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Western Himalayan *Nāgs* as Guardians of Water Resources

I.

A small temple is embraced by a *pīpal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*, fig. 1-2). It contains not only figures of *Nāgrāj*, the “king of the cobra deities”, but also a pool of “cool water” (*śītal jal*), as an inscription proclaims. This building both integrates and is integrated in beings of “nature”, namely, the pool and the tree, the latter of which is addressed as an animated being by the local Hindu community. I crossed this little and non-extraordinary example of small-scale, everyday Hindu worship, situated in Pantvari village, on my way from Nain Bagh in the Yamunā valley up to Nāg Tibba. As its name suggests, this peak (3022m) is home to the *Nāgs*, the serpentine species of deities, and also a prominent geographical feature, towering above the surrounding Himalayan Hills of southwestern Uttarākhaṇḍ.

Temples of *Nāg* deities can be found throughout this young Indian state which is believed to be densely populated by divine beings and therefore often called *devbhūmi* in Hindī. Its whole geography (*bhūmi*) is as divine (i. e. *dev* or “godly”) as the rivers and goddesses Gangā and Yamunā, the mountain and goddess Nandā Devī, and, not the least, the *Nāginīs* and *Nāgs*. This species of temporarily, partly, or wholly cobra-shaped deities has both female and male members: *Nāginīs* and *Nāgas* in Sanskrit, *Nāgins* and *Nāgs* in Hindī, *Naiṇīs* and *Nāgs* in the local Garhwālī language, respectively. These are said to inhabit and protect alpine springs and mountain lakes. While being worshiped as idols in a huge number of disparate and remote villages, the *Nāgs* are often overlooked by public media and scholarly representations of local Hindu religion. Even in the bigger towns of Uttarākhaṇḍ itself, their religious traditions are not well known. Nevertheless, they are central to the villagers’ ritual lives and are often regarded as adopted or ancestral members of their communities. How do the *Nāgs* affect and affirm their human kin’s relationships to the springs and creeks they live in, symbolize and care for? This is one primary question of the PhD thesis that I am just beginning to work on.

During my preliminary research journeys from June to August 2015 and from September to November 2016, I visited 16 sites of *Nāg* worship. Their temples are often situated high upon a mountain site or on large rocks, and near a body of water (a spring, a creek or simply a small natural or dug-out pool (fig. 2-3). Observations and conversations at each of these places confirmed my impression that landscape as a religious category, as cultural imagination and as physical reality takes shape through the placing of temples within landscape, the temples’ spatial relation to each other and in their architecture. I also focus on two other aspects of religious life: telling stories (*sthal purānas*, local myths) and performing

rituals (*kriyā*). The stories are “myths” because they inform about the origins of the narrators, the audience and their surroundings as well as about otherly beings; and the performances are “rituals” because they have to be done to keep deities benevolent and to keep the world in order. What both have in common is the “religious”¹ moment of transcending everyday situations and giving a larger overview of (or at least a commentary on) the world, of social issues and of oneself.

Insofar as they are recorded within an ethnographic context, myths, like rituals, can be analyzed as “situated practices in the world [...]: Every life is inextricably attached to the landscape of myth, and this being the case, myths are also seriously attached to practices within the world”.² If ties between local and global environmentalist discourses were to be established, activists as well as politicians have to consider how the world and its landscapes are thus shaped by myth. To find out more about this, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the *Nāgs*, who are *genūs loci (bhūmiyāl)* of springs, ponds, pools and rivulets all over the Western Himalayas. Sometimes they also function as representatives of remote places within a village.

II.

A hundred years ago, the Nautiyal priest of Gaṇeśpur became too old to regularly walk the long way up to the Mugdatāl Lake (fig. 4), where Vāsuki *Nāg* used to live. He begged the *devtā* (“deity”) to come closer, so his queens dug tunnels to Gaṇeśpur and two other villages. Where they came up, the water of the lake found its way to the surface and temples were built next to these fountains.

This story was told to me by Dinesh Bhatt, a medical doctor, on the 17th of July 2015 in Gaṇeśpur at the banks of the Gangā, seven kilometers upstream from Uttarkashi. Vāsuki, king of the *Nāgs*, symbolically connects the neighboring villages Gaṇeśpur, Garampānī and Netala to each other and to Mugdatāl, his birthplace (*janmasthan*). This distant mountain lake is situated around 3600 meters high in the mountains, approachable only by two days of strenuous off-road hiking. His festivals take place twice a year in Gaṇeśpur and Netala, both of which are home to 200-300 families. Two Vāsuki temples are built above these villages’ *tālas*, which are flat hilltops covered with rice fields. In Gaṇeśpur, the surrounding one or two hectares of rice paddy are treated as property of Vāsuki (fig. 5-6). Being the topmost plane of the *tāla*, they expand over those canals that feed the whole irrigation system of all the villagers’ wet rice plantations below. His rice is used to provide the crowd with a feast during a festival to celebrate him after the strenuous *rupani* season, during which the rice fields have been dammed, filled with water, plowed with the help of oxen and planted with young rice plants.

I attended one of these festivals, held in Gaṇeśpur on the 17th and 18th of July 2015. Beforehand, 16 village men had walked up to Mugdatāl to bring flowers and leaves of four different aromatic, healing and yellow plants. At a climactic point of the festival, these were showered down on the crowd amidst intense whistling and screaming, shortly after which a man fell into a state of possession by the forest god Sameśvar. Trees and other plants have been described as agents, having intentionality and a personal relationship to humans³ – whether this applies here as well, remains to be seen. The ontological state of these plants and of the water body of Mugdatāl, symbolized or maybe even personified by Vāsuki *Nāg*, will be investigated in depth through detailed and non-suggestive in-person interviews with local believers. In any case, the festival affirms the mythical connections of the human people to the lake and to the god Vāsuki, who is the main deity of the village (*grām devtā*) and of several local families (*kul devtā*). Thus, their connection to a place animated and/or inhabited by local deities (*bhumiyāl*) is kept vivid.

The three villages have at least five temples dedicated to Vāsuki, his Nāg queens and administrators (*vazīr*), hinting at a more proper home or birthplace of the deities. This is not unusual in this area: in parts of Uttarākhaṇḍ and Himanchal Pradesh, temples inside and outside the village are distinguished by the terms *bhandar*, “a wooden temple built in the heart of the village”, and “*dehra* – the root-place in the jungle, where the original ‘symbol’ of the deity is enshrined”.⁴ Thus, temples inside the village represent the spaces and places of its environment, if not the concept of environment or wilderness as such – a symbolism enforced by concrete beings of the remote brought into the village, like the flowers from Mugdatāl.

Even on a small regional scale, social organization, religion and geography are complexly interlaced. Temples are situated in and, through their spatial relation to each other, conceptualize several ecological habitats in the forest (*jāngal*) and along the Gaṇeśgaṅgā, the rivulet coming down to Gaṇeśpur from the mountains near Mugdatāl. Local law, regulating ownership of areas and distribution of water, assigns common property to a nonhuman being. The rice grown there is symbolically conferred to Vāsuki and, for ritual purposes, given back to the people. This raises further inquiries into the villager’s microeconomics, agriculture and irrigation techniques in general: How do different villages and caste groups distribute the water? Do conflicts arise? Therein, religion might serve as a stabilizer, attributing certain common interests to a nonhuman being and attuning different forms of water and land use to a common idea of responsibility.⁵

Places of “serpent lore”⁶ are of emotional value in a world thoroughly structured by family ties, if these include not only living human people, but also certain gods and goddesses, trees, animals and the deceased⁷ – all of which are “people” (*jānvar log*). *Nāgs* are regarded as relatives and cohabitants in many parts of South Asia⁸, where the social networks of kinship are enlarged by caste and common myths, forming an imagined Pan-Hindu background. Of course, a background of disparate village traditions even within a state like Uttarākhaṇḍ manifests in very diverse and rarely congruent belief systems. For instance, Vasukī, king of the *Nāgs*, has more than one birth place – one of them is situated in another mountain lake above Hurri village (fig. 7), some 30 kilometers upstream from Gaṇeśpūr. And when talk is about *Nāgraj* or *Nagarjā*, the king of *Nāgs*, the title often does not refer to Vāsuki, but to Kṛṣṇa, one of the major gods of mainstream Hinduism.

III.

For a long time, the demoness (*Rākṣasī*) Hidambā lived a peaceful and righteous life as wife of the mortal hero Bhīm, who is known all over South and South East Asia from the epic *Mahābhārata*. For a while, her love for her husband counterbalanced her demonic needs. But after his death she felt so desperate that she started to eat people and cows. To ward off this most extreme sin, Kṛṣṇa Bhagwān came by and kicked her belly out of her body, which became a deep and ghoulishly reeking swamp (fig. 8). Where her head came to rest, the village Mukhem (“face, mouth”) was built.

Told by Kullananda Swamī
Mukhem, 3rd of June 2015⁹

Talbala Sem, the swampland equated with a body part of Hidambā, is part of a whole landscape of places related to god Kṛṣṇa as Nāgrāj, king of the Nāgas, all within walking distance. This area, called Sem Mukhem, is counted by locals as the fifth of the “Four Abodes” (*chār dhām*), which are the most important sites of Pilgrimage in Uttarakhand, situated next to the most prominent sources of Yamunā and Gangā rivers. Such an embedding of space and places in narrative and vice versa by large and small scale mythologies, being confirmed in daily practice and consciousness, might be called „mythscape“. ¹⁰ Originally from Amazonian ethnography, this concept may be applied to the Hindu realms as well, wherein *Nāgs*, humans and other beings share a “multiverse of an unspecified number of agential and interacting spaces”¹¹. They inhabit different worlds (*lok*) such as *Nāglok*, the nether world of the *Nāgs*, *Mṛtyulok* (“world of mortals”), and *Devlok* (“world of gods”).

In spite of the worlds’ separateness, in mythical as well as ritual events nonhuman “beings can still penetrate other times and places, wandering into each other’s space, but in a transformed way”¹². Changing worlds and places may require some sort of bodily change. To visit human people, even a Nāg whose home is a lake within “this world” might have to shift his shape, to animate an image or ritual figure (*murti*) or even to possess a human person’s body. But also, for instance, the ground of the Mugdatāl lake might be classifiable as an “other world”, albeit ambiguously. At least it is not a space reachable by humans – hence it is a geographical point where separate realms can overlap and converge, so that beings can look into or even visit other worlds. The nine *Naiṇīs* (female *Nāgs*), who are adopted members of nine villages in the Pindar valley, spend most of their time in the *Nāglok*. “Down there”

(*nicevālā*), they miss their human kin and, in dreams and visions, articulate their desire to reunite to the inhabitants of their own village, who then set up an extensive cycle of rituals and processions longing for six months. During this time, the respective *Naiṇī Mātā* (“mother”) takes the form (*murti*) of a huge bamboo pole, to be nourished, clothed and carried around through the whole area. They display a kind of kingship over their respective territory, and are treated with much veneration.

All these varieties of local tradition and ontology mediate concepts of nature, landscape or the environment, which are embedded in Pan-Uttarākhaṇḍ or even Pan-Hindu cosmographies. On the larger scale of the Western Himalayas, between Western Nepal and Kaśmīr¹³, the disparate *Nāgs* are connected to each other by their common connection to water bodies and springs. Villages named *Pokhri* or *Sem*, both terms suggesting swamplands, more often than not also include little *Nāg* temples or are next to more prominent ones. A method indispensable for approaching “mythscares” is the elicitation of local landscape terms as well as of place names¹⁴: How do semantic properties, such as “size, shape, color” or “affordance”¹⁵, define and delimit landscape categories? “Is metaphor employed (cf. English ‘river mouth’, ‘foot hills’)?”¹⁶ If that is the case, are these metaphors semantically drawn from mythical domains?

If such religious stories are “clothed in an aura of factuality”¹⁷, it might be inappropriate to refer to the imaging of Sem Mukhem’s *Talbala Sem* swamp, being a demoness’s belly, as a “metaphor”. If it, to the people, really *is* or has been her belly, their talk about it as such requires no metaphorical transfer of meaning. Likewise beyond metaphor, the “bodies” of lakes, springs, creeks and rivers can hardly be delimited from each other. If they are believed to have or be not only a body, but also a face, intentions or moods, their veneration may be called “Animism”. This once outdated term has been reanimated recently, redefined as “the notion that the relations between human beings and nonhumans are essentially social” and often “constitutive of places and communities”.¹⁸ The manner in which the *Naiṇī Devīs* of Pindar valley bridge the ontological, symbolical and geographical distance to their human kin by appearing in dreams is reminiscent of the communication between human and other beings in South East Asian Animism, which often happens “in dreams or trances, but even in sight, touch, or hearing in everyday situations [...], giving them a sensual form in the controlled situation of rituals”¹⁹. Terms like Animism aptly describe a worldview wherein certain features of landscape, crops and animals can interact with human people as animated beings, while means of narration and ritual settle it within larger “mythscares”.

In the summer of 2015, spending a week in Sem Mukhem, I met Apurva Sharma, a then 22 years old young woman living with her parents, aunts and uncles in the big city of Dehradūn, but bound to the place by the ties of her family deity (*kul devtā*), the *Nāgrāj*. She told me, laughingly, that it would be very dangerous for me as a male to walk up the alpine meadows alone. I would be in grave danger to be seduced or even ripped into pieces by the mountain fairies, called in Hindī by the Persian word *pārī*. As I later learned, these fairies, named *ācharīs* and *dāḡuṛīs* in Gaṛhwālī, “are the daughters of *vāsukī nāga* – the mythical snake Vāsukī – who is supposed to have once ruled the central Himalayas”²⁰. Still they are said to sometimes appear as snakes, among other animal bodies they can have.²¹ Like the *Nāgs* of the high mountain lakes and springs, they inhabit remote and high alpine forests and meadows marked as “wild” (*kaṇḍa*) and “pure” (*śuca*).²²

How do *Nāgs* and fairies, by symbolizing, embodying and possibly *being* these places, channel the interaction between humans and the mountains? This question will be explored more systematically through participatory mapping²³ and thick description. I am also using philological methods to compare the local *Nāgs*, as they manifest themselves in myth, ritual and iconography, to the *Nāgas* and similar beings in the textual traditions of the classic epics, *Purānas*, Kaśmīrī historiographies and Tibetan mythologies. These are potentially still influential contexts and backgrounds of local mythologies: While ultimately open and fluid, a common reservoir of Hindu imagery, geography and narratives is nevertheless held together by a variable set of family resemblances. Many of the mentioned places of *Nāg* worship are commonly attributed to the Pan-Hindu gods Kṛṣṇa alias Viṣṇu, to mother Durgā and sometimes to Śiva. These are Pan-South-Asian deities recognizable to Hindus everywhere. Their popular iconography, also reproduced in Gaṛhwālī temples, features *Nāgs* as garlands of Śiva (*Vāsuki Nāg*), as the whip of Durgā, and as a resting place, throne, bed or royal umbrella of Viṣṇu (*Anant-Śeṣ Nāg*).

Kṛṣṇa, identified as an *avatār* of the latter, is often depicted dancing on the head of Kāliya *Nāg*. Unlike the others, this last motive is less an eternal and sublime form of the god than the depiction of one event: After Kāliya *Nāg* has fled into the lower Yamunā River, he does harm to cattle and people by poisoning the water and is defeated and befriended by Kṛṣṇa, who sends him to into the mountains to dwell there.²⁴ Although this story is set in the Braj region, south of Delhi, I often heard it in Uttarākhaṇḍ: In Sem Mukhem, the story functions as a prequel to Kṛṣṇa’s coming there as *Nāgrāj*; in Pindar valley, it is an alternative background myth of the nine *Nāginis*. Indirectly, the upper Yamuna regions of Uttarākhaṇḍ are thus semantically bound to the north Indian plains and with the theme of river pollution. As much

as the storytelling of Garhwāl relates to myths of classical epics and of other parts of India, local landscape gets embedded within larger formations of South Asian mythical geography – including nether worlds and heavens as well.

Bhīm, already mentioned in the tale of Hidambā as her husband, is one of the five Pāṇḍav Brothers, main heroes of both current Garhwālī folk theatre and the Sanskrit versions of the *Mahābhārata* epic. In two different episodes, Bhīm and his brother Arjun descend into the *Nāglok*, where each of them sires a son with a *Nāg* princess.²⁵ Both stories, listing local places visited by the protagonists, have counterparts in the classical *Mahābhārata* editions. Thus, protagonists of larger-scale cosmology are written into local features of landscape. Reciprocally, the immediate environments of villages are written into a larger story and thereby formed and affected – both ideologically and physically. My research question thus focuses on how landscape is crafted by religious activity and imagination: Is an infrastructure for pilgrims arranged? Are specific forms of land use restricted, due to the augmented holiness of a place? Are the superregional traditions invoked in the variety of practices centralizing or, due to their high-caste provenience, rather fragmentizing the communities and their territories? And how do modern environmentalist discourses tie in with these complexes?

IV.

While visiting many *Nāg* temples during my field trips, I asked people about what they associate with these serpent deities and what they mean, both as a symbol and as personal beings. Most stories connect them to the life-giving, fresh and refreshing mountain springs, while de-emphasizing the uncanny, potentially life-taking reality of their poison. The latter feature is more central to the ambivalent *Nāgas* of the ancient Sanskrit text corpora²⁶, as also their chthonic being, literally “down-to-earth”, and their inhabiting of an underworld (*Paṭal* or *Nāglok*), which is still a prevalent theme.

Although the narratives of contemporary *Nāg*-worshippers have deviated from the classical texts, the latter are of enormous importance to the Hindu communities, as has been shown in the previous chapters. Even as different village traditions display a large variety of rituals and relations between human and nonhuman people, these religions are tied together by their common reference to those old Sanskrit texts. Another unifying and super-regional factor is the role that Brahmin priests play in ritual performances, providing responsible representatives and ritual specialists. This seems to be a recent development of what beforehand had been a concern of local castes.²⁷ However, the sacred geography of Hinduism – a network of meaningful places all over India and beyond – has been highly influential in Uttarākhaṇḍ for as long as the river/goddess Gangā and her tributaries have been worshipped.

The river Gangā’s five main confluences (*prayāg*) are central sites of pilgrimage. As I was told by the main priest (*pujārī*) of the Karaṇ temple in Karaṇaprayāg, the different stages of the river are taken to represent the different stages and temperaments of a girl becoming a woman, as they grow from little creeks and streams into Gaṅgā’s watery body and increase in width and torrent. When doing any research on the religious traditions of Uttarākhaṇḍ, one cannot ignore its geographical proximity to some of the most venerated streams in the world, which supply a huge part of the world’s population with water. Their water bodies are, to many Hindus, bodies in a sense quite similar to how ordinary people have a body: As Hindu goddesses, they are thought and felt to be mothers. Exactly these thoughts and feelings can motivate environmentalist activism.²⁸ Thus, when the rivers are dammed up, tunneled or bypassed by the large hydroelectric projects planned and already built in the upper Gangā basin, these technological interventions have religious as well as ecological impacts. Among the opponents of such projects are not only environmentalists, but also religious believers, who feel a deep aversion to what might be seen as acts of surgery, since they involve violence to the goddesses’ bodies. In my work on local religion and, in particular, on the worship of

deities who protect many of Gangā's genuine sources, these aspects of large-scale landscaping and its environmentalist and religious opponents are an important part of the picture.

Such confrontations have happened several times in this part of India: In August 2010, the “controversial 600 MW Loharinag Pala hydel project on Bhagirathi River” was abandoned by the government, “keeping religious sentiments and environmental concerns in view”²⁹. To protest another environmentally questionable dam-project near Srinagar, which resulted in the relocation of the important Dhārī Devī temple, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) invoked the “right of people to worship at the temple”³⁰. The relocated goddess herself, in her wrath, is believed by some to have caused the devastating floods of 2013, consequently. Like a governmental expert committee had concluded about the 1970 flood, surely in 2013 “the widespread deforestation in the Alakananda catchment”³¹ has again been worsening the catastrophe. The influential Chipko movement against privatizing communal forests³², the subsequent efforts in joint forest management³³ and the more recent protests against the huge Tehri Dam³⁴ display Uttarākhaṇḍ as an epicenter of environmentalist activism on religious grounds. Such discourses are also often appropriated by political parties.³⁵

But is “nature” as the inanimate environment, a collective of all habitats endangered and in need of protection by modern human infrastructure similar to the natural world worshiped and addressed by people³⁶ as a scenery of animated, intentional and responsive beings? Both concepts of nature might be translated as *prakṛti* or *bhūmi* in Hindī; both share at least the minimal definition of containing mountains, rivers, plants and animals. But what melds these assembled beings into larger entities, such as a landscape, might be fundamentally different in cultural systems such as traditional religion, postmodern spirituality, political environmentalism and scientific ecology. On the other hand, participants in these discourses rarely devote their thinking and engagement to only one of these natures.

Worshipping features of nature is praised as indicating and supporting mentalities of “biotic community”³⁷ or “interconnectedness”³⁸. But it remains unclear whether traits of a so-called nature religion can really lead to ways of living that intentionally or effectively benefit biodiversity or manage resources sustainably.³⁹ Being a great example of how religion physically and imaginatively frame places, landscapes and their unity, the worship of *Nāgs* as the guardians of water resources provides enough different sites and manifestations to test and cross-check such hypotheses.

V.

My questions pertain to people whose religious traditions have rarely been systematically explored and whose sacred places I visited on incidental hearsay information. Having just begun this work, it remains difficult for me to judge what an interdisciplinary exchange between biologists, geographers, ethnographers and the people explored by them might result in, and whether it can be empowering to all participants of such an exchange. Can local concepts, opinions and practices about nature be integrated into the global agendas of environmental protection?

The human experience and meaning of environments is the subject of anthropology, which adds to the findings of natural science, sometimes questioning its epistemological base.⁴⁰ But how “hard” are scientific facts in an ecology that no longer clings to the idea of ecosystems as closed, “pure” and undisturbed homeostases? When, in the 1990s at the latest, ecology started focusing on disturbances like forest fires or El Niño, they began to be valued as productive as well as destructive ecological forces, provoking the adaptations, patterns of self-organization and internal feedback loops that create and form ecosystems in the first place.⁴¹ Of course, a continuous self-creation of ecosystems does not imply personality or, at least, the ability to interrogate and interact with the ecosystem that is implied in myth and ritual. But it seems somewhat compatible with a world shared by human and nonhuman people.

How open is this new ecological paradigm to “animist” worlds and spaces which are intentional, perceiving, “feeling” and responsive to human acts of communication? How far is Abel and Stepp’s *New Systems Ecology*, equipping ecosystems with “autocatalytic design [...], self-organization, emergence [...], directionality [...], surprise, indeterminism, pulsing, and chaotic dynamics”⁴², from Native Himalayan theories and mythologies about water, rain and *Nāgs*? After all, these features of and experiences with nature tend to be personified and systematized by myths in terms of monstrous, demonic or divine beings who inhabit realms beyond the places and spaces under people’s direct control and observation.

Spread among common people via schools, the media and activist groups, newer approaches in the fields of ecology might, instead of being too complex or far-fetched, even appear more sensible to “ordinary people” than standard teachings. The different meanings of “nature” and their common ground, however, remain a factor of uncertainty in estimating the possibilities of shared initiatives and dialogue between the “worlds” of rural religion and science. There is thus still a need for deeper ethnographic enquiries about how people feel and talk about water, wood, glaciers, mountain tops and other components of their surroundings.

1 My use of the much-disputed concept resembles Geertz' definition of a religion as „a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence [...]” (Geertz 1973, p. 90). More recently, Michaels has reintroduced “*religio*” into ritual studies as a mode to distinguish rituals from other kinds of behavior, defining it as the belief that an act transcends its concrete situation, be it through supernatural powers or by influence on *dharma* or another general order of existence (Michaels 1998, p. 259).

2 Overing 2004, p. 71.

3 Haberman 2013.

4 Bhatt et al. 2014, p. 125.

5 Cf. Guha 1989, p. 162; Lansing 2011.

6 Vogel, J. P. (1926): *Indian Serpent-lore or The Nāgas in Hindu Legend and Art*. London: Probsthain.

7 Sax 2009, pp. 165-200

8 Evidence for this is, for instance, the short story *Nāg Pūjā* (1915) by Premchand, edited in *Manasarovar*, part 4 (https://archive.org/details/Manasarovar-4_by_Premchand).

9 Cf. Mamgai 2008, pp. 106 f.

10 Overing 2004.

11 Overing 2004, p.73

12 Overing 2004, p. 84

13 On Kashmir: Ghaī, Vedakumārī: *The Nilamata Purana. A critical edition & English translation*. Srinagar: J & K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1973; Ikari, Yasuke (ed., 1994): *A study of the Nīlamata. Aspects of Hinduism in ancient Kashmir*. Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, 1994.

On Nepal: Bloss, Lowell W. (1971): *Ancient Indian Folk Religion as Seen Through the Symbolism of the Nāga*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, p. 62.

14 Bohnemeyer et.al. 2004

15 *ibid*, p. 75

16 *Ibid*.

17 Geertz 1973, p. 90.

18 Sprenger 2015, p. 7f.

19 Sprenger 2015, p. 9.

20 Bhatt et. al. 2014, p. 136

21 *ibid.*, p. 93

22 (*ibid.*, pp. 115 ff.).

23 IFAD (2009): *Good Practices in Participatory Mapping* (<https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/d1383979-4976-4c8e-ba5d-53419e37cbcc>), S. 32.

24 The slaying of Kāliya is told in chapter II.11-12 of *Harivamsa* (http://mahabharata-resources.org/harivamsa/vishnuparva/hv_2_011.html)

25 Sax 2002, pp. 68-73 & 98-100; Bhatt 1976, p.296-298.

26 In the Devanāgarī-text of the Pune edition, critically edited by MĪŚRA in 1988, episodes about the *Nāgas* start from 1.1.16.

27 Guha 1989, pp. 11ff. “Untouchables” like “the Bajgis and Aujis, the drummers who play [...] a leading part in all religious and social ceremonies” (*ibid.*, p. 14) are still indispensable to summon up the Gods by their drumming, which is said to be heard in the heavenly and nether-worldly realms, thus connecting different worlds.

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- 28 Haberman 2006, p. 144.
- 29 Economic Times, 4th July 2011: *Noted environmentalist embraces sanyas*.
<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/environment/the-good-earth/noted-environmentalist-embraces-sanyas/articleshow/9093007.cms>
- 30 *Zeenews*, 2nd July 2013: *Uttarakhand Floods. Dhari Devis Wrath – Myth or Reality?*
http://zeenews.india.com/news/uttarakhand/uttarakhand-floods-dhari-devis-wrath-myth-or-reality_857295.html
- 31 Guha 1989, p. 160.
- 32 Guha 1989.
- 33 Mishra 1997, pp. 568-571.
- 34 Werner 2015.
- 35 Linkenbach 2006; Tomalin 2009.
- 36 Müller 1878, pp. 175-193; Sprenger 2015.
- 37 Sanford 2012, pp. 66ff.
- 38 Framarin 2015, p. 41.
- 39 Hames 2007.
- 40 Cf. Ingold 2003; Sax 2009, p. 51-91.
- 41 Abel, Thomas; Stepp, John Richard (2003): *A New Ecosystems Ecology for Anthropology*.
In: *Conservation Ecology* 7 (3), online: <http://www.consecol.org/vol7/iss3/art12/> [02.2009].
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 1

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Figures and Bibliography

Figure 1) *Nāgrāja* temple in Pantvari village, 30°36'N 78°5'E



Figure 2) Interior of fig 1, 30°36'N 78°5'E



Figure 3) *Nāg Devtā* temple on *Nāg Tibbā* mountain, near 30°35'N 78°9'E



Figure 4) Mugdatāl lake, ca. 30°49'N 78°31'E



Figure 5) Temple of the *Nāg* deity *Vāsukī* amid his property in Gaṇeśpur, 30°45'N 78°28'E



Figure 6) Gate into Lord *Vāsukī*'s property, defined by a wall



Figure 7) Vāsukī temple in Hurri, 30°54'N 78°41'E



Figure 8) Talbala Sem, a swampland equated with the demoness Hidambā's belly (30°35'N 78°27'E)



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