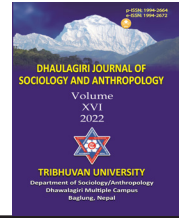


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Violence and Order in the Activities of Nepalese Shamans

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Abstract

When abuses of power are committed by those of unchallenged authority, how can justice be established? In the previous century's still-feudal society of Western Nepal, one way to seek justice was to commit ritual suicide, becoming a "vengeance suicide" that would plague the oppressor. "Vengeance suicides" are one prominent class of supernatural forces among many that shamans command as they seek to manipulate the order in the world, whether to re-establish or disrupt it. After recounting some well-known stories of these suicides, I seek to place them within the broader context of the many unseen forces that blacksmith shamans insist they can manipulate. The taxonomy of such forces I use here is a mantra that shamans recite at the beginning of any ceremony while heating his drum to improve its membrane's tension. Heating that tension is an apt metaphor for the violence seen as necessary to reorder or disorder the world, as explored here.

Keywords: Jajarkot Nepal, oracular medium, ritual violence, shamans, spiritual healing

Introduction

In the previous century's still-feudal society of Western Nepal, shamans played important roles in mediating social conflicts and maintaining social balance and stability by threatening supernatural punishment to enforce justice. Shaman sessions unfold within surrounding social conflicts and tensions, including those within households, extended families, neighborhoods, entire villages, and wider networks of societal connections. Witches (*boksī, daikinī*) are ordinarily relatives and neighbors, not strangers unknown to their victims. Likewise, various haunting agents such as *pitār, masān* and *bāyu* very often have the identity of recognizable relatives who happen to be dead but who nevertheless continue to meddle in family and village affairs.

The narrative oral texts that shamans recite insist that all conflicts, with relatives and neighbors, with previous and future generations, with families and wider society, must be resolved before anyone can expect to be truly healthy, truly healed.

This, too, suggests reasons why shamans remain relevant in contemporary Nepal, and why temporary setbacks and failures do not discredit their practice, and why increasing access to western medicine has not made them irrelevant. It also explains why shamans cannot be reduced to some primitive medical system and why practitioners of modern medical systems have much to learn from them, as one still struggles to convince medical students that there is a radical difference between curing a disease and healing a patient.

The avenging suicides, the *barmā bajyū*, are a unique class of so-called "spirits." ("Unseen forces" might be more accurate.) These are Brahmins who suffered enormous injustice in their lifetimes by those in authority. Unable to resolve the conflicts satisfactorily, they commit suicide on a funeral pyre and return to society as an avenging force who punishes those who mistreated them. They remain contemporary sources of social justice in western Nepal, frequently appealed to by the powerless when they suffer injustice, often with more success and far less expense than recourse to the legal system.



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Methods

Most of the material used in this essay was collected between 1977 and 1983 in Jajarkot District, Western Nepal, where I lived for six years, supplemented by numerous later visits as recently as 2018. Initially, I worked as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer teaching mathematics, first in Jajarkot's only high school for two years and then more remotely for another year in the village of Paink when a second school was opened. Fellow teachers, students, and their families all assisted me in collecting stories, kinship charts, songs, variations of language, and diverse other material as I sought to understand the local culture. This preliminary collection enabled me to qualify as a King Mahendra scholar at Tribhuvan University, allowing me to live in Jajarkot for another three years and eventually leading me to concentrate on the local shamans.

Vengeance Suicides

In Western Nepal, a well-known force is Kamal Jaisī. Many different stories are told of him. One goes:

Kamal Jaisī was born to a Brahman family in the Khadi Gotam area of Rukum. At his birth, an astrologer predicted that he would reach a crisis (*khadgo*) at the age of twenty, noting that his astrological chart had other unusual characteristics.

After his father's death, Kamal Jaisī requested a grant of land from the king of Khagankot, but he was refused. Later, his family moved to Maidi Village in Halchwar Pancayat of Jajarkot. He continued until he reached the Airari village of Lahan. There he repeated his request to the local landlords. Since they were in need of a Brahman, they immediately granted him some land.

The time of the predicted crisis arrived, he made plans to kill himself, and on the first day of Bysāk he sent all of his friends and neighbors to collect yogurt, greens, and everything else needed for the Bysāk Sakrantī puja. As soon as he was alone, he built a pyre, performed his funeral rites, and sacrificed himself. When his friends returned and what saw what he had done, all of them were moved to join him on the pyre, and together they sacrificed themselves. Kamal Jaisī's *pret* then killed the male descendants of the Khagankot king. The royal line continued through a daughter's son, but later that king was killed by Curma Jaisī.

In Jajarkot, Curma Jaisī is regarded as the most powerful 'Barmā,' or male avenging suicide. One story of his follows:

Many years ago, the king of Sija Khola, seeing only forest at Lahan, went there and founded a kingdom. It angered the Khagankot king, who protested "This is my kingdom. You cannot settle here." He arranged for a dance to be staged inside the Lahan King's palace. The dance continued for four or five days, until everyone in the palace fell asleep. The Khagankot king then set fire to the palace, from which only a pregnant woman

managed to escape. She took refuge with a Magar family in Karuwa village. The soldiers of the Khagankot king, searching for the woman, reached Karuwa. The Magar told the soldiers that the only woman in the house was his daughter-in-law, who had just given birth (and so was ritually polluted). Thus, he concealed her while the soldiers searched all the houses. The soldiers returned to Khagankot.

At that time, one of the Lahan king's purohits was returning from his home in Thanbara in Saru. From the hill above Karuwa he could see the Lahan palace ablaze. He returned to his own home and invited his family for a feast. He explained to his family that he had survived a terrible event. After the feast, he returned to Lahan. There he set fire to a large woodpile. Then he cut open his thigh, from the knee to the waist. He took the blood from his thigh and put it inside a small clay doll. Since this doll would not dance, he threw it into the fire, and inside the flames, it began to dance. Then the purohit entered the fire and was burned to ashes. His actions caused a violent plague to strike the Khagankot king's palace. Everyone began to die. The king and queen died while dancing and dancing. None of the king's descendants survived. Since then, Curma Jaisī has been recognized as the most powerful spirit in Lahan.

When a female Brahman kills herself following an intolerable injustice to return as an avenging force, she becomes known as a *bajyū*. Best known in Jajarkot is Catur Malla Bajyū of Punmā Village. She was a widow who lived with her father-in-law in Swar Village. Together with the two of them lived a cow herd. The local nayak attempted to seize this field, which is where she is now. The father-in-law and daughter-in-law petitioned the King of Jajarkot to restrain the nayak. Before a final decision was reached, they tried to persuade the nayak to return the field; instead, he killed their cow herd. They saw that nothing would restrain the nayak, and they were unable to endure their anger. Both father-in-law and daughter-in-law decided to kill themselves there in that field, to return and destroy the nayak and his family. They built their funeral pyres and cremated themselves. They then killed all of the nayak's family. Their force gained a local reputation, and their fame spread. So that she would similarly destroy others who cause injustice, *thans* were built in her honor in various places.

Also well known throughout Jajarkot District is Rukumalla Bajyū. Her story: Around the year 1700 Saka Sambat, the nayak of Majkot, Jajat Malla, made a land grant in Thana Nauli Village to a very skillful astrologer, Simmu Padya (Sambhu Upadaya). Simmu Padya was married to two sisters, the elder was Rukumalla and the younger Shantu Malla.

A few years later, the nayak of Badaban, Madu Shahi, went hunting. He and his attendants searched all day long, but they found no game whatsoever. Exhausted from so much searching, amid a deep forest, they came across an animal shed belonging to Kailo Thapa of Jaiwa village.

Famished from the unsuccessful hunt, they descended on the shed like a herd of wild animals, consuming all the milk, butter, yogurt and anything else that could be eaten, destroying all the pails, containers, jugs, and everything else that was there, then they gave Kailo Thapa a terrible beating.

After this outrage, Kailo Thapa decided to complain to the king, but he could find no one to testify for him. "Get Thana's Simmu Padya to go with you" all of them said. So Kailo Thapa went to Thana Nauli and tearfully explained everything. Simmu Padya then sent his younger wife, Shantu Malla, to Madu Shahi's palace to request justice. When she reached the palace, she said, "I've come on behalf of Kailo Thapa." Madhu Shahi replied, "You phony Brahman, your old man sent you here. Go back and tell him to send his senior wife, Rukumalla, immediately." Shantu Malla returned home. There Rukumalla was preparing rice, but when she heard her sister's report, she set out immediately, wearing the same clothes she had on in the kitchen and not even taking leave of her six month old son, Sankar, who was asleep, nor of her own younger brother, who had just arrived from their parent's home. Rukumalla ran to Madhu Shahi's palace, where she addressed him: "Your Majesty, do whatever must be done." But Madhu Shahi replied: "The thing to do with any so-called Brahman who talks to me in this way is to build her a funeral pyre. Get yourself a pyre and die." A pyre was quickly constructed and Rukumalla sacrificed herself on it.

While the pyre was burning, Bijai Raut of Dhaya Village poured a pitcher of sacred water from the Ganges, which he had brought back from a pilgrimage to Kashi, to pacify the spirit of Rukumalla. The other nearby nayaks learned of Rukumalla's sacrifice. Jagat Malla, the nayak of Majkot, poured milk on the pyre's flames. Karna Shahi, the nayak of Bhiusa, sprinkled water on the corpse, praying, "as this water flows and disperses, so may this soul find peace." The brother of Ram Singh, the nayak of Barikot, was carrying buttermilk from their animal shed when he learned that Rukumalla would kill herself. He reached the cremation before his brother did and poured the buttermilk on the corpses with the words "Be Cold!" When the pyre was reduced to ashes, Madhu Shahi had the remains, along with all the ashes, bound up in a cow's hide and buried the bundle in the Haudi Forest near Badaban.

Rukumalla died on the 11th of Jesth, 1709 Saka Sambat. That night, there was no milk to feed her baby son, so her younger sister Shantu Malla fed him. But once she had finished feeding the baby, Shantu Malla vomited blood and died.

After the death of these two sisters, everything began to go wrong at nayak Madhu Shahi's palace. Madhu Shahi and his wife went crazy, and both died in great pain. Then his family also perished. Nor was this all that happened. All of the men who were hunting with Madhu Shahi when Kailo Thapa's animal shed was destroyed, and all of the other nayaks who tried to quiet Rukumalla's spirit all

began to suffer various misfortunes. The nayak of Bhiusa also went crazy and left off a cliff to his death.

It is customary to speak of Rukumalla's seven sisters and two brothers. The sisters are Caturmalla, Chatrumalla, Shantumalla, Thagumalla, Chardamalla, and Kokimalla. The brothers are Maharudra and Kamal Jaisī. All of these were individuals who sacrificed themselves.

Forces Manipulated by Shamans

Besides appeals made to the *barmā bajyū*, many other threats are explicitly recognized by shamans, including those that originate in the natural environment, in non-natural realms, and from economic, social, political, or caste conflicts at the level of the family, the village, or regional political entity (Maskarinec, 1992), and those that shamans themselves may create. These threats are identified and explained in the social, narrative world of shaman oral texts. These texts explicitly argue that each of these ruptures of the world's fabric can only be repaired by performing the ultimate violent rupture: death. Sacrificed life, offerings of blood, flesh, and bones as negotiated payment to unseen agents to reward them for intervening or bribe them to withdraw, achieving with each performance new degrees of strife, not peaceful, harmonious concord. Acts of violence, not acts establishing peaceable relations, are core properties of a shaman's role in the world.

In Western Nepal, a successful shaman must be known to curse as effectively as he can cure, to stir up trouble and discord, guaranteeing employment as a feared intercessor who can ward off other shamans as effectively as he can ward off witches, spirits, demons and ghosts, or repair astrological crises. A shaman who is not dangerous commands no respect, attracts no clients and would be mocked mercilessly as weak and ineffective by other shamans (Gaenzsle, 2002, Hitchcock, 1967, Hitchcock & Jones 1976, Höfer 1981, Lecomte-Tilouine 1987, Oppitz 1986, 2013a, 2013b, de Sales 1991, Strickland 1982).

A short mantra (Maskarinec 1998, text I.27), recited at the beginning of every ceremony as a shaman heats his drum to improve the tension of its membrane, itemizes a short, incomplete range of anticipated situations that he may need to identify and in which he may need to intervene, demonstrating how the social world - geographically, socially, and discursively - is filled with dangers that the shaman and his drum can manipulate. The most notable omission is the shaman's relatives, the witches, with whom a mythical pact of coexistence and mutual support exists:

In this house, it may involve cloth strips offered on branches,
it may involve cloth strips offered at shrines,
it may involve slanders, quarrels, curses,
it may involve borrowing or lending, oral promises,
it may involve disputes over grain, disputes over wealth,
it may involve borrowing or lending of animals,
it may involve a fistful of earth, a theft of property,

it may involve someone's field borders,
 is it a Barmā affliction, a Barāh affliction,
 is it a river right bank or left bank affliction,
 is it a water-dwelling ghost, spring-dwelling Deurālī,
 is it field dwellers, clearing dwellers, armed forest dwellers,
 is it charms, harms, is it tricksters, deceivers,
 a dispute over grain, a dispute over wealth,
 a dispute over gold, a dispute over copper,
 a dispute over iron, a dispute over silver,
 Kālu Jaisī, Maitu Dhāmī, Ratau Gyānī, Ratan Pārki,
 enthroned Masta,
 give strength in front, support in the back,
 there's no one more able, no one more capable,
 we will eat from one dish, one share!

Enumerating the six types of threats mentioned explicitly or metonymically in this mantra, we find:

1) cloth strips offered on branches and at shrines;
 2) slanders, quarrels, curses; 3) borrowing or lending,
 including that of animals, oral promises; disputes over
 grain and wealth, including gold, copper, iron, and silver;
 [ownership of] earth, field borders, theft of property; 4)
 Barāh afflictions; river bank afflictions; water-dwelling
 ghosts, spring-dwelling Deurālī; field dwellers, clearing
 dwellers, armed forest dwellers; 5) charms, harms,
 tricksters, deceivers; Kālu Jaisī, Maitu Dhāmī, Ratau
 Gyānī, Ratan Pārki, and 6) Masta.

Clarifying each of these, in turn, demonstrates, from a
 shaman's perspective, one range of shamanic intervention:

1) Cloth Strips Offered on Branches and at Shrines

This first set of threats, obliquely identified by the
 distinctive pledges of cloth strips made to them, are the
 vengeance suicides, the *barmā bajyū*. Strips of cloth are
 attached to tree branches near their shrines, or on rafters
 within the shrine itself, which is otherwise empty - it was
 previously popular to offer small brass votive statues at
 these shrines, but by the 1990s these were all stolen and
 now appear for sale on the international artifact market.
 The strips of cloth (as were the brass statues) are contractual
 promises requesting assistance of the vengeance suicide
 to intervene in some dispute; when a shaman becomes
 involved, he summons the specific *barmā* or *bajyū*,
 either taking the side of the person or family who made
 the promise, or against them, depending on which party
 of the dispute has employed him. "Spirit possession" in
 these cases becomes a form of coercion that negotiates
 new relations with more powerful elements of society by
 those without power. These violent episodes contradict
 portrayals of the hill societies of traditional Nepal as
 peaceful, harmonious polities.

There is also a related case of a fratricide within
 Jajarkot's royal family, resulting in a *dhāmī* (oracular
 medium) specific to Jajarkot's royal family. The royal
 family remains firmly outside the range of shamanic
 intervention, as shamans are forbidden by this oracular

medium to perform for them, as is true also for other
 families with oracular responsibilities in the area, applying
 to entire villages that will not permit a shaman even to
 enter, let alone to perform. One memorable case during
 the years that I lived in Jajarkot (1977-1983) involved a
 Kāmī shaman who brought his young son to register as a
 new student at the school in Paink and was denied entry to
 the village despite the purely secular reason that he wanted
 to visit it.

As these episodes demonstrate, intra-palace feuds and
 political assassinations have, as might be expected, a long
 history. That vengeance suicides remain so prominent
 throughout Jajarkot and Rukum Districts suggests that
 troubled political relations between local rulers and their
 subjects has long been a key feature of the local polity, and
 may help to explain the radicalization of those districts,
 which became centers of Maoist revolt.

2) Slanders, Quarrels, Curses

Of course, anyone can curse, and some can curse
 effectively - recall the Irish poets known to Shakespeare
 who could rhyme a rat to death, blight crops, dry up milk
 cows, or raise ulcers on the face (Henry VI, Part 1), or
 Joseph Rock's account of Naxi sorcerers who kill a victim
 by writing mantras on an effigy (Rock 1936). The most
 effective curses are delivered by shamans, who can use
 mantras that not only curse enemies, enemies of clients, or
 even people at random to generate business, but also other
 creatures, as is clear in lines from mantras (Maskarinec
 1998, texts VI.16 and VI.17) to treat snakebite, which
 directly address the snake:

Your venom dies, my venom remains.

or:

Strike with oaths, crush with the heel,
 oath striking, blood stopping,
 killing in this direction, killing in that direction,
 killing venom of the inner organs,
 killing venom of the nine pulses,
 killing venom under the nails,
 across the Kālī Gañgā depleting,
 atop a mound of cow dung retreating,
 destroy this venom!

Killing your venom,

beat with my venom, treat with my venom!

A powerful example of how a shaman may stir up
 trouble is a mantra (Maskarinec 1998, text VI.5) to awaken
 dead souls, from which I quote:

Wake up, dead souls, those who died at the right time,
 wake up!

Those who died at the wrong time, deceased dead
 souls, wake up!

Wake up, dead souls, wake up!

Go to the east, go to the west!

Go to the north, go to the south!

You, go in the middle of the night,

entering towns, whoever you fancy, strike!

Go, dead souls, go!

The purpose of this formula is clear. It commands unseen forces to strike with affliction random victims, whose cure can then only come from the shaman who dispatched these agents. Dead souls can also be used against enemies (Maskarinec 1998, text VI.4):

Om, all honor!

Rise up, dear dead souls!

Rise up, dear dread souls!

Rise up, ghosts! Rise up, ghouls!

Hey, arise!

Come, little brothers, take oaths!

Come, lick up the oaths!

The dead souls' charcoal be in the mantrist's hands, release them at an enemy's house, their own share.

Hu! Hu! Hu!

Eat, dead souls, leave only bones at the enemy's house!

3) Borrowing, Lending, Promises, Theft; Disputes Over Grain, Wealth, Animals, Land Borders, or Property

These are all problems with social origins, but this does not mean that disputants have not enlisted various forces that are not human – or no longer alive – in origin. Their inclusion in the drum-heating mantra reminds clients, current and potential future employers, of the kinds of social problems they may have in their life, for which they may need the services of a shaman. These conflicts require an animal sacrifice, and the shaman's intervention is a resolution imposed by force, benefiting the person willing to hire his services, remote from any concept of justice or benevolence. The key issue is power.

4) Barāh Affliction; River Right Bank, Left Bank Affliction; Water-dwelling Ghost, Spring-dwelling Deurālī; Field dwellers, Clearing Dwellers, Armed Forest Dwellers

These are all agents of affliction, dangerous entities one tries not to offend, some with their own stories and histories, some not identifiable. All are forces prone to take offense when slighted, ready to act when bribed, to exercise power in the interests of a gift-giver, or through the compulsion of a powerful intercessor.

Barāh is also known as the "Eighteen Brothers." A sheep is the customary offering. A shaman text (Maskarinec, 1998, note #1009) tells us that:

They strike some with fainting,
they strike some with leprosy,
they give some heart attacks,
some swelling,
some jaundice,
they make some senseless,
they send some singing,
they also break open the eyes of some,
they also break open the ears of some,
they also strike some with boils,
they make some mouths crooked.

Shamans control them with additional mantras, such as the "Jantar and Mantar to Cure Madness," (Maskarinec 1998, text V.11):

Bind wishes, bind residences,
spreading water in four directions,
ghosts, ghouls, important spirits of the dead,
deceased Brāhmans, vengeance suicides,
striking, killing, driving into deep earth,
bind their tongues!

Those that affect, you must leave off!

5) Charms, Harms, Tricksters, Deceivers, Kālu Jaisī, Maitu Dhāmī, Ratau Gyānī, Ratan Pārki

This group involves other specialists who may also perform acts of intervention and healing, here derisively dismissed as "tricksters and deceivers," short-hand for all other local healers, the oracles (*dhāmī*), astrologers (*jaisī*), sooth-sayers (*gyānī*), and negotiators (*parkīl*). The recognized but limited activities of these specialists are summarized in the shaman recital "Distancing the Star Obstructions" (Maskarinec, 1998, text I.22), in which we learn that astrologers may:

check horoscopes, check auspicious days,
check figures on a dust slate,
calculate times to travel to bazaars, to go to Tibet,
to fight and dispute, the time to marry,
the time to begin a house

but they are unable to postpone death by re-arranging the "star obstructions" – astrologically fixed lifespans and crises – as can the shaman. Likewise, the oracle, we are told:

took a green plant in his hand,
tossed a handful of sacred rice to Indradev,
tossed a handful of sacred rice to Bāsudev,
threw down sixteen grains of sacred rice on his throne,
"I can postpone children's crises, I can postpone planetary threats" [he says]

but he cannot postpone death fixed by the star obstructions, and neither can the soothsayer, who can only think and concentrate, nor the negotiator, whose activity is limited to examining and discriminating. None but the shaman can perform the sacrifices necessary to cure the patient.

These ritual specialists, and all others who have skills, are regularly threatened with acts of violence, as at the end of the *rudrākṣa* seed mantra (Maskarinec, 1998, text III.3), declaring that the shaman will cut out the tongues of those responsible for afflicting his patient:

Striking enchanted enchantments, kill for all ages!
Scattering black cowries, villages, towns, charms,
harms, striking, killing,
stomping into deep earth, with an iron staff!
bind sky-entering air-born dead souls,
bind waterfall-dwelling ghosts,
bind spring-dwelling Deurālī,
bind ridge-dwelling solitary ghosts,

bind tomb-dwelling shamans,
 bind strikers' hands,
 bind speakers' tongues,
 bind gazers' eyes,
 bind reciters' abilities,
 bind walkers' feet,
 bind glances from all directions,
 cutting tongues of schemers who did these things,
 dry it in the sun!

In a mantra (Maskarinec, 1998, text II.1) recited over the mustard seeds that the shaman scatters in every ceremony, after fixing in place ("binding") the surroundings, those in attendance, and moving beyond the immediate site into the village and places further away are attacked even more forcefully those who cause trouble, stomped into the ground, pierced with iron spikes, and, finally, destroyed, enemies' tongues turned to ash:

Wherever I strike, there I bind.
 Bind, bind,
 first bind this house, this home,
 putting its own forebears away,
 bind the secondary forebears,
 foundation stone, central pillar, the house mother,
 this hearth, this drying rack, these rafters, roof gutters,
 golden door, silver doorway, bind cow sheds, bind
 buffalo barns,
 navel-cord-dropped ones, tooth-dropped ones,
 bind white-haired elders, nursing infants, trembling
 ones,
 binding the thief's entrance, bind the honest person's
 entrance,
 bind all four corners, drive in all four pillars,
 drive in iron spikes, drive in lightning spikes,
 strike down enchanted enchantments, kill them for all
 time,
 scattering black cowries, bind this house, this home,
 bind my courtyard seat,
 bind my equipment, this wayward seat,
 completely bind my summoned assembly,
 entering the village, the village, the town,
 charmers, harmers, tricksters, deceivers,
 pulling out their eyes, drive them beneath my soles,
 kill them with an iron staff!
 Trapping in a skull cup, striking enchanted
 enchantments,
 scattering black cowries, bind this village, this town!
 Entering the crossroads, split it with a plowshare!
 Bind sky-entering air-born dead souls,
 sky-entering important dead souls,
 King Dead Soul, Karbir Dead Soul,
 Ash-covered Dead Soul, Gaṅgārām Dead Soul,
 Manbir Dead Soul, Little Brothers Urathā Jurathā,
 charred dread souls, coaled dead souls, all male
 relations,
 died at the right time, died at the wrong time,
 impaled, netted, swept away in rivers, fallen from cliffs,

honored, respected oracles, attendants, priests,
 officiants,
 striking, killing, I stomp beneath my soles!
 Bind waterfall-dwelling ghosts, bind spring-entering
 Deurāī,
 bind ridge-dwelling solitary fiends, bind tomb-dwelling
 shamans,
 bind strikers' hands, bind speakers' tongues,
 bind shrine-dwelling deceased Brāhmans, bind corner-
 dwelling forebears,
 bind ridge-dwelling solitary fiends, bind tomb-dwelling
 remaining shamans,
 field dwellers, clearing dwellers, armed forest dwellers,
 driving into deep earth, I kill with an iron staff!
 Trapping in a skull cup, striking enchanted
 enchantments,
 killing for all time,
 scattering black cowries, bind this house, this home!
 Strike witches, bewitchers,
 striking the sky, kill vultures and eagles,
 striking deep earth, split open the earth!
 Either destroy this enemy's endurance, or destroy this
 iron's endurance,
 cutting the tongue of the planner of these things, turn
 it to ash!

6) Masta

Above, I mentioned villages that forbid a shaman to perform, in extreme cases, even to enter the village for any reason. These are primarily places, home to an oracle (*dhāmī*) for the god Masta, where the oracle sits for regular consultations - on full moons and eleventh day of the waxing moon-on a special throne, places connected to shrines where larger events are held twice yearly (Maskarinec, 1989). Known collectively as the "Twelve Brothers" whose origins are traced back to Jumla, north of Jajarkot, the Masta are sometimes divided into "Milk Masta" and "Tooth Masta," depending on whether the particular manifestation demands blood offerings or is satisfied with dairy products. While sometimes threatened by shaman mantras, Masta receives much more respect from shamans than does any other local spirit, keeping his prominence as indisputably the most powerful spirit in the area, in Jajarkot as well as to the north in Jumla and the west in Dailekh and Accham Districts, areas of Nepal where there are no shamans but many *dhāmī*. In Jajarkot, when a shaman summons Masta, he does so with a degree of respect not shown for any other spirit, acknowledging his enthroned status and taking on, at least sometimes, the role of a humble supplicant:

O throne of Masta, O shrine of Masta,
 I have a branch in my hand, I have a request in my
 mouth,
 of the honorable, honored, of the rank, ranked,
 you must end difficulties; we must place the wage...
 (Maskarinec, 1998, note 348).

One shaman, Guman Kāmī of Syaula, Jajarkot, infamous for transgressive acts that included performing séances at homes whose family gods forbade it, even invoked Masta as one of his protectors in a mantra (Maskarinec 1998, text I.4) recited when lighting incense:

Leap up, Father Masta,
I've provided a silver throne,
provided a golden drumstick,
they [Masta brothers] deliver a pat on my back!
Put force at my front,
put strength at my back,...
Moving at my front,
they rest on my head, my shoulders.
They are concerned for my safety.

In other cases, however, Masta still receives the same contemptuous "Come when I say come, go when I say go", demanded of other local spirits, as shamans insist that their power is greater than that of any found among the unseen forces, and that like all the others, Masta can be compelled to act as desired by the appropriate sacrificial offering. At the end of a ceremony, Masta, along with other prominent gods, may be dismissed with respect but is still dismissed, controlled by the shaman, in contrast to the possession of a *dhāmī*, in which the spirit decides when to arrive and when to leave.

Pure ones, go separately,
Masta throne sitters, go separately,
Barmā shrine dwellers, go separately,
Bhayār shrine dwellers, go separately,
all four Barmā, go separately,
all four Powers, go separately,
all four Bhayār, go separately,
pure ones, go separately,
blood-thirsting gods, [go separately!].
(Maskarinec 1998, text I.35)

Conclusion

Sacrifice, an act of substitutional violence, characterizes Nepalese shaman activity. These acts of transgression and conflict dismiss any tendency to characterize shamans as benevolent healers, altruistically motivated by justice or compassion, though as Nepalese shamans join the international performance circuit, we may expect the emphasis to become universal. Kāmī shamans of Western Nepal see themselves as dangerous, corrupt, and selfish, willing to stir up strife and manipulate injustice, characteristics that their oral recitals trace back to the original shaman. Seeking and amassing power, shamans use it opportunistically, demanding that it be recognized. Fear, not respect, best characterizes the patient-shaman relationship. It should not surprise us, for the world is chaotic and offers no meaning or purpose, no solution to the dilemmas of human life. The world insists on presenting singularities, eruptions of chaos, violence, cruelty without agency, and suffering without purpose. In the end, too,

nothing but unclarity persists, the foundation of culture, of attempts to understand, of attempts to explain.

These stories of the vengeance suicides show that shamans do not simply uphold the seamlessness of the natural and the supernatural, the extravagant and the prosaic, the ordinary and the extraordinary. They undertake to refashion the seams and tighten relations that have been loosened by unrelenting daily drudgery, by hopelessness. Disorder in the world is countered through orderliness in language. Each shaman performance affirms that reality truly is socially constructed through the medium of language. Consequently, only words have any genuine effect on the world and its participants. Shamans undertake, through language, to repair and refashion the cosmos. Through endless series of inversions, they try to return time to timelessness, corruption to original innocence. They accomplish this with speech.

Shaman rituals do not just perform readymade schemes. They produce them each time as vibrant, new, and ultimately harmonious. Shamans create the conditions they treat as orderly, grammatical, eloquently expressible states, replacing the chaotic, unbalanced, inexpressible suffering of a patient. Shamans take responsibility for the orderliness of affliction and the balance of its cure. Grammar precedes "facts".

Because shamans battle the progressive chaos of a disintegrating world, shaman texts resist indexicality and reflexivity. Texts are artfully constructed to reproduce their reality in whatever context they are invoked, themselves becoming the context of their invocation. I once recalled to Jajarkot's leading shaman Rousseau's charming remark that the first speech was all in poetry, prose only came much later. Karṇa Vir unhesitatingly and enthusiastically agreed. He commented that this follows from Mahādev being the first speaker, not men. Our efforts at imitating divine poetry are feeble, but our world sometimes remains responsive to them. To be a shaman is to achieve a practical mastery over language, like a blacksmith's mastery of fire. As metal is hammered on an anvil, words are pounded on a shaman's drum, tempered until they crack to reveal an unspeakable presence. Shaman texts may also be heard as winks and nudges, as provisional instruments for grasping at things that they can never entirely contain or express. But before we attempt to decipher the chimera of mythic enormities, we need to listen carefully to the details, to the words themselves, without which any discourse becomes a sea of murmuring babble. Shamans achieve with words in their ritual context:

Blood measured out for blood,
flesh measured out for flesh,
sense measured out for sense,
breath measured out for breath.

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