An Annotated Bibliography on the Thakalis

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Introduction

In relation to their number (estimated 1,500 households) the Thakalis may be the most studied group in Nepal. The Thakalis have been studied by 15 trained anthropologists who have published nearly 50 works on them.

There are several factors contributing to this situation. First, Western anthropologists interested in the Himalayan Region come to Nepal because of difficulties in obtaining research permission in neighbouring countries. Secondly, anthropologists are generally more attracted by the people of the Hills and Mountains, than by those of the Plains. Thirdly, fieldwork in Thak Khola (the homeland of the Thakalis) involves no great hardship; communication is reasonable, the climate is pleasant, people are friendly and cooperative, and the accommodation and food are excellent. Finally, the Thakalis are a good choice for anthropologists interested in trade, migration and social change.

Nepal was virtually a closed country for Westerners from its foundation in the late 18th century until 1951. The few Westerners who visited the country were permitted to travel only along the main trail from India to the Kathmandu Valley.

In 1952 Toni Hagen (the Swiss geologist) and Giuseppe Tucci (the late Italian Tibetologist) became the first Westerners to visit Thak Khola. At that time little ethnographical information existed on the Thakalis. Traders and pilgrims from neighbouring countries had been visiting Thak Khola for centuries, but none have left written accounts on their journeys. Hari Ram from the Survey of India passed through Thak Khola in 1873, and based on his observations the area was detailed on a map published by the Survey in 1915. The Japanese monk Ekai Kawaguchi stayed secretly in Thak Khola for several weeks in 1900 and his book Three Years in Tibet (1909) includes a few observations on the valley.

Jiro Kawakita (Japan) was the first anthropologist to visit Thak Khola. Kawakita was a member of Kihara’s scientific expedition to the Nepal Himalayas 1952-53 and stayed in Thak Khola for less than one month. Kawakita revisited Thak Khola in 1958, and again in 1963 in connection with fieldwork among the Magars south of the valley. Kawakita
has published some general ethnographical information on the Thakalis in Ethno-Geographical Observations of the Nepal Himalayas (1957) and The Hill Magars and their Neighbours (1974).

Shigeru Iijima (Japan) was a member of Kawakita's 1958 expedition to the Nepal Himalayas and spent about one month in Thak Khola. He revisited Nepal in 1975-76, 1980-81 and 1984 to study Thakalis in Kathmandu. The main focus of his research is social and cultural change. Iijima has published six articles on the Thakalis, namely The Thakali, A Central Himalayan Tribe (1960), Hinduization of a Himalayan Tribe in Nepal (1963), Two Types of Plain Emulation Among the Thakalis and the Karen (1968), A Note on Thakali Leadership (1977), Ecology, Economy and Cultural Change Among the Thakalis in the Himalayas of Central Nepal (1977), and The Thakalis: Traditional and Modern (1982).


Christoph von Furzer-Haimendorf (England) was the first anthropologist to live for a long period among the Thakalis. He stayed in Thak Khola for more than six months in 1962, and revisited the valley in 1972 and 1976. Furzer-Haimendorf has studied mainly Thakali trade, but his work also deals with Thakali history and social organisation. Furzer-Haimendorf's contributions on the Thakalis are Caste Concepts and Status Distinctions in Buddhist Communities of Western Nepal (1966), Morals and Merit, A Study of Value and Social Control in South Asian Societies (1967), Himalayan Traders, Life in Highland Nepal (1975), Trans-Himalayan Traders in Transition (1978), Social Change in a Himalayan Region (1981), and Social Structure and Spatial Mobility among the Thakalis of Western Nepal (1981).

Dor Bahadur Bista (Nepal) stayed in Thak Khola in 1962 and has published his findings on the Thakalis in People of Nepal (1967) and The Political Innovators of Upper Kali Gandaki (1971).

Pierre Valeix (France) stayed in Marpha (Thak Khola) for about one year in 1969-70. This research has resulted in one article, Marpha: aspects humains et économiques d'un village du Pâc Gau (1974).

Donald A. Messerschmidt (USA) is a well-known authority on the Gurungs, but has also researched the Thakalis. His findings on the Thakalis are contained in Parallel Trade and Innovation in Central Nepal: The Cases of the Gurung and Thakali Subbas Compared (1974, with W.J. Gurung), Bhikuru: Rotating Credit Associations in Nepal (1978), and The Thakali of Nepal: Continuity and Change (1982).


Reinhard Crewe (FR Germany) stayed in Thak Khola for three months in 1978 and two months in 1980. He has published the article A Shama's Concept of Illness and Healing Rituals in the Mustang District, Nepal (1981/82).


Barbara Parker (USA) carried out fieldwork for 18 months in Marpha (Thak Khola) in 1981–83. Her findings have yet not been published.

Susan von der Heide (FR Germany) studied Thakali emigrants (mainly in Kathmandu) for about one year in 1981–82. The results of this research are yet not published.
Finally, Bill Fisher (USA) conducted a two-year research project among Thakalis in Nyagdi and Baglung districts in 1982–84. He is presently completing a thesis on Thakali emigrants.

Besides anthropologists, other scientists have studied Thak Khola and Thakali culture. The Tibetologists C. Tucci, D.L. Snellgrove, A.W. Macdonald and D. Jackson have researched the history and religion, C. Kleinert, C. Millet-Mondon, and F. Morillon and P. Thouveny the architecture, and J.F. Dobremez and M. Fort the ecology of Thak Khola. M. Harf and M. Mazaudon have studied the Thakali language.

In addition to the above-mentioned professional scholars, Thakalis (including, among others, Dhruba Kumar Bhattachan, Narendra Gauchan, Omkar Prasad Gauchan, Prakasan Gauchan, Narendra Serchan and Chandra Man Thakali) have studied and published works on Thakali history and culture. While Western anthropologists have focussed especially on trade, migration and social change, the Thakalis' main interest have been the question of their origin. These studies are published in Nepali language, and have only seldom been referred to in the works of Western anthropologists.

Besides the older generation, young university educated Thakalis have studied their culture and society. The sociologist Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan (presently teaching at the Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University) has researched problems of modernization and social change. Som Prasad Gauchan (a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science, Delhi University) is interested in the political aspects of Thakali society, and Tasso Kanti Gauchan is studying socio-cultural change among the Thakalis of Kathmandu for a M.A. dissertation.

In conclusion, Thakali culture and society have been examined in numerous works by a large number of scientists and Thakalis, but some aspects (e.g. the traditional political organisation) are little researched, and a monograph has not yet been published. Also, there is a conspicuous lack of physical anthropological and archaeological information on the Thakalis and Thak Khola.

Works in Nepali Language


Presents a brief note on the gods of the four Thakali clans.


Contains the programme of the 17-day long lha phewa festival which the Thakalis celebrate every twelfth year.

Describes the history and activities of the Kathmandu Thakali Society, as well as the Society’s rules and regulations.


Based on secondary sources the author provides an introduction to the history of the Thakalis.


Having described the origin of the Thakalis, the author details the torenla festival which is the Thakalis’ main annual festival.


Describes various types of rotating credit associations (dhikur) and examines the origin and importance of these associations among the Thakalis.


Provides information on the syopen lawa which is an initiation ceremony for young boys.


Examines the yēūl pūja (village sacrifice ceremony) as performed in rural and urban Thakali settlements.


Presents the myth relating to the origin of lha nari jhowa, the protective goddess of Thasang (the present Kobang Banchayat), the homeland of the Thakalis.


Discusses the origin of the Thakalis.

Compares the Thakalis' torenla festival with the Hindu phāgu festival.


Examines the role of women in the preservation of Thakali culture.


Discusses the problems of Thakali integration and points out the need for a central Thakali organisation to maintain Thakali cohesion.


Provides a brief introduction to Thak Kholo and the Thakalis.


Discusses the challenges facing Thakali women as members of the Nepali society.


Examines the contributions of Thakalis in Nepali literature and poetry.


Discusses problems facing contemporary Thakali youth.

Contains a collection of opinions of Thakali youth on intra- and inter-caste marriage.


Describes the Thakuri origin of the Thakalis as well as the 1855 Nepal-Tibet War.


Details the syopen lama festival which is celebrated in the month of bhadra (August/September).


Presents the rules of the lha phowa festival prepared in 1896.


Contains a translation of the Cimang bomca which deals with the old kingdom of Sumbo Garab Dzong (Thini). The text includes a reference to Hansa Raja and Nima Ranj of Thak.


Contains a resume of the Cimang bomca.


Provides an introduction to Thakali history, society and culture.


Argues that the Thakalis are of Thakuri origin.


Discusses problems faced by contemporary Thakali youth.

Describes activities undertaken by the Thakali Youth Organisation.


In this interview with Krishna B. Bhattachan, Ms. Gauchan discusses the problems facing Thakali youth, and their role in the Nepali society.


Provides a brief introduction to the Thakalis.


Describes briefly the history of the Karnali region and Thak Khola, and argues that the Thakalis are of Thakuri origin.


Examines socio-cultural change among Thakali emigrants.


Discusses the problems facing Thakali youth and suggests measures to solve these problems.

Based on historical documents published by Omkar P. Gauchan, the author describes Hansa Raja's reign and territory, and marriage relations with Jumla kings.


Deals with the *Lha Phewa* festival and the origin of the Thakalis.


Mentions the activities undertaken by the Siddharthanagar Thakali Society.


Discusses the role of Thakali women in industrial activities.


Describes the form and functions of the Thakali Social Reform Organisation of Pokhara.


Examines the socio-economic role of the dhikur system in Thakali society.


Contains a brief introduction to the Thakalis.


Includes reference to Thak Khola in the 17-18th centuries.

Contains a genealogy of the Sijapati (Jumla) kings and mentions about the exile to Thak Khola of Hansa Raja, the youngest prince of Sijapati.


Argues that the Thakalis are of Thakuri origin.


Retells the myth of lha narī jhowa whom the Thakalis identify as Mahalakšmi.


Describes the torenla festival which the Thakalis celebrate in the Nepali month of phāgu.


Retells the myths relating to the lha phewa festival.


Rejects Malla's conclusion that the Thakalis are of Thakuri origin.


Contains the constitution of the National Thakali Association, as approved by the Association's first general assembly, held in Pokhara, 1983. Besides the Association's rules and regulations, the constitution includes rules relating to life cycle ceremonies, and outlines a programme for the preservation of Thakali culture.


Contains the constitution of the National Thakali Association, as amended by the Association's second general assembly, held in Kobang, 1984.
1984b. Thakālī sewā samiti ko kārṣyakram tathā dhikurī niyamābālī.

Contains the rules and regulations governing the establishment and functions of dhikuri, as approved by the Association's second general assembly. In addition, it includes the Association's ten-point programme relating to social, cultural, economic, legal, religious, intellectual, historical, development, national and moral activities.


Describes the form and functions of the Dharma Panchayat which consists of the 13 headmen of Thaksatsai. This political body traditionally looks after the internal affairs of Thaksatsai.


Discusses social discrimination among the Thakalis.


Describes some common diseases among the Thakalis.

Vinding, Michael, 1985. Thakālīharule aba bhannuparcha: "hāmī thakālī haũ ra hāmīlāi thakālīhumānā garba cha." (Thakalis should say: "We are Thakalis and we are proud of being Thakalis"). Phālo, Vol. 2, pp. 79-88.

In this interview with Krishna B. Bhattachan, Mr. Vinding discusses his anthropological research on the Thakalis, and comments on the question of the origin of the Thakalis.

Work in other Languages


Includes a note on Thakali rotating credit associations (dhikurs).


Analyses social change among the Thakalis of Pokhara.

Includes a brief introduction to the ethnography of the Thakalis.


Examines the role of the Thakalis in the salt-grain exchange between Tibet and Nepal in the 1862-1960 period, and related political developments.


Includes information on population and economy in Thak Khola.


Presents an ecological analysis of the Thak Khola valley.


Compares caste concepts and status among the Thakalis and the Tibetan speaking people of Upper Mustang District.


Includes a brief note on the Thakali value system.


Contains a long chapter on Thakali trade during the period 1862-1972.


Examines briefly recent socio-economic changes among trading communities in Northern Nepal, including the Thakalis.


Examines Thakali descent and family system.


Compares lexical lists of several Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal, including Thakali.


Describes briefly Thakali marriage customs and ceremonies.


Describes the diagnosis and treatment methods of a (non-Thakali) shaman from Thini, Thak Khola.


Examines phonemes in the Thakali language.


Analyses tone in the Thakali language.


Describes segments in the Thakali language.

Contains translations of various Thakali texts.


Includes a vocabulary of the Thakali language.


Examines tone in the Thakali language.


Provides an introduction to the ethnography of the Thakalis.


Examines various aspects of Hinduization among the Thakalis.


Compares the process of Hinduization among the Thakalis with that of Buddhistization among the Karens of Thailand.


Describes the rise of Balbir (a 19th century Thakali) and examines the political activities of some of his descendants.


Analyses ecological and economical changes in Thak Khola, as well as relating cultural changes.

Discusses socio-economic change, identity crises and related problems among Thakali emigrants.


Contains information on the history of Mustang and Western Tibet from the 7th to the 14th centuries.


Examines the history of Serib (the old kingdom of Thini in Thak Khola) and neighbouring areas from the 7th through the 18th centuries.


Contains an introduction to the ethnography of the Thakalis.


Describes ancestor worship among the Thakalis.


Includes an ecological map as well as a description of the ecology of Thak Khola.


Describes the lha phewa festival as celebrated in 1968.


Contains photographs and some brief comments on the phala festival as celebrated in Cinang, Thak Khola.
Includes a brief note on Thakali shamanism.


Includes information on Thak Khola in year 1900.


Contains general information on the people of the northern part of Central Nepal, including the first first-hand ethnographical material on the Thakalis collected by an anthropologist.


Contains ethnographical information on the Thakalis of Pokhara.


Includes information on the ecology and architecture of Thak Khola.


Presents a transliteration of a Tibetan guide to some holy places in Thak Khola. The text has been translated in Snellgrove (1979).

Examines the form and function of the Thakali Social Reform Organisation in Pokhara.


Offers the reason for the emigration of Thakalis in the early 1960's and the effects of this emigration on Thak Khola.


Based on material from the Thakalis and the Byzanzis, the author rejects Führer-Haimendorf's (1975) explanation that a specific outlook of life accounts for whether or not a group pursue trade as a central economic activity, and argues that the success or failure of a group as long-distance traders relates to ecological factors.


Deals mainly with the Thakali's ability to maintain close group cohesion, and their use of impression management. It is suggested that in order to permit close cooperation and prevent cultural vertigo as a result of maintaining multiple cultural guises for extended periods of time, the Thakalis maintain a series of rituals which create a shared reality behind the masks.


Describes how the Thakalis as a group have manipulated the group's collective image in order to attain wealth and social prestige.


Deals with animal husbandry in Thak Khola.


Examines tone in several Tamang, Thakali, Gurung and Managba dialects. It is suggested that these languages are semi-tonal or marginally tonal.

Describes the system of custom contracts in the trans-Himalayan salt-trade, and how some Gurung leaders successfully challenged Thakali supremacy in Thak Khola and neighbouring areas.


Details the organisation and function of rotating credit associations (dhikur) among various Nepalese groups, including the Thakalis.


The author challenges the view of radical cultural change among the Thakalis as put forward by most anthropologists and suggests that what has been interpreted as rapid change for the Thakalis is more continuous than discontinuous, demonstrating a fairly standard and historical patterned response to change.


Contains a general survey of housing in five areas in Nepal, including the Thak Khola valley.


Describes how in Thak Khola the construction of basically the same house type varies according to the natural resources available.


An architectural study of villages and houses in Thak Khola.

Examines prosodies in the above-mentioned languages.

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Provides a reconstruction of proto Tamang-Gurung-Thakali language.

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Contains a translation of an order from 1855 regarding the recruitment of Thakalis in connection with the preparations for war against Tibet.

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Contains translations of various documents concerning taxation in Thak Kholo in the early 19th century, as well as a conflict in the 1860's between various Thakalis regarding salt trade.

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Contains a translation of an order from 1886confirming the monopoly in salt trade to the contractor of custom revenue in Dana.

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Contains translations of various orders from 1811 relating to taxation in Thak Kholo.

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Contains a translation of an order from 1858 confirming that the people of Thini are allowed to travel to the south for trade.

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Contains a translation of a notification according to which Subba Hitman Sherchan was given monopoly in the trade of cigarettes in Nepal from April 1947 through April 1950.


Contains a translation of regulations relating to revenue collection in Thak Khola, 1811.


Contains a translation of a petition from 1859 submitted by Khamba and Thakali traders from Lamjung who complain that people of Manang have prohibited them from raising animals and engaging in trade in Tingaun (Gyasumdo) in Manang District.


Contains a translation of a royal order from 1791 notifying that weights and measures at Dana need not yet be stamped with the royal seal. The order indicates the existence of a revenue/custom office at Dana.


Includes information on salt-trade in Thak Khola during the period 1853-56.


Contains a translation of a petition from 1833 from the Tibetan (Khamba) traders known as Hiksum Tsungi (Thib., bshi-gsum bchugnyis?). The traders complain that while they formerly had to pay a total of 21 Rs. only for four-five months trading in Thak Khola, they are now forced to pay an additional duty on goods traded.


Includes a note on the consumption of yak meat among the Thakalis.


Includes notes on the religion and history of Thak Khola.

Includes a few references to Thak Khola.


Contains three Tibetan texts relating to various religious sites in Thak Khola, along with English translations and introductory comments.


Describes the lha phewa and bu ama festivals which were celebrated in Thak Khola in 1981.


Includes references to the religion of Thak Khola.


Contains information on the religion and history of Thak Khola.


Contains information on salt-trade in Mustang 1895-1905.


Examines agriculture, husbandry and migration among the Thakalis of Marpha, Thak Khola.


Contains a retelling of four Thakaali clan histories.


Presents some myths relating to the kingdom of Garab Dzong (the old kingdom of Thin in Thak Khola).

Lists the kinship terminologies of the Thakalis and related groups, and discusses the use of kinship terms.


Analyses the marriage systems of the Thakalis and related groups. It is shown that the Thakalis have a non-prescriptive marriage system, and that cross-cousin marriage is the preferred marriage form.


Examines household types, residence patterns, the development cycle of the household and the inheritance system of the Thakalis. Contrary to earlier reports, it is shown that the Thakalis have a nuclear family household system, and that the paternal property is shared equally among male heirs.


Details the form and function of patrilineal descent groups among the Thakalis.


Using the death ceremonies as an example, the author suggests that while Tibetan Buddhism is an important element of the ritual aspect of Thakali religion, pre-Buddhist traditions are prevalent in the cognitive aspect.


Examines the subsistence economy, the need for cash, ways to make an income, traditional credit associations, and emigration among
the Thakalis of Thak Khola. It is shown that the Thakalis in gen-
eral enjoy a relative high standard of living, and the factors
accounting for this situation are analysed.

List of Nepali Periodicals and Newspapers Cited in the Bibliography

Ahwān
Weekly. Published by Ganesh Serchan, Pokhara.

Dainik Niraya
Weekly. Published by Pratap Kumar Bhattachan, Bhairahawa.

Dhulagiri
Journal. Editor: D.P. Paudel. Published by Dhulagiri Jana Club,
Kathmandu.

Gorkhapatra
Daily. Published by Gorkhapatra Samsthan, Kathmandu.

Khāgalo
Journal. Editor: G.M. Serchan et alia. Published by Thakāli Samāj,
Kathmandu.

Narījhowa
Journal. Editor: B. Serchan et alia. Published by Thakāli Simskrti
Bikās Samiti, Siddharthanagar.

Naulo Dāko
Weekly. Published by B. Bajimaya, Pokhara.

Pančayat Darpan
Journal. Published by the Training Materials and Production Centre,
Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development, Patan.

Phālo
Journal. Editors: N.K. Gauchan and K.B. Bhattachan. Published by
Thakāli Tubā Pariwār, Kathmandu.