

THE CAREER OF BHANUBHAKTA AS A HISTORY OF NEPALI NATIONAL CULTURE, 1940-1999

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Introduction

In recent years, national culture, nationalism and ethnicity have been three of the major concerns of social analysts worldwide. The sources that led to this attention are diverse. They include changes in the political systems adopted by various countries in different parts of the world, the rise of 'national', 'sub-national' or 'ethnic' movements across continents and the development of pertinent scholarly trends across disciplines. However, in the context of Nepal, the main reason why scholars have paid attention to activities in the realm of and debates about national culture, nationalism and ethnicity must be sought in the social movements that have arisen since the *Jana Andolan* (People's Movement) of 1990. Under the new dispensation, it has become possible for Nepalis to openly debate (in various fora including media and academia), and with emotional force, about their national culture, nationalism and ethnicity. Social activists have begun to ask what was encompassed by and what was excluded from the national Nepali identity promoted by the state during the three decades of the Panchayat era (1962-1990) and to inquire about new cultural possibilities of being a Nepali national. In other words, as such activists began openly to promote sub-national or ethnic identities such as that of Newars, Tamangs, Gurungs, Rais, Magars, Thakalis or any of the other 60 plus ethnic groups, researchers of Nepal followed through by paying attention to their activities under the scholarly rubric of nationalism or ethnic activism.

Amongst writings that have already been brought out in the public domain, it is easy to see (for examples, see Onta 1996b) that Nepali social scientists working on themes related to national culture, nationalism and ethnicity have been predominantly concerned with the future. Their prescriptive writings have urged the creation of a Nepal that is more inclusive, one where diversity, as embodied in Nepal's various janajatis and *jatis*, regions, religions, languages, and cultures, can actually flourish. This is surely a commendable venture to be part of, and Nepali scholars from various disciplines have been at the forefront of this exercise. However, Nepali historians, by and large, have not been part of this

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activity. Considered historical writings on the subject that could throw light on the present configurations of Nepali national culture, nationalisms and ethnicities, and possibly even give pointers about where we might head from here, have been missing. When turning their attention to matters related to nationalism, Nepali historians have been prone to regurgitate commonplace narratives of the growth of the Nepali state (e.g., Adhikari 2045 v.s.). They begin, as can be expected, with the story about the 'unification' of territorial Nepal, and reiterate, without being critical, the general and thematic claims of glorious *bir* (brave) history reified during the thirty years under the Panchayati dispensation (Onta 1996a). Alternatively when Nepali historians of Nepal have turned their attention to matters related to the domain of culture, they have been prone to restrict their discussion to talk about food, drinks and ornaments consumed in Nepal, or the festivals celebrated here (e.g. Shrestha 1997, Vaidya et al. 1993). This lack of attention on the part of Nepali historians to the social history of Nepali national culture and nationalism may have multiple explanations. But what seems to be the foremost factor at work is that for many such historians, Nepali national culture and nationalism seem 'naturally' present in the 'organic' growth of the Nepali state. Hence from their point of view, there is no history of nationalism or national culture to research apart from a recounting of the consolidation of the Nepali state and its version of *bir* history.

In contrast, for non-Nepali scholars of Nepal, during the past decade the cultural history of Nepali nationalism and of various ethnicities have been captivating themes, but themes caught in their own webs of "excess plausibility" (Ludden 1993). Non-Nepali historians and anthropologists writing in the 1990s who are trying to figure out the terrain of Nepali nationalism have succumbed, more often than not, to analytical accounts narrated in very general terms in which much of the agency for historical change is attributed to the 'Nepali state', itself captive to the fancies of nameless Hindu Parbatiyas (Bahuns and Chettris). In other words, the history of the actual agents and institutions that built the dominant Nepali national culture is missing from their accounts (cf. Fisher 1997). While extending a gesture of sympathy or solidarity to the non-Bahun/Chettri Nepalis—about whom ethnography exists aplenty—the need to do an ethnography of the historical formation of dominant Nepali national

culture is obviated.¹ These aspects of Nepal scholarship are interesting from the point of view of the politics of Nepal studies.² The main point that can be derived from this brief overview is that not much good social history is being written about Nepali national culture and nationalism. Hence my main concern here is to propose, by example, *one* way to write such a history.

What would a “good” history of Nepali national culture or nationalism amount to? First of all, we need to be able to distinguish between the history of the formation of the Nepali state and the history of the development of Nepali national culture or nationalism. These two histories are related but they are not the same. With respect to the history of Nepali national culture or nationalism, we need to pay attention to the world that various agents have produced, engaged in and embodied in the name of the Nepali nation over the last one hundred plus years. It means describing richly the work of agents—in the form of individuals, groups, institutions and the state—and the social-structural conditions within which they produced the activities, affiliations, celebrations, clothes, discourses, emblems, emotions, icons, identities, idioms, indexes, institutions, memories, monuments, photographs, representations, signs, souvenirs, stamps, statues, symbols and texts that embody and engender the entity, however abstract, imagined or contested, called the Nepali nation. The archive that could be called upon for the writing of such a history in Nepal is extensive. It includes not only those sources conventionally used by historians in the past but anything that contains the traces of the character and production of nationalism at various points in time. Yet, in any single attempt like this one, one can only choose a small part of this archive to write a partial account of the history of Nepali nationalism.

Nationalist Ideology and National Culture

¹ See, for examples, the many contributions to Gellner et al. 1997 esp. Gellner 1997, Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997 and Whelpton 1997.

² In particular, they are essential to any understanding of the political economy of how one becomes, and operates as an expert on Nepal, as a Nepali or a non-Nepali individual, within and beyond Nepal's boundaries. However, this politics is not my subject of inquiry here and will not be pursued further.

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Thus far, I have used the terms 'nationalism', 'ethnicity' and 'national culture' without introducing much definitional certainty to them. To do so, and to explicate the relationship between them, I utilize the vocabulary of a short introductory essay by anthropologist Richard Fox (1990) in a volume on nationalism and national cultures. Fox uses the term "'nationalist ideologies' to refer to sets of cultural meanings that are sometimes labeled 'nationalisms,' 'subnational identities,' and 'ethnic nationalisms'." 'Nationalist ideologies' refers to the production of conceptions of peoplehood" (Fox 1990:3). Various categorical terms such as nationalism, subnationalism, racial identity, ethnic nationalism or ethnicities that are in vogue amongst activists and scholar-analysts obscure, he argues, what can be "better understood as a single phenomenon: the production of ideologies of peoplehood, that is ideologies of common ('national') culture" (Fox 1990:3). By putting it this way, Fox argues that the 'fuzziness' associated with the various categorical terms mentioned above can be eliminated. The use of the single term 'nationalist ideologies' "leads us to see the processes by which these conceptions develop, alter, and intergrade in real life" (Fox 1990:4).

Culture, in turn, must be understood as "a set of understandings and a consciousness under active construction by which individuals interpret the world around them" (Fox 1990:10). Elaborating the relationship between a nationalist ideology and a national culture, Fox writes:

A national culture starts out as a nationalist ideology, that is, a consciousness or perception of what the nation is or should be, which then may gain public meaning and be put into action. Usually there are several coexisting and even contradictory perceptions, which constitute competitive nationalist ideologies. A national culture emerges from the confrontation over what the nation should and will be among nationalist ideologies....A national culture is always 'temporary' because, whether antique, or recent, its character and puissance are matters of historical practice; they are plastic constructions, not cultural givens (1990:4).

Emphasizing that any national culture is an outcome of historical practice has an important implication for the perceived relationship between material conditions and national cultural forms. Material conditions might influence the course of nationalisms but cannot determine it. On the other hand, cultural materials, far from being epiphenomenal as argued in some approaches to social analysis, have a "compelling effect on what happens. They constitute strong emotional commitment by individuals and even enable 'nonrational' cultural practices" (Fox 1990:6-7; cf. Fox 1989).

As a working theory to organize the empirical evidence related to my own subject of inquiry, I find Fox's explication of the relationship between a nationalist ideology and national culture to be most useful. For almost two decades now, Benedict Anderson's (1983) formulation of a nation as a politically "imagined community" has enjoyed much currency among scholar-analysts who have written about the nation. His formulation has greatly helped us to see nations as products of cultural projects. However, as has been pointed out by a number of commentators, Anderson's formulation lacked precision regarding the historical agents that played key roles in the formation and consolidation of nations as imagined communities. As another scholar of nationalism, Thongchai Winichakul has pointed out, "Anderson seems too concerned with the imagination, the conceivability of a nation....One may still wonder how such a mediator formulates the social institutions and practices which perpetuate the operation and reproduction of the imagined community in actual human relations" (1994:15). Fox's framework allows us to avoid the lacuna pointed out by Thongchai in that within it, we can easily pay attention to the social agents, institutions and practices that made a particular imagining of Nepali national community possible, all the way from its production as a nationalist ideology to its rise to national cultural dominance.

Like all cultural forms, a national culture, once dominant, compels, enables and generates certain kinds of practices. It produces definite kinds of cultural and social attachments and specific material objects. The framework used here also allows us to see the particularities of those attachments and their artefacts. It enables us to see that each national culture is not merely a poor replica of ideologies, events and processes that have happened elsewhere. In other words, the work of agents and institutions that "put into action" a specific nationalist ideology provides the historical particularities that differentiate one national culture from another, warranting study of each in chronological, substantial, spatial and material terms (cf. Alonso 1988, 1994). For instance, with respect to space, the processes associated with the making of national cultures everywhere encompass a paradox. As Ramaswamy (1994) has argued, nationalizing the local and localizing the national are two contrary processes that characterize the constitution of national cultures. On the one hand, national cultures need to be trans-local; on the other hand, they need to be "visible and present" in the localities that constitute them. National cultures have found various solutions to overcome this

contradiction and the particularity of these solutions too can be studied within the framework adopted here.

Bhanubhakta and Nepali National Culture

Studying the making of dominant Nepali national culture entails writing the history of inventions of important elements of that culture, the projects that supported their growth, and the various media that facilitated their distribution and reproduction. The research that will provide a comprehensive history of Nepali national culture largely remains to be done. In this article I am mainly concerned with only those agents, institutions and social technologies that help us to reconstruct, however partially, the career³—spanning six decades between 1940 and 1999 AD—of one particularly potent element of Nepali national culture, the poet Bhanubhakta Acharya (1814–1868 AD), presented in the dominant national narrative as the *adikavi* (first or original poet) of the Nepali language. As Nepali nationalists love to point out, Bhanubhakta is said to have effected the emotional unification of all Nepalis, that is, those brought together inside territorial Nepal by King Prithvinarayan Shah, through his rendering of Ramayana into colloquial Nepali. Literary history pivoting around Bhanubhakta, and celebrations (in various modes) of Bhanubhakta as the second 'unifier' of Nepal via the medium of the Nepali language (Des Chene 1996) are two important aspects of the dominant national culture. These characteristics of contemporary Nepali national culture are hardly transhistorical phenomena. A Nepali in the 1910s, for instance, would hardly have identified these characteristics as elements of the dominant Nepali national culture. They are products of the activities of multiple agents since the early decades of this century, which it is the task of this article to describe.

In an earlier article, I showed how the image of Bhanubhakta was deployed as a *jati* (in the sense of a 'people' or 'nation') symbol by Nepali nationalists in British India before 1940 (Onta 1996b). Here I continue the story where it was left off. I thus focus on the historical agents and media that have contributed to making Bhanubhakta the most recognized icon (from those selected from the level of the people, i.e., not counting Shah monarchs of Nepal) of national culture inside Nepal since 1940, at which

³ Throughout this article, I am interested in the career of 'Bhanubhakta' the nationalist icon, and not in Bhanubhakta the historical individual. The career of this nationalist icon only really got started after the death of the historical individual.

time his image travelled to Nepal from Darjeeling in a major way.⁴ Obviously, this later deployment was made possible because of the work of the earlier generation of nationalists in British India. However Bhanubhakta's career inside Nepal has flourished to an extent that, in all probability, none of the early nationalists would have anticipated.⁵

I have selected a few key aspects of the career of Bhanubhakta for discussion here: the transportation of the nationalist ideology built around Bhanubhakta to Nepal from Darjeeling, textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta as the Nepali *adikavi*, audio-visual dissemination of Bhanubhakta, the celebrations of his birthday as *Bhanujayanti* and the development of Bhanubhakta's birthplace in Chundi Ramgha in the present day Tahahu district of central Nepal—*Bhanujanmasthan*—as a site for national pilgrimage. Alternatively, analysis might have proceeded through periodization and chronological examination of events within each period. I have instead deliberately structured my exegesis to highlight the role of various technologies (print media, textbooks, radio, visual media, performance, public speech, festival, travel, etc.) used by Nepali agents to make Bhanubhakta a central aspect of Nepali national culture. Thus the narrative sections are arranged topically, with the contents of each being organized roughly chronologically.⁶

The structure of the remainder of this article is as follows: I first focus on how Bhanubhakta's image travelled to Nepal in 1940 and highlight the nationalist ideology associated with that migration. I then describe the textual means through which biographers, literary critics and historians

⁴ In this essay, I shall not have much to say regarding challenges to this making of Bhanubhakta into a national icon.

⁵ Despite his importance, Bhanubhakta's career should not be construed as being coincident with the whole history of the national culture in Nepal in the post-1940 era.

⁶ In addition, to augment the analysis presented in the text of this article, several illustrations depicting various moments in the post-1940 career and celebration of Bhanubhakta, are also included. Such visuals, it is hoped, will surpass some of the limitations of textual telling and "speak" to readers in another language. A more elaborate multi-media presentation is perhaps necessary for a complete rendering of those aspects of Nepali national culture discussed here which have themselves relied on not only textual and audio-visual media but also on performances to achieve their dominance inside Nepal.

cultivated his *adikavi* status. Not all of them thought that this title was appropriate for Bhanubhakta and hence a debate regarding his *adikavi* status raged in the decades after 1940. This textual cultivation laid the ground for Bhanubhakta's deployment as the Nepali *adikavi* in school textbooks and other media (print and electronic), and created the environment in which the dispersion of his image—sketches, posters, stamps, statues, and film—and name throughout Nepal was made possible. The cultivation of Bhanubhakta through these means was augmented by the celebration of his birthday as *Bhanujayanti* and his birthplace as *Bhanujanmasthal*, processes described in the last two sections of the paper. All these actions on the part of individuals, institutions and the state, cumulatively, contributed to making Bhanubhakta a central element in Nepali national culture and the dominant discourse associated with him a central part of the organizing narrative of Nepali national history (cf. Alonso 1988; Vartak 1999). In the conclusion, I reiterate the need to pay attention to the agents and social technologies through which national cultures are produced.

Transporting *Adikavi* Bhanubhakta to Nepal

I have previously argued that the Nepali *bhasa* (*language*) and the *bir* (brave) history of an independent Nepali nation constitute two central elements of Nepali national culture (Onta 1996b). The ground work for the making of these elements was laid during the first half of this century in British India by a small group of variously expatriated Nepalis. This group of Nepalis included both temporary migrants of a proto-middle-class and India-born children of permanent migrants from Nepal of different cultural and class backgrounds. These people 'discovered' Bhanubhakta as a potent symbol for their *jati* making nationalist ideology. To argue my case, I examined the work of Parasmani Pradhan, Dharanidhar Koirala and Suryabikram Gyawali in particular.⁷ While it is not necessary to cover that ground again, it is useful to revisit one particular work edited by Gyawali whose role in transporting Bhanubhakta to Nepal was decisive.

⁷ In literary terms, Parasmani and Gyawali were primarily essayists and Dharanidhar a poet. Together they were the major pillars of the Nepali language movement initiated in the early 1920s in the Darjeeling area. On the life and work of these three, see Onta 1996b, Chettri 1993, D. Koirala 2033 v.s., M. Koirala 2049 v.s., P. Pradhan 2044 v.s., Pradhan and Lamu 1984, and Sharma Tripathi 2049 v.s.

A volume edited by Gyawali and published in 1940 by the Darjeeling-based organization, *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* (Nepali Literature Association) to mark the 70th death anniversary of Bhanubhakta was an important milestone for the repatriation of this nationalist hero into Nepal.⁸ While the earlier works of Gyawali and others had reached Nepal through clandestine means, this volume, blessed by the Rana officialdom of Kathmandu, was decisive in starting a new era of Bhanubhakta devotion inside Nepal. As writer Tukaraj Mishra (2047 v.s.:62), who is now almost 90 years old, has recalled recently, it was only after the publication of this volume that discussions on Bhanubhakta increased inside Nepal. This volume contained essay contributions from authors based both in India and Nepal as well as statements of greetings from important political and social personalities in Nepal. Apart from his editorial preface, Gyawali published two essays on Bhanubhakta in this volume. In the editorial preface Gyawali begins by reiterating the "poor and powerless status" of his *jati* (i.e., Nepalis). The volume, he adds, does not befit the grandeur of the *jati* poet Bhanubhakta but he adds that it is a work encompassing the *bhakti* (devotion), respect and thanks of the *jati*. Gyawali describes the moment of the release of the memorial volume as one of great happiness for he says that, in so doing, his *jati* was remembering the deeds of a *mahatma* (great soul). He describes Bhanubhakta as a *mahabir* (a very brave person) from whose work the *jati* could receive lessons on life, vitality, and lustre. Only if the nation could learn these lessons, he adds, would it be able to build a true memorial in comparison to which other, physical memorials would be of no value (2026 v.s.a[1997 v.s.]:ca). Gyawali further wrote:

[We can build such a memorial by] doing service to the mother-tongue, extending the fields of education and by developing our character....Oh Nepalis, come, let us begin to build such a strong memorial. Let us begin our efforts to make the mother-tongue beautiful in an all-encompassing way. Like Bhanubhakta, let us

⁸ The preparation for this volume was begun in 1995 v.s. (1938 AD) which was the 70th year of Bhanubhakta's death. However it was only published in 1997 v.s. (1940 AD). Three decades later, this volume was reprinted with an additional section of new contributions to mark the 100th death anniversary of Bhanubhakta (S. Gyawali et al. 2026 v.s.[1997 v.s.]). I have denoted the Vikram Sambat that is in use in Nepal by v.s.. V.S. is ahead of AD by 57 years (Baisakh to mid-Pus) or 56 years (mid-Pus to Chait end).

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disperse knowledge amongst our population through our mother-language. Knowledge is power and energy and light that destroys darkness (2026 v.s.a[1997 v.s.]:cha).

Gyawali rhetorically asks his readers if they have heard the drums played by Bhanubhakta, calling for service to the mother-tongue and if so, why they have not answered the call. He states further that the dispersion and popularity of Bhanubhakta's work (i.e., the Ramayana in the Nepali language) is proof of the fact that Bhanubhakta was a *bir purus* (brave (male) hero) of the Nepali *jati*. He continues:

If we cannot see and understand the greatness [of Bhanubhakta] the fault lies with us....Just because our confused and educationless status does not give us a good clear view [of our past] we cannot say Bhanubhakta was not good. Bhanubhakta was good, he was big, he was majestic and since we lack those qualities we have not been able to appreciate his greatness. But time will give us eyes [to see those qualities], power to evaluate [them] and minds to understand Bhanubhakta. After that we will honour Bhanubhakta [properly] and understand his importance (2026 v.s.a[1997 v.s.]:cha).

In closing his preface, Gyawali stated that there is a lack of knowledge about Bhanubhakta amongst Nepalis due to a lack of discussion about him. Gyawali hoped that the memorial volume he had edited would at least partially eradicate this lack of knowledge about the *jati* poet Bhanubhakta and inspire Nepalis to learn more about his life.

In his two essays, Gyawali highlighted the political and historical aspects of the nationalist ideology which he and others were building around 'Bhanubhakta' the symbol. In the first, simply entitled "Bhanubhakta", he suggested that in the political confusion reigning in the country following the disastrous conclusion of the 1816 Treaty of Sagauli (see Stiller 1976 for details), young Bhanubhakta could not decide what he wanted to do with his life. This period of confusion ended with Bhanubhakta deciding to render the Ramayana in Nepali, a work which Gyawali claims has helped thousands of men and women to find their responsibilities in life (Gyawali 2026 v.s.b[1997 v.s.]:42-5). In the second essay, entitled "The Place of Bhanubhakta in the Development of the Nepali *Jati*", Gyawali began by stating that in Nepal, *bir purus* have been born from time to time and proceeded to glorify the history of the kings of Gorkha whose biographies he had already written, namely, Drabya Shah (credited for founding the kingdom of Gorkha in the mid-sixteenth

century), Ram Shah (r. early 17th century) and Prithvinarayan Shah, the mid-18th century king whose conquest campaigns resulted in a "unified" Nepal (cf. Onta 1996b). Gyawali claimed that along with the larger state put together by Prithvinarayan Shah, a Nepali *jati* was created. When Hindu freedom was lost in India, it was protected in the foothills of the Himalayas by this *jati*. But, wrote Gyawali, this *jati* was constituted by different-language-speaking Newar, Kirat, Magar, Gurung and Tamang peoples. Hence Nepali *jati*-ness could not articulate itself because of the different languages and customs of these people. An empire (i.e., the Gorkhali empire put together by Prithvinarayan Shah and his immediate successors) had been built, but the above-mentioned situation amounted to a smouldering fire that could burn away its imperial grandeur from within. In this condition, according to Gyawali, Bhanubhakta wrote his Ramayana in colloquial Nepali, a work that was read by all the constituting members of the Nepali *jati*. In Gyawali's image, Bhanubhakta's work laid the plaster upon the house of Nepali *jati*-ness that had been constructed by putting one brick upon another; the Nepali *jati* found a single language to articulate itself (Gyawali 2026 v.s.c[1997 v.s.]:64-68).

In this excessively rhetorical manner, Gyawali promoted Bhanubhakta as the *bir purus* whose work in the Nepali language represented the unity of a distinct Nepali *jati*.⁹ He also depicted Bhanubhakta as a *jati* poet, one who was the common ancestor of all Nepalis and one without whose work the territorial Nepal put together by Prithvinarayan Shah would have fallen apart. In describing his hero in these terms, Gyawali gave birth to a nationalist ideology in which the territorial unity of Nepalis at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Sagauli is described as fragile. This was sensed by Bhanubhakta, and emotional unity that makes possible the experience of Nepali *jatiness* was brought about by him through the rendering of the Ramayana in the Nepali language. Thus this nationalist ideology celebrates Nepal's territorial unity augmented by emotional unity experienced through the common act of reading the Ramayana. In so doing it also makes Bhanubhakta a common ancestor of all members of the Nepali *jati*. At a time when Gyawali and others were engaged in forging a respectable linguistic identity for Nepali *jatiness*, deploying Bhanubhakta as a common ancestor was a way to advocate recognition of Nepaliness as if it were a race. In other words, Bhanubhakta became the central

⁹ The story of Ram as the celebration of an ideal Hindu king remained in the background of Gyawali's presentation.

symbol through which talk about the existence of a collective Nepali *jati* was made possible, even as efforts to bring the latter into existence were going on.

Contributors to this memorial volume from Darjeeling included Rupnarayan Singh (one of the early novelists in Nepali), Khadgabahadur Singh, Krishnadas Pradhan, Motichandra Pradhan (the then head of the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan*), Dharanidhara Koirala, Parasmani Pradhan and Suryabikram Gyawali. Dinanath Sapkota, who had earlier been involved in the production of the periodical *Gorkhali* in Banaras, wrote an essay and a poem. These works emerge out of several decades of *jati*-making activities in British India (see Onta 1996b). It is the writings submitted by people from Nepal that provide us with the clues to conclude that Bhanubhakta's career as a national symbol got a jump-start inside Nepal with this volume.

There are several noteworthy aspects to these Nepal-based writings. To begin with, we must first note that the volume contained messages from the then Rana premier in Nepal, Juddha Shamsheer and some other important intellectual personalities of Kathmandu such as Lekhnath Paudel (one of the 'founding fathers' of modern Nepali literature), Mrigendra Shamsheer (Director General of Public Instruction), Hemraj Sharma (Director of Public Instruction, a very respected scholar of Sanskrit and author of an early grammar book for Nepali), and Rammani Acharya Dixit (ex-chairman of *Gorkha Bhasa Prakasini Samiti*).¹⁰ Contributors to the volume included Guruprasad Mainali (considered one of the 'founding fathers' of the Nepali short story), Brahma Shamsheer (who wrote one of the earliest works of criticism on Bhanubhakta inside Nepal, a work published prior to this volume), Siddhicharan Shrestha (a poet), Arjun Shamsheer, Kulchandra Gautam (a highly respected scholar), Chakrapani Sharma Chalise (a poet who also wrote extensively in prose), Balkrishna Shamsheer (who later changed his name to Sama and who is considered the Shakespeare of Nepali drama, cf. Onta 1997), Rudraraj Pandey (one of the 'founding fathers' of the Nepali novel who was also a highly respected educationist), Taranath Sharma (a writer then based in Birgunj in central south Nepal), Puskar Shamsheer (a noted short story

¹⁰ In translation, the name of this *Samiti* would be *Gorkha Language Publications Committee*. Established by the order of Rana PM Chandra Shamsheer in 1914, this Committee played the role of a gatekeeper with respect to the promotion and censor of Nepali language publications.

writer and compiler of folk epigrams), Laxminandan Sharma, Purna Das, Baburam Acharya (history 'laureate' who contributed two essays), and Mrigendra Shamsher. This is an impressive line-up of influential people from contemporary Nepal. Not only were these people intellectual and literary luminaries of the day, some of them were to play important roles in the field of education in the post-1940 era. Hence their participation in the making of this volume on Bhanubhakta is highly significant.

The second noteworthy aspect is the use of the term *adikavi*—first or original poet—to describe Bhanubhakta. It should be noted that this term was not used by Suryabikram Gyawali in the preface to the volume and in his two essays discussed above. Instead he preferred to refer to Bhanubhakta by several other titles, most notable of which was *jati* poet. This seemed quite appropriate given the structure of the nationalist ideology he and his cohort were propounding in Darjeeling. Hence it is worth noting that in his message, Rana premier Juddha Shamsher reaffirmed that Bhanubhakta was the *adikavi* of the Nepali language, thus making possible the wider use of this title by others to describe Bhanubhakta in subsequent years. It is not known if once this message from PM Juddha Shamsher was received, Gyawali informed other contributors from within Nepal about it and they, in turn, felt comfortable in using it in their own contributions to this volume. Such a possibility is likely because almost two years went by between the time initial submissions for this volume were sought and its eventual publication. Whatever may be the case, the term is used by many of the other contributors from Nepal such as Hemraj Sharma, Guruprasad Mainali, Taranath Sharma, Laxminandan Sharma, and Mrigendra Shamsher.

The term *adikavi* in reference to Bhanubhakta had first been used by Motiram Bhatta (see Onta 1996b for details). While writing Bhanubhakta's biography in 1891, Motiram described him as *adikavi* not because he was the first or original poet in Nepali. As Motiram himself recognized, there were many poets before Bhanubhakta. Instead he argued that Bhanubhakta was the *adikavi* because he was the first poet who wrote with an understanding of the *marma*—inner essence—of poetry (Bhatta 1964[1891]:5). Describing it thus, Motiram gave birth to a tradition of anointing Bhanubhakta with titles, one in which there have been many participants and many titles (Dixit 2036 v.s.[2017 v.s.]:45-53). The title *adikavi* had not been so much in use inside Nepal before 1940, perhaps because it had not been officially approved by the Rana premier. But from today's vantage point in Nepal, "Nepalka *adikavi* " is the title most used for Bhanubhakta. Hence its emphatic use by PM Juddha Shamsher and

others in the volume under discussion is noteworthy for having made this title legitimate for use inside Nepal, and for helping to transform the meaning of *adikavi* from one who understands the essence of Nepali poetry to one who exemplifies the essence of the Nepali nation. However it must be added that not all of the contributors from Nepal to this volume thought that this title was appropriate for Bhanubhakta. Affirmation and rejection of Bhanubhakta as *adikavi* within this volume itself formed an early stage in the long debate on the topic, one that has not ended even now.

The third aspect to note is that in many of the contributions, the structure of the nationalist ideology involving Bhanubhakta was identical to the one constructed by Gyawali. This is significant because what it means is that at the very initial moment of the career of Bhanubhakta inside Nepal, strong foundations of what would later become a national culture were put into place. Bhanubhakta's location in nationalist history as the second unifier of Nepal was fixed and it had only to be cultivated through various means as the years went by. Hence it can be concluded that the volume edited by Gyawali became the bridge through which Bhanubhakta the national symbol traveled to Nepal, repatriated with official sanction. In addition, the contributors to this volume were the initial agents of a larger phase of what can be called the 'cultivating *adikavi* Bhanubhakta' project.

Textual Cultivation of the Adikavi

In the years after 1940, the project of cultivating Bhanubhakta as the *adikavi* of the Nepali language began to traverse two separate but nearly parallel roads: one in the greater Darjeeling area and the other inside Nepal. At least through the decades of the 1940s and the 1950s, Darjeeling-based devotees of Bhanubhakta took the lead and their actions were closely followed and imitated by those inside Nepal. While this relationship is noted below in specific instances, a detailed description of it is not pursued here. Instead, I discuss how the *adikavi* was cultivated through textual means, focusing for the most part on efforts inside Nepal. The corresponding details for the case of the audio-visual media will follow in the next section. It must be remembered that both these aspects of the cultivating Bhanubhakta project happened concomitantly with the gradually expanding celebrations of Bhanubhakta's birthday as *Bhanujayanti* and of his birth location as *Bhanujanmasthal*, subjects discussed later.

Many people who were close to the world of Nepali literature participated in this project of cultivating Bhanubhakta in one way or other in the decades after 1940. They did so either simply by repeating the narrative of Bhanubhakta's location in Nepali history as elaborated by Gyawali and others in Darjeeling or by taking specific positions on one or other point of contention regarding Bhanubhakta's life, his writings or his importance as a national symbol. Many also did research on various aspects of Bhanubhakta's life and work, and facilitated the publication of reprint editions of the latter. Others wrote plays & poems about him, or made reference to him in works that did not directly deal with him. The participation of literary scholars, critics and others in this affair was widespread.

This textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta took place in the form of book-length studies or articles in newspapers, periodicals, and books. It also happened through the re-publication of his works or lessons on his work and life in textbooks for school students. To get some sense of how Bhanubhakta was textually cultivated by the literary critics, writers and historians during these decades, let us consider the more important works published during the period.¹¹ These are deemed important because they added new dimensions to what was then known about Bhanubhakta. In addition, since most of those involved in producing work on Bhanubhakta were people with a social reputation, these writings arrived in the hands of the general Nepali reading public with the stamp of authority.

In terms of book-length works, we should first mention Brahma Shamsheer Rana's *Kavi Bhanubhakta* (1995 v.s.), based for the most part on Motiram Bhatta's biography of Bhanubhakta originally published in 1891 (Bhatta 1964[1891]). Two years later, the above-discussed memorial volume edited by Gyawali was published. The following year, *Bhanubhakta-Manimala* was published by Bhanubhakta's granddaughter Bishnumaya Devi in which clarifications regarding his birthdate and some of his erstwhile unpublished poems were published (Acharya and Acharya 1998 v.s.). In the year 2000 v.s. (1943) Balkrishna Sama (2049

¹¹ What follows does not contain the names of all those who might have participated in this project simply because they are too numerous to be listed here or their works have not come to my attention for lack of direct access to the publications in which they appeared. Some parts of this section might read like an annotated bibliography but that is a hazard associated with the writing strategy chosen here in order to highlight the media through which the cultivation effect was realized.

v.s.a[2000 v.s.]) published his famous play, *Bhakta Bhanubhakta*.¹² Sama's play, which covers the life-time of Bhanubhakta from the time he was eighteen to the moment of his death, is also largely based on the biography by Motiram. However, Sama has added a few interesting details from his own imagination. Amongst these, Bhanubhakta's meeting with the infant Motiram Bhatta is the most noteworthy. By adding this encounter, Sama draws an imaginary link between Bhanubhakta and the person who, later in life, was to popularize his life and work. This play was performed by various groups of artists in subsequent years. When Gaurishankar Natya Samudaya put up this play in Kathmandu in 1945 AD, a report published in *Gorkhapatra* (2002 v.s.)—then the sole newspaper—praised the play and the performance for their 'Nepaliness'. Almost four decades later, extracts from this play found a place in a Nepali language textbook used in grades nine and ten (U. Dixit 2039 v.s.:155-62), and in the film on Bhanubhakta released in 1999.

In his famous collection of essays entitled *Laxmi Nibandha Sangraha*, Laxmiprasad Devkota, himself called the *Mahakabi* ('Great Poet'), described Bhanubhakta as the most impressive person in the history of Nepali literature (2050 v.s.[2002 v.s.]: 26-32). Given Devkota's own stature within the world of Nepali literature and the inclusion of his book in various curricula as a foundational text of Nepali essays, this recognition can be considered an important milestone in the cultivating Bhanubhakta project. A year later, historian Baburam Acharya (2017 v.s.[2003 v.s.]), in his *Purano Kavi ra Kavita*, discussed both Bhanubhakta's work and the *adikavi* controversy.¹³ Parasmani Pradhan (2009 v.s.) then edited *Bhanubhakta Granthavali*, a compendium of works of Bhanubhakta including the Ramayana. Bhaichandra Pradhan (1952) published a critical study under the title *Adikavi Bhanubhakta Acharya*. During Bhanubhakta's birthday celebrations in Kathmandu in

¹² The 13th edition of this play was published in 2049 v.s. Its print run was 10,000 copies. The previous edition, published a year earlier, had a print-run of 2,100. The sale of these copies must be judged in the context of the market in Nepal where most literary works have a print-run of 1000 copies and only a few see a second edition. The inclusion of this play in the college-level Nepali curriculum accounts for its huge sales.

¹³ Acharya's book is one of the foundational texts in the field of Nepali literary history.

2010 v.s., poet and playwright Bhimnidihi Tiwari announced that he would write a volume on *var siksa* (Education of the Groom) to complement Bhanubhakta's *Vadhu Siksa* (Education of the Bride). This he managed to do before the end of the year and both were published in a single volume in 2012 v.s. (Acharya and Tiwari 2025 v.s.[2012 v.s.]). A writer of Marxist bent, Hridayachandra Singh Pradhan (2013 v.s.) wrote *Bhanubhakta: Ek Samiksa*, critically examining various facets of Bhanubhakta's life and work. His book, we can say, was central to the cultivation of the debate on the *adikavi* status of Bhanubhakta, and for initiation of attention to the national poet on the part of Marxist writers in Nepal.

Critic and historian Balchandra Sharma (2014 v.s.) wrote *Bhanubhakta* and this was published by *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* in Darjeeling. A shorter version by the same author later found a place in the first anthology of literary criticism published by the government owned publishing house, Sajha Prakashan (B. Sharma 2025 v.s.). Narnath Sharma Acharya (2017 v.s.), who was a member of the Acharya clan from Bhanubhakta's birthplace Chundi Ramgha, published a biography of Bhanubhakta based on documents and oral family sources. As he acknowledges in the preface, some of the costs of this publication were covered by the then recently established Nepal Academy and he also received help from Suryabikram Gyawali who had then just come to Nepal from Darjeeling. The author commented upon many previous arguments about Bhanubhakta's life and work and provided correctives to some of the popular views. A much enlarged second edition (done with the help of Narnath's three sons—Shivaraj Acharya, Sambaraj Acharya and Jayaraj Acharya—who had in the meantime participated in the Bhanubhakta cultivation project through their own research and writing about the poet) appeared in 2036 v.s.

In the 1960s two important books were published. One was the second edition of *Bhanubhakta Smarak Grantha* to mark the poet's 100th death anniversary (Gyawali et al 2026 v.s.[1997 v.s.]). This edition contained the original edition published 30 years earlier and a new section set off as Part II. In the latter, several writers of repute based in India and Nepal contributed poems or essays. To mark the same anniversary, *Nepali Sahitya Parisad* of Darjeeling published a volume entitled *Bhanubhaktaka Kriti: Adhyayanharu*. Edited by the noted Darjeeling-based writer Indrabahadur Rai (1969), this volume contained critical essays on Bhanubhakta's writings by well-known Nepali critics and scholars based in India. Another biography of Bhanubhakta emerged from Muktinath Acharya (2029 v.s.). Dayaram Shrestha's (2041 v.s.) book

locating Bhanubhakta's Ramayana in the tradition of Hindu stories about Ram was published by the Department of Information of the Nepal government. Muktinath Acharya (2042 v.s.) also produced yet another biographical account. Suman Dhakal (2045 v.s.) wrote a book with the title *Kavi Bhanubhakta ra Unka Kehi Sahityik Paksa*, which is a useful guide to the literature on Bhanubhakta and the various arguments that have been made about him. Shambhuprasad Dhungel's *Shree Adikavi Bhanu Bhaktacaryako Jivan-Caritra* (2049 v.s.) was published, about 80 years after it was written. Commentary on the authenticity of many aspects of Bhanubhakta's biography continues apace (e.g., T. Mishra 2047 v.s., Sharma Bhattarai 2055 v.s., Kaundinnyayan 2056 v.s.). It must also be noted that even as scholarly debate on various facts about Bhanubhakta's life continues, many cameo biographical accounts of him have appeared as chapters in books about Nepali (literary) heroes meant for consumption by children and adult neo-literates (e.g., Joshi 2044 v.s., Parajuli 2049 v.s.). These chapters reify the elements of the narrative about Bhanubhakta put together by Gyawali in 1940.

The government of Nepal established the *Bhanubhakta Janmasthal Bikas Samiti* (Committee for the Development of Bhanubhakta's Birthplace; hereafter BJBS) in 2052 v.s. and it has, among other activities, published two books related to Bhanubhakta in 1999 A.D. BJBS has also produced a film, *Adikavi Bhanubhakta*. As part of the preparation for the making of the film, a contingent of six people visited various potential shooting locations in Nepal and India. An interesting account of this survey trip was written by one of Nepal's premier literary historians, Ghataraj Bhattarai (2054 v.s.) who later played a cameo role in the film. Bhattarai's book, however, is not among the two published by BJBS which are *Bhanu Bicarana* by Kamal Dixit (2056 v.s.) and *Adikavi Bhanubhakta Paṭkathabya* Yadav Kharel (2056 v.s.). Dixit's book is a compilation of articles written by him about Bhanubhakta and various aspects of the Bhanubhakta cultivation project over the last 45 years. They include Dixit's research on the publication of Bhanubhakta's texts, his travels to Chundi Ramgha and other places in connection with *Bhanujayanti* or in preparation for the shooting of the film, the making of audio tapes of Bhanubhakta's Ramayana (a project in which Dixit was one of the early facilitators) and more than ten essays related to the making of the film. As the coordinator of the film production sub-committee of BJBS and as someone who competently acted the role of Bhanubhakta's grandfather, Shreekrishna Acharya, in the film, Dixit has turned out to be one of the most devoted adherents of Bhanubhakta in Nepal since 1940. The preface

to this book was written by politician Narhari Acharya who is also a member of the Acharya clan of Tanahu. The second BJBS book, *Adikavi Bhanubhakta Paṭkatha*, is the script of the film written by director Yadav Kharel. Each of the 120 scenes from the film is presented with a photograph and detailed script pertaining to that scene. The book includes several appendices in which the list of actors, playback singers and the film crew are given.

In the years covered here (1940 to 1999), other relatively obscure books on themes related to Bhanubhakta have also been published. Also various works of Bhanubhakta's were reprinted by different individuals and institutions in Nepal and India. While we do not have a good account of how widely these books circulated, we know that cumulatively they have reached an influential group of Nepalis, ones who were in a position to produce further work on Bhanubhakta, textual and otherwise. As such, there is no doubt that these books, and their writers and publishers have made important contributions to the cultivating Bhanubhakta project.

The second form of the textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta occurred through the voluminous writings about him published in magazines, literary journals and the feature sections of newspapers. These articles—particularly newspaper articles—reached a relatively larger section of the Nepali reading public (in comparison with the books discussed above). They were also the means through which many of the discussions and debates about Bhanubhakta were carried forward. In that sense, they kept Bhanubhakta the national symbol very visible amongst the reading public in Nepal. However, many newspaper writings, except those that appeared in *Gorkhapatra* (e.g., M. Sharma 2011 v.s.) are not easily accessible to researchers now.¹⁴ Some of them, and some of the articles that appeared in various periodicals have later appeared as book chapters in the collected essays of the concerned authors, or in anthologies, some of which were used or are still being used as prescribed textbooks in school or college-

¹⁴ Gorkhapatra is available in microfilm at the National Archives of Nepal for the period before 2019 v.s. Hard copies are available there for the subsequent years. This lack must be attributed to the absence of a good reference library for these materials. Had the microfilming project at Kathmandu's Madan Puruskar Library, the world's largest repository of Nepali language materials in the world not been stalled, access to these publications would have been better by now. Incidentally, the collection now held at this library originated as the private collection of Kamal Dixit.

level Nepali language and literature courses.¹⁵ While analyzing this corpus it is worth noting that in some cases, the same author wrote two types of articles on Bhanubhakta, apparently keeping two sets of readers in mind: one for students and the other for their literary peers.¹⁶

The role played by various literary journals in facilitating the cultivation of Bhanubhakta in the post-1940 era must also be stressed here. In the late 1940s, *Bharati*, published from Darjeeling with none other than Parasmani Pradhan as editor, took the lead in this matter. From its very first issue dated June 1949, it published various types of materials related to Bhanubhakta and some of his own shorter works. In its inaugural issue it commenced serial publication of a long article on Bhanubhakta by Suryabikram Gyawali (1949). The first issue of its third volume dated Asar 2008 v.s. (July 1951) was a special issue dedicated to Bhanubhakta. In the 1960s and the 1970s, *Diyalo*, brought out by *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* in Darjeeling also provided space to articles related to Bhanubhakta. Inside Nepal, in the 1960s and 1970s, *Gorkhapatra*, *Ruprekha*, *Bhanu* and *Madhuparka* provided the most visible forums for articles on Bhanubhakta. *Bhanu* published an influential special issue of almost 400 pages on Bhanubhakta in Asoj 2028 v.s. (1971) to which many of the well-known writers of the time contributed pieces. This issue brought many of the debates on Bhanubhakta into sharp relief and several of the contributions made therein were later collected in other volumes. Around the same time, a special Bhanubhakta issue of the journal *Sarangi*, published from Janakpur, a town in southeast Nepal, was brought out. It contained poems and critical essays by many contributors and provides clues to one of the regional cultivating Bhanubhakta projects.

¹⁵ For examples of chapters related to some aspect of Bhanubhakta that are included in collected works or anthologies, see Upadhyaya 2032 v.s., Parajuli 2045 v.s., R. Sharma 2049 v.s., among many others.

¹⁶ One such example is the set of two essays by one of the most well-known critics of Nepali literature, Ishwar Baral. Baral's essay (2006 v.s.) entitled "Bhanubhakta" was first published in the journal *Bharati* in Darjeeling and later included in the anthology of exemplary Nepali prose for 10th grade students, *Nepali Gadhya Sangraha* (B. Bhattarai 2014 v.s.:246-254). His other essay (2055 v.s.[2011 v.s.]) was published in the Kathmandu-produced literary journal *Pragati* and has been included in his most recent collection of writings, published posthumously.

For the period since 1970, the greatest number of articles related to Bhanubhakta in literary journals have been published in the monthly, *Madhuparka*, published by the government-owned Gorkhapatra Corporation. This is perhaps the case simply because of the longevity of this periodical. In the 1970s, the Bhanu Sewa Samiti (Bhanu Service Committee, about which more will be said in the next section) published a journal called *Bhanudarsan*. Editorially dominated by members of the Acharya clan of Chumdi Ramgha, this journal represented what might be called the Tanahu view on Bhanubhakta, one advocated by people who made special claim to the national hero by exhibiting their clan membership and territorial origins. Since the mid-1980s, the monthly literary journal, *Garima*, has also provided space for many Bhanubhakta-related articles.

While I have mentioned journals that have played a prominent role in the Bhanubhakta cultivation project, others not mentioned here also contributed to this project.¹⁷ *Rastrabhasa*, an annual publication of *Nepali Siksa Parishad* (Nepali Education Council), has published many materials that highlight the 'inside story', as it were, of the Bhanubhakta cultivation project. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of poems and articles of various types related to Bhanubhakta have been published in Nepali newspapers and magazines in the last half century.

Besides the above histories, distinguished by type of publication, a third form of textual cultivation should be noted. This occurred through the participation of literary critics and historians on either side of the debate regarding Bhanubhakta's status as *adikavi*. While a whole host of analysts including Mrigendra Shamsher, Baburam Acharya, Balchandra Sharma, Kamal Dixit, and Ghanshyam Upadhyaya 'Kandel' (2035 v.s.) continued to argue that this title was appropriate for Bhanubhakta (cf. J. Acharya 2033 v.s.), others like Dinanath Sapkota, Balkrishna Sama, Hridayachandra Singh Pradhan, Ananda Dev Bhatta, Basudev Tripathi, Balkrishna Pokharel, Tanasharma (penname of Taranath Sharma) said it was not. Tanasharma (2050 v.s.[2027 v.s.]:1-9) took the position that to call someone the *adikavi* of Nepali literature was to manifest a 'traditional' and 'unscientific' view, especially so when research had clearly shown the existence of other poets before Bhanubhakta. Others like critic Ramkrishna Sharma (2038 v.s.[2026 v.s.]) have written against the entire hagiographic

¹⁷ For instance, recent issues of journals such as *Sathi* (Jeth 2054 v.s.), *Bagar* (Pus-Chait 2054 v.s. and Baisakh-Saun 2056 v.s.) and *Utsaha* (Saun 2056 v.s.) have carried articles related to Bhanubhakta. Similarly *Dayitwa* has published several articles.

celebration of Bhanubhakta. 'Progressive' literary critics like Govinda Bhatta (2054 v.s.[2028 v.s.]) and Rishiraj Baral (2054 v.s.) have also written against the celebratory mode, saying hero worship of Bhanubhakta is in keeping with the agenda of the members of the 'reactionary' classes of Nepal. But even within the camp of 'progressive' writers, people like Modnath Prasrit (2056 v.s.) have sympathetically evaluated Bhanubhakta and his contributions to Nepali language and literature.¹⁸ Participated in by some of the most prominent contemporary literary personalities of Nepal, this debate about Bhanubhakta's *adikavi* status was fiercely conducted until the mid-1970s, but some form of it continues even today (e.g., Lamajel 2051 v.s.; Basti 2055 v.s.; A. Bhattarai 2056 v.s.; M. Shrestha 1999). The debate took place through articles in print media (newspapers and magazines), literary journals, and chapters in edited volumes or books. No matter what position any individual participant took in this debate, he or she contributed to keeping Bhanubhakta, the national symbol, visible in the life of the Nepali nation (cf. Verdery 1990).

A fourth form of the textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta is evident in the writing of the history of Nepali literature. In particular, between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, there was an ongoing debate regarding how to periodize Nepali literary history. One influential formulation was simply to break down this history into 'ancient', 'medieval', and 'modern' with debate centring on the question of the years to be assigned to each of these periods. However, an alternative proposal came from the then fiery critic Tanasharma (aka Taranath Sharma). In his *Nepali Sahityako Itihas* (2027 v.s.), one of the first comprehensive accounts of the history of Nepali literature, he introduced what he called the "Bhanubhakta Purva Yug" (Pre-Bhanubhakta era) and "Bhanubhakta Yug" (Bhanubhakta era) as a way to talk about two periods of Nepali literature (2027 v.s.:6-12). Tanasharma argued that since "the literary personality of Bhanubhakta Acharya could explicitly express itself" (2027 v.s.:10) and his Ramayana was a great work marking the beginning of a new era of Nepali literature dominated by religious and *bhakti* oriented texts, it was appropriate to name this era after Bhanubhakta. The era that preceded Bhanubhakta, Sharma argued, could be called "Prithvi yug" (Prithvi era) in honour of King Prithvinarayan Shah but when further research brought to light

¹⁸ Many members of this camp do not recognize Modnath Prasrit of 2056 v.s. as a member. They view him as a writer who has joined the 'reactionary' camp in recent years.

works of Nepali literature that were written before this Prithvinarayan's time, it would introduce difficulties. Hence to keep the doors of research open, the era of Nepali literature before Bhanubhakta was called the "Pre-Bhanubhakta Era" by Tanasharma. Since then Tanasharma's periodization of Nepali literature, centred around Bhanubhakta, has been followed and repeated by other historians (e.g., Bhandari 2053 v.s.) .

Sharma's proposal, put forth in his 2027 v.s. book, is interesting for its timing as well as its content. As will be recalled from the above discussion, at that time he was engaged in a fierce debate with those who liked to call Bhanubhakta the *adikavi* of Nepali literature. Even when he was against the use of the term *adikavi* to describe Bhanubhakta because it was "unscientific" to call anyone the original poet, he was for using the national hero's name to designate two entire eras of Nepali literature. Not only did Tanasharma choose to name eras of Nepali literature around Bhanubhakta, he also entitled a contemporaneous collection of his critical essays (2050 v.s.[2027 v.s.]), *Bhanubhaktadekhi Tesro Ayamsamma* (From Bhanubhakta to the Third Dimension). What this suggests is that even for critics who refused to call Bhanubhakta the Nepali *adikavi*, the latter's constructed national personality was so overwhelming that they chose to organize their own writings and analyses around Bhanubhakta.

The fifth form of textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta relates to how the Nepali state took advantage of the ambiance created by all the above described activities. The Nepali state was not intensely involved in the textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta at least through the early 1960s. But in the late 1960s (2024 v.s.), as part of the Panchayat system's nationalist policies, Bhanubhakta was declared a *ras̥triya bibhuti* (national hero) and cameo accounts of him were distributed in publications of the Department of Information (e.g., K.C. 2055 v.s.[2028 v.s.]:42-45). When the so-called New Education System Plan was put into place in 1971 by the Panchayati government, dispersion of Bhanubhakta as a foundational symbol of the Nepali nation through nationalized textbooks began to assume great significance (e.g., Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.a; Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.b; G. Sharma 2032 v.s.; Parajuli et al. 2039 v.s.).

Since this is an important topic in its own right, I have treated it at some length elsewhere (Onta n.d.). Here it is sufficient to note a few points. The first is that the chapters on Bhanubhakta in several of the textbooks present him as the *adikavi* of the Nepali language. These lessons do not give even a hint of the fact that the appropriateness of the title itself has been debated amongst literary critics and scholars. Those who prepared the textbooks were either direct participants in the

Bhanubhakta cultivation project or people who had been influenced by arguments made on behalf of the *alikai*. In either case, they were interested in conveying an image of Bhanubhakta that was devoid of contestations. Second, they present Bhanubhakta as the second unifier—a unification based on language, culture and emotions—of Nepal, following the territorial unification effected by King Prithvīnārāyaṇ Shah. As such, the core structure of these stories repeat the narrative style and elements first put together by Gyawali and others in or before 1940.

Third, Motiram's role in making Bhanubhakta visible to the Nepali nation is always emphasized and nowhere is the discovery and deployment of Bhanubhakta as a symbol of *jāti* identity by the likes of Suryabikram Gyawali and others from Darjeeling (i.e., outside of Nepal) stated. Fourth, the space of the circulation of these textbooks is almost coincident with the territory of Nepal. This is so because primary schools have expanded in a phenomenal way in Nepal over the last three decades. Even if we were to just count the number of students who have passed through grade five (by which time the textbooks would have already introduced Bhanubhakta to the students) in the last 30 years, it would exceed several millions. Fifth, the productive effect of textbook cultivation of Bhanubhakta can be seen in the way in which school students have participated in the cultivating Bhanubhakta project itself. In addition to participating in various types of celebrations held during the course of *Bhanujayanti*, school students contribute poems and essays on Bhanubhakta in the 'Children's Section' of newspapers and magazines.¹⁹ It is in the use of the educational texts that the Nepali state's agency in the making of Bhanubhakta a dominant part of Nepali national culture is most significant. These textbooks are the instruments that have shaped the memory of two generations of Nepali students regarding Bhanubhakta and other national heroes (cf. Onta 1996c).

Textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta was achieved through the use of all the print-based media and genres described above. While each individual medium had certain limitations, in their totality, they more or less covered all of the reading space within Nepal. In so doing, we can assume that they were able to reach most of the reading public in Nepal.

¹⁹ For a few examples of such writings we can refer to a short essay by eighth grader Vikran S Kafley (1999), a poem by sixth grader Susrut Timilsina (2056 v.s.), a poem by eighth grader Santanu Pradhan (2056 v.s.), and another poem by tenth grader Subash Neupane (2056 v.s.). Many other examples exist in my research files.

While certain types of publications contained debates on the *adikavi* status of Bhanubhakta, these writings contained practically no opposition to the nationalist ideology built around him by Gyawali. Hence instead of having to expend its energy to win over competing nationalist ideologies, the project of textual cultivation of Bhanubhakta could firmly secure his position in the dominant national culture in Nepal.

Audio-Visual Cultivation of the Adikavi

The role of the radio in disseminating Bhanubhakta the national symbol inside Nepal is not small although no significant radio archive exists to document this process in any satisfactory way. Some of the materials that were broadcast have been later printed and some broadcasted material was drawn from published works. Fragmentary evidence gives us some idea of what was said over the air waves through Radio Nepal many years ago. For instance, an essay by the late Ratnadhaj Joshi (2009 v.s.), a well-known critic of his time, provides commentary on various evaluations of Bhanubhakta that were current in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Kashinath Tamot's (2032 v.s.) essay—a guide-like account of his trip to Bhanubhakta's birthplace, Chundi Ramgha, and a description of its physical and historical environs—was broadcast over Radio Nepal during the *Bhanujayanti* celebrations of 2030 v.s. More recently, to mark the occasion of *Bhanujayanti* two years ago, extracts from the Sundarkanda of Bhanubhakta's Ramayana were sung by Govinda Acharya on Radio Nepal's literary program upon the request of the program host, Yagyanidhi Dahal (2055 v.s.). Given that radio is still the most influential national medium in terms of reach, Radio Nepal's role in the cultivation of Bhanubhakta cannot be minimized, although we are not in a position to study it in detail. In more recent times, with the arrival of FM stations in Kathmandu, Bhanubhakta's works and discussions about him have been aired over Radio Sagarmatha (FM102.4), a public broadcasting station. Apart from weekly airing of a recording of Bhanubhakta's Ramayana produced by Music Nepal, Radio Sagarmatha did a live broadcast of the 1999 celebrations of *Bhanujayanti* in Kathmandu. This broadcast included coverage of the proceedings of the ceremony held in front of the statue of Bhanubhakta and the subsequent

march around the city, interviews with two key organizers and conversation with two participating school students.²⁰

Perhaps because the reach of Radio Sagarmatha is limited to the Kathmandu Valley, a listener has suggested that Radio Nepal, with an almost country-wide reach, broadcast the tapes of Ramayana as part of its early morning religious broadcast (Pokhrel 2056 v.s.). This production of Ramayana by Music Nepal in eleven cassettes had its origin, as mentioned earlier, in the program hosted over Radio Nepal by Yagyanidhi Dahal during the *Bhanujayanti* of 2054 v.s., a fact that was overlooked in the official launching ceremony of the cassettes on 1 Saun 2055 v.s. (17 July 1998) by the then prime minister, Girija Prasad Koirala. Impressed by Govinda Acharya's singing, Kamal Dixit, Ramesh Khakurel and Koshraj Neupane (the 'Karako' trio as they have been referred to) asked Acharya and Ambica Bhattarai to sing the entire Sundarkanda. A cassette was produced by the trio which interested the Managing Director of Music Nepal, Santosh Sharma, who later decided to produce Bhanubhakta's Ramayana, in its entirety, in audio cassettes. Accordingly Khakurel, Neupane and musician Madan Dipbani took over the responsibility for recording all of the 1319 verses in the voices of 132 people (including 44 women) from different parts of Nepal (Kantipur 2055 v.s.). Some weeks later, the cassettes were launched in Darjeeling (Dixit 2056 v.s.:66-71). The promoters of this cassette production described the venture as an attempt to reverse the loss in the practice of oral recitations of the Ramayana while celebrating the work and the memory of Bhanubhakta at the same time (Dixit 2056 v.s.:61-65; cf. Wagle 2056 v.s.).

The cultivation of Bhanubhakta the national symbol has occurred not only through textual and audio means, but also through images. The dissemination of Bhanubhakta's image in the form of sketches, posters, stamps, statues, and film is an interesting story in and of itself. Although sketches of Bhanubhakta were included in some early works about him, the dissemination of his image started in a major way only after 1940. This first happened in British India. Later, in the early 1950s, it began inside Nepal where it continues even today. The first portrait of Bhanubhakta that was made into a poster was sold to the public inside Nepal in the early 1950s.²¹ This portrait was made by Jwala Sama, daughter of the

²⁰ I was one of the two anchors who did this live broadcast, the other being Jitendra Rawat.

²¹ This paragraph is based on information obtained from Kamal Dixit.

multi-talented Balkrishna Sama. Literary scholar and Bhanubhakta devotee, Kamal Dixit says that once a statue of Bhanubhakta was established in Darjeeling's Chaurasta in 1949, Balkrishna Sama visited Darjeeling and took its photograph.²² After he came back to Nepal, he instructed his daughter Jwala to make a portrait of Bhanubhakta based on the photographs he had taken. According to Dixit, it is even suspected that Balkrishna made this portrait himself but for unknown reasons, attributed it to his daughter, who might just have applied the finishing touches. Once this portrait was ready, its conversion into a poster was facilitated by Dixit and his colleague Basudev Sharma Luintel, one of Nepal's foremost humorists, on behalf of Madan Puruskar Guthi. They took the portrait to Calcutta and made the poster there. Altogether 5000 copies of the poster were printed and they were sold for one rupee each back in Nepal. All copies were sold out in a few years. During the late 1960s, when Kamal Dixit became the chairman of Sajha Publication, a government publishing co-operative, he assigned artist Tek Bir Mukhiya to make another portrait of Bhanubhakta based on the earlier one by Jwala Sama. Mukhiya's portrait was also made into a poster and it has been printed by Sajha many times. While it is not clear exactly how many copies of it have been printed in the past 30 years or so, the number runs into many thousands. This poster is still being sold by Sajha for ten rupees.

Before we continue the story of further dissemination of Bhanubhakta's image inside Nepal, it is appropriate to dwell a bit on how the likeness for the statue erected in Darjeeling in 1949 had been determined. For this purpose we have to revisit an old debate on whether or not Bhanubhakta was photographed during his lifetime and the associated discussion regarding the basis of the sketch of Bhanubhakta that was included in the biography written by Motiram Bhatta (first published in 1891). Concluding his account of the life of Bhanubhakta,

²² A photo of this statue appears in the special issue devoted to Bhanubhakta of the periodical *Bharati* 3(1):52 in 1951. This statue was destroyed during the Gorkhaland Movement in the Darjeeling area on 8 August 1992 and was replaced by a 9-foot tall statue, also commissioned by Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, in 1996 (Bibas 2054 v.s.). For a photo showing the destroyed statue see Hutt 1997:110 and for a photo of the new statue, taken by Bikas Rauniar, see *Kantipur*, 19 Kartik, 2053 v.s. For a general history of photographic consumption in Nepal and for some specific information on Sama as photographer, see Onta (1998).

Motiram mentioned that he had written what the former's name, work and characteristics had been in his text and for those readers who were interested in knowing the physical attributes of the poet, he had provided them with his "photograph". What Motiram called the photograph of Bhanubhakta was more a sketch of the upper half of the poet's body. When this book was reprinted by *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* under the initiative of Suryabikram Gyawali in the 1920s, Gyawali remarked that it was not known whether the sketch provided by Motiram was real or imagined (i.e., based on the real Bhanubhakta or not). In the early 1950s, Gyawali recalled a past meeting with two elderly persons from Tanahu in Banaras (2008 v.s.:40-41).²³ He states that one of them, who was over 70, recalled seeing Bhanubhakta when he was a child. According to what that person told Gyawali then, Bhanubhakta was a portly character. Gyawali stated that this description matched Motiram's sketch. More recent portraits and statues made on the basis of that sketch, added Gyawali, also show Bhanubhakta as a fat or stout person. Published in the special issue of *Bharati* dedicated to Bhanubhakta, Gyawali's description of him as "*humma pareka, amma pareka*" (stout and portly) was picked up by the editors of that journal and reproduced around a portrait made popular by that periodical (see *Bharati* 3(1):42). This description has influenced all subsequent imagination of how Bhanubhakta looked, but it did not solve the question about the basis for the sketch provided by Motiram in his biography.

When Narnath Sharma Acharya published his biography of Bhanubhakta, he argued that, based on information he had obtained from another Acharya clan member, the sketch provided by Motiram was actually based on a photograph in which Bhanubhakta was shown in the company of his cousin sister Mahabidyadevi and her husband Kulakchakra Keshari Aryal (2017 v.s.:106-8). He tried to corroborate this with statements from senior members of the Acharya clan that circulated within the clan networks. His son Sambaraj Acharya (2029 v.s.) published an article on this subject in the early 1970s in which he argued that since Jang Bahadur Rana's photographs had been seen in various collections, it was fair to assume that photography as a technology had arrived in Nepal at least by the time Jang Bahadur returned from his much-discussed trip to

²³ Although he simply referred to the meeting as having taken place a long time ago, given what we know about when Gyawali's interest on Bhanubhakta was aroused, we can plausibly date this meeting to around 1920.

Europe in 1850 (see Whelpton 1983). In that context, Sambaraj further argued that even if the common folks might not have had access to photography, the family of Bhanubhakta's brother-in-law, the Aryals would have had access to it given that they were the royal gurus. Hence according to Sambaraj, a photograph including Bhanubhakta did exist and it had been used by Motiram to make the sketch published in his biography.

We are now almost certain that photography was not brought to Nepal by Jang Bahadur when he returned from Europe (Onta 1998). Based on documented history, the first photographs in Kathmandu were taken by a British person named Clarence Comyn Taylor in 1863. Taylor was the Assistant to the British Resident in Kathmandu and had arrived here in March 1863. By the time he left Nepal in November 1865, he had taken a lot of photographs (Losty 1992). Given that we know Bhanubhakta was a frequent visitor to Kathmandu and given Sambaraj's argument about why he could have had access to the medium, we can say that it is possible that Bhanubhakta was photographed by Taylor in the company of his relatives. But such a photograph has not been discovered yet amongst Taylor's known works and hence we can not resolve this question. However, we could say that even if a photograph did not exist, a painting could have existed, given how popular that medium was with Kathmandu's prominent families at the time. Such a painting (or a photograph) could have been the basis for the sketch of Bhanubhakta published in the biography by Motiram.

Whatever its origins this sketch, in turn, was the basis for the statue of Bhanubhakta erected in Darjeeling in 1949. It was commissioned by the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* at Suryabikram Gyawali's initiative. According to Jagat Chetri (2043 v.s.), the first round of talks on this subject was begun some time in early 1947 and the *Sammelan* decided to establish a Bhanu Statue Fund on 18 August 1947. Funds were raised from schools, institutions and individuals in the Darjeeling area. Gyawali raised some funds by reciting Bhanubhakta's poetry and verses from his Ramayana. The statue itself was built by an Englishman named Tompson who was in the Darjeeling area around 1947-48. Extant sketches of Bhanubhakta were provided to him and they became the basis for the statue he made. Described as a "very good person" by Gyawali, Tompson is quoted as saying, "It has been my endeavour to present him [Bhanubhakta] not only as a virtuous poet, enamoured of divineness but also as a brave

nationalist, pregnant with feelings of seething patriotism."²⁴ For the management of the construction work of the base on which the statue was placed, a certain Rajaram Babu extended managerial help. Having earlier won the Darjeeling Municipality's approval to place the statue in Chaurasta (which was an important road junction), the statue was established in its place on 17 June 1949 amidst a major ceremony in which students, well-known personalities and a military band participated. The government newspaper in Nepal, *Gorkhapatra* published a commentary praising the unveiling of the statue in Darjeeling. The paper described Bhanubhakta as the first devotee of the Nepali language and thanked all who were involved the statue-installing project (*Gorkhapatra* 2006 v.s.).

As stated earlier, photographs of that statue formed the basis for the portrait of Bhanubhakta made by Sama. Once the Sama-produced poster was made available to the public, the process of the dissemination of Bhanubhakta's portrait inside Nepal picked up pace. Apart from the early poster and its successor produced by Sajha Prakashan from the 1960s, a stamp bearing Bhanubhakta's portrait was issued in 1962 by the government of Nepal. This five paisa stamp was brought out on 29 Asar 2019 v.s. to mark the 149th birthday of the poet. In August 1962 the government also issued a stamp of Motiram Bhatta, the official guide to Bhanubhakta!²⁵ Bhanubhakta's portraits were also printed in school textbooks along with lessons on Bhanubhakta or extracts from his works (e.g., Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.a: 97; Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.b:107, G. Sharma 2032 v.s.:58, Parajuli et al. 2039 v.s.:7; Ghimlre 2044 v.s.:113). By the early 1970s, Bhanubhakta's portrait had become so recognizable that in an advertisement that appeared on the back cover of a very popular literary journal, Nepal Bank Limited used it along with the caption, "Cinnuhos—NepalkaAdikavi, Nepalko Adi Bank" (Recognize—Nepal's First Poet, Nepal's First Bank) (Ruprekha 2029 v.s.). Bhanubhatka's photograph has been further used in advertisements in recent years (e.g., Ajako Samcarpatra 2055).

²⁴ In Himalayan Times of 22 August 1948, cited in Chetri 2043:45 n3.

²⁵ It should be noted that these stamps were brought out during the early phase of the Panchayat government when it was busily engaged in solidifying its hold on power and establishing its cultural legitimacy.

Bhanubhakta's birthday was celebrated by the *Nepali Siksa Parisad* (NSP) in Kathmandu in 1953.²⁶ Immediately afterwards, talk about making a statue of Bhanubhakta began. NSP took up this project and the bust that now overlooks Rani Pokhari in downtown Kathmandu (Photo 1) was made by artist Amar Chitrakar under the direction of Balkrishna Sama. Financing was provided by Rani Jagadamba, widow of Madan Shamsher JB Rana, the youngest son of the late Rama premier Chandra Shamsher.²⁷ After some delays during which Gopal Pandey Asim persevered to finalize all the necessary arrangements, this statue in Kathmandu was inaugurated by the then head of state, King Mahendra, on *Bhanujayanti* day in 1959 (2016 v.s.).²⁸ As the project of celebrating Bhanubhakta spread to other parts of Nepal, statues of Bhanubhakta were installed in several locations and cities: the premises of Prithvinarayan Campus in Pokhara (central Nepal), Ramgha, Ghasi Kuwa, and Dhading Besi in central Nepal, Balaju in Kathmandu (made by artist Balkrishna Tuladhar and unveiled in 1994 by the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala), Birgunj and Janakpur in southern Nepal, Dharan in east Nepal, Biratnagar & Bhadrapur in southeastern Nepal. In 1999, another statue was installed in L.R.I. Higher Secondary School in Kalanki, Kathmandu. Made at a cost of 60,000 rupees, this statue was unveiled by the famous poet Madhav Prasad Ghimire as part of *Bhanujayanti* (Himalaya Times 2056 v.s.b; Gorkhapatra 2056 v.s.a).

A statue is also under construction in Diktal, a district centre in east Nepal. This statue will be made possible by *Dipawali Sahitya Pariwar* of Biratnagar (Himalaya Times 2055 v.s.). Two full-length statues are to be

²⁶ This paragraph is based on information provided by Kamal Dixit and Rama Sharma.

²⁷ During the *Bhanujayanti* celebrations in 2012 v.s. the NSP had appealed to the public for financial assistance to make this statue. A request had also been placed in the Gorkhapatra to which Rani Jagadamba apparently responded (N. Pandey 2037 v.s.:135). After her husband's early death in mid-1950s, Rani Jagadamba, who was of Indian origin, got involved in cultural work mainly due to the encouragement of Kamal Dixit and his parents, Kedarmani and Bidyadevi Dixit. Among other things, she instituted the Madan Puruskar which is the oldest literary award in Nepal.

²⁸ A photo of King Mahendra inaugurating this statue can be found in *Nepal Siksa Parisad* 2037 v.s., p. facing 94.



Photo 1: Bhanujayanti celebrations in front of Bhanubhakta's bust near

Rani Pokhari, Kathmandu, 29 Asar 2054 v.s. (Photo: Usha Tiwari)

built in Kathmandu, one in the premises of the Bhanubhakta Memorial Higher Secondary School, the other in the compound of the Royal Nepal Academy. A committee headed by Sushil Gautam Chetri is trying to raise 400,000 rupees for the former (Gorkhapatra 2056 v.s.b). This statue, to be made by artist Gopaldas Shrestha, will be located inside a garden to be called Bhanu Garden. An advisory committee for the purpose has been constituted and its members include Narahari Acharya and Jayaraj Acharya, members of the Acharya clan of Tanahu. The decision to make a statue inside the Academy, the government-sponsored institution for the promotion of arts in Nepal, was actually taken seven years ago. Artist Rabindra Jyapu will make this statue. It is said that both of these will be ready by *Bhanujayanti* of 2000 (Himalaya Times 2056 v.s.e).

The most recent visual cultivation of Bhanubhakta has happened in the form of a full-length film entitled *Adikavi Bhanubhakta*, directed by Yadav Kharel and produced by *Bhanu Janmasthan Bikas Samiti* (BJBS) with a partial grant from the state of Nepal. After much research and surveys of shooting sites (see G. Bhattarai 2054 v.s. and K. Dixit 2056 v.s. for details), the director settled on a story consisting of 120 scenes (Kharel 2056 v.s.). The script for some of these scenes was borrowed from Sama's

play, *Bhakta Bhanubhakta*, discussed earlier. The shooting was begun in October 1998 and the film was completed by late spring 1999. After months of media hype, its press showing took place on 23 June and its premier showing on 20 July 1999 in Kathmandu. On the latter occasion, HRH Crown Prince Dipendra Shah was the chief guest. Over 220 actors and actresses, many of whom in real life are literary personalities of national reckoning (and not professional actors) took part in this film, and director Yadav Kharel was assisted by a large crew of professionals (Kharel 2056 v.s.).²⁹

Touted as a 'historical' film that all Nepalis "must see" (Rajan Ghimire 2056 v.s.; K.M. Dixit 2056 v.s.), *Adikavi Bhanubhakta* was shown in three cinema halls of the Kathmandu Valley during the second half of July 1999. Much advertisement was done through large posters and hoardings (one of which can be seen in Photo 2) placed in different locations within the Kathmandu Valley. In two of those halls (one in Kathmandu and the other in Patan), the show did not last for more than a few days and in the remaining one in downtown Kathmandu (barely 100m away from where Bhanubhakta's statue is located), it lasted for about three weeks. When I went to see the film during a night show, the hall was practically empty. Just judging by its record in Kathmandu, it is tempting to consider the film a flop, but that might turn out to be a rushed conclusion given that it has not yet been shown in other parts of Nepal.

Commentaries on how the film was ill-made for various reasons appeared in different print media once the premier show took place on 20 July (e.g. K Sharma 2056 v.s.; K. M. Dixit 2056 v.s.; Raman Ghimire 2056 v.s.; Shaha 1999; P. Bhattarai 2056 v.s.a, 2056 v.s.b). Some complained about how it lacked a good storyline, others suggested that the camera work was not up to the mark. Yet others have wondered just how 'historical' this film really is. They have argued that it has failed to convey much of the sense of the setting of Chundi Ramgha of the mid-19th century. The film not only fails to provide us with a broad introduction to the physical environs where Bhanubhakta grew up, but also to the complex social composition of the mid-hills of central Nepal. In its flat portrayal of the social and cultural upbringing of Bhanubhakta, the film remains, at best, a one-sided story. It exhibits a precocious *adikavi*-in-the-

²⁹ It must be noted that a documentary on Bhanubhakta had previously been made by director Tulsi Ghimire in India. I have not seen it and as far as I know, it has never been screened in a public showing in Nepal.

making, followed by the disputed encounter with the *ghasi* (this meeting with a grass-cutter is supposed to be the fountain of



Photo 2: One of the boardings of the film *Adikavi Bhanubhakta* placed in central Kathmandu, July 1999 (photo: Bhaskhar Gautam)

inspiration for Bhanubhakta to begin his translation of the Ramayana into Nepali) and other familiar episodes from the Bhanubhakta cultivation project that had been made famous by Suryabikram Gyawali and others.

When criticisms of the film (and the means of its financing) surfaced, some of the literary personalities associated with its making and BJBS countered by saying that attempts to raise controversies about *Adikavi Bhanubhakta* are not legitimate (J. Bhattarai 2056 v.s.; Kantipur 2056 v.s.d) as Bhanubhakta is a national *bibhuti* (hero). In their view, such criticism amounts to an act of anti-nationalism (cf. Humagain n.d.).

Discussions regarding the bases on which artistic creations in any of the three media—text, audio or video—can be described as 'historical' have not taken place in any vigorous manner in Nepal. On what basis does a play or film become 'historical'? Should the standards of academic history with its own regime of evidence, modes of interpretation and conclusions be used to judge the historicity of 'historical' works of textual

or visual art? Almost half a century ago, in the preface to the second edition of Balkrishna Sama's famous play, *Bhakta Bhanubhakta*, Suryabikram Gyawali had stated: "Although historical plays are written on the basis of historical truths, literary conventions allow authors the right to add non-historical elements to augment the effect of their plays" (2049 v.s.[2010 v.s.]:na). In other words, such plays cannot stand up to the interrogation of academic history because they contain fictional elements. Referring to a person or an event in history, they are 'historical' first and foremost because of the effects they seek to produce. This applies to 'historical' films as well.

Hence, we can say that *Adikavi Bhanubhakta* is 'historical' to the extent that it tries to extend to the visual media the effect of the nationalist-hagiography interpretation of Bhanubhakta. Given that its director and producer were familiar with the potential power and reach of film as a medium, it is no surprise that they chose to portray their hero on the large screen. However despite forcing several schools to bring their wards to watch the film—a feat approved by the likes of Rawat (2056 v.s.b)—it did not survive in the market in the Kathmandu Valley for too long. Its producers probably could not foresee that making the general public watch the movie was more complicated than making students (both during the Panchayat era and now) read about Bhanubhakta in their school textbooks. However cinema audiences in other parts of Nepal might be more sympathetic to this film and it might after all succeed in disseminating its historical effect among a population as yet less influenced by textual, audio and other visual means of the cultivating Bhanubhakta project.

In the context of the making of this film, it is interesting to note the level of mutual referencing and reinforcement among various media. Not only was its script published separately as an elegant book (Kharel 2056 v.s.) but the research that went into its making and actual production work has already been described in sections of at least two other books (G. Bhattarai 2054 v.s.; K. Dixit 2056 v.s.). In the two years since mid-1997, more than 135 news items or interviews about the film, the actors and actresses involved in it, and the members of the directing staff appeared in the Nepali media. This coverage was not confined to the specialized magazines that cover the Nepali film world, but was extensive in mainstream newspapers and magazines which also published photographs from various scenes of the film and those of the members of its cast. A photo of the actor who played the role of adult Bhanubhakta was even included in an "identify the following people" type of photo competition

in a popular monthly magazine (Sadhana 2056 v.s.). The songs of this film have been released on compact disk and audio cassette.

In fact the books by Kharel (2056 v.s.) and Dixit (2056 v.s.), the compact disk and the cassette were jointly released by the Chief Justice Mohanprasad Sharma, Chief Speaker of the House of Representatives Taranath Ranabhat, Chief of the Opposition in the House of Representatives Madhav Kumar Nepal and renowned poet Madhav Ghimere during a function organized by BJBS on 18 July 1999 in Kathmandu (Himalaya Times 2056 v.s.d). Hence even if the film might be considered a flop from the point of view of audiences in Kathmandu, the huge amount of attention it has managed to get through all kinds of media can be hardly denied. The publicity it has generated for Bhanubhakta and his birthplace—through visual, textual and audio means—is so extensive that it may have already achieved some of its objectives prior to its release. By trying to forward the cause of Bhanubhakta visually on a large screen medium, devotees of Bhanubhakta have claimed a new territory. The film is also being dubbed in English, with financial assistance from the Indian embassy in Kathmandu, and will be shown in the first SAARC Film Festival in Colombo, Sri Lanka in the fall of 1999 (Himalaya Times 2056 v.s.a; The Kathmandu Post 1999).

All these projects of cultivating Bhanubhakta, designed under and to propagate a particular nationalist ideology, have contributed toward making Bhanubhakta a pillar of national culture in Nepal, recognized by most Nepalis. Textual and audio-visual media have been the means through which Bhanubhakta has been turned into the Nepali *alikai*, ancestor of all those who claim membership in the Nepali nation. However the activities described thus far in this paper do not exhaust the set of practices that helped to firmly locate Bhanubhakta as a hero of the Nepali nation. Some of the other significant activities have been performative in nature. We now turn our attention to them.

Inventing a National Festival: Bhanujayanti

From a simple ceremony with little national importance in the early 1950s, *Bhanujayanti*—celebrations of Bhanubhakta's birthday on 29 Asar³⁰—has become a national festival throughout Nepal. Comprised of many events, activities, and award presentations, *Bhanujayanti* today has

³⁰ Asar is the third month in the Nepali calendar of the Vikram Sambat. 29 Asar falls in mid-July.

become one of the the reproduction of regarding people travel long and participate in different parts of Nepali state has made the celebration of this times, making it a actually the result of such as the late (Photo 3) and the he founded, *Nepali* (NSP).³¹ The work of and institution and of very important to the *Bhanujayanti* has festival in Nepal briefly discuss



Photo 3: Gopal Pandey Asim (1970 v.s.-2035 v.s.), Founder of Nepali Siksa Parishad (Photo courtesy: Rama Sharma)

work regarding the institutionalization of *Bhanujayanti* in its early years before describing how this festival has been celebrated in different parts of Nepal in more recent times. It should be noted here that *Bhanujayanti* is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm amongst Nepalis in India and increasingly in other parts of the world, the cultural politics of which could not be researched for this study.³²

The first celebration of Bhanubhakta's birthday was held in Darjeeling in 1945. Darjeeling's *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* started an annual celebration from 1946 even though controversy about Bhanubhakta's exact birthdate was not resolved until some time in the early 1950s (R. Sharma 2049 v.s.:82-94). As described earlier, a statue of Bhanubhakta was

main occasions for the national memory Bhanubhakta. Many distances to organize these events in Nepal. While the some investment in festival in recent national event was the labour of people Gopal Pandey Asim organization which *Siksa Parisad* such an individual other similar agents is story of how become a national today. I shall first Asim's and NSP's

³¹ Asim is actually a title added to his name by Gopal Pandey. For various details about Asim and NSP, see N. Pandey 2037 v.s., R. Sharma 2037 v.s. and other articles in *Nepali Siksa Parisad* 2037 v.s.

³² See Thapa and Kirat (2053 v.s.) for an illustrated description of how *Bhanujayanti* is celebrated in Sikkim. Also see Paudel (2053 v.s.:14-34) for an account of how it was celebrated in Gantok, Sikkim in 1996. See Gorkhapatra (2056 v.s.c) for a description of celebrations in others places in India.

established in Darjeeling in 1949. Darjeeling's ways of celebrating Bhanubhakta had impressed Bhanubhakta's devotees inside Nepal. Hence Bhanubhakta's birthday was celebrated in a small way for the first time in the eastern hill town of Dharan in 1946 (S. Regmi 2053 v.s.). It was hurriedly celebrated for the first time in the south-central town of Birgunj in September 1951 in conjunction with Tulsidasjayanti. The following year it was celebrated after some preparation on 29 Asar itself (M. Dixit 2053 v.s.). It was celebrated in Chundi Ramgha, Bhanubhakta's birthplace, for the first time in 1951. Devotees of Bhanubhakta established a library called *Bhanu Pustakalaya*, and one of its initial objectives was to establish a statue of Bhanubhakta in the vicinity where he was born (Bhanudarsan 2031 v.s.; B. Acharya 2033 v.s.).³³

The first recorded public celebration of Bhanubhakta in Kathmandu took place on 9 Asoj 2009 v.s. (24 September 1952). This celebration was organized by the Hindi Instruction Committee on the occasion of the death anniversary of Bhanubhakta. Writer Tukraj Mishra had taken the initiative and the gathering was held at the home of Khadgaman Singh under the chairmanship of writer Chakrapani Chalise. Several literary personalities were present during the ceremony and they paid homage to Bhanubhakta (Gorkhapatra 2009 v.s.; R Sharma 2049 v.s.:91-92; S. Regmi 2056 v.s.). The first major celebration of *Bhanujayanti* in Kathmandu was held on 29 Asar 2010 v.s. (1953) under the sponsorship of NSP. NSP was established two years earlier by Nepali language activist, grammarian and teacher Gopal Pandey Asim and one of the objectives of this organization was to celebrate the birthday of Nepali literary personalities, both dead and living. The kind of celebration of *Bhanujayanti* NSP started in Kathmandu in 1953 is still being organized every year on a larger scale by another organization, *Bhanu Sewa Samiti*.³⁴

In early 1953, under Asim's initiative, it was decided that NSP would organize *Bhanujayanti* celebrations. It called for literary contributions

³³ Other than the one in Dharan, these celebrations of *Bhanujayanti* came very soon after the major political change of 2007 v.s. when Rana rule in Nepal ended.

³⁴ This *Samiti* was earlier a Kathmandu-based sub-committee of the *Bhanu Pustakalaya* of Chundi Ramgha. It was converted into this *Samiti* in 2026 v.s. (1969) to organize larger activities to highlight Bhanubhakta. Apart from organizing the celebration in Kathmandu on 29 Asar every year, it now holds poetry recitals and competitions between students during the week of events that mark *Bhanujayanti*.

regarding Bhanubhakta with the idea that they would be compiled and published. Responses to this call were received from many individuals including poet Siddhicharan Shrestha, Balkrishna Sama, poet Madhav Prasad Ghimere, poet and playwright Bhimnidhi Tiwari, politician and essayist Dharmaratna Yami, novelist Sundarprasad Shah 'Dukhi', educationist Shankardev Panta, bureaucrat and writer Bishnuprasad Dhital, novelist Liladhoj Thapa, writer Padmaraj Mishra, songwriter Nirbikram Pyasi, writer Laxmanprasad Lohani, writer Chakrapani Sharma Chalise, and writer and educationist Khadgaman Malla. These writings could not be compiled into a volume at the time. They appeared some 37 years later in a volume edited by Rama Sharma (2047 v.s), under the title, *Bhanubhaktapatri*.³⁵

Closer to 29 Asar 2010 v.s., NSP formed a "*Bhanujayanti* Celebration Committee" under the chairmanship of the poet laureate Lekhnath Paudel. Forty-two well-known personalities were members of this Committee. It organized two programs on 29 Asar. In the morning there was a march past around the inner city of Kathmandu with a band and dignitaries accompanying Bhanubhakta's portrait. The group then assembled in a location in central Kathmandu near the house where it was believed Bhanubhakta stayed when he visited the city. Lekhnath Paudel and the famous critic Ishwar Baral highlighted the achievements of Bhanubhakta and paid homage to him. Artists from Radio Nepal played some music. In the afternoon there was a program at Saraswati Sadan located within the premises of Tri-Chandra College in which many political and literary personalities participated. Many people recited poems and prose texts in honour of Bhanubhakta. It was then announced that in the following five days, Balkrishna Sama's new one-act play on Bhanubhakta, *Krantikari Bhanu* (Revolutionary Bhanu), was going to be staged in the theatre in Singha Durbar and its proceeds would be used to make a statue of Bhanubhakta. Funds worth more than 160 rupees were also collected on the occasion for the same purpose (Gorkhapatra 2010 v.s.a). *Bhanujayanti* was also celebrated in another small ceremony held at the Kanyamandir High School in central Kathmandu (Gorkhapatra 2010 v.s.b). Sama's play was shown during the following week. The government newspaper, Gorkhapatra, published an editorial commentary approving the celebration

³⁵ Rama Sharma is the daughter of Gopal Pandey Asim, a university teacher of Nepali literature and an accomplished literary historian with several books to her credit. She is currently the secretary of NSP.

of *Bhanujayanti* in Kathmandu and the launching of the statue-making project (Gorkhapatra 2010 v.s.c).

The following year, as part of the *Bhanujayanti* program organized by NSP in Saraswati Sadan, critic Ishwar Baral made a short presentation on the life and work of Bhanubhakta. The wax statue made by artist Amar Chitrakar was exhibited on the occasion and many individuals and representatives of various organizations placed a flower garland around it. Secretary of NSP, Gopal Pandey Asim presented a progress report and other speakers paid homage to Bhanubhakta through poetry or prose recital (Gorkhapatra 2011 v.s.a). Bhanubhakta's grandson Devibhakta Acharya was also present on the occasion (N. Pandey 2037 v.s.:135). Another ceremony was organized at the Ranipokhari Sanskrit Pradhan Pathsala in which many speakers talked about Bhanubhakta's works and life (Gorkhapatra 2011 v.s.b). Another ceremony held at the Kanyamandir High School in Kathmandu, began with a recitation from Bhanubhakta's Ramayana. Speeches were made by many including Chittadhar Hridaya, a towering figure of modern Newari literature. School students Ramadevi, Ranjana Rimal, Sugandakamal and Shanta Sharma participated in a short skit about Bhanubhakta. Works of Bhanubhakta and poetry and prose in honour of him were recited by many teachers and students of the school. Later students participated in a debate under the title "Bhanubhakta is the best poet of Nepal" (Neupane 2011 v.s.).

Outside of Kathmandu, *Bhanujayanti* was celebrated for the first time in Baudhadham M.E. School in Ilam, a district located at the eastern end of Nepal, close to Darjeeling. Students enacted the encounter between Bhanubhakta and the *ghasi*, performed skits, recited poems, sang some songs, and read out stories as part of the celebrations (Bharati 1954a). Palpa Shanti Samiti celebrated *Bhanujayanti* for the first time in the mid-western town of Tansen in 2011 v.s. These celebrations were held at the Janata Bidyalaya, Dhawal Pustakalaya and the premises of the Balsakha Dal. Various speakers highlighted the life and contributions of Bhanubhakta, recited poems, sang songs, told stories, and held a lecture on 'what is literature?' Participants included nationally known writers such as Kulmani Devkota and Kamalraj Regmi and student Mohanman Sainju (Bharati 1954b), who went on to become an economist and prominent upholder of Panchayati nationalist ideology.³⁶

³⁶ Sainju is mostly known for his tenure as the vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission in the late Panchayat era and as

From these simple beginnings, *Bhanujayanti* has become a nation-wide affair these days.³⁷ To chart this growth in detail would not be possible here due to limitations of space but we can identify certain factors responsible for it. First would be the continued effort of Gopal Pandey Asim and his colleagues in NSP (such as Nityaraj Pandey) who worked relentlessly to make *Bhanujayanti* a national festival. An important accomplishment on their part was the installation of Bhanubhakta's bust in central Kathmandu in 2016 v.s., inaugurated by the then HM King Mahendra. As mentioned above, this was just the beginning of a process in which statues of Bhanubhakta of various sizes were installed in different parts of Nepal. Another aspect of Bhanu celebration inaugurated by NSP is the tradition of celebrating *Bhanujayanti* in different locations within Nepal by transporting personalities of national note to those sites. Early examples of such work by NSP included the celebration of *Bhanujayanti* in Janakpur in 2025 v.s. and in Birgunj the following year. In 2027 v.s., a similar visit was scheduled for Bhairawa but it had to be scrapped due to floods (N. Pandey 2037 v.s.).

NSP also started organizing programs to mark *Bhanujayanti* in locations particularly associated with Bhanubhakta. Examples include a 2021v.s. poetry recital in Balaju in the Kathmandu Valley (a poem about Balaju is attributed to Bhanubhakta), and the three-day celebrations in his

Nepal's Ambassador to the USA during the time of the 1990 *Jana Andolan*.

³⁷ Also noteworthy is the fact that *Bhanujayanti* is now being celebrated by Nepalis in such places as Boston, London, Stockholm, New York, and the Greater Washington D.C. area, the cultural politics of which could not be researched for this study. For instance, on 19 July 1999, the International Nepali Literary Society held its 7th general assembly and organized a poetry recital competition in a park located near Washington D.C. to celebrate *Bhanujayanti*. It also organized the Bhanu Runner Cup volleyball competition. Nepal's ambassador to the US was the guest speaker on the occasion (Subedi 1999). As part of *Bhanujayanti* celebrations, Nepali students in Sweden organized a poetry recital in Stockholm on 13 July 1999 and formed a Bhanu Club (Himalaya Times 2056 v.s.c). Jayaraj Acharya (2056 v.s.) has argued that the fact that *Bhanujayanti* is also being celebrated in the West is a fresh evidence of the development of Nepali nationalism.

birth place, Chundi Ramgha, in 2029 v.s. Such initiatives generated other efforts on the part of individuals and institutions to celebrate *Bhanujayanti* in different parts of Nepal. The three-day celebration in Chundi Ramgha in 2033 v.s. organized by Bhanu Sewa Samiti, discussed below, is a good example of this ripple effect, but similar examples can be found in places such as Bhadrapur, Biratnagar, Dharan, Janakpur, Birgunj, Pokhara, Tansen, and Dang.

The second factor responsible for making *Bhanujayanti* a national festival is the participation of schools and students from the very early days of its celebration in Nepal. As mentioned above, in the first two years, students in various schools in Kathmandu, Ilam (east Nepal) and Palpa (west central Nepal) participated in *Bhanujayanti* celebrations by performing skits about and works of Bhanubhakta. They sang songs, participated in debates about Bhanubhakta, and read their own poems and stories. These early modes of celebration seem to have set the standard for how schools and students actively participated in making Bhanubhakta the common ancestor of all Nepalis in the following decades.

To make this celebration even more of a pervasive national phenomenon among school students, a lesson on *Bhanujayanti* was included in the Nepali textbook for grade five some 25 years ago (Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.a:89-92). Ostensibly included in the textbook as a lesson on how to write a letter, a son named "Gyaneswar" studying in Bhanu Secondary School in Kathmandu reports to his father about how *Bhanujayanti* was celebrated on 29 Asar 2029. In the letter, he reports that the chief guest on the occasion was poet Dharanidhar Koirala who advised the students to devote themselves in the service of the national language following the example set by Bhanubhakta. He further reports that those present placed garlands around the statue of Bhanubhakta located in front of the school. Then, in the ceremony organized inside the school premises, students recited Bhanubhakta's poems. Later poetry competitions amongst famous poets and students were held, he reports. Such a lesson in a grade five textbook, complete with a photo from a real celebration of *Bhanujayanti* provided, we can reasonably guess, a model for how *Bhanujayanti* should be celebrated in schools across Nepal. In addition, Kamal Dixit's account of his first visit to Chundi Ramgha during *Bhanujayanti* of 2039 v.s. was later included in the Nepali textbook for students of grade ten, written and compiled by critic Taranath Sharma



Photo 4: Students participating in a Bhanujayanti procession, New Road, Kathmandu, 29 Asar 2055 v.s. (Photo: Rama Parajuli)

(2054 v.s.:246-56).³⁸ It drew the students' attention to yet another facet of *Bhanujayanti*, namely a trek to his birthsite as a way of celebrating the national hero.

In recent times—taking the last four years as our 'ethnographic present'—we can say that the celebrations all over Nepal start a week or so before 29 Asar with poetry recitals and seminars on Bhanubhakta and his contributions to the Nepali language, literature and nation. These programs are now organized by a whole host of individuals and institutions. On 29 Asar itself, in Kathmandu a ceremony is held in front of the statue of Bhanubhakta early in the morning where speeches and poems about the national hero are recited (Photo 1). The prime minister is usually the chief guest on the occasion. Then a procession with a police band and Bhanubhakta's portrait in a horse-driven carriage processes through the inner city of Kathmandu. Students from various schools compete in the march past—which is held as part of the procession—displaying the national flag, portraits of Bhanubhakta and slogans about

³⁸ This textbook contains a total of 18 chapters, among which two are related to Bhanubhakta. In addition to Dixit's essay, another chapter carried an extract from a short work by Bhanubhakta.

him and his work (Photo 4). Apart from this ceremony in the morning, many other ceremonies are held in Kathmandu. NSP presents its "Adikavi Bhanubhakta Puraskar" later that day. One of the largest cash awards (101,101 rupees) given in Nepal in the field of literature, this award recognizes the awardee's life-time contribution to the cause of the Nepali language. The award has thus far been given to poet Madhavprasad Ghimire, historian Nayaraj Panta, historian Kesharbahadur K.C., critic Yadunath Khanal and writer Dr Tulsi Bahadur Chhetri.³⁹

In Bhanubhakta's birthplace Chundi Ramgha, *Bhanujayanti* is now celebrated for a whole week with programs organized by the BJBS. In 1999, these included worship in local temples, lectures on the national poet by various experts, poetry competition among children and school students, recitals from the works of Bhanubhakta and a competition based on them, a literary quiz contest, cultural program and a procession on the morning of 29 Asar itself. During the afternoon, a long lecture session and poetry recital were held where many visitors and local *bhaktas* of Bhanubhakta spoke about the national poet and read from their own work (Saptahik Janasatta 2056 v.s.). Elsewhere in the country, various programs are held to celebrate *Bhanujayanti*. For instance, in Biratnagar in 1999, a procession was taken out around the city in the morning. Those who participated in this procession later placed garlands around the statue of Bhanubhakta located at Trimurti Chowk. Later in the afternoon, Bhanu Kala Kendra organized a cultural program in which many folk songs and dances were presented. The chief guest on the occasion, the mayor of Biratnagar, Ramesh Chandra Poudel distributed Bhanu medals and certificates. Prativa Puruskar Pratisthan organized a poetry competition in which more than 30 poets participated. This function was chaired by the nationally-known linguist and writer Balkrishna Pokharel and the chief guest was Dev Kumari Thapa, a well-known writer and a member of the Royal Nepal Academy. The following day, Hidappa Sahityik Pariwar organized a literary seminar in which various speakers talked about Bhanubhakta and two artists were felicitated for "their contributions to the nation" (Cirphar 2056 v.s.).

³⁹ Contributions to the fixed funds that support this award have come from many individuals and institutions, most noteworthy of which is the government-owned Nepal Rastriya Bank which has given 300,000 rupees apart from contributing 100,000 rupees toward the first award given during the year 2052 v.s. The government itself has given 100,000 rupees to this fund (R. Sharma 2052 v.s.).

In recent years, new arenas have been created to mark *Bhanujayanti*. For instance, sporting events and competitions (some named after Bhanubhakta) are being organized to mark the national festival. The first *Adikavi Bhanubhakta Memorial Open Men's Volleyball Competition* was organized by the Nakhipot Youth Club in Lalitpur to mark *Bhanujayanti* in 1999 (Kantipur 2056 v.s. a). Similarly, Yupis Club in Biratnagar organized the National Yupis Cup Snooker & Pool Competition to celebrate *Bhanujayanti* in 1999. 46 participants from different parts of Nepal including Dharan, Itahari, Biratnagar, Kathmandu, Hetauda, Jhapa, and some from India took part in this competition (Kantipur 2056 v.s. b) which was inaugurated by a high ranking police officer by placing a garland around Bhanubhakta's photo (Cirphar 2056 v.s.). All in all, newspaper reports that I was able to collect indicate that more than 25 poetry symposia were held in different parts of Nepal to mark *Bhanujayanti* in 1999. More than 35 other programs were also held to mark the occasion. These included lectures on Bhanubhakta, unveiling of Bhanubhakta's statue, official showing of the film *Adikavi Bhanubhakta*, and the launching of two books, a cassette and a compact disk related to the film. Other programs included literary seminars, worship in a temple, inter-school competitions of various kinds (some with awards named after Bhanubhakta), quiz contests, award presentation or appreciation ceremonies, cultural programs, sports competitions, song competitions, book launchings, and the inauguration of a library. Publication of special editions of newspaper supplements dedicated to Bhanubhakta, news reports, feature articles, poems, interviews, editorials and reviews of the film were some of the ways through which *Bhanujayanti* was celebrated and reported by the print media in 1999.⁴⁰ Activities related to *Bhanujayanti* got prominent coverage in the national and regional newspapers and literary magazines.

One other aspect of how *Bhanujayanti* is now celebrated deserves a mention here. As can be anticipated from the previous discussion about the early work of NSP regarding the promotion of *Bhanujayanti* in different parts of Nepal, it is now common for some well-known personalities, literary and otherwise, to travel to Chundi Ramgha or some other place to participate in *Bhanujayanti* celebrations. After their trips, they tend to write about it in newspapers or magazines, sharing with the

⁴⁰ This description is based on my research files . For reasons of space further details about these programs are not given here.

larger Nepali reading public their feelings and experiences of participation in a celebration of the national poet. For instance, one of Nepal's well-known novelists, Dhrubachandra Gautam attended *Bhanujayanti* celebrations in Gorkha in 1999 in the company of critic Mohanraj Sharma and writer Khagendra Luintel. Among other things, they were guests of honour during a competitive poetry symposium and Gautam released a novel called *Kalkhanda* written by a Gorkha-based writer, Sushilchandra Shrestha. He later wrote about this visit in *Himalaya Times*, a daily newspaper with a national presence (Gautam 2056 v.s.).

That was by no means the first time well-known literary personalities from Kathmandu had gone to Gorkha to celebrate *Bhanujayanti*. Eleven years earlier, the likes of Chudamani Bandhu, Thakurnath Parajuli, Krishnaprasad Parajuli, Tulsiprasad Bhattarai and Sudha Tripathi had gone there for the same purpose, hosted by Gorkha Campus and Sahitya Sangam. Tripathi (2050 v.s.:1-7) described the room where the poetry recital and the lectures took place as being completely full. The following year, Tripathi went to Tansen, Palpa in west central Nepal to celebrate *Bhanujayanti* in the company of Rajendra Subedi and Ashesh Malla, among others. The separate accounts by Tripathi (2050 v.s.:53-59) and Subedi (2054 v.s.:49-53) of their trip to Tansen, written in two different modes, make for informative reading. Subedi highlights how their hosts in Tansen referred to them as having come all the way from Kathmandu (the "centre") to celebrate *Bhanujayanti*.⁴¹ As also discussed in the next section, some visit Chundi Ramgha to attend the ceremonies held there to mark *Bhanujayanti*. Since the celebrations are also held many days before and after Asar 29, it is not uncommon for some to visit two different places

⁴¹ Bandhu is currently professor of linguistics at Tribhuvan University (TU) and has authored several books, including a biography of *Mahakavi* Laxmi Prasad Devkota. Thakurnath Parajuli, author of several books including a compilation of critical writings on Nepali literature (2045 v.s.), is currently the head of the Central Department of Nepali at TU. Krishnaprasad Parajuli, a poet who also teaches at TU, has authored more than 20 books and is considered one of Nepal's foremost experts on children's literature. Tulsiprasad Bhattarai is a well-known critic and currently the Member-Secretary of the Royal Nepal Academy. Tripathi also teaches at TU and has authored two volumes of essays and a volume of one-act plays. Rajendra Subedi who also teaches at TU is a well-known essayist and critic who has authored many books. Malla is a well-known playwright.

to participate in Bhanubhakta's birthday celebrations. For example, essayist Koshraj Neupane (2056 v.s.)—also involved in the audio cassette production of Bhanubhakta's Ramayana—visited Chundi Ramgha on 29 Asar and participated in another event held in Birtamod (an eastern Tarai town) on 31 Asar this year.⁴²

To conclude then, celebrations of *Bhanujayanti* with all the activities described above, introduce a performative aspect to the cultivation of Bhanubhakta project. Activities like poetry recitals, public speeches, processions and travel we can argue, reinforce Bhanubhakta's place in the national culture through means that are relatively more participatory and immanent. Their effect is more immediate than that of the media described earlier. Events associated with *Bhanujayanti* help to ground the national imagining associated with Bhanubhakta in particular localities of Nepal.

Developing Ramgha as a National Pilgrimage Site: *Bhanujanmasthan*

As part of the cultivating Bhanubhakta project, Bhanubhakta's birth place in Chundi Ramgha in central Nepal has now become a site for national *tirtha* (pilgrimage). Some Nepalis who did not belong to that region had started to visit it as the site of Bhanubhakta's birth as early as 1950 (e.g. Hari 2006 v.s.). The inhabitants of Chundi Ramgha started to celebrate *Bhanujayanti* in 1951. As mentioned earlier, some of them had established a library called *Bhanu Pustakalaya* that year. People such as Gyanhari Pandit, Tikaram Paudel, Ramchandra Paudel, Ramchandra Pandit, Pashupati Acharya and others were instrumental in this process.⁴³ They also started collecting books and other materials related to Bhanubhakta. To support this library's activity, a committee was formed in Kathmandu in 2010 v.s.. One of the main objectives of this library was to establish a statue of Bhanubhakta in the vicinity of his birthplace (Bhanudarsan 2031 v.s.). According to Brataraj Acharya (n.d.), after his visit to mid-western Nepal in 2015 v.s., King Mahendra donated 5,000 rupees toward the

⁴² It is also common for Nepali literary personalities to be invited to participate in *Bhanujayanti* celebrations in various locations in India. For instance, in 1999, poet Tulsi Diwas, poet Ishwarballav, songwriter Kaliprasad Rijal and poet and critic Abhi Subedi went to Gantok, Sikkim to participate in a program jointly organized by the Arts and Culture Department of the Government of Sikkim and the Calcutta-based Eastern Cultural Centre (Prajnapatra 2056 v.s.).

⁴³ I have not been able to find more details about these people but Ramchandra Paudel is currently the head of BJBS (see below).

establishment of Bhanubhakta's statue in Chundi Ramgha. Tirtharaj Acharya, Somnath Paudel, Gyanhari Pandit, Ramchandra Paudel, Laxminath Acharya and others had the statue made in Kathmandu and after a viewing by King Mahendra it was transported to Chundi Ramgha in 2017 v.s.. Brataraj Acharya (n.d.) states that the then prime minister B.P. Koirala had said that the establishment of Bhanubhakta's statue must be done according to a master plan made after consultations with experts. Koirala's subsequent removal from the central stage of politics by King Mahendra meant that this master plan was not formed immediately and the statue languished in the area until it was installed in Ramgha in 2022 v.s.⁴⁴

But it was only after the completion of the Prithvi Highway joining Kathmandu to Pokhara in central west Nepal in 1971-72 that the work of transforming Bhanubhakta's birthplace into a *ras̥triya tirthasthal* (national pilgrimage site) intensified. Due to the highway, the distance between Kathmandu and Chundi Ramgha was reduced to a day's travel by car and foot. The *Bhanujayanti* celebration held in Chundi Ramgha in 2029 v.s. (1972), with the participation of literary heavyweights from Kathmandu, is an important episode in the transformation of this site into a national cultural location. Asim had made a reconnaissance trip to Ramgha in late 2028 v.s. (early 1972) after which the NSP considered participating in the celebrations held there the following year (N. Pandey 2037 v.s.:139).

Accordingly, Asim arranged to take a nine-member NSP contingent from Kathmandu to Chundi Ramgha for three-day *Bhanujayanti* celebrations in 2029 v.s.. In that team were 80-year old Dharanidhar Koirala, poet Siddhicharan Shrestha, critic Basudev Tripathi, writer Dhundiraj Bhandari, writer Nityaraj Pandey, Harihar Prasad Bhattarai, Sagar Lamsal and Gopal Pandey Asim. Nityaraj Pandey says he assured Asim that he would personally look after the well-being of the aged Bhanubhakta devotee, Dharanidhar during the trip. In fact, the latter was treated as the 'bridegroom' of the procession that found its way to Ramgha from the plains of Chundi. Members in the contingent from Kathmandu took part in poetry recitations and lecture sessions in the company of local inhabitants as part of that year's *Bhanujayanti* (N. Pandey 2037 v.s.:139-40). According to a news report about that visit (Gorkhapatra 2029 v.s.), in addition to those mentioned above, Bhanubhakta's grandson Shivabhakta

⁴⁴ Bhanu Pustakalaya published a compendium of the shorter works of Bhanubhakta around then (see Sharma Pandit 2023 v.s.).

Acharya, great-grandson Suryanath Acharya, politician Shreebhadra Sharma Khanal, principal of Bhanu Secondary School Rambhakta Acharya, district representative Padambahadur Bohara, and student Harihar Bhattarai also spoke during the formal lecture sessions. Narnath Acharya, Bijayaraj Acharya, Sagar Lamsal, Sampha Upadhya and Jayaraj Acharya recited poems as a homage to Bhanubhakta, whose works were also recited during the celebration.

Once these devotees of Bhanubhakta returned to Kathmandu, they were felicitated in a program organized by NSP. Those present on the occasion decided that a petition should be filed with the Nepal government suggesting why and how Chundi Ramgha should be developed as a site of national pilgrimage. In so doing they were trying to give more concrete shape to previous talk about converting Bhanubhakta's birthplace into a national pilgrimage site (e.g. B. Sharma 2028 v.s.). The influential literary magazine *Madhuparka* (2029 v.s.) published an editorial supporting their endeavour. A delegation from the NSP that consisted of Balkrishna Sama, Dharanidhar Koirala, Bhimnidhi Tiwari, Basudev Tripathi and Gopal Pandey Asim met with the then Minister of Education, Gyanendra Bahadur Karki on 28 Bhadra 2029 v.s. and with the then Prime Minister, Kirtinidhi Bista on 19 Asoj 2029 v.s.

In its petition, among other things, the NSP delegation suggested that Bhanubhakta's house should be repaired, *Ghasi Kuwa* (grasscutter Pond) must be conserved, a museum should be opened to house Bhanubhakta-related materials, guest houses should be built for visitors, a full-length and attractive statue of Bhanubhakta should be made, publications related to Bhanubhakta should be published from the *Bhanu Pustakalaya*, and an annual literary conference should be held at the place where Bhanubhakta was born. Moreover, it also suggested that Dumre Bazar (located on the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway, from where one turns off to go toward Bhanubhakta's home village) should be renamed "Bhanu Nagar" and a wide road to join Dumre with Chundi Ramgha must be constructed and named "Bhanu Marga." It added that programs designed under the Panchayat regime's Back to the Village National Campaign must attend to development of Ramgha where drinking water was not readily available and a bridge over the Chundi River was needed. The petition argued that work on these fronts must be started immediately so that

Ramgha would attract the attention of Nepali pilgrims and foreign tourists.⁴⁵

A year later, a literary seminar organized by the graduate department of Nepali of the Kirtipur College of Tribhuvan University further highlighted these demands. Subsequently the government of Nepal released 142,000 rupees to do construction work in Chundi Ramgha. By 2033 v.s., a guest house and a Bhanu Memorial Building & Musuem were constructed with this money on land donated by descendants of Bhanubhakta, namely, Shivabhakta Acharya, Suryanath Acharya, Muktinath Acharya, Biswanath Acharya, Harinath Acharya and Kedarbhakta Acharya (B. Acharya n.d.). Additional help, financial and otherwise, was received from local state offices, literary institutions located in Kathmandu and businessmen. These buildings were inaugurated during the 163rd *Bhanujayanti* celebrations held in 2033 v.s., organized by the Bhanu Sewa Samiti (BSS). NSP's Asim had played a key role in formulating the development plans for Chundi Ramgha and in getting funds from the government for the construction of the above-mentioned buildings, and BSS's hijacking of the inauguration of the guest house and the museum came as a shock to him and his colleagues in NSP. The tension between BSS and NSP had not subsided by the time of Asim's death some 29 months later.⁴⁶

The inauguration of the two buildings took place as part of the three-day celebrations of the 163rd *Bhanujayanti* held on 28-30 Asar 2033 v.s. (Bhanudarsan 2033 v.s.a, 2033 v.s.c). HM King Birendra sent a message on the occasion. So did a whole host of political and literary personalities including Dharanidhar Koirala. The State Minister for Education, Dr Harka Bahadur Gurung was the guest of honour for the inauguration ceremonies. In addition to local participants, others came from Damauli, Pokhara and Kathmandu. The nearly 50-member contingent from Kathmandu included politicians, writers, academics, educational bureaucrats, and journalists.

⁴⁵ For the complete text of this petition, see Rastrabhasa 2054 v.s.. There are many celebratory accounts of the Back-to-Village National Campaign (e.g. Khatri 2033 v.s.) which was launched by late King Mahendra in December 1967. For an early critical reading see Baral 1976. It must be noted that there have been no critical studies of this Campaign after the demise of the Panchayat System.

⁴⁶ This is based on conversations with Rama Sharma and Kamal Dixit. See also Rama Sharma (2052 v.s.: 31-2).

The three-day celebrations included a big "introduction of the guests" ceremony on the first day, and a procession which began in the plains of Chundi and ended by paying homage to Bhanubhakta at the site of his bust at the top of the hill in Ramgha on the second day. Apart from the playing of traditional Damai music, several poets recited their own and Bhanubhakta's poems at the site. Minister Gurung and others present paid their own homage to the national poet. Later that day, Gurung inaugurated the Bhanu Memorial Building & Museum. BSS members organized an exhibition of materials related to Bhanubhakta. At a function held in the building, messages received from His Majesty and other personalities were read out. Shreebhadra Sharma, poet Madhavprasad Ghimire, Yogi Naraharinath, poet Kshatrapratap Adhikari, Basudev Tripathi and others spoke. Minister Gurung highlighted how Bhanubhakta had contributed toward the enhancement of the Nepali language which in turn, he added, was an important medium to maintain national unity in an otherwise multi-lingual and multi-*jati* Nepal. Later that day, a big literary convention was held under the chairmanship of poet Madhavprasad Ghimire in which more than 60 poets and writers recited their work. An audience of about 2000 people, of which more than half were women, assembled for this convention. On the third and final day of celebrations, more speeches about Bhanubhakta and additional poetry recitals were given. An award presentation ceremony ended the three-day celebrations (Bhanudarsan 2033 v.s.c).

Subsequently, BSS constituted a committee with Dharanidhar Koirala as the convenor to prepare a master plan for the development of Bhanubhakta's birth place. Such a plan was prepared but its propositions were not executed. In 2049 v.s., under the convenorship of Narhari Acharya, a member of parliament from the Nepali Congress Party and a member of the Acharya clan of Tanahu, Bhanu Pustakalaya attempted to revise the original master plan. However it was then felt that only government-backed initiatives could address the financial and managerial needs of the development activities proposed for Chundi Ramgha (B. Acharya n.d.). At that point, the District Development Committee of Tanahu passed a resolution asking the government of Nepal to constitute a Bhanu Janmasthan Bikas Samiti (BJBS). Assurance for the same was received from the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala in 2051 v.s. and a committee was formed the following year (see Appendix 1 for extracts from the government document ordering the formation of this committee). The government appointed Ramchandra Sharma Paudel as the chair of this committee. Dr Basudev Tripathi, Dr Brataraj Acharya, Laxmi Acharya and

Shampa Upadhyaya were nominated as members. In its first meeting held in Baisakh 2053 v.s., the Committee constituted a 15-member Advisory Committee of Intellectuals (see Appendix 2 for a complete list of members) under the convenorship of Dr Basudev Tripathi and asked it to prepare a master plan for the development of Chundi Ramgha as the birth place of Bhanubhakta. Such a plan has been prepared and proposed to the government (see Appendix 3 for the full text).

The first section of this plan emphasizes the need to enhance literary and cultural activities related to Bhanubhakta. In particular it promotes research and publications (text and audio-visual) on Bhanubhakta. The second section of the master plan emphasizes physical construction in the area and materials collection for the library. The third section emphasizes enhancement of the physical infrastructure, ecological, educational and social environment of the locality. It has been estimated that the cost of implementing all aspects of this plan would be about eighty million rupees (Neupane 2055 v.s.).

The master plan has not been officially approved by the government. Nevertheless some work toward fulfilment of its objectives has already been completed. The film on Bhanubhakta and the books by Kamal Dixit (2056 v.s.) and Kharel (2056 v.s.), discussed above, are products of BJBS that fall under the activities listed in the first section of its master plan. Recently BJBS and *Gandaki Wangmaya Pratisthan* (Gandaki Literature Academy) co-organized a three-day Poetry Writing Workshop in Chundi Ramgha (Himalaya Times 2056 v.s.f). Activities that partially fulfil the agenda of the second section of the master plan include the repair, maintenance and reconstruction of several sites that fall within the territories delimited as *Bhanujanmasthal*. An archeological dig was done at the site of the remains of Bhanubhakta's house in the fall of 1997 under the direction of historian Dr Rajaram Subedi (2054 v.s.). Several material objects—54 items to be precise—were found. Subsequently BJBS built a house there for 126,000 rupees since it was needed for the shooting of the film on Bhanubhakta. Its architecture and features are said to reflect those found in mid-19th century houses (Basnet 2055 v.s.). BJBS is also in the process of collecting other items used by or associated with Bhanubhakta.

Funds for all these various activities of the BJBS have mostly come from the central government.⁴⁷

It must also be noted that some of the construction in recent years was done before the formation of BJBS. For instance, the construction of the *Ghasi-Kuwa (Pond)* and the *Bhanu-Ghasi Memorial Park* within which the former is located, as well as the 1995 installation of Bhanubhakta's half-size statue in the Park (located near Damauli) was facilitated by a special committee. The idea for this construction came after a visit to Darjeeling by a team headed by the then mayor of Byas Municipality, Taraprasad Shrestha (Basnet 2053 v.s.). Financial and material assistance worth about 114,000 rupees came from Byas Municipality, Tanahu District Development Committee, Ministry of Education, Speaker's Office, Tanahu District Irrigation Office, Tanahu District Land-Conservation Office, and Adikavi Bhanubhakta Campus.⁴⁸

Despite the activities of BJBS and other organizations, critics emphasize that while the plans to develop Bhanubhakta's birth place as national *tirthasthal* are grand, weaknesses in its execution have stunted its development. Delays in governmental approval of the plan and outlay of inadequate funds to BJBS are pointed to as reasons for its limited development thus far (Neupane 2055 v.s., 2056 v.s.; Hadkhale 2055 v.s.).⁴⁹

In the meantime, celebrating *Bhanujayanti* in Chundi Ramgha has now become an important ritual not only for local inhabitants but also for visitors from outside. As mentioned above, visitors of national reckoning started to come to Chundi Ramgha during *Bhanujayanti* of 2029 v.s.. The second major assemblage of visitors for *Bhanujayanti* celebrations in Chundi Ramgha happened in 2033 v.s. Subsequently, such visits by political and literary 'heavyweights' have become an integral part of *Bhanujayanti* celebrations. For instance, among those who arrived in Chundi-Ramgha to celebrate *Bhanujayanti* in 2053 v.s., 2054 v.s. and 2056

⁴⁷ The central government provided the following amounts to BJBS: Rs 500,000 (fiscal year 2053/54 v.s.); Rs. 500,000 (2054/55 v.s.); Rs. 510,000 (2055/56 v.s.) and Rs. 1,000,000 (2056/57).

⁴⁸ Further details about this Park, its construction process and inauguration ceremonies can be found in Gorkhapatra 2052 v.s., Basnet 2053 v.s., and Naharki 'Bibas' 2054 v.s..

⁴⁹ However other commentators (e.g., Bibas 2056 v.s.) remain more optimistic about the execution of the plans for Chundi Ramgha.

v.s., there were many nationally known writers, poets, critics, musicians, and politicians.⁵⁰

It is also worth noting that since 2029 v.s., many visitors to *Bhanujanmasthal* have published accounts of their journeys in various media. Their writings, in turn, have generated further interest in *Bhanujanmasthal* among other Nepalis. Essays by Kashinath Tamot (2032 v.s.), Jayaraj Acharya (2032 v.s.), Kamal Dixit (reprinted in 2056 v.s.:45-9 but originally published in 2039 v.s.), Govinda Giri Prerana (2047 v.s.), Nirmohi Byas (2051 v.s.), Ayod Dhaumya (2054 v.s.), and Bijayaraj Neupane (2055 v.s.) are some of the main contributions of this kind. Tamot, who did extensive field research on various aspects of Bhanubhakta's life and published about a dozen articles in newspapers and magazines in the early 1970s, wrote his essay as a guide for those who want to visit Chundi Ramgha. It was initially broadcast over Radio Nepal in 1973 before being published. Starting off with a description of the celebrations of 2029 v.s., Jayaraj Acharya, then a local inhabitant, produced another guide to Chundi Ramgha in the *Gorkhapatra*. Kamal Dixit's essay, written after he visited Chundi Ramgha in 2039 v.s. for the first time, was later included in the Nepali language textbook for grade 10 students. This chapter contributed to the inclusion of Chundi Ramgha on the cultural map of the nation in the minds of students. Similarly Neupane's recent essay, published in the children's magazine *Muna*, is an attempt to

⁵⁰ In 2053 v.s., the visitors included Basudev Tripathi, Ghataraj Bhattarai, Saradchandra Sharma Bhattarai, Achyutraman Adhikari, Suryamani Adhikari, Parsu Pradhan, Bishnuprasad Dhital, Rambabu Subedi, Victor Pradhan, Pratapchandran Pradhan, Prahlad Pokhrel, Shreehari Phnuyal, Navaraj Karki, Ratnanidhi Regmi, Bishnu Bhatta, Narayan Nepal, Muktinath Sharma, Narahari Acharya (Minister at that time), Brataraj Acharya, Phanindra Nepal, Ramchandra Poudel, Kamal Dixit and Narendra Raj Poudel (Kantipur 2053 v.s.; Dhaumya 2054 v.s.). In 2054 v.s., the visitors included Ramchandra Poudel (the then Speaker of the Lower House), Govindaraj Joshi (a member of Parliament), Kamal Dixit, Michael Hutt (British scholar of Nepali literature), Rajendra Subedi (critic and the then head of the *Gorkhapatra* Sansthan) and Basudev Tripathi (Himalaya Times 2054 v.s.). In 2056 v.s., the visitors included Kamal Dixit, Santosh Sharma, Koshraj Neupane, Ramesh Khakurel, Ramchandra Sharma Poudel, Madan Dipbam (musician), Prabha Bhattarai, Sambhu Ghimire, Sarojani Neupane, and Dhimantaraj Neupane (Neupane 2056 v.s.).

arouse their curiosity about *Bhanujanmasthal*. We must also note that in the course of the shooting of the film *Adikavi Bhanubhakta*, Chundi Ramgha has been so much in the news that its location as *Bhanujanmasthal* has been re-asserted in the national consciousness.⁵¹

While all these efforts to turn Bhanubhakta's birthplace into a national pilgrimage site were going on, the "Bhanuization" of other parts of the country has not been neglected. As stated earlier, many localities in Nepal have installed Bhanubhakta's statue (see above for place names) and named neighbourhoods, parks, schools, colleges and libraries after him in the last three decades. Examples of neighbourhoods named as Bhanu-Chowk, Bhanu-Nagar or Bhanu-Tol can be found in Bhadrapur, Dharan, Diktel, Biratnagar, Janakpur, and Damauli.⁵² Parks named in his memory include the Bhanu-Ghasi Memorial Park in Ghasi-Kuwa and Bhanu Park in Siraha, although the latter is said to be suffering from neglect (Bista 2053 v.s.). The road joining Dumre bazaar to Besi Sahar of Lamjung has been named Bhanubhakta Highway. There are many schools and colleges named after Bhanubhakta. The more well-known include the Adikavi Bhanubhakta Multiple Campus in Damauli, and Bhanubhakta Memorial Higher Secondary School and Bhanubhakta Memorial College in Kathmandu. A number of libraries have been named after Bhanubhakta. Apart from the one in Chundi Ramgha, such libraries exist in the Bulingtar Village Development Committee (VDC) of Nawalparasi district,⁵³ and Bijayanagar VDC of Pyuthan district. Other groups, institutions and products also carry his name. For instance, a committee of vegetable and fruit venders in Dharan is called the Bhanu Sabji Committee (Blast Times 2056 v.s.) and one kind of the packaged salt is now called "Bhanu Nun" (Nepal Samacarptra 2056 v.s.). These developments, one can say, are

⁵¹ While talking about *Bhanujanmasthal* as a national pilgrimage site, it is important to note that some have described Bhanubhakta and the celebration of his memory as a *tirtha* (pilgrimage) in itself (e.g. K. Pradhan 2049 v.s.). Pradhan wrote this article after Bhanubhakta's statue was destroyed in Darjeeling in 1992.

⁵² Harsha Subba (2051 v.s.) of Dharan has written a poem with the title "Bhanu Cokma".

⁵³ The library was established in 1998 on land donated by Duwal Puri. It has been reported that Read Nepal, an American INGO, that is helping community libraries in Nepal, is going to donate 15,000 books to this library (Gorkhapatra 2055 v.s.).

examples of how Nepal's territorial landscape has been culturally nationalized through naming (after Bhanubhakta) or through the presence of icons, symbols and products associated with Bhanubhakta (cf. Adhikary 1996).

Conclusion

The main point I have tried to establish in this article is that Bhanubhakta's central location in Nepali national culture according to dominant national history—Bhanubhakta as the Nepali *adikavi* and Bhanubhakta as the second unifier of all Nepalis—is the product of the intricate work of multiple agents and institutions over a greater part of this century. The second point I have tried to establish is the role of social technologies—textual and audio-visual media, performance and pilgrimage, physical infrastructure—through which the nationalist ideology associated with Bhanubhakta became a central part of Nepali national culture. I have shown that the agency of individuals and institutions who invented new practices to cultivate the nationalist ideology built around Bhanubhakta was central to the history of its rise to the status of national culture. It was their work which later allowed the central state to use powerful instruments such as school textbooks, posters and film to make Bhanubhakta every Nepali's ancestor.



Photo 5: A student learning his lessons on Bhanubhata from his school textbook, Dang, 2056 v.s. (Photo: Usha Tiwari)

This making of Bhanubhakta has succeeded not so much as the result of work that followed a 'blue-print' of what I have called the cultivating Bhanubhakta project, but rather through multiply overlapping and over-determining projects, not all of which were conceived as parts of a grand whole. Executed separately or in tandem with each other, they have nevertheless contributed to what perhaps seems like a hyper-production of Bhanubhakta as an element of Nepali national culture.

While there is much truth to this perception, some of it must also be attributed to the structuring of my narrative, one that takes Kathmandu as the focal point of activities across the country. This is a fair representation in that, perhaps to overcome the centre's anxiety regarding whether or not the nationalist ideology it propagates will convert into a national culture that sufficiently covers all of the national space, it resorts to all kinds of repetitive inscriptions. We could call this a process of hyper-nationalizing the singular Bhanubhakta. However, viewed from the separate localities in which Bhanubhakta's icons were placed, we would have to interpret these material objects as means through which the national culture is localized. If "the very survival of the nation is predicated on it being visible and present in these constituent localities, on it being alive in the minds and hearts and souls of its loyal citizenry" (Ramaswamy 1994:297), then

Bhanubhakta statues or institutions and physical spaces named after him in different parts of Nepal are instances of how dominant Nepali national culture is locally embedded.

What of the individuals involved in the cultivation of Bhanubhakta project? We might ask, what's in it for them? Here too, there might be two perspectives from which to address these questions. From the point of view of those who cultivated Bhanubhakta from Kathmandu in the early days of such activities, we might guess that the motivation for them was to bring to life a national symbol and culture that, in its distinctiveness, would provide them with a recognizable national identity in the international arena of nations. Alternatively, from the point of view of those who participated in the cultivation of Bhanubhakta project in other localities in Nepal, we might guess that their motivation primarily came from their role as brokers of the national culture in their particular region or locality. They, in a sense, brought Bhanubhakta home and in so doing, they also asserted their presence in the national sphere of things.

The recent post-*Jana Andolan* resurgence of the cultivating Bhanubhakta project similarly needs to be considered from both social locations. While international legitimacy and recognition for Nepali national culture clearly remains a motivation for Kathmandu-based Bhanu devotees (witness the preparation of an international version of the Bhanubhakta film), the internal politics of Nepali nationalism are different now than in Panchayat days. Amid sharp challenges to the equation of a Nepali language-based (Hindu) cultural identity with Nepali national culture, the cultivating Bhanubhakta project appears to have taken on new importance for those who wish to preserve that equation. Redeployment from the centre of Bhanubhakta the national symbol, carefully cultivated through the Panchayat years, needs to be understood in this light.

From the point of view of those who currently participate in the cultivation of the Bhanubhakta project in other localities in Nepal, we can speculate that their motivation remains much the same—setting themselves up as brokers of the national culture in their particular locality, asserting their presence in the national sphere of things. But we must recognize that the local significance of these acts has, in many places, undergone significant transformation in the post-*Jana Andolan* period. In at least some locations, promotion of Bhanubhakta as a national symbol now takes place in a social field that includes assertions of other cultural identities, direct challenges to the equation of Nepali language-based (Hindu) cultural identity with Nepali national culture. That is, amid challenges to the national culture of which Bhanubhakta is, as we have

seen, one of the most potent symbols. Thus local participation in the cultivating Bhanubhakta project may now not only serve to connect people to the centre, but also situate them (whether they desire it or not) in complex local struggles over what counts as Nepali national culture. Spatial aspects of how Bhanubhakta became a part of Nepali national culture, especially the 'local' initiatives and stories that illuminate this process, and the transformation of the meaning of Bhanubhakta promotion over time deserve a deeper analysis than has been possible here.

Finally we might ask what kinds of collectivities do the individuals who have participated in the cultivation of Bhanubhakta project in the capacity of active agents represent. I have emphasized the point that these individuals mostly worked outside of the machinery of the official state even as they sought the latter's collaboration in their project. It would very much be the case that participation in such an exercise would bolster their class, caste and gender interests in ways I have not been able to explore here. Nevertheless the fact that most of these agents were Bahun and Chhetri males is an indication of the particularities that characterize the social institutions that have made the present-day dominant Nepali national culture.

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