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Filmmaker Kesang Tseten, a citizen of Nepal, has created a magnificently edited and filmed depiction of a Newari festival observed in the Kathmandu Valley for a millennium, when every twelve years the chariot (*ratha*, a flat platform on four huge wheels) of the red god, *Macchendranath*, is pulled on the road between the towns of Bungamati (near Kathmandu) and Patan, with stops in-between. This festival (*jatra*) is organized by Newari Hindu and Buddhist religious societies. To Hindus, the deity is a yogic saint Macchendranath; to Buddhists, he is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara.

The film at first focuses on the two castes who construct main components of the ratha—its gigantic tower of woven branches, and the wooden wheels. At the tower's base is a hollow area where the red-painted image of Macchendranath travels, accompanied by one or two priests. Some tower-builder-weavers ride high on the moving tower, helping to guide the ratha through narrow streets, away from power lines, and between tall buildings. One man proudly asserts that while he is of low caste, yet because of his job he gets to ride high above the deity. Projected in front of the ratha is a long, heavy timber (representing a *naga*, a divine snake), upon which sits a young man who clings with one arm to its prow while sweeping forward with his other arm to urge the pullers onward. When the chariot reaches the town of Patan, it meets the smaller ratha of the deity Minnath, pulled by children, and the two rathas proceed together through the streets, Minnath following Macchendranath.

The narration consists of voice-overs by the filmmaker, while conversations among jatra principals and interviews with individuals are sub-titled in English. We quickly meet Kapil the main priest. He will perform most of the rituals because it was his ancestor who stole the deity from the distant forest and brought it to Bungamati. The jatra has a foundation myth, illustrated by hand-painted pictures within the *mise en scène*, that depict the transformation of the god into a bee that is put into a pot and secretly stolen from its forest demon mother. Priest Kapil performs many rituals to appease this demon mother by sacrificing goats, otherwise she will come and spoil the festival.

The huge wooden wheels with large painted eyes represent the demon-fighter deity, Bhaivrava, who is also worshipped before the festival begins. His mask is hung on the prow of the chariot, signalling that he is bearing Macchendranath under his protection.

Tree branches are cut to make brake-wedges, and we meet the main brakeman, who has been doing this job all his life. As the chariot moves, we see the brakemen in action, stopping the ratha from hurtling out of control. The huge thing moves in fits and starts, while everyone is having fun and enjoying the suspense. Will it get through to Patan and safely back to Bungamati? At one point the tower leans over by 45 degrees. More ropes are brought to pull the tower back up. A crane stands by, but nobody wants to use it.

If the participants who pull and push the ratha along succeed in getting it to Patan and back to Bungamati in one piece, people say that the god is satisfied and that he will ensure prosperity for everyone. If they don't succeed and the tower falls, or the ratha tips over and cannot be righted, the god will be displeased and people will die. It is only by the god's will that the heavy chariot moves at all. The ritual imperative—that everything must be done right with no flaws—is what keeps the god agreeable.

A poignant sub-text in the film is the story of Priest Kapil's desertion by his mother who, when he was just a child, vanished after her husband took a second wife. Kapil relates how he longs for his mother to visit the jatra and see him at work. He comments on the irony of his being the priest who ritually appeases the god's demon mother, keeping her away, while he himself cannot see his own mother. "If I could see her it would be like seeing god," he says. The film ends as one of the tower builders, and a toothless, ninety-years old fellow wearing huge sun-glasses, converse and joke about how the god was pleased with the jatra because it all went well, and now they can eat meat, dance, drink, and be happy.

This is a complex film, both colorful and dominated by a lot of rousing action. Not only does it cover ratha construction in detail, and stories pertinent to areas the chariot passes through, but also the religious rationales and the social and gender roles involved in performing the jatra. The ironic sub-text of the priest Kapil's longing for his mother invites the viewer's personal interest. There is fighting

during various phases of the festival; nevertheless, the conflicts blow over and peace reigns. The film is thus a first-rate visual exposition of collective liminality, of how the performance of this widely popular ritual not only divides but also unites the human collective in shared exertion, expense, suffering, and happiness.

Classroom use of this film can enhance the instruction of topics such as the conversion of nature to culture; comparative ritual structures; gender issues and hierarchies; social issues of caste and class; rural-urban contrasts in myth and ritual; geography in the organization of processions and festivals; religious hybridity; and comparative approaches to religious processions in Asia or across the vast Asian super-continent (which could include such processions in Europe as well). I highly recommend it for courses in comparative Asian religions, in Asian Studies topics in general and in South Asia Studies in particular.