Chapter 11.

KINGS AND CREMATIONS: ROYAL FUNERALS AND SACRIFICES IN NEPAL

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Introduction

The year 2001 was a tragic one for Nepal and the royal family. Ten members of the royal family died at the Narayanhity Palace massacre on June 1st. The late King Birendra died that evening and Crown Prince Dipendra was declared the new monarch on June 2nd, but he died the next day. King Birendra and the other members of the royal family were given a state funeral on June 2nd and King Dipendra on June 4th. The King is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu when he is alive during his reign over the kingdom. He is a god on earth. On the 11th day after death he will return to the heavenly abode of Vishnu. Crucial in this process where the king transcends from this world to heaven is the *katto*-ritual whereby a Brahman priest eats a small part of the king's body. The priest loses his caste by this ritual and becomes an outcaste expelled from the nation. The kings were cremated at Pashupatinath which is the holiest place in Nepal. Between 4500-5000 people are cremated each year at Pashupatinath, and the royal funerals took place at a separate *ghat* in front of the temple.

My aim is to analyse royal funerals in relation to priests and the common people as cosmogony and constructions of castes and social order. Cosmogony is the re-creation of the world (Eliade 1987:105). Cosmos is an ongoing process where "transformative sacrificial acts destroy in order to create, but they also cause life-giving powers to flow" (Read 1998:145). There is an underlying structure and coherence between the royal cremations and the thousands of other cremations which occur at Pashupatinath because it is the same actors and principles of purity and pollution involved in all of the funerals. This structure is manifest in the material culture, and hence, my aim is to approach caste and cosmogony from the spatial organisation of materiality through an investigation of cremations.

Katto and the Funeral Priest

The Funeral Priests are a special group of Brahmans – *Mahabrahmans*. The specialist that conducts the ritual is not only acting in service for the deceased's soul and family, the Funeral Priest himself becomes the *pret* or *pitr* – the deceased's soul – and he is worshipped as the deceased. Even before the chief mourner shaves his head, the Mahabrahman should be shaved as if he was the *pret* himself. The Funeral Priest is also consubstantial with the deceased. The Nepali royal and aristocratic funerals are the most explicit rituals in this regard (Parry 1980), and particularly the *katto*-ritual whereby a Brahman priest eats parts of the king's body. "*Katto*" means literally "something not worth eating" (Shrestha 2001:131). Traditionally it is a part of the dead body, and in particular the brain, which is eaten. The *katto*-priest is seen as a "sin eater". By eating the "uneatable" the priest becomes declared as an outcaste, and he is banned and chased out of Kathmandu valley. The ceremony ensures the salvation of the king's soul, and the deceased's body takes spiritual form on this day.

The role of the Mahabrahman is crucial because he enables the soul to cross towards the other world. The gifts to the Funeral Priest are in fact a symbolic representation of the gifts to the deceased, or more correctly, they are identical because the idea is that the departed receives the gifts in the next world. The ideal gift is all the standard requirements needed for use in daily life for one year – everything from food, clothes, furniture, money, and so on. This has its rationale in the idea that the Funeral Priest *is* the deceased at the moment he receives and accepts the gift. The power to bless and curse the deceased enables the priest to negotiate and take advantage of the size of the offering, emphasising that the gift will be received by the *pret*, and thus, the family has to offer a lot (Parry 1980:95-96).

The *katto* Ceremonies of King Birendra and King Dipendra

The 75 year old Brahman priest Durga Prasad Sapkota ate the *katto* of the late King Birendra on the 11th day of mourning, Monday June 11 at Kalmochan *Ghat*. The elephant was decorated traditionally, and the Brahman was dressed as the king wearing a gold-embroidered Nepali dress. The priest wore a replica of the crown; he used clothes, shoes and other ornaments that belonged to the deceased king (**Figure 1**). He was sitting in a tented room which was furnished with offerings from the Royal Palace, such as a sofa, bed, and

Figure 1. Durga Prasad Sapkota during the *katto*-ritual (courtesy Kantipur Publications).

study table together with more personal belongings of the king including his briefcase and walking stick. On Thursday June 14th, the *katto* ceremony of king Dipendra was held at Kalmochan *Ghat*. Kalmochan *Ghat* is located by the Bagmati River where it forms the border between the former kingdoms of Kathmandu and Patan, and when the *katto*-Brahman crossed the river, according to the tradition, the priest is not allowed to return again, and he is so highly polluted that the people would not even "see his face" again. When there were only petty kingdoms in Nepal, Kalmochan *Ghat* and the Bagmati River represented the country's border, and the *katto*-priest was expelled from the kingdom by the symbolic crossing of the river. Nowadays the priest is expelled from the Kathmandu valley.

Durga Prasad Sapkota felt that he was forced to do the *katto* ritual, and afterwards he felt cheated. He demanded a house and he was promised gifts worth 10,000 dollars, but he received only some 300 dollars, and he now aims to sell the king's clothes and personal belongings he received for 10,000 dollars (**Figure 2**). He is living in his old house at Pahupatinath because he has no other options. According to him, the king's flesh in the *katto* ritual is a relict myth from the past. He cooked the meal himself which consisted only of rice, vegetables and goat meat. Some people living in the vicinity of Pashupatinath believed, however, that the *katto*-priest ate the king's flesh, and in particular the part of the brain where the "third" eye is located. The priests who cremated King Birendra said that some security guards collected small parts of the ashes from the king which were put into the *katto*-priest's meals without Sapkota's knowledge. It was only symbolically, they believed, but it was a part of the meal, because only goat meat would not have affected and polluted the priest in such a negative way. Just after the ritual Sapkota could not walk openly in the streets, and

Figure 2. Durga Prasad Sapkota with his wife showing some of King Birendra's personal items which he received as gifts.

especially not in the Pashupatinath area. People treated him as excluded from the community, and he sat, predominantly, in the backyard of his house, feeling guilty and impure after the *katto* ritual. The other temple and funeral priests referred to Durga Prasad Sapkota as "the priest who became a *pode*", meaning a "toilet-cleaner". Sapkota, on the other hand, emphasised that he was a Brahman, although he acknowledged that he was impure and a *katto*-Brahman. His wife also stressed that both of them were Brahmans, and they categorically refused to hear anything about low-caste status; Sapkota perceived himself as both a Brahman and a priest. According to Sapkota, he was not treated as, and he had definitively not become, a low-caste person or outcaste (despite his impure condition after the *katto*-ritual, two years later he had worked as a priest on several occasions).

Seen from the position of wider society, the priest eating *katto* will attain the king's sins. But the impurity of the priest does in no way correlate to the sins committed by the king, who is a living Vishnu, the supreme Godhead. Even low-castes detest the priest and expel him out of the country stressing that the priest is below the lowest in regards of purity. Low castes may eat cows – another type of Vishnu's flesh – but despite their impurity they are purer than the *katto*-priest. Everyone, except his family, see the *katto*-priest as the most polluted man in the nation. It does not seem plausible, however, that the king has been the most sinful person in his kingdom. The pollution acquired through *katto* must represent other sins than the king's sins. This, it is argued, is a part of cosmogony – the re-creation of society and cosmos, and has to be seen in light of Hocart's (1950) interpretation of caste and caste theories in general.

Caste – Ideology or Subtle Substance?

Brahmans work as priests, and religion is most often an integral part of explanations of the caste system, its origin, function and hierarchy. The problem is, however, to relate text to context. Ideological and religious foundations of castes are based on the Sanskrit texts, and among them, the Bhagavad-Gita and Manu. The *Bhagavad-Gita* (Bg) distinguishes four castes: "Brahmanas, ksatriyas, vaisyas and sudras are distinguished by the qualities born of their own natures in accordance with the material modes (…)" (Bg. 18.41). The duties and the qualities are further described: "Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness - these are the natural qualities by which the brahmanas work. Heroism, power, determination, resourcefulness, courage in battle, generosity and leadership are the natural qualities of work of the ksatriyas. Farming, cow protection and business are the natural work for the vaisyas, and for the sudras there is labour and service to others. By following his qualities of work, every man can become perfect" (Bg. 18.42-45). Thus, there are four classes in the hierarchical order: (1) the sacerdotal and learned class, the members of which may be, but not necessarily priests, (2) the regal and warrior caste, (3) the trading and agricultural caste and (4) the servile caste, whose duty is to serve the other three.

Declan Quigley argues that it is impossible to explain caste as a product of a particular ideology, and he sustains a critique not only of Dumont's theory but all who emphasise the Hindu ideas when explaining castes (Quigley 1996:1, 12-13). Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970) has been the most influential contribution to the recent debate on caste, but nowadays few scholars advocate his ideas. Therefore, his theory of the castes is a point of departure for the debate and the disputes of the caste system(s). Fundamental in Dumont's concept of caste and hierarchy is totality: "So we shall define hierarchy as the *principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole*, it being understood that in the majority of societies it is religion which provides the view of the whole, and that the ranking will thus be religious in nature" (Dumont 1970:66, original emphasis). His theory is based on a social principle; hierarchy, and thereby distinctions between the castes. It defines groups in a hierarchy of ritual purity and pollution and prescribes inter caste relations, especially regarding marriage and commensality (Bennett 1983:8). According to Dumont, "Superiority and superior purity are identical: it is in this sense that, ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status" (Dumont 1970:56). The fundamental opposition between pure and impure is not the cause but the form of all distinctions between caste (ibid:26). "It is generally agreed that the opposition is manifested in some macroscopic form in the contrast between the two extreme categories: Brahmans and Untouchables. The Brahmans, being in principle priests, occupy the supreme rank with respect to the whole set of castes" (Dumont 1970:29). Dumont's theory cannot cope with the role of priests whose status is at best seen as intensively ambiguous and at worst defiled (Quigley 1999:308). "Perhaps the central feature of caste is that one cannot ride roughshod over one's ritual obligations without fear of losing one's status, one's very position in the community" (ibid:313).

It is not necessary at this point to challenge or criticise Dumont's approach to caste, but it is cogent to merely point out that his theory of caste represents one side in the debate. The other interpretative framework, based on a "coded substances theory", is mainly advocated and developed by the "ethnosociological school" or the "Chicago School" (e.g. Marriott and Inden 1974, 1977, Marriott 1976, 1990). The caste structures and principles are seen from the "inside" and from the actors' perspectives. Caste systems may be defined as "moral systems that differentiate and rank the whole population of a society in corporate units (castes) generally defined by descent, marriage and occupation" (Marriott and Inden 1974:982). In the "coded substance theory" the stress is put on the non-duality of South Asian social thought; "South Asians do not insist on drawing a line between what Westerners call "natural" and what they call "moral" things; the Hindu moral code books are thus filled with discussions of bodily things, while the medical books at many points deal with moral qualities" (Marriott and Inden 1977:228).

Moral qualities are thought to be altered by changes in the body resulting from eating certain types of food, sexual intercourse and participation in rituals. When a Bengali

woman is being married it is believed that her body is transformed as well as her inborn code for conduct (Inden and Nicholas 1977). "The code for conduct of living persons is not regarded as transcendent over bodily substances, but as immanent within it", and as such "Bodily substances and code for conduct are thus thought to be not fixed but malleable, and to be not separated but mutually immanent features: the coded substance moves and changes as one thing throughout the life of each person and group. Actions enjoined by these embodied codes are thought of as transforming the substances in which they are embodied" (Marriott and Inden 1977:228).

Seen from the "coded substance theory", moral and social codes are presumed to be inherent in every kind of generic category, and each single person has an embodied moral code of this world. Persons are therefore "unique composites of diverse subtle and gross substances derived ultimately from one source; and they are also divisible into separate particles that may be shared or exchanged with others" (Marriott and Inden 1977:232). These substances exist prior to birth in the parents (seeds, food). In life a person becomes what one eats. This high-lights consumption of food as fundamental in transactions and creations of moral qualities, but also the defilement from bodily substances which are disposed of such as menstrual blood, semen, excreta, and those associated with death. All bodily genera are descended from the original cosmic Purusa, and "person and genera are thus conceived of as channelling and transforming heterogeneous, eve-flowing, changing substances" (ibid:233).

Simply presented and with a container metaphor as point of departure, the body is a "vessel". This "vessel" metaphor is crucial in the understanding of castes as transactions of coded substances. A pure person that has been defiled by temporary impurity, basically through water or food consumption, has to purify his body ("vessel") through subsequent rites. Therefore, all interactions and transactions of substances are potentially dangerous because it may involve defilement of one's purity. Each substance has a value, an entity which in theory is both morally and religiously defined, and society is structured around the different transactions that are hierarchically regulated through sanctions and taboos. Those who perceive themselves as being purer than others are particularly concerned about interaction with people they see as less pure than themselves. These personal perceptions are difficult or impossible to rank in *one* model because most people put themselves on top of the social ladder in terms of status and purity. There is a general concern about one's own purity and possible social interactions and transactions of substances which may threaten the personal purity. The body as a "vessel", which each and everyone is concerned with, is fundamental in castes when perceived as moral substance codes. The Funeral Priests who conduct cremations and mourn the dead are called Mahabrahmans which literally means the "great Brahmans", but this sub-caste of Brahmans are also known as Mahapatra which means "great vessels" (Parry 1994:76). Their role in funerals as "great vessels", which are filled with sin and pollution, is the crux of debate regarding the caste hierarchy and the common assumption that Brahmans are ranked highest because of their purity.

Hocart's Interpretation of Caste

The main core of Hocart's theory is in essence that all societies are communities of persons organised for ritual purposes, and their primary aim is to secure and procure life in its broadest sense. This has to be seen in relation to the divine king who was both God and human. Everything in service of him was a ritual service. Accordingly, the caste system is a distribution system of rights and duties connected to the royal ritual and the king's service (Raglan 1950). The caste system is a sacrificial organisation where the aristocracy are feudal lords performing rites by which they need vassals and serfs because some activities involve pollution, and the lords cannot become defiled (Hocart 1950:17). Hubert and Mauss (1964) distinguish between the "sacrifier" – those who perform the sacrifice, and "sacrificer" – the ritual specialist sometimes employed to perform the sacrifice for the sacrifier. The sacrificial basis of the caste system is religious purity of those worthy and excellent castes which are allowed to participate in the sacrifice. The main object of these sacrifices is *immortality in the form of freedom from death and diseases, it is to becoming a god and ascending to the world of gods*. Or in the words of a sage, "The sacrificer [*sacrifier*] passes from men to gods" ([Hocart 1950:18] – Hocart builds parts of his theory on the differences between sacrifier and sacrificer, but he does not distinguish these ritual roles by the terminology developed by Hubert and Mauss. I will use Hubert and Mauss' terminology when discussing Hocart even though he does not use this distinction himself, and when quoting Hocart, Hubert and Mauss' terminology is added in brackets and written in *italics*).

Obtaining immortality and eternal presence with gods is the main goal and idealised outcome of the sacrifice. Corpses are vehicles which can be used to move from this world to the other world. The recent dead cling to this world although the spirit is being transformed into other spheres. The dead are truly liminal beings, and as such are highly polluted (Kinsley 1997:237-238). The funeral aims to give the deceased to the gods whereby he can attain the divine and eternal sphere by becoming a god. Cremation is a transformation and a medium to change and to transmute. The king was "the sacrifier" in the state sacrifices in the earliest texts. This means not necessarily that the king controlled the total ritual, but he was the chief actor and the sacrifice was his responsibility whereby he supplied the offerings and covered the expenses.

In Rig-Veda (X, 90) it is expressed directly that castes are made from sacrifice. The skeleton of the ancient caste system is based on four groups of the population: 1) *brahman*, 2) *kshatriya*, 3) *vaisya*, and 4) *sudra*. This model is based around the king, which comes from the *kshatriyas*. The priests cannot form a caste themselves due to the practice of celibacy, and thus the priests are derived from the farmer caste or the aristocracy. They hold the same place in the hierarchy and in ritual as the Brahmans when priesthood became hereditary (Hocart 1950:23-26). Later tradition has stressed that the *kshatriya* caste is a warrior caste, and the *Chhetris* are commonly ranked as second after the Brahmins in the fourfold

caste system. In the earliest prose writing the *kshatriya* caste was nevertheless the royal caste, and only later the stress was put on the warrior aspect. Therefore, the first caste is the one that provides the king, and as such the royal one or the nobility.

The difference between the king and the priest is their roles in the sacrifice; "A nobleman gives but does not solicit; offers sacrifice, but does not perform it, studies, but does not teach" (Hocart 1950:34-35). The second caste supplies the priests, namely the Brahmans. They perform the ritual for the king. The priest may perform the sacrifice himself, but he is mainly the person that officiates for the sacrifier, and therefore the priests are more closely related to the royal family than the farmers since it is the king that normally is the chief sacrifier (ibid:37). The main function of the third caste is to support the king and the priests, and to feed the sacrifice from their lands and cattle (ibid:39-40). According to Hocart then, the caste system is basically a sacrificial organisation where everything is structured around the king and his sacrificial role. The other groups in the society have different obligations in relation to the sacrifices (**Figure 3**).

Kings, Sacrifices and Creation of Cosmos

In Vedic mythology, Manu is the hero eponymos of the human race, and he belongs therefore by nature to both humans and gods. He is seen as the progenitor of mankind (Bühler

The sacrifier passes from men to gods. Obtaining immortality and eternal presence with gods is the main goal and idealised outcome of the sacrifice:

Sacrifice	**=**	**gods;**
Sacrificer [*sacrifier*] **becomes**	**=**	**sacrifice;**
Sacrificer [*sacrifier*] **becomes**	**=**	**gods.**

The caste system is a distribution system of rights and duties connected to the royal ritual and the king's service. The caste system is a sacrificial organisation where the aristocracy are feudal lords performing rites by which they need vassals and serfs because some activities involve pollution, and the lords cannot become defiled:

Caste		**Office**	
Good people	Royal Priestly Farming	***Inside***	Receiver of cult Celebrants Officials
Low	Various		Outside and menial duties

This schematic representation of the castes and their function is extremely close to the one found in the old texts, and the way the ideal cremations are structured at Pashupatinath:

Caste structure according to Hocart		**Ritual space in cremations at Pashupatinath**	
God		**The Shiva Linga**	
Good people	Royal Priestly Farming	***Ghats***	Royal Priestly Farming
Low	Various	Low caste cremated outside the holy area, denied access to the *ghats*	

Figure 3. Hocart's theory of caste and sacrifice in relation to cremations at Pashupatinath.

1964:lvii). According to Manu, "for the sake of the prosperity of the world, he caused Brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his tights, and his feet" (Manu I, 31). Manu prescribes physical separation of the habitual areas and thereby creating a spatial caste hierarchy by saying "But the dwellings of Kandalas and Svapakas [untouchables] shall be outside the village, and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys. Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place" (Manu X, 51-52).

The king's rebirth is a cosmic regeneration. On earth, the king *is* above the caste structure, he is in between Man and God, he is everything. Cremation is a redistributive practice, a sacrifice by which cosmos and society is recreated and maintained. Thus, the cremation of the king is a ritual by which he becomes god whereby he distributes his body to the prosperity of the world. The king's body is transformed through the sacrifice into Man from which he divides himself into the different castes. Thus, the caste system is a ritual and religious system. The king's funeral is a consecration which raises the king to a higher rank. The dead man is the principal in the funeral; he is the initiate. Funerals are therefore a kind of initiation rite where the deceased is the person who is initiated, which is core in Hocart's theory that *the first kings must have been dead kings* (emphasis added, Hocart 1954:77). Funerals raise the dead to a higher state. The process when the Brahman priest is fed by *katto* is a means of securing the king's eternal freedom and liberation from this world. Creating cosmos whereby the king becomes the purest incarnation of Vishnu in the heavenly abode, so he successively can redistribute his body back to society legitimating society, is a process which involves consumption of parts of the king's corpse. Following Hocart, the Brahmans' role in society is to assist the king in his sacrifices. It is their duty and *dharma* to function as sacrificers. The cremation of the king is the king's last and most important sacrifice whereby he sacrifices himself on behalf of society which is re-created as a cosmogenetic event. The king has responsibility for all, and it has to be a Brahman priest who assists in the king's last sacrifice and eats *katto*.

Katto is a piece of the king's body and *the funeral is a sacrifice whereby the king becomes Vishnu giving legitimacy to society by dividing his body into castes*. Following this line of thought, the king *is* society, and his body *is* the castes in the kingdom. The king *is* everyone in society. Logically, when the priest eats the flesh he consumes the sins from all people in society. Since the king is everyone and everything, the priest takes on his shoulders, or more precisely in the flesh, all the sins in the kingdom, which enables the king to ascend to Vishnu's abode. Thus, cosmos is created out of chaos, and this is cosmogony. The consequence is that the priest becomes so sinful that he cannot stay in the country. He is *the* incarnation of sin. The king's priest who consumes a piece of the king's body symbolically digests all the evilness and pollution in society. This ritual task requires personal purity *prior* to the ritual, but even the most pure Brahman cannot transcend this enormous amount of sin.

Priests and gurus know exactly the burden of karma or sin they would have to bear when they take onto themselves others sins. As an individual they can encounter a lot of trouble by performing penances (Svoboda 1993:228). If a guru takes on another person's karma (sins), they might overstep their limits and take onto themselves too much. (ibid:311). Being pure means that a person has a "vessel" that can be filled with impurity, and being holy implies that the person has the capacity to transform the impurity into purity by their own means. The acceptance of *dan* – the gifts made to Brahmans – is a perilous matter especially when it is associated with death, because receiving gifts means accumulation of sins (Parry 1980), and the gift is poisonous (Raheja 1988). In the words of Mauss, "to accept something from somebody is to accept the same part of his spiritual essence, of his soul…all exert a magical or religious hold over you" (Mauss 1990:12). Being the king's priest is the most dangerous occupation of all (Quigley 1996:67). To make chaos into cosmos and impurity into purity is both holiness per se and a divine capacity. In the case of the *katto*-Brahman he receives more sins than he can digest and transform into purity, and therefore he becomes defiled, impure, and expelled. Thus, proving one's holiness whereby one is acknowledged as having a superior status in certain social spheres of interaction (but not all) is to a large extent a matter of accepting other people's impurity. The inferior giver cleanses himself through this asymmetrical interaction whereby his sins are handed over to a guru or priest, and the superior part *becomes* the superior part through the acceptance of the impurity that defiles his own body.

Castes and Cosmos – Cremation and Cosmogony

Regarding state cult Geertz (1980:102) argues: "The state cult was not a cult of the state. It was an argument, made over and over again in the insistent vocabulary of ritual, that worldly status has a cosmic base, that hierarchy is the governing principle of the universe, and that the arrangements of human life are but approximations, more close or less, to those of the divine". The rites create divine legitimacy because when rituals are the principal medium by which power relationships are constructed, the power or the material embodiment of the political order is usually perceived as coming from divine sources (Bell 1997:129). "In its cosmological mode, this "dramaturgy of power" involves the creation of comprehensive ritual systems that raise the ruler above normal human interaction" (ibid:130). Rites of installation when nobles take on prerogatives or titles are also treated as sacrifices, for instance sacrifices consecrated by priests to purify a crown prince after the death of the king (Valeri 1985:39). In traditional Hinduism, the fire from the wedding ceremony was taken back to the couple's home and kept burning for the duration of the marriage. At death, this fire could be used to light the funeral pyre on which the body is committed for yet another act of sacrificial purification (destruction of the corporeal body) and rebirth into a further stage of existence (Bell 1997:100)

Cremations are creations of both man and cosmos, and consequently microcosm, mesocosm, and macrocosm are integrated in the procreative funerals. By using the materialised hierarchies in space it is possible to trace a creation and manifestation of an *idealised* caste structure and its cosmogenetic function in society and religion. There are basically only two ways of staying and becoming pure. One way is to distance oneself from the polluted objects or persons, and the other way is to remove pollution by a purifying agent, of which water is the most common and effective. In spatial terms this implies physical distance. The caste system is normally seen as hierarchy, and as such, it is the distinctness of each group and its separateness and distance from each other that is crucial. Ideas of purity and pollution are most efficaciously expressed through spatial hierarchies and different use of space. Ideally the social structure in terms of ritual status requires social distance between the different caste groups (Srinivas 1976:185-187).

Materiality is thus a powerful mechanism. Power is the "ability to mobilise economic, social, or political forces in order to achieve a result…by the probability of that result being achieved in the face of various kinds of obstacles or opposition" (Blackburn 1994:296-297). Social relations are often expressed by people's disposition of space. Hierarchies are spatial constructs where space defines the hierarchical relations (Torén 1990:1-2). Physical restrictions are explicit in one way, but implicit in others because material constraints limit the numbers of possible actions available, and prescribe structures and practices to be performed a certain way. Space is not neutral or abstract but a field of lived experience, and people construct houses, villages and temples according to religious rules and regulations. Thus, the built environment has an ontological dimension because space is the place where actions take place.

The temple is the body of the Gods and their worshippers (Albanese 1999:13). The sculpture of the god "is not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realize how the god looks; rather, it is a work that lets the god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself…" (Heidegger 1997:120). Regarding monumentality and spatiality the Marxist Henri Lefebvre wrote, "Monumental space offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage. It thus constituted a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one…this social space… embraced…a generally accepted Power and a generally accepted Wisdom" (Lefebvre 1997:139). The Monumentality is eternal because it transcends death and seems to have escaped time (ibid).

People are often aware of the spatial restriction at a certain locale, but since material structures may have a long continuity and traditions change as time succeeds, people ascribe new meanings and older conceptions and understandings of the use of space may disappear. The same practice at the same place may continue but people give new meanings to their practices, forgetting the origin of their tradition. Thus the aim is to "understand how spatial constructs inform people's notions of social relations, and how this process is manifested in people's cognition over time" (Torén 1990:3). It is possible to trace older social structures and principles in the current material culture that is in use, even though the people living in this environment cannot give an explicit account for their lost tradition. This is a complex task, but at Pashupatinath the materiality of the temple complex and the cremation *ghats* may reveal traces of older perceptions and understandings of caste and cosmos, and the interrelatedness of caste, water and death in the Shivaite worship. Since this materiality is still in use, the hierarchies of the spatial constructs of *ghats* are efficacious power structures that express caste rule and regulations. Finally, by using the materialised hierarchies in space it is possible to trace a creation and manifestation of an *idealised* caste structure and its cosmogenetic function in society and religion. As shown, there are different theories of castes, and the use of space may therefore indicate which of the different caste systems was the original one, at least ideally. Social structures are inevitably a part of the creation of cosmos, and the construction and maintenance of caste is a consequence of cosmogony.

Parts of the materiality at Pashupatinath express the cosmic and karmic ideas of caste and hierarchies of purity and pollution. The territorial hierarchy found on the *ghats* along Bagmati river strictly refers to the caste system, and in particular, the caste system as presented by Hocart. Even though the current use is a relic of past realities, and the mourners cannot give an account for the reasons why they are performing the rites the way they do, the materiality bears witness to a special type of caste society emphasising the problems of death and immortality. The materiality of space creates traditions and hierarchies. The closeness to the Pashupatinath *lingam* is of uttermost importance because it is the most holy spot in Nepal; Shiva's head by which the world was created and is re-created through sacrifices and funerals. Cremation is cosmogony, and at Pashupatinath there are three distinctive areas. At Arya *Ghat* there are two cremation platforms. The one closest to the temple and the linga is for royal cremations only. The second platform is for those who today are called "the wealthy" people, but traditionally this has been the *ghat* reserved for Brahmans only. The six cremation platforms at Ram *Ghat* (of which four are recent - In 2002 a seventh cremation platform was built and completed at Ram *Ghat*) are basically for the common people. Low caste people have traditionally been cremated on the banks below these *ghats*. The ritual space at Pashupatinath is hierarchically structured around the Shiva-*linga*, and the closeness reveals a caste hierarchy close to Hocart's interpretation of caste (see **Figure 3**).

Even though the caste system is abolished today, the spatial restrictions and the actual use of the *ghats* manifest, structure, and reincorporate caste principles in society. The materiality of space directs and prescribes actions and taboos concerning purity and pollution. The physicality of agency implies restrictions on access to a place according to a person's caste status. This is especially seen among the low caste today. The taboos have structured their practices – practices which have become their traditions. Since the introduction of democracy in 1991 there are no laws prohibiting low castes from cremating at Ram *Ghat*, but socially, it is still not

acceptable. There have been a few exceptions in recent history. A former minister in the *Panchyat* period before the introduction of democracy was a low caste Newari, and he was cremated at Ram *Ghat*. According to tradition they should cremate at other places, and no low caste people are allowed, socially, to be cremated at Arya *Ghat* even today. It is mainly Brahmans, Chhetris, and high caste Newari that are cremated at this *ghat*. These are the "wealthy" both in terms of ritual and economic status, whereas the "commoners" are cremated at Ram *Ghat* (**Figure 4**).

Today there is a mixture of statuses and practical considerations which together determine where the deceased is cremated, and high caste people may choose to cremate at Ram *Ghat* if there is a long queue at Arya *Ghat*. The underlying rule is, however, still visible, especially among the royal and the low castes. They are at each side of the scale concerning purity and pollution, and ritual obligations in society. Most low castes, if they are cremated at Pashupatinath, are cremated south of Ram *Ghat* on either of the sides of the river whereas the king is cremated next to the Shiva-linga (**Figure 5**).

Conclusions

Rites are a reproduction of the original creation but on a microcosmic scale. The creation of this world has the creation of the universe as its paradigmatic model (Eliade 1987:30-31). Myths are materialised and have particular locations which necessitates restrictions and regulations for interactions. All these social patterns are archaeologically manifest in the actual use of space because people live in a materialised world. Hierarchies and social differentiations are spatial dispositions which separate pure from impure people. Although stratification as a phenomena is most often imagined as having a pyramid structure, in daily life it implies material hindrances and obstacles.

According to Dumont, this hierarchy is manifest in macroscopic form in the contrast between the two extreme categories, Brahmans and Untouchables (Dumont 1970:29). As seen at Pashupatinath, the caste system is evident in the materialised space but not in accordance with Dumont's scheme. Hocart's interpretation of caste is, on the other hand, manifest in the way cremation as a sacrificial act and a cosmogonic event takes place at Pashupatinath. Combined with the "coded substance theory" of castes whereby the body is a "vessel" possible to fill with impurity, the bodily qualities of the deceased, descendents and Funeral Priests comprise a ritual unity. The royal funerals whereby the *katto*-ritual is crucial can be seen as a cosmogonic event which raises the king to a higher state at the expense of the priest who becomes an outcaste. These structures of purity and pollution, creation and cosmic deterioration, are a part of the total cosmocentric and spatial organisation at Pashupatinath where all cremations are cosmogonic, but different people and groups have different roles and functions in the creation and maintenance of micro-and macro-cosmos.

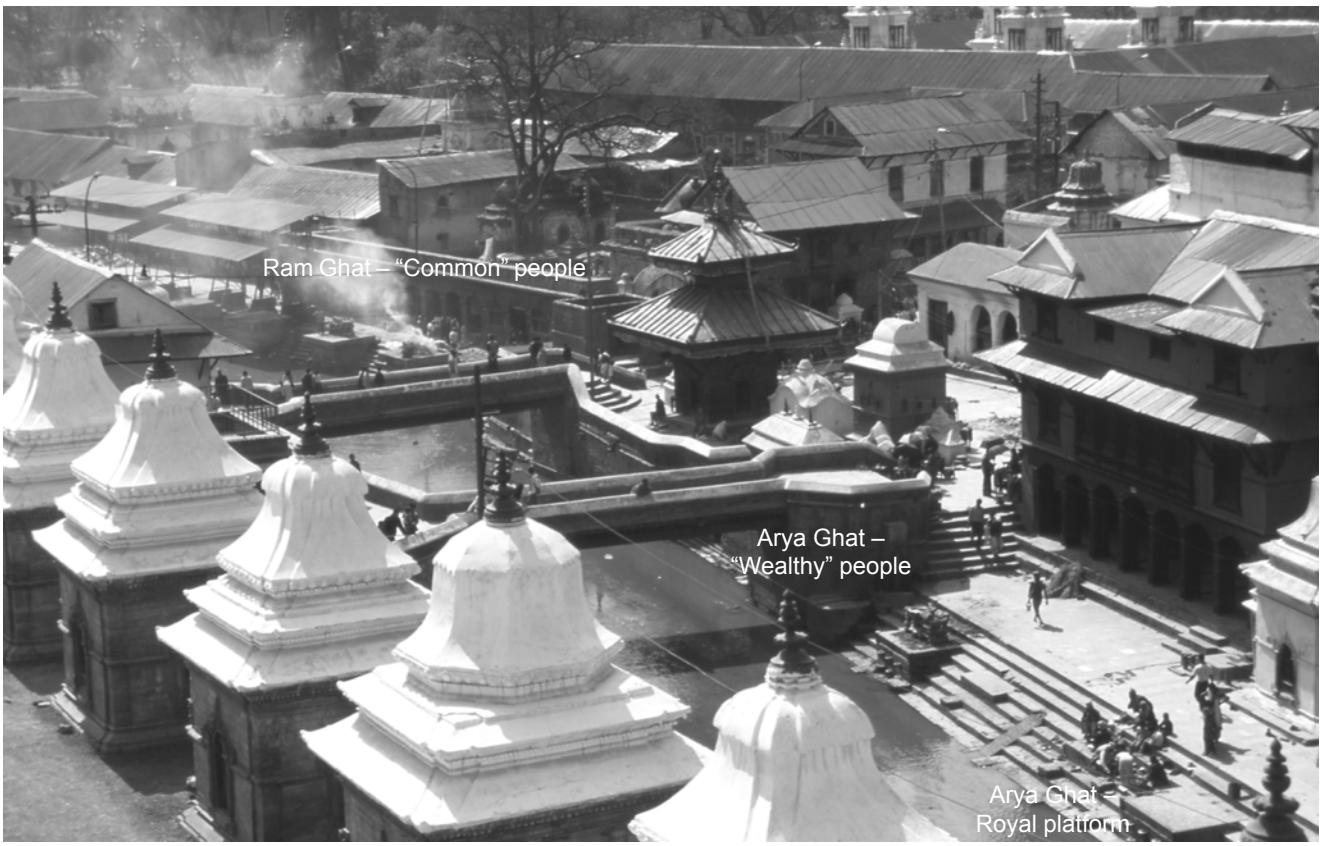

Figure 4. Pashupatinath with the different ghat-areas. The royal platform is the northernmost, followed by the cremation platform for the 'wealthy', and finally the southernmost platforms for the 'common' people.

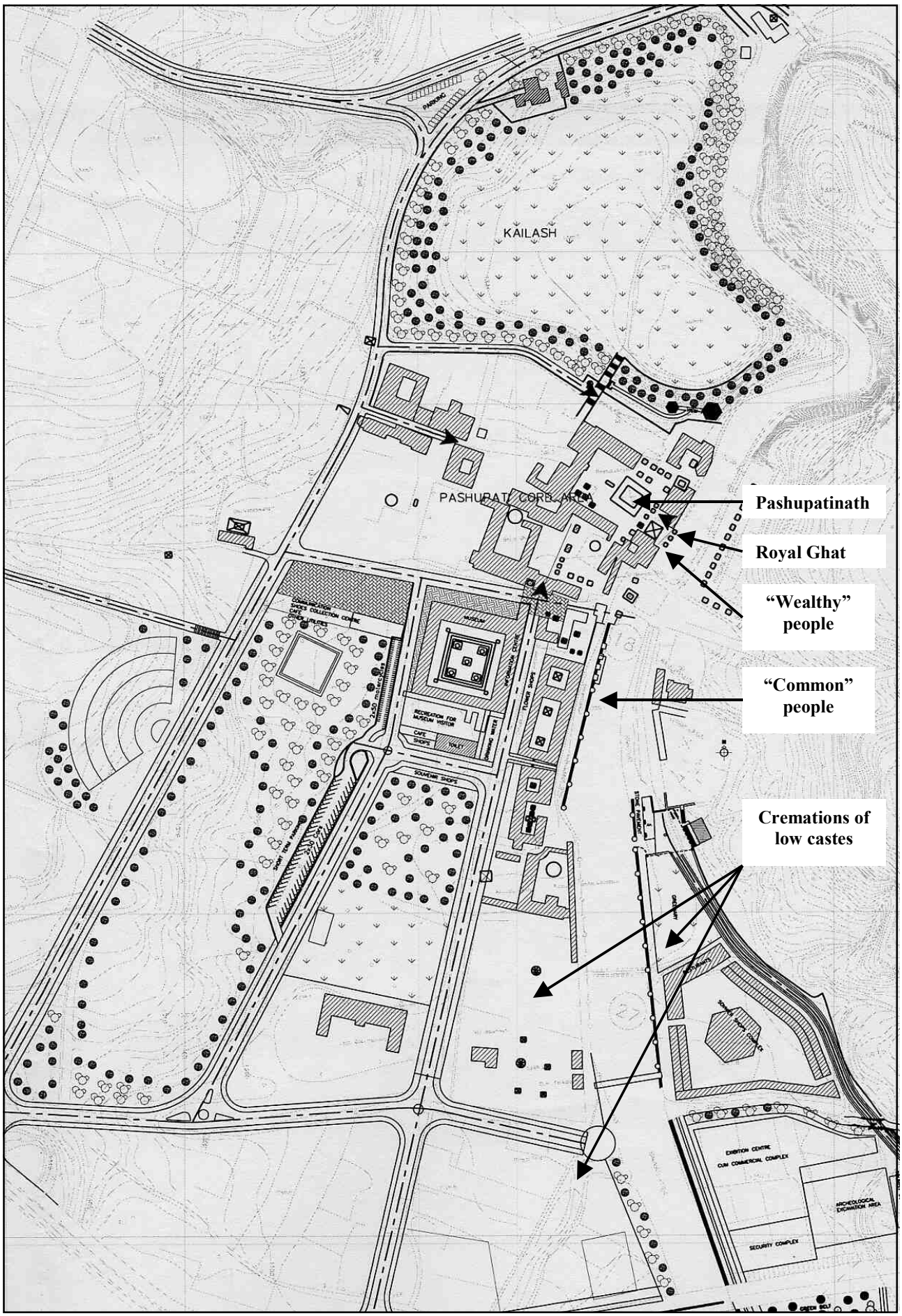

Figure 5. Aerial view of the spatial distribution of cremations according to caste (map courtesy of Senior Engineer Rabi Ratna Tuladhar, Pashupatinath Area Development Trust).

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