**Editorial**

Hello and Namaste! CNSUK publishes occasional newsletters and we are pleased to publish this special edition to present findings of the study: Vernacular Religion: Varieties of Religiosity in Nepali Diaspora, known as the VR project. Being a research organization, CNSUK strives to generate knowledge on the Nepali community and share it with Nepalis and others for informed decisions at policy and practice levels. The VR project had a major survey component which was carried out in the UK by CNSUK as an institutional partner. This newsletter briefly presents some findings of this survey. Apart from this, updates on selected major activities of CNSUK are also included here. We hope you will find this information useful. Please send your feedback to: cnsuk07@gmail.com

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**VARIETIES OF RELIGIOSITY:**

“Religion for Nepalis is neither fixed nor monolithic; it is contested, fluid, and often multiple, both in the sphere of practice and census affiliations”

(Gellner and Hausner, Page 4-5)

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**वेलायतमा नेपालीहरुको धार्मिक विविधता र बहुआयामिक अभ्यास**

(पेज 3-8 विविध सामाजिक हरु)

(फोटो: प्रोजेक्ट टिम)

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This newsletter is published with the kind support of the VR project, Oxford University funded by ESRC-AHRC (Religion and Society programme)

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**CENTRE FOR NEPAL STUDIES, UK (CNSUK)**

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**CNSUK’s NEWSLETTER**

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**SPECIAL ISSUE - VERNACULAR RELIGION OF NEPALI DIASPORA**

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28 April 2012

Volume 2 Issue 1
New Book on Nepalis Released

Based on the CNSUK’s large scale survey of Nepalis in the UK in 2008 and up-to-date information from the Home Office, Office of National Statistics, Nepal Census and many other sources, CNSUK has published a book on Nepalis in the UK. Published in January 2012, the book was launched on 28th January by NRN’s Chairman Jiba Lamichhane and Patron Upendra Mahato at a function in London. The following is the abstract of the book.

“Hundreds of thousands of Nepalis have served Britain as Gurkha soldiers for almost two centuries, but it is only since 2004 that they have started to come and settle in the UK. Since the 1950s and increasingly since the 1990s, Nepali professionals, economic migrants and students have also made the UK their home. However, their actual numbers, demographic characteristics and state of integration are still not well known. Mainly based on a large-scale survey conducted by CNSUK in collaboration with the Non-Resident Nepali Association UK, and supported by various Nepali networks of voluntary organizations and individuals, this book offers concise and reliable information on a range of issues related to Nepalis in the UK including migration, health, religion, education, employment, ex-Gurkhas, social organizations and integration.”

A time when questions have been raised by an MP in neighbouring Rushmoor regarding the presence of Nepalis there, CNSUK’s Director Dr Chandra Laksamba contributed to this event by loaning his objects, helping with the translation of documents and giving a video interview. CNSUK’s members and advisors were invited to the opening ceremony. Opening the exhibition, Mayor Tim Dodds spoke warmly about CNSUK’s recent book, Nepalis in the United Kingdom: An Overview. He also urged Nepal to consider joining the Commonwealth so that Nepalis in the UK would have local voting rights and become further integrated in local communities. The organisers are selling CNSUK’s book at the exhibition.

Nepali Connections in Surrey

Surrey Heath Borough Council has organised an Exhibition called Nepali Connections at its museum from 21 April to 30 June 2012. This event celebrates Nepali people’s migration and settlement in the Surrey Heath area, and features Nepal’s culture, landscapes and economy. This is a very positive move for the UK Nepali community at a time when questions have been raised by an MP in neighbouring Rushmoor regarding the presence of Nepalis there. CNSUK’s Director Dr Chandra Laksamba contributed to this event by loaning his objects, helping with the translation of documents and giving a video interview. CNSUK’s members and advisors were invited to the opening ceremony. Opening the exhibition, Mayor Tim Dodds spoke warmly about CNSUK’s recent book, Nepalis in the United Kingdom: An Overview. He also urged Nepal to consider joining the Commonwealth so that Nepalis in the UK would have local voting rights and become further integrated in local communities. The organisers are selling CNSUK’s book at the exhibition.
ED Dr Chandra Laksamba’s message

Religion and culture are integral parts of human beings and, at times, very sensitive issues as well. They automatically migrate with people and continue to guide their lives. The Nepali Diaspora who has recently immigrated in the UK is no exception. Therefore, through the ‘Vernacular Religion: Varieties of Religiosity in the Nepali Diaspora’ research, conducted in collaboration with Oxford University, we are pleased to explore and contribute to understanding of the realities of the vast and complicated religions and cultures of Nepali Diaspora in the UK. The findings of this research are important to the policy makers, academicians, researchers, social workers, students and so on.
VARIETIES OF RELIGIOSITY

By Prof. David Gellner and Dr. Sondra Hausner

Religion is usually translated as ‘dharma’ in South Asian contexts, but dharma, a very old word, covers far more than a religious designation or even religious practice: it can mean ritual, customary practices, duty, morality (both individual and group), law, and even (in Buddhist philosophical contexts) ultimate constituent (i.e. atom) of the universe. There are other words in South Asian vernacular languages which could be argued to correspond more closely to Western ideas of ‘religion’ in the sense of a path to (or doctrine of) salvation, such as panth, marg, sampraday, and mat. But it is dharma that has come to be the conventional and most widely used term to convey the Western notion of ‘religion’.

Tracing the religious variety among Nepalis in the United Kingdom must therefore be approached historically, first by looking at what has happened in Nepal, but then also by placing Nepal in wider South Asian context. Because it has been linked to caste and ethnicity, also aspects of dharma, the question of religious affiliation in Nepal has recently become particularly politicized. Overtones of contentiousness continue to operate, if in slightly different terms, in the British Nepali diaspora. Our project aims both to explain why it has become important to be seen as belonging to a particular religion (rather than simply being religious) in the Nepali context and to chart differences in the religious demographics of the Nepali population in Britain as compared to those of Nepal.

In the past, particularly during the Rana period (1846-1951), Nepalis knew clearly and distinctly which jat (‘caste’ or ‘ethnic group’) they belonged to, but they did not necessarily know which dharma they belonged to – in fact, performing religious acts might more accurately have been seen as participating correctly within the social order as a whole, rather than adhering to the code of a particular religion. Knowing one’s jat was essential for all kinds of daily interactions – who one could marry, who one could accept food or water from, what level of politeness to adopt, what one’s rights, duties, and expectations in relation to other people were. This was a matter of tradition, of one’s hereditary family dharma or kul-dharma. But dharma as a decontextualized identification recorded in government censuses – in other words, dharma as an exclusive social identity – was a new and, for some, a strange idea. Part of the reason for this new connotation is that ‘Hinduism’ is a relatively modern term, only found in English from about 1815 and only really popular from the 1870s. Even the word ‘Hindu’ goes back no further than the sixteenth century; its original meaning was ‘inhabitant of South Asia’.

In the UK the religious make-up of the Nepali population is very different from that documented in Nepal. If the categories Hindu, Hindu + Buddhist, and Kirant + Hindu are added together, Hindus represent 55.5% of UK Nepalis, many fewer than the 80% of Hindus in Nepal. These figures are based on a sample of 7,881 people in a survey conducted by the Centre for Nepal Studies UK in 2008. Following on from these base figures, our 2010 Vernacular Religion survey (300 households selected randomly from the CNSUK sample) found the following figures: 48.3% Hindu, 5% Hindu and Buddhist, 4.1% Hindu and Kiranti; 57.4% claim at least partial Hindu identity before being prompted with a list of options (see Table 1 below).

Buddhists, by contrast with Hindus, show a significant increase in numbers: even those who are only Buddhist, without combining it with anything else, are nearly three times as numerous as in Nepal. Meanwhile, three times as many Nepalis are reporting their religion as Kiranti and four times as many are reporting their religion as Christian. Islam, on the other hand, is followed by far fewer than in Nepal, though it is likely that Muslims were under-represented in the survey conducted by the Centre for Nepal Studies UK.

Many of the changes charted between religion in Nepal and religion among Nepalis in the UK can be explained by different ethnic demographic proportions in the UK: some Nepali ethnic groups (principally Magars, Gurungs, Rais, and Limbus) have historically been favoured for Gurkha recruitment and are therefore much more highly represented in the UK Nepali population than in Nepal. Gurungs in particular are very numerous in the UK, having been recruited in high numbers for the Gurkha regiments; in the contemporary ethnic and political climate, they are likely to identify as Buddhist (although many also identify as Hindu-Buddhist). Similarly, Limbus are just 1.6% of the Nepali population but 9.6% of the Nepali population in the UK (this difference goes a long way to explain the statistical increase in Kiranti dharma reported in the UK.)

Some part of the change in religious affiliation may, in addition, be due to a new cultural and political environment. Any residual sense that one should be Hindu because Nepal is a Hindu country, or because Hinduism is favoured by the state, has gone. People feel free to be entirely non-Hindu if they wish, and a certain amount of compensatory anti-Hinduism – or at least a desire for Buddhism to come out from behind the shadow of Hinduism – would appear to be at work. For example, there has been a concerted and successful campaign since 2007 to have Buddhist chaplains, in addition to the traditional Brahman pundits, attached to Gurkha regiments. The first Buddhist chaplain, Chewong Lama of Dolpo, arrived in 2008 and is based in Catterick in Yorkshire. The second, Lopon Kalsang Dorge,
of Mustang, arrived in 2010 and is based in Aldershot.

Despite this resurgence and invigoration of Buddhism, many Nepalis in the UK retain a considerable personal attachment to Hinduism. Nepalis anywhere are very diverse culturally; there are many sub-divisions within particular groups. The Newars, for instance, are divided internally into castes: some are much more Hindu and others much more Buddhist by tradition. Limbus are also very divided: 50.7% describe themselves as following Kiranti dharma (which rises to 68.66% if those with dual allegiances are included). But almost 20% also describe themselves as Hindu. (When given the choice, however, almost 85% opt for combined identities, and 8.2% report being Hindu or Hindu alone; see Table 1 below.) To multiply categories even further, the single label ‘Kiranti’ actually covers two very different sets of practices: the ‘animist’ and shamanist traditional practices of the Phedangma priests, which involve alcohol and animal sacrifice and are based on the oral tradition of mundum, and the ritualist and pacifist teachings of Guru Phalgunananda, which reject alcohol and animal sacrifice and are based on scriptures recorded in the Limbu script.

While emphasizing many groups’ internal differences, diversity, and multiple allegiances, it would be wrong not to recognize that for some groups religious adherence is indeed a straightforward matter. To be Sherpa is almost always to be a Tibetan Buddhist. For nearly all Bahuns and Chhetris, allegiance to Hinduism is not in doubt. Likewise, the overwhelming majority of Tamangs and Thakalis are Buddhist (though in the Thakali case the clear and unequivocal affirmation of Buddhism is relatively recent). Thus, a strong correlation between ethnic/cultural identity and religious affiliation does operate for some groups just as – equally clearly – it does not operate, and should not be assumed to operate, for other groups. More importantly, such affiliations and pairings are always subject to political dynamics, both in Nepal and in the UK: very few elements of religious identity or practice are static, even when they are presented as if they were immutable and unchanging for millennia. Such religious complexity is characteristic of Nepal and is equally characteristic of the Nepali diaspora in the UK.

One significant finding of the Vernacular Religion survey is that once people are made aware that dual or even triple religious affiliations are a possibility, significant numbers switch to them. As Table 1 shows, about 10% of Hindus and 8% of Buddhists switch to other identities (either Hindu + Buddhist, Kirant + Hindu, or Kirant + Buddhist). When offered the possibility of dual or triple identities, some groups (like the Limbus described above) enthusiastically embrace them. Others (Bahuns, Chhetris, Dalits, Tamangs, Sherpas) are, by contrast, entirely convinced by their Hindu or Buddhist identities and seem not to be interested in them, even when offered.

Thus we cannot refer to religion without specifying whether one is referring to religion as a category or religion in practice. Such a distinction is essential in order to make sense of two very divergent orders of empirical phenomena: (i) the state’s taxonomies or categories of religious identity, and people’s subsequent use of them, whether for political or other purposes; and (ii) personal and/or group worship, which usually involves a ritualized practice that may or may not correspond to a putative census or other category. We do not claim that category versus practice is the only distinction required in our breakdowns of religion, nor that it is sufficient for all purposes. But understanding the difference between category and practice is an essential first step. Religion is such an important part of so many people’s lives – and so remarkably resilient as a feature of human life across time and space – that we need to keep it in sharp theoretical focus, whatever political, cognitive, or social frame we use.

We gratefully acknowledge support for the Vernacular Religion project from the AHRC-ESRC-funded Religion and Society programme, headed by Professor Linda Woodhead (www.religionandsociety.org.uk).

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Table 1: Religious affiliation by ethnicity (VR survey, percentages, 2010: religion as given after reading out a list of prompts)
फरक कमयकाण्डहरुमा फरक फेर्दािंगबाहरुको भूलमका रहने गछय साम्बा फेर्दािंगबाहरुिाई नै मुन्िुमको ज्ञाताको रुपमा मान्छन् । फरक लििौट र छापामा आएता पनन आफसे आफ मुन्िुम फिाक्न जान्ने जानत हो । पशुबिी काँ मानेर पूजा गने प्रकृनताई र्दैवीशक्त गछयन । िरती लिम्बुहरुिे आफूिाई र्ुमािाई प्रकृनत र सृक्ष्टकतायको रुपमा पनन लिइन्छ । मूित पूजा गछयन् भने र्दुवैिाई आफ्ना आर्दी पुिायको रुपमा पनन मान्छन् । स्िापना गरेर आफ्नो िमय सिंख्र्ामा आइपुगेको हामी पाउँछौं ।

र्वशेषत बिदटस गोिायमा भनतय भएर लिम्बुहरु व्र्ापकरुपमा अरुण उपत्र्का

नेपालमा लिम्बुहरुको धर्म सुकोस्पर्श स्मारकहरू शुरु भएको छ। नेपालमा लिम्बुहरुको धर्म सुकोस्पर्श स्मारकहरू पारिक्षेत्रमा पनन आफसे आफ मुन्िुमको ज्ञाताको रुपमा मान्छन्। स्मारकहरू लिम्बुहरुलाई आफ्नो पूजा गने प्रकृति र राजनीतिक रूपमा मान्छन्। स्मारकहरूलाई आफ्नो आफसे आफ मुन्िुम फिाक्न जान्ने जानत हो। नेपालमा लिम्बुहरुको धर्म सुकोस्पर्श स्मारकहरू पारिक्षेत्रमा पनन आफसे आफ मुन्िुमको ज्ञाताको रुपमा मान्छन्।

नेपालमा लिम्बुहरुको धर्म सुकोस्पर्श स्मारकहरू लिम्बुहरुलाई आफ्नो आफसे आफ मुन्िुमको ज्ञाताको रुपमा मान्छन्। स्मारकहरू नेपालमा लिम्बुहरुको धर्म सुकोस्पर्श स्मारकहरू पारिक्षेत्रमा पनन आफसे आफ मुन्िुमको ज्ञाताको रुपमा मान्छन्। नेपालमा लिम्बुहरुलाई आफ्नो आफसे आफ मुन्िुमको ज्ञाताको रुपमा मान्छन्।
बन्दो नेपाली साङ्गसंस्थाहरू र समुदाय निर्माणका प्रयासहरू

फ्रॉम कृष्ण अधिकारी लिबनन युके।/अर्कानिक विषयविद्यालय

बेलातामा नेपालीहरूको संगठनहरू दिनानुमित बढ्दिएका छन्। गतान्त्र (२०११) मा नेपालीहरूको डाउनट्युरी बनाने क्रममा सिविलस्युलचल ३०० वटा अर्थविभागीय वा अर्थविभागीय नेपाली संस्थाहरुको सूची संकलन गरेको थियो। यसै धेरै संस्थाहरु अर्थविभागीय नेपालीहरू र नेपालीहरूको भएको पनि ओल्ड नवो हुनेका हुनसक्छ।

बन्दो संस्थाहरुको संघसंस्थाहरूमध्ये विचारका सम्पन्न हुने लागेको छ भनेर सामुदायिक यस्ता संस्थाहरू यस्ता संस्थाहरूको संगठनहरूको बढी र प्रमुख भएको छ भनेर यसो भएको छ।

चतुर्वेदी धर्मस्थली समग्रियो सार्वजनिक सम्बन्धित यस्तो संस्थाहरूको संगठनहरूको बढी र प्रमुख भएको छ भनेर यसो भएको छ।

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Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. We would greatly appreciate receiving your input, comments, suggestions and reflections. Edited by: Dr Krishna Adhikari and Mr Lokendra Dhakal. Please contact us at: <cnsuk07@gmail.com> www.cnsuk.org.uk

Vol 2 Iss 1
28 April 2012

Volume 2 Issue 1

CNSUK’s NEWSLETTER

8

Page 2 of the document. The page contains text in both Nepali and English. The text appears to be a newsletter with various sections including news, updates, and reflections. The content is a mixture of informational and conversational text, likely intended for the members of CNSUK (Centre for Nepal Studies, UK). The text is written in a professional tone, appropriate for an academic or institutional newsletter. The layout includes sections with headings and appears to be well-organized, with clear demarcations between different parts of the newsletter.

The text on the page discusses topics such as the response and feedback from participants over the last year, and an upcoming big event - redcarpet in July. The newsletter also includes updates on the membership, upcoming events, and other relevant news. The content is rich with details, providing a comprehensive overview of the activities and developments within CNSUK.