Literature Review

SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON NEWĀR CULTURE AND IDENTITY: BRIEF REFLECTIONS

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Surendra Man Shrestha. NS 1129. *Newā Saṁskritiyā Itihās*. Kathmandu: Indra-Jawahar Charitable Trust.

Laksman Rajvamshi. NS 1128. *Newā Saṁskritiyā Mhasikā*. Lalitpur: Nagarjuna Publications.

Tulsi Narayan Shrestha. 2010. *Nepālkā Newārharū: Pahicān ra Priṣṭhabhūmi*. Kathmandu: Institute for Research and Development.

A few weeks ago, a well-wisher mailed me three recent Nepalis publications on culture and identity of the Newāh community, apparently for review. All three authors, like most of us, are currently in search of the common denominator called Newāh identity or culture. As all three authors are equally noted scholars what they have to say has considerable value for the social sciences as well. A few thoughts are given below as preliminary reflections. I propose to discuss them in brief, leaving more elaborate analysis for future, with some critical reflections on the changing perceptions of Newāh identity and culture.

Among the three books, Surendra Man Shrestha's is a handy reference work on Newār culture. Earlier he collaborated with Baladeva Juju in *Tantric Worship and Deities of Nepal* (NS 1105) and *Kāntipurā* (NS 1108), and a decade later in 1998 he also published a monograph on Newār domestic architecture. Although the recent book is entitled as "The History of Newāh Culture," it is a reference book, a treasure room of unexpected beliefs, hearsays, superstitions, legends and tantric lore of the Newārs. Written in cozy style, it is, unfortunately, loose in structure and argumentation. His easy-going style makes us feel at home as if we were listening to him in person, but uneasy at his wayward approach. Some 98 short write-ups on cults, beliefs, superstitions, rites of passage, feasts or festivals, *guthi, āgama*, etc. are assembled at one place in an order which is neither thematic nor alphabetical. The compiler believes that "culture is

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a system different from religion, and that each author has his own way of looking at it." He believes that "(his) culture is living, and not a dead culture, displayed in a museum" (pp. *gha–nga*). The problems with this publication begin here.

To begin with, one does not know why or how the given topics are selected. Some are merely quotes from inscriptions and introduction to other publications. Some deal with prehistory, others with myths. Some entries cover several pages, others are only a paragraph long. The author does not outline his approach to culture, nor the aim of the compilation. "The History of Newāh Culture" is a project he took up at the behest of his friends, and it is evidently a challenge for any author. Had it a less pretentious title, the book could have been used at least as a "general knowledge" book, or as a reference book on selected topics of interest to the author or some readers, for example, sitting for a quiz contest.

Fascinating though the book is as a source of scattered information, it is too difficult to search any topic. There is a "Table of Contents," but it is misleading for searching. For instance, the Contents mentions "*Saṁskriti va Dharma*" on p. 183, but in the text it is in p. 182! The rites of passage are briefly dealt with in pp. 131–176. Just as the sequence of topics is arbitrary their treatment has hardly any consistency of approach. The pieces have more of the flavor of "personal essay" than of cultural history. With a little effort, most of the pieces could have easily been grouped into sub-headings and chapters. For example, under the sub-heading of pūjā, topics such as *cahrhe pūjā, dyah pyākham pūjā, pañcamakāra pūjā, nimantraṇā pūjā, jogi cakra pūjā,* etc., could have come. Similarly, *āgam chem, āgam, āgamdyayā dikṣā, iṣṭadevatā, dyahchem, degu dyah,* etc. could have come in a group. At the end of reading it, the book leaves us wondering what history is, if not confused what constitutes the Newāh culture.

An accomplished writer in fiction and an educationist, Rajvamshi avoids that mistake of treating each topic in isolation. His book too serves as an accessible and handy glossary of 436 selected terms in use in our social and cultural life. They are, however, *grouped* under the 13 subheadings, rites of passage, dress and ornaments, food and drinks, utensils, means of carriage, localities, feasts, the ritual roles of select castes, and festivals. Although it is written in Nepāla bhāṣā and translated into Nepali, a useful glossary in Nepali is provided for each term. The publication is also furnished with clear line-sketches of objects.

The book begins with an introduction to Newāh identity where the author argues that "Newāh identity is related to Newāh philosophy" (p.

3). The unique nature of Newāh philosophy "began to erode with the arrival of Hinduism and its formal cults." "The unique features" of Newār social and cultural practice are precisely what the author sets out to catalogue and gloss in the book. Evidently, he thinks of these "terms" as "the identity marks," or finger-prints of the Newārs, if you like. How far Newāh ideology, their social and cultural systems are influenced by Hinduism is a complex subject deserving detailed investigation on its own. We wish the terms were more inclusive, at least less selective.

Unfortunately, the cultural "finger-prints" are neither unique nor shared by all castes, nor practiced at all Newār settlements within the Valley, its periphery, much less outside the Kathmandu Valley. Inspired by the Hindu/Buddhist *tantra*s or *purāṇa*s, the Newārs are said to be intoxicated with *jātrā*s, feasts and festivals; they are known for their madness for gods and godlings, but those worshipped as key deities differ from locality to locality, from caste to caste, from settlement to settlement. The Pradhāns of Thamel are Buddhists; whereas the Shilpakārs are Urāy by caste, but they are Vaiṣṇavas by religion. The Newārs of Khonā don't celebrate Mohanī. The inhabitants of Tokhā as well as the Kumhās of Thimi don't have Mhapūjā. Not all castes have Degu pūjā nor do all castes have a tantric *āgama*. More than one-third of the community doesn't even speak a common language – believed to be the sole binding link among the Newārs. Although 85 percent Newārs call themselves Hindu, even among the followers of the Mother Goddess/Ajimā cults, some worship seven, others eight or nine, while the Shresthas in Lalitpur worship Ten Mahāvidyās! The Ugratārā of Buddhists is a Mahāvidyā to Hindus. The same cult of Bungadyah is Lokanātha, Matsendranātha, Avaloketiśvara to some – an androgyny, a *siddha* who was at once a Kaula, a Śaiva Nātha and a Buddhist savior for others. Their priests range from orthodox Vedic Brahmins to heterodox Śaiva Kapālikās, from esoteric Buddhist tantrics to monks and nuns living and practicing pristine monastic Buddhism. As they worship a diversity of cults some social scientists hesitate to identify the Newārs as adherents of any formal/organized religion. They have no common scriptures, nor any shared religious institution or authority, certainly no Golden Temple, no Potala Palace, nor any Vatican, nor Mecca. If religion is defined as a set of theology, pantheon, scriptures and rituals guarded by priesthood, the Newārs have each a religion of his own! So in isolation or collectively, the *selective terms* might not be the *absolute* markers of Newār cultural identity.

In the past centuries, the communities which migrated out of the Kathmandu Valley preserved their cultural memory by erecting the temples of Nāsah dyah, Gane dyah, Bhin dyah, or by observing Gāi jātrā, Lākhe nāc or Hanūman Nāc in their new settlements. Those who left Nepal to work or live overseas still observe *Ihi* or *Kayetā pūjā* in Maryland, *Jhoh bhoye* in Texas, or group *Mha pūjā* in London! Small but dedicated groups still are working to preserve language, script, religion and culture to the best of their ability in not too hospitable countries. I was stunned when a correspondent from Dubai wrote me asking for my "personal opinion on when to celebrate *Mha pūjā*" as if what I tell him would have carried any weight.

These days the word "identity" is overused at best and brandished at worst, and in the hands of unscrupulous and self-seeking politicians, it is loaded with emotive semantics. However, as the Nobel-laureate economist Amartya Sen argues, each individual has several contesting identities, often conflicting and divergent (Sen 2006: 18–39). Any attempt to limit it by exclusion is in Sen's analysis, "an illusion of destiny." If not properly understood, identity may be an unending source of conflict and in some contexts and places, of relentless violence. How much misused it may be, is well documented by Amin Maalouf in his book. Of immediate interest to us would be "Taming the Panther" in Maalouf (2001: 120–158). In Brave New Nepal, the need to belong is as likely to lead to violence as any other aspiration. The taming of ethnic "panthers" is likely to be a difficult political project now when we have 28 official parties with 102 armed groups championing limitless causes of 102 ethnic groups!

Although all three books approach the complex issue of "identity" in their own ways, they give the primary importance to cultural practices, rites of passage, religion and the castes/sub-castes, as if these are the hallmarks of Newār identity. None gives due importance to the fine arts, such as painting, sculpture and architecture in which the Newārs excel as famed masters. There is little about the literate culture, less on epigraphy and vast textual treasures.

When someone asks me, "Who are you?" I might, of course, instantly reply by giving my name and surname, or nationality, or place of residence, or profession, or secular status, or religion, or pieces of information recorded in my Identity Card, or Passport, or Citizenship Certificate. To these, one can go on adding further details and specifications. You are soon put into a pigeon-hole or slot, depending upon who is asking, or what information is being sought. You are soon

classified and slot into a single ethnos. That may not be exactly where you feel you "belong."

If anyone asks me about my "religion" I will be nonplussed. As I was initiated as a *vaṭuka*, a novice, by an Upādhyāya by reciting the Śiva Gāyatri into my ears, I can't tell that I was born into a family with no faith. My *degu-dyah* is an aniconic slab of stone in Pharping, midstream of river Vāgmatī, identified by my ancestors as Gopāleśvara Mahādeva – but also worshipped as a Vītarāga by the Buddhists. My *iṣṭadevī* is Mahālakṣmī with nine heads, and eighteen arms. But the only scripture close to my heart is the *Dhammapada* which I carry everywhere I go! In troubled hours of life I recite it, but never pray anyone.

Like all human beings, most Newārs live in a social network and follow cultural systems in a state of flux, confronted by forces which are intricate and complex, bound by interlocking ties, as it were. If we isolate only one or other aspect of these ties we will only be mistaking a part for the whole.

In the early 1970s, French anthropologist Toffin (1975) published a brief but perceptive paper, outlining the gaps between ethnic aspirations and social and historical facts. Later, Gellner (1986) took up this theme to evaluate Newār ethnicity, ancient and modern, and discussed the problems of defining it in terms of four parameters: caste, territory, religion or language. Quigley (1987) joined the debate by showing that there can't be any substance to Newār ethnicity "without Newār nationalism," that is to say, a political agenda. Recently, Balgopal Shrestha (2007) published an incisive paper showing how confusing the Shrestha caste is as "a ritual status." The claims and counter-claims of pure and mixed castes are interminable among this status group.

Nearly synonymous with the name of the country, the word, *Newāra/Newāla* is not older than the mid seventeenth-century. When Pratap Malla used it, he used it for a script, not for an ethnic/cultural group. The word had no ethnic or cultural connotation at all. It simply meant the resident of the valley which was then known as "Nepal." In the formation of Newār society and culture, a number of historically attested lineages, tribes and clans seem to have been assimilated in its formation. Among others, mention may be made of the Kirātas, the Licchavīs, the Vṛjjis, the Abhīra Guptas, the Varmans, the Karṇāta-Mallas, the Vardhans, the Pālas, the Senas, the Rābuttas, later immigrant Rajputs, and cultural elites such as the Pañca Draviḍa, the Pañca Gauḍa, the Ḍoyās and the occupational groups. A continuous process of racial, social and cultural assimilation lies behind the formation of Newār society and

culture – a process which can be peeled off layer by layer over two millennia of recorded history. It is, therefore, not too easy to say what makes a Newār what he is – his surname, caste, profession, trade, religion, rituals, social institutions, language, place of residence, his historical self-consciousness or "imagined collective self."

Notwithstanding all social, cultural, and religious diversities in this community what binds it together is, presumably, the experience, historical as well as contemporary, of living and sharing together in building a unique urban civilization in the mid-Himalayan valley based on agriculture, handicrafts and entrepôt trade. Majority of Newārs are farmers, traders and artisans par excellence, and as earliest known *sārthavāha*s (long-distance traders), as famed *śreṣthin*s (master of craft guilds), they were the architects of an urban civilization and pioneers of the market economy in the mid-Himalayas. As farmers, they are "the best in Asia," producing three harvests a year in the fertile valley before farm land and orchards were encroached upon on an unprecedented scale since the 1960s.

Two fundamental social and economic changes in contemporary Nepal have critically altered the quality life of the Newārs in the Valley: the Land Act 1964 and the abolition of the entry-permit for Nepali citizens to enter the Valley, since December 23, 1956. The past tenant-landlord relations underwent a qualitative change, and most of the vital income in cash or kind slowly drained out leaving Newār social, religious and cultural institutions gradually impoverished. Newār culture began to lose its economic and social foothold as soon as the political patronage changed with the fall of the city-states. The dereliction of duties in the maintenance of the *guthi*s, temples, *baha*s*, bahi*s, festivals and group rituals and public events became the rule, not its exception, and a gradual process of fossilization started. The encroachment on tradition has now become so widespread that one can't even trace many endowments in land for maintenance of rituals. Many a section in Surendra Man Shrestha's book or Rajvamshi's book is only nostalgic records of this culture in the death-bed. If we ask an educated middle-class urban Newār about some of these topics it is almost certain that 90 percent would answer negatively. Many details in Shrestha's book (e.g., the seasonal varieties of flowers cultivated in different endowed orchards in the outskirts of Kathmandu to be offered to deities on prescribed days) are totally revealing to me at least.

What is strikingly common to all three books, however, is that they ignore the language of the Newārs – the single potential binder of

ethnicity. All three writers are evidently unaware of recent research findings in population genetics of the Newārs, the code that is likely to reveal where our ancestors came from ten millennia ago. According to recent findings based on DNA analysis, "the deep ancestors" of the Newārs came from the plains of the Yellow River in China about 10,000 years ago, bringing with them the Neolithic culture of wet rice cultivation without traction. Although 43 percent of Newār "gene pool" is East-Asian, and 10 percent Central Asian, South Asia too has contributed 25.7 percent of their racial makeup (see Gayden et al. 2009).

Although they are racially a mixed stock, several aspects of Newār social and cultural practices *ultimately* go back to "the great tradition" of Vedic-Hindu-Buddhist traditions. Their cherished institutions such as the *guthi, āgama, vihāra, degu pūjā, phukī, shāh*, *nani, twāh*, their arts, architecture, or their festivities and rituals are all inspired by the same common South Asian "great tradition," with minor local modifications.

Take their language, for instance. The Nepālabhāṣā Academy's *Practical Nepālabhāṣā Dictionary* (NS 1130) gives a distorted picture of the Newāh language as it has, unfortunately, a disproportionate (65 percent) Sanskrit, Hindi, and English words. However, the basic vocabulary of the Newār language has 28 percent common words with Chepang, 22 percent with Tibetan, 19 percent with Tamang (Glover 1970), and our first person singular "I" – the most important marker of one's identity – is cognate with Kusunda! All scripts used in our literate culture are derived from Brāhmi, based on common orthographic principles. Nearly 80 percent place names found in ancient Sanskrit inscriptions are, however, *not* Sanskrit. In the 5th century AD, what we call today *Khopva* was known by an ancient place name *Khopring*. Similar place names are to be found even now in Dolakha or in Khotang districts that end with *-pring* as a suffix. We still have place names such as *Sipring* river in Dolakha or *Chipring* VDC in Khotang. These clearly are deposits of prehistory of the Newārs – traces of the ancestral route before we arrived here in the central valley.[1]

The question "who are we?" is, thus, more complicated than we think, or our misguided leaders tell us (that, the Newārs are a nation, or a nation-state, or *bhūmiputra*s, aborigines, or *janajāti*s, etc.). Social and cultural anthropologists have, in the last six decades, pondered over the rich, tangled and enigmatic complex called today the "Newār society and

[1] See http://www.kpmalla.com for papers on the place names as a key to prehistoric settlements.

culture." So far both Western and Nepali social anthropologists have given us not only diverse, but conflicting interpretations, depending upon their theoretical or methodological leanings, but none too complete nor compelling.

Some inflated, idealized and flattering self-images of the community are best outlined in the 25 "caste profiles" compiled by the Newāh Dey Dabū (NS 1127). It is not easy to assess their value as history or social science, but one may compare these romantic "self-portraits" with, for instance, French anthropologist Gérard Toffin's excellent publication (1975), or Gellner and Quigley's collaborative ethnography (1995), or Parish's cognitive account (1996). It is difficult to believe that these publications are about the same community, the same social groups or culture. Reading these books by Western scholars and Newār experts is not only like looking at social reality through different colored glasses of the human mind. They seem to be dealing with totally different universes of discourse.

Social anthropologists find the social organization of the Newārs deeply stratified, fragmented, and entrenched in introversion, nearly an improvised but miscarried project based on the code of Manu. The ethnocentric leaders, on the other hand, tell us that there are neither untouchables, nor any ritual stratification of high and low castes in Newār society. Most "conscious" Newārs these days think that they are the sons of the soil of the Nepal Valley. Enlightened Buddhists resent being called Hindu, and Hindu Newārs disown their cultural roots to be classified as "secular" or indigenous.

The complexity of Newār culture is recently exemplified by the eruption of a public controversy on the appropriate dates for observing *Svanti, Lakṣmī pūjā, Mha pūjā,* and *Kijā pūjā*. The official Almanac Committee went strictly by "true reckoning" of the ending moment of a *tithi*. If a *tithi* (i.e., the 12 degree angular distance between the Moon and the Sun) ends before the sunset the observation of a *parva* or auspicious celebrations shouldn't take place on that day. Different Newār astrologers follow different authorities. Some follow the Vedāṅga astronomy or mean reckoning, in which there is no missing *tithi*; others follow the later Siddhāntas which are based on true reckoning, with overlapping/missing *tithi*s. Even among them, there are those who specialize in specific astrology, e.g., casting a horoscope (*jyotika*), calculating the motions of the planets (*gaṇaka*), fortune telling (*daivajña*), and forecasting the impact of evil planets (*graha-cintaka*). However, each camp cited a favorite text as the *śāstra vacana*! Aspiring to show ethnic solidarity, the

New Year Celebrations Committee for NS 1131 insisted on following the observations *uniformly* by all the Newārs in a sequence, obviously for convenience as "they have done in the past." To the dismay of pious leaders, the Shākyas, Vajrācāryas, and Jyāpūs of Patan observed the festival as the Almanac Committee prescribed! The layman stood confused and confounded.[2] The episode is yet another subtext to illustrate that Newār identity doesn't consist of uniformity of any single cultural event across the whole community.

The spillover of these conflicting perspectives is partly reflected in our cultural/ethnic politics and aspirations too. As we don't yet know who we are, we don't know what exactly we want now out of the movement, either. In the 1980s our movement was social-cultural to begin with, and once it was highjacked by the political parties after the 1990s, it didn't take a long time to be fragmented and radicalized as a political one for "the right to self-determination." Not unlike the consortium of feudal lords in the late medieval Nepāla-maṇḍala, the Joint Committee for the Struggle for Ethnic Autonomy comprises 11 different "national-level" Newār organizations and 25 caste societies!

The next publication comes as a useful source at this point in time. A noted expert of development administration, Dr. Tulsi N. Shrestha's book on the identity and background of the Newārs is written in Nepali. Though it is written with admirable clarity and cogency of style, the contents of the book have several fault lines. It is not clear to me why the author focuses so much on the caste conglomerates or rituals of the Newārs. Neither ethnicity nor identity can be viewed in exclusive terms of any isolated social or cultural trait.

There is hardly any doubt that almost all Newār rituals are inspired by the classical Hindu/Buddhist *sūtra*s*, purāṇa*s and *tantra*s. The so-called "castes" in present-day Newār society are a hopeless *mixture* of professions, trades, administrative/religious roles and secular functions, *superimposed* upon a tribal base – the vestiges of the base still visible in the plethora of family surnames derived from plants, animals, utensils and natural species. One has only to get out of the ring road to see how the Newār society in Nālā, Sāngā, Khonā, Tokhā, Pyāngāon, Pāngā or any of the 31 settlements in the Valley is close to what is called "peasant society" by social anthropologists like Robert Redfield.

Shrestha seems to believe that the Newārs are at once a nation (or a consortium of city-states, which is what historical Nepāla-maṇḍala was),

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2 See *Nepal Samacharpatra* (2010) and *Sandhya Times* (2010).

an indigenous group, aborigines, sons of the soil, *janajāti*s, immigrants, and so on. What astonished me was his readiness to equate the ethnic identity of the Newār community with a single cultural trait, i.e., the caste system (Chapters 3 and 4), or with their rites of passage (Chapter 5). The eight main status groups – the Shresthas, the Jyapus, the Tuladhars, the Bares, the Nays, the Sayamis, and the Kumhas comprise more than 84 percent of the Newārs. I believe ethnicity or identity is more complex than the Newār caste system which, as Louis Dumont says, is merely "an imperfect copy of the classical *varṇa*-model." No two authorities agree on how many castes we have – 25, 36, 64, or 82 or more, nor do they agree on their relative ritual status. The farmers of Bhaktapur alone have 420 *kula-nāma*s! This is painfully clear if one reads the caste profiles published by the Newāh National Forum. The ritual status of each group is fiercely defended and debated though recently a national conference of 11 Newār organizations, and 25 caste councils affiliated to the Joint Action Committee announced on December 4, 2010 at Bode/Bhaktapur Conference, attended by 700 delegates from 60 districts that the Code for Castes formulated by King Sthitirjamalla in AD 1395 is now "abolished."[3] Because of this conceptual framework, Shrestha seems to believe in (Chapter 6) the possibility of "going back in history," to the restoration of the walled medieval city-states where the non-Newārs were driven out each nightfall. He has even a readymade name for it, just as our activists have recently devised a new flag of Newār identity, sadly resembling the national flag of North Korea!

The total number of Newārs in Nepal was only 5.6 percent of the national population in 2001. Although the Human Development Index of the community, measured in terms of per capita income, literacy rate, life-span, etc., is one of the highest, their grip on political power is slipping day by day. This is in part a fall out of demographic shift, but mainly because of the settlement patterns. Not all 1.24 million Newārs live in the Valley, nor do they live in ethnic enclaves in the 12 chosen districts only, identified by some articulate political groups as the historical Nepāla-maṇḍala. In fact, more than 56 percent live outside the Valley. What future will federal dispensation hold for them, other than more disenfranchisement?

In the Kathmandu Valley, the electoral constituencies for the Constituent Assembly elections were delineated by mixing urban municipal wards with rural VDCs. Among the MPs elected from 15

[3] As found in http://www.nepalmandal.com.

constituencies of the Valley, there were only seven Newārs. No matter on what basis the proposed provinces are organized, as long as the current electoral constituencies continue, there is no hope for the enfranchisement of minorities. Because of the steady immigration in the Valley and the dispersed nature of Newār settlements elsewhere, the Newārs are unlikely ever to enjoy much substantive political power or leverage.

Historically, the Nepāla-maṇḍala was a loose consortium of warring feudal lords whose political grip over any defined physical territory in and out of the Nepal Valley was always a matter of contention, and it was more a part of religious/cultural geography than a historical/political state. Shrestha's hope that a federal province on ethnic basis in and around the Valley "will give the Newār community a greater access to political power and leadership or better opportunities for development" (p. 198) is sanguine but rosy pipe dream.

Everything will, of course, depend upon the *degree of autonomy* to be granted to provinces in the new constitution yet to be framed, if at all, in the next few months. The competing political parties in the Constituent Assembly will, of course, try to devolve as little substantive power to the local levels as possible so long as they can monopolize the allocated local budget among themselves. That is why there have been no elections to these bodies for more than a decade. Meaningful governance is currently defunct, not only at the center, but more so at the grassroots. More than 1,000 VDC offices were ransacked during the People's War and some 800 VDCs don't even have a Secretary! In a political process where a limited number of entrenched groups are enjoying absolute power with no accountability, it is difficult to believe that power will ever be devolved to the provinces organized on ethnic identity.

To the chagrin of many social scientists (from Toffin to Quigley) as an organized group or groups, the Newār movement in the 1970s–1990s was a social and cultural movement. The activists protested against the Government decision to discontinue 5-minute newscast in the Newār language on the radio since April 13, 1965. The protest meetings were organized week after week for a year or two in the disguise of literary or poetry recitations. The national referendum in 1980 encouraged the Newārs to launch a movement for official recognition of Nepāla-saṁvat as "national." A joint delegation of the eight Newār organizations met the then Prime Minister Manmohan Adhikari on February 14, 1994 to submit 12 explicit demands. The demands included such "harmless" wish-lists as official recognition of Nepāla-saṁvat, script, language name and 15 more minutes' extra time in the national radio and television! There was no

political demand for greater participation or representation in power structure. With the advent of the People's War in February 1996, particularly after the publication of a paper by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, on "The People's War and the Road to Newār Ethnic Liberation" (1997), the activists among the Newārs too were increasingly radicalized, and by winter 2006, fifty-two top Newār activists issued a joint statement demanding an ethnic autonomous state and a secular constitution to be written by people's assembly.

Engrossed with identity and culture, most conscious Newārs now tend to look back at their past with nostalgia. "Only the vanquished remember the past," said Herbert Marshall McLuhan, a celebrated sociologist. If the Newārs have no roadmap to future as a community they may very well have none in "New Nepal." That they have not so far thought of any roadmap is only painfully clear when Padma Ratna Tuladhar,[4] an iconic figure, recently said that Vikrama-saṁvat should be replaced by Common Era "as in India" though Nepāla-saṁvat should continue as the national epoch era.[5] This came as an anti-climax in the thirty-year long cultural movement for the national recognition for Nepāla-samvat.

Because of their numerical size and distribution pattern, the options before the Newārs may be limited. They can go back to late medieval walled city-states to live in isolation in search of an assumed identity and ignore the challenges of accommodating to a nation-state in the making, or they can join the world economy by keeping up with knowledge society and acquire vital new skills, values, knowledge and ever-changing technology to survive in the market. Although we find it difficult to agree with Shrestha's simplistic approach or conclusions, reading his book is worthwhile since it is written by an accomplished specialist and development administration expert.

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[4] Tuladhar, Padma Ratna. 2010. Interview. http://www.nepalmandal.com; November 9.

[5] See video blog clippings at http://www.nepalmandal.com/November 9, 2010.

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