The Malla kings' *dīkṣās* seem to have been so various in type (e.g. others were staged on eclipse days) as to defy being addressed here further.

(Lecomte-Tilouine 2009: 91; Sanderson 2007: 288–291). Before his conquest of the Kathmandu Valley, Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa is said to have performed a ritual to acquire *khadḡasiddhi* in Benares and to have afterwards received a sword from a Yogi (Acharya 1978).<sup>7</sup>

The motif of a sword ensuring success can also be traced in documents. In VS 1862 (1805 CE) King Gīrvāṇayuddha sent a sword to Kājī Ambara Sīm Thāpā,<sup>8</sup> who at that time was in charge of the Western Command and one of the heroes of the Gorkhālī fighting force (Doc. 1 in the Appendix):

As the astrologers (*jaisīharu*) have given the advice that it will be very good if a [single-]handed sword of mine is sent [to you at the] auspicious moment (*sāṭa*) of Vijayadaśamī, [I have] given [the necessary] orders, and a Khurāsān sword of mine, which [I] kept at [my] waist while performing worship (*pūjā*) according to the rules on *khadḡasthāpanā*, has been sent to reach you through the hands of Subedāra Caṃdrabhāna Khatrī. Keep it with you at your waist. Remain in a state of devotion (*niṣṭaisīta*) as long as this sword is [at your] waist. Let it remain at [your] waist even when there are official tasks [to do]. There will surely be victory (*phateha*). Thursday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āśvina [in the Vikrama] era year 1862 (1805 CE). Auspiciousness.

The occurrence of the term *khadḡasthāpanā* may suggest that the Śāhas took over or at least adapted some of the elements which were part of the royal Navarātra as performed under the Mallas (see next section). At least the handbooks and digests on Navarātra written in the Śāha period that I am aware of so far do not mention the “setting up of the

7 The scene of a Yogi handing over a sword to Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa is depicted in a monastery of the Nātha tradition in Chaugera, Dang (Krauskopff 1996: 207, photo 2).

8 Two persons of the same name were active as military commanders at that time. Stiller writes: “Nepali documents rarely distinguish between the two, and many English writers of that period seem to have completely confused them. To add to the confusion, both of these commanders were active in Kumaon at various times” (Stiller 1973: 218). Their names occur with the same variance in spelling (Amara/Ambara/Ambara Sīm/Sīm/Sīmha) and they even exchanged letters, one of which has been edited by M. Panta (1966). One Amara Sīmha Thāpā (VS 1816–1871) was the father of Bhīmasena Thāpā and commander of Palpa (ibid.: 48 n. 1); the other, the famous conqueror and David Ochterlony’s adversary (ibid.: 48 n. 2). As the present document uses the title *kājī*, it seems more likely that the latter Amara Sīmha Thāpā, the Nepalese war hero known as Būdhākājī, is being addressed.

sword”.<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, what the letter announces to Aṃvara Sīm Thāpā can be correlated with what is promised for the achievement of *khaḍgasiddhi*. At first, it may surprise one that, in the royal letter, the receiver is not advised to use the sword in battle, but only to keep it at his waist, but this, together with the injunction to remain in a state of devotion, can be justified through Sanskrit texts that rule that the sword empowered by *khaḍgasiddhi* is not to be used in battle.<sup>10</sup>

On a more general level, the document raises the question of what the role of a commanding general of the Nepalese army implied. Did he actually fight at all? What at least can be said is that the image of the general with a ritual sword at his side to ensure the success of his command strikingly tallies with the description of the same Aṃvara Sīm’s behaviour on the battlefield ten years after the sword document was issued. It is found in a British account of a battle in the Anglo-Nepalese War in April 1815:

Umur Sing [i.e. Aṃvara Sīm Thāpā, AZ] himself also resolved to appear in the field with his youngest son ... in order to encourage and support the attack.... [T]he British position ... was attacked at once on all sides where it was accessible just at daybreak, on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> of April. The Nepalese came on with furious intrepidity.... Umur Sing stood all the while just within musket range with the Nepalese colours planted beside him, while Bhugtee [i.e. Bhakti Thāpā, AZ] was everywhere exciting the men to further efforts. (Smith 1852: II, 10–11)

9 These practices may, however, be connected with the Bhadrakālīpūjā, which Chaulagain calls “[o]ne of the most esoteric rituals” (2013: 155) and is performed for the Śāha kings in the night of the seventh day of the festival. In its course “weapons employed during the conquest of Gorkhā in 1559 and of the Kathmandu Valley in 1767/8” are “smeared with vermilion powder and raised (implanted) ... in the *pūjā* room for *khaḍgasiddhi*” (ibid.: 156).

10 Sanskrit texts differ on this point. The *Mahākālasamhitā* (*Kāmakalākhaṇḍa* 6.115–117) says it should be carried in one’s hand, and if one marches into battle, victory is secured. The carrier should only wave it; it then cuts down enemies by itself. Thus the empowered sword does actually kill. In contrast, *Merutantra* 29.82 advises one only to carry the sword, without using it to kill. Whether, in the Malla period, the swords worshipped during Navarātra were used in battle cannot be completely ruled out. But given their ceremonial function up to the present day, for which purpose they are all well taken care of at specific locations in the three palaces and have custodians who release the swords to participate in all major festivities of the old Malla realms as substitutes for the actual Malla kings, it is more likely that these ceremonial swords were used neither in battle nor in sacrifices; cp. M. Lecomte-Tilouine’s (1996) remarks on the different types and functions of swords during Navarātra at Isma (Gulmi).

It is not known whether Aṃvara Sīm received the king's sword at all, whether he carried it, and if so, for how long. Still, one might assume that the commander's widely praised bravery and his power to encourage his men by "standing immobile on the hillside just within the range of musket fire from the Company position" (Burghart 1996: 223) derived in part from his conviction that Durgā was at his side. That Dasaī, and particularly Vijayadaśamī, was a meaningful ritual occasion for this commander is also evinced in his donation of a silver door panel (*kapāṭa*) and ornamented arch (*toraṇa*) he had his son Raṇadhvaja Thāpā make to Paśupatiṇātha for him on Vijayadaśamī in VS 1871 (1814 CE; D. Vajrācārya/Śreṣṭha 1980: 578–581).

That very same Dasaī of VS 1871 was a memorable date for the Gorkhālī army, as it marked the beginning of the Anglo-Nepalese War. As M. Panta (1964: 48), citing the personal diary of the famous astrologer and court pundit Daivajñāśiromaṇi Lakṣmīpati Pāḍe, has remarked, the British took advantage of the Gorkhālīs being busy celebrating Dasaī to move their troops from the 7<sup>th</sup> (*saptamī*) onwards and to attack the fort of Nalapani on the 11<sup>th</sup> of the bright month of Āśvina.

Thus there is evidence for an intimate connection between ritual, particularly Dasaī, and actual warfare in the period of the Gorkhālī expansion. To say that war was ritual may be too farfetched, but war, including deliberations pertaining to war, was often engaged in in concert with ritual action and underpinned by it. Royal astrologers were consulted before any battle. In dynastic chronicles, such as the *Goraḥṣaśāhavaṃśa*, Brahmins devote themselves to ritual practices, such as *mantrajapa* or *puraścarāṇa*, whenever fighting is impending. In the Gorkhālīs' wartime litany, it was particularly Durgā who was invoked and worshipped to render the king victorious. In a Nepalese Sanskrit poem on the Anglo-Nepalese War studied by B. Kölver (1986) this is one of the means advanced to ensure the Nepalese king's defeat of the British. As Kölver (1986: 10–12) rightly stresses, what at first sight appears to be a common stereotype from Hindu rulers' repertoire of rhetoric was, in the case of the Gorkhālīs, made part of the actual military *modus operandi*.

Furthermore, the celebration of Dasaī, and particularly the buffalo sacrifices to Durgā and to military banners (*niśānapūjā*), was strictly observed every year in each military company. A regiment's colours present on the battlefield were renewed on this occasion and impressed with bloody handprints (Chaulagain 2013: 180–183). Lists of officers who slayed buffaloes were kept and sent to the central authorities (see



below). Studying more systematically how the state rituals performed at Dasañ were woven into military life and war strategy thus promises to be a fruitful line of research.

### **Conquering Palaces, Deities, and Rituals**

In light of the close connection between Dasañ and warfare, it is not surprising that the Navarātra rituals of former royal houses, plausibly regarded as potentially dangerous sources of power, came to be integrated into the Śāha kings' rituals. As R. Burghart (1996: 220–221) has shown for rituals and deities in general, and G. Krauskopff and M. Lecomte-Tilouine (1996) for Dasañ in particular, to step into the ritual shoes of defeated kings was used as a strategy to deprive them of their power.

The king integrated the kingdoms of his realm by forming an unmediated personal relation with the deities of the lands he conquered. (Burghart 1996: 221)

As Burghart remarks further, this was achieved by confirming the tenurial rights of the territorial deities. He interprets this acknowledgement not primarily as a legal act, but as a sign of the conviction that the deities' claims to the territory were preeminent and needed to be respected. Among other things, this meant that, to a large extent, the rituals went on effectively as before, with even specialists being left in place. Local performances turned into glorifications of the past (Krauskopff/Lecomte-Tilouine 1996: 30–31), as places such as Argha (Ramirez 1996) or Isma (Lecomte-Tilouine 1996) illustrate. This also holds true for the Kathmandu Valley, where the old Malla rituals at the courts of Bhaktapur (Levy 1990: 523–563) and Patan (Toffin 1996) largely remained intact. Thus, to add to Burghart's remarks, the Śāha kings gave their nod not only to the tenurial status of the deities in the conquered territories, but also to the efficacy of local worship practices.

The palace of Kathmandu, however, was an exceptional case, because the Śāha kings moved their capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu and laid claim to the earlier dynasty's palace, together with its deities and rituals. What did this imply for the ritual complex of Navarātra? Though the two royal dynasties in question, broadly speaking, had a common religious affiliation—their Brahmins followed the same Vedic

school, both considered themselves Shaivite Tantrics and referred to often the same textual authorities—their ritual cultures were notably different, and they engaged different groups of ritual specialists.

From looking into handbooks, digests and diaries, it becomes apparent that this holds good for the celebration of Navarātra, too.<sup>11</sup> In the Malla palaces, Ugracaṇḍā, an 18-armed form of Durgā Mahiṣāsura-mardīnī, was invoked into a *maṇḍala*. The central goddess was surrounded by a group of eight 16-armed Caṇḍās. As palace handbooks dictate, in the course of the Navarātra performances the Mallas' royal goddesses and those of their forebears all had to be worshipped as this Ugracaṇḍā. At the same time, the same configuration of goddesses worshipped inside the palaces became alive in urban space, with the awakening of the Navadurgāgaṇa, who shifted from their aniconic seats spread out in protective circles around the three royal cities of the Kathmandu Valley into the bodies of human dancers from the sub-caste of gardeners (called Gathu or Mālākāra), their transformation being completed on Vijayadaśamī when the Navadurgāgaṇa received *khadgasiddhi* from the central goddess. In Bhaktapur and Patan, this forms part of the annual Navarātra program, whereas in Kathmandu, the awakening of the Navadurgāgaṇa happens twice in twelve years only, and included the leading deity exchanging swords with the king (Zotter 2016a, 2016b).

In contrast, the Śāhas worshipped their protective goddess Kālikā at Gorkha Palace as a ten-armed form of Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardīnī. As in the case of the Mallas, a sacred topography came into play. Kālikā is conceived as the eldest of Seven Sisters worshipped at strategic points in the Gorkha kingdom. On the occasion of Dasaī, these spatial markers of the realm are activated by an exchange of offerings between the sisters and the reception of tributes by the 'senior' and central goddess (Unbescheid 1996).

But not only the forms of the goddess(es) worshipped and their local embedding, but also, as already indicated above, the ritual procedures differed markedly between the two dynasties. While the Mallas' practices, apart from worshipping the goddesses within a mandalic configuration, focused on the sword, which was worshipped and paraded about, the Śāhas' practice featured elements known from East India (see Rodrigues 2003; Sarkar 2012), including setting up a jar on the

11 The following three paragraphs summarise details elaborated in Zotter forthcoming.

first day, invoking the goddess into a branch of the wood-apple tree (*bilva*, *Aegle marmelos* L.) on the sixth, introducing a bundle of nine plants into the worship area on the seventh (*navapatrikāprāveśa*, Nep. *phūlpātī*), sacrificing on the eighth and ninth, and dismissing the deities on the tenth.

So what happened when the two dynasties' festival practices came into contact with one another in the palace of Kathmandu? Were two rituals performed side by side by two groups of specialists, or were they somehow conflated? That is, do we witness a simple process of accretion, or else did some Malla practices fall away, while others were taken on board by new specialists? Concerning these points, such sources as handbooks can be expected to remain silent, since they address specialists of either the one or the other ritual culture. Observational data clearly point to the fact that indeed two teams of specialists were (and in some cases still are) working according to the court procedures of the two separate dynasties. New ritual arenas were created under the Śāha kings, such as the royal *dasāṅghara* newly established as an attachment to the Mūlacoka.<sup>12</sup> It is to be hoped that the process of 'conquering' deities and rituals, and of confirming or redefining ritual duties and rights, can be elucidated by reading documents. The mention of *khadḡasthāpanā* as being meaningful for King Gīrvāṇayuddha already points in that direction, but there is other, more concrete evidence, too. Initial searches of the documents in the NGMPP corpus have, for example, turned up *lālamoharas* issued to re-establish *gūthīs* to finance both the regular and occasional worship at Talejyu and Digutalejyu, two of the main temples in the Kathmandu palace complex devoted to the goddess(es) who were the focus of Malla kings' veneration. These charters are almost identical in wording and are each accompanied by a list of items (Nep. *sārajāma*) needed for the rituals.<sup>13</sup> In their *narratios*, as expected, they confirm earlier kings' endowments to the deities, listing the names of royal donors from the Malla period. They also list the rituals to be performed daily or on special occasions during the year, thus establishing the continuity of ritual practice. It is to be noted, however, that these charters were only issued in 1776 CE

12 A royal charter dated Thursday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āṣāḍha in VS 1849 (1792 CE) issued in the name of King Raṇabahādura announces a reward (*inām*) to Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa Putuvāra for constructing the *dasāṅghara* (NGMPP K 625/39); see Doc. 2 in the Appendix.

13 The *lālamohara* microfilmed as NGMPP DNA 12/48 lists the *pūjā* items required for Talejyu, and NGMPP DNA 12/51 those for Digutalejyu.

(VS 1832, 5<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Māgha) to “fivefold venerable Talejyu” and in 1777 CE (VS 1833, 5<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Phāl-guna) to “fivefold venerable Digutalejyu”, that is, eight or nine years after the conquest of Kathmandu, under the second Śāha king of Kathmandu, Pratāpa Siṃha. The two documents specify:

हामीले नेपाल अम्बल गर्दाका बिचमहाँ धुमधाम हुनाले गुठका खेत बाँधा-बित्ता-जागिरभित्र पर्याको थियो । नेपाल हाम्रो अम्बल भयापछि आफ्ना तरफबाट हामीले सबै गुठका खेत — — — कन गुठ चह्राउँ

Because there was turmoil when we created the district (*ambala*) of Nepāla, fields belonging to trusts (*guṭha*) fell among [land] mortgaged (*bāndhā*), donated (*birtā*), or assigned as remuneration (*jāgira*). [Now,] after Nepāla has become our district (*ambala*), we offer a trust (*guṭha*) to N.N. (i.e. Talejyu and Digutalejyu individually), [providing] all *guṭha*-fields from our own side. (NGMPP DNA 12/50 ll. 12–16; and DNA 12/47 ll. 8–11, with minor spelling variants)<sup>14</sup>

Thus the story told by these documents is not as rosy as suggested before. Apparently, the tenurial rights of the deities were confirmed, but only some years after the conquest, the original landholdings of the temples having been alienated in between, with probably an attendant loss of funds for performing the temple rituals. So the question arises: What happened to these rituals in this intermediate period?

That at least some of the Mallas’ Navarātra rituals may actually have been discontinued following the change in dynasty is remembered as having impacted the *khadgasiddhijātrā*, the sword procession and exchange on Vijayadaśamī performed twice in twelve years. The Gathus, the group from which the Navadurgā troupe is still recruited, report that the ritual was discontinued under Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa and restarted only under his grandson, Raṇabahādura (Zotter 2016b: 240). Interestingly, such breaks are not addressed in the official versions of events. On the contrary, dynastic chronicles for one stress the continuity of rituals and have the deities favouring new rulers and sanctioning dynastic change (Michaels et al. 2016: 219). The phrasing of the two charters to Talejyu and Digutalejyu might also be read in this way. The reference to the “turmoil” (*dhumdhām*) during the conquest and the

14 I have refrained from preparing complete editions for the appendix. That they deserve much greater attention can be inferred alone from their lengths of 6.56 and 3.88 metres respectively.

accompanying ‘fortuitous’ co-opting of trust lands may have been a verbal attempt to downplay and smoothen over suspensions of court rituals and represent the Śāha kings as upholders and just heirs of the Malla rituals.

The charters may also contain implicit evidence of fairly pervasive refashioning of Navarātra practices and of the temples to goddesses at the Kathmandu palace. In the *lālamohara* to Talejyu, the rituals for the autumnal Navarātra (Nep. Baḍādasai) are explicitly excluded (NGMPP DNA 12/48 ll. 5-6). They are excluded too in a similar charter issued in favour of a “fivefold venerable Bhagavatī brought to Kathmandu from Nuvakot” (*navākoṭabāṭa kām̐tipuramahā lyāyākā śrī5bhagavatījyu*).<sup>15</sup> This *lālamohara* is written in almost the same wording as the other two documents and was issued in between the charters to Talejyu and Digutalejyu in VS 1833, the 15<sup>th</sup> of the bright half of Śrāvaṇa. Thus the years VS 1832–1833 (1776–1777 CE), that is, the period following the death of the founding king Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha in VS 1831 (Māgha, 10<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight, Makarasamkrānti, i.e. January 1775), were perhaps formative for the recalibration of Navarātra at Hanumandhoka. The second Śāha king of Kathmandu regulated the funds for two royal goddesses of the Mallas and the one recently introduced from Nuvakot, another capital of the Śāhas, in virtually the same breath. In these regulations, the ones having to do with Baḍādasai are set aside, but given the centrality of the festival their funding was probably regulated by separate royal charters.

Another point, on which handbooks usually remain silent, is what specialists were involved apart from the users of the handbooks (i.e. the priests). There too, documents may provide invaluable insights. There is a document, issued in VS 1933 (1876 CE), which speaks about the funds for and the service period of Daitya and Kumāra, the two deities, embodied in boys of the Newar community, who accompany Taleju in her processions during Navarātra.<sup>16</sup> The *lālamohara* refers to several earlier royal edicts on the subject, the earliest issued in 1776 CE

15 NGMPP DNA 12/47. Navākōṭa is Nuvakot, and Kām̐tipura is Kathmandu. The accompanying list of *pūjā* items has been microfilmed as NGMPP DNA 12/52. The goddess, who is also called Kanhehola- or Kaḍelcok Bhagavatī from her location in the palace, is said to have been brought to Kathmandu by Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha himself (G. Vajrācārya 1976: 58). For legends surrounding the transfer of the goddess and her connection to the goddesses at Nuvakot and Manakāmanā, see Unbescheid 1985: esp. 106–108.

16 NGMPP DNA 12/56; for the roles of the Daitya and Kumāra dancers in Navarātra, see Hoek/Shrestha 1992.

(VS 1832, 14<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Śrāvaṇa), thus pointing to an initial regulation under Śāha rule in the same period as the above-mentioned *lālamoharas* were issued. Much work will be required in order to answer the question of who was employed by whom and when for which part of the rituals, as there are numerous documents still to be explored regarding the trusts of the different goddesses worshipped by the palace through its specialists.

### Exercising Patronship

By assuming financial responsibilities for Navarātra rituals, the Śāha king became the realm's central ritual patron (*yajamāna*). This function, however, involved not only the provision of funds; it also called for his participation in the actual practice. Obviously, the ruler could not attend all Navarātra rituals performed on his behalf throughout the realm in person. Even in the palace of Kathmandu and the Valley, his presence was limited to certain moments in certain rituals.<sup>17</sup> First insights into documents attest to yet other ways to exercise patronship.

The first strategy concerns the timings of the rituals. Festivals are usually precisely fixed in time. Thus the performance of the autumnal Navarātra is bound to the first ten lunar days (*tithi*) of the bright fortnight of the autumn month of Āśvina. As lunar and solar days do not tally, a lunar day (defined as one-thirtieth of a synodic month) ranging from about 19 to 28 hours and being in the majority of cases shorter than a solar one, the timings are different every year. Their determination is a specialists' occupation, and schools of thought may differ. But not only the general time frame has to be fixed; certain key actions, too, must be performed at precisely computed auspicious moments (*muhūrta*).

In royal Nepal, the calculations of the time frames and *muhūrtas* (Nep. *sāita*) of festivals were made by court astrologers serving in a governmental committee responsible for officially fixing and approving these timings, the Nepāla Rājakīya Pāñcāṅganirṇayaka Samiti.<sup>18</sup> Nowadays these *sāitas* are announced in the newspapers. The timings for the Navarātra in 2015 included: two moments for the first day (for

17 For implications of the king's personally attending certain rituals and not others, see Zotter 2016b.

18 The history of this institution, which was presided over by the main royal astrologer and still exists (having dropped the attribute "royal"), has yet to be studied.

sowing barley seeds and hoisting the national flag), the fixing of the procession of Pacalībhairava on the fifth, a *sāita* for the procession of Taleju and the putting her to rest at exactly the same moment when the *phūlpātī* is introduced into the royal *dasaīghara*, the determination of *kālarātripūjā* on Mahāṣṭamī, a *sāita* for the conclusion of worship on Mahānavamī and a *sāita* for receiving the blessing (*īkā*) on Vijayadaśamī.<sup>19</sup> At the present state of research it is difficult to judge whether this list remained stable from the beginning of Śāha rule from Kathmandu, but documents bear witness to the fact that even before the rise of mass media the Navarātra *sāitas* were communicated to state officials throughout the realm. For example, in VS 1868 (1811 CE) ‘Ambar Singh Thapa’<sup>20</sup> writes to Bhīmasena Thāpā and Raṇadhvaja Thāpā from Srinagar, Palpa, reporting on construction work and requesting information regarding the auspicious timings for the Navarātra rituals. The respective passage reads in Regmi’s translation:

It will be good if you send an order for impressing Jhara labor in villages other than those assigned for the transportation of mail (Kagate Hulaki), as well as for magazine and gunpowder factories, as well as a note regarding the auspicious moments at which different functions are to be performed at the palace from the Pratipada to the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the moon during the Dashain festival, which will occur soon now. (M.C. Regmi 1971: 217)<sup>21</sup>

Centrally fixing the time frames meant that the Navarātra celebrations throughout the country were synchronised so as to conform in their temporal unfolding to the rituals carried out by (and for) the Śāhas at the capital. At first sight, this may appear a minor point, but in royal Nepal appropriate timing was essential. Any important act by royals or other individuals were performed in accordance with stellar constellations; astrologers were important court counsellors.<sup>22</sup> In the Sanskrit digests on

19 See e.g. <http://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/greatest-hindu-festival-dashain-to-begin-with-ghatasthapana/> [accessed 2 May 2016].

20 The name is quoted as given by Regmi. The sender of the letter was probably Amara Siṃha Thāpā, father of Bhīmasena Thāpā and an historically attested governor of Palpa (M. Panta 1966: 48 n. 1). For the problem of the two Amara Siṃha Thāpās, see n. 8 above.

21 The letter is dated 2<sup>nd</sup> of the dark fortnight of Āśvina VS 1868 and is found in *Regmi Research Collection* 37: 210–211 (NGMPP E 2442/1). This text is not yet accessible.

22 For more on the importance of timing public actions and about the profession of astrologers in Nepal, including in a historical perspective, see Kropf 2005: 53–70.

Navarātra, too, the calculation of proper timings (*nirṇaya*) is discussed extensively. As a preliminary engagement with the recalibrations of the *sāitas* for the Navarātra rituals in the palace of Kathmandu suggests (Zotter forthcoming), fixing the *sāitas* was an important step in adopting the former kings' rituals and establishing authority over their performance.

Another way for the Śāhas to make the major celebrations throughout the country depend on their central authority and to exercise patronage was to have *prasāda*, offerings made to and blessed by the main local deities, sent to the king. This has been noticed by anthropologists, such as J. Pfaff-Czarnecka (1996: 81) in the case of Belkot, and P. Ramirez (1996: 231) in that of Argha. Documents show that this practice goes back right to the beginning of the Gorkhālī state. Together with the *prasāda*, lists of all officials who sacrificed buffaloes were typically dispatched.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the two documents sent by Badarībāṇa Sāhī from Salyan in VS 1877 (1820 CE) and by Khadga Bahādura Kūvara Rāṇā in VS 1905 (1848 CE) (respectively Docs. 3 and 4 in the Appendix), there is more such evidence in letters sent in VS 1870 (1813 CE) and VS 1871 (1814 CE) from Palpa. In the former case, Amara Siṃha Thāpā (here probably the father of Bhīmasena Thāpā) reports on the successful completion of Dasaī at the Palpa court and of the worship at the military arsenal (*kotapūjā*) of the military units. He announces the submission of a list of the buffaloes sacrificed, and payment of the *ṭikābheṭī* levy imposed on all army officers as well.<sup>24</sup> The second letter brings us back to the memorable Dasaī of VS 1871 (1814 CE). Kṛṣṇānanda Khaṇḍuḍī and Dhanavīra Thāpā, stationed at Palpa, report that the sending of the Dasaī *prasāda* has been delayed by five to seven days taken up with supplying munitions for Nalapani.<sup>25</sup>

23 For the sacrifices at the Kathmandu palace, a few such lists of buffalo sacrifices are preserved in the NGMPP corpus (e.g. E 2767/49, 2775/40, 2776/1, 2779/19, 2784/1) from the period 1829–1851 CE (VS 1886–1908). Interestingly, they not only record the names and sequence of slayers but also the types of sword used (*khudā*, *tarovāra*, or *khukurī*), whether one-handed or two-handed, and whether the decapitations occurred with a single stroke.

24 Letter from Amara Siṃha Thāpā to Bhīmsena Thāpā and Raṇadhvaja Thāpā, dated Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> of the bright half of Āśvina, VS 1870 (NGMPP DNA 2/81; ll. 13–18).

25 Letter from Kṛṣṇānanda Khaṇḍuḍī and Dhanavīra Thāpā to General Bhīmasena Thāpā and Kājī Raṇadhvaja Thāpā, dated 8<sup>th</sup> of the dark half of Kārttika VS 1871 (NGMPP DNA 1/13). The letter has been published by M. Panta (1965: 65–67), whose article was translated by M.C. Regmi (M.R. Pant 1979). The passage in question reads in the latter's translation: "Due to preoccupation with arrangements for the supply of munitions to Nalapani, there has been a delay of five or seven days in sending the ritual offering made at the Dashain ceremonies. Please forgive us for this delay. It will be reaching you soon".



In receiving *prasāda* from the major Dasaī performances throughout the country, the king was exercising his function as the central *yajamāna*. He was thereby uniting the blessings from the major deities of his realm within his own person, and so certifying the ritual efficacy of the Navarātra rituals performed “on the ground” as part of a long hereditary tradition.

## Conclusion

While priests’ handbooks are certainly the most informative sources on ritual details, other types of written material allow for insights into often neglected aspects of festivals, particularly administrative ones dealing with such matters as organisation, logistics, and sponsoring. Śāha administrative paperwork, together with other documents, attests to the fact that Navarātra was deeply imbedded in the apparatus of state. There is an intimate and often very concrete connection of its rituals to warfare. One may say that the achievement and maintenance of victorious rule through worship of Durgā during Dasaī formed part of the master narrative of the Śāha dynasty, which was spelled out in various ways and documented in various sources. More concretely, the Dasaī rituals or parts thereof were acknowledged as legitimate tools of warfare, the arenas of ritual and battle being closely interconnected.

Conquering earlier kings’ realms, then, implied gaining control over their rituals and deities, as royal edicts to redefine patronage ties show. Apart from being instructive for the process of conquest itself, these charters contain much other information that needs to be explored, such as the specifics of materials and implements used in rituals. In the material list referred to in the royal edict on the re-establishment of the trust to Digutalejyu, the list of items needed for Dasaī alone numbers close to 150.

As shown above, the Śāha kings did not content themselves with just taking over patronage relationships of previous local rulers and with reconfirming or reassigning ritual duties among specialists; there were also other means of ‘conquering’ Navarātra rituals, testified to in official papers. Documents on the sending of *sāitas* to local officials and having them return *prasāda* and records of the buffalo sacrifices elucidate how one form of patronship was exercised annually. Thus it was not sufficient to *know* that the king was the realm’s central ritual patron;

large investments by the state were made to ensure that patronship was put into *practice*. The regular exchange of paperwork between the satellite sites of worship and the centre might, in the long run, be used to trace the topography of this process and also to establish a “Who’s Who” of festival practices.

To take up Burghart’s analysis of the Śāhas’ ideology of rulership again, in which “the king subjectified the entire polity by conceiving of all persons who derived their livelihood upon his land as being members of a single body politic” and “objectified his agents of rule together with the ruled as the limbs of his body which the king, as mind, co-ordinated and commanded” (Burghart 1996: 222), we see that likewise the king’s rituals came to integrate all Navarātra practices performed on his land, with all agents being coordinated by and dependent on the king and his priests. It should be noted, however, that control over the defeated kings’ Navarātra rituals largely concerned framing structures, such as setting timings and receiving *prasāda*. Such measures put them under direct state control and made them appendage-like performances of what was practised at the heart of the realm. What happened apart from these few official constraints being observed was largely left up to the local performers. This strategy left broad scope for the actors on the ground to carry out their hereditary rituals. Thus rather than exporting and perpetuating a central model for the rituals and having it performed throughout the realm, the Śāha kings extended the ‘body’ of their rituals by taking on ‘foreign limbs’.

## Appendix

### Editorial Conventions

The texts are reproduced as closely as possible and only minimally invasive normalisations and corrections have been applied in order to enhance readability. Original spellings and line-breaks have been retained. Punctuation has been normalised. Middle dots are dropped. The various types of macrons and lines are uniformly represented by “- - -”. *Daṇḍas* are introduced to mark the end of a sentence or a sentence-like syntactic unit. Hyphenation is introduced in cases where a single word runs over into the next line. For technical reasons, the so-called “eyelash-ra” is transcribed as र्.

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### Editorial Signs

|      |                                  |
|------|----------------------------------|
| [रा] | editorial addition or correction |
| ⟨रा⟩ | scribal addition                 |

**Document 1: A Bhanāī of a Letter by the King to Kājī Aṃvara Sīm Thāpā re the Sending of a Sword**

Dated VS 1862, 10<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āśvina (1805 CE); RRC vol. 6, no. 604, pp. 552–553; microfilmed as NGMPP E 2393/1; for the digital edition, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.36604>.

Facsimile:



Edition:

[p. 552]

[p. 553]

१९४

- 1 काजी अंवरसी थापा वर्मा ।  
चीठीको बनाइ ।  
उप्रान्त मेरा बाहुलीको तरोवार वीजयादश[मी]-  
को साईत पठायो वढीया होला भनी जैसीहह-
- 5 ले वींती गर्दा उर्दी दी मेरा कंवरमा राषी षड्ग-  
स्थापनामा वीधीपुर्वकको पुजा गरी षुरासान  
तरोवार चंद्रभान षत्री सुवेदारका हात तीमीछे-  
उ पुगन्यागरी पठायेको छ । आफना साथ कमरमा  
राषन्या गर । यो तरोवार कंवर छज्याल ती[मी] नीछै-

- 1 सीत रहन्या गर्नु । काज पर्यामा पनी कंवरैमा रहोस । फ-  
तेह हुन्या छ । मिति १८६२ साल मीती आश्वीं सुदी १०  
रोस ५ । शु ।

Translation:

[No.] 994<sup>26</sup>

[To:] Kājī<sup>27</sup> Aṃvara Siṃ Thāpā Varmā.<sup>28</sup>

The main body of the letter:<sup>29</sup>

*Uprānta*:<sup>30</sup> As the astrologers (*jaisīharu*) have given the advice that it will be very good if a [single-]handed sword of mine (lit. “my hand’s sword” *mero bāhulīko tarovāra*) is sent [to you at the] auspicious moment (*sāṭta*) of Vijayādaśamī, [I have] given [the necessary] orders, and a Khurāsān<sup>31</sup> sword of mine, which [I] kept at [my] waist while performing worship (*pūjā*) according to the rules on *khḍgasthāpanā*, has been sent to reach you through the hands of Subedāra<sup>32</sup> Caṃdrabhāna Khatrī. Keep it with you at your waist. Remain in a state of devotion (*niṣṭaisīta*) as long as this sword is [at your] waist. Let it remain at [your] waist even when there are official tasks [to do]. There will surely be victory (*phateha*).

Thursday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āśvina [in the Vikrama] year 1862 (1805 CE).<sup>33</sup> Auspiciousness.

26 This number probably refers to the number given in the register of the Lagata Phāta (Records Section) of the Department of Land Revenue in the Finance Ministry, from which the documents in the *Regmi Research Collection* were copied (M.R. Pant 2002: 70).

27 n. “an officer of ministerial rank superintending civil and military affairs” (M.R. Pant 2002: 133).

28 On the problem of two persons of the same name, see above n. 8.

29 Such remarks may have been added when Regmī’s scribes made copies of documents in the Lagata Phāta. The present document probably was either an original *lālamohara*, or, more likely, a copy of a *lālamohara*, but in any case a version that presumably still contained the initial formalities, including *invocatio*, *initulatio* etc.

30 conj. after that, besides, in addition to, hereafter. In earlier prose and documents, this word marked the beginning of a text or paragraph.

31 Swords from the Central Asian region of Khorasan have been very famous since antiquity (cf. entry on Sword in the 1911 Encyclopedia Britanica; [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclop%C3%A6dia\\_Britannica/Sword](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Sword) [accessed 25 August 2017]).

32 Commander of a military company often placed in charge of a district.

33 Judging from the date, the original document was issued in the name of King Gīrvāṇayuddha.

### Commentary:

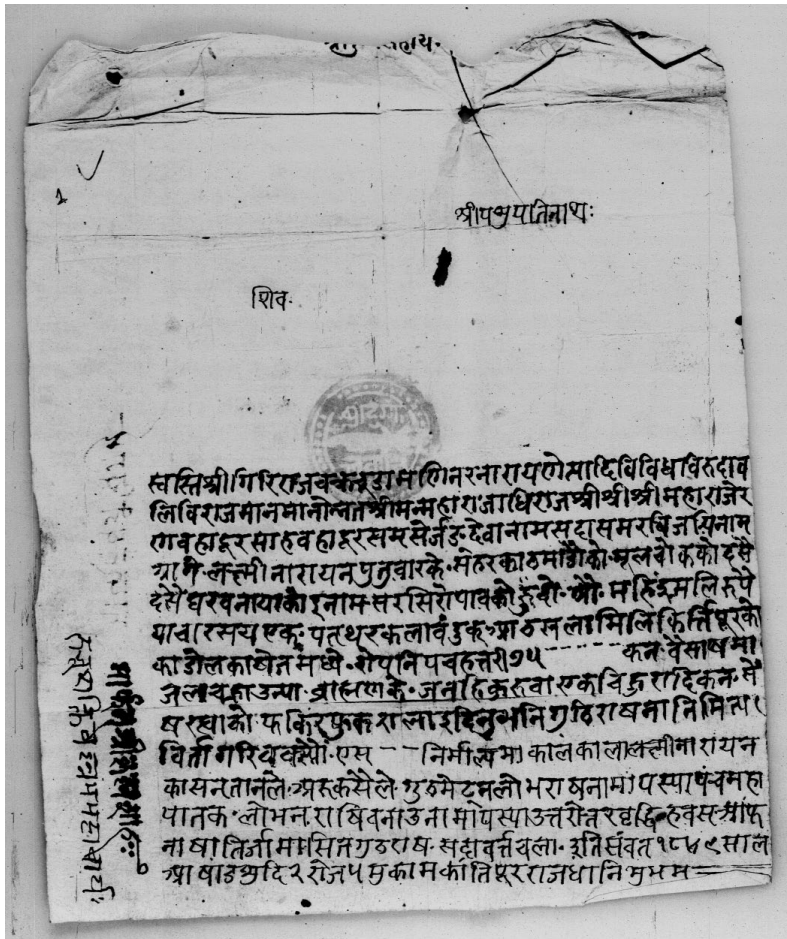
The document has previously been translated by M.C. Regmi (1989: 50). He renders *niṣṭaisīta rahanyā* as “remain ritually pure” and *kāja paryāmā* as “when fighting occurs.” These translations render what may have been intended, but are at least imprecise. Even more loose is Regmi’s rendering of the passage *khaḍgasthāpanāmā ... pujā garī*.

**Document 2: A Lālamohara from King Raṇabahādura to Lakṣmīnārāyana Putuvāra re the Reward for Building a Dasaīghara**

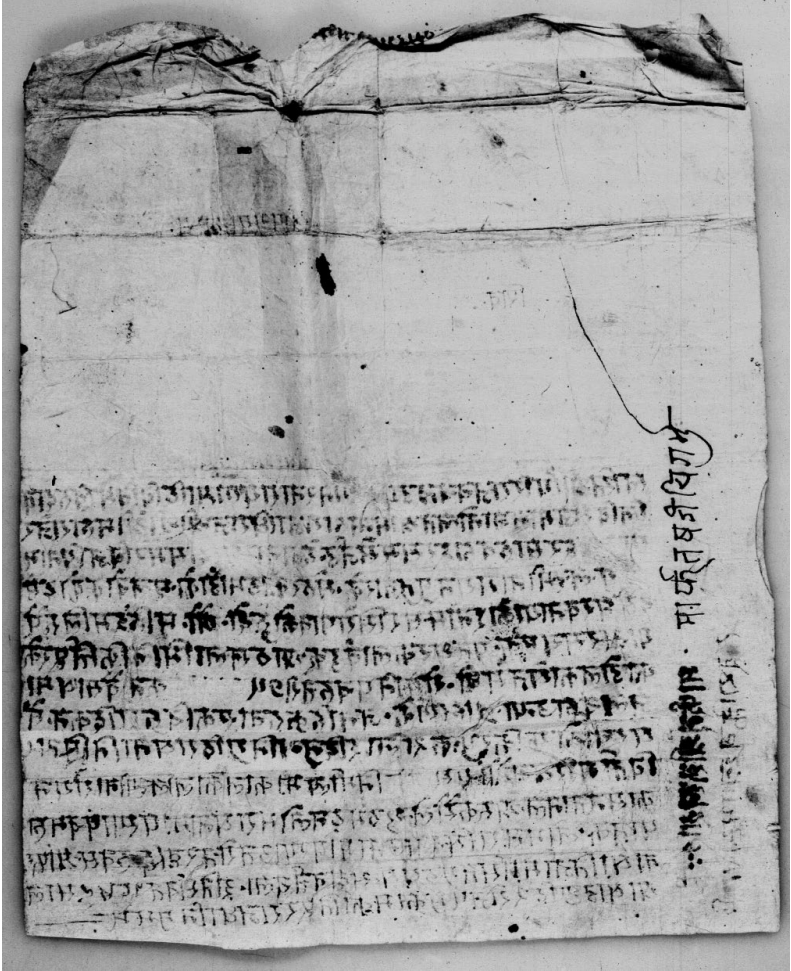
Dated VS 1849, 2<sup>nd</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āṣāḍha (1792 CE); Guṭhī Saṃsthāna card no. 2 (Pa. Go. no. 104); Pa. Bam. Pō. no. 19; micro-filmed as NGMPP K 625/39; for the digital edition, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.34880>.

Facsimile:

Recto:



Verso:





Edition:

[Recto]

[श्रीदुर्गास]हाय\

«1»

श्रीपशुपतिनाथः

शिव

[royal seal]

- 1 स्वस्ति । श्रीगिरिराजचक्रचूडामणिनरनारायणेत्यादिविविधविरुदाव-  
लिविराजमानमानोन्नतश्रीमन्महाराजाधिराजश्रीश्रीमहाराजेर-  
णबहादूरसाहबहादूरसमूसेर्जङ्गदेवानाम् सदा समरविजयिनाम् ।  
आगे लक्ष्मीनारायण पुतुवारके । सेहर काठमाडौंको मूलचोकको दसै
- 5 दसैघर वनायाको इनाम सरसिरोपावको हुँदो औ महिद्रमलि रुपै-  
या चारसयएक पत्थरकलावदुक् आठ सलामि लि किर्तिपूरको  
काडोलका षेतमध्ये रोपनि पचहत्तरी ७५ - - -कन वैसाषमा  
जल चर्हाउन्या ब्राह्मणके जन हि कुरुवा एक चिहुरा दिकन से-  
ष रह्याको फकिरफुकरालाइ दिनु भनि गुठि राषना निमित्य
- 10 विर्ता गरिवक्ख्यौ । एस् - - - निर्माल्यमा कालकाला लक्ष्मीनारायण-  
का सन्तानले अरु कसैले गुठ मेट्न लोभ राषनामा पस्या पंचमहा-  
पातक लोभ नराषि वनाउनामा पस्या उत्तरोत्तर वृद्धि हवस् । आफ-  
ना षातिर्जमासित गुठ राष सदावर्त्त चला । इति संवत् १८४९ साल  
आषाड शुदि २ रोज ५ । मुकाम कांतिपूर राजधानि । शुभम् - - - ।

[On the left margin]

मार्फत् श्रीकृष्ण साहः

रुजू शक्तिवल्लभ महाचार्यः

[Verso]

मार्फत् षजंछि गर्भु

Translation:

[Recto]

[May] Śrī Durgā help [us]!

Śrī Paśupati-nātha

Śiva

[royal seal]

Hail! [A decree] of him who is shining with manifold rows of eulogy [such as] “The venerable crest-jewel of the multitude of mountain kings” and Naranārāyaṇa (an epithet of Kṛṣṇa) etc., high in honour, the venerable supreme king of great kings, the thrice venerable great king, Raṇabahādura Sāha, the brave swordsman, the divine king always triumphant in war.

Āge:<sup>34</sup> to Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa Putuvāra.

As a reward for having built the *dasāṅghara* for the Dasaī[-rituals] of the Mūlacoka of Kathmandu City, we [herewith] grant for [his] well-being (*hūdo*) a full *siropāva*-garment<sup>35</sup> and 401 *mahendramallī*<sup>36</sup> (text: *mahiṃdramali*) rupees while receiving an eight-gun (lit. “eight-flint-lock”) salute; [in addition,] 75, [in words] seventy-five, *ropanīs*<sup>37</sup> of wet-rice fields (*kheta*) of the Kāḍola [neighborhood?] of Kirtipur as land grant (*birtā*) in order to set up a *guthī*<sup>38</sup> for the purpose of giving to mendicants (*phakiraphukarā*) what remains after giving one *kuruvā*<sup>39</sup> of flattened rice to the Brahmins who offer water to [Śrī Paśupati-nātha]<sup>40</sup> in [the month] Vaiśākha.

34 Lit. “henceforward”; used in documents to mark the beginning of a text or paragraph.

35 [H.] n. long robe (from head to toe) given as garment of honour by the king.

36 Monetary unit first coined by King Mahendra Malla (r. 1560–1574), consisting of 16 *ānās* and equivalent to half of a Mogul rupee.

37 Unit of land measurement in the hill region, comprising four *murīs*, the area varying according to the grade.

38 *gutha/guthi/guthī*, n. “endowed lands or other sources of revenue for financing religious and charitable functions” (M.R. Pant 2002: 132).

39 Volumetric unit equivalent to two *mānā*, or 20 *muṭhī*.

40 Inserted from the space above.

May the sin of committing [one of] the five heinous crimes (*pañca-mahāpātaka*) [fall on] Lakṣmīnārāyana's descendants or anyone else who, [in] the future (*kālakālā* for *kālakalā*), becomes involved in coveting [funds] in order to wipe out the *guṭha* in [connection with] this bathing water (*nirmālya*)<sup>41</sup> of [Śiva];<sup>42</sup> [but] supreme growth [for him who] becomes involved in building/repairing [work] without coveting. Establish the *guṭha* [and] conduct the regular food distribution (*sadāvarta*), being mindful of your duty.

Thursday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āṣāḍha in the [Vikrama] era year 1849 (1792 CE). Residence: Kantipur,<sup>43</sup> the capital. Auspiciousness.

Through (*mārphat*) Śrīkrṣṇa Sāha  
Attested by (*ruju*) Śaktivallabha Mahācārya

[Verso]

Through the Treasurer (*khajāncī*) Garbhu

Commentary:

Copies of this *lālamohara* are extant as NGMPP K 87/2 (of the Paśupati-nātha Jāla Guṭhi po. 5, certified by the clerk [*bahīdāra*] Najaramāna? from Naradevī Ṭola) and K 498/7 (Po. no. 16 Gu. Bam., certified by someone from Naradevī Ṭola whose name is illegible, but ends with Putuvāra). Follow-up documents on the *guṭhi* established by this *lālamohara* are extant, e.g. as K 305/26 (VS 1974) and K 625/40 (VS 1974).

The present document grants Lakṣmīnārāyana Putuvāra high honours. The garment of honour (*siropāva*) was given to newly appointed

41 Usually this term denotes all remnants of offerings, but Parājulī et al. (2015) record as a second, more specific meaning “water, in which a deity has been bathed” (*devatālāi nuhāeko jala*). The whole phrase *es śivanirmālyamā* remains obscure. The present translation assumes that it reflects the *guṭhi*'s support for the Brahmins bathing Paśupatinātha.

42 Inserted from the space above.

43 Note that the city of Kathmandu is referred in the document under two different names. When the place where the building was erected is being referred to, it is called *sehara kāthamādau*, “city of Kathmandu”; when the place of issue, *kāmtipūra rājadhāni*, “Kantipur, the capital”. Is this scribal arbitrariness, or does it reflect a distinction between the city as a physical entity and the capital as the administrative centre of the kingdom?

persons or to those who performed extraordinary tasks for the king (Krauskopff/Deuel Meyer 2000: 122–123). Was the building of a royal *dasaīghara* such a service, or is it and the gun salute somehow also connected with the favour supposedly shown by Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha to the Putuvāras (also called Duñās or Rājāvāhakas), a low Newar caste of porters? The *vaṃśāvalī*s record that a Putuvāra helped Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa to escape death during his first assault of Kirtipur. Because he saved the king's life by carrying him back to Nuvakot, the Putuvāras became “close to the king” (*Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī* II, pp. 114, 134; Hasrat 1970: 90).

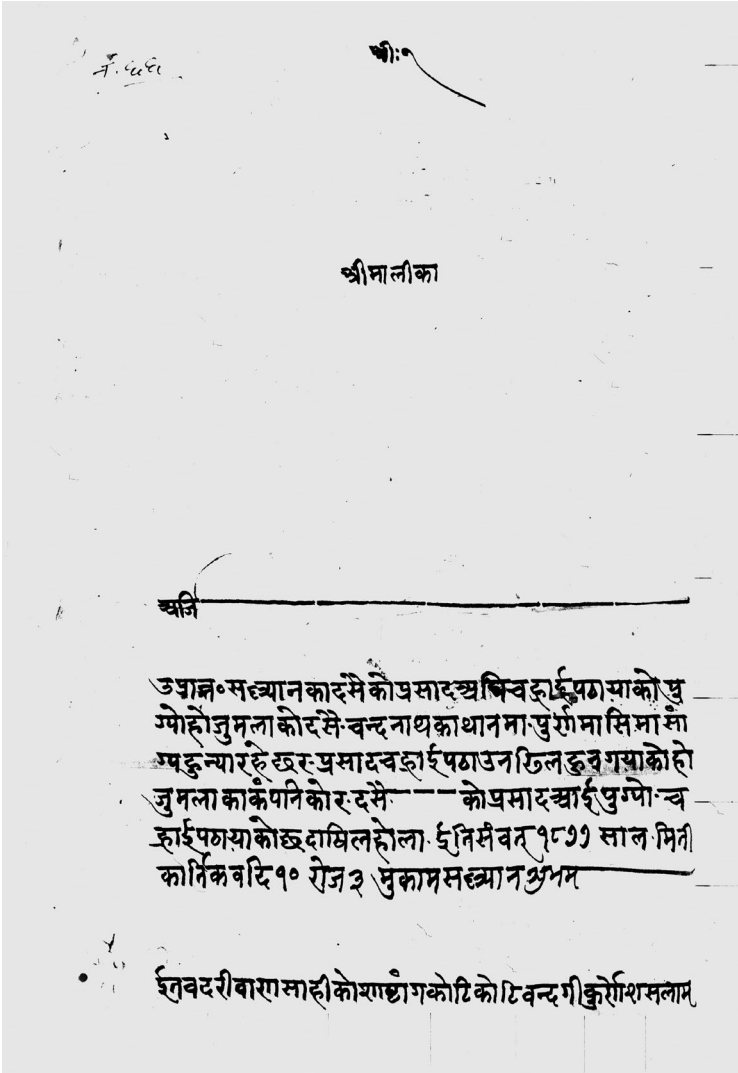
The service Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa Putuvāra was rewarded for, namely the building of the *dasaīghara* at the Mūlacoka, seems to have been part of a broader renovation scheme of Hanumandhoka palace under King Raṇabahādura (for which see Slusser 1982: 198). Even if it cannot be ruled out completely that the *dasaīghara* mentioned in the present document was located elsewhere in or around the Mūlacoka, it is likely to be the *dasaīghara* (or a predecessor of it) adjacent to the eastern side of this courtyard (G. Vajrācārya 1976: 120–121), the exact period of whose construction remains unknown. The only dated item at the building is a bell which, according to its inscription, was donated by Queen Suvarṇaprabhā in VS 1859 (1802 CE; G. Vajrācārya 1976: 267; Dh. Vajrācārya/Śreṣṭha 1980: 352–353). Having studied its architecture, N. Gutschow (2011: II, 344–345 no. 29) assigns the current building to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The completion of the building the present document talks about can be pinned down to the year 1792.

As G. Vajrācārya has stressed, the *dasaīghara* of Hanumandhoka is the only one of its kind added under the Śāhas to an old Malla palace. That this was probably part of a broader scheme to appropriate the palace and to re-adjust the courtly rituals to the needs of the new dynasty can also be inferred from the fact that “Śaktivallabha Mahācārya” signed the document. Śaktivallabha Arjyāla had been the king's house-priest (*purohīta*) since Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa's time. He also composed court poems. In the same year the present document was issued he finished the *Jayaratnākaranāṭaka*.

**Document 3: An Arjī from Badarībāṇa Sāhī re the Sending of Dasaī Prasāda**

Dated VS 1877, 10<sup>th</sup> of the dark fortnight of Kārttika (1820 CE); NAK ms. no. 66; microfilmed as NGMPP DNA 1/66; for the digital edition, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.32351>.

Facsimile:



Edition:

श्रीः \

《नं.६६》

श्रीमालीका

1 अर्जि - - -

उप्रान्त सल्ल्यानका दसैको प्रसाद अघि चर्हाईपठायको पु-  
ग्यो हो । जुमलाको दसै चन्दनाथका थानमा पुर्णमासिमा सां-  
ग्य हुन्या रहेछ र प्रसाद चर्हाई ढिल हुनगयाको हो ।

5 जुमलाका कंपनीको र दसै - - -को प्रसाद आईपुग्यो । च-  
र्हाईपठायको छ । दाषिल होला । ईति संवत् १८७७ साल मिति  
कार्तिक वदि १० रोज ३ । मुकाम सल्ल्यान । शुभम् । - - -

ईत वदरीवाण साहीको शाष्टांग कोटि कोटि वन्दगी कुर्णेश सलाम् ।

Translation:

Śrī

No. 66<sup>44</sup>

Venerable Mālikā

Arjī<sup>45</sup>

*Uprānta*: The *prasāda* from the Dasaī in Salyan, which was sent earlier, must have arrived. Regarding the Dasaī in Jumla, it turns out that at the Candanātha sanctum the conclusion [of the ritual only takes place] on the full moon day, and the sending of the *prasāda* was [therefore] delayed. The *prasāda* of the Jumla Company and that of Dasaī [Venerable Mālikā]<sup>46</sup> arrived. It has been sent. They will have been presented [to you].

Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> of the dark fortnight of Kārttika, [in the Vikrama] era year 1877 (1820 CE). Residence: Salyan. Auspiciousness.

From me, Badarībāṇa Sāhī, crores and crores of greetings [and] reverential salutations in eight-limbed prostration.

44 This number, added by a second hand, refers to the ms. no. given by the NAK.

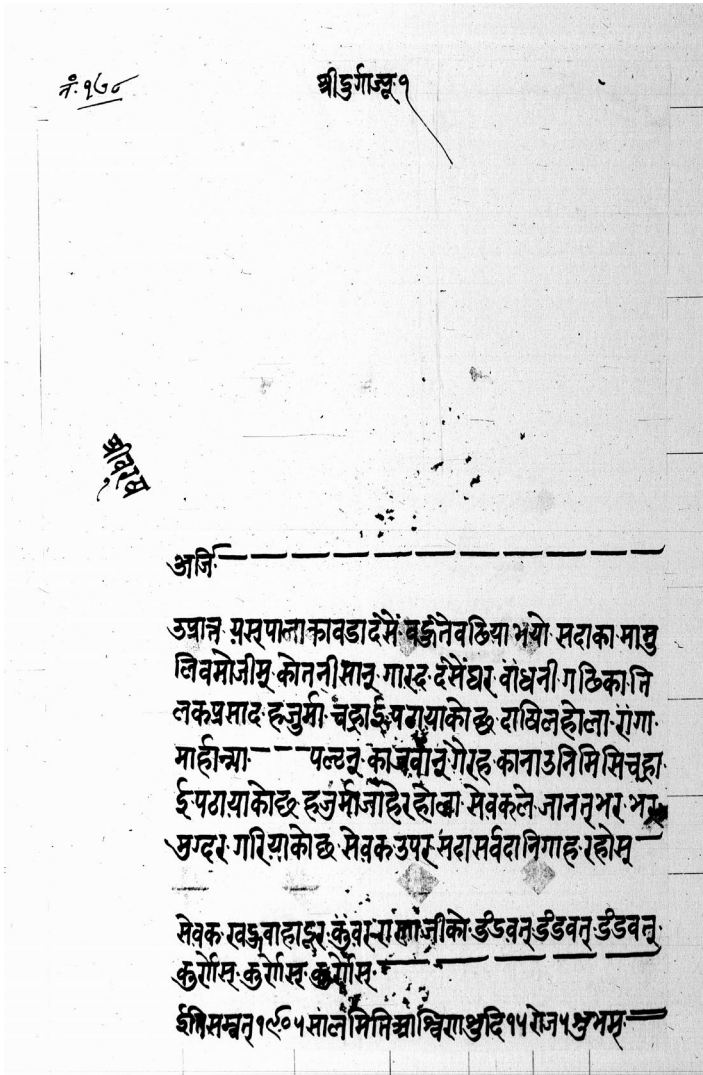
45 A respectful letter to a superior authority, especially the king.

46 Inserted from the space above. The phrase *dasai śrīmālikāko prasāda* is a bit puzzling. Either it refers to a special form of the goddess worshipped on the occasion of Dasaī or the syntax is deficient, a formulation such as *dasai ko śrīmālikāko prasāda* or *śrīmālikāko dasai ko prasāda* being intended here.

**Document 4: An Arjī from Khaḍga Bahādura Kūvara Rāṇā re the Sending of Dasaī Tilakas and Prasādas**

Dated VS 1905, 15<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āśvina (1848 CE); NAK ms. no. 178; microfilmed as NGMPP DNA 2/61; for the digital edition, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.34492>.

Facsimile:





**Edition:**

श्रीदुर्गाज्यू \

«नं. १७८»

श्रीवरष \

१

1 अर्जि - - -

उप्रान्त यस् पालाका वडादसैँ बहुतै वढिया भयो । सदाका मामु-  
लि वमोजीम् कोत नीसान् गारद दसैँघर वाँधनी गढिका ति-  
लक प्रसाद हजुर्मा चह्हाईपठायको छ । दाषिल होला । राँगा

5 मार्हान्त्या - - -पल्टन्का जवान् गैरहका नाउनिमिसि चर्हा-  
ईपठायको छ । हजुर्मा जाहेर होला । सेवकले जानत् भर भर-  
[मग्दुर]<sup>47</sup> गरियाको छ । सेवक उपर सदा सर्वदा निगाह रहोस् ।

सेवक खड्गवहादुर कुँवर राणाजीको डंडवत् डंडवत् डंडवत्  
कुर्णेस् कुर्णेस् कुर्णेस् । - - -

10 ईति सम्बत् १९०५ साल मिति आश्रिण शुदि १५ रोज ५ शुभम् । - - -

47 Text: *mugdara*.

Translation:

Śrī Durgājyū

No. 178<sup>48</sup>

Śrī Barakha

1

*Arjī*

*Uprānta*: This time the Baḍādasāi went very well. According to what has always been usual, the *tilakas* [and] *prasādas* from the *kota-nisānas*,<sup>49</sup> guard, blood sacrifices, [and] fort have been sent to you. They will have been presented [to you]. The names and personal details of all soldiers of the [Śrī Barakha]paṭṭan<sup>50</sup> who have killed a buffalo have been sent. They will have come to your notice. [Your] servant has done as much as he knew [how to], as much as he could. May at all times [your] favour remain upon [this] servant.

A threefold fully prostrate salutation from Khaḍga Bahādura Kūvara Rāṇāji.<sup>51</sup>

Thursday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of the bright fortnight of Āśvina, [in the Vikrama] era year 1905 (1848 CE). Auspiciousness.

48 Ms. no. given by the NAK.

49 As part of the blood sacrifices in the military forts/arsenals (*kota/koṭa*) the banners (*nisāna*) serving as regimental colours are worshipped (Chaulagain 2013: 180–183).

50 Name of the army regiment inserted from the space above.

51 Khaḍga Bahādura Kūvara Rāṇā was a first cousin of Jaṅga Bahādura Rāṇā, his father Balarāma (mentioned in NGMPP K 10/1) being the younger brother of Jaṅga's father Bālanarasimha. He is thus addressed by Jaṅga as a younger brother, *bhāi* (e.g. in a letter published by Adhikari 1984: 262), and he himself addresses Jaṅga as an elder brother, *dājyājyū* (e.g. in DNA 1/95). Khaḍga Bahādura had a remarkable career, consecutively holding the rank of colonel (e.g. in K 104/13), commander colonel (e.g. in K 118/23), brigadier general (e.g. in DNA 1/95), and general (e.g. in K 10/1).

Commentary:

The document does not state where it was dispatched from. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of the dark fortnight of Śrāvaṇa in VS 1905 (i.e. roughly two months before the date of the present document), the sender, Khaḍga Bahādura Kūvara Rāṇā, was addressed in a letter as the “Gaunda Governor of Doti” (Adhikari 1984: 221 n. 7). “Within a few months of the dispatch of this letter, Khadga Bahadur was transferred to Palpa to take charge from the Governor of that place, General Krishna Bahadur” (ibid.). Adhikari gives VS 1905, the 13<sup>th</sup> of the dark fortnight of Kārttika as the date of this transfer. Thus the setting of the festival the present document speaks of was either Doti or Palpa. Likewise, the Barakhapaḷṭan mentioned in the document is known to have been stationed at Doti in 1825, 1832, and 1843 (ibid.: 155 table 3), and at Palpa from 1850 to 1877 (ibid.: 157 table 5).

## Abbreviations

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| NAK   | National Archives, Kathmandu                        |
| Nep.  | Nepali  |
| New.  | Newari  |
| NGMPP | <i>Nepal–German Manuscript Preservation Project</i> |
| NS    | Nepāla Saṃvat                                       |
| RRC   | <i>Regmi Research Collection</i>                    |
| VS    | Vikrama Saṃvat                                      |

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