

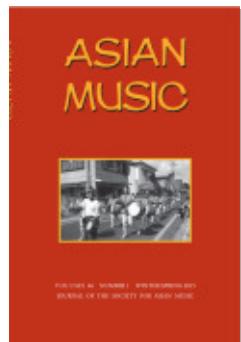


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Sounding and Writing a Nepali Public Sphere: The Music and Language of *Jhyāure*

Anna Stirr

Abstract: This article examines how the interaction between the oral/aural and written aspects of language and song has shaped a modern Nepali-language public sphere and its uneasy relationship with the politics of difference and inequality in intimate life. To do so, it traces the history of the musical and poetic genre of *jhyāure* in Nepal and northern India, in music and literature from the early nineteenth century through the present, with a focus on how the demotic values associated with *jhyāure* and orality/aurality have come to hold a significant place in an idea of Nepali national public space.

यस लेखमा भाषा, साहित्य र गीत संगीतका मौखिक र लिखित पक्षहरूको अन्तरकृयाले आधुनिक नेपाली सार्वजनिक तथा निजी क्षेत्रमा रहने असमानतामा पर्ने प्रभावहरूको बारेमा विश्लेषण गरिएको छ। उन्नाइसौं सताब्दी देखि हाल सम्मका नेपाल र उत्तर भारतमा “इयाउरे” सांगीतिक विधा र काव्यात्मक विधाको इतिहासको बारेमा केहि अंश लेखिएको छ। यसको साथ साथै इयाउरे र मौखिक (लोक) साहित्य तथा गीत संगीत संग जोडिएका स्थानिय मुल्य र मान्यताहरूले नेपाली राष्ट्रिय सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रमा महत्वपूर्ण स्थान कसरी बनाएका छन् भन्ने कुरा समेटिएको छ।

When I was in jail, I was the only one who could read and write. So it was my job to write letters for all of the other men. They would come and ask me to write a letter home to their sweethearts, and I would write down what they said on paper and then copy it over so it looked nice. . . . I wish I had been able to save those letters! They were all in songs, all in *jhyāure*.

(Name withheld by request)

In 2011, a politician from Syangja district, a member of the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist-Leninist), told me this story of his experiences as a political prisoner in a rural jail in the early 1980s.¹ In his narrative, he styles himself as a mediator between his fellow political prisoners and their lovers, and also between written and oral media of communication. His surprise that the letters dictated to him were “all in songs” suggests that he, an educated man, saw letters and songs as two separate genres, belonging to separate spheres. The men who dictated the letters, in contrast, saw *jhyāure* lyrics as the most appropriate way to send messages of love, whether their rhyming couplets were written or sung.² Had they been in the same place as the ones they loved, the words of love would have been expressed in song. And if the men were illiterate, it is likely that the lovers to whom they sent letters

were as well. So the recipients of the letters would have heard the messages read by someone else: a letter reader analogous to their jailed sweethearts' letter writer. Writing was a medium transmitting sounded messages, recorded on paper by the letter writer's hand, and re-sounded at their destinations by those who read them to their intended recipients. While the literate politician might have found this surprising, this meeting of one man's lettered world with the primarily sounded world of others illustrates an ongoing interaction between the oral/aural and written aspects of language and song, which has significantly shaped a modern Nepali-language public sphere and its uneasy relationship with the politics of difference and inequality in intimate life.

The *lok* or folk genres of Nepali poetry and song emphasize the sounded aspects of language. Song dominates both the worlds of rural performance and the commercial music market in Nepal. Even the instrumental bands of the past two decades that are oriented toward the world music market primarily play instrumental versions of well-known folk songs.³ In Nepali folk poetry and folk song, which are hard to separate from each other, poetic play with language takes pride of place in performances that involve often-improvised lyrics sung to a set melody, instrumental accompaniment, dancing, flirting, and often eating and drinking. Although this primacy of language contributes to naturalizing the separation of songs from their performed sources and their recontextualization in print and recordings, the poetic meters common to performed, written, and recorded versions of songs continually recall the musical *tāl*, variations of which in turn index various dance steps (Shah 2037 v.s., 158–60).⁴ Poetic meter, a constant as songs circulate through different media, acts as a vehicle not just for the words and their lexical content but also for an entire embodied way of performing and experiencing the performance and everything with which it is associated.

This emphasis on the primacy of sounded language in Nepali folk poetry and song has long been bound up with writing, recording, and other forms of inscription. Debates about the written Nepali language, and decisions made by particular publishing houses, have shaped its spoken forms (Hutt 1988; Chalmers 2003). Recording and broadcasting technologies that re-voice both written and aurally heard and remembered text have afforded further imbrication of the written and the sounded (Kunreuther 2004). Laura Ahearn (2001) has also noted that love songs often make their way into Nepali love letters and that the meeting of writing and song has important associations with modernity, ideas of development, and what Lisa Gitelman (1999) refers to as relations of textuality.

As Gitelman observes, “Print culture and nonprint media evolve in mutual inextricability” (1999, 13). The question is not whether speech or writing (or any other form of inscription) is actually prior or of greater importance

but how they evolve together. Gitelman further argues that “contemporary inscriptive forms”—starting with the phonograph—“were deeply dependent upon reworkings of the social and economic relations of textuality, of print culture and print capitalism. They engaged literacy practices in toto, the cognitive and the somatic, the semiotic and the social,” and contributed to reconfiguring notions of public and private, and social solidarity and social difference (*ibid.*, 13). Following a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship that looks at music and language together, I conceive of relations of textuality in terms of oral/aural and written texts, as well as texts in other inscriptive forms (see Faudree 2012; Feld and Fox 1994; Feld et al. 2004; Maskarinec 1995). My own scholarship stands at the intersection of Nepali- and English-language texts in ethnomusicology, anthropology, folklore, literary studies, history, and historiography and is grounded in a 15-year relationship with the music of central and western Nepal, including many years as a musician in the region’s pop, classical, and folk scenes, two years of full-time ethnographic fieldwork on folk genres including *jhyāure*, and ongoing participation as a scholar and performer both in Nepal and among Nepali communities in the United States and United Kingdom.

In Nepal, folklore and Nepali literary studies have been the main academic disciplines concerned with changing relations of textuality. Over the past few decades, discussions in these fields have been colored by a concern for nation building that places the origin of the Nepali nation at the time of the Gorkhali conquests and includes the farthest reaches of the Gorkhali state’s territories within the imagined nation of Nepal. In the opinions of several Nepali scholars, musical and poetic exchanges and the development of new regionally hybrid styles became laudable contributions to Nepali cultural unification, paving the way for a new national consciousness through the embodied practices of singing and dancing (Bandhu 1989; Pant 1968; D. B. Thapa 2066 v.s.). Thus, these folklorists place great emphasis on these exchanges of song in developing a Nepali public sphere. As Chalmers reminds us, Nepal has been characterized by “nationism rather than nationalism” (2007, 88), with the state searching for ways to create nationhood among a highly ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse populace. The development of a Nepali-language public sphere through oral and print media was thus very important to efforts toward consolidating a national culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, state-led and otherwise, and remains so today, though in significantly modified forms.

My argument here focuses only peripherally on the state; rather, I focus on how changing relations of textuality have shaped a Nepali public sphere. Loosely following Habermas ([1962] 1989), I see this as a public sphere of communicative action within which creators of texts—oral, written,

recorded—have aimed to shape the idea of public space. In this case, I focus particularly on public space imagined as national. This Nepali public sphere is grounded in intertwined concepts of linguistic and national unity, which are both exclusive in their focus on the Nepali language at the expense of the other hundred-odd languages spoken in Nepal and inclusive in their embrace of oral along with written texts as representative of a public sense of nationhood. To address the significance of *jhyāure*, my concept of the public sphere is extended to embrace what Francesca Orsini (2002) refers to as the “customary”—a sphere of cultural practices and beliefs that overlap both public and private. The oral and aural practices of *jhyāure* singing, with their “private” love-song topics and their “public” performance contexts, fall into the sphere of the “customary.” This introduction of a third, overlapping space, with its bridging of public and private—a step also toward bridging elite and nonelite spheres—just barely begins to solve the problems that *jhyāure* brought into the emerging Nepali public sphere: the problem of defining the lines between public and private, and in doing so, also defining lines between genders, classes, and ethnic/caste groups. Examining *jhyāure*’s place in a Nepali national public sphere is another step toward understanding how such hierarchical divisions are formed and contested.

Ana María Ochoa (2006) makes the important point that the social formations resulting from interactions between different textualities can be highly unequal, and these inequalities are shaped by the ideologies associated with different media forms. In her analysis of Latin America as an “aural region,” she identifies “epistemologies of purification” and practices of “sonic transculturation,” which exist in a cyclical relation in which cultural forms are ideologically identified as “pure” representations of national or ethnic essence “[provincialized] in order to ascribe them a place in the modern ecumene” (2006, 803), and also consciously recontextualized through practices of celebratory hybridity, disrupting such purifying drives (*ibid.*, 806; Feld 2000, 146; Stokes 2004). Musics that fall outside the purview of youth music, “heritage” folk music, or revolutionary aesthetics—those that defy categories—she argues, are dismissed as being vulgar or in bad taste (Ochoa 2006, 805–6). In Nepal, *jhyāure* (in its broadest sense) is one such type of music and poetry, in both the musical and literary fields. Yet its borderline status, as a site of debate and a place to push boundaries of what is acceptable, has remained central to ways of imagining a particular Nepali public sphere, one shot through with debates about love, eroticism, and ideas of belonging inflected by gender, caste, ethnicity, and class. Following a series of prominent recontextualizations of the *jhyāure* poetic meter through the development of relations of textuality in Nepal from the early nineteenth century to the present, I trace how *jhyāure* has evolved through, shaped, and challenged the projects of cul-

tural nation building that have shaped a Nepali public sphere throughout the past two centuries.

The Rhythm of the Nation: *Jhyāure* and Nepali Nationalism

Jhyāure is an important part of Nepali folk music and literature that has several definitions. It is a polysemic term that denotes a wide variety of song genres, a variety of poetic meters (*chhanda*), and the 6-beat musical *tāl* known as *jhyāure tāl*. The song genres known as *jhyāure* all use the *jhyāure* poetic meters and variations of the following basic *tāls*, here represented using western-Nepali *bols* for the two-headed barrel drum known as the *mādal*, as shown in Bhatkande notation in tables 1 and 2.⁵

Table 1. Fast *jhyāure tāl*

<i>Bol</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	-	<i>Ti</i>	<i>Na</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Na</i>	
Beat	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strong beats	x			(x)			

Table 2. Slow *jhyāure tāl*

<i>Bol</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Tang</i>	<i>Khat</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Tang</i>	
Beat	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strong beats	x			(x)			

Referring to all of these song genres at once, at least one folklorist has referred to *jhyāure* as “the most important [type of] folksong of today” (Bandhu 2006, 5). The term has even come to denote the gatherings where *jhyāure* is performed, along with various other types of songs: “Let’s go sing *jhyāure*” or “let’s go dance *jhyāure*” are ways of inviting someone to a gathering meant primarily for enjoyment and pleasure, with love songs that have mildly erotic lyrics, perhaps including dancing to the beat of the *mādal*, or the *khaijadi* frame drum, with the added percussion of various shakers, and the melodies of the *bāsuri* flute or 4-stringed Nepali *sārangī*. In its broadest usage, *jhyāure* has also come to refer to all folk song in the Nepali language, although scholars attempt to differentiate it from other such broad categories (folk song, rural song, people’s songs; Tiwari 2003). This article primarily concerns *jhyāure* as poetic meter. But by focusing on poetic meter, I want to draw attention to all the other things that it can come to signify.

Nepali folk poetic meters are syllabic rather than durational, and while the number of syllables can vary slightly, the placement of caesuras helps define the poetic meter. Unlike in English, changing the way words are accented is

frowned upon. Thus, a strong beat in the poetic meter should always fall on a strong beat in the *tāl*. Throughout this article I privilege poetic meter in my transcriptions and translations of *jhyāure* songs and poetry. In Nepali, I use nonstandard spellings in cases where they best illustrate how the words are actually pronounced. In English, I allow myself some awkward turns of phrase in order to reproduce the poetic meter without playing fast and loose with the meaning.⁶ I focus on one of the best-known poetic meters in the *jhyāure* category, known as *Asāre Jhyāure*. It carries this name because it is used in the rhyming couplets of many rice-planting songs sung in the monsoon month of Asār, especially from the central-western hills over through the eastern hills of Nepal. Here is an example of *Asāre Jhyāure* meter, from the song “Raspberry Leaf” (*Aīseluko Pāt*), which is discussed in depth later.

*Rimī ra jhimī, pānī hai paryo, rujheu ki rujhenau
ākhāko sārle, bolāe maile, bujheu ki bujhenau*

Softly and gently, rain is now falling, did you get wet or not?
With my eye-signals, I called you over, did you get it or not? (Gharti and Chhetri 2012)

It is divided into groups of 5, 5, and 6 syllables, with a caesura on the final syllable of each group. These groups of syllables can be further divided into groups of 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, and 1, with the first syllable of each small group stressed. This means that the first syllable of each small group must fall on a beat when the words are set to a melody. *Asāre Jhyāure* is sung exclusively with 6-beat *tāls*. And it is the *jhyāure* poetic meter that was adopted by the world of written literature to the greatest extent. There are several other well-known poetic meters that also fall within the category of *jhyāure*,⁷ which are used in the various song genres that all bear the name *jhyāure*.

The various *jhyāure* song genres can be identified with particular regions within the Nepali hills, but *jhyāure* as a 6-beat *tāl* and a category of poetic meters that scan easily within this *tāl* remains common to them all. Based on these commonalities, *jhyāure* has been used as a symbol of pan-Nepali (i.e., Gorkhali) national unity by the nineteenth-century private publishing industries, the state-run music industry from the 1950s onward, and the private music industry from the 1980s onward. Though now found throughout the country, *jhyāure* is most strongly associated with the central hills of Nepal, with rurality, a lack of refinement and even vulgarity, yet also an idea of authentic Nepaliness. This idea of authentic Nepaliness has been constructed through processes of purification that never quite forget multiple origins, instead aiming to include them within the embrace of an all-encompassing Nepali public.⁸

Jhyāure History

The songs and sung poetry of Nepal's hill regions have been shaped by migration throughout their history, and we can trace their changes in Nepal's western hills back quite far through attention to the songs of bards and mediums in far western Nepal (Bernede 1997; Lecomte-Tilouine 2009). Yet to my knowledge, none of these are in *jhyāure* poetic meter or *jhyāure tāl*.⁹ *Jhyāure*-like poetic meters may have begun to appear in the Nepali oral tradition around the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah, in the mid-eighteenth century. Soldiers in the armies of this Gorkhali king and his successors engaged in military campaigns throughout the surrounding regions, ranging from the Darjeeling hills to Kashmir in the west, parts of Tibet in the north, and even parts of the plains to the south. These soldiers' interaction with each other in the army, with the people in the areas where they were posted, and with their home communities upon return, contributed to the exchange of musical and poetic material between regions.

This was also true for courtiers: the poet Subananda Das, believed to have been associated with Prithvi Narayan Shah, wrote panegyrics to the king that both demonstrated familiarity with songs in Braj Bhasa, the language of the plains that now span southeastern Nepal and northern Bihar, and referenced places and customs of the Nepali hills (Dahal 2011; Hutt 1991). His verses have been described as having a "rugged texture and irregular rhymes" (Nepali 1997, 389), an appraisal similar to those often made about *jhyāure* and its supposed rusticity, but the verses themselves do not sound like *jhyāure*. But there are orally transmitted verses about Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest of the Kathmandu Valley in 1769, said to date from that time, which proclaim his victory in a near *jhyāure* meter:

*Sarau rukhmā basyo lau khutṭāko sārale
Jityo aba tīna śahara gorkhālī rājāle.*

Up in a tree, a myna bird perched, balancing on one leg
The king of Gorkha is now victorious over the cities three. (cited in Dahal 2011,1, my translation)

A characteristic of *jhyāure* poetic language seen in this verse is the use of final /a/ in words commonly pronounced without them: *tīna* (three) and *śahara* (cities). Yet the poetic meter is not clearly *jhyāure*; with some creativity, including dropping the final /a/ on *śahar*, it can also be made to scan as a different poetic meter, *sawāi*, in which one line contains 14 syllables rather than *jhyāure*'s 16.¹⁰ The lexical content of this verse introduces a pattern common to many Nepali songs in various poetic meters: the first line is rarely related

thematically to the second line, and while its imagery is no doubt valuable, the first line's sonic content is arguably of greater importance than its lexical content in terms of the verse's coherence.¹¹ End rhyme is of primary importance (not only verb endings but also verb stems must rhyme); this particular couplet also has an internal rhyme between *sarau* and *lau*, and the repetition of the consonant /kh/ links it to *gorkhālī* in the second line—all valued aspects of verbal art among singers and poets in Nepal today. Thus, it is clear that this verse shares some aspects with current *jhyāure* and other Nepali sung poetry. Yet sources do not make it clear whether or not this is actually a verse from Prithvi Narayan Shah's era.

The story of Gorya Siras, Manabhir Khatri, and the early nineteenth-century *jhyāure* song craze in Baglung district more conclusively links military labor migration with the *jhyāure* of today. After the wars with the British in 1814–16, these two men stayed behind in Garhwal for a year and in 1817 brought the songs they learned there back to their village of Rangkhani in Baglung district. They created their own innovative songs based on the Garhwali models (Pant 1968, 70–73; D. B. Thapa 2066 v.s., 28–31). Their new songs became so popular that people came from far and wide to learn them in Baglung. The song styles were further carried around the Himalayan foothills by those who learned them, as well as through migration out of the central-western hills, the continued movements of the Gorkhali army, and the new practice of recruiting Nepalis into the British army.

Nepali folklorist Kalibhakta Pant did fieldwork on Siras and Khatri's legacy in 1950, interviewing Gorya Siras's 85-year-old nephew Narjit Agri and his 87-year-old sister, who is unnamed in Pant's text. Pant states that "the songs born of the national language were given the name *jhyāure*" (1968, 71), and the songs Siras and Khatri brought from Garhwal form the basis for this set of Nepali-language songs. He provides a long list of vocable words (a category of words known as *thego*, *rahanī*, or *bathan*) that today signal types of songs, many of which are thought of as *jhyāure*, but some can now fall in other categories. But this list tells us that even at this time, there were various song types in the umbrella category of *jhyāure*, with different musical structures and different poetic meters. Because of this musical and poetic diversity, and because the term *jhyāure* has such a wide range of meanings today, it is hard to tell exactly what was new about the songs from Garhwal and what it means to say these songs are the basis for *jhyāure* as it is known today.

While similar poetic meters and 6-beat *tāls* probably already existed in central Nepal before the nineteenth century, the particular poetic meters of these songs, perhaps combined with a way of counting the *tāl*, may well have been new to this area of the Himalayas. The poetic meter of the Garhwali song "Hai Gori" (O fair girl), on which Siras and Khatri based their new song,

is the same as *Thādo Bhākā* meter, one of the poetic meters currently placed in the category of *jhyāure* (Nepal 2006, 106):¹²

Hāi Gorī
Khāniko peṭa rāniko peṭa,
Hāi gorī adhivilo khānyā ho,
Lām jānyā belā na pichhyau cheli,
Pheripāli rānī khet lānyā ho.

O, Fair Girl

The hungry belly, the queen's own belly,
 O, fair girl, if you want to eat just half,
 Girl, don't you follow me for a long time,
 I'll come back and take you to Rāni Khet. (D. B. Thapa 2066 v.s., 29–30)

The lexical meaning of this song first requires a bit of explication: The speaker is male, singing to a woman who's in love with him, her desire equated with hunger. His reference to eating half a measure implies that he is already married—if she stays with him, she'll only get half. Letting her know this, he implores her to wait until next time, when he'll take her with him. Unlike in the couplet from Prithvi Narayan Shah's time, which was presumably composed by someone from central Nepal, there is narrative coherence among all the lines of this song. Also, the language is the Nepali of the west: *khānyā*, *jānyā*, and *lānyā* rather than the central Nepali *khāne*, *jāne*, and *lāne*,¹³ and the construction *lām jānyā belā*, all mark this song as coming from the western Himalayan foothills. The poetic meter of the song Siras and Khatri based on this one is similar but not identical and is sung as a male-female duet:

Siras and Khatri's New Song

Thiti:

Ā . . . ā . . . surtī halyā jābībāsā
 Ā . . . ā . . . kinyo ki kinina sai
 Ā . . . ā . . . bāla dinmā sangai khelthyaū
 Ā . . . ā . . . chinyo chinena sai

Thita:

Ā . . . ā . . . tala ringe singāru ta
 Ā . . . ā . . . māthi ringe bingo nā
 Ā . . . ā . . . ek gāūko rastī bastī
 Ā . . . ā . . . nachinnu ke thiyo nā

Girl:

They've added special tobacco
 Did you buy it or not?
 In childhood days we played together
 Do you know me or not?

Boy:

Lower down is Ringe Singaru
 Further up is Ringe Bingo
 We stay and live in the same village
 How could I not know you? (D. B. Thapa 2066 v.s., 30)

It is impossible to know from Thapa's text whether or not Siras and Khatri added vocalizations on /ā/ to their performance of "Hai Gorī" and the other Garhwali songs. But this example of their innovative song based on the Garhwali models, with the /ā/ written into the text, also suggests some similarity with today's *Thāḍo Bhākā*, which is now associated more with Lamjung, Gorkha, and to an extent, Tanahun districts rather than with Baglung. This new song of Siras and Khatri's also shares the feature of a "nonsense" first line and "meaningful" second line with the earlier couplet about Prithvi Narayan Shah and with many Nepali folk songs of today. Another song of Siras and Khatri's shares much more with the *jhyāure* of today and retains close associations with Baglung:

Pitalu kātī machungī mero sālīju
Bajaī ra bajāulā
Gamana belā naroe cheli sālīju
Sāthai ra laijāulā

Made of cut brass, this, my little mouth harp *sālīju*
 I'll play this instrument.
 Don't cry now, cousin,¹⁴ when we are parting *sālīju*
 I may take you with me.

Here the word *sālīju* is inserted into the middle of an exact *Asāre Jhyāure* meter as a *thego*: a word, phrase, or set of vocables inserted into a line of poetry or used as a refrain. In this case, it has been argued that *sālīju* is not a vocable word but an actual meaningful word, *sālī jyu*, or "respected female cross-cousin."¹⁵ The implication is that the male singer is addressing a woman who is a preferential marriage partner (Neupane 2012; see also Pant 1968, 71). However, this meaning no longer holds widespread currency, and this *thego*, now pronounced as *sālāijo* and understood by most as a vocable, defines today's song genre of *Sālāijo* or *Baglunge Jhyāure*. As in *Thāḍo Bhākā* and the first song of Siras and Khatri's presented earlier, modern *Sālāijo* also contains vocalizations on /ā/, which in its particular case come at the ends of the final lines of couplets. Female "echo" singers enter on /ā/, overlapping with the final beat of the male lead singer's line, and repeat the final three words of the male lead singer's couplet. A fast refrain, which may be in a different *jhyāure* poetic meter, but still in *jhyāure tāl*, often follows, in which fast *jhyāure* dancing is performed and all join in singing.¹⁶

In addition to poetic meter, these nineteenth-century musical exchanges in the context of military labor migration may have contributed to innovations in *tāl*. The late Nepali musicologist Subi Shah suggests in his book *Madal* (2039 v.s., 21), and more strongly in a discussion I had with him in 2006, that a particular way of counting *jhyāure tāl* out loud in two, over beats that are counted in three, was brought back to Nepal by soldiers in Prithvi Narayan Shah's armies and may also have been one of the new and attractive characteristics of Siras and Khatri's *jhyāure* of Baglung. To this day, it remains one characteristic of songs in *jhyāure tāl*. However, the tension between these ways of dividing the beat is not always highlighted, and when it is, this is often only for a few bars.¹⁷ Ingemar Grandin (2005, 13) describes *jhyāure tāl* as "6/8 in the right hand, 3/4 in the left," but in my experience few *mādalists* think about their right and left hands separately, as mnemonics and *bol* patterns both demonstrate (plus, handedness on the *mādal* is a matter of personal preference rather than fixed convention). For example, one mnemonic for *jhyāure tal* is *dinna ma ta* (literally, "I won't give it"), which involves both the right and left hands playing the *bols* "ghin—ti na ghin—" in which *ghin* is played with one hand and *ti* and *na* with the other; "—" represents a rest of one beat. The mnemonic brings all the *bols* into one single sentence, where which *bols* are played by which hand is incidental, but the rhythm of the words clearly shows which beats should be accented. A common phrase of *mādal bol*s in *jhyāure tāl* involves divisions of six beats into groups of both two and three, as shown in table 3.

Kofi Agawu (2003, 92) has argued persuasively that the 3 and 2 relationship in African music is best thought of not as a "polyrhythm" but rather as part of one whole rhythmic gestalt. Thus, in this case, what Western musicians might hear as a 3-against-2 polyrhythm is better thought of as a feature inherent in *jhyāure tāl*, which is highlighted to create pleasurable tension at certain points in a song. This feature is found in other South Asian genres as well, and while it may indeed have been brought to central Nepal in the early nineteenth century, it may also have existed there already.

The meaning of *jhyāure* expands even further: perhaps because the songs of Baglung and the surrounding areas of the central-western hills became so famous throughout Nepal, *jhyāure* is now sometimes used to refer to all Nepali hill-area folk songs that are not specifically associated with a season or ceremony (D. B. Thapa 2066 v.s., 87).¹⁸ This may have some relation to the ideas of *rasa* and *bhava*, in which the predominant *rasa/bhava* of *jhyāure* songs is *śringara* or romantic/erotic: in other words, most *jhyāure* songs are love songs. Love not being a theme limited to any particular season or ceremony, *jhyāure* songs can thus be sung at any time of year. Acknowledging the wide range of meanings that now exist for the term *jhyāure*, folklorist Din

Table 3. Divisions of *jhyāure tāl*

<i>Bol</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	—	<i>Ti</i>	<i>Na</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Na</i>	—	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Na</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Na</i>	—
Beat	1	2	3	4	5	6	—	1	2	3	4	5
Strong beats	x						x					
<i>Bol</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	—	<i>Tang</i>	—	<i>Tang</i>	—	<i>Ghin</i>	—	<i>Tang</i>	—	<i>Tang</i>	—
Beat	1	2	3	4	5	6	—	1	2	3	4	5
Strong beats	x						x					
<i>Bol</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	—	<i>Ti</i>	<i>Na</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Na</i>	—	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Na</i>	<i>Ghin</i>	<i>Na</i>	—
Beat	1	2	3	4	5	6	—	1	2	3	4	5
Strong beats	x						x					

Bahadur Thapa, in his study of the music of Baglung, concludes that the best definition of *jhyāure* songs is not a musical one or one based on a poetic meter but rather one based on how the songs fit into everyday life. However, he is clear that they are songs, performed with musical instruments and dancing, and that *jhyāure* is a multisensory, multivalent performance genre:

A survey [of the scholarly literature] suggests that *jhyāure* may be defined as songs sung in folk tunes [*loklayaharu*],¹⁹ at certain times and situations within folk life when young men and women are gathered together, with the boisterous accompaniments of frame drum [*damphu*], small barrel drum [*mādal*], large cymbals [*jhyāmta*], small cymbals [*jhyālī*], and other instruments, in order to forget momentary suffering and sorrow, etc., and for enjoyment. (D. B. Thapa 2066 v.s., 90)

So, to Thapa, *jhyāure* songs are those performed in a mixed-gender environment for the sheer pleasure of making music, dancing, and performing poetic lyrics. A synonym for this meaning is *bāhramāse gīt*, in its Nepali sense: songs for all 12 months or songs not tied to any particular time of the year. Because they are not specifically associated with any one season or ritual, they are available for performance in nearly all contexts. Even when specific rituals are occurring, *jhyāure* songs will be performed on the outskirts of the area set aside for ritual performance or performed after the rituals have been completed. Since the nineteenth century, songs modeled on aspects of Siras and Khatri's innovative songs have been adopted and further innovated all over Nepal and the eastern Indian Himalayas, creating diverse forms of *jhyāure* as musically defined. These songs, along with many others, are performed at the gatherings still known as *jhyāure nāchne* (*jhyāure* dancing), *jhyāure gāune* (*jhyāure* singing), and by many other local names.

Bandhu (1989, 126) interprets Pant's findings to suggest that no matter the origin of the term *jhyāure* or what it originally denoted, and even without complete knowledge of what exactly was new about Siras and Khatri's musical imports, the poetic and musical exchanges brought about by the Gorkhali army's movements through the Himalayan region invigorated innovation in folk music in Nepal and contributed to the ongoing creation of greater cultural commonalities across the Nepali hills. Dharmaraj Thapa corroborates the importance of these exchanges in creating shared cultural reference points throughout the reaches of the Gorkhali state (2030 v.s., 272). And Pant himself notes that a process of "Gorkhalification" (*gorkhālikarāṇ*) was occurring in other song forms as well during the same time period (1968, 73).

Literary studies also acknowledge the contributions of *jhyāure* to Nepali cultural unification and proto-nationalist consciousness. In the following section I turn to literature, its role in producing a new kind of Nepali-language

public sphere, and the ambivalent place of the *jhyāure* poetic meter in this early twentieth-century “imagined community.” In particular, attention to how *jhyāure* was adopted first by the popular press and then in elite literary circles provides us with insights into how this new public sphere was shaped by changing ideas of gender and caste/ethnic relations.

***Jhyāure* in Written Literature**

After the 1814–16 wars, the British began recruiting men who lived within the Gorkhali state to fight in their armies in India. This was the origin of the Gurkha/Gorkha regiments. Although Nepalis had long been migrating to India for various reasons, not least for labor, Gurkha recruitment was among the factors that led to an increase in migration throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. The desire for education, access to which was severely limited in Nepal up through the early twentieth century, was another long-standing draw for Nepalis to move to India temporarily, and Benares and Calcutta, along with Darjeeling, were centers of Nepali-language intellectual activity.

In the 1920s and 1930s, as historian Pratyoush Onta points out, groups of elite male Nepali intellectuals in these Indian cities started creating a national “historical genealogy” through “the self-conscious fostering of the Nepali language and the writing of a particular *bir* [vir] (brave masculine) history of the Nepali nation” (Onta 1996a, 39).²⁰ According to Onta, in the early twentieth century, groups of high-caste Hindu male intellectuals in Darjeeling, Banaras, and Calcutta began to articulate a Nepali identity around the Nepali language. They did so in part to counter the prevailing prejudice in British India against their language as suitable only for manual laborers and thus to raise their own status by separating themselves from the class of Nepali migrants engaged in such work. These men, dedicated to *bhāṣā prem* (love of language) and *bhāṣā sudhār* (language reform), wrote in literary Nepali to distinguish themselves from the manual laborers’ colloquial style of Nepali. Despite this elitism they envisioned themselves as promoting national unity through linguistic unity.

Central to this imagined unity was the figure of poet Bhanubhakta Acharya (1814–68), who in the mid-1800s had written a version of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* in Nepali. Since his promotion as the “first” Nepali poet by his biographer Motiram Bhatta in the 1880s, Bhanubhakta had been known for writing in Nepali at a time when it was prestigious to write in Sanskrit; these intellectuals “rediscovered” him and recast him as a hero of the “Nepali *jāti*”: a unifier along the lines of Prithvi Narayan Shah, but one who used the pen instead of the sword (Onta 1996a, 1996b, 1999). *Jāti*, which can be lit-

erally translated as “type” or “kind” and is often used for both caste and ethnicity today, was the word used at the time to describe the group of people who identified as Nepali, including high Hindu castes such as Bahuns and Chhetris; ethnic groups such as Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs; and low Hindu castes (Dalits); in Nepal as well as in India, all were members of the “Nepali *jāti*,” a concept of nation that existed across borders and without reliance on state structures (cf. Malkki 1995). Language was of paramount importance to this idea of a *jāti*. As Lisa Mitchell (2009) has discussed, the formation of such nations around language was an important feature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernity in South Asia, and language-based political solidarities remain highly salient in South Asian politics today. Including Bhanubhakta in the pantheon of *vir* heroes made “service to the Nepali language” an act of devotion to one’s nation on par with serving in battle. In doing so, it also reconfirmed a view of poetry, verbal art, and such facility with language as masculine pursuits and talents.

Beyond the relatively high literary pursuits of those lauding Bhanubhakta and his religious concerns, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the emergence of vernacular Nepali language publishing in Banaras, representing, as one critic has put it, “the literary aspirations of the common man” (Pradhan 1992, 287). This included devotional (*bhakti*) poetry and narrative poetry in the *sawāi* and *jhyāure* meters. While *sawāi* poetry could theoretically address anything, it often addressed current events and social issues and lacked one particular associated *bhava* or *rasa*. Chudamani Bandhu describes *sawāi* as “descriptive folk poetry” (1989). *Jhyāure* poetry, however, was strongly associated with the erotic (*śringāra rasa*). Sometimes the secular *sawāi* and *jhyāure* poetry printed in this era are referred to together as *laharī sāhitya*; other times, the term *laharī sāhitya* is reserved for the erotic poems in *jhyāure* meter.²¹ As Chalmers discusses, volumes of erotic *jhyāure* poetry were aimed at male Nepalese migrants, primarily soldiers and students in Banaras. They were printed in large type to appeal to the newly literate. Many of these volumes were advertised as songs: for example, Hajirman Rai’s 1900 collection entitled *Miṭhā Miṭhā Geetharu* (Sweet sweet songs) (Pradhan 1992, 288, original spelling); or the 1926 advertisement for *Madan Vinod Laharī* that states, “lovers of songs will surely purchase it” (Chalmers 2002, 79). Like the letters written in jail, these *jhyāure* poems that made up popular *laharī* literature were songs in written form, yet importantly, they were still songs.

Laharī literature tells love stories, with dialogue between lovers that recalls the teasing exchanges of *jhyāure* couplets in *dohorī* songs (improvised, flirtatious duets sung between men and women). Written by and produced for men, as was the case with most Nepali literature at this time,²² these *jhyāure* poetry volumes idealized feminine love objects, including aspects of nature

and the Himalayan foothill landscape. Even when writers began to integrate imagery of the urban with the rural, the conventional pattern of desiring man and resisting woman remained characteristic of *jhyāure* poetry in the *laharī* literature, even though it may sometimes have been ironic. In some of the *laharī* Chalmers cites, the traditional *viraha* theme of lovers' pain of separation begins to take on a nationalist character, as female characters' expressions valorize the rural and the "traditional," and male characters' longing for women also symbolizes longing for home. Thus, *laharī* literature played a part in solidifying existing associations of the *jhyāure* meter with rural life, rusticity, and a village-based national authenticity that remained connected with the body to a greater extent than that described in other vernacular poetry, like *bhakti* poetry and secular *sawāi*. The place of eroticism, already associated with *jhyāure*, in this developing idea of a rural national essence was subject to great debate.

The eroticism in the *jhyāure laharī* literature is generally quite mild and indirect (especially in comparison to the overt bawdiness of some folk songs). For example, in the second part of Ram Prasad Satyal's *Nayā Prem Laharī*, subtitled *A Juicy Question-Answer for Phagu*,²³ a man and woman exchange *jhyāure* couplets, in the common thematic structure of male desire and female resistance:

*Paṭṭho: He Pyāri! Dekhchhu rāmrī chhau ati, komal chha timro jiū
 Kulli kām chhoda pirati joḍa chharna deu premko biū
 Paṭṭhi: Sansārmā rāmri ko chha ra hajur? Rāmro ho āphnai man
 Jasmā man jānchha u rāmri thānchha jagatmā premī jhan.*

Boy: O dear one! I see you even more lovely, your body soft and fine
 Leave your coolie work, come be my lover, let me plant seeds of love.
 Girl: Who in this world is lovely, huh, sir? Your heart is what's lovely,
 Whomever it likes, it sees as lovely, a world full of lovers. (2019 v.s., 39)

Later in the same *laharī*, there is a more explicit scene where a woman describes her shame at her disheveled state after a night of ravishing illicit lovemaking:

*Othamā khat chha gālāmā khat chha tokeko dāṭaile,
 ākhā chhan rātā dukhtachhan pātā bhulechhu bātaile,
 Phātera choli bhaigayo jholi, kosita line ho,
 sodhne chhan sāsu bagnechha āsu ke javāb dine ho.*

Marks on my lips and marks on my cheeks where his teeth bit me there
 My eyes are red, my shoulders are hurting, I got lost in our talk
 All torn, my blouse has become like a sack, who'll give me a new one?
 Mother-in-law will ask as my tears flow, what answer can I give? (2019 v.s., 203).

Verses like these were evidently enough for contemporary critics like Parasmani (1930, cited in Chalmers 2002, 38) and later critics like Taranath Sharma (2051 v.s., cited in *ibid.*) to dismiss all *laharī* as morally degenerate and not worthy of being called literature. Furthermore, they have been virtually ignored by the literary community: Ram Prasad Satyal (1878–1963), like Motiram Bhatta, is remembered today less as an author of erotic *laharī* literature and more as an author of poetic treatments of Puranic stories, such as *Sati Savitri* (Satyal 1928; cf. Das 1995, 129), an essayist (Gurung 1988, 1228), and the author of a Gorkhali-English dictionary (Satyal 1916).

Such debates about appropriate content of published songs/poetry draw our attention to the moral aspects of the expansion of Nepali print capitalism and the formation of associated reading publics, and along with this, greater interaction across lines of caste, ethnicity, region, and class. As Chalmers writes of *jhyāure* and *sawāi* literature,

In their pages we can discern the first indications of a shared and articulated sense of Nepaliness, the exchanging of experiences and traditions, the basis for a *jātiya jivan*,²⁴ tentative steps towards a common Nepali social consciousness. For the first time, young recruits from across Nepal could be reading printed versions of Bahun-Chhetri folk traditions, while Banaras Brahmins (also including a student population drawn from across Nepal) could be reading of lāhure exploits from Manipur to Afghanistan.²⁵ (2002, 89)

In other words, Chalmers rightly sees the birth of Nepali print capitalism as central to the development of a modern “imagined community” of national consciousness among readers of popular literature. His arguments tend toward a de-emphasis of content, stressing the acts of reading, writing, and circulation as constitutive of a new public. But this was not the first step toward cultural unity through media—as we have seen, *jhyāure* songs had already been serving this purpose in the oral tradition (Bandhu 1989, 126). Written literature was arguably extending this existing public and the debates that took place within it. Debates about the morality of erotic lyrics in *jhyāure* may have been happening even before the advent of print media, as ongoing reactions to performances suggest. For example, one Brahmin author’s description of his disapproving reaction to a rural performance of erotic songs in the 1960s (Manjul 1988, 32) expresses, at the very least, a high culture/low culture divide in which the erotic is the element that pushes a song over into the realm of the low and immoral.²⁶ Such anti-erotic sentiment is characteristic of high-caste Hindu morality, yet Brahmin women (and men) do indeed sing bawdy, erotic songs in some contexts, though usually not together.²⁷ The dependence of such songs on performance context is important, as the framing of a performance determines the limits of its potential effects as much

as the performance itself (cf. Werbner 2010). *Jhyāure* song performance, in which men and women trade erotic couplets and dance together through the night, unsettles the ideology that keeps men's and women's public erotic expression safely within separate homosocial spheres. *Laharī* literature, building on the continued resonance of the *jhyāure* poetic meter with *jhyāure* song performance, brought such cross-sex erotic expression into the new context of circulating print media, in which rules separating men's and women's consumption practices had yet to be established. Thus, the debates about the literary merits of *laharī* addressed the levels of cross-sex intimacy that would be deemed acceptable within an emerging national public sphere.

Along with bringing new challenges to established gender norms, the nascent Nepali-language publishing industry promoted two different forms of masculinity that remain as ideals today: the high-culture word warrior whose facility with the Nepali language could be equated with doing battle for the Nepali *jāti*, and the low-culture lover who reveled in the pleasures of erotic longings for women and a feminized landscape. There was also a desire among writers to bring the two together, as part of further forging a sense of national identity that was based on folk culture yet polished and refined into high culture.

Munā Madan

The high and the low, and the two masculine themes of elite service to the national language and vernacular celebration of erotic love and sensuality, converge in Laxmi Prasad Devkota's episodic love poem (*khanḍa kāvya*), *Munā Madan*. *Munā Madan*, whose title refers to the names of the two main characters Muna and Madan, is a Nepali adaptation of a story expressed in various poetic and song forms that were originally in Nepal Bhasa (Newari), the Tibeto-Burman language of the Kathmandu Valley's Newar ethnic group (Hutt 1996, 9–11). The story is a *viraha* tragedy of love and separation: Madan heads to Lhasa to seek his fortune, while Muna slowly dies of heartbreak in Kathmandu. Devkota adapted the story from a Newar to a high-caste Hindu cultural context, adding many details and episodes. First published in 1936, it has remained publisher Sajha Prakashan's best-selling title to this day (Kharel 2012). This poem takes a major risk for elite literature of its time, as it is written in *Asāre Jhyāure* poetic meter.

Devkota's choice of a *jhyāure* poetic meter for what was also meant to be a high literary *khanḍa kāvya* shows that he was consciously trying to make an argument for the vernacular, in terms of both the sound of the poem and its theme. He was a member of Kathmandu's small elite lettered class, was greatly influenced by Lekhnath Paudyal, and interacted with many who wished to do

“service to the Nepali language.” But his choice of *jhyāure* went a step beyond the literary “service” of those who had begun to venerate Bhanubhakta in India. Legend, corroborated by many facts and Devkota’s own writings, has it that he was inspired to write a poem in *jhyāure* when he heard women singing while planting rice (Bandhu 2006, 46–47; Hutt 1996, 13). Hence his choice of *Asāre Jhyāure*—the poetic meter of central-Nepali *Asāre Git*, rice-planting songs for the month of Asār.²⁸ Throughout South Asian folklore, rice planting is associated with fertility and the erotic; one Nepali euphemism for sex is *dhān ropnu* (to plant rice).²⁹ Hutt has argued that *Munā Madan* established this *jhyāure* meter as one of the “native” meters of Nepal (1988, 189). It may have had this reifying effect in the literary world, but because *jhyāure* was already grounded in actual flirtatious song traditions and the written *laharī* publications of the previous decade, Devkota had to navigate the associations that it had developed.

Successfully toeing the line between high literary expressions of love and what would have been deemed excessive eroticism, and thus avoiding the potential scandal of *jhyāure*’s association with flirtatious singing and “pulp fiction” *laharī*, Devkota adapted these Newar tales and songs into *Munā Madan*. The poem thus created a link between his elite world and the worlds of ordinary Nepali people of various castes and ethnic groups, bringing hallmarks of folk song and vernacular erotic poetry into a refined atmosphere where meticulous Sanskrit aesthetics and Brahminical Hindu morality were the norms.³⁰ He was aware of the risk involved in such a breach of class divisions, and in the preface to *Munā Madan*, “To the Respected Reader,” Devkota addresses his choice of *jhyāure* meter, framing a meta-narrative about his poetic intervention. Here and in the body of *Munā Madan*, Devkota links *jhyāure* and its association (among elites) with rurality and rustic national authenticity to ideas of the feminine, using gendered images of the nation as both wilderness to be tamed and garden to be tended.³¹ This recalls writer Suryavikram’s metaphor of a few years earlier, which in a preface to a biography of Motiram Bhatta, compared *jātiya chhanda* (folk poetic meters) to copper pots, which must be polished if they are to shine (Bhatta 1927a, 3–4, cited in Chalmers 2002, 89). It also recalls Wordsworth’s “Scorn Not the Sonnet”; as Hutt (1997, 7) points out, Devkota was heavily influenced by Wordsworth and probably modeled this preface on the English poet’s defense of poetic language.³² Devkota’s preface to *Munā Madan* is simultaneously an apology and a polemic for the use of *jhyāure*.

He begins the preface with “What a sweet wonderful Nepali song, the song called *jhyāure*” (line 1).³³ Asking readers to give the poetic meter some respect with the line “Calling it *jhyāure*, don’t just dismiss it, respected gentle friends” (line 6),³⁴ he directly links *jhyāure* with authentic Nepali identity, writing,

“Nepali people’s real and true life speaks ever in *jhyāure* beat” (line 37).³⁵ He anticipates facing criticism from the literary community: “Jhyāure poet! With this small slur, my good name will be marred / On the full moon so dear to the people, will lie an ugly scar” (lines 53–54).³⁶ But he announces the change of an era: “Now we have come to the turn of an age, feelings are changing fast / Hearts tightly closed may easily open, blindness will end at last” (lines 55–56).³⁷ Near the end of the preface, before asking forgiveness for the poem’s potential failings, he suggests that his choice of *jhyāure* is a challenge to those who adopt “foreign” meters: “There they dance nightly choosing meters that lie to their very souls” (line 66).³⁸ Thus, Devkota is ambivalent about how his circle may receive his choice of rural-vernacular poetic meter but is also committed to using it as a symbol of Nepali *jāti* unity, at this point in history beginning to be expressed overtly as nationhood, in ways that brought aspects of high and low culture together to emphasize national unity.

Devkota’s use of *jhyāure* to stand for the nation is different from the way intellectuals of the previous generation treated Bhanubhakta and his Nepali-language writings. While they emphasized the use of the Nepali language rather than other languages, he emphasizes a vernacular poetic meter that comes from songs. He stresses the oral and aural aspects of language to a greater extent than his predecessors did and calls attention to the songs of the majority of Nepal’s nonliterate population at the time. Not only the meter but some of the structure of *Munā Madan* takes its cue from songs: Hutt notes that while usually called a *khanda kāvya*, *Munā Madan* is irregular for this genre, partly because sections often end with restatements of the final rhyme (1996, 12). This is a common way of marking cadences in songs, a way of letting fellow performers know that the current section of the song is ending, cueing musicians to make appropriate musical cadential statements and dancers to bring their phrases to a close. With this emphasis on the aural/oral, Devkota suggests that the essence that unites Nepali people is more authentically found in such folklore (*lok sāhitya*), thus orienting the locus of authenticity in Nepali nationalism away from the written literature of the cities and toward the songs of rural oral tradition (cf. Bauman and Briggs 2003).

Devkota overtly associates orality and aurality with the national landscape. Continuing a metaphor of the nation as garden that first appears in the dedication, in the preface Devkota represents the land, water, birds, and other elements of nature as speaking in *jhyāure* meter and as speaking as parts of a national body. In his *jhyāure* verses, features of the land take on characteristics of human bodies, and human bodies become akin to the land; they are continually united in that they all have a voice; they all make sounds. *Jhyāure* beats in the heart of the hills, which repeat the song. In Devkota’s ver-

bal imagery, hearts, forests, rivers, waterfalls, and even the soil of the nation (*swadesī māto*) arise and speak; the blood in Nepali veins finds the rhythm of its throbbing in *jhyāure*. With this focus on orality and aurality, the rhythmic sounds of language, the speaking voice, and the body that produces, hears, and feels it are linked to rurality and nature as Devkota situates *jhyāure* in an organic Nepali authenticity.

While the national body and voice initially have no specific gender, half-way through the preface Devkota clearly articulates them as female, using feminine noun and verb forms for birds, rivers, and their actions:

Janako muṭubhitrakī charī swabhavmā kurlanchhe,
Janako jivan-nadikī lahar yasaimā urlanchhe.

The bird inside the hearts of the people of her own free will cries,
 To this very song the people's life-river surges, her current high. (lines 41–42)

The spirit who inspires poetry is also a goddess, Kavitā-devī,³⁹ who herself is intimately connected to nature (line 50).⁴⁰ Right after this emphasis on the feminine in the Nepali national body and voice, Devkota returns to the image of himself as a gardener caring for a neglected land (lines 51–52). While this is most clearly a reference to his intent to venture into the world of Nepali folk poetry, neglected by elite literary circles, it also has gendered implications: the high-class male here takes on the responsibility of caring for, taming, and molding an unrefined, rural feminine, which in turn represents the essence of his nation. In light of Onta's account of how service to the Nepali language came to be regarded in nationalist intellectual circles as equal to service to the nation in battle, we can surmise that service to the national language was seen as a masculine virtue. But just as the nation itself is often invoked as feminine in popular discourse (Nepal Āmā, Mother Nepal), the symbols of the nation that Devkota uses are feminine as well. This particular feminine is creative, fertile, and untamed—it is the fertility of gardens and forests, the goddess who inspires poetry, the bird in the hearts of the people who sings of her own free will. And if *jhyāure* is the basis for these sounds, then this poetic meter is also feminized here.

The feminine as essence of the nation is central again to the actual story of *Munā Madan*, but here it is another feminine archetype, one that does not speak much. The female protagonist, Muna, is a paragon of high-caste Hindu female virtue, enclosed in the home and waiting for her husband, Madan, who has gone to Tibet in search of wealth. She and the other women who stay at home are themselves equated with home for the traveling Madan—his wife, mother, and sister are what he longs for while he is gone, and their happiness is what he hopes to achieve by bringing back his wealth. Though

Muna lives in the city, home to forces of evil as well as of good, she herself represents the ultimate in wifely purity, the home Madan longs for when he is away in “impure” foreign territory. In this way the relationship between gender and national feeling in *Munā Madan* is similar to that described by Partha Chatterjee (1993) regarding Indian nationalism: the feminine is associated with all that is inner, pure, and spiritually valuable about Nepali identity; the masculine, however, is compromised by association with foreign ways through daily work that is guided by increasingly Western rules and norms or, more salient in many Nepali cases, through actual migration to foreign places for wage labor.⁴¹ Two different ideas of the nation as feminine thus appear side by side in *Munā Madan*—first, the bird that sings of her own free will, the life-river that can surge unpredictably; and second, Muna inside the house, pure and protected from outside contamination.

It is significant that the wild type of femininity is associated with abstract nature, sonically embodied in the *jhyāure* poetic meter, while the pure and domestic type is associated with a particular female character. The *jhyāure* poetic meter, with its associations of exuberant rural dancing and all-night festivity, can be used to represent all things dangerous about an untamed femininity—the originary creative force, the voice directed toward her own purpose, unpredictable, river-like surges of life and emotion; this abstract, wild feminine can be expressed as a universal creative potential that unites all members of the Nepali nation regardless of individual gender. But an individual woman possessing those qualities would move out of the abstract into the social realm, posing a challenge to a patriarchal society such as Devkota’s high-caste, high-class Hindu social world. Muna, the Sita-like paragon of Hindu feminine virtue, poses no such challenge. Yet the spiritually pure Muna is just as much of an abstraction as the idea of an unruly feminine force embodied in the sounds of *jhyāure*—both represent feminine ideals that have been mobilized in different ways throughout the past two centuries. These two archetypes of the feminine continue to intertwine in discourses about folk songs, mapping at times onto dichotomies of urban and rural, caste Hindu and indigenous, and middle and lower class.

The Folk Music Industry, *Jhyāure*, and Social Change

In the literary sphere, Nepali poetry since the 1970s has moved away from metric verse toward free verse, shape poetry, and other modernist forms. Yet rhyming metric verse remains prominent, perhaps most of all in song. Although people still compose and publish written *sawāi* poetry, the *laharī* of the turn of the last century remain in print, and *Munā Madan* is still a best

seller; the primary media outlets for *jhyāure* from the second half of the twentieth century to the present have been audio and audiovisual recordings, along with the performance culture associated with these two media forms. Unlike in some societies where a highly literate urban sphere has shifted to an emphasis on orality/aurality as a hallmark of modern media culture (cf. Miller 2007), Nepal's urban middle and upper classes continue to privilege the literate.⁴² The commercial folk song industry proudly reasserts an oral/aural culture and concomitant demotic values, even as literacy continues to stand for modernity and development.

Jhyāure in its broadest meaning as folk song has dominated Nepal's airwaves since the advent of private music companies in the 1980s. Prior to 1983, the music industry was state run, and both Radio Nepal and Ratna Recording Corporation gave priority to *ādhunik gīt* (modern song), a broad genre of art songs that drew on Western tonal harmony and South Asian *rāga* and valued a more high literary style of lyrics. *Lok gīt* or folk song (i.e., *jhyāure*) was given less airtime, placed in a subordinate, feminized position. However, concentration on the folk songs of the central hills at Radio Nepal's Folk Song Department ensured that many of the recorded songs from the 1950s played on national radio were in *jhyāure tāl* and *jhyāure* poetic meters and that the subsequent private music companies recorded many of the same types of songs. Folk songs and their music videos are the mainstays of most music companies in Nepal today.

The vast majority of commercial songs in *jhyāure* poetic meters are in *Jhyāure Tukkā* meter (10-syllable lines; see discussion in note 7), and mildly erotic love songs predominate. But there are also other types of love songs, political songs, social commentaries and satires, and songs simply about dancing. Songs in the *Asāre Jhyāure* poetic meter come up in various settings: in performances on urban stages, when two of my interlocutors sat down over several hours and several drinks to write a song for their latest album, and in the musical drama or opera performances of political parties. But *Asāre Jhyāure* is most often found in *Asāre* songs, as well as in *Sālaijō* and in slower *jhyāure* songs that rely on this poetic meter's long lines to tell stories.

Asāre songs and their music videos bring the many associations of *jhyāure* together in their depictions of the festive and permissive atmosphere of rice planting. Planting season is associated with fertility, and the muddy rice fields are also sites for singing, dancing, and playful and flirtatious games.⁴³ It is a time of homecoming for rural-urban migrants who return to their villages to help with the labor-intensive work of transplanting rice seedlings, and the wet rice paddy setting is famous for its association with homecoming along with its erotic charge. This example, from a *lok dohori* music video, demonstrates

the atmosphere of playful interaction, infectious dance beats, and flirtatious lyrics that are common to many *jhyāure* songs, as well as their reiteration and challenge to social hierarchies.

The 2012 music video of the *Asāre* song “Raspberry Leaf” (*Aīseluko Pāt*), sung by Devi Gharti and Tika Chhetri, re-creates a scene of rice planting from Nepal’s mid-hills. A *naumati bājā* instrumental ensemble (*sahnāi, damahā, ḫholakī, tyāmko, narsingh, jhyālī*) provides the backing music, in keeping with the tradition of such ensembles playing while laborers planted in landlords’ fields (Stirr 2005; Tingey 1990). A lead male and female actor play the lovers communicating through Gharti and Chhetri’s words, in the playback tradition of South Asian film and music video. The “hero” is differentiated by his binoculars and city clothes—a migrant man returned from abroad, using his new technology to spot his beloved among the women working in the fields. The “heroine” wears clothing similar to that of the other young women, a *gunyo cholī* skirt and blouse, but her blouse is silk whereas the others’ are cotton. A plethora of other actors perform the actions of rice planting: young men plow with oxen and dig the fields, while young women transplant seedlings. Older men sit lazily smoking, and older women walk past carrying heavy loads of fodder. The landlord stands by with a large umbrella and a cane, which he uses to direct the laborers. There are whimsical touches to the video that highlight the atmosphere of play: a small boy tries to dig with a shovel too large for him, and an older boy surreptitiously reroutes water from a neighboring field into the one he is planting, only to get into a playful fight when the field’s owner notices him. Boys and girls splash each other flirtatiously and dance to the *naumati bājā*, which plays in a fast *jhyāure tāl* for about one minute in between each of the singers’ couplets. The couplets themselves last about 15 seconds each:

*Thitā: Rimī ra jhimī, pānī hai paryo, rujheu ki rujhenau
ākhāko sārle, bolāe maile, bujheu ki bujhenau
Bajāī ḫholakī.*

*Thiti: Pardeśi mānchhe dukhiko manmā bās basyo sutukkai
Māyāle basyo najarle hānyo mai pare bhutukkai
Bajāī ḫholakī.*

*Thitā: Bātai ra muni bātai ra upri karāyo kuturke
Khetālnī raichhan bijulī jastā khetālā luturkai
Bajāī ḫholakī.*

*Thiti: Manamā bādhi urlera āyo dekhane bittikai
Māyāko bhāṣā bujhemā khāsā nabujhe ettikai
Bajāī ḫholakī.*

Boy: Softly and gently, rain is now falling, did you get wet or not?
With my eye-signals, I called you over, did you get it or not?

As the *dholaki* plays.

Girl: Secretly in the heart of this poor girl, shelters one from afar

Love came to stay and slayed with a glance, I've fallen hard for you

As the *dholaki* plays.

Boy: Below the path and over the path the *kuturke* bird cries

The girls planting are clever like lightning, leaving the boys behind

As the *dholaki* plays.

Girl: Right when I saw you, filling my heart up, a flood came rushing in

Love's language is true when understood, but misunderstood is lost

As the *dholaki* plays. (Gharti and Chhetri 2012)

The song continues for a total of 20 minutes. It emphasizes the familiar in gender roles, social hierarchies, ways of joking, flirting, and fighting. The atmosphere in the music video is a permissive one, yet patriarchal gender roles remain, and there is a relaxing rather than an inversion of social norms that govern public professions of love and flirtatious behavior. Eroticism lies more in the ways the lead actors move their bodies and the looks they give each other than in the lyrics, yet the female lead singer's expressions of passionate love would be considered inappropriate in a different setting. She, along with the other women flirting and dancing in the muddy water of the rice paddy, clearly represents the "wild" feminine associated with *jhyāure* in *Munā Madan*.

If this were a documentary about planting season in rural Nepal, we might conclude, following Werbner, that it is the rice-planting setting that allows for this celebration of eroticism and overt expression of a woman's passionate love, which, although notable, do not indicate broader social change, as such contexts for women's expression have been around for centuries. But this is a widely circulating commercial music video, available on TV, VCD, and YouTube, poised between nostalgic remembering of an idealized village setting and celebrating the ongoing practice of rice planting that continues in much the same way today. It is thus open for interpretation and further recontextualization, beyond that of the context-dependent, circumscribed expression of erotically charged flirtation. The rice-planting setting in this case is more of a trope than a legitimizing device—other music videos do not have to resort to traditional settings to eroticize their heroes and heroines. For a migrant audience especially, the rice-planting setting may be more important in terms of structures of feeling associated with rurality and home than in terms of providing a way to legitimize the public expression of female sexuality.

The basic significance of *jhyāure* in representing a broad, rural-hill-based Nepali public sphere is not changing that fast. At one level, the *jhyāure* poetic meter has become what Michael Silverstein calls an indexical icon—something that is construed not just as representing a certain thing but also as (and

because of) resembling what it signifies (2003, 203). *Asāre Jhyāure* poetic meter is iconic of (central-western hill area) *Asāre* songs because it is the poetic meter employed in singing them; used in other contexts it continues to represent, by resemblance, these songs and the rice-planting setting in which they are performed. Although the bounding effects of ritual context (and indexical iconicity) on meaning are significant (cf. Ahearn 1998), recontextualizations of this poetic meter do change its meanings. So far, such recontextualizations are limited to the Nepali-language media. Thus, first-order indexical associations with rurality and *Asāre* songs still stand, while other “second-order” indexical meanings multiply around them, each one taking priority at various times and places, yet all resonating with each other as part of a complex set of sometimes-contradictory meanings of *jhyāure* (cf. Miller 2007, 267).

Some second-order indexical associations include eroticism, female sexual forwardness, and social hierarchies of gender/caste/ethnicity/class, as shown in the music video. All these link the sound of *Asāre Jhyāure* to social practices and ideologies. And *jhyāure*’s circulation and linking role in different media has gained for it further associations with unifying interactions within the Nepali nation: from a new form of popular song that people traveled to Baglung to learn; to a basis for “pulp fiction” that provided common ground for readers across region, caste, and class; to an emblem of rural national essence in Devkota’s high literary world, *jhyāure*’s association with national unity has grown as the idea of a Nepali nation has developed.

It remains a demotic form of unity, feminized and associated with rural backwardness and often predicated on the pleasures of rural life that themselves are grounded, to some extent, in the very familiarity of those hierarchies. Paul Greene (2002–3) suggests as much when he worries that recontextualizations of *jhyāure tāl* and other musical indexical icons of rurality in the genre of *lok pop*, which emerged in the 1990s, might merely reproduce old images of idyllic village life, relegating it to bygone eras, and lead urban Nepalis to turn a blind eye to rural political violence and the necessity of political change. Yet this is not what happened, at least not on a large scale; rather, urban and rural Nepalis together adopted folk music in their street protests in the People’s Movement of 2006.⁴⁴ And through its very circulation in multiple media forms and interpretation by multiple audiences, various “sonic transculturations” of *jhyāure* destabilize the existing associations that the poetic meter carries and ascribe different values to its rural performance contexts. For example, some view women’s relative expressive freedom in *jhyāure* songs as a potential challenge to the established patriarchal social order (Dixit 2002), and the cross-ethnic interaction in *jhyāure dohori* songs as even more potentially challenging to paradigms of social purity based on

endogamy.⁴⁵ If *jhyāure* poetic meter is one semi-stable sign of the idea of nation that developed around the Nepali language, its sounds, and its various expressions in media throughout the twentieth century, the associations that continue to develop around it as it is recontextualized are both shaped by and themselves shape how ideas of a Nepali national public sphere are changing.

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Notes

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¹ Going to jail has long been a rite of passage for Nepali politicians, so his experiences are probably far from unique.

² Throughout this article, I use diacritics for clarity of meaning in all non-English words except proper nouns (i.e., Nepal), and words that have been adopted into the English language (i.e., Brahmin). I use *ch* for च and *chh* for छ.

³ Some such bands include Sur Sudha, Sukarma, Rudra Band, and Kutumba.

⁴ The official calendar of Nepal, Vikram Sambat (v.s.), is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar. I use Gregorian dates whenever possible, but without knowing the month of publication, it is difficult to convert Vikram Sambat dates to Gregorian ones, as the Vikram Sambat year begins in May. In such cases I use Vikram Sambat dates.

⁵ I use the *mādal bols* taught to me by Kharka Budha Magar. *Mādal bols* vary regionally but usually have enough in common for *mādal* players to understand them across regions. The notation used is Bhatkande notation as used in Nepal, in which an x represents a strong beat, (x) represents an accented but less strong beat, || represents the end of a phrase, and – represents a rest.

⁶ While I agree with Michael Hutt (1994, 257) that a verse translation of an entire poem that maintains the meaning and tone of the original would be impossible, I attempt to maintain the *jhyāure* meter in my translations for the sake of sharing its rhythms with readers of English.

⁷ Another very well-known *jhyāure* poetic meter is as follows, with two lines of 10 and 10 syllables that scan in groups of 2, 2, 3, and 3 syllables, in which the first syllable of each group is stressed (every once in a while a line may have 9 syllables, as the first line below does, and a vowel, here the /u/ in *kunni*, will be rearticulated to make 10).

*Mero māyā kahā chha kunni
Chhāti chirī dekhāuna nahuni*

Where is my love, what to say, I don't know

I can't simply tear open (my) chest to show.

(stock couplet, sung by Grandfather Majhi, Pame, Kaski, May 2010)

This meter, known simply as *Jhyāure* but also known as *Jhyāure Tukkā* and called *Māruni* when it is used with a 4-beat *tāl*, is used for both couplets and refrains and has wider applications beyond songs that fit the narrowest definitions of *jhyāure*. For a discussion of this poetic meter, see Shah (2006 v.s., 56–57). His naming system is idiosyncratic, so his polemics about the names of songs and poetic meters (along with his words for *mādal bols*) should be understood to apply to Dhading district, especially to his home area of Jhyamrung.

⁸ In the mid-twentieth century, the metaphor of a flower garden was the main way in which the Nepali state under the Panchayat regime articulated its version of unity in diversity. This was taken from a line in Gorkhali king Prithvi Narayan Shah's deathbed message, the *Dibya Upadesh*, which described Nepal as "a garden of four *varna* and thirty-six *jāti*." In Nepal today, the words *varna* and *jāti* are often translated respectively as "castes" and "ethnicities."

⁹ Many of them are, however, in *sawāi*.

¹⁰ *Sawāi* is another poetic meter strongly linked with national identity and ubiquitous in early twentieth-century vernacular literature, yet without *jhyāure*'s strong association with gender and love. *Sawāi* is also known as *bhattyāune*, "telling" or "storytelling" poetic meter, a reference to sung epics and the "reporting" historically done by the Gandharva or Gaine caste of traveling musicians in *ghatanā gīt*, or "event songs" (Weisethaunet 1997). Songs in *sawāi* poetic meter are just as common as those in *jhyāure* in current commercial and noncommercial music making, and *sawāi* can be used for verses in songs that are still considered *jhyāure* due to their refrains being in *jhyāure* poetic meters, especially *Jhyāure Tukkā* meter as discussed in note 7.

¹¹ Pant expresses the view of the literate elite when he writes, "As long as the citizens of any country are uneducated, songs with narrative coherence won't be created there" (1968, 83). Yet Calla Jacobson (1999) asserts that the imagery in such first lines is important in its own right, and I agree. I also assert that such disjunction between lines is characteristic of central and eastern Nepali songs, as it seems to be less common in the far west.

¹² Specifically, the *Thādo Bhākā* meter that is said to be based on *Asāre Jhyāure*. For a recent example of *Thādo Bhākā* (with quite a bit of liberty taken with the meter in some couplets), see the video of famous *Thādo Bhākā* singers Bhede Kharke Saila and Uttam Gurung at the Shivaratri Mela in Karaputar, Lamjung, March 2013 (accessed March 6, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX8icJaFnI0>).

¹³ This is not just a difference in spelling as Hutt (1988, 78, 84) asserts in other contexts. The use of /jā/ rather than /e/ is a common feature of speech in the Doteli speech community of Nepal's far west (for example, listen to any number of commer-

cial recordings of the *deuda* genre made in the far west, or political speeches given in Doteli, all available on YouTube; or see Stirr 2012). D. B. Thapa's use of this spelling, as he uses /e/ elsewhere, is a clear choice of how to represent the sounds of the words in writing.

¹⁴ *Cheli* specifically refers to a female agnatic relative; in the song “Hai Gori” I have simply translated it as “girl.” It could also mean “sister,” but in the context of this love song, “cousin” is more appropriate, as cousin marriage is a feature of many ethnic groups’ kinship systems in Nepal. The term can also be used even more broadly to indicate a woman from one’s own village or area, regardless of blood relation.

¹⁵ I am translating *sālī* here from its Magar sense: female matrilateral cross-cousin, a preferred marriage partner. In Parbatiya (hill-Nepali caste Hindu) society, a man’s *sālī* is his wife’s younger sister, also a preferred marriage partner in polygamous terms. In the Magar case, the two senses can of course be combined. Also, many vocal words in Nepali songs are said to have originated from meaningful words, while others are considered to have always been vocables.

¹⁶ For an example of a modern *Sālaijo*, see Garbuja et al. (2006).

¹⁷ Two commercially recorded songs that maintain such a rhythm throughout almost the entire song are “Banko Kāphal Bankai Charilāi” (2005) and “Dāda Wāri Jun” (2007).

¹⁸ *Bāhramāse git*, as used in this area of rural Nepal, means songs that are not specific to any particular season and may thus be sung anytime. This contrasts with its more well-known meaning in South Asian literary and folklore studies, of songs that describe the changing of the seasons through all 12 months, using them as metaphors for changes in feelings, most often those of a woman missing her lover. In this sense *bāhramāse* is a category of *viraha* songs; in Nepal, songs called *bāhramāse* express a wider range of *rasa/bhava*.

Also, because his study is about Baglung district, Thapa uses the local pronunciation *jhyāmre* rather than *jhyāure*, which is common in more central districts and standard in written sources. *Jhyāmre* is also common in Palpa and Arghakhanchhi districts. Most of my spoken/sung sources are from farther east (primarily Syangja, Kaski, Tanahun, Lamjung, Gorkha, and Dhading districts), where *jhyāure* is standard pronunciation, so I use the spelling *jhyāure* throughout this work.

¹⁹ The term *laya* in classical Hindustani music refers to tempo. But in regard to Nepali folk songs, *laya* is used to mean “tune”—melody and rhythm, separate from lyrics. The term *bhākā* is used interchangeably with *laya* in this way.

²⁰ Onta (1996a) notes that this self-conscious attention to language as the basis of an imagined community had been developing in the rest of India for some decades, and Nepalis in Darjeeling felt that they were behind the times in attention to their own mother tongue. The growth of the mother-tongue paradigm of affective unity based on language is analyzed in depth in Mitchell (2009). In Nepal itself, the language now known as Nepali became the official language of the Gorkha kingdom during Rana rule. Often called *Khās kurā*, the language of the Khāsa of western Nepal, this language was also referred to as Parbatiya (the language of the hill country)

by outsiders to the former Khas country; Gorkhālī (the language of the Gorkhas) by outsiders to the Gorkhālī domain, such as British and Indians; and, after 1857, Gurkhālī (the language of the Gurkhās) by British army officers and others involved with Gurkhā regiments in the British Indian Army, who for reasons unknown decided to spell it with a *u*. Finally, in the 1930s, the Rana government began to refer to the kingdom as “the realm of Nepal” and to their official language as Nepali, bringing their official terminology in line with that of the most powerful outsiders to their kingdom, the British (Burghart 1984). With this definition of an official language, the other languages spoken in various parts of Nepal (123 listed in the 2011 census) were marginalized if not barred entirely from official discourse and national public life. Recent policy changes have aimed to remedy this, but the specifics of these changes remain topics of major debate.

²¹ *Laharī* as a genre name for both poetry and songs appears in many South Asian languages, including Sanskrit; the genres that are referred to by this name are not all the same. *Laharī* literally translates as “wave.”

²² Rhoderick Chalmers (2002, 49) notes that there were indeed some exceptions to this male-dominated public: citing personal communication from Kamal Diksit, he notes that volumes of *śringara jhyāure* verse were smuggled into the Rana palaces for the female servants.

²³ Phagu is the name of the month in which the Holi festival takes place, traditionally a time of taking sexual liberties.

²⁴ That is, a shared idea of “national” life.

²⁵ *Lāhure* (pronounced *lāure*) is the colloquial term for a Nepali recruit in the British, and later Indian, armies. The term has recently been extended in some contexts to encompass all who migrate abroad for labor.

²⁶ It is probably also significant that both this writer, Manjul, and critic Taranath Sharma are not only Brahmins but were also communists in the 1960s. The Nepali communist disdain for eroticism can rival high-caste Hindu morality in its puritanical zeal.

²⁷ In Nepal, the most famous setting for rural, high-caste Hindu women’s erotic songs is the *rateuli*, the party at the groom’s house when all the male relatives have gone to fetch the bride. Having attended only Dalits’ *rateuli* parties in rural Nepal, I can say that these are indeed bawdy and full of satirical performances of gender reversal, and based on the pleasure that these women took in them, I would expect that such performances are still occurring in the families of rural high-caste women as well.

²⁸ Asār is also spelled Asāḍh and Aśāḍh. I use the most colloquial Nepali variant here.

²⁹ For discussions of pan-South Asian poetic tropes such as this one, see Orsini (2006). Thanks to Amanda Snellinger for reminding me of this euphemism, which she often heard among student political activists as much as I heard it used in *dohorī* songs.

³⁰ See Hutt (1989, 152, 159, 163), for examples of the poet Lekhnath Poudyal’s didactic verse expressing Vedanta philosophy.

³¹ Such proto-nationalist linkages of nature and nation helped set the stage for later nationalist emphasis on Prithvi Narayan Shah's image of the nation as a garden of peoples, expressed in his *Dibya Upadesh*.

³² Although Wordsworth is generally thought to have been defending the sonnet's strict structure against criticisms that it stifled expression, an argument that Devkota can hardly have been making against proponents of Sanskrit poetic meters.

³³ *Kyā rāmro, miṭho, Nepāli gānā jhyāure bhaneko.*

³⁴ *Jhyāure bhanī nagara helā he pyāra sajjana.*

³⁵ *Nepāli sachcha jātiya jivan jhyāuremā boldachha.*

³⁶ *Jhyāure kavī bhanera mero durnāma hunechha,
Janako pyārko chandramālāī kalangka chhunechha.*

³⁷ *Yugale arko linechha kolto, bhavanā phirnechha,
Khumchekā dila phukera jālān, andhātā marnechha.*

³⁸ *Atmālāī jhuṭo boleko chhanda nāchdachhan pāri rāt.*

³⁹ Literally, "poetry goddess."

⁴⁰ *Kavitā-devī jhardachhin yahi prākriti liī bandha.*

Poetry goddess is here descending, joined with the natural world.

⁴¹ A similar theme is found in the plays of Bal Krishna Sama, Devkota's contemporary and fellow Nepali nationalist writer. Bal Krishna Sama's tutor was Devkota's father.

⁴² A thorough examination of this phenomenon will require further study.

⁴³ Harvest is another time when rules are relaxed, as at planting time. Manjushree Thapa's novel *The Tutor of History* (2001, 227–30) has an apt description of the erotically charged atmosphere of the rice harvest among Nepali youth in a rural town.

⁴⁴ See Lakier (2007) and Stirr (2010) for discussions of the appropriations of mainstream *lok gīt* in the 2006 People's Movement.

⁴⁵ See Stirr (2009) for a more in-depth discussion of the issue of cross-caste/ethnic *jhyāure dohorī* duets; see also Moisala (1991) for documentation of this practice in the 1970s and 1980s, and Holmberg (1992) for a Tamang origin myth that starts with an incestuous marriage made through a binding male-female duet.

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