

A Tale of the Tail: Classical Newari and Proto-Tibeto-Burman

Kamal P. Malla

Tribhuvan University

kamal.malla@gmail.com

Compared with a wealth of attested /dated lexical roots available in Classical Newari, Shafer (1967), Benedict (1972) and Matisoff (2005) give marginal importance to Newari roots. Although it may not be a case of “willful neglect”, access to most of these resources are now available on the Internet and in hard-copy dictionaries.

The paper cites a root, “the tail”, its reconstructed form as given in the literature, the cognates in TB languages in general and Himalayan languages geographically adjacent to Newari. It argues for “climbing the tree from the bottom” than “descending from the top” in search of stable roots.

The proto TB form reconstructed as **r-mey* by Benedict, **k-r-mei* by Shafer and **ba~may~mey~mi* by Matisoff seem to have an early reflex in attested Newari form *mhe* (A.D. 1380) and *nhi* (A.D. 1517). This early incidence of the root also indicates that Newari had prefixes such as **s-*, already proved by Malla (1985) as well as **r-*, surviving in the whole set of *mh, nh, rh, lh, vh*, set of initial consonants.