

SCHOLAR OF THE NEWARS: THE LIFE AND WORK OF JOHN K. LOCKE

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John Kerr Locke, the American-born Jesuit who made Nepal his home, and the study of Newar Buddhism his life's work, died in Kathmandu in March of 2009 after several years' struggle with cancer. His passing occasioned an outpouring of tributes from colleagues in the academy which attest to his central role in the development of Nepal and, in particular, Newar studies.

Father Locke was a gifted linguist, diligent scholar and popular teacher who will be remembered, not only for his seminal writings and lectures, but for the advice and direction he gave to a generation of younger anthropologists and sociologists of religion whose own work was inspired, in part, by his research and teaching. Such is the number of Nepali and international scholars indebted to him that it is no exaggeration to describe him as the founder and longtime dean of the discipline of Newar Buddhist Studies.

Less well known to colleagues in the disciplines of South Asian and Buddhist studies are Locke's contributions in the realm of Catholic theology and to discussions about the attitude of the church and the Jesuits to other religions. Locke served the Asian Christian community for many years as a theological advisor, in the area of inter-religious relations, to the cardinals and bishops of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

He was also one of the delegates to the Jesuits' 34th General Congregation, held in Rome in the first three months of 1995. He was a principal author of that congregation's Decree Five, "Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue," which exhorts Jesuits to enter into dialogue with other cultures with openness to the religious experiences of non-Christians.

An educator throughout his life, Locke made a long-term contribution to development efforts in Nepal through his earlier work as a teacher and administrator of St. Xavier's, the school that many of Nepal's most prominent professionals and industry leaders count as their *alma mater*.

Locke's Early Years

John Locke was born in 1933 in Chicago, the midwestern city from which many American Jesuits who worked in the Nepal region originated. He and his sister, Mary Jane, who lost their mother when John was seven, moved to Des Moines, Iowa where Locke finished high school in 1950. He returned to Chicago to study at Loyola University, but entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1951, after his freshman year.

From his earliest years of training Locke expressed interest in joining the Chicago Jesuits' mission in Patna, India. While the vow of obedience requires a Jesuit to go wherever sent, it was considered a laudable thing to request assignment to the "missions." In earlier generations it was the norm that Jesuit missionaries rarely, if ever, returned to their homeland.

Among the mementoes that Locke kept over his decades in Nepal are the annually-repeated requests he sent as a young Jesuit, each neatly typed on an abstemious half sheet of stationery, each coupled with the provincial superior's reply, assuring him that that he would be considered in due course.

Assignment to Nepal

After completing his philosophy studies at West Baden College, in southern Indiana, Locke received his assignment in 1957. He took ship for India with his classmate, Charles Law, later a science instructor at St. Xavier's School and founder of the department of social work at St. Xavier's College.

Changes in immigration policy in newly independent India made it difficult for American missionaries to obtain long-term visas there. Moreover, recruits were needed for a new venture in Nepal, under the direction of Fr. Marshall Moran, founder of Godavari School. Though Jesuit missionaries were the earliest recorded European visitors to the Nepal Valley – Portuguese Father João Cabral had passed through in 1628, as did Fathers Grueber and d'Orville in 1661, among others – these travelers did not set down roots. The modern mission dates to 1949, when Moran came to Nepal as delegate of the Patna University vice-chancellor to conduct exams at Tri-Chandra College. Donald Messerschmidt (1997) provides a detailed account of these early years of the modern Jesuit mission to Nepal in his biography, *Moran of Kathmandu*, first printed in 1997, but soon to be released in a second, revised edition.

The new volunteers for Patna, unable to work in India, were assigned to the kingdom to the north, which had recently thrown off the yoke of the Rana oligarchy and was open to new educational enterprises under Jesuit

direction. Locke and Law reached Kathmandu Valley on Laxmi Puja of 1958. In his later years Locke was fond of recalling the wonder he felt at that first sight of a lamp-lit Kathmandu.

Still a Jesuit in training, he spent the traditional three years of Jesuit “regency” teaching at Godavari. Like at least a few American Jesuit peers, he made rapid progress in learning Nepali, despite the handicap of teaching in an English medium school where, for pedagogical purposes, Nepali was discouraged.

After this first teaching experience Locke was sent to St. Mary’s College in Kurseong, Darjeeling District, for theology studies. Some Jesuits, particularly Indian confrères from the warmer plains and from south India, found a four-year sojourn in the cool and misty hill station a penance. For young Americans posted to Nepal, however, the benefits of studying in Darjeeling District were considerable; they were able to hone their skill in Nepali. By the time he returned to Nepal, Locke had mastered the language.

After theology studies and ordination a Jesuit spends a final year in probation before being invited to profess final vows. The year’s program typically includes pastoral service to a Catholic community. Locke did his in Bihar and he enjoyed relating an anecdote from this time that foreshadowed his eventual scholarly work.

A young Catholic woman he met explained that, though her family was Nepali in origin, only her grandfather was still fluent in Nepali. Locke was invited to the family home to meet the old man. He and the grandfather were momentarily baffled when they discovered that their dialects of Nepali were mutually unintelligible. The grandfather’s “Nepali” was, in fact, Nepāl Bhāṣā – the language of the Newars. Thus did Locke make the acquaintance of the Bhaju caste of Chuhari, descendants of the Newar Christians who chose to follow their Capuchin Franciscan pastors into exile not long after the Gorkhali conquest.

Godavari School

Locke returned to St. Xavier’s Godavari as a teacher, and then served as principal from 1966–70. Under his direction St. Xavier’s senior school was transferred to Jawalakhel and Godavari became a primary-level boarding school. It was also during this period that, prompted by the lament of Kamal Mani Dixit that his sons, Kunda and Kanak, could not spell in their native language, Locke published his first book: *Godāvārī Śabda Śuddhi*, a guide to correct spelling in Nepali.

Throughout his years as teacher and administrator Locke was attentive to, and interested in, the ethnic and religious diversity of the students who filled the Godavari classrooms. He became particularly interested in the culture of students from Kathmandu Valley's most indigenous community, the Newars, whose festivals were a prominent part of the valley's culture. Whereas it was common to refer to the Newars collectively as a caste, Locke realized that the Newars are neither a caste nor an ethnic group. Historically, rather, they were a state, of composite ethnic origins with a religiously pluralistic, multi-caste society.

Research on the Newars

In 1970 Locke was able to pursue his interests more systematically when he was relieved of his responsibilities in the schools in order to do graduate studies. He followed the trail blazed a few years earlier by Fr. Ludwig Stiller, SJ, the renowned Jesuit historian, who had done his PhD in the history of the modern state of Nepal. That study was published as *The Rise of the House of Gorkha* (Stiller 1973) and soon became the standard English text on the origins of the modern kingdom of Nepal. Stiller went on to write a total of six books on the history of Nepal, capping his work with the masterly *Nepal: Growth of a Nation* (Stiller 1993), which analyzes Nepal's development as a nation through a consideration of its political and economic history.

In 1972 Locke joined Stiller at the Human Resources Development Research Centre (HRDRC). Based in Sanepa from 1980 until its closure in June of 2009, the centre was envisioned as a human sciences resource centre, whose output in the areas of history, sociology, cultural anthropology and applied economics might provide development specialists with a more nuanced grasp of the social challenges they were engaging.

Locke did his master's and doctorate at Tribhuvan University (TU). Like Stiller and their colleague, the anthropologist Fr. Casper Miller, Locke might easily have persuaded Jesuit superiors to send him abroad for graduate work. By this time, however, all three had renounced their American citizenship in favor of Nepali citizenship; Locke did so in 1976. It was a measure of their commitment to their new country and its fledgling university that they chose to pursue their doctorates at TU.

Locke's MA was done under the aegis of the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies (INAS), then a degree-granting body, before it became the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS). At INAS he worked under the direction of the chair of the Culture Department, Dr Hit Narayan Jha.

Locke wrote his thesis on the worship of Āvalokiteśvara in Lalitpur and was awarded the Master's in Nepalese Culture and History in 1973.

After his MA, Locke spent a year at London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), which was already one of Europe's foremost centers of Nepali studies. There he worked with David Snellgrove, one of the pioneer ethnographers of Nepal, whom he knew from one of Snellgrove's research visits, when he visited the American and Indian Jesuits in Godavari. Kathmandu's expatriate community was a small and close-knit community in those days.

Returning to Kathmandu Locke enrolled for his PhD in the Department of Culture at TU; there was, as yet, no department of Buddhist Studies. Locke did his doctoral work under Professor Prayag Raj Sharma, formerly dean of INAS and later director of CNAS. This collaboration was the foundation of a decades-long friendship. Locke regarded Sharma as a first-rate intellectual and had only the highest praise for his character and his acute and honest insights into Nepali history, culture and society.

He took up the investigation of the cult of Āvalokiteśvara at a more profound level, expanding it to include all of the major images of Lokeśvara worshiped in the Kathmandu Valley. His doctoral dissertation formed the basis of the first of his major books, *Karunamaya*. Six years later Sahayogi Prakashan published the book that Locke considered his most important work, *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*.

For the remainder of his life Locke's primary assignment was to the Jesuit research centre, HRDRC, first at rented quarters in Kathmandu's Nag Pokhari and Patan's Chakupath, and later at its home in Sanepa, chosen for its proximity to the central campus of TU. From this base Locke continued his research and writing. Though he found the task of mentoring Nepali and foreign graduate students satisfying he was also a much sought-after lecturer on Hinduism and Buddhism for study abroad programs run by American universities. A number of young and middle-aged American scholars of South Asia recall these lectures as an important influence on their interest in the field.

Another way that Locke influenced the field of Nepal studies was through his close involvement with *Kailash – A Journal of Himalayan Studies*, published by Ratna Pustak Bhandar in Kathmandu. Billed as an “independent, interdisciplinary journal”, it was intended to be published three or four times per year.¹ *Kailash* first appeared in 1973 under the

¹ From the masthead of *Kailash – A Journal of Himalayan Studies*.

editorship of the late Hallvard “Hal” Kuløy, a Norwegian UNICEF officer with a profound interest in Asian history and culture who established *Bibliotheca Himalayica* and went on to found Orchid Press in Bangkok. Guided by an editorial board that included some of the most pre-eminent Nepali, European and American scholars of Nepal, *Kailash* was an important outlet for scholarship in the growing field of Himalayan studies in its first few decades.

Locke joined the editorial board of *Kailash* in 1978 (Kailash 6[1]) and succeeded Kuløy as editor in 1979 (Kailash 7[2]). He served in that post until the end of 1994, when he handed over the editorship to Kamal Prakash Malla (Kailash 17[1–2]). As no issues of *Kailash* appeared in the years 1991–1994, however, it would be more accurate to describe him as having edited the journal from 1979 to 1990. Locke continued to serve on the editorial board for subsequent volumes of *Kailash*, though publication of the journal became increasingly irregular in the ensuing years.

He also continued, at least for some years, to keep his hand in as a teacher at St. Xavier’s School, where he had been principal. One editor of this journal, Pratyoush Onta recalls Locke’s course on Nepali history that he took as a student of grade nine in 1979: Locke used the standard school history textbook, but added some works of his colleague Fr. Stiller, including *Prithwinarayan Shah in the Light of Dibya Upadesh* (Stiller 1968).

After the Buddhist Studies department was established at the central campus of TU in Kirtipur, Locke served for several years as an adjunct professor, thesis supervisor and examiner. He enjoyed guiding Nepali scholars, often Newars, who were augmenting his work with their insights as practitioners raised in the tradition. He had a further impact on the intellectual formation of young Americans and Nepalis through his years as a member of the Nepal Fulbright Commission.

Competent in many things, Locke served the church and the Jesuit community in Nepal in a number of significant ways. As mentioned, he was a theological advisor to the Asian bishops. On the pastoral side, he was a popular retreat master and spiritual director for fellow Jesuits and for communities of religious sisters. During his last two decades he took on the job of treasurer for the Nepal Region of the Jesuits. Ever the teacher, he made time to train younger Jesuits in the art of financial record keeping.

Locke underwent major treatment for prostate cancer in 2002. Though he enjoyed several years’ remission, his health began to decline seriously in late 2007, at which time he handed over his responsibilities as

treasurer. He then assisted with the cataloguing of his scholarly notes, papers and photographs of Nepal, which were digitally archived by the Jesuit research centre staff. Locke passed away in the early hours of 18 March 2009, just one week after his longtime colleague and fellow community member, Fr. Ludwig Stiller. His funeral liturgy was conducted that same day at the Cathedral of the Assumption in Lalitpur, and his remains were cremated along the banks of the Bagmati, at Teku.

Locke's Writings

John Locke's output of scholarly writings was respectable, though not strikingly prodigious. His publications can be listed on a single page. But a quantitative assessment overlooks the value of his contribution to the field of Nepal studies and the religious ethnography of Buddhism, as the quality of his work far exceeds its quantity.

Locke was a meticulous researcher who double-checked the smallest ethnographic datum or textual detail to ensure accuracy, but never lost sight of the big picture. Days and weeks of tireless investigation are often summed up in a brief, clear sentence. His years of teaching Nepali speakers in an English-medium school possibly fostered this clarity of style. He had an extraordinary ability to synthesize disparate facts and make very complex matters intelligible to his readers. He did this without oversimplifying the picture, or distorting the ethnographic data that ground his case.

Locke wrote a total of five books and produced the English text for a sixth. He wrote five major articles on Buddhism, some of which appeared in journals, and some of which were included in collections of essays on Buddhism.

Karunamaya and Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal

Karunamaya and *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal* are Locke's most important books, and through them he had his greatest influence on the field of Buddhist studies. Along with David Gellner's *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest* they are the primers, so to speak, for anyone undertaking the study of Newar Buddhism (Gellner 1992). Gellner freely admitted his intellectual debt to Locke's pioneering work and acknowledged the assistance Locke gave him when he undertook his own study of the Newars. Clear testimony to the continuing importance of *Karunamaya* and *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal* is their scarcity; they are still much in demand.

Recognizing the need for reprints of both, Locke set aside time in his final years to prepare new editions and incorporate corrections to the first editions. Advances in computer technology would allow him to correct some other shortcomings of the earlier editions. Most significant of these was the problem of correct and clear rendering of Romanized Sanskrit, Newar and Nepali words. In the letterpress first edition of *Karunamaya* diacriticals are simply dispensed with, and “common-sense” spellings sometimes displace more precise orthography, limiting the book’s usefulness for those wishing to learn the correct form of unfamiliar names and terms. *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal* was printed from offset plates of a typescript generated on an early-generation home printer. Many of the necessary diacritical marks were simply added by hand.

Despite his illness, Locke supervised the correction of both texts personally, with help from the staff of HRDRC, especially his devoted assistant, Kiran Maharjan. Orchid Press in Bangkok will re-print *Karunamaya* and received the new manuscript while Locke was still alive. The status of *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal* is unclear. With his death publishing rights passed to Nepal Jesuit Society officials.

Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal was published by Sahayogi Prakashan for CNAS in 1980. It was a re-working of Locke’s doctoral dissertation at Tribhuvan University. Building on his published MA thesis, *Rato Matsyendranath of Patan and Bungamati* (1973), Locke expanded his investigation to treat the worship of the two most famous images of Āvalokiteśvara: Buṅga Dyaḥ in Bungamati and Ta Bahāḥ, and Jana Bahāḥ Dyaḥ in Kathmandu.

He added research on Jaṭādhāri Lokeśvara, known colloquially in Patan as Cakwa Bahāḥ Dyaḥ, and more widely recognized as Minnāth. This is the secondary image of Āvalokiteśvara that accompanies Buṅga Dyaḥ in Lalitpur’s annual *ratha jātrā*, or chariot festival, which culminates each year in *Bhoṭo Jātrā*, at Jawalakhel. He describes the cult of Āvalokiteśvara images in Cobhar and Nala at some length, and also reviews the worship of the chief Lokeśvara images in Bhaktapur, Thimi and Dolakha, the ancient Newar settlement far to the northeast of Kathmandu, which is better known for its temple of Bhimeśvara, a popular pilgrim site.

Locke collated information from inscriptions, manuscripts and early modern reports, as well as oral traditions. While establishing the clearly Buddhist origins of this cult of Padmapani Lokeśvara, he elucidates the ways in which a Hindu construction is overlaid. Through interviews and field observation he gathered information about the cycle of worship,

including the chariot festivals in Kathmandu Valley. In documenting the performance of the rite, and the roles played by those responsible for executing it, he shed light on the structure of Newar Buddhist society.

Locke's careful attention to the details of Newar Vajrāyāna liturgies is a concrete instance of his influence on subsequent work. He sets a high standard for completeness and accuracy in the recording of ethnographic phenomena. Where possible and appropriate he then sets the rituals in a wider context by reference to historical sources and orally-preserved traditions about them. The descriptions in *Karunamaya* provided a model for Gellner's accounts of rituals, not only in *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, but also in earlier articles on Newar rites (Gellner 1988, 1991). They clearly influenced my description of the cycle of rituals at Newar *vihāras* in *Buddhist Daily Ritual* (Sharkey 2001). Locke's background as a practicing Catholic priest, with a good understanding of sacramental theology, undoubtedly enhanced his sympathetic treatment of Vajrāyāna ritual.

Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal: A Survey of the Bahas and Bahis of Kathmandu Valley was published in 1986, also at Sahayogi. It soon became an indispensable resource for anyone interested in the valley's Buddhist community. The book is somewhat deceptive because of the workmanlike way in which it presents information, some of which seems repetitive if one comes to the book expecting a continuous narrative. Locke himself often made the self-deprecating joke that it was "like a phone directory of the *bahāhs*." The steady and neat presentation of data may seem dry to a non-specialist. Anyone familiar with the subject he is treating, however, immediately recognizes what an extraordinary amount of information he makes available here – and the tireless effort expended to gather it. To collate it required uncounted visits by Locke and his assistants, Tirtha Maharjan and Kundan Sthapit, to the hundreds of sites covered, as well as the persistent checking and re-checking of details. Only someone living long-term in Nepal, with a command of the local languages, and with the network of friends and associates that Locke had built up over the years, could have produced such a monumental work.

A general introduction on Newar Buddhism is followed by three major sub-sections: Patan, or Lalitpur, which has the largest percentage of Buddhist faithful; Kathmandu; and Bhaktapur, which has the smallest Buddhist community. A shorter section covers Buddhist monasteries located in outlying territories, such as Sankhu and Nala. Over four hundred *vihāras* were investigated.

He laid out the distinction between main *bahāḥs*, branch *bahāḥs*, *bahis*, and *nanis*—residential courtyards attached to a *bahāḥ* or one of its branches—and cleared up confusion that besets even knowledgeable Newar informants. Locke also combed historical records to report on *vihāras* that no longer exist. In some of these cases all or part of the physical structure of a monastery remains, but its *saṅgha* has died out. In others, all physical trace of the *vihāra* has disappeared.

Simply cataloguing these institutions was a notable achievement. Locke goes well beyond this, discussing each *vihāra* as completely as existing evidence allowed. There is a physical description of each *vihāra* and its locality, with attention to architectural details, the identity of sacred images, religious monuments and inscriptions. The details of the *saṅgha* of the *vihāra* and any special customs and practices are included. The origins, where known, and any notable history of the *vihāra*, culled from oral sources, manuscripts and stone inscriptions, are covered. Photographs by Hugh Downs, Jr., son of the famous American broadcaster, illustrate the book. The pictorial record, like the verbal one, is exceptionally valuable because so much has changed in the quarter-century since the book was published.

Minor Books

While *Karunamaya* and *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal* are of greatest interest to scholars of Nepal and the Newars, Locke's other books are deserving of consideration. The first, cited earlier, is *Godāvārī Śabda Śuddhi*, printed in 1968. This slim manual was intended as a *vade mecum* for Godavari students. Before the recent growth of the vernacular press Nepali spelling was not as standardized as in its Indian cognates. To add to this problem of carefree orthography, Locke's students were immersed in English rather than Nepali literature. The results were embarrassingly obvious. Locke set out to rectify this by summarizing the rules of good spelling in Nepali, most of them based on Sanskrit principles.

Locke's second book was his MA thesis, published by INAS in 1973 under the title *Rato Matsyendranath of Patan and Bungamati*. It focused exclusively on the cult of the image of Āvalokiteśvara worshipped by the Newar name Buṅga Dyaḥ, after its primary home in the Lalitpur village of Bungamati. Other Nepalis and foreigners identify the image as the Red Matsyendranāth, which distinguishes it from the White Matsyendranāth, the image of Lokeśvara at Jana Bahāḥ in the heart of Kathmandu, halfway between Indrachowk and Asan.

Locke explained in the preface that, by tracing the development of the worship of Āvalokiteśvara, one could gain insights into the development of the Kathmandu Valley's many-layered indigenous culture. Locke opted to use this divinity's most standard, widely used Sanskrit name, Matsyendranāth. While this is the name favored by Hindus, Locke establishes quite clearly that this is fundamentally a Buddhist cult of the *bodhisattva* Āvalokiteśvara, in the form of Padmapāṇi, with certain Shaiva overlays. As was mentioned above, he elaborated this point in *Karunamaya*.

The last of the 'minor' books is *Bihar – Land of the Buddha*, in the Wisdom of Bihar series by Navjyoti Prakashan, a Jesuit press in Patna. Though the printer omitted the date, internal references indicate that it was published in 1986. The text, intended for use in schools, outlines the history and philosophy of early Buddhism and includes a glossary of basic terms and names in Buddhism. The last part of the book is a series of questions for reflection.

Buddhist Ritual Dance is a short book on *caryā-nṛtya* and *caryā-gīti*, Tantric ritual movement and song, that was published by Kala-Mandapa, the Institute of Classical Nepalese Performing Arts, based at the Vajra Hotel in Bijeshwori. In his foreword Ratnakaji Vajracharya, the Newar priest and scholar, credits Locke with translating the narrative material. The distinctive style suggests he might be more fairly described as the co-author. *Buddhist Ritual Dance* has experienced a surge in readership during the past few years as interest in the genre of ritual dance and song has grown.

Articles

Locke's first article, written in 1966, was an explication of certain Christian beliefs, published in *Vedanta East and West*, the journal of London's Ramakrishna Centre. Another theological article, from 1991, was "Some Reflections on the Phenomenon of Fundamentalism," written for the Delhi-based *Vidyajyoti Journal*. In addition to the Jesuit document on interreligious dialogue mentioned already, he wrote or co-authored a number of the reflections and pronouncements of the Asian Catholic bishops' federation on interreligious issues. Locke's contributions to the Christian theology of religions and his salutary influence on the Asian church's approach to other faiths are important. Nonetheless his writings on Newar Buddhism, including his five very important articles, remain the solid foundation for his scholarly reputation.

In 1975, while pursuing his doctorate, Locke published “Newar Buddhist Initiation Rites” in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, the journal of INAS. The article describes monastic initiation of young Śākyas and Vajrācāryas at Jana Bahāḥ, and the further tantric consecration of the Vajrācāryas. It is his typical fine synthesis of ethnography and textual work. Direct observation of the ritual is supplemented by interviews with the participants, and then compared to the *vidhis*, or ritual texts.

In his introductory observations Locke refutes the judgment that Newar Buddhism is a syncretistic, or inauthentic, form of Buddhism as a “totally erroneous impression” (Locke 1975:18). Instead, he argues, we see in Newar Buddhism a survival of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism in a form that has continued to adapt itself to the socio-cultural matrix in which it is situated.

“Vajrayana Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley” was published in 1986, after his two major books. It was printed in *The Buddhist Heritage of Nepal*, a souvenir book prepared by the Dharmodaya Sabha for the 15th General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, held in Kathmandu. This overview begins with a clarification of the unique aspects of Buddhism in Kathmandu Valley. It describes basic ritual and devotional practices, initiation rites, the nature of the *saṅgha*, the organization of Kathmandu *viḥāras*, the structure of Newar Buddhist society, and its relationship to Hinduism. It concludes with an appraisal of contemporary developments within Newar Buddhism, and an optimistic assessment of vital signs.

In the following year, 1987, Locke published “The Upoṣadha Vrata of Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara in Nepal” in *L’Ethnographie*. The subject is the monthly observance of intensified religious practice known in Nepal as the *aṣṭamī vrata*, because it is held on the eighth day of the bright half of the lunar month. Associated with pilgrimage to sacred sites in the valley known as *tirthas*, this observance plays a major role in the spirituality of Buddhist householders, especially women. Newar Buddhism today is often described as if it is exclusively concerned with ritual. A major aspect of the *aṣṭamī vrata*, however, is the education of practitioners through the re-telling of important Buddhist narratives, and through preaching.

Though the Newar observance focuses on a Mahāyāna-Vajrāyāna *bodhisattva*, and is presided over by a Tantric priest, the observance is found in a parallel form among Theravadins. The roots of the tradition are deep as it was, in origin, a Vedic householder practice transformed by the

ascetics of the Buddha's time. Locke suggests that the development of Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley can be tracked diachronically by studying the development of this observance.

Nearly two decades after he began his work on Newar Buddhism Locke (1989) published the essay that he believed summed up his work most effectively, "Unique Features of Newar Buddhism." Delivered at a symposium organized by SOAS in 1985, it was included in *The Buddhist Heritage*, first volume of the *Buddhica Britannica* series.

Locke reiterates his fundamental conviction that the once-common assumption that Newar Buddhism is a syncretistic blend of Hinduism and Buddhism is based on a misunderstanding of the history of religion in India. He attributed the core insight to David Snellgrove, who had argued that, in Buddhism's Indian heyday, it shared a common cultural patrimony with Hinduism (Snellgrove 1970: 129–30). Locke takes this argument further, demonstrating that most of the supposed anomalies of the Newars were established elements of late Indian Buddhism.

Though Buddhism effectively disappeared in most of South Asia, it survived in this unique form in Nepal. Locke goes on to isolate and analyze the genuinely unique aspects of traditional Newar Buddhism, such as the transformations of the monastic *saṅgha* into a closed patrilineal descent group. He then presents a survey of Newar Buddhism, treating religious art and architecture, sacred geography, the social structure of Buddhist society in Kathmandu, and so on.

The last of the significant publications on Newar Buddhism appeared in 1996, in a volume of essays edited by Siegfried Lienhard, *Change and Continuity: Studies in the Nepalese Culture of the Kathmandu Valley*. Entitled "Buddhist Themes on the Toranas of Newar Monasteries," this article is a brief, but thorough, iconographic study of the architectural form known in Nepal as a *torāṇa*, and in western architecture as a tympanum. Newar tympana, rendered in wood, repoussé metal, or stone, are found above the entryways of both Hindu and Buddhist shrines, illustrating a point made earlier about shared cultural features. Locke identifies the eleven primary subjects depicted in *torāṇas*, noting the frequency of occurrence of particular images, variations between the three cities of the valley, and outstanding examples of the form.

Locke's final scholarly research was never published. This was envisioned as a history of the Theravada movement in Nepal and an assessment of its impact on traditional Newar Buddhism. The choice of topic demonstrates that he had more than an antiquarian interest in Newar

religion. He sought, rather, to understand the evolving forms of Buddhism in Kathmandu Valley, whose historical resilience fascinated him.

Over the course of several years he gathered data on the foundation of Theravada *vihāras* and on the composition of the Theravada *saṅgha*. He conducted interviews with members of the Dharmodaya Sabha and other lay practitioners of the Theravada tradition, with ordinary *samaneras* and *bhikkhus*, and with leaders of the *saṅgha*, such as his close friend Bhikkhu Sudarshana. Progress was slow, however, because of his growing, deadline-laden responsibilities as Nepal Jesuit treasurer and advisor to the Asian Bishops.

Gellner reports that, when he and Sarah LeVine began their own book on Theravada Buddhism among the Newars (LeVine and Gellner 2005), Locke never made them feel as though they were trespassing on his turf. Instead, he was pleased to know that research on this important religious phenomenon was continuing. He shared his own notes and research findings with them; and when their book was done, he wrote a magnanimous review of it in the *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* (Locke 2006). Such generosity is hardly a universal trait among academics, for whom publications are the measure of achievement; but it was typical of a man who sought to thoroughly integrate ideals of religious detachment, even into his life as a scholar.

Locke's Lasting Contributions

Locke will surely be best remembered for his books *Karunamaya* and *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*. In them he expresses fundamental insights that have guided a generation of scholars of Newar Studies, and will continue to influence subsequent work in the field. Locke establishes that Newar Buddhism is an authentic form of Buddhism. It is, he acknowledges, unique; but not for the reasons people commonly suppose. Alleged anomalies and divergences from normative Buddhism are often features shared with all Vajrāyāna Buddhism, or with Indian Buddhism as it existed in the late medieval period. Locke's investigations illustrate the insights of his predecessors Sylvain Lévi, who famously described Nepal as "India in the making" (Lévi 1990[1905–08], I: 28. "le Népal c'est l'Inde qui se fait."; cited in Höfer 1979: 178 and Bista 1991: 8), and David Snellgrove, whose comment about the shared cultural heritage of South Asian Buddhism and Hinduism was mentioned earlier. In the Nepal Valley, Locke realized, we see Buddhism surviving within a larger Hindu matrix. Ultimately Newar Buddhism's most distinctive feature is the

capacity for adaptation that allowed it to flourish in Nepal after it disappeared from India.

For all those with an interest in Nepal's culture, especially that of Kathmandu Valley, his studies will offer an accurate and insightful record of Newar Buddhist religious life in the latter half of the twentieth-century, illuminated by an appreciation of the historical and social forces that shaped it. This record will only grow in value, as it did in his own lifetime, because of the rapid pace of social change that has re-shaped the face of religious practice and belief in Nepal. Some of the religious architecture and sacred space, and many of the customs, that he documented changed significantly, or disappeared, just in the four decades since he began his work.

Less obvious, though very significant, will be the contribution he made through his teaching about the religions of Nepal. Had Locke followed the normal career of an American anthropologist studying South Asia, he most likely would have become a respected university professor in his homeland. Opportunities to interact with colleagues in an academic department, and to meet at regular intervals with other experts in the field at academic conferences would have been routine. So, too, would be access to public and university libraries with the funding to accession the most up-to-date scholarly works

Opting for the life he did, as a research scholar at HRDRC, limited some opportunities; but it had its compensatory advantages. His long acquaintance with the people he studied and the respect he earned from them, his facility with Nepali, and his habitual interaction with Hindus and Buddhists all enhanced his investigations of Nepali religion profoundly. As a westerner who had already undertaken graduate level studies before setting foot in Nepal, he brought the critical skills of an outsider. As a naturalized citizen who spent most of his adult life observing and reflecting on it, though, he had an unmatched familiarity with, and sympathetic insight into, the workings of Nepali society.

Because he spent his early years in Nepal as a teacher and principal of St. Xavier's, a school that produced leaders in many walks of Nepali life, he had a wide circle of well-informed friends and former students in Kathmandu, in addition to his contacts with the Nepalis whom he studied and with whom he interacted as a scholar. An acute observer of Nepali life himself, he stayed up-to-date on political developments during some of Nepal's most turbulent decades through his contacts. He was often called on to share his analysis of the political situation and his profound

insights into Nepal's ongoing social transformation, especially with fellow Nepal scholars working abroad.

One of his greatest contributions was this readiness to share the fruits of his learning and reflection with Nepalis and foreign students alike. He saw his lecturing to Nepalis at the university, and his teaching of international students, volunteers, INGO staff members and the like, as an integral part of his mission at the research centre, which was envisioned as a place that would support, in a deep though indirect way, the healthy development of Nepali society.

Though it was originally proposed that Locke become a professor of theology for Jesuit seminarians, he opted instead to direct his talents into the study of Nepali religion and culture. He thus exemplified to fellow Jesuits and Christians the need to understand other religions and to approach their practitioners with respect, rather than fear and communalistic defensiveness. Because he was well-rooted in his own faith, and well-versed in its theology, he was able to serve as a bridge between the Christian community from which he came and the Buddhist and Hindu community to which he was sent. In that he exemplified the virtue of openness to other religions that he espoused in his writings for the Jesuits and for the Asian church.

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