

**ILLNESS BELIEFS  
AND FEEDING THE DEAD  
IN HINDU NEPAL**

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS**

**LINDA STONE**

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**For Paul**



# CONTENTS

PREFACE	i
CHAPTER 1: THE VILLAGE OF DHUNGAGAUN	1
Social Organization	6
Medical Traditions	11
Illness and Social Ideology	17
CHAPTER 2: AN ILLNESS IN THE FAMILY	27
Vishnu	28
Vishnu's Madness	31
Repercussions	36
The Witchcraft Theory	38
The Search for a Cure	42
Vishnu Over the Years	52
CHAPTER 3: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	59
Heirarchy and Interdependence	62
Patrons, Clients and Others	71
Scarcity	75
Ritual Friendship	79
Social Ideology and Illness	83
CHAPTER 4: LINKING UP WITH FOOD	87
Hindu Food	90
Food in Everyday Life	97
CHAPTER 5: FOOD FOR THE DEAD	105
Food in Illness Ideology	106
Food and Malignant Spirits	114
Ritual Feeding: Pacification and Transformation	119
Feeding a Ghost	119
Blood Sacrifice to a Demon	123
The Making of a Bayu	133
CHAPTER 6: TO BE FED UPON	143
Vishnu's Madness	149
Individualism and Holism	155
REFERENCES	161
GLOSSARY	171
INDEX	175

**CHINA**

**RESEARCH AREA**

**NUWAKOT DISTRICT**

**KALI GANDAKI RIVER**

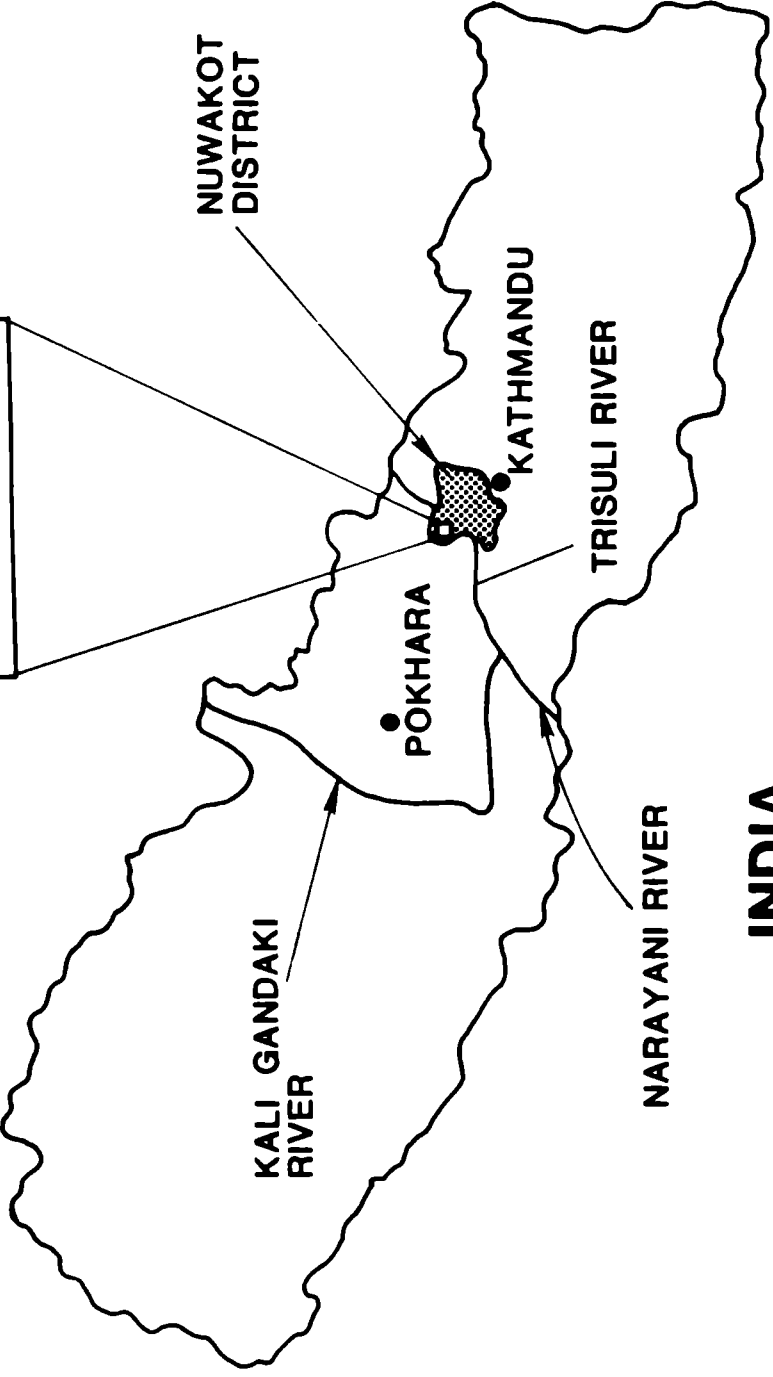
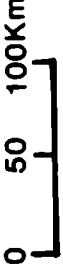
**POKHARA**

**KATHMANDU**

**TRISULI RIVER**

**NARAYANI RIVER**

**INDIA**



# PREFACE

Anthropologists are accustomed to making changes in their research plans as they encounter unforeseen phenomena or other special circumstances in the human settings of their fieldwork. In my case, fieldwork took place in a small village of the Nepalese hills where I had intended to study the impact of "modernization" on certain religious traditions among high castes. But about six months after I had settled in with a local family, an incident occurred which profoundly affected, indeed redirected, the course of my work. One of the members of my host family, a young boy, went "mad." The turmoil caused by this unfortunate incident was inescapable, and soon I found that the majority of my time, thoughts, and field notes were filled with the details of this case, its repercussions and implications. Through it, I was drawn into an investigation of local beliefs about malignant "forces" (ghosts, demons and witches) and the harm they bring to human beings.

The first part of this book presents a case study of this incidence of "madness," with discussion of my efforts to understand how the case was perceived and accounted for by the people among whom I lived. The effort led to my drawing a connection between local beliefs about malignant spirits on the one hand, and a

much broader social ideology, or set of cultural ideas about society and about interpersonal relationships, on the other. The book, then, is about the social ideology of high caste Hindus (Brahmans) in the Nepalese village of my study, and about how this ideology is reflected in local beliefs about illness.

I characterize the Brahmanical view of interpersonal relationships as emphasizing hierarchy and interdependence in human affairs. Here there is an ideal of "properly ordered" relationships, with this order also perceived as providing a framework for the distribution and exchange of "goods" (material and other). At the same time there appears to be a cultural recognition that this "order" is impossible to maintain in perfect harmony, that distributions and exchanges within it might at any time be unsatisfactory. It is here that ideas about malignant, illness-causing spirits become significant.

A link between these two realms of local life--social ideology and illness beliefs--is in later chapters drawn through examining symbols of food. Drawing upon the work of several other anthropologists who have studied Hindu society, I discuss how food and food exchanges serve to distinguish hierarchical statuses while at the same time symbolizing interdependency between persons and groups. This, in my analysis, reflects the villagers' view of the "proper order" of their society, of how things should be. But in the domain of illness beliefs, food serves as a symbol of some "inevitable imperfections" in these hierarchically ordered, interdependent social relationships. Through a comparison of these two realms of social life, this work constructs an overall ideology of social relationships that encompasses both



an ideal of social harmony and a culturally recognized notion of disharmony in human relationships.

Theoretically, this study draws from the work of Dumont (1976, 1977) who has written extensively on the principle of "hierarchy" in Hindu society and who is also concerned with establishing analytical importance to ideology in the study of human society and culture. Dumont is best known, of course, for his elucidation of the principle of hierarchy in relation to his theory of the Hindu caste system--an issue, and a controversy, not dealt with in this book. What is followed here is Dumont's fundamental contrast between the ideology of "holistic hierarchy" (1977) of non-Western societies (within which, to Dumont, Hindu society shows a form of "pure hierarchy"), and the ideological values of individualism and egalitarianism in the West. Dumont has repeatedly stressed that the Western conception of the individual, as an autonomous and valued "normative subject," is not culturally universal and that in Hindu society we find in place of this "individual," "a constellation of persons making up a whole" (1970 a:141). The study of this book suggests that the principles of holism and hierarchy are sharply reflected in both the illness beliefs and the ideology of interpersonal relationships of the Nepalese Brahmans of my study.

Dumont (1960) has given attention to the areas of Indian life where "holistic hierarchy" vanishes and "individualism" is asserted, for example in his discussion of the Hindu renouncer, or sannyasin, who leaves society in order to pursue his own spiritual liberation. But Dumont's interpretation of the place of the renouncer within Hinduism reaffirms the strength and importance of holism and hierarchy in Hindu caste

society. My study suggests that within "holistic hierarchy" itself there is already another idea, expressed at least in the village of my study, an idea of an imperfection in the system. This is not a denial of hierarchy but rather an assertion of one of its "problems," namely its ability to engender social conflict. The "proper order" of society, entailing the principles of hierarchy, interdependence and holism, operates not only as a coherent way of defining human relationships and expressing cultural values but also as a framework for defining access to valued "goods." But here the system is seen, by those within it, to work imperfectly: in other words, there appears to be a notion that the social "whole" can never really satisfy the needs of all the parts. There is an ever-present potential for ordinary expectations and desires to be unfulfilled. Within the system, someone will always be left out, left in need, and this someone (living or dead) constitutes a source of danger and acquires the ability to cause illness. Yet in this domain, a domain where demons dwell and witches strike, I find a negative "mirror image" that reflects back to us the strength, importance and pervasiveness of the cultural ideas of holism and hierarchy. The analysis demonstrates in the negative, as it were, the primacy of a holistic and hierarchical view of human relationships.

Following a brief introduction (Chapter One) to the village of Dhungagaun<sup>1</sup>, the site of fieldwork, we move to the case study of "madness" (Chapter Two). This case is presented early in order to show how it was instrumental in directing my analysis toward uncovering a connection between illness beliefs and social ideology. But here it becomes necessary to

recognize the "holistic" orientation of that ideology and to abandon the "individualistic" assumptions of Western social science, at least in order to understand local perceptions of this case of "madness." This then sets the stage for a look at Dhungagaun social organization and interpersonal relationships (Chapter Three), where the major orienting ideas behind social relationships (hierarchy and interdependence) are examined.

Chapter Four introduces the topic of food and food symbolism and opens the idea that social ideology can be linked to illness beliefs through symbols of food. This chapter discusses how food is used to symbolically express the themes underlying social relationships covered in the previous chapter. Chapter Five returns to the realm of illness and shows how the role of food in illness beliefs and curing practices is connected with the cultural recognition that disharmony is inevitable in Dhungagaun social life.<sup>2</sup> Chapter Six summarizes the analysis and returns to the original case study for illustration.

Most of the data presented here were collected between April 1973 and September 1975, when I resided in the village of Dhungagaun. There I conducted fieldwork alone, living with a Brahman family. I later returned to Nepal in 1977, and remained until 1981, during which time I served as a Reader in Anthropology in the Research Center for Nepal and Asian Studies at Tribhuvan University. During this period I revisited Dhungagaun several times and conducted another month of fieldwork there in 1979. My most recent visit was in 1982.

Prominent among my methods of data collection was "participant observation." The majority of my time,

and the bulk of my field notes, were devoted to merely living in the community, observing and recording my experiences. In the early years, I also taught English in the local primary school to develop rapport, meet people and make some contribution to the village society that accepted my presence with such gracious hospitality. I worked closely with a research assistant (a local school teacher) and with him conducted more formal interviews with priests, healers and others. Later, in 1979, I conducted a sample survey of households using a questionnaire that covered illness beliefs and curing practices.

I am grateful to the Social Science Research Council for a fellowship during this research. I would like to acknowledge the considerable help of my research assistant and close friend, Kailash Nath Paudell. I am also grateful to Tribhuvan University's Research Center for Nepal and Asian Studies, where I was affiliated while working in Dhungagaun. For their comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript, I thank Dor Bahadur Bista, Lynn Bennett, J. Gabriel Campbell, Lina Fruzzetti, Harihar Acharya, Donald Messerschmidt, Karen Sinclair, John Bodley, Mark Handler and George Hicks. For his support throughout the preparation of the book, I am grateful to my husband, Paul Lurquin. I also wish to express my thanks for the hospitality of the villagers with whom I lived in Dhungagaun.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Dhungagaun is a pseudonym, as are names of individuals in this village.

<sup>2</sup>Chapters Four and Five are an expanded version of an earlier paper (Stone 1983).

# CHAPTER 1:

## THE VILLAGE OF DHUNGAGAUN

In one Hindu myth the great god Shiva heroically drank a dangerous poison that threatened to destroy the world. The poison so burned Shiva's insides that he sped to Nepal in search of the cooling Himalayas. At Gosainkund Lake in the far north, Shiva thrust his trident (trisul) into a mountainside. From the three prongs of his trident, water gushed out of the mountain and a great river began to flow. This river came to be called the Trisuli after Shiva's trisul.

Along the Trisuli River, in the hills of Central Nepal, lies the village of Dhungagaun,<sup>1</sup> the site of my fieldwork. Dhungagaun, containing a little over 1200 people, is in Nepal's hilly midsection between the high Himalayas to the north and the Mahabharat mountains to the south. This midsection of the country is cut by transverse river valleys. Dhungagaun is located within one of these, the Trisuli Valley, and the lowermost point of the village is at the bank of the river. Trisuli is also the name of the major market town of the area. This town, about five miles from Dhungagaun, is the administrative center for Nuwakot District.

Hoffpauir (1978) distinguishes two types of village economies in the Trisuli Valley. At higher elevations (above 1600 meters), villagers practice dry cultivation of wheat, barley and corn along with

herding of sheep, goats and cattle. In the lower areas, of which Dhungagaun is a part, wet rice is the dominant crop, and livestock are kept largely for their contributions to agriculture.

Nearly every household in Dhungagaun is organized around farming. Farmland is divided into bari (unirrigated fields in the hills) and khet (irrigated fields, usually in the lowlands). Bari land supports corn and millet, while on khet the farmers grow wheat and, the most valued crop, rice. Other important cultivated foods include barley, potatoes, peanuts, various legumes, tobacco, sugarcane, and fruits such as bananas, jackfruit, mangos, and papayas.

As with rural Nepal generally, landholdings in Dhungagaun are small and fragmented. The average amount of cultivatable land owned per household is 0.65 hectare; for the more valuable khet land, the average holding is 0.28 hectare. These figures are only slightly higher than those for the Nepalese hill farming region as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Very few villagers are landless. Most of the agricultural production in this village is for subsistence, but at least half the households sell, in a good year, some portion of their crops to shopkeepers in Trisuli or to other villagers.

Settlements in Dhungagaun are scattered over a steep and curving hillside, interrupted in the center by a small plateau above sharp cliffs. The village spans roughly 300 meters, from an elevation of 600 meters at the lowest settlements on the bank of the Trisuli River, to about 1000 meters where the upper region of Dhungagaun meets another village. As is common throughout Nepal, settlement is dispersed with fields between houses (Fürer-Haimendorf 1966:25; Bista 1972:4).

Houses in the village are typically two- or three-story structures built of stone and mud over wooden frames. Walls are plastered with red or white clay; and floors are cleaned and resurfaced daily with a mixture of cow dung and mud. Roofs are thatched, although sometimes, among wealthier households, they are finished with corrugated tin. Each household has a cleared courtyard with a nearby vegetable garden and livestock shed. A network of small trails connects the houses, water sources, and fields that are scattered over the rugged terrain. Along the main trails, clearings with large pipal trees serve as shaded rest stops.

Within Dhungagaun there are several named settlements, or hamlets, the boundaries of which are vague. Often the hamlet name refers to the major caste group settled there. Most of these hamlets are in the upper regions of the village, above the cliffs. In the last 25 years, however, two new hamlets have opened up in the lowlands, and these now serve as important links between the village and the outside world, a world that is itself changing rapidly and increasingly affecting the lives of village people.

Formerly these lowland areas were unsettled, consisting of pasture and forest land. The villagers' name for the major area, "Akare," is suggestive of their earlier view of this area as inhospitable. The name comes from akkar, "a difficult precipice." An informant described this area as formerly "but a path, treacherous because narrow. On one side there was the raging river; on the other side, the jungle." These lowland areas were opened for settlement by the Indian Cooperative Mission's (ICM) Trisuli Hydroelectric Project which began in the early 1960s. The ICM

project constructed a paved road from Kathmandu to Trisuli, and later a dirt road from Trisuli to Dhungagaun. The project then constructed a dam on the Trisuli River at the base of Dhungagaun, in Akare, and cleared an area there for the housing of project staff. Dam construction and maintenance also provided opportunities for off-farm employment for villagers. Being thus linked to the outside world and new economic ventures, villagers and outsiders began to settle in Akare and in another nearby lowland area called Karmetar. Some people came for trade, setting up small shops and tea stalls to tap the business from the ICM project, as well as link into the trade flowing between Trisuli and more remote points upriver beyond Dhungagaun. Some villagers also migrated downhill to the lowlands for easier access to their lower fields. And perhaps all who came from higher elevations in Dhungagaun came with a sense of leaving the village way of life for something new and something better. There is today a conceptual opposition between these lowland areas and the rest of Dhungagaun. The former are referred to as bisi (flat land near a river) and only the higher areas are called gau (village).

The history of villages like Dhungagaun has involved a great deal of interaction among diverse ethnic groups. Contact with Westerners, however, has been both more recent and more rare until very recently. By the time of my initial research, there had been a few researchers and Peace Corps volunteers stationed in Nuwakot, and the adjacent Dhading and Rasuwa districts. One U.S. volunteer lived in Akare, serving as an agricultural extension agent, and his stay overlapped with my residence in the upper village, the gau. In addition to these individuals, villagers



are aware of the foreign presence in Nepal largely through their observations of tourists (trekkers). The trail to Langtang National Park, a popular trekking goal, lies across the Trisuli River from Dhungagaun. Dhungagaun villagers easily spot foreign strangers across the river and discuss them at great length. Regardless of the nationality of these groups (most are European, American and Japanese), Dhungagaun villagers excitedly pointed out these foreigners to me as members of my "caste" or social group (jat). Yet the fact that trekking groups merely pass within the visual range of Dhungagaun rather than through it accounts for some difference between Dhungagaun and the other villages across the river along the Langtang trail. These latter villages have seen an increase in the number of their local tea stalls, inns, and restaurants. In the trekking season (October to May), shops exhibit English signs for "Coca Cola," "Cold Beer," and "Cheap Hotel." Young children beg the foreigners for coins (paisa) and display their newly-learned phrases of English slang.

In terms of economic development and the social, political and ideological changes associated with it, Dhungagaun probably is being most profoundly affected by its inclusion in Nepal's Small Farmer Development Program, begun in 1975.<sup>3</sup> This program is an experiment in "people's participation" in development, with Dhungagaun serving as a pilot site. The program encourages "small farmers" (those with small land holdings) and landless laborers to form groups of their own or to work individually on income-raising or other development activities. The individuals and groups receive credit plus some technical advice and assistance, but the major planning and implementation of activities rests with the small farmers themselves.

Among other activities, the small farmers of Dhungagaun have built a project office, completed several drinking water projects, set up a handloom factory, and have constructed a fish pond and orchards (Ghai and Rahman 1981:27).

## Social Organization

The focus of my study is the Brahmans, the highest caste and a majority caste in Dhungagaun. It is important to understand this group in relation to their broader social context, which includes several other castes and ethnic groups in Nepal. Nepalese Brahmans migrated into Nepal from India, with a major migration occurring in the 12th century when Indian groups fled from the Muslim invasions. They brought with them notions of caste divisions and hierarchy, and as they, along with other high castes (see below), gained hegemony in Nepal, a caste system came to increasingly define relationships between Nepal's diverse groups. Yet precisely because these caste Hindus encountered a plurality of ethnic groups in Nepal, many of them Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples, the Nepalese caste system developed its own distinctive flexibility in contrast with the Indian system (Fürer-Haimendorf 1960; Dumont 1964; Caplan 1973; Fisher 1978). Most notable is that in Nepal there are greater allowances for intercaste marriages and for incorporation of the children of these unions into the kinship groups of the father.<sup>4</sup>

The Nepalese Legal Code of 1854 ranked caste groups using five major categories: (1) wearers of the sacred thread, (2) nonenslavable alcohol drinkers, (3) enslavable alcohol drinkers, (4) impure but touchable castes (from whom water cannot be accepted),

and (5) impure untouchable castes (also "water unacceptables") (Höfer 1979). This code is no longer in force; indeed in Nepal, as with India, discrimination according to caste is illegal. But socially and ritually caste is very much a part of life in rural Nepal; and in villages Hindu people perceive caste distinctions roughly along this model, except that slavery has been abolished and so a distinction between enslavable and nonenslavable castes is no longer made.<sup>5</sup>

Along with the Brahmans, who rank above all other castes, other "twice born" thread-wearing (tagadhari) castes include the Jaisi, Chetri and Thakuri. These last two form an equivalent to the Ksatriya category of the classical Hindu varna system. Jaisi refers to a group formed from unsanctioned marital unions between Brahmans. Thus for example, if a Brahman widow elopes with another Brahman man, she and her children of this union will assume the lower Jaisi caste rank. Most Chetri and Thakuri groups claim to be descendents of Indian Rajputs (Ksatriya warriors, see Fürer-Haimendorf 1966); but in fact their origin is not precisely known.<sup>6</sup>

The next major category--alcohol drinkers (matwali)--includes, from the point of view of the higher Hindu castes, many of Nepal's Tibetan or Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups, such as the Sherpa of northern Nepal, the Magar and Gurung, largely found in the west, the Rai and Limbu in the east and the Tamang, numerous in east and north central Nepal. The Matwali category is roughly comparable to the Vaisya in the varna system. But these groups, and individuals within them, vary in the extent to which they have accepted ideas of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Throughout the middle hill

area of Nepal, the high caste tagadhari are often found at lower elevations (below 1300 meters) with the other ethnic groups settled above them. In the area of Dhungagaun it is the Tamangs who are settled at these higher altitudes.

In reference to "water unacceptable" castes, the old Nepalese Code distinguished "impure but touchable" and "untouchable," castes (paralleling the Sudra and Untouchable categories of the classical Hindu system). But this distinction is not relevant in most rural Nepalese communities, where all the low castes are "untouchable."

In addition to all of these groups are the Newars, a Tibeto-Burman speaking group prominent in Kathmandu, the nation's capital. Although sometimes ranked as matwali by others, the Newars do not themselves recognize this caste placement. Instead they have a separate and roughly parallel hierarchy of their own, with high, middle and untouchable ranks. Aside from the Kathmandu Valley, Newars are concentrated in rural market towns, such as Trisuli. Throughout Nepal they have specialized in trade and business, although pockets of Newari peasant farmers are also found in the middle hills in villages like Dhungagaun.

Table 1 lists the castes of Dhungagaun and the distribution of household heads by caste. The table shows the predominance of the high (tagadhari) castes and the numerical supremacy of Brahmans. As in most rural Nepalese communities, there are no castes of the "impure but touchable" category. Among untouchables are the tailor caste (Damai) and the blacksmith caste (Kami). Brahmans, of course, are at the top of the caste hierarchy. Brahmans themselves claim neither to know (or to be very concerned with) the precise ranking

of castes within the categories of non-Brahman tagadhari, matwali and untouchable. I was frequently told that "this is a problem for them, not us."

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Household Heads by Caste

Caste	Percentage Household Heads N=197	Total Percentage by Caste Category
<u>Tagadari</u>		
Brahman	44	81
Chetri	23	
Jaisi	9	
Thakuri	5	
<u>Matwali</u>		
Newar	3	9
Magar	3	
Gurung	2	
Tamang	1	
Gharti	1	
<u>Untouchable</u>		
Damai	6	10
Kami	4	
Total	101	

All castes of Dhungagaun trace descent agnatically (through male links) and reside patrilocally (after marriage, the couple resides with the husband's family). Patrilineages are strictly exogamous. A large joint family is the ideal, but commonly brothers will separate their households upon the death of the father, or even before.

Among Brahmans there is a strong emphasis on the solidarity of agnatically related males and on lineage purity. From this point of view, women, already perceived in Hinduism as religiously inferior to men on

account of the fact that they menstruate, are seen as a threat. Not only might a married woman draw the attentions of her husband away from his own family, but any lapse in her sexual conduct will threaten the purity of the husband's lineage (Bennett 1983). As safeguards to these threats, Brahman women are married early, preferably before menstruation, and their conduct is carefully supervised. A new bride in her husband's home, is enjoined to be shy and obedient. She can expect that her husband (probably a stranger to her at the time of the wedding) will ignore her, at least publicly, as any signs of interest on his part would be interpreted as disrespectful to his parents. She will have most to do with her mother-in-law, who will watch her carefully and assign her the most taxing of the household chores. In Dhungagaun, most (though not all) families will marry a daughter into other villages to avoid hearing about or seeing her ill treatment and domestic misery. Many mothers connive to marry daughters into villages where their own brothers live, so that at least the new bride will have some kin on her mother's side to support her in the early trials of marriage. A woman's status improves, of course, when she bears children, especially sons, who will continue the husband's lineage in the next generation (Bennett 1983).

In Chapter Three, caste and kinship relationships among Brahmans are discussed to establish the pervasiveness of the principle of hierarchy. In this discussion, hierarchy is a framework for interpersonal linkages, within which the interdependence of the participants is socially and culturally emphasized. I then show that the same principles of hierarchy and interdependence lie behind virtually all interpersonal

relationships inside or outside the realms of caste and kinship. This is done to provide a basis for my characterization of the Brahmans' view of their social world, which I eventually link with their ideas about evil spirits, illness and curing. These beliefs emerge as a kind of negative reflection of the Brahmans' social ideology, of their view of their own interpersonal domain.

### **Medical Traditions**

To follow the material on illness and curing in later chapters, and especially to follow Chapter Two, a case study of an illness, it will be helpful to give here a brief description of medical traditions in Dhungagaun.

Despite the fact that Nepal is so often characterized as culturally diverse, medical traditions also show a striking compatibility from one place to another. Once outsiders have learned some basic principles of local medicine in one area, they will find themselves at home on the topic of medicine in nearly any region of the country. This is particularly true when interest is confined to the lower altitude Hindu areas, of which Dhungagaun is representative, where the dominant patterns parallel North Indian traditions. Here the influence of Central Asiatic traditions is present but much less strong than among Nepal's high altitude groups (Hitchcock 1967).

Dhungagaun villagers' ideas of illness causation reflect many different influences. Very prominent in folk medicine throughout Nepal is the "hot/cold dichotomy," found in ancient Indian Ayurvedic medicine (Basham 1975) but also in Greek humoral pathology and traditional Chinese medicine. In folk medicine this

idea has been researched by anthropologists in many regions of the world and particularly in Latin America (Foster 1978). As Foster describes the system,

. . . illness is explained as due to 'cold' causes, such as entry of the air into the body, or 'hot' causes, such as excessive consumption of foods believed to have heating qualities. In a general sense curing conforms to a doctrine of opposites: hot remedies to drive out the cold, and cold remedies to extract the heat. The terms 'hot' and 'cold' usually do not refer to actual temperature, nor to spiciness or blandness. Rather they refer to innate 'qualities' or characteristics of the foods and herbs (1978: 3).

In Dhungagaun, innumerable illnesses are attributed to hot/cold "imbalances," caused by consumption of certain foods or food combinations. Nearly every villager knows a few herbal mixtures used to restore the balance in the body. Another example, and a common complaint in Dhungagaun, is "body swelling." Excess exposure of the body to wind or "cold" air, particularly in warm weather or during a "heat generating" activity such as sleep or childbirth, is said to cause body swelling as the air enters the skin through the enlarged pores.

There are other kinds of "imbalances" related to illness, at least in theory. Villagers say that humans need to maintain proper relationships with ancestors, and lineage gods; and if these relationships are disturbed, illness or other misfortune can result (see Opler 1963). But although this idea is readily acknowledged, in my experience villagers never referred



to these forces to account for any particular case of illness. Similarly, another Hindu concept, karma (the notion that moral actions in a past life have consequences which accompany the soul through subsequent lives), is rarely invoked to account for a particular illness (see Babb 1973; Dumont 1970b:276). But villagers will say that, theoretically, karma could be related to illness or might help to account for why one person suffers repeated illnesses from other, more immediate causes.

In terms of illness in relation to "supernatural" forces, one idea which is commonly expressed, and the one with which I am most concerned in later chapters, is that many illnesses are caused by "malignant spirits," (lagu). These include ghosts ("ghosts" of humans who died in some inauspicious manner), demons, and, witches. Ghosts and demons cause illness in humans in order to wrangle food offerings from them. They will attack anyone they can and are normally indifferent about who the victim may be. However, persons already physically weak or psychologically disturbed are said to be more vulnerable to harm from all malignant forces, as are persons who thoughtlessly hang around places where ghosts and demons dwell, such as crossroads, funeral grounds or certain streams.

Witches (boksi) are humans (usually female) who deliberately learn and practice "evil" means of causing illness in others.<sup>7</sup> Symbolically, human female witches are seen as extensions of the Hindu goddess Devi in her violent manifestation (Bennett 1983:307); and some of these manifestations of Devi may also bring illnesses. Unlike the other lagu who are motivated by hunger, the witch strikes out of anger or jealousy. The victim is the person arousing the anger or jealousy, or a

relative or even the livestock of this person. Anyone can learn witchcraft, either from another witch or from a shaman. A shaman (see below) automatically knows how to bring illness, since this knowledge is like the other side of the coin of the shaman's special healing knowledge. There are many different ways that a witch can cause illness, but most of the techniques involve the use of powerful mantra (formulae of words).

In Dhungagaun there are a number of options for treating illnesses. First, a great variety of herbal and food mixtures are prepared and used for nearly any illness. Some herbs are available within the village. Others, and generally those considered most potent, are found only in the high mountain areas, renowned for their powerful medicinal substances. On medicine in ancient India, Basham wrote that "Particularly noted for medicinal herbs were the Himalayas, the home of the god Shiva, the lord of viadyas [healers] . . ." (1976:30). In Dhungagaun, these mountain herbs are collected by Tamangs who live at such altitudes and are sold to villagers or healers who live below, or to merchants in Trisuli. Trisuli is in fact a central point in a rather large business in highland medicines that extends all the way to drug companies in India.

An additional source of medical treatment, and undoubtedly the most important in Dhungagaun, is the jhankri (shaman). For Nepal as a whole, Macdonald has defined the jhankri as ". . . he who after having first of all suffered possession by a spirit foreign to his everyday world, manages to control it and to regulate it" (1975:118). The jhankri then becomes ". . . a privileged intermediary between spirits (which give and cure sicknesses) and men; between the past, the present and the future, between life and death . . ."

(Macdonald 1975:115). The controlled spirits aid the jhankri in diagnosing illnesses and in recommending treatments. When in trance, the jhankri's spirits are said to enter and speak through him. A jhankri also may be able to induce a spirit to enter a patient and speak through the patient. Jhankris use their control over spirits to offer advice and assistance for any kind of human misfortune, although they are primarily summoned for cases of illness.

The jhankris of Dhungagaun appear as a somewhat watered down version of the colorful Tamang bombo of higher elevations in central Nepal (see Höfer 1973) or the shamans of other areas in Nepal more heavily influenced by Central Asiatic shamanism (see Hitchcock and Jones 1976; Watters 1975; Campbell 1978; Miller 1979; Peters 1981). Unlike these shamans, those of Dhungagaun undergo no formal initiation ceremony, they wear no special costume during healing ceremonies, and they do not become healers through any special spiritual calling or possession. Indeed, Dhungagaun villagers claim that their own jhankri, though frequently consulted for illnesses, are far less powerful than the "true jhankris" who, they say, are Tamang practitioners "who have long hair."

Nevertheless, the term "jhankri" is in Dhungagaun very loosely applied to all local healers, including those shamans who invoke spirits, as well as other "lower level" healers who merely practice jhar phuk. In jhar phuk, the healer first utters a mantra; then he places the mantra onto the body of the patient (or into food he eats, an amulet he wears, etc.) by the technique of "blowing" (phuk garne). Blowing is usually accompanied by jharnu (to take out, sweep away or shake off). Here the healer takes an object such as

a broom or a hat, blows a mantra into it, passes the object across the patient and then forcibly thrashes it to the ground to transfer the ill condition out of the patient's body. Similar uses of mantra, "blowing" and "sweeping" actions in curing have been reported for North India (Marriott 1955:252).

There are some healers who, along with jhar phuk, practice a few other specialized curing techniques (e.g., ritual pacification of malignant spirits, or extraction of substances [putla] sent into one's body by a witch). There are also Brahman priests (porohit) who perform Hindu religious ceremonies to help cure people, and astrologers (jyotis) who diagnose but tend not to treat illnesses. Within Dhungagaun at the time of my study, there were nine men who regularly practiced medicine. Of these, only two were able to invoke spirits; the others practiced jhar phuk and/or were considered specialists in herbal treatments.

Finally, villagers also resort to Ayurvedic medicine (there is one practitioner in Trisuli, a Newar) and to Western, or allopathic, medicine. Among the available Western facilities, the most widely used by Dhungagaun residents is the Trisuli hospital. Begun as a hospital for the Indian Cooperative Mission staff, it was later opened to the Nepali public and is now a government district hospital. In connection with the government's national health program, Dhungagaun also has local Village Health Workers ("barefoot doctors") who provide health education and may provide a few minor medicines like aspirin and eye ointment.

In Dhungagaun, as is generally true the world over, people easily combine traditional and modern medicine and will frequently treat one case of illness by both summoning a jhankri and visiting the hospital.

In my 1979 survey of household heads, 72 percent said they had used the Trisuli hospital at some time or another; 94 percent claimed that they regularly summon jhankris. Among the jhankri users, 69 percent had summoned one within the last three months; and among those who had ever used the hospital, 54 percent had done so within the last three months.

Some villagers do express, or at least did express to me, skepticism toward jhankris, saying it is all "superstition" or that jhankris "are for uneducated people," but often these same people will on other occasions summon a jhankri for their own illnesses. Belief in jhankris, or belief in witches or illness-causing spirits, is not an either/or matter. Individuals in fact vary in their stated belief and in practice from one context to another and sometimes admit, in deeper discussions, to a certain ambiguity about the whole matter. One young man who had a high school education expressed strong disbelief in jhankris in the early years of my study. He has since then not only summoned jhankris, but has also learned a few healing mantras and the art of jhar phuk, which he practices on his family members when they are ill.

### **Illness and Social Ideology**

For my analysis of the relationship between illness beliefs and social ideology I present one case study of a long-term and serious illness in the village, the subject of the next chapter. I use this case for a couple of reasons. One is that the illness occurred in the Brahman household in which I was living; and given the seriousness and long duration of the illness, I was drawn into it on a daily basis throughout the entire time of my fieldwork, and for

some years afterward as well. As a result I was able to record the drama in considerable detail as it unfolded. Secondly, and most importantly, this case produced considerable tension in my own mind as I struggled to make some sense of it. This tension eventually led to the analysis of illness beliefs in relation to social ideology that I present in later chapters.

The case concerns a young boy, whom I call Vishnu. Rather abruptly, it seemed to me at the time, Vishnu began to exhibit some bizarre and disruptive behaviors which his family members sometimes interpreted as signs of "broken mind" (man bigrayo). As the case persisted and became the focus of endless discussion among family members, local healers, and others, I began to notice a wide gap between my own thoughts on the case and the view of it that was taking shape within Vishnu's family. It seemed that I was speculating about Vishnu's "madness" from a Western socio-psychological point of view. This theorizing placed a great deal of emphasis on Vishnu as an individual actor: his illness was a response to a range of problematic circumstances affecting him personally. In short, it was an individual "failure to cope." But gradually I became interested in perceiving Vishnu's case from the family's point of view, particularly when my speculations met with blank faces whenever I suggested them to others. As I came to understand the family's perspective, it seemed that here the emphasis was on a web of problematic relationships that extended through kin groups, back in time, and across the boundary between the living and the dead. And very few, if any, of these relationships had much to do with Vishnu as an individual, or at least not "the individual" as I was defining the concept.

My attempts to interpret Vishnu's case were rooted in "Western individualism," and an individualistically-oriented Western social science (or, at least, a popular version thereof). The family's view, by contrast, emphasized "holism." To follow Vishnu's family's perspective on his illness required on my part an intellectual shift away from seeing the individual in isolation from and pitted against society, to a view of the "individual" in meaningful connection with others. It is through this holistic orientation of local social ideology that I attempt to link two realms of life among Dhungagaun Brahmans, namely their perceptions of interpersonal relationships and their beliefs about illness. As this idea of holism is central to my later analysis, I will briefly discuss theoretical significance before proceeding to the drama of Vishnu's madness.

In anthropology Louis Dumont (1970b, 1977) has written extensively on the contrast between Western egalitarianism and the principle of "hierarchy" in Indian society. He suggests that underlying this contrast is Western individualism. Individualism, supporting the twin values of equality and liberty, not only permeates Western Culture, but has by extension interjected an ethnocentric bias into social science theory. In this Western cultural conception, the individual is both autonomous and nearly sacred:

. . . there is nothing over and above his legitimate demands; his rights are limited only by the identical rights of other individuals. He is a monad, in short, and every human group is made up of monads of this kind (1970b:4) . . . What is called 'society' is the means, the life of each man

is the end. Ontologically the society no longer exists, it is no more than a reducible datum, which must in no way thwart the demands of liberty and equality (1970b:10).

From this cultural point of view, according to Dumont, the Indian caste system becomes intelligible only as some kind of moral aberration, a system of oppression which denies to the individual his right of self-determination. Translated into the only slightly more objective terms of sociological or anthropological theory, the caste system becomes an extreme and rigid form of "social stratification," directly comparable to class systems and even racism in the West. Dumont argues that neither in the popular nor the sociological imagination can the Indian caste system be understood without consideration of its own ideological context, i.e., the ideas and social values of traditional Indian society. Here, in place of individualism one finds holism: the individual is secondary to and valued in terms of his/her relation to others and to a larger social whole, to "society." In place of equality, in India the emphasis is on hierarchy.

Fundamental to Dumont's work is the definition of "hierarchy" as "the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole . . . in the majority of societies it is religion which provides the view of the whole, and . . . the ranking will thus be religious in nature" (1970b:66). The religious ranking is in Indian society based on ". . . a single true principle, namely the opposition of the pure and impure" (1970b:43). Hierarchy is thus based upon the superiority of the pure over the impure.

Along with hierarchy (or the gradation of status) Dumont refers to two other "principles" of the caste



system. First, rules ensuring the separation of castes in some contexts, and second, the interdependence of castes which results from the traditional division of labor in Hindu India. The pure/impure opposition underlies all three principles:

This opposition underlies hierarchy, which is the superiority of the pure to the impure, underlies separation because the pure and the impure must be kept separate, and underlies the division of labor because pure and impure occupations must likewise be kept separate. The whole is founded on the necessary and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites (1970b:43, italics his).

Thus for Dumont, it is only in relation to an Indian worldview or ideology that the caste system can be either understood or explored in social science. Interpretations of caste based on social theories that have incorporated ideas of Western individualism are ethnocentric. In the dominant Indian ideology, the value is on hierarchy, not equality, and holism, not individualism.

From this reformulation of the ideological place of the individual in Indian society (and from his premise that ideology is important to a study of social behavior), Dumont explores the implications of the caste system, challenging previous interpretations of it. Many of his views on caste have been criticized (see, for example, Madan 1971; Marriott 1969; Tambiah 1972; Lynch 1977), and his ideas remain highly controversial.

Without entering this debate on caste, I wish to focus attention on Dumont's contributions to our understanding of Hindu society through an elucidation

of holism, or through attention to specifically cultural definitions of the individual in relation to society. In a work which appeared after the Indian caste study, Dumont drew the contrast between the social values of holism and individualism as follows:

On the one hand, most societies value, in the first place, order: the conformity of every element to its role in society--in a word, society as a whole; this is what I call 'holism.' On the other hand, other societies--at any rate ours--value, in the first place, the individual human being: for us, every man is, in principle, an embodiment of humanity at large, and as such he is equal to every other man, and free. This is what I call 'individualism' (1977:4).

Dumont then uses the holism/individualism contrast to set up societal "types," and claims that the holistic type has been predominant among world civilizations. Western society is indeed the single exception he finds.

As for "hierarchy," this social value is, for Dumont, inevitably stressed in holistic societies (in place of the emphasis on equality and liberty in individualistic societies), but not everywhere to the same degree. With this, India emerges as an extreme case within holistic societies.<sup>8</sup>

In a way similar to Dumont's criticism of sociological views of the individual in relation to society, Hsu (1985) objects to a Western cultural bias in social science definitions of "the personality." And like Dumont, he locates the bias at the same source: Western individualism. Thus, "The main problem created by the concept of personality is that

we tend to see it as a separate entity, distinct from society and culture" (1985:25). The Western ideal of individualism has so dominated social science thinking about the personality that Hsu remarks: "Many social scientists of non-Western origin, like myself, have in this regard essentially acted like intellectual Uncle Toms" (1985:24). Hsu offers a reformulation of the concept of personality that makes room for individuals' interpersonal relationships. For this he diagrams a series of seven concentric circles covering "elements of human existence," spanning from an innermost layer of the "preconscious" to an outermost layer of "outer world." The new concept of personality is a shaded area in the middle, covering some layers wholly and shading off into others (1985:28). What is significant here is that the "personality" fully covers what Hsu calls "layer 3":

. . . that part of the external world with which each individual has strong feelings of attachment, which often seem to people of other cultures irrational. It contains, first, human beings with whom he stands in a relation of intimacy (1985:29-30).

In the same volume as this work by Hsu, Bharati (1985) finds some fit between these "layers" of the personality and the different levels of the Hindu concept of the "self."

For Hsu, interpersonal relationships are the locus of ". . . the meaning of being human . . ." (1985:27), not only in non-Western societies but in fact in the West as well. The mistake in social science has been to incorporate a Western cultural value--individualism--into its concepts. Similarly, Dumont remarks that sociology has its very roots in



## CHAPTER 2:

### AN ILLNESS IN THE FAMILY

I had been living with my host family in Dhungagaun for only a few months before Vishnu became ill. His particular condition apparently had no name; and indeed, it was only in reference to his symptoms that the words "broken mind" (man bigrayo) were sometimes applied to him. The seriousness of Vishnu's condition and its long duration (I followed the case over a period of seven years) cast a dark shadow over his entire family and led them into an endless search for a cure.

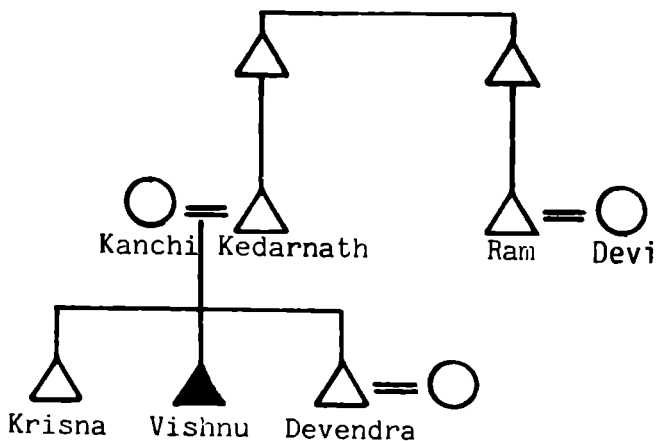
Although I have attempted to record the case with as much objectivity as possible, there is no question that, living right in Vishnu's house and becoming a part of the family, I was personally affected by this case and was far from being a "passive observer." In the beginning I was a little worried about how the family would feel about having a foreign visitor around at this time; but my impression is that this was not a problem, and certainly not as the case wore on and we all grew used to the situation. Occasionally, and in the beginning, a family member would apologize for this "terrible event" and express hope that I was not inconvenienced.

The family was always very open about the case and did not ever seem to mind my many questions about it.

Indeed they often initiated these conversations and seemed to want to talk about their problems. I was never really asked for an opinion about what was going on, or for advice. It may have been that from my questions, especially in the beginning, it was clear that I was in the dark about many important issues, such as witchcraft and demonic attack, that were often in their view crucial to the case. I did volunteer to be of assistance and I was asked for (and gave) financial help to cover costs for local healers and medicines. I also suggested taking Vishnu to the Trisuli hospital, but this, when done, was not on account of my advice. Throughout the drama, I felt that, as long as I did not indicate that I was in any way troubled by Vishnu, my presence, and my inquiries, were easily accommodated.

## Vishnu

Vishnu was 16 years old at the onset of his illness. He was a student of Class Eight in the Trisuli High School, where his older brother, Devendra, was completing Class Ten. Vishnu's position within his household is as follows:



The head of this household is not Vishnu's father, but an older man, Ram, Vishnu's father's father's brother's son. As will be discussed later, Ram, himself childless, had earlier in life "adopted" Vishnu's father, Kedarnath, and had arranged his marriage to Kanchi, Vishnu's mother.

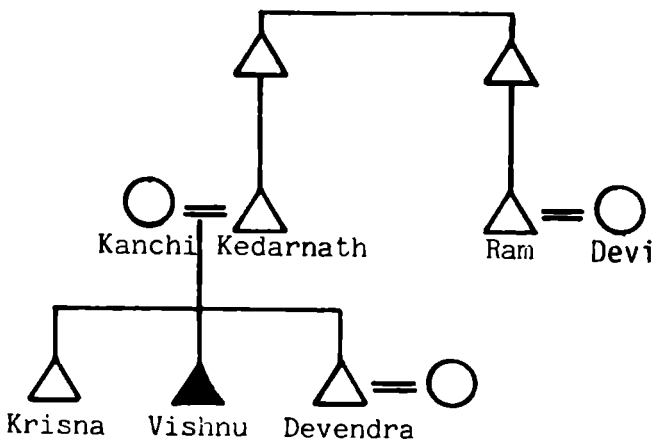
In Dhungagaun, a village boy's advancement to high school carries prestige. Vishnu's educational experience was, however, reaching a crisis. In years past he had been a good student and moved without difficulty to Class Five. A local schoolmaster described the Vishnu of those years as exceptionally bright but quarrelsome with the other students. On account of his ability, and through some political negotiations on the part of his elders, Vishnu was promoted to Class Eight, skipping Classes Six and Seven. Class Eight proved too difficult for him and he failed the yearly exams. He therefore had to repeat Class Eight and was doing so during my first year of fieldwork. At the end of that school year, the exams were once again approaching. According to his brother, Devendra, Vishnu had been worried about passing. But he never took the exams--his illness intervened immediately before they began.

Days before Vishnu's illness, he had been involved in a physical fight at school. Rumors about this fight became so distorted that I was never able to determine precisely what happened. In any event, it was clear that Vishnu had quarreled with other students and that in the course of fighting he was, in some manner, hit on the head. This incident gradually assumed importance amid the speculations on why Vishnu had fallen ill.

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There were also indications of other social problems, or at least signs of social ineptness, in Vishnu. Some villagers remarked vaguely that he was "not good" and often drew a contrast between Vishnu and his "good" brother, Devendra. A few pointed out his nervous manner and jerky speech.

At home Vishnu interacted most with Devendra. Within the family he held a position similar to that of his brother, yet his status was clearly that of younger sibling. Most importantly, he was separated from Devendra in the status of full adulthood by the factor of marriage. Devendra had a wife, but a marriage for Vishnu had not yet been arranged. Vishnu's elders were anxious to arrange a marriage for him, and they were in fact hoping that a good family would offer a daughter to Vishnu in the coming months. But in the meantime, as a result of being unmarried and the junior brother, Vishnu was more likely to be given household chores than Devendra.

From the moment I moved in with this family, Vishnu attempted a great deal of interaction with me. I felt he was at pains to receive the approval, respect and acknowledgement of an educated/modern status that he saw me giving to Devendra. In this respect, I suspected that Vishnu saw me as a new, untapped source of what the village community in general denied him. But for my part, interaction with Vishnu was no easy matter. The slightest attention made him frantic for more. He showed boundless energy in the persistence with which he sought attention, and in the persistence with which he asked to borrow items (typewriter, pens, books, camera, flashlight, etc.), all of which were later difficult to recover.

It was these and other "social problems" that I attempted to weave into some kind of interpretation of Vishnu's madness. But these factors--indeed anything to do with Vishnu in relation to a set of personal problems or pressures--were never referred to by family members or by other villagers in discussions of his illness.

### **Vishnu's Madness**

For several days Vishnu had been complaining of back and head pain. Such complaints were not at all unusual for Vishnu, and I, at least, took little notice of them. For two consecutive days he came home from school early, saying he was sick. On the third day, Vishnu's pain became acute and Ram (head of the household) took him to see a specialist, Chandra.

I first observed Vishnu in his new state of illness when he returned from Chandra's late that night. When Vishnu approached the house, he emitted a shrill, piercing scream and began to pound the main door of the house with his fists. This awoke me and the women of the house. Soon we had all gathered on the porch, where Kedarnath (Vishnu's father), Ram, and several other village men who accompanied Vishnu, were attempting to restrain him. Into the night, this group watched and discussed Vishnu. After his initial outburst, Vishnu grew calm but continued his unusual behavior. As he crouched on the porch, he frequently made "X's" on the ground with his finger in quick jerking movements. He made smacking noises with his mouth, tossing his head back and forth and darting his eyes from one side to another. His father yelled at him to stop. Sometimes he slapped Vishnu's hand or threatened to hit him on the head. His attempts had but a mild restraining effect on Vishnu.

In the discussion of those assembled that night, two ideas emerged. One was the necessity to consult an astrologer as quickly as possible. The other was a suggestion that Vishnu may have been attacked by a witch. That night Devendra's wife cautioned me to avoid food in any house but our own, since witches can so easily poison others with food they prepare themselves.

The next day Vishnu was calm and responded to people verbally. When I inquired of him directly about his condition, he told me that he had become well. But he was wild-eyed, jerky, and generally disobedient. Vishnu remained in this state throughout the day, and it was not until the next day that his condition became noticeably worse.

The next day, Vishnu's family took two immediate measures: his father consulted an astrologer from another village, and Ram took Vishnu to see Yadunath, a healer who lives next door. By evening the results were in: the astrologer (who made his diagnosis using Vishnu's ritual "inside name" and year of birth) declared that Vishnu was suffering from ill-fated planetary influence (graha bigrayo) and recommended that the family summon their priests for a worship ceremony (puja) to the planets. Yadunath, through reading Vishnu's pulse, declared that he had been attacked by a ghost (bhut) and instructed the family to carry out a ghost feeding to pacify this spirit. The family performed a ghost feeding that night and arranged for the planet worship the next day. The ghost feeding was a simple preparation of a plate of food and other items which was placed away from the house, along a trail to attract, and appease, the ghost.

It was during the planet worship on the next day that Vishnu made the transition once again from a state of mild unruliness and nervous gestures to one of pronounced outbursts and disruptive behavior. From my own point of view, this worship ceremony marked the crystallization of Vishnu's "madness." Before, he had shown intermittent periods of ability to respond to others--to recognize people, converse in some manner with them, and so on. After the worship, Vishnu lost this ability and appeared to have entered a world of his own. Vishnu's family members also became more concerned about him after this worship and resigned themselves to a long and arduous search for help.

Family members, like myself, might have connected the idea of Vishnu's condition becoming worse with the obvious fact of his exhibiting some rather bizarre behavior. But what they stressed to me, what they seemed to be using as a criterion for "broken mind" was not Vishnu's strange outbursts but the fact that Vishnu was apparently losing ability to show respect to superiors and to obey them (Nepali mannu).

The planet worship was conducted by the family priest (purohit), and his son (in training to become a priest). It was held on the porch of our house in the afternoon. Offerings to the gods--flowers, consecrated rice, red and yellow powders, water and fruits--had been prepared and were assembled in the worship area. The priests read from sacred texts and instructed Vishnu (who had been seated on a mat before them) for the handling and giving of the offerings to the gods. Several neighbors had also gathered to watch the ceremony.

At first Vishnu was calm and seemed to be falling asleep. The priests, or sometimes a family member,

would shake him and tell him to sit up or to do whatever the priests had instructed (toss water here, sprinkle rice there, etc.). Later Vishnu was alert, but he did not follow instructions correctly. He played with the flowers or sprinkled water in the wrong place. The priest, or another elder, would slap his hand, or take his hand and make him do the right thing. As the worship continued, Vishnu became more active and less cooperative. Sometimes he writhed as though there were great pain in his back or head. He frequently snarled and made growling or smacking noises. He beat the floor with a broom. He beat himself on the back. Sometimes he twisted up his whole body. Once he ate a flower that was to be offered to the gods, which the priests and onlookers considered an utterly outrageous act. Toward the close of the worship, he demanded a book from his sleeping area upstairs. Devendra left to get it for him; but when he returned, Vishnu declared it was the wrong book and he went upstairs to get the right one himself. He returned with another book, carrying it on his head. He then bounced the book from his head into the lap of a reading priest.

Throughout these disruptive acts, the priests never wavered from their reading and instructing, except to slap Vishnu's hand or to scold him. Other family members helped to control Vishnu, but they allowed him to do whatever he wanted until it directly interfered with the worship. They allowed him to snarl and contort, for instance, or to get up and prance about the worship area; but they interfered when he persisted in stomping the floor, screaming, or when he tried to eat flowers.

During the next few days and for a period of about three months, Vishnu remained in the state that had

developed during the planet worship ceremony. He spent most of the time sitting on the porch, wrapped in a blanket, or trotting about the house. I did not feel that he was aware of my existence. Family members reported that he was no longer able to converse with anyone and that he could only verbalize "the strange imaginings" that were going on in his mind. Frequently he verbalized obscenities.

During this period, Vishnu was generally withdrawn, exhibiting a persistent unruliness and a mild, though constant, babbling. He babbled words, or parts of words, repeatedly. Often he uttered real words and then mixed up their syllables, forming new nonsense words and phrases, which he then uttered over and over. Sometimes his eyes fluttered and rolled back into his head. In this state he disobeyed commands ("eat," "wash your face," "go upstairs," etc.) and threatened, though never carried through, destruction of objects or other violent acts (e.g., setting the house on fire). There was perpetually a half-smile or snicker on Vishnu's face; and he laughed a great deal for reasons unknown to others. When others about him were laughing, Vishnu always laughed too, but then he would quickly become hysterical.

Throughout his illness, Vishnu periodically broke out of the state just described and exhibited a brief but intense period of screaming, thrashing, and writhing. These periods lasted only a few minutes and occurred about once or twice a day. When he entered one of these phases, Kedarnath, Ram, or another man would intervene and physically restrain him. He would then be carried upstairs and given a tranquilizer prescribed by a Trisuli doctor, as discussed below. In one such instance, Vishnu had braced himself against

the wall of the kitchen and began to scream at the top of his lungs. He looked as though he were glued to the wall, in pain and unable to move. He remained there until forced upstairs by his father. On another occasion, Vishnu was babbling on the porch, inhaling a cigarette. He started to shake as he inhaled and began to laugh and babble. Gradually his babbling became loud yelling. He crouched on the porch on all fours and hung his mouth open to yell. His yelling grew louder and louder and he began to foam at the mouth, until he slowed in exhaustion, and was carried upstairs.

Elsewhere in Nepal, a person's sudden "madness" may be interpreted as a spiritual "calling" to become a shaman, or jhankri (Peters 1981). But at no time did Vishnu's family members or other villagers ever suggest this possibility for Vishnu. As noted earlier, local jhankris do not undergo a spiritual calling of this kind.

## Repercussions

Vishnu's illness effected profound changes in his personal life. First, his formal education came to an end. Not only was he unable to attend school, but even if he recovered, he would have to repeat Class Eight yet once again. Secondly, hope for his marriage ceased. As his mother sadly remarked, "No one will give us a bride for Vishnu now." The family expressed concern that even should Vishnu recover, his having experienced this illness might discourage a family from giving their daughter to them. But possibly, they hoped, Vishnu would recover quickly and people would gradually forget that he was once so ill.



More immediately, Vishnu's illness marked a shift in his social relationships. Before, as noted, he interacted most with Devendra, his older brother. Now he was usually with Krishna, his younger brother (age nine at the time). The two played together, whereas they had not done so before. Usually their play ended in Vishnu's beating Krishna, the adults ordering him to stop, Vishnu disobeying, and Krishna somehow managing, in the end, to escape from the scene.

Vishnu's family members maintained that Vishnu had never previously fallen ill in this peculiar way, nor had any of them experienced "broken mind" (man bigrayo) in the past. Likewise, few villagers reported of similar cases in their homes, although one woman did report that her daughter had once suffered an illness "just like Vishnu's." Vishnu was on occasion compared to the "village madman"--an older man who had gone mad years ago--and his family expressed fear that Vishnu could become like this man. For the present, however, Vishnu was not placed in the category of "madman" (bhola manche). A bhola manche is distinguished by the assumption that his case is hopeless. He is permanently beyond the pale of society. Once I inadvertently referred to Vishnu as a bhola manche while talking with his family. I was quickly told that the term was inappropriate. It was alright, however, if I said, "His is acting like a madman." For as long as there was hope for Vishnu, he was not bhola; and his family never lost hope. As Vishnu's condition continued, other villagers became less optimistic. Once when I was discussing the applicability of the term bhola to Vishnu, Devendra remarked, "Some other people already say that of him."

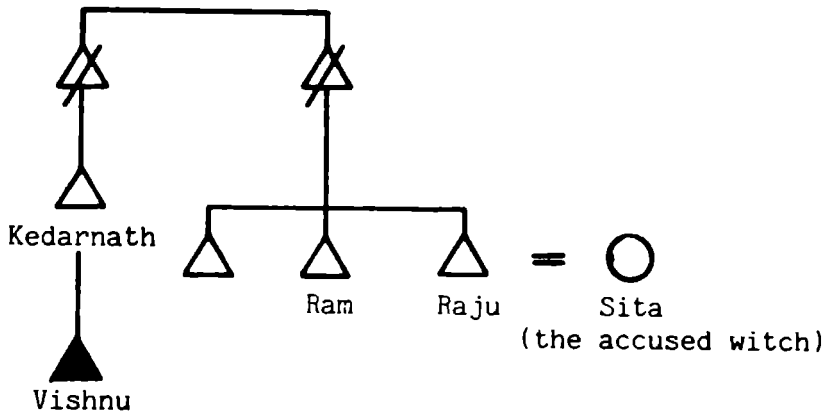
Throughout his illness, Vishnu's family maintained a stance of deep concern and eagerness to find a cure. Aside from references to "broken mind," Vishnu's condition was rarely given a name that persisted beyond an immediate setting of diagnosis and curative ceremony. If asked to specify what, in their opinion, was wrong with Vishnu, family members referred immediately to the declarations of various specialists: "Chandra says he was attacked by a witch," "Yadunath says his planetary influences have gone wrong," etc. As the number of consulted specialists grew, there was rarely one diagnosis for Vishnu at any one time. Rather, the diagnoses were multiplè, multi-leveled, and in constant flux. In and through this process, however, two themes emerged in the family's assessment of what, after all, had happened to Vishnu, and what, therefore, must be done. One was the growth of the theory that a particular witch--Ram's brother's wife--was behind it all. Reference to this woman was a continual feature of Vishnu's case and, in the end, the witchcraft theory won out above all other speculations. Secondly, as Vishnu's case wore on, the family increasingly related his illness to a larger issue of "general family troubles." The household itself, in their view, was being threatened by an assortment of evil forces.

### The Witchcraft Theory

As noted in the last chapter, many illnesses in Dhungagaun, indeed throughout rural Nepal, are attributed to the actions of witches (boksi). Witches, almost always women, deliberately attack their victims out of jealousy or anger. Their methods of causing illness must be learned, either from another witch or

from a shaman (jhankri). These methods are many but they usually involve the use of mantra that a witch "blows" into a victim's food or some other item that will come into contact with the victim.

The relationship between the accused witch in this case and the household of Vishnu is as follows:



Many years ago, before Vishnu was born, Ram lived with his own brothers. They separated before the death of their father, and their father divided his land among them. Ram did not get along with his brothers, especially with the eldest, and many times Ram reported a whole history of fraternal conflicts.

Ram had married, but his wife bore no children. He took a second wife (his wife's mother's co-wife's daughter), but this woman died after three years of marriage and she, too, bore no children. With time and age, it became clear that Ram would have no sons of his own. Meanwhile, Kedarnath's parents died while Kedarnath (Ram's father's brother's son, much younger than Ram) was a child. Ram then decided to take Kedarnath into his household and foster him. Later he arranged Kedarnath's marriage and set up a joint

household with him (joining his property with that which Kedarnath inherited from his own father). By this maneuver, Ram hoped to eventually transmit his own property away from his brothers and to the future sons of Kedarnath. But this act, which amounts to a sharing of fatherhood with Kedarnath, is not strictly legal by customary or national law. Should Ram die sonless, his brothers (following his widow, who only holds an estate in trust for the next heir) have the highest claim to his property. Without the brothers' permission (and failing real brothers, the next closest agnates), a sonless man cannot easily transmit his estate to anyone else. This means, too, that a sonless man cannot ordinarily adopt a child unless the child is a brother's son or unless the man has permission from his agnates who would otherwise inherit from him (Stone 1978). Nevertheless, these laws are not hard and fast and Ram hoped that by joining forces with Kedarnath and making it clear that he wished Kedarnath's sons to perform his death ceremonies and inherit his land, he might transmit his estate to the sons of Kedarnath.

Vishnu's family members maintain that upon Ram's death, there will be a land quarrel between themselves and the brothers of Ram. Although it is likely that Ram's brothers will have a stronger case, there will at least be resistance to them and an attempt to negotiate a portion of land from them. Ram and Devendra persistently attempt to find ways around the rules of land transfer in an effort to keep it from the other faction.

This conflict over land remains dormant while Ram lives. But at one point in the past the issue surfaced: several years ago, Ram sold a portion of his land in order to send Devendra to school. Ram's

brothers were against the sale, but did not take direct action. This incident created a great deal of tension and ill-feeling between these two groups of agnatic kin.

Ram and his family maintain that this incident, and the overall problem of the land, form the central reasons for their being victimized by Sita, the wife of Ram's eldest brother. Such victimization itself carries a long history. Vishnu's mother, Kanchi, related to me how the family first determined that this woman is a witch and they her prime victims. When Kanchi had just given birth to Devendra, she was taking sutkeri foods (special nutritious foods given to women recovering from childbirth). At that time, Sita gave her some goat meat as sutkeri. But Kanchi didn't feel like eating meat then, so she gave it to a poor neighbor child. Immediately after eating the meat, this child became very ill and only escaped death through the ministrations of a powerful healer. "We knew then," I was told, "that a witch had tampered with the meat and that the witch was the woman who gave the meat." From that time on, Ram and his household have been wary of the powers of their witch. Since this time, several other household sicknesses have been attributed to Sita.

The family's witch is believed to attack at any time out of sheer malice and jealousy. If Sita sees that family members are doing well, an evil spell is inevitable. In the case of Vishnu's illness, a particular (and in itself interesting) motive was alleged: Sita was jealous because the sons of Ram's household were getting an education. Vishnu's mother also pointed out that the witch's timing of her attack on Vishnu was particularly ripe: she got to him right

before the yearly exams, thus preventing him from taking the exams and so passing Class Eight.

## The Search for a Cure

As Vishnu's condition wore on, despite curative efforts, his family consulted more and more specialists. In all, during my residence with the family, over seven healers were consulted, each recommending or conducting a variety of curing rituals.

Prior to Vishnu's illness, the family had regularly employed Chandra, a man who lives some distance below them, and Yadunath, their close neighbor, as healers. Neither of these healers invokes gods in curing. On the one hand, Yadunath commonly diagnoses illness and prescribes cures through pulse reading; he frequently recommends herbal treatments. For ghost attack, Yadunath recommends a ghost feeding and administers jhar phuk ("blowing" a mantra and ritually "sweeping" an illness away). In general Yadunath's diagnoses are not grounds for serious worry and his recommendations--herbs, ghost feedings, etc.--are simple and inexpensive. Chandra, by contrast, frequently diagnoses witchcraft; his curing ceremonies are more complex and often involve the making of costly amulets.

Vishnu's family consulted Chandra first on the evening of Vishnu's first major signs of trouble. When Vishnu showed little sign of recovery (and in fact became worse), they turned to an astrologer and to Yadunath. The family maintained that they consulted the astrologer because they already suspected that Vishnu's planets were involved on account of his peculiar symptoms of "broken mind." They consulted Yadunath because he was so easily available, living

right next door, and because their other regular practitioner, Chandra, had not been able to help Vishnu. Then, when Yadunath's recommended ghost feeding and the astrologer's recommended planet worship proved ineffective, the family decided they must once again summon Chandra. Maybe Chandra just needed more time, and he was, after all, better at treating witchcraft cases.

Vishnu was taken to Chandra's house for two additional nights, but he showed no signs of improvement. Chandra then instructed the family to bring Vishnu down for a third night. But by this time, their faith in Chandra was wavering. They were uneasy and desperate. That evening, after some discussion, they decided to invoke their own special ancestor spirit (bayu, see Chapter Five) instead of visiting Chandra. Toward midnight they gathered in their kitchen where Ram invoked the bayu to ask it what they should do about Vishnu. Thus Ram became possessed by the bayu to serve as a vehicle for its words, while the rest of the family gathered around to ask questions.

From the rhythmic chants of the possessed Ram, the bayu's advice was heard. It told the family about Vishnu's fight at school and his being hit on the head. Because of this, the bayu said, Vishnu must be taken at once to the hospital in Trisuli to see a doctor. The bayu also instructed them to perform yet another ghost feeding. Finally, the bayu said that Vishnu had suffered attack from a witch who cast her spells on him while Vishnu had been pasturing the cows some days earlier. For this, they were to summon a new and stronger healer (jhankri) from outside the village. Chandra, the bayu said, could not help them.

The bayu's words strikingly bear out one feature of Vishnu's case that I was to repeatedly encounter, and that was the sheer number and variety of simultaneously entertained diagnoses of Vishnu's illness. Vishnu's family bayu, in one single ceremony, had mentioned a witch, a ghost, and physical injury as pertinent to Vishnu's condition. I asked if the family saw this diagnosis as in any way odd or exceptional. All of my inquiries were met with the single remark: "This is as the bayu said. We must obey the bayu." Much later, when a jhankri declared that witchcraft and not the head injury was the source of Vishnu's trouble, I asked the family: "Was your bayu wrong? Did it not know? Did it misdirect you?" Again they replied: "That was what the bayu said. One must obey the bayu."

Following the bayu's instructions, Ram and Devendra took Vishnu to see the doctor in Trisuli. The doctor gave them vitamin B-complex and tranquilizers for Vishnu. He also told them not to summon a local healer (jhankri). "The doctor does not believe in witches and evil spirits," Devendra later explained to me. The doctor claimed that Vishnu would recover within 15 days.

With this resort to the hospital, Vishnu's case shows a mixture of traditional and modern treatments. Even when Vishnu did not recover after 15 days, the family continued to treat his illness with "doctor medicine"--vitamin pills and tranquilizers. They also entertained the idea of my taking Vishnu to a doctor in Kathmandu, although they never in fact made use of this option until many years later.

In any event, Vishnu's family showed no concern that the hospital and local sources of medical aid might represent two entirely different ideological



systems, each employing separate, and conflicting, assumptions. In a sense, their continual reference to the sheer need to obey their bayu (and therefore lack of need to question what it says) allowed them to capitalize on any and all sources of medical assistance. In the interaction between traditional illness treatment and the recent introduction of modern medicine, their bayu proved adaptable.

Although the use of the hospital stirred no controversy among Vishnu's family in the privacy of their home, it was a source of public controversy among the villagers generally. Several villagers took sides on the issue of whether Vishnu should be taken to a doctor or a jhankri. Those who urged the family to use the hospital were explicit that they, at least, did not believe in witchcraft or ghosts or in the curing powers of jhankris. Generally these people were literate (schoolmasters, government officials, etc.) or in other ways catering to "modern views." Other villagers advised the family that Vishnu's case was clearly related to some malignant spirit and that therefore going to the hospital would be a waste of time.

Over the following two weeks, several other family members also became ill. The most serious case was Ram's wife, Devi, who suffered severe coughing. Ram felt she needed a jhankri. They had not found a new one for Vishnu yet, and Chandra had been the one to cure her of a similar condition before. Ram therefore decided to summon Chandra. For several days he sent word through other villagers that Chandra should pay a visit, but Chandra did not come. At this, various family members began to speak against Chandra. Vishnu's mother reported that when Vishnu failed to recover following Chandra's treatment, the family had

mentioned that they were thinking of calling another jhankri. No doubt, she said, someone had overheard this statement and reported it to Chandra. "So he is angry with us now and that is why he will not come." Devendra said that Chandra was a "bad person," that he was only interested in the money he would get from them, and that his curing knowledge was not very powerful anyway.

After several days, Chandra did arrive at the house. He was well received, and tension between him and the family was masked in the amicable atmosphere of receiving a special guest. Chandra administered treatments to Devi and other family members who were suffering minor illnesses. Then Ram asked Chandra if he could try to do something for Vishnu again. Chandra flatly refused, said there was nothing that could be done for Vishnu; and with a wave of his hand, he dismissed all further discussion of the matter. (In an earlier, private conversation with Chandra's wife, I was told that Chandra was indeed fed up with Vishnu's family and was determined not to perform treatments for Vishnu. His wife also said it was clear that Vishnu's trouble resulted from head injury and that therefore a jhankri could do little for him).

Within a few weeks Ram declared they need never summon Chandra again, for they had found another jhankri and had begun negotiations with him for the cure of Vishnu. The new jhankri was an older Tamang man from another village. About a month before, he had been summoned to a neighbor's house in Dhungagaun, and on the night of his performances there, Vishnu's parents and Devendra had taken Vishnu to petition the jhankri for a diagnosis. Vishnu's case was one of several being petitioned that evening. The healer

involved his own "helping spirits" (spirits he could summon while in trance) on Vishnu's behalf while Devendra sat close by to ask questions and listen carefully to the answers. Under possession, the jhankri related several past events in the case of Vishnu, including the fight at school and several measures the family had taken in an attempt to cure Vishnu. Listening to his words, Vishnu's family responded "ho! ho!" (yes! yes!) and were visibly excited to hear the jhankri's accurate rendition of events past. "He could not possibly have known beforehand," Devendra said (despite the fact that the jhankri had been staying with the neighbor family for a number of days). The jhankri finally declared that Vishnu's fight at school had nothing to do with his condition and that the trouble had been caused by a witch. He recommended that he himself be summoned for a curing ceremony. Later that evening, after all the petitioning ceremonies were completed, the jhankri performed a putla extraction (removing a substance that a witch places into a person's body) on a woman of the house to which he had been called. He told the assembled people that, "according to the gods" (i.e., the various spirits he invoked) no one who had come was allowed to leave until all the ceremonies were over because, he said, many harmful spirits would be lurking outside in the dark. Thus Vishnu's family bore witness to this jhankri's successful putla extraction, as well as to his impressive relating of the past events in Vishnu's life. Following this encounter with the jhankri, Vishnu's family members were visibly elated. Several of them remarked, "Now we have hope."

Over a week elapsed between the meeting of this new jhankri and this man's return to Dhungagaun to

treat Vishnu. It was necessary to explicitly summon him and to carry on negotiations over what would be done and how much it would cost. Ram also visited with the neighbors who had employed this man earlier to inquire about his reliability and his character. Later Devendra commented: "We are glad to find that the jhankri is a poor man because then we can please him with but little money."

In the intervening week, other ceremonies were performed for Vishnu, each carrying different implications as to the cause of his illness. One was a worship (puja) for the goddess Simbu, a goddess that frequently attacks children, and another was the ritual hom (offerings made to planets by placing them in a large fire) performed by a Brahman priest.

The new jhankri finally returned to Dhungagaun and performed, over time, several ceremonies for Vishnu, including a pigeon sacrifice, a goat sacrifice, several sessions of "blowing" and "sweeping," a house-protection ceremony (ghar bandhane), a ritual protection of Vishnu and his family with fire, and the making of amulets for Vishnu to wear for protection.

It was through the ministrations of the Tamang jhankri that both the witchcraft theory of Vishnu's illness and the idea that Vishnu's illness was but a part of the whole family's general troubles, began to solidify among family members. Hence, many of the jhankri's rituals were aimed at assisting the household in general, as well as Vishnu in particular.

But in this process, some additional ambiguities and inconsistencies in the handling of Vishnu's illness also emerged. When this jhankri had begun his services for Vishnu, the witchcraft diagnosis gained ground and other ideas (e.g., ghost attack and head injury) were

dropped. This did not mean, however, that the "true cause" of Vishnu's trouble was clarified--on the contrary, the diagnosis became more complex. For one thing, it was some time before this jhankri and his clients reached a consensus on the identity of the witch. This point was never argued between them; there was, rather, a subtle interplay of ideas and events. When this new jhankri performed his first major curing ceremony for Vishnu--a pigeon sacrifice--he introduced a whole new causal dimension in the case. During this ceremony, he invoked a variety of "helping spirits." In succession the spirits each gave the same message: Ram's own mother (now dead) had been a witch. While she lived, no one knew she was a witch. She had regularly worshipped (made food offerings to) a particular helping spirit, a demon (bir), that carried out her harmful instructions. When she died, the demon was left without a feeder and grew hungry. It then decided to trouble this woman's descendents so that they would be induced to resume their regular feeding. It was to this demon that the jhankri claimed to have made a pigeon sacrifice. Further, he said, the family would have to buy a goat and later sacrifice this goat to the hungry demon and make a similar sacrifice yearly. Although the family heard this diagnosis, and discussed it with me, they never really supported it themselves but rather continually said that the witch who harmed Vishnu was Sita, Ram's brother's wife. Many months later, when the goat was actually sacrificed, the jhankri himself maintained that, indeed, Sita was the witch behind the trouble and that the goat sacrifice was intended to stop her harm. Even so, client and healer still interpreted the ceremony somewhat differently. Ram was convinced that the

goat's blood was fed to the evil witch herself (that her "soul" came to eat it). But, when asked independently, the jhankri said that the blood was fed to a demon that Sita had sent to harm Vishnu.

As mentioned, during the Tamang jhankri's period of service, the notion grew that Vishnu's sickness was but a part of larger family troubles. Indeed, several family members were falling ill during this period, and they complained of other mishaps as well. The atmosphere around their home was one of gloom. But this problem of general family affliction itself met with numerous and varied theories as to the cause. At some points, family members told me that their witch, Sita, was causing all the trouble. At other times, individual family members claimed that their troubles were due to the inauspicious location of their house. From each of them I heard the following account: "Our house is too close to the stream above. That is where many ghosts linger. It is because we live here that we have had such trouble, that Vishnu became ill, that so-and-so became ill, etc. If we move, all will be well." Suddenly I was hearing stories of unlucky things that had happened to people around this very house site generations ago. At one point the family asked an astrologer to inspect the dirt inside their house to see if he could detect a picas (ghost). A picas was discovered, but no measures were taken to nullify it. The family did, however, give serious consideration to moving, and at one point even talked of emigrating to Nepal's Terai (the southern plain).

The current jhankri supported all these and many other theories as to why Vishnu's family suffered. And for nearly every theory, he had a cure. No one (except myself) was concerned that all of these varied notions

could be entertained at the same time. In the same way that Vishnu's family had stressed the need to obey their ancestor spirit (bayu), no matter what it said, they now emphasized the need to obey their jhankri. When pressed, they claimed that they themselves were confused about Vishnu's illness and their other troubles, that they did not know the cause. But such knowledge, they stressed, is not for them to discover. Knowledge is the concern of the jhankri (and, earlier, the ancestor spirit). Their role is to seek help and obey instructions.

The Tamang jhankri remained as the family's healer for a period of several months. Following each of his ceremonies, the family was elated and hopeful. But, in the long run, Vishnu's recovery was uncertain, and the family began to mistrust the jhankri and to speak against him, just as they had spoken against the local healer, Chandra, many months before. At one point Ram's wife remarked: "Either he does not really have the knowledge to cure, or he is deliberately not curing because he is angry with us" (i.e., for being underpaid). Devendra said the family was somewhat afraid of this man because, as a jhankri, he had power to cause illness as well as cure it. Efforts were made to "keep the man happy" without sustaining a great financial loss. At one point Vishnu's mother asked me to speak to the jhankri myself: "He thinks you are rich and you have already given him many fine cigarettes. Go to him now. Say that Vishnu is like a younger brother to you and that you would be so pleased if he were to get well." To this I complied.

Eventually, Vishnu showed some signs of improvement under the care of this jhankri. However, Vishnu's family was never completely satisfied that he

had been cured altogether. At those points when Vishnu suffered relapse, the family discussed the idea of calling in yet another jhankri but refrained from doing so out of fear that this would only anger the present one. This jhankri remained on amicable terms with Vishnu's family; but there came a point when he had done all he could for them, and the family gradually ceased to summon him for their illnesses.

### Vishnu Over the Years

During the family's association with their second jhankri, Vishnu resumed verbal contact with others. By the time I left Nepal in 1975, Vishnu was able to carry out household labor and had ceased babbling. His family members referred to him as cured (bisek), although opinions varied both within the family and in the larger community as to what extent Vishnu became a normal functioning adult.

Significantly, Vishnu remained disobedient toward his elders and he did not return to school. The shift in his social relationships, noted earlier, also continued. Vishnu became a playmate of much younger children and could be seen in their packs, towering above them. He became a source of entertainment for them, carrying out various antics amid their laughter. At the same time, he was a leader of such groups. He ordered his younger friends about and they obeyed. At home, Vishnu continued to abuse Krishna.

In a private conversation with Vishnu, which occurred a few days before my departure (this was now over a year and a half since his illness began), I asked him why he had become ill. Vishnu said a witch had done it--Ram's brother's wife. He claimed he was completely cured. When asked about his alleged fight



at school, he claimed to have no recollection of such an event ever taking place.

Also immediately before my departure, Ram confided to me that he did not really think Vishnu was well. The important thing, Ram said, is that Vishnu continues to disobey elders and is not well enough to return to school. He also added that they would not call another jhankri ("they only take our money"). But as it turned out, they were to call several more. In 1977 I returned to Nepal and visited this family several times over the next three years, and visited again in 1982. During this period, Vishnu's drama continued to unfold and took some new turns as well.

In 1977, Ram proudly announced to me that Vishnu had indeed returned to school. He was in Class Eight again. However, they had placed him in a fairly remote school in the adjacent district of Rasuwa and not in the Trisuli High School where he had had such trouble before. To me, Vishnu appeared withdrawn and not in complete command of himself. He was quiet, expressionless, and rarely spoke to anyone. But he was strikingly obedient. I had the feeling that there was tension underneath his placidness and that, in fact, it would be possible for him to "go off" at any moment. The family assured me, however, that this was unlikely. They knew he was completely well now because he was both obedient and successfully back in school.

Meanwhile the family's witch had died. But according to them, this did not solve the family's problems because, before dying, the witch had taught her husband all her evil knowledge. Now this man, Raju, Ram's own brother, was believed to be periodically practicing witchcraft against the family. This was the first and only time I heard a direct

witchcraft accusation against an agnatically related male. The public ideal of "agnatic solidarity" was no longer being preserved. The family also added that Sita, the deceased witch, had taught her knowledge to her daughters. They told me the daughters were married off in other villages and had developed a kind of business racket with the father. They would make people ill and then encourage them to go to their father for treatment. The father had meanwhile picked up minor healing knowledge along with his witchcraft skills.

In 1978, Vishnu once again faced his Class Eight examinations and passed. Nonetheless, the tension between Vishnu's family and Raju was increasing. Everyone agreed that this was due to the yet unsettled question of the land. Then, in the fall of 1979, Devendra's wife and Ram's wife both fell very ill with what was diagnosed as demon possession. Ram ushered in various jhankris. But Devendra independently took another route. He decided to gradually warm relations with another segment of the lineage and to seek their advice and support. He operated through the wife of the other brother of Ram. Relations between his family and this one had never been good, but they were far better than the relations between Devendra's group and the household of Raju. And anyway, Devendra was dealing with the married-in female of this house and not directly with Ram's brother. He also said that this woman was "clever" and "knowledgeable."

After a few initial visits, Devendra raised the sensitive issue of the repeated illnesses in his wife and "grandmother" being caused by Raju. This woman gave Devendra some solid advice: "Do two things at once," she said, "Go to Raju and call him in as healer."

plead with him to help, and at the very same time tell him that your family has decided that some of the disputed land should really be his so you want to give it to him. Give him the good land next to his own fields." The old woman explained that Raju could not refuse to heal the two women because that would be a violation of kinship duty and would throw public suspicion on him; and anyway, he would want to cooperate because of the land.

Eventually this strategy was accepted at home. However, Ram appeared to want nothing to do with his brother and would only permit this course of action if Devendra carried it out. Ram's wife commented, "hut! In the old days when these things happened, people just called in a powerful jhankri who would pull the hair of the witch and make the witch powerless and that would be that. These days we are not to say that so-and-so is a witch except among ourselves."1

Later Devendra summoned Raju to cure the two women. He also made a reference to the possibility of the land transfer. A few days later, Raju arrived at the family's house. Inside the house a worship ceremony was underway. This was hom--worship of the planet gods by tossing offerings into a large fire. The worship was being done to promote the recovery of Devendra's wife and Ram's wife. The family priest was there directing the ceremony and many friends and neighbors were also gathered around.

Devendra and other family members reported to me that when Raju arrived, he took the two women to a separate room. There he began some treatments and preparation of amulets. Then, suddenly, Ram's wife became possessed by the demon that had been troubling her. As she trembled, the demon spoke through her and

told the entire story (from this family's point of view) of the trouble between the two families. The demon confessed it had been sent to harm the family, especially Vishnu, years ago by the now deceased Sita. It said Sita had been a witch. It recounted a history of harm done to Vishnu and the family. It said that before Sita died, she had given her knowledge of witchcraft to her husband, Raju, who now fed and sent the demon on his own. Then it complained of hunger. No one was feeding it enough, and everyone had better feed it now or it would not stop its troubles.

The family reported that with this, Raju sat paralyzed. The worship in the other room stopped and everyone--the priest, friends and neighbors--listened to the words of the demon.

The family considered this incident a clear victory. Raju had been publicly shamed. When I asked if he had denied the demon's words, Ram, laughing, said, "No. He just sat there with a dark face, finished his amulets and went home."

About a month later at the festival of Dasai (a festival honoring the Hindu goddess Durga), I visited the family again. They still felt victorious over Raju and there had been no subsequent illness problems. Vishnu continued as before (placid, but in school) and now the family was eager to find him a bride.

At Dasai, Devendra suggested it would be politically appropriate if the entire family went up to Raju's house to receive his blessing (in the form of receiving a special forehead mark, called tika)--something they had not done as a family for years. Previously, only Ram would take a solo walk up the hill, quickly receive the forehead mark from his elder brother and return home. "Then I will stay on,"

Devendra continued, "and negotiate with him about the land. When I offer a portion of the land, he will know we are going to cooperate if he stops giving us trouble."

I accompanied the family to Raju's house. He was momentarily away and Ram said that in that case we should forget all about it and leave. But Devendra urged that we stay. Raju's son was home and tried to offer special Dasai food to the group. For a time Ram and the others refused, but eventually the son won out and we ate. Once food had been accepted, it was impossible for anyone to leave until they had also received the forehead mark from Raju. Finally he returned. The interaction between Raju and Ram's group was cold. Very quickly, formal greetings were exchanged and the forehead marks given, after which everyone left immediately, except for Devendra.

A few months after Dasai, Devendra came to visit me in Kathmandu. He said that Vishnu must now marry and that the family was mobilizing all their forces to locate a bride. He asked me whether I could find a Kathmandu girl, "from a family that knows nothing of Vishnu's history," but this I did not attempt.

A few months after this, Devendra returned to visit--this time to invite me to Vishnu's wedding. He said a girl had been found from a village just outside of Kathmandu. All the arrangements were proceeding. An auspicious date had been set. The only possible problem, Devendra said, is that the girl's family had insisted at the last minute that they see the groom, and that groom and bride be introduced. If they liked each other, all would be well. Devendra was optimistic. He told me to plan to come to the wedding (a mere four days away) and that if anything went wrong, he would come back to tell me.

He came back two days later and told me the wedding was off. The family had met and refused Vishnu. "Someone must have told them about Vishnu's illness," Devendra said, "and now this has brought great shame on our family. What we say in our village is that Vishnu saw the girl and didn't like her, so the wedding was cancelled. But no one really believes that and now, after this insult to us, it's going to be very difficult to find a bride for Vishnu."

A few months later, I received another message from the family, brought by a villager coming in to Kathmandu. The news was that Vishnu had had a total relapse and had gone completely mad. He became violent and so was tied up to two posts on the side of the house: "he yells all day long and has to be fed like an animal." When asked, the messenger said that no actual transfer of land had been made to Raju, and that no one knew what was going to happen now <sup>2</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This may be because Nepalese law now discourages public witchcraft accusation (Macdonald 1976).

<sup>2</sup>I last saw the family in 1982. In the intervening years, Vishnu had continued to be ill, although, the family reported, he usually did not need to be tied up. The family had also decided to take Vishnu to the government hospital in Kathmandu, which they did just as I left the country. From their letters, I read he is now back home and "better."

# CHAPTER 3:

## INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

As mentioned earlier, during fieldwork I found myself speculating about Vishnu's case from a Western socio-psychological point of view. I knew from school staff that Vishnu was indeed worried about his original Class Eight exam and had reason to be. I also knew that a week before the exam was to begin, Vishnu had gone to ask a jhankri to invoke his helping spirits to predict his chances. I was aware that Vishnu had some problems with his schoolmates (they reportedly teased him and there were various quarrels), and I was aware of his tension vis-à-vis Devendra. It seemed to me that these two issues in Vishnu's life--his anxiety about the exam and his social problems, particularly his envy of Devendra--were related. Devendra, aside from being older and married, was socially recognized as superior, partly on account of his relative success in school. He was already in Class Ten, it seemed likely he would achieve his School Leaving Certificate, and then perhaps go on to Kathmandu for further education (which is what he eventually did). In this community, education is a key to prestige and respect and this, I felt, must be making an impression on Vishnu as he faced his exam and looked to the model of his elder brother. I viewed the approach of the exams as a trigger of Vishnu's illness, the breaking point in his ability to cope.

I interpreted some aspects of Vishnu's illness in accordance with this perspective. For instance, I viewed his physical tormenting of his younger brother, Krishna, as a symbolic venting or transference of envy toward the elder brother. And I interpreted his disruptive request for a book during the planet worship ceremony as a symbolic reference to "education/literacy"--i.e., that he had mastery of books and the right to request them. It was interesting that, according to Vishnu, Devendra brought the "wrong" book and Vishnu had to go get the "right" book himself.

Whether or not my ideas about Vishnu may have had some applicability to his condition, it was clear that my way of thinking about the problem was radically different from that of his family. Also my interest was not to analyze Vishnu's case according to my own premises concerning social psychology, but rather to understand the family's point of view, or more generally to understand ideas about illness on the part of members of this family and others in the community. I noticed that in their discussions of Vishnu's case, his family members made reference to elements that were also a part of my theorizing, for example "education" and "social relationships," but these elements were put together in a very different way. For them, "education" was not "a personal problem for Vishnu, causing stress" but rather a sign of prosperity for the whole family, causing jealousy in a witch. Again, my ideas emphasized the personal, problematic aspect of Vishnu's education--i.e., that he had already failed the Class Eight exams and was afraid of taking them again. In their discussions "education" always came out as a positive, jealousy-inspiring factor. Their



emphasis was not on Vishnu's potential failure but on the witch's "success" at getting to Vishnu right before the exams and so preventing his passing them.

When it came to social relationships, my ideas again focused on problems I saw in Vishnu the individual. He was struggling to receive recognition from society, to assert a desirable individual identity as a "modern, educated" person, with his fears of failure compounded by his jealousy of his successful elder brother. His "madness" then was the result of his individual failure to cope with the stresses and strains of his own personal life. But when the family referred to "social relationships" as important to Vishnu's illness, these did not center on Vishnu as such, but rather on conflicts over land involving much larger units of people. Adding up many of the diagnoses in Vishnu's case, it seems there were several problematic social relationships, each with a long history and some involving persons long since dead. In their view of his illness, Vishnu was significant only because of his position within a much larger social order.

To analyze Vishnu's case, as seen by his family, and by extension to analyze local beliefs about illness, it is necessary to first of all look more closely at social organization in Dhungagaun and local ideas about interpersonal relationships. In this chapter I discuss social relationships, starting with relationships within the realms of kinship and caste and then moving to a discussion of patron-client relationships and ritual friendship. My central point is that social life among Dhungagaun Brahmans, far from being predicated upon the value of individualism, expresses the principles of hierarchy and human

interdependence. But at the end of the chapter I raise a new point--that hierarchy and interdependence, or "hierarchical holism," can create certain kinds of social conflict. In other words, I suggest that along with a social ideology emphasizing hierarchy and holism, there is another underlying cultural idea in Dhungagaun that social "wholes" do not really satisfy the needs of all the parts. And it is here that local ideas about illness, especially ideas about ghosts, demons and witches, become significant and reflect the problematic side of interpersonal relationships in Dhungagaun.

### **Heirarchy and Interdependence**

Many studies of Nepalese high castes have discussed the hierarchy of kinship (Dougherty 1974, Bennett 1983). An agnatic hierarchy establishes the superiority of higher generations over lower, and within one generation, age over youth. Another principle in this hierarchy is that males rank over females, except where this conflicts with "age over youth," in which case the latter principle is dominant (Bennett 1983:142). But women introduce another dimension in kinship hierarchy: in their roles as daughters and sisters, they are religiously superior (though not superior in a secular sense), to fathers and brothers, who must worship them on a number of religious occasions. In their roles as wives, however, women are inferior in all respects to husbands and in-laws (Bennett 1983).

Finally, marriage establishes the superiority of the groom and his family over the bride's family. In marriage the daughter is a religious "gift" which must be given upwards, to superiors (see Dumont 1966, Gray

1980, Bennett 1983, Fruzzetti 1982). Particular relatives of the bride wash the feet of the bride and groom at the wedding and participate in the ritual of the "gift of the virgin" (kanyadan), after which the groom and his family assume a high, respect-receiving position vis-à-vis them.<sup>1</sup>

Within the agnatic hierarchy, inferiors must show respect to and obey (mannu) superiors, a dictum that one very frequently hears in the village. Children learn early that, despite verbal threats, they may escape punishment for a wide variety of "misdeeds," but failure to show respect to a superior is quickly reprimanded. We may recall that Vishnu's family in part defined his state of "madness" in terms of the fact that he showed blatant disrespect to his elders. In turn, I was frequently told that all of this was only tolerated because Vishnu was not of sound mind.

Aside from showing respect or obedience in everyday life, there are a number of ways in which the agnatic hierarchy is ritually expressed, and this ritual expression is also encompassed by the concept of mannu. One is in the giving and receiving of a special forehead mark (tika) on the festival of Dasai (an annual celebration honoring the Hindu goddess Durga). Here, as relatives visit back and forth exchanging food and other gifts, a man gives tika, his symbolic blessing, to his inferiors (e.g., son, grandson, brother's son, younger brother, etc.) and receives tika from his superiors.<sup>2</sup> The giving and receiving of this forehead mark at Dasai is taken as a very serious kinship obligation among villagers, one which cannot be omitted even if the kin are quarrelling. As we saw in the last chapter, Ram, as head of his household, was obliged to receive the forehead mark of his elder

brother on each Desai, despite the bitter conflicts that divided the households of these men.

Along with the hierarchical dimension of kinship, defining relationships of superiority and inferiority, villagers also divide kin into those traced agnatically (through male links), in which case the relation is formal and duty is stressed, and those traced matrilineally (amapate, through the mother, or on the mother's side), where relationships are affective and intimate. Particularly affective is the relationship between a male and his mother's brother (Dougherty 1974). Thus each marriage may begin with very formal, hierarchical and often strained relations between wife-givers and wife-receivers, but with the birth of sons, a new kind of affective bond is created between the alternate generations. Thus a father may wash the feet of his daughter's husband at the wedding, and in every way show him high respect, mannu, throughout his life; but his own son will have a relaxed and strongly affective relationship with the son of the groom.

The rules governing behavior between kin, and the ways in which relative positions in the hierarchy are expressed, are similar to those rules and symbolic forms of deference that obtain between castes. A powerful expression of relative status is in the giving and receiving of certain foods, as will be seen in the next chapter. Greeting gestures are another means of showing proper respect, or mannu, and expressing status. Any non-Brahman male may (and in some contexts must) show ritual deference to a Brahman man by bowing his head to the feet of the Brahman (a gesture called dhok) when they meet. In Dhungagaun this is especially expected whenever a lower caste man visits the Brahman in the Brahman's home or whenever the Brahman comes to

his house. This same bowing gesture is used as greeting between kin. A son bows to his father, father's brother, grandfather, etc., especially on important religious occasions. A woman is also to greet her husband with this same gesture, and will use it to greet her superior female kin. But a woman must not ever fully bow her head to the feet of any male other than her husband.

Untouchability is another expression of status. Certain castes (the Carpenter [Kamai] and Tailor [Damai] in Dhungagaun) are permanently untouchable to all other castes. Other caste persons must not touch them or any item directly connected to an untouchable (clothing, objects held in the hand, mats and benches on which an untouchable is sitting, etc.). But women of all castes are also untouchable each month during the first four days of their menstrual period. This temporary, though regular, untouchability of women expresses the generally inferior status of women to men as much as permanent untouchability expresses low caste rank.

In village life, the principle of hierarchy is not only important for the establishment of patterns of authority, respect and religious deference, but hierarchy also provides a framework for the exchange of goods and services. This feature of the system further emphasizes the interdependency between individuals and ranked social units.

High caste persons say that to maintain their greater religious purity, they must have certain services performed for them. Thus Brahmans and Chetris claim that they must hire other castes to plow fields for them as plowing would be defiling for themselves. Members of any other caste, including untouchables, can

be recruited for this service. Similarly, all sacred-thread-wearing (tagadhari) castes say they are too pure to themselves carry brides and grooms in the wedding palanquin (dholi) and must recruit other "clean" (i.e., matwali) castes to perform this service. The thread-wearing castes also hire untouchable Tailors (Damai) to provide music at weddings. These local articulations of intercaste relationship invoke the pure/impure opposition that Dumont (1970) discusses as the basis of the caste hierarchy. But this idea has been challenged by other scholars (e.g., Marriott 1968, 1976).

Aside from these contractual exchanges, there are in Dhungagaun hereditary intercaste service relationships similar to the widely reported jajmani relationships in India.<sup>3</sup> Here, families of one caste regularly perform particular services for families of other castes, and the service relationship is handed down in each family from father to son over the generations. In Dhungagaun this kind of relationship obtains between Brahman priests and the families they serve (all of whom must be of touchable castes). We saw in the last chapter that, aside from regular services, Vishnu's family called their priest for a special religious curing ceremony early on in the case. In return for services, a priest receives grain, cash and, if serving fellow Brahmans, a meal.

Another hereditary service relationship obtains between untouchables and the higher caste groups. Each Carpenter and Tailor family has a network of client families among the higher castes and each other. For their services, Tailors are paid in kind, especially in grains. Payments are made at particular times, usually on days of some religious importance, when the Tailors make a specific request. Tailors must also be given a

portion of the first harvest (bali) of any grain crop from the land of the served family. Carpenters are paid in cash for the making of farm tools or kitchen equipment; but for all repair work they are paid in grain. All untouchables are paid with meals provided on those days when services are performed at higher caste homes. Untouchables are also given gifts or cash whenever a wedding takes place in their own homes. In addition, an untouchable can come to his or her served family with requests for advice or direct assistance in virtually any matter.

On the basis of the caste hierarchy, certain interdependent linkages are established, and exchanges then operate through these linkages. At the same time there are prescribed patterns of deference and exclusion that govern interaction between members of various caste groups. Thus with a specification of relative caste rank, linked participants know (a) how to behave (who must show respect [mannu] to whom), and (b) what to expect in the way of exchange (what can appropriately be demanded of whom) in a variety of contexts.

Essentially the same process is at work among kin: hierarchical linkages, expressed through prescribed patterns of respect-giving, or mannu, entail exchanges of goods and services, or the possibility of exchanges. In some cases the link, and the hierarchy, are well established and the exchange of material goods or services is more or less automatic. Thus sons inherit a father's estate in return for which they are to care for parents in old age and perform their death rituals, along with other important rituals for parents as ancestors. Sons may partition the family land and property before the death of the father; and separation

of the brothers while the father lives is not uncommon. But generally the father will not complete the transfer of all his land before his death, but will reserve a portion, called juni bhag, in his own name to be passed after his death to the son or other relative with whom he chooses to live and who will take care of him. This portion remains in his own name as a wedge of power. Informants in a position to pass on their land claimed that if they were to complete the transfer before death, they could not be assured that their descendants would properly look after them in their old age.

Although the exchange of land for care-taking is culturally well established, in real life matters are not so simple, since, among other problems, a man may die without sons. Although there is an "order of inheritance" in customary law, the law is sufficiently flexible, and individual circumstances sufficiently complicated, to allow people to argue over their position within a kinship hierarchy as a means of acquiring property. It was essentially this flexibility that intensified the land quarrel between Ram and his brothers, and which became so pivotal in the drama of Vishnu's madness and the growth of the witchcraft theory to account for his troubles. In this case Ram, himself childless, sought to transmit his land to the sons of his father's brother's son (i.e., to Vishnu and his brothers). This attempt met resistance from Ram's own brothers, who asserted that they had a higher claim to the land. This and other cases of land conflict in Dhungagaun have a way of becoming extremely complicated and persisting for many years, with occasional resort to arbitration through the Village Council (pancayat) office. Yet they all have in common that the contenders' claims are based



on, and expressed through the rhetoric of, their kinship position vis-à-vis the deceased, articulated as simultaneously the right to inherit land and the duty to perform the death rituals.

The importance of the kinship hierarchy in relation to economic resources can also be seen in its effect on particular kin within a household unit (parivar). In very general terms, those people who occupy similar positions within a hierarchy are in the most direct competition for access to limited resources. This competition may be relevant to the tension that often exists between brothers in the Hindu joint family (discussed for India by Madan 1965:181, and Mandelbaum 1970:64). There is, of course, a hierarchical relationship between brothers based on relative age; yet however much one is "lower" and the other "higher," the similarity of their position within the larger agnatic hierarchy and within the household is notable and may account for some conflicts between them. Because brothers may separate their households and partition their father's estate, they have the potential to become structural equals in the sense that they can each become heads of independent household units. Thus, however much a younger brother may defer to his elder brother in their undivided home, he knows that someday he may become a household head himself.

In addition to their future social and economic independence, the brothers of a joint family headed by their father may be in competition for whatever limited benefits the family corporation can provide. There is only so much new cloth for clothing, only so much money for schooling of sons, only so much of everything. In the case study of Vishnu, we saw that conflicts between brothers of two different generations played a role in

his illness. First was the conflict between Ram and his brother, in particular one brother, who eventually became accused of witchcraft against Vishnu and others in Vishnu's household. Secondly was the conflict, far more veiled and possibly one-sided, between Vishnu and his own brother, Devendra.

To summarize, kinship relations work something like intercaste relationships in terms of the connection between hierarchical linkage, interdependency and ensuing economic exchange. Father and son, for example, are linked something like high caste and low caste in hereditary service relationships. Low castes must show respect (mannu) to high castes and perform services, in return for which they receive goods and various kinds of assistance or protection. Similarly, the son shows respect to the father, and tradition specifies that the son shall receive the land in return for performance of the death rituals.

But in the realm of kinship there is much more at stake than land and other inheritable property. In fact, kinsmen have a great deal more to give one another and it is the hierarchical structure of kinship that, as with castes, specifies both how kinsmen should interact and at the same time what can be appropriately expected, demanded, asked for or subtly encouraged from whom. Thus one can make respectful requests from agnatic superiors for commodities and for assistance in other matters, such as a loan of money or help securing a job or a bride. One can also use one's close agnatic inferiors to advantage and demand from them a share of whatever commodity they control.

In addition, kinship has its distinctively affective dimension by way of the mother's side

(amapate) as well as the more formal agnatic aspect that is more comparable with the intercaste model of interpersonal relationships. One can more casually ask for commodities or assistance from one's relatives traced through the mother. This becomes particularly important for women when, for whatever reason, their relationship with their husband's family is particularly strained. For example, during my fieldwork in Dhungagaun, one childless widow developed a tumor in one of her breasts. This woman lived with her deceased husband's kin for whom, she said, she was clearly of little importance since she had failed in her duty to continue their lineage. The woman claimed these people would do nothing for her: "I am old and have no husband or sons to help me." In desperation she turned to her mother's brother's son and even moved into this household. Though she died three months later, these people at least summoned local healers for her and took her to the Trisuli hospital.

Also as a result of affective kinship links, many goods that are originally transferred "A" to "B" out of agnatic duty can be rechanneled to "C" who bears a specifically affective relationship with "B". Thus, for example, Devi, a Brahman woman of Dhungagaun, received a new sari from her father-in-law for the festival of Dasai (a transfer of agnatic duty). But the sari then became the property of Sita, Devi's married daughter, who, Devi said, "begged it off me with tears, what else could I do?"

### **Patrons, Clients and Others**

Kinship and caste relationships are more or less fixed. However, not only are these relationships themselves amenable to manipulation, but caste and

kinship do not by any means exhaust the possibilities of relations or connections between people. In innumerable ways, unrelated persons "link up" and interact in settings where caste is either neutralized or of minor importance. But in these contexts, one still sees a very similar idea of hierarchy at work, although this may only involve dyadic "high-low" pairs. Nevertheless, the participants in many kinds of interaction appear to be emulating intercaste or kinship relations. I suggest that the structure of caste and kinship relationships can be seen as providing a model for relating in these other extra-caste, extra-kinship realms of social life in Dhungagaun. And here the underlying process is the same: establish a hierarchy, connect, exchange.

Hierarchy defines relative high/low positions, simultaneously spelling out how people are to behave toward one another, what they can expect from others, and what can be expected from them. Using a variety of bases for hierarchical divisions, such as age, sex, education, wealth, job position, etc., people establish connections with one another patterned along the cultural model of high caste/low caste, or, if the connection becomes more intimate, parent/child. Many dyadic relationships follow this caste/kinship model as individuals maneuver to acquire access to "goods" through hierarchical linkages. Most obvious are the patron-client relationships established, for example, between political leaders and their followers or between ritual friends (Nepali mit, discussed in a later section). Thus a person in control of a valued commodity finds himself surrounded by several people willing to play "low" to his "high." What they have to offer him in exchange for a portion of the commodity he

controls is a further enhancement of his status through displays of respect/obedience (mannu) plus the potential delivery of any return favors or services that the high status person may later request. Other similar hierarchical, dyadic relationships are found between teacher/pupil, employer/employee, and money borrower/money lender (asami/sau).

For any two persons, the different dimensions of hierarchical divisions may, of course, conflict. For example, one man may be lower in caste but higher in economic status or education than another. Nevertheless, in any particular social setting, an attempt is made to determine and behave according to relative rank with respect to the particular issue at hand. Thus the lower caste, but wealthier, man may show deference to the higher caste man when they are participating in a religious ritual or exchanging greetings, but receive deference from him when they are negotiating a loan of money. In other cases, different kinds of hierarchy may be both present and actively manipulated at the same time. For example, I once observed a Tailor (Damai) approach his Brahman client to intervene on his behalf to negotiate a loan from a Muslim money lender in Trisuli. The Muslim money lender ranked above both the Tailor and the Brahman in wealth. But the Tailor maintained that whereas he had no leverage whatsoever, the Muslim had to respect (mannu) the superior caste rank of the Brahman; and thus if the Brahman served as middleman, the chances of securing a fair deal would be greater. In all cases the operation of hierarchy needs to be seen in the context of the lives of the people involved and the particular setting of their interaction.

Hierarchy provides an ordered and culturally recognized framework for interpersonal linking, and these linkages will entail exchanges that, to varying degrees, can be depended upon. Thus one may attempt to capitalize on a link he or she already has with another in order to gain access to desirable resources the other controls. In the above example, the Tailor is already hierarchically linked to his Brahman client; and on account of that linkage, the Tailor could make a particular kind of request for assistance. Far more fluid is the process of manipulating one's network of links to eventually connect with another, in a kind of "chain effect" fashion. For example, one Dhungagaun man, "A," sought a job from a man, "B," in Trisuli. "A" first proceeded through his mother's brother, "C," (affectively related) who then approached his own employee, "D" (low to B), who stood in the position of son-in-law (high) to "B." By manipulating these links and exerting pressure from "C" to "D" to "B," "A" was able to secure the job. Another example of manipulation of multiple links was seen in the last chapter. Vishnu's mother, using the affective links between herself, me, and her son (I was a fictive "younger sister" to her and an "older sister" to Vishnu), she then asked me to manipulate my link with a healer they called for Vishnu: "He thinks you are rich and you have already given him many fine cigarettes. Go to him now Tell him Vishnu is like a younger brother to you and you would be so pleased were he to get well."

In sum, social relationships in Dhungagaun are nearly everywhere hierarchical; and one's access to valued goods is in part determined by one's position within a hierarchy. This is particularly notable in

terms of the hierarchy of certain caste relationships that establish regular exchanges and in terms of the hierarchy of kinship that establishes patterns of distribution of land and other family resources. But in other spheres one is able to establish new hierarchical linkages that gear distribution in one's favor. The point seems to be to either establish links or capitalize on existing ones in such a way that one is in a position to validly make a request of another, to take a share of what the other controls. As we will see in the next chapter, much of this social maneuvering to establish or capitalize on hierarchical linkages is symbolically expressed through the giving and receiving of food.

## Scarcity

Thus far hierarchy has been discussed as a framework for ordering human relationships and the distribution of commodities, a framework that does not simply fix status, but allows a certain amount of social manipulation to effect advantageous connections, or linkages. The idea has been that hierarchy connects people together and makes them interdependent. Needless to say, there are strains in such a system since there may be several people making a claim for access to the same commodities at the same time, and some reciprocities may be perceived as imbalanced. In fact, I will attempt in this chapter to open a central point: that the link between the hierarchical interdependency among persons and the workability of human exchanges is seen as imperfect by the people of Dhungagaun themselves. A later chapter will show that it is at this point that cultural ideas about illness become significant.

One basis for the notion of "imperfection" in the villagers' system of ordered human exchanges is the real and sharply perceived scarcity of material goods among them. Obviously, all societies must cope with a scarcity of certain commodities. But what concerns me here is not so much the facts of scarcity (and the organized forms of dealing with it), but the ideology of scarcity. The villagers of Dhungagaun are indeed "poor" by world standards, and in particular they face a severe and increasing land shortage. But regardless of how an outsider might evaluate their poverty, what remains significant is that they perceive themselves as poor, as getting poorer, and as constrained to struggle within a world of uncertain and unstable material welfare.

Others have discussed the effects of a pervasive concept of scarcity on interpersonal relationships in peasant communities, notably Foster (1967) in his development of the "Image of Limited Good." The idea is that peasant peoples perceive all desirable goods (material and nonmaterial) as being in finite supply. Thus, extra accumulation of goods by any one person or group is perceived as a threat by the others since this accumulation diminishes the total available. Although Foster's ideas have been criticized, anthropologists such as Kearney (1984:184-185) continue to use his formulations in their studies of peasant societies.

Foster stresses the implications of the concept of "limited good" in the negative: he discusses how people avoid displays of prosperity, how institutions serve as negative sanctions against accumulation of wealth (or positive sanctions for conspicuous consumption) and how one avoids being exploited by others. But there is another side to this phenomenon



which is also important: where people see themselves as highly interdependent for access to scarce goods, they may be compelled to combine the very notion of social relations with pursuit of goods.

In Dhungagaun, human interdependency in a world where shortages are persistently feared places pressure on all interpersonal relationships. The pressure is to use relationships and to view relationships instrumentally. In Dhungagaun instrumentality appeared to be accepted as a legitimate basis for close and personal relationships. In contrast to Western society (where many personal relationships may in fact be instrumental [see, for example, Gorer (1948) on American Society]), there is little outward pretense that close personal relationships must only have value in and of themselves, or that such relationships should be immune to manipulation for some other advantage.

Some kinds of interpersonal relationships in Dhungagaun parallel relationships between men and gods. Certain gods are "to be made happy" by the devotional giving of foods and other offered items. If they are pleased, they shall return favor with favor--the delivery of good fortune and the prevention of ill fortune. In a similar way, when villagers told me of their efforts to secure favors from particular kin or, say, jobs from the outside realm of nonkin, nonvillage officials, they frequently expressed their approach as a strategy to "make so-and-so happy" in order to secure an explicit and tangible end. Wadley (1975:81) drew a similar parallel between relationships between man (particularly in the hereditary intercaste service relationships) and relationships between men and gods, in an Indian village.

In one respect interpersonal relationships in Dhungagaun would appear to contrast with those in other peasant societies where a notion of pervasive scarcity has relevance. In his discussion of perceived scarcity Foster wrote:

. . . each minimal social unit (often the nuclear family and, in many situations, a single individual) sees itself in perpetual, unrelenting struggle with its fellows for possession of or control over what it considers to be its share of scarce values (1967:311).

Foster's comment presents a picture of equally valorized and atomized units struggling one against the other. This view is consistent with Foster's generalization that ". . . peasants are individualistic . . ." (1967:311). Perhaps this is the case in peasant societies following an egalitarian ethic or in societies where individuals or households are economically autonomous. But in Dhungagaun the units of society taken at any level (individual, family, caste) are neither equal nor autonomous in their pursuit of valued goods. Interpersonal relationships are hierarchical, and one's access to valued goods is dependent on his/her position within, and his/her manipulation of, a hierarchy. What one seeks is not only to successfully compete with one's neighbor, but to enhance one's material and other benefits by capitalizing on one's particular, hierarchically ordered, connections with others. In pursuit of scarce goods, villagers of Dhungagaun are not so much struggling against one another as through one another.

## Ritual Friendship

The inseparability of human relationships from the explicit concern with benefit and specific advantage is discernible in many contexts. I think this notion is implied, for instance, in the expressed anxiety of elderly people that their children would not properly care for them if they prematurely relinquished all their land.

Another relationship which, in my view, best illustrates the villagers' approach to the interpersonal is mit (or miteri, ritual friendship). Nepalese mit is a variant of the institutionalized ritual relationships found in a variety of cultural traditions and shares, for instance, many features with the Latin American compadrazgo (ritual co-parenthood) discussed by Mintz and Wolf (1967). In Nepal, mit marks the establishment of life-long ties of mutual support and assistance between any two nonrelated persons of the same sex and generation. It can be and frequently is carried out across caste lines (cf. Okada 1957; Messerschmidt 1982). It may even take place between high castes and untouchables, though the rules of untouchability must still be observed.

As with marriage, parents often arrange mit for their children. Adults may arrange mit among themselves. Mits are to be "like siblings," with their respective positions determined by their relative ages.

The mit ritual may vary from an elaborate ceremony with invited guests, an officiating priest and a feast (Okada 1957:215-216) to a simple ceremony involving only the mit pair. Essential to the establishment of mit, at least according to Brahmans, is the ritual exchange of money, the exchange of a red forehead mark (tika) and a ceremonial exchange of a bowing gesture

(dhok). The mit pair are then bound to give one another advice, exchange gifts from time to time, and lend assistance in financial and other matters. In the more orthodox mit, the pair will refer to one another by the respectful term hajur--the term which, for example, a wife must use when addressing her husband. A man has an avoidance relationship to the wife of his mit; and he and his mit's wife are untouchable to one another. There is avoidance between a woman and the husband of her mit as well. The bilateral kindred of mits cannot intermarry and one must observe thirteen days of mourning for a mit. In mit one gains not only a ritual friend, but also a connection to his or her mit's entire kin group. One will refer to the kin of his/her mit (excepting the mit's spouse) by the terms that his or her mit uses.

Mit is a formal relationship and is taken very seriously by villagers. Gossip follows even the slightest neglect to respect and assist a mit. At one wedding feast I was harshly scolded by an old woman because I had not immediately given the appropriate greeting gesture to my village mit upon entering the feast area.

Informants in Dhungagaun expressed that mit is carried out to secure explicit benefits or "good" (phaida). Among men, mit may be arranged to secure a convenient place to stay in the various villages to which one must travel. Generally, a man wishes to do mit with another who is established in prestige or wealth. One informant told me that as he rose in prominence in the village, he was increasingly barraged by requests for mit. These requests were, in his view, a clear indication of his rising status. Among women, mit may be arranged to secure a nonfamily source of

gifts and favors. Likewise, parents may arrange mit for their children to insure a nonfamily source of support for their child. Finally, as Dhungagaun is becoming increasingly linked to Kathmandu, a recently popular idea in the village is to arrange mit with someone in the city.

In no sense must mits be well acquainted beforehand and in many cases they are not. In response to my questions as to how two people could ritually cement a "friendship" (platonic love; Nepali, maya) when they had not even met, informants overridingly asserted, "Oh, that comes afterward. One does mit to get maya." Again, when I asked whether mits always developed mutual affection or whether they sometimes failed to hit it off, the inevitable response was: "One must have maya for one's mit." Friendship is automatic within the ritual relationship.

My view of the mit relationship differs from that of Okada, who stresses that:

In Nepal, the predominant reason for entering into ritual brotherhood is mutual affection between the participants and their desire to strengthen and formalize the ties of their relationship. Naturally, the advantages of mutual aid are not overlooked but, in the main, the emotional reason is primary (1957:214).

In Okada's view, a villager forms a friendship and then happens to cement the tie with ritual and surround it with binding mutual rights and obligations. My emphasis would be the reverse: the interesting thing about mit is its suggestion that in the interpersonal sphere, villagers repeatedly relate to one another within highly formalized and ritually sanctioned

frameworks. In one sense, mit is very much like caste and kinship. Like the latter, it serves to rather strictly categorize and define human interaction. To be sure, the institution of mit allows people to create, or cement, affective ties of a kind that caste and agnatic kinship do not encourage. At the same time, mit ritually contains affection; it strictly spells out how the people involved are supposed to feel and interact.

A few examples of mit in Dhungagaun will serve to illustrate how this relationship can be formed and manipulated, much like kin relationships or intercaste relationships. One woman, who had earlier explained mit to me in the glowing terms of sisterly love and mutual aid, later confessed that she had arranged mit with another woman because she suspected her husband was interested in this woman and might even bring her in as a lower caste co-wife. She knew that once mit rituals were performed, her husband and her mit would be untouchable to one another.

Another case concerns a man from another village, Chisopani, who did mit with a man of Dhungagaun. The man from Chisopani had a mother who was chronically ill. The family had been losing a lot of money in payment to jhankris. One time they summoned a new healer from Dhungagaun. Under his care the woman recovered but, as usual, fell ill again. Then the Chisopani man saw that he might be able to arrange mit with the son of the Dhungagaun healer. If so, his family could then call the Dhungagaun healer again and again without having to pay since it would be unacceptable for the healer to receive payment from the family of a son's mit. In return, the Chisopani man made it clear that he could arrange for many more

Chisopani patients for the Dhungagaun healer by speaking highly of the healer's powers and offering to send for him. Both families agreed to this arrangement and mit was performed. Later, the mother of the man from Chisopani died and so meetings with the Dhungagaun healer became less frequent. Eventually the mit pair had little to do with one another, and by now they have not even seen one another for over ten years.

In criticizing Okada's views, I do not mean to suggest that emotional affection is lacking, or only a matter of rhetoric in mit. I rather mean to suggest that the sharp separation between affection and instrumentality in personal relations perhaps reflects a Western view of "friendship," ritual or other. Early on, Wolf drew this kind of distinction in his analysis of friendship in "complex societies":

If we are to make headway in a sociological analysis of the friendship tie, we must, I believe, distinguish two types of friendship. I shall call the first expressive or emotional friendship, the second instrumental friendship (1966:10).

Likewise, Okada seems to think that either affection or instrumentality has to be primary as a motive behind mit. I would suggest that mit can be both affective and instrumental at the same time (cf. Messerschmidt 1982). Affection and instrumentality need not be seen as warring impulses, but within another world view, as two sides of the same coin.

## Social Ideology and Illness

This chapter began with the statement that in attempting to understand Vishnu's illness from the point of view of his family, I was forced to shift my

attention away from Vishnu as an individual and on to relationships between many individuals and groups. The claim was made that his case could only really be understood in relation to a local ideology of interpersonal relationships. In this chapter we have seen that interpersonal relationships in Dhungagaun are influenced by the dominant principles of hierarchy and interdependence in human affairs. The notion of interdependence is important both as an element of local social ideology and as a hard fact of life in Dhungagaun. Villagers are interdependent for access to "goods." At the same time there is a prevalent notion of a "perpetual scarcity" of all goods and this idea introduces an element of danger into the system and opens the way for social conflict. I return to Vishnu's case later, but in the next chapters I seek to explore this ideology further and to uncover some of its symbolic and religious aspects. This I do by connecting two realms of Dhungagaun culture--social ideology and illness beliefs--through symbols of food. By looking at how food symbols emerge in both the realms of social relationships and illness beliefs, we will see how beliefs about illness reflect a local ideology of interpersonal relationships.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In contrast to many Indian groups, the high castes of Dhungagaun and elsewhere in Nepal do not marry daughters into higher-ranking sections of their caste. Instead, it is the act of marriage itself that establishes the superiority of the wife-receiving group (cf. Bennett 1983:145).

<sup>2</sup>The Dasai prestations are actually much more complicated than this, especially where the relationship between two persons is traced to or through daughters/sisters. This reflects the different



status of women in their varied kinship roles. For a description of Dasai prestations in relation to female status see Bennett (1983).

<sup>3</sup>An early account of the jajmani system in India occurs in Wiser (1958).



# CHAPTER 4:

## LINKING UP WITH FOOD

My characterization of the social ideology of Dhungagaun Brahmans is admittedly my analytical "guess" of their view. One must adhere to Geertz's warning that,

The ethnographer does not, and, in my opinion, largely cannot, perceive what his informants perceive. What he perceives, and that uncertainly enough, is what they perceive 'with' or 'by means of,' or 'through' . . . (1976:224).

One of the things my informants appear to be perceiving "by means of" or "through" is food. It is through symbolic uses of food that the principles underlying interpersonal relationships--hierarchy and interdependence--are articulated. These uses of food are important because, as we see later, an understanding of food symbolism in the realm of illness and curing depends on an understanding of food symbols in everyday social life. In this and the next chapter, I use food symbolism as a central route into a broader ideological system, one that bridges local ideas about interpersonal relationships and illness beliefs. This chapter looks at how food symbols and food transfers emerge in key areas of Dhungagaun society. The next chapter discusses how, in the context of illness, food

use and references to food allude to some inevitable conflicts within the social order.

The use of food symbols as a key to penetrating and interrelating other aspects of culture is well established in anthropology. In a recent popular work, Farb and Armelagos (1980:115) point out that "Because of values that go far beyond filling the stomach, eating becomes associated, it only at an unconscious level, with deep rooted sentiments and assumptions about oneself and the world one lives in." Anthropologists have for a long time drawn attention to the varied ways in which food and food transactions serve as powerful social statements and cultural symbols. A fundamental inspiration was, of course, provided by Lévi-Strauss (1966, 1969) who saw the universally human opposition between "nature" and "culture" reflected in methods of preparing food. Food and dietary laws figured significantly in Douglass' (1966) discussions of cultural symbolic systems as a means of controlling "dirt," or matter out of place. In recent literature, interest in the symbolic aspects of food remains strong, as for example in Meigs' (1984) analysis of the connection between food rules and sexual values in highland New Guinea. There are also current studies of food in relation to ethnicity (Brown and Mussell 1984); and there is a growing interest in applying anthropological approaches to food to problems of poverty and hunger (Jerome, Pelto and Kandel 1980; Douglass 1984).

Cultural symbols that derive from food and eating pervade Hindu society (Dumont 1970:130-151). Stevenson (1954) and Marriott (1959, 1968, 1978) have discussed Hindu food distinctions and transactions in relation to caste ranking. Beals (1962:20-22) referred to an

association between food and social control in a village of South India. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1977) suggested that ritual food offerings in South India are complex communicative acts that can be analyzed like language. Also from South India, Appadurai (1981) analyzed "gastro-politics" in the settings of the household, the marriage feast and the temple. From a study of Benares, Parry (1985) analyzed the symbolic themes of eating and digestion in Indian mortuary rites. An exhaustive discussion of food use and its symbolic importance in a Hindu area appears in works by Khare (1976a, 1976b) in north India. In Nepal, Ortner (1970, 1978) analyzed food as a "key symbol" among the Buddhist Sherpa; and Lowdin (1985) studied food in relation to ritual and social organization among Newars of the Kathmandu Valley.

In Dhungagaun, the villagers' persistent symbolic use of food is apparent even to a casual visitor. The standard verbal greeting is "bhat khanubhayo?" (have you eaten boiled rice?) And any discussion with elders about the old days will immediately bring forth references to food as a criterion for "the good life." Ideas about modernization and its attendant ambiguities are also expressed in an idiom of food. For instance, one Brahman informant described himself to me as "a modern man" because he would eat anything he liked regardless of his caste-based food prohibitions. A few days later this same informant commented to me that certain lower caste groups lag behind others in modern advancement because "they drink liquor" and "eat beef."

In Hindu Nepal generally there are additional social, ritual and linguistic ways in which "food and eating" emerge as potent symbolic markers. With food, gods are worshipped, ancestors sustained, and malignant

spirits pacified. Certain foods and the act of eating may be ritually polluting, and the denial of food (fasting) is a form of purification, necessary before many religious rituals. It is also through food that caste status and some kinship statuses are distinguished.

## Hindu Food

In what is by now a voluminous literature on food in Hindu culture, a number of points have become well established. Three of these are important to my later analysis of food in illness beliefs. The first is that transactions (or lack of transactions) in certain types or categories of food serve to express differences in status, for example between caste groups. In many ways the hierarchy of caste is embodied in rules governing who can eat what food, with whom and prepared and served by whom. Some scholars have made use of a general rule that between castes, givers of certain foods are superior to receivers, but in all transactions the type of food, its relative superiority or purity, is crucial. Early scholars (such as Blunt 1931 and Hutton 1946) focused on distinctions between raw food, superior to cooked food, and the important categories of pakka (foods fried in clarified butter, and some other "pure" foods), superior to kacca (water-boiled or roasted food; everyday meal food). The more "superior" a food, the more freely it can be exchanged between castes. Thus raw foods can be given up and down the hierarchy, whereas kacca (and other even more "inferior" items, see below) tend only to be passed downwards and are powerful indications of relative rank. In his early work on caste, Marriott (1968) developed an elaborate, quantified "matrix" of food

givers and receivers among thirty-six castes in a village of north India. He concentrated on five food types (ranged from superior to inferior)--raw food, superior cooked food (pakka), inferior cooked food (kacca), garbage (polluted food or leftovers) and feces (here, a very low Sweeper caste removes, and thus "receives," feces [transformed food] from homes of some higher castes). Using a wealth of data on observed and reported transactions in these types of food, and following the assumption that givers are superior, Marriott was able to give each caste a rank "score" based on the total set of transactions. His study showed that local opinions on caste rank correlated closely with the hierarchy produced by the scoring procedure based on intercaste transactions in food. This and other studies which followed (e.g., Freed 1970) also demonstrated that the relationship between food and caste status is exceedingly complex, and that a totality of transactions, and not just one or two "rules" of food transfer, must be considered. Marriott concluded that villagers themselves perceive (and manipulate) relative caste rank in terms of these multiple transactions in different types of food. Although since this study Marriott has expanded his focus and altered some of his ideas about caste,<sup>1</sup> his systematic "matrix" study remains a landmark in studies of Hindu food.

A second point to emerge from at least some analyses of Hindu food, is that food transactions in Hindu culture, while expressing rank, simultaneously symbolize interdependency between persons and groups. Thus, for example, in the intercaste service (jajmani) relationships, high castes depend on low castes for certain meals (kacca food) and raw grains. The food

patterns show both separation and integration, or hierarchy and interdependency. Some authors (Marriott 1959:98, Khare 1976a:137, Selwyn 1980:304, Stone 1983) have emphasized that food "circulates" through Hindu society, expressing an idea of holism.<sup>2</sup> Thus food patterns express rank, but rank in relation to a larger social whole. Selwyn (1980) and others have shown how food transfers express the property of "inclusion and exclusion" in Hindu society.<sup>3</sup> Thus one kind of food pattern will express separateness and rank between two groups, but another type of food pattern will express the unity or inclusion of these two at a higher level in relation to other social categories. In the Indian area of Selwyn's study, for example, Brahmans distinguished themselves by the fact that they would take neither kacca nor pacca food from any other caste. But the Brahmans were joined with another category of high castes by the fact that they would exchange a category of food with them that Selwyn calls "wet" (e.g., water and tea). Brahmans plus these other high castes in this way formed a unit in opposition to all lower castes and untouchables, with whom they would not accept "wet" foods.

A final important point to emerge from studies of Hindu food patterns is that there is a fundamental moral dimension to food and food transfers in Hindu society. Scholars have expressed this idea differently and have woven it in different ways into their own particular theories of Hindu civilization; but it is this moral aspect of food that has led some authors (e.g., Appadurai 1981, Khare 1976b) to suggest that food indeed assumes a particularly great and remarkably pervasive significance in South Asian civilization. Khare (1976a) in particular has drawn attention to food



as a link between men and gods and to the interlocking of men and gods in the very production of food. To produce food, human labor and technology are insufficient; humans must also depend on the gods to provide rain and heat. To insure this divine cooperation, men feed the gods, thereby perpetuating a "primordial cycle" of transactions with the gods to maintain a proper "moral order" of the universe. Khare argued that the whole complex set of cultural ideas and practices concerning Hindu food must be understood within this broader cosmological significance of food in Hindu thought.

The ways in which food assumes both social and religious significance in Dhungagaun are fundamentally similar to what has been widely reported from Hindu South Asia in general. For this reason, as well as for the fact that detailed ethnographic accounts of Hindu food use are so easily available elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> I will here only give a summary sketch of major food patterns in Dhungagaun in order to show how hierarchy and interdependence are reflected. In the next chapter I will also refer to the moral dimension of food transfers.

There are, of course, rules of food transfer that distinguish caste rank, the most important being that everyday meal food (Nepali, bhat, or boiled rice and lentils, equivalent to the term kacca in the Indian literature) can only be transferred between individuals of the same caste or from higher castes to lower castes. In this intercaste context, to feed is to be religiously more pure than the person fed. Any public violation of this rule results in loss of caste (the violator assumes the lower caste of the person whose bhat he ate). The emphasis on "public" violation of

the rule is important in Nepalese villages like Dhungagaun where there are a number of intercaste marriages (fifteen percent of all unions are intercaste). Dhungagaun men who have taken lower caste wives into their households are able to maintain their caste standing so long as it does not become publicly obvious that they eat bhat cooked by the lower caste wife. My informants unanimously agreed that these men likely do take bhat from their wives in private, but as long as no one "sees," there are no consequences. Similarly, some high caste villagers do eat bhat cooked by lower castes when they are in the city of Kathmandu or other urban areas, claiming that this will have no bearing on their caste standing since, after all, no one in the village will ever know

Most Brahmans will accept "superior cooked food" (pacca) and water from all touchable castes, who also freely exchange these items among themselves. Most touchable, non-Brahman castes will only take bhat from Brahmans or from their own group. No caste will take cooked food or water from untouchables, but all castes will accept raw foods like unpeeled fruit and vegetables from them.

In the intercaste realm, or within the endogamous caste group, some important food transfers are governed by a reverse of the rule that obtains between castes, i.e., low feeds high. Thus in the wedding and in patterns that persist after the wedding, the bride's family feeds bhat to the higher status groom's family, and must not accept bhat, or other food, from them. Also it is a duty of a wife (low) to prepare and serve bhat meals for her husband (high).<sup>5</sup> Within the family, an important exception to this low-to-high feeding is that parents (superior) feed and in all other ways

provide for children; but as we shall see in a moment, this is reversed after death.

Another important food rule concerns the transfer of polluted food (jutho, i.e., leftovers, or food that has been partially eaten and so contaminated by a person's saliva). Polluted food, like intercaste bhat, can only be transferred from high to low. For example, the son can take the polluted food of the father, and the wife consumes the polluted food of the husband, whereas the reverse cannot occur. Not only may a woman consume the polluted food of her husband, she must do so. After her husband has eaten a meal, a high caste woman of Dhungagaun, like Hindu women of many other areas, is not given a clean plate for herself but must eat off her husband's polluted plate, to mark her inferiority to him. This inferiority of a woman to her husband is first of all symbolized in a food exchange during the wedding ceremony, a rite called jutho khane (eating the pollution). After the main wedding rites have been performed, the groom eats a bit of a sweetmeat (kasar) and then gives the polluted remains to his bride. ..

The superiority of gods to humans is also expressed with an important transfer of food. Humans worship the gods by offering them certain foods. Once offered, this food becomes prasad (offering) which is then consumed by devotees as a kind of blessing from the gods (see Babb 1975). Adding this to the other rules of food transfer, a set of equivalences emerges: man is to god as wife is to husband as low caste is to high.

Even with these few, and very general, patterns of food transfer, it is easy to perceive a central theme: in marking hierarchical distinctions, the rules of food

transfer simultaneously reflect interdependency. "A" depends on "B" for food, and by tracing through the connection, we find that "B" is linked back again to "A". In effect there are "circles" by which people are linked together and the linkage is expressed in an idiom of food.

Three such "circles" are easy to see. First, in a real and obvious sense, a son depends on his parents for food. But "food" in this link assumes a new significance when in old age and in death it is reversed and the parents become dependent on their sons for food. It is a profound religious duty for a son to ritually feed his deceased parents, and other ancestors, for instance in the annual ancestor feeding ceremony (sraddha). In this ceremony, descendants offer a rice ball (pinda) to deceased kin which, they say, is the "ancestor's bhat." A Dhungagaun priest explained that one earth-year is equivalent to one day in the abode of the dead. As the living feed their ancestors once every earth-year, the ancestor feeding ceremony constitutes a daily bhat meal to the deceased relatives. Thus, an important link between kinship and sustenance extends beyond this life into the afterworld; and in the process a circle is formed: parents feed sons who then feed parents.

Secondly, an interdependency between castes is evident from the fact that high castes depend on low castes for services. Low castes, in turn, receive rice (bhat) meals and raw grains from high castes as payment for services. Finally, the duty of a wife to feed her husband and the rule of polluted food transfer from husband to wife suggests a curious interdependency between this pair. In high caste households of Dhungagaun and elsewhere in Nepal (Bennett, personal

communication), husbands may in fact consume most of the better quality foods at meals, leaving little for their wives; or, as a special token of affection, the husband may leave some better quality food on his plate for his wife to eat. Thus the husband and wife are linked together in a way that resembles the linkage between high castes and low castes and that between parents and children. The husband depends on his wife to cook and serve his meals and the wife depends on the husband for the quantity and quality of the meal food she receives.

In these realms of caste and kinship, food symbolically separates statuses and links people back together again. Food, then, connects as much as it distinguishes. Hierarchy and interdependency are expressed at once, and this is consistent with the equally hierarchical and interdependent socioeconomic links between people in Dhungagaun as discussed earlier. Sons, for instance, depend on their parents not just for their food, but for their portion of the family land. In turn, older people depend on their sons to care for them in their old age; and informants express this exchange between land and care-taking as a kind of mutual "feeding."

### **Food in Everyday Life**

Earlier it was shown that caste and kin relations suggest a model of hierarchical linkage and exchange that underlies other kinds of interpersonal relations as well. Similarly, the food rules that govern caste and kinship positions also provide a means for specifying the types of linkages that obtain between people in a more general way. Thus, as food transfers operate to express hierarchy and interdependency, food

can be directly used to establish and maintain new connections, as well as to express those caste and kinship linkages that are already well established.

Food may be used, for example, to honor and please another--hence in some contexts to influence another or put pressure on the person to reciprocate the honor by performing a particular favor.<sup>6</sup> In this case, the more delectable "special foods" (pakka, which in Dhungagaun are exchanged between nearly all castes, excluding untouchables) are the most appropriate. The use of these foods to please, honor or influence another is somewhat similar to one's attempt to please, honor or solicit help from the gods through the ritual feeding of equally pure (cokho) and delectable foods. One offers these special foods to another as a sign that one recognizes the honorific status of the other or, in some contexts, as a means of establishing a more intimate social link with the other. Here, if the other person accepts the offered special foods (and particularly if he does so on a continuing basis), he is more or less agreeing to allow this linkage, and a refusal would imply that he does not wish to promote the linkage or place himself in a position where certain later requests or favors will be asked of him.

In general terms, whenever any villager is visiting another, the matter of food transfer will reveal something of the nature of the visit and the intentions of the participants. Of course, particularly high status kin, such as a son-in-law, must be offered something whenever they visit. But in other contexts where there is no such connection, the offering of food will suggest that the visitor is welcome or that the host recognizes the visitor as locally eminent. But the visitor's importance to the

host can be gauged by how strongly the host entreats the visitor to accept food or drink and by what food the host offers. If adamant about showing respect, the host will merely have some food prepared without informing the visitor and present it to the visitor on a plate. Were a visitor to refuse any food after lengthy encouragement (and particularly food that was already prepared and served), this might be interpreted as an expression of the visitor's low regard for the host, or the visitor's wish to refrain from allowing any stronger link with the host to develop.

But in some cases, a food recipient has little choice but to be entrapped in a food link, since a refusal would be awkward and tantamount to a strong statement of rejection. For example, a young boy in Dhungagaun was concerned about whether he had passed or failed a school exam. He went to a shaman (jhanakri) who, in trance, told him that in fact he did not perform well on the exam, but if he presented the teacher with some oranges before the results were announced, all would be well. The student told me that in this context the teacher could not have outright refused the food gift unless he were utterly determined to fail the student. And whereas the teacher could still fail the student, once he accepted the oranges, this would become more difficult to do.

Another category of foods that carry clear communicative value in Dhungagaun, as elsewhere in Nepal, are rich foods (generally prepared with large quantities of milk or clarified butter, to which substances like sugar or honey are added) or simply any particularly sweet foods. Significantly, as we shall see later, these foods are also considered nutritious and strength-giving. But most important here is that

these foods serve as vehicles of affection (maya) and concern for another (Bennett 1976:41). Rich, sweet foods are given to help one recover from illness; they are particularly given to women who have just given birth. Sweets are the foods that husbands "sneak" to their wives as a private gesture of affection and approval (Bennett 1976:52). Sweets are particularly given to children as a means of rewarding them or encouraging good behavior; and sweets are also customarily presented to household members by a married daughter returning to visit her parental home.

The transfer of sweets between the sexes is sometimes associated with sexual seduction. Thus one Dhungagaun man recited a long story of how a woman from another village had attempted to seduce him by repeatedly offering him sweet foods whenever he passed by her house. Similarly, a man of Kathmandu once confided to me that he was unsure his mistress truly loved him until one day she served him rich, delectable food: "Only then I knew it was real."

Food, then, serves something like a code, spelling out messages of respect, duty, honor, rank and affection. With this code, villagers both express and create social linkages as a means of maintaining or promoting other kinds of exchange. In general, but also depending on context, a transfer of raw foods is more distant, less powerful and less intimate. Like raw foods, special cooked foods can be used to please, honor and influence, but they do so more powerfully and more intimately. Most intimate of all are transfers of boiled rice (bhat) and polluted food (see Marriott, 1978). Where boiled rice is used as payment between castes or served as daily food in the family, it is associated with regularized interdependency between



feeder and server (see also Marriott, 1968:144). Where rice is served outside the kin group, but not as payment, it will signify a greater closeness or intimacy between host and guest. Polluted food is a clear marker of both hierarchy and close connection between male agnates and between husbands and wives.

But just as food transfers express linkage and interdependency, so the denial of food can symbolize social conflict. A sudden refusal to offer or receive food can serve as an immediate expression of anger. With the cessation of food exchanges, social relations can be effectively broken off. At one point during my stay with Vishnu's family, there was a quarrel between Vishnu's father and Ram, the head of the household. This quarrel had nothing to do with Vishnu's illness but was rather based on disagreements over the buying and selling of livestock. In any event, the quarrel grew serious (at one point Ram shouted out that Vishnu's father was an incompetent farmer). Vishnu's father then ordered his wife to set up a separate kitchen in a spare room adjacent to my room. Meals for Vishnu's nuclear family could only be prepared and served in the new room, although raw food was still obtained from the main house (I was allowed to go to either kitchen for meals). With the creation of a separate kitchen, the quarrel surfaced to the public and was talked about in the village. About a week later when the group resumed eating from one kitchen, it signalled to the community that the individuals involved had patched up their differences.

The idea of food transfers as symbolic of social connections and social processes also appears to be reflected in some colloquial uses of the verb "to eat" (khanu). For example, "to bribe" is expressed as ghus

khuwaune (to feed the bribe) and in reverse, to accept a bribe is to "eat" it. One also "eats" rather than "gets" a salary. To inherit is sampati khane (to eat property) and to swear on oath is kasam khane (to eat on oath). Even more interesting are the associations between khanu (to eat) and mannu (to respect/obey). For example, a very common expression, kura khane (literally, to eat the word), is used to refer to one person obeying or agreeing with another. In a similar way, a woman who obeys her husband and in-laws and in every way becomes a proper subservient wife is described by the phrase ghar klanchin (she eats the husband's house).

An important feeding distinction is between intermittent and regular feeding. The more regularly a transaction occurs, the more established the relationship, and the more that one can depend on the relationship for other kinds of transactions. Thus all higher castes can (and in different contexts do) feed rice meals to untouchable castes. But only between partners in the hereditary service relationships (jajmani) does this feeding occur on a regular basis, and it is these relationships that are solid, fixed and entail many other kinds of standard exchanges. In turn, the families involved will approach those they regularly feed or are fed by for many different kinds of requests. Similarly, any member of one caste can theoretically feed rice meals to a member of the same caste and thereby establish a certain intimacy, but the most significant relationships are those among kin for whom meal feeding and pollution transfers are regularized. Finally, where any other social linkages are established, the more often or continuous the feeding, the more solid and manipulatable the link.

The importance of regularized feeding becomes more clear when, in the next chapter, it is contrasted with irregular feeding patterns in the realm of illness.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Marriott (1976a, 1976b) and Marriott and Inden (1974, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>Selwyn (1980:302) rightly points out that although Marriott's early (1959) work stressed the "circulation" of food and implied a holistic orientation of Hindu society, this idea was dropped as early as his 1968 article, where the focus is on transactions between pairs or castes rather than on transactions in relation to a "whole."

<sup>3</sup>On "inclusion and exclusion" in Indian society, see Pocock (1947).

<sup>4</sup>See especially Babb (1975:31-67), Beals (1962:20-22), Dumont (1970b:130-51), Mayer (1970):38-41) and Khare (1976a, 1976b).

<sup>5</sup>With respect to this point, Czarnecka (1984:35) writes that very often a married woman's mother-in-law or husband's brother's wife will do the daily cooking for the family (and so feed the woman's husband). Still, it is a cultural idea that a woman has the duty to cook for her husband even if she does not actually do so on a regular basis until many years after her marriage.

<sup>6</sup>Sherry Ortner (1978:68-80) has discussed similar uses of food in context of Nepalese Sherpa "hospitality."



# CHAPTER 5:

## FOOD FOR THE DEAD

The last chapter largely emphasized the "proper order" of society that a cultural emphasis on food reveals. People should feed one another by the rules of caste and kinship transfers; the linkages established between people should be maintained, as backed by both social and religious prescriptions. To feed and be fed, up and down hierarchies and across the boundary between life and death, are positive processes, suggestive of the integration of society and of individuals' prescribed place within a social order. Previous chapters suggested that Dhungagaun social organization is based on a hierarchical interdependence between its members, within which goods are distributed and exchanged, and that this ordered interlocking is reflected in an idiom of food and rules of food transfer.

At the same time, I have also suggested that this ordered system of human exchanges is seen as imperfect by villagers and that one basis for this notion of imperfection is villagers' perception of a sharp and perpetual scarcity of material and other goods. As one informant expressed it (in reference to conflicts in his own joint family): "The problem is that we all want the same things at the same time." In other words, along with the culturally pervasive notions of

hierarchy and interdependence is the notion that the hierarchically integrated "whole" (the community, the caste, the lineage, the family, etc.) can never perfectly satisfy the needs of all the parts. Someone or some group will be left out, left in need, and this constitutes a source of danger.

It is here that ideas about illness became significant and revealing, for illness is a negative physical and social state, even more so when it is surrounded by speculations of witchcraft or diagnoses of malignant spirits, as is common in Dhungagaun and other areas of Nepal. In illness ideology we can see a negative extension of the cultural themes already discussed; and again, it is the use of food and food transfers that serve as an idiom through which these ideas are expressed.

### Food in Illness Ideology

There are several ways in which food penetrates the realm of illness and curing. Most obvious, perhaps, is that fatness or plumpness (moto) is considered the very epitome of good health, whereas thinness (dublo) is associated with weakness and vulnerability. Already this suggests a connection: to be "fat" is to be fed, and what is more, it suggests that one is being regularly fed. By extension, the ideas about moto and good health are suggestive of the positive aspects of social feeding, of maintaining interdependency in a proper way. In the abstract, a person's attribute of "fatness" is a clue that he or she is an integrated member of the community and assumes proper food-receiving positions in society. What is more, a "fat" person is likely a frequent recipient of rich or sweet foods that serve as vehicles

for affection. Among high castes, "A fat child--like a plump woman--is not only considered healthy and attractive, but beloved" (Bennett 1976:41).

This positive value on plumpness is widespread in Nepal; and Nepalis are quite serious in drawing an association between plumpness and other positive social states. For instance, one very prominent man in Kathmandu said that, in all honesty, he did not think he could have risen to his current eminence were it not for his being "fat" and thus seen as strong and potentially powerful.

A thin person is considered unattractive, as well as vulnerable to illness, and this may be because, in direct opposition to plumpness, thinness carries cultural associations of detachment and severance from others. To be thin is to be unfed or irregularly fed, to lack proper linkages with others. Obviously, there are plenty of cases of real people in Dhungagaun who are "thin" but nevertheless well fed, who are surrounded by food-giving kinsmen, and who enjoy a host of proper food-receiving positions. Still there is the suggestion that one underlying reason why plumpness is so highly praised and thinness seen as unattractive is that these attributes have associations with one's position in society, where food exchanges (feeding and being fed) become an idiom for both proper and "improper" (unlucky, unauspicious) social states.

An even more pertinent way in which food enters beliefs about health and illness, and a way that lends support to the above interpretation of plumpness and thinness, concerns the illness-causing malignant spirits that plague residents of Dhungagaun. It is here that a link between the concepts of hierarchy, interdependence and scarcity is most strongly revealed in a rhetoric of feeding, being fed and being fed upon.

We can begin by outlining the place of spirits in illness ideology. A clear majority of the people of Dhungagaun profess a belief in these spirits. But, as discussed in Chapter One, there is variation in belief, and at one extreme a few villagers claim that the spirits are only "superstitions." In any event, the following discussion of these spirits and their connection with food exchanges refers to general and explicit cultural concepts--that is, categories that all villagers recognize as elements of their own tradition, regardless of the extent to which they personally may have broken from this tradition.

Instances of illness in which spirits are said to have played a role are distinguished from naturally caused (answari) cases of illness. The evil, illness-inflicting spirits are collectively called lagu. This term covers spiritual forces like the bhut, pret, masan and picas (all spirits formed from souls of people who have died inauspiciously or for whom death ceremonies were not performed), the bir (demon) and boksi (human witch). These kinds of spirits are recognized throughout Nepal and India (e.g., Fuchs 1950:281-283; Opler 1963:34; Berreman 1972:111).

A great variety of minor ailments (body pains, headache, stomach aches, etc.) and, more rarely, some severe conditions, are attributed to attacks by "ghosts" (bhut, pret, masan, picas). In Dhungagaun, one may hear references to these spirits, and the aches and pains they have caused, virtually every day.

A bhut is usually described as the ghost of a person who died in some terrible or inauspicious way, as by violence, suicide, by fire or by drowning. Properly speaking, pret refers to the spirit of a person between the moment of death and the time at



which, through the funeral rituals, it becomes an ancestor (pitr). The spirit may be temporarily harmful in the pret state, but especially harmful is the spirit which fails to ever reach the "place of the ancestors," or pitrlok, due to some mistake in the rituals, or for some other reason. Both masan and picas are described by some villagers as ghosts of untouchable caste persons, by others as ghosts of "bad" people, and by still others as variants of the general bhut, or spirit of a person who dies in some unfortunate way.

Ghosts wander about, invisible, attacking their victims, usually at night and usually at crossroads or "dirty" places. Masans dwell about the ghat (burning place of the dead) and, hence, riversides. Although most people maintain they are unseeable, one Tamang healer boasted that he had seen them and could show them to anyone who cared to accompany him to the funeral grounds at midnight (there were never any takers). He described those he had seen in ghoulish terms--some with no heads, and some with body parts in the wrong places.

Villagers frequently group demons (bir) with ghosts when listing evil spirits. Birs are not considered, however, to arise from the souls of the dead. Rather, they are said to "simply exist." Like ghosts, they are ordinarily invisible. Local healers (jhankris) maintain there are 52 types of demons, but I did not find a healer who could list more than a few. Some demons are said to resemble pigs, others buffalos, and others men. Many are associated with colors. The names of a few are kalo bir (a black bir), dwase (blackish-brown), siglare (black and white and "like a man"), and dare-masan bir (a bir with a long tooth).

Each of the ghosts and the demons may attack anyone, or a family's livestock. Further, practically any common ailment (excluding, perhaps, bodily injuries) may be attributed to any one of these spirits. The demons, however, are somewhat distinctive for their manner of attack: whereas the ghosts merely encounter their victims and mysteriously inflict their harm, a demon may actually enter a person. In this case, the victim will become possessed and tremble (kamne). In possession, the demon is said to control the victim's mind and body and speak through the victim. A victim may suffer such possession independently or at the direction of a jhankri who induces possession in the patient in order to communicate with the demon. When one is attacked by a demon, however, the person is likely to suffer other illness symptoms along with trembling.

Whether any of these spirits strike on their own or are sent by a witch (see below), the reason for their harmful activity is the same: these spirits are in a constant state of hunger. They seek to be fed by humans. If a spirit attacks on its own, its victim (or the victim's family) must appease the spirit with food.

Food offered to spirits is considered a substitute for the victim's own body which the spirit desires to eat. But this idea that in illness one is being fed upon is not immediately apparent in every case of illness caused by a malignant force. A villager would not likely say, for instance, that "in this particular illness I am being eaten by an X." The expressed idea is rather that a spirit attacks so that it will be fed nonhuman food. And it is only in response to questions like "What would happen if you refused to feed the X?" that one hears "The X would eat my body." In other

contexts, the association between illness and being fed upon is more direct. One jhankri told me that blood in a person's feces is a sure sign of demon attack: the demon is eating the stomach of the victim and so he bleeds.

Although the notion of one's literally being eaten is restricted to illness caused by malignant spirits (lagu), the imagery of illness as "being fed upon" carries over into naturally caused illness as well, or into general conceptions of illness regardless of the cause. For example, one word for heart attack, heart trouble, or chest pain is mutu khane, "heart devouring." Similarly, a food-eating image surrounds the word dhamki (asthma). In times of quarrel, one person may insult another by calling him dhamki ko ahar, "the food (literally, prey) of the asthma disease." Villagers say that because of the association between the word dhamki and this particularly insulting expression, the word dhamki should be avoided when one is speaking respectfully to or about a real asthma sufferer. In these contexts, expressions meaning "breathlessness" are used instead. An insult phrase parallel to dhamki ko ahar can also be formed with the illness term for syphilis, bhirungi.

Another lagu, and one which exhibits unique features, is the boksi, or human witch. Witches are distinct from all other malignant forces in that they are human. Furthermore, many of the other lagu (and especially the demon) can become agents of the witch.

Villagers maintain that although witches can be either men or women, they are usually women. All but one of the witch accusations I heard in Dhungagaun were against women. However, as mentioned earlier, male jhankris are generally suspected of knowing harmful

mantras, as well as curing mantras, and it is said that healers will harm those who displease them. This, as we saw in Chapter Two, was a concern during Vishnu's illness. But even if suspected of harm, jhankris are not called "witches." It is rather said that they are "using witchcraft knowledge."

One of the most common techniques of witchcraft involves the transmission of harm to a person (or animal) through food. A witch may deliberately transmit this harm by ritually "blowing" (phuk garne) a mantra onto the food that the victim will eat. In discussions of witchcraft, villagers say that for this reason it is dangerous to eat outside one's own home; and we saw that this caution was voiced by Vishnu's sister-in-law when he first became ill. Also, should one fall ill after a communal wedding feast, witchcraft is inevitably suspected.

Thus, the very process of establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal connections--i.e., through feeding and being fed--is by this idea tinged with danger. This illustrates one way in which food can be used to express the other (negative) side of the coin of human interaction and exchange, and this negative side is further woven into beliefs about illness. In one context, one may be entreated to eat and understand this as a recognition of one's status and/or a prelude to some further exchanges. Later, should the relationship deteriorate and the intended exchange fail to satisfy all parties, the same act of receiving food can be referred back to as an attempt at witchcraft and as an explanation for a current illness.

Another common technique of witchcraft (also restricted to deliberate witchcraft) involves the witch's use of other malignant (lagu) beings. Witches,

it is said, worship (i.e., ritually feed) the evil-doing lagu and are able to send them to harm their victims. According to one informant, the relationship between witches and the other lagu is like that between Ram and Hanuman of the great Hindu epic, the Ramayan: as Hanuman was the helper and servant to Ram in his epic exploits, so the lagu are the helping agents of witches. What is interesting here is that the witch gains control over the hungry lagu by feeding it. Further, the witch may either make a one-time contract with a lagu (whereby the witch feeds it once to induce it to harm a specific person one time) or the witch may agree to feed it on a regular basis, in which case the lagu becomes a more or less permanent servant of the witch. When one is attacked by a witch-sent spirit, the counter action normally involves appeasement of the helping spirit through ritual feeding rather than any action directed toward the witch. Yet a few villagers say that the "spirit" of a witch herself may be directly fed in a curing ceremony. In this case the idea is that the witch, rather than or together with a helping spirit, is attempting to "eat" her victim. Blustain (1974:93) reports of a similar notion in another area of Central Nepal.

As mentioned, it is commonly agreed that witches strike through jealousy or anger; and, not surprisingly, witchcraft accusations are made against those with whom one has important relationships or with whom one is in competition for resources. Thus in Dhungagaun, as with other areas of Hindu Asia, a common witchcraft accusation is against one's family head's brother's wife, as was the case during Vishnu's illness. This reflects the conflict between brothers, a conflict relevant to Hindu society generally, as

discussed in the last chapter. Discussing witch beliefs in a village of Mysore, India, Epstein (1959) suggested that women accused as witches became a vehicle through which conflicts between brothers are expressed. Accusing the brother's wives (women are already seen as dangerous outsiders who will pull the brothers apart) protects the ideal of fraternal solidarity.

### Food and Malignant Spirits

Many anthropologists (e.g., Dumont 1959, Harper 1959, Babb 1975, Wadley 1975) have discussed the notion of hierarchy in relation to spiritual forces in Hindu culture, and the relationships between spiritual hierarchies and the hierarchy of human caste groups. For Dumont (1959) distinctions between divinities derive meaning from the social order, or distinctions between caste groups. Thus, in the area of his study in South India, the distinction drawn between vegetarian (pure) and meat-eating (impure) gods is relevant in terms of the parallel distinction between vegetarian and (lower) meat-eating castes. Drawing a distinction between "textual" (Sanskritic) dieties, local village gods and evil spirits, Babb (1975) shows that distance between humans and supernaturals is an important factor in the "divine hierarchy" in popular Hinduism. The higher the spiritual entity, the more remote and inaccessible it is to most humans. Wadley (1975) is critical of previous attempts to define Hindu "pantheons," claiming that first some definition of "supernatural" must be provided. For Wadley, the one defining characteristic of all supernatural beings in the Indian village of her study is power (sakti), an important characteristic of which is control over human

affairs. This is an unbounded domain since in Hinduism, "All that exists in the universe contains some power and can be part of a Hindu 'pantheon'" (1975:56). Then, "the task of understanding the nature of a Hindu village pantheon becomes one of understanding the differential distribution of embodied powers" (1975:57).

In Dhungagaun some distinctions made between types of "spiritual beings" show a connection between the kinds of powers these beings have over humans and the extent to which these beings are dependent on humans for their sustenance. Table 1 shows the relationship between the lowly malignant spirits (lagu) and other broad categories of spiritual forces in terms of their food relationships with humans. The table is by no means an attempt to construct a local pantheon or to plot criteria by which all supernatural forces, or even illness-causing forces are distinguished or related. Rather, the table only draws attention to some major divisions in the spiritual hierarchy that are relevant to my discussion.<sup>1</sup>

Table 2. Feeding Hierarchy of Spirits

Irregularly Fed	Regularly Fed	
Malignant Spirits (fed to pacify)	Higher Spiritual Forces (fed to sustain and make safe)	High Gods (fed to please)
bhut pret masan picas bir	bayu pitr kul devta	Shiva, Vishnu, etc. graha (planets)

Here the malignant spirits are an extreme. They attack humans because they are constantly and desperately hungry, and their attack is directly designed to elicit a food offering from their victims. Humans feed the malignant spirits in order to temporarily pacify them. With the other spiritual forces, hunger and a dependency on humans for food become less significant as we move from left to right on the chart. The pitṛ (ancestors who died properly), the bayu (a transformed ancestral ghost, discussed in a later section) and the kul devata (lineage gods) are also dependent on humans for their food. But in contrast to the malignant spirits who are only fed when they have caused illness, these other spiritual entities are regularly fed in special worship ceremonies. Humans feed them in order to sustain them, and by so doing fulfill a religious obligation. People may fear that they have failed to feed these spirits properly, but were such a spirit to then harm an individual (an occurrence which was never in fact reported), it would not be with malicious intent but out of anger that someone had failed in his or her obligations. These spirits are, in any case, in a much better position than the malignant spirits, who are forced to wander in painful hunger from the moment of their inauspicious creation. Whatever food the lagu wrangle from man is only a temporary relief, and hence the lagu are perpetually dangerous.

On the far right of the chart are the high Hindu gods (e.g., Shiva, Vishnu) and the planet gods (graha). These gods are not only regularly worshipped, and hence regularly fed, but they are not dependent on humans for sustenance. Food is given as a means to please and thus favorably influence them to bring good fortune rather than to either sustain or pacify them. Some



divine forms of the Hindu Goddess (Devi, not on the chart) do bring illness and may be appeased with blood sacrifice; but they are not dependent on humans for food and may attack from anger rather than hunger.

We can see in these ideas about the afterworld a reflection of cultural notions about the world of the living. The ghosts are unfed or irregularly fed. They are as hapless people would be and like beggars are (whether religious mendicants or simply poor): they are outside the proper order of this-worldly society, which entails a hierarchically organized system of feeding and being fed.

In this life there are those who will make claims upon one, or "beg" from one. In the spiritual realm there are the "ghosts" whose claims for food are made more powerful by their supernaturally sanctioned power to harm. Similarly, in life and in death there are those whom one is duty bound to sustain (such as close kin in this world and the ancestors and lineage deities of the other world). These are relations of regular feeding. Finally, in this life there are those people one "feeds" to please, make happy or to show respect to (mannu), in order to move into a position where one can ask favors of them. They are fed much as the high gods are worshipped and the idea is that favors are more likely to be forthcoming the more regular the feeding.

In a milieu of perceived scarcity, the insufficiency of material goods and the demands made on one by those in need become specific problems of everyday life in Dhungagaun. Although patterned food transfers express the nature of various kinds of relationships between people, there are, of course, many different goods being passed between people and groups along the same lines. In the day-to-day

competition for access to limited resources, villagers must manipulate their links with others within the hierarchies of kinship and caste or cultivate links with relatively powerful persons. Yet the distribution of most goods--whether it is a father's estate or a family's new cloth for clothing--rarely meets with the satisfaction of all. Someone is always left out. But those left out, or those who feel themselves slighted, can cause trouble and can press their claims to a greater share by virtue of their established hierarchical linkage to an individual or group with power over distribution.

In many ways villagers appear to recognize that since all goods or all desired things in life are scarce, all the hierarchically ordered interdependency in the world cannot possibly insure sufficiency to all. Someone will always be in need. But it is in conceptions of spirit-caused illnesses that recognition and fear of this is expressed as a general cultural theme. Thus the illness-causing spirits may serve as a symbolic, or cultural, realization of the ever-present potential for disharmony in human exchanges, or the unsatisfactory distribution of valued goods in human society. These spirits are the ultimate losers, as marked in the first place by their inauspicious creation, and as expressed symbolically in their attributes of perpetual hunger and being but irregularly fed. Yet by virtue of having died improperly, or without linkages to others, they acquire power (the ability to cause illness) by which to press their claims for food back on to the human community.

## Ritual Feeding: Pacification and Transformation

Forms of appeasement for evil spirits cover a great variety of complex ritual activity. Here, only three common types of curing ritual will be described: the feeding of a ghost, the blood sacrifice to a demon, and the ritual transformation of an "ancestral ghost" into a bayu as an attempt at therapy. In the discussion of the bayu, we will return to themes of scarcity and hierarchy in social relations and illness ideology.

### Feeding a Ghost

On virtually any walk through Dhungagaun, one can spot small withered plates made from the leaves of the sal (Shorea robusta) tree lying on the ground. Inside the leaf plate, or sometimes scattered around it, there may be shreds of cloth, incense, uncooked rice, red, yellow and black powders and a small human-looking figure molded out of mud. These little plates are particularly easy to find at crossroads, or around "dirty" places--areas where ghosts and other malignant spirits hang about. The plates represent a ritual food offering that someone has recently made to pacify a spirit and thus help an ill person recover. This kind of ritual feeding is called mansanu.

To give an idea of the frequency and extent of ghost attack in Dhungagaun, 58 percent of households in a sample survey reported that an attack on a household member had ever occurred. Of these, 95 percent reported that an attack had taken place within the last year. In only about half of the most recent cases of attack was the ghost actually fed. In other cases, another treatment such as jhar phuk ("blowing") was administered, or the person recovered before any

treatment. In only one case was modern medicine given in combination with a traditional treatment.

One case of ghost feeding I observed was carried out for a young boy, Kumar. Kumar, age 10, was the youngest male member of a large Brahman family. He seemed to have few troubles, and his parents and other elders often spoke of him with pride and approval. One local astrologer, in fact, had declared that of all the family, Kumar had the brightest future. His family members were concerned, however, when about three months back Kumar suddenly stopped going to school. Every morning they urged him to go and scolded him at length, but to no avail. Later they connected his refusal with his deteriorating physical condition. His mother once held him up to me and pointed out that he had grown thin and that his skin was turning dark and dry. She and other family members claimed to have no idea what was wrong with him, but a few days later they took him to see a local healer (a healer who does not invoke spirits). This man inspected Kumar, and after carefully feeling the pulse in Kumar's wrist, he declared that Kumar had been attacked by a ghost (specifically, a bhut). He instructed the family to feed the ghost that very night. No one--the healer, Kumar's family or Kumar himself--knew the former identity of the ghost or took any interest in the question when I raised it. This was also the case in other instances of ghost attack in Dhungagaun, including the ghost attack diagnosed in the case of Vishnu.

That night Kumar's mother and grandmother prepared the plate. Inside they placed uncooked rice and other grains as food offerings, and over the food they placed strips of cloth (cloth offerings). Finally, they made

a human-like figure (called murti, statue) out of mud and stuck corn silk into the head to represent hair. None of Kumar's family members know why they had to put the mud figure into the plate. They said it was just common practice, but they were quite sure the ghost wouldn't eat the figure as it would the rice and other grains. Other villagers I questioned, including jhankris, were equally uncertain about the purpose of the mud figure in the ghost plate, although one informant did suggest that perhaps the figure was merely added so that the spirit would recognize the plate as a human offering. One jhankri maintained that the figure is not necessary in ghost feeding and suggested it as a Tamang practice that Hindu groups later adopted.

The women next put wicks in the plate (to be lit so that the ghost could find the plate in the dark). They colored some of the wicks red with red powder (abir), some yellow (with tumeric), and some black (with ash).

After the food plate was prepared, Kumar was seated on the house porch and his elder male relatives gathered for a ritual communication with the ghost. At this point the women of the household withdrew from active participation and maintained a distance from the food plate. They told me that the presence of women displeases ghosts and other evil spirits (unless a woman is herself the victim) and that women incur danger through contact with a food plate once it has been set out. This was consistent with reports I had from other informants that if a pregnant woman crosses over a food plate that has been set on the ground, her unborn child will develop an illness called sukwa betha (thinness and drying up) and may die.

Kumar's elder brother took the lead role in the next ritual action, although any male relative, friend, or healer could have done so. The elder brother first sprinkled water over Kumar and then chanted commands to the ghost while he circled the food plate around Kumar's head. In ghost feeding, this kind of chant does not follow a set formula, but is merely a formal explanation to the ghost (in whatever words the speaker chooses, but with rhythmic voice) that it is going to be fed and must, therefore, cease its harm. Next, Kumar's brother instructed him to take strands of his own hair and a piece of fingernail and toss these into the plate. Unlike their explanations for the mud figure, my informants were clear about the purpose of the hair and fingernail: these were to be given to the ghost as substitutes for Kumar's own body, which the ghost would otherwise eat.

When this ceremony was complete, Kumar's brother, father, and a few male neighbors who had been watching set off in the darkness to place the food plate by a crossroad some distance from the village.

Kumar's condition did not improve immediately, but his family members did not raise the question of whether there had been a misdiagnosis, nor did they show interest in this idea when I mentioned it. But some weeks later they summoned a jhankri (from another village) to look at Kumar. This man claimed that Kumar's planets were in a problematic position (a condition called kargo, literally "crisis"). The jhankri performed a ceremony by which Kumar's kargo was transferred out of him and into a pigeon. The jhankri explained to me that if the pigeon then dies, the patient will recover; but if the pigeon lives, the patient will not get well. The pigeon died and was

later cooked and served to everyone present for the evening meal, with the restriction that Kumar alone could not eat it since it contained his own kargo.

Gradually Kumar's state of thinness and dark skin improved, but it was over a year before he returned to school.

### Blood Sacrifice to a Demon

Maya was an elderly Brahman woman in her sixties, and a classificatory grandmother to Vishnu of Chapter Two.

Maya had been besieged by demon (bir) attacks throughout her adult life and was several times attacked during the course of my stay in Dhungagaun. Most often the demon attacks coincided with Maya's chronic coughing and spitting up, a condition which she treated at various times with ayurvedic medicine, modern drugs and local herbs.

I first became aware of her trouble when, visiting the family one evening, I heard Maya emit an ear-piercing shrill from the upper floors of her house. I accompanied the other family members in their dash up the knotted pole that connects the ground floor to the upper rooms. There we found Maya sitting up in a trance-like state, shaking and moaning.

At first we all simply stared at Maya. Then the eldest son of this household, Hari, addressed the demon inside her. Interestingly (and somewhat startling to me at the time), he addressed the demon with the low/familiar pronoun timi, a form he would have never used in talking to Maya herself (to her he must use the respectful tapai or the honorific hajur).

Hari asked the demon to identify itself. Through Maya, the demon responded in a rhythmic chant-like

voice. It gave some sort of demon identification, the name of which I did not catch and which my informants could not later recall.

Hari asked the demon why it was troubling Maya and the demon answered that it was hungry and wanted food. Then a long bargaining took place between several family members and the demon over what should be offered, how much, how soon, and whether or not a jhankri would be needed to perform the ceremony. This type of negotiation with a demon, which I observed again in different contexts in Dhungagaun, is similar to the preliminaries for the exorcism of the churel (ghost of a woman who had died in childbirth) that Fuchs (1950:287) describes for the untouchable Balahis of India, and to communication between shaman and possessing ghost which Freed and Freed (1967:301) record from a village near Delhi.

In the end, Maya's family reached an agreement with the demon: they would summon a jhankri to feed the demon, including in the offerings one black goat for sacrifice (the demon insisted it be a black goat). It was agreed that this would take place after 15 days. The demon claimed that only then would it depart from Maya and cease to prey upon her. But Hari had demanded that for the 15-day wait, Maya be well and stop coughing. The spirit agreed.

With this, Maya stopped trembling and speaking in the voice of the demon but remained in a kind of trance. Hari grabbed her shoulders and shook her, calling out "thuli ama" (elder mother). Finally she relaxed and returned to normal. She told me she was unaware of anything that had happened during the possession.



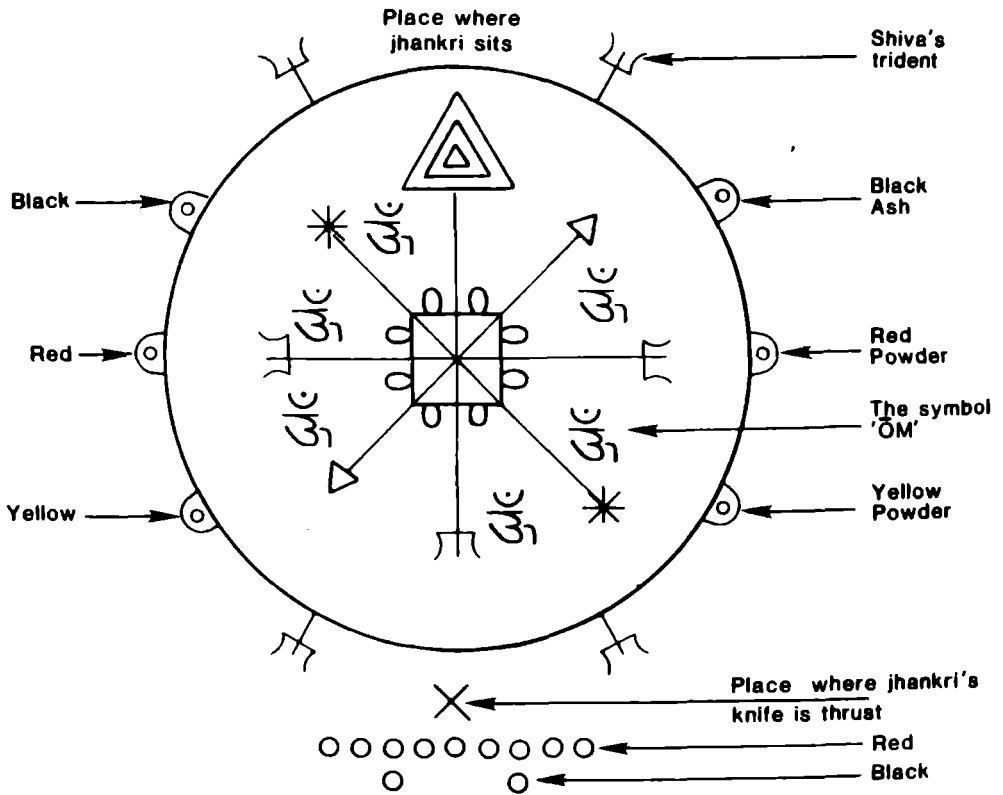
While preparations for the demon exorcism were being made, Maya remained weak and her coughing continued. However, a few other therapeutic measures were taken in the interim. One was heavy doses of cough syrup that the family asked me to provide. Another was a ritual promise to the demon that the family was serious about their agreement for a later feeding. This action is often taken if the arrangements for a feeding ceremony cannot be made immediately, on the assumption that the spirit involved will at least decrease its harm in the face of this promise of imminent food. A promise to a spirit (in this case carried out by Maya's husband) is made by placing consecrated rice (acheta) in a piece of cloth and placing it between the beams of the ceiling inside one's house. While placing the rice, one verbally informs the spirit that this act shall serve as a guarantee for a later feeding.

Maya's husband arranged for a jhankri to come. This jhankri was a Tamang from a nearby village. Between Maya's husband and the jhankri, another bargaining took place. When could the healer perform the ceremony? What, besides a black goat, did the family need to provide? And could the jhankri offer a guarantee of a cure?

Evidently the ritual promise to the spirit was not enough, for only 6 days after the demon made its presence known, Maya suffered another possession. She was again upstairs inside the house. Hari and a visiting cousin rushed to attend her. The cousin screamed in anger at the demon, "Didn't you promise if we did this you would leave? What do we have to do now?" The demon merely complained that it was hungry and wanted to be fed soon.

This same day Maya's husband went off to summon the jhankri and a curing ceremony took place six days later, a total of 12 days after the initial attack. Meanwhile, a black goat had been secured. This was provided not by Maya's household, but by her (affectively linked) mother's brother.

The ceremony took place at night on the house porch. All of Maya's family members were present, many of them moving about to prepare whatever the jhankri requested. A few neighbors had gathered to watch. The jhankri had also brought along his own pupil who assisted him. In the ceremony, the jhankri began by drawing a design out of rice flour on the front porch of the house. He then added color to the white design



by placing dabs of colored rice at various points and a row of nine dabs in front. The colors were red, yellow and black, the same colors used in the food plate for a ghost. This design (above) became the base for a larger structure which the jhankri used for the invocation of spirits.

When the porch diagram was completed, the jhankri took some raw rice in his hand and made a noise by sucking in air. He threw some rice on the diagram. Next a flat straw-woven plate (used for winnowing) was put over the diagram. The jhankri bowed down to the plate and then put small piles of rice inside it (nine piles in a circle on the outer rim, seven in an inner circle, and one pile in the center). Leaves from the tartelo flower (a dry papery plant) were stuck in the piles of rice. The jhankri next took a knife and decorated it with red streaks. Holding the knife in front of his face, he again made a humming sound and then "blew" mantras into the knife and thrust it forcibly into the ground, on the diagram before him, at a point directly above the nine red dabs of rice.

The jhankri continued to place on the first diagram implements and substances brought from inside the house--incense, a brass cup full of raw rice, a brass water pot filled with water and streaked with red color, pots of mustard oil and wicks and, inside the pot, a weed called titepati (which people said gave off "a bad smell") that attracts evil spirits. Finally, the jhankri placed his own implements on the assemblage--a wooden dagger with three carved faces on its handle and three porcupine quills.

The jhankri later explained that his own implements--the two knives, the quills and the wooden dagger--had a common function: "Should a witch come

around during the ceremony, I can send these things to harm her." The other items--food, money, papery flowers--were used to attract the helping spirits he would call (the raw grain and money also serving as reimbursement to the jhankri). As for the underlying rice-flour diagram, this was to direct the spirits to their proper "sitting place " On this diagram there was also symbolic recognition of higher Hindu deities, as in the trisol (trident) of the god Shiva and the symbol "om", the sacred syllable of the Hindu Vedas.

When this assemblage was complete, the jhankri removed his hat and began to chant. While chanting, he tossed some rice on to the assemblage, into the courtyard and into the air. He also put rice on each of his shoulders, on the top of his head and inside his belt. He paused, gave namaste (greeting gesture) to the audience and asked someone to light the wicks in the cup of oil.

Then he took a stick and a tin plate, began to beat and soon started to chant. Occasionally he uttered a cry, a kind of deep "burble," within the chant. All of this went on for some time and was occasionally interrupted by "breaks" where the jhankri would stop altogether for a few minutes, then throw some rice on the assemblage and start beating again. At some points he beat hard and fast and started to flap his knees up and down and tremble all over. Finally he put the tin plate over his face, rocked back and gave out an ear-piercing whistle, after which he resumed beating but did not resume chanting. He was now in full trance, and as he later explained, the whistle was the final call to a particular spirit. Gradually he began chanting again.

The jhankri continued in this manner for over two hours, with occasional breaks. He called a variety of spirits (when I asked him the next morning how many he called, he gave some staggering number in the hundreds). The spirits did not speak about Maya and her problem, and on this occasion the jhankri did not take petitions from the gathered people to give answers to particular questions as is sometimes done. Rather, the spirits spoke of the other world in which they lived or acted out various characterizations for which they were known. For example, one spirit that arrived a number of times was Kickada, the spirit of a murdered female baby who intermittently laughs and cries. Kichkada's mother, I was told, did not want the baby girl. So one day she built a fire under the baby's crib and went off to cut grass for the livestock, leaving the baby to die and pretending it had been an accident.

The audience responded to the spirit invocations with amusement, and an extremely light, joking atmosphere was maintained throughout. The assembled people laughed at the jhankri's summoning whistles and at the words and cries of the various spirits. Many "jokes" were also made. For example, at one point two neighbors who came to watch said they were tired and wanted to go home. The jhankri abruptly interrupted his chants and told them they must not leave since the spirits were coming along the trail this very moment and it would be dangerous to go out. At this, Maya's husband got up and announced to all that he was going to urinate, saying, "and I hope I don't run into any of the spirits while I'm urinating," upon which everyone broke into laughter.

Eventually a mat was set out in front of the jhankri and Maya was instructed to sit there, facing him. The jhankri announced that Maya and the mat on which she sat were now "untouchable," and sometime later a child was scolded by its mother for brushing against the mat. Then the jhankri told Maya to remove and throw away the amulet (jantra) she was wearing (this had been made by another jhankri for a previous illness). The jhankri began to beat, tremble and chant again. Then, quite suddenly, Maya began to tremble too. The bangles on her arm shook and jingled. For a while the jhankri and Maya trembled together as the jhankri beat. Then Maya gave out an unusual cry, a kind of high-pitched, long-lasting, deep gurgle, something like "whoooooople." She gave this cry a few times as she shook. The jhankri stopped chanting and shaking but Maya continued to shake. The jhankri addressed the demon which he later said was kalo [black] bir) in Maya, promising it food and telling it to stop troubling Maya. Then suddenly Maya stopped trembling. Everything was quiet. The jhankri laughed and announced to the audience that the demon had left because somewhere some other "strong person," whether it was a witch or a jhankri he did not know, had called the demon at that moment, "what to do?" The audience laughed. The jhankri had a cigarette and then started over again to induce the demon into Maya. The jhankri and the demon began their negotiations again. When the matter was settled (we feed, you leave), the jhankri said, "Good. I will feed you an oil wick right now and then you will leave this woman, won't you?" The demon said it would. The jhankri got up with a lit oil wick in his hand and went over to Maya. Maya opened her mouth wide and the jhankri dropped the lit oil wick

inside. Maya swallowed and then instantly returned to a relaxed state. At this point the whole group relaxed. People talked, the jhankri lit a cigarette and the neighbors were finally allowed to go home.

Later the jhankri began to beat and summon spirits again, much as before, and this went on for a few hours before the sacrifice. First, while the jhankri was beating, he instructed a man (a Gurung laborer hired by Maya's family) to bring the baby chicken the family had purchased that day, snap off the head, throw it onto the specified point on the assemblage in front of him, and to throw the body onto the second diagram in the courtyard. This done, the jhankri began to beat and tremble again until some time later preparations were made for the goat sacrifice. This was done at a "shrine" (made by piling up stones and sprinkling raw rice over them) on a piece of ground away from the house. Water was tossed on the goat's back and when it "shook" the man who had killed the chicken cut the goat's throat. The blood was directed over the stone to feed the demon. This healer, like jhankris generally in Nepal, said that when (and only when) an animal shakes like this, it indicates that it is "ready for sacrifice" or that it is appropriate to sacrifice it. Interestingly, however, Maya's husband later remarked to me that when a goat shook, this meant that Maya's illness had gone out of her and into the goat's body, an illness transfer reminiscent of the transfer of the kargo (crisis) from the patient into the pigeon in the earlier case of ghost attack.

The next day, Maya's family was tired but elated. Maya appeared altogether well and had stopped coughing. She also claimed that she had had a pain in her arm before, and now that was gone too. Other family

members spoke of how "bright" her face had become. That morning the jhankri and his pupil took half of the goat meat home with them and Maya's family served the other half for dinner that evening.

In the village, attacks by demons are regarded as more serious than those by ghosts, but demon attacks appear to be more rare. Of the sample households, only 27 percent reported that a household member had ever been attacked by a demon. Of these, 79 percent of the households claimed that an attack had occurred within the last year. About half of the households reporting demon attack claimed that in the last case of attack, the demon possessed the victim. For the last case of attack, most households (90 percent) summoned a jhankri, but slightly less (89 percent) called a spirit-invoking jhankri who invoked the demon. In all cases, the attacking demon was fed something; in about half of the cases, the demon was given a blood sacrifice. In three of these most recent demon cases, the victim died and in another two cases, a demon was said to have killed livestock. By contrast, I only heard of a very few cases where a person was believed to have died as a result of ghost attack.

In the rituals discussed so far, the emphasis on food, feeding, and the hunger of the spirits is prominent. In the simple ritual preparation and offering of a food plate, it is merely presumed that the ghost or evil spirit is hungry and if left unfed will "eat" its victim. But with the possessing demon, who sometimes speaks through its victim, there is more direct evidence of the spirit's desperate hunger and of the threatening power of an unfed force. Even before being offered the blood it demanded, Maya's demon was titillated with a ritual promise for feeding and with



lit oil wicks. The demon also actively bargained for food with the victim's family, a negotiation process that was repeated between the victim's family and the hired jhankri over cost, means of payment and quality of services.

### The Making of a Bayu

As discussed, a person who dies inauspiciously or a person for whom death ceremonies are not performed (or improperly performed) may become a "ghost." The ghost, like all other evil spirits, or lagu, may harm any human being. However, it may restrict its harm to its own living agnatic kin in order to become a bayu of those kin. This kin group, the lineage, consists of agnatic kinsmen who worship lineage deities in common. If these lineage members then worship (i.e., ritually feed) their harm-giving ancestral ghost, the ghost is transformed into a bayu and passes out of the lagu category. Once a ghost is transformed into a bayu (and, by implication, receives regular worship), it ceases its harm.

A ghost, it is said, can only become a bayu of its own lineage and not of any other (cf. Höfer and Shrestha 1973:53). Thus to become a bayu, a male ghost will trouble the surviving members of its own lineage; a female ghost will trouble the lineage of her father (if she was not married at the time of death), or the lineage of her husband (if she married before dying). Although this is the explicit rule, it is sometimes violated (see below).

Nearly every lineage in Dhungagaun has one or more bayus. However, not all lineage members who die inauspiciously are necessarily made into bayus, since first the spirit must bring harm to its kin and make its presence known to a jhankri.

A ghost will trouble its lineage members for the same reason that any evil spirit strikes humans: it is hungry and wishes to be fed. Because of its inauspicious death or a failure in the performance of its death ceremonies, the ancestral ghost is in marked contrast to the pitr, an ancestor who died properly and who is regularly fed by its descendents in the ceremonies (sraddha) held to honor the dead.<sup>2</sup> Like any other evil spirit, the ghost must wander in hunger and bring harm to the living in order to procure food. But a ghost that has living agnatic kinsmen can, through its harm, capitalize on a rather exceptional opportunity: if successful, it can escape the miserable world of starving evil spirits, lagu, and be fed on a regular basis, much like the pitr.

A ghost that wishes to become a bayu will, it is said, generally confine its affliction to the infants and livestock among its living lineage members; but it may also harm an adult. Only a jhankri is able to determine whether an illness is due to an ancestral ghost wishing to become a bayu. If the family accepts this diagnosis, they must summon a jhankri for the ritual transformation of their ghost. When the male lineage members have gathered together, the jhankri calls forth their ancestral ghost and asks it to enter whichever lineage member it seeks as its most promising vehicle for future invocations and worship. One lineage member then becomes possessed. The ancestral ghost speaks through the possessed man to make its wishes known. A fire will have been built and if this possessed lineage member enters the fire without being burned, the act stands as proof that the ancestral ghost (and not some other interfering spirit) has possessed him.

Unfortunately, I was unable to directly observe a bayu-creation ceremony in Dhungagaun. However, Höfer and Shrestha (1973) offer a vivid account of bayu rituals based on their fieldwork in the nearby Trisuli Bazar area, and their descriptions conform to those of my informants. Höfer and Shrestha write that

Formally at least, the whole procedure resembles that of the witch-trials in post-medieval Europe. As a witch cannot be tried without her own confession (with some exceptions), in the same way a bayu will not be evidenced without giving its kahiran (evidence) (1973:63).

Following this original invocation (and, hence, creation) of the bayu, the chosen lineage member must hire the jhankri to teach him the secret mantras needed to invoke the bayu on his own. This person then becomes the bayu-invoker for the regular worship of the bayu by its lineage; and he must later transmit this knowledge to his own agnatic descendents before his death. During his associations with the hired jhankri, the chosen invoker may develop an interest in learning other mantras and some curing techniques. By this process, a bayu-invoker may become a healer himself.

Though there is variation in the customs of particular lineages, bayus are generally worshipped yearly. The most common time is the full moon of the month of baisak (April-May). The full moon is a "time to remember the gods," as opposed to lesser spirits, malignant spirits and ordinary ancestors. There are two parts to regular, or annual, bayu worship: ritual feeding (daytime) and invocation (night). Feeding takes place in the morning and usually inside the house. A special structure is made (a stone stuck in

cow dung and surrounded by simali [Vitex negundo?] stems); then a male lineage representative makes offerings to the structure. Banana, yoghurt and milk, along with lighted wicks, consecrated rice and incense are commonly offered. If the bayu was, in life, a high caste male, the structure is decorated with a white cloth, a sacred thread (janai) and supari nut; if female, a bangle, a red plastic forehead mark (tika), red cloth and hair ribbon. When worship is over, and for the rest of the year, these added items are kept in a basket and hung from the ceiling inside the house.

Women are not allowed to see or participate in the daytime bayu feeding; and they must not even touch the basket containing the symbols of the bayu. Thus I was only able to elicit descriptions of the feeding ritual from male informants and did not myself observe the ceremony. However, women may (and do) attend the bayu invocation ceremony, which generally occurs on the night of the bayu feeding day.

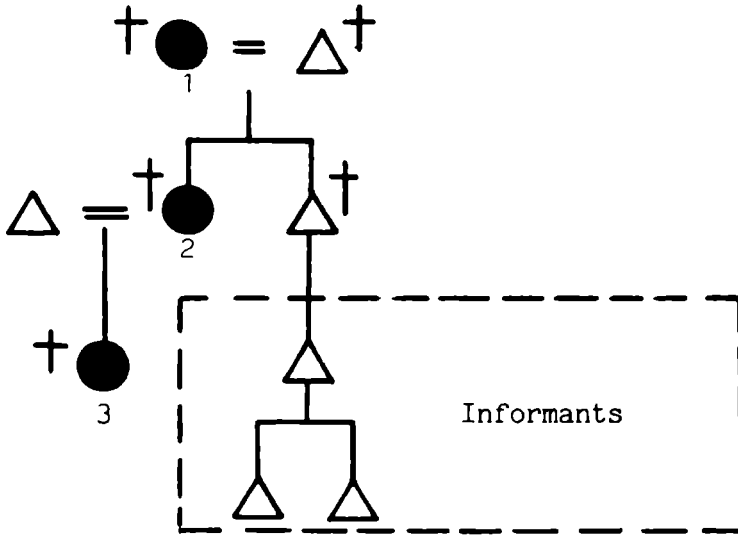
I observed bayu invocation on two occasions. In this ceremony, lineage members, friends and neighbors gather at the house of the invoker. The invoker calls forth the bayu with mantras and "music" from a tin plate beaten with a stick, a process resembling a jhankri's invocation of helping spirits.

These night-long bayu ceremonies are festive occasions. The invoker entertains his audience with antics such as leaping, crawling and going into a fire ("to prove it really is a bayu"), reminiscent of the original "fire ordeal." Those in attendance laugh and gossip throughout the performance. At this time, members of the audience also address the bayu with questions pertaining to their future; the bayu, in somewhat garbled language and rhythmic voice, provides answers.

The bayu, as noted, troubles its own lineage. A lineage is responsible for its own male members and their wives in life (significantly, it must provide food for them in real life and perform their funeral rites). Bayu worship continues this patrilineal responsibility in death (cf. Höfer and Shrestha 1973:64). A ghost has died inauspiciously and so suffers in the afterlife. But responsibility for its hapless fate rests with the lineage. Living lineage members will suffer too until they compensate for the inauspicious death of their ancestor by transforming the ancestral ghost into a regularly worshipped bayu.

Furthermore, although men or women may, following an inauspicious death, become bayus, women have a far greater propensity to do so. Significantly, women are attached to lineage units by marriage and so "belong to a lineage," but are not ritually of them in the same way as are men (notably, women are excluded from many parts of the lineage's worship of its own gods and, as noted here, from the crucial portions of bayu worship). In this way, the propensity for harm-giving, illness-causing bayus to be female continues in death the pattern of agnatic self-protection noted earlier in discussion of witchcraft and social conflict. Female bayus themselves express the sentiments and tensions of the living: as with their human counterparts, female bayus that married before death wish to return to mother's side (to be fed by their matri-kin). But this desire is frustrated by the "rule" that to become a bayu, the female ghost can only trouble and be fed by her husband's lineage. Exceptions are sometimes made, and they are revealing of how the beliefs and practices surrounding the world of the dead mirror the concerns of the living. For example, in one interesting case

informants told the following story of bayu creation in their lineage:



Here the women (1), (2) and (3) all became bayu of this lineage at the same time. (1) died by falling in a river, thus becoming a ghost. The family was troubled with illness, and a jhankri diagnosed that (1) was seeking to become a bayu. But during the ceremony for her transformation, her dead married daughter (2) "just came along" (possessed a lineage member and spoke). The jhankri recognized the identity of (2) and shouted: "Go away! Go and trouble the house of your own husband and become a bayu there!" As (2) had married out, she properly belonged to another lineage. But (2) protested, saying she wanted to stay in the house of her own mother. Eventually the jhankri and the lineage members gave in and granted bayu status to its own "father's sister." Meanwhile, (2) had been pregnant at the time of her death and her unborn child died with her. The baby automatically became a ghost, and then a bayu, along with its mother.

The creation of a bayu not only cures the ill and prevents further trouble to a lineage. The bayu can also be invoked at any time by a lineage for advice on their subsequent cases of illness as was done in Vishnu's case. The bayu is said to "know things" and is able to specify how a person became ill and what he or she must do to recover.

Bayu creation is an ongoing feature of village life. It plays a continual role in diagnosis and curing of illness and in establishing the social contacts and inspirational setting for those inclined to themselves become healers. One might suspect, then, that each lineage, over time, would accumulate an unwieldy number of bayus that it must invoke and feed. Over generations, however, bayus may be lost as well as found. A member of one lineage in Dhungagaun (that had no bayu at the time of my fieldwork) explained how this might occur:

We used to have a bayu and we worshipped it faithfully. But then one time we tried to invoke it and it simply didn't come. So we have not tried to call it again and by now we have forgotten the mantras.

The relationships drawn earlier between hierarchy, interdependence and scarcity in Dhungagaun society and the way that these relationships are reflected in the world of the spirits is clearly seen in the beliefs and practices surrounding the bayu. It is important to note that the creation of a bayu raises the ghost's status. The bayu literally moves up the spiritual hierarchy. It is no longer a hungry, illness-inflicting ghost; it is a spiritual entity that assumes membership in the category shared by lineage gods and other lineage ancestors who died properly. The bayu is

no ordinary wandering ghost, but a ghost who has come home to eat. Thus the bayu represents a regular and institutionalized means whereby a spirit of the lower realm is moved upward. And the elevation of the bayu's rank parallels the movement from illness to health, from harm to help, for the kinsmen involved.

The bayu's raised status is marked by its transition from "hungry" or "irregularly fed" to "regularly fed." With this the bayu is admitted to a fixed status that entails an exchange with the living: regular food for cessation of illness, regular food for fortune-telling powers.

The bayu and its lineage are also highly interdependent. The bayu depends on its lineage for food, but the lineage, in turn, has little choice but to reestablish its obligation to sustain a deceased and hungry member.

The bayu, like the ghosts, reflects a village recognition that on account of perpetual scarcity of all goods, anyone potentially can be left out. But in the bayu we can also see the importance of being linked or connected, of having some position within a larger whole. In this respect, the bayu is in a much better position than other malignant spirits because of its kinship connections. Thus one who is ultimately unconnected--one who has no kinsmen or surrogate to perform the death rituals--will, villagers say, without question become a ghost. And such a spirit could never become a bayu, having no kinsmen to harm and thus make a claim for regular feeding. In the end, what the bayu manages to do (or what villagers manage to do with the bayu) parallels a fundamental social process: the establishment of ranks and statuses, the regulation of the ensuing relationships, and the manipulation of them.



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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The table shows "high Hindu gods" as a single category, but villagers do make many distinctions here, for example between male and female, vegetarian and meat-eating gods and between Bhagwan (the universal all-encompassing divinity) and the gods such as Shiva and Vishnu. Divine forms of the Hindu Goddess (Devi) may bring illness and be offered a sacrifice; but their motive is anger and not hunger.

<sup>2</sup>A household is religiously required to worship and feed direct agnatic descendents and their wives to three ascending generations, no matter how these individuals died. If one of these died inauspiciously and later became a bayu, it is still fed in the sraddha for the pitr. Yet informants were unanimous that pitr and bayu are distinct and that a bayu cannot also be a pitr. Some seemed uncomfortable with my questions about a particular deceased person that was being fed both as a bayu and as a pitr, of which there are, in fact, a number of cases. One informant said: "The spirit may be offered food in sraddha, but if it becomes a bayu, then the food does not reach it."



# CHAPTER 6:

## TO BE FED UPON

In Dhungagaun, food giving is a complex act, but this only reflects the complexity of social relations. In every case where food emerges, the elements of status, intimacy, ritual pollution, sentiment and social purpose must be taken into account. Throughout these processes, we find that while the food rules distinguish statuses, food transference in every case links people and serves as a meaningful statement of that linkage. The principles of caste and kinship organize society and they do so in a way that highlights and, indeed, assures human interdependency. It is the way that society is organized and the emphasis on interdependency that food transfers perpetually express in Dhungagaun. But previous chapters have also discussed a local conception that human beings are interdependent for scarce goods, and the suggestion was made that this conception influences villagers' approach to interpersonal relationships. Interdependency amid scarcity introduces an element of danger into the system. A cultural apprehension of this danger is itself reflected in the use of food; and it is at this point, I have suggested, that illness assumes a significant place within a broader cultural theme.

Food is an offering intended to pacify spirits that cause illness, and food giving is the technique villagers use to "please" and influence one another. An ill person seeks to make a spirit "happy" (by giving food) in the same way that one seeks to manipulate and influence one's fellows. There is, as well, another parallel in the associations which food carries in these contexts. I have discussed human interdependency in Dhungagaun by referring to a convergence of hierarchy with rules of access to valued goods, and I have shown that the cultural concept of interdependency is expressed through a food idiom. With respect to illness, the very existence of many of the harmful supernatural forces rests on the idea of an interdependency among humans that persists after death. The spirits--such as the bhut, picas and masan--are in death manipulating the living. For their own survival (i.e., for food), they are making claims on their victims. Yet to view the spirits as an extension of human interdependency does not specify how it is that villagers also grant these spirits power to inflict harm. I suggest that the spirits are not merely an extension of the living, an extension of interdependency, but also a cultural expression of the "imperfection" in human exchanges or in the village game of ordered give and take.

In various ways I have discussed the villagers' notion that human needs and wants are filled through the operation of fixed and hierarchical relationships between people. This particular structure and ideology of human exchanges encourages an ordered distribution of valued goods. In every interpersonal context one assumes a place, a rank. By virtue of such placement, a set of possible rights and obligations--the

potentials of giving and taking--is defined. One operates within these potentials and may manipulate the rules to one's advantage. At the same time, distribution is not everywhere a harmonious process, either in fact or in conception. Put simply, and echoing a comment of one informant quoted earlier, too many people want the same things at the same time. On account of the notion of pervasive scarcity, the same rules which order harmonious exchanges also entail a potential for disharmony. I suggest there is a conflict between the cultural concepts of ordered interdependency on the one hand and scarcity on the other. Villagers appear to recognize and to fear that even an ordered system of give and take cannot provide sufficiency to everyone. Someone, some force, will always be in need. There will always be unfilled demands or claims. However well one succeeds in the earthly game of give and take, one cannot, by the principle of interdependency itself, entirely separate one's self from the fact that there are losers. At all times those in need may make demands upon one; at any point they may acquire the power or influence to force their claims.

Demands made on one by those in need are a problem of everyday life. But the problem finds expression in beliefs about spirit-caused illness. The harm-giving spirits, wandering in hunger and dependent on the human community, represent the ultimate failure. They are a realization of the potential for disharmony inherent in human exchanges. These spirits are the ultimate losers, as marked in the first place by their inauspicious manner of death or by the fact that they died without dependents on whom in death they could depend. Yet by virtue of having died improperly or

without surviving kin, they acquire power (the ability to cause illness) by which to press their claims.

This conception of illness is seen in the villagers' use of the bayu. The bayu, we will recall, begins as an ancestral "ghost"--one's own ancestor who has died in an improper way. It is opposed to the pitr, an ancestor who died properly and for whom all the appropriate death rituals have been performed. Both the ancestral "ghost" and the pitr represent the persistence of human interdependency after death. Specifically, both are a continuation of kinship obligations, or agnatic responsibilities. Both claim, as it were, a continued right of maintenance from the lineage. The pitr also depend on their descendents for their food. But the feeding of the pitr is a matter of dharma (religious duty). Even if unfed, the pitr are less dangerous. One's ancestral "ghost," on the other hand, can inflict harm--illness and death. Their feeding is a matter of practicality. In the creation of a bayu, this power to harm is transformed into the power to help by a ritual feeding which raises (and fixes) the spirits position in the supernatural hierarchy. The bayu passes over the divide between the lowly evil spirits and the higher spiritual forces.

Ritual attention to the ancestral ghost and other evil spirits does not follow as a necessity from individual breaches of the moral order. Such breaches are more generally held to result in demerit (one suffers in the next life) or, at most, in a propensity to illness. The ancestral "ghost" is not angry with its descendents; it is merely hungry. It seeks admittance into a fixed status which entails agreement on give and take: regular food for cessation of harm and for fortune-telling powers. The bayu is "made

happy" and thus safe by its assignment of a new rank and the agreement to allow it regular participation in a give and take with the living members of its lineage. The bayu reflects the cultural place of illness as an outgrowth of disharmony inherent in human interdependency; and, in microcosm, the creation of the bayu is the village story of man's relation to man: human welfare depends on a ranking, a fixing, a regulating and then a manipulating of social relationships.

The "food and eating" imagery in the realm of illness is consistent with the symbolic role of food in other areas of village life. It is little wonder that "fatness" is praised and considered as the epitome of good health. To be fat is to be regularly fed, to be a fully recognized and continual participant in ordered human society. Thinness is associated with detachment and severance from others. Further, villagers say that the evil spirits are fearsome and harm-giving, but what they stress most of all is that the spirits are hungry. They are unfed. As in life, in death the unfed hover on the fringes of organized society and are dangerous.

Villagers also allude to the idea that in desperation for food, spirits desire to eat their human victims. And we have seen that in local terms used for some illnesses and for a few insulting expressions, there is likewise an association between being ill and "being fed upon." The unfed threaten to prey upon the community that has failed them. They seek temporary or permanent readmittance into the harmonious realm of "to feed and be fed." In such an ideology, organized human society is rather clearly the source of sustenance, the "food" of its members. Where it fails to feed, it may itself be fed upon.

The notions of being "fed," "unfed," and "fed upon" in Dhungagaun society serve as a kind of rhetoric through which villagers' physical, social and spiritual relationships are articulated. These relationships are summarized in the table below. The "regularly fed" marks a positive category of things made safe and helpful. On the spiritual plane are the higher deities (pleased at being fed by humans and therefore inclined to grant favors), the disarmed bayu, and the sustained lineage gods and other ancestors. On the social plane, to "be fed" suggests integrated membership in the human community. Whether this is to "be fed" as a low caste laborer, a high status son-in-law or a potential patron. In turn, "to feed" can be an equally positive process of expressing superiority, fulfilling a duty, or seeking a favor. The "unfed" (or "irregularly fed"), by contrast, marks an unsafe category: in life and in death the unfed are left outside the proper order of society, are in need, and so become a source of danger. Finally, the "fed upon" are in a physical state of illness, a state that, culturally speaking, represents the negative outcome of a social order based on hierarchy and interdependence amid scarcity.



Table 3. Relations Between Humans and Spirits According to Feeding Link.

	The Fed	The Unfed	The Fed Upon
	high gods, lineage gods, ancestors, <u>bayu</u>	ghosts, dissatisfied ancestors, etc.	humans
Relations of spirits to humans	safe	harmful	harmed
Social state of humans	proper place in the human community (receiver of affection)	precarious place in the human community	the receiver of socio- economic demands or claims
Physical state of humans	plump, healthy ( <u>moto</u> )	thin, vulnerable to illness ( <u>dublo</u> )	ill

### Vishnu's Madness

I will now return briefly to the case of Vishnu's madness with which this whole excursion into Dhungagaun social relationship and the world of malignant spirits began. We will recall that the major conflict concerned the family of Ram, who is a kind of "grandfather" to Vishnu and head of this household, and the families of Ram's brothers. The conflict was focused on land inheritance: Ram, a sonless man, wished to pass his land to Vishnu and his brothers, as though they were his real sons; but Ram's brothers claimed the land for themselves. Most of this land quarrel was carried on between Ram and one of his

brothers, Raju. It was Raju's wife, Sita, who was eventually accused of making Vishnu ill through witchcraft, out of anger over the land problem and jealousy over any prosperity that befell Ram's household. Later when Sita died, it was believed that she passed on her evil knowledge to her husband Raju. Over the long course of attempted therapies for Vishnu, many spirits were ritually pacified or invoked, including a variety of ghosts, demons, and the family bayu, but the majority of rituals were somehow connected with nullifying the powers of the accused witch Sita, and later her husband, who were believed to control and send out evil spirits.

As mentioned, in order for me to comprehend Vishnu's family's interpretations of his illness, I had to shift my focus away from Vishnu the "individual" to Vishnu in connection with a much larger social whole. My eventual interpretation of the family's perspective was that Vishnu was a somewhat appropriate victim of the (inevitable) failings of many interconnected people to maintain obligations, reciprocal exchange and satisfactory divisions of scarce "goods." This interpretation developed as I began to look at Vishnu's drama in terms of "food"--who, or what, is hungry, and who, or what, is being fed.

The first force fed in this illness drama was a ghost, and sometime later another ghost was also fed. Here the connection between Vishnu and problems among people, expressed as an "unfed force" preying on a potential feeder, is the most remote, since the identity of the attacking ghost was unknown and in fact there was no interest in the question of who the ghosts might have been.

The other spiritual forces related to Vishnu's illness had a closer connection. Among the many involved at one time or another, two were attached to the third ascending generation, to the time of Vishnu's father's father. One of these spirits, the family's bayu, was transformed/helpful. This bayu, a married-in female who had died inauspiciously, had once brought illness to the lineage even before Vishnu's father was born. When the lineage accepted the duty to regularly feed their hungry ancestor, the bayu was pacified and it was to this spirit that the family later turned in desperation to help Vishnu. Thus the act of agreeing to feed an ancestral ghost in one generation created an avenue of spiritual recourse for an illness in another generation.

The other spirit attached to this earlier generation was the bir (demon) that had been under the command of Ram's own mother. This spirit was at one point directly blamed for Vishnu's trouble and a feeding ceremony (goat sacrifice) was conducted, although not all family members agreed that this spirit was the one being fed at the time. In any event, this spirit, like the bayu, was asking to be regularly fed, since Ram's mother was dead and could no longer provide food. Like the bayu, the demon was operating on the idea that descendants recognize their duty to maintain the obligations established by their ancestors, much as a servant may demand maintenance from his master's son following the master's death.

Ram's mother, in contrast to the married-in female of the next generation (see below), never directly harmed this family and was not doing so now. She had merely used the demon to harm others and now that she was dead, the demon was going hungry and making a

claim. In this context, Vishnu was the victim of manipulations that had gone on before his birth, a victim of the hunger that Ram's mother had left in the world of the spirits.

But when we move down one generation, and at the same time directly move into the world of the living, the nature of the connection between Vishnu's illness and "interpersonal relations" shifts dramatically. Vishnu is again being attacked by a demon, but this time it is a demon directly sent by a living witch, Sita (Vishnu's father's father's brother's son's wife). And in this case there is a clear conflict between Vishnu's household and the household of the witch. The conflict, as discussed, centers on land (potential food). Here it is not just the demon but the living who are "hungry" and competing for land. But although Vishnu's family members were explicit about the land conflict and referred to it as the source of the strained relations between the families, they did not directly refer to land in the context of Vishnu's illness. Instead they referred to education. The witch, they maintained, attacked Vishnu because she was jealous that his family's sons were being educated. And yet a connection with the land is clear: the conflict between these groups escalated many years ago when Ram had sold land (that the husband of the witch might have otherwise inherited) in order to educate Devendra.

When people discussed Vishnu's illness in terms of these broader land/education conflicts, Vishnu appeared as a mere cog in a greater social machine of envy and competition. I became curious as to "why Vishnu?" Why not the younger brother Krishna, or even more appropriate, the older brother Devendra, who was even

more educated than Vishnu; and, after all, it was for his education that land had earlier been lost. When I raised this question with family members, their answers were in ready agreement: the witch probably got to Vishnu because he was already weaker. The astrologers had confirmed that there was something wrong with Vishnu's planets--hence the necessity for all of those expensive worship ceremonies (puja). Devendra himself pointed out that he was "fat" (moto) and so had always been too strong for witches. Vishnu, then, was the witch's easiest victim, and certainly a more likely choice than Vishnu's consistently healthy and socially adroit elder brother.

After the witchcraft diagnosis solidified, the attacking demon was ceremonially fed (another goat). The demon in this case was not asking for regular feeding but simply for a meal. It is significant that for many years the cure for Vishnu did not involve any confrontation with the witch herself or any attempt to resolve the land quarrel (though later Raju was confronted and there was an attempt to settle the land controversy). In a sense, and from the point of view of Vishnu's family, communication between the two groups was through the demon. The witch fed the demon to induce it to attack the family who then fed the demon to send it off. In fact, very little communication ever takes place between these two families and only a close circle of friends are aware that Vishnu's family regarded Sita, and now regards Raju, as their witch. It is also quite possible (although understandably difficult for me to confirm) that Raju's family considers Ram's wife as their witch and that from time to time they feed demons presumed to be sent by her.

From the point of view of the family, Vishnu suffered because there are "hungry forces out there" and he was vulnerable to them. His state of vulnerability was never clearly explained, although there were references to astrological problems. His lack of social adroitness, and social and academic problems in school were known, and after his illness these issues were sometimes referred to as signs of his weakness. But the hungry forces that fed upon him were directly or indirectly related to failings in other kinds of human exchanges in which Vishnu himself played no direct role. In one movement of the drama, the entire family was in an inauspicious position (mainly due to the location of their house which left them vulnerable to any and all evil spirits); and in this context, Vishnu was but one of many who suffered as a result. During the witchcraft speculations, too, it was the family group (and not Vishnu personally) that was the object of the witch's evil intentions.

In short, Vishnu suffered because he was a member of a human group and, as with all human groups or human society in general, there are occasional failings in the relationships between the parts, specifically in the distribution of scarce commodities among them. Not everyone can be "well fed" all of the time, and in this world and in the other world those left out will come back to press claims. The idea of another's "hunger" being one's own danger is quite strong. In Vishnu's case, the same idea was used to explain why jhankris (feeling underpaid) did not cure Vishnu.

Only very late in Vishnu's illness, with a solid witchcraft focus, do we encounter direct interpersonal conflict among the living. But in the perspective of the longer and more complicated drama of Vishnu's case,

this diagnosis emerges as but a "closer to home" extension of a broader theme: that human beings are interconnected and interdependent; that there are inevitable losers in the system of human exchanges or distributions; and that one way or another the losers (transformed into powerful forces by crossing the boundary between the living and the nonliving) will return to be fed, or to feed upon others.

### **Individualism and Holism**

Throughout Vishnu's drama, what I had been earlier trying to interpret as an individual failure to cope, family members were seeing as an affirmation of a failure in the social system, a failure for which their own cultural ideas about evil spirits, witchcraft and illness come to terms. As Vishnu's family members struggled to understand his illness, the theme underlying their thinking was holism. In my view, the reactions of Vishnu's family to his illness, and indeed the cultural place of illness among Dhungagaun Brahmans, is predicated upon holism.

This contrast between individualism and holism can be highlighted through a comparison between the cultural view of illness in Dhungagaun, as I have analyzed it here, and the cultural place of illness in American society where individualism and values on what Hsu (1983:4) calls "militant self-reliance" are strong.

For this, Talcott Parsons provides an illuminating discussion of illness in America; and although he is largely concerned with mental illness, his suggestions apply to illness in general. Yet even confining the points to mental illness, the contrast with Vishnu's own case of "broken mind" is striking.

Parsons asserts that in America illness is culturally defined as an individual's incapacity to perform his or her ordinary social roles. Emphasis is on the individual as an independently competent actor:

I suggest, then, that the American pattern of illness is focused on the problem of capacity for achievement for the individual person. Therapeutically, recovery is defined for him as a job to be done in cooperation with those who are technically qualified to help him. The focus then operates to polarize the components of the problem in such a way that the primary threat to his achievement capacity which must be overcome is dependency [italics his] (1972:124).

Illness becomes a temporarily sanctioned deviance from independent performance; therapy is a temporarily sanctioned dependency the purpose of which is to gradually sever the ill from dependency:

An essential point is that the dependency component of the deviance of illness is used constructively in the therapeutic pattern, essentially through what is in certain respects a recapitulation of the socializing experience . . . the element of dependency, through "transference," is the basis of a strong attachment to therapeutic personnel, which can then be used as a basis of leverage to motivate the therapeutic 'work' which eventually should result in overcoming the dependency itself . . . (1972:125).

In Dhungagaun, illness, from beginning to end, sanctions and affirms interdependency. The stress is not on the ill person as deviating from independent



competency, but rather on the ill as victim of the disharmony inherent in interdependency; therapy does not focus on the severing of the ill person's dependency, but rather entails a reaffirmation of his dependency through the ritual act of feeding. In the process of falling ill and seeking recovery, dependency is a constant; only the element of harmony is in crucial flux.

I have tried to demonstrate how among Dhungagaun Brahmans an ideological conflict between "holistic hierarchy" on the one hand and scarcity on the other is articulated through beliefs in illness-causing demons, ghosts and witches. It is through cultural conceptions of these spiritual forces and ritual attention to them that this conflict is confronted and played out in Dhungagaun. Symbolically, food passes between the world of the living and the parallel world of the dead; food is used to pacify or transform spirits, all in an effort to restore "holistic hierarchy" or to contain the dangers inherent in it.

Some South Asian anthropologists have found Dumont's theory of "holistic hierarchy" fundamental to their own research (Barnett, Fruzzetti and Ostor 1976). Others have criticized Dumont for his emphasis on the ideology of hierarchy as a sacred conception "englobing" society, and as an entry point into the understanding of Hindu civilization. One critic, McKim Marriott, has over the decades developed alternative ideas which have received support from a number of other scholars. Early on, Marriott (1968) analyzed caste hierarchy, not in terms of a theory of purity and pollution, but as a more fluid outcome of transactions (especially in food) between individuals and groups. Later, Marriott and Inden (1977:229) deem this approach

"cognitively incomplete" and seek to rephrase and modify it in terms of an indigenous Indian ideological context. Here, in place of Dumont's holism, Marriott and Inden offer Indian "monism" (see also Marriott 1976b). They focus on a caste group as consisting of a particular "substance" shared by its members, with the "substance" embodying a "code" (dharma) for conduct. With all this, there is one point on which Marriott, Inden and Dumont agree, and this concerns the normative absence of the autonomous "individual" in Hindu society. But in Marriott and Inden's scheme, the "single person," rather than assuming significance in relation to a larger "whole," becomes "dividual":

. . . single persons are 'dividuals,' or unique composites of diverse, subtle and gross substances derived ultimately from one source; and they are also divisible into separate particles that may be shared or exchanged with others (1977:232).

Dumont has also been attacked for the static image of Hindu society that his "holistic hierarchy" presents. Thus of Marriott's earlier transactional approach, Tambiah wrote that his students ". . . see in it an inner coil of compulsion that is lacking in Dumont's 'idealistic' comparative view . . ." (1971:834). Even more strongly, Berreman commented that:

The Indian world of ritual hierarchy described by Dumont is as sterile and unreal as the world of stratification depicted by sociologists he vilifies. In each case the people who comprise the system are depicted as unfeeling, regimented automatons ruled by inexorable social forces, conforming

unquestioningly and inerringly to universal values (1971:18).

I have tried to show in this book that the ideology of hierarchy and holism is not incompatible with all the social dynamism and individual variation that some critics have felt lacking in Dumont. First, I have shown that "holistic hierarchy" contains its own dynamic in the sense that, joined with a notion of scarcity, it produces interpersonal and social conflict. In a way, hierarchy and holism, however these conceptions serve to hold society together are, on another level, seen as imperfect; some parts of the "whole" are left unfulfilled and the resulting conflicts are reflected in illness ideology and are played out in illness dramas. Secondly I have emphasized that hierarchy is neither a rigid idea nor a rigid social framework that restrains action, but that on the contrary the principle of hierarchy is actively manipulated. This occurs both in the manipulation of hierarchy in interpersonal relationships to gain access to resources, as described in Chapter Three, and in connection with the evil spirits who are believed to be trying to create and manipulate their ties to the living. It is, for example, through tempting the bayu with promise of a higher rank that negotiations and exchanges are begun with this spirit. An ideology of hierarchy does not require regimented automatons or slave-like conformists, but rather can be seen as a cultural conception which people use as a springboard for social action.



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# GLOSSARY

<u>amapate</u> ( <u>āmāpāṭe</u> )	relatives traced through the mother
<u>bayu</u> ( <u>bāyu</u> )	the ghost of a lineage member, transformed into a regularly worshipped ancestor spirit
<u>bhat</u> ( <u>bhāt</u> )	rice boiled in water
<u>bhola</u>	simple-minded, insane
<u>bhut</u>	ghost
<u>bir</u>	demon
<u>boksi</u>	witch
<u>Brahman</u> ( <u>brāhman</u> )	the highest caste; male members may become Hindu priests
<u>Chetri</u> ( <u>chetri</u> )	a twice-born caste just below Brahman in rank. (Sanskrit: Ksatriya)
<u>Damai</u> ( <u>damāi</u> )	untouchable tailor caste
<u>Dasai</u> ( <u>dasai</u> )	a major annual Hindu festival held to honor the goddess Durga
<u>Devi</u> ( <u>devi</u> )	the goddess, with many different manifestations
<u>dharma</u>	religious duty
<u>dhok</u> ( <u>dhok</u> )	a gesture of respect where one person bows down and touches

<u>dublo</u>	the forehead to the feet of another
<u>Durḡa</u> ( <u>durḡā</u> )	thin
<u>gau</u> ( <u>gāũ</u> )	a manifestation of the Devi, a destructive, blood-drinking goddess
<u>ghar</u>	village
<u>graha</u>	house
<u>graha bigrayo</u>	planet
<u>hom</u>	an unfavorable astrological position
<u>jajman</u> ( <u>jajmān</u> )	ceremony where offerings are made into a sacred fire
<u>jajmani</u> ( <u>jajmāni</u> )	the client in the hereditary intercaste service relationship
<u>jat</u> ( <u>jāt</u> )	The system of hereditary intercaste service relationships
<u>jhankri</u> ( <u>jhānkri</u> )	caste or kind
<u>jhar</u> ( <u>jhār</u> ) <u>phuk</u>	shaman, a traditional Nepalese healer
<u>jutho</u> ( <u>juṭho</u> )	technique used by a healer whereby a mantra is "blown" into an object or a substance which is then used to "sweep" an illness away
<u>kacca</u> ( <u>kaccā</u> )	pollution, impurity
<u>Kali</u> ( <u>kāli</u> )	"inferior" cooked food
<u>kalo</u> ( <u>kālo</u> )	a destructive form of the goddess Devi
	black



<u>karma</u>	doctrine that moral action in a past life will affect subsequent lives
<u>khargo</u> ( <u>khargo</u> )	crisis, especially a crisis in one's life as determined by a horoscope
<u>khanu</u> ( <u>khānu</u> )	to eat
<u>lagu</u> ( <u>lāgu</u> )	malevolent spiritual forces
<u>man bigrayo</u>	"broken mind," a severe emotional or mental disturbance
<u>manche</u> ( <u>mānche</u> )	person
<u>mannu</u> ( <u>mānnu</u> )	to respect or obey
<u>masan</u> ( <u>masān</u> )	ghost, also the burning ground for the dead
<u>matwali</u> ( <u>matwāli</u> )	"liquor-drinking" caste category; a clean, touchable, but not twice-born caste
<u>maya</u> ( <u>māya</u> )	love, affection
<u>mit</u>	ritual friendship (also miteri) or ritual friend (for women the ritual friend is <u>mitini</u> )
<u>moto</u>	fat
<u>Newar</u>	A Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic group
<u>pakka</u>	"superior" cooked food
<u>pancayat</u> ( <u>pañcāyat</u> )	village council; also an administrative unit including one or more traditional villages
<u>phuk garne</u>	to blow
<u>picas</u> ( <u>picās</u> )	ghost
<u>pitṛ</u> ( <u>pitṛ</u> )	ancestor spirits

<u>pret</u>	ghost; a harmful spirit that has not yet (or will not ever) reach the abode of the dead and become a <u>pitṛ</u>
<u>puja</u> ( <u>pujā</u> )	religious worship or ceremony
<u>purohit</u>	Hindu domestic priest
<u>putla</u>	a pain-causing substance that a witch causes to enter into the body of a victim
<u>Shiva</u> ( <u>śiva</u> )	a major Hindu god, the god of destruction
<u>sraddha</u> ( <u>śrāddha</u> )	ritual honoring of ancestors, during which the ancestors are symbolically fed and sustained
<u>tagadhari</u> ( <u>tāgādhāri</u> )	the twice-born castes, whose male members wear the sacred thread
<u>Tamang</u>	A Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic group
<u>tika</u> ( <u>ṭikā</u> )	forehead mark; in religious contexts, a mark of blessing
<u>trisul</u> ( <u>triśul</u> )	trident
<u>Vishnu</u> ( <u>viṣṇu</u> )	a major Hindu god, the god of preservation

# INDEX

- Amulets, 15, 42, 48, 55-56, 130
- Ancestors, 12, 43, 51, 67, 89, 96, 109, 116-17, 134-35, 137, 139, 146, 148-49, 151
- Ayurvedic  
See medicine
- Bayu, 43-45, 51, 115-16, 119, 133-40, 146-51, 159
- Bhat, 89, 93-96, 100
- Bir, 49, 108-9, 115-23, 130-51  
See also, demons
- Boksi, 13, 38, 108, 111  
See also, witchcraft
- Brahman, 6-11, 16-17, 19, 48, 61, 64-66, 71, 73, 74, 79, 87, 89, 92, 94, 120, 123, 155-57
- Caste, 6-11, 19-21, 64-67
- Chetri, 7, 9, 65
- Curing, 11-12, 16, 42, 45-47, 49, 51, 66, 87, 106, 112-13, 119, 126, 135, 139
- Damai, 8-9, 65-66, 73
- Death,  
and partition of households, 9, 67-69  
in Vishnu's family history, 39-41, 49, 61  
and emergence of spirits, 108-9, 133-40  
and feeding obligations, 95-96, 105, 117, 134, 140, 144-48, 151, 157
- Demons, 13, 28, 49-50, 54-56, 62, 108-11, 119, 123-25, 130-33, 150-53, 157  
See also, bir
- Dhok, 64, 80
- Dhungagaun village, 1-17  
food rules in, 93-100
- Dumont, Louis, 6, 13, 19, 20-23, 62, 66, 88, 114,

- 157-59
- Education,  
 as a factor in Vishnu's  
 illness, 41, 59-60,  
 152-53  
 in hierarchical social  
 relationships, 72-73
- Food,  
 as a cause of illness,  
 12  
 used in curing, 14-15  
 used by witches, 39, 49  
 food offerings to  
 spirits, 32, 119-23,  
 130-36, 140  
 food symbolism, 84-103,  
 157  
 in illness beliefs, 105-  
 14  
 in defining spirits,  
 114-19  
 in social ideology, 143-  
 49
- Foster, George, 12, 76, 78
- Gharti, 9
- Ghosts, 13, 32, 42-45, 48,  
 50, 62, 108-10, 116-17,  
 119-22, 124, 127, 131-  
 34, 137-40, 146, 149-  
 51, 157
- Gurung, 7, 9, 131
- Hierarchy, 6-8, 10, 19-  
 22, 61-69, 72-75, 78,  
 84, 87, 90-93, 97, 101,  
 144, 146, 148, 157-59
- Hinduism, 1, 7-9, 11, 13,  
 16, 21, 23, 56, 63, 69,  
 88-93, 95, 113-17, 121-  
 128, 157-58
- Holism, 19-22, 62, 92,  
 155, 158-59
- Hsu, Francis L. K., 22-  
 23, 155
- Hunger,  
 as spirit's motive harm  
 humans, 13, 49, 56,  
 110, 113, 116-18,  
 124-25, 132, 134,  
 139-40, 145-47, 150-  
 52, 154
- Ideology, 11, 17-21, 62,  
 76, 83-44, 87, 106,  
 108, 119, 144, 147, 159
- Illness,  
 local ideas on causes  
 and treatments, 11-17  
 case studies of, 27-36,  
 119-42  
 and malignant spirits,  
 115-18  
 and food, 106-14  
 and social ideology,  
 17-19, 83-84, 143-59
- Individualism, 19-23, 61,  
 155-56
- Interdependency,  
 in social  
 relationships, 62,

- 65, 67, 70, 75, 77,  
84, 91-93, 96-97, 118,  
155-57  
as symbolized by food,  
97-103, 105-7  
between spirits and  
humans, 140, 146
- I n t e r p e r s o n a l**  
relationships, 10-11,  
19, 23, 59, 61-62, 71,  
74, 76-79, 81, 84, 87,  
97, 112, 143-44, 152,  
154, 159
- Jaisi**, 7, 9
- Jajmani**, 66, 91, 102
- Jhankri**, 14-17, 36, 39,  
43-55, 59, 81, 99, 109-  
12, 121-22, 124-36, 138,  
154
- Jhar**, 15-17, 42, 119
- Jutho**, 95
- Kacca**, 90-93
- Kami**, 8-9
- Karma**, 13
- Kinship**,  
and social structure, 6,  
10-11, 61-65, 67-72,  
75, 143  
in Vishnu's family  
history, 39-42, 53-57  
and ritual friendship,  
80, 82  
and food exchanges, 90,  
96-98, 101-2, 105, 117  
and ancestor spirits,  
133, 137, 140, 146
- Lagu**, 13, 108, 111-13,  
115-16, 133-134
- Land inheritance**, 68-69
- Lineage**, 9-10, 71, 106  
lineage gods, 12, 116-  
17  
and ancestor spirits,  
133-40, 146-49, 151
- Madness**, 18-19, 24, 31,  
33, 36-37, 58, 68, 149
- Magar**, 7, 9
- Mannu**, 33, 63-64, 67, 70,  
73, 102, 117
- Marriage**, 9-10, 62-64,  
94, 137
- Marriott, McKim**, 16, 21,  
66, 88, 90-92, 100-1,  
157-58
- Masan**, 108-9
- Matwali**, 7-9, 66
- Maya**, 81, 100
- Medicine**,  
traditional, 11-16  
herbs, 14  
allopathic, 16-17, 44-  
45, 120  
ayurvedic, 11, 16, 123
- Mit**, 72, 79-83  
See also, ritual  
friendship
- Newar**, 8-9, 16, 89
- Pakka**, 90-91, 98

- Picas, 50, 108-9, 115, 144  
Pitr, 109, 115-16, 134, 146  
 See also, ancestors  
 Planets, 32-33, 35, 43, 48, 55, 60, 115-16, 122, 153  
 Plumpness, 106-7, 149  
 Pollution,`  
 and caste, 21, 57  
 and food, 90-91, 95-96, 100-2, 143  
 Possession by spirits, 14-15, , 47, 54, 78, 110, 124-25  
Pret, 108-9, 115  
 Priests, 16, 32-34, 48, 55-56, 66, 79, 96  
Puja, 32, 48, 153  
 Ritual friendship, 61, 79, 81, 83  
 See also, mit  
 Scarcity, 75-76, 78, 84, 105, 107, 117, 119, 139-40  
 Shaman,  
 See jhankri  
 Spirits, 11, 13-17, 32, 43-45, 47, 49, 51, 59, 90, 106-21, 124-29, 132-34, 139-40, 144-55, 157, 159  
 See also, bhut  
 See also, lagu  
 See also, masan  
 See also, picas  
 See also, pret  
Sraddha, 94, 134  
Tagadhari, 7-9, 66  
 Tamang, 7-9, 14-15, 46, 48, 50-51, 109, 121, 125  
 Thakuri, 7, 9  
 Thinness, 106-7, 120, 123, 147, 149  
Tika, 56, 63, 79, 136  
 Trance, 15, 47, 99, 123-24, 128  
 Trisuli, 1-5, 8, 14, 16-17, 28, 35, 43-44, 53, 71, 73-74, 135  
 Untouchability,  
 of castes, 7-9, 65-67, 79, 92, 98, 102, 109, 124  
 in ritual friendship, 80, 82  
 in a healing ritual, 130  
 Witchcraft, 13-14, 16-17, 28, 32, 106, 108, 110-14, 127, 130, 135, 137, 157  
 in Vishnu's family, 38-56, 60-62, 68, 70, 150, 153, 154-55  
 Women's position, 9-10, 65, 95-97

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