



**TRIBAL
ETHNOGRAPHY
OF NEPAL**

VOLUME II

**DR. RAJESH GAUTAM
ASOKE K. THAPA-MAGAR**

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Dedicated to all those deprived and loving people inhabiting those nooks and crannies of Nepal, who will never be able to read this book on account of their illiteracy.

PREFACE

After extensive travelling through villages in the rural areas of Nepal, we could not help but be impressed at the people coexisting with the harsh environment minus all the facilities required for a human being's basic existence and yet accepting the reality of their miserable status. In our travels, we were fortunate to perceive the changing of the ethnic mosaic towards a more artificialised pattern and in the process annihilating the simple cultures that are precariously balanced. This book is the outcome of the conviction we mutually felt in making it our personal campaign to somehow record whatever we could salvage from the deteriorating tribal landscape and thus preserve in writing some portion of our diverse cultures, with the objective of creating an awareness of the true position of our country's various tribes, among those who are interested to learn but do not have the material at hand. From the lap of the Himalaya to the hot, humid, tropical *terai* plains, tribes have lived and died oblivious of the existence of one another or aware but wary of each other. On account of Nepal's geographical location, and the tundra to equator type of climate that exists, the tribal variety is phenomenal, however, what is more interesting is the fact that this region has been the entrepot where ancient tribes have merged into recently migrated ones to form new tribes, and where the old austroloid types have been transformed into mixed tribes which bear features and characteristics which range from the totally dark-skinned to the fair types, bearing the flat flared nose, the hooked Semitic nose and the long aquiline noses of the caucosoid aryan.

Nepal lies in the region where the variety of languages, dialects and *kura* are found in great profusion. While some tribes have upto ten different *kura* among their sub-tribes, other tribes have lost their *kura* and so use Nepali as a language of communication. Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibeto-Burman, Munda, Mon-Khmer, Austric and such language groups are found here indicating this region as either a melting pot area where tribes were and are still in the process of metamorphosis or the seat of various cultures and civilisations which have so badly overlapped that today it is very difficult for the researcher to excavate and study the various stratas. In this book, we have made an attempt at being simply and strictly ethnographic, however, we wish to clarify a few terms that have been used in the text for a better understanding of the tribes of Nepal. The word tribe (*Jat*) used in the text is inaccurate from the sociological perspective, however, due to lack of a more appropriate term to denote a group of people, possessing a common language and culture, but due to migration, are not confined to particular geographical region and do not regard

themselves as a politically autonomous group, tribe is the word which we have found to be most suitable. Similarly, the word sub-tribe (*Upa-Jat*) is used within the text and indicates that a sub-group exists within the tribe and basically similar, but differing in some particular aspects. Sept (*Thar*) is a word used in the text to indicate a category within a tribe (which does not possess sub-tribes). Septs follow patrilineal descent in most tribes though some cases exist where matrilineal descent septs are also prevalent. Sub-septs (*Upa-Thars*) means the sub-group which exists within a sept and is existent in tribes which are extensively stratified. Totemism is also seen to be prevalent in the tribes studied and this is equated to the *gotr*. Those of the same sub-tribe but of different septs and possessing similar *gotr* are not permitted to inter-marry, as it is considered incest and thus taboo.

Whatever we have written in this book is what we have personally collected through observation and interviews, and therefore all the matter here is firsthand as perceived and collected by us. The main objective of this book is to help those laymen who do not have any social, anthropological and cultural exposure, to be able to pick up this book and read and enjoy the tribal diversity of Nepal, alongwith the benefit of being able to discover the various cultural, social, ritual and such aspects of their tribe that they had never realised existed. In this way every person will be in a position to learn about his or her own roots and also about the other neighbouring tribes and the similarities and differences that exist among themselves. We hope that this book also helps the beginners of cultural studies to gain a little by reading through these pages and receiving a rudimentary education which can be used as a base from which real research in the fields of sociology, anthropology, ethnography and such can be conducted. We also wish to thank all those people who live in those far- flung places who will never be able to read this book due to their illiteracy, for it was their unfailing co-operation and love which helped us to prepare these two volumes since we started almost eight years ago. Currently, we are working on the next two volumes. Finally we feel that this book is not yet complete and there are places where improvements can be made in the future and this is definitely not our last word in ethnography. We hope that the readers enjoy this book and receive an insight into the tribes of Nepal as they are, neither romanticised nor glorified.

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October 1993

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Limbu	1
Loba	17
Magar	22
Maji	41
Manangba	55
Matwali Ksetri	61
Mugal	72
Mushr	83
Muslman	94
Newar	115
Phri	141
Rai	155
Rajbansi	176
Raji	194
Raute	202
Sarki	215
Satar	220
Sherpa	239
Surel	250
Tamang	258
Thakali	281
Thakuri	298
Thami	311
Tharu	325
Index	347

LIMBU

The Limbu tribe have an extremely interesting and colourful culture. Although they possess short tempers, they are in reality very jolly, straightforward and decent. Most of these people populate the eastern region of Nepal called Limbuwan or the land of the Limbu. While they live in the hills and the plains of the terai, they are also found in areas east of Nepal in places like Darjeeling and Sikkim, in India. They are found in a majority in the areas of Dhankuta, Sankhuwasabha, Terathum in the Kosi Zone, and Taplejung, Panchthar and Ilam in the Mechi Zone. Besides these areas there are other parts where pockets are seen.

Historical Background

Scholars state that at one time in the past the Yakkha, Rai and Limbu were one large tribe with a genealogy known as the *vamsavali* which cannot be located today. They say that it was lost during the aggression of Limbuwan by the Gurkha troops of Prithivi Narayan Shah.

The Limbu are split into *dus thar* or ten septs but it is seen that there are actually 13 septs. The Tibetans of the north call these Limbu Monpa meaning those who live south of the Himalaya. The other tribes like the Lepcha, Bhotia and Tibetan inhabiting areas like Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal call them the Tsong, because there are 5 septs which have the Lhasa *gotr* and it is said that at one time they had inhabited the area of Tsang in the north from where these Limbu have migrated.

The Lepcha also call these Limbu as Chaang and could be a corruption of Tsong. Today the Limbu are called Subba which is a title given to them by the king Prithivi Narayan Shah and today it has become synonymous to Limbu. Some sources state that these Limbu inhabit the hills of the areas between the Dudh Kosi and the Kankai Khola till Sikkim further east. There are other views which state that they were spread from the Arun to the Mechi rivers and till the eastern shores of the Tista river. The Limbu themselves are of the belief that at one time in the past, they inhabited the hilly regions of the Tamba Kosi headwaters and from there they migrated at a later date and the sept called Tambakholae is an indicator of this fact.

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

They also believe that 13 groups migrated from Lhasa in the north, and 5 groups came north from the south or Kasi. While the former became the Lhasa *gotr* the latter became the Kasi *gotr*. But in spite of all these stories the distinct fact is that these Limbu possess mongoloid features and express their ancestral home to be across the great Himalayan Barrier to the north, but seem to have migrated south and then at a later date mingled with the local races like the Lepcha of Sikkim.

Physical features

The Limbu are a purely mongoloid people and they exhibit the features clearly with the skin stretched across the face and the eyes which show clearly the mongoloid or epicanthic fold, the malar bones make the cheeks appear high, the nasal roots are low and the noses are small and flat among some. They have sturdy and strong bodies and are of short to medium stature. Facial hairs are scarce and their complexion is fair to pinkish, the lips are thin and prominent (there do exist some with slightly thick lips but in a small number).

Language

The language of the Limbu is placed in the Munda stratum which itself is under the Austro-Asiatic linguistic group, and again under the grand Sino-Tibetan heading, it is placed in the Himalayan group of Tibeto-Burman eastern pronominalised dialects.

The language of the Limbu is the language of the Yakthumba who are the original Limbu migrants from the north and who later changed into the Limbu of today. The script of the Yakthumba is called the *Srijunga lipi* and named after the martyr who died for the Limbu cause. A list of some Limbu words with their Nepali and English equivalents are listed as below :

Limbu	Nepali	English	Limbu	Nepali	English
<i>anga</i>	m	I	<i>Khaene</i>	timi	you
<i>khunae</i>	uni	she/he	<i>angae</i>	hamiharu	we
<i>paegi</i>	janu	go	<i>paegae</i>	gayo	went
<i>me</i>	aago	fire	<i>chwa</i>	pani	water
<i>kham</i>	mato	mud	<i>saam</i>	hawa	air
<i>Iksading-</i>	prithivi	earth	<i>chuiitha</i>	akas ko	rain

Sept (*Thar*)

The Limbu also have a tribal structure and there are septs and sub-septs lined up in their social order. As earlier stated, the Yakthumba are split into ten septs, namely : Panchthar, Chhathar, Anthari, Yangrup, Chaibisa, Terathar, Charhkola, Maikhola, Phedap or Bhuinphutuva, Tambakholae.

Among these above septs or *thars* there are different sub-septs which are endogamous in nature. The names of these sub-septs are curious in structure and they are listed as below:

Anglah, Anglabang, Baidohang, Bakhim, Chemjong, Chungbang, Yongyah, Tumbahangfe, Angdembae, Madden, Lawati, Kandangwa, Angbang, Chabaeguhang, Mangyak, Thaebae, Hukpha, Sambahang, Lingdenbeh, Pheyak.

In spite of the above structure, while inquiring it was found out that the origin of the Chungbang sub-sept was at Terathum and there are divisions among them like Saereng Chungbang, Hoop Chungbang, Fagu Chungbang, and among the ones originated at Yangrup there are the Menyangbo, Bokhim, Sambahang, Lejum. Thus it is seen that even today after so much research has been done, it is extremely difficult to clearly state or define the septs and sub-septs of the Limbu. Thus the ten septs of the Limbu are not septs but in reality places of the origin of these groups.

Family

The Limbu family is a limited nuclear one today, though there are though traces of extended family structures in the past and today also at places. Though the Limbu tribe is patriarchal, initially it seems to have been matriarchal. This matriarchy is discerned from the fact that one is allowed to marry his mother's sister (maternal aunt or *sani ma*), however, this practice was banned in 1853 AD. which is recorded in the *lal mohar* issued at that time.

Life Cycle Rites

Births

Immediately on hearing the news of a woman's pregnancy, the *phedangma* (priest) begins to offer prayers to the gods so as to ward

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

off the evil spirits that may try to attack the child even in its foetal stage. The birth of a son causes observation of birth pollution for 4 days while for a daughter it is 3 days. It is believed among these Limbu people that during the pollution period, the soul of 8 ancient Hang kings come to establish the destiny of the newborn.

Navran

The last day of the pollution period is set for the *navran* or naming ceremony. The household and the child are purified together by the *phedangma* who simultaneously names the child also. A feast follows and there are many people invited, from the surrounding areas. In this way the child is named and receives common sanction to be part of the Limbu tribe from then on.

Pasni

Rice feeding or *pasni* is also prevalent among these Limbu and is done in the same way as other Hinduised tribes do. The *mama* presides over this occasion and the child is fed its initial solid food.

Chhaewar

Chhaewar is also celebrated by the Hinduised Limbu people and the hair is shaved by the *mama*. Other rituals like tying the halter around the child's neck are not done. This *chhaewar* is only done for male children. The Limbu do not perform the ritual of *bratabandh*.

Marriage Practices

The two most common forms of marriage are elopement marriages and arranged marriages.

Elopement marriages

These occur when the bride is tricked into eloping with the groom. It is not a solo effort by the bridegroom only but a concentrated effort by his friends and wellwishers. They separate the girl during a fair or *jatra*, *hat bazar* or during the famous *Dhan Nach* and trick her into this liaison. During fairs and such occasions the boy ties a *baina* (payment of advance staking claim on that property) on to the girl and this *baina* is called *puparang*. The Limbu people believe that a girl touched by a boy can be claimed by the lad, and then this is followed by the girl being told or requested to follow the boy's

party. Should she not comply to their request then they literally drag her to a house or a place where she cannot be found by her parents and then she is married to the boy by being anointed with the *tika*. This is called *tika talo garne*.

If the marriage is one where love is involved then after the *lagan* (tying of nuptial knot) is over the legs of the slaughtered animals are sent as gifts to the house of the girl's parents with a message stating that these are the tokens of the marriage of their daughter with the boy. These legs are called *baehasalang* and should these be accepted then the marriage is also accepted is the belief they have. If the legs are returned then it is understood that the marriage is not sanctioned from the bride's parents' side. This sort of non-acceptance situation remains like this for years and even decades.

Should a Limbu boy desire to marry a woman of another tribe then there is a procedure where the rite of *chokfung thim* is done to bring the prospective bride into, the Limbu fold. A ten member committee of elder Limbu people called *Pasing Padang* (meaning they all have to be of the Limbu tribe and the same *gotr* or *ming mama*) is set up. These people must sanction this rite as completed and then only will the woman be made a Limbu and be able to marry the Limbu she loves.

Saimundri is not completed when the marriage talks are over, but only when the children are born and there is a surety of the husband being not in a position to divorce his wife. This rite of *Saimundri* is when the *jawai* or son-in-law pays a price of Rs. 2.00 to the wife's parents. Unless he doesn't pay this amount the male's family will remain at his in-laws and within this period should he die prior to payment of *Saimundri*, then his children (sons) pay the amount and take the responsibility of the death rites and pollution. In such marriages exogamous unions are seen, but in reality the Limbu tribe prefer tribal endogamy even today.

Arranged marriages

These marriages are determined by the selection of the auspicious moment by the *phedangma*, after which the bridegroom's mate is looked for with the help of the *lami* or matchmaker. In marriages the matrilineal lineage and the families of similar *gotr* must be avoided. A girl among the matrilineal grandfathers or matrilineal relatives of the father or the groom's own matrilineal relatives, are not

encouraged and not eligible for marriages.

Once a girl is found and does not confirm to the above criteria, then the boy's friends along with the *lami* go to ask for her hand in marriage and this is done in the traditional way by carrying offerings of pork thighs, alcohol and other such gifts. After all the talks have ended positively, the boy in adherence to the old traditions, places some money as an advance, at the feet of the prospective in-laws and pays respect by bowing and then pushing the previously offered gifts forward. Once these are touched by the girl's folks, it is taken as a gesture of acceptance and permission to marry. In this way the marriage is finalised.

The next step is for the girl's parents to commence preparing gold ornaments for their daughter, followed by the prospective groom performing *dhog bhet* with his future wife's relatives and the day and date of the marriage is fixed. Now the bride is brought to the groom's village and kept in another house. The bride's procession that accompanies her is called *maekae sama* by the Limbu. The day is spent beating the large hand drum called the *chyabrung*, and a feast is given for all the participants. Rice, meat, curries and alcohol are the main items.

The *lami* takes the clothes and ornaments offered by the groom to the bride to the house where she is kept and there the *maekae sama* change the clothes and ornaments she wore when coming from home and she is adorned with the clothes and ornaments given by the groom. Now she is ready and brought to be taken into the groom's house. The local bands strike up as the *janti* go from the groom's house to the house where the bride has been housed and there is a lot of noise and fanfare.

The bride is brought out and while about to enter the groom's house, 2 urns of water surmounted by 2 *kalas* filled with flowers are placed on the two sides of the main doorway. From the verandah of the house till the place where the bride and groom are to be seated a white homespun cloth is laid out. On the arrival of the bride, she is made to wash her feet and taken into the house walking over the white cloth with her bare wet feet. The arrival of the couple is followed by the sprinkling with *aksata* and they are given curds to consume as *sagun*. Once this is over, the bride is given *tika* by the groom's respected kin and she is blessed, after this she is covered with shawls symbolising she is now one of their clan member. The

bride has to bow to every person who presents her a shawl before she can sit.

Tying of the nuptial knot or *lagan gantho* and streaking the hair parting of the bride with vermillion or *sindur halne* are purely Hindu rituals but prevalent among these Limbu people. When joining a couple in wedlock, a hen and a rooster have to be sacrificed and the blood must be trickled on a banana leaf. The rooster must be sacrificed prior to the hen. *Sri tongba* (a bamboo container of millet beer) and *sajogta* (eight pieces of meat) must be touched to the lips of the couple. This is followed by the *thuppor chema* or *lagan gantho* being tied while a rupee coin is tied to a corner of the bride's shawl and then the groom pours the *sindur* on her hair. This ritual is performed around the main pillar of the house after the bride is ushered in by the respected female relatives while covering her with their shawls. The *phedangma* now makes the couple promise to live with each other in sorrow and death, while reciting *mantras* from the *Mundum*. The *phedangma* now dances around the main pillar of house to the beat of the *chyabrung*. In this way the marriage is concluded.

The day after the marriage is the day for *rit bujhaune* where the groom along with his chief the *ingmeba* and friends visit his in-laws to complete this ritual where either a live buffalo or a slaughtered pig without the entrails have to be presented. While returning after this ritual is over the groom brings back the dowry of the bride. Judging from the Limbu marriage customs and traditions, they can be said to be extravagant affairs. In spite of many objections and appeals to control these excesses like the *sunaulo rit bujhaune* where the girl's family has to provide money to buy the girl silver and gold ornaments. Today however, this is also trying to be eradicated by the people of those areas where these Limbu live.

Divorce

This is also one of the results of marriages and it is quite prevalent among these Limbu people. If the husband divorces the wife it is *khemjong* and if it is the wife leaving the husband it is *najong*. In the former case, rituals are unnecessary, but should the wife leave the husband, then all the ornaments she has been given by the husband have to be returned. But if the woman marries another man while being the wife of one (*jari marriage*, the second husband

has to present money to the woman's mother to establish the new relationship. This is called *saino tomba*. The ex-husband can claim compensation called *jari cull*.

Death Rites

When a Limbu dies it is easily known because they send runners and fire salvos from their muzzle loaders. Drums are beaten and this rhythm for the announcement of the death is special. The death signals the extinguishing of the family hearth and it is not lit till the burial is completed.

The corpse is placed stretched out on the floor and covered with a white cloth with two oil lamps burning at the sides. One rupee coins are placed in a row from head to foot. The old and young females collect at the side of the corpse and sing a melancholy song weeping at intervals, and even wailing miserably during this period the coffin is prepared by the menfolk. A wood coffin is called *khongkhi* and a bamboo one is a *chhetap*. During the construction of the coffin, 4 horizontal pieces of wood or bamboo are placed breadthwise in case of a male deceased and three pieces in case of a female.

The next ritual is for the corpse to be bathed, bound in the white cloth shroud and placed within the coffin and is accompanied by the personal items loved and cherished like ornaments, weapons, etc. A gun is fired and the corpse is carried over to the burial grounds called the *Iepung daen*. Women also accompany the funeral procession but do not help in carrying the corpse. The procession is led by the *phedangma* carrying a naked *khukuri*, chanting and simultaneously shouting and jumping. At various places the people in the procession stop and offer *sanghu* while on the way to the cemetery. Here also guns are fired.

The grave is dug to a depth of approximately 7 feet and is lined with flat stone slabs reminiscent of the primitive scargophagus. Within this time interval, the women mourn the dead with the sorrowful and pathetic song. Once the grave is prepared the coffin is lowered inside and covered with stones. Then the *phedangma* chants -

'Since man has been cursed by god to die, today this man's/woman's husband/wife, brother/sister etc. (says the name) due to his/her illness was bedridden. While he was alive the *lama* and *kaerung* were read for his health, *jhankri* and

bijuwa did all they could for him, medicines of all kinds were used, but nothing happened. This person was destined to die and so he/she lived only uptill today/yesterday etc.. Thus today this man/woman (says the name) has left and gone'.

In such a way the death of a person has to be publically announced to the whole community and the response of those collected is '*gayo hai*' meaning-yes, he/she has gone.

Again the *phedangma* says that the descendant of god is taken back to Him, and descendant of the sun is taken back by the sun, and the descendant of the moon is taken back by the moon. Again the gathering repeat-Yes he has been taken.

For the third time the *phedangma* says -

The deceased has taken along with him/her all the household problems, losses, damages, and all the difficulties, and now we pray to the Lord to protect the remaining members of the household from such troubles.

The gathering respond with - yes, keep them protected.
The *phedangma* continues -

We pray to the Lord not to turn the soul of this deceased into a pig or a fowl, instead either make him/her someone's son/daughter and keep him/her in heaven.

The response is - Yes keep him in heaven.
Finally the *phedangma* says -

In the beginning man was made of mud and ashes, but on account of the *Mulungsema* and the *Maelongna*, all mankind had to die and finally turn to dust (mud), so all those gathered here for this funeral should give a handful of mud each.

Then he takes a handful of mud and throws it into the grave followed by the others there. Then the grave is filled in and a wall of

stone is erected over it where a *chautara* is constructed. The *chautara* on the grave of a woman is different from that of a man., in that while the man's *chautara* is constructed with a 4 plinth wall, the woman's has only three plinths.

Death pollution

This is observed for a period of 4 days for a man and 3 days for a woman. During this period salt and oils are abstained from. On the final day of death pollution there is compulsorily a feast of meat, alcohol etc. known as *Samdahkhung* and all those who had attended the funeral are invited for this feast where they are all seated parallelly and facing the group which has been under observance of the pollution. Wearing a turban the *phedangma* begins -

Guests, friends, brothers, kin, kindred and all present. A few days back -(deceased's name) of this house suffering from _ (name of disease) remained ill for a long time. A *lama* was brought in from Bhot (Tibet) and scriptures were read for his health. Ojhas were brought in from the plains and they also tried their *tantra-mantra*. *Pujas* were offered and medicines were given, but these were of no avail It was destined that he/she was to live till the day he left us and went back to god's house.

The response is - Yes, he has gone. The *phedangma* again says -

From this day, his soul is separated from those of us living in the world,

and the response is - Yes, he is separated.

The *phedangma* goes on to say that it is because of the death that everything is defiled and all kinds of interactions have ceased. Now a request is made to the gods, by the people observing death pollution and holding salt and oil in their joined hands, and praying for their defilement to be purified. The people present have to make them pure by saying that they have been cleansed.

Now the *phedangma* turns to the observers of the pollution and says that from that day they are purified, so now they are able to perform

all religious and social functions normally. Thus the *phedangma* breaks the stick he had been holding from the beginning. Then at this signal all the householders of the deceased start paying their respects and *dhog* and the reintroduction of salt and oil usage. This is topped off by a grand feast.

There is a custom of observing a one year observance of the death by not cutting hair or nails and not eating what others touch. This is *barkhi barne* and done by the close kin of the deceased like the son. On the day when the yearly *barkhi barne* time approaches, the rich Limbu build a sort of memorial in the name of the deceased and it is called a *Song Taen*. The deceased's name, dates of birth and death and other bio-data are inscribed on this structure. This work of inscribing is called *Lunglaema Thim*.

Thus in Limbu society it is observed that from birth till death and in other such rites, the *panch vakya* or voice of the community plays an extremely vital role. According to the sanction of the *Panch Bhalaadmi*, social boycott can be initiated, moral offenses and communal felonies can be judged. They also have the power to assimilate women of other tribes by the mere action of touching them with a stone and grass. Punishments are enforced by these people also.

Religion

From the time of birth till death the Limbu are disciplined in the life full of religious rituals, traditions and culture. *devi devta*, *bhut-pret*, *sime -bhume*, *nag-nagin* and the natural elements when displeased result in the deaths and diseases among the community, is a strong belief among the Limbu folks even today. Should these deities be kept happy and well propitiated then they shower their devotees with blessings.

They believe that their god who is their father is *tagaera ningba juma* the creator of the whole universe. He is worshipped as the *adi shakti* meaning primordial force or energy. *Tagaera* is not worshipped directly but instead worship of the earth goddess in the *yuba samang puja* is done where uncastrated goats, fowls and pigs are offered as blood sacrifices. The male counterpart of *yuba samang* is *yaeba samang* the god of war. *Agni deo*, *griha deo* and *patal deo* are some deities who have been given more emphasis by these Limbu.

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

Patal deo is *okwama samyang* and is worshipped when any new home is to be built, and this deity is worshipped at least once a year otherwise calamities may befall the house as this deity resides at the centre of the earth. *Nahaen* is a short tempered god and must be appeased through blood sacrifices, once every three years. Anger of this deity may cause the usual diseases and death. The *ban devta* or *tamfungma* is a god to be feared also for if not properly propitiated misfortune will fall upon the community. The ritual of animal sacrifice is also one way of appeasing this deity. To guard against calamities befalling the household, they perform *nahangma puja* in the name of the household (male). A year old rooster (not less) is needed for this offering. The *phedangma* performs the *puja* to *nahangma* by reciting the *Mundum* and carrying the bows and arrows.

For good health and a future equally bright, the *maiti* will perform a *puja* for their daughters by offering a pair of fowls and *saptok* (black millet beer - *tongba*) for the *Mangaema puja*. If the daughters do this then they offer it for their *maiti* (parents). When *nahangma* or *mangaema puja* are performed it is essential that a piece of clothing, in the name of the person in whose name the *puja* is being done, be present, and this cloth is called keeping the *aebu*.

Limbu people believe in the *sodha*, *suguth* and *susik*. When people die unfortunately and suddenly like in accidents, or are victims of murders, or die while very young, then it is believed that their spirits turn into the angry *sodha*. When a woman dies at childbirth then it is blamed on *suguth* an evil spirit and the death of the unborn child is the cause of the *susik*. The spirits of the dead influence the lives of the Limbu to a great degree, and so they perform *mansaunae* (offering of foods to the deceased before consuming) and try to please these spirits.

From birth till death the *phedangma* is responsible for the rituals. This person is skilled in these rituals and ceremonies. Besides him there are the *samba*, *mangba*, *yeaba*, *yeama* who are considered as priests too, but each has his or her own field of work. For, instance the work of the *yeaba* and *yeama* (former male latter female), is to protect the community from the wrath of *nahaen*. These male and female priests are said to also protect the people from the witches and wizards who attempt to suck the blood of the people. The *samba* is one adept in the ancient Limbu scriptures or the *Mundum*. The *mangba* is considered an exorcist.

The Limbu religion is the *Mundum* and as the traditions dictate, they perform *puja* to their primitive and animistic deities of the forests and homes. While every one worships the forest deities the ones at home are solely worshipped by the women. When these women marry they carry away these household deities along with them to their husband's houses. From then on these deities are considered belonging to that house. Among the gods and goddesses they worship some are similar in nature while most are different and function accordingly.

Festivals

There is, a custom among the Limbu, that when festivals come they have to go to their Subba's (chieftan) house with offerings of *jad-raksi*-pork or mutton legs, curd or milk. In the past these Subba had been given a *lal mohar* (paper of sanction with royal seal investing them with full rights to decide cases and pass judgement, decree punishment and fines).

The Limbu people are also experts in dances and songs. While the Dhan Nach is the main dance of these people, Chyabrung Nach is also quite popular and performed on occasions of such festivals and religious occasions. These dances are performed by large groups in the compounds of village Subba and *dhvja* (cloth banners attached to tall poles) are erected to announce the performance of this dance and acts as a visual invitation from afar. In reality this dance is performed by the playing of percussion instruments by the old village folks. While one person plays the *dholak* (drum without the black central part called the *khari*) and the other one twirls a *chmar* made of yak tail. No song is sung for this dance. According to this dance's rhythm and that of the *dholak* the dance depicts the forgotten legends of the distant past.

The Dhan Nach is a famous dance among the Limbu people and is called *yarakama* or *yalangma*. This dance is composed of a long line of girls and boys holding hand and placed alternately. According to the stretched tone of the song they sing, they shuffle one foot forward and again backward, turning fully at the end of one verse. The long-drawn tone of the voice that is the song is called a *pa-lam*.

The Dhan Nach reflects the friendship, and communal harmony among these people. This activity provides a happy interaction

among the opposite sexes and also helps them to relax from the monotony of every day life. The songs themselves are love songs and help to create an atmosphere of love and affection among the participants and spectators. The Limbu society does not regulate strict control of their daughters and have given them control over their own lives is said to be indicated by the dance. Today this dance is the activity which is the ground where the young boys and girls choose their partners for life.

The Dhan Nach is actually performed after the paddy harvest and at the time of the initial consumption. This dance which was normally danced in the compound's and open spaces outside houses, are being done at *hat* bazaars, due to the changing times, and also at festivals and marriages. There is an injunction that clearly states that relatives are not permitted to dance together indicating the nature and objective of the dance. While the dance is in progress and if two dancers touch each other's toes they have to leave the circle, come out, put out their right hands, touch each others knees, perform the folded hands (*namaste*) gesture ask each other for pardon and once more join the group.

Khyali is a sort of duet song and a slight impromptu dance is also done. It has the custom of *chutki halne* or *juwari* (duet). This sort of throwing verses at each other goes on and should a girl be unable to answer the queries hidden in these verses then she has to marry the boy who has thrown the query. But should the girl be the victor, then the boy must comply to the rules where the custom states payment be done of whatever bet had been made.

Economic status

The *kipat* of the these Limbu plays a vital role in their economy. *Kipat* means the area where they live or are settled and it is *Tangsing Khoksing* in the Limbu language. There is a story about how the northern inhabitants from across the high Himalaya threw their shoes into the river and found these at a place south of the Himalaya where they settled as they believed that this was the land given to them by their god as their *kipat*. This group of people later on split into sub-groups and cleared lands in that region to make claims on their family *kipat*. The *kipat* system is still prevalent in some Limbu areas in Limbuwan even today.

The *soharani* system was later evolved by the Limbu and it was through this that they could lease lands to others, who were non-

Limbu, for farming. At a later date these *soharani* lands were changed into *raikar*, and though everyone was interested in extracting the utmost from these lands no one was much interested in the upkeep so the quality of these lands began deteriorating thus the output fell. The effect of this phenomenon greatly hit the Limbu people.

During times of plenty the Limbu had a custom of making kin and kindred share holders in their property and were accordingly brought into their *kul*. But as production decreased then all this ceased to function. They lived in large extended families in the past but after they were hit by the crash, they splintered into basic nuclear families. Even youths working on daily wages began to marry and maintain separate nuclear families. Thus, it is stated that according to the splintering of families, the *kipat* lands also broke into pieces. When this occurred the possibility of performing those great ritual worships and *pujas* looked economically unbearable and so these people sold their *kipat* (lands which are not to be sold but must be handed down from generation to generation) and migrated to the *terai* plain. In the year 1977 AD. the *kipat* system was abolished and those who were tilling the lands on lease became the owners of the lands they cultivated. Today, *kipat* is just a word.

Social Status

Socially the Limbu cannot be classified within any of the 4 *varnas* of Manu and thus maybe called a tribe from outside the Hindu caste structure, however the clever Brahmin priests have tried to keep these people in line by assuring them of their Ksetriya heritage.

Though there is no such thing as *chhu-achhyut* (pollution of status by physical contact with low caste) among these Limbu people, they are very conscious of position (social or otherwise). They respect their elders and these people are always consulted when a case has to be sorted out or decision has to be made. The elders or the old folks in the family are always fed first. When all eat together then the elders are placed at the right side of the line as the food is always served from the right side. Food such as rice, pulses, curries, pickles, butter, clarified butter, milk, whey, curds, etc. are kept to the right side of the plate. Before eating the host joins the palm of his hands in the *namaste* gesture and says - " Sir, nothing is good but still I'm offering you these which I hope you will accept and eat, whether delicious or not."

Dress & Ornaments

Although much changes and modifications have been adapted in Limbu attire and ornaments, still vestiges of the ancient dress mode can be glimpsed. The traditional garments were *mekhli* worn by the males and the *daugari* worn by the females. Today they wear the common dress of Nepal. While the women wear the typical patterned *phariya*, *patuka* at the waist, blouse or *cholo*, *khasto* or shawl, the men wear *daura-surwal*, pants, shirts, etc.

Ornaments include *mundri*, *laskari*, *chyaptae soon*, *bulaki*. Necklaces are made of antique silver coins joined together to make the necklace, *kanta* consisting of glass beads and gold rings alternately spaced on the necklace *tilhari* is a cylindrical gold piece placed between the glass beads necklace, *nau gaedi* is a necklace like a *kanta* but possessing nine gold rings. The *shirphuli* is placed on the top of their heads and clipped, consisting of a large disc of beaten and engraved gold. They wear the *chyaptae soon*, *laskari* and *mundri* on their ears, and the *bulaki* on their noses. Gold or silver bangles on their arms and silver *kalli* or leg bangles also.

LOBA

The people who inhabit the northern borders of Mustang District, and who are of Tibetan origin are customarily called Lobas or Lo. Since the capital of the kingdom of Mustang is Lo Manthang, this word has been created to indicate or categorise those who live in this area. These Lobas are also known as Sat Thapaulé Bhote or Mustange.

House & Settlement

Their houses are mostly constructed of stones and the roofs are also made of stones sliced or chiseled into thin square pieces. The roofs look extremely uniform and smooth, and on at each corner, a small square *chorten (mane)* is constructed and prayer flags tied on ropes are strung all around. These are the special features of the Mustange houses.

Most houses are constructed in proximity with each other. These houses do not possess any actual windows, but just holes in the walls as a protection against those high speed winds that race up the Kali Gandaki Gorge towards the Tibetan Plateau on whose southern most tip the land of Mustang is located. Accordingly, their houses are so constructed that they never face the south from which direction the winds blow. However, this becomes a drawback in summer when houses become very warm since no air enters to ventilate these dwellings, thus the inhabitants sleep on the terraces.

Houses in Mustang are painted with *kmero mato* (whitish clay). This painting is not with their hands as is the case in the lower areas of the kingdom, however, they mix this 'paint' in buckets of water and then splash this mixture on the walls. Thus some parts of the walls are extremely white while others are a dull white in colour.

Though feudalism is more or less extinct in Nepal, it is seen to be very much prevalent in Mustang as observed from the way in which Lobas construct their dwellings. The feudal lords or *jamindars* are called *lumbos*, and they are the only ones permitted to build three-storied houses, while the common people, the Kamis, Taelis and other low castes called Gaeras are allowed to build only one storied houses but without walled-in compounds. These kinds of bans are still common features in this region.

Sept (Thar)

The location of Mustang is north of the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri mountain ranges within approximately 84 degrees longitude and 29 degrees latitude. The climate of this region is quite arid and the people live between 11,000 and 13,000 feet above sea level. They earn their livelihood through agricultural practices, pastoralism and trading.

Initially it is seen that this place was called Lo and later on non-Tibetans began to use the name Mustang, which is seemingly derived from Monthang (som thang) meaning 'Plain of Aspiration' in Tibetan.

According to the version of one scholar, Mustang, the kingdom, was founded by Ama Pal, a fierce soldier, in the 1380's. Much can be learned about the kingdom of Mustang through a study of the *mollas* which were speeches whose main aspects were historical, oratorical and religious. From a social point of view, these people are distributed into 3 septs or *thars* namely Kudak, Selbha and Righin. In the Tibetan language, Kudak means high family or royal lineage, Selbha means that they are allegedly descended from the Bista or Thakuri and hence that is their *thar*.

Currently, however, a trend is observed where, due to some dominating influences, the Kudaks are voluntarily assimilating themselves into the Thakuri lineage, while the Selbhas and Righins have begun to align themselves to the Gurungs.

Their family group is called Lompa and due to the distribution of work, many other sub-septs were created as has been observed. In their families, some work as the king's royal guards, some carry fuel wood to the king's palace and still others split this fuel wood and carry it to the storage areas. On account of this ancient traditional belief, the existence of various castes or *jats* within the Loba community is still prevalent.

Religion & Festivals

The Lobas of Mustang are very religious minded. Two Buddhist sects, the Kargyupa and Sakyapa are dominant in Upper Mustang. It is found that the Kargyupa sect of Bhutan has created a strong influence here, and there exists a Dugpa gumpa in Mustang and it is

utilised by the Kargyupa sect. This gompa is believed to have been constructed when the wish of the Bhutanese queen could not be disregarded. Below the place where this gompa has been built, there are many small and large caves, within which many Buddhist, *maths chortens*, *chaitiyas*) are found.

To reach these caves, one has to go by means of wooden ladders. On account of the custom that every second son of a Loba must become a monk, the monk population of Mustang is rather large in comparison to the overall populace. Among such monks, there are basically two types: one type remains at the *gompa* continually while the other type goes home to till the lands and harvest crops. He later on returns to the *gompa*.

Monks function as executors of the orders of their head or chief monk called *unje*. These monks function as guards of the treasury, overseers of the agricultural works on the *gompa's* farmlands and work manually as farmers too. The food produced from the *gompa's* lands and the cash obtained from the sales are equally distributed among these monks.

There are four major festivals in the Loba society, namely Gine, Nayune, Gensu and Gelung. Nayune is celebrated twice or thrice each year, for a duration of four days continuously. To celebrate this festival, five rules must be adhered to. These rules are: maintenance of a 48 hours fast, total silence (no conversation whatever), giving *daan* (donations to the poor and needy), abstinence from sexual relationship between spouses and such rigid and tough stipulations. When this Nayune is conducted, *tormas* (conical dough images) made of *tsampa* (fried barley flour) are distributed as *prasad* or blessed offerings.

Life Cycle Rites

After a child is born, the Mustanges perform the naming ceremony after three days. In Loba society, a person has upto three different names. The first name is that given by the *lama*, then that given by the parents and the third one is given by the *guru* while giving *mantra daan*. The name given by the *guru* during *mantra daan* is used sometimes though rarely as per the individual's wish. However, it is a belief among these Lobas that this name must be kept a secret and so this name is very seldom used. Instead, this name is written on a piece of paper and inserted into a copper or

brass box which is sealed and hung around the person's neck as a talisman for luck. On the death of a person, the locket or talisman is removed from around the neck, by the *lama*, who then takes out the piece of paper on which the *mantra daan* name is written, reads it out and burns the paper.

Marriage Practices

Thar endogamy is very much prevalent among these people where they prefer to marry among their own septs. Thus, a Kudak prefers to marry a Kudak, a Selbha another Selbha and a Righin with another Righin. Polyandry is still prevalent among these Lobas, where a single woman is the common wife or a group of males. This is rather unique feature of the Lobas. A single woman is selected and married to five or six brothers as a common wife, or the eldest brother's wife is also utilised as a wife by his other younger brothers. However, the Lobas mention that this practice is gradually fading out among their community and isn't as prevalent as it used to be a decade ago. In spite of the younger Lobas attempting to discard this practice, the old folks desire this custom to continue for reasons such as: there is less chance of a woman becoming a widow if she has many husbands, sharing of property is unnecessary since all live in the same house due to the single wife and thus the family remains integrated, and other such factors. Currently, the number of youths who are uninterested in marrying one's sister-in-law or possessing a common wife with their brothers, are increasing day by day. In such cases where the younger brother is unwilling to follow the prevalent customs then he is free to leave the family and is automatically cut off from the family and property rights. There exists a totally separate village consisting of such anti-tradition renegades and it is called Dhurang gaon.

Dress up & Ornaments

The Lobas dress up in similar way to the Tibetan type of tribes that inhabit the Himalayan region. Their main dress is the *chhuba* (*bokkhu*) and *docha* (cloth shoes or boots which are knee length). Males also grow their hair like women, combing and plaiting it as well. Now a days, the number of people adhering to this traditional style or hair plaiting has deceased drastically. Women also wear such types of clothes and in addition, they make leather belts, studded with large and small semi-precious stones, necklaces of such stones and even impressions or carvings of gods and

goddesses on these hand made necklaces. It has been seen that such semi-precious stones in fairly large sizes are worn in abundance by a single woman. This is supposed to indicate the status of the wearer, a rich one in this case. One ornament of these Lobas is unique and consists of a flap that is attached to the hair in such a way, that it falls from the hair parting along with the hair and is turned back falling till the shoulders. This is studded with semi-precious stones of various sizes and intricately patterned. A similar type of headgear can be seen worn by the Ladakhis).

The male Lobas carry a small leather box on their belts or waistbands. This leather box (sometimes studded with semi-precious stones) contains needles of various sizes. Even young boys carry such boxes. The function of these needles is, when Lobas have any freetime, they make a hole in the earth and try to put these needles into this hole. This is a very popular and common game among these people, and possibly unique.

Social traditions & beliefs

The Loba society is completely based on the traditions of respect and honour. Their family organisations are also based on these traditions, it is observed, and accounts for the fact that when the property is inherited by the eldest son, the second eldest son has to become a monk and live in the *gompa*. The future of the youngest son depends upon himself solely. He can become a participant of his eldest brother's household, or he can follow in the footsteps of his second eldest brother i.e. become a monk. If he becomes a participant of his eldest brother's household, then he is eligible to a part of the ancestral property.

In the Loba community, once the eldest brother has been married, the father, the household head, officially resigns and hands over the responsibilities of that household to his eldest son. This shows that as the eldest son is married, he automatically becomes the household head and inheritor of the patriarchal property (ascribed inheritance).

MAGAR

It is said that the Magar tribe is one of the oldest tribes of Nepal and is spread across the length of the country and also to the east in places like Sikkim, Darjeeling, Duars, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland in the eastern part of India, while on the west they are found in Dehra Dun, Almora, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh in the western part of India. In the country of Nepal it is difficult to clearly state the total population and the area populated by these Magar people. The habitat of these people is the *terai* plains where the hills commence and the small lower hills of the Mahabharat Lekh and in some places in the high altitude mountainous areas and low lying river valley there exist deeply concentrated pockets of these people. They are encountered mostly on the bases of hills where the plains begin from the east to the west of Nepal, indicating their direct interactable proximity with other tribes and peoples who migrated from the south.

The regions that the Magar tribe inhabit are the districts of Palpa, Gulmi, Arga Khanchi, Syangja, Baglung, Parbat, Myagdi, Tanahun, Gorkha, Nawal Parasi, Rupendehi in the Western region; Rolpa, Rukum, Dolpo, Dailekh, Jajarkot, Pyuthan in the Mid-Western region and Ilam, Taplejung, Dhankuta, Sunsari, Sarlahi, Okhaldhunga in the Eastern region. Besides these areas there are small pockets of Magars spread out in the regions of the hot *terai* both east and west, and also in the hills and the areas around the Central region of Nepal.

Origins

It is necessary to know the oral legends or traditions of their origins as stated by these people themselves, thus the version of the 3 different language groups are presented as follows:

The origin of the Magar of the Bara Magaranth is that in the land known as Seem there lived a tribe of people. There were two brothers named See Magar and Chitoo Magar who began to have differences thus while one stayed back the other headed south and after a series of migrations reached the place called Kangwachen. This is in southern Sikkim and made up of a valley on whose northern end lived the Bhotia people while at the bottom or southern end settled these Magar immigrants, As the years passed the Magars

became very powerful and made the northern Bhotia their vassals. At this time the Magar king named Sintoo Sati Sheng (Shang) ruled in a very despotic manner and the northern Bhotia conspired and assassinated him. Later on the queen of this king took revenge and poisoned 1000 Bhotia people at a place called Tong Song Fong meaning where a thousand were murdered. But later on the Bhotia won and so the Magar had to again migrate further south and from there they moved in all directions among which one group migrated to Simraongadh. They are believed to have stayed here for a time and then from here they are believed to have moved towards the Bara Magranth area of Palpa, Gulmi, Dhor, Gherung, etc. One group moved towards the Okhaldhunga region and another group seems to have returned to the east. In this manner the Magar are said to have come into Nepal. No dates are given.

The Kham Magar further west of the Bara Magranth Magars have a different origin legend. There were four brothers, so says the legend, and one day they went hunting but got lost. They camped at a place and distributed the chores to do. From these four brothers the various *jats* or tribes emanated. The first tribe was the Bahun Magar (the eldest brother's tribe), then came the Thakuri Magar (the second eldest brother), then the Khas Magar (the third brother) and lastly the Kami Magar (the youngest brother). Thus the Khas Magar became the Kham Magar of today, it is said.

The Tarali Magars are said to have originated from the union of a male whose mother had fled the region of Jumla during a war of the Kalyal kings there. It is not known who her spouse was but she is said to have arrived at Tarakot in a very pregnant condition and given birth to this boy. One day this boy sees a strange phenomenon in the jungle lake where he goes with his cattle. The lake was alleged to be filled with milk and surrounded by a large forest. The boy spotted 7 shining creatures like fairies bathing in the waters of the lake. He was enthralled and came to observe them daily. One day he told his mother about this strange sight and she advised him to touch the youngest of these angels so that she would become human and thus he would be able to marry her. This happened and the boy brought the beautiful damsal to his mother, but when they asked her who she was she replied in a tongue which was incomprehensible for them. The *devi* was offered some bread and she uttered the words '*Tai khe nan*' Slowly they began to learn the language of this woman and *Kaike* was spread among themselves. The language was called *Kaike* meaning language of the gods.

In time there were three boys from this union and the eldest Kavae married a Thakuri King's daughter from Dailekh in the west, the second eldest Jayai married a Magar girl from the south and the youngest Ging married a Tibetan girl from Tibet. From Kavae's descendants came the Buda, from Jayai's descendants came the Rokaya and the Gharti from Ging's descendants. Among the children of the three sons, one used to go and take the goats for grazing. Everyday one goat used to disappear among some bamboo strands in a grove and then emerge later on. The boy was curious and when he followed the goat, he found it nursing a child in the hollow of the grove. He took the child home and from that day it became a part of their family and the ancestor of the Jhankri sept.

Sept (*Thar*)

It is generally known that in the structure of tribes there are the septs followed by the sub-septs, then the *gotr* is discerned and so on. Among the Magar people it would be proper to first state that this tribe is not divided into straight clans or septs, but into sub-tribes. This differentiation commences first with the linguistic classification which means that there are 3 sub-languages among the Magar people. The Bara Magranth Magar people speak the common *Magarkura* while those living in the Kham region speak the *Khamkura* and those in Dolpo area speak the *Kaike*. Each language is a distinct one with its own identity, and the *Kaike* is a language which is spoken nowhere in the world.

The Magar tribe is now divided into basically seven clans or septs: Thapa, Ale, Rana, Budathoki, Roka, Gharti, Pun, but here also some differentiation must be made. While the first three are considered the pure Magar, the latter are assumed to be assimilated elements from the neighbouring hill tribes of Bhotia ancestry (especially the Pun). Linguistically we can categorise these clans as follows:

Language

Magarkura speakers

Khamkura speakers

Kaike speakers

Septs

Ale, Thapa, Rana

Buda, Gharti, Roka, Pun, Jhankri

Tarali Magar of Dolpo/ Buda, Gharti, Rokaya, Jhankri

From this it is seen that there are distinctly four language groups within the Magar tribal structure, and although a person may claim

to be a Magar, the linguistic categorisation distinguishes the person as of one of the above groups. Today however, one is distinguished by his or her sept, because everyone asks what Magar one is and the answer is Thapa Magar or Buda Magar or Pun Magar, etc. Thus the linguistic classification is set out for the need to understand the Magar as a people.

The following table will help to further the understanding of Tribe/ Septs/ sub-Septs :

Tribe (Jat)	Sept (Thar)	Sub-Sept (Upa-Thar)
Magar	Thapa	Kunwor, Sapkota,
Magar	Ale	Kunwor, Sapkota,
Magar	Rana	Kunwor, Sapkota,
Magar	Buda	Oolungae, Lamichanae
Magar	Gharti	Oolungae, Lamichanae
Magar	Pun	Oolagae, Lamichanae
		Oolango, Lamichanae
Magar	Tarali	Buda, Rokaya, Gharti, Jhankri.

Septs of the Magar people have already mentioned and there are the sub-septs like: Arghali, Uchai, Kunwor, Kamanjan, Kannaujae, Khulal, Gaen, Chitaurae, Chuhan, Thada, Deesa, Pulami, Puwar, Bankawal, Byangnasi, Bhandari, Raya, Raeghami, Raeshami, Lamichane, Samal, Sattigharae, Sapkota, Sinjapati, Sinjali, Seem, Sunakhari, Suyal, Susuraling, Suryabansi, Soti, Somui, Hiski, common among Thapa, Rana and Ale.

The Kham Magar are divided into the following septs: Buda, Gharti, Roka, Pun, Jhankri. Tarali Magar septs and sub-septs are Kavae, Jayai, Ging are the ancestors from whom the Buda, Rokaya and Gharti evolved respectively. The Jhankri emanated at a later date. There are two types of Jhankri - Mapa and Topa. It is interesting to note that today the Jhankri are identifying themselves with the Roka sept due to feeling of being segregated from the other three septs. From the above brief outline it is seen that these Magar are a tribe which has, in the course of time, assimilated various other neighbouring tribes and become a large cultural and tribal nation.

Language

The languages of the Magar people are of four types has already been said. It must be understood that there is the Bara Magranth area

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

which is where Magarkura is spoken the Rolpa, Rukum and Pyuthan region where Khamkura is spoken and the Dolpo region where Kaike is spoken.

A sample of Kaike, Magarkura, Nepali and English languages for a comparative glimpse :

Kaike	Magarkura	Nepali	English
im	im	<i>ghar</i>	house
tyu	dee	<i>pani</i>	water
nga	nga	<i>m</i>	I (used with am)
ngai	ngai	<i>mailae</i>	I (used with did)
nu	hosai	<i>oo (u)</i>	he
ngo	kan	<i>hami</i>	us/we
ngaen	nangko	<i>tiniharu</i>	they

Khamkura is different from the above two *kuras* and placed separately for a glimpse : Khamkura is spoken in a variety of ways and the intonation differs from region to region and village to village.

Khamkura	Nepali	English
Hunke/gran	<i>ayo</i>	came
koda/ktade	<i>kata</i>	where to ?
ba	<i>jaun</i>	lets go
banke	<i>jau</i>	go
koda bane?	<i>kata gayako</i>	where to where are you off to?
chal chanaker	<i>chamal lina jaun</i>	lets go get some uncooked rice.

Physical characteristics

The Magar range from the ones who have been inhabiting the foothills of the Mahabharat Lekh till the high Himalayan areas like Dolpo, thus they do exhibit differences in physiques and features, however, this can be described generally to encompass the tribe.

The physiques of these people are thick set and sturdy, though shortish. They register an average height of 5 feet to 5 feet 3 inches, though some of the northern Magar people are very tall due to the Bhotia blood in them. The skin pigmentation of the plains Magar people is a dark to alight brown and the one living in the hills are

brown to fair. The body and facial hairs are minimum, malar bones prominent, epicanthic fold of eyes exist, the eyebrows are very slight and perched precariously on the high brow ridges, nasal roots are depressed and so the nose is quite small and flat at times, the lips are of medium thickness and tended to eversion among some Magar, while the integumental lip is slanted among others showing some of the Proto-Australoid features to a marked degree. The teeth are large and the incisors are flat chopper - like indicating their mongoloid ancestry. The ears are seem to be extremely large among the males especially.

Family

The family structure of these people is quite similar to the other tribes scattered throughout the country, however, there are some differences which make them different and a tribe apart. The main family splits into nuclear ones as the children marry, but there are families where the system of staying joint is existent, where they live in the same house and eat at one kitchen. In some cases though they live under the same roof, internally they are separate and have their own living quarters and kitchen. Thus it is seen that sometimes in large families there are actually many small nuclear family units.

The most distinctive element in the Magar family kinship is the strong connection between a maternal uncle and his nephew. Each has to respect the other equally and the uncle is permitted to call his nephew as *jawai* meaning son-in-law. The reason for this is that the nephew has the first claim to marry his matrilineal cross-cousin. This shows that the Magar people or society sanction and prefer tribal endogamy and integration of family, but this practice is gradually vanishing due to the pressure of modern and educated Magar youths. This is an indication that in the past the matriarchial society dominated this tribe.

Life cycle rites

Births

The birth of a child is an occasion of happiness in any community and it is no exception among these Magar people. While birth pollution is observed for 5-6 days within one Magar group it maybe for a period of 11 days in another.

Hinduised Magar do this ritual the Hinduistic way and thus call in a Brahmin priest to perform the necessary activities like the *Chaiti* on the sixth day where the belief is that the god of destiny arrives and writes the destiny of the child on its forehead. Thus they maintain a whole night long vigil and in the process sing devotional religious songs. The ones who remain till the morning are presented food alcohol and money, which are laid out on a *nanglo* meaning winnowing fan. While the money and alcohol are retained to show acceptance, the rice is returned to the householders. This *Chaiti* is mostly done only for the first born. The next step is the *navran* which is when the child receives its name and is made ritually pure alongwith its mother and the whole household. This is done on the 6th. day after birth for daughters by some Magar people but most do it on the day when their sons also have this ceremony. As earlier stated the time of the *navran* varies and some do perform it on the 4th. day after birth. While the Brahmin is used by some Magar people others use their own *dhami* or *jhankri* who are their priests. The calculations are made using the time of birth, date and such data, and then the zodiac is determined. After this the child's name is selected and the *navran* is over, after the child is told the name in its ear and then the parents are told. A thread is tied around the wrist of the child and parents who make gifts to the priest. A feast follows where those present offer gifts to the child. It is only after the *navran* that the child is allowed to wear proper stitched clothes.

Pasni

The initial rice feeding ceremony or *pasni* involves the child to be bathed in *sunpani* (water through which gold has been passed) followed by the feeding of the rice, milk, curds and bird meat also. The child gets a new set of clothes and the parents commence this feeding first to be followed by the others who are present. A girl is fed rice when 5 months old and a boy when 6 months. Once more gifts are given and a feast is eaten by the invitees.

Chhaewar

This is the ritual hair shaving ceremony or *chhaewar* and done at the age of 3 though some do it at the age of 5. The years on which this is done must be odd. All maternal kin and cross cousins are invited along with other guests. The shaving of the hair must be done by the maternal uncle or *mama* and if he should be absent then a member of the maternal kin group has to perform this function. Only the *tupi* or

topknot is left on the child's head. The shaved hair is placed on a new cloth piece and deposited at a holy spot or under a tree or at the local *pandero* (underground spring). The child receives new clothes and a feast follows. The totally Hinduised Magar people do not allow the child from now on to touch a low caste person nor to eat anything he wants.

For girls there is no such ceremony but they do receive *gunew-cholo* (clothes worn on the lower body and upper torso respectively) when they reach the age of 9 or 10 years.

Marriage practices

Among practically all the Magar people the marriages pattern are basically of the two common kinds - arranged and elopements, though there are cases of forcible or *latarnae* marriages also. Widow marriages are done and not uncommon and the *jari* marriages where a person marries someone else's wife is also a regular phenomenon among these people. They do not marry within the same *thar* and practice *thar* sept exogamy but tribal endogamy is very essential for them, though there are instances where marriages in which Magar girls have married hypergamously into Ksetri or Brahmin families and where the reverse has occurred also. The main characteristic that distinguishes the Magar people is the matrilateral cross cousin marriage pattern which is preferred and compulsory.

In this matrilateral cross-cousin marriage the *mama* or maternal uncle's daughter is the exclusive marriageable property of his nephew or *bhanja*. Thus this man's sister's son or *bhanja* has to marry his daughter. Should the daughter wish to marry elsewhere, then the father (*bhanja's mama*) must ask the *bhanja* if he has any objections and if the permission is given then only can she marry elsewhere. This is a social and traditional injunction that is strictly adhered to even today. This example clearly illustrates the endogamous nature of the Magar society.

Marriages of arrangements occur when the boy reaches a mature age of 25 and female is also about 20-22. The matchmaker looks around for a suitable bride for the boy(should he decline from marrying his matrilateral cross-cousin) and once the girl is located the relatives of the prospective groom go to the house of the girl's parents and present them with a *theki* of curds, *rayo sag*, bananas, sugar cane, and talks take place regarding the agreement of the match. The *theki*

is returned but filled with rice grains.

The boy's folks again go to the girl's house to confirm the matter and this time they do not take any gifts. The matter is confirmed verbally and the boy's folks return home to go once more for the third time. This time they carry *sale roti*, alcohol like *jad* and *raksi*, roosters(3), curds in *theki*, an uncastrated goat or *boka*, *sindur* or vermilion in a packet, and when all these are presented then the marriage is confirmed and the girl is bound meaning she is not free to go any where she likes from this day onwards. Should the girl elope with another person then the girl's husband has to pay compensation to the boy who had intended to marry the girl. If on the other hand the girl dies then the boy's family have to perform her death rites and observe death pollution. Should the boy die then the girl becomes a widow (but can marry someone else after a year).

At this third meeting called *kura chhinne* meaning finalising the matter, the number of *janti* to go, the number of musicians, whether a *pancha baja* or a *naumati baja* or an *athara baja*, and the bride's folks demand that the groom's folks send the necessary items for the feast to be given to the *janti*. These items consist of *sale roti*, *jad* and *raksi*, a pig or a castrated goat, ricegrains and such. Once all these things are sorted out the preparations commences on both sides.

On the day of the marriage, the marriage procession or the *janti* starts its march towards the bride's house. This *janti* consists of the old folks, youths and all interested in entertainment. Except for the couple of girls who are to handle the bride, there are no other females in the *janti* as this custom does not exist. Once the groom leaves the house, the gods and spirits are pacified by the flinging of *dhyja* (cloth banners) and the firing of guns into the air. The groom has to carry a *theki* of curds as is customary, and at this time he is decked out in ornaments and the sword or *khadga* as is the tradition.

Before reaching the house of the bride the *bhatkurae* come to receive them. These *bhatkurae* are those persons who had gone to the bride's house a day previously with the items like the pig or castrated goat, rice grains, *sale roti*, *jad* and *raksi*, etc. Now the time for the ritual called *janti parsane* or welcoming the *janti* arrives and the bride and her childhood friends have to part so they hold each other and cry mournfully. This is followed by the *janti* entering the compound of the house and from a circle and almost everyone opens his umbrella. Now the bride's folks strike up the *maiti baja* and

holding lit oil lamps in their hands the bride's people circumambulate the whole *janti* thrice, showering them with flowers, ricegrains or *aksata*, and curds and water mixture. Everyone of the *janti* is presented a garland and *abir* or red powder is put on them, by the bridesmaids. At the time of the *parsane* the damai of the local band stand a way off and strike up the music relevant to this situation.

Then the bride and groom are carried into the house and placed at a cleansed spot by the bride's brothers. The groom is seated on the right and the bride on the left. Then the bride puts a garland around the groom's neck and says that from that day she is his wife. This is followed by the bride's householders performing the required *puja* on the couple and then anointing them with the *tika*, blessing their union, and presenting them some money also. Actually the ritual of *sindur halne* is not a Magar ritual though it is catching up very fast due to the Hinduisation that is still in progress. The bride's parents put her hand in that of the groom's and so they transfer the responsibility of her security and protection to the groom.

There is a ritual of *kakha chhodaune* meaning to separate the child from the mother (her lap), and this is a Hinduised ritual where a brahmin priest presides and the bride must give her mother a sari while her maternal kin are fed with the usual *roti* and the alcoholic beverages. Now the *janti* are given a grand feast where they are made to eat *roti*, meat, food, pickles and the usual *jad* and *raksi*. The whole night these people keep a vigil and sing and dance throughout the night, high on the spirits in liquid form. This night is the happiest moment of the bride's kin and all the other distant kin and guests are collected here to make merry and celebrate.

The next day the bride has to be sent away with a farewell which is called *dulhan anmaune*. Prior to this ritual the *janti* are made to dance in the compound, then the local band strikes up a melancholy strain on their instruments that the bride and all her folks start wailing and she is taken and seated in the *doli* of palanquin ready to move away to her husband's house which becomes her house from that day. Normally the bride is given all the presents she had received to take along with her, but some of the presents given by those of her family are not given until she has not given birth to a couple of children.

Now the *janti*, dancing and singing return to the house of the groom

with the bride. On the way there is the custom of firing the guns, throwing the *dhvja* and praying at the various shrines and the deities within and chasing away the evil spirits. The *janti* is welcomed at the groom's house with a sprinkling of water curds, *aksata* and rice grains mixture. Then the *janti* is given a feast and the marriage is ritually over for that day.

Dulhan phadkaune is done the very next day and some places it is done after a period of three days. This means return of the bride to her house. The bride and groom carrying roti and alcohol(*raksi*) go to visit the parents of the bride. They stay there for a few days and then return. The coming Dasai festival time and the *tika* day is crucial for this newly wed couple, because this is the final ritual which completes the marriage. The couple have to take items demanded by the *maiti* of the girl. These consist of *jad*, *raksi*, pig or castrated goat, *sale roti*, bananas etc. The *maiti* when presented with these things have to compensate with money. This is called *maiti chinnae* meaning to get to know the parents and kin of the bride. This is because during this Dasai the couple have to visit all the bride's relatives for *tika* and hence get to know them.

Some taboos exist that the married couple must observe after the marriage. The groom is not permitted to touch his wife's elder sisters and the bride is not allowed to touch her husband's elder brothers. Should they accidentally touch then they have to purify themselves with water in which gold is dipped. The groom must perform *dhog* to *mama*, *maiju* (mama's wife) *jethan* (wife's elder brother) and those elders in the family. This is the general way in which the Magar people complete their marriages.

Death Rites

When a Magar dies then the corpse is wrapped in a white cloth and tied to a bamboo structure at five places. The corpse is oiled and then given a garland of flowers with a sprinkling of the usual water in which gold is dipped. The custom is for the corpse to be carried by the son alone or at the most by the two people. The bier is preceded by the priest or *dhami* who recites *mantras* and sprinkles coins, *aksata* and blows the conch shell also.

On reaching the site of cremation the corpse is denuded and placed on the pyre where the sons burn the *daag batti* on the corpse's mouth and then the pyre is fired with some straw. Only Magar

people are only allowed to handle the body. After the body has been burnt the ashes are thrown into the nearby river and the pyre washed. The custom of burial on hill tops also exists among the Magar people and this is a very old tradition. Even today the *dhami* or *jhankri* Magar are buried face down.

Once the burial or cremation is over the sons and brothers of the deceased have to shave their hair and even their top knots. All hair on their bodies are to be shaved is the sacred injunction they follow. But all Magar folks do not do such a thing and some follow very Tibetanish rules also. Then they bathe and wear the white loincloth and a white cloth to wrap their bodies and a cloth of similar colour on their bald heads. They are barefeet. The funeral goers must also bathe and then they all return homewards. They light a fire and place a branch of the *chautari* (a tree) or some *titepati* (a shrub) on it and then walk over it slightly touching the fire itself with their feet. This is also done in another way where a branch of the thorny *bhalaio* bush is placed across the fire or a branch of rose bush. This is to ensure that the spirit of the deceased and the others which are roaming in the ether cannot follow the funeral goers or *malami* back to the house. On the way back, at a predecided spot the *malami* are fed with *jad* and *raksi*, and other foods.

The sons of the deceased return and are placed in the place which is cordoned off from the rest of the living area, maybe on the outside verandah or *pindi*. They remain there for the period of immediate death pollution and perform their daily activities of going to the river or stream, bathing, cooking food, offering the deceased some and then consuming this. Then returning and resting in the *kuro* for the day. This continues for, a period of 10, 12 or 13 days. The married daughters and *jawai* are freed from this pollution within the 3rd. or 5th day of the death. The 10th. day is for the ritual called *digro phutaune*, the 12th. day is for the offering of water to the sun god, the thirteenth day is for purification of the family and kin.

On the last day the ones in *kuro* are allowed to touch salt and oils which were the items on the banned list and they are purified with the sprinkling of *gaunth* (cow urine) and the drinking of a small quantity of this *gaunth*. The *malami* are also given some of this *gaunth* to drink and then a feast is given to all there. From then on the ones of the immediate family are eligible to eat anything. The food ban is lifted though some sons maintain certain taboo for a year or 6 months or 45 days.

Religion and Festivals

In reality the Magar are animists, but due to the influx of the Brahmins from the Indo-Gangetic plains through the ages, the impression of these learned Vedic scholars and their Caucasoid features seem to have made a great impact on these simple Magar folks thus gradually being manipulated into the acceptance of the religion called Hinduism. Today the Magar are the most Hinduised tribe in the country. They worship the Hindu Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Siva and the host of other deities in their pantheon both Hindu and local.

They celebrate all the Hindu festivals like Maghe Sankranti, Srawane Sankranti, Teej, Chait Dasai, Baisakh Purnima, Kusae Aunsi, Janma Astami, Dasai, Tihar and such. They worship the Hindu god and also other female deities representing fertility and power - Chandi, Deurali Mai, Kalika, Bhawani, etc.

The Dasai festival is celebrated by the Magar people and this is the time when they offer blood sacrifices of pigs to their deities, especially the female *shakti* and they drink alcohol and make merry. Families visit their *mul* or main houses and wear *tika* from the hands of their elders or parents and meet their relatives and kin after an interval of a year. The significance of the Dasai period among the Magar people is one where the Lord has given them time to let out steam after the whole year's suppression and to make up on the time lost during the year with separation of the kin. People travel from one place to the other carrying gifts or *koselee* which are essential when going for *tika*.

It is said that the custom of playing Bahilo in Tihar is a tradition started by the Magar king Balihang who lived in the west of the country of which the eastern border was Pokhara, the southern border Gorakhpur, the western one being Pyuthan and the northern border Galkot. It is said according to the legend that he was a very wise and religious king and could foresee the future so one day he assembled his courtiers and informed them of his impending death which was to occur on the dark moon of the month of Mangsir that was around the corner. His courtiers were worried for everyone loved and respected King Balihang. They asked him if there was any remedy and he told them that if they lit lamps throughout the kingdom on that night, and prayed to the god of death to spare him

then maybe there was a chance. The courtiers spread the word and the whole kingdom prepared for the night of the dark moon in Mangsir. On that night the kingdom was lit as if day and the people kept singing and praying maintaining a night long wigoil. At midnight the god of death came and the people implored him not to take the king from their midst, so being touched by the love the subjects had for Balihang, the god of death hovered over the king and finally when morning came he flew away leaving Balihang alive. This is celebrated by the festival of Tihar where the children ask for Bhailo and play Deusi.

The *Kulian puja* of the Magar people is one of great importance to them. It is said that this worship of the *kul devta* commenced somewhere in the seventh century and due to the fact that their *kul devta Barha* troubled them a lot so according to the *jhankri* an *dhami* of those days the people got together and began to propitiate the *kul devta* and that is how this has come to pass. This is gleaned from their oral tradition. Unlike the other traditions of different tribes the Magar tribe does not have these traditional injunctions and customs made at a sitting by a group of people but it has evolved through centuries of situations and circumstances through which the Magar have passed and gradually changed into the form they are seen as today.

The injunction states that the *Kulain puja* can be done only once every three years and so it is followed. It is done only on the full moon of the month of Mangsir, or on the *dashara* of Jestha or Baisakh. The worship involves propitiating Siva and all the deities worshipped by that family. Though there are animal sacrifices involved in this worship, the variety of animals used are many like some use the kid of a lamb for this *puja* while others use the pig (the black small type) and yet others use plain roosters also.

A day prior to the *Kulain puja*, the house and the members of the household clean and get cleaned. There must be no polluted things within the premises if the house and all the *kul* members offer a single sacrifice to their *kul*, thus indicating the community worship involved here. A separate sacrifice can be offered during this *puja* if one has made a vow, a child is born or someone has married. This sort of sacrificing is actually done on a private scale and this presentation in the community worship is slowly vanishing. Extra animals like bulls or pigs are slaughtered so as to be able to present shares to the various groups that are involved in this worship.

Since the *Kulain puja* varies its style from sept to sept and place to place, it cannot be said that there are these animals sacrificed here or that so many priests are found in this group or that group. Mostly there are 9 to 3 or 5 priests presiding besides the main priest. The place of worship is either in the house near the hearth or in the forest under a tree. Nine is the number in these *puja* and 9 *mana* of rice grains, 9 *mana* of *jad*, 9 *mana* of *raksi*, have to be made and 9 times they must dance and then only the *prasad* (the blessed offerings) is eaten, however, even now while the *prasad* is eaten the person must keep on dancing. Some Magar folks dance round the place where the *puja* is performed in the forest and then they take all the paraphernalia laid out there and immerse these in the nearby river.

Consumption of alcohol is not permitted when attending this *Kulain puja*, and only those members of that *kul* are permitted to go to the *than* or shrine. This *puja* is very important for the Magar people as it is the time when brothers and sisters are recognised and the relationships of agnates strengthened. Today the *Kulain puja* has taken on a different meaning and is a point in the year when the Magar people actually identify themselves in the context of the tribe as a whole and the agnatic family in particular.

The other *puja* like Baraha, Chhatra and Bhairav are performed with the sacrifice of a bull, Deurali is propitiated by the sacrifice of a goat kid, Mai is appeased with the young male buffalo, then goats of uncastrated category, roosters and so on. Pigeons, hens and such are also used for other *puja* and also eggs and flowers at times. The *puja* to the Baraha, Chhatra, Mai and Deurali are done in a communitywide way and thus these are celebrations where there are many people and fun too. There is the custom of having a local band playing.

For the protection of the animals they have the Goth *puja* or worship, of the cowshed twice annually, once on the full moon of the month of Mangsir and the next time in Baisakh on the full moon. These *puja* are one day affairs. In the month of Srawan there is a *puja* called Harali, and it is done to ensure that the crops ripen properly. They lope off branches of the Bhakimlo tree and make effigies which are worshipped.

Some festivals that the Magar celebrate are Hindu in their entirety, while there are others where the Hindu concept and ideas have been enforced but the rituals and gestures are very non-Hindu. The

Ghantu is one such festival where the actions are all animistic yet the whole song and meaning has been converted into the Ram-Lila and Krishna Lila. The *Ghantu* is a primitive dance where the dancers are the *Ghantu* and these consists of girls who have not married. This *Ghantu* dancing festival is called Baisakh Purnima and also Chandi Purnima, falling in the middle of the month of Baisakh. The basic aim of this dancing is to gather people of a region at a place and promote interaction, at the same time being a large group to offer prayers to Chandi devi, who is believed to be the universal mother. This is very much similar to the *Ghantu* of the Gurungs.

Srawane Sankranti is the festival when the *luto phalne* ritual is done. Here they hammer various sorts of tins and drum and eject the *luto* (actually a skin disease contracted from the dogs and buffaloes) from their houses. The daughters are invited and given gifts of this day. The whole night the *dhami, lama, jhankri* people sit and pray to the gods to avert the various calamities like floods, landslides, hailstorms, famines, epidemics, and such. Since Srawan is a month which is considered inauspicious, the Magar folks are forbidden to touch the percussion instruments during this period and a silence prevails over the Magar villages.

Occupation

The Magar of the high regions like the Tarali of Dolpo, are also agriculturists but trade as their neighbours do and as they have learnt. Thus they are agriculturists and traders, meaning that the trade brings in the cash and the agriculture brings in the food. They are almost living in the pattern of the high altitude Bhotia people who have influenced them very much as can be seen from the location of 3 Tarali Magar villages in proportion to the 9 Bhotia villages in that region. They use a wooden plough with a wooden ploughshare and they use only a single ox putting weight on the plough by standing at the side and bending. There is only one crop in the summer, as the land is snowbound the rest of the time. They grow buckwheat, millet, beans, *uwa, chinucamal*, soya, maize and potatoes which were introduced only about half a century back. These products they grow and also sell, along with the oil pressed out of the mustard and hemp (*cannabis sativa*) which they make into oil or cakes and sell these in the markets at lower levels.

The Kham Magar people have a mixed economic base that is agriculture and some livestock rearing. They are adept agriculturists

and have utilised the lands that exist near their settlements near the river valleys, simultaneously rearing the cattle and other high altitude livestock for the purpose of boosting their income. The lower altitude Magars have emphasised more on the agriculture than the pastoralism and the high altitude ones have increased their pastoralism to a greater degree. They grow a double crop of corn or wheat, barley, millet, buckwheat, amaranth, beans, soya, radish, etc, at the lower altitudes of 6000 to 8000 feet, while higher up there are potatoes, buckwheat, naked barley or *uwa*, hemp, corn, wheat. The Magar of this region are strong, healthy and very hard working rearing livestock for consumption and extraction of products like wool, milk, meat etc.

The Magar of the Bara Magar area are more of agriculturists and less of pastoralists. They cultivate huge tracts of lands that lie in the *besi* (river valley flatlands) and grow the paddy crop even twice per year thus making them self sufficient and also keeping some animals for consumption during festivals like the inevitable pig and some chickens and goats. Cattle are kept for the ploughing and for the milk they provide along with the manure which is of the utmost importance to the farmer, however today the artificial fertiliser has reached these nooks and crannies and so the necessity of the cattle for manure is slowly being felt less.

The tradition of going to the Indian or the British Armies is the one which is causing the Magar people to become vegetated since they have set a trend and anyone who is not in the army is useless or no good is the feeling these people have. The girls are also interested in marrying a soldier than an ordinary farmer from among the community. Even today this tendency to go to *Lahur* meaning out of the country as a soldier, is very much strong among the Magar boys and cause of the Magar identity to stagnate. However, this is also a strong source of income for those rural people who have no education and can procure money to fulfil desires like their children's marriages, only joining the armies where they are paid to do work and not think much. But today there are schools coming up in these regions and the so called *sojo* (honest and straight forward) Magars of yesterday are becoming slightly conscious of their identities and social status in this society.

Social Status

The Magar are considered to be the true portrait of the Gurkha warriors, never turning back and always ready to protect the nation by taking the enemy head on. This is the sort of feeling the Magar people themselves have about themselves and do not know the fact that the caste hierarchy of the Hinduistic state has no place for the Magar warriors who laid down their lives. Thus it can be said that the Magar are a people who are socially placed in the category of the *pani chalnae jat* meaning those above the water pollution level, yet not awarded a specific place in the Hindu hierarchy. The Magar people have not thought about this and thus it has remained a problem.

Should a Magar touch an untouchable like a Sarki then this Magar must have *soon pani* sprinkled in him by someone who is undefiled. A Brahmin can drink water given to him by a Magar but cannot eat the rice cooked by the same Magar. This is the social position of the Magar people.

Dress and Ornaments

The Magar of the low hills wear the ordinary *kachhad* or wrap-on-loincloth, a *bhoto* or a shirt of vest and the usual Nepali *topi*. The women wear the *phriya* or sari-like dress above the ankles, *chaubandi cholo* or a closed blouse and the heavy *patuka* or waist band or girdle and the *mujetro* or shawl like garment. The higher altitude Magars wear an additional *boku* similar to the Gurung shepherders and the ones living in Tarakot area even wear the Tibetanish *chhuba*. The ornaments are the *mundri* on the ears, *bulaki* on the nose and the *phuli* on the left nostril, the silver coin necklace and the pote with the *tilhari* gold cylinder. Some are seen to wear the *kalli* on the ankles but it is out of style now a days. Magar males do not wear ornaments but some are seen to have earrings or silver and gold hanging from their ear lobes. The amulet or locket necklace is worn by the Magar girls and women of the lower hills and the high altitude ones wear these made of silver with *muga* stones imbedded in them. The bangles of gold and glass are also worn on their hands along with the *sirbandi* and *sirphuli* on their heads. These are large pieces of gold beaten in elongated and circular shapes.

Social Organisation

The Magar people are today organised into a countrywide network which has succeeded, to an extent, in assimilating all the Magars into a social organisation which was initially established in Kathmandu district in 1985 as the Nepal Langhali Sangh, but it has been transformed into the Nepal Magar Association recently in 1993. The main objective of this organisation is to unite and develop the Magars socially and culturally in the context of today's changed situation.

M A J I

The Maji are a tribe, who, if judged from the point of view of their culture, could be classified in the category of the Tharu of the terai. It is seen that language, culture, rites, rituals, society and living patterns among these two tribes are quite similar. This is further supported by the fact that among the *batis thars* (32 septs) of the Tharu people, there is a sept or *thar* called Maji Or. But in spite of the above mentioned facts, the Tharu classify the Maji as a separate tribe and different from themselves, although it would not be completely inaccurate to state that they are in some way related to one another.

Settlement areas

The total Maji population in the country is estimated at approximately 20,000 heads, among whom a majority are settled in the eastern *terai* and hills, living in close proximity to the rivers in these regions of habitation. In the central regions, especially the area around Chitwan, it can be seen that these Maji live on the banks of rivers such as the Narayani, Rapti, and river junctions like the one at Deo Ghat some distance north of Narayanghat, where the Seti and Trisuli rivers merge to form the larger Narayani. It is also observed that some Maji communities live away from the rivers and today have become highly assimilated into the tribes among whom they have been living for many decades.

Historical Background

The main and traditionally accepted occupation of these Maji folk is to fish and paddle boats which are used as ferries, at various points along rivers. But in spite of this traditional job set out for them, some are seen to cultivate *pakho kheti* or lands reclaimed from the river after it has changed its course. It is not a rare, but an impossible matter of finding a rich man among these Maji. When their social and cultural traditions and customs are studied, it is clearly evident that this Maji people are still the same as they were in ancient times. In the aspect of literacy, these Maji are not even at the bottom rung of the development ladder.

These Maji claim descent from the lineage of Lord Rama, meaning from Kus or Kusari one of the sons of Lord Rama, while the

Chepang tribe claim descent from the other son Laba or Lohari. However, here there is a controversy as the Chepang claim the Kusunda are also known as Ban Raja or Kings of the forest and have become almost extinct except for a few settled at various places in the Western part of Nepal. Thus according to the claim of the Chepangs about the descendants of Kusari, or the Kusunda and themselves, no actual similarity or relationship can be perceived. Therefore, it is assumed that while the Chepang claim the Kusunda as the descendants of Kusari, the Maji dispute this and stake their names on this claim of descent from Kusari. Though some Maji call themselves Sugar, the other tribes in the *terai* call them Kushars.

The Maji are said to have migrated from certain areas in Tanahun district to the *terai* and Chitwan areas, through the centuries. But regarding the time of arrival and habitation of the Chitwan and other areas in the *terai* nothing is known, even among the Maji folks. It has been found that the Maji inhabiting the banks of the Nayayani river and the confluence of the Trisuli and Seti and Deo Ghat, are actual descendants of the Maji people involved in the Tanahun migration from Patthar Ghat and Sisa Ghat areas specifically. These Maji settled around Thori, claim to be aboriginals of that area.

Physical characteristics

Maji are dark-skinned, of medium height, with thin wiry bodies and extremely shy in nature. This shyness is due to their fear of unknown persons. At a glance these Maji resemble the Tharu of the *terai*, to a remarkable degree. It is seen that the Maji are characteristically a rather slow type of people and may be even considered azy, but it is not so. This slowness we consider to be slow or almost lazy is a nature that has been bred through the centuries of patiently fishing and ferrying people to and fro, and today it is an inherent characteristic among these Maji.

Sept (*Thar*)

The word Maji is mostly used by these people who populate the hilly terrian of the kingdom, and the *terai* inhabitants call them the Bote, but actually the Bote are a different tribe. Although it is stated that these Maji have their own *thars*, inquiries revealed that they themselves did not know anything about *thars* but said that they had *barga*, and so this could be a means of internal tribal classification similar to other tribes with their *thars*.

Those Maji living upstream are known as Kshare which maybe due to the fact that other hill tribes also used this word for those living in isolated areas in the hills. Among the Maji of the Chitwan region, names such as Sundhanwa, Kshare, Thar Bote, Mushar Bote, Kushar Bote, Pakhe Bote are prevalent. Besides this there are the Bhagu Bote in the Thori area. It is seen that these names have slowly been assimilated into the Maji communities to classify a certain group living in a particular area through the ages and today have become their special *thar* or sub-names which they term *barga*. Among the above *thars*, the Bote suffixation is regarded as a controversial matter since Maji and Bote are stated as being two definitely different tribal entities altogether.

Maji are classified three major language groups. The first group consists of those Maji who cannot articulate in the *Maji boli* and speak Nepali only. The second group consists of those Maji who are bilingual, meaning speak both *Maji boli* and Nepali, intermixing both at times. The third group includes those Maji folks who only speak or prefer to speak the *Maji boli*. This sort of categorisation arises from the facts such as: the Maji of Sunkosi area speak Nepali even though they are fully conversant in *Maji boli* but do not prefer to use it at all; those who live in the area opposite Chawal Danda cannot speak nor understand the *Maji boli* at all Maji Gaon, Aespati and Bhulum Tar use the *Maji boli* in all matters of communication, both internal and external. The Chitwan Maji use their own *boli* within their own society and Nepali when dealing with the general population. Thus they retain their own *boli* and also become conversant in the national language, Nepali.

Family

The basic family structure of the Maji people is the large primitive joint family pattern, but they reside in different dwellings however all their activities, when carefully observed, are seen to be jointly executed and as a team which clearly indicates their cohesiveness. Thus what we consider as a small Maji village is in reality a single large family, as each nuclear family lives in separate dwellings physically, but is a unit of a whole in every other aspect.

Houses

On a festivals, the *mul ghar* or main - central house of the oldest agnate is the focal point of celebrations where all the family

members have gathered to celebrate or propitiate. In the event of an important decision to be made, every concerned member (mostly male) gathers here at the *mul ghar* to discuss and finalise the matter. One thing to be noted here is the fact that a single and separate nuclear Maji family cannot be found easily, and if one such family does separate from the main family group, it does not survive for long as a Maji family, because it is almost immediately assimilated into the majority group of the area where it is settled.

Life Cycle Rites

Navran

Regardless of sex, the newborn babe has his or her *navran* 3 to 7 days after birth and is done by the child's father. However, the traditional practice is for a relative to perform this and the best choice is the *jawai chela* or brother-in-law or the *mama* or maternal uncle. A gift of one *mana* of rice and five rupees for performing this rite is made as is the traditional custom. Birth pollution is also seen to be observed and purified on the day of the *navran*, and the *sutkeri* or woman who has given birth is given some oil to touch and then all the household members are sprinkled with *gaunth* - urine of a cow - the purifying liquid used by Hindus.

This is followed by a feast and during this a name is given to the child, according to the bar or day of birth. Thus, names such as Aite for someone born on Aitabar or Sunday, Mangale for one born on Mangalbar or Tuesday and so on are the traditional types which are however not used daily but substituted with other modern names, as they believe that the original names of the children should not be known by everyone, as the possibility exists where *bokshi* or witches and *boksha* or warlocks can easily trouble the child with *mantras* or spells. So they use names like Kale, Thule, etc. while calling the children.

Bhat Kulai

The initial solid food feeding is done when the child reaches the seventh month and it is called *bhat khulai*. Here too, the presence of the *mama* is essential for he has to feed the child with rice, milk and other such things and then only can other relatives follow suit. The end of this ceremony is followed by a feast.

Chhaewar

The initial hair cutting ceremony or *chhaewar* is only done for male children. This ceremony is usually performed within the age range of 3 to 5 years. This is also called *topi dine chalan* or custom of presenting a *topi* or cap. Here again, the child's *mama*, is the person who is of immense importance, since the actual cutting of the locks has to be done by the *mama* as is the practice among most of the tribes in the kingdom. Customarily, the *mama* carries his *bhanja* or nephew into the house where he shears the boy's locks and presents him with a new cap or a cloth turban and also hands him some money (as much as he can afford). This is reciprocated by the *bhanja* with similar gifts, which though accepted by his *mama*, are never taken away but left at the nephew's home as is the custom. The *phupu haru* or paternal aunts, *didi haru* or elder sisters or cousins, *bahini haru* or younger sisters or cousins and other village belles also present the child with gifts or *sagun* which consist of *raksi*, meat (cooked), etc., as is the custom. These presentations are reciprocated with gifts of clothes and money by the child's parents. Among some Maji people, it is seen that all these who attend this ceremony present the child with money within the range of Rs. 1/- to Rs. 5/-.

Bratabandh

This is also called the thread-giving ceremony or *bratabandh* and is in fact a ceremony done by the higher castes like the Brahmin and Ksetri. While most Maji people living in the *terai* regions do not perform this *bratabandh*, some of these small isolated communities do this but not as a separate ceremony but as a part of the ceremony of marriage. When the marriage date is settled, the day before this *bratabandh* of the bridegroom is performed, where all his hair is shaved off and a yellow thread is tied round his neck. The reason for this, according to their belief is that while the *janti* or marriage procession is returning, the evil spirits and evil eye are warded off.

Marriage Practices

Although the Maji are in constant contact with other communities, they prefer their marriages to be endogamous, and these Maji people have achieved endogamy to some discernible extent. Though some scholars claim the existence of marriages between Tharu, Danwar, Darai and Maji people since the Maji community has given

permission or freedom for such inter-tribal marital liaisons, the Chitwan Maji vehemently deny this and state themselves to be separate from the Darai, Danwar Tharu and marriages with these tribes is taboo. A strange custom of heirarchy among some Maji communities is that if a Maji male marries a female from another Maji community, then the child inherits his father's ancestral name or patrilineal descent if a boy and his mother's ancestral name or matrilineal descent if a girl.

Maji have their own marriage procedures. When a boy is inclined to seek matrimonial liaison, then preliminary talks are conducted and should this materialise positively, then further procedures are carried out. The boy's people or representatives visit the girl's house according to the traditional procedures, and they carry 3 or 5 hen eggs, two *perungo* (flat bamboo woven baskets for keeping dried fish) of dried fish as *sagun* and a *bhala* or spear which is (needed when the party reaches the girl's house) stuck into the ground in the girl's parents' house's compound. This spear symbolises the fact that they have come to finalise the marriage talks and conveys the message-*hami keti ko kura chinaunu aako ho* - to the girl's people. After sticking the *bhala* into the ground, the boy's party enter the girl's house with the *sagun* they have brought along with them. A *lami* or matchmaker is the leader of the boy's party and he presents the girl's father with the *sagun*, which if consumed by the girl's father, then is considered a sign that the marriage is to be, but if the *sagun* is left alone then this is a sign of non-acceptance of the match and thus no marriage is to occur. Should this latter action occur, then the boy's party leave the girl's house taking back the *sagun* and *bhala* with which they had arrived previously.

A fortnight prior to the day decided for the wedding, the bridegroom undergoes a strange ritual. He is tied with a halter around his neck and both his hands and feet are also tied. Then he is given advice by his kin folks in the *Maji boli*. On the day of the marriage, the *janti* or marriage procession moves towards the bride's house and it is accompanied by 2 Damai (who are tailors and an occupational caste of the Sudra level), 2 Madauli and Lokanti and kin, relatives, neighbours and friends, but the bridegroom does not accompany this *janti* in the case of the Maji folks of Chitwan.

The ritual of *dulahi anmaune* is also practised by the Maji like the other tribes of the kingdom. Here, the bride is given a farewell by her kin and as she is coming out of the house, the *janti* are ready

with an open umbrella and immediately hide her while simultaneously making off with her for a distance as the custom dictates. At a short distance away, the Mizar obstructs their path and for a clear way, *surti* (chewing tobacco) and *tamakhu* (tobacco smoked in a hubble-hubble or *hooka*), are presented to him and the other relatives of the bride who are also present there. Half of these gifts of *surti* and *tamakhu* go to the Gaurang who is the Maji of that village or community who keeps the accounts of taxes, land revenues, etc., while the other half is shared among the bride's relatives and the Mizar.

This custom of presenting gifts to the bride's relatives when they block the path of the *janti*, as stated above, suggests and indicates that in earlier times, the Maji were quite affluent and performed their marriages in an extravagant manner, as assumed by some scholars. Once the bride reaches the groom's house and is taken inside, she is given a new set of clothes and the *sindur halne* ritual is performed as done by other tribes in the kingdom. Wednesdays are considered to be auspicious days for marriages and accordingly it is seen that marriages are performed on Wednesdays, which fall within the permissible months observed by the Brahmin and Ksetri.

Other Kinds of Marriages

Besides the normally preferred arranged marriages, a certain type of marriage where the bride is literally dragged off and married exists. This is practised by those couples who love each other but their parents are opposed to the union and this method of marriage is the only way out. Thus this marriage form is called *ghisarne biwaha* or dragging type of marriage though the couple is in perfect understanding. Thus this pattern of marriage can be explained as a put on for the benefit of the society which accepts this and thus helps to save face on both sides.

The way in which such *ghisarne biwaha* is performed is after the couple have decided the venue (which is a *jatra* or fair), the girl alongwith her friends attend and so does the boy with his group of male friends. They then commence singing a *juwari* or duet, which is a sort of questions and answers session but in song. As the *juwari* continues, the boys observe and pinpoint the girl their friend wants to marry. After assessing the general situation of the *jatra* the actual *ghisarne* or dragging is done. The actual process is for the boy to advance towards the girl and catching her wrist, pull her. Once this

is acted out for the benefit of all those present in the *jatra*, she is 'dragged' away. Sometimes, there are more than one male interested in the same girl and this results in a big brawl, as some Maji folks laughingly mention when asked about their youthful escapades.

These sorts of fights were and still are settled by the decision of those present. The decision is that the male who first caught the girl's wrist is legally and socially the recognised husband. Though many other tribes consider this sort of marriage as barbaric and forcible, for the Maji it is a perfectly normal and systematic form of marriage as can be. They declare that it is a natural behaviour of any living organism to give preference to the first advance in the matter of mating, since humans are basically animals.

The other form of marriage that is different is the *mama cheli - phupu chela* or matrilateral cross-cousin marriages, which are prevalent among the Maji. Traditionally, the daughter of one's *mama* or maternal uncle's daughter is the rightful property of the paternal aunt's son or the girl's cross-cousin. Should the girl wish to marry another boy then she has to be granted permission for this by her paternal aunt's son. If permission is granted then the prospective groom has to pay a monetary compensation to the girl's *phupu's* son, who is supposed to be the rightful husband for the girl, by birthright. The patrilateral cross-cousin marriage or *mama chela - phupu cheli* (which is rare in most tribes) is also existent among these Maji. Marriages among Maji people are seen to be monogamous as no evidence of polygamous liaisons has been found among them in the regions of their settlement. It is a single Maji male with a single Maji female that makes a Maji nuclear family.

Death Rites

In the event of any Maji falling ill, they use the *dhami* and *jhankri* as their belief in the manipulations of *bhoot*, *preth*, demons and evil forces is so strong that they seldom if ever go to nearby hospitals or use allopathic concoctions.

The supernatural forces both good and evil are pacified by the *jhankri* and *dhami* or shaman who use the *dhyangro* or drum which is beaten throughout the night to propitiate or exorcise the cause of the illness. When this does not seem to have any effect, the shaman uses the other method of transferring the disease to a black rooster or a black goat. Should this also fail to show any improvement in

the condition of the sick person, then it is considered that the person is on the threshold of death and the Maji household begin to prepare for his death. But those Maji people and communities living in quite close proximity to the towns, do not abandon hope after the shaman fails to cure the sickness, instead they take the patient to the nearby hospital as a sort of last resort when their traditional methods prove unsuccessful, and the sick person's chances of survival are nil. It is still distinctly seen that the Maji, even those living near towns, never take a sick person immediately to the hospital for application of modern medicines even today, for their traditions cause them to hesitate.

The belief of being able to transfer the disease of a sick person onto another living creature makes them use a black goat or rooster, as earlier stated in this ritual called *khadgo katne*, which literally means nullifying the obstacle. Here the shaman chants *mantras* and attempts to induce the disease to leave the person and enter the other living creature (black goat or rooster). This is a ritual that other tribes in the kingdom and in other parts of the world still believe. Should everything fail, and the person expires, the corpse is either buried or cremated. Cremations are done like the other tribes do and is a Hinduistic affair, but the burials are quite different in form from what other tribal communities practise.

They select a place near a river bank or on a hill and dig a hole almost 5 to 6 feet in depth where they make a wooden bed at the bottom on which they place *shywla* or leafy branches and then a *gundri* or straw mat is spread over this. A white cloth is placed over this whole set of things. Now the deceased's son or his kin carries the corpse and walks three rounds around the hole after which the corpse is laid on the white sheet. The next ritual is the washing of the corpse's face, anointing with oil and placing *tika* on the forehead. When this is done, a small bundle of ricegrains and coins are placed on the deceased's chest. The face is left uncovered and all around this open grave small oil lamps are lit. When these oil lamps burn out then only is the corpse covered with another white cloth over which is placed, in reverse order, a *gundri* and then some *shywla* and finally a set of wooden planks. After this is completed, the grave is covered with mud and stones. It is quite strange that although they bury the dead with so much care and reverence, they do not place any sort of marker of tombstone over the grave.

After the funeral is over, and prior to entry into the house, oil incense

is burnt, meaning oil is poured on a heap of coals, and the funeral goers have to pass through this smoke. This is done to purify them, so they state. Without performing this ritual they do not ever enter their dwellings. They also have a custom of throwing cooked food at cross-roads for a period of twelve days, that is from the day of death, in the name of the deceased. On the 13th day, these cooked foods are thrown into the nearby rivers or streams. Even after all these rituals are completed, unless and until they do not perform the *anthayasthi kriya* or *srat* (or the ritual where deceased is again given some more offerings and requested to go into the heavens) the death rites are considered incomplete. This is also called *shant swasti*, similar to rest in peace.

Srat or *sraddha*: is performed on the year of the death on the second Wednesday after the commencement of *sohara saraddha* (prior the Dasai period) and ends after three days. In this ritual, they have special procedures of their own kind.

The first day of the ritual is called *thalne* or *dakne* meaning starting or calling respectively. The second day is the *palne* or looking after and the final or third day is *phalne* or casting out. The first day is a Wednesday and then followed by a Thursday and the last day is a Friday.

The household holding this *srat* makes a lot of liquor and has to stock a lot of foodstuff too. All the villagers are invited. The old folks of the village congregate in the compound of this house and dancing and singing to the rhythmic beat of the *madal* takes place. The songs are sung with the intention of calling their *pitree* or ancestral spirits.

On Wednesday, when they begin *thalne* (the *srat*), they call or invite their *pitree* and the customary ritual is as follows. To the rhythm of *madal*, preceded by a man holding a stick on which is tied the flowers of the *Bhare khar* like a horse's mane. The procession commences moving from the river bank itself. They are of the belief that when this ritual is performed, the soul of the deceased enters the bodies of these persons.

This sort of ritual is followed by a grand dance when they reach the compound of the deceased's house. During such ritual dances, should any individual other than the kin and neighbour, arrive in the compound or vicinity of the house, then it is considered a bad omen and according to their custom they purify these people with *gaunth*

sprinkled with the aid of a few *titepati* leaves dipped in it. They believe that when this is done, their *pitree* are happy.

After the ritual dances are over, foods of various kinds are placed in a bowl which is placed on the ground and then the *pitree* is summoned. This ritual is the *thalne*. At this moment, there are still people beating their *madal* in the compound while the sons and grandsons of the deceased remain within the house. The shaman remains outside the dwelling muttering all sorts of unintelligible things. The person on whom the *pitree* has to enter when summoned also has to remain outside with the shaman. This person has to be ritually and physically purified. When this person begins to tremble and commence walking backwards, then it is considered and believed that the *pitree* has truly entered this person. Now the Maji are agitated, excited and very elated. This whole night and the whole of next day, the *madal* keep on beating out their rhythm and the dancers keep on dancing. These dances contain a lot of comedy to entertain the onlookers. On this day, the food offerings like rice, meat, eggs, which were kept on the ground the previous day, are placed on a platform made out of bamboo. In this way, Thursday also ends and it is called *palne*.

On the final or third day, which is a Friday, the person on whom the spirit of the *pitree* has come, is fed with rice, meat and then the *pitree* is given a farewell. Prior to departure, the *pitree* or spirit of deceased expresses all its wishes, is believed by Maji as a whole and this is an unshakable truth, for them. It is also stated that this spirit also requests that the parents, friends and other loved ones should be properly cared for and no trouble should befall them. This is followed by the foodstuff, placed on the ground on Wednesday or *thalne*, then on a bamboo platform on the *palne* or Thursday, is now taken and immersed in the river. This is *phalne* and ends the *srat*.

To find out whether the *pitree* are happy or not, they have their own kinds of methods. On Wednesday when the *pitree* is summoned, the foods are laid on the ground and *kesari* or *sindur* is used to make a few dots on the walls. These spots or dots are then covered a layer of mud. If the *pitree* is displeased, so it is believed, then the dots on the wall can be seen quite distinctly through the layer of mud. If this occurs, then the rituals are once more repeated regardless of the days as previously necessary.

If the *pitree* doesn't come as per the summons, then these householders go to another house where a *srat* is in progress and ask the person through whom the *pitree* of that household is speaking. The Maji firmly believe that when this person is possessed, he is like a *devta* or god (actually a sort of oracle) and is knowledgeable of all matters past, present and future. Thus, on account of this belief, he is questioned as to why a certain householder's *pitree* does not come when summoned. The answer mostly consists of two aspects, either the shortage of some items desired or being tied up in some other works in the hereafter. Once these two aspects of the failure of the *pitree* to come are clarified, then the *srat* has to be redone in the following year. The *kriya* of the deceased is completed on these *srat* days. It is customary till the arrival of the *srat* period, the Maji folks offer water in the name of the deceased continuously. Judging from the observance of the preceding rites and rituals, it can be assumed that the Maji are a people who believe in the immortality of the soul.

Dress & Ornaments

It is seen that while the Maji menfolk wear the usual *kachhad* and turban, the women wear short *phriya* or sari-like dress covering the parts below the waist and a strip of cloth to cover their mammary protrusions. But today, the males have begun to wear *bhoto*, *malpos* or *daura* and the females have started to wear *cholo* or blouse instead of the strip of cloth mentioned earlier.

Both males and females wear earrings. Women are seen to wear *tilhari* and glass *pote* of on their necks. This is about the maximum amount of ornaments these Maji folks wear, and it is seen, from their settlement areas and the situations existent in their societies, that they have been strongly influenced by the nearby villages and the modernity rampant in the closeby towns.

Religion & Festivals

Maji folks state that the rivers, near which they live, are their *ista devta*. Those living in the Chitwan worship the Narayani river, while those inhabiting the Rapti or Mahra river banks have accepted these rivers as their *ista devta*. Once a year, for a period of three days, those Maji living in the vicinity of the Narayani river celebrate their *ista devta* worship grandly. This *puja* is done on a Wednesday or a Friday and in the month of Baisakh. From the day this *puja*

commences, till the following two days, they do not operate their boats and also do not do any other works. (Nowadays, at most ferry-points these ferries operate on a contract basis and do run these ferries but never use their own boats). Among an assortment of animals ranging from buffaloes, uncastrated goats and sheep, ducks, fowls, etc. it is compulsory for one to offer at least one kind of animal as blood sacrifice in the *puja*.

This Nau Puja is also performed by those Maji communities inhabiting the regions around the Kosi rivers in the eastern part of Nepal. This *puja* is done on the banks of rivers at those particular places which are not accessible to other people. On the first and second days the heads of the sacrificed animals or fowls are laid out in a line along the river bank and on the third day or *tauko uthaune din* (meaning day of raising the head - literally) the whole *puja* is concluded and these Maji even begin boat operations on this day.

Bhimsen is another deity worshipped by these Maji people. While doing *puja* to Bhimsen, it is believed that a *panch bali* must be offered compulsorily. This *panch bali* consists of five sacrificial creatures which are a sheep, a fowl, a duck, an uncastrated goat or *khsi* and a male buffalo or *ranga*.

Besides having *ista devta* like the Narayani river, Rapti river and the Mahra river, and a chief deity like Bhimsen, there exist separate *kul devta* within each Maji household. These deities are given a place behind the family hearths. This is the reason why, besides the household members, others are prohibited to enter their kitchens. The *kul devta* is propitiated on a yearly basis during the festival of Bada Dasai, by either a son-in-law or an old member of the family.

Every year, in the month of Asadh which falls in the period of the monsoons. Bardeo puja and Bhume puja are performed. Bhume puja is also known as Jhaknau or Jhakni puja by the Maji community. The peculiar custom of *dasai barne* exists among these people and here if one's mother has expired at an earlier date then from the day of Ghatastapna till Phulpati, the person concerned abstains from consuming milk and meat. If it is the father who has died, then during the above stated period, foods like fish, curds, millet and soyabeans are not eaten. This traditions has been observed to exist even among the Maji communities living in the Kavre Palanchok region, due east of Kathmandu city.

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

Besides all these above mentioned rituals and *pujas*, the Maji also worship other deities in their respective temples and shrines. For instance, on Maghe Sankranti (the first day of the month of Magh which falls approximately in mid January) these people congregate at Deo Ghat (a confluence of the Trisuli and the Seti rivers north of Narayanghat, in the Chitwan district, Narayani Zone) and offer prayers and worship to the deities there.

When the Maji people undergo fasts, they drink only liquids. This is due to the running traditional belief that since these liquids or alcoholic beverages are produced with the help of *mrcha* - which is made out of herbs, therefore it is considered pure and unpolluted. Thus the consumption of liquors is not prohibited. *Tantra-mantra* are also used to commence or conclude certain *puja* among these Maji people.

MANANGBA

Among the various tribes spread around Manang District, the Manangba is the chief one. In ancient times, the people populating the Chosum or Upper Manang area used to call themselves Ghale Gurungs, however, they were changed to Lamas later on. So, although they claim to be Gurungs, the southern Gurungs disagree and thus do not acknowledge the people of Manang as real Gurungs. The area where these people are settled is called Neshyang and so they are also called the people of Neshyang. In spite of the above facts, on account of their spoken language, they are called more commonly known as Manangbas.

Settlement

Although the area of settlement is known as Chosum Manang meaning six villages in their language, however, in the present context, there are more than six villages there. Some other villages that have sprung up are Khangsar, Manang, Braga, Angwal, Chyaru, Pisang, Nar, Phu, Tunki and others. In these Manangba villages, the total house count can be from 15-20 houses, to almost 500 houses in one settlement. The largest settlement among these is Manang and the second largest is Braga.

Houses

Manangba houses are built in extremely close proximity (like a city) spaced out with streets and alleys. They construct two and sometimes three storied houses and use materials locally available such as rough cut stones, wood and strips of rough, uneven wood. The rooms within these houses are very dark. The ground floor is utilised as a shed for housing cattle and sheep the first floor is their living quarters and storage area. The roofs are flat and composed of stones, wood and mud plaster, pounded firmly down, where they dry their grain. The movement from one level or floor to another is by means of a notched wooden log placed at an angle in the corner and is called a *lishnu* (Nepal language) and serves the purpose of a ladder. Most houses are constructed in rather precipitous places.

Septs (*Thars*)

Among the Manangba tribe, there various *thar* or septs, such as the

Kle, Syolmi, Dhihai, Ghelai considered to be of the higher echelon and called *char jats*. (four septs). The rest of the septs are considered low or inferior and lumped into the *sora jat* (sixteen septs) category. Among the Kle there are four *upa-thars* or sub-septs namely Chhyamy, Byapki Fraklam and Osare. Manang is populated with a majority of the Syolmi septs.

Physical characteristics

The Manangbas are similar to the Gurungs in the build up of their bodies, however, their facial features are similar to that of Tibetans. They are much taller than other hill tribes, possess slightly slanting and oval shaped eyes, yellowish skin pigmentation, minimal facial hairs, flat and elevated noses due to depressed and high nasal roots. Scholars have categorised them in the mongolian stock.

Language

Though 50% of the language these Manangbas speak is Gurung and they claim it to be the Manangae language. According to linguistic experts, it is estimated that their language is quite different from that spoken by the Tibetans (but is classified in the Tibeto-Burman language group).

Life Cycle Rites

It is found that rites like *navran*, *pasni* and *bratabandh*, which are common and essential among the Hindus and other Hindu influenced tribes throughout the kingdom are absent among these Manangbas.

Msarriage Practices

Regarding marriages of these Manangbas as a tribe, their language, way of living are all similar to the Tibetans and so the question arises as to whether they may also prefer to marry Tibetans. In reality, they do not prefer to marry Tibetans in spite of so many similarities they share in characteristics and rituals. Marriage patterns are strictly adhered to among these people and should a male of this community marry a female of another *jat* (tribe) and bring the wife to his home, the male's family will not make any attempt to establish contact with the female's family. In the case of a female Manangba marrying another *jat* then this female is ostracised from the

Manangba social circle and not even permitted to enter her parents'house. Whatever kind of marriage. if it is endogamous, a grand feast is offered and everyone present sings, dances and makes marry on this happy occasion.

Death Rites

When death occurs, their *lamas* are consulted and his orders are carried out to the letter, be it burial, cremation or water burial (where the corpse is thrown into the river), or dismemberment(where the corpse is cut up into pieces and fed to the vultures). This ritual of dismemberment is a tradition borrowed from the Tibetans who performed and do still perform this due to unavailability of wood for cremation, is estimated by scholars. But in the process of performing such works, these Manangbas offer worship to their gods and say prayers, seemingly with great devotion and sincerity, as has been observed.

Religion & Festivals

In most parts of Manang District, the *guru purohit* (main priest) is the *lama*, however, *jhankris* and *dhamis* are also consulted in lower or Tallo Manang. The *lama's* word is law among these Manangbas. Upper or Chosum Manang possess a *gompa* where offerings are made to their gods and prayers are offered under the guidance of the *lama*. The way of living, rites and rituals, language, religion and religious beliefs, etc are all the same among the Manangbas of Chosum Manang and the other tribes living there.

The greatest festival celebrated by these people is *taro hanne*, held in Baisakh-Jestha and Lhosar held in Magh-Falgun. Lhosar signifies new year for *lho* means year and *sar* means has moved. Due to these people being Buddhists, they do things such as paying obeisance to the various incarnations of Buddha in statue forms in their *gompas*, turning the prayer wheels at the *gompas* and the hand held ones, fingering their ever present prayer beads and intoning *Om Mani Padme Hum*(O Jewel in the Lotus). Large wheels have been erected at various places, and these are continually turned by running water(like the channelised water used to turn the rural mill-stones for grinding grains) in a clockwise direction. In all the villages of Chosum and the villages of Thonje and Bagar Chhap in lower Manang, there are *gompas*.

Social beliefs

In the Chosum area of Manang District, the inhabitants have an ancient form of a Socio-Tribal Council of Elders. Every two years, a village chief is chosen and he must be selected from another family other than that of the previous chief. Thus every family gets a chance, in other words, the chieftainship is not inherited but ascribed biannually when the head of another family is chosen as chief as is the traditional custom. This headman or village chieftain is called the Dhawa and after him are the Sherpas and Katuwals. What ever the Dhawa says is law and his words are never questioned. All the villagers must listen to and implement his orders. If a villager has to be brought before the Dhawa for any valid reason, then the Sherpa does this fetching (like a sort of policeman or law officer). The Katuwals function in this society is to inform all the villagers of any meeting or such that is to occur (like a kind of peon). Every village has a Dhawa, a Sherpa and a Katuwal, but in the large settlement of Manang, there are two of each. The reason for this maybe due to the large size and therefore proportionately bigger population which is difficult to be handled by a single Dhawa, Sherpa or Katuwal.

The Dhawa of Manang is considered as the Head Chieftain of all the other villages combined and consequentially the most powerful individual among these people. When necessary, this Dhawa has the power to summon all the villages for a meeting or such programme. Except for Manang village, if a problem arises in any village in the Chosum area, the Dhawa of that village must inform the Dhawa in Manang. The Dhawa nominates a Mukhiya who functions as a complier of the report on the thoughts and ideas of the people who attend the meeting. The Dhawa is the leader of the people and the chairperson of the meeting as well, and he is replaced after every two years as mentioned earlier. After his term, the Dhawa serves as a Sherpa for another two years. Women are debarred from contesting for the Dhawa seat and if a male migrates from one village to another, he is not eligible for the seat even if it is his turn. However, in the case of the Kle Ghale people, this is possible even though they have migrated from another village.

There is another law which states that any male, who is more than 60 years old, is not eligible to attend any meeting in the village, however, if he does attend and the council comes to know of this, the defaulter is fined Rs. 500/

Economic Status

On account of these people living at high altitudes, they have emphasised more on occupations other than agriculture. Due to the cold climate, their main crops are buckwheat, wheat, barley, maize, potatoes, radish and such. Since the food they plant do not last them for more than 3 or 4 months, their main occupation is business. These Manangbas, clever in trade, worked as mediators in business, between Tibet in the north and Lamjung to the south. They used to barter wool, salt etc. brought down from Tibet for foodgrains from the people of Lamjung and with the margin they earned, they fed themselves. Currently it can be observed that they travel the south-east Asian countries and do good business which has made them the nouveau rich. Thus, those who do this sort of business, leave their villages in Kartik (October-November) and return in the month of Baisakh (April-May). However, many have permanently settled in the Kathmandu valley after earning good money in business.

When the winter commences, most of these people temporarily migrate to the lower, warmer areas leaving only the old folks and cowherds behind. When the males are away on business trips within the country or abroad, the females engage themselves in the transportation of food-grains brought up from Tanahun, Lamjung, etc. Out of this, they store some for their personal consumption and the remaining they sell at a profit.

Farming

The Manangbas have their own traditional way of harvesting their crops. On the first day of the harvest or *tankipiwa*, the Sherpa collects all the villagers and they congregate in the fields. Though there are many people present, one family is allowed to harvest the area demarcated by the Dhawa. After this harvesting is over and the family wants to harvest more then a bottle of *raksi* and a *khata* (white scarf functioning as a garland and a sign of great respect) is offered to the Dhawa. Only a week after the *tankipiwa*, are the people allowed to harvest the grains according to their desire. If this law is not adhered to then the Dhawa fines the law breaker. It is taboo to irrigate lands cultivated by females. If irrigation is attempted, then the Dhawa has the authority to levy a fine of Rs. 500/-. Other than agriculture, these Manangbas rear sheep, goats, yaks, horses, etc. This can be considered the second largest occupation after business

Dress up

Although their dress up is similar to the other Tibetan type tribes of the kingdom, due to the males travelling to foreign countries on business, the westernisation of their dress is increasing day by day. Except for those of Nar and Phu villages, the other villagers have begun to wear synthetic attire, cut their hair, polish their nails, etc. However, the old timers, with their old thought patterns and ethics still wear clothes made of skins, woven out of sheep wool due to the cold climatic condition of this place.

MATVALI KSETRI

In the regions of Mid and Far western Nepal live a category of Ksetri known as the Matwali Ksetri, who are mainly concentrated in a pure form in the Chaudbis Khola region of north-western Jumla district, Kamali Zone.

Origins

These Matwali Ksetri are very much different from the other *tagadhari* (thread wearing) Ksetri, because they do not wear the *janai* or sacred thread while their other brethren do, as their name implies. These Matwali Ksetri consume liquors like *raksi* and *jad* and also flesh of chicken, though such actions are taboo among the *tagadahari* Ksetri. Questions as to why the Matwali Ksetri are found in the regions of Mid and Far western Nepal, or what are their origins, are both open to discussion and further research, because of the fact that these people are one of the many migrant, and non aboriginal, tribes of Nepal.

The Matwali Ksetri claim descent from the Ksetri tribe and state at one period in their social history, the ancestors of these Matwali Ksetri are supposed to have broken some social tabu and accordingly, the ruler or headman in those days, dropped or demoted them from their original status to Matwali Ksetri which means literally those Ksetri who consume alcoholic beverages, and are considered to be lower than the other *tagadhari* even today. Though a highly palusible hypothesis, it cannot be taken as the only one and the matter of them being known as the *pavai* by the other inhabitants of that region must also be taken into consideration. A more commonly agreed aspect of their origion is that they are descendants of the ancient Khas race that had spread over a large area consisting of the kingdoms of Dullu and Sinja in western Nepal and Purang and Guge in western Tibet.

Physical characteristics and language

The Matwali Ksetri are no different from the other tribes of Caucosoid racial stock though many cases of admixture are existent, in a low percentage. The language they speak is Nepali but in the rustic style particular to that region and it needs no elaboration due to its familiarity as the national lingua franca.

Family

The family structure of these people is similar to other tribes who are Hindu. Extended and nuclear families are prevalent, but emphasis is laid on the extended family. The father is the household head and on his death, the responsibility passes on to the eldest son. Should there be more than one son, the property is shared, but the responsibility is invested in the eldest son. The family may remain as a joint structure until the sharing of the property or *hisa banda* after which, the eldest son inherits the *mulghar* or ancestral house. The other brothers construct their own houses and live separately with their own nuclear families. Should a couple have no son to inherit, then the house and property is inherited by the daughter and her husband or *jawai* who have to remain at the *mulghar* and be responsible for it. This shows that the *jawai* lives with the daughter of the house or his wife in her house and this sort of living is termed uxorilocal or matrilineal residence pattern. This is called *ghar halne* by the Matwali Ksetri.

Sept (Thar)

As stated earlier, since the Matwali Ksetri and the Tagadhari Ksetri are actually the same, and their *thar* are also similar such as: Buda, Bohara, Rokaya, Aidi, Basnet, Rawat, Mhtara, Thapa, Rawal, Bhandari, Khadka, etc. however, it is observed that Matwali Ksetri never state to which *gotr* they belong and sometimes, the Brahmin are called in to perform *puja*. They do not practise marriages of people within the same village, meaning their boys marry girls from a neighbouring village or vice versa for the girls. This indicates village exogamy, but it is seen that they are permitted to marry within the same septs and so it is *thar* endogamy that is prevalent.

Settlement

The villages of these Matwali Ksetri consist of dwellings within the range of 15 and 90 houses that are closely clustered, resulting in narrow streets that restrict proper movement. Houses are made almost two or three storied and in level to the terraces of their fields along which these dwellings are constructed in a sort of attached pattern. Local materials like uncut stone, wood and mud are utilised to build these houses, which lean backwards with the mountainside as a sort of backrest and the other three sides are walled in temporarily with wooden beams placed at intervals. The open

verendah-like structure, that exists at the front of the house is called a *chjad*. As is normally the case regarding houses in the hilly regions, the interior is extremely dark due to lack of windows which are not built as a measure to prevent the cold wind from entering. But some of these houses do have windows which are covered with rural motifs on their door frames and the walls which receive a coat of red or white mud mixtures.

The ground floor is occupied by domestic animals, and is the goth which is mostly enclosed with a stone wall. Only the first floor is called the *ghar* or house, where rooms are partitioned separating the kitchen, store, and living quarters which are known by various local names. For instance, a room where all the necessary items for domestic usage are accumulated meaning the kitchen is called *odro* the place where guests are received or drawing room is the *changya* and the sleeping area or bedroom is the *khad*.

While constructing a roof, they fix *salla* beams horizontally across which wooden planks are placed and then leaves are spread all over. The stones and the mud mortar are put on the top of this and then compacted so that rain doesn't seep through.

The front part of the house is occupied by a terrace resembling a *chok* which seems to be a compulsory part of the Matwali Ksetri house. Here an *okhl* is kept for pounding millet, paddy and other such foodgrains. It is here that ordinary conversations are held, and one must pass across the terrace or *chok* to go to another's house. Some even fence off these terraces or *choks* with *planks* and thus separate their area for privacy. The notched log or *lishnu* is the ladder which is used to go from one floor to another. The upper part of the house where foodgrains are kept is called the *thada* and the place above this is the *pad*.

Dress and ornaments

While males wear the popular *lveda-surwal* called *keche* and *jghelo* respectively, a *pauri* or waistcoat, and a Nepali *topi* or cap on their heads, the females wear *ghaghr*, *kurta* like long *choli* (blouse), and a shawl as is the dress tradition among these people. Sari or the so-called *dhoti* are not commonly used. They adorn themselves with earrings of gold, and consisting of *phuli*, *mundri*, *kalli* (only on festivals), and necklaces of silver coins strung in a line. Males and females both wear the Tibetan shoe or *docha* (made out of wool and

cloth combined) during the cold seasons. They weave woolen cloth and stitch these for clothing and shawls are also woven. In this region very few Matwali Ksetri are seen who do not go around with a needles in hand stitching cloth or spinning yarn on a *ktuva* (a gadget to spin yarn and portable). Even the menfolks are seen knitting items like mufflers, pullovers, gloves, etc. while they walk up the trail or down, portering loads. The custom of spinning yarn and knitting mufflers is very old, they say.

Life Cycle Rites

Navran

When a child is born among these people, the rituals they perform is similar to what all other Hindu tribes do. Birth pollution is observed for a period of 11 days (including the day of birth) and on the last day a Brahmin priest is called and he purifies the household and gives the child a name according to all the appropriate rites. The mother is also purified from this pollution and is now permitted to interact freely, however, some of these people observe this pollution till the twentieth day after the birth.

Bratabandh

The *bratabandh* rites and rituals are all similar to what the Brahmin do except that the presentation of the sacred thread or *janai* is lacking. The child's hair is shaved and then worship is performed. After this a feast is given to all those present which includes the kin, relative, neighbours and friends. It is believed that if this ritual is not completed by a male than the road to heaven is obstructed and is unable to attain peace after death.

Marriage Practices

A majority of these Matwali Ksetri have arranged marriages, where their parents choose the bridegroom. The first process in the institution of marriage is that of *Biwaha magne* or proposal of marriage from the boy's side for the girl's hand. When this ritual is done, the boy's folks ask whether the girl's side are willing to accept *arni* (gifts) or not. If the reply is an affirmative, then gifts of bread (*sale roti*) are taken as is the custom. But in the Caudhbis area, *arni* consists of a *theki* of curds and a bundle of *koira* (leafy vegetables) which are taken when talks of marriage have to be

initiated. After *arni* is over, the proposers return to the boy's home and discuss how much *mrja* (rice or paddy which is to be used to feed the groom's party on the marriage) the girl's folks will accept and go to ask about this matter which is also an important feature of the marriage due to its function as an economic boost. This *mrja* is normally decided at 4 *muri* of paddy and the marriage date is also fixed at this time.

On the morning of the marriage, the boy's folks go to the girl's house to present *puredharo* or bread to the girl's *maiti*. If the groom has not had his *bratabandh*, he has it at this time. Then the groom receives money according to the custom, after he undergoes a change of clothes. A *mungeri mangl gan* is sung by the female singers at the time of *luga chhekne*. On the evening of the day set for the marriage, the *janti* sets out for the bride's home as is customary, and prior to the *janti's* departure, a *kalas* is decorated and the *mungeri* tells the *janti* to proceed in style. A *roti* and *tate* are given to the *janti* as a symbol signifying them invited and thus they are sent off. Usually, a Matvali Ksetri *janti* consists of practically all the males of the village.

In the Caudhbis area, a groom is not permitted to go with the *janti* as is their custom. The instruments used during this procession are *dmiha*, *anahi narsing*, *jhyali*, and such. A *doli* or palinquin of the rural type is also carried along by the *janti* to carry the bride back. This *doli* is covered with a red cloth which is known as *jhapn*.

On reaching the house of the bride, the *janti* break into dance and songs and an atmosphere of general merriment prevails, making the environment lively and festive. During this merry activity, a call for *bhaturaule* is made by the bride's folks. At this call, two members of the *janti* move in towards the bride's house, where there is a woman holding a *kalas*. These two men place two *laddu* in the *kalas*, over it with a cloth and present their salutations or *namaskar* (*Imaskar* by the Matvali Ksetri)

After this, the two men or *bhatualue* are fed with *sagun* by some of the village belles who are from among the bride's group. While they return inside the house, they are fed with *jad* and *tate* (wheat flour mixed with *ghyu* and cooked into *roti*) and are forcibly rubbed with a mixture of rice flour colour and honey on their mouths and clothes. This is followed by *vacan charne* (saying things like from today I am yours and such sexual overtures) and in the night, they

perform *chachi* which is also called *ratauli* where the life after marriage and the activities in the bedroom are enacted here among the women who have gathered here. This very night, *ratauli* is also performed at the groom's house too.

After dinner is over, and the marriage ends for the day, the ritual of the bride's feet being washed by her *maiti* is done after which items like utensils and livestock are presented to her (by her *maiti*) as a *daijo* or dowry. Then she is given a tearful farewell and is accompanied to the groom's house by two virgins or *mudyauli*. At the groom's house, after the *janti* returns with the bride, the *dhami* or *jhankri* sets a time limit within which the *mungeri* (singer) must adorn the groom with clothes, shawl, turban (*pcheni*) which is all white, and must place a *ktaro* or a *knn* (which are weapons and placed like how a *khukuri* is). This is followed by another ritual where a person carries the groom on his shoulders and takes him to the *thada* of the house where all the deities are worshipped by the groom with sprinkling of *aksata*. Then the groom is carried downstairs and taken to the cowshed and it is here that the marriage is performed. Once the groom is seated near the *pheruva* and *pakhi*, the bride is brought and placed at the groom's left.

At the place of marriages or *mandap*, a *gagro* full of water, the initially decorated *kalas* (which was exhibited prior to the departure of the *janti* to bring the bride), and an oil lamp placed on a *pathi* (measuring utensil) filled with *jolu* are already readied. On the groom's right is seated his sister (younger or older) or *phupu* (father's sister or paternal aunt) holding a bowl of rice flour mixed with honey, and on the bride's left hand side is seated the *mudyauli* with a similar bowl full of *ryalo* flour, which is used by the bride and the groom to rub on each other, which is called *choka chak*.

Next, the bride and groom are made to stand and the groom's shawl is knotted with the bride's *dautho* and the groom precedes the bride as they walk round the *mandap* (thrice) and after they reach their own places, the *sindur halne* ritual is done. While circling thus, *lawa* (dry roasted paddy or buck wheat resembling popcorn) is sprinkled and those accumulated shout *biha bhyo* while the circling goes on. After this ritual is over, the nuptial knot is opened.

The next ritual is commenced with the dropping of three *laddu*. The bride with both hands while the groom with only one try to cover these *laddu*. The one which the groom covers is given to the person

holding the bowl in which these *laddu* were kept, while the ones the bride covers are given to the person who carried her to the *mandap*. Then the groom looks squarely at the bride's face and applies *sindur* on her *chana* or forehead, while the bride reciprocates with *tika* of rice and curds which she put on the groom's *chana*. Now only is the bride taken into the groom's house.

Prior to entry into the groom's house, there is a ritual to be completed. The bride must pick up the needle which her *sasu* or mother-in-law has imbedded at the threshold, by first sprinkling *aksata* there and then picking it up. The *nand* or the bride's husband's younger sister also known as sister-in-law, washes the *aksata* stained fingers of the bride and for this act the bride must present her with an ornament worn on the hand like a *bala* or a *chura* (meaning bangles) or a *manna* ring on the finger. This is a traditional custom. Then the respected women of the household (and the village) look at the bride's face which is called *dulhi ko mukh herne* and present her with gifts of money and ornaments and also anoint her with *tika* made up of curds and ricegrains.

The next day, placing *tate* and *imate* (dry wheat bread) in a *dalo* which is again put inside a *doko* covered with a cloth the couple go towards the bride's *maiti* or main house of her birth, with the above mentioned items, however the custom for them is to return from halfway. If the groom's *sasurali* (wife's house) is nearby, then he returns in the evening on the same day, but if far then he returns from halfway. There is another custom where an old man of the same lineage as that of the groom, annoints the couple with *tika* of rice grains and curds. The old man is called *budeuti*. Now the couple's real domestic life starts.

Divorce

If a couple requires to separate willingly, and if the husband is not keen, but the wife is, then this divorce is done showing as if it is the male who leaves his wife as is the custom. In such a case, the husband must give the wife the money demanded or required called *goji bhrai* meaning literally filling the pockets, and then letting her go.

Jari

Should a person's wife leave him for another person (his *jar*), then

the people from this man's side go to the place where the *jar* lives or if from another village then to that village. There they close the door of this person's house and try to burn it. The villagers come and request the persons not do such a deed, and thus stop them from implementing this drastic step. After this, the people of the man's side must be provided with a *khsi* or castrated goat, rice grains, and such by the *jar*. The whole night is spent in feasting. It is customary to pay *jari* or compensation for the act of 'stealing' someone else's wife and the amount ranges from Rs. 1000/- to Rs. 22,000/-. The *jar* is called *sai*. Once all these formalities are over, the *sai* is blessed by the people from the previous husband's side after which these people return home. This is the tradition of *jari* payment among these people and as has been observed.

Widow marriages

These sort of marriages are also seen to occur among these folks, and the progeny of these unions are given the status equal to that of any child born out of a normal marriage.

Death Rites

While normally the Matvali Ksetri use the services of a Brahmin during deaths in the Chaudhbis area, this necessity is not felt for performing the *kriya*. The custom is to cremate the corpse of a deceased member of the Matvali Ksetri community. While a funeral procession is moving along, at the cross-roads encountered, *aakhi gedaor* paddy and roasted barley are sprinkled. The lineage kin of the deceased shave their hair totally. The funeral goers are given a feast outside the village area, but not too far off, This feast consists of meat, liquors and such foods and beverages. The *kriya* or purification is done after a period of three days, and during this period, besides millet, soyabeans, meat, salt and liquors, things such as rice, wheat, bread, barley are permitted to be consumed. After purification, the daughters and female lineal kin and their progeny are given a feast. At this time *pind* made out of barley flour is also offered. *Pati* (rest house), *pauva* (rest house), *sangu* (small bridge), *dhara* (tap) are constructed in the name of the deceased. While constructing a *pati* a bowl containing money, silver and even gold ornaments is placed at the spot and then the foundation is prepared on top of this. Due to this practice, it is seen that in Caudhbis area, there are many of these memorial in existance in comparision to other places.

Religion & Festivals

Matvali Ksetri are semi-Hindus and they also worship a non-Hindu deity the Masto as do most tribes living in this region. Though every Matvali Ksetri village consists of many temples, housing various deities both male and female, only brass or iron bells are seen hanging within with no signs of any idols in the precincts. The *dhami* is very powerful and asked to perform healings of diseases with the help of his blessings. Even the effects of spirits can be cured by the *dhami* is a strong belief among these Matvali Ksetri even today. The *dhami* looks no different from anyone of the villagers in the Chaudhbi area, but the silver or golden thread that is used to tie his long hair into a top knot indicates his social and religious status. There is also a *dangri* who is the person who makes arrangements for the deity's worship. A *dhami* does not perform worship to a deity as this is the sole responsibility of the *dangri* who must be compulsorily present at any shrine of a deity. The positions of the *dhami* and *dangri* are seen to be hereditary as their lineal descendants take over these responsibilities after the deaths of their parents or elders. On the day the new *dhami* or *dangri* takes over, a *than* or shrine is constructed outside and at a place above the village, where people both young and old, male and female, flock with musical instruments, *aksata*, *bheti* and *naibaidh*. Items to be offered at the *than* consist of the usual red and white cloth banners or *dhvja*, *ghyu*, oil, fruits, and rice which are the main ones, while there are other things also offered.

On every Kartik and Baisakh Purnima, a *puja* is performed and on this day, at the shrine a long *salla* or pine pole measuring 25 to 30 cubits (approx) with a *dhvja* or banner replaces the old one. These Baisakh and Kartik Purnima are the great festivals for the *dhami* of that region. As mentioned earlier, a majority of the Hindu including these Matvali Ksetri worship the Masto whose family consists of twelve brothers and nine Durga Bhavani, meaning 12 types of Masto and 9 kinds of Durga.

However, among the Matvali Ksetri of that region only Budumasto, Kvamasto, Babiromasto, Tharpamasto and Dadthyamasto are popularly known about and worshipped. Though there are seven more Masto, besides the above named, according to the belief of the people there are twelve Masto brothers. Actually there are supposed to be more than 12 Masto deities, but since the people do not know

names of all the masto brothers they just simply say there are 12 Masto brothers which is easier to say, and is in reality only a common belief whose authenticity may be in doubt.

Among the other important deities of this area are Chandan Nath of Jumla Khalanga or main Jumla town and Bhairav Nath which is adjacent.

Occupation

Though the main occupation of these people is agriculture, in reality their income generation is through a number of various occupations or sources. Maize, millet, wheat, barley, buckwheat, paddy, potatoes and *chino* are produce of their toil in cultivation. These people harvest two crops a year. Besides agriculture, they also rear livestock and do some sort of business which are two equally important sources of income. They barter wool and salt brought by the Khampa folks of Mugu and Mandhara, for foodgrains. They also travel to other areas in that region, to rebarter the salt and wool for foodgrains at the current rates of exchange. This tradition of doing business is said to be a very old practice. In the summer months, these Matwali Ksetri people load their sheep with foodgrains and migrate (for that season) to the surrounding high altitude places like Mugu, Dolpa and Bhot (Tibet). When winter sets in, they come down to low altitude places like Dailekh and Jajarkot. Another occupation which these folks follow is the collection of herbs and medicinal plants in the high mountainous areas. Those living in the Caudhbis area often work as porters to earn their daily bread.

The locals supplement their incomes by collecting mushrooms that sell for approximately Rs.3000/kg locally, while it is collected and taken by businessmen to India where it is sold at almost IRs. 6000/kg. The revenue paid is only Rs. 7/kg. at the border. Other medicinal plants that are collected are *silaju* or *silajit*, *yarsa gomba*, *bhutlae*, *katu ko*, *padmachal*, *hattejada*, *attis jatamasi*, etc. It was observed that during the collecting season which falls in March - April, the school going children dodged classes and went to collect mushrooms or other medicinal plants to add to the income of the family.

Entertainment

A dance-song activity called *deuda* is played among the Matwali Ksetri boys and girls in this region, but not seen among the Brahmin, Ksetri and Thakuri folks. This takes place in the goth or cowsheds where the boys and girls collect and sing in the evenings after the day's work is over. They gradually build a relationship of closeness both physically and mentally as the night deepens. Thus, the tune and words of these songs sung in the *deuda* are very much influenced by the situation of that moment this *deuda* lasts till the morning. This traditional ritual or timepassing mechanism is also attended by married females, who have come for a visit to their *maiti*. The men go only if they find themselves free or if they consider themselves still young enough. Should only a single sept exist in a village of these Matwali Ksetri, then this *deuda* becomes taboo, since the presence of various different septs is an essential requirement for this. Should a case arise where a girl is found to be pregnant, this isn't considered a shame. Young husbands and mature wives are also married and not considered an abnormality among these people. Should a young man have a clandestine sexual relationship with a married woman, then the man has to pay *jari* and marry the woman. The boys and girls of marriageable septs can participate in *deuda khelne*. If a person's wife goes to the *deuda* and if the husband finds out, the practice is of not talking about that evenings happening, thus stopping any dirt flying around the family name.

MUGAL

The Mugal are a tribe of people who inhabit the regions of the western Himalaya in Nepal. They live in the areas of the north-western Kamali Zone in a village called Mugu from which they have derived their name. It is said that previously they inhabited the old Mugu or Purano Mugu which lies 24 km. south of the Chinese border and about 9 km. north of today's Mugu. This shift downwards was attributed to location for trade. Even today, ruins can be found at Purano Mugu which attest to the fact of the earlier settlement there.

Mugu is accessible by climbing out of the Karan and moving along the base of a narrow gorge to the north west of Mount Syanan. At an altitude of approximately 11,500' this gorge widens out into a V-shaped, rock strewn valley. It is a quarter mile wide at this point which is the widest, with the east and west being hemmed in by rockslides which are joined to the steep sides of the mountains which reach a height of almost 19,000'. Mugu village lies at the bottom of this valley on the left hand side of the Mugu river and at an elevation of 3307 metres.

Houses

The Mugal construct their houses in their own unique way. Due to their settlement being in mountainous areas, the main jointing material used in stone and wood works is little or no mud, as mortar. To prevent the walls from giving way, or to leave space for future upward construction, they pile stones as foundations, punctuated with wooden pillars at places. Houses are mostly three storied and the roofs are flat made of wood laid flat and covered with a sort of mud mixture (mortar) which is spread all over and then stamped in. Every storey consists of a single room without any windows. There is a single door on each floor and the small holes in the walls act as ventilators, and a kind of window.

The ground floor is the *goth*, where livestock are housed. The first floor or the *chhipra* contain their store of grain and salt and the topmost storey called the *koga* is used as a live room-cum-kitchen. The winter season's onset causes the reversal of the functions of the upper and first floor, as the latter is more well insulated than the former. Access between floors is gained by the use of notched-log

ladders. When one is inside the house, these logs are pulled in and thus the house becomes inaccessible to entry. Religious ceremonies are performed on the terraces where there are wooden edges which act as windbreakers.

Physical Characteristics

Mugal people are strong, healthy, sturdy and tall. They are fair in complexion, and typically mongoloid in facial make up, almost Tibetan. They possess straight, black and long hair, often greasy and plaited by both males and females alike. They resemble Tibetans to a great degree as their history also indicates.

Language

Although the language of the Mugal is *Khamkura*, nowadays, they have begun to articulate quite well in the Nepali lingua franca. The *Khamkura* spoken by these people is different from that spoken by the Kham Magar of Rolpa and Rukum regions. A sample of their language with the nearest Nepali and English equivalents is listed below:

Khamkura	Nepali	English
<i>katgyal</i>	kaeta	boy
<i>katemale</i>	kaete	girl
<i>thungdung</i>	yuvak	youth
<i>nujung</i>	taruni	young woman
<i>mae</i>	aago	fire
<i>sing</i>	daura	wood (fuel)

The Mugal calendar consists of 31 days in each month. The new month commences the day after every *pu'nima* (full moon). The new year begins from Poush (the month which lies between the second half of Dec. and the first half of January).

Family

The Mugal family is of the extended type. The norm within the kindred among whom the daily social life revolves is that loan of goods and services are to be mutually reciprocated. This is strictly considered as endo-kindred cooperation and is never found to exist outside this circle. If such cooperative ventures did occur outside this group, then it is marked by the regular features like mistrust,

jealousy and envy. Solidarity is a strictly family matter and outside it is found to be almost non-existent. Lack of hospitality in this area is attributed to the prevalence of adverse economic conditions that exist. Generally, it can be said that the family is an endogamous unit and very closely knit due to the economic factors which also seem to be a reason for the migration of several families permanently to various places in northern India.

Dress & Ornaments

A uniqueness and identity can be reflected by the dress up and ornaments of these Mugals. The males wear clothes like the *dau* or *bokhu* (Tibetan type coat-like covering), *buraesaenju* or *bhoto* (vest-like clothes worn inside the *bokhu*), *karo* or *patuka* (waistband or beltlike cloth), *syango* is the *suruwal* or pant-like clothes, *kulae* or *topi*, *docha* or cloth boots worn by Tibetan people and those in contact with them. Females wear *cholo* (blouse), *syabai* (gown) and a piece of embroidered cloth worn at the rear called the *maiti talo*, similar to the *pangden* of the Tibetan married women, but while this is worn in the front, the Mugals wear these at the rear.

Males wear *muga* along with *Ul ghalung* (silver) with a *yun* (semi precious stone) mounted on it and called *talae*. On their right hands they wear *serke oljum* (golden ring). *Ghalu* is mostly worn by married men only. Women wear *alung* (a thick silver ring, almost two or three inches in diameter and quite heavy so as to wrench off the ear lobes). Coins of the defunct East India Company like the *mohar* or the *ath anni* and the *rupiya* are welded into a necklace and worn.

The matter of bathing is not a matter of much interest for these Mugals, and thus their skin colour is dirty and they exude a uniquely Himalayan body odour.

Life Cycle Rites

Births

When a woman is at the point of delivering a child then the females living in the neighbourhood look after her. After the birth of the child the mother is fed with barley flour (*sattu*) mixed with a lot of *ghyu* (clarified butter) and made into a paste called *haluva*. This is fed to her for a period of three days continuously. Then for the next

month, she is fed with this paste and also meat.

Five days after this delivery, the birth pollution which had been on the woman is lifted by purification through a *lama*. This is called *sang*. In this ceremony the *lama* uses his *gyan* or knowledge and *dhyān* or concentration. This has to be attended to by the whole family. On this day of purification, the neighbours bring *chhang* and *sattu*, and the child and mother are also bathed with hot water. The ritual of severing the umbilical cord or *navi* is done by the child's maternal grandmother, or maternal aunts, or relatives and neighbours. This *navi katnae* (navel cutting) ceremony is known as *Taechogyān*. In their language, *tae* means navel and *chogyān* means to cut.

If a woman has difficulty during childbirth, then the *lama* is called and it is he who performs the work of a doctor by extracting the child. If this operation proves to be difficult and the life of the woman is at stake, then the unborn infant's head is cut off and then it is extracted. The *lama* is responsible for naming the newborn child and he has the authority to set the date at anytime within the period of a year. If in case the *lama* doesn't provide a name for the child within the stipulated time, then the family members themselves name the child.

Marriage practices

There exist three types of marriages among the Mugal people. These are: arranged marriages, elopement marriages and marriages with others wives. While the first one is *Magi biwaha*, the second one is *Chori biwaha* and the last one is *Jari biwaha*.

Arranged marriages

It can be observed among these Mugal, that they have their own custom of performing these arranged marriages also called *Magi biwaha*. When the girl or the boy reaches the age of 5 or 6 years, they are matched and arranged to be married at a future date when they reach the mature age of 15 or 16 years.

When initiating such marriages, two males (especially the boy's maternal and paternal uncles) go as matchmakers or *lami*, to the girl's house to commence the marriage talks. While going for this sort of talk, these uncles carry alongwith them a *pari* (wooden pot

also called *theki*) which has three sides of its mouth smeared with *ghyu*, *ko tasi*, a *gajni* (clothpiece) tied to its neck and the pot itself is filled with *chang* (millet beer).

Those who carry this gift try to induce the girl's parents to accept and drink it, but should it is refused. Then those from the boy's side doff their caps or *topi thapae* (holding caps upturned signifying that they are beseeching the girl's parents) and beseech the girl's parents using a lot of flattery, prayers, appeals and requests. If the girl's parents are not at all inclined to comply, then they refuse the gifts totally. But should the girl's parents be willing to accept this proposal, then they consume the *chhang* and authorise the match. In Mugal society, once this *chhang* is consumed, it is understood that the girl has been betrothed to the boy from whose side the *chhang* has been presented.

After the marriage has been fixed, the actual ceremony is performed within a period of 5 to 6 years. As long as this ceremony is not over, the relatives on the woman's side like her parents, paternal and maternal kin and such have to be regularly presented with *chhang* and meat. The ceremony of feeding kin folks on one's wife's side occurs twice a year - once in the period between Baisakh and Jesth months and the next time in the period between Kartik and Marga months. This custom is called *kangkok*. During this period, the females are offered tea (butter tea) and *soksae* (sheep meat) to eat.

The *sait* (auspicious date and time for performing a religious ritual or ceremony) is determined by a *lama*, a paternal or maternal uncle among these Mugal folks. It is only after this ritual is completed that the boy's relatives, friends and father go in a group as *janti*. The existent custom is that the paternal and maternal uncles, along with a Dom (here meaning a Damai or tailor) accompany this *janti* and while returning, the maternal or paternal uncles carry the bride while the Dom carries the *daijo* or dowry presented to the bride so that these items may help her household. A wise and experienced individual is an extremely important and a necessary fixture of any such *janti*. This man is called the *goba* and has to be invited by offering him *jad*. Others are either offered *jad* or just invited to join the *janti*.

The girl's relatives are also allowed to participate in this *janti*. After this group leaves the village and is out of the limits of the village, it is joined by two Dom (Damai). Among these two, one plays an

instrument like a *madal* (Wooden or clay cylindrical shape open at both ends and covered with goatskins) called *doli* while the other blows the *kaling* (an instrument like the *sehani* or clarinet). The *janti* commences movement towards the girl's house at midnight, and no unmarried persons are permitted to participate in this procession.

On the day of the marriage, the relatives of the bride, called *naetru*, accumulate there to sing and dance. Among these dancers and singers is one called the *naetru goba* resembling a sort of leader. No instruments are played on during these songs and dances.

As soon as the *janti* reaches the bride's house, they begin to dance. A *juwari* (duet) also occurs between the groups belonging to the groom or *janti* and the group on the side of the girl. In this duet, the bride's group asks questions like why have they come? For what have they come? Where have they come from? etc., in song and full of folk melody. The *janti* reply in a similar manner.

Once this is over, both groups enter the house of the bride. It is said that this duet or *juwari* custom, is but a traditional remnant of a formality which enhances the marriage by adding some intrigue. All the *janti* go upstairs but the last two of the group are held back and not permitted to go up. At this moment, the bride's party begin to ask questions from within the house in the same way as they previously did and these two have to reply to the melodious queries from the place where they have been stopped. The bride's party level a fusilade of frightening questions at these two individuals who are locked out and who act as though they can't answer and so are finally let into the precincts of the house. This is also stated as being a remnant of some old traditions, but the meaning of this has been lost through the ages, and only the dumb enactment remains.

When the *janti* goes to fetch the bride, she is at that time in her *phupu's* (paternal aunt's) house. After the *janti* are provided with *jad* and *raksi*, they are sent to rest (or relax) and only after sometime do they go to the bride's house.

On the occasion of their marriage, the bride's relatives present her *thulo taulo* (large copper pot for cooking food item and it is also called *kharkundo*), distant relatives present *thal* or plate and even more distant relatives present *kachaura* or small bowls in which curries or pulses are served. In the early hours of the next morning, the bride-to-be comes to the house of her parents or *maiti* from her

phupu's She is taken away by the *janti* that very same evening. On reaching the groom's residence, he goes upstairs and descends with a bow and arrows. The bride's *ongyon* shawl is used as a shield to block the arrows shot by the groom, however, the shawl is holed and it is only after this customary ritual that all go inside the house of the groom. Inside, the groom's parents anoint the *bride* and groom with *ghyu* (clarified butter) *ko tika*, and then offer them *chhang* to consume. The bride then returns to her *maiti* on that very day, changes her clothes and returns to the groom's house.

When she reaches the *chirpa* she asks for *taulo* from the groom's house, lights a fire and remains there. This fire must be authorised to be burnt according to ritual by a *lama* in control of the ceremonies. The bride remains at the *chirpa* with her friends for a period of 6 to 7 days, after which they leave her and go to their homes. Although the bride works in the boy's house the whole day, she goes to sleep at her parents house or *maiti* at night. In such cases, the groom is also permitted to accompany the bride to her house and sleep with her there. In the morning, the bride goes to the groom's house and does her chores there the whole day repeating the same process in the evening.

This continues for almost a year or till the girl does not deliver a baby. It is only after this that she begins to live permanently at her husband's house. Thus, in this sort of residence pattern, on the night of *purnima* (full moon) the couple is locked in a room as is the custom among these people. In this way the marriage ceremony is concluded. A point to note here is that in Mugal marriages the *janti* actually consists of only three persons namely : the *kancha buwa* or youngest brother of groom's father the *mama* or maternal uncle and the *Damai*, but these numbers are seen to vary today and according to the availability of people.

Jari marriages

Such marriages occur when a person marries someone else's wife. While this sort of union is much disliked and a cause for tension in other societies, among the Mugal it seems to be popular in fact, as observed. The basic pattern of this marriage is similar to others in other societies in the kingdom, where the *jari dand* or compensation for stealing someone else's wife is to be paid to the one who has lost the woman. The amount is maximum Rs. 1000/- and this is known as the *jari cull*.

Chori Biwaha

While visiting *mandirs*, *gompas* or distant religious shrines, girls and boys interact and sometimes fall in love, with each other. Thus they decide to marry and create a family of their own. It is observed that many Mugal couples elope and go away (migrate) to distant places. While others hide the girls in their jungle *goths* (cowsheds in secluded forests or alpine pastures away from human settlements) and then marry openly at a later time.

If the girl's parents do not like the boy, or the girl's parents are not satisfied with the boy, or if the boy and girl are in reality close kin and have broken the taboo of marriage between agnates, or one of the couple (girl or boy) is already married, then an attempt is made to separate this couple. But should this attempt be unsuccessful, then the parents themselves go to look for the couple later on in an attempt to reconcile.

After the couple is brought home, the boy's mother places a *tika* of *ghyu* on the *tal* (top of head - cranium part) of the girl and on the boy's temples. In the absence of the mother, the boy's elder or younger sister performs this ritual which is customary. This is followed by the feeding of barley flower mixed in *ghyu*, then *chhang* is offered in a silver bowl or *phuru* (wooden bowl inlaid with silver). Now they all live together as a single family.

After the above rituals are over, the *san* (ritual where the newly wed bride has to go to her paternal home or *maiti*) must also be observed and the date is decided on by the *lama*. In this social custom or ritual within a period of 5 to 6 months, a delegation of 1 to 2 persons from the boy's side goes to the girl's parents house and invite the kin of the girl's to the house of the boy. At this stage, the girl's parents exhibit their annoyance and anger at the union, but eventually the parents, sons and daughters-in-laws all go for this invitation. The feast consists of foods such as rice, meat, *chhang*, butter tea (Tibetan style), is also served, but only for the ladies in the group, meaning for the mother of the bride and her sister-in-laws

Death Rites

Should a Mugal fall ill, the medical treatment is done by a *lama*, and if it is observed that the patient doesn't stand a chance of surviving

then his or her pillow's *kriya* (rites after death) is performed even though the individual hasn't died. This is done by the *lama* and also by *chumma* who have gathered at the house. This ritual is known as *ung ko narak*. After this is over and when the person dies a *sait* (auspicious time) is determined and on that day the pillow is taken out of the house. Now the *lamas* follow and determine the mode of disposal of the corpse according to what the sacred scriptures state. The disposal of the corpse could either be cremation or burial, however, dismemberment and throwing into water or feeding to the vultures are also other bizzare ways of disposal existent even today. The cremation and burial are similar to what other Buddhists do in the kingdom, 5 days after the death, the *lamas* are again gathered on the flat terraces of the house and the *kriya* performed. The *lamas* consume *chhang* and meat during this ritual. The spirit of the deceased is summoned and requested not to be anxious about his household, but to go straight to heaven. They appeal to the gods to elevate this spirit to their abode, etc. These prayers are said repeatedly and called *yada narak* and *thara narak*.

After 49 days, the next *kriya* called *syabasipachi swargwa* is performed. In the case of the deceased being a father, his brother has to undergo ritual purification and should the deceased be a mother, then her younger sister has to undergo the ritual purification. The next year another *kriya* is performed and it is called *dhuiraina* where a *lama's* presence is required since he has to offer prayers. The villagers and neighbours are invited to drink *chhang*. These people gathered there also sympathise and reassure the family members of the deceased. It can be observed that the custom of erecting *chetin* or *chorten* (stone mound as marker/cairn) in memory of the deceased, exists among Mugal. When any *lama* or person of such religious status dies, the custom is to preserve a piece of their bones in a box made of silver, mud, wood, metal and worship these as relics. The *khappad* (cranium) of a deceased with a good *bhagya* (destiny) is hidden for a period of 10-15 days and through *tantric* rituals is said to be brought under control. Then it is cleaned with sand and kept in the *gompa* as is the prevalent custom that was observed. *Chhang* is poured into this 'vessel' and a sip is offered to all the devotees.

Religion

Mugal people are Tibetan Buddhists and adhere to the Nyingmapa and Sakyapa sects, however, they have their own distinctiveness culturally due to their isolated topographic location and mediatory economic role in the matter of trans-Himalayan trade.

The village of Mugu has two *gompas*. While the upper part possesses the Sakyapa *gompa* or *lha-khang* the lower part has a Nyingmapa *gompa*. Due to their juxtaposition, they indicate that some basic social division exists, however, this is not so simple an explanation because the two sects are not at daggers drawn and do interact freely, in fact. There are three other *gompas* which are mainly used as retreats. One is just above the village of Mugu and the other two a few hours walk downstream on the left bank. The village priests are actually married agriculturists and pastoralists, and not the monks as we may envision them to be. Normally, *lamas* wear *chhuba* (red robes), the other *lamas* wear green robes, while the other male laity of the village wear grey robes.

The *lama* is the *chumma* and it is he who performs the rites and rituals for placating the gods in cases of illness or injury. They are the ones who possess the power to go to places or houses which are social tabu. It is believed that the *chumma* is permitted to have sexual intercourse with any female (married) and should the husband see this, then it is he who must abscond from that place. The Mugal people state that this was what happened in the past but today it is not actually done. The junior *lama* is the *jhimu* and is found to exist in every household functioning as a cleaner. He gets rid of the corpses as decided by the *chumma*. Basically, religion among these Mugal is Lamaism with vestiges of the ancient shamanism and Bonpoism, at places. They worship Chomdendae (*rinopoche*) the four-limbed Chenresig whose one pair of hands holds a flower and a prayer rosary and the other pair is joined in a *mudra*. All their religious activities are associated with the *gompa*, due to their Buddhistic tendencies. All their festivals are celebrated in their *gompas* and this is the reason for the many *gompas* found in Mugu region.

Festivals

The main festival of the Mugal people is Lhosar of which there are two types. The first type is celebrated on the *aunsi* (dark moon) at

the end of the month of Poush (Dec-Jan) and the other Lhosar is celebrated at the end of Falgun (Feb-March). They consider the first Lhosar as the greater. They enjoy themselves during such celebrations through songs and dances. Actually it has been observed that whatever festival they celebrate is based on dances. One such dance is *naeserba*, which is performed by the girls and boys dressed up in their finest clothes. This dance is performed only twice in a year. The first time is in Kartik-Marga and the second time is in Baisakh-Jesth. This *naeserba* is danced after these Mugals return from a pilgrimage. During this dance, the married males wear a white turban and the married females a certain type of golden ornament. However, the unmarried youths do not wear any such thing but only new clothes.

Economic Status

Since arable land is in short supply, the Mugal people do not go in for agriculture in a majority, however, those who do, plant potatoes in Chaitra, and a variety of barley called *narwhal* in Baisakh. Besides these *titae phapar*, *mithae phapar* (buckwheat) and millet are also planted. Weaving and selling *liu*, *phaerae*, *bokhu*, *choru*, *dhujaen* is also an occupation of these people, who are also interested in rearing and breeding livestock. They rear *chauri* or yak which are left to graze in the pastures with bells hanging on their necks, while the *dzuma* (hybrid) yaks are kept in their respective stalls near the homes of the yak owners. Since these Mugals are traders, they use the yaks as pack animals. They mostly trade with Tibetans, but within the kingdom, they have business links with Jumla, Sinja, Khatyang, Plota, Bhajhang, Gum, Karan and other such places. The main items of trade in these parts are rice, barley, millet, wheat, chillis, beans, honey, salt, wool, dogs (apsoo), shoes, etc.

Judging from the above patterns of trade and the concerned commodities, one may be inclined to state that the economic status of these Mugals is standardised, however, this is only apparent and applicable to only a limited few Mugals. The tribe as a whole is somehow or the other eking out a subsistence, almost hand to mouth.

MUSHR

Among the tribes inhabiting the areas of Morang, Sunsari, Udaypur, Siraha, Sarlahi, Dhanusha, Janakpur, Saptari, Mahottari, Malangawa, Rautahat, and Gaur are the Mushr with strange traditions and cultures. Previously they were a nomadic tribe, but today, they are a settled community. They claim to have migrated into this region approximately 7 centuries ago from the southern regions which now lie in India. Information received from other sources state that it has been almost four centuries since these people have settled down in a permanent sort of way. However, there is no concrete evidence to corroborate the fact that these Mushr actually migrated 7 centuries ago or settled down permanently 4 centuries ago, in this region. These time periods are gleaned from the oral traditions which exist among these people as is the case of the histories of most tribes in Nepal.

Origins

It is said, by their oral traditions and stories that they were an ancient hunting gathering tribe because they did not know anything about foodgrains or cereals. This indicates that they were not agriculturists meaning they were nomads. They claim descent from the great sage Valmiki, the supposed author of the religious Ramayana epic. The Mushr claim to have entered the region which falls in present day Nepal on account of the large and extensive jungles where food like tubers, roots, fruits and such could be easily available and gathered without much pains.

Today, the Mushr do not remember these wild fruits, tubers and such because they claim to have begun to eat cereals and other foodgrains about 2 centuries ago. This was followed by clearing and cultivating lands where foodgrains began to be planted. It is during this period, they say, that they were harassed by rodents, especially rats and bandicoots, which infested their fields and destroyed much of the standing crops. Thus, as a curative measure they launched a campaign to trap these rodents, especially the bandicoots and eat them for their proteinous flesh. This they do even today and so they are believed to have been given the sobriquet Mushr, which could probably mean those who eat rats for *musa* means mouse or rat in Nepali so they became rat eaters. Though the Mushr claim this to be incorrect and prejudiced version of their names or tribal identity.

Settlement

That the Mushr were nomads can be proved by the types of houses or huts they construct for dwellings, which are small and low in height. It is light and constructed from locally available materials such as bamboo, straw, *khar* and *bhato* or split bamboo pieces. The house is comprised of a single large central room. In one corner they keep their livestock, in another they cook their meals and in the third corner they sleep. The opening is at the fourth corner.

Mushr folks are fond of living in harmony with each other and it is due to this feeling of one tribe or commune, that the Mushr village is in reality a gathering of houses which are glued to each other and numbering 20-25 at a single place. Any problem faced by an individual is considered the headache of the community and is solved by the community. This shows the close-knit society these people live in even today.

Dress

Initially, in olden times, Mushr used to wear only so much as to cover their genitalia and mammary glands, as they were savages and not yet in contact with any other less savage and slightly more 'civilised' tribes. But as time passed, they inevitably came into contact with and were influenced by their neighbouring tribes. Among the many aspects influenced, dress was one. Thus, today we can observe them dressing in a way similar to the other inhabitants of their area of settlement. Thus the *dhoti* and *kurta* are the clothes worn by the males while the females wear the usual *phariya* and *cholo*. These are the clothes worn because the Mushr inhabit the plain or *terai* areas mostly where such attire is common.

Sept (Thar)

Though the Mushr claim descent from a single ancestor (unilineal descent), there are found to exist many septs or *thars* within their tribal structure.

Septs among the Mushr are : Mdhdhaiya, Tirautiya, Tysvriya and Sinauriya, among which Tirautiya are in a majority in Nepal, while the others are found in regions of India also.

Family

Mushr are a people who prefer and respect the joint or extended family pattern of residence. It is one of the features of primitive tribes and indicates the primitiveness of the Mushr, though they are slowly showing a proclivity towards the nuclear family pattern which is a practical one in modern times and also because of the financial situation today.

Though these people are of a patriarchal society, the women in their tribe or society are given the respect they command. While these females are responsible for all household chores, the men are fully responsible for performing the necessary works outside the homes.

Life cycle rites

Births

On the birth of a child, a *sudeni* or rural midwife, belonging to the Chmar tribe is called in and it is she who handles all matters pertaining to delivering the baby, cutting the umbilical cord, stimulating the drop of the after birth or *sathi*, cleaning up the blood and filth which are by products of a birth, and cleaning the baby and the mother. From the day after the birth, the mother is given a broth of ginger mixed with a sugarlike substance called *shakkhr* and other spices also. Till the fifth day, no rituals are performed, and then on the sixth day after the birth, the mother's finger and toe nails are cut, red colour applied on these digits and she is given a new set of clothes to change into or at least a *phariya* or sari-like cloth. On this day the mother is permitted to eat rice and other normally eaten victuals. The child is named or has the *navran* on this day, and seven kinds of cereals are mixed to make a special type of sweet which is called *stnja* by the Mushr. It is from this sixth day that the mother is considered cleansed from birth pollution.

Though the mother has been purified, she has to refrain from touching wells, tanks or any water sources, even taps, for a month as is the tradition among these people. While some folks observe this abstinence for only twelve days, others do so for the whole month as tradition stipulates. If the need arises that this mother must fetch water, then she has to first perform a ritual before she touches any water sources to obtain water. First, the mother takes a *lota* and places it in front of the water sources, next she has to place some

paddy grains, fresh green grass or *duvo*, and turmeric at five spots. *Puja* is then performed at those spots and after this *puja* the water in the *lota* is emptied into the water source

After this ritual is over, she is eligible for drawing water and she can give water to anyone to drink since she is considered purified now. In some places, this emptying of the *lota* into the water source is done in a such a way so that she is not observed by anyone while at the task. This is in conformity to the customs which demands such discretion.

Pasni

Mushr folks do not seem to practise the ritual of *pasni*. While the parents are eating, the child also eats the same food regardless of the age. Thus it is seen that no particular time or date is fixed for this feeding and hence no special feast is necessary. So, the Mushr child commences eating solid foods at anytime prior to the 5 or 6 months time period which is the time where only liquids are given to the child in most tribal societies in Nepal.

Mudn

Only some of these Mushr people perform this ritual called *mudn* or *chhaewar* meaning shaving of the initial hair on the boy's head. This is a rather short ritual. Prior to the actual *mudn*, they perform *puja* to their tutelary and other deities. Then the boy is placed on his mother's lap and his hair is cut by a barber. While the hair is being cut, the mother makes sure that the locks do not fall to the ground by collecting them in the *anchal* or tip of *sari* or *phariya*, spread out under the boy's head. The collected hair is taken and thrown into a large river if they are able to go there, otherwise they merely dump it into a nearby bamboo grove. The belief they have regarding the throwing of the cut locks into a river is that the boy's hair may grow like the river, long and continuous. While the bamboo grove disposal means the hair will grow like the bamboo grove, tall and straight and thick. For this *mudn*, a female goat which has not had any sexual contact, is needed. This goat is slaughtered and cooked, then a feast is given to the boy's kin, neighbours and acquaintances who are present in a majority for witnessing this ritual.

Marriage Practices

Marriage talks are initiated by the girl's father as is the tradition among the Mushr. Two to six people from the girl's side go to the boy's house to sort out the matter and observe the potential groom. If the group considers the boy suitable for their relative the girl, then they say so and the boy's parents give the girl's folks a meal and then send them off. The day after this, two to six of the potential groom's people go to the girl's house to see her.

The boy also accompanies this group and should he like the girl, then this is expressed to the girl's folks who give the boy's group a meal and then send them off. During these meetings, the presentation of clothes and money is performed, but it is a two way affair.

The next step in this marriage procedure is to investigate whether there is any agnatic link between the families of the boy and girl in question. In the bygone days, the custom was to observe a gap of 9 generations, and thus many such matches had to be cancelled due to the ties in some of their generations, which did not possess the 9 generation interval. This became a hinderance for the Mushr so they have reduced this period of 9 generation to a period of 3 generations for practical reasons. Investigating this sort of relationship before a marriage is known by the Mushr as *dih milaune* or arranging the lineage.

Once the *dih* is arranged (found compatible) then the two families about to becomeaffines, send presents to each other and the date of the marriage is decided on somewhere during this period. A marriage in Mushr society is different from that of other societies in that it takes 5 to 7 days for completion.

The first day is started by singing songs which commence the marriage rites. These songs have themes expressing love, blessings for a bright future after the marriage and such. On the second day at both houses, a paste, composed of turmeric, oil and *pina* or filtrate of pressed oil is rubbed on the bodies of the prospective groom and the bride. This ritual is *aptn*. This rubbing is done by the boy's sisters (younger or elder) or his *bhauju* or sister-in-law meaning wife of elder brother. The girl is rubbed by her elder sister or *didi* and her *bhauju* or sister-in-law only. After this rubbing is over, the prospective bride and groom are bathed by the same persons who

rubbed them. On the third day, gram, *aruwa* or glutinous rice, mustard oil and *sindur* or vermilion are mixed and taken to the nearby watersource like the local tank or well, alongwith the boy. The same thing is done at the place where the girl lives and she is also taken like the boy to a watersource near her place. Here they have to bathe and after this, they have to perform worship by placing the items mentioned in five small heaps near the water source. This ritual is *mt kor*, during which the women sing devotional songs while encircling the boy or the girl as the group moves towards and returns from the water sources. The fourth day is the actual day of the marriage also called *janti jane din* or day of the marriage procession's movement. While the boy in his own village goes from door to door, the girl does so in her own village on this fourth day. This is *vilauki magne* and is a ritual where they go to the houses of their neighbours and also the affluent villagers. This ritual nets the boy and girl things like money, rice grains, paddy, and such. During this ritual, the women folks of the girl's put earthenware pots full of water on their heads and take the girl all around the villages.

On the evening of this day, the *janti* and the groom have a hearty meal after which they proceed towards the bride's house. The bride's folks give the *janti* and the groom a grand welcome and the clothes, ornaments and foodstuff taken by the groom as gifts for the bride are kept in the centre of the compound to show the neighbours and villagers. At this time, some of the villagers belonging to the bride's village take the groom for a walk around their village, with the intention of showing off the groom, so that the villagers can judge him fit for the bride or not. The Mushr believe in this and do this ritual even today. On such a walk, the groom collects gifts of ricegrains, money and other things. This is the ritual of *dura lgaune*.

The first rite is that of presenting *tilak*. Among the items presented to the groom, are a *dhoti*, *kmij*, *rumal* and other things that have been promised by the bride's family. This *tilak* is somewhat similar to a dowry. Now the couple are taken and seated at the *mdva* or *jagge* which is in itself like a small house. This *mdva* is constructed in many different kinds of ways, by these Mushr folks. While some of them use a solid bamboo to make these strcutures, others cut the bamboo into pieces and still others use rice flour with which they enclose an area which is the *mdva*, though of a two dimensional nature.

When the couple are brought to the *mdva*, the groom presents clothes and ornaments to the bride and she wears them there (on top of her other clothes) symbolically. Now it is time for an *okhl* or wooden mortar, to be brought forward to the *mdva*. The fathers of the couple come and extract 5 grains of rice and five grains of paddy each from within the mortar. These they wrap in their clothes and knot this end. Those present at this ritual try to observe who is faster in picking those grains and knotting them. Once this is over, the rituals at the *mdva* commence. At first, a branch of a mango tree, complete with leaves is brought and kept in a pot. A thread is used to measure the girl's height and then this thread is tied round the branch. It should be noted here that among the Mushr people, the mango branch is considered as the key witness of the union. After this, two leaves of the branch are broken off and on one is written the names of 3 generations of the groom's and similarly three generations of names of the bride's side on the other leaf. Then the leaf wherein the groom's three generations are written is tied to the bride's arm and the one with the names of three generations of the bride's is tied to the groom's arm.

This ritual is followed by that ritual called *sindur halne* where the groom and bride are considered really married. Here, five of the bride's relatives screen the bride using a 2 metres long cloth, preferably white.

At this time, a bowl of curds each is placed in the hands of the bride and groom. Under these bowls are placed *dubo*, paddy, turmeric, etc. Five members from the groom's side take the curd bowl and all the items under it from the bride's hands and then they sprinkle the groom 5 times, and the bride's folks take the bowl from the groom's hand alongwith the other items and then they sprinkle the bride five times. In this ritual, both men and women on both sides are involved. Now the bride's head is anointed with oil and the groom - now holding the *sindur* in his left hand and using a wooden spoon with his right hand pours *sindur* on the *siudo* or hair parting of the bride. It is believed by these Mushr, that while applying this *sindur* none of it must drop onto the ground, therefore a wooden bowl is placed under the bride's head to hold the *sindur* that falls off. This is the ritual that is commonly known as *sindur halne* literally meaning pouring or putting of the *sindur*, and it is done five times, repeatedly by the Mushr people. The *janti* are not allowed to observe this ritual.

The next step is commenced by bringing the barber to the *mdva* and

he makes small cuts on the small fingers of the couple. The blood that oozes out from their fingers is dropped into a *paan* (betel leaf), *kaera* (banana) or *khir* (sweet rice). The food item on which the groom's blood is dripped is given to the bride to eat and vice-versa. This ritual is *lh chu*. It is followed by the groom being presented a new set of clothes by the bride's folks. The groom discards his old clothes which are given to the barber who has just done the *lh chu*. The barber is called the *hjam*. Now the whole ritual of *mdva* is over.

Though the actual marriage is over, the *janti* remain at the bride's house and return only three days later. Prior to the *janti* returning the groom's folks present betel nuts or *supari* to the female singers of the bride's village and the bride's female relatives are also given the present of betel nuts and *paan* (betel leaf which is filled with all sorts of species like cloves, cardamom, etc. and then folded up, put in the mouth and chewed).

On the third day, the *janti* return with the bride and she is made to stand directly in front of the main door of the groom's house when she reaches there. A basket or *tokri* is placed in front of her, on which a tortoise bone is placed and then burnt. The heat of this fire is absorbed by someone's hand and then his heat is transferred to the bride's cheeks. Five balls of sweet rice or *khir* are thrown in five different directions. Now the bride is allowed to move forward, towards the main door, but she is again obstructed by the groom's sisters (younger and elder) and *phupu* or paternal aunt. This barrier is removed by the couple presenting them with some items. After this, the groom's sisters and *phupu* wash the feet of the couple and then take them into the house and place them in front of the *kul devta*. Now the couple have to perform worship here and bow. It is only after this ritual is concluded that the Mushr marriage is considered really over.

Child marriage and polygyny are prevalent among the Mushr. Then payment of *jari* exists but in a very rare state, because *jari garne* (marrying someone else's wife while she is married to that person) is looked upon with scorn and even hatred by the Mushr society and so it is almost a kind of taboo. Even widow marriages are not encouraged among these people.

Death Rites

On the death of a Mushr, those who are able to cremate the corpse, while those who are unable to bury it. It is estimated, according to Mushr statistics, that while 25% cremate their dead, 75% bury them. Initially a corpse is bathed and clothed in new clothes and then placed on a *khat* or bed-like structure constructed out of bamboo (green), tied at three points and then carried off towards the burial or cremation site. The funeral goers themselves dig the grave or construct the pyre, as the case may be, making the grave or pyre in a north-south direction and placing the corpse's head in the northern direction.

While removing the corpse from the house, an earthenware pot is also carried containing 5 *kaudi* shells, oil, barley grains, *tulsi* etc. This pot must be carried by the person who is to light the funeral pyre, meaning the person who lights the *daag batti* which is the fire lit on the corpse's mouth by placing some camphor on a copper coin, and is called the final farewell fire which sends the soul of the deceased into the hereafter. It is only then this that the same person lights the funeral pyre after walking round thrice. Prior to placing the corpse inside the grave, the five *kaudi* shells are placed in five different directions, within the grave and the person goes round the grave five times with a lighted oil lamp in his hand. After this, the corpse is placed in the grave. Now the son of the deceased puts a handful of mud into the grave and this action is followed by the other funeral goers who also throw in handfuls of mud each. After this symbolic gesture, the grave is filled in with mud and stones. The wooden handles of the implements, used in the digging of the grave, are thrown away and then the funeral goers go to a nearby stream, river or lake or any water source and wash before they return home.

The women of the house clean the compound with mud, dung and water mixture as soon as the funeral moves out towards the cemetery or cremation grounds and finish this job before the return of the funeral goers. After all the funeral goers return to the house of the deceased, a *karahi* or utensil shaped like a semicircle, live coals, stones and chilli are placed on the path and these must be circled from the left side to the right, five times for each item. After completing these rounds, each funeral goer must eat some of the chilli and then only enter the dwelling.

On the 4th day after the funeral, they go to the place of burial or cremation and make a mound there. In the case of the Vaisnav Mushr, they plant a *tulsi* plant on this mound, while the other Mushr leave this mound as it is made. This mound making ritual is known by them as *chor jh ppi grne*. On this day, those who had gone for the funeral are invited and given food to eat and alcoholic beverages to drink.

On the seventh day, the son of the deceased or *krta* is taken to a lake or river where he has to bathe and perform worship with barley, sesame, fire, placed on a banana leaf. At this time, five balls of *pind* are made out of rice and the *krta* pours milk on it. Once this is over, the *pind* is thrown into the stream or lake nearby and the *krta* bathes once more only after which he returns home.

On the eleventh day, everyone including the *krta*, have their nails and hair cut and on the twelfth day, *sraddha* is performed. On this day, 12 *pind* or balls of rice, are offered again as *daan* or donation-charity. On the thirteenth day, the *krta* casts off the clothes he was wearing till then and wears new clothes. Thirteen *pind* or rice balls, are again offered as *daan*. On this day, the *krta* eats meat, liquors, rice and such foods which were banned for him till then. If one does not receive the food items he desires to eat, then this person is not permitted to eat these foods for a year according to the custom of the Mushr and also other tribes who have the same sort of tradition. This becomes a taboo for the *krta*.

Religion

Though the Mushr claim to be Hindus, the procedures of their rites and rituals are quite different from what is done by the Hindus. They seem to be more inclined towards *devi* (mother goddesses) or *shakti* (power-primordial) worship rather than gods of the Hindu pantheon. They believe that a *devi* is more powerful than a *devta*, which is the explanation given by some old Mushr folks and nothing more.

Among the *devis* and *devtas* they worship, there are Lukseyr, Surser, Gaiya, Goriya, and the most popularly worshipped Dina Bhdri. Besides these deities, every Mushr family has a separate deity which they worship in their houses. To these they offer blood sacrifices of pigs, *boka* or uncastrated goats and tender female goats or *pati*, for propitiation. On every Mushr *puja* or worship, a round

(uncut) *betel* nut and a *paan* leaf with a stalk are necessary items. The *pujas* are done by the *dhami* who must be Mushr also. Prior to the *puja*, these *dhami* sing songs and this ritual is called the *Jhummr*. They also have their own kind of priest.

Their greatest deity Dina Bhdri is worshipped once a year on any month suitable for them, however, Asadh, Magh, Marga are the ones preferred. It is performed in the fields, flat spaces or *chaur* and even on the threshold of the main door where it is cleaned with a mixture of mud, dung and water and a heap-like mound is erected. During the *puja*, the necessary items are borrowed from the villagers and the *puja* performed. In this *puja*, the villagers help out according to their ability in terms of foodgrains and other donations. Various foods like *khir* or sweet rice, *pathi ladhdu* and such items are offered to the goddess. The main festivals of the Mushr folks are Phguva, Gauren, Chth, Maghe Sankranti, Jur Sitl and Ghdi Pvni. Besides these, they celebrate the Hindu festivals of Bada Dasai and Tihar also.

Economic Status

Like most of the tribes, still in tribal existence, with in the kingdom, even the Mushr are in economic doldrums. A majority of these Mushr have no lands registered in their names. Their main source of sustenance is working others lands on lease or *addhya*, and toiling as hired labourers. They also live as *hli* or a person who does the ploughing and other works for a family in lieu of which he receives food, shelter and mostly payment in kind. In spite of such weak economic positions, these people consume alcoholic beverages with the hard earned money and in this way, their economy has become weak and now at the point of total collapse.

Sickness is treated by their *jhankri*, instead of a doctor who is available at the nearby health post. While using a *jhankri* to treat sickness, food items like meat, liquors and eggs must be offered to their deities if not to their *jhankri*. This is one of the reasons why their mortality rate is extremely high, especially when epidemics strike. It can be said that even in a time when mankind is on the threshold of the twenty first century, these Mushr are still living in such a state of hopelessness, as though time and development have completely forgotten them.

MUSLMAN

For the first time since the dawn of recorded Nepalese history, during the reign of king Ratna Malla in 1463 AD , an influx of Muslman people from the northern areas of India, has been logged. Actually during the period of the Mughal Emperor Jehangir of India, there are proofs of sporadic Muslman migrations in Nepal, but not of a magnitude so as to influence the whole social environment. Among these migrant people were the Iraqi and Kashmiri Muslman.

Initially they settled in the valley of Kathmandu and commenced doing their business of selling Indian manufactured luxury items to the Nepalese and simultaneously trading Nepalese items and commodities with the people of Bhot (Tibet). These Muslman had no problem to gain a toe-hold in Nepal, because the main customers of their wares were the rich courtiers of the Nepalese King's *darbar*. The ruler of those days also employed Muslman musicians and singers in the *darbars*. Besides these activities, cheap glass bangles, threads for braiding hair called *doro*, and such items were also the sole monopoly of the other ordinary Muslman people, as it is so even today. Some of these Muslman penetrated rural Nepal and gradually became active agriculturists.

Settlement

At a later date, the Kathmandu centralised Muslman community gradually disintegrated and began to migrate to other parts of the country. Today they are spread across the length and breadth of the country and concentrated in places like Butwal, Rautahat, Makwanpur, Gorkha and Trisuli. Their habitations are found mostly in the *terai* lowlands and in the middle hills at the business centres there. Tanahun also has its share of Muslman people.

Population

According to the 1981 census, it is seen that they inhabit 73 out of the 75 districts of the country, but to state even an approximate population of Muslman in Nepal, is rather a difficult matter. In this respect, there are many opinions and the figure 1 to 1.4 million is what was published by the Gorkha Patra of 5th Baisakh 2038 B.S. (February 1981), on the occasion of the Saudi Foreign Minister's official visit to Nepal at that time.

The census board has recorded the Muslman population in the country as listed below:

Year	Percentage of Muslman in the country
1950-54	2.53%
1961	2.98%
1971	3.04%
1981	2.66%

Judging from these figures, the population estimate is inaccurate and only presents an apparent population picture.

Language

The Muslman of Nepal speak Nepalese, though they do converse in the Hindi dialects of the Bihar and U.P. areas of India.

Sept (*Thar*)

The main theme underlying the Muslman concept of family is that the system gives strength to the whole community of Muslman people existing today. Thus the whole Muslman world is considered and believed as being one large family or an Islamic brotherhood as stated by some scholars of Islam. According to this sort of conceptual feeling, these Muslman are categorised into two divisions or septs found in Nepal and placed in their own social stratas.

The first sept consists of 4 sub-steps : Saiyad, Seikh, Pathan and Mugul while the second sept includes the occupational groups who are said to have embraced Islam at a much later date and therefore classified as converts. There are many sub-steps within the second sept also. The Saiyad and Seikh sub-septs within the second sept claim Arabian origins and state to be the direct descendants of prophet Muhamed himself, the Pathan sub-sept claim Afgan origins while the Mugal state to be descendants of the Turks. These four sub-septs of the first sept (High Status) Muslman are mostly seen to be concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley.

The second sept (Low Status) Muslman are those who inhabit most of the areas of Nepal, but concentrated mostly in the Western Hills and the *terai* areas. The sub-septs consist of the following :

Ansari (weaver), Sabji Farosh (greengrocer or vegetable vendour), Dhobi (washerman), Maddaf (cotton leaser), Doffali (bangle, tassle seller), Mochi (cobbler), Dhapal, Mukeri, Jagsad and others. Both septs have family sub-divisions and descent is patrilineal, thus the agnatic lineage is seen to be dominant and the child inherits its name and sept from the father's side or lineage.

The Muslman in the hills of western Nepal are furthur divided into Mirja and Fakir, where the former is considered to be of higher social status than the latter.

The Muslman of the *terai* call themselves northern Muslman, to separate their identity with those Muslman living in India and whom they call southern Muslman. Contrary to the Islamic code of equality, these two septs are beginning to have differences because each sept claims to be of a higher level and better Muslman than the other. While this is a general picture, a close-up on the Kathmandu Valley reveals clashes between the 4 sub-septs of the first sept (high status).

Dress & Ornaments

Regarding this aspect, it is seen that Muslman people living in Nepal dress as normal Nepalese do, except for the negligible few who wear *kurta-pyjama*, Turkish hat or the skull cap or *topi* and grow beards to show their Muslman-ness.

Women must wear clothes which cover their whole bodies from head to feet (leaving only the hands free for work) in such a way as to make them look like a heap of clothes. This is to ensure onlookers cannot distinguish their figures. The faces are covered by *burka* which is a flap that hangs down from the forehead and covers the face but a net like pattern is placed across the area of the eyes so the women can perceive where she is headed for, and while eating she can push this flap over her head. Today, this dress mode is gradually fading away and especially in Kathmandu, Muslman girls are no different from the rest of the crowd. Some women do wear the traditional dress even in Kathmandu today, while in the *terai* many Muslman women are seen similarly dressed, however, in general and considering the proportion, it may be stated that the old traditional dress mode is slowly but surely going out of style and daily use, as women march on the road towards emancipation.

Thus it maybe said that today it is not as easy as it used to be, to instantly recognise a Nepalese Muslman either male or female, as the picture of the prototype is gradually fading, beginning from the Kathmandu Valley area.

Fooding Habits

Muslman people prepare and eat extremely spicy but exotic and delicious food. They have been acknowledge as great chefs in matters of preparing dishes which stimulate the taste buds tremendously. But they themselves are strict adherants of certain rules laid out by their religion regarding food and beverages consumption.

- Taboos :
- (a) Touching a pig or eating its flesh.
 - (b) Eating flesh of dead animals.
 - (c) Consuming blood of slaughtered animals.
 - (d) Eating the flesh of animals slaughtered by non-Muslman i.e. animals sacrificed by people of other tribes to their gods/contrary to the Muslman who has to slaughter the animals by sawing through the necks all the while saying particular prayers to Allah.
 - (e) Drinking of intoxicants like alcoholic beverages (*jad, raksī*)

- Rules:
- (a) Take the name of Allah before and after meals.
 - (b) Abstainence from eating permissable food and swallowing one's own spit, during the time of fasting or Ramzan.

Exception to rules: In case a person is in a condition where it is a matter of extreme necessity to consume prohibited food, then he/she can eat, but as much as required, to stabilise his/her condition or for his/her immediate need.

Religion

A Muslman, whether a Nepalese or any other country's citizen believes in the one god Allah and in his prophet Muhamed. A Muslman is a person who follows Islam and this is a commonly known fact, but when delving into this it is observed that Islam is actually not a religion, in the true sense of the word, but is in reality

a social system, possessing a code of ethics which show the path or way. Thus, Islam can be said to be the follower's (Muslman's) way of life.

Islam is said to contain philosophy, theology and pragmatism, and man is considered as a member of society, not a mere individual. As other religions of the world, Islam is based on pure faith.

Islam has laid out 4 pillars of faith and these are : Nmaj (prayers), Roza (fasting), Zkt (charity) and Hz (pilgrimage).

These exercises are systematically structured so as to encompass short, medium and long periods. For instance, namj is daily, roza is monthly, zkt is biannually or according to the person's desire and hz is done either annually or once in a person's lifetime. All the true and faithful Muslman people follow the rules, codes and taboos of Islam, by performing all the above listed religious activities.

Nmaj (Prayers)

This is one of the four exercises of faith and it is the main pillar of Islam. The function of *nmaj* or prayer is to motivate a person to reach a goal by means of a natural path so as to create in himself an awareness of his existence and aim in life. What the Muslman believe is that it is we who need god and so we pray to him or request him for help in times of trouble. God is an idea and is always there, not tied and shackled but free, so why should he need the people. It is only for the people themselves, because the good they do gives them gains, while the evils done always make these very same people feel the guilt within. Thus it is seen that *nmaj* is said five times daily by these Muslman in any part of this world.

Fajir is the early morning *nmaj*. This is offered between dawn and sunrise. (approximately 2 hrs) Zuhur or the midday *namj*. This is offered exactly at midday. Asr or the mid afternoon *nmaj*. Mghrib or the *nmaj* at sunset. This begins exactly after sunset till the reddish afterglow on the horizon fades out. Isha is the evening *nmaj*. On account of various reasons such as work, travel, etc. a Muslman encounters problems for saying his *nmaj* 5 times a day, so he is permitted to say all these together, just once a day. This is a pragmatic concession contained in Islam.

On Fridays, there is a group prayer session called *jumma* at the mosque, and it is compulsory for all the male Muslman members of

that community to attend. Women are exempted from this activity. This *jumma* is an important group activity and expresses the binding of a community into a close knit family, to give the individuals strength and confidence.

This *jumma* is led by the Iman, who is a sort of socio-religious leader of the community within the jurisdiction of the mosque. Many Musliman who are unable to perform *nmaj* even once a day do their best to attend this *jumma*.

Nmaj is considered obligatory for all Musliman who meet the following requirements:

- (a) All who are sane.
- (b) Relatively mature and in the age of puberty. (Islam says that parents should advise their children at 7 years, and at 10 years should emphasise strongly on the *nmaj*. This adhered to by a negligible few).
- (c) Those in good and for women who are not menstruating or confined on account childbirth and resultant nursing.

(Note - Menstruation pollution is observed for a period of 10 days and child-birth pollution for 40 days among these Musliman.)

For a *nmaj* to have validity there are four conditions to be fulfilled. These are :

- (a) Ablution or *wuzu* has to be performed. This exposed body parts have to be washed with water and cleansed from the dirt.
- (b) The ground or earth where the person will kneel for the *nmaj*, has to be clean along with his clothes and body.
- (c) Proper dress complying with moral regulations must be worn. The rules state that private parts must not be exposed, transparent clothes are tabu. While the women are permitted to have their hands, feet and face exposed, the males must cover the area between the knees and the navel.
- (d) The correct direction (i.e. west towards the Kaba at Mecca) must be faced while performing *nmaj*.

Prayer in Islam, is supposed to help an individual to discipline the self and develop a strong will power, to increase spiritual and moral balance, to guide the person on the right path, show unity of all (Musliman) people, to prevent leaving the path and being drawn by

the world's vices and evils, to achieve peace within the self, and to realise Allah.

Roza (Fasting)

Fasting has become synonymous to the Muslman people the world over. Their *roza* has made others truly wonder about the force that drives them to such abstinence in a world wrecked with innumerable temptations. The Muslman of Nepal also are no exception. They fast throughout the holy month of Ramzan and offer *nmaj* five times a day, eating only after and before the sun sets and rises respectively.

Ramzan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, where the lunar months fall short of the solar months, thus creating a 10 day difference each year. At this rate, every three years, one month is displaced so this makes the Islamic calendar a dynamic one where there is perpetual motion.

Ramzan month	Year
Jan - Feb	1965
Dec - Jan	1967
Nov - Dec	1969
Oct - Nov	1971

These displaced months are shown above.

The month of Ramzan starts on the first day of the bright fortnight while *roza* commences, as soon as the crescent moon is seen and ends with the reappearance of this crescent at the end of the month. This means the crescent goes through its sequence of waxing and waning for one full cycle.

During *roza*, the people go about their normal activities, then in the evening, after Isha, another special prayer is offered as Tarewiih. This special prayer is offered only during the month of Ramzan. The day after Ramzan (and *roza*) is over, a festival called Id is celebrated. *Roza* is not only abstinence and fasting, but something more than that. It is supposed to help a person to develop patience and unselfishness, through the experience of physical hunger which is endured with patience, and then the realization of how someone else would feel when such an experience is prolonged and no solution in sight.

The Islamic calendar is lunar and as mentioned earlier, the month of Ramzan is variable, Therefore, it is seen that through a limited period of years the month of Ramzan passes through all the seasons in a year in one cycle and once this is over it restarts again. Due to this fact, the Ramzan *roza* of the Muslman can be said to posses a systematically flexible timetable, which is phenomenonal. Thus the Muslman fast in different environments and gain a lot of physical, spiritual and mental awareness from their living, moving calendar which they say proves the existence of their living Allah.

In accordance to the position of the moon, Ramzan fasting maybe 29 or 30 days. The *roza* during this month is compulsory for all adults both males and females, while the children are encouraged to try it but on a less harsher level and when they are 14 years or above only. Old folks are exempted from the rigors of *roza*, but in lieu of this exemption they have to provide an average meal to an extremely needy Muslman brother or sister, or else pay money worth the value of an average meal to the poor.

Zkt (Charity)

This is also one among the 4 pillars on which Islam stands. This means giving of alms to the needy and is said to be a responsibility entrusted to every Muslman by Allah and should be implemented by the person. This is practised by all Muslman people and our Nepalese Muslman are no exception in this matter. This they state is essential for the betterment of our society.

Zkt means purity in Urdu but its practical meaning is donation of cash or kind that a Muslman must distribute to the needy according to the donor's financial abilities. They believe that the ritual of *zkt* helps the donar to be freed from greed and selfishness and the recipient is also blessed. This is a small way in which an attempt is made to uplift the poor and needy of that community.

Thus it is calculated that at the end of every year, every Muslman both male and female must pay *zkt* at the rate of 2 1/2% of all his or her assets. This collection is used directly for aiding the poor and needy Muslman folks by helping them to start small business, or schools. It is a historical fact that *zkt* or purifying tax, was the first sort of regular tax to be levied in any part of the world.

Hz (Pilgrimage)

This is also one of the 4 pillars which uphold Islam and it is obligatory for every Muslman, whether young or old, male or female, mentally, physically and financially fit, to undertake this pilgrimage at least once in his or her lifetime. This *Hz* is in reality a sort of yearly gathering of Muslman people from all over the globe to get to know each other. All are one, for they have the same aim and goal which is Mecca.

Mecca and Medina are important places for the Muslman pilgrims, for their prophet Muhamed was born in the former place in 570 A.D., and died at the latter spot in 632 A.D. Muslman people go to Mecca to be near Allah and glorify his name. This is symbolised by the kissing of the black stone at the Kabba placed there by the prophet with the intent of regenerating the faith in Allah. The pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina costs about Rs. 15,000 for a Nepalese Muslman and the arrangements are made by the Hz committee constituted by His Majesty's Government.

Festivals

The followers of Islam celebrate many festivals as do people who follow other religions. The Muslman era commenced with Hijrah about 1400 years ago. They follow a lunar calendar and each year consists of 12 months, with 29 or 30 days in each month according to the position of the moon. The months are as follows:

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Muharam | 5. Jamada al qola | 9. Ramzan |
| 2. Safar | 6. Jamada al shaniyah | 10. Shawwal |
| 3. Rabi al awwal | 7. Rajjab | 11. Bul Gadah |
| 4. Rabi al shanni | 8. Shaban | 12. Du-Hijjah |

The festivals that Nepalese Muslman follow are:

Muharam which is considered to be one of the greatest (if not the greatest) of their festivals, is celebrated to commemorate the deaths of the Prophet's grandsons Hassain and Hussain. The story is that Hassain and Hussain received their grandfather's property and seeing this, the khalipha or king of Damascus who was a bitter enemy of the Prophet wanted to seize the property so he poisoned Hassain. Hussain being not as susceptible as his brother, escaped and fought the wicked khalipha for many years and finally on the

plains of Krbala, was surrounded. Though he fought bravely without food or water for 10 days, he finally succumbed to the enemy's sword.

The attempt of the two brothers, especially Hussain, to uphold Islam is the main point in this celebration and in reality Muharam is a festival of lamentation rather than joy. This festival is held for a period of ten days in the month of Muharam. The Hijrah falls on the eve of the first day of Muharam and it is on this day that the festival commences till the tenth day. These ten days are spent in pondering Islam and its relevance to the self by Muslman people all over the world. The Nepalese Muslman like those in other parts of the world, break fast after feeding the hungry or giving alms(money) to the poor. These ten days are for mourning the deaths of one's relatives and the atmosphere in the whole community is one of sorrow and misery.

In the western hills of Nepal, especially in Gorkha , Muslman (Shia) make small replicas of two *darga* (grave of Muslman saints), which are supposed to symbolise Hassain and Hussain. These replicas are called *tazia*. On the 11th day of the month of Muharam, the festival is over and these *tazia* are taken to the nearby river or stream and immersed. Regarding this custom of making *tazia*, it is considered to be outside the structure of Islam, since it is a form of image worship. In this matter Muslman people are divided whether to make the *tazia* on Muharam or not.

The Muslman in the *terai* enact the scene of Krbala where Hussain fought to his last breath. Sticks are used instead of the swords, and these sticks are whirled along with their bodies, showing great speed, dexterity and seriousness in this stick play. Being experts there are hardly any cases of participants being hurt. Thus Muharam is concluded.

The Prophet's birthday is another event in the Islamic calendar and it falls on the third month Rabi al awwal on the twelfth day. The eve of this day is one of great rejoicing, prayers are offered and there is feasting among the Muslman of Kathmandu, the Hills and the *terai*. They consider this day auspicious because Muhamed was born and he gave Islam a new life and meaning, making all the Muslman people proud of their religion. This is what they say and fervently believe.

The death of Bada Peer Shahab is commemorated in the fourth month Rabi Al Shanni of the Hussain year. It occurs on the eleventh day of this month. No celebrations are held, but prayers are offered for Bada Peer in solemnity.

Heraj is celebrated on the 27th. day of the seventh month Rajjab. This is an important festival since it is believed that the prophet Muhamed on this day, was taken into the sky and made to travel the universe on a fast winged horse - *burrak* - within a matter of a few seconds and then returned to earth with the message for all mankind from the one and only Allah, the merciful. The Muslman people fast throughout this day and break their fast in the evening after sunset when they eat sweets.

Shab I Barat occurs on the eleventh day of Shaban, the eighth month in the Islamic lunar calendar. This festival consists of fasting for the whole day and breaking the fast by consuming delicious foods. Sweets and delicacies are prepared in Muslman households on these days, and these are distributed to relatives, friends and neighbours. They keep a night long vigil and pray for the well being of the living and the dead.

Ramzan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. This is said to be the month in which the Quran was revealed to Muhamed. On the 27th. day of Ramzan, a night long vigil is maintained by reading the Quran and offering prayers to the almighty Allah. This night is known as the night of power or Shab I Qadr. Islam says that on this night, the angel Jib Ra I brought the Quran to the Prophet and so it is called the night of power. Nepalese Muslman follow this Islamic ritual to the letter.

Id UI Fitr is a rather popular festival known by this name in most areas of Nepal, and even by many non-Muslman people. This is a festival in the true sense of the word for Id means jubilation. The 1st. day of the tenth month of Shawwl, is celebrated as the first day of the commencement of the Id UI Fitr festival, and the month long Ramzan fast is broken on this day. Id is celebrated with smiles and happiness for three days continuously. Eating delicious foods is what the youths and children indulge in on this day. On this first day, the Muslman congregate at their mosques and in a jolly and happy atmosphere they offer prayers to Allah, to thank Him for helping them to making the Ramzan month of fasting a success. This happiness of the Muslman people is further expressed by their

activities of alms giving. This is basically a sort of annual get together of the community and performing activities such as praying for the poor and needy, and also offering thanks to Allah for His blessing on them. Id U1 Adha/Zoha is a festival of sacrifice and falls on the 10th. day of Dul Hajjah which is the 12th. month of the Islamic calendar. This festival is also called Bak Ra Id, and it is observed for a period of three days.

The Hz is completed and then this festival is celebrated. Here again, the Musliman gather and offer prayers at their mosques. Those who have completed Hz and those who haven't all gather and sacrifice goats and feed the poor and hungry. Each family is obliged to offer a goat for this sacrifice, but if it is a bull that is being offered then seven families have to make this a joint effort. This is prevalent in Nepal, especially in the middle hills, while goats are preferred in the terai and those rich Musliman of Kathmandu offer multiple sacrifices to show their wealth and high economic and social status. These sacrifices are made on the first day of Id, but the practice of performing this sacrifice on the second day is also prevalent in Nepal.

Whether it is Id U1 fitr or Bak Ra Id, all Musliman folks enjoy as though they are a large family unit, regardless of the rich and poor statuses. While those can afford give, and those who cannot receive. There are group prayer sessions in their mosques and they pray for forgiveness of any wrongs they have done and ask strength to carry their faith. Thus, this day is one of forgiveness and sharing.

Life Cycle Rites

Birth

When a child is born, the father or guardian reads prayers from the Quran for the child's welfare. The mother and her child are bathed and cleansed on the 6th. day after the birth. *Hakika* or cutting of the child's hair is a ritual that occurs anytime between the 7th. and 21st. day after the birth. On the day of *hakika*, the child is named and a feast is offered to relatives and friends. Animals are also slaughtered on this day. One if a daughter and two if a son On the 40th.day, the mother and child are thoroughly washed, after which they are considered purified both physically and socially. Thus it is seen that the Musliman folks observe a sort of birth pollution for a period of 40 days (39 to be precise).

Rtjga (Chhaiti)

On account of the Muslman people living in extremely close proximity with their Hindu neighbours, many of their rituals have been influenced and among these is *rtjga*. After the newborn reaches an age of one month, this ritual is performed. Here, the child is taken to the mosque where something sweet is put into its mouth and butter lamps are lit in its name. Then the *molvi* (priest) reads the *phtiha* and also the Quran, for the well-being of the child. Though this ritual is not practised by all Nepalese Muslman people, it is slowly gaining popularity, and is seen to be spreading.

Akika

This is a ritual of extreme importance and is performed only when the children reach the age of 5 years. While two kids have to be slaughtered for a boy, only one is necessary for a girl. The children have their hair shaved, and the hair is weighed with an equal weight of silver which is donated to a poor person (whether a Hindu or a Muslman). The sacrificial animals are cut up, cleaned, disembowelled and divided into three equal shares which are distributed among the family, the guests and the poor. However, today this sort of purity is not found in the ritual of *akika* on account of the inability to get goats or the extremely low financial status of the Nepalese Muslman. Therefore the ritual is completed by using meat bought from elsewhere and thus completing the *akika* according to one's financial status. The hair of the children is also partially cut or not cut all in the case of girls today. This practice is slowly catching up among the Muslman due to its practical nature.

Circumcision (Khtna)

The rite of *khtna* or circumcision is one of immense importance in Islam. This is an initiation rite for a Muslman boy to become a true Muslman. There is a custom (not religious) which states that this *khtna* should be done on an odd day, according to the age of the boy which must be 9 years or less, but this is done normally when the boy is 5 years old or less. The rite of *khtna* actually involves cutting off about an inch of the foreskin around the glans of the boy's penis. This is circumcision which is prevalent since ancient times among tribes like the Hebrews and the aborigines of Australia.

Among the Muslman people of Nepal, and especially among those inhabiting the district of Banke and in Nepalgunj, in particular this rite of *khtna* is performed mostly on the day of Muharam as has been observed in 60% cases. The Muslman of high social status invite their relatives, friends and experts in circumcision from other areas (India). Some sources in Nepalgunj state that today, Muslman children have their *khtna* when they are born and so the necessity of celebration does not arise, but since there is no facility for circumcision in Nepalgunj hospital, Muslman go across the border to fulfil this rite.

It is believed that the matter of circumcision being of immense importance is a purely selfish one and is due to the fact that the Muslman of the middle hills were not circumcised and to make them do this ritual, the extra importance was tagged. But the reason for these Muslman of the Hills not being circumcised is because of lack of circumcision experts. But today this problem has been overcome as there do exist experts among them. *Khtna* is a rite similar to *bare chuiga* of the Gubaju (Newar priest), *Kaita puja* of Hinduistic Newars, *bratabandh* of Hindus, not in the actual actions but in the concept and significance as initiation rites. A grand feast is the crowning event after these initiation rites are over and now everyone relaxes.

Excision (Circumcision of females)

This is a rite where the females are circumcised, but here it is necessary to use the word excision. Here the parents themselves or hired experts perform an operation where the hood of the clitoris is cut off thus providing the clitoris a free and unrestrained movement. This is a mild form of excision. The more radical version prescribes the total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, after which the vaginal hole is narrowed by stitching. In some cases the labia majora is also removed thus causing the narrowing of the vaginal opening to great extent. This is done by the Muslman with the belief that excision of the clitoris lessens the females's sexual desires thus ensuring her retention of virginity till her marriage, and after the marriage ensuring her faithfulness as a wife. It is stated that this is a prophylactic measure to ensure that the girl maintains her chastity and abstains from clandestine sexual liaisons, for she is very much aware that once the seal is tampered with, it cannot be mended to avoid detection, hence making her own life miserable, for no one

marries such a girl among the Muslman community.

On the night of the marriage, the nuptial bed is laid out with a white bed-sheet. During the sexual intercourse that occurs, the vagina is torn and the blood that issues forth from the wound and from the ruptured hymen is spattered on the bed-sheet. The next morning the family members parade this bloodstained sheet all around the neighbourhood announcing this is to be the nuptial bed-sheet of such and such a couple. This act increases the respect of the couple in that community.

In cases where a woman has already been defiled (which is not uncommon), to save face, the couple use the blood of a chicken sprinkled on the bed-sheet. Muslman people all around state that such cases have occurred. However, should the husband feel cheated then this can be the cause of instant divorce, which is valid and comes into affect according to Islamic law, the very next day.

This rite of excision or complete removal of the clitoris, or the less radical form where the hood of the clitoris is cut, both part of a religious tradition which has been performed throughout the centuries and even today in areas of Muslman habitation like some Middle-East regions, Indonesia, Malaya, African countries and South Asia. Ethnologists state that an estimated 75 million to 85 million females have undergone this rite so far.

The side effects of this operation are sharp pain during intercourse, anaemia, and difficulties during childbirth. In spite of all this, it is a matter of controversy as some scholars state, for it is impossible to detect the practice of excision or circumcision unless the excised or circumcised individual does not inform one of the fact or the operated part is not shown. It is out of the question for a male or female Muslman to exhibit his or her private parts to a researcher, therefore the matter remains a controversial issue here among the Nepalese Muslman.

Marriage Practices

Among all the tribes that inhabit Nepal, the Muslman has the most different marriage practice. Tribal endogamy is practised though the Muslman boys and girls break this rule often. Among these people, only sibling (brothers and sisters of one father and mother) marriages are tabu as is the case in most societies throughout the

world. Parallel cousins (first cousins whose related parents are of the same sex, i.e. mother's son or daughter is first cousin of mother's sister's sons or daughter) are allowed to have martial unions among each other and also cross-cousins (children of siblings of opposite sex i.e. one's mother's brother's son or daughter and his father's sister's son or daughter). While boys are eligible for marriage at the age of sixteen, girls are ready when they reach the tender age of 13.

Marriages are normally arranged within the Kathmandu Valley Musliman community, however, those in other areas resort to elopements at times. A Musliman completes his marriage in various stages and with many formalities, but though tedious, the rites are very interesting.

The initial step is for the boy's father to locate a girl and then select a relative for a mediator. When the agreement for the match is reached, then the boy's father goes to the girl's house, meets her father and submits a formal proposal for the hand of the girl. This proposal is accepted in front of witness and this ritual is called *nisvat* or engagement. After this the boy's father sends off gifts of sweets, fruits and edibles which the girl's mother distributes among their relatives. Now the marriage date is fixed.

A day prior to the marriage, a feast is given to the kin and kindred by the girl's parents and married women paint the hands and feet of the bride with *mehendi*. A similar feast is given for the groom's relatives at his place and he is anointed with *tika* of sandal wood or *ubtan*. On the evening of the next day, or the day of the marriage, after being fed with sweets, betel nuts, *paan* etc. the groom's procession consisting of male relatives and friends leave for the bride's house, accompanied by a band. The groom is accompanied by two married women dressed like the bride and known as *samdhin*. When the procession reaches the bride's house, they are given a feast and the groom presents the bride with clothes jewellery, sweets and foodstuff according to his financial standing.

The groom's party are seated in a group with the groom in the front with one leg bent under his buttocks and with the sole of his feet upwards, while the other leg is bent with the knee on the ground and the toes of the feet placed perpendicular to the ground with sole facing backwards. The groom's head is covered with a handkerchief or a skull cap. The bride and her group are placed in

the other (or next) room and separated by a curtain, for formality.

The representatives of the groom go to the curtained doorway and from there announce to the bride inside that the groom (who is given the title of *shezade* meaning prince in Urdu language) has offered a certain amount (to be mentioned) of money for *nikah*. The bride must answer whether it is acceptable or not. The bride consults her group behind the curtain and then answers that the price is acceptable along with the items brought for presentation. This is followed by the representatives of the groom's group returning and informing the groom that the bride (who is called *shezadi* meaning princess in Urdu) has accepted his suit.

Now the *kazi* takes the cue and begins to read the *nikah* while the bride and groom are brought together and seated side by side and the *nikahnama* or marriage contract is signed by the couple and also by the two witness whose presence is compulsory. In the contract the groom offers to pay a certain amount of money to the wife in case of divorce in future. It is compulsory to provide *mahr* which is a sort of bride price and the value of this is determined by mutual agreement among the two families. The *mahr* is the exclusive property of the bride and cannot be wrested from her on any condition, even divorce. These ritual continue till late in the night and after completion they all rest.

The next morning some formalities such as giving the bride dowry by here parents are carried out and then the groom and his group return to his house along with the bride. They are welcomed by two married women, and some more rituals are repeated here with the bride paying her respects to the elders followed by a feast for all present there. The day after this, the bride's brother or some male relative comes to meet her with sweets and fruits. On the fourth day after the marriage again the bride's brothers or near relatives come to fetch her to her parents home. Four days after this the groom is also invited to the bride's home where he pays his respects to his in-laws and other affines and then he returns with the bride to establish his own nuclear family within the extended family of his parents. The next ritual is the familiarisation of the bride with her husband's relatives, paying them their due respect and then she becomes a part of the family.

Widow marriages are not considered as social taboo among these people and if a widow is forcibly married and she objects to the

marriage even after the rituals are completed, then by Islamic law this marriage is revoked and considered null and void.

Islam permits polygamy but only to a certain degree and under some conditions, but in Nepal this practice is totally banned and it is considered illegal if one person has more than one wife, thus the Nepalese Musliman are not found to practice polygamy.

Divorce is granted under Islamic law when the couple have lost mutual rapport, but prior to initiating divorce procedures, a last ditch effort is made,

- a) to patch the differences and re-establish mutual harmony among them,
- b) if not possible, then a representative from each side is used to try what the couple could not do themselves,
- c) in spite of such attempts, should the situation remain unchanged or deteriorate then only is divorce initiated.

Islamic law seeks to grant divorce only when both sides are keen on it. After the divorce, the wife is allowed to remain at her husband's house for a period of three months to a year. This time is the waiting period, in the hope that the couple may reunite. If this occurs, then they consider the Islamic law to be fulfilled, since it states - Of all things, God has permitted, he dislikes divorce the most - and thus the divorce in such cases is naturally and automatically annulled. Another reason for the wife to wait for three months cycle is to see if she is pregnant or not. During this period, her husband is fully responsible for her.

If the situation deteriorates further then the divorce is permitted for the second time, however the chances of reunion are still existent, since the last and final announcement for divorce is still withheld and once announced then this is irrevocable. The wife is free to remarry after the three monthly cycle is over. Should the husband want to remarry his former wife and if she has not remarried then it is possible. If she has remarried and divorced again then the former husband can again remarry her. If the husband is the one seeking divorce or if the divorce is of mutual interest then the *mahr* is paid to the wife as promised in the *nikanama* contract. *Khul* or wife's request for divorce means the husband is exempted from paying the *mahr*. Once divorced the husband has no legal right over his ex-wife's dowry or anything of hers. Today these divorces are done in law courts.

Islamic law being the main guide for the Muslman people, they obey it and thus understand that a couple, if unhappy with each other should separate and stop making each other unhappy, but should there be a chance of reconciliation then why not give it a chance is also another side of the same coin. But if the divorce is genuinely necessary then there is no delay as is the theme of the Islamic law on divorce. This is practical and agreeable for simple folks as our Nepalese Muslman are.

Death Rites

On the death of a Muslman the corpse is scrubbed and washed with detergents so as to clean it properly and then perfume is sprinkled on it. Males corpses are bathed by males and females and children corpses by females. Washing is done by gloved hands or hands wrapped with cloth strips. The private parts of the corpses are washed without looking at that area. When this is over the corpse is wrapped in a couple of white sheets and placed in a wooden coffin or *tabud*, which is carried to the cemetery by male relatives.

At the cemetery, the coffin is placed on the earth with the head side towards Mecca (west). *Wuzu* or prayers are said by all those present and the *januzahl* or funeral prayers are read out while the Iman stands near the coffin facing Mecca and lines of funeral goers stand behind him. Once these prayers are over, the coffin is placed inside the grave with the head in the direction of Mecca and lines of funeral goers stand behind him. Once these prayers are over, the coffin is placed inside the grave with the head in the direction of Mecca and then covered with earth. At a later date a simple tablet is laid on this grave to mark it.

Death pollution is observed for the next three days which ends with prayers for the peace of the departed soul. On the tenth day and the twentieth day after the death prayers are recited by the relatives and the immediate family of the deceased. On the fortieth day, prayers are once more said. During those forty days, a meal per day is fed to a poor Muslman brother or sister in the name of the deceased and on last day the poor person is gifted with some money and clothes of the deceased.

Six months after death, *chomai* is performed and *rarsi* after a year. Mourning in the deceased's household goes on for a year and the widow of the deceased stays indoors for a period of four months

and ten days, according to the Islamic law.

Economic Status

Islam also includes economics and Islam has a direct effect on the economy of the Nepalese Muslman, also. The emphasis of community more than individual and community welfare instead of only the self makes the Muslman people eager to uplift their brothers. Anti-social works among these people is considered tabu and not found to exist. Self-centred business like monopoly in trade, hoarding and such illegal economy-disbalancing activities are condemned by Islamic law. Money lending on interest is also a deadly evil. Thus, *zkt* is an absolute necessity to uproot such self-centred and corrupt practices to make the community a stronger and better one.

If a piece of land is lying barren and uncultivated then too the owner must pay *zkt*, so as to stop him from being lazy and utilise the land Allah has given him, is the sort of application Islamic law has. *Zkt* is practical as an economic tool with aims at minimising the accumulation of riches into the pockets of the few, and spreads it around before it creates grave economic imbalance.

In the light of such Islamic laws and realities, the lot of the average Muslman is pitiable. Firstly it is necessary to state that they are given a status equivalent to that of the untouchable, especially in rural areas and go by the name of *churate*. They are landless and earn their daily bread by setting up shops at rural cross roads and sell items like bangle, tassles for hair plaiting, *tika*, and make-up paraphernalia for women. the word *churate* could possibly have emanated from the *chura* meaning bangle in Nepali so *churate* meaning one who sells bangles. But this is an assumption and the Nepalese Muslman can neither say whether this is correct nor can they give us another explanation for the word in question.

Muslman in cities and town conduct business and contracts, while some work in government offices and there are others who are high ranking officers in the Administrative machinery of the country. The *terai* Muslman are quite affluent since they have seriously taken up farming. There are some who are still the usual bangle seller, while tailors and barbers are also seen. A majority of the *terai* Muslman on the average are farmers while some are landless.

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

They have their own society consisting of district, sub-district and village level groups and representatives and religious leaders. A *mukhiya* or chief controls his own area and is powerful enough to be given a status even by the government. These area chiefs settle small land disputes, met out punishments for small crimes and also impose fines. They also act as witnesses in various social and economic matters.

The Muslman of the hills unlike his *terai* brother is poor and an inferior individual on account of his financial weakness and minority status. The Muslman of the Kathmandu Valley are strong in posture and economically also, though here too there are the economic weak ones. It is observed that what Islamic law says is not practised and the channelling of capital into the pockets of a few individuals has left the majority of the Muslman population in a state of economic doldrums and financial instability today and may continue even till tomorrow.

NEWAR

Kathmandu Valley in the Bagmati Zone is the place where the tribe called Newar originated and although they are found scattered in almost every district within Nepal, their majority is seen to be within the Kathmandu Valley. In the census of 2028 B.S. these people numbered 1,47,092 heads in terms of language speakers only and thus they are seen to be a definite majority, in the Valley. Thus when one says the civilisation and culture of the Kathmandu Valley, it actually means Newari civilisation and culture without a doubt.

Historical background

It is necessary and important to understand that the matter regarding the tribal identity of the Newar people is much disputed among the various schools of thought even today. Some genealogies or *vamsavalis* explain the Newar people to be actually descended from Brahma Putra Kstriya meaning warrior son of Brahma (the god of creation). Another source states that they are the descendants of the people who migrated into Kathmandu along with the first Kamataki king Nanya Deva from the lands in the south called Nayr.

Though some scholars have presumed (on certain grounds) that the Newar are a separate tribe, this seems to be quite an unreliable presumption, because of the fact that the valley of present day Kathmandu was time and again invaded and ruled by various tribes as our country's historical records state, and when one tribe weakened, it was replaced by another stronger tribe, while the vanquished tribe vanished in the process of assimilation into the people already present there as the so-called indigenous populace. Thus, in the course of hundreds of years, this sort of step by step assimilation of different racial types resulted in the emergence of an amalgamated product with special characteristics as befitting a mixture race of the Kiranti, Lichchhavi, Thakuri and others. Today this tribe is known as Newar because it is a socio-linguistic group that speaks the common tongue Newari.

The word Nepal, Nepar, Newar are considered as derivatives from one common root and thus people of Nepal were Newar or Newa which assumption could never be far from the truth, claim some scholars. However, this sort of thinking is not common among scholars, because while one suggests that Nepal was Nepar in

ancient times, another opposes this assumption and states that the actual origin of the word Nepal and Newar being derivations of Nepar is not easily proved on account of the lack of evidence and therefore of not much weight. Yet another scholar has advanced his notion that the *p* and *l* of Nepal have been corrupted to the *w* and *r* of Newar. In spite of so many assumptions, contradictions and criticisms, the fact remains that Newar people are residents of the Kathmandu Valley and have, so to say, originated here.

Physical characteristics

Looking at these people it cannot be said that they are of particular racial stock, but to say that they contain facial features of all kinds of races available in the Asian region, would not be incorrect but valid. Some scholars state that while they are more handsome than other tribes physically they are frail but taller. Their skins range from the very dark types to the very fair ones, but their limbs are not as sturdy as that of the hill tribes. The facial features of these Newar people resemble Caucasoids, Mongoloids, Austroloids, Capoids and the typical Tibetanish strains, thus a particular physical feature cannot be ascribed to the Newar as is the case with other tribes. The farming community or Jyapu of the Kathmandu Valley is a distinctly different type exhibiting strong physiques and dark skin pigmentation. Thus it is but natural to, state that Newar people in all reality resemble the Rai, Limbu, Magar, Thakuri, Meche, Koche, Tharu, Satar, Gurung, etc. because of the mixing of the various racial stocks through the last 2 millennia or so.

Language

While the Newari language is categorised as Tibeto-Burman, it is specifically classified in the Himalayan group. While analyzing Newari, many Maithli and Prakrit words are found within its structure indicating the influences of these languages.

There are three types of alphabets in the Newari language : .Bhuji mol, Ranjana and Newari. The Bhuji mol is the twisted line representing the straight line of the head or *diko*. *bhuji* or *bhojini* means head or *seer* in Nepali. Besides there were other styles like Kua mol, Kwae mol, Gol mol, Yachu mol, Hie mol and Litu mol. One scholar states that Newari script was initially based on the Brahmi script but today it is more or less *devnagari*. It is seen that the Newari script is derived from the ancient Gupta script.

Ancient Newari was a very rich language and among the languages in the Himalayan group, in the context of literature, it can be compared with Manipuri and Ahom. When analyzed in the context of the written script, it is perceived that in all the inscriptions found till date, the Newari is a much older language than Nepali.

Thus it can be said that Newari is a language that is rich in literature, ancient and evolved through much painstaking effort by those ancient scholars. Following is a comparative sample of Newari, Nepali and English words :

Newari	Nepali	English
<i>La</i>	pani	water
<i>monu</i>	manchhae	man
<i>ji</i>	m	I
<i>du</i>	chha	is
<i>ukhe</i>	tihan	there
<i>chharka</i>	ek	one
<i>nirka/nyarka</i>	dui	two
<i>lipa</i>	pchchhi	after
<i>Gana ?</i>	kata ?	where to ?
<i>tunaeula ?</i>	pyunae ho?	want to drink ?
<i>chiko(n)</i>	tel	oil
<i>misa</i>	kaeti	girl
<i>mi</i>	aago	fire
<i>hukhe</i>	yahan	here
<i>chhpu</i>	ek	one
<i>nipu/nypu</i>	dui	two

Slight differences exist depending the place of settlement of these Newar people, as the local language creeps into their speech, giving it a twist that makes it localised.

Family

The Newar people are a community who live in large houses where in may be found many nuclear families welded into a unique extended family, cooking and eating in the common kitchen and only having separate sleeping quarters. Today this structure is gradually breaking up and being replaced by separate nuclear families of progeny who establish their own houses away from the main house or *mul ghar* and raise their children in an environment where they are able to experience extreme closeness with parents

only, as opposed to the living pattern in the joint-family-structures. In spite of the disintegration of the Newari extended family structure, the fact is that Newari society has been constructed in such a way, possessing taboo and injunctions of various kinds that no matter where they migrate to, they always tend to live in proximity and as a community. The rules of these people are strict and for things like *bhoj*, *kul puja*, *guthi puja* and such, attendance is compulsory, indicating the rigidity and coerciveness (of the injunctions) which are the cementing force with which these people are glued together into a very close-knit, introverted community, kept alive so that it can protect and uplift the Newari community and help to strengthen the foundations on which the Newari identity is built.

The household head is the family head and therefore a patriarchal society, though it is discernable that in bygone times it could possibly have been a matriarchal one judging from the worship of the various female fertility deities even today.

Septs (*Thars*)

Newar means the one who is able to communicate in the Newari language, is the standard definition set by scholars, however it is not so in today's context. But in the ancient times, as Aryan meant the language that was commonly spoken by a certain group of people, so also Newari was a similar language. Thus these people settled at a place and speaking the same language (though of different racial stocks) were called Newar or speakers of the Newari language.

On looking at the Newar community, it is seen to be distinct because there are people who are stratified from the lowest level, socially, economically and religiously. All professions are found among these people from the priest through the businessmen to the garbage collectors and the butchers. Firstly it is important to divide the Newar into two religious groups the Hindus and the Buddhists.

The Buddhists among these Newars are divided into septs as follows:

Bajracharya, Shakya, Udas, Tamrakar, Kangsakar, Amatya, Pradhan, Rajbhandari. Jyapu, Kumal.

Chitrakar, Salmi, Napit, Tandukar, Pode, Chyame.

Among these can be seen the professions, eg.

Bajracharya	- priest of the Buddhist and also called Gubaju.
Shakya	- goldsmith and called Bada.
Udas	- weaver and called Tuladhar.
Tamrakar	- copper worker.
Jyapu	- farmer
Kumal	- potter
Chitrakar	- artisan (mostly paintings and carvings)
Salmi	- oil presser called Manandhar.
Pode	- eaters of dead carcasses, akin to Sarki (cobblers)
Chyame	- garbage collectors.

The Hindu Newars are divided into the following septs:

Rajopadhaya (royal perceptor for Malla Kings) or Upadhaya also called Deubhaju.

Chha Thare Newar : Shrestha, Pradhan, Amatya, Joshi, Vaidya, Malla. The Gurbacharya and Karmacharya are also sometimes included in this group. Dhobi, Kasai, Kusule (also called Kapali), Pode, Chyame and Kulu are also included in this Hindu category.

On account of the religious tolerance in the Newari speaking community, except for the clear religious demarcation of the Bajrachaya, Udas, Shakya, Rajopadhaya and Upadhaya, the others follow any of the religions they prefer and it is difficult to state that a certain sept is a follower of a particular religion, since it is a matter of choice. Therefore, it is perceived that these people are found to follow both religions with equal devotion, a unique feature found among these Newar people. Some Newar even use Hindu and Buddhist priests for a particular *puja* at the same place, side by side and simultaneously.

The Bajracharya is the Buddhist while the Hindu priest is the Deubhaju who are actually born brahmins but perform worship for the Hindu Newars. The Bajracharya does not have to be a Buddhist priest by birth but is eligible if he is able to function as such through rigorous training and religious initiation. There are some Vihars in Kathmandu Valley where through training and perseverance Brahmins and Jyapus have become Bajracharyas. Should a Bajracharya not be able to initiate his son into this priestly line then the boy becomes a Shakya as is the injunction followed by them.

Regarding the Hindu priests of the Newars, it is necessary to understand that even today, there are to be found among some Newar communities, within the Kathmandu Valley, who are Shaivates and have Hindu priests as earlier mentioned called Deubhaju. These priests are pure Brahmins and do not possess an iota of Newar blood (if it could be called such), but they speak fluent Newari and perform *puja* only for that particular Newar community to which their ancestors had pledged themselves. But the onslaught of modernisation has taken a heavy toll and along with other cultural practices, these Rajopadhaya are also gradually heading towards amalgamation into other Brahmin groups or even into the Newar hierarchy.

It has been noted by some scholars that there are 20 septs among the Newar, who are *pani chalnae* meaning above the water pollution strata, while 6 septs fall below the water-mark or *pani na chalnae*. Though this sort of division is banned by the Mulki Ain (Law of the region or land) of Nepal, and it states that everyone is of the same level still this malpractice occurs among the people of higher birth who shun the low caste even today.

Similar to the caste stratified Hindu communities, the Newar of Hindu religious proclivities are also accordingly stratified and practice activities like water and rice pollution, in this modern age when on the threshold of the 21st. century.

A general structure of the social stratification is as below:

Social status	Hindu Newar	Buddhist Newar
Brahmins -	Deubhaju, Rajopadhaya, Upadhaya	Bajracharya (priests)
Chha Thare-	Shrestha, Pradhan, Amatya, Joshi, Vaidya, Malla (Karmacharya & Gurbacharya)	Shakya (Bada meaning gold-smith)
Panch Thare -	Mathema, Maskey,	Traders - Udas, Manandhar, Tuladhar, Kangsakar
Low castes - (considered)		
Jyapu (farmers) -	Maharjan, Dongol, Suwal	
Kumahale or Kumal (potters) -	Prajapati	
Kasai (butchers)	-	Sahi, Khadgi

Untouchables - (considered)

Kusule, Kulu, Chyame, Pode

Settlement patterns & Houses

Newars are seen to live in closely packed communities both physically and socially. While their houses are joined to each other, having a common wall on each side, their social activities like *guthi puja*, *bhoj*, etc. are indicative of their communality and unity which is a unique feature not observed to be existing to this degree, in any other tribe within Nepal. The few scattered Newar people who live separately are to be considered as isolated cases of negligible magnitude.

They have their community split into smaller social units that live in groups in areas called *tole* and these are further sub-divided into *bahal* and *agam*. Each of these areas is controlled or populated by one lineage family.

The Newar communities are in reality structured not only socially, but also physically i.e. place of residence related to one's social level, thus the higher caste and richer Newar folks live at the centre of the village while the lower caste people moved outward slowly as their caste degressed in status, till the untouchables inhabited the periphery. The Jogi, Chyame, Pode, Kulu. etc. were those selected for ostracism and the strange thing about this is that this structure is alive even now.

Newar communities like Bandipur in Tanahun district, western Nepal; Dolakha in Dolakha district, eastern Nepal and Tansen in Palpa district, also in western Nepal are some business towns where the Newars have mustered up a majority through quite a bit of migration, especially from the medieval town of Bhaktapur and its neighbour Thimi, in the Kathmandu Valley. These Newar settlements are located in the gateways of trade routes along the Trans-Himalayan tracks since ancient times. Amidst all this there are individual Newars who have ventured out of their communities and made their stand singly in another tribal society, but these are a few and most have been seen to have assimilated the characteristics of the people among whom they live.

Even ordinary Newar farmers houses are two-storied, and it is quite an impossible thing to discern single storied Newar houses as this is very unNewar. Thus the Newar houses are either two storied or more in height, while the single storied unNewar houses could be found in the outer perimeter of the village indicating the dwellings of the untouchables of the Newar society (and possibly their unNewariness) and the poor.

Usually bricks are used for building houses everywhere where these Newar people live except when there are none available. While on the outer side they use baked bricks, the inside is built with unbaked or sun-dried bricks. Great quantities of mud and wood are used while constructing such abodes. The roofs are usually made of straw, *kh*r and such locally available material, by the poor ones, but this is also going out of style as the corrugated iron sheets are found to be better and last longer.

It is not possible to find any sort of exterior decoration or speciality in the straw roofed houses, but on the walls of temples, *bahals*;, *vihars*, *chaitiya*, *chibaha* and such public places alongwith houses of the rich, can be found exquisite carvings and motifs that reflect the artistic nature of these people.

A typical Newari house is four storied with the lowest level or ground floor called the *chhaedi* meaning dark, damp hole, the first floor is the *mat/mtan/m-tan* either of the three names; the second floor is the *chwam* or *chvta* and the topmost floor is the *bjigal* or *bhigal* or *bui gal*. Every floor has its own distinctive name, function and structure.

The *chhaedi* is utilised for livestock, fodder, fuel-wood and such; the *mtan* is the family's living area; the second floor or *chvta* is the place where grains and foodstuff are stored and there is some place left for utilising during the *bhoj* or feast; the topmost floor or *buigal* is the family kitchen-cum-worship area, that is why it is set at the top. In old styled Newar houses, windows are adorned with wood carvings and the window frames are also very intricately carved. Door lintels, door flaps, roof struts, etc are carved with motifs and designs consist of snakes, deities of mythical origins, monsters and at the four corners of the roof are the *singha sardool* supports which are carved as lions ready to spring with penises erect.

Today, Newar houses have taken a different shape and these carvings are being discarded because they are believed to give the house a very ancient look which the modern day Newar do not like reflected of them. Thus at certain places, beautifully carved windows and doors are cut in half due to the differences that have arisen between brothers and caused the sharing of the main house in such a way. So while one half of the wall is ancient the other half is totally modern, twentieth century.

Initiation ceremonies for young Newar girls

Bel Biwaha or *I-hi* in the Newari language is a practice very unique only to the Newar community of Nepal. This is a ritual of extreme importance, for a girl who has not wed a *bel* (wood apple) is not eligible to marry a male.

The literal meaning of *I-hi* is marriage, and it is a ceremony that is one of social and religious significance to the Newari female. Before a Newari girl attains puberty and before she commences her menarche, this ritual of *I-hi* has to be completed. But this injunction is not applicable to the Deubhaju, Kasai, Chyame, Dhobi and Newars of this caste level. The *bel* symbolises the *amar purus* (immortal man) also called Srawan Kumar, thus this *I-hi* is commonly called *bel biwaha* or marriage to the wood-apple.

The rites and rituals of this *I-hi* are similar to an actual marriage, and instead of doing this individually, all the young girls of that *tole* or community as a whole are gathered and their *I-hi* done collectively. This is done because expenses can be minimised and the burden of *daksina* or donations will not be felt heavily. It is true that once this *I-hi* is over, the marriage of this girl to a male of her tribe is not a compulsory religious responsibility of the parents, but something which is more of a social obligation as has been observed. Thus, for a Newar girl, it is of extreme importance to complete her *I-hi*, than for her to marry a male which is only seen as a socio-biological necessity.

This *I-hi* is done when the girls are in the age range of 7-9 years. The date is set by consulting the *patro* by the Brahmin along with the girl's *chi na* or horoscope. Normally, friends and relatives are invited for this ceremony which continues for two days. The *bel* is selected from a healthy *belpatra* (*Aegle Mazmelos*) tree found growing at about 1200 - 1300 meters above sea level in the

Himalayan regions and especially near Siva temples, which is said to connect this tree to the *linga* (phallus) worship. It is necessary to know in this context that women hug this *belpatra* tree once, so that their husbands are able to satiate their sexual desires, while young unmarried girls do the same so as to ensure them obtaining husbands who are properly endowed. The *bel* tree is an object of worship by all Hindus.

A *bel* fruit is roundish and greyish in colour when raw, but turns yellowish on ripening. It has a hard outer coat which is like the shell of a coconut. The inside of the *bel* is orange in colour and fibrous and of course sweet, therefore it is sought after as an edible even by the Newari girls prior to their *I-hi* but once the *I-hi* is completed then eating this *bel* fruit is taboo.

The main ceremony of the *I-hi* consists of adorning the girls in all their finery, loading them with gold ornaments and family heirlooms to exhibit the financial status of the family. The girls have to fast and eat only after sunset. A *mandap* or enclosure is constructed out of banana stems and at the centre is suspended a red square cloth tied to the four corners of the stems. *Goda dhunae* or washing of the feet of the girl is done, and *sindur* or vermilion is applied to her hair parting or *siudo* signifying wedlock. The *bel* fruit is wrapped with several rounds of yellow thread and it is the girl's groom. *Kanyadaan* occurs when this *bel* is given to the girl by her parents and during the marriage of this girl with a male at a later date, this *Kanyadaan* ceremony is not repeated. The girl is then given jewellery, ornaments and such things like money as a sort of dowry.

When this ceremony is over, the *bel* is wrapped in a piece of cloth and kept away by the family elders so that it is not damaged, but should this happen then the girl is considered a widow from then on. Should the girl die before her real marriage to a male of even after, then her *bel* is placed in a river, like the Bagmati in Kathmandu Valley, so that it is washed away. This *I-hi* is a ceremony where the *bel* represents the husband and this is done so as to assure the longevity of the future husband, as the *bel* is supposed to symbolise Narayan the Preserver, is what the Newar folks believe even today.

Gufa Basne (living in a cave) or *Bahara*, is the ritual that the girl who has completed her *I-hi* has to undergo prior to her

menarche. For a period of 11 days the girl has to be kept in a dark room where no sunlight is to penetrate and she is not permitted to look on the face of any male. On the twelfth day, before sunrise, she is taken out, bathed and then blind-folded and taken to the top floor of the house or to a place from where she will be able to see the first rays of the rising sun. She offers *aksata* and flowers to Surya (the sun god) after which she is faced east. As the sun peeps out of the horizon her blind-fold is removed and she sees the sun after a period of 11 days. Now she is considered purified. *Bahara* is also done in a communitywide way where groups of girls are kept together in the dark room so that they can peep each other company and not get bored. This sort of group *bahara* is called *baharatyug*.

Should a girl reach menarche prior to this *bahara* ritual then it is customary for her to observe *bahara* at that time. During this *bahara* should a girl expire (as has and does happen) then the floor of that room is holed and the corpse lowered below till the *chhaedi*; is reached and preceded by a flaming torch bearer, even though it is daylight. She is then buried in the foundation there directly below the room where she died. The injunction is that the corpse of the girl who has died in such circumstances must not be taken down the staircase nor must she be shown to the sunlight outside, but should be taken down as mentioned earlier.

Chyame and Duiya Newar people do not observe this ritual of *bahara*. Buddhist Newar people do not observe pollution during menstruation as do the Hindu Newar folks for 4 days like the Brahmin, Ksetri, Thakuri people. During such condition, the Buddhist Newar cook food, sit and eat together but they never go near the area of worship and also refrain from participating in any religious ceremonies and rituals.

I-hi and *bahara* are ceremonies which prepare the Newari girl for her future destiny as a housewife and mother, keeping her in social and biological synchronisation.

Initiation ceremonies for young Newar boys

Chudakarma (Hair shaving ritual)

Newar boys between the age range of 5 to 7 years have their hairs shaved in a special ceremony known as *chudakarma* or

chhaewar popularly, and *vsuka* in Newari. Among the Hindu Newar the razor to be used for the shaving must initially be worshipped by the boy's *phupu* or paternal aunt and then only does the *mama* or maternal uncle commence the actual cutting. The ritual of cutting the hair is done by the *mama* after which the *nau* or barber takes over. This ritual does not exist among the Buddhist Newars.

Karnavedh

This is also another ritual done during the *chudakarma*. This *karnavedh* is a ritual which involves piercing the ear lobes of the child. In some communities it is done on a separate day and there is not much ritualization done for this ritual.

Bratabandh (*kyuta puja*)

This ritual is done after the *chudakarma* and when the boy reaches an age of 9 to 12 years, however it is done even at the very late age of 17 to 18 years. The Hindu Newar like the Deubhaju and Chha Thare Newar people perform this *kyuta puja* which is followed by giving of the sacred thread to make the boy a real man, more purified and whole. The other Hindu Newar folks besides the above mentioned, make the boys wear a loincloth as is the custom and this is taken as the *bratabandh*; ritual. The Buddhist Newar folks like the Gubaju and Bada take the boys to their Vihar have their hairs shaved and call this the *brechhuigu* ceremony. The Hindu Newar retain the *sika* or topknot also called *tupi*, but the Buddhists shave the boy bald. This is one difference between the Newar people of two different religious beliefs, and the second difference is the placing of a sacred thread on the Hindu boys while the Buddhists have no such ritual.

Life Cycle Rites

Births

A woman who is married and pregnant is not allowed to give birth at her natal home or *maiti*. If such a thing happens, it is considered very inauspicious. If the woman and her husband are living uxorilocally, meaning the man is living with his wife in her house as a *ghar jawai* or son-in-law of the house, and the wife is about to deliver a baby, then she is taken out of the house to some other

house where she gives birth to the child. The birth pollution of the initial child is observed for a period of 6 days among these Newar people, while during the second child's birth it is lessened to just four days. Today, on account of certain external social influences it is seen that these Newar observe pollution during birth upto a period of 10 days. This purification ritual after the observance of the birth pollution period is called *mchabu vynkegu* in Newari.

Navran

The naming or *navran* ceremony is not necessarily held by these people on the day of purification of birth pollution, as is the case with most Hinduised tribes. This means that it could take place at a later date when all necessary requisites are collected. The child's nickname is given by the paternal aunt or *phupu* while the real name set in the horoscope is recorded after making calculations. This is done by the Joshi or *jyotisi* (astrologer).

Pasni (*jngko*)

When the boy reaches an age of six or eight months, he undergoes the ritual rice feeding ceremony called *jngko* in Newari, while for a girl she has to be five or 7 months old. Whether a girl or a boy, the maternal uncle or *mama* has to send the items necessary for worship and a set of new clothes for his nephew. During this *jngko*, on a large platter or tray are placed the child's toys, some paddy grains, a brick, some mud, some ornaments made of gold, a book, a pen, etc. and these are shown to the child. The child looks and touches one of these items and from the item touched his future profession is analyzed, is the belief that these people possess. At the end of this auspicious ceremony, there is the inevitable *bhoj* or community feast which has become synonymous to Newar. It is during this *jngko* that the girls have their ear lobes pierced, however, the custom of piercing the nostrils of a girl is non-existent among these people and a trademark of the Newari beauties in any part of the country. This taboo is gradually under the attack of woman's emancipation and modernisation in the country.

Marriage Practices

Marriage within groups possessing similar family names or *gotr* are taboo and avoided at all costs by most tribes in Nepal, however, this sort of thing is not considered to be taboo among the Newar

people and in fact this is their preferred form of marriage. The paternal lineage or *had* (bone meaning agnatic) marriages are avoided and almost never occur, while on the maternal side or lineage, a gap of at least seven generations have to be kept is the social regulation existent, but seldom practised. Should a Newar marry a member of another tribe then he or she (meaning the outsider) is never invited for any sort of *puja* or *bhoj*, indicating non-acceptance into community.

Chaitra, Kartik, Poush, and Srawan are known as Chaila, Kachhala, Pohela, Gunla in Newari. While the first is the month of horse, the second is the month of the dog, the third the month of the loss, and the fourth is the month which is considered holy. Due to this belief there are no Newar marriage during these four months.

For a Newari marriage to occur, the *lami* or matchmaker is of immense importance and can be male or female. Once the *lami* clarifies all the preliminary talks, then the *swyambar* approaches, and on this day the boy's parents send ten uncut and whole betel nuts enclosed in a velvet bag or in a silver box called a *lampichat*, a box called *sinhmu* containing *sindur* or vermilion, items necessary for *puja* and set of new clothes for the bride to be. The old timers among the Newar community state that providing a new set of clothes is a recent addition to their ritual which was known as *gvae viygu*; by the groom's folks while the girl's folks called this same ritual by the name of *gvae kaygu*. The former means presenting betel nuts and the latter means accepting the nuts offered.

Once these gifts reaches the girl's house, then the Thkalinaki puts the *sindur*, which is brought from the groom's side, onto the hair parting of the prospective bride's and also presenting the betel nuts in her hands. Rich Newar people send these gifts to the accompaniment of musical bands. Prior to the marriage, there is a custom of the boy's side sending a traditional sweet called *lakhamari* (which is sometimes as large as a *nanglo* or winnowing fan) as *sagun* to the girl's house. Since the dispatching of *lakhamari* is a very expensive affair, it is quite common to see the presenting of cash instead. Should there be an arrangement for an exchange marriage, meaning the bride's brother marries the groom's sister, then *lakhamari* is not necessary. The period from the date of dispatch of *lakhamari* till the marriage is called the *pynja* and during this interval, all the family and neighbours express their love and respect for her, as if she were the

daughter of all the villagers or *tole* people. During such times, it is seen that the people of that section of Newar society discard their differences and work together towards achieving a good and successful marriage for the girl whom they consider as their daughter and not of just a single family. Not only in feeling, but also in practice, every family in that *tole* feeds this girl a farewell meal showing their oneness as Newar during the *pynja*. A day prior to the marriage or on the day of the marriage it is the turn of the girl's *mama* to provide a grand feast for her and this is the last farewell meal she eats before her marriage.

There is an interesting custom among many Newar communities, for the groom not to accompany the *janti* or marriage procession which consists of the groom's brothers, cousins, friends and the neighbours, while the women are also permitted to go along. When such a groomless *janti* reaches the bride's house, they are presented with betel nuts and spices, which they eat and leave for their respective houses, while only the very close kin or brothers of the groom remain back. Their lodging along with their food is arranged by the bride's folks.

Among the Mukhiya and Rajbhandari Newar, in contradiction to the above practice the *janti* must be accompanied by the groom.

When the bride reaches the house of the groom later, she is made to stand at the door and the priest makes her perform worship to the *kul devta* (lineage deity) of the house, and then Ganesh and others of the pantheon. Next she is made to wash the groom's feet (ritually) by the groom's mother, or if he has no mother then by a woman whom he respects as an equal of the real mother. This ritual is followed by the handing over the keys of the house to the bride by the groom's mother or any such woman among his relatives. Now the bride is taken into the house. This keys-handling-over ritual indicates the bride is accepted as one of the groom's family and her responsibility towards her husband's, which is now her own family. After this ritual the couple are seated together for the first time, to carry out worship to the groom's *kul devta* and other deities followed by *tika-talo*. This puja performed within the groom's house is called *honkegu*. Now the people present are offered a feast which is supposed to contain all the 84 varieties that exist, but this is an impossibility today, so this ritual is symbolic and means presenting them with a wide variety (not necessarily 84 varieties, could be less too) of food.

A Newari *bhoj* is incomplete should they not consume beaten or flattened rice, buff meat and alcohol. Alcohol means *aela*, *chhoela* is roasted buff meat churned in some spices and *kachila* which is actually raw buff meat which is marinated in spices and then eaten. There are very few Newar who do not consume *aela*, *chhoila* or *kachila*, but the .i.dhobi ;among these people do not eat meat of buffaloes. The priest class of the Hindu Newars community and the Buddhist priests consume this meat. On account of the fact that the priest consume this polluted meat (according to Hinduistic injunctions), they were not permitted to read the Vedas and also not allowed to touch this sacred book in any Sanskrit school in which they taught prior to 1951 AD, thus they studied secretly at home.

After the 84 varieties of food (*chaurasi bhyanjan*) have been consumed by the couple, the bride alongwith the groom's female household members, goes to the nearby *tole* shrine or to a *bahal* where once more she has vermilion poured on her hair parting, animals like an uncastrated goat or a duck are sacrificed, or an egg is broken and offered to the deity, *sagun* is distributed to all present, *saptya*; is eaten and after all these activities are over then only is the marriage considered completed, ritually.

Four days after the marriage, towards the evening, the bride's male relatives come to the groom's house to see how their relative (bride) is doing. This is known as *dulahan ko mukh herne* and some Newari groups practice the custom by taking the bride and keeping her at a third person's house where the male relatives have to go and meet her. She has to be presented with some expensive items during this visit by her male relatives as is the custom. Now the bride is taken back to her *maiti* by those who have come to see her and the groom also has to accompany the group. At his *sasurali* (house of in-laws) he is introduced to all the bride's kin and kindred.

On the evening of this day the bride's female relatives are all present and she has to eat *abhaj*; seated with them. The groom has to meet all the respected elders of his *sasurali* and present them with ten unbroken betel nuts each and perform *dhog*. This is called *duchakegu*. The customs of *khando jaggaunae silo halne* and *ratauli khelne* are not found among these people. They permit the marriage of a person of their community with a woman of

another caste but which is compatible (meaning *pani chalne jat*) to their society and its norms. It does not matter whether the union is classified as a *chori* or elopement, *jari* or stealing someone else's wife and such, but the ritual of handing over the keys of the household is not performed as in a regular marriage. Should a Newari woman marry someone of another tribe which is of course compatible to her tribe in terms of caste equality, then the woman is removed from the *guthi* (religio-social organisation) which is the worst form of social boycott that a Newari woman has to undergo and which is the factor that binds them together in tribal endogamy.

Should a Newar male marry a woman of a tribe below the *pani* or water line, meaning with whom their society has no social connection in terms of caste equality, then this woman is never accepted as part of the Newari society and is always (until her death and after) excluded from any religio-social activities of the *guthi*. This is the most terrible punishment for a non-Newari woman living in a Newari community.

As earlier elaborated, the *I-hi* is considered an everlasting and immortal bond between a Newari woman and her *bel* fruit, while the marriage which occurs later is one of socio-biological necessity only. Thus, even on the death of a husband, the woman is still considered a married one since the *bel* fruit is intact.

The 10 unsplit and whole betel nuts presented during marriage are symbols of great importance among the people, and among the Bajracharya, Shakya, Udas and Jyapu communities, should any married woman leave these 10 betel nuts under her husband's pillow and then abscond, it is taken as an appeal for divorce which is socially accepted. Once the betel nuts are placed in such a place, then the woman is eligible to marry another male, or live singly and freely, without suffering from any social restrictions or stigmatisation, and according to this custom she would be a virgin once more. The husband that was, has no social, religious or legal right over this woman after she has placed the betel nuts strategically under the pillow. Today, however, this custom is falling apart as it is not granted social sanction. Widow marriages are prevalent today among these people who almost a decade ago objected to this practice vehemently. Reforms in marriage practices are underway and hopefully for the better and more emancipated Newari society is what some elders state.

Budo Pasni (*Budo Jungko*)

Among the various strange and unique practices of the Newar people, there is one called *budo jngko* or *budo pasni* meaning the rice feeding of old people. Here the people in old age perform this rite which is similar to the *pasni* done for a child who reaches 5 or 6 months after birth. This *budo jngko* is celebrated thrice. Firstly when the person reaches the age of 77 years, 7 months, 7 days, 7 hours, 7 seconds; secondly when 83 years, 4 months, 4 days, 4 hours, 4 seconds; and thirdly when 99 years, 9 months, 9 days, 9 hours, 9 seconds. Both male and female Newari people are honoured and respected on these occasions by their neighbours, who make a necklace of *yomori* (hollow flour cakes lined with molasses) for these elders, which is the customary way of honouring them. Ordinarily, worship is done with flowers, fruits, *abir*, *aksata*, *lawa*, after which a necklace of flowers is put over the person's head. Once all these rituals are over the person is put on a kind of chariot and taken around the *tole* in sort of exhibition called *deshatan* and there is music and much rejoicing and celebrations to mark this great occasion.

Death rites

In a Newar community if a sick person goes into a coma or is about to breathe the last breath, then the person is taken to the banks of the river so that death occurs there and not within the house or even in the *tole*. This is followed by the Brahmin and Chha Thare people. Among the Buddhist Newars, the Bajracharya, Shakya, Udas people, the sick one is taken to the *buigal*, and after death overtakes the person, the deceased is brought downstairs and put on a bed-like structure made of bamboo (raw) and then taken towards the river banks. The other ordinary Newar folks do this in a different way. Prior to death the person is laid out in the *chhaedi* or else kept at a place made pure ritually and called *brahmnal*. At this time, the dying person's wife/husband or eldest son must remain at his foot end and using a *kalas* called *akolla* (especially used in *sraddha*) filled with water which must be poured in a continuous stream there. Once the person breathes his/her last, two two-headed oil lamps are lit and placed at the head and feet of the corpse. This is why they consider lighting a two-headed oil lamp on any other occasion as inauspicious and a bad omen.

The last rites of the person are done by the *guthi* within which the deceased was a member. There is a cloth kept in the *guthi* called *sppa* or *devn* which is brought to the deceased's house along with a bundle of straw, *chhvali* or wheat ears, cowdung cakes, *bhajn* or an earthenware pot, an iron sheet funnel and other necessary items for the cremation. Next, green bamboo are cut into pieces and a bier called *kota* is readied. Once this bier is prepared and ready, the corpse is laid on this facing upwards and fastened with ropes made of bamboo strips. Prior to this activity, the household members of the deceased or his son must wash the corpse's face and then apply a *tika* of vermilion on the forehead, or if a woman who has a living husband then *sindur* is placed on her hair parting and she is decked out like a bride. The horoscope of the deceased is also tied to his neck and to his /her mouth in exceptional cases.

Should a Thkali or chief of the Gubaju, Shakya, Udas Newars die, the corpse is placed on the bier in a seated posture and accompanied by musicians amid showers of red vermilion powder, the funeral procession proceeds towards the river's edge with full enthusiasm and fanfare. Besides members of the family and relatives, there are friends and neighbours also in the procession.

A group of Jyapu and Kasai proceed the procession playing musical instruments called *Indra baja* or instruments of god Indra. All funeral goers are and must be barefooted. There are some exceptions in these processions where the females are also included. The relatives and family members of the deceased cover their faces with shawls called *khasto* or with a piece of cloth while going for the funeral. This is a custom and is said to express the sense of sorrow. Mournful, long drawn out and sad sounds of crying can also be heard, while the funeral procession is being taken out. At this time it is customary to place three bricks at the first crossroad or *duva* encountered in the tole; or village. These bricks are placed so that the deceased one's soul can use them to build a house in the hereafter. This is a very strange but strong belief that these people have and state that when placed at the *duva* the bricks are definitely used by the deceased.

Whether Hindu or Buddhist, these people cremate their dead, however, the Kusule (or Kapali) Newar bury their dead and according to their status, they pour certain amount of salt over the corpse and then fill up the grave. This burial occurs in the seated

posture. Should the deceased be less than 3 months old or should the deceased not have had any religious rituals to its credit, eg. a still born or one which dies prior to the *navran*; then it is buried as is the custom among all the Newar people. If an adult dies from the ravages of epidemic or plague then this person is to be buried as is the prescribed custom. The children cemetery is known as *Mcha ga*.

The Hinduised Newars observe the usual 12 days death pollution, applicable to the immediate members of the deceased's family and on the thirteenth day, the family and environs are both purified. Some customs have been localised and so the purifications occur on the twelfth day itself, while relatives have to observe death pollution for a period of 10 days only or 12 full days. If a member of a married woman's *maiti* dies, she has to observe death pollution for 4 days only. The Buddhist Gubaju, Bada, Udas, Jyapu, observe this death pollution for only 7 days, though there are some who do so for 12 days also. The custom during such pollution periods is for the daughter to be purified in four days and then go over to the *maiti* where she helps out in the cooking of ritually clean food, however, during death pollution rice is not cooked at all and it is then customary to eat the food cooked at the houses of relatives and brought there. Salt is not totally abstained from, and pickles, curries, *dal* and *bhat* are consumed. But today this is slowly being Hinduised and the salt and oil abstainences are increasing among these people during death pollution periods, as observed and stated by them.

After the death of a person, the next day some male relatives go there and express their pollution which is called *vicha vnegu*. On the fourth day is *cholazz*; and sometimes on the 6th. day after death, when female relatives go to the deceased's house and exhibit sadness by carrying some beaten rice, curds, etc as gifts and then walk about crying and moaning. On the 11th. day is *ghsu* and there is a ritual which purifies the whole family, *ghsu* emanates from the Sanskrit *ghtsudhi*, since a large earthenware pot is called *ghyampo* in Nepali, *gh* in Newari and *ght* in Sanskrit and *su* in Newari means pure which is a corrupted and abbreviated form *sudhi* in Sanskrit. It can be thus said that *ghsu* means the process of purification of water (in the *gh* or *ght*). While this is done on the eleventh and sometimes twelfth day by the Hindu Newar, the Buddhist do it on the seventh day only.

While the Hindu and Buddhist Newar are separate entities, there exists another group which is a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism, which could be labelled as Buddhist-Hindu Newar people. Except for the purely Buddhists like the Gubacharya, Shakya or Bada, Udas, the other Newars whether Hindu or Buddhist both follow Hinduism and Buddhism parallelly.

On deaths these Newars perform rituals both Hinduistic and Buddhistic. On the seventh day after the death the Gubaju completes the *ghsu* and then on the eleventh or, twelfth day the Deubhaju performs the *ghsu* in the Hindu way. But today, the Gubaju is slowly discarding this *ghsu* ritual and hence the Hindu Deubhaju is gaining full control of the situation. This is happening because the Newar people are gradually inclining more towards Hinduism. On the death of a child this *ghsu* is done on the fourth day after death.

On the day of the *ghsu*, the family members of the deceased's household and the relatives go to a clean water source and bathe, but prior to this male members cut off their hair and nails. The *kriyaputri* (one who is observing the death pollution totally) has to shave off his eyebrows too, alongwith his moustache and beard if he possesses any. On the final day of the purification, a *havan* or fire worship is organised. Should the deceased be a woman then the Thkalinaki has to comb the hair and pour *sindur* on the hair parting of either the priest's wife or his daughter. It is only after this that *daan* or donations are made to a woman. If the deceased is a male then all this is unnecessary and *daan* is directly given to the priest presiding over this activity. There is a much prevalent custom of granting *daan* to the Kusule and then feeding them.

On the day of *ghsu* (in certain families), a member is singled out to function as the one to make every individual wash his or her hands and then to collect all the dirty leaf plates after the *bhoj* is over and to put them in the *chhvas* or garbage dump. Thus this person who does this sort of literally dirty work has to have his hands washed prior to entering the house, and this washing is done by the Thkalinaki, who also presents him two pieces of raw meat. The man has to act as though eating the meat (which he actually discards) and then enters the house a clean and purified person.

The ritual of purification being over, the invitees go to their respective houses. While offering *pind* the Newars use barley

flour and not *pyas*. They perform *sraddha* in 45 days, 6 months, a year, 2 years intervals. Some also do it on a monthly basis. The yearly *barkhi barne* meaning abstaining from certain foods, wearing white clothes and not wearing leather objects is observed by today's Newari society in imitation of the Hindus.

Religion and Festivals

It is said that in ancient times, the deities of the Newar people were called *amjiju* meaning grand ancestors, thus it observed that the Newar gods are actually emanations of the ancestor worship or *pitree puja* rituals. Today many Newar people call their deities *ajajyu* and this belief seems to be made stronger by the fact that these people erect *chaityas* over their ancestors or deceased elders' *asthi* (cranial bone) which is a very prevalent custom among the other animistic tribes and also the practice of *daewali*.

Today, regardless of from whatever god or goddess the Newar deities emerged, it is seen that they have been prominently influenced by either Hinduism or Buddhism.

The Newari Buddhist priests worship the omnipotent and almighty Adi Buddha as the central deity in their pantheon. This primordial Adi Buddha is also known to, them as Swyambhu whom they worship as the Self Existent One - the jewel in the lotus. This Buddha has various emanations which are the bodhisattavas or his reincarnations through the ages. The fourth Bodhisattav called Padma pani (also called Matsyendra Nath) is the Buddha who is supposed to have created this earth, and this is a strong belief among the Buddhist Newars.

Parallely, these Buddhists also accept the greatness of Vishnu, Brahma, Siva and other deities in the Hindu pantheon, while accepting Ganesh, Indra, Bhagawati, Garuda, Laxmi, Saraswati, etc. as the creations of Padma Pani Lokeshvara, and thus these are also venerated and worshipped. Hinduised Newars worship Siva and hence Pasupati (phallus of Siva) as the greatest of Hindu temples. Siva is worshipped as Nas Dho or Natraj the Cosmic Dancer and also as Lukma Dho or the Hidden Siva.

The daily lives of these people is greatly influenced by the elephant headed god Ganesh, a son of Siva, hence there does not exist any village or *tole* where a Ganesh statue is not seen. In matters of

domestic and religious activities, it is compulsory for the Thkalinaki or head woman to offer *puja* to Ganesh.

The dreadful god Bhairav is also a must in every tole and village and he is as popular as Ganesh. The God Bhimsen is also worshipped and said to be an emanation of the great Bhairav.

Newar people do not kill snakes and is due to the fact that they worship the snakes as the Nagas who are the harbingers of rains that are of immense importance for the agricultural Newar community. Cows are worshipped twice a year, once on Sukul Purnima and once on Gai Tihar, during the Tihar festival. On Janai Purnima, *puja* is performed in their fields to the frog. On Kartik Sukul Dvitiya it is time to worship the elephant, which is quite an interesting if not strange form of worship.

The Newari religio-social structure and activities are also as many as there are festivals. It is almost like one festival a month and could even beat the Bengalis of Bengal who say that they have 13 festivals in 12 months.

Some Newar festivals are Swapna Tirtha, Mata Tirtha Aunsi, Buddha Jayanti, Sithinkha, Narayan Jatra, Gathe Mangal, Gokarna Aunsi, Chya, Indra Jatra, Panchali Bhairav Jatra, Phul pati, Kal Ratri, Navratri, Tika, Laxmi Puja, Mh puja, Bal Chaturdasi, Yomohri Punhi, Siva Ratri, Basant Panchmi, Chnkggho jatra, Pahan chnhe, Seto Matsyendranath, Lhuti Punhi (Jamache Jatra), Nag Panchami, Krishna Astami, Krishna Tarpani, and so on.

Thus, whenever these people reside they celebrate their festivals and grant importance to the festivals of that locality where they are in reality immigrants. Guthi puja and Kul puja etc., are also found to be celebrated by these people.

Structure of the Newar *Guthi*

In spite of various differences in opinions among the Newar individuals, they are seen to be very united in purposes where groups are seen. This phenomenon is largely due to a certain socio-religious organisation called a *guthi* which exists among both the Buddhist and Hindu Newar people. This *guthi* is seen to exert a very strong pressure which greatly influences a Newar person's life.

These *guthi* are organisations intent on maintaining the balance, both socially and religiously, and simultaneously keeping the individuals within the line of tribal discipline which is an important factor in the binding of the Newari mentality.

Guthi members are all those within the family which is part of the *guthi* and participate in the various *guthi* organised activities like *bhoj* and *puja*. Every member is granted authority to help another when required, and should a family or individual not participate, then there is a clause, in the *guthi* rules, which states that social boycott can also be used as a pressurising instrument. *Guthi* is very synonymous to the Newar but today other tribes are also forming their own *guthi* in imitation of the Newar people, whose *guthi* are slowly said to be disintegrating.

The *guthi* can be looked on as an association where every resident of that *tole* or village or area is listed as a member, which means that they are obliged to pay a donation (monthly or yearly) and accordingly certain social and religious facilities are obtainable (like when death occurs), but these *guthi* members must adhere to the religio-social injunctions laid out by this association.

A Newar can never remain aloof and not be a member of the *guthi*, because this is inconceivable and opposed to the traditional injunctions which causes the person to sever links of all kinds with his society, but today these strong links are also losing their temper and snapping because there is freedom of thought and emphasis on personal identification rather than on the affiliations one needed in the old days to achieve a status. Many educated Newar people are of the opinion that the *guthi* try and limit or bind people, meaning these organisations are, in today's context, obstructing the mental progress of the Newar people. What was good in those days is a hinderance today. They also go on to state that the only way out is for implementing amendments to the injunctions or else this *guthi* concept will crumble like the ancient houses are doing in the old Newar settlements.

There are various categories of *guthi* and the main ones are *sanan*, *si* and *daewali*. While the first two are related to deaths and succeeding rituals, the last one deals with worship of the gods and ancestors. *Sanan guthi* and *si guthi* handle death. While the *si guthi* is responsible for taking the corpse to the cremation ground and performing the cremation, the *sanan guthi*

is there to function as the helping group in matters of administrative or such works and not permitted to touch the corpse.

When a person dies, his *guthiyar* (*guthi* member) carry his or her corpse to the site of cremation and perform all the necessary rites and rituals. Only the *guthiyar* are entitled to do this and if there is an outsider and not of the *guthi* who performs all these rituals, then it is considered very inauspicious. The importance of the *guthi* is exhibited when only after the *devn* is brought and the corpse covered is it carried towards the burning grounds. This *devn* cloth is made of silk and satin but could also be of ordinary cloth depending on the socio-economic status of that *guthi*. The colour of the *devn* is saffron, though reddish and orange types are used. Once the funeral is over the *devn* is kept away by the *guthi* for future use. This helps to alleviate the financial strain imposed when buying a *devn* which is quite expensive since it has to be ultimately discarded.

Sanan guthi is a permanent organisation and run by elder members and the head of the *guthi* is the Thkali (a male) or a Thkalinaki (a female). For good and auspicious works there are other *guthi* like - *nas dha guthi* related to dancing and singing activities of the gods; *chre sewa guthi* related to Chauthi puja; *holi guthi* related to the festival of Holi; *sasu guthi* related to Saraswati puja, etc.

Another *guthi* of importance is the *daewali guthi* which is actually an organisation made to perform the *kul devta puja* of a particular group of people having the same *kul* (ancestor) or *gotr* (totem). Wherever a person of this *guthi* maybe, he is always a member and so must try and fulfill the responsibility he has towards his *guthi*. These *kul devta puja* are done annually and sometimes after every two years. If the woman is married then she is automatically cut off from her *guthi*. When one *daewali guthiyar* addresses another the term use is *phuki* as is the long standing custom. Marriages are impossible among *phuki* and should a *phuki* die then death pollution must be observed by other *phuki* as though a family member has died. The actual custom being for the male *guthiyar* to wear a white one piece cap or *topi* on the head, white clothes and shoes.

All worship is performed by the head of the group or the Thkali and Thkalinaki have to preside over these rituals. Blood sacrifices of an

uncastrated goat is a must during this *daewali guthi puja*. The head and hoofs are divided into eight pieces and distributed along with other items to those present. Each such share is called *si*. Everyone is given two pieces of the ears, eyeballs, lower jaw, while the nose and tongue are distributed only one piece each.

A *daewali guthiyar* can branch out and form his own *guthi*, but must never deviate from the rules. The place and the deity must be the same. The image of the deity is normally made out of a stone. Once a person or his entire family is ejected from the *daewali guthi*, then he or his family is automatically removed from the rolls of the *sanan guthi* and *si guthi*. The fear of being thus ostracised is what has bound these people for such a long period of time, helping them to exhibit their unique identity in the tribal mural of Nepal.

The Newar as a whole are a tribe with a difference. They show traits that are completely opposed to that of other tribes while some characteristics are exact duplicates of some tribes. Their current status is in transition from a cloistered, introverted social group to an emancipated, liberal and unshackled community where conservatives and *guthis* are slowly being pushed to the rear.

PHRI

Within the boundaries of Nepal, there live various tribes, and among these is a minority tribe said to be a branch of the Tamang by some ethnologists, while others state them to be Newars and still others as a branch of the Ksetri. This tribe is known as the Phri.

Settlement

The area in which the Phri are settled is located within districts of Lalitpur, Kavre, Makwanpur and Sindupalchok. The villages inhabited by these Phri in the Lalitpur district are Vdikhel, Sikharpa (Tika Bhairav), Itayti (Chrmpa), Phade (Lele), Tokhel (Godavari) and Ghyampe Danda (Chapagaon). In Kavre district the villages are Khopasi, Kitni, Danghat, Mathillogaun, Tallogaun and Planchok. Besides the above districts, they inhabit Betani and Kullekhani in Makwanpur, and Sanga in Sindupalchok. There are some Phri villages in the area of Darjeeling in India also. While the house count in Lalitpur district is approximately 40 to 50 houses, Khopasi alone in the Kavre district shows 40 to 50 houses and Planchok has 110 to 120 houses approximately. The Planchok Phri consider themselves to be of a higher level than others of their tribe and call the Khopasi Phri, Khole Phri.

Origins

There are many stories about the naming of these people and their origins. Some old timers state that during the time of a Newar King of Bhadgaon. Some people of that community worked as royal cooks. These cooks were in the habit of tasting everything and anything they cooked before serving the king. The king heard such kinds of rumours and so set out to investigate this matter only to catch the cook tasting the food. Not only this but also wiping his dirty hand on his surwal or pant. This sight was too much for the king and so he decreed that this *pho ho ri* (meaning dirty in the Nepali language) person and his group were to be exiled to the forests surrounding the city for a period of 12 years. From then on, these people became a sort of gatherer type of community and lived in the forest as ordered. They ate fruits and wild tubers and roots dug from within the ground. They did not cut their nails nor hair and thus looked unkempt and naturally dirty or *pho ho ri*. When their time of exile was over, they returned to the city as they were. Then

the king gave them permission to inhabit the region of Kolku, approximately three kilometres from Godavari. The other tribes in that area and in the vicinity of these new settlers called them *pho ho ri* as they were literally such dirty animal-like beings, and gradually the name evolved through corruption in the pronunciation and became Phri.

There is another story where these *pho ho ri* people went out of the city area and began to inhabit the surrounding hills or *phad*, thus the *pho ho ri* began to become *phadi* which later turned into the modern Phri. This story does seem to be rather dubious in nature.

Regarding the main root of these Phri, there are many hypotheses, among which some scholars state that originally they were Ksetri, and others oppose this saying their's is a Newar origin as is supported by the stone inscription at Heje Bahairav in Bhaktapur, which states that these people are in reality Newar, and who at a certain period became corrupted and decadent (may have broken taboos and social norms then existent). At this time they must have taken on a new identity and called themselves Phri. There is a version narrated by some old Phri of Planchok area which states that the Phri actually transformed from the Newar to the Phri identity. When other tribes began to migrate into the Kathmandu Valley, the Newar of weak and unstable economic statuses were compelled to leave the city and migrate towards the neighbouring hills. Here they came into contact with the Tamang people already settled in these hills. As time passed, these people inter married and their progeny became the Phri tribe of today's it is believed.

Thus, the stone inscriptions and the existent oral traditions attest to the fact that the main root of these Phri is the Newar, of the Bhaktapur area. The theory that inward migration of other tribes into the Valley, causing the outward migration of these Phri who were the older residents, is to be considered in the light of other ethnological phenomenon that have occurred in the past with a similarity in pattern.

Family

The Phri people have an extended family pattern in their society as most primitive tribes do, however, due to the modern influences exerted by their surroundings, today the nuclear family is gaining

popularity as can be seen after a male marries and tends to live separately and away from his main house and family. Women are respected and honoured in Phri society, therefore it could be said that they have a matriarchal society and is proved by the custom of the progeny from sept exogamous marriages being assigned names from their mother's lineage.

Language

The Phri language is classified within the Tibeto-Burman family and closely related to Newari (could be called an offshoot) but possessing no written script of a separate nature. The Newar language spoken around the areas of Lalitpur (Patan) and the hilly areas around Dhulikhel is closely related to Phri. Though the Phri language is very much related to the Newari, however, when spoken, it is done in the typical Tamang way with intonations of that Tamang kind. They speak their language with the typical drag which is a feature seen among the language of the Tamang and other hill tribe languages also.

Some words from the Phri language alongwith equivalents (approximates) of these words in Nepali and English are furnished as follows.

Phri	Nepali	English
<i>ji</i>	m	I
<i>lukhu</i>	pani	water
<i>makhe</i>	hoin	no/not so
<i>khyu</i>	ho	yes/it is so
<i>ja nhtira</i>	khan khayau	have you eaten?
<i>ya pyaro huya</i>	khet ropn jau	let's go sow the field
<i>liba rori</i>	aber bhyo	it's (getting) late
<i>chnt sukh dhula</i>	tapailai snchai chh	are you well?

Today, it is found that the Phri language is not in regular use, since the new generation Phri do not speak their language and consequentially it is gradually fading through disuse as some Phri folks sadly express this cruel fact.

Physical Characteristics

When we look at a Phri male or female, it is easily seen that they bear the striking Tamang features. They are short, stocky, robust

with dark skin pigmentation (not like the Tharu folks) but there are traces of fair skins sporadically. The epicanthic eye fold is very common among them and the nasal roots range from low to medium nasal roots, broad fine noses are a common feature and the brow ridges are pronounced but to a lesser degree than other tribes of mongoloid stock. they possess straight black hair and the males have very scanty facial hair. Their lips are thin to medium and eversion is not prominent as has been observed. They have brown to black eyes.

Dress and Ornaments

The women of these people dress in the usual *phriya* hitched high up so as to expose half their muscular calves and the upper body is covered with a *cholo* or blouse. They resemble Tamang women or even Jyapu women when dressed so. Men folks wear the common *bhoto* (vest-like clothing) or *daura* and *surwal* and waistcoat. Today they have switched over to the more practical and modern pants, shirts and even slippers. Though the youth are those who prefer such clothes, gradually it is being worn even by the older Phri folks. Women do things like piercing their nostrils, wear *sindur*, *pote* and *tilhari*. Ornaments made of silver and gold are used.

Life Cycle Rites

Birth

When a child is born, the mother is kept secluded in a particular place where limited people are permitted to enter. On the day of birth or the first day, the mother is not touched by anyone, though she is fed with nourishing and strength giving food. On the 7th. day after the birth, the mother and child are taken out from their place of confinement and both are bathed after which they are ritually purified. During this purification, the householders call their traditional *nau* or barber and have their hair and nails cut. This ritual is known as *nung churi*. In exchange for performing this service, the *nau* has to be paid Rs. 5 and 2 *manas* of beaten rice immediately. Beside this, the *nau* receives a part of the yearly harvest as an additional payment for the role he has played. 2 to 5 families share the services of one *nau* who is paid 1 *pathi* of foodgrain (normally paddy) from each family, annually.

Navran

For purifying the newborn and the mother, they use the services of an Upadhaya brahmin, rather than a Newar priest. Initially, they clean their compound or *chok* with the usual mixture of dung, mud and water. After this they use *gaunth* (cow urine), *til* (sesame) and *jau* (barley) and the mother, baby and the whole household are purified. This is followed by worship performed to the sun, earth and *mungro* (club made of wood used to beat clothes when washing). The worship to the sun and the earth is for ensuring the child to be as fair as the former and strong as the latter. The worship of the *mungro* is done, they say, because it is a traditional custom, and express their ignorance when asked why about the ritual aspect. Now, keeping in mind the day of the birth, the child is named. From this day onwards, the mother is allowed to touch water and there is no need of performing any *puja* or worship at the wells, taps, tanks and other water sources, anymore.

Pasni

This is also called *anna prasan* or *bhat kulai*. When a male child reaches the six month mark and a female child the five month mark, it is the custom among most tribes in the kingdom to feed this child with solid foods. This is done with ceremony and the ritual evolved has been observed. Firstly, a room of the house is cleaned with the usual dung, mud and water mixture and then a small *jaggae* or mound is erected out of mud and dung. Items such as curds, fruits, fish, gold and silver are placed in front of this *jaggae* and worship to the Fire god or Agni is performed. Here some Phri differ in that they do not offer fish and meat. They do not have the custom of taking the newborn to the shrine of the tutelary deity. The actual feeding of the first solid food (rice) is done by the household elder, who is followed by other household members. It is only after the agnates finish that the maternal uncle gets the first chance to feed his *bhanja* (nephew) or *bhanji* (niece). He is followed by the next *mama* according to seniority. The youngest *mama* is last, and after he finishes, he picks up all the *jutho* (food touched to the mouth of a person and fallen on the ground to become polluted) and on top of this heap lights an oil lamp. Then he carries all this and flings it at some crossroad.

The ritual of piercing the earlobes of a daughter is done when she is 2 or 3 months old. The Phri believe that this piercing must be done

prior to the *pasni* ceremony, but the reason is unclear. If in any case family members begin to die one after another, then they pierce the earlobe of the eldest member of the family to arrest this string of bad luck. This is an extremely strong belief that is found to exist among these people, even today.

Chhaewar

This is the hair shaving ceremony and is done only for boys when they attain the age of 7 or 8 years. To do this, they do not use any sort of cutting instrument on the hair of the boy till that age. A date is fixed and the child's *mama* is invited on this day. He is the one to cut off the boy's hair and also to present new clothes to his nephew or *bhanja*. No worship is performed before or after this *chhaewar* among the Phri. The boy receives the present of a *topi* after his hair is shaved off. The shaved off hair is kept in a *tapari* or leaf plate and a lighted oil lamp is placed on it. This is then taken by the *mama* and thrown away at a crossroad. Those who are financially well off take this hair and throw it at places of pilgrimage.

Bratabandh

Among the Phri *bratabandh* is done on the day of the *daewali puja* which is performed on Maghe or Swastani Purnima. On this day, the Phri people worship Saraswati, Vnij khane and Gmvar. While the first and second deities have images, Gmvar doesn't have one and is worshipped on the ground, or earth. Some Phri state that the stone stele on which is etched a sort of face is the Gmvar deity which contradicts the statement that Gmvar has no image.

On the day prior to the *bratabandh*, or *daewali puja*, all the male household members have to have their hairs shaved, nails cut and bathe. On the evening of this day, 6 *mana* of beaten rice, sugarcane, a *perungo* of fish, leafy vegetables and such are placed and worship is performed. Prior to this worship, an oil lamp is lit and must not be extinguished by any external force. Paternal kin (brothers) of the household also come to this house to offer lighted oil lamps.

On the day of the *bratabandh*, the boy wears the new clothes brought by his *mama*, carries the items for worship and along with his *mama* goes to the place where *daewali puja* is

done. A male goat kid is a very essential item for this *puja*. Once the *puja* is over, the boy whose head has been shaved, is given a turban and *dhoti* to wear. Close relatives and sisters offer *sagun* and a *topi* which is a compulsory present. The *mama* has to present beaten rice, a fowl, a castrated goat or *khsi* and a turban. The longer the turban, the better it is, so goes the belief among these Phri. Now there is a feast with songs and dances. Towards the evening, the invitees return to their own homes.

Marriage Practices

When a marriage is to occur, the initial marriage talks are commenced from the girl's side. Should these talks end positively, then the brothers and family or community elders alongwith the boy go to the girl's house to finalise the proposal or *kura chhinne* ritual, during which the boy's folks take along a betel nut, a ring of gold, money and such according to the financial capacity of the proposer, but actually, only Rs.50 - 60 are given to the prospective bride by the boy's folks. The boy is garlanded by the girl with a garland made of *dubo* or grass leaves. This *kura chhinne* is followed by a presentation, by the boy to his prospective father-in-law or *sasura*, a sum of Rs.40 for *lakha* as is the tradition. Today, this ritual is considered unnecessary and is slowly vanishing.

After *lakha* is presented, the prospective bride has to perform *dhog* to the boy, sometime prior to the actual marriage. On this occasion, the prospective groom has to give money as *daksina* to the prospective bride every time she performs *dhog* and it is seen that this tradition is still prevelant among certain Phri. At the *kura chhinne*, 12 *mana* of beaten rice, 1 *pathi* of *raksi*, ginger and some money (Rs.20-30) are also to be presented to the girl's folks. When all this is over, the date for the marriage is decided on and then the boy's group are given a feast and warm send off. The *janti* must consist of as many persons as has been fixed by the girl's folks, and the specified number of *janti* must reach the girl's house on the eve of the date fixed for the marriage.

The Phri do not construct a *jaggae* during their marriages, therefore, while some perform the rite of *janti pasarne* at a set place, others do not perform this at all. The groom is taken and kept in a room where the ritual of playing with the betel nuts is performed. Here, 7 betel nuts are taken and placed in a brass plate

and played with 7 times. The groom and bride alternately play with these betel nuts till finally, all are retained by the bride. This is an aspect of the *supari dine* ritual performed in Newar marriages. It is interpreted that this playing with the betel nuts by the couple signifies the fact that they are thinking about each other and their marriage while playing, and the bride retaining the nuts indicates her acceptance of the groom as her husband.

The ritual of *kanyadaan* is done in a rather strange way among these Phri people. This ritual involves tying both hands of the couple with raw thread and on top of this a rooster is sacrificed and the blood oozed over the hands. This symbolises the union and its permanency and this ritual involving tying the hands, to sacrificing the rooster must be done by the girl's father or if he is dead, then by the girl's elder brother or patrilineal cousin (brother).

The next ritual is *sindur halne*. Prior to this the bride has to present a *dhoti* (*sari* made of cotton) to her mother along with as much money as she can so as to pay the price of breast milk which nourished her during her infancy. This is called *dudh ko bhara tirne*. This is followed by the bride's mother permitting the groom to pour *sindur* on her daughter's *siudo* or hair parting. But the mother of the bride leaves before the *sindur halne* occurs, because like the Brahmin and Ksetri, the Phri also have a custom, where the bride's parents and *maiti* as a whole are not permitted to see the *sindur halne* ritual.

Prior to *sindur halne*, the bride and groom make a vow, where they state that if one goes to the sky, the other will pull him or her by the leg, and should one go into the earth, then the pulling would be done by the hair.

Now the bride is given clothes, ornaments, bangles, a hair thread or *doro* etc. by the groom. These she has to don and then only is she eligible for the ritual of *sindur halne*. A *kalas* is placed nearby and *puja* is performed and from this *kalas* till the bride's hair parting a long white cloth is held like a bridge along which the groom pours *sindur* gradually going closer to the bride and finally ending the line on her *siudo*. It is necessary, so they state, that the line the *sindur* makes from the *kalas* till the *siudo* must be unbroken and the groom must not back track his hand at anytime during this ritual. This pouring of *sindur* along the cloth bridge is done 7 times and all this time the bride's face is

obscured by the white cloth which is held at the edge of her forehead exposing only her hair and *siudo*. This is followed by a grand feast. The *janti* return with the bride to the groom's house the next morning.

When the *janti* return, in the compound of the groom's house, is placed a *nanglo* on which there is a *pathi* measure filled with rice grains on which incense is burnt and an oil lamp is lighted. The bride and groom pay their obeisance to these items by performing *dhog* which is followed by the *muli sdhva* or head woman of household touching the bride's head seven times with a bunch of keys. This is the signal for the couple to enter the house, however, as they are about to enter, they are again obstructed with a barrier of a shawl by the groom's sisters (elder and younger). The couple must promise to fulfill the demands of these females and then only are they finally allowed to enter the house.

On the third day after the bride has been taken into the house of her husband or her *ghar*, her parents or brothers or relatives, also called *maiti*, come to meet her. This is called *mukh herne* which literally means looking at the face, but it is in fact a sort of enquiry of how she is adjusting with her husband and his family. At this time, the bride's mother bathes her daughter, washes off the *sindur* of the marriage and gives her a new set of clothes and fresh *sindur*. The groom who is the bride's mother's *jawai* is also presented with some new clothes and *sagun* to consume.

After this, the couple's fathers meet each other but they must be screened with a shawl so as not to be seen exchanging the *duna* (leaf bowl) containing incense, ricegrains, money or coins. After this exchange is over the screen is removed. Since these two men are *samdhi* to each other, this is called *samdhi bhet* or meeting of the *samdhi*. After this ritual is over, the bride's parents return to their home along with the couple. This ends the marriage.

Widow marriages are seen to be non-existent among the Phri though there are cases of *jari* marriages. Here a man makes off with another man's wife and has to pay the fine which is called *jari kur* and the offender is the *jar*.

Death Rites

On the death of a Phri, the corpse is taken and given the last rites by

members of his/her own *guthi* (socio-cultural group), therefore, on the death of a person, the *guthi* must be informed initially. Prior to the corpse being taken away, three stones are placed on the *vlesi* and a fire is lit in the area between these stones. An earthenware pot is placed on this fire and paddy is roasted in it. When the corpse is taken away, these stones are also tied together with thread and carried along. At the site of cremation, the corpse is offered water and *daksina* and then the *daag batti* is lit on its mouth and the pyre fired by the *kriyaputri*. The corpse is seen to be placed on its back on the pyre as is the case with most cremation practices. The Phri have a belief, that the smoke from the pyre must be visible from the house of the deceased. On account of this, the cremation site is usually near their homes or on the tops of nearby hills.

When the cremation is over and done with, the funeral goers use a grass called *smagatho* or *dhupi* (pine needless) to rub their hands and apply to their mouths, after which they bathe. These funeral goers make a barrier of thorns (raspberry bushes) and step over this while they return. The reasons given for this barrier erection is that the spirits from the cremation area follow the funeral goers and when they come across this barrier, they cannot cross over so they have no alternative but to return to their own haunts. The Phri are very ardent in this belief and so this ritual is compulsory.

On reaching the home of the deceased, the funeral goers are fed with beaten rice. A place for the *kriyaputri* is cleaned and readied and the place where *dhikuro* is kept is laid with stones on which the *kriyaputri* has to offer anything he eats. On the seventh day after the funeral, in the deceased's name, food items he was fond of during his life are cooked and mixed with the rice cooked by the *kriyaputri*. These are then offered outside the door of the house. Purification and lifting of death pollution occurs on the 12th day after the death. The funeral goers are also fed on his day. On the 13th. day, the *nau* is called and he cuts the hair and nails of all the male householders (not the women). They then go to the river bank where bathing is done and *puja* is offered and *daan daksina* given. All these rituals are presided over by an Upadhaya Brahmin.

If a person, who has married into another tribe or has fallen from the Phri social level dies, then the corpse is cremated elsewhere and not within the cremation grounds of the Phri community. It is not good

even to see the smoke of this person's funeral pyre. Also, the *nau* does not get to cut the hair and nails of the members of this person's family. But should a *nau* perform these rituals for the stigmatised person, then it is considered that the person has been reinstated into the Phri social level. Thus it is clearly seen that a *nau* has an important role in Phri society.

Festivals

Culturally, the Phri of Kavre and Lalitpur have to be looked at in different ways, since they celebrate festivals which are different. But generally the Phri can be stated to celebrate Daewali, Bhume, Guthi, Chaite pumima, Kuse aunsi and the usual Dasai and Tihar.

Daewali puja

On *daewali puja*, they worship three deities -Saraswati, Vnij khane and Gmvar. A day prior to this *puja*, everyone has his or her nails cut and thus ritually purifying themselves. They fast on this day. The next day or the day of the feast, they cook *roti* out of rice flour and it is called *chtamri* and with it, they collect other items required for the worship and go to the site of the *puja*. The head of the community or society has the right to perform the main *puja*, after which the elders of each household perform worship in their own way. *Boka* or uncastrated goats, roosters and ducks are slaughtered and their blood offered to the deities. All eat the slaughtered animals at the site of the *puja*. Though the place for *daewali puja* is the same for all Phri, they hold their feasts at various outlying places according to the requirements and wishes of the individual families.

The main deity of the *daewali puja* is stated as being Vnij khane who is supposed to be the main deity of the Khopasi and Planchok Phri. It resembles a *daitiya*. The head is pointed at the top, there is a tikka on its forehead which is indicated by a depression, two large eyes, a nose and an open mouth. This is worshipped as their foremost deity. The Vnij khane statues of Khopasi and Planchok are very much similar in appearance. The Khopasi statue is dated back to 2007 (BS 10th.Falgun) Wednesday as is inscribed on the stone stele standing nearby. These deities both in Planchok and Khopasi are kept at places where they can be worshipped while people are moving to and fro. Near Vnij khane is a statue of Saraswati and a place nearby is set aside for worship of Gmvar which has no image.

Bhume puja

This worship occurs on Dhany purnima. Planchok and Khopasi Phri have separate places for doing this *puja*. At these fixed places, there are no statues of any deities and the earth itself is worshipped as a deity since *bhumi* means earth. An uncastrated goat or a rooster is offered as blood sacrifice, but it is the rooster which is much used for this purpose. The necessary items for this *puja* have to be taken from the house. Every individual family performs its own *Bhume puja*, but at the specified spot and nowhere else. Previously, they used to have a feast at the site of the *puja*, so they state, but today, they return home and then have a feast.

On the *purnima* or full moon of Poush, a *guthi puja* and *bhoj* (feast) is held. The deity worshipped here is Bhairav. The image of this deity is kept in the house of the family, whose turn it is to perform the *guthi*. Thus, all the other *guthi* members go to the house where the Bhairav is housed and perform *puja* there. Thus it is seen that this *guthi puja* is done in a sort of rotation every year with the Bhairav image passing or moving so to say, from one house to another. Blood sacrifices are not performed in this *puja*.

Among the festivals celebrated by the Phri of Lalitpur, Chaite purnima (full moon of Chaitra month on which they have to bathe at *bais dhare* - 22 water-spouts) is the most important. On this day they go to Kodku village, visiting the Devasthan and Ganesthan there and hold a *jatra* or procession which is the main one and largest in the year.

Another festival these Lalitpur Phri celebrate is Dhany purnima and Kuse aushi a day after. They go to the temple of the Rato Matsyendranath and worship there. When these people go to worship the Rato Matsyendranath, their village neighbours give them some of the newly harvested crops to offer for them at the shrine. On their return, they distribute *prasad* to those households, which had sent offerings. The main reason why these Phri go to worship at the Rato Matsyendranath temple, is to pray that the rains be sent timely and the crops grow properly. This the belief as stated by the Phri. Today, the Phri have begun to worship Mattirtha aushi and Sdvij chme aushi, also.

The festivals of Dasai and Tihar and Gaijatra are also being celebrated by the Phri of Kavre and Lalitpur. While Dasai and Tihar are celebrated like the Brahmin and Ksetri do, the Gaijatra is celebrated in a typically Newar way. But the festivals like Maghe Sankranti, Srawane Sankranti, Ban devta puja, etc, are not found to be celebrated by these Phri people.

The Phri have great belief in demons and spirits. In the case of sickness, they give priority to the *jhankri* and *dhami* to exorcise the evil spirits believed to be within the patient, instead of providing medical attention. They exhibit great faith and belief in shamanistic rituals even today.

Economic status

While studying the economic status of the Kavre and Lalitpur Phri, it is seen that the Lalitpur Phri are in a state of economic backwardness and pitiable condition. Similarly, when studying the Phri of Kavre, it is seen that those around Khopasi are in better economic condition than their Planchok brothers. The reason for this slight economic development of the Khopasi Phri than the Planchok Phri is on account of the nearness of the towns and facility of transport which are enjoyed by the former, though both are of the perserving kind. Agriculture is the main source of income for the Phri of Kavre and Lalitpur districts, however, due to the lack of knowledge in modern farming methods, these folks are unable to produce a good harvest using their primitive ways even today.

To improve their living standards and eventually their economic status, the Khopasi Phri have begun to take up other occupations, but those Phri of Planchok and Lalitpur have not yet started in that direction as observed. Khopasi Phri also rear fowls, goats, buffaloes and sell these to supplement their income. They also sell their milk products in nearby Pannauti and Banepatowns since transport facilities are existent. A majority of these Phri have taken up poultry farming in a big way.

Cottage industries are not at all seen among Phri folks as such industries are seen to be non-existent in the areas of their habitation. To improve their economic statuses, many Phri have joined government jobs and hired themselves as laboureres. They say that education and family planning are two important aspects that are developing in their community, indicating a positive trend.

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

Looking at the Phri people, it is seen that they are still in the backwaters and need aid from local administrative machinery to help develop their economy and consequentially their economic status. Phri being a minority tribe, hesitate to even identify themselves as such. Encouragement is necessary by social and administrative agencies so that these people are made to feel that there is no stigmata attached to their names and thus they should identify themselves as what they are.

R A I

The Rai people have been classified as a separate sub-group on the basis of language analysis. It is said by some oldtimers that the region from the Dudh Kosi to Tambur rivers was inhabited by the *jimidars* (landowners) and the Yakkha tribe. This region is called Kirant Desh by these people and they are themselves called Rai. When *jimidars* introduce themselves, they emphasise that they are Khambus. Rai is a title conferred upon these *jimidars*. According to some scholars, *jimidar* is the corrupted form of the Indian word *jamindar* or land lord who is rich and owns vast tracts of lands. This word really means a farmer with a lot of lands. In the Indian languages the word Rai is used when honouring a person. According to local experts, the *jimidars* speak more than one *boli* or dialect, thus they state the possibility of the Dumi and Bahiang being sub-groups of the *jimidars*. In the context of today's Nepal, if one looks at this situation, *jimidar* and Rai *bolis* are not found, on the contrary, all Khambus are called Rais or *jimindars* and the *boli* they speak is known as *Rai boli*. Therefore, although *jimidar* is a word used to respect people among the Rais, however, ordinarily the word Rai is used to denote a person of the Khambu tribe. The census statistics show that all the Khambus are put into one group and also those who speak *Rai boli* under the Rai label.

Historical background

Though there is no historical record or evidence to indicate when these Khambus became Rais or *jimidars*, however, the possibility of them being conferred these titles when the Sens entered Nepal from the plains of Bengal, exists. It is also very likely that the Sens bestowed these titles on the Khambus to pacify them. From another angle, it could also be possible that these Khambus themselves created these titles mimicking the tribes of the southern plains. Therefore, on one hand the possibility of the word Rai emerging as stated above exists, while on the other hand other possibilities can be observed.

The word Rai is seen on a copper-plate inscription of the Jumla Raja Punya Malla and dated 1259 Shak sambat or equivalent to 1338 A.D. however, the word Rai is used in the inscription in the King's own way and doesn't indicate the Rai in question. If properly

studied, one can clearly see that this Rai word came into full use only after Prithvi Narayan Shah annexed Kirant areas to make a greater Nepal around 1831 B.S. or approximately 1774 A.D. The reason for the use of the word Rai is because Prithvi Narayan Shah appointed the village chiefs of that region as the local administrators and conferred upon them titles like Rai for the Khambu and Subba for the Limbu, and also provided honorary titles for their sub-groups. As time passed, these words began to engulf the whole group or tribe and thus the Khambus and their sub-groups became the Rai of today, while the Limbu and their sub-groups became the Subba. Other groups like the Sunwar became Mukhiya and the Yakkha became the Dewan.

The persons with titles like Rai, Limbu, Mukhiya and Dewan were given responsibilities like land reforms and revenue collection, after their *kipat* lands were demarcated. They were also the regional or area heads. *Kipat* means lands deeded to people but which are not saleable, thus the land reforms had advantages and facilities. Such *kipats* became hereditary rights and the title, which was also hereditary, began to be used to mean a separate class of people.

Totem (*Gotr*)

It is said that initially, Rai were of ten types and there is a reason for this. The Rai seem to have emerged from ten ancestors among whom five came from the north while the other five from the south. As time passed, the descendants of the five northerners began to be called Lhasagotr and the descendants of the southern emigrants were known as the Kasigotr. However, the question which makes us think is that those of the Lhasagotr were related to the Tibetan region, the Kasigotr section were in no way related to Kasi or Varanasi. If there did exist a relationship then it would be with the Hindu-Kush mountains located to the north-west of India. These Hindu-Kush mountains have been the focal point of discussion on the matter of man's evolution in Nepalese society, folk tales and other lore.

While the Rai of the Lhasagotr prefer beef, those of the Kasigotr loathe it. From this sort of difference, it can be assumed that the present day Rai emerged from the assimilation or union of the two separate ancestors and today also they are split into two separate sections to retain the vestiges of the union which we assume to have occurred in antiquity. But in spite of so much elucidation it is rather

strange that the *gotr* are overlooked or thought unimportant during the marriage practices among these people.

Septs (*Thars*)

Similar to the other tribes, the Rai also have many *thars* and *upa-thars* which are called *pachhas* and some are listed below.

Ochong Hang Salten, Ombole, Kulung, Ketra, Koyu, Khamla, Khaling, Khuk Khang, Gandha ang, Ghume, Tamchhang, Tubi hang, Thulung, Dalhang, Dasiangsamang, Dewa Raja, Dumi, Dungmali, Deoja (sa), Naika, Nakchong, Nachhereng, Namlung, Nechali, Newa-hang, Palemung, Faling, Bagle, Bangdel, Batu, Bantawa, Balali, Balung, Bahiang, Bolna, Bhola, Manthamu, Yangtongpa Yangdarang, Yamfu, Runghang, Salten, Rungchhengbung, Ruchhanebung, Rupabung, Rumdali, Ronong, Lengmuk, Lohorong, Sabhari, Sakchham, Sangbong, Suwarja, Sokeap, Sodengla and Sitang.

It is possible that there are many more *pachhas* than the above listed ones among the Rai social structure. These *pachhas* are evolved from incidents and places in the distant past. A single sub-group can contain two *pachhas* also. These *pachhas* are the basic elements necessary when Rais have to assess and establish agnatic relationships. Though Rais are almost all the same, every separate *pachha* has its own regulations and beliefs. For instance, the *Bantawa pachha Rai* are not permitted to consume mutton (castrated or uncastrated goat's flesh). While categorising these *thars* and *upa-thars* (*pachhas*), the Yakkhas have been excluded because it is seen that, from a cultural viewpoint, these Yakkha are quite suitable for placing as a category in between the Limbus and Rais. The reasons for this are many but foremost is that they have their own *bhasa* or language. Though these Yakkhas are spread around the kingdom, their concentration in the districts of Sankhuwasabha and Terathum, in the Koshi Zone of Eastern Nepal is seen to be a reality. On account of geographical reasons many Yakkha rites and rituals are similar to that of their neighbours the Rais and Limbus, as has been distinctly observed.

Thars and *upa-thars* or *pachhas* of many Rai coincide with their areas of settlement, such as the Kulunge Rai of Kulung, the Sotang Rai of Sotang village, etc. At this stage a question arises as to whether the place is called Kulung after the people or vice versa.

Physical characteristics

Rais are of mongoloid stock without any doubt as can be discerned from their facial features which consist of high cheek bones, flat or small noses depressed at the nasal roots, mongoloid folds on the upper eyelids, scanty facial hair and eyebrows, large ears and oblique (almond) shaped and small eyes. Their heads are large, bodies stocky and strong, moderate heights, facial complexion pink and healthy (though dark-skinned Rais do exist in profusion) and broad, square chests. These Rais are a tribe that looks slightly different from the other tribes in the kingdom and of mongoloid stock.

Language

While discussing the cultures of Rais, one must do so rather carefully, for one *pachha's* culture might be insignificant for another *pachha* and vice versa. Thus, a single Rai *bhasa* doesn't represent the whole tribe. Most of the main *thars* or their *pachhas* have their individual *bhasa*. These *bhasa* are in the Tibeto-Burman category and their scripts are classified into three types, namely-*Sirijanga*, *Rong* and *Chandrapuling*.

A sample of the Rai language and its Nepali and English approximate equivalents are as follows -

Rai (Generally used)	Nepali	English
<i>anka</i>	m	I
<i>khana</i>	timi	you
<i>cha wa</i>	pani	water
<i>sangtang</i>	rukh	tree
<i>hak</i>	hawa	air
<i>ba kha</i>	bumi	earth
<i>upal/opa</i>	buwa	father
<i>oma/uma</i>	numa	mother
<i>mana/duwachha</i>	manis	man
<i>mi</i>	aago	fire
<i>wait na</i>	tirkha	thirst
<i>anga</i>	ho/huncha	yes
<i>man</i>	hudaina/haina	no

Dress and Ornaments

Dress is determined by the locality these Rais inhabit. For example, the Ath Phre Rais of Dhankuta wear *mekhli* as is their custom, and could possibly have been adopted by the Rais of other areas. Thus it is seen that there is no actual uniformity of dress up among the Rais i.e. to say, the males do not necessarily wear the same sort of clothes throughout the kingdom. However, in the case of Rai women, they are seen to wear the typical *kaichi mar gunew*, *chaubandi cholo*, *tangdongma* or *tangkxonbi* (scarf-like cloth pieces on their heads) and *patuka* or long cloth pieces wound round their waists (similar to the girdles). Some Rai men and women use homespun cloth for making such dresses even today. In a majority, the Rai men wear *daura-surwal*, *patuka* (into which the *khukuri* is compulsorily tucked) and the Nepali *topi* which is a permanent fixture on their heads. Some wear waist coats or *lukunis* as they can afford.

Women wear ornaments like bangles of silver and brass, *reji*, *tilhari* or *kantha*, *naugedi* or silver *chandrahar* on their necks and silver *kallis* on their ankles (prevalent especially in Eastern Nepal). *Dhungri*, *bulaki* or *lawangfuli* on their noses, and *lurka* or *kaan dhungri* on their ears. Rich women wear a golden *ful* (leaf-shaped) on their heads and golden clips too. On their waists they carry *chhisinge khurpa*, a *binayo* and *murchunga* are hung on the lace (*tuna*) of their *cholis*, tie scented flowers and leaves on their *lachhas* (hair plaiting threads) and walk around with much freedom and enthusiasm, which is a unique and special feature of these *Rainis* (Rai women).

Life Cycle Rites

Navran

As is the procedure of the other Himalayan tribes in the kingdom, the Rais also use priests or brahmins also called *bahuns* to preside over important rites and rituals. They use their own priests also for performing certain rites such as the *kul pujas*. These Rai priests are known as *bijuwa* and they have to be of the same *kul* as of the family for which they are performing *puja*. When a son is born, after 5 days or on the sixth day the birth pollution is considered over while it is on the fifth day for a daughter's birth. Here too, the period varies as the Yakkhas observe 4 days birth

pollution for a son and three days for a daughter. After this period, the purification is done and the child is named by the village elders. While naming the child, it is customary that the name should be a memorable one, and in relevance to the place and time. For instance, a daughter born on Mangalbar (Tuesday) is called Mangali while it is Mangale for a son born on the said day. If the father of the child is working in India (Munglan) then the son is called Desh Bahadur and if a daughter then she will be Desh Maya (*desh* meaning country but here indicating India). The Rais of Okhaldhunga have a strange custom of slaughtering fowls for three consecutive days. If the child is a male then it is roosters and hens in the case of a female child.

Pasni

This ceremony involves the feeding of initial solid foods to the infant child and it takes place six months after birth if a son, while five months after birth if a daughter. On this occasion, various foods are placed on a *tapari* (leaf plate). In some places, it is imperative, as the custom demands, that the shaved or cleaned head of a pig is also placed alongwith the foodstuffs. On this occasion, the child is also presented with a plate, a bowl and new clothes by his or her *mama* (maternal uncle).

The *mama* has to feed the child with a rupee, *mohar* or other coins (made of silver) as per his financial ability and that money or coin has to be left in that *tapari* containing the foodstuff. This coin, used to feed the child is called *mukh puchhaunni*. If the child's parents are affluent, then they organise songs and dances to celebrate this joyous occasion. In places where the Brahmin and Ksetri influences have heavily permeated the Rai cultural structure, a Brahmin is used to purify the family after the period of birth pollution is over by using *gaunth* (cow urine), however, it is considered compulsory to accept the sprinkling of *jad* from the hands of a *bijuwa*. In places where the Hindu influence is extremely great, the child receives a Hindu name from a Brahmin and a Rai name from the *bijuwa*. While the Hindu name is used to make the child's horoscope, the name given by the *bijuwa* or Rai name is used in daily life, only. These days, however, this sort of practice has dwindled greatly and the Rais are reverting back to their traditional names with the Hang suffix denoting royalty or king.

Chhaewar

This is performed in the period after the child reaches 3 years and till he is five. This done for male children only. The *mama* is the relative who plays the key role in this ceremony too. While performing the *chhaewar*, a halter (rope used to tie cows) is put around the boy's neck and then only is his hair shaved off. When this hair falls as it is shaved off, the paternal aunt or elder sisters of the boy have to hold a *tapari* into which these locks drop. Then this *tapari* of hair is taken and thrown into the river or kept in a secret place. The other rites and rituals which follow are similar to those of the other tribes in the kingdom.

Marriage Practices

In arranged marriages or *Magi Biwaha*, the custom among these people is for the boy's folks to go and ask for the girl's hand. For this, two representatives or *lami* (matchmakers) are dispatched. These *lamis* are known as *kaliya* and they carry two *chinda* of *raksi* along with them. The quantity of *raksi* or the number of *chinda* is determined by the *thars*, meaning some *thars* require more and some less number of *chinda*. This *raksi* is some sort of present to the girl's folks. The village *panch* and elders are invited and then the *raksi* is distributed. Should the offered *raksi* be drunk by the girl's folks also, then it is taken as a sign that they are in agreement with the proposal and think the match is good. However, should the *chinda* of *raksi* offered be kept aside and *raksi* from elsewhere be distributed among the people gathered, then it is understood that the proposal has been rejected. *Kaliya* are made the butt of jokes and criticism is heavily launched at them by the girl's folks, as is the prevalent custom. Unless and until the *raksi* is not accepted by the girl's folks, these *kaliya* bear all the jokes and criticism with patience and stoic silence. However, once the *raksi* in the *chinda* is distributed and consumed by the girl's folks and all those present, the *kaliya* respond with equally strong criticisms and jokes where the butt is the girl's whole family. There is no offence taken as the proposal is accepted and the agreement of the match is sealed.

Though it is seen that Rais have a matriarchal society, however, patriarchy is also seen to have a strong influence and the clear evidence is that of the or *phupu cheli mama chela* (Patrilateral cross-cousin marriage) relationship in marriage being considered

incestuous. The *mama chela* (maternal uncle's son) and *phupu chela* (paternal aunt's son) must consider *mama cheli* (maternal uncle's daughter) and *phupu cheli* (paternal aunt's daughter) as their sisters and vice versa. Accordingly, regarding marriages, these Rais make sure that the mothers are separated by at least five generations and the fathers by at least seven generations, but of course, there are some Rais who permit marriages keeping a lesser margin in the generations. Thus, in marriages where the paternal side is not much cared for are called *had phora* (breaking of bones meaning disturbing the agnatic lineage) and should the maternal side be uncared for then it is known as *dudh phora* (breaking the milk meaning that the affines line age is disturbed). These sorts of socially hated marriage practices are found only in some sub-groups where it is permitted socially.

Chori biwaha or *Rakshas biwaha* and *Gandharva biwaha* are common and permitted in the Rai society. The widowed wife of a person, if married by the deceased's younger brother (*bhauju married by devar*) is not looked down upon and is socially accepted by the majority of Rais.

Jari biwaha is also quite prevalent among the Rai people. Prior to 1951 AD. there was authorisation for *jar hanne* among Brahmins and Ksetris. This *jar hanne* means that the *sadhu* (person whose wife has been taken away by another man) was allowed to kill his *jar* (the person who has taken away another person's wife and married her) at whichever place he was found or the *sadhu* had to make the *jar* crawl under his legs. However, this sort of punishment was not permitted among the Rais, instead the village *ipanch* or elders (council) would decide the matter and fix a certain amount of money called *jari* to be paid as compensation for the marriage expenses incurred by the first husband, and this amount had to be paid by the *jar*, after which he was entitled to keep the woman. This system is prevalent even today.

After the decision is made regarding the acceptance of the proposal, *baghdaan* has to be performed. To complete this ritual, the boy's folks must send gifts of food for the girl's household and this is known as *char kulko rit bujhaune*. Here, it is thought provoking to consider why the *char kulko rit bujhaune* is completed with such gifts. It is possible that there were initially four or *char* brothers in this region from whom these Rais emerged. The gifts consist or *koselee* consist of 18 *thans* of silver rupee coins, 4

to 5 *chinda* or *jad 2 chinda* or *raksi*, 10 silver rupee coins have to be offered separately as offering to the *dus (ten) kirant*. Those Rais who can afford present a whole pig which has been gutted and the hairs shaved off, while those poorer Rais just present a thigh of a pig as is the custom. The whole pig, gutted and shaved is called *do le*.

In reality, the *dus rupiya* (ten rupees) as gifts to the *dus kirant* are a sort of compensatory fee levied by the council and the reason is that these Rais prefer *chori* rather than *magi biwaha* (elopements and arranged marriages respectively). And also because *chori biwaha* are much more successful than *magi biwaha*. Thus, in the case of *magi biwaha*, a scene is enacted where the groom runs off with the bride, and since it is natural that the council fine the couple, so the payment of the *dus rupiya* for the *dus kirant* is relevant in this sort of way.

There exist very few cases of Rais marrying Brahmin or Ksetri women, but should such a thing occur, the woman is purified and brought into the Rai society by the council. Therefore, the progeny from this mixed union are also Rais and not considered as anything else. There are many cases where Rai women have had sexual relationships with Brahmin and Ksetri males and this is called *chepang-pareko* meaning fallen from grace or society-decadent. If such a situation exists, then the Rai female must not keep this matter a secret from her family. If she does keep it a secret, it is believed that the male other than Rai male with whom she has had the sexual liaison will become paralysed or lame due to the effect of the *siae* of the dead souls of the Rai female's ancestors. No girl would like to see her lover become a cripple, thus *chepang pareko* is known about very quickly and the guilty male's folks have to offer *char kulko rit* to the girl's family alongwith the *dus kirant* gifts of *dus rupiya*.

Besides the *magi, chori, jari biwaha*, there is also the *gandharva biwaha*. While on communal works, or going to *hats* (local weekly markets in rural areas) for shopping, or on trips to the jungle for foraging fodder for cattle, girls and boys get together to sing and dance for whole days and nights. Initially, the boys and girls dance in their own groups, but as the songs progress they slowly form pairs according to the queries and replies thrown across in the songs. Then they all dance holding hands and shifting forward and backward to the rhythm of the song and in pairs.

Sometimes, the boys and girls dance in pairs and holding hands right from the beginning. At the start of this singing, a song is sung which says they are about to commence dancing and that if there are any maternal and paternal kin folks in the vicinity, they should either leave the group alone or go away. When this is said, those relatives of the participants must sportingly leave the place and grant them their privacy. During this dancing session, if a boy and a girl like each other then it is customary that they run off and hide somewhere. Even if their parents are in the know how of their whereabouts, they pretend as if they are unaware. In this way, after a few days the custom of completing the marriage officially is observed. In such marriages also, the *char kulko rit* and the *dus kirant* gifts or fine have to be paid and the custom observed. In this way a *gandharva biwaha* is done.

In places where the Rais have been influenced by Brahmins and Ksetris, menstrual cycles of women are considered bad and pollution is observed for a stipulated period, but in areas where this Hinduistic influence is non-existent, such practices of menstrual cycle pollution observance is not practised. Also, child marriages are completely non-existent among these Rais.

As earlier mentioned, after the *char kulko rit bujhaune* and the *dus kirant* gifts are offered, then the *baghdaan* is done which completes the marriage talks and the date is fixed. In some areas inhabited by these Rais, the *char kulko rit bujhaune* is completed at the time of the marriage. *Baghdaan* has a great significance among the Rais and it is customary that the girl's father or any agnatic relative or guardian says that he or the family have given away their daughter once, twice and thrice they have given the flesh but not the bones. This signifies that they have given a woman from their family but she does not belong to their agnatic lineagewhich is called *had* (bone). This vow is made in the presence of all the council of elders. In this way, *baghdaan* is concluded. It is only after this that the daughter's *chulo* (kitchen or hearth) is considered separated from her family. This means that the girl's relationship with her original family is severed and she now owes her allegiance to her husband's family (in-laws), and her thar also becomes the same as her husband's. After this, even if this woman dies, her natal family are unaffected and do not observe death pollution.

The next step after the marriage is fixed is that of the *janti* going to the girl's house and is similar to that of the other Hindu tribes in the kingdom. The groom has to be dressed completely in white i.e. white *daura-surwal*, *patuka*, etc. Instead of a cap, the groom wears a turban which is of expensive silk or *muga* if he is rich, and should the groom be financially weaker then a white velvet turban is used.

The ornaments that the groom uses consist of a golden chain and a *kanta* (a necklace) by those rich enough to afford, but an ordinary silver chain for those common people. The bride wears an ornament called a *nathha* (*mundri* or nose ring) however, though found at places, this is gradually going out of style. Other nose rings like *dhungri*, *mundri* are made of gold. Besides these ornaments, they wear the *chepte soon* (golden disc-like ear rings), *soon ko phuli* (golden flower-like objects on heads) and *sirbandi* (golden bands on their heads), if they are affluent and can afford these luxuries. Necklaces consist of *golden kantha* mostly, but the silver *hansuli* is a compulsory item in ornamentation. Another necklace which is long and hangs till the stomach is worn by the Rai women. These necklaces are made of gold by those who are rich but the average women wear necklaces made up of many silver coins of the British Raj in rupee, eight annas and two annas denominations. These coin necklaces are called *patna*. It is possible that such coins were brought from Patna in India thus giving them the name. It is also customary for these women to wear silver bangles and sometimes silver *kallis* (leg rings or anklets) are also seen. The necessity of *tilhari* as in the Brahmin-Ksetri societies is not evident among the Rai women folk, though they have begun to wear *pote* (glass beads necklaces) as a sort of compulsory ornament. In place of *tilhari* they wear a necklace called a *naugedi* and *chandrahar*. The custom of wearing *muga* necklaces, by those who can afford, and glass or imitation *muga* by those who cannot is prevalent among these Rai women.

While the *janti* moves towards the bride's house, *Damais* are also seen to be included for the musical backing, however, the local *chyabrun* and other instruments which the Rais themselves play must also be present. It is also compulsory for the groom to have a black umbrella. The priest who presides over the marriage is definitely not a Brahmin but a Rai of their own group who is called a *bijuwa*. Prior to the *janti's* departure he sprinkles *jad* on the group and after that, they are all made to drink some *sagun*,

then only does the *janti* move out. At *chautara* and *deorali* (resting places and crossroads) they fire guns and the local Damai band strikes up with much enthusiasm. Here also, *jad* is distributed as *sagun*. When the *janti* reaches the girl's house, then also they show their enthusiasm by firing guns, playing music and dancing without inhibitions.

When the *janti* reaches the bride's house, they are welcomed and given a feast according to the financial capacity of the girl's folks. The actual marriage rites and rituals are commenced after this. For completing the marriage, a mature hen and a rooster pair are essential. These fowls are slaughtered by the priest on a whole banana leaf which is laid on the backs of the bride's folks. The fowls must bleed profusely, but should the hen bleed less then it is considered unlucky for the bride and should the rooster bleed less then it is unlucky for the groom. If both fowls do not bleed as much as they should then the Rais believe that the marriage will not last, but if the bleeding is profuse from both the fowls then the couple's life will be happy. So it is believed. After this ceremony, singing, drinking and dancing commences and this goes on throughout the night. The next morning, the bride bids a tearful farewell to her family and friends, then she goes with the *janti* towards the groom's house.

When the *janti* reaches the groom's house, the groom's mother or other respected ladies walk and sprinkle the compound with water poured from an *ankhora* (a brass *kalas* with a spout). Now the *bijuwa* lays a whole banana leaf on this purified area and slaughters a fowl on it and the blood is made to drip all along the way that the bride has to walk to go into the groom's house. This blood is to welcome the bride, who must deliberately step on the blood as she is taken into the house by the women present. This is known as *dulahi bhitraune* and is done in many tribal societies throughout the kingdom. Once the bride enters the house, she is made to perform *puja* to the *kul devtas* and *chulo* (three-stoned hearth) after which she is considered as having entered the *kul* of the house. This is followed by *dhog-bhet* (bowing or kow-towing) to all agnates (respected ones) or the groom's lineage and sometimes, it can be observed that this *dhog-bhet* is done by placing money as *bheti* or gift. Nowadays, Rais have also commenced performing marriages using the Hindu *yagyas* and calling these marriages *sindur biwaha*, since it is compulsory

toput *sindur* in Hindu marriages. This is indicative of the fact that the Rais have been slowly influenced by the Brahmin and Ksetris living in their vicinity. But when marriages are done by *bijuwa*, the *sindur* is not used at all. Instead, these marriages have a custom that the bride and groom have to consume curds and fish as *sagun*.

As earlier mentioned and due to its importance, it must be clear that *phupu cheli mama chela* or *phupu chela mama cheli* relationships in marriages are considered incestuous and within the same *pachha* as tabu. In spite of this, at some places, marriages between the same *pachha* and with maternal lineage kin do occur even when the paternal lineage has not completed the stipulated period of 7 generations and the maternal lineage of 5 generations. Also, the *devar* marrying his own *bhauju* (younger brother marrying deceased elder brother's wife) is also practised at places.

Death Rites

Among the important rites that Rais practice, the death rites are of great significance. If a person is sick and has reached a stage from where death is the only release, guns are fired as is the custom. On hearing the gunfire, the people all around converge at the origin of the sound.

After death, the corpse is cremated in some places, but mostly the Rais prefer the practice of burials. Every *thar* among the Rais have their own cemetery. If a Rai of one *thar* dies in a place where there are Rais of different *thars*, then the deceased's relatives must pay one rupee and 25 paise or *char anna* as *char daan* and purchase the land where the corpse is to be buried. This is the prevalent custom. A bamboo *khat* (bed-like platform) is constructed on which the corpse is kept or laid out and covered with a white cloth that is large enough to cover the corpse completely. Near the head of the corpse a sort of net is made and a *brass* plate is placed under the head and feet. The two big toes of the corpse are tied together with a strip of cane and a silver thread. Then a silver thread is taken from over the head and joins both ears to the chin. Quality of such threads depend on the financial position of the deceased's folks. In some cases, silver coins or strips are placed all over the corpse from head to feet, however, this custom is slowly going out of style. A *mana* of rice and a coin is also placed inside

the shroud as is the traditional custom. This coin is used to light the final *daag batti* or for any other ritual.

During a Rai funeral, the funeral goers must carry swords, *khukuris*, guns and such weapons with which they make noise (firing guns) and brandish. They also make sounds like - Hah! Hah! Hum! Hum! as they walk with the corpse. In case a funeral procession or *malami* has to cross a bridge, then the weapons are brandished towards the sky and earth, both left and right and the guns are fired prior to the crossing. After the burial or cremation also called *dahakarma* is over, the corpse is covered with earth (in burials) or the pyre is washed (in cremations), a *tongba* (bamboo container where fermented millet is placed and filled with hot water, to be drunk with a narrow bamboo pipe) is placed on the pyre or grave since this is considered a compulsory ritual. The brass plates which had been placed under the corpse's head and feet are taken back home, alongwith the coin placed on the chest of the corpse. These items are brought into use only after the purification is completed.

Rai graveyards are located on hill tops and cremation grounds are near river banks, however, mostly the hill top cemeteries are used since burials are more frequent than cremations. The Rai migrated to the plains bury their deceased at the edge of forests. It is customary for the relatives of the deceased to cry while the rituals are in progress. The corpse is placed in a rectangular hole in the earth, after which items like a *chinda* of water, a *khukuri*, a catapult and clay balls used as missiles, bow and arrows, a hubble bubble, a *chillum*, a plate and bowl for food, a *bhujungo* of *jad*, and a bamboo pipe which is put into the corpse's mouth, are put in. Then the hole is covered with earth leaving the other end of the bamboo pipe protruding out of the grave and for the next 7 days, *jad* is poured into this pipe daily. In some places, the corpses are buried in stone lined graves or 'stone coffins'. In some other places, alongwith the bamboo pipes, an *ulto lishnu* (*ulto* meaning upsidedown and *lishnu* meaning notched log ladder) is also placed within the grave, with the belief that the soul of the deceased can come and go using that *lishnu*. Most Rais make the above mentioned 'stone coffins' in cemeteries of their own *thars*, but there are some who bury their dead on roadsides and later on erect *chautaras* (open resting places) on these graves as has been observed.

Untimely or accidental deaths have different rituals in comparison to those occurring by natural deaths. It is not unknown for Rais to build wooden boxes where the corpse is placed and then the whole thing thrown into the river, but this water burial is a very rare practice. Even when giving water burials, the deceased's personal effects, favourite items, and such have to be placed within the box. This is the rite of the dead among the Rais.

When the funeral procession returns home, on the way they are provided with food and drink as per the financial capability of the deceased's household and should the procession include thread-wearing brahmins or *tagadhari* brahmins, then food and drink for them is made and offered separately. When these funeral gores return home (that of the deceased), water in a bamboo *sote*, *titaepati* leaves, and *totola* flowers are offered inside the house. These *sote* are many in number. In such offerings to ancestors, ginger is an item which is compulsory and the place for such offerings is in the *chulo* or hearth. The Rais say that they have two hearths, the *bhitri chulo* (or internal hearth) and the *bahiri chulo* (or external hearth). These *chulo* are called *ageno - aago* or fire and or place. The *bhitri ageno* are located inside the houses and cannot be seen from outside. Here, only Rais are permitted to enter as it is the holy of holies for them. The *bahiri ageno* are located outside in the outer rooms and is a common area for other people (such as guests) besides Rais. This is the area where food is cooked and others are even allowed to touch this *ageno*. But the *bhitri ageno* is only used for ritual purposes and touching it is considered sacrilegious by anyone besides a Rai. Near this *bhitri ageno*, *jad* and *raksi* are kept continually, because it is believed that should these liquors not be present, their *dewa* and *pitree* will not remain within the house and thus cause the household ill-luck and hard days follow naturally, as the Rais think.

When the funeral procession returns from the cemetery or cremation grounds, at one corner can be seen a pole stuck into the ground and it is called *deo-pitra gho cha* (token pole of the goods and ancestors) or an image of the deceased's soul called *pret atma gho cha*. When this pole is seen, it is a sign which warns passers by that a death has occurred there and it has not yet been purified. This pole is not to be touched by anyone other than the *kriyaputri* (son of the deceased who observes complete death pollution) and he removes this pole immediately after death pollution is purified.

The *kriya* (ceremony to purify the death pollution) is normally done by the *bijuwa* and according to their individual *thars*. Therefore, the periods of observation of death pollution vary from ten days to 7 days to five days to three days as per the *thar* of the deceased. The purification is done by the *bijuwa* who trusses up a hen in an immobile position, and places it on a *tapari* or a banana leaf alongwith a bow, arrows and coins. Then the *bijuwa* orders for *raksi* to be brought in a vessel, salt and oil in another and then he touches these and reciting the *Mundum* (sacred scriptures of the Kirant people) he sacrifices the previously immobilised hen.

This completes the ritual, and the *kriyaputri* is made to touch the salt and oil and then the household or *haqwala* is made to do likewise. This is followed by sprinkling of the *raksi* and once this is over, everyone is given *jad* and *raksi* to drink. From this day, salt and oil are permitted to be consumed by those observing the pollution and this is called *baran phukaune*. Their *sraddha* is completed after forty five days and this performed on a hill or on the side of the road. This ritual is commenced with the procession moving from the house to the accompaniment of musical instruments to the spot. While enroute, the party stops to consume *raksi* and *jad*, and as the procession moves, *chinda* are broken at various places as is customary. The *bijuwa* performs rituals to appease the *dewas* and *pitree*. This is done by offering blood sacrifices of fowls and pigs, followed by dancing and singing alongwith musical backing. When this ceremony has finished, then also while returning there is dancing among the old and young folks in the procession with musical instruments in full blast.

When this group reaches home, there also dancing takes place in the compound and both old and young folks are in action. After this, the villagers present the deceased's household with the digging implements such as *kodali* and also other weapons like *khukuris*, *karda*, *chulesi*, swords and also various foodstuffs, *jad* and *raksi*. Then these villagers are offered *jad* and *raksi* as *sagun* by the householders of the deceased. Such ceremonies are also done in the compound of the Thakali (eldest member of the village council) in some areas and it is thought that if done on Chandi Purnima, in the month of Jesth, the ceremony will be of great significance.

The other rites and rituals are already mentioned earlier such as the construction of a *chautara* in the name of the deceased and a barand *pipal* planted there side by side. This custom is seen to be quite prevalent not only among these Rais but also throughout the kingdom. In some places, *chautara* or *falaicha* (long bench-like structure made of wood) are erected where weary travellers can rest. Some of the more affluent people construct *dharamsalas* (lodging place for travellers and pilgrims), which is a custom borrowed from the other tribes of the plains who do so.

Among the Rais of Okhaldhunga, it is observed that should death occur, in any family, a chicken is cooked and the meat (curry) alongwith some rice is placed near the corpse which is laid inside the house. After doing this, they commence digging the grave. When this is completed, then only is the corpse taken out of the house and buried.

Religion

Since Rais are classified within the Kirant tribe, they have their own culture and religion *Mundum*, which is based on the principles of freedom and generosity. Regardless of tribe or religion, should the Rai council make a person touch grass and stones, this person can be assimilated into the Rai tribe. If a Rai marries a woman of another tribe (other than Rai) then she is also brought into the Rai tribe (*jat ma lyaune*) and given the *pachha* of her husband's (Rai male's) agnate lineage.

These Rais claim descent from the martial union between the granddaughter of the Earth or Marema and daughter of Nina with the Kirant Mahadev who roamed the regions of Simraongad and Bara Ksetr as mentioned in the sacred scriptures. Actually, Rais are Shaivites and their main deities are Shiva and Parvati (Sumdipang Paruhang and Sumnima) whom they acknowledge as their ancestors and protectors. Chandi is a goddess they worship thrice a year with great fanfare and is considered a tribal festival unique to the Rais.

Together with worshipping these deities as their ancestors, while performing *puja*, they call or invoke the names of their ancestors, from generation to generation and beg them to accept the blood sacrifices offered. Here, it is to be noted that many Rais state that the religion of the *Mundum* does not permit blood sacrifices it is worth considering when and how this tradition commenced.

Kul puja is given the main status among the other pujas, and things like ginger, millet *jad*, *chinda* and banana leaves are considered very important items and compulsory too. The other *pujas* they perform are *Sat Kanya puja*, *Pancha.Kanya puja*, *Siddha Shikari puja*, *Banko puja*, and *Kholake puja*. These *pujas* are done by the Rai *bijuwa*. As earlier mentioned, the Rai households have two hearths, among which the *bhitri ageno* is the one used for rituals and consists of three stones in triangular formation which is considered to be the *kul devta* of the Rai household. This hearth is not to be touched by anyone other than household members and twice daily, in the morning and evening, a fire must be lighted here. Food is cooked on this *ageno* when *kul pujas* are performed and the food is prohibited to be given to anyone outside the household, so distributing to people other than Rais is out of the question. It is believed that if anyone besides the household members eats this food, then convulsions and semi-paralysis occurs due to the anger of the ancestral *dewas*. Each stone of the *bhitri ageno* represents deities of these Rais. Even though these Rai people follow their religion of the *Mundum*, they also respect and worship Hindu deities simultaneously.

Besides the Dasai and Tihar festivals celebrated by a majority of the tribes in the kingdom, the Rais have a very important festival called Chandi. On the day of Chandi or Baisakh Purnima (full moon) they go to the Chandi Than (shrine of Chandi Devi) and celebrate this festival with great enthusiasm and happiness, singing and dancing. On this day, boys and girls all congregate at the area around the Chandi than and dance in long curved lines holding hands and swaying to the rhythm of the large drums that beat out the hypnotic beat of *sakeba seelee*, which is the name of this dance form. Chandi is a festival of the Rais which can be written about so as to form a book, but due to the lack of space more details are not possible, only the fact that the various *thars* or *pachhas* have their own rhythm and dance form of this *Chandi Nach*, but the basic structure is the same. After *Chandi puja*, the next important festival is *Bhume puja* which is prevalent among the Chamling Rais and is also known as *Phagu*.

Social Entertainment

Though it is a fact that Rais are extremely short-tempered, another fact absorbs this shock and that is they are lovers of peace too. They

are extremely fond of feasting where they drink large quantities of *jad* and *raksi* and consume pork. These are compulsory items which determine a true Rai, so they say. It is incorrect to state that these Rais are only interested in consumption of liquors, since there are artists and lovers of art in a great number among them. And to say that these people are lovers of music would also not be incorrect when one observe the youths playing on their *binayo* and *murchunga*, or when a young lass is seen with such an instrument dangling from a tassel on her blouse. The *binayo* and *murchunga* (jews hasp) are instruments played with the mouth and said to be unique to these Rai people within the kingdom, though this sort of instrument can be seen among the various nationalities of southern China, in Yunnan province. While one blows through the mouth, the fingers manipulate the instruments to produce exotic tunes. While a *binayo* is made from a piece of *malingo* bamboo, the *murchunga* is made of metal, mostly iron.

A *binayo* is made from a mature piece of *malingo* bamboo, possessing no nodes. It should be approximately 10 to 11 cms. long, 3 cms. wide and 1/2 cms. thick. Then, it is carved out with a *karda* or knife according to whatever specifications are necessary. When it is half complete, its overall length is about 9 cms., the width is about 2 cms. on one end and about 1 cms. on the other end. The 1 cms. end is the bottom and the 2 cms. end is the top. It is almost wedge-shaped.

Leaving less than 1 cms. at both ends, and chiselling less than a 1/4 cms. a place is made for typing a small thread. Once this is ready, leaving some space at both ends, slightly thick at the base and thin at the top, a tongue is carved internally. This tongue is about 6 cms. from top to bottom, but the thickness is about 1/4 cms. at the bottom and 1/2 cms. at the top. This cannot be seen from outside but when looked at from one end, it (tongue) can be seen as a thin strip. The carved top and bottom are tied with thin threads made of *sisnapat* (fibres of stinging nettles). This thread is used to hang the *binayo* when not in use and is caught across the mouth while playing the instrument.

Thus, when the thread is placed across the mouth, the bottom and top threads are held by the fingers of either hands and the top thread is jerked, rhythmically. This causes the tongue of the instrument to emit a vibrating sound. This tune or sound is manipulated by the

fingers, tongue and breath to produce various exotic tunes, which can be kept on the *sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni, sa* (do, re, me, fa, so, la, te, do) scale. This is the *binayo* of the Rais.

This *binayo* is made by skilled craftsmen in their homes, however, the *murchunga* cannot be made like the *binayo* and only the blacksmiths can make this instrument, since it has to be made of the metal iron. The *murchunga* is almost trident shaped and the central rod is 6 cms. from top to bottom, while the left and right prongs are about 3 1/2 cms each. The central piece which is extremely thin works like the tongue of the *binayo*. About 1 cms. of this tongue is twisted and raised at the tip and the remaining part is the functioning tongue. The lower end of the whole thing is tied with a string which acts as the line for hanging the instrument.

While playing the *murchunga*, the trident-like part is caught across the mouth and the fingers push the tip of the tongue, thus producing the vibrating sound, which is manipulated by the breath, fingers and human tongue as in the *binayo*. Here also the basic chords can be blown out.

The *binayo* and *murchunga* are popular folk instruments of the Kirant region. There are other instruments like the *chyabrung* which is like a large drum (akin to the *damfu* of the Tamangs). This percussion instrument is seen to be used on occasions and festivals in a sort of compulsory way. Towards evening, it is observed that in almost every Kirant settlement in the hills, the rhythmic beat of a *chyabrung* gives the twilight an exotic setting.

Economic status

It is seen that the main economic resource of the Rai people is agriculture. When not busy in their fields, they weave mats (*mandro* and *chitra*), *doko* and *thumche* (baskets) and such items from bamboo strips and sell these in the local markets or *hats*. Some Rai women also weave cloth out of locally available cotton, which they either sell or wear themselves. But the availability of machine made cloth is causing this home industry to decline sharply towards total extinction. Rai have migrated to the *terai* and taken up farming alongwith their neighbours the Satar, Tharu and Dhimal.

The Rai are people who are famous for their bravery, honesty and truthfulness. Though they possess very docile natures, if irritated they become extremely aggressive to the point of violence. A source of income is from the Indian Gurkha Regiments which recruit many of these Rais and also the British Gurkhas. This income source has contributed towards the material development of these people and to some extent even mental development has been achieved.

RAJBANSI

The Rajbansi tribe inhabit the area of Jhapa district in the eastern *terai*, but they are also spread around in the adjoining district of Morang. They live in communities with villages consisting of houses clustered together. The number of houses in these villages ranges from 10 to almost 100 houses.

Houses

The houses of these people are made from locally available raw materials like wood, bamboo, thatch and mud. They keep their houses clean and tidy and do not consider it necessary to have the doorway facing a particular direction (as is very important in other tribal house construction patterns). But if one direction proves inauspicious, then they rebuild the house facing another direction. Thus, Rajbansi houses are found to have doorways facing any one of the four directions. While one house is utilised as the kitchen, the other maybe used as the storeroom, bedroom or such.

They also have the tradition of constructing a separate house which is used by beggars or by strangers who need shelter for a night or so. This is also used as a parlour for guests or as a conference room. At the centre of these houses is a clean compound, where there is a hearth or pit for burning a fire during the winter season and where household members and other people gather to narrate ancient lore, simultaneously absorbing the warmth. The cowsheds are constructed quite a distance away from the dwellings, but not too far. The Thakur Than is situated to the south-east of the main house. Thakur is worshipped as *Kul Devta*, by these people.

Historical Background

Many scholars and historians have stated and it has been observed that the sanskritised Rajbansi and the unsanskritised Koche are very much the same kind of tribe, and that initially they were of one single tribe known as the Koche. These Koches had a very powerful kingdom, established by a man called Hajo. Later, Hajo's grandson, Bisu annexed the surrounding kingdoms and consolidated his kingdom, establishing a city called Koch Behar, which is still existent in India even today. The Brahmins were awed by this powerful Koche king so they elevated him to the Ksetri (warrior)

rank and conferred upon him the title of Rajbansi. It is after this that the Koche metamorphosed into the present day Rajbansi, as has been stated.

When attempting to calculate or estimate the antiquity of these people, it has been often heard, as stated by them, that they are an extremely old tribe, descended from ancestors who lived even before the Mahabharata episode, because they are aware of the fact that they are Koche, with a dramatically changed title Rajbansi. These people are also found to be mentioned in the Mahabharat Epic, where their King Kichak had sided with the Kauravas. It is said to be Bhimsen, the herculean Pandava, who slew Kichak in the area that is inhabited by these people today. This place is called Kichakabad. Thus it is observed, that among the ancient tribes, inhabiting Jhapa and Morang regions, these Koche or Rajbansi are definitely one.

Origins

It is stated that after the Koche king was conferred the title of Rajbansi, many Koches became Muslims and many did not desire to be called Rajbansi, thus these remained as Koche, retaining their traditions, religion, culture and tribal identity to a degree of purity. Though the Muslim Koche followed Islam, they identified themselves as Rajbansis. Therefore, it can be found that in Jhapa, there are 3 types of people: the branched Hindu Rajbansis the branched Muslim Rajbansi and those who did not change and still remain as Koche. In spite of these facts, there are scholars who identify these Koches as people of mongoloid stock and the Rajbansis as of Dravidian descent. There is a story that these Rajbansis are descendants of the progeny of a Bengali man and an Arakani woman. Regarding the migration of these people into the kingdom, the facts are hazy, however, on the basis of some a, it can be estimated the time was approximately 250 years to 230 years ago.

Physical Characteristics

Their skins are pigmented darkly, they are tough and of medium stature. They have short wide noses with round prominent nostrils and depressed nasal roots giving the noses a flattish appearance. Their eyes are narrow or slanted (almost almond shaped), large ears, thick and full lips and thick, black hair.

Sept (Thar)

These Rajbansi people claim descent from the Surya Bansi (solar dynasty) *Kstriyas* (warriors) and state their *gotr* as Kashya (Kasi- a holy shrine in the Gharwal mountains of Uttar Pradesh, India).

There are basically seven *thars* among these people, namely: Rajbansi, Lakhat Rajbansi, Rajpuriya, Koche, Ramaniya, Kahal, Koal Makra, Woang Rajbansi. Besides these, there are the Muslims too.

Language

These Rajbansi people use the language of the Koche, who have till today retained their culture and traditions as Koches. However, these who call themselves true Rajbansis do not use the Koche language, but instead speak a language of their own calling it *Rajbansi Boli* or *bhasa*. It is found that this language they speak is similar to the language spoken by the Bengalis of West Bengal in India, since many inflexions, intonations, words, verb usages, etc are the same. While these people speak their own language within their own community, when communicating with other tribes they use Nepali.

Family

Rajbansi families are of three types: joint or composite unilineal, nuclear or conjugal-natal, and composite-conjugal-natal or a mixture of both joint and nuclear under a single roof. Among these three types, the nuclear family pattern is most prevalent.

In a Rajbansi family, even after the marriage of the eldest son, he and his spouse remain in the same house, eating in the same kitchen, with no change except for the daughter-in-law or *buhari* being an addition to the household. This situation remains unaltered until the marriage of the next son. Up till this time, the head of the household (the father) is the sole authority and everyone is supposed to work and act according to his (father's) directions. It is after the second son marries that the nuclear families begin to emerge.

Rajbansi society is a patriarchal one and can be seen from the fact that after the death of the household head, the responsibility and authority are both transferred naturally to the eldest son. In spite of this, any rites or rituals that involve the family must be attended by all the sons, whether they are living within the same roof or in separate nuclear families. This is so, because the role of sons in Rajbansi society is of paramount importance. In the light of such glaring evidence a scholar has blandly stated that these people are of a matriarchal society. It can be thus stated that, the Rajbansi society is purely patriarchal and no evidence is available regarding their tendency towards matriarchy today.

Life Cycle Rites

Births

These people state that when women are pregnant, they are listened to. While pregnant, women, are not permitted to do many things. These are: heavy works involving lifting of loads, crossing large rivers, stepping over halters of horses and cows (cattle), looking at monkeys or a tree when fruits are being picked, helping out in the fields or orchards, and other community works. They are given a sort of rest period or pre-maternity vacation, so to say.

During the period of a woman's pregnancy, her husband makes various vows called *bhakals*, for the timely, proper and painless birth of the first child. This is so because these Rajbansi folks believe that should the first born die, then it is extremely difficult to save the others, born later, from death. If the first child dies, then during the second pregnancy, *pujas* are continually performed with the guidance of a *Gosai* (*dhami* or shaman) who is supposed to be a specialist in saving the lives of unborn children). The *sudeni* (local mid-wife) is called *dawani* and is from the *pani na chalne jat* (caste or tribe with whom any water connections do not exist, i.e. no one drinks water offered by them) also called untouchables.

These *dawani* perform the delivery of Rajbansi children. Initially, the umbilical cords are severed by these *Dawani*, but should such a person be absent, then the child's grandmother does this task or ritual (as it is considered by them). Immediately after this, the child is placed on a *shupa* (winnowing fan) or *nanglo* and the mother is made to sit on a gunny sack placed on a stone. Then a

rope is touched to the woman and her child and strung till a nearby well, and then *puja* to this well or *innar* is performed. While doing this *puja*, 5 dots or *tikas* are placed on the outside of the well's wall if the child is a male, and 5 *tikas* or dots on the inside if a girl.

This is followed by the child being shown the four directions and two or three days later, retaining two top-knots, the rest of the newborn's hair is cut off by a barber. Ordinarily, the child and the mother are purified after 10 or 11 days. On the day of purification, all the household members, including the servants, all have to cut their nails, hairs and have a bath (physical purification). Then the Adhikari or their priest, who has been invited to preside over this purification, performs the necessary *puja*. The water, in which the barber's razor has been rinsed, is drunk (actually only touched to the lips and thrown over the head) thus completing the ritual of birth pollution purification.

The naming of a child is based on his or her complexion, birthday, some memorable incident, someone else's name (ancestors, kin, etc.). If the first born has died, then the second born is given a hateful and undesirable name. This, they say, is done so that the gods may see but not like this child due to its name and so leave it with its parents, not taking it away like its elder sibling.

Pasni

The *pasni* or *bhat khuwai* (rice feeding ceremony-commencement of providing solid foods to the child) is known as *Khira Chhuwa* by these Rajbansi people. This ceremony is performed on a grand scale but only for the first son of the family. The sons born after this are not feasted with any ceremony at all. This *Khira Chhuwa* has to be performed before the child grows milk teeth. During this ceremony, the *Saryanarayan puja* is performed and then the *Khira Chhuwa* commences.

Here, the child's maternal uncle or *mama* first rinses the boy's mouth, feeds him with *khira* (sweet glutinous rice cooked in milk and spiced with raisins, cashews, peanuts, coconut pieces, etc. and sugar) and again rinses his mouth. This is repeated by the maternal aunt (*mama's* wife or *maiju*). After this is over, then only the other family members do the same but on a seniority basis. This is then followed by the maternal kinfolks. (As long as the child does

not commence uttering any sounds, his mother's parents do not eat any thing). In this *Khir Chhuwa* ceremony, the *mama's* role is vital, and this can be said to be applicable in most tribes in the kingdom. If the case is such that a real *mama* does not exist, then the child's mother makes a male her *dharma bhai* (ritual younger brother) and then this pseudo-*mama* completes this ceremony, performing all the rituals that a real *mama* does.

Bratabandh

This ritual of *bratabandh* is known as *karna chhed* among the Rajbansi and in their society it is stated that if a person has not had this ritual completed, then he is not eligible for marriage. Since there is no hard and fast rule that this *karna chhed* must be done within a fixed time, it can also be completed a day prior to the marriage. This ritual is performed by the *Thakur* or *Gosai* who does various *pujas* and blows some *mantras* (sacred incantations) into the boy's ears. This is also known as *kan phukne*, in some other tribes. Once the boy hears this *mantra*, he become purified is the standing Rajbansi belief.

Karna chhed is performed for females too and they have to begin wearing *kundals* (ear-rings), therefore, in anticipation, they have their ears pierced when very young. When Rajbansi females have their first menstruation or menarche there does not exist a custom of observing pollution as is the case with other Hinduised tribes of the kingdom. No importance is given to this natural phenomenon, which is contrary to many other tribal customs throughout the world.

Marriage Practices

Rajbansi communities practice *Magi biwaha*, *Dhaenijiya biwaha*, *Damdumai biwaha*, *Daguba biwaha* and the currently initiated, *Prem biwaha*.

While marrying, Rajbansi people are very careful and avoid the marriages between agnates - *had nata jogaune* (had meaning bone or agnatic kin, *nata* meaning relationship, *jogaune* meaning avoidance). According to their traditions, they must keep an interval of seven generations in the agnatic lineage and 5 generations in the matrilineal lineage. 7 generations must also be kept as an interval in their *guru kul* lineage and three generations in their *meet*

lineage (some what like the blood brother relationship in other tribes throughout the world). It is only after this that they are permitted to intermarry, however, this rule is not strictly adhered to by the Rajbansis themselves, as has been observed.

Magi biwaha or arranged marriages are frequent among these folks. When they marry in accordance with traditional rites and rituals, *subh dekha* is performed initially. In this ritual, the boy's or prospective groom's folks select a person who is known as *Kahuwa* (*lami* or matchmaker), and this man goes to the prospective bride or girl's house to arrange the matter of whether the girl's folks will go to see the boy or vice versa. If the boy's folks have to go to see the girl, as decided, then the boy's father goes with some of his relatives (agnates or matrilineal kin). The girl offers *dhog* (kow-tow or bowing) to all who go there i.e. elders only. If the boy's folks take a liking for the girl after observing her nature and other habits, the delegation return home and calling a *Thakur* they discuss the matter of martial union. Next is the part where the *Kahuwa* is sent to the girl's house with the message that the *subh dekha* was good and whether the girl's parents are willing to give the hand of their daughter in marriage. The *Kahuwa* returns with either a positive or negative decision.

In this way, should the girl's folks also like the boy and should they wish to see the boy's house and status, they send the message of their visit and date alongwith the *Kahuwa*. This traditional custom is called *Tilakhiwar*. After this, if the girl's folks wish to carry out the marriage, they send a *paan* (betel-nut leaf filled with various spices), *supari* (betel-nut) and an affirmative message to the boy's parents. This is also a traditional custom known as *Subaer paan*.

Once this is over, the boy's folks invite the girl's folks over for a ritual of *paan katani*, where they are presented with 300 to 900 *paans* by the boy's folks according to their financial capability. However, should the girl's party decline to accept this gift, there is no compulsion for acceptance.

Dahaeguwa is next and it is also called *Dalikhara* by these Rajbansi people. Unless this *Dahaeguwa* is not completed, the marriage is not considered as finalised or fixed. This ritual is done on a day convenient for both sides. The boy's party (number is predecided) go to the girl's house as guests. They are seated in the

compound is the presence of the village elders or *panch* and the girl is also present. In the presence of this august gathering, the boy's father presents the girl with clothes, ornaments, cosmetics, etc. for the marriage and the goods presented depend on the financial status of the person. Since these presents are the girl's property when she goes to her husband's house after the marriage, at this pre-marriage stage they remain as collateral. This ends the ritual and the boy's party return home, though they may possibly fix the date of marriage or *karal* at this stage.

The next step in the marriage is the presenting of foodstuffs, like fish, meat, sweets, milk, curds, etc. to the girl's mother and relatives in compensation for their troubles taken to rear their daughter. This ritual is called *Sandesh*.

Now, the time for determining the exact date of marriage and informing the girl's folks comes. This is known as *karali bhar*. Since, after the completion of the *Dahaeguwa*, it is understood that the marriage is over, so the *biwaha karan* is actually done later, thus they practice the *karali bhar* custom. Therefore, should any one of the couple die after the *Dahaeguwa*, then death pollution observance is effective on the living partner. Should the male die, then the female becomes a widow even before the actual marriage and vice versa.

To conclude the marriage with full rites, they perform the *Adibas*, then *Baerati Apit Chaphari* and finally *Bhar Bhat*.

Adibas among the Rajbansi means the day prior to the actual day of the *janti* or marriage procession. On this day, the tutelary deities or *ista devtas* of the girl's house are all worshipped and the girl is allowed to make a *meet* of her best girl friend. On this day, relatives and guests arrive as is the custom. The girl's elder sisters or cousins (aunt's or uncle's daughters elder to her) apply a paste of *baesar* (turmeric) and *kasa* and oil on the girl's whole body. This ritual is called *kasa kuta laune*.

Similarly, at the boy's place also, worship is performed to their *Ista Devtas*, *Kul Devtas* (ancestral deities or ancestors), *Sat Gurus* or *Ramanth*, *Thuni Thuniya* and such *Kul Thakurs* or familial deities. At night, the grandmother or the boy's *thuli ama* (mother's elder sister) fries the *kasa kuta*, which is then mixed with oil by the boy's *b h a u j u* (elder brother's wife) and

didis (elder sisters - real or cousins as mentioned earlier) and it is applied on the boy's body i.e. parts which are visible like the hands, face etc. On this night too, the boy exchanges a *dhoti* and *supari* with his best boyfriend and makes him his *misther* (the male counterpart of the female *mitini*).

The boy's *bhenajyu* (elder sister's husband or brother-in-law), *jawai* (younger sister's husband or brother-in-law), *phupu-bhenajyu* (paternal aunt's husband) and other male relatives wear new *dhotis* and then dig a hole in the earth at the centre of the compound. This hole is called *maruwa khuda*. The diggers are plastered with colours, water, curd, black soot, teased, and made butts of jokes by their female relatives such as *salis* (wife's younger sisters), *jethanis* (wife's elder sisters) and others present on this joyful and fun filled occasion. This is a tradition among the Rajbansi people. In this way, the eve of the marriage is whiled away in entertainment and pure fun at the boy's house. This is followed by the ritual where the barber gives the boy a haircut, nailcut by making him sit on *maruwa* and at this time once more the boy's sisters and cousins apply *kasa kuta* on him.

The next day dawns and the people are all ready to go to the girl's house in the *janti*, and the time is determined by the distance of the girl's house from that of the boy's. Prior to the departure of the *janti*, the boy has to perform the ritual of *Aam Mahalaune* which means that the boy has to wind *kacho* (raw) *dhago* (thread) five times around a mango or a mango tree and offer special *puja* on it. Such a *puja* is also done by the girl after the boy reaches her house.

Now the *Gosai Thakur* takes the boy to his *kul devta than* (ancestral deities shrine) and whispers some *mantras* into his ears. Then the *janti* and groom eat together, however, salt, rice, oil are abstained from by the groom, who is given other things to eat. After the meal is over, a 7 to 16 *haaths* (*haath* or cubit) turban, of red colour is wrapped on the groom's head. Even the groom's clothes are coloured. A *supari*, stuck through by a knife is given to the groom to hold and this is called *jeevan churi* (*jeevan*(life), *churi* (knife) or the knife of life). Now the *janti* commences its movement towards the bride's house. As was done in the groom's house, so also in the bride's house, songs are sung and these consist of musical criticisms flung at each others (bride's and groom's) households or families.

When the *janti* reaches the bride's village or vicinity of her home, it is obstructed by the local boys and girls who do not let the groom's *palki* (palanquin) pass. This is a customary procedure and is called *Ghat Teknu*. The obstructors demand *supari* and money as sort of ransom for the passage of the *palki*. When the ransom is paid, the *janti* moves forward and soon reaches the bride's house.

As they reach the bride's house's doorstep, the women present there begin to sing satirical songs and simultaneously extract the groom from his *palki*. Here, the custom that follows is for the bride's sister (elder or younger) to wash the groom's feet and this is how he is welcomed.

Towards the evening, the bride is seated in the *palki* and taken for *Aam Mahalaune* and to worship the *kul devtas* and this procession is accompanied by music and the villagers, en masse. When she is brought back, then the *bhenajyus* of both the bride and groom jointly construct a *jagge mandap* (place where the ritual fire is burnt and around which all the marriage rites and rituals revolve) and then the couple are taken there. The custom is for the bride to be tied up (almost trussed up) and brought to the *jagge mandap* wailing and lamenting rather loudly. Though it looks as though the marriage is forcible, in reality this is a very important tradition that must be adhered to, say these Rajbansi people.

While at the *jagge* the bride and groom each retains a bunch of bananas which are covered. The ritual commences with the groom's paternal uncle putting crowns or flowers on the heads of the couple, according to the tradition called *Chhat Pahiraune* (covering the head with a roof). This is followed by purification which is done by a *hajam* (barber), then the *Kanyadaan* (giving away of the virgin-bride) and the ultimate *sindur halne* (pouring vermilion powder on the bride's hair parting by the groom). This *sindur halne* ritual is as follows: The groom stands directly in front of the bride, holding a *gosen* (plate) on which is placed a *paan*. On top of this is placed the *sindur* and then a *khuni* (cane stick). The groom holds the *gosen* and pours the *sindur* on the bride's hair parting thrice. Though other tribes have the custom of rubbing or placing the *sindur* by using the thumb and index fingers among the Rajbansi people, this is tabu and it is customary to pour the *sindur* onto the hair parting without touching the *sindur* with their hands.

Once this *sindur halne* ritual is done with, the groom has to perform worship or *puja* with *dhan* (paddy) to the bride. This is followed by the bride's kinfolks presenting gifts and this is called *chumaunu* by them. This ritual ends and the marriage is considered complete, in a way.

The next day, prior to bidding the bride a tearful farewell, the groom is fed with *khir* (sweet rice) by the bride's kinfolks or his new in-laws. This *khir* is not immediately eaten or touched by the groom, but instead he begins to make demands for things he desires. As long as these demand are not fulfilled, the *khir* remains untouched. It is eaten only when the demands are met with. Then the bride and groom are placed in the *palki* and the *janti* joyfully returns to the groom's house amidst singing, dancing and music.

The groom's kinfolks are ready and waiting for the *janti's* arrival and the moment they hear that it is on its way, a grand feast is laid out and this is called *Bhar Bhat*. The *janti* arrives and stops at the main door of the groom's house. The mother and sisters of the groom await with a large *nanglo* (circular winnowing fan) containing *dhan*, *diyo* (oil lamp), mango leaves, mirror, comb, *paan*, *supari*, etc. This *nanglo* is called *Chalni batti*. The couple's feet are washed by the groom's sisters, and then they are taken to the compound to rest for a while, where those present begin to offer the couple presents. The feast follows and here relatives, friends, neighbours, etc. are all invited and fed with food and drink. While the bride doles out *Lal Bhat* (red coloured rice), the groom distributes curd.

The next day, the couple are kept in the compound while their heads are massaged with oil and their bodies are given a rub with *kasa kuta*. This is followed by the groom being carried away by his *bhenajyu* while the bride by the groom's *didi*, or by his *bhauju* for bathing. This carrying away ritual is called *Basyasnan*. After the couple return from their baths, entertainment is provided by these present who play various kinds of games.

Eight days after the marriage, the couple go to the river and holding hands (one hand each) dip themselves in the water, simultaneously. Who ever surfaces with more stones is considered lucky and who

has more sand is unlucky. This customary ritual is called *Aathubari*.

On the ninth day, the bride is taken away to her house by her kinfolks, who come on this day to fetch her. Eight days after this the groom's female kinfolks go to the bride's house and bring her back. This custom is called *Saangna Maangna*. In the first year of marriage, the girl spends the whole month of Bhadra with her parents (*maiti*) as is the traditional practice, even among other tribes in the kingdom.

The next kind of marriage is *Damdumai biwaha*. This kind of marriage is for those who are financially weak. The boy takes the girl to his home and they are considered married, though not ritually. Thus, the couple can get ritually married when their financial position is better in the future, when they have a few children too. This is considered absolutely practical and socially normal procedure.

There are also *Dhaenijiya biwahas*, where the person who wants to marry off his daughter, preselects, and so to say books a boy in advance i.e. the boy resides uxori locally (with his wife's folks). This boy has to work under the orders and direction of his father and mother-in-laws or *sasura* and *sasu*, respectively. Therefore, since the boy remains as a *ghar-jawai* (son-in-law residing at wife's place), in his *sasurali* (in-laws house), the marriage, which occurs at a later date, is also performed at his *sasurali*.

Widow marriages are known as *Daguba biwaha*. There are no rites or rituals involved here. This sort of marriage occurs, when a person (mostly another widower) begins to live with this widow in her house. It is an accepted form of marriage by their society and is neither criticised nor encouraged. Such marriages are minimal among these Rajbansi people.

Religion & Festivals

Judging from their ties and rituals, it can be stated that they are adherents of Hinduism. They worship various *devis* and *devtas*, but the *puja* to the goddess *Kali* (female *shakti*-energy) is carried out with great fanfare and enthusiasm. Every

village has a separate hut dedicated to this goddess and it is here that she is propitiated. While in some huts, mud mounds are coloured and worshipped, other huts contain images of Kali at the centre, flanked by faires on both sides. On some roadsides, banana trees are also planted, where the worship of Masan Kali is done. In such places, the Rajbansi people state that they bury *puthlas*. These *puthlas* are mounted on horses. The *Nagas* (snakes) mounted on donkeys are also worshipped by these folks.

Every village has an individual *gram* (village) *devta* (deity) and separate from other villages. In some villages, this deity is housed in a hut while in other villages, it is placed beneath a tree. Among the deities they worship some are Sarwamangala, Bisahari and Dulai Chandi.

Puja is also performed to a man's skull or *khappar*, and to clay deities located in the their fields. These clay deities are worshipped in the fields to ensure protection of the crops from natural disasters and the *khappar* is worshipped so that *bhuts* and *preths* (demons and spirits) do not trouble them. The Rajbansi people who worship such deities naturally do dabble in the realm of *jadutona* (white or black magic), *mantra-tantra* (incantations and spells) and the priests of such activities, the *dhamis* and *jhankris* act as mediators.

Rajbansi worship Bisto Thakur - the water god, Burma Thakur - protector from fire, Pawan Thakur protector from storms, Basumati Thakurani - and Mahakal Thakur - god of the mountains and forests. There are other deities such as: Shiva Thakur, Dharam Thakur and Laxmi Thakurani.

Rajbansi festivals are called Pawani. Though the Hindu festivals of Dasai and Tihar are celebrated by them, they do so in a different way. On the Astami (eighth day) and the Nawami (ninth day), of Dasai, blood sacrifices are offered to the goddess Durga as is done by other Hindus, but on the tenth day or Vijaya dashmi (*tika*), these people do not wear any *tika* or *jamaro*. Similarly, in Tihar too, they perform Laxmi Puja in their own way, but the custom of Bhai Tika is not at all prevalent.

Besides the above festivals, there are some unique to the Rajbansis and reflect their socio-cultural importance. These festivals are: Dol Siruwa, Dol Pawani, Bhaedae Khaili, Teesta Budi, Siruwa Pawani,

Biswa-Siruwa, Rung-Siruwa, Kad-Siruwa, Aasari-Ghaesari, Dudhi-Kad, Jaitra, Lakhi puja, Bhaktiyar puja, Jituwa Pawani and Ananta Dora.

Death Rites

Rituals differ according to the age of the deceased in Rajbansi society. If a child, who has not yet grown milk teeth, dies, it is buried and death pollution is not observed. In the case of the deceased being older than the toothless infant, death pollution is observed from 3 to 5 days. Adults are either buried or cremated according to the desire of the surviving family members. Here also, a classification exists i.e. while old women, young girls and boys are cremated, old men are buried.

In the society of these people, the deceased is bathed, clothed in white clothes and laid out in the compound with his head towards the north. It is only after this that the message of death is sent to the concerned relatives and kin. Though the people are aware of the death, they do not come for the funeral unless the message is received. These funeral goers or *malami* are called *kathiyar*. Thus, when the *kathiyar* arrive, they bow down to the corpse or perform *dhog*, and present money as is customary. Now the making of the *khat* (green bamboo structure for carrying the corpse, like a bed) ensues. This *khat* is called *aanchi* by these people. The corpse is placed on this *aanchi*, covered with a white shroud and lifted. At this time, all the *kathiyari* must shout unanimously - the name of lord Vishnu. To the blast of a conch shell, or *sankha*, and the shout of the funeral procession at regular intervals, the corpse is taken to the place of burial or cremation place which has been decided earlier. The *kathiyari* members carry digging implements or *kodali* and a *handi* or earthenware pot. While the males walk in a group along with the corpse, the women who belong to the deceased's clan follow in a group of their own. They carry a *handi* filled with a semi-solid mixture of water and cow-dung, which at intervals, they turn back and sprinkle with a broom, crying continuously. In this way, the funeral reaches the selected spot. This *handi* is called the *Dukhaer Handi* and it is smashed at the point which is half way from the place of burial or cremation and the deceased's houses. After the ritual of burial or cremation is over, everyone has a bath in the nearby river or ritually sprinkle water on themselves should it be a burial at a site where water is scarce.

Cremation - Once the corpse is reached at the *ghat* and is to be cremated, it is placed in a north-south direction on the *chita* (pyre). This is followed by the pouring of *ghyu* or oil over the corpse and then the *kriyaputri* (son observing the pollution and who later on has to say in *kuro*) throws some earth on the corpse thrice, after which he fires the *chita*.

Burial - If a corpse is to be buried, then a hole, which is large enough for the corpse is dug. The digger goes into the hole once and then comes out and only after this the corpse is placed inside this hole with the head towards the north and an oil-lamp is lit and placed near the head. This lamp is called *chirag* by these Rajbansis. Now a piece of the shroud is torn off and tied around the *kriyaputri's* neck, where it has to remain for twelve more days. This cloth piece is called *halka*. The person who has the *halka* throws three handfuls of earth into the grave and then the *kathiyari* follow suit. The grave is then filled in with the surrounding earth and the ritual is completed.

A bath is compulsory for the *kathiyari* after the burial or cremation. In memory of the deceased and with the *Thakur's* orders, a white piece of cloth is nailed on all four sides of the grave or cremation site and called *chanduwa*. Underneath these a *handi* is placed and all around it holes are punctured. A stick is then measured to the size of a *kodalo* and this stick is broken into pieces and left there while the *kodalo* itself is taken back home. When women bathe after the funeral, they also offer water in the name of the deceased. They also break three sticks and throw these pieces into the river and then they return with some sand from the river bank, in the case of a cremation. While returning home, either the deceased's *buhari*-daughter-in-law, or a main woman of the household draws three parallel lines across the road and tells the deceased to go to a place, whose name she utters in here mind, and shows the way. This is also done by the *kriyaputri* when he returns along with the *kathiyari*, but the difference is that he makes these parallel lines with a *kodalo*.

At the main entrance of the house, where the death has occurred, a fire made of dung-cakes (cow dung and straw mixture) and water are kept. The *kathiyari* returning from the *ghat* or cemetery have to wash their feet and hands with that water, touch the fire with their hands after which they are permitted to enter.

Three days after the funeral, i.e. counting from the following day of the funeral, *Teen Sinan* is performed, where relatives invite people

to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs of a religious nature). The house is cleaned or washed with a thick mixture prepared from cow dung and mud. This is *suduwad* and on this day the daughter-in-laws of the house, or if none exist then the daughters, gather in the compound to make a batter of *bel patra* (wool apple residue of mustard pressed to obtain oil) mixed with *pina*.

On this day, all the people go to the *ghat* to bathe and perform all the rites and rituals fully. While going a group sings *bhajans* and the *kriyaputri* carries *pina*, *diyo* (oil lamp), *ghyu*, bananas, milk, *paan*, *supari*, etc. At the *ghat*, all the people present shave their heads, though this is not compulsory, as is the nail cutting ritual. The *pina* is rubbed on the shaved heads and then these people bathe, while the *kriyaputri* removes his clothes which he has been wearing since the day of the funeral. While returning home, the *kriyaputri* carries water in a *lota* or *kalas* and sprinkles it as he walks till he reaches home. Prior to entry, he has to wash his feet and touch the dung cake fire.

On this day, the women folk also carry *pina*, *diyo*, *ghyu*, bananas, etc. and go towards the *ghat* crying. After they rub *pina* on their hair, they bathe and perform *pind puja* with the items they have taken with them. After everything is over, they collect some sand from the river bank or *ghat* and carry some water in *lotas*, which they sprinkle as they move back towards the house. As they reach the house they also wash their feet, touch the dung cake fire and throw the sand onto the roof of the house prior to entry. Once all this is over, the *kriyaputri* is made to stand in the compound where the people gather and touch his feet and bow down to him or perform *dhog*. Once the *Teen Sinan* is over, pollution has to be observed only by the kin, while the others are purified. This is what has been learnt from the Rajbansis and what they consider as their tradition.

On the twelfth day, after the death, rituals similar to that of the *Teen Sinan* are repeated i.e. going to the *ghat*, etc. On this day, the ritual of eating *katto* is also done and also very prevalent among these people as has been stated by the Rajbansis themselves. (*Katto* means the small piece of the deceased's flesh mixed in food which is eaten by a priest or person so that the deceased's soul is propelled into the heavenly realms. Actually, a Hindu belief). There is a grand feast organised and on a banana leaf, a little of the various foods are placed in the name of the deceased. The following morning, before

the cock crows, this is taken outside the village and thrown away.

On the next day (thirteenth day), the *Thaemali* is performed. Initially the compound is cleaned with a mixture of cow dung and mud and water, the turmeric, water, milk, etc. are placed on the earth and the son, *jawai*, and other kin of the deceased circle around these items five times. Then they prostrate themselves on the ground (on their bellies) and perform *Thaemali* or remembrance of the deceased.

This is followed by the deceased's householders distributing money to the *Thakur*, *Gosai*, *Bhajan group* and *hajam* as per their financial ability permits them. Then all the above persons are thanked and wished farewell, thus concluding the rites de passage.

Dress & Ornaments

The Rajbansi people dress up in a very simple way. The men folk wear knee length *dhotis*, and *langautis* (loincloths), while the women wear *paetanis* which consist of a piece of cloth wrapped around to cover their breasts and lower torso till their knees. These are their traditional clothes, however, they have begun to wear modern clothes now a days.

Rajbansis do not have the custom of their married women wearing *sindur*, cutting and combing their hair and wearing *tika*. They mostly wear silver ornaments. Married women wear silver chains, wristlets, bangles and *churi*. While making such ornaments, they use almost one to 1.25 kilograms of silver, meaning their ornaments are extremely heavy.

Foods

Their staple diet is rice. Ordinarily, they eat the usual Nepalese food consisting of *bhat*, *dal* and *tarkari* (rice, pulses and curry). *Sale roti* is cooked only on certain occasions or when guests arrive. They seem to prefer to eat maize and wheat. In Rajbansi society, they all seem to like a food called *panta bhat* meaning cooked rice soaked in water. This is soaked the whole night and eaten the next morning. They throw away the water and then pour some oil and add salt to this dish. Onions are also used to flavour this *panta bhat*. Though meat consumption is permitted in their society, they do not like people who eat pork, buff and chicken and also those who drink intoxicants. Though these folks use earthenware pots and metal

utensils, guests are served on banana leaves which they say is the way of showing their greatest respect in their society.

Economic status

Rajbansis are agriculturists and they survive on the produce of their labour. They are unable to adapt to any other profession and do not desire to do so. Thus, their income is limited and consequently their economic standard never rises. The reasons for this economic stagnation are: extravagance; possession of very little cultivable lands; great population increase; unwilling to accept modern farming techniques, to mention a few, as has been observed. Livestock rearing is also done by the people, as has been observed, but only as an economic contingency on which they can fall back. Bulls and buffaloes (male) are seen to be reared under some sort of compulsion i.e. till the land. They do possess cows, buffaloes (females), goats, chickens, pigeons, etc. for milk and proteins. They are found to carry their farm produce like milk, curds, *ghyu*, etc. to the nearby local markets or *hats* and the money they earn is used to add a slight boost to their sagging economy.

Besides livestock breeding and farming, they are good weavers and some are also employed in government or private sectors. This is another source from which they draw extra money into their community. But all these are not enough and the Rajbansi are still in economic doldrums.

RAJI

Prior to them attaining their present status, the Raji were nomadic hunter-gathers, eating the flesh of hunted animals, roots and tubers of the forest dug up from the earth and various fruits that grow wild. At a later date, they split into various sub-tribes that settled in western Nepal and some places adjacent to but on Indian territory.

The largest settlement of these people in Nepal is in the district of Kailali in Bhurwa village lying in Khailad VDC and Lakhrayan village within Lalbhaji VDC. There are more than 60 to 70 houses in these places. Another Raji settlement is in the hilly areas of Soldah and the outlying hill villages. Besides these places, they inhabit areas in Dang Deokhuri also.

Origins

Regarding the origin of these Raji, there is nothing definite to prove their tribal identity. Besides assumptions and hypotheses, no concrete evidence is available.

Many scholars relate them to a more developed tribe branched from the Rautes, though the fact is that these Raji dislike and thus disassociate themselves from anything related to the Raute. Some researchers have advanced the hypothesis that the Raji are a branch of the Majis, while others have hypothetically used the lingual angle to define the Raji. Another way for assessing them is by judging from their characteristics of openness, straight forwardness and agreeable nature, they are always *raji* (willing) to do anything. Thus, gradually they were affixed with the name Raji.

In spite of all the above assumptions, in Raji society, the story of their origins is quite different. This story is heard from the Raji who inhabit Kumaon Hills and have settled at Askot village. The story, according to Raji sources is as follows:

There were two Rajput brothers at the time of creation. The elder brother was fond of hunting, so he began to live in the forest. Thus, the younger brother became the king. After this, the king told his elder brother to live permanently in the forest as he could fulfill his desire to hunt. From that time, the elder Rajput brother settled permanently in the forest and began to call himself Raji.

In spite of the controversy regarding the origins of the Raji, it is a fact acknowledged by all that those of this tribe, residing within the kingdom are concentrated within Surkhet district in the village of Ghatgaon. Scholars have labelled them under various names like Ban Manis, Ban Rawat, Ban Raja, Raji, Raute in their writings. But the Purbiya Raji wish to be known as Faan (Faas).

Population

When attempting to gauge the population of the Raji, it has been observed, according to the 2009-11 B.S. census, that they number 1514 heads totally. Among these, 334 heads were located in the western hills and 1180 heads in the mid-western and far-western *terai* areas. But in Sawar only 801 were recorded. Currently, their population is estimated at 1300 heads, approximately. The main reason these Raji are facing extinction (as seen from their dwindling population) is, it is thought that they have stopped speaking their own language and use Nepali also, they migrate from their places of origin and interact with other tribes freely and in this way lose their originality, assuming pseudo-identities which are not counted in the census.

Houses

Even today a majority of the Raji do not settle permanently and thus do not construct permanent dwellings, on the contrary, they live in haphazardly clustered (slums) settlements. These temporary settlements are shifted to other places after every 2 to 4 years. Their houses consist of square and triangular roofs and built in a line with clusters of 5 or 6 houses with common walls.

Family

The Raji live in joint families because they prefer this sort of residence pattern. The special feature of this sort of residence pattern is that it is based on social and economic factors and must be appreciated. However, this exists only as long as the household head is alive. After his death, the family breaks up into smaller nuclear units. The lands and cattle and other property are divided equally among the sons of the household head. In any Raji family, the eldest male member of the family is considered the natural head.

Physical characteristics

The Raji resemble mongoloids in facial features, though they possess brown or very dark skin. They have elongated foreheads, broad, noses sometimes depressed at the roots, but not so as to make the face flat, they have very little hair on their faces, though beards are seen to be grown frequently, but always thin and sparse. Moustache growth is very scanty. Generally the moustache grows in patches on both ends of the upper lips. Their body structures also indicate their mongoloid character, however, in comparison to other Tibeto-Burman speaking mongoloid tribes, this feature is extremely less among the Raji.

Sept (*Thar*)

Although the Raji were initially one tribe, they gradually split up into various sub-tribes or septs. This caused the diversification of their language and culture and slowly the various smaller tribes began to be assimilated into the larger tribes. This is illustrated when we observe that currently they are divided into only three major septs with dis-similar cultures. The currently available Raji are: Purbiya Raji, Naukale Raji and Bundale Raji.

Though the Purbiya Raji have migrated from their home region of Surkhet, they, however, remain within and around the Bheri Anchal region always. These Raji possess customs and manners similar to that of the other Raji, and some customs of theirs are akin to the Maji tribe.

Naukale Raji are settled in the Kailali district, in the villages of Soldah and Badi. Thus, customs and cultures are similar to the Purbiya Raji. The Naukale Raji also possess an independent language. If this language is used as a measuring yardstick it is stated, by the linguistic experts, that it is similar to the language spoken by the Majis and Purbiya Raji.

A large population of the Bundale Raji inhabit the areas of Khailad VDC and Lalbhoji VDC. In the process of migration, it is observed that they have moved to places like Bardia, Kanchanpur and other nearby areas. These Bundale Raji are the third sept and constitute a majority in the whole Raji structure. They too possess a different language.

Language

On analysis of how these three Raji septa or *thars* possess their individual languages it can be assumed that they separated and migrated to various places where on settling and remaining for long periods, they assimilated or were influenced by the dialects of the local tribes.

Accordingly, it is seen that the Purbiya Raji language consists of a mixture of various dialects spoken by the other tribes of the Mechi zone. The Dotaeli dialect seems to have influenced the language of the Naukale Raji. The Bundale Raji speak a language consisting of a mixture of *terai* dialects since they inhabit the *terai* belt.

On looking at the Raji languages, it can be estimated that these three different types cannot be classified into any of the existent categories, since one *thar* of Raji does not understand the language of the other *thar* and such. However, in spite of such a drawback, the linguistic scholars have placed the Raji language in the Tibeto-Burman category.

Life Cycle Rites

Births

After the birth of a child, birth pollution is observed for seven days during which period the woman who has given birth is kept in quarantine *orkuna rakhne*. It is only on the eighth day that she is considered purified. However, due to the influence of other tribes, living around them, the Raji have been influenced and observe this pollution for eleven days.

Whether it be the birth of a son or daughter, no ceremony is performed and no ceremony called *navran* exists among these people. According to their wish they name their progeny within the first year at anytime. While naming the child, they keep in mind the circumstances surrounding the birth. They do not have any customs of *chhaewar* or *bratabandh* among them.

Marriage Practices

When Raji youths reach the age of 15 or 16 years, it is estimated that they have come of age and thus they prepare for marriage. If the

male reaches the age range of 22 or 25 years, and he desires to marry, he is classified as an old man, thus the custom of early marriage is prevalent among them. While marrying, the age difference of the male and female is preferred not to exceed the range of 4 to 5 years.

While marrying the rites and rituals traditionally prevalent among other tribes is totally absent among the Raji. If the marriages have to be consummated soon, even the unauspicious month of Marga is used. It is unnecessary to fix a definite date time (*lagan*) and for marriages among these Raji. After discussion among the boy's and girl's parents and kin, the marriage is performed.

Two types of marriages are prevalent among the Raji. One is *Magi biwaha* (arranged marriage) and the other is *Baljapati biwaha* (forcible marriage). When going to ask for the girl's hand, a sort of curriculum vitae of the prospective groom is presented. This sort of discussion is never opened without the prior consumption of *jad* (millet beer) and *raksi* (home distilled alcohol). After the settlement of this matter, the date is fixed and everything is readied.

On the actual day of the marriage, the *janti* or groom's party go in a procession to the bride's house where they are treated with great respect and given a feast. After the rites and rituals are over during the night, the next morning the *janti* leave the bride's house with the bride and precede towards the groom's house. While taking the bride she is carried on someone's back.

In such marriages the groom's folks present the bride with ornaments and clothes. This is how a *Magi biwaha* is carried out. Once it has been decided which male marries which female, there is strict adherence to this union, however, if this union is annulled due to some reasons, then the boy forcibly takes the girl to his house and marries her immediately. If it is the boy who breaks the arrangement, then he is abducted and taken to the girl's house and then forcibly married to the girl. This sort of marriage is very prevalent among these Raji and is classified as *Baljapati biwaha*. As far as rites and rituals are concerned, the most important and only existent ritual is that of *sindur halne*.

Satti biwaha also exists among the Raji and this means a sort of exchange. Here, the bride does not have to be presented with these

ornaments and clothes as in *Magi biwaha*, but either the groom's younger or elder sister is married to the bride's younger or elder brother. In this way the terms and conditions of the marriage are met with, concluding the marriage.

Matrilateral cross-cousin marriages are prevalent among these Raji and also marriages between boys and their *bhauju's* sisters or *soltinees*. These are preferential marriages and indicate the expression of nuclear communality through these endogamous liaisons. Divorce or separation is also a common feature among these people. Widow marriages are not prevalent, but not rare also.

Death Rites

Corpses are buried as is customary among the Raji. The householders of the deceased do not perform any rites or rituals whatsoever. They do not have any custom or tradition of death pollution observance or abstinence from eating particular foods as exists in other tribes in the kingdom. However, they are observed to perform some rituals which are essential to block out the soul of the deceased from returning to the village of the living Raji.

These folks have the custom of offering *pani* (water) as a token to their *pitree* (ancestral spirits) and this may be, in a way, called the *kriya* among Raji society. Some who are able, perform this ritual early, while others do it later. On the day of offering *pani* to their *pitree* the Raji sit together in a very intimately communal circle and partake of foods such as fish, meat, *raksi*, etc. After this feast is completed, it is believed that the soul of the deceased has finally crossed over or *tareko*, to the heavenly abode.

Religion & Festivals

The Raji worship *deotas* and *deotis*. Their main deities can be classified into *gaon ko deota* or village deity and *kul deota* or tutelary deity. The *gaon ko deotas* are kept in small shrines or *thans* within the villages, and the whole community worships here. The caretaker of this *than* is the *pujari* (priest). The *kul deota* is worshipped through the physical medium of a mud heap outside the house but within the compound. This *deota* is worshipped by the householders only. Jagnanali Nagrahi is one

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such *kul deota* worshipped during the Laxmi Puja in Tihar. *Deotis* they worship are - Mari, Semeo, Devi-Bhawani, Kalika and Kanya Kumari. According to their beliefs and statements, all these *deotis* are in reality sisters. Even in their *pujas*, they give preference to the *deotis* more and worship these female deities in special ways.

The main annual festival of the Raji, like other tribes of their kind, is Deepavali (Tihar). Second on the list is Holi or Fagu Purnima. Besides these two festivals other festivals are celebrated throughout the year in ordinary ways. In Dasai, they plant maize grains and use the *jamaro* (tender shoots of these grains). However, this greatest of Nepalese festivals is not observed in a big way by these Raji, though they use the traditional *tika* at this time.

Due to the religious beliefs of these Raji, sickness is also treated with religious *mantras* and no sick person is taken to hospitals unless their *dhamis* or *jhankris* (shamans), called *gurubas* by them, do not authorise this move. Therefore, due to the belief of these Raji in the powers of *jhar-phukh* their mortality rate is extremely high, on account of the untimely and immature deaths.

Dress and ornaments

Male Raji wrap a short skirt like cloth around their loins and call this cloth a *kachhad* or wear *dhotis* also. In this way, they wear their own type of shirts and a *bhoto* (vest) with a lining and buttons. Almost all Raji wear caps.

Females wear *gunew* (lungi-like) and a different sort of blouse which is backless and held in place by strings, running horizontally across the back. The *gunew* is called *batauli* since it is made in Butwal.

The ornaments of Raji women are silver *churis* (bangles), silver *tariya* (on the shoulders) and *phulis* (studs on their nostrils). *Pheruwas* are worn on their ears and number upto 5 on each ear. These *pheruwas* are not worn by unmarried girls or women.

Fooding habits

In spite of eating ordinary foods such as rice, pulses, curries like other tribes in the kingdom, they supplement this diet with maize

flour bread, fish and plants collected from the forest. On festivals they prepare a great variety of foods. *Bhati jad* (rice beer) is their favourite liquor.

Occupation & business

Agriculture is their main occupation or it could be called business. Their main crops are paddy, maize and *tori* (mustard). While they retain the paddy and maize for personal consumption, the *tori* is used as a medium for earning cash money, so it is a cash crop for them. Besides this, they plant *haledo*, *channa* and vegetables for their daily consumption.

Occupations other than agriculture are fishing and working as boatmen. They also extract honey from the hives in the jungle and sell it. *Pipla* are also collected and sold. Instead of engaging themselves in home industries, the women go into the forest to forage *gittha*, *trul*, herbs and such. The women also stitch the clothes of their menfolk and children.

The Raji are extremely fond of and skillful in hunting. Their hunting method is to drive the animals, like deer and wild boars, towards a predecided spot where the hunter or hunters await the quarry with muzzle-loader guns. Another method of hunting is to conceal themselves near water-holes where the unsuspecting animals converge to quench their thirst and meet death.

Even today, these simple Raji do not want to leave their jungle surroundings, nor do they wish to eat good food or wear decent clothes. This backwardness and shy simplicity of these people is currently being exploited by the other tribes.

RAUTE

A tribe of nomadic hunters and food gatherers still roam the far western regions of Nepal. They are the Raute said to be one of the last of such a primitive tribe in Asia. As they are nomadic, they have no permanent settlements. They roam the region between the Siwalik Hills in the south and the Himalayan highlands in the north. They travel till Doti in the west and Pyuthan in the east. Most of the time, however, they roam the central areas of Jajarkot and Dang districts, and the jungles of Sallyan. They never remain for more than 10 to 21 days at a single place. These people are considered to be the aborigines of Nepal, by scholars.

Historical background

These Raute are said to be the descendants of Thakuri people by some of their own community folks, while other people clearly state that since they are a nomadic tribe, they do not know their origin and are just guessing. People of other communities say that these Raute have traits and customs similar to the Jumlaeli people, and thus it is assumed that their origins are in the Kalikot and Jumla regions. One scholar has put forward the theory that Raute are closely related to the Kumaouni tribe called the Raji in matters of speech (linguistic aspect), culture and history.

There is a legend which tells us that these Raute are descendants of a Thakuri man and a Sarkini (carrion eating untouchable caste classified as *sudra* in the Hindu stratification of castes) woman. Due to this fact the ancestors of these present day Raute were compelled to go into the forest and there they remained, multiplying to form a separate tribe known today as Raute. On account of this, it is said, these people claim Thakuri ancestry, though none of their activities, whether cultural or social indicate anything of their Thakuriness.

Though historical data is scarce about these people, a foreign scholar claims that Rawat or Raut are the clan names that have been found to be used by some Kumaoun Rajas in the past, indicating that these names are of a higher caste. It is possible that from these names the Rawat became the Rawate or the Raut became the Raute of today. Since the Nepalese have the custom or habit of changing a name by adding an *e* at the end e.g. Ram to Rame, thus the Raut clan name was changed to Raute, is not an impossibility and thus stated by

some scholars.

Settlement

Being a minority tribe, these Raute inhabit the forested areas (that are remaining today) where there is a maximum possibility of obtaining plentiful game, meaning where there are monkeys in abundance. This is the sort of terrain that Raute people prefer to inhabit. Another feature that is necessary for the Raute to inhabit forests is the availability of smooth, soft wood trees such as the *gurans*, *uttis*, *siris*, *gittha*, *olma*, *simal*, *sallo* and *tooni*.

Rautes do not settle in close proximity to villages inhabited by other tribes. They settle in jungle clearings where they construct huts from branches of trees called *shyawla* (meaning a branch with leaves). These huts are roundish in shape and crude to look at. They migrate towards the hot plains and warm valleys during the winter season, and in the summer move in the opposite direction towards the hills or *lekh*. They do not tolerate, even slightly, interference from other communities and thus live this lonely nomadic existence.

Their houses are approximately 4 feet high and these huts are made to shade them from the sun only. The rain pours in during very heavy showers. The family hearth or *ageno* is contained in the hut, though it is also seen that they tend to cook outside. Tools, utensils and foodstuff are also placed within this shack. In the area outside the hut is the *okhal* or mortar which is used for husking paddy. These people do not use the hut for sleeping but instead lie down outside. Widows live in separate huts slightly away from the main cluster of huts.

Should it be necessary for them to move out again, they leave the huts as they are and move away. However, should they have to suffer a lot of hardships while at this encampment then before their departure they fire all the huts. Outsiders are prohibited to enter their huts.

Septs (Thar)

As earlier mentioned these Raute claim Thakuri ancestry and say they are the *ban ko raja* (kings of the forest). Their concept is that kings are or must be of the Thakuri lineage, therefore they call themselves Thakuri or kings, trying to assert that they are also of the

same lineage. Their community works under the leadership of a single individual called the *purmunge* or headman. The septs or *thars* among them are of the Thakuri type though it is seen that they have adopted all this culture as they travelled through Thakuri inhabited areas in the region of their annual migrations. They claim septs like: Raskoti, Kalyal, Hamal, Samal, Sahi, Thakuri, Malla, Chhatyal to exist within their tribal structure.

Language

The Raute speak a Tibeto-Burman language and they also claim to possess a script which is inscribed on a flap of wood and which they say is their geneology. Normally they speak Nepali in their own way and intonation. Their language cannot be understood by others and they call it Khamchi, which is spoken mostly by the children and women folks.

The Khamchi language of these Raute is unique because it is the most different of all the Tibeto-Burman languages in Nepal, or among the Himalayan tribes. This is an indicator that it is not much corrupted by the influence of other languages of dominant tribes in the regions they traverse. Thus it may be said the Raute language or Khamchi - is one of the few remaining languages of hunter-gatherers rare in the Asian sector.

Language sample based on a single source and disputable :

Raute	Nepali	English
<i>na</i>	m	I
<i>nhaen</i>	tpai	you
<i>ber</i>	gham	sun
<i>ber</i>	joon	moon
<i>gerha</i>	tauko	head
<i>bae</i>	manchhae	man
<i>keti</i>	keti	woman
<i>ti</i>	pani	water
<i>suee</i>	ragat	blood
<i>muhaei</i>	aago	fire
<i>akha</i>	hath	hand

Physical Characteristics

At a glance, these Raute look short and sturdy, while their womenfolk look short and plump. Their lips are slightly thicker, rounder and clearcut than ordinary Nepalese. Their teeth are placed in delicate rows, and noses are flared and joined to low nasal roots, eyes are beady and imbedded, small foreheads, sunken cheeks due to prominence of malar bones, wavy and kinky woolly hair, raised square flat chests, straight shoulders, short necks, short hands and legs, turned down ears, very little facial hairs. Their general features are almost Austroloid-like and possess very dark pigmented skin. They have a calm, cool nature with much stoicism and patience.

Dress & Ornaments

Raute women wear *mujetro* (shawl) on their heads like other women in Nepal do, blouses or *cholo*, *patuka* or girdles (waistbands), knee length *phriya* or sari-like flowery designed cloth. This is what they wear today, however, their traditional dress consists of a shoulder to knee length sheep-skin garment called *gado* which is similar to the *ghlek* of the Gurungs only it covers the upper and lower parts of the body. While the women do not, the men are still seen to wear this sort of dress.

The women have adopted the ways of other tribes by piercing their nostrils ear lobes and adorning themselves with nose-rings, earrings, tassles to their braided hairs, *tika* on their foreheads and a variety of coloured bangles on their forearms. This is because of the fact that the Raute males pick up women as they move along that region and hence the customs and styles of one community infiltrates the Raute nomads.

The men wear the *gado*, which is knotted on both side of the shoulders, but today they have discarded this sort of attire and have begun to wear *kachhad* or wrapper loincloths like the Tharu people turbans on their heads and also the *gado*. All these have become the Raute dress. But nowadays, due to the heavy influence of modern society (villages) which exist all around them, these nomads have begun to wear the pants, shirts, caps, shoes and such items of clothing and footwear indicating their gradual transition from the constantly moving nomad to a more settled agriculturist-cum-pastoralist is evident. Whether male or female a Raute is incomplete without his or her tote bag which is a permanent fixture.

Fooding Habits

The main foods of these Raute are: meats, food grains like paddy, *gittha*, *bhyakur* and other such wild roots and tubers. Among meats, they prefer monkeys (the large males are called *dhaedus* in Nepali and *guna* in Khamchi, mutton and some species of birds. These *guna* are eaten only by them when killed and not distributed to others. They also do not eat what is killed by others, or rice husked by others, instead they pound this themselves on the *okhal* outside their dwellings. They also eat the unhusked paddy grains. Flour is ground in a *ghatta* (millstone) and then consumed. Besides these they eat curries prepared from pumpkins, radishes and the universal potatoes. They are also fond of eating wild creepers and fruits, which are part of their diet.

Their society does not differentiate between whether a thing is eaten raw or cooked. They do not consume alcoholic beverages gifted by others as earlier stated, but do drink what they themselves distill. They are accustomed to chewing tobacco and smoking the infernal *bidi*.

While cooking nowadays, they have begun to use oils which was not done during the recent past, and a strange thing is that they do not drink milk, curds or whey, and neither do they consume butter. They also never drink flowing water, meaning they only drink water that is stagnant like in natural springs found in holes in rocks. Initially they never used to cook in utensils, but this has changed. Thus before the advent of utensils they made leaf bags and put the rice into these bags and then after sewing them they were put into the embers of the fire. This sort of cooking was done for almost everything like meat, vegetables, tubers, roots, etc. Bread was baked on heated stones or the dough was sewn into the leaf bags and then cooked in the burning coals of the fire. This is done even today. The utensils they use for eating are mostly those carved out of the wood they cut while at one place. Cooking utensils are metal ones today.

Life-Cycle Rites

Births

It is not surprising that in the course of their wanderings, the Raute women deliver their babies, as they are natural nomads till today. As

soon as the baby is delivered, the males gather together and immediately set off for a hunt or *ara*. This is to determine the child's future by the availability of game during the *ara*. After the hunters return from the *ara* they celebrate with songs and dances to indicate the success due to the child's luck. On this day the child's father has to dance with the head of the tribe or *purmunge*. During this dance, there is a circle of males and the oldest one is placed in the centre. He has some ashes in his hand and chanting he moves forward while followed by the group beating *madals* (cylindrical two headed drums). Then this old man turns towards the sun and points at something. In this way he invokes the elements such as mountains, hills, rivers, fire, wind, earth and deities like the *nagas*, *bandevtas*, *jaldevtas* etc. to protect the infant from any sort of harm.

The delivered women observes birth pollution for a period of 5 to 6 days. She is not allowed to eat meat as they believe that it is poisonous for her at this stage of her life and bodily condition. They are satisfied even if it is a daughter, as the sex of the child does not make much of a difference to them, since they accept this infant as a gift from the Lord. *Pasni*, *chhaewar* and *bratabandh* are customs not observed by these nomadic Raute people.

Marriage Practices

When boys and girls reach physical maturity, they are married off. There is only one pattern of marriage among these people namely the *Magi biwaha* or arranged marriage. Child marriages, love marriages, elopement marriages, polygynous marriages, polyandry, etc. are abhorred and totally boycotted by the Raute society. These are all considered taboo.

When females reach the age of 15-16 and the males 20-25 years, they are considered eligible for marriage. If a girl and a boy have a mutual liking, it is not considered bad but must go through the proper channel meaning permission must be asked and sanctioned. Marriages are not consummated within a sept or *thar* indicating the existence of *thar* exogamy.

There is no taboo against the *phupu-cheli* (patrilateral cross-cousin) or *mama cheli* (matrilateral cross-cousin) marriages, nor against nephews and nieces marrying. A Raskoti male is not permitted under any condition to marry a Raskoti female. Thus, while they marry into different septs or *thars*, they do not marry

outside the community and seem to practice a form of tribal endogamy, but cases exist where they have taken women from other tribes for wives, but the Raute females have not been taken by males of other tribes till date.

A marriage is a signal for festivities and so these Raute go in search of goats or go hunting and return to dance and get mesmerised to the songs and rhythmic beat of the drums. In the evening, the groom garlands the bride and puts *tika* on her forehead. In this way the marriage is completed and they are seen not to be bound by any sort of rites or rituals of marriage as in other more civilised tribal societies.

The same evening, the groom's father offers a gift of specially cooked bread which is considered symbolic of the special relationship between the newly wed couple. After the marriage is over the woman begins to live with her husband who has a separate hut slightly away from his parents' hut. This hut is constructed by the parents immediately after the marriage. If utensils are available then the newly wed couple begin to cook immediately in their own kitchen and as is the custom. But should there be no utensils, then they eat for a certain period of time with the parents of the husband.

Divorce does not occur in Raute society. Widow marriages are taboo. On account of the Raute groups being very small in size, there is no existence of extra-marital sexual relationships. No one is allowed to force himself on any woman. If someone in the group should attempt such an attack, it is considered an extremely bad and nasty folly and the person in question is branded for life.

Death Rites

When death occurs among these Raute folks, there are two methods of disposal of the corpse. While one is the normal burial method, the other is a strange method where the corpse is just left at the place of death. On the death of a person the corpse is wrapped in a monkey trapping net, fully clothed and like this they take him to the selected place and bury him on that very day. The wealth of the deceased is also buried alongwith him or her.

Among some Raute, there is the custom of leaving the corpse where death has overtaken him or her and they pack up and leave the settlement, migrating to another place. The reason for this sort of

non-burial is because of the belief that when people die, they need peace, therefore, after death the corpse must not be touched or moved. It must be left as it is and so in this way will the deceased gain peace.

There are no ceremonies, rites, rituals after death as other tribes have and the kin of the deceased feel the sorrow of this passing away but do not express with the loud weeping and wailing that is popular and compulsory among many tribes in Nepal.

After the death of a woman's husband, the widow is prohibited from participating in dancing and singing activities. She is to stop eating salt or salty foods till her last breath. She is built a separate hut which has a door facing in a different direction than the other Raute huts. She has to trail behind everyone else during camp shifting and is not allowed to mix up with others and gets the worst parts of the hunt's kill (as earlier stated). On an overall basis, the lot of the Raute widow is that of tolerance and internal social ostracism.

Religion

It would not be wrong to say that the Raute are extremely and fully religious minded. They worship their *devis* and *devtas* with great zeal, and perform *puja* in their own special ways. The deities they worship are Masto, Bhuinyar, Bandevi and Nagraja which are the major ones. From the names of these deities, it is seen that they have been religiously influenced by the religions of the western Himalayas.

Masto

The Masto is sincerely believed in by the Raute and they treat him as their most loved deity. They believe that if Masto is angered, then mankind must suffer great difficulties, the sky would fall on the earth and so on. This deity is offered *puja* on every *puṇnima* or full moon. This *puja* is performed without bloodshed and using only flowers as offerings. There are three types of Masto according to these Raute namely: Masto, Dahare Masto and Dudhae Masto. The rites for worshipping these are separate. While Masto is worshipped with flower offerings as stated earlier, Dahare Masto must be worshipped with an offering of an uncastrated goat or *boka* as a blood sacrifice. Not only this, but the blood of the sacrificed goat must be drunk by the *dhami* who is the presiding priest. The Dudhae

Masto needs only milk offerings and the milk must be consumed by the priest presiding over this *puja*.

Bhuinyar

This *puja* is done in other communities also, and the Raute devoutly worship Bhuinyar as others do. This deity is also called Bhume Deo or Gram Devta (village deity). The Raute perform Bhuinyar and Bhumi (earth) *puja*. This *puja* is done when the Raute have to leave their settlement or begin some new works or for obtaining animals on hunts.

Ban Devi

Since Raute do not worship graven images or idols, there is no need for constructing shrines or *thans* and therefore, it is not possible to observe any deities or *than* that house them. Ban Devi is worshipped at a particular tree or at the source of a stream. *Puja* is performed using flowers and whatever things are available for offering to this deity. There is no special date, time or place fixed for performing worship to Ban Devi.

Nagraja

This deity is worshipped by the Raute because it is believed that they are dependant on the mercies of the rains just like any ordinary agriculturist since they have to dig and eat the roots and tubers which will not be there should the rains be sporadic. Thus they pray to Nagraja who is the rain god of the Hindus also. It is said that if the Nagraja is annoyed then there will be scarcity of water and unending drought, thus this *puja* is done in the month of Srawan and Poush. This *puja* is also performed at the source of a stream or river. There is no specific idol representing this deity. Besides all the above mentioned deities, the Raute also worship the sun and the moon, though no actual *puja* is performed for these elements. Though the Raute claim to be Hindu, they never perform *puja* at any Hindu shrine or bow to any idol, Hindu or otherwise.

Festivals

Dasai, Tihar, Srawane Sankranti and Maghe Sankranti are the few festivals that are celebrated by the Raute folks. On Dasai they perform *puja* and wear *tika* on their forehead put by their sisters on

Tihar, but this is actually an extra addition at a later date and is meaningless for them without their understanding of the actions, so they state. They go on further to state that in reality they have no traditional or cultural festivals of any kind.

Dances and Songs

Today the Raute not only sing songs in their Khamchi language but also in Nepali. This is because of the songs they hear along their routes of nomadic movement and thus they pick up these songs. They can be said to be skilled in singing and dancing. Their dancers are specially decked out in the best finery they possess and the main dance among these people is called Raute Nach.

In this Raute Nach, they make a large circular group and joining hands, jump up and down enthusiastically and shout at the top of their voices. This group dancing is led by the lead dancer who is to dance within the circle of the other dancers, all the while screaming encouragement and giving the others impetus to dance properly. This dance portrays enactments of hunts, hunters, and hunted in profusion and the make-up that these dancers wear are reminiscent of the ancient hunter-gatherer tribes that dotted the Asian landscape. This jumping in frenzied enthusiasm and pure ecstasy. Before commencing this dance, the Raute colour their faces in strange ochre red paint, and when they dance, their facial features assume a rather terrible animal-like look.

These dancers wear long frock-like cloaks, which are used only while dancing, and are very much similar to the clothes worn by the Newari Gubaju priests of Kathmandu Valley. Only males are permitted to participate in this dance. *Tantras* and *mantras* are chanted prior to the beginning of the dance. It is said that they perform this dance on request at any other time also, but only if they are compensated with presents of either castrated or uncastrated goats. On the days of such dances, it is compulsory to have a great feast with meat as the main course. The *madals* used are of a much larger type than what is normally used by other tribes.

Economic Life & Status

Hunting is an all important factor that dominates the Raute way of living. They only hunt monkeys and no other wild animals such as deer or antelope. Women folks and children do not participate in the

hunts, but instead go about collecting fruits and dig up tubers and roots which are necessary should the hunt yield nothing at times. Flesh of monkeys are eaten by the Raute to increase or balance the proteins in their bodies, since they are constantly moving and their muscles need to be toned up with regular doses of proteins. Hunting is the main source with which they supplement this deficiency.

Hunting among these people is done in a rather primitive and crude though very successful way. A group of Raute hunters carrying their nets, axes, sticks and other paraphernalia go into the areas of the jungle where the monkeys are in abundance. Their hunting nets are very strong and made of a bark of some tree, which they refrain from identifying and this is boiled, beaten dried and finally made into ropes which are woven into the nets. Firstly the *purmunge* or headman of the Raute group takes out some ashes from his tote bag and chanting some special *mantras* he demarcates a certain area in that forest. They are of the belief that the monkeys within this boundary will fall into the nets of the hunters because of the *mantras*. Once this boundary is set and secured by the magical circle, the nets are placed all around at strategic places and in a semicircle. They are stood up with sticks or poles, so that when the prey comes in contact with these poles they collapse and the nets cover the unfortunate animals which are beaten to death with axes and sticks by the hunters who emerge from their hiding place in the nearby bushes.

When all the nets are in place some of the hunters climb the nearby trees while others hide in the bushes and shrubs closeby. Suddenly in unison, all the hunters utter a strange scream, to which the monkeys on the trees also reciprocate and begin descending and moving towards the nets. Soon the fate of many monkeys and especially the *guna* are sealed except for those who are lucky enough to escape and the couple who are freed from the nets as a customary gesture which is explained thus : One must not destroy the seed of the monkeys they hunt, for then only can they procreate and multiply to provide food. Any other animals caught in the net are set free.

The meat brought back from such a hunt is distributed equally among all the hunters and should an outsider arrive at the time of the sharing, then he is also given a share which must not be refused for the sake of courtesy, even though he will definitely not consume it but instead give to some other Raute. Should someone refuse the

offering of *guna* meat, then it is considered an insult to the hunters.

Men who have gone to the villages for exchanging their bowls for grains are not entitled for a share of the hunt, because it is said that since they received their grains for their bowls they will not starve and, do not need the meat. A widow is given the tail and a side of the monkey's face. This part of the face is called *kunchet* in Nepali, and consists of the temple region.

It is strange that when the Raute scream, the monkeys reciprocate, drop to the ground and walk into the hunters nets and die. This phenomenon is attributed to the magic of their *purmunge*, however, there is more that meets the eye. Also, prior to celebrating a festival, they go on a hunt to inaugurate this celebration. Thus, hunting among these Raute is a necessity and also a remnant of a primitive culture whose actual meaning has been lost through the ages, and after thousands of back and forth migratory movements.

Wooden Furniture manufacturing

Raute are basically unagricultural people and hence have no knowledge about farming, because of their nomadic existence they have been more the hunter than the farmer. During these wanderings through the jungles, they select proper wood and make wooden bowls of various sizes with which they exchange food grains. The method is to place a piece of cloth spread out on the earth in front of a villager's house and on this keep a wooden bowl. The villager will fill the bowl with *dhan* (paddy) and the Raute will pour this into his cloth while returning the bowl which now belongs to the person who filled it with grain and offered this to the Raute. These wooden bowls are hand made using various iron tipped instruments made by local Kami (blacksmiths).

These Raute also make wooden boxes for keeping valuables and clothes in rural areas with wooden locks and all. These boxes cost much more and are bigger thus they require more grains to fill thus indicating the higher price than the simple wooden bowls. Among the items they make are *gobba* or glass, *kosi* or beds, *mahusa* or the boxes already mentioned and such. They also carve beautiful wooden walking sticks. The instruments they use to fashion these things are the axe, adaze and the chisel. The boxes and beds are all joined with wooden locks and nails are not found to be used. It is said that when they came across rivers they never used the bridges

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

but built canoes and crossed. This could be partially true for lack of bridges could have made them build canoes, but it does not mean they would not cross a bridge when they came across one and instead fashion canoes which could take a few days to build at the least. The items they barter consist of commodities for consumption like - salt, oil, foodgrains, chillis, etc. Whenever there is some free time, a Raute is never seen to sit around doing nothing. They always keep themselves busy as they are aware that their persevering characteristic is the main pillar of their tribal identity and its survival.

SARKI

The Sarki are an occupational tribe and can be found in most areas of Nepal, due to their profession, they are as widely spread out as their kinsmen the Kami and Damai.

Origins

Information regarding the origin of the Kami and their relationship to the Brahmin and Ksetri can be found and read about, and similarly other data relate the Sarki to the Brahmin and Ksetri too. It is stated that a group of Brahmin and Ksetri ate polluted or taboo food items, thus breaking the religious code set by their ancestors. These so called polluted food items were actually the dead carcasses or *sino* of animals like the buffalo, bull and cows too. Since dead animals are not consumed by humans in most areas of the world, this sort of activity merited their demotion within the Hindu social-structure and reduced to the level of *pani-na-chalne jat* or a tribe from whose hands water was not accepted as it was considered polluted the moment it came in contact with the Sarki. This was said to be done by the Brahmin and Ksetri people.

This could be called the great purge and after this happened, the people who were directly on the receiving end found out of their dismay, that they had become or made themselves outcasts by their greed and thoughtlessness. Being shunned by society in general, they dropped to the level of the *sudras* or menials in the Smṛiti tradition of Manu and gradually occupied themselves in the trade where they are found even now tanning leather and making or mending shoes similar to the cobblers of India, called Mochi. The emergence of this new breed created a new name for them and they became the ancestors of today's Sarki people. Thus, it is stated that the Sarki are no different in genetic and other ritual features from their brothers the Brahmin and Ksetri, but only on account of their misadventure they are differentiated and ostracized.

Language and physical characteristics

Regarding the language of these people, it can be said that they speak the common Nepali language as is the case with many tribes in Nepal. They resemble the Brahmin and Ksetri people to a great extent and have other physical characteristics similar to other tribes

due to their promiscuous contacts with other tribal peoples and producing offspring of uncertain pedigree. Thus today it may be seen that though the Sarki claim descent from the Brahmin and Ksetri ancestors, mixing (sexually and clandestinely) with all the consequences like unwanted children and literal bastards has caused the Sarki identity to emerge or re-emerge as a factor to consider seriously.

Septs (*Thars*)

There do exist a number of septs within the Sarki tribe as is the case with all other tribes in Nepal. Septs or *thars* like Mangrati, Rokai, Bailkoti, Bisunkae, Koirala, Dooturokaiya, Bhokotaerokaiya, Dolal, Ramaethl, etc. are some that are mentioned to show their similarities with the Brahmin and Ksetri. Though they consider themselves of one large family and hence traditionally inter-related, they are not permitted to inter-marry among their own sept meaning sept or *thar* exogamy is the standing practice and the marriage of one Sarki to a Kami or Damai or any other hypergamous marriage also is not preferred as they emphasise on *jat* endogamy.

Life Cycle Rites

Navran

Birth pollution is observed till the tenth day from the day of birth and the Mangrati Sarki consider anything touched by a freshly delivered mother, within this period as polluted, and water is the main item against which one must safeguard oneself. The *navran* or naming ceremony is actually performed on the third day after the birth and on this occasion, a *hom* is organised as is the prevalent custom of all Hindus, especially the Brahmin and Ksetri. Among the Baikoti, the child is taken out of the house on the eleventh, while the Dolal perform the *navran* on the seventh day after the birth. Thus, it is observed that the different *thars* among the Sarki have evolved their own rites and rituals according to their separate *kul*.

Pasni & bratabandh

The ritual of feeding the child its first solid food is called the *pasni* or *bhat khuwai* and is a family feast which occurs 6 months after the date of birth. The ceremonies are all the same as that of the high caste Brahmin and Ksetri people.

When the child reaches the age of five, its ear lobes are pierced and this ritual is done on the festival of Maha Shivaratri, as is the prevalent custom. At the age of seven the child's hair is shaved and a cap is given to him according to the custom.

When the girls have their initial menstruation or menarche, they are kept in quarantine for 22 days and not allowed to do any sort of housework. Any food she touches is considered polluted and must be thrown away. It is understood, that this girl is cleansed only after the 22 days are over.

Marriage Practices

Among these Sarki people, marriages are arranged by the family heads, meaning that they adhere to the *Magi biwaha* tradition. After the preliminary talks are over and done with, and the response is positive, a group of people from the village and representing the boy's party goes to the girls's house to meet her parents. This ritual is called *kaliya halne*. The foodstuff they take as gifts for the girl's parents include oranges, *palung ko sag*, *chamsur ko sag*, and other edibles. This ritual means that the decision to, give so and so girl to so and so boy in marriage is finalised, when the ultimate and irrevocable decision is made.

After this *kaliya halne* is over and three days prior to the date of the actual marriage, a function is held which they call the *swyamvar* or garlanding of the groom by the bride and vice versa. For this occasion, almost 31 *pathi* of rice, 14-15 fowls, about 3 *pathi* of *raksi*, two *kthara* of curds, *rayo ko sag*, two pou (200 grams in one pou) of black pepper or *mrich*, etc. are dispatched to the girl's house for her, while for her mother white *chaku* (molasses), spices, etc. are sent as custom requires.

The groom lays down a rupee coin at the feet of his mother-in-law or *sasu* and then he performs the *dhog* (bowing down like kowtow). For these three days, the groom remains in his bride's house as custom demands. After the completion of the marriage which is the Hindu way, the bride is taken away by the groom and at this time the bride's parents and relatives make presents of *gundri* (straw mats), *radi* (mats or carpets or blankets woven from sheep wool), *kharkulo* etc., as *daijo* which could be an Indian equivalent of a dowry. When the bride is brought home, there is a grand feast at the groom's house. A *ranga* or male buffalo is slaughtered, dances,

songs, games and talking are the various ways in which this occasion is celebrated. *Jad* is consumed in large quantities by those who are present and they make merry throughout the night till the early hours of the morning. Ordinarily, the age range for marriage is 25 years for boys and 16-17 years for girls, however, exceptions do exist at places due to circumstances.

Religion & traditional beliefs

From the point of view of religion, these Sarki are purely Hindus and worship Hindu deities, which include Dakshin Kali, Bishnu Devi, Chun Devi, Nath, Ganesh, Bagh Bhairav, all of whom are worshipped devoutly. The festivals they celebrate are Chait Dasai, Maghe Sankranti, Bada Dasai, Tihar and such. Sarki are a superstitious people and believe in *bhut-preth* (ghosts and evil spirits). If a Sarki in their community falls sick, it is attributed to the *masan* who has attacked him, and consequentially a black chicken is sacrificed to the concerned *masan* as a propitiation and the prayer for the sickness to be cured is uttered.

Death Rites

Cremation of a corpse is customary among the Sarki. The one who lights the *daag batti* has to shave his hair and wear white clothes of mourning. The person is separated from the other household members and community for a period of eleven days like the Brahmin and Ksetri people following Hinduism do. On the 12th day he bathes and is purified on the thirteenth day. For performing the necessary rituals a Brahmin of their own kind is present. A yellow thread is tied to the wrist of the person who has observed this death pollution by staying in *kuro* or in quatrintine. Using *jaun* (barley) and *til* (sesame-black), the purification is done. The priest who does this is carried for a distance of at least 10 cubits and he blesses the person saying - Such a thing (meaning death) should never occur in your house - and then he leaves.

Economic Status

It is found that in almost all parts of the kingdom, the Sarki people mainly pursue their time old profession of stitching and repairing shoes and other leather goods. Today, it can also be seen that they have become total agriculturists at places while in some areas they are dominating the field of rural constructional technological works

with their diligence and expertise as carpenters and stone masons. Whatever it is, the Sarki are emerging as an economically well-off group among the low caste tribes of Nepal.

SATAR

Among the tribes populating the areas of Jhapa and Morang districts in the Mechi and Kosi zones respectively, the Satar is one which possesses its own cultural identity and speciality.

Regarding the Satar population, it may be stated that there are varied and contradictory data which are unreliable and do not at all give the reader even an approximate idea of the actual population. While the 1955 AD census lists these Satar at 16,751 heads, the book *Mechi Dekhi Mahakali* published in 1974 AD records this number at 23,853 heads and yet another source shows a total of 15,335. One source even goes on to state that in the year 1961 A.D. they numbered 2,800,000. These figures do not aid, but rather perplex the reader and thus they should be regarded as inaccurate statements. Today, it is estimated that the Satar population is approximately 60,000 heads as per the 1991 census report.

Settlement

As earlier stated, the Satar live in the hot and tropical plains or *terai* of Jhapa and Morang districts in the far eastern tip of Nepal. A foreign scholar has stated that during his research period in the areas of Jhapa and Morang in those years almost 125 years ago, the Satar population was a negligible few, but could be seen as inhabiting the areas of the Chotta Nagpur plateau such as the Santhal Parganas, Malda, Rajmahal and the surrounding regions in a large concentration. One scholar has stated that the Satar inhabit the areas of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bhagalpur and Santhal Parganas. Although they are known as Satar by other tribes in those areas, they call themselves Hor which indicates that they are the descendants of the ancient Hor of Central Asia. It is said that they initially lived in a place Saunt in Midnapore area in West Bengal state, India. It is from this place that they have received the name Sauntal, which slowly changed to Santhal and Satar in the Nepalese *terai*. While some scholars state that Saunt was named after these Santhal and not the other way round, opinions vary. Though these Satar are spread around in various parts of India like Bhagalpur, Manbhum, Santhal Parganas, Birbhum, Bankura, Hazirabagh, Midnapore, Singhbhum, Mayurganj and Balasore, the ones populating the Nepalese Terai in the Jhapa and Morang areas are mostly from the Santhal Parganas areas as stated by them.

Historical background & migration into Nepal

Though one cannot state the exact identity of these Satar, it is a fact that they are not the original inhabitants of Jhapa and Morang, and that they are migrants. While Satar stay in these areas, some do go to the Santhal Parganas and return after sometime to harvest the crops they have previously sown, thus the population of these Satar is not fixed due to their regular to and fro movement. Some families live in the Nepalese area while others go back to Santhal Parganas and return even after as much as 2 or 3 years. But today this migratory trend is slowly being replaced by a desire of permanency.

They are now settled in places like Dhulabari, Jyamirgedo, Kakarvitta, Duagadi, Annarmani, Garamani, Haldabar, Bhadrapur, Chandragadi, Kumakhod, Tanganduwa, Saranmati, Chckki, Surunga, Satasi, Mahabhara, Shivagang, Rahgad, Ghailadubuwa in the district of Jhapa, and in the Morang district they are gradually spreading as in the Jhapa area. Satar eders state the Satar began their migration almost two centuries ago in small streams and which finally spread in the above mentioned two districts of Jhapa and Morang. The reasons why these Satar migrated to the area they inhabit today are many and to state a few would be enlightening to the reader.

The first reason was the Satar people lived in clustered settlements and thus the chances of contagious diseases spreading were great. Thus, at times diseases such as smallpox and cholera took a deadly toll of lives. Therefore, the Satar migrated to other places where such diseases would not effect their lives.

The second reason was the fact that famine was an important factor that caused their migration to other places. Such famines effected Satar inhabited regions in the Indian sub-continent in 1871, 1873 and 1886 A.D. as stated by historians.

The third reason was that those Satar who went against traditions and socio-cultural taboos left their villages and migrated to other areas where they could commence a new life without the fear of stigmatisation.

The fourth reason was the population pressure which was another important factor which contributed to the Satar migration. As Satar families expanded, the lands were divided among themselves and

the shortage began to be felt. Therefore, some Satar decided to migrate to new areas leaving the ancestral land to those who remained behind.

The fifth reason was the attraction of new and fertile lands and promises of the landlords of the Jhapa area.

The last reason is of extreme importance and requires further elucidation, so as to explain how the Satar were lured into this area and then made into landless and bonded labourers ruthlessly exploited, stripped of their humanity and left in perpetual poverty even till today.

Satar are acknowledged as experts in the techniques of clearing forests for agricultural purposes, and utilising the lands to produce good crops. On account of this the landowners of Jhapa and Morang areas lured them with false promises to settle the areas where grew the thick malarial forests and make these lands worthy of cultivation. Once these forests were cleared and made agriculture worthy, these Satar were made to work these lands and given a meagre compensation for their troubles. They were shuffled from one area to another by these ruthless landowners and even till now they have been unable to attain freedom from this exploitation as they are kept in perpetual poverty. These financially exploited Satar state that it was only in 1958 AD. that they received political status. In very recent times, they have been granted the right to vote, rather grudgingly.

The Legend of the Satar Origin

The legend of the origin of these people is like most creation myths where in the beginning there was water everywhere and no land existed at all. The God Thakur jyu and his attendants were only present. One day, while they were talking, the matter of man's creation came up and when questioned by his attendants, Thakur jyu ordered Malin Budi, who lived below the rock on which Thakur jyu lived, be brought into this presence. When Malini Budi presented herself in front of the God Thakur jyu, she was commanded to make two human statues. While these statues were moulded and left drying in the sun, the Vayu Pankhi Goda or flying horse came along and spoilt these statues. Malini Budi complained to Thakur jyu who again ordered her to make another couple, into which he breathed life. He (Thakur jyu) did this by going to the place where life was

found and brought back life which he gave the statues, however, it happened to be bird and not human life. This first bird couple were called Hans and Hansin. This Hans and Hansin (a couple of ducks or possibly geese) couple flew around in the air and after a long time in flight they were tired and requested Thakur jyu to create some solid matter on which they could perch to rest their weary bodies.

In the water lived Solahako (the fish), Kotkobh (the crab) and Lenden (the earthworm) who attempted the task of creation of land. Initially the fish and crab tried their hand but were unsuccessful, so the earthworm began to accumulate earth on the water but it was not solid and could not remain firmly on the water. One seeing this problem, the earthworm requested Kachick (tortoise) to help out. Once the tortoise offered its back, the earthworm began to pile the mud on the hard shell of the tortoise. Thus, an island was created. On this island grew a Karm tree and *sirome* grass at its base. Thus it is said that the earth was created, in the Satar legend.

Now Hans and Hansin came and perched with relief on this Karm tree, where they built a nest and the Hansin (female) laid eggs out of which hatched two chicks. However, the Raghopawu (wild animal) came along and ate these chicks. Hans and Hansin were terribly sad and flew to Thakur jyu to unburden their sorrow. Thakur jyu was also sorry for them so he sent Jhare Ada to protect Hans and Hansin, who once more produced eggs and these hatched into a male and a female chicks which were named Pilchu Hdam and Pilchu Budi respectively. Now Thakur jyu appointed Mrang Budu as their protector. Mrang Budu taught Pilchu Hdam and Pilchu Budi the art of planting crops and agricultural practices, the art of cooking food, way of rearing livestock and such matters. One day, Mrang Budu made the two Pilchu clean their house, bathe and harvest the grain, and with milk and water, Mrang Budu made them face east and offer these as *prasad* (offerings).

On this day, Mrang Budu taught them how to make millet beer or *jad* which he showed them how to offer, firstly to the *devta* and then to be consumed. Mrang Budu left them and the two Pilchu did as told, however, after they had consumed the *jad*, the intoxicating effect was heavy on them and permeated their senses resulting in their sexual arousal and the final act of incest. But Mrang Budu informed them that there was actually nothing wrong in this and in the course of time there emerged seven brothers and seven sisters from the union of Pilchu Hdam and Pilchu Budi.

After the birth of these 14 children the Pilchu migrated to a place called Heheree Pipree and it is here that Pilchu Hdam and Pilchu Budi quarrelled. This resulted in a sort of divorce where Pilchu Hdam moved towards Sooeepur and Pilchu Budi went to Pooeepur. While the former took the seven sons, the latter took her seven daughters.

Time passed and these 14 children grew up into young boys and girls. One day, the seven boys went on a hunting trip into the jungle of Surukkuch. Incidentally, the seven girls had also gone to this same jungle for the purpose of gathering wild roots and tubers. After they had finished collecting enough roots and tubers, they tied their hammocks and lazed around in a clearing in the forest while singing and dacing. The group of seven boys (who were actually their brothers) were also nearby and heard the sweet voices of girls. They were attracted and decided to investigate the source of the singing. When they saw seven girls they were surprised and thrilled as were the girls, who asked them to participate in the fun of singing and dacing. Each boy chose a girl as a dancing partner and they danced till tired, then they rested and slowly one after the other couples went into the undergrowth in various directions till there was no one left in the clearing.

The sun began to descend on the western horizon and Pilchu Budi began to fret for her daughters and wept, but soon Mrang Budu arrived and related to her all that had happened in the forest between her 7 daughters and the 7 boys. Pilchu Hdam was also worried about his 7 sons and went in search of them arriving at Pilchu Budi's house. After some time the 7 couples emerged from the forest and the whole family was once more united and lived together from then on at Suee jungle.

From the incestuous union of the seven brothers and sisters there emerged *bangsa* or lineages Kisku, Murmu, Hembrhom, Soren or Sose, Hasda, Tudu, Marandi. It is said that these are the original lineages of the Satar and that later on were added Baske, Basera, Pauriya and Kore. Later on these people seem to have migrated to Chhayee looking for work and then on the Champa where they lived for a long period. The Kisku were the rulers, Murmu were princes, Marandi were *rajbandari* or treasurers, Tudu handled the section of entertainment and musical instruments. In this way, special allocation of jobs or work distribution was initiated.

From Champa, these Satar seem to have migrated, at a later date, and reached Santhal Parganas where they settled and are found even today. Regarding the division of the various Satar sub-septs they tell a rather farfetched yet plausible tale.

It is told that in the beginning, there were only Satar people who lived as a large single family unit and hence there was absolute communal harmony. But one day, so the story goes, Mrang Budu felt the desire (why he felt so is not said) to divide these Satar into various *upa-thar* or sub-sept. To achieve this Mrang Budu wove a large leaf *tapari* or plate consisting of thousands of leaves. Then he placed various types of foods on this and left it at a cross road. Mrang Budu collected all the male Satar and placed them at one side of the crossroad. At a preset signal from Mrang Budu they ran to the leaf *tapari* and picked the best food they liked. The ones who reached there first picked *gai ko masuor* beef dish and raced into the jungle with it. The other who reached the crossroad second chose the *boka ko masu* or mutton (uncastrated goat) and ran into the jungle with it. The one to reach last had to eat the left over which consisted of rice and milk. The ones who chose the beef became the forefathers of the present day Satar; the one who chose mutton became the ancestor of the Bhuniyar and the one who got the milk and rice became the forerunners of the Brahmins of today. This is the Satar version of the *jat* formation.

Language

The *Santhali bhasa* spoken by the Satar people is said to belong to the Kolarian category linguistically by the language experts. It is further stated that there exist similarities between this language and those like Munda, Khasi, Mon-Khmer and the languages spoken by the Australian aborigines and the people inhabiting the Malaysian peninsula and the outlying islands. It does not have its own script and it uses both *Devnagari* and English alphabets when written.

In Nepal, it is seen that this language is similar to and contains various roots akin to Limbu and Newari languages:

Satar	Limbu	Newari	Nepali	English
<i>meth</i>	mik	mikha	ankha	eyes
<i>da</i>	wa	wa	pani	water
<i>manuwa</i>	munwa	mnu	manis	man

Other Satar words:

Satar	Nepali	English
<i>bankhaidi</i>	ho	yes
<i>ing</i>	m	I
<i>ce</i>	ke	what
<i>bnuwa</i>	chhaina	is not
<i>minagiya daka</i>	bhat	rice (cooked)
<i>sigil</i>	aago	fire

To speak this language, the tongue has to be twisted within the mouth and most words are pronounced distinctly at its beginning but as it ends the sound is swallowed and the mouth only moves, but the last part of the word is not audible.

Physical characteristics

These Satar people are said to belong to the category of pure Dravidians, who were of the Negroid type as is seen to be fairly certain, as observed. Their complexions which range from the very dark to charcoal black, noses are flared at the tips and depressed at the roots showing negroid type elements; everted lips are common, large mouths; dark brown to black eye colours and oblique shaped, coarse, black and curly or wavy hair; prominent zygomatic arches, medium to large ears; sturdy stature and wiry physiques; though they are seen to be larger than their Rajbansi neighbours.

Life-cycle Rites

As in all tribes and societies throughout the world, the Satar also go through the rites and rituals from birth to deaths.

Births

It is seen that from the highly developed stage of pregnancy in the eighth month, the female is not permitted to perform or participate in religious ceremonies or worship of any kind in the household, as she is considered polluted from this time onwards till the birth and naming of the child.

The *chhtier* is done on the 3rd. or 5th day after the birth of the child and this is the equivalent of the naming or *navran* among other tribes. Guests, friends and kin are invited and for purification a Dom

or low caste person such as a Sarki or Chmar is called in. This custom exists on account of the superstition that anything (meaning the child) if touched or related to a low caste is not liked by god who will not tend to take it away. It is thus found among many other tribes that at birth the child is 'sold' to a Sarki, or a Kami who ties a iron piece on it or it is named as Kami, Sarki and the like, so that god doesn't get a chance to take it away. Children of these Satar are named with the names of their grandparents. In this respect every family has a maximum of only four names which are ample as they are repeated after every alternate generation.

This custom requires the name of the deceased ancestor to be used, but why is still a matter of much thought and analysis. As in a other societies, the Satar are happy when a male child is born and it is associated with the fact that they are a patriarchal society.

The role of the midwife or *drigin* is seen to be of importance among these people, as she is a person who must be compulsorily present prior to and after the actual birth. These *drigin* are skilled and experienced women of the Satar community. She is to reach the house where the child is to be born prior to anyone else as it is considered her duty or responsibility once she is given the title of *drigin* by the village Satar community. The *drigin* is responsible for caring for the newly delivered mother and also for naming the child, and for this she is granted a compensatory remuneration which could be in cash or kind. If the child is a son then the *drigin* is given 2 *mana dhan* in the month of Mangsir and if a girl then only 1 *mana dhan* is granted.

Navran

As earlier stated the the *navran* is performed on the 3rd. or 5th. day after birth, however, there is also the custom of naming on the 7th. 9th. and 21st. days after birth and purifying the mother at that time. This time depends the situation and occurs on the 2nd. or 3rd days after birth should the mother only be present. On the *navran*, a special rice is cooked for Mrang Budu, the deity which protects the child and after this offering is made, the rice is given to all those present and the newly delivered mother as *prasad*. This rice is of the *aruwa* variety (glutinous) and is cooked with a mixture of *neem* leaves. In normal circumstances, these Satar eat the paraboiled rice.

Prior to offering the above mentioned rice, it is ground into flour

and this is mixed to make balls which are offered initially. All these works are done by the previously mentioned *midwife* or *drigin*. She then places the invitees on the verendah and places a little of the mixture of the ground flour in front of them along with some saltles lentils, curry and cooked rice in a *tapari*. After eating this all go to the compound or *agan* and then the *drigin* publically announces the child's name. This is followed by the invitees going off to their respective houses. Names are kept according to the days of the week and correspondig to the names of deceased grandparents as is the custom already mentioned earlier. There is a dispute regarding the matter of *dindamdi* which some scholars state is the name of the feast given on the occasion of the *navran* while others claim the name to be the Satar equivalent of the *navran* itself. One strange thing about these naming ceremonies among the Satar is that no music, dancing and singing is done during this period, though these people are very suceptible to making merry at even the slightest pretext.

Nothing is seen regarding the ceremonies such as *pasni*, *mudn*, etc which are common among other Hinduised tribes. It is however seen that the Satar are being influenced heavily by the surrounding modernisation and the Hinduisation process which is gradually steam rolling them. In spite of such odds they are very much stubborn and are in the attempt of keeping alive what little is left of, their cultural identity.

Marriage Practices

Similar to the various customs, there are also many types of marriages. Sept or *thar* exogamy is the regular marriage pattern and the various marriages that these folks practise are listed:

1. Kirin Vahu Vapla
2. Thunki Dipil Vapla
3. Hirom Chetan Vapla
4. Sangya Valpa
5. Ghardi Jawai Vapla
6. Golat Vapla
7. Jawai Kirinok Vapla
8. Nirbolok Vapla
9. Itut Vapla
10. Apangir Vapla

The main link who fixes the pre-marriage talks is the *wad ama*. The bride and groom only meet each other for the first time on the day of the wedding. Among these Satar, marriage between people of the same sept or sub-sept is not permitted and this is prevalent so as to avoid clashes in the agnatic lineage, which is *had* or 'bone'. Discreet sharing of an elder brother's wife is seen to exist among these folks and indicates the survival of fraternal polyandry which seems to have been a common feature in those ancient times.

Kirin Vahu Vapla is the most popular pattern of marriage prevalent among these people. In such marriages the female has to be purchased. This custom is considered as one symbolising respect. To bring the female (the bride to be) the boy's father has to pay her father or guardian her value in money called *poon*.

Marriage talks are started by the male's folks who use a *lami* or matchmaker. This first step is *rayabarich*. The male and female are given an opportunity to catch a glimpse of each other at some *hat* (local bazaar), or at a fair. But they are never allowed to come in any sort of physical contact prior to their marriage, as this is the rule and the desire of the Satar community. Should the male be liked by the female, she sends him a present of a *dhoti*, indicating her desire and this is reciprocated by the male's folks visiting the female's house with *poon* and accompanied by the male's parents, friends and kin.

According to the belief among the Satar, they actually do not buy or sell the female as may be thought by an observer, however, it is only her use that is bought or sold. This is quite a hard concept to digest but it is perfectly logical for any Satar. The *poon* paid for the use of the female is not an exactly stipulated amount and can vary. Thus if a *poon* of rupees five to seven is paid then the girl's side must reciprocate with a brass plate, bowl, *lota*, *gagro* and a calf. If the *poon* is rupees sixteen then the objects of reciprocation are a pair of bulls, digging implements (*kodalo*), an axe and a servant. So it can be seen that the larger the *poon*, the more things the girls's folks have to present to the couple. It is only after these preliminary customs are completed that the *janti* go to the girl's house and perform the *sindur halne* ritual along with other marriage rites. When everything is over, it is time for the usual and inevitable songs, dances and drinking that follow the completion of any occasion.

On the occasion of the marriage, the male's father, through the medium of proper traditional procedures, has to present gifts to the newly formed relatives on the girl's side. The girl's paternal uncle is given a piece of red and white striped cloth which is called a *dola*. In reciprocation, the recipient has to present either a cow or a calf. The maternal grandmother of the girl also has to be presented with a *dola* like the paternal uncle, and she reciprocates by presenting a *handi* of *jad*, some *lawa* and a *dhalot ko hasuli*. The *lami* is the recipient of a pair of shoes and a *dhoti* from both sides. While on the job, the *lami* has to be treated with great respect and given food and drink accordingly. Servers are kept to look after the bride and groom. The female servers receive presents of bangles called *sakom* from the groom's side, while the male servers receive a kind of bangle called *todor* from the bride's side. The two women who accompany the bride to the groom's receive a nominal payment of *ek anna* each as *dastoor*, meaning that they are given one *anna* (an outdated coin) as a *dastoor* meaning customary payment.

Tunki Dipil Vapla is such a pattern of Satar marriage where there is no requirement of a *janti* and the groom is not required to go. A few friend and relatives go to the bride's house and return with the bride who comes to the groom's house carrying here personal effects in a *tunki* (a basket like container). This marriage is prevalent among the poor Satar folks.

Hiom Chetan Vapla indicates a marriage while there is already a wife at home. This is a marriage pattern practiced when a Satar does not have any children from his first wife or no male heirs. A case of polygynous marriage pattern.

Sangya Vapla indicates the marriage of a widow or a widower.

Ghardi Jawai Vapla is a marriage pattern where uxori-local residence pattern is existent. Here the male must remain at his wife's residence and help out in the chores like tilling the lands, sowing, harvesting and such for a period of at least five years. After this period, he can separate and build his own shelter to house his own nuclear family, nearby. After this five year uxori-local residence, the bride's family must present the groom a pair of bulls or oxen, a cow, a calf, foodgrains (rice), a digging implement (*kodalo*) and an axe. This is some sort of compensation though it is not spoken of as such.

Golat Vapla is a pattern of marriage where, due to the family's inability to pay the *poon*, there is an exchange within the families. This means that while one female is taken as a wife by a male, his sister is in turn married by the wife's brother. This sort of exchange marriage is seen to occur in many tribes, though we cannot call it a common phenomenon. Thus the wife takers are also the wife givers.

Jawai Kirinok Vapla occurs in cases of pre-marital pregnancies where news spreads like wildfire among the Satar community. It creates a stink in their society and so their council decides the case. Once the culprit is found, the pregnant female is handed over to him, publically and legally. Thus they are considered man and wife once this is declared and done with. However, if the actual offender is not traceable, then an eligible Satar is located, paid money and made to marry the pregnant female so as to cover up her shame. This sort of covered up marriage is called *Jawai Kirinok Vapla*, which means marriage where the son-in-law is purchased.

Nirbolok Vapla occurs when a Satar female is attracted to a male, then she along with her friends enter the concerned male's house with a *handi* or earthenware pot, of *jad* in broad daylight and at a predetermined time. Since it is perfectly legal for one Satar to enter another Satar's hut, according to their rules, forcible expulsion is out of the question. Thus, these girls remain in the hut with the main girl. This news spreads and villagers gather around in the compound, while the concerned girl's mother tries to lure her daughter out using all sorts of promises and methods. One method is quite successful, where all the openings of the house are blocked up and dried chilli is burnt in the fire and the smoke passed into the house. As the smell is extremely irritating to the olfactory lobes and suffocating to the lungs, tough and dauntless girls have been seen to emerge crying and cursing. But some girls remain inside the house in spite of this smoke treatment. Even the ranting and cursing of the boy's mother, at her expense, does not deter her if she is determined, though this is also effective sometimes.

If the female can bear all this for a specified period of time, she is considered as having qualified the test and then the door is opened and she is declared as the new daughter-in-law of that household. No *poon* is presented in this sort of marriage.

Itut Vapla is a marriage pattern which is almost the reverse of the *Nirbolok Vapla*. Here, the male who has taken a fancy for a

particular female will forcibly apply *sindur* on her hair parting or *siudo* at some local fair or the weekly *hat bazar*. These marriages are not prevalent today, but in the past when these were in vogue, much violence occurred when the *sindur* smeared girl reached her home with a tear streaked face. The householders along with neighbours went to beat up the offender and a fight ensued where much bones were broken and property damaged. These violent situations did not favour the marriage, however, if the violence could be stopped or prevented and a compromise made then the marriage occurred as a grand affair like *Kirin Vahu Vapla*.

Apangir Vapla is the term which denotes a love marriage which does exist among these ancient, unAryan people. The lovers meet at the local fairs and *hat bazars* and after setting a date they meet once more and at the opportune moment they run off or elope. While some such couples return to their homes after a certain time, there are others who simply elope and move off or migrate to another place altogether and settle there never returning to their homes. This latter type of marriage occurs when the couple are aware that their union will not be sanctioned by their parents or the society they live in. If no obstacles confront these couples, then according to the Satar community rules, they marry openly.

During a Satar marriage, the groom wears a yellow shirt or *kmiz*, *dhoti* of a white colour and a yellow turban. The bride wears a red blouse, yellow sari, and a yellow *patuka*. Their heads are covered with a white cloth, as is customary and there are fringes all around this cloth. She wears ornaments like *kalli* (leg rings), *chura* or bangles, *bain* or glass bangles and a chain around the neck, all these made of silver. The hair is adorned with any sort of metal hair-clip.

The groom is annointed and bathed with oil by the bride's female relatives. This is then followed by the *dhog bhet* where the bride must bow to her new relatives touching their feet with her forehead. The whole night is spent in revelry by the *janti*, who drink, sing and dance as suits the occasion. After the bride has been taken by the groom, a pig is slaughtered at the bride's house and when she is taken into the groom's house, then also a pig is slaughtered there.

Separation of married couples is extremely easy and easily done among these Satar. If the couple stop liking each other or as they say 'fall out of love', then they are perfectly eligible for filing divorce which is decided by their council. Should their council consider the

female to be at fault, then payment in reciprocation to the *poon* must be duly reimbursed to the folks of the male. If the male is found at fault, then according to the council's decision he must reimburse double the *poon* that had been paid.

Should someone desire to divorce his wife with any valid reason, then she must be presented with clothes, rice grains, a cow and utensils, although today money is used as this compensation, due to its practical uses. If a woman is barren or a widow being sent back to her parents' home, then also items mentioned above must be presented to them as compensation for their expulsion. Child marriages are unheard of among these people.

Thus, unless and until females remain unwed, they are the exclusive property of their parents. It is only after the *poon* is accepted that these females become the property of their husbands-to-be.

Dress and ornaments

The dress up of the Satar is very ordinary, with the males wearing *dhoti* or *kachhad* which cover their loins or regions below the waist. The females wear clothes which are similar to the sari but that they are wrapped around the torso covering the breasts and groin area in a loose fashion. The children are normally naked. Ornaments worn by these females consist of bangles, *kalli*, and such made out of brass with silver chains around their necks.

Social organisation

There exists a social organisation among these Satar and composed of elected members. The chairman is the decision maker and called Maji Hdam. His works will be to supervise the community as a whole and preside over functions and various village occasions. The secretary is called the Pranik and does his work as a secretary by coordinating various functions and group activities within the village community. The next person on this structure is the Jg Pranik who is a sort of judge for criminal cases. He evaluates criminal cases and accordingly pronounces judgement. The Jg Maji is the person who works out marriage problems and sorting them out along with other such social knots. The last functionary is the Gudit who is a guard, caretaker, peon and policeman.

This organisation functions very smoothly and the elections are

examples of complete fairness. It is seen that this organization is one of the main factors that is keeping the Satar community integrated and quite 'pollution' free, than the other less lucky tribes. Satar drink intoxicating liquors in great quantities and this makes their festivities and celebrations extremely merry. Also, sexual discussions or talks are common among these people with a great amount of prolific descriptions and heavily accentuated overtures of sexual nature. This shows that they could be set in a class of highly emancipated people.

Among the Satar, the oldest male member of the family has an important role to play. As long as the family's wealth remains consolidated and in one piece, it remains under the protection and authority of this male. After this family splits, when the males marry and establish their own separate nuclear families, then this wealth is also shared accordingly. Regarding sharing of livestock, here it is necessary to mention that the females household members also receive a share as is customary.

Religion

Although it is observed that Satar are currently adherents of Hinduism, their religious traditions are completely unrelated to Hinduism and based on their tribal traditions. Their greatest god is Thakur Jyu whom we have already come across in the creation legend. Some scholars have linkened this diety with Surya or the sun god of the Hindu pantheon. Besides this, they worship Mrang Budu, who we have also seen earlier, and is called the big mountain and finally More ko or the god of fire-Agni in Hinduism. The female *shakti* are also worshipped by the Satar in the form of Durga and Kali, emanations of mother goddesses. Ato Banga is their village deity and they worship Manas who is their *pitree* or ancestral deity, whom they try to keep pleased.

Currently, these Satar have begun to follow Christianity. Although a church has not been constructed, they do gather en masse at a predecided spot and pray. Day by day, the number of Satar Christians are increasing.

Festivals

Initially, these Satar had no festivals. While they inhabited Champa, the Kisku built Koyanda Killa, the Murmu constructed Champa

Killa and the Marandi the Khera Killa. It is in these Killa that they lived. One day, the Kisku of Koyanda Killa erected a tall pole atop which they had attached an umbrella of a sort. They then commenced dancing at the bottom of this pole with great enthusiasm. It is from then on that the Chhata Parba or umbrella festival came into existence.

On seeing this, the Marandi also went with their drums and flutes to join in the festivities, however, due to the river being in spate, these Marandi were unable to cross over and join the Kisku. Thus they returned to Khera Killa and beating their drums, celebrated the festival there itself with singing and dancing. They loped off a branch of a nearby *kdm rukh*, or tree, stuck it into the earth and danced around it singing also. They named this the *kdm Utsav* after the name of the tree.

The main festival of these people is Soharai which is celebrated in the month of Poush after the paddy is harvested. On this day, they offer blood sacrifices of fowls, pigs, pigeons, *boka* or uncastrated goat, etc. Alcoholic beverages are in plentiful and they drink till heavily intoxicated. It is stated by some sources that during this period of the Soharai, where almost everyone present is under the influence of alcohol, caution is thrown aside and a free-for-all sexual game commences where copulation occurs between anyone, regardless of married or unmarried status, and also relations. This is contradicted by some scholars who state that this sort of thing never did and does not occur, and is an imagined phenomenon broadcast by some publicity hunters. This Soharai is a festival where the Satar try to remember and pray for their ancestors.

Baha puja is celebrated in spring when they pray to and worship the jungle deities and ask for blessings so that they maybe successful in hunting and gathering roots and tubers that grow in the forest, of which Baha is the protector. Besides these festivals, they also celebrate Yorok, Dasai and Hariyad.

Dances and Songs

It is said that in the beginning, these people did not know dancing or singing. According to their legends it is stated that the arts of dancing and singing were taught to them by the gods themselves. The legend is as follows:

One day a youth of the Tudung tribe and another of the Besar tribe

were strolling in the jungle. Towards the evening, they heard the sweet melody of music and songs. They were attracted by this sound and followed the direction of the sound's source. Soon enough they reached fairly close to the place from where the sweet music was emanating but due to the thick undergrowth they could not actually see from what the sound was issuing. Thus they climbed a nearby tree and to their surprise, they saw the gods or *bonga* dancing in a clearing to the rhythm of the music. Present were More ko, Jahare Ada, Mrang Budu and Gosai Ada. This sight left these two lads astonished. Suddenly one of the dancers stopped and began to look around. He said that he could get the smell of humans very near and so saying looked towards the mortals on the nearby tree. Jahare Ada commented that there was nothing wrong if it were humans or animals observing them, for who could harm them as they were *bonga* or gods. He suggested that the mortals be summoned to their presence in the clearing. The two lads were by this time scared stiff and when they saw that they were being called by gestures, they slid down the tree and approached the gods hesitatingly. They remained there the whole night with their *bonga* who taught them the songs and dances. When morning came, each boy was given a drum, some advice and sent home. They were told to go and tell the villagers about the *bonga*. Every year, blood sacrifices were to be offered to them and whatever songs and dances they had learnt, were to be taught to their people and handed down through the generations.

In this way, so they say, the arts of dancing and singing were brought into the Satar tribe. Even today, one can observe these dances and hear the songs of the Satar. Such stories where gods have handed down knowledge, power and such are prevalent among many tribes throughout the world, with a view to express their direct descendancy from the gods.

Fooding habits

Regarding food, these Satar eat whatever is eaten by the people living in that particular region, meaning whatever is grown and available there. Their chief foods are rice, maize, millet, buckwheat, wheat, etc. among cereals, while they collect *gittha*, *bhyakur*, and such roots and tubers from the jungles with which they consume as a sort of dietary supplement. The flesh of chicken, pig, goat, mice, crab, snakes, etc are eaten for obtaining their quota of proteins. Cooked rice is kept immersed in water throughout the night and

eaten the next morning as it is supposed to keep the stomach cool.

Economic Status

The major occupation of the Satar is agriculture. Besides this they earn money to fulfil their other needs by weaving *doko*, mats, rugs, and by hunting animals which are sold, working as grass cutters for wages and also as *hli* or ploughmen. Though it is seen that these people do earn enough to live and eat, they have no idea or concept of economics and so use up their financial resources before schedule, thus leaving them always short of the basic necessities. This is when they go to the doors of the local moneylenders and ask for credit against their next season's crops, or some such promise. It is also seen that practically every Satar family owns a pair of oxen for ploughing and this is a great help to them.

Hunting

Satar people hunt with the help of a bow and arrows. Spears and other crude weapons are also used. When the winter season begins, these Satar, along with their weapons and dogs enter the jungles. They are accompanied with sweet notes of music from the *bansuri* or flute. They kill all sorts of animals for their food. These range from the *dhukur* or bird species in the trees to the wild rats in their burrows. Since they hunt only out of necessity, they are excellent and successful hunters.

Death Rites

Like other tribes, the Satar also have rites and rituals after a person of their community dies. They follow the pattern of cremation and the remnants are given a water burial after three days. These remaining pieces of the cremated corpse consist of bones, as stated by them.

The whole village abstains from eating salts and oils for a single day to show respect towards the deceased and to commemorate his death. Every year, they hold a *sraddha* which is a memorial service for the deceased and this *sraddha* is done in the month of Marga. 3,5, or 7 days after death, the *kriya* is completed and on the last day all the funeral goers are called to the house of the deceased and they are given a feast consisting of food and alcoholic drinks, and like in any other feast they celebrate. The purification of the household is

not necessarily done by priests of the brahmin type. The one who observes the death pollution fully and who is the son in normal circumstances, has his hair shaved on the 3,5,7 day after death and abstains from eating oil and salt for three or more days as is stipulated. The name of the deceased is shifted onto a baby yet unborn and lying in the womb of the mother who is in pregnancy. In this way a single name lasts for as long as the tribe exists. Dancing and singing also marks this day when it is considered that the soul has been freed from the final links with its kin and is on its way to heaven. Earth burials are also found to be prevalent among these people. While burying or cremating, these Satar place a fowl alongside the corpse, normally at the head area. These folks also believe in metempsychosis.

SHERPA

It may be found that the tribe known as the Sherpa inhabit the regions of Oolangchung Gola, Laelep, Papung and Yamfuddin in the eastern district of Taplejung and then to the west these people occupy almost 11 out of the 50 VDCs in the Solu and Khumbu region. They are also spread around in other places like the Kathmandu Valley and the areas east, but in a minority. Since these Sherpa are a tribe settled in the highlands of the country, there can be observed a distinct Tibetan type of lifestyle.

Historical Background

After investigations into the Sherpa penetration of the Himalayan region on the south of the Sagarmatha, it is seen that the event occurred approximately 600 years ago, when they commenced the migration through the Nangpa La. They have a legend which states that during the reign of the mongol king Tsokpo Dzangubrae, he attempted to spread the teachings of the Gelugpa sect and in the process tried to forcibly change the existent Nyingmapa followers into the sect he followed. Many were converted, but many others were put to death for their unwillingness to part with their Nyingmapa beliefs. It is at this time in history that those Nyingmapa adherents who wanted to safeguard their religion, migrated to the land south of their homeland and thus they initially settled in the Khumbu region, from where they re-migrated to other outlying areas. The Sherpa is a tribe which inhabits the Himalayan region and is purely mongoloid in origin and characteristics, and their religion is one which is one of the oldest forms of Lamaism.

The reason why these people are called Sherpa is a story in itself. It is said that when they fled south to protect their religion, they came into contact with the Kiranti people who used the Khumbu alpine pastures as grazing grounds for their cattle and sheep. A war ensued and after much struggle, the king of that region solved the conflict by permitting the migrant Tibetans to remain there, but as vassals to the locally settled Kiranti inhabitants, who were acknowledged as *jimidars* by them. From then on, these people began to be called Sherpa meaning people from the east, and the Sherpa themselves called the Kiranti landlords *jimidar*. Even today the Sherpa call the Kiranti of that region as *jimi* which means master of the land.

Physical Characteristics

That the Sherpa are a people of mongoloid stock is beyond doubt. They are of short stature in a majority (though tall Sherpa are found in quite a number these days) and physically well built and the epitome of rural fitness. They possess straight black hair, eyes with and without the epicanthic fold characteristic of true mongoloids, facial hairs are very scanty and almost negligible, broad faces with prominent malar bones depressed nasal roots and short noses and flat noses also, skin complexion fair to reddish and darkish also, due to their working under harsh winds, dust and sun. The skin gets burnt and weather beaten which gives them a wheatish and leatherly appearance. The women have jet black and glossy hair braided and done up with assorted ornaments and clips of varieties.

Language

Regarding the Sherpa language, it would be incorrect to call it as such because in reality these Sherpa are actually Tibetans but being in this area for a long time and mixing with other tribes, a slight deviation in their language can be seen, however, it is not much different from the Tibetan language and thus even the script they use is Tibetan. Thus it is easy to say that the Sherpa use their Sherpali language among themselves and those capable of understanding them, while Nepali is what they speak with everyone else. It is necessary to state that the Sherpa language has by now borrowed heavily from neighbouring dialects and languages to become a separate language, but still within the Tibeto-Burman category.

Septs (*Thars*)

Among the Sherpa as in other tribes, there are many *thars* or septs like: Lama, Chhusherwa, Chiyawa, Garja, Golae, Goprama, Hirgoma, Lakshindu, Mendae, Mope, Dawa, Paldorjae, Pangkarma, Penasa, Salaka, Sagup, Serwa, Yakut. Besides the above mentioned septs, the Tibetan migrants began to attach the names of their villages, they left behind in Tibet, to their names as suffixes so that they could identify themselves even while among their people as exactly what or who they were. These village names became their septs later on. Hence those who had come from the Tibetan village of Rong Sherwa adopted the sept Rong Sherwa, and the Naejung people had the sept name of Naejung, and the Penkapa villagers had their sept name as Penkapa.

Houses

Most Sherpa houses are double storied and constructed out of stones. The side walls are all of stone and sometimes the roof is also made of stone, but mostly it is composed of wooden planks pressed down by stones. The ground floor is used for cattle manure and fodder storage while the first floor or upper storey is used by the family for cooking lounging and sleeping purposes. This is the main domain of the Sherpa housewife and it is here that many a tales can be heard about the Khumbu, the abominable snowman, Tsheringma and her judgement of the Wind and Mist and so on.

The hearth is constructed at the side of the room while the walls are lined with drawers for keeping utensils, bedding and other personal effects. The floor is wooden and thus the room is overally warm with the fire contributing some heat also. The main area of worship is set in a place where it is convenient for the whole family to worship. The Sherpa house is rustic, cosy and homely, topped by the famous Sherpa hospitality.

Dress & Ornaments

The dress made of these Sherpa people is very similar to that of the Tibetan or Tibetan type of people in the other Himalayan areas of Trans-Himalayan Nepal. They wear the *bokkhu* which is a long *daura* or shirt-like garment which is rather thick and covers the upper torso till the knees. This *bokkhu* is also called a *chhuba* by these people and inside this is worn a long shirt which is called a *tutung*. They cover their legs with a pant-like garment called *nangoya*. The *bokkhu* worn by females are called *anggi* and the inner shirt is *bangjur*. Both male and female wear woollen woven boots called *docha*. This footwear is also of two types namely: *halam* or all leather shoe, and *sondaha* which consists of a leather or woven sole and the upper made from wool or cloth and having a large opening for putting the foot inside. The females have a uniqueness in their attire. They wear certain kind of woollen stripped apron at the front and at the rear below their waists and covering their front and rear pelvic regions. The frontal one is the *pangden* which is worn only by married females. The one at the rear is worn by both married and unmarried women and is called *gametill*. There is a certain type of cap called the *shyamahu* and is worn only by the Sherpa women.

Sherpa women are extremely fond of wearing ornaments. Welloff Sherpani women wear bangles, necklaces, earrings, etc. made of gold. The use *yun* meaning semi-precious stones, to a maximum degree in the construction of their ornaments. These *yun* are mounted on silver necklaces and *muga* (red semi-precious stone) are also worn by these women. Small ornaments like earrings on their ears are also very much popular with these women. Some names of their ornaments are: *Takcha*, *Patuk*, *Chhou*, *Kaedak*, *Ahlong*. Among these Sherpa people, there is a custom for the males to grow and plait their hair like their women folks. Previously these hairs were decorated with clips studded with semiprecious stones, but today the style is dying out and those that have these sort of hairs are cutting them off, while the young ones are tending more towards the westernised type of culture in a very serious way.

Life-Cycle-Rites

Since the main source of Sherpa culture is Lamaism, thus all the rites and rituals are based on and determined by their religion and their religious leaders. Their culture, rites and rituals are directed by the local *lama* through the *gompa* of that region.

Births

Although they are overjoyed at the birth of a child, it is not considered so great an occasion. On the instance of the child's birth, they inform the *lama* and mention the time of birth too. On the basis of this information the *lama* determines the child's name and the date on which the naming is to take place. On the said date, the *lama* and the local kin and kindred are invited and are feasted with *chhyang* (millet beer) and *roti* (oil fried bread).

Chhartanae

The custom of *pasni* or initial rice feeding at the age of 5 to 6 months is not prevalent among the Sherpa people, however, as in the Hindu society when the child reaches an age of 7-9 years they hold the *bratabandh* or initiation into boyhood ceremony, so also the Sherpa people hold a ceremony called *chhartanae* with is similar to the above Hindu ritual. This is celebrated with a lot of feasting among the kin and the local *lama* presides over this ceremony, as he is the religious and social head of that community.

Marriage practices

There are two ways in which these Sherpa people marry, either by self arrangement through love and mutual liking, or through the arrangements of the parents. Among the Sherpa folks, marriage is considered an occasion of great happiness and joy. There are rites to be completed for the marriage to be fully concluded. These rites are *Dae chyang*, *Daem chyang*, *Pae chyang* and *Gaen kutawa*. All these rites are not completed at the same time but at different times.

The first rite of marriage is *Dae chyang*. In this rite, either the parents of the prospective groom or his kin go to the girl's house with a *thake* of *jad* to ask for the hand of the girl. This can be done either before or after i.e. either after the prospective groom and bride are already well acquainted or when they were minors and the two families had at that time agreed to the marriage when they matured (child marriage type). It is only after the *thake* of *jad* is accepted will the rites follow up. However, should this present be rejected then the marriage proposal is not accepted is the understanding among the Sherpa.

If this rite ends in the acceptance of the proposal, then the groom to be receives the right to go to his prospective in-law and stay the night there with his bride to be. In this situation, should the girl develop pregnancy, then for many years the other rites are left unfinished. The child born prior to the completion of these rites is called *themba*.

The second rite of marriage is *Daem Chyang*. Once the *Dae Chyang* rite is concluded, it is not considered that the relationship between the boy and girl be permanent. It is actually a rite for advancing the talks of marriage further. But the *Daem Chyang* rite is the one which cements the relationship of the prospective couple. This rite make the girl and boy into the bride and groom, in the eyes of the Sherpa society and community. The *Daem Chyang* is equivalent to the Hindu *janti jane*.

The day for bringing the *Daem Chyang* is discussed and decided by the parents of both the bride and the groom. Prior to going for the *Daem Chyang*, the kin of the groom accumulate at his residence. These people must be offered *chhyang* to drink and then only are they sent to the bride's house. This group will remain at the bride's house for next 2 or 3 days feasting and singing and dancing.

Among the Sherpa community, while the *Daem chyang* go to the house of the bride, the groom does not accompany them but instead, stays home. But he is permitted to go there separately alone and attend the singing and dancing. When the *Daem Chyang* proceeds towards the bride's house, two people carrying *Thaksee* of *jad* called *Yangji* and *Kaekal* as gifts, precede the group.

On reaching somewhere near the bride's house, they announce their arrival with the firing of guns. On hearing the sounds of gunfire, the bride's mother and other women of the village prepare themselves and carrying *thake* of *jad*, rush to a convenient spot along the road to welcome the *Daem Chyang*. When the oncoming group meets the welcoming groups, the bride's group dip pine leaves into the *chyang* and sprinkle the groom's group. After this the *jad* in the *thake* brought by the bride's folks is offered to the groom's party. There is a lot of merry making here also and after the *jad* is consumed amid laughter and general amusement, the groom's group is taken to the bride's house. This ritual of meeting and offering of *chyang* to the groom's group is called *sur chyang* by the Sherpa people.

After the *Daem Chyang* or groom's party reaches the bride's house, the bride's father, grandfather (if he exists), maternal uncles and other agnates present *khata* (a white cloth worn like a scarf which is presented with respect and honour) to the groom's party members, and then the bride's father announces the completion of his daughter's marriage with the concerned groom. This announcing can be done by other people in lieu of the bride's father. Now singing and dancing ensues and the most important ritual of *Daem Chyang* is concluded. It is after this that the *janti* take the bride back to the groom's house.

For the completion of the final ritual of marriage the parents of the couple gather at a place to discuss the matter. This is called *Pae Chyang* and according to the Sherpa people, it is said that since this is not such an important and necessary rite, it is done by mostly rich or affluent Sherpa people only.

The last ritual of marriage is called *gaen kutawa*. Unless and until this rite is not completed it is believed that the bride's relationship with her parents is not fully severed. To complete this rite, the bride must take a goblet of *chyang* in her hand and give a drink to every relative of hers, simultaneously singing a song and thus ask farewell

of her relatives. This scene is rather touching and sad. The bride gives a drink to all her immediate family and sings the farewell song, taking leave of them with tear filled eyes. This is called *thuyanla*. The song sung at this time consists of the following feelings:

Now I am going to my husband's home. Whether there is sorrow or joy, a daughter is unable to remain with her parents (*maiti*), since it is her duty to go to her husband's house. Please bless me and give me a happy farewell.

After this the bride's relatives present her with many things or *daijo* (akin to a dowry). After this ritual of *thuyanla*, it is considered in the Sherpa community that the bride's connection with her *maiti* is broken and her relationship with her husband's family and husband becomes strong. This means that the bride cuts off the relationship with her parents and goes to live with her husband. In this manner Sherpa marriages are concluded.

Polyandry is practised among these Sherpa people where a single woman may be the wife of two to three brothers, or she may have a couple of husbands who are unrelated. In the old times, a single Sherpa woman was permitted and did possess more than one husband, but today this sort of total polyandry has been replaced by the system of keeping two husbands who are, in a majority of the cases, generally brothers. When a single woman is married like this they all live together but the children born out of these unions are all considered the progeny of the elder brother only and it is he who will have a right over the children. These sort of marriages are also concluded with the above rites.

Death Rites

In the Sherpa community when a person dies he or she is initially covered with a white cloth and the *lama* and pall bearers are called for. Everything is determined and decided by the *lama* in the Sherpa society. Due to this fact, any ceremonies or rituals and rites are not performed without the sanction of the *lama*.

After the arrival of the *lama*, some hair of the deceased's head is cut off. This is a ritual where it allows the *pran* (life breath) of the deceased to leave the body ritually through this head path. This is a belief which is very great among these people. While removing a part of the deceased's hair the *lama* chants *mantras* for the soul to ascend straight to heaven. Sitting very close to the corpse the *lama* performs the ritual where the sacred *Pho Gyu* is read for at least 5 times. The *Chhae Pee* or astrological scriptures is consulted to find out in which direction and in which method the corpse should be given the final send-off. The *dadu* (*patro*, of the Hindus and is also an astrological calendar) is also consulted for this matter. It is only after this that the *lama* decides on whether the corpse is to be buried, cremated or given a water burial.

After death occurs, the Sherpa have a ritual of making *torma* (kneaded dough shaped into cones - barley, millet, rice) which are used as effigies to absorb the evil eye or *dasha* and then remaining in *kriya* for the observation of death pollution. All present are fed and *ghyak* is made and thrown outside. Next the *Totuk Shaetu* scriptures are read so that the deceased attains *moksha* and is educated in such a way so that he can reach *Sinjae Chhogyal* who is the god of death also called Yama in Hinduism. This rite is performed sometimes 3 to 4 days after the death occurs or sometimes even as late as 7 days.

According to the *lama* of the Sherpa people, although there are customs of burial, cremation and water-burials, children are mostly buried while youths are cremated. Old people are taken to the place decided by the *lama*. The funeral procession consists of flags, drums, cymbals and conch shells which are blown by the people (mostly novice *lamas*) who precede the bier. If cremation has been decided then they build a pyre and use either the son-in-law or one of the funeral goers to light the pyre. Once this begins to burn, the *lama* presiding over this funeral begins chanting *mantras* and flings the clothes and personal effects of the deceased into the blazing inferno one by one.

On the 8th. day after death the ritual of purification is performed and their homes are rid of the heavy pall of death pollution. This purification ritual is called the *Dae Jhaong*. From the day of the burial or cremation till the end of the *Napur* ritual, the *Totuk Shaetu* scriptures are read. This *Napur* is performed after 3 -7 or 11 days after the burial or cremation. To complete this ritual, the *lama* gives the soul of the deceased called *same*, a warning that it should leave

this world of the living and all the love and affection it had and accordingly the *lama* burns bits of paper on which the deceased's name is written, simultaneously chanting *mantras*. On this day there is a big feast held at the house of the deceased.

On death, the Sherpa people believe that the soul remains in the vicinity of the house for the next 49 days. Therefore, for these 49 days, the *Konechok Chinduyi* is read and *Shaetu* and kin and *lama* are invited for a grand feast held on the final day, where donations are also granted. This is the *Ghaepa* ritual.

Once a person dies the corpse is cleaned or washed, put into a clean bag and seated in the lotus posture and either placed in a wooden box or a copper pot and then buried. In the same posture the corpse is taken out of the house in the direction set by the *lama* and carried to the burial grounds. After the above rites and rituals are over then only do the Sherpa folks think that the death rites have been concluded totally. However, if the *sait* (auspicious time) for the removal of the corpse is not or cannot be determined then the corpse is not removed for as many as seven days. Hence it can be observed that more than marriages, it is the rites of death which cause them difficulties in overcoming the economic obstacles that are erected but must be settled and overcome anyhow.

Religion and Festivals

Sherpa people are Buddhists of the Nyingmapa sect. Their *lama* wear red robes. These Sherpa are religious minded people and every house has a corner set aside for their gods placed in decorated chambers. Pictures and icons of Buddha and the Dalai Lama is a must along with various incarnations and *bodhisattavs*. The curling smoke from the incense sticks gives the room a holy and profound atmosphere and the perpetually lit butter lamps flicker off the calm face of the seated Buddha. This is what one can find in every Sherpa altar.

Sagarmatha or Mount Everest as it is more popularly known in the world, is considered a deity and worshipped as *jagat jannani Bhagawati* (mother of the world) and they call this mountain by the Sherpa name of Chomolungma. Mount Makalu is also worshipped as Shankar. Mount Twache or Khumbila is a deity who rides on his magical horse and protects the Sherpa people all the time, which is a strong belief among these people. Thus they worship Mount

Khumbila saying *shyo shyo Khumbila*.

Major festivals are Lhosar or New year, Dumje, Phuduk and Mani Rimdu which are celebrated with great enthusiasm and devotion.

Lhosar is celebrated as the Sherpa new year and it falls in the Nepali month of Falgun. They eat and drink and do a lot of singing and dancing to celebrate this festival.

Dumje is celebrated for a period of 7 days continuously and at this time they offer prayers to their deities at their local *gompas*. The *lama* people also dance their religious and sacred dance at this time. Since the Sherpa are of the belief that if this festival is celebrated, then those who celebrate will prosper, therefore, they dress up in their Sunday best, eat good food and enjoy themselves singing and dancing.

Phuduk is celebrated in the first week of Marga (Nov-Dec) and is centred around the local *gompa*. On this festival, the *lama* of the *gompa* wear different masks and dance for three days.

On the third month of the Tibetan year, a festival called Naesu is celebrated where ancient stories such as *Suba Sangsu* and *Aji Halamu* are enacted through drama.

Mani Rimdu is celebrated once a year in an extremely grand way. This festival goes on for 7 days at a stretch and the *lamas* perform religious masked dances, amidst the smoke of the *dupi* (pine) incense. This is the great and important festival of the Sherpa people.

Besides these festivals there are others like Ohso (protection of the crops), Ingunn (deliverance from sin), and others like Dunaeyjyang, Iyungnn, Maiyu. On the festivals of Dunaeyjyang and Maiyu, youths collect money and the whole night they keep a vigil singing and dancing. In this dance the girls and boys hold each other's shoulders and standing in a line they stamp their feet on the ground and sing in unison and in loud voices too.

Occupation

Among these Sherpa people, businessmen occupy a good percentage of their population. They weave carpets, rear yak, *dzo* and *dzuma*, and currently are engaged very much in trekking and

mountaineering businesses. They work as *sirdars* of trekking groups and as mountaineering guides in expeditions, both in the east and west. Villages along the trekking routes have changed into small shanty towns and so these Sherpa women are more shopkeepers than the original potato diggers, as they earn more by running a shop catering foods and other luxury items like the international coke. In fact, today the Sherpa folks who have migrated to Kathmandu live in affluence as trekkers, trek leaders, trek agency owners, trekking goods shop proprietors and such. It is observed that basically these sherpas have become tourism oriented and so occupy themselves with works related to tourism only.

Regarding the matter of political representation, educational consciousness and such matters they are failures and only a negligible few Sherpas are actually educated and doing something far reaching for their community and the nation. The rest are simply bent on trying to make ends meet by working as trekkers during the tourist season and when the slack sets in operating a restaurant in some back alley.

SUREL

The Surels are a tribe of mongoloid stock inhabiting the eastern areas of the kingdom. In the eastern district of Dolakha, within the Suri-Teenekhu and Haleswar area, on the left bank of the Suri Khola, these Surels inhabit the small villages of Suri Doban and Khahare. Their total population is estimated at 250 head count and contained within 45 households.

Historical background

According to the Surel legends, their forefathers were 5 brothers, among whom, the youngest was the ancestor of the Hayus, the second of the Limbus, the third of the Rais, the fourth of the Sunwars and the eldest of the Surels. It is said that these Kiranti brothers migrated from the east to the west till Chatra. The descendants of these 5 brothers gradually evolved their own individual characteristics and languages and began to be distinguished as the five separate tribes. How these Surels reached the Suri region and became its inhabitants is differently stated by them.

In the village of Gurungpi, which lies near the Suri and Khahare rivers and where the village of Suri is situated currently, there seemed to have been a bustee of Majis in the bygone past. These Majis used to purchase their provisional requirements from the nearby Sherpa village. Once, when the Majis were unable to repay some borrowed for a long period, the Sherpas abducted three Maji children and kept them in their stone housed village as hostages. The Majis were very much grieved and sent messages stating that if these three children were returned without being harmed, then these people (the Majis) would forfeit all their lands and property to the Sherpas. At this point in the story, two Surel hunter-brothers were in the vicinity. They were called Base and Bikhhal. When they learnt of the Majis' predicament, they went to the Sherpa village, killed the chieftan and rescued the three Maji children. When the Majis of Gurungpi village were returned their children, they were overjoyed, but because they had given their word so they left everything to the two Surel brothers and departed from that region. In this way, the Surels are said to have come to inhabit this Suri region. There is another story that recounts how these Surels came to this region.

From the village of Darkha and near Rasnalu village, there lived a man of the Jespocha sept or *thar* named Cherbu, who had a young daughter. One day, while a Surel was hunting near the banks of the Suri Khola, a group of Majis from the village of Thami-Khaep caught him, relieved him of his bows and arrows and then let him go. While this Surel was on his way back home, he was spotted by Cherbu, who on seeing a stranger approaching, shot him with an arrow and wounded him on his right leg. This wounded Surel, unable to walk, remained at Cherbu's *goth* (cowshed) for a few days. As the Surel's leg healed and his strength came back, Cherbu's daughter fell in love with the Surel hunter. She urged her father to marry her to the male, so Cherbu complied and married the couple, thus the Surel remained there. In this way, the Surels began to inhabit the area of Suri.

From these stories, it can be seen that these Surels were a hunting, nomadic tribe, unhesitant to fight for justice, indicating their tough outdoorsman nature. It is also clear that the nomadic hunters were slowly forced to settle by the liaisons they were forced into by the local inhabitants and it is very much believed that Base and Bikhali were the two Surels who initiated the habitation of the Suri area.

Septs (*Thars*)

After the Suri region gradually became the habitat of the Surels, their population naturally increased and accordingly the various social groups began to assert their own *thars* such as Digarcha, Gauthacha, Gaurothcha, Kiyompalithcha, Konasu, Largali, Longkuthcha, Pragathcha, Tongputhcha, etc as can be heard from old timers. However, it is extremely difficult to know about the above Surel septs because it is said, that due to much oppression by other local tribes, these Surels migrated to another area and only the Surels of the Durnicha, Jepocha (Darkathcha), Rongku, Galerung, and Yatajedi (only five *thars*) remain today in the Suri region.

Thus, when no signs of these migrant Surels can be found elsewhere, it can be assumed that either they were assimilated into other tribes or that they became extinct as can be deduced by the research done till date. Among the Suri region Surels, the Galerung are suspected of being a mixture of Surels and Gurungs as much evidence points in that direction. Thus it is imperative that more detailed study be made on this aspect of the Surels and more solid conclusions be arrived at regarding this tribe.

Life Cycle Rites

After a child is born, the Surels perform a sort of christening ceremony known as *basine*. In the past, so they say, this ceremony was performed by their own priests called *nakso*, however, nowadays the local Brahmin priests preside over this ceremony. *Basine* is performed on the auspicious day that is selected between 3 to 7 days post-birth and the name is also given at this time. Although a feast is not compulsory, the Surels are nowadays competing with other tribes who practice this sort of tradition. At the age of two, the male progeny has his ear lobes pierced while the females have their earlobes and nostrils pierced.

When the Surel girls reach menarche, they are kept in some friend's or relative's houses for a period of 7 days, after which they are purified by a Brahmin priest and then only brought back home. To declare the purification of their daughter, the parents prepare a feast of chicken and feed her. After this, the later menstruation requires only a 4 days observation of pollution among the household.

Marriage Practices

Two types of marriage practices are in vogue among these Surels. *Magi Biwaha* and *Chori Biwaha* or arranged marriage and marriage through elopement, respectively.

Magi Biwaha

This kind of marriage occurs easily when both the bride and groom mutually like each other or if the parents of the groom like the bride. Marriages in the Surel community occurs like in any other hill tribe and they too like to make a great show of it. *Magi Biwaha* or arranged marriages are fixed through talks and discussions as is the case of other tribes in the kingdom. When these are over the Brahmin priests is called for and in his presence and that of the groom's and bride's parents, an exchange of gifts occur and this is how the marriage is concluded. It is only after this ritual, that on a day selected by the priest, the bridegroom along with his party and the necessary ritual requirements like: *jad*, *raksi*, meat, ornaments and clothes for the bride, etc. leave for the bride's house in the form of a procession or *janti*. If the bride's house is close by, then the *janti* return with the bride on the same day, however, if the distance is far then they stay the night and return the following day. When

the bride is brought to her husband's house, she must wear the clothes and ornaments provided for her by her husband.

Chori Biwaha

Marriages through elopements are a common form of marriage among these Surels and known popularly as *Chori Biwaha*. It is similar to the traditions of the other tribes and mostly the unions are accepted, though initially some parents do create a tense situation by their unwillingness to accept this matrimonial alliance.

In the case of a remarriage, a Brahmin priest is not required and no rituals and ceremonies are performed. When a barren woman wants to divorce her husband or vice versa (as exists in most cases) then they are permitted to do so. If this woman is desirous to remarry then also she is allowed, but if not then it is found that they normally go to live with their parents.

Widows or widowers do not marry their husband's younger brothers or *devars* (levirate) or wife's younger sisters - *salis* (sororate) respectively, as is the case in some tribal societies. Polygyny and polyandry are non-existent among these people as is clearly indicated by the customs stated as follows:

A man must obtain a divorce sanction from the community council prior to divorcing his barren wife. If a woman is unsatisfied with her husband, she also has to obtain a sanction from the community council. In both these cases, the husbands have to pay a certain amount of money to their ex-wife (alimony) and a pitcher of *raksi* to the in-laws to satisfy them. This custom is found to be very much prevalent among the Surels even today. If a person's wife elopes with another man during her married period, the payment of compensation or *jari tirne* is applicable and the new husband has to pay a sum in the range of Rs 100 to Rs 1000 as a fine for making off with someone else's wife. In the case where an unmarried Surel female becomes pregnant, she informs the old women-folks of her family, regarding the identity of the unborn child's father. These old hags spread this 'secret' throughout the village. Thus the culprit has to or is compelled to accept this woman as his legal wife. These sort of awkward situations are currently beginning to emerge frequently in the Surel society in question. It is thought to be the feedback of sexual promiscuity through the infiltration of modernised Surels.

Death Rites

When a death occurs in a Surel household, the corpse is immediately removed from the precincts of the house and laid out on the right side of the verendah or *pindi*, on a straw mat. Then the inside of the house i.e. basically the floor is cleaned with a mud, water and dung mixture with the help of a rag. The internal area of the house is purified, and this is followed by the shaving of the eyebrows, beard, mustache of the corpse and then bathing it. Then a new set of garments are fitted on to the corpse and a copper coin is placed on its (corpse's) mouth or lips to be precise. The shaved hairs of the corpse are either kept in a sacred place or thrown into the river at the auspicious time. According to their custom, it is not right to cremate the corpse along with the eyebrows, beard and mustache.

If the deceased is a male or a female within the age range of 1 to 10 years, then burial is the custom, but mature folks are always cremated. If a woman dies during delivery, then the woman and child are cremated together i.e. if the child is still born. The pieces of wood used in making the funeral pyre is determined by the age of the deceased.

Death pollution is observed for 12 days and those who observe this pollution do not cook their own food but eat what the family hearth cooks for them. During this period, the persons observing the pollution do not eat boiled food and also foods containing salt or *ghyu* (clarified butter). However, they are eligible to consume oil fried foods. If the husband dies, the wife has to observe death pollution by eating only two meals a day and if a man's wife dies, then he also has to observe the death pollution but eating only one meal a day. If the head of the household (father) dies, his wealth is inherited by his youngest son, but on condition that he (the youngest son) looks after his widowed mother and unmarried sisters as well. Due to this practice, the Surels desire that the property sharing be done prior to the death of the family head.

Religion

Although it is true that Hinduism and Buddhism have made inroads into the religious beliefs of these Surels, they are found to still adhere to their ancient customs and beliefs as observed in their performance of various rites, rituals and ceremonies. On the occasion of religious and tribal rituals, festivals and such, it is seen

that these people use the *jhankri* (shaman) or *jhakrini* (female shaman) known as *poyambo* or *giyamini*, respectively. (Nakso-priest *Duma Nakso*, *Poke Nakso* are the name of *dewari*, *purohit* and *pujari*, through whom these various rites are performed). These *shamans* wear white robes, a turban, use a skin drum or *dhyangro*, perform *dewa devi*, *kul pitree* and such rites and rituals.

These shamans diagnose sickness, diseases and such ailments which afflict the community. They also gauge what unlucky stars befall a person and provide medication for evading such bad times or sickness. Sri Bantu, a god, is worshipped as the creator of the Surels, and they believe that there is no other god greater than him. Without his protection, anything could happen to them and so to keep him pacified, they offer their harvest produce first, prior to consumption. Other lesser gods of the Surels religious pantheon are Sri Dol, Sri Chand, Jasi Dol, Itith Dol, etc.

The protector of the Surels' fields is the god Ki-Kee Tani and he is also worshipped with strong fervor. There is a story about Ki-Kee Tani and how this god originated:

Many years ago, there lived a Danwar ploughman or *hli*, in a Surel's house in Suri village. This Danwar being very uninterested to plough the lands used to break the ploughshare and spend his time trying to extract the broken ploughshare from the plough, thus wasting time. Later in the evening, he would go to his master and tell him how the ploughshare stuck a stone and broke. The Surel did not believe this Danwar's story and so the next day he (the Surel) went to the fields before the Danwar and hid himself in the fields. The Danwar came along as usual with a new ploughshare and again set to work breaking it. Now the Surel knew the problem and so made an appearance and caught the Danwar red-handed. Asked why and what he was doing, the Danwar was at a loss to utter a single word and so just wept. The he took up his belongings and put them in the hollow of a tree and committed suicide by jumping into the Suri river before the astonished gaze of the Surel employer.

The matter was dismissed as a case of possession and everything returned to normal. After a couple of years, a *jhankri* began to speak during his trance and claimed that it was the dead Danwar. The Danwar is said to have appealed to the Surel to forgive his soul and that he would remain to protect the Surels always. The

Danwar's soul had become a *baiyu*. Because of this, every Surel has, on the right hand side of his store, a place set aside, in remembrance of that Danwar, where the Ki-Kee Tani is placed and worshipped. Thus, if any new grain or edibles are to be eaten or cooked within the house, or if a feast is to be offered, then at first a share is offered and prayers recited to Ki-Kee Tani, prior to consumption by the Surels.

Another god is the Seto Bhume (forest god), and then there is the Seto Devi (forest goddess), Seto Nag (forest Serpent), Aitabare (Protector of *goths*) Ganga, Nokande, Komela Mai (Protector of Health), Eebe, Rail and Basee (Indra Dhanu). These people also believe in Masane, Ban Jhankri, and Kalo Bhut. On Mangsir Purnima and Jestha Purnima, Surels visit *devi thans* (shrines of goddesses), Bhume Thans, (shrines of earth gods), Shri Bamtu Than (Shrine of Creator), Chandi Than and Daudali Shikari Than (Hunter god shrine), etc. with vermilion, incense, camphor, flowers, rice-curd mixture, *torma*, etc and worship there, simultaneously offering fruits and blood sacrifices of birds and beasts.

Prior to planting crops and even after storing the harvested crops, the Surels offer prayers and worship their pantheon of gods and goddesses, and before eating some new edibles, they offer a small part to their gods and then commence eating.

The Surels are extremely religious and respect their gods to a very high degree. Their religious activities are reminiscent of the animists of the ancient past.

Economic Status

Although agriculture is the main occupation of the Surels, due to the unavailability of proper cultivable lands, they are compelled to employ themselves in offices as peons or work as hired manual labourers, in small projects and do odd jobs.

When and if the youth (males and females) leave home for such jobs, the old folks remain in the villages and engage themselves in weaving thumplines or *namlos*, baskets or *dokos*, *dalos*, *tokris*, etc. In spite of their colourful and rich culture, these Surels are economically extremely backward. Illiteracy and disease hound them, today. On account of their unknowing and simple natures,

the other tribes of the surrounding villages exploit these Surels to a maximum. The local trend there is to sweet-talk these susceptible Surels, into working for minimum wages and thus help the financially strong landed persons to help solve their labour problems, cheaply. Thus it is found essential to uplift the Surels as a unique tribe, and give them a chance to survive, so that their cultural, traditional, economical, political and social features may be preserved as an identity.

TAMANG

A tribe known as the Tamangs can be found spread out in many districts throughout the kingdom, but the main districts are Okhaldhunga, Gorkha, Sarlahi, Tanahun, Lamjung, Sindhupalchok, Kavre Palanchok, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Makwanpur, Humla, Mugu, Taplejung and Bhojpur. Languagewise, these people can be counted as the third largest tribe in the kingdom, but if assessed from the angle of their being of the Tibeto-Burman category, then they are the most populous.

Settlement and houses

Though these Tamangs inhabit many districts, they are actually more concentrated in Sindhupalchok, Kavre Palanchok, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, and Makwanpur. Tamang houses are clustered at one place to make up a dense village within which there are constructed many cobble-stone paths for movement. Most of these house consist of stone walls, thatch or wooden planked roofs held down by stones. The doors and windows are extremely small. Normally these are single storied houses with single roofs, where the bedding is rolled up in one corner, and livestock like the goats, chickens, sheep, etc. are kept in another corner. The hearth is located at the centre of the floor. Some two storied houses use the upper floor as a bed room, but mostly this floor is used as a store room where all sorts of things from foodstuff to nails and ropes are kept. These houses have a roofed verendah outside the main door and it is called a *pindi*. Since the house interior is very dark, the *pindi* is used as a sort of open living room where guests are seated and discussions held. Weaving, gossiping, idling, all such activities occur on the *pindi*. Thus this is a place for social interaction, as is observed.

The Tamangs of the northern regions, while making or constructing, houses make a statue of *ratilila* and keep it at a place where the people can see it while walking to and fro on the village paths. This is done because the Tamangs believe that this ensures warding off of evil spirits, no chance for lightning or *vajra* to strike their houses, and the person (housewife) of the house will not have to remain barren. According to their financial status, the houses are single, double or triple storied, as has been seen.

Dress and Ornaments

When one looks at the Tamang mode of dress, it can be clearly seen that the region and climate have greatly influenced them. The northern Tamangs wear clothes similar to what other tribes wear in that area and the southern Tamangs have imitated their lower altitude neighbours.

The northern Tamangs, living in high altitude areas wear *punga*, *bokkhu*, *docha*, *gyaso*, *chikukonam*, *arti*, etc. and their female folks wear *syame phanya* (sari-like clothes) instead of *bokkhu*, *cholos*, *dormo*, *kitti sukrae*, etc. Married and unmarried women wear a *pangden* (apron-like cloth) similar to those worn by the married Sherpa and Tibetan women folks. This *pangden* is worn either in front or at the back. Due to this use of the *pangden* among these Tamangs, it is difficult to distinguish an unmarried woman from a married one, as is extremely easy among the other users of this *pangden*. The Tamang women living in the southern regions are not found to wear *pangden*. While observing the Tamangs as a whole, it is clear that they prefer to wear clothes in black, green, red and maroon colours.

Ornamentation is of great interest among these Tamang women as is the case among many other tribes all over the globe. The northern Tamangs women wear ornaments such as gold or silver ear-rings called *bhutil* or *biru* gold or silver bangles called *singikarmu muga* (semi-precious stone) and gold ornaments called *gahu*, etc. The men are also seen to wear the *bhutil*. Gold or silver *jantar* (square amulets hung on the chest on a string or a necklace) are also worn by both sexes. The Tamang women or *Tamangnis* are more fond of ornaments than men as is natural and similar to the dresses, these ornaments also vary according to the place of habitation. This means that it is not possible to explicitly state that Tamangs wear some particular ornaments. Other ornaments worn by these people are: *maramiko* or *sirphuli* on their hair, and *ringa* or *sirbandi* (strips of gold) on their hair. Today, they have begun to wear *potes* too.

Physical Characteristics

Tamangs are of mongoloid stock as can be clearly seen from their facial features and physiques. They are stocky and well built, with medium short stature. They possess straight, black hair, which is thick in texture also. They have slanted, almond shaped eyes, and

possess the characteristics mongoloid folds on their eyes. Facial hairs are minimum though there are rare cases of profuse growth. Faces are wide with high-cheek bones, flat noses with low nasal roots, though there are Tamangs with rather aquiline noses. Their jaws are round and their complexions range from the very fair to the wheat brown and dark too. Wide mouths and thick lips are also seen.

Septs (*Thars*)

Tamangs have their own beliefs regarding *jati-pati* (tribes and clans). Basically, Tamangs are divided into *barah* (twelve) *jats* (tribes), and *atharh* (eighteen) *thars* (septs). This is akin to the *char jat* and *sorah jat* of the Gurungs. There is no actual difference between the septs or *thars* within these tribes or *jats*, and they are of the same type in both groups. Some Tamang *thars* are as listed below :

Karmaba, Karte, Gomden, Gaule, Garden, Garmeba, Glan, Ghising, Angraten, Chauden, Chyaba, Chaelengarten, Zimba, Tupa, Thokur, Darden, Darpa, Dimdu, Titung, Thing, Yorika, Damrang, Dong, Dhyapa, Payen, Pakkrin, Pajunden, Pramuba, Baju, Bomjon, Balam, Mandaen, Moktan, Yonjon, Rumba, Laeden, Lo, Lopchan, Lochan, Waiba, Syangtang, Sahi, Samden, Singden, Syangbo and others.

It cannot be said that these are all the *thars* of the Tamangs, since there could be more too. These *thars* have emanated from two main sources, namely: places and incidents or events. Besides there are other events that can also determine the *thars*. For instance their main reason, if researched for, could also put things in the right perspective and is not an impossible task. The Tamangs living in the flat or even lands (low lands) are called *dimdus*, those inhabiting hilly places are called *maelaendens*, and those dwelling at cliff edges are the *chanden*. Similarly, other *thars* could also be identified.

Regarding *thars*, one fact they state is that whatever *thar* a person maybe, he will be of the same *gotr* as that of another unrelated person but having the same *thar*. Though this is the case, but in some places this is not applicable. The *gotr* is some sort of totem. Dissimilarity of the same *thars* having the same *gotra* can be seen when the Gaulae and Dong *thars*, though different, have the same *gotr*. Marriage among people of the same *gotr*, regardless of whether same or different *thars*, is considered taboo. Thus it can be

seen that the Tamangs practice *gotr* exogamy.

It is said that the Barah Jat Tamangs are of pure blood, while those of the Attarah Jat are of mixed blood, but it is extremely difficult to distinguish between these two categories, since they both have the same *thars*. However, this categorisation is meaningless in Tamang society, since on the basis of food, marriages, etc. no barriers have been seen to exist. Religious ceremonies and rituals are also seen to be free of any sort of *jat* bias and they work in extremely good mutual cooperation among themselves.

Social Organisation

That the Tamangs are one of the oldest inhabitants of the country is a well known fact and further clarified by a study of the social organisation that exists in Tamang communities. The traditional organisation of the Tamangs consists of 8 members originally. It is these elders or councillors who control the whole Tamang social structure and resultant activities. This sort of a council is compulsory in any and every large Tamang settlement. Every member or councillor is given a certain job to do or supervise and it is imperative that implement this properly and fully. After comparing this committee with other such organisations in tribal societies, and their relevant beliefs, the organisational structure can be laid out on a heirarchical ladder on the basis of their functional importance.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Yoho</i> | - Chief Councillor or Chairman. |
| 2. <i>Mulmi</i> | - Village headman. |
| 3. <i>Angsa</i> | - <i>Lama</i> or priest. |
| 4. <i>Bonpo</i> | - <i>Dhami</i> or priest of a lower category. |
| 5. <i>Angsa</i> | - <i>Sadhu</i> (hermit). |
| 6. <i>Aata</i> | - <i>Thalu</i> (elder) |
| 7. <i>Tamba</i> | - Scribe (needed to write geneology). |
| 8. <i>Gurm-Godali</i> | - Secretary. |

The existence of such a systematised organisation is a salient feature that proves the antiquity and stability of the Tamang tribal community. This sort of stability is uncommon among most tribes in the country.

This *Mulmi* is a very important post, as can be seen on the preceding list, and he is elected by the villagers to function as such for a specific duration. After this period is over, someone else gets elected

for this post. The tradition that exists among these Tamangs is to elect a Mulmi on the auspicious occasion of Sanisare puja also called Bhume puja. There are cases where this post has been occupied hereditarily. Prior to 1951 AD. in certain Tamang villages, land taxes or similar revenues were collected by these Mulmi, as was their social function and they were also recognised by the authorities (Government of the kingdom). The duties of the Mulmi were not only making arrangements for the various festivities (both religious and entertaining), social functions and tax collection, but they had to also protect the forests and common people from any external dangers. In lieu of his services, he was permitted to collect *baet baegari* (work without charge) from the villagers for one day annually. The meaning of this is that he was allowed to use the village work force to do his personal works for that one day and had to pay them nothing.

In the past, the Mulmi had the authority to settle ordinary disputes and pass judgement on common issues. Since this status of Mulmi was an extremely important one, the other tribes began to call the Tamangs, Mulmi, as a whole. This was soon corrupted to Murmi. Actually, not much difference exists between the pronunciation of *ra* and *la*. Thus, the above mentioned activities of the Mulmi in the Tamang community indicates the antiquity of these people.

Historical Background

Tamangs are also called Murmis and some scholars have stated that these people call themselves one of the oldest tribes of the kingdom. One scholar states that through the availability of various proofs that these people are of Tibetan origin. Besides being called Murmi, they have various other names like Ishang and Sain. Some scholars have also stated that these Tamangs are the descendants of various mixed tribes, on account of the exogamous proclivities exhibited by them. One faction believes that though their language is Tibetan in origin, if it is detially checked or analysed by linguistic experts, then the word *thar* is also found. Whatever be the case, there is no doubt that these Tamangs are one of the oldest tribes in the kingdom. The next question that arises is where did they originally migrate from.

According to a legend prevalent among these Tamangs, it is said that they were created from Lord Siva or in other words, their ancestor is Lord Siva. There is no doubt that initially Siva was an unAryan and thus the possibility that these Tamangs were related to the ancient

Kirantis, emerges. It has already been stated that Tamangs are also called Murmi and has been interpreted as those people who inhabit border regions, however, it is a fact that no difference exists between the Tamangs or Murmi as they are one and the same. While some experts and scholars maintain that Tamang means horse soldier or cavalry, there seems to be some evidence that corroborates this in a Tamang legend.

The legend tells of a group of King Srong Tsen Gampo's cavalry, who came across the Himalayas and settled in the high hills and so they were called Tamangs. But on checking the Tamang geneological charts neither Tibet nor a cavalry migration is found to have been mentioned, thus this line of thinking is not a reliable view point. At some places, the meaning of Ta mang is found to be horse owner and not a horse rider (cavalry), but lack of evidence makes this arguement frail. The inhabitants of Helambu region, like the Yolmu and Kagate Bhotes have also been lumped into the Tamang category by some scholars. Sometime in the past the Thami had also been considered Tamangs. However, this cannot be accepted now. Since it is indicated that the surrounding hills of Kathmandu Valley were the habitat of the Tamangs, and their inclination was northwards, it is a matter to be considered and analysed. It is very much possible that even the Kathmandu valley was inhabited by these Tamangs, however, with the influx of other tribes these Tamangs were compelled to migrate to the surrounding hills. As scholars have stated that when a larger or technically stronger tribe appears, the simple and more primitive tribes are pushed to the periphery. Thus the original inhabitants of that area can be found on the outer periphery rather than at the centre. This seems to hold good for the migration of the Tamangs from the Kathmandu valley on the influx of other tribes.

Regarding their creation, the Tamangs narrate an ancient story. It is said that their ancestors were three brothers Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar. While Brahma became the ancestor of the Brahmin, Vishnu became the ancestor of the Ksetri and Maheshwar became the ancestor of the Tamang. Maheshwar was supposed to have been taken away by a *ban jhankri* (wild man living in the forest, expert in the art of *tantras* and spells, short in stature and dwarf-like). According to the above story, there are those who believe that Brahmins, Ksetris and Tamangs are all descended from ancestors of the same blood, and so they are in reality relatives.

The Tamangs of Nuwakot believe that almost a thousand years ago, there lived an anti-Buddhist King in Tibet called Galang Marma or Gyalbo Lunder. He was victorious over the Buddhists and set fire to many *gompas*. He then forced the *lamas* to marry and become civilians. Many icons and statues of the Buddha were destroyed too, but not all the *lamas* were subdued. Some managed to escape with their lives. Among these escaped *lamas*, there was one Dapalgani Dorjee who was brave, for he disguised himself as an entertainer in the palace and assassinated the despot. Then Dapalgani Dorjee and his co-conspirators fled south on horses. They were pursued by Galang Marma's soldiers till what is today known as the northern part of Nuwakot. In this way, those monks (*lamas*) settled down in what is now Rasuwa and Nuwakot districts located north of Kathmandu valley. It is believed that it is the descendants of these first settlers who gradually spread to the regions around Kathmandu Valley, Sindupalchok in the east and Dhading in the west. An archaeologist has stated, that through a study of the findings of the excavated sites within the Kathmandu valley, this regions seems to have in fact been inhabited by people of mongoloid stock almost 30,000 years ago, and they indicate a north to south migration pattern. This archaeological evidence further strengthens the Tamang view that they are the oldest inhabitants of the valley.

Thus it seems very clear that the Kathmandu valley was inhabited by mongoloid people initially, however, later on they migrated outwards due to pressure by other tribes who began to migrate inwards. Thus, the tribes at the centre (Kathmandu valley) can be said to be the new ones, while those on the circumference (surrounding hills) to be the older ones. Through the passage of time, these mongoloid people began to be called Tamangs, Murmi, etc. and they can be found even today in those same hills to where they had migrated in the dim past.

Religion

Tamangs have their own beliefs regarding religion and have priest called *lamas* as the Hindus have their priests called *bahun*s. The difference between a *lama* and a *bahun* is that while the later is a hereditary position, that of the *lamas* is not, and they are priests in the strict sense of the word. Any Tamang is eligible to study and become a priest regardless of his previous occupation. However, since it is very easy for the *lamas* to hand down rituals and *mantras* to their descendants (from father to son) this position has also

naturally become a family legacy. Generally, it is customary that while speaking with respect to a Tamang, he is addressed as Lama.

The Tamangs are Buddhists since a long time in the past and they are adherents of Lama Buddhism or Lamaism. Their deities and rituals are very similar to other Buddhist tribes living among the Himalayas, such as the Sherpas who are of the Buddhist Nyingmapa sect. In the main villages high up in the hills, there can be found Buddhist *ghyangs* as in the region inhabited by the Sherpas. Padma Sambhava is worshipped as *rinpoche* or great teacher, by these people. The *ghyangs* are looked after by the *ghyang guthi* (association) who see to it that these *ghyangs* are swept and cleaned daily, and worship is performed. On Maghe Sankranti Cha puja and on Bhadra Purnima Nara puja is performed at these *ghyangs*. The purpose of these *pujas* is to pray for the community's protection against the external forces of evil. At some place in these Tamang villages, the words *Om Mani Padme Hum* are seen inscribed or painted on rocks, houses, *ghyangs*, etc. and these are called *hiki*, or *mani*. Regarding these, it is also believed that should one walk on the left side of the *mane* or *hiki* then it is a religious activity and one doesn't tire easily while on a journey. *Chaitya* are constructed in memory of dead persons and these *chaitya* are also called *mane*. The custom is to complete this *chaitya* and then invite relatives, neighbours and neighbours for a feast. This is done due to the beliefs that in this way the *pitree* also receive food offerings and those who have gathered there for the feast are performing a good religious activity.

On such occasions, religious ceremonies or on deaths, the *lama* has to preside and read from the sacred scriptures simultaneously perform *puja*, however, in marriages, the presence of a *lama* is not found necessary. Another Tamang priest is the *Bompo*, whose function is to discard the evil spirits possessing a person, perform *puja* to *sheda deota*, *bhume puja* and *jal devi puja* to ensure the deity's protection of their crops. *Bompos* are commonly called *dhamisor jhankris* (shaman). They are unbaeto read the sacred scriptures, but a uniqueness found among these Tamangs is that whatever the *thar* of the man who wants the *puja* (any *puja*) performed, the *Bompo* who performs the *puja* must also be of the same *thar*.

Similarly to *kul pujas* of Ksetri and Brahmin, these Tamangs also perform *Hla puja* which is basically *puja* performed to the deity through the medium of offerings of blood sacrifices of fowls and uncastrated goats. After this is over a feast is offered to those in attendance. Similarly to other Nepalese tribes, these Tamangs also offer a sacrifice of a male uncastrated goat to the Hindu goddess Durga Bhawani during the festival of Bada Dasai. While performing *puja* like in Dasai and Tihar, or doing some community works, the headman of the village guides or leads the whole community. This headman, as we have already seen earlier is called the Mulmi, which means village chief. In some villages, the Mulmi is succeeded by his eldest son after his death, while in other villages the villagers get together and elect a Mulmi from among their midst. In ancient times, these Mulmis were chieftans and *jimawals* as well, thus handling the collection of land revenue too.

Hla is the *kul devta* of the Tamangs. From this it is estimated that those priests who performed *puja* to the *Hla* were called *Hlama* or *Lama*. *Kul devta puja* or *Daewali* is performed at any time within the months of Magh and Falgun and all the kin (mainly agnatic) accumulate for a feast and enjoy themselves thoroughly. If the *puja* is done by a *Bompo*, then animals are sacrificed, but if a *lama* presides over a *puja*, blood sacrifices are abstained from though this is not a hard and fast rule among the Tamangs of today. Sometimes kinfolks gather and perform *kul devta puja* or *Phaula Hlasu* as a community activity. Though *Bompos* are of different *thars* and accordingly used, the *lamas* are of one particular type and used by all Tamangs.

Festivals

Tamangs are Buddhists in a majority though there are traces of Bon adherents too. *Ghyangs* or *gompas* are spread around the Tamang inhabited areas and it is around these *gompas* or *ghyangs* that all religious activities are commenced and concluded. Though Tamangs follow Lamaism, there are various festivals which are different from those celebrated by Buddhists. The festivals celebrated by them are Maghe Sankranti, Chait Dasai, Baisakh Purnima, Srawane Sankranti, Bada Dasai, and Tihar (among the Hindistic festivals) and the Tibetan festival of Lhosar. On Maghe Sankranti, these Tamangs go to their *ghyangs* and perform *puja* which they call *ho*. Similarly, the *puja* done on Srawan purnima is called *Nara*. In such *pujas*, the Tamangs participate as a community and a feast is also

offered. During such festive occasions, it is natural that the whole night is whiled away with songs and dances.

Besides *ghyangs*, there are also places called Siddh Than in Tamang villages. This than can be labelled as that of the village deity and one couldn't be wrong. However, though this *than* could be pointed out as a place for the deity, it is believed that very place could also be inhabited by evil spirits, along side the deity. Though this *than* doesn't contain any idol, it can be seen to house tridents, tongs, oil-lamps (iron ones), belts and such items. In blatant imitation of Hindu shrines, some Tamang thans contain idols in the form of a few rocks placed together at this *than* and worshipped. Siddh Thans are mostly located at the base of large trees surrounded by a garden and being walled in so that livestock are prevented from entering and causing breakage, within.

It is also seen that worshippers offer *dhvjas* or *patakas* (Hindu religious cloth banners offered at Hindu shrines after a *puja* in a sort of commemoration) which are seen to be fluttering in the breeze at all times, both new and old alike. Except for the blood matted fur of the sacrificed animals, or the scattered feathers of slaughtered fowls, no other kinds of dirt can be seen in the vicinity of the *than*. This is because that no one dares dirty the Siddh Than and incur the deity's wrath. In such places the Tamangs perform *Sanisare Mai*, *Simae* and *Bhume pujas*. The *Bhume puja* is performed in the month of Kartik. *Paula Hlasu* is done at the Siddh Than also.

The *Kul devta puja* performed by the Tamangs as a community is called *Daewali*. *Paula Hlasu* is performed any time within the months of Marga and Falgun. Kin, kindred and relatives are allowed to participate in this in a group and thus the atmosphere is made enjoyable and entertaining. Whatever *puja* is performed at the Siddh Than, animals and fowls are sacrificed, therefore in such bloody *pujas* the Lama's presence is unnecessary as the rituals are handled by the *Bompos*. Though the *lama* is not invited as a *lama*, he will be present since he is also a member of that community, but the *Bompo* is the one who presides over the whole *puja*. The *tantras* and *mantras* recited or chanted by this *Bompo* are completely unrelated to Buddhism and said to be of a pre-Buddhist religion.

Life Cycle Rites

As in other societies all around the world, Tamangs also go through the rituals of birth, death, marriages and such.

Births

After a child is born, the naming takes place three days after the birth, but 7 to 11 days are also observed in places where the Tamangs have been permeated with the Hindu culture. Birth pollution is observed till the *navran* or naming ceremony as is the case in most tribes in the kingdom. According to ancient Tamang traditions, this *navran* can be done by the child's father and that is enough, but in imitation to and the pressures of surrounding societies, *lamas* or other kinds of priests are used for this ceremony as has been said and observed. This naming is called *Chhoi* by the Tamangs and the scriptures used or read out by the *lama* is also called *Chhoi*. *Chhaiti* (sixth day) is also seen to be observed by these people. On this day, the new mother and child are both bathed and kept in a clean room where burns an oil-lamp. This is the day when Lady Luck is said to come and write the destiny of the child, so it is believed.

Pasni

This is done six months after the birth of a son and 5 months after a daughter's birth. Whether the first born be a boy or a girl, these folks prefer to perform this *pasni* or initial rice feeding ceremony, using the beak of a Maina bird. According to their belief, if the child is fed with such an exotic spoon, then he or she will have a sweet voice like the bird. After the first grains are fed to the child, by the parents, relatives, friends, neighbours, etc. all feed the child and make presents of things or cash. Here it is found that invitees also carry good, pure foodstuffs as presents, e.g. pure honey, pure *ghyum* etc.

Chhaewar

The ritual of *chhaewar* or initial hair cutting of a male child is performed by these Tamangs. The child must be 3 years, 5 years, 7 years, 9 years or 11 years. The *mama* or maternal uncle plays the key role in this haircutting as it is he who has to clip the lad's locks. In the case of a *mama* not existing (i.e. the mother doesn't have any

brothers) then a relative can be used to function as a *mama*. During *chhaewars* the *cheli beti* (females or the family-girls) have to compulsorily offer presents to the child as is the custom among these people. Guests, relatives and friends must also do likewise. The boy's parents have to reciprocate with donations to the *cheli beti* as is customary too. This auspicious occasion is celebrated with songs and dances.

When a girl grows up or if a woman is undergoing menstruation, except from the point of view of hygiene, there exists no such thing as pollution meaning that as in the case of other tribes untouchability for that period is totally unknown. When girls reach the age of 3 years or 7 years, they are given *Shyama* or *gunew* (sari-like cotton dress) as is the prevalent custom among Tamangs and other hill tribes too.

Marriages Practices

There are various types of marriages among these Tamangs, *Magi biwaha*, *Chori biwaha*, *Prem biwaha*, *Jari biwaha*, *Bidua biwaha*, are all given sanction by their society. But it cannot be pointed out that a particular type of marriage is the most prevalent among these people.

In *Magi biwaha* (arranged marriages), there is the custom of the *lami* or matchmaker, representing the boy's family, going to the girl's house. The *Tamba* is the person who functions as the *lami*, because it is he who is knowledgeable in matters of ancient rituals and the family genealogy. Once the talks are over and the finalisation is made by the *lami*, *sagun* or gifts consisting of fowls, *khsi* or castrated goats, *sale roti*, *jad*, *raski*, etc. are sent to the girl's house by the boy's family. It is at this time that the actual date of the marriage is fixed. The *janti* leaves for the girl's house on the scheduled date, as per their custom. While the *janti* makes its way towards the girl's house, exotic rhythms are beaten on their *dampfu* or large one side open hand beating drums. *Damai bajas* or instruments played by the *Damai* are not used, but in places where Brahmin-Ksetri populations are dense, the Tamangs inhabiting these areas have been very much influenced and are found to include *Damai bajas* along with the *janti*. The singers, dancers and instrumentalists precede the groom, while relatives, friends and neighbours follow him. At some places, it has been observed that the *janti* includes women also.

When the *janti* reaches the bride's house, her family members busy themselves to welcome the groom and *janti* by placing *raksi*, an egg, 4 *sale rotis* on the doorstep. When this ready the groom is taken inside the house and given *sagun* (milk, etc.) to drink or something to eat and he is then seated on an *asan* or elevated seat of honour. Once the groom accepts the honour and is seated, the bride has to be carried by her elder or younger brother (on their backs) and placed on the *asan* next to the groom. Then both the bride and groom are given *sagun* to eat or drink. After this is over, the actual marriage ceremony commences.

The marriage starts with the *Tambas* of both sides beginning to praise the ancestors and ancestry of their respective sides, narrating exploits and incidents, adventures and deeds of valour, and such. This is followed by a duet where the *dampfu beaters* of one side ask their counter parts questions in a certain tune or *bhaka* and these questions are answered by the other side in the same *bhaka*. All this time these people are in a rhythmic motion or dancing as is customary. The *bhaka* sung on this particular occasion is *Tamba geeth* or song of the *Tamba*, because whatever is said in these songs is related to the respective families and their genealogies. The next part of the marriage is the *ratri bhoj* or night feast, where the bride, groom and all present eat and drink together. After the feasting is over, the solemn ceremony or ritual of *kanyadaan* (giving away the virgin) is performed. Now the bride's folks are required to present *char daan* consisting of 1 *mana* of rice, *char paisa* (old coins), *jad* and *raksi* as much as they can afford, eggs, etc. which are necessary for the *kanyadaan* ritual. After the *char daan* is presented to the groom's party, then the *kanyadaan* ritual, in Tamang society, is considered concluded. Then various relatives of the bride present the couple with things they can afford and as is customary.

The marriage rituals are presided over by a *lama*, however, it has been observed that a majority of Tamangs prefer to use the services of a *Bompo* instead of a *lama*. Only when a *Bompo* is unavailable, then these people use a *lama*. There are cases where when neither a *lama* or *Bompo* is available, a Brahmin priest is used in lieu of the required *lama* or *Bompo*. This occurs only in cases where a Tamang family lives away from the community and doesn't have easy access to *Bompos* and Buddhist *lamas*, i.e. when a family lives in a community consisting of non-Tamangs in a majority. *Sindur* or vermilion is not used by Tamangs in marriages, or otherwise as it is not customary, but again, in those areas where the Hindu influence

exerts more pressure, the *sindur* has also been found to be used in Tamang marriages. In spite of difficulties and extenuating circumstances, *sindur halne* (putting vermilion on the hair parting of the bride by the groom, as in Hindu marriages) is not preferred. The *goda dhune* (washing of the bride's and groom's feet) is also not prevalent among these people and seen where the Hindu influence is greater.

The next morning, prior to the departure of the *janti*, groom and bride, a feast called *Samdhi bhoj* is given. This is to celebrate the occasion where in-laws of both sides have met and had *dhog bher* (bowing down to each other), i.e. introductions have been completed and relationships have been acknowledged. The *Samdhi bhoj* is followed by the blessing of the bride by her relatives and then a tearful farewell results.

When the groom and this *janti*, along with the bride reach the groom's house, the whole group is welcomed and given a *Jitaurae bhoj* or a victory feast. From this it is observed that the ancient and popular form of marriage was for the groom to kidnap the bride and then only perform the marriage. After this *bhoj*, the groom's relatives, friends and neighbours welcome the couple with *sagun* consisting of *raksi*, *jad*, eggs, meat, fish, etc. After this is accepted, the bride is taken into the house. At this point of the wedding, the *Tamba*, in the presence of the gathering, makes the parents or guardians of the groom promise never to let the bride suffer in the future and the groom is made to vow in a similar way also, by the *Tamba*. The rituals that follow are first the couple's heads are gently banged thrice then feeding each other with what they have already eaten (polluted food) or *jutho khuaune*, and changing their seats. The final ritual is the placing of the *tika* on their foreheads and receiving blessings from an elder. This concludes the marriage.

On the third day after the marriage, the bride is sent to her parents home. This is called the *do wori - niwori* by the Tamangs. During the marriage, if it is found out that the bride is pregnant with the seed of someone else other than the groom, then this is not a matter to be considered inauspicious in the Tamang society and this union is permitted without any inhibitions. Due to this sort of liberal attitude existent among these people, their sexual activities are prolific to quite an extent as they themselves also state.

Chori biwaha, *Prem biwaha* and *Jari biwaha* seem to be very much more popular than the *Magi biwaha*, among the Tamangs. This is

because of the enormous expenses incurred in the *Magi biwaha* compared to the small compensatory fine payable as demanded by the *panch* in the other types of marriages.

Talking about marriages, it is seen that the Tamangs of Rasuwa district north of Kathmandu valley, have different marriage practices. There are mainly three types: *Dhansing biwaha*, *Balsing biwaha*, *Sursing biwaha*.

The *Dhansing biwaha* is generally performed by those rich families and it is tagged as *Dhansing* (*Dhan* meaning wealth) because of the enormous expenses involved. Since most Tamangs are not too wealthy, this type of marriage is rare and not too prevalent. In such marriages, the parents of both the bride and groom discuss the matter and finalise the wedding. They agree to the marriage so as to establish a relationship between the two families because they are rich. It is performed with great pomp and extravagance.

Balsing biwaha is when a girl is forcibly abducted or carried off from some local fair where she has gone to enjoy herself or while she is walking along the road or any such time. This is purely marriage by capture as can be seen from the way it is performed. The abducted girl is taken to the boy's house directly or to a friend's place and hidden there. The next step is to dispatch the *syalkar* consisting of *raksi* and money to the girl's parents and kin. In such circumstances, the *syalkar* maybe within the range of Rs. 5 to Rs. 50, and if this is accepted by the girl's parents, it is considered that the marriage has been authorised. In spite of this acceptance, the girl's parents have a right to demand a compensatory fee or fine of *hazaranna* in lieu of the forcible abduction of their daughter. From this it is seen that *bal* (meaning force in Nepali) is used, so the name *Balsing*. Should the *syalkar* be returned, then the girl must also be returned to her parents as is the custom among these people.

The favourite marriage preferred by most Tamangs is the *ursing biwaha* where the custom is for the boy's father to send a *theki* (wooden vessel) of *raksi* and a *mohar rupiya* to the girl's house. After sending these gifts, he can go and fetch the girl for his son to keep as wife. The *theki* of *raksi* is the *syalkar* and the gift of *mohar rupiya* to the family and kin is *sungden*. Once these are accepted by the girl's parents, it is understood that the marriage proposal has been accepted. In such marriages, the boy and girl assess each other initially, and should the liking be mutual, the boy requests his

parents to finalise the marriage. Thus the marriage is finalised through preliminary talks. In case the parents are adamant that the marriage should not occur, then the couple elope on the quiet and marry. Among the above outlined three types of marriages among the Rasuwa Tamang, *Sursing Biwaha* is the most popular.

Jari biwaha is also a simple affair among these folks, where an ordinary sum has to be paid as a fine.

Another marriage practice among the Tamangs is that when the elder brother expires, his wife legally becomes the wife of his younger brother i.e. the *devar* (woman's husband's younger brother) is allowed to marry his *bhauju* (elder brother's wife). This is a custom still prevalent among the Tamangs, under condition that both the *bhauju* and *devar* should be willing to this union. This is *Bidua biwaha*.

In some villages in the northern areas, the practice of polyandry was also previously prevalent, where two or more brothers were married to a single woman. This has however, become extinct nowadays. Polygyny is also prevalent among these Tamangs and so a person is permitted to have a couple of wives simultaneously, however, a person who lives uxorilocally (in wife's house) is not permitted to marry polygynously. This means that one who lives with his wife's family as a *ghar jawai* cannot marry another woman as long as he lives there. If such a *ghar jawai* does marry another woman, he automatically forfeits his right over his first wife. Or if his first wife brings another man to live with her, then her previous husband (the *ghar jawai*) has no right to live in that house from then on.

Matrilateral and patrilateral cross-cousin marriage patterns are prevalent among these people as is the case with some other hill tribes. The former is called *mama cheli phupu chela* type and the latter is known as *phupu cheli mama chela*.

Among Tamangs, a person's marriage is celebrated as a community festival. After a boy marries a girl and brings her home, to his village, every household in his village send presents for him and his wife costing Rs. 1 to Rs. 5. Thus customarily, the couple must reciprocate this magnanimity of the villagers by throwing a grand feast for all the village.

Divorce or *parpachuke* is existent and conducted in a rather simple

way among the Tamangs. Should a couple wish to separate, or if the husband is attracted to another woman or if it is the wife, they are kept together and tied to each other by a thread around their waists. Then this thread is severed thus completing the divorce formalities. In payment of the thread severing, the *panch* must be compensated with a very nominal fee as a formality. Couples so divorced can remarry and the society does not look down upon them with hate and they have nothing to be ashamed off.

Death Rites

The death rites of these Tamangs are of a different kind. When a person falls sick, his or her relatives rush to the house and look after him. Medication of the sick person is the responsibility of the *Bompo* or *jhankri* and the *lama* also. While the *Bompo* pacifies the evil spirits that cause the sickness (so they believe), the *lama* reads their sacred scriptures and prays to their gods and goddesses to cure the diseased person. At certain times, the *lama* also performs rituals to drive out evil spirits (exorcisms), but actually this is within the field of the *Bompos* or *jhankris*. Even after such attempts, if the sick person doesn't recover, then it is believed that his time has come. Immediately on the death of this person, an oil-lamp is burnt and placed on his thigh or beside his head.

If the deceased is a rich person, then it is customary to light 108 oil-lamps (clarified butter-lamps) surrounding the corpse. The moment death claims the person, the body is raised so that the waist and knees can be bent and the whole person kept in the *padma asana* or lotus posture, by placing the corpse in a large copper or earthenware pot or any other such large vessel. After placing the deceased in such a vessel, the corpse is decorated and new cloth is used to cover it. Rich persons use *ghyu* and oil poured into the vessel to immerse half the body, while the poorer folks use water. Unless the *lama* doesn't give the signal, the corpse must not be raised and until the auspicious time for the removal of the corpse is not decided, or stated by the *lama*, the householders keep various edibles like rice, curry, pulses, etc. all around the corpse as is the custom. Since the removal of the corpse could be placed at two or three days later, the neighbours and villagers come to the house of the deceased and help to keep watch over the corpse.

When the time for the corpse's removal arrives, the corpse and the container in which it is placed is lifted into a wooden box or bamboo

bed-like structure. At this stage, their tradition is to deck out the corpse and container with red, yellow and white *dhvjas* (pennants or banners). The funeral procession starts to move with the lamas preceding the corpse, and playing instruments like the *ghyangling* (a clarinet-like instrument used in Buddhist religious ceremonies), *dhyangro* (drum), *jhyamta* (cymbals), *sankha* (conch shell), etc. Just in front of the corpse walks the head *lama* who rings a bell he carries simultaneously reciting *mantras*, and walking in rhythmic steps. While his one hand rings a bell, his other hand is used to hold a *dhvja* which is attached to the box or bamboo structure, carrying the corpse. The pall-bearers walk in time to the head lama's speed and rhythm. Behind the corpse is the main body of the funeral procession, consisting of friends, neighbours, sympathisers, and in some places even women accompany the procession. But this women-participation of funerals is not observed everywhere.

The last rites for the corpse is preferentially done on a hill top rather than on the river-banks and burials are fewer than cremations. While the corpse is being consumed by the flames, the *lama* sits nearby continually reading the sacred scriptures. While this is going on, the *lamas* are offered *jad* and food brought along with the funeral procession. This they consume while reading the sacred books and the corpse is burning. This is customary and not considered dishonourable. The funeral goers do not eat or drink at this cremation or burial site, however, when they return to the deceased's house after the funeral, after the work is over, then they eat and drink what is prepared for and served to them. When this is concluded, the *jutho barne* or death pollution commences. This means that the family members are not allowed to eat certain items like salt and oil for a certain period i.e. till the death pollution is not over and the householders purified.

Death pollution is observed for three days and during this period, the deceased's relatives abstain from consuming oil and salt. Purification is done on the last day. *Shyarku Tiangsi* is the name given to the purification rite in some Tamang areas where this purification is done after 7 or 13 days. *Shyarku Tiangsi* is not actually the purification rite, since this is called the *ghaewa*, and done at a later, appropriate date. This is the actual practice. This *ghaewa* is performed on the 49th. day after the person's death, but should the time be inappropriate, then it can be done after six months or in the month of Poush as has been stated by the Tamangs. Since this *ghaewa* is an extremely expensive affair

(people have to be fed and the ritual lasts for two days), it can be done even after a year's interval, and is quite common among the Tamang community. At the time of the *ghaewa*, the *dora nach* (dance) is performed as is the custom. Thus these Tamangs state that the *ghaewa* is an indispensable part of the death ritual completion.

Ghaewas are of three types: *ek bihane ghaewa*, *ek rate ghaewa*, *so ghaewa*. The first type, though called a one morning ritual, lasts for the whole day, and so it could be called *ek dinae* (one day) *ghaewa*. The second type commences in the morning, goes on throughout the day and the whole night to end in the early hours of the next morning. Though it is called *ek ratae* (one night) *ghaewa*, it goes on for 24 hours. The last type or *so ghaewa* is that ritual performed by a living person who wishes to attain heaven while still alive, however, this ritual is considered as part of the death rites. *So ghaewa* is performed by those persons who have no family or progeny, but there exist cases where people with families and children also perform this *so ghaewa*. On account of the need to make extensive preparations for completion of a *ghaewa*, the Tamangs have an organised social institution to handle this matter. The functionaries and functions are as listed below:

	Functionaries	Functions
1.	<i>Lama</i>	priest
2.	<i>Ukjae</i>	instrument player
3.	<i>Laiwa</i>	food incharge
4.	<i>Ktubakae</i>	co-ordinator
5.	<i>Chyangla</i>	distributor of sagun
6.	<i>Chyuba</i>	utensils incharge

Among these six functionaries of the *ghaewa* association, the lama's function is considered the most important, because unless the *lama* doesn't read the sacred scriptures the soul of the deceased (*pitree*) cannot ascend into heaven, so they believe. Besides the head *lama*, there are other *lamas* who participate in the reading of the sacred texts. Some *lamas* are present to blow the sacred instruments, at places where there are stops in the reading of the texts. These *lamas* are called *ukjaes*. It is not only the association that handles such *ghaewas*, but the compulsory support and cooperation of the community is also involved. It is a custom that those who come to the *ghaewa* bring *jad*, *raksi* and various cooked foods as a sort of aid. If such help is not possible, then cash donations can also be offered.

If a person dies in a far away place, and his householders receive the message, then a *ghaewa* is performed to let the soul of the departed into heaven. However, if this person is not really dead, but returns after the *ghaewa* is completed, then he is not taken to or allowed to come to his house directly, instead he is kept at another place for a few days, and according to their rituals he is put into a large vessel or *ghyampa* (earthenware pot) and then the pot is broken to let him emerge. After this only is he allowed to enter his house.

In memory of the deceased, Tamangs make *chaityas* as is customary. These *chaityas* can be seen on the hill tops or high places in and around Tamang villages. If there are no hill tops or high places, then these *chaityas* are constructed elsewhere also. These *chaityas* are called *hiki* at some places and *mane* at others. While *Om Mani Padme Hum* is inscribed on or near a Buddhist *chaitya*, a Bonpo *chaitya* will have inscribed *Om Matrimyae Salaedu*. Thus, travellers walk around the right side of a Bonpo *chaitya* and around the left side of a Buddhist one. This is done with the belief that it is a religious act for the travellers and so he will not weary soon.

Therefore, the Bonpo *chaitya* has to be walked around anticlockwise while it is clockwise for the Buddhist one. In spite of this difference the other beliefs are similar to each other. Except for this and the *mantras* inscribed, no actual difference can be seen between the Buddhists and Bonpos. Idols of deities have different names but the overall forms are the same. On completion of a *chaitya*, a feast is given after the *lama* has read the sacred texts and consecrated the *chaitya*. In doing so, the Tamangs firmly believe, that the deceased's soul attains a place in heaven, and simultaneously all those present are involved in performing a religious activity.

It is seen, that prior to their deaths, these Tamangs supervise the construction of their own *chaityas* and so fulfil their responsibility, but this pre-death construction is done by those people who are barren or have no issues.

Budo Pasni

This is the rice feeding ceremony of old people. Among these Tamangs, the *pasni* or rice, feeding ceremony is performed for old people also on occasions such as the attainment of their eighty fourth birthday, the old man or woman is given a rice feeding ceremony called *Budo pasni*. Here also, like in the case of children, it is performed in an atmospheres of joy, happiness and exuberance. Invitees wish the elder a longer life. This is found to be a unique feature existent among the Tamangs and similar to the Newars.

Economic Status

The economic status of the Tamangs hasn't been too good since early times. It is natural, that these Tamangs, who desired to live in the hills, did not possess proper cultivable lands. The few Tamangs who inhabit the flat lands of Nuwakot region produce enough food for their personal consumption and look healthy and happy. But in comparison, those Tamangs inhabiting the hills to the north are perpetually toiling as hired labourers on others farms and fields, and yet they live a hand to mouth existence. Thus they have to depend partially on the wild tubers like *gittha*, *bhyakur*, *sisnu* or stinging nettles, as supplements to their poor diet. On the hillsides where these Tamangs live, they can be seen growing crops like maize, millet, soyabeans, potatoes and such. Paddy is found growing only in slightly warm, flat and irrigatable lands in the lower reaches.

Tamangs are experts in weaving baskets, ropes, thumplines, halters, rain covers (*ghoom*), *dokos*, etc. from stripes of bamboo and *ningalo* (a small type of bamboo). They also weave sheep wool into *radi* (coarse woolen blanket or rug), *bokkhu* (clothes worn on the upper torso by Tibetan type of people). These items they sell to generate extra income for running their lives, just barely. Besides these commodities, they sell firewood, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, tender ferns, etc to the people in the low lying areas and Kathmandu. It is seen that during the Rana Regime, some Tamang boys and girls had obtained jobs in the *durbars*. Some Tamangs have educated themselves, and through the exhibition of their abilities, have attained high posts in the government machinery. However, the number of such people who have elevated their economic standard is negligible.

Fooding Habits

Regarding food, Tamangs have their own belief and ideas. They prefer to eat foodstuff like millet, maize, wheat and barley flour. They do not use paddy so much and those living in rice growing areas use the rice to make *jad* and *raksi*, using flour and other cereals as food. Wherever Tamangs live, they are liquor drinkers and none of their rituals are complete without the use of liquors. Similarly, meat is also considered essential to complete their dietary structure, and according to their own beliefs, they do not abhor beef, yet it cannot be said that this is consumed by all of them.

Dance & Songs

By nature, the Tamangs are lovers of entertainment and their most popular instrument is the *damphu* (a circular structure about 1 1/2 feet in diameter and covered on one side with a goat skin, stretched by means of bamboo spike shooting inwards to the centre). Except for those Tamangs who have lived most of their lives in cities, majority of the males and females of this tribe and who live in the villages, know how to beat on this *damphu* and extract a rhythm unique to these people. They also know how to sing to the beat of the *damphu* and dance too. This *damphu* is considered an important and compulsory item in the lives and activities of Tamangs, from birth, through life, till death. What are the origins of the *damphu* we know not, as no written records exist which could enlighten use, however, there is an oral legend which is rather interesting.

According to the Tamang belief, the story begins in ancient times, when a man called Wang Dorjee, went to the jungle to hunt. He is supposed to have killed a *ghoral* (wild mountain goat) and skinned it. After this, it is believed, Wang Dorjee desired to make a musical instrument and so he felt the need for a piece of wood. Thus he cut a branch of a *koiralo* tree and made a ring with the wood. Then he stretched the *ghoral's* skin over this wooden frame and fastened it at the edges with bamboo nails. Then he beat on this skin and heard the emergence of a soft sound. Wang spread the word of his invention and popularised this instrument. This is said to be the precursor of the modern day *damphus* these Tamang use today.

Thus, the *damphu*, which is said to have been invented in this way, can be seen and played by a majority of Tamang boys and girls. The popular *Bhote selo* is actually a Tamang folk song which is sung to

the rhythmic beat of *damphus*. Even today, if one visits a Tamang village, it can be seen that they dance to the beat of these *damphus*, singing *Aamui lae Ho Aamui Lae* and dancing. Sometimes they spin around, or sit or stand, dancing in many groups. The folk songs for these dances are called *Bhote selo* as earlier mentioned, however, at this juncture it is necessary to clarify the misconception and terminology. *Bote Selo* as the Tamang folk songs are inappropriately dubbed and is actually *Tamang selo* to be exact. This *Tamang selo* is lifeless without the rhythmic beat of a *damphu*. Among the other folk songs of the Tamangs are *Haawai geeth*, *Fawar geeth*, *Tambakaiten geeth* and *Doota geeth* considered to be the important ones. Similarly, among their folk dances there are *Damphu nach*, *Dora nach*, *Saraswati nach*, and *Doota nach* which are worth mentioning. Among these the *Damphu nach* is the most famous and popular.

All the above mentioned dances require the rhythm of the *damphu*. The *Haawai geeth* is sung in religious festivals or *jatras* and it tells about the creation of human kind and society. *Fawar geeth* expresses daily life activities like frustrations in love or love in general. *Tambakaiten geeth* is sung to throw light on the genealogy of an individual, but this name is also affixed to songs sung during feasts and marriages where the necessity of genealogical description is required. During festivals or occasions of importance, the *Saraswati nach* is performed on *pujas*. *Dora nach* is exhibited during death rites.

THAKALI

The Thakali are a tribe of mongoloid stock inhabiting the area called Thak Sat Sae in Thak Khola the southern part of Mustang district in Dhaulagiri zone. Though this is their main area of habitation, and which is what they call home as it is what they identify themselves with, they are also spread out in other districts like Myagdi, Baglung, Parbat, Kaski, Gulmi, Syangja, Palpa and Rupendehi. The thirteen major Thakali villages are spread on the western bank of the Kali Gandaki Gorge through which flows the Kali river. It is said that originally there were seven hundred Thakali households here, so the place is called Thak Sat Sae even today. The thirteen villages in this area are: Tukuiche, Khanti, Nabrikot, Bhurjungkot, Nagung or Nakung, Dhampu or Dhampus, Tuti, Toglung, Kobang, Larjung, Lete, being the major ones, while Sokung or Sirkung are those not too well known.

Historical Background

Prior to the migration of the Thakali to this region of the Thak Sat Sae the original inhabitants were the Tan people and so the area was actually called Tha. These Tan people were named Thatan by the migrant ancestors of today's Thakali, who claimed descent from the ancient Thakuri. Gradually their Thakuri name changed to Thkuli, Thkli, Thkoli and finally the last corrupted from of Thakali, which actually means a sort of responsible person who acts as mediator and not a tribe so the Thakali people claim.

These Thakali of Thak Sat Sae claim to be descendants of the Sinjali Thakuri of Sinja in Jumla. There is a legend which states that in ancient times, a man from Sinja arrived at a village called Thini and settled there where he married a Thinilni woman. The progeny of this union are believed to be the direct ancestors of today's Thakali people. The Thakuri of the Karnali region claim that Thakali is a corrupted form of Thakuri and it is seen that in ancient times, there was a custom of calling these Thakuri of Jumla as Thakali which is pronounced almost like Thakali and thus indicative of the relation to the Thakuri. However, a point of dispute even today is the fact that it is unknown whether the Thakali ancestors, the Sinjali kings were Hindu Thakuri or Buddhists of some mongoloid stock, therefore, it is difficult to confidently state that the ancestors of today's Thakali were truly Hindu Thakuri.

Some sources state that Thakali was derived from the word Thapali which was the name given to these people by the natives of that region when they set up small stalls along the Kali Gandaki river route or better known as the Old Salt Trade Route. In the course of time, this Thapali seems to have become Thakali so they say.

It is seen that the first consonant *th* of the word Thakali is related to Thak, and actually Thak Khola was initially supposed to have been known as Thasang and Thatngkor which words are also related to Thak. These two words mean the area of Kalapani, Nertung, Lhetindhong which was also called Tha so the inhabitants of these areas in those days were called Thatan. When a Thakali greets a fellowman, the word Tamang is heard to be articulated. Thus, in those ancient times, these people began to greet each other in this way after they had settled at Thak Khola, and the other older tribes living there began calling them Thanang. From this the word Thakali is supposed to have emerged according to one version.

Some claim that the Thakali are actually descended from the Chan clan, which are also found in India. On the basis of their culture, regional weapon, Thakuri ancestors, dress up, ornamentation and such features, it can be said that not only is the Karnali region their place of origin, but also Rajasthan in India as has been analysed by some scholars. It is seen that the Thakali are distinctly not the initial inhabitants of the Thak Khola region, but that some other tribes were already entrenched there much before the Thakali exodus. This seems to be proved by the fact that they settled in Thak Khola region and later on became the Thakali who became middlemen for the Salt Trade and other resultant businesses. Besides this, the pots discovered at Chokho Pani testify to the existence of a people in this region almost 3 millineum ago.

The most propounded legend of the Thakali origin is that of the four Chan brothers who arrived in Thak Khola region and founded the four Thakali clans namely the Chyoki or Gauchan, Salki or Tulachan, Burki or Bhattachan and Dimzen or Sherchan. It is said that these Chan brothers were Thakuri who had travelled across the region of Dolpo and emerged into the Kali Gandaki Gorge from the northern part through the Dhampus la and into the Thak Khola area at a much later date. They seem to have slowly but surely been assimilated into the culture of the tribes inhabiting that area, retaining only their name Chan which in most probability is Hinduised form of the Chen.

Physical Characteristics

As is clearly evident, the Thakali possess purely mongoloid features although they claim descent from Thakuri ancestors. Normally, they possess circular faces, slightly prominent maler bones, oblique eyes with the characteristics epicanthic fold (a feature which is only found among mongoloid people), low and even depressed nasal roots though the noses are large enough and shapely also, wheatish brown complexions, scarce facial and body hairs, sturdy bodies and medium statures.

Language

It is rather difficult to say what language these people spoke prior to their gaining their present day Thak Khola identity, however, there are many theoretical assumptions. The inhabitants of Thin, Chimtan (Chimi) and Syangtan (Syang) claim that the Tamanang (Tamang) language spoken by the Thakali today is the original language. The language was popular as Tan before the supposed migration of the Thakali ancestors from Jumla or from anywhere outside the Thak Khola region. This language is called Tamang language today though it is Tan but given a slightly different name. Thus it is seen that the modern day Thakali speaks the language that was existent in the Thak Sat Sae region and spoken by the inhabitants of that area. This means that the Thakali speaks someone else's language or they speak their original language because they are actually indigenous inhabitants of that region, only pretending to be immigrants of Hindu origin.

The reason stated for this phenomenon, seems to be that after the ancestors of the Thakali migrated from Sinja, they were in a minority at Thak Khola and so they gradually underwent inculturation. This cultural transformation also effected their linguistic aspect and soon they were speaking the local language giving up their own western Jumli-Sinjali tongue. When we look at the language which is today called the Thakali language, we can see that it is a Tibeto-Burman type.

Septs (*Thars*)

Thakali elders state that the Thakali ancestral lineage commenced with the Chan patrilineal name, which they use even today. Since the four Chan brothers were in an absolute minority in the Thak

region initially, they were compelled to follow certain social, cultural and linguistic practices of the indigenous inhabitants, thus being slowly assimilated into the original inhabitants' society, as earlier mentioned. The years passed and these migrant people adopted septs from among those used by their older neighbours, and also became fully conversant with the Tamang language spoken there. Therefore, the natives and migrants spoke the same language and had the same septs or *thar*, making it impossible to differentiate them apart. Physically too, they could not be differentiated. In the light of the above matter, it could be said that the immigrants and the locals merged to produce the Thakali identity of today.

Though the Gauchan were called the Cyo Ghyu or chief sept, this was slowly corrupted into Cyoki or Choki and exists in this form today. There are six lineages (sub-septs) within this sept, namely: Dehaten gyuba, Ghotshe, Tanjang, Balamtan, Lara gyuba and Gera gyuba. The Choki or Gauchan are considered to be descendants of the eldest Chan brother, and therefore the highest authority in most matters is reserved by this sept. The Tulachan are considered the second eldest Chan's descendants. They were originally known as Sal ghyu which slowly changed into Salghi and then to Salki. There are three lineages (sub-septs) within this sept namely: Dehaten gyuba, Dumba powe (or Lama Gyuba) and Chyakbu gyuba.

Dhimchan is the name that was given to the ancestor of the Sherchan like the other brothers, their whole name was not corrupted and so only Dhim was the changed name, but Chan remained the same. This indicates that they did not desire to remove the Chan, which was supposed to be their only and important connection showing their relation to Thakuri Chans. The second last brother was known as Bhurghyu which was later corrupted to Bhurghi and then finally to Burki as we know them today. Burki is the name given to the ancestors of today's Bhattachan.

There are nine lineages (sub-septs) within this sept namely: Lha-kang Thungi, Mar Thungi, Sarchung gyuba, Nardzung gyuba, sere-gyabpalden-dzang, Thakuri gyuba, Pamor gyuba, Tazu gyuba, and the extinct lineage (Dehaten gyuba). There are four lineages (sub-septs) within this extinct lineage namely: Dehaten gyuba, Para dorje, Cha-minge-gynou and Ta-parsing.

Thus, due to the population, cultural and linguistic pressure, these immigrants had no alternative but to merge with the local inhabitants

and thus losing their real identities along with their Chan titles as they state. However, as modernisation was ushered into Nepal, the Thak Khola people began to dig up their roots and pride themselves as being descendants of ancient Thakuri royalty. It is then that they began to discard their borrowed identities and revert to their original title, Chan, though they had lost their language forever so they say. Today these people who call themselves Thakali are known by the Chan suffix to their sept name. At this point, it is worth mentioning that though they do call themselves Chan and associate themselves to the Thakuri of Jumla, it cannot be explicitly stated that they are truly descendants of Hindu-Thakuri, since there is no real evidence which states that the four Chan brothers were Hindu-Thakuri at all. Another factor is that the Thakali are seen to be purely mongoloid, possibly a mixture of the northern Tibetan-type of people and the southern mongoloid people like the Magars who have been inhabiting that area since ancient times.

Life Cycle Rites

Births

On the birth of a child, the birth pollution is observed till the third day on which it is purified. *Bahun*, *jhankri* or *lama* are used as priests for this occasion, and these three types of priests perform the rites and rituals according to their own methods which are all seemingly accepted by the Thakali. This purification ritual is called *sangteni*.

Pasni

Completion of the fifth month from the day of birth signals the child's *pasni* or initial rice feeding ceremony, where the child is introduced to solid foods for the first time. An auspicious day is selected and the child's relatives and acquaintances are all invited. The child is attired in new clothes and taken around the whole village visiting all the shrines to pay respects to all the deities there. While *panch ratna* is placed on the child's hands, silver *kalli* are placed on the legs or feet. The rice is fed to the child by the parents using the beak of a Bhadrai bird as a spoon. This is done they say, because the Bhadrai is alleged to be able to speak the language of all the other birds. Once the parents finish, they are followed by the other kin and invitees on a seniority basis.

There is another rite where objects of gold, writing items, weapons and such things are placed in front of the child. Should the child touch the golden objects, it is believed that a fortune is to be earned or is destined if the writing items are touched then the child will be knowledgeable and the touching of weapons indicates valour and bravery. This is what the Thakali express is their belief.

Chhaewar

When a Thakali boy reaches the age range of 5 to 7 years, an auspicious day is selected and this *chhaewar* ceremony is performed. First, the child is bathed and then clothed in a *daura-surwal* made of *nainasut*, a cap which is encircled with a turban. Ornaments provided for the child are golden earrings or *kundl*, gold or silver bangles or *bala* on the wrists, and legs are adorned with *kalli* of silver on the ankles.

The child has his nails clipped in a cowshed, near a cow and tied with a halter round his neck. The boy's *mama* or maternal uncle uses a razor to shave the boy's hair leaving the topknot intact. After this, the *mama* carries his *bhanich* or nephew into the house to the accompaniment of the local Damai *baja*. *Sagun* is given to the boy, prior to his entry into the house, by his female kin like sisters or aunts, then he is annointed with *tika* by his parents and others, turn by turn. Blessings are showered upon him by all and this is his day. Thakali people call this *chhaewar* as *bokor*.

Bratabandh (Dev Kumar Jatra)

This is the thread giving ceremony which is existent among Hindus, however, the Thakali also follow this Hindu practice but in a different and unique way. Those boys who are below the age of thirteen and who want to undergo the ritual of *bratabandh*, have to go through the whole process of the *Dev Kumar Jatra* where they have to be or participate as the Kumars. The area from Kobang till Tuckche is one half while the area south of Kobang is the other half. Thus, the Kumars of both halves who participate in this *jatra* have to do so every alternate year and twice during their lifetimes. This *jatra* is the Thakali equivalent of the purely Hinduised *bratabandh*.

On *Bhadra sukul pks*, these Kumars cut their nails/hair, bathe and wear clean clothes which consist of white *nainasut labeda-surwal*, *patuka* and a crown-like cap or *sripech topi*. Pure woolen shawl or

dosalla are worn in a special way. They also wear ornaments like earrings or *kundl*, made of gold silver and gold worked amulets or *jntr khmbh* encrusted with *muga*. They also wear a *kuglo* consisting of 100-150 tolas of silver, encrusted with golden flowers and motifs in beads. These decorated Kumars have equally elaborately decorated chargers and another experienced horseman also accompanies each youth as a sort of guide and bodyguard.

After being annointed by his parents, the youth goes with his bodyguard, to his other kin and relatives and affluent folks in that area to receive their blessings. Towards the evening, these Dev Kumars converge at a predecided spot. Once all the Dev Kumars have gathered, they dine together and that same night, they go to the shrine of Mahalaxmi located above Khanti village.

According to the existent tradition, there have to be 33 Kumars to represent the *tyatis koti devtas* or 33 crores gods and goddesses. If there is a shortage of Kumars then 23 will also make do, or even 13 for that matter. On this day, the ornaments, weapons, dresses, and other items are inspected to see if all are in accordance to the rules of the *Jatra*. While the clothes and ornaments are as mentioned earlier, the weapons include bows and arrows, shields and swords, and a *surahi* (earthenware pot) for drinking water from. Should any of these items be missing then the offender must be ready to accept the punishment and should be in possession of the missing item by the next morning. After this inspection is over and everything is correctly present, the Kumars go to worship and light oil lamps at the four *kuldevta* shrine and also, at those of other deities. By the time this is completed, it is midnight or past, so all the Kumars go to their respective resting places and sleep to conserve their strength for the *Jatra* which commences the following day.

The method in which the *jatra* commences and the rules that are to be observed are as follows:

One year before this Kumar Jatra, the representatives of the various villages to be involved get together and decide about the posts to be granted to the Kumars. Thus a king or *dhukse*, a prime minister or *kimb*, courtiers or *chirthova*, four commanding generals or *khe lehi* and other Dev Kumars as members are selected.

The *jatra* commences with the lining up of the Dev Kumars according to their pre-decided ranks. Then a gun is fired to wake up the Kumars as is the tradition. The second gunfire announces the time for meal and the final or third gunfire heralds the actual start of the *jatra*. The Dev Kumars wake to the sound of the first gunfire, ready themselves and then present themselves to the *badshaha*, or the *dhukse*. At the second gunshot they eat their meal and after this they mount their steeds and in full ceremonial regalia and pageantry they commence moving along with musical instruments blaring out, when the third gunshot is fired. The *yatra* starts and moves along slowly and soon reaches the Mahalaxmi Temple, where the deity is worshipped. After this, they move on to a place called Chokho Pani reaching there the same evening. The reason for this visit to Chokho Pani is to pray for power so that they are able to counteract the forces of evil and vicious animals which threaten their daily lives.

On reaching Chokho Pani, devotional songs and dances are performed to please the deity. The next morning, at about 4 am. the sound of a gunshot starts the day for these Kumars, who wake up and bathe in the nearby Chokho Pani river, after which they soak in the heat from the pine logs that are burnt in a large bonfire style. Thus they purify themselves. The second gunshot announces the time for eating and then the third gunshot announces the mounting of steeds and commencing the second day of the procession, alongwith the full traditional pomp and the cacaphony of the musical instruments of the local band.

Once more the procession returns to the Mahalaxmi Temple and everyone pays obeisance to the deity and lamps are lit. Then the Kumars must unsheath their swords and attack images of devils called *ranke bhut* which they drag through a distance and finally destroy. Once the *ranke bhut* is destroyed, the villagers are overjoyed and collect there in groups to sing and dance to celebrate this victory of good over evil in their social huts situated near Kobang village. When this celebration is over, the Dev Kumars go to their respective houses and rest for two or three days. During these days of rest, the Kumars have to eat foods with high calorific content and also a lot of honey. This is eaten according to the dictates of tradition though the actual meaning, of this sort of food consumption practice is not known today.

When these three rest days are over, the Kumars once more don their regalia as in the beginning of the *jatra* and then visit their relatives and kin and respected personages of their villages to seek their blessings. Once more they return home. The following day, early in the morning and according to the traditional way as earlier mentioned, they gather at a predicated spot and accompanied with music and fanfare they proceed towards the Mahalaxmi Temple, where they perform worship by lighting oil lamps.

After this is over, they visit a nearby cave, where it is believed Mahalaxmi changed her form from that of a deer (*deo*) to that of the goddess. Here, they place an image of the deity and pray to her, again burning some oil lamps, here too. Then this image is carried away covered with a large decorated umbrella and accompanied by music to Larjung village, at the bottom of which is a river bank known as *kyongr*. Here the image is circled thrice around a *dhupi* (pine) and a *bhote pipal tree* and then again taken back to the temple of Mahalaxmi, but the Dev Kumars remain at *kyongr* and compete in target shooting. These targets are actually pictures of demons, goblins and other evil creatures which are supposed to be responsible for all the obstacles encountered by human beings. These targets are shot at in various ways such as from a fast moving horse, from under a decorated umbrella and other classic postures.

When this shooting is over, the elders and kin present them with turbans wrapped around their heads and bless them. When all is over, the people commence their traditional celebration of songs and dances, and in the end, the Dev Kumars are taken home by their respective kin or group. *Bratabandh* is also called Kumar Gava Rajghrana by these Thakali people, while the ancient name is *Syavelava*, and also *Bhdau Gava*.

Marriage Practices

Elopement or abduction marriages are the most common forms of marriages existent among the Thakali people and also among a majority of the tribes in the kingdom. Patrilateral and matrilateral marriage practices are prevalent among them, on conditions that the generations must not intermarry for an interval of time, as is also similar to other tribes. Clan endogamy is practised, polygyny is found in traces and polyandry is seen to be totally absent. Though the marriages that Thakali practice are those of capture, abduction and elopement, today, they are gradually assimilating the Hinduistic

marriage patterns into their social structure due to the fact that they believe themselves to be descendants of Thakuri and thus must practise Hindu and not any other form of marriage rites and rituals. Therefore, today we find that a majority of Thakali people perform very Hindu marriages, and that too arranged, using the services of a Brahmin priest who chants *sutras* from the ancient scriptures of the Hindus and preforms the rites of *kanyadaan*.

The abduction of a girl occurs when she is in the forest foraging for fodder or fuel wood, or when she goes to fetch water from a *dhara* or a water hole. For here, she is whisked away to the boy's relative's house and never directly to the boy's parents' house. Since marriages are endogamous, as earlier stated, a union occurs within relatives and kin (clan endogamy), both the concerned families have a mutual understanding. Thus, when such an abduction occurs, the female's family pretend to be very much unaware of the fact and express surprise to authenticate the situation.

The abducted girl has to be hidden away for a period of 3 days, after which the boy is fully entitled to marry that girl. The girl's parents try to locate the girl's whereabouts, but when they are unable to pin point the location, then they simply wait for the boy's folks to approach them with the news of this abduction. This is actually what most of the tribes do in the kingdom and nothing that is unique to the Thakali people. It is now that the the girl's parents and relatives know who had abducted the girl, and marriage talks commence. When the boy's folks go to inform the girl's kin, they carry presents consisting of *sale roti*, *jad*, a rooster, cooked vegetables and such to the girl's house. Should these gifts be accepted, it is taken as a sign that the marriage is accepted or tolerated. Normally these gifts are accepted and there may be rare cases where rejection and social upheavels have occurred in the past. On a selected day, the boy's kin go to the girl's house where *khumichuji* is concluded. This means that the girl's ancestors are worshipped. This is then followed by the transference of the girl from her paternal clan to her prospective husband's clan which is somewhat like a lineage transfer. Now her link with her family of birth or *maiti*, is broken and relinked with the family of her husband or into her husband's lineage for good. During this *khumichuji*, the boy's kin sing songs of praise and admiration of the bride's parents. *Jad* is served three round or more, never less, to each of the bride's kin and one of the groom's junior kin has to bow down, touching the feet of these kin who receive the *jad*.

Once the *khumichuji* is concluded, the actual marriage occurs. The couple are annointed with *tika*, and the groom is presented with a cloth about two metres in length for a turban. The couple is blessed by the kin and others present, starting with the seniormost. When the marriage is over, the couple visit the bride's parents carrying a bottle of *raksi* and some *sale roti* as gifts, these are reciprocated with presents of rice and salt by the girl's parents, as is the traditional practice. Should permission be granted prior to abduction, then this abduction is enacted by the boy and girl. The boy literally drags the girl from her parents house, and after this is over the boy's kin apologise to the girl's father for this offense. This is the custom prevalent. After this, proper sanction is again requested for the marriage to be conducted. However, today such marriages are not practised as earlier stated since these Thakali consider themselves to be of Thakuri descent and Hindus, so this barbaric tradition does discredit their status in the modern Hindu heirarchy.

The marriages practised currently in Thak Sat Sae region of the Thak Khola are very much Hinduised, and therefore, arranging marriages using matchmakers and matching the bride and groom, *kanyadaan* rituals, etc. are given more priority today, so as to express the fact of the Thakali transformation into the Hindu. But the ritual of *khumichuji* is a compulsory one where relatives gather to witness the transfer of clan lineage of the bride into that of her husband. This is a very unHindu ceremony where the brahmins are not used, however, in the cities or urban areas, Thakali households are seen to use brahmin priests to perform Hinduistic ceremonies and rituals.

The system of *daijo* or a form of dowry was prevalent in ancient times and is still very much in vogue even today. Here the dowry consists basically of items such as: ornaments, clothes, utensils, furniture and money. The peculiarity of this dowry is that it is presented only after the birth of a male heir, as tradition dictates and this male offspring is the factor that glues the couple to each other permanently, with no reason to break this martial union, so the Thakali elders state. Thus it is seen that prior to the birth of a male child the couple can separate or divorce should the situation so demand.

After marriage, the eldest son separates from the main family and sets up his own nuclear family unit within the new house he builds or procures from some one else. The sharing of the property is done at a later and suitable date. The youngest son receives the largest

share of the property, as it is he who retains the *mul ghar* and thus must look after his aged parents.

Divorce is also prevalent among these Thakali people as in other tribes. Divorce among these folks is a two-way affair, where both the husband and the wife can file for divorce against each other. Whoever seeks the divorce initially, is the one who has to pay the alimony later. A divorced woman can remarry another man with the full rites and rituals, as if it is her first marriage. Payment of alimony is made in a lumpsum amount, which depends on the social and financial status of the divorcee. It is worth noting here, that Thakali state, their folks hardly divorce as there exists the devotion and faithfulness among their women and men.

Religion and Festivals

Thakali were animists initially as were a majority of the tribes that inhabit the southern areas of the Himalayas from the Kashmir valley upto Bhutan. Animism gave way to a more sophisticated Jhankrism or the Bonpoism and finally the winds of Buddhism from the north which were overcome by the hurricane of Hinduism pushing forcefully into the tribal mosaic of the Himalayan region. The people inhabiting the regions along the Kali Gandaki Gorge were the victims of all these forces of change and the Thakali were also caught up in this vortex. Today they have emerged claiming to be descendants of a Hindu ancestor who lived in the far north-western regions, which were initially inhabited by the Bhotia people following a religion consisting of an amalgam of shamanism, animism and a kind of Buddhism or Lamaism of Tibet.

Though it is clearly stated by many scholars that the Thakali are of mongoloid origin, and adherents of the ancient religions of shamism Bonpoism, the Thakali of today are discarding their ancient beliefs and clothing themselves in the mantle of Hinduism. It is observed, that due to this proclivity towards Hinduism, the Thakali are undergoing a metamorphosis, indicated by the fact that their language and culture are in the process of drastic degradation - an unhealthy sign, so the scholars say.

Even the once proud tradition of becoming Buddhist monks is more or less extinct today, and only those old monks and nuns are upholding the traditional religion and its beliefs, while the others consider these as the skeleton in their cupboards and await the death

of these old monks and nuns so that once and for all they can bury the past and live in a present where they can fantasise themselves to be of Thakuri lineage.

The major festivals these Thakali celebrate are: *Kul devta puja*, also known in its ancient form an *Lha chesi* which literally means 'god worship' in the Thakali language; *Pitree puja* or ancestor worship *Nag Puja* or worship of the snake and *Lha pheva* or 'coming of the Lord'.

Kul devta puja or ancestor worship is performed by most tribes around the globe and the Thakali are no exception. While some Thakali folks do this *puja* annually, others do so after a period of two or three years, as per their convenience. This *puja* also called *Lha chesi*, has been done since ancient times by their ancestors, with great reverence and devotion, as it is considered a very holy *puja*. These ancestral worships are done by the various Thakali people in their own ways. There is no question of changing or adding any ritual in this *puja*, and whatever methodology exists in this worship indicates the culture, history and roots of that type of Thakali, so they say.

The *kul devta* is housed in a separate room which contains nothing but the items necessary for the *puja* and a cupboard on the western wall, where these items are kept. There can be seen no idols or images within this room.

On the day of the *kul devta puja*, the *jhankri* is the presiding priest. The things necessary are: a *panch pala* or five mouthed lamp which is made of copper and lit, a *dalo* or basket made of copper also and full of uncooked rice grains or wheat, a *dhyja* or a banner of cloth consisting of five coloured cloth pieces, a *karuva* or brass drinking vessel with a spout which is filled with pure *jad* which must not be touched by the birds or man.

The *jhankri* use their *tantra-mantra* or incantations and so commence the worship of the *kul devta* while simultaneously the householders invoke their *pitree* also. In this worship, the household head or the *buhari* (daughter-in-law who is of the same tribe and clan) has to face the west, towards the cupboard, earlier mentioned, and pay obeisance with water, *jad*, *aksata*..

Annual *kul devta pujas* need the presence of a closely related *jawai* and daughter, since the *jawai* has to offer the blood sacrifices. These sacrifices consist of sheep having their breast cut open, a hand inserted and the heart wrenched out and offered to the deity. This is the traditional way of doing *kul devta puja* among the Thakali people. It is said, in ancient times, kings used to offer the hearts of rhinos.

Besides this family *kul devta puja*, they also perform this in a broad community wide way. For instance, in the ancestral home of the *Ghyuva* family of Thakali, there is a structure called the *khimi* which is about 10 to 12 square feet in area, and possess a height of approximately 4 feet. It looks similar to the Tibetanish *mane* or *chorten*. Inside this stone structured *khimi*, there is a hole or a niche which is used to house the cranial bones of all the deceased ancestors of the *Ghyuva* lineage. The *khimi* is said to be the most concrete emblem of a lineage, as the Thakali elders state.

Though all four septs among the Thakali are considered as on the same status or plane, during these *kul devta pujas*, or any such occasions, the *Choki* or *Gauchan* is given the first priority followed by the *Salki* or *Tulachan*, then the *Burki* or *Bhattachan* and finally the *Dimzen* or *Sherchan*.

Pitree Puja

Thakali call their *pitree deo* as *ghutinta*. In every Thakali *mul ghar* (main ancestral home) or *ma dhim* meaning a sub-lineage member's house where the ancestors are worshipped, two small metal *karuva* are kept to represent their lineage *pitree deo* or ancestors.

The room where these objects are kept are strictly out of bounds for anyone besides the immediate family members. The *pitree puja* is performed in the Thakali *mul ghar* also called *bhytim*, annually or after every four or five years. This *pitree puja* is performed with great enthusiasm and rejoicing. Here also the presiding priest is a *jhankri*.

Nag Puja

This *puja* is also of ancient origins among the Thakali and they perform this *puja* with great devotion in the month of *Srawan*. This worship is done within the house by all Thakali people. It has been

stated by some scholars that as *Nag puja* is an ancient form of worship existent among the Thakali people, even today, it corroborates the fact that even after the migration of the Thakali from the lowlands to the hills, this worship continued. This is stated on the basis of the fact that snakes are not found in the present region of Thakali habitation and also the necessity but unavailability of the betel leaf being substituted by the walnut leaf, necessary for the rituals of *Nag Puja*. All these are indicators towards the Hindu identity of these Thakali people, it is argued but not accepted at all due to lack of concrete evidence.

Lha pheva

This is considered the main festival of the Thakali. This festival is celebrated after consulting the Tibetan calendar and calculating the year of the Monkey which occurs after every twelve years and then the worship is set on a day in the month of Kartik. The Thakali call this the *Barh Barsah Jatra* or the *Kumbh Mela Lha pheva* in Tibetan means 'coming of the Lord'.

On the occasion of the *Lha pheva*, the four Thakali septs arrange their *kul devta* in order of seniority and status and then commence the procession. Prior to the commencement of the procession, the priests or *pande* of each of the septs and the Kumar of each sept have to go to Chokho Pani and remain there for a night. The next day they bathe in the waters of the Chokho Pani river and pay obeisance to the four deities there. After this, they keep on doing rituals till the ninth day, on which the four deities are again worshipped and then the *jatra* is actually underway. On the 8th day after the commencement of the *jatra* when all the ceremonies and rituals are completed, then the *Barh Barsah Jatra* is considered over.

On this great festival, the *pande* of every sept reads out the genealogies of their ancestors and the brave deeds they performed in those far off times. They also read out sacred texts. The image of Mahalaxmi is also worshipped, at the spot where it is placed after preselection. Dasai and Tihar are celebrated by the Thakali like the other tribes in the kingdom. They also celebrate the Lamaistic festivals and always face the west when they pray.

Traditional & Social Institutions

1. In the past, the Thak Sat Sae Thakali used to select a person of substance from among themselves and grant him the title of Amali which is found among the Tamangs and Limbus also. While such a person is called a Mulmi by the Tamangs, he is known as *Subba* among the Limbu. The Amali was responsible for matters such as: the local administration, land taxes or *malpoth*, maintaining the peace in and the security of the villages, and settlement of minor quarrels and disputes justly. The Amali were also granted the title of *Subba*, is stated by the Thakali elders.

Thus it is seen that the Thakali society consists of not only the Amali, but also Mukhiya who occupy high positions within the Thakali community though lesser than the chief, Amali. Traditionally, the Thak Sat Sae region was split into 13 parts and each was governed by a Mukhiya in the past, and they were granted a semi-governmental status then.

2. *Dhikur* is an interesting and traditional organisation of the Thakali people. This is in reality a sort of money rotating system which exists even today and has infected other business men who live in proximity with these Thakali folks. It is a businessmen's co-operative where their resources are pooled and used by the person who is in need of a large amount by paying a sort of fee. There are certain specifics to be maintained and conditions to be fulfilled while participating in this *Dhikur*. Thus it is a clear fact that *Dhikur* or *Dhikuro* has contributed in uplifting the Thakali both socially and economically and made them what they are today.

If any Thakali is interested in doing some business and requires some capital, he calls on his kin and relatives and commences the *Dhikur*. Here every player or member has to contribute or pool in a certain amount of money annually or monthly, out of which the person who starts the *Dhikur*, uses the first instalment collected, to fulfil his requirement. Then the next installment is used by another member of that *Dhikur* to fulfil his requirement and so on, till all get a chance to use the *Dhikur* funds.

There are usually 25 to 50 members in one *Dhikur* and each member contributes within the range of Rs. 100 to Rs. 20 and even Rs. 10 thousands, in a single installment. The *Dhikur* continues for as many years or months as there are members, and it automatically ends when the last member receives his collection.

3. The Thak Sat Sae Thakali state that those Thakali of Panch Gaun and Barh Gaun are a different type, and express open dislike for them. This indicates that the Thak Sat Sae Thakali feel superior to these other Thakali living outside their area and wish to delink themselves to the more animistic Thakali and associate themselves to the more Hinduised ones. Thus this has become an institution in itself, where a Thakali from Thak Sat Sae will introduced another friend as being a Tamang like one of them.
4. The Thakali in the Thak Sat Sae region are very particular about one formality which they adhere to rather strictly to the point of fanaticism. This is that they never let a non-Thakali enter their kitchen.

Economic Status

It is seen today that the economic condition of the Thakali in general is not of the poor kind. Their main occupation has become the business of catering to the palates of travellers and some form of agriculture. The crops they grow in their fields are mainly maize, millet, barley, buckwheat, potatoes, beans and such. Today it can be seen that Thakali have become interested and successful in horticulture as the apple orchards of Jomsom and Marpha tell us. But these people are known not because of their agricultural prowess but mostly because of their food catering business. They buy Tibetan wool, salt and such items which they stock, and sell when the signs of a good profit are there. They are still the true middlemen in trade and so called Thakali aptly.

Transit towns and junction cities are full of foodstalls where these people cater to the belly's needs, and very successfully too. They even state that food catering and their culinary talents are in reality hereditary characteristics, meaning that they have been in this sort of business since ancient times and there is no telling how close to the truth they really are.

THAKURI

Some districts in the far western parts of the kingdom is the habitat of a tribe of people called the Thakuri. Among these districts, their highest concentration can be found in Jumla. It has been seen that they possess their own uniqueness in matters of traditional and village customs.

Historical background

While investigating their origins, these Thakuri claim descent from the Rajputs. They state that during the Muslim invasion in India, the Rajputs had fled to the hills in the Kamali region which lies within Nepal. This story of fleeing the Muslims is rather common among most tribes inhabiting the mentioned area, however, on the basis of the evidence and information obtained, regarding the Khas civilisation's history, these Thakuri seem to have already been inhabiting the area in question, even prior to the Muslim invasion. Consequently, scholars estimate that these people are actually descendants of the ancient Khas inhabitants of that region, who supplanted the lineage of the Lhasa Yatsae.

Family

Though joint families are very important institutions in the Thakuri society, however, in relation to the kin within the household and members, it can be seen that small nuclear families are in vogue and consists of the parents and their progeny. The size of family increases in proportion to the financial status increment. A polygynous person will build a separate house for each of his wives.

Septs (*Thars*)

Among Thakuris, there exist *thars* such as Kalyal, Shah, Sahi, Malla, Singh, Bam, Pal, Chandra, etc., but it is to be clarified that every *thar* has its own separate *gotr*. For instance, the Chhatyal Malla belong to the Athsaya *gotr*, while the Kalyal Sahi belong to the Ravi *gotr* and the Workote Sahi to the Raika *gotr*. Another point to note is they never marry within the same *gotr* and naturally within the same *thar*. Thus it can be said that they practice *thar* and *gotr* exogamy.

Life Cycle Rites

Birth

In Thakuri society, a woman about to give birth, is transferred from within the house to the cowshed. After the child is delivered by a *sudeni* (rural version of a midwife), the householders are informed of the birth. At this time, if it is during the day, the sun's position and the shadow thrown by a person who is standing there are noted and on this basis the astrologer determines the child's zodiac sign. But should the birth occur at night, then the moon is used as the yardstick and an oil-lamp or *diyo* is placed at a point from where it throws a shadow of a person standing there. These two measurements are then used to determine the zodiac. If a son is born, guns are fired into the air some 5 to 10 times according to the newborn's father's social and financial status. Nothing like this is done if a daughter is born. On the sixth day after the child's birth, *Pusti puja* is done. Here the child is first bathed at the cowshed itself and then it is taken to the place where the brahmin is performing *homa* (offering food to *Agni*-the god of fire). During this journey from the cowshed to the *homa* site, a man with an unsheathed *khukuri* precedes the child, which is done, so they believe, to ward off the effects of the *dankanis* (witches) who attempt to attack the susceptible and defenceless baby. At the *jagge* (the place where the *hom* is done), the presiding brahmin *blows* a name into the child's ear and ends the *puja*. After this, the child is once again escorted back to the cowshed.

Navran

On the 9th. day after the child's birth, the naming ceremony or *navran* is performed. This is in reality *griha puja* (household worship). Here the Brahmin is given *daan* (charitable donation) of red, yellow, white, black cloth pieces as brought by the householders. Metals are also given as *daan*. These metals include copper, brass, bronze, iron and if they are able to afford, then a small bit of gold too. This completes the ritual and a grand feast is offered to all the villagers after which the *navran* ceremony is rounded off with great joy and much merriment.

Annaprasan (*Bhat khuwai*)

This ceremony is necessary to start feeding the child solid foods and

it occurs when the child is 5-7 months if a daughter, and 6-8 months if a son. On this auspicious day, after all the household and other areas are cleaned and purified, the brahmin priest begins to read the *slokas* and the person who is considered to be favoured or *ras jureko chha*, feeds the child initially with a coin five times. The coin can be one of silver or of gold. This is also called *panch gans* meaning five mouthfuls. This is followed by a village elder carrying the child out into the *othalo* which is a kind of compound of the house, carried round and then brought in again. This ritual is *desh dulaye ko* or a symbolic representation of the child being shown all around country or world.

The *annaprasan* ceremony is an extremely important milestone in the lives of the Thakuri people. The reason for this is stated that after the ceremony is completed, then the child, if a girl, is considered eligible for being promised for marriage in the future. If the child is a boy, then he is also eligible to have a proposal of marriage put forward by his folks to a girl's parents, at that time, for future consumation.

Bratabandh

This *bratabandh* ceremony is also called the thread-giving ceremony. Between the ages of 8-12 years, a son's thread-giving ceremony or *bratabandh* or *chuda karma* must be performed and it lasts for three days, among these Thakuri folks.

The first day is spent in *ghhata pisne* (grinding the millstones), *pitho kutne* (pounding food grains like wheat, millet, etc.) and *chamal kutne* (pounding rice). On the second day, clothes are stiched and shyawlichar are brought from the forests for the *jagge*.

The final day is spent in ritualistic shaving of the boy's hair with full traditional and religious rites and rituals. The boy is fed with seven *laddus* (sweet balls) made of barley, and his tongue is touched seven times with a piece of gold while the *guru* recites the *mantras* simultaneously. After this, other rituals such as *jogi chodaune*, *deshant* are completed and then *ghar paincho* is performed. Here, the father puts *tika* on the boy's forehead and this is *ritiaune din*, after which he presents the boy a plot of land or cattle whatever he possesses. This does not come within the property sharing between brothers or *bhai bunda*.

This *bratabandh* is not done for daughters, however, when these girls undergo their first menstrual cycle or *chhui*, they are immediately taken to the cowshed, where they must remain till the seventh day. From the third day onwards, she must go to bathe in the nearby river or *pandero*, but should not be seen by friends. On the seventh day after she is anointed with *aksata* by her sisters, then only is she allowed to enter the house. On her later menstruations, she does not have to hide as previously, but must remain in the cowshed or a house called *chhui ghar* for the stipulated period of seven days.

Marriage Practices

In the local language, formal marriages are called *bya*. Thakuri folks practice various forms of marriages. One type is *uralera laijane*, where the couple intent of marrying knows that the parents will not agree, so they elope. *Satta biwaha* occurs when an elder daughter is married to a man and she later on elopes with another person. Then the first husband feels cheated so he appeals to his *kul devtas* (*kul devta jagaia ra* - awaken these *kul devtas*) to trouble his wife and her present husband (*jar*). At this stage, a *dhami* is used to diagnose the trouble and he accordingly pacifies the angry *kul devtas* and the first husband as well, by handing over the wife's younger sister as a sort of compensation. This is called *jawai ko killa kayam garidinu* or to keep the son-in-law's fort defended. In some cases, while girls are on trips to the forests for foraging fodder and fuelwood, or while going elsewhere, they are seized and forcibly abducted. This sort of marriage is called *Chore ra bya* or marriage by capture or stealing or force. Though these sort of marriages are dramatic and adventurous, they are gradually becoming rare nowadays.

Arranged marriages or *byas* occur when the boy is almost 14-15 years old in comparison to the girl's age of 8-9 years. The marriage procedure begins at the time when the family, which is on the look out for a bride, makes a person the *bhalaji* (sort of matchmaker) and sends him to the girl's house with some special foodstuffs. This is known as *kutiro khuaune* among the Thakuri. If the girl's folks accept this and consume it, in other words should they eat the *kutiro* or *kutiro khayao*, then it is taken as a sign that they are willing to give the hand of their daughter. As a result of this, the *bhalaji* is sent with gifts of beans, peas, a *theki* of curds, beaten rice, vermillion, bangles, hair plaiting thread, shawl, *laddus* and a one rupee coin, after a few days to ask for the hand of the girl. When all the gifts

sent are accepted by the girl's parents, the boy's folks promise not to do *phucho-mucho* and not to bring *sauta* (second wife-while the first is alive).

In reply to this promise, the girl's parents say that they have considered giving their daughter's hand in marriage. This utterance or promise made by the girl's parents is called *Bagh daan bolne* meaning the betrothal is confirmed.

This is followed by *pito lagaune* which is done by the boy's folks every succeeding Dasai, and *taaga puraune* on every Baisakhe Sankranti. When the time for the marriage approaches, a gift called *biwahadalo* is sent through the *bhalaji* for *biwaha magne*, then the month of the marriage is fixed. A few days later, the *bhalaji* goes to the girl's house with the *lagan ko kagaz* (papers which contain calculations of horoscopes, etc. and the time and date of marriage found auspicious by the astrologers). Once the date of the wedding is set, the people of the boy's household commence the traditional rituals like *syawli bhanchne* (breaking of branches) and *dubo karne* (collecting the short grass found growing almost anywhere). When these rituals are over, the *janti* sets off towards the bride's house.

The *jagge* is constructed in the cowshed and after the ceremony is completed, a ritual called *bhawar ringyaune* is done, meaning a cloth is tied around the waist of the bride and the other end being in the groom's hand and he leads the bride (like leading a cow) around the *jagge* thrice. Prior to the completion of the third round, the bride's paternal aunt stops the groom and she has to be given *phupu char* (a cloth piece or money) after which the third round is completed.

At the time of *bhawar ringyaune*, the bride is given a new name. Once this is over, the *goda dhune* (washing of the bride's feet), *daijo dine* (giving gifts to the bride-or dowry) are two rituals which are performed. After this the *janti* return to the groom's house along with the bride.

Then the rituals of *bhitraune* are performed at the groom's house and the bride is taken in walking on the sprinkled foodgrains and breaking the threads stretched across the main door. After being taken in, they give the couple *sagun* to eat and drink and then the *rika talo* after which the marriage is considered over ritualistically, though the feast is after this and goes on into the wee hours of the morning.

The next day of the marriage at the boy's house, the bride returns to her *maiti* (a girl's parents' home but not in case of boys). After some days and at an auspicious time, the groom goes to his parents-in-laws' house, stays for a few days and then returns with his wife. This is called *durgini phadkaune* or returning of the bride.

On the year of their marriage, *kamsale* (Kamis and Damais) carry the new couple to their (couple's) fields at a place called *purkhaule daap* (ancestral field) where a pennant or banner is stuck into the earth and they are carried around this pennant or *putali* thrice, then they dump the groom into the muck in the fields. This is the signal for all present there to splatter each other with the muck. This traditional custom finally ends the marriage or *bya*.

Death Rites

When a man is about to die among the Thakuri community, he is made to drink some water brought from holy pilgrimage shrines and *dus daan* is performed. When death occurs, the *bandan*, *dori* and clothes are removed from the corpse and it is laid out naked. If a woman precedes her husband in death, then her hair is combed, vermilion applied to her hair parting, and bangles which are broken only when she reaches the cremation grounds. The rituals performed at the ghats are the same as any Hindu's.

The *kriyaputri* remains in *kuro* (observation of death pollution by the *kriyaputri* who is normally a son of the deceased) either in the fields or cowshed according to the existent climate or season. *Sayaya daan* is performed on the 11th. day after death and *go daan* is done on the 13th. day. After this the *kriyaputri* is permitted to emerge wearing only a single layer of clothing. On the 16th. and 30th. days, they observe two *tithis* and only one day a month for the succeeding months. When the 13th month is reached, they perform *barshik karya* (yearly *puja* or *sraddha*) and with full rituals, they have a *homa* after which *daanis* given to the brahmins. After this, every year, on a set date (*tithi*), and on *sohara sraddha* they perform their rituals of *s. ddha* twice.

Religion and Festivals

Though these Thakuri people can be classified as Hindus, their religious traditions are different from ordinary Hinduism. Though it may be seen that they worship the gods of the Hindu pantheon like Shiva, Brahma, Bishnu, Durga Bhawani, Narayani, etc., their belief and concepts of these deities are much more different than those beliefs and concepts prevalent among other Hindu tribes within the kingdom. Thus, among the deities they worship some are unknown and unfamiliar to those people living in central and eastern regions of the kingdom. The deities the Thakuri worship can be classified in various ways, however, they are listed as classified by the Thakuri into 4 groups: (a) Masto, (b) Other deities equivalent to Masto, (c) Devi and (d) Others.

Deities can be *paturne* (possess the shaman and speak using his body as the medium) and *na paturne* (those who cannot possess the shaman and speak through him) or *gupta basi*. This is a classification that is extremely important for the Thakuri people.

According to their religious traditions, the most powerful, almighty and important supernatural force is Masto. This deity is not only worshipped within the districts where these Thakuris are settled, but throughout the whole Karnali zone itself and also the adjacent Bheri zone and the outlying hilly regions. This tradition can be accepted as an aspect of the civilisation that spread in this area from antiquity. It has been estimated that the Masto worshippers migrated to central and eastern areas of the kingdom, because of the fact that many Ksetris have Bara Masta as their *kul devtas* (tutelary deities).

According to the local traditions, the Masto community consists of 12 or Barah Masto brothers and 9 or Nav Durga Bhawani. This local belief is that in ancient times, the aggression of the *rakshas* (demons) was combated by Nav Durga Bhawani, but she also found it difficult to subdue them alone and at this point Masto appeared, saving the earth and Durga Bhawani. Though it is said that there are twelve Masto brothers, and nine Durga Bhawani sisters, it is not a topic agreed upon, as sometimes there are the names of thirteen Masto also. They are Budu Masto, Kwa Mast, Baan Masto, Tharpa Masto, Babiro Masto Dhudae Masto, Kamul Masto, Seem Masto, Ramal Masto, Dhandar Masto, Dharae Masto, Dadisital Masto, Kurmi Masto. Therefore, even if twelve major Mastos are mentioned, their numbers fluctuate according to the regions. Among

the names of Nav Durga Bhawani are Bhawani, Kalika, Malika, Kesmalini, Thigalni, Pugelni, Himalui. Here too, place or location is the cause of variation in names and numbers. For instance, there are various Malikas such as Durbar Malika, Chimara Malika, Badi Malika, Basi Malika and others in various localities in the region.

No images or idols of the Masto exist as it is considered as a sort of invisible force. Every Masto has an altar or *than* in the jungle called a *ban than* and another at home or the *ghar than*. This is a niche in the wall, where the relevant Masto is worshipped. This Masto worship is related to that of the *kul* and therefore, different *kuls* worship different Mastos though they belong to the same *jat*. As a result, in a village, Mastos which are worshipped by the relevant *kuls* are those who possess both *ban thans* and *ghar thans*.

Every Masto has a *mul than* or main altar, such as the Tharpa Masto is located in the place called Tharpa lying in Mugu district, Babiro Masto is in Babiro village at Panch Sai Dara near Tatopani village, Jumla district. Thus the *ban thans*, *ghar thans* and *dhami thans* are established after receiving the *chhap* or sanction from the *dhami* of the *mul than*.

The Masto is considered a *paturne devta*. Every village which has a Masto must have a *dhami*. Besides this, a *dangre* is also required to do things like offer *puja* look after the whole altar and guard the precious items within. On the day of the *puja*, the *dangre* prepares everything, the *dolos* (Damai) play the *sahanai*, *dama*, *narsingha*, *jhyali* outside. As the tempo of this music increases, the *dhami* is gradually possessed by the Masto. Then this *dhami* goes to the *gaddi* (elevated seat in the *ghar than* where the *dhami* sits while performing *puja*) and begins to show *bhod* or 'miracles' which is a sign that Masto is among them. At this time, those experienced people present, begin to appeal to the *gosai* or *Narayan gosai* (a term used to respectfully indicate the deity) and lay out their problems verbally. Then the *dhami* who is under the full power of the deity provides solutions for the stated problems. Some Masto speak in the *Bhote bhasa* or Tibetan dialect and thus a bilingual person is also present to mediate between the utterances of the possessed *dhami* and that spoken by the others present.

Locally, it is believed that the Masto's power is limitless and should anything happen to anybody, they immediately appeal to the Masto. Thus, Masto is seen to be considered such a supernatural force that influences the lives of these people at every step in their existence.

Besides the Masto, these Thakuri also worship other deities. For instance, they believe that a force called *siurailni* (not separable as a male or female deity) protects the villages. This deity also possess a *ban than* and a *ghar than*, and is propitiated with blood sacrifices of castrated goats (*khsi*) only. Guro and Kailash are also powers like Masto, and considered to be deities of judgement. The Badpal Masto of the Damais and Kamis is also considered in the same power level as the Guro and Kailash.

Besides the worship of these deities and powers, the Thakuri people also worship the Khalanga located Chandannath and Bhairavnath deities. On the death of an elder, to perform *puja* for his soul's well being, they go to a place in the Thakurji Lekh called Chhayanath Thakurji and pay their obeisance there. Pasupatinath in Kathmandu is also a very important pilgrimage spot for these people and in the past decades there existed a custom where the village walked for half a day to the accompaniment of musical instruments to welcome the returning pilgrims.

Thus, it can be clearly seen that although the religions of the Thakuri can be categorised within the circle of the broad Hindu spectrum, however, it does radiate an identity of its own where the Masto plays the key role. Another thing is that their religious traditions are based on the community as a whole and it is seen that group worships or *pujas* like *kul* and *gram pujas* are given more importance than household or individual *pujas*. Since festivals are commonly based on religious occasions everywhere in the kingdom, the Thakuri also follow the same pattern. The festivals among these people are categorised into two types namely: one related to worship of deities like Masto and such, and the others of the ordinary sort as celebrated by other tribes in the kingdom.

The first type of festivals which are related to Masto and local deities are Srawane Purnima, Kartik Purnima, Maghe Sankranti, Baisakh Purnima. On these four *purnimas* (full moons), worship to Masto is performed everywhere. Among these festivals, Srawane Purnima is of great importance and therefore much significance. On this day, *paitha* (worship or *puja*) is performed in most of the Masto

thans. *Paitha* is an occasion of entertainment in the villages and commences on the Ekadasi of Sukulpaksh. This period is known as *khadati* when all the villages gather at a single point at night and the women sing *mangal gaan* (songs of joy). Dances are performed by the *dhamis* and brahmins. This continues till Chaturdasi and on the 5th. day, *puja* is performed in the *ban than* or *ban madu*. On Srawane Purnima, Sukul Chaturdasi fairs are held at all Malika *than*.

Besides the above festivals, there are others and especially one called Taage Sankranti on Baisakh. On this day, all married women wear *taages* (threads or *janais*) and also send betrothed girls home to wear *taages*. Srawane Sankranti is also called *luto falne din* or the day to throw away or discard skin diseases. In this month, Gai Jatra is celebrated for 4 days at Khalanga in the district of Jumla. On this day, a person of the house (where a death has occurred that year) is made like a cow and must be paraded around the bazar. On the fourth day is the Paltan Jatra where the army stationed there present songs and dances for public viewing. Krishna Astami is also celebrated in a grand manner during this month. The *lakhe nach* is also performed on this day at Khalanga especially. Annanta Purnima Jatra is celebrated in the month of Bhadra. In the same month, on the day of Teej, Haritalika is also celebrated. On this day, at the confluence of the Jwa and Tila rivers at a place called Dan Sangu, a large *mela* or fair is held to mark this festival. In Aswin, Sraddha Purnima and Bada Dasai are celebrated. Kartik witnesses the celebration of Bhái Tika and Laxmi Puja. In Poush, there is a large fair held once more and this is followed by Aunsi Chel Tihar and Maghe Sankranti. On the first of Falgun, Jando Maghe Sankranti is celebrated. Rishi Panchami and Chait Dasai are also celebrated with much enthusiasm. During all their *pujas* Thakuri face the west always as is the tradition even as it exists today and did in the past.

Dress & Ornaments

The influence of foreign clothing is absent among these people. The children wear *bachho*, *bhoto*, *kantho*, etc. When they grow up, the males wear *daura-surwal* and the *patuka* or waistband, as do people of other tribes. The *surwal* of the smaller children are open from one knee to another to facilitate bowel movement without the hindrance of removing the clothing, in winter. Girls are seen to wear *bhotos* which reach their knees and sometimes till the ankles. When children reach the age of 10-12 years, they have *kantho* tied around

their necks to prevent goitre, so they believe. Females wear *ghagro* (skirt-like dress), *cholo*, *pachhaura* (shawl). After marriage, these Thakuri women wear *gunew*, *phariya*, etc. For the *ghagros* and *gunews*, the cloth is woven in the villages and are called *thetuwa*. The women try to keep their foreheads covered at all times. In the past, the custom was for them to cover the upper half of their faces with a cloth called *doto*, however, this practice has diminished. But even today, while the women go, in and out of their houses there exists a custom of covering up to their foreheads with a *kamlo*.

When the boys grow up into adults, they begin to wear turbans, and coats, but today this turban has been replaced by a *topi* or cap. In the winter season, they wear a long, thick woolen garment-like covering called a *bakhu*, which is fastened to the waist by means of a *patuka*. A muffler is wrapped around their necks. Women use *kamlos* and *radi*. They protect their legs with *dofars* (a stocking worn inside Tibetan boots or *dochas*) which are fastened by *dojyada* (ropes which fasten the *dochas* from the exterior). Nepalese socks and Chinese canvas shoes have become replacements for the *dochas*.

Traditional entertainment

Among the Thakuri people, entertainment has also been assimilated into and made part of their lives. Even while going to the forests or fields to pick *dotelo* or *dhokaya* (leafy green vegetables) for cooking, the young girls and boys entertain themselves by singing, dancing and joking all along the way. Besides this, they have the custom of *chotti basne* which is a counterpart of the Gurung *rodhi basne*. Here young girls and boys participate and sing duets throughout the night.

During the monsoons, these youths hold the *chotti basne* programme in faroff caves, where they can sing in loud voices without any inhibitions and fear of disturbing the villagers. Also the acoustics of the caves allows for a larger sound and better effect. During the winter season, they congregate in someone's house or in cowsheds. But, sometimes, when the household does not permit the *chotti basne* programme the participants make the householders the victims of abuses and curses.

Houses

In the Jumla region where the Thakuri population is concentrated, most houses are found to be constructed on the southern slope of hills and the fields are located at the lower levels near the river beds. As earlier stated, they have small nuclear families and thus each family has its own house. The Thakuri houses of this region are of a different and thus special type.

The ground floor functions as a cowshed, which is further sectionised and this depends on the size of the house. In a small house, the outer section or cowshed is the *chor* and appears to be somewhat like a *chok* (open space). The next section which falls within the actual area of the house is the *jangi*, which functions as a fuel storage depot-cum-a cattle feed bin. The next part is the *goth*, *majh goth* where the cows are tied and also *jagge* is performed. Thus it is also known as *jagge goth*. Further inside is the *bachhi goth* where the young calves are kept. If the house is large and the household possess a lot of livestock, then this *bachhi goth* is further sectionised into *ghodi goth* and *bakhri goth* housing horses and goats respectively,

First floor or the storey above the ground floor is the real part of the house. Once one clambers up the *lishnu* (notched log used as ladder) the *othalo* (located exactly above the *jangi* section of the ground floor) is reached and it acts as a sort of a compound or verendah of the house.

The next part after the *othalo* is the *ubra* which is a sort of common room where villagers gather to gossip and also where the copper utensils called *gagros* (water carrying utensils), foodgrains boxes called *khats* and such are kept.

Further inside is the *borso* section which is also called *majhe* meaning central area and is mainly used as a kitchen. The hearth of the household is located here and the members sit around and eat their food. As we move in further the store or *bhandar* is reached, where *khat*, *bhakari* and *mato* meaning foodgrains stored in wooden boxes as food reserves or contingencies. In the case of people with larger houses there is yet another room called *chhadya* at some places and *bhanchha* in others. Affluent Thakuri houses have a single large living room.

Those rooms on the outside like the *ubro* and the *baithak* (living room) are the only ones which have windows. The other internal rooms, the *borso* and the *bhandar*, do not have any windows. A small hole is made on the ceiling of the *borso* and this is the only vent for the exit of smoke and the entry of sunlight. The terrace of the house is called the *thada* and there is another *lishnu* placed at the corner for ascending upwards. While constructing this *thada*, first the door-post is placed and then pieces of wood on it, followed by leaves of the *salla* (teak), *Bhoj patra* (birch) is laid out and covered with mud.

In some places, the *thada* has another level made at a corner all around it called *pand*. Here grains and other items are stored. In some houses, at the *pand thadas*, at one corner an area is cordoned off with *chhapani* and grass (fodder) and grains are stored. Thus it has been observed that these houses of the Jumla Thakuri have various stories with various sections for many functions. Sometimes, these houses are continually made on the adjacent and upper land terraces and from afar, they tend to resemble giant staircases. In these villages, though houses are initially made separately, they slowly form a single joint line after the side by side constructions are completed at a later time. *Othalo* of all houses are of the same levels and joint side by side as the houses are in the case of the single joint line houses on one level. This pattern of construction of this line of dwellings is called *pagri*.

More important than the *pagri* is the *single bado*. Every village is split into *bado* or *bada*. Though some *bado* are not listed in specific geographical areas, everyone knows which area lies in which *bado*.

A *bado* consists of a group of brothers and their families and the name of the *bado* emerges from that *kul* or *thar*. Thus, every *bado* has a historic or social importance. For instance, a *bado* where Acharya Brahmins live is called Acharya bado, and a *bado* where *Odes* (local name for Kami) live is called Ode Bado. A *bado* where Damais (locally called Dolipni) live is called Damai bado or Dol bado and where Sarkis live, Sarki bado.

THAMI

The Thami are a tribe that inhabit the regions of Suspa, Ishmawati, Sunandrawati, Babre, Alampu, Bigu, Khopamangu and Kalihangmek VDCs lying in the Dolakha district east of Kathmandu. They are also seen to be spread out in the areas of Sindupalchok and Solukhumbu districts.

Origins

Legend One

It is said that the Thami were initially a nomadic people and migrated from the west to settle in the place called Thimt which lies east of Kathmandu town and almost neat Bhaktapur. But it seems that they did not settle there but instead migrated further east and finally the remaining two families reached Suspa where they decide to settle. They are said to have cleared the jungles here and slowly as time passed their children married each other to increase the population. After many years Suspa became a small village as the married couples began to create their own small nuclear families. Accordingly, the tribe's nomadic proclivity was shackled at Suspa where they began to live as a settled community. This is a rather vague and dry legend with not much historical proof to back it.

Legend Two

In ancient times when there ruled a Newar king in Dolakha, a person called Apat Chhupu and his wife Sunariaji left a place Simangadh (Simraongarh) and went to Kumangadh. From there they again moved on towards the east hoping to cross a ferry on the way. Here an incident occurred, the cunning Kumau Kumai people were the lords of this area and the Maji who ferried the people across had to obey them. They were ordered to let the woman cross but not the man so in this way the husband and wife were separated for a long period. They wandered along the opposite sides of the river for a long time.

One day they came to the Tama Kosi river region near a place called Nag Daha (half an hour's walk from Dolakha town). They faced each other with the river in between them, she on the west bank and he on the east. They could not meet each other because no ferry

existed at this point so the woman plaited a strong rope from the *alo path* and using this rope of *dhairo* attached to a strong staff which she threw across the river with her whole strength. Apat caught it and tying that end of the rope to his waist he plunged into the river and soon emerged on the other side with the wife pulling him all the while praying for his safe deliverance. They were very happy and the woman Sunariaji bowed down at her husband's feet thrice. They then constructed a small hut out of the *alo path* and they rested there that night.

The next day they moved through Teen Dhunge and reached Gairi Aumsa where they sheltered in a nearby cave for the night. It was while they were asleep that night, that a *khurpa* or sickle fell from the woman's cheek. The next day this couple faced the problem of basic needs so they decided to act. While the wife Sunariaji carved a stone into an *okhal* (deep tall mortar) for pounding grains, the husband Apat went into the forest to search for wild roots and tubers or *kandmul*. These they squashed in the *okhal* and so satiated their hunger. It is said that this stone *okhal* is still seen there even today.

From there the couple moved again westwards and on their journey seem to have stayed a night at Bandipukhr. The next day, they walked on and when they reached Alam dol, a white and red *dhvja* (cloth piece used as sacred banners during *puja* and at shrines) fell from Sunariaji's hair into her hand. She tied this to a stick and imbedded it in the ground there and again they walked on. This ritual is *alm gadnu* thus the place is called Alm dol which lies in the Suspa Ismawati VDC. That evening they reached a place called Bongsae Pani Dong Dong Apok (a cave) and stayed there for the night but since the cave was cold and damp, the following day they moved on to Gaudi Bplik Pokhari where erecting a *teen dhungae chulo* (three stones hearth) they bathed and cooked their meals. This hearth is still seen at this place. From here also the couple once more moved on and reached a place Rang Rang Thali where they erected a hut out of *tite pati* and them settled here. Today the Thami claim Rang Rang Thali as his place of origin. Rang Rang Thali is located at the source of the Suspa river and lies within the Suspa Ismawati VDC.

Apat Chhupu and his wife Sunariaji lived here and sustained themselves through hunting and gathering practices. The legend states that due to the faithfulness of Sunariaji and her devotion to her husband, she was given various implements and tools by the gods

so that they could clear the forests. While in the process of felling trees, the wood chips fell into the nearby river and floated down to get stuck in a *tip* (bridge-like structure constructed across a river for catching fish in cage like contraptions which are constructed at the base of the 'bridge' at various places). The Maji of that place called Dolti near Nag Daha were baffled, so they went to the king of Dolakha for informing him that there were some illegal settlers possibly settled within the kingdom. The king dispatched a soldier to investigate and found two wild animal-like creatures, one male and the other female. After conversing with these two and assessing the situation, the soldier returned and reported whatever he saw. Once more two soldiers were dispatched and consequentially they returned with Apat. The king showed his anger and ordered Apat that he was to present himself at the *darbar* daily and was released on this condition. Eager to be liberated from this royal order, he began to present himself regularly at the palace and also presenting the king game which he caught while on his way.

But even after 7 consecutive days this order was not rescinded so on the eight day Sunariaji also accompanied Apat to the *darbar* where she astonished the king by producing a gold plate and a deer from her hair. The king was pleased and wished to grant them a boon, to which Sunariaji said that they were in requirement of land for agriculture. Thus the king promised to grant them land which they could walk around within 7 days as their *kipat* (land which belongs to a people and cannot be sold by anyone). Thus Apat and Sunariaji lay markers and walked till finally on the 8th. day they reached the *darbar*.

The king granted the couple a *tamrapatra* (copper plate inscription) according to his promise, wherein the *kipat* of these people consisted of the area known as Almpu (north of Dolakha) about 15 *kos* (approx 35 km) to the north, Tama Kosi in the east and Surke in the west. In lieu of the *kipat* the king bound them with a condition that they go to Dolakha Bhimsen Temple with an uncastrated goat or *boka*, vegetables and a *theki* of curds on the day of Fulpati in Bada Dasai. Even today the Thami adhere to this binding. In this way Apat Chhupu and Sunariaji became the first settlers of Rang Rang Thali and their descendants are the Thami.

After the system of land tax was implemented on the *kipat* lands by the government, a person from among the Thami was selected to be Mijar functioning as a collector of land taxes and revenue and also to

act as a village chief.

Physical Characteristic

Judging from their overall habits and physiques, Thami are said to belong to the mongoloid stock. They possess the regular low nasal roots, flat flared noses, prominent malar bones and lower jaw bones also enlarged side ways, epicanthic eye folds, brown to black eyes, wheat brown complexion, straight black and coarse hair, scanty facial and body hairs and short sticky bodies. They work at a steady pace and do not stop till they finish the job. They are unable to lie, cheat or deceive, and they are very susceptible and exploited on account of their backwardness. They are not clean in their habits and it is due to their lack of awareness one must admit. They spend money beyond their means in feasts and do not care whether they earn or borrow this money. This is one of the main reasons for their economic stagnancy.

Language

Thami language is not much known about and needs proper investigative research done. They call it *Thami Bhasa* and can be lumped into the Tibeto-Burman category. They speak this tongue among their own community, but with other communities Nepali is used as the medium of communication. They articulate very slowly when speaking their own language, but when one listens closely the sounds are soft and sweet. A few Nepali words are always borrowed while they speak. A sample of words for an idea in Nepali and English equivalents of the Thami are listed :

Thami	Nepali	English
<i>Abpa</i>	Buwa	father
<i>Tae Tae</i>	phupu	paternal aunt
<i>Humi</i>	bahini	sister(younger)
<i>Sya</i>	gai	cow
<i>Wanu</i>	sathi	friend
<i>Maesa</i>	bhainsi	buffalo
<i>Asa</i>	tel	oil
<i>Kawai</i>	ahlu	potato
<i>Pang ku</i>	pani	water
<i>Namepate</i>	ghar	house

Nepali	: Mah bhat khanchhu.
Thami	: <i>Gai isa kraingah.</i>
English	: I want to eat rice.

They have no written script, but they claim to have one and point to the inscriptions on their *mane* (monuments built over deceased's ashes, etc.) however the deciphering of this and comparing this with other scripts is a different matter altogether and awaiting a well equipped and expert researcher.

Septs (*Thars*)

The legend states that the first Thami couple to settle at Rang Rang Thali had 7 sons and 7 daughters, but due to the strict rule of tribal endogamy, suitable brides and grooms were not available and since their other brethren were located at Simanggadh, from where Apat and Sunariaji had migrated long ago, it was impossible to find their own tribal people. Now the existence and continuation of their lineage was threatened so they decided that the sons marry the daughters in incestuous relationships.

Thus, selecting a particular and auspicious day they organised an archery contest and accordingly matched the brothers with the sisters. The surrounding tribal societies looked down on the Thami for this was incest and multiple too. This was a breach of basic social rules and violation of a tabu, because marriage between agnates was *had phora* (meaning *had* = bone or agnate, *phora* = breaker). Since this was the situation, Apat Chhupu and Sunariaji told their children to branch out in seven different directions away from Rang Rang Thali and then settle down when they came to the correct place, or where they wanted to settle. The son-daughter couples obeyed and that evening whichever tree they sheltered under, the same tree's name they used for their septs *thars*. There are only seven *thars* among these people namely :

Rijmi Akyangmi, Khurpe Akyangmi, Sairo Akyangmi, Jaidhane Akyangmi, Sat Thanglo Akyangmi, Tyampae Akyangmi, Vudaperae Akyangmi

(Note : Each *thar* has the Akyangmi suffix)

Thami of today practice *thar* exogamy but tribal or *jat* endogamy. There are the two *gotr*, among them namely Kasi and Lhasa. In this way the children of the first Thami couple spread and settled in the

area within the *kipac* lands. Some sub-septs also gradually branched out at a later date and are listed below:

Rismi, Harva Thanti Akyangmi, Pente Tale Akyangmi, Dolkhae, Humphali, Siti Rismi, Dan Gore Akyangmi, Rismi Bhimsen Akyangmi, Chalya Rismi, Thro Rismi, Dada Rismi, Ise Rismi, Dumphali, etc. Besides there are others like Agyang Sri Rmn, Dmn Remirati, Pentedali, Ynti Sri, Alta Sri, etc.

Among the Thami the Ise Rismi *thar* people are considered to be *thyamsing* (cross-breed) *thar*, and the product of the liaison between a Thami man and a Sherpa woman. Unmarried women fall in the Nyapit sept but after they marry then this sept is dropped and the husband's sept is adopted as is the social rule.

Pre-natal rites

Like the Newar people the Thami also never have their daughters at home during the time of their delivery, because it is the social rule that a woman must never have her child while in her parents house or *maiti*. If this accidentally and inevitably happens then she and her family will be looked down upon and cursed by the groom and his family is the standing belief. Thus it is only after the birth of her child that the woman moves to her *maiti*. When such a grave offence is committed there is a ritual called *Thapidine* which must be performed as is their strong belief. To do this a *jhankri* is the presiding priest who first takes some rice flour in a leaf plate and then using this makes the image of the woman on the earth and then another image of the husband on top of the first image. Then uttering exceptionally filthy words and murmuring abuses, the *jhankri* puts grains of rice in the leaf plate. The next step is for the *jhankri* to take a nice fatted red hen and going into the nearby jungle, he spits on the hen first and then hits it. When the hen dies the *jhankri* eats it and then returns to the house thus concluding the ritual. The abuses uttered by the *jhankri* have to be listened to by the whole family of the woman who has delivered on the wrong side.

Life Cycle Rites

Births

Three days after a Thami child is born, the floor of the house is cleaned with cowdung and water mixture and the *jhankri* whom they

call *khami* sprinkles the house and householders with *gaunth* (urine of cow) to purify them according to their custom. Birth pollution of a son is observed for 11 days while for a daughter it lasts 7 days only.

Navran

This is the naming ceremony and on this day also the floors are cleaned with the same cowdung and water mixture and the *khami* purifies the household in the same way with *gaunth*. 7 earthenware pots or *ghada* of *gaunth* and a mixture of *khuraank* (slice of the tuber of a certain flower), *lekhu* and water. The *khami* uses his *mantra tantra* to purify the 7 *ghada*, after which the people must be purified by drinking the contents. Only after the contents of these *ghada* are emptied that the newborn and the mother are considered purified. The woman's *maiti* are also to consume some of the contents in these *ghada* as the rules state, otherwise their daughter's family lineage (husband's side) will not increase and spread, is the belief for doing this ritual.

The child's wrists, waist and ankles are tied with threads wet with tumeric and made yellow. The threads must go 3 to 5 to 7 rounds before being tied at the places. The child is given a name according to the day on which it was born. The child's maternal lineage relatives (*maiti* of the mother) are invited and after the ceremony they are feasted with rice, pulses and lentils, fish, meat, leafy vegetables and the usual alcoholic beverages. On such feasts at least one rooster is required for consumption to celebrate the occasion.

Chhaewar

The Thami perform the ritual of *chhaewar* or the shaving of the hair to bring a child without a tribe into the Thami fold. They believe that the child can only perform the last rites for his mother if he has had his *chhaewar*. When aged 3-5-7 years old (odd years) the child is initiated into the tribe when the *mama* or maternal uncle shaves his nephew's head leaving the topknot intact. The *mama* must feed the nephew with *roti* and eggs (hen) in lieu of having shaved off his nephew's hair. If no *mama* exists then he is taken to the cowshed and tied with a halter after which anyone is eligible to shave the lad's hair. A child below the age of 8 years is exempted from performing the death rites for his parents or any close relatives even though he may have completed his *chhaewar*. This is a rule of much

importance in the Thami society.

Marriage Practices

Marriage is considered a very sacred institution among these Thami and should one of them perform a *Gandharva biwaha* or elopement marriage, then unless and until the full rituals are not completed as in a regular marriage, this martial union is not socially accepted. Thus the children of such marriages are effected very seriously both physically and psychologically too. Thus it is observed that the Thami marry with full rituals at ages like 40-50 and even older.

When a marriage is to occur the *lami* goes to the proposed girl's house with 3 *roti* (baked from one *mana* of rice flour) out of the lot and two other persons accompany him. When they reach the other side they talk very politely about the intention of the boy's side. They tell them who is proposing to marry the girl if granted permission and so saying they place the 3 *roti* enclosed in a bag in front of the parents of the girl. If this bag is accepted then the talks can proceed further, but if not then the *lami* hides the bag somewhere in the girl's house and goes back to the boy's house with a longdrawn face. The custom is for the *roti* never to be taken back. There are two more chances meaning that the girl's parents can be approached twice more.

The second time the *lami* goes with 6 *roti* and a container full of alcohol. If this time also the gifts are not touched then the third time the amount of gifts is doubled but should this suit be refused this time also then there is no hope and so the boy's folks must look in another direction.

Should the proposal be accepted whether the first, second or third time, gifts are sent to the girl's house and consists of things like large pots full of alcohol, rooster(1) *dhunge roti* (9), 4-5 *pathi* of rice. These are consumed and then the marriage is fixed. After this should this girl elope with anyone else then the feast which they had earlier eaten must be reimbursed to the boy, by the offending girl's family. On this feast the date of marriage is set up and the astrologer is consulted for the *lagan* time. To know the time of the *lagan* the boy's parents must once more go to the girl's house and in the process have to take the usual presents for a feast. This ritual is *jana uti* and in the Thami language it is called *lisar*.

Once the *agan* is decided the 3 to 7 days earlier the groom's folks invite the *maiti* and *mavali* of the bride and then they talk about how the *lagan* is set and how there should be no differences and quarrels now. This is followed by the usual feast called *maiti mannaune* (making the *maiti* willing). A day prior to the marriage at the groom's house, two *mana* of rice flour are made into two *tormas* (deities made out of kneaded dough made into cone-like shapes) and 12 *manas* rice are soaked in water and then taken out and made into 12 heaps which symbolise deities. On the morning of the marriage, *puja* is performed by sacrificing three roosters and cracking 12 eggs.

This ritual is followed by another for the groom's longevity and then the *khami* starts worship by beating the drum or *dhyangro* and chanting *mantras*. Now two *ghada* of water are placed into two *doko* as *sagun*. At this moment two carrying flaming torches emerge from the house along with two others carrying rice grains and vegetables. This is the signal for the end of the *puja* and guns are fired also to show the joy. Food is fed to those present and then the *janti* readies to move towards the bride's house. The groom is preceded and followed by one sister each as customary among these people. The *janti* includes two persons with flaming torches and two bundles of *sal* leaves. Prior to the bidding of a temporary farewell, the groom sits with his parents and touches his mother's left breast thrice and then he moves off. All the participants of the *janti* tie a white cloth on their heads. It is the custom that from the time of the groom's departure till his return the father must remain at one spot smoking the *hukka* (hubblebubble). When the *janti* reach the bride's house, a *gundri* is laid out which is a gesture of welcome. His sisters and he sit on it.

First is the *swyamvar* or garlanding which is done on a ritually purified area cleaned with cowdung and water mixture and laid out with banana leaves. A *gundri* is placed on top of this and the couple are made to stand there. While the bride garlands the groom, he has to make a present of a *mohar* meaning coin or golden *tika* and the bride reciprocates with the garland. The next ritual is *varni* where items like 1 fish, 1 *theki* curd, 1 bundle of *rayo sag*, 1 *doko* of sugar-cane, 1 banana leaf are all tied together on a wooden stick and held upright by someone. The groom stands on the purified spot and the bride's father circles him thrice and then washes the groom's feet with a *karuva* (*kalas*-like water container with spout) of water and having some *dubo* grass stuffed in the spout. The water that trickles off the feet is drunk by the one who pours and this is followed by

the presentation of clothes as *daan* to the groom. The bride's kin do so and present him with a white turban cloth. The groom bows to all kin thrice. Now the groom is carried into the house for the *dhog bhet*.

Next in line is the *grahashanti* where the flowers held by the kin till now are all presented to the bride and then they sit and perform the ritual of *suro puro chalaune* when they all dip their bamboo pipes and drink from the same *ghyampo*. The *jad* in the *ghyampo* is the *char dam*. This is followed by *chene maiti* where the *khami* is presented with cloth for a turban and the bride is presented with a pair of silver bangles and an ornament called *atthais* hung in between a *pote* necklace and similar to a *tilhari*. A feast is offered where a rooster is slaughtered.

The *sindur halne* is done by the groom in the presence of the *khami* and after this the *devar* bangs the head of the couple 6 times. This head knocking ritual is called *lagan garne* and the *devar* who does it has to be presented with a share of chicken, a bowl of *jad*, 1 *mana* of cooked rice, 1 bundle of *rayo sag* and cooked fish. The *devar* is an extremely important person in Thami marriages. If such a *devar* is non-existent then a socially acceptable person is made the *devar* and the rituals carried out.

After this *lagan*, dances and songs are the order of the time and a feast must be given to them. The food is rice boiled with a spicing of turmeric and cooked into a mush. This feast is followed by a Maruni dance and songs. The bride is now given a tearful farewell and the *janti* sets off with the bride. When they reach the groom's house they all go into the house and are fed with food and alcoholic beverages which are a common sight now. The participants go off to their respective homes after the feast.

The *dulhan phadkaune* is done after a few days when the bride and groom are taken to the bride's house by the two *lami* who carry, mutton leg, rice grain, *jad* which are presented and the bride's mother stores these in the *bhandar* or store room. Firstly *jad* is offered to all of them then at a later time they are given food to eat. By this time it is dark and the *lami* go home burning *pultos*, which are flaming torches, while the bride and groom remain here for the night to return the next day.

On the first Dasai after the marriage the *lami* along with the couple

have to go to the groom's *sasurali* (in-laws) for *tika*. Here again like previously the leg of mutton, 2 bottles of *raksi* have to be taken along as *sagun* or gifts. Then they are all anointed with *tika* and a lot of blessings.

During the marriage the groom is attired in a white *nainasuth* (type of cloth) *suruwal* (pantlike dress) and a *daura* (shirt like a frock). His head is adorned with an equally white turban. The bride wears a *dhoti* (sari), *cholo* or blouse, *pachaura* or shawl, *kadae mala* or thorny necklace of gold, silver bangles, nosering or stud, large plate-like ornaments on ears called *chakti* and the necklace made of coins all in a row.

It is compulsory that the head of a *goru* (bull-ox) complete with skin and hair be present during a Thami marriage.

If a Thami marries a woman of another tribe like a Gurung or Rai, then the whole Thami community must be given a feast by the groom and then only is this union socially accepted and its progeny recognised as Thami. If a Thami woman elopes with a person like a Magar or Tamang then she is allowed to come her *maiti* alone but is ostracised from other socio-cultural and religious activities. If a Thami man or woman marries a partner of a very low caste like a Sarki, then this Thami also falls to that level.

Devar-Bhauju marriages are frequent and *jari biwaha* also occur now and again. Should a Thami woman leave her house and go else where without permission from her husband, then she is socially ostracised. Regarding the matter of sexual relationships these people are orthodox and believe in the one-man-one-woman unions, each remaining faithful to the other till death.

Death rites

Thami people perform both burials and cremation. The corpse is taken to a high hillock or a predecided spot. They still retain the primitive belief that the height of burial or cremation site determines how quickly the soul of the deceased will move towards heaven. When a Thami dies then his or her sons bear the bier and if these are absent then the brothers or the cross-cousins do so. There is the usual uttering of prayers for the deceased and then burial or lightening the pyre if cremation. After this is over the funeral goes have to bathe somewhere and then go back to the deceased's house

where all types of foods have been cooked and a little of each is offered in the name of the deceased while the rest is eaten by the funeral goers or *malami*. Finally the food offered in the name of deceased is also eaten by the *malami* and then they depart.

Death pollution is observed by the deceased's son from the day of the death and two days after the death all the brothers and the *khami* get together and decide on constructing a *mane* for the deceased. They remain awake the whole night and the next day either construct a *chautara* or a *mane* for the deceased. On the 3rd. day the sons and brothers of the deceased go to the site of the *mane* or *chautara* and shave their heads living no top knot and perform the *kalo ghyava*. A fowl is slaughtered and placed on a *tapari* (leaf plate) but upside down with some uncooked rice grains also. This ritual ends after three days, thus ending the death pollution also. The ones observing pollution come out and wear a white cloth (on their heads) called *jhopa*. *Thulo ghyava* is done in Poush, and it is after this that all rituals are considered over, and all bans are lifted.

A child less than 10 years is buried and the *kaj kriya* is completed in three days also. Like in the marriage, in death also the head of the *goru* is compulsory. Hinduistic rituals like offering water for the deceased's soul, performing *sraddha* are not followed by these Thami folks. The custom of constructing *chautari*, *pati*, *kuwa*, *sanghu*, *pauva* etc. are works done after the *thulo ghyava* is over. Then when everything is over an oil-lamp is burnt at the shrine of Mahadev and then only they commence eating *sisnu* (stinging nettles) which is otherwise banned.

Religion

Thami people are not purely Hindus nor purely Buddhists. They worship deities which are not at all in any of the major religions. They try and earn merit by constructing the various resting places, bridges, wells, etc. They are very much Buddhism tended though they use the rituals of the Hindu religion in their marriages. Their allegiance to Dolakha Bhimsen is also continuous as seen every year in Dasai at Dolakha. They also worship the Vayu devta, Nayanaini, Budaeni, Raja Bhimsen, Khola ko Mai, Gamalae devta, Shikari (in particular), Bhume Chyurkun and Biswakarma. Kalingchokae Mai is also a deity of the Thami pantheon. The festivals that these Thami celebrate are Sankranti, Srawane Sankranti. On the Maghe Sankranti the Thami of Almpu and Bigu offer worship to Siva with *belpatra*

(woodapple), do *puja* to the *devi* and eat wild roots tubers and *roti*, while playing the *madal* and *jhyali*. They go dancing to the Siva temple carrying *bel* and water. They offer small copper trisuls (tridents) to Siva as a token of their worship and devotion.

Fooding

The popular and staple diet of these people is fish and *dhendo* (mush made of millet or maize flour as is the case of majority of Himalayan tribes) where the rice culture is an impossibility due to climatic disadvantages. Millet *dhendo* is preferred than the maize one. They love to drink *jad* and *raksi* (alcohols) and eat meat of goats (castrated and uncastrated), fowls, duck and also the carcasses of dead cows (as is mentioned by them). They state that in the past they even used to eat rats. They do not touch pigs so the matter of its consumption does not arise.

Dress & Ornaments

When a Thami is seen it is clear that these people have recently renounced their uncivilised ways and have adapted to modern society. Their traditional dress was the *labaeda* (made out of the *bhanga* plant beaten and woven into fibres and the women wore *gunew* also made of *bhanga*. This sort of dress is worn by Thami people of some areas even today. On account of modernisation, the men have begun to wear the *daura surwal* made of black cloth, *patuka* or girdles wrapped around their waists, *lukuni* (like under garments) and caps. The women also wear *phariya* (sari-like cloth wound round the lower body), *cholo* or blouse, *patuka* and *lukuni*. Ornaments worn are large gold discs hung on their ear lobes and called *Chyaptae soon* and large *tlki* on their nostrils.

Economic status

Observed from an economic perspective, it can be clearly seen that the Thami community is exceptionally backward. They possess no lands and till 1995 AD. they worked as hired labourers for the Khadkas and Pandeys who are the landlords in the surrounding areas, and being paid meagre sums of money for their physically back breaking toil. In this way they lived a hand to mouth existence. Today these Thami folks are found to be in the stone quarrying business where they carry these stones all the way to Charikot markets where they are paid a paltry sum which is spent on the

alcoholic amenities of life. Their habit being such, the possibility of their economic conditions further deteriorating is apparent and cause for increased death rates while the fertility rates are going down on account of malnutrition. Another reason ascribed to the decreasing Thami population is because of the fact that they leave their place of birth and go in search of jobs to India, but some old timers state that very few if any of these migrant Thami ever return once they start working in India.

There are many Thami people who have either stopped or never ever did this stone quarrying work, because they are of the belief that if one earns his livelihood by selling stones, then slowly his family will become extinct or *ni santan hunae*. Thus there are many Thami living below the poverty line due to this belief, and who are not noticed by the government, instead they are exploited even in this miserable condition as is clearly evident through observation. They claimed to have been made slaves during the Rana Regime and are no better off now even after the attainment of democracy.

THARU

The *terai* is the region where much tribal interactions, resulting from inwards and outwards migrations, have occurred. Among the many tribes that populate this region consisting mostly of lowlands and *duns*, the Tharu are perhaps the most important. In the 2028 B.S. (1971 A.D.) census, according to the listing of the Tharu language speakers, their population was published at 4,95,881 heads, however, this figure is inaccurate on the basis of tribal head count. The area known as Inner Madesh, and the thick tropical jungles spread out in the broad warm plains of the *terai*, are the habitat of these Tharu people. From the eastern end of Nepal comprising Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, through Bara, Parsa, Chitwan in the centre, Rupendehi, Kapilvastu in the West and Dang-Deukhuri, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur in the mid west and far-west, these people are found and have been stated to be the aboriginals of these regions by many scholars.

Historical Background & Origin

Regarding the origin of the Tharu tribe, even today, scholars have not been able to come to a definite and clear conclusion while some claim them to be migrants from the Thar desert in Rajasthan, India, others say that these are descendants of the children that were born out of the liaisons between the Rajput women and their servants who fled the Muslman invaders and after living without their spouses in these area for long periods, they ultimately cohabited with their servants thus giving birth to the breed known as the Tharu. Some Tharu state that Tharu women push the plate of food with their feet across to their husbands even today, which shows that these women still consider themselves to possess the Rajput blood, hence higher in status to their husbands. Also, that the Tharu are a mixed tribe whose ancestors had migrated into this area, seems relevant to the Rajput women and servants migration aspect. But in spite of so much trouble taken in trying to associate the above theories with the presence of the Tharu people in the *terai* and *duns* of Nepal, none of them seem to be able to hold the picture as they profess to be a bit too farfetched, though highly romantic. There is one theory that seems to explain the presence and pedigree of these people who are considered the aborigines of the areas lying within the Inner Madesh or *duns* and the malarial forest areas of the hot plains south of the Mahabharat Lekh and around the Churia range.

One point to note here is that had the Tharu people been migrants, they would definitely not have been foolish enough to settle in the unhealthy flatlands of the *terai*, but would have naturally chosen a better site for habitation.

The explanation that seems most likely is that approximately 100 years after Buddha attained *nirvana*, Buddhism branched out into Mahasagahik and Sthvir schools. At a later date, the Shakya people of Kapilvastu seem to have inclined towards the Sthvir school, thus causing themselves to be known as sthvirbadi or Sthvir in short. It is believed that these Sthvir slowly had their name corrupted till it became today's Tharu. This is what one group of scholars state could be the most plausible origin theory pertaining to these Tharu folks.

There is yet another explanation which states the existence of the Vriji Republic, which stretched from the South-East to the West and lay adjacent and south to the area of the present day Tharu habitat, through an area of almost 800 miles in length where its influence was strong. The capital was first at Vaisali or Baniyanbad in Muzzafarpur in Bihar, India, and later on it shifted to Chunsuna or Janakpur in Nepal. At this time the Kapilvastu Shakya people, descendants of Lord Buddha, were also of some repute and surely they cannot be assumed to have kept a low profile. Thus it is apparent that while the Vriji Republic consolidated its area, the Shakya also did something similar by controlling the upper areas of the *terai* from east to west and the Inner Madesh also, thus strengthening the foundation of the Shakya lineage. It is a great possibility that these Shakya are none other than the ancestors of today's Tharu people, because of the fact that they are still occupying the areas founded as the domain of the Shakya of old and they do not desire to leave the northern *terai* and Inner Madesh areas.

Tharu people call other people who are different from them or live to the south as *baji* as is customary among themselves and this word is said in a scornful manner indicating its dirty or bad meaning. It could be possible that the Shakya and Vriji Republicans were enemies and the name Vriji was later phonetically corrupted to *baji*. Since the Shakya seem to have hated the Vriji inhabiting the southern lands, marriage relationships were never and even today are not maintained with people of the southern regions. This resulted in the extension of marriage pacts with the northern mongoloid tribal

societies. For such interaction it is seen that while they somehow seem to have retained the southern cultural practices and language affinities, their features definitely resemble the mongoloid racial stock. Today, however, they are neither in contact with the southerners nor the northerners. It is possible that when the Shakya kingdom spread across the length and breadth of the *terai* and Inner Madesh and reached its peak, it fell into the usual cyclic decadence and began to disintegrate. One of these groups may have set up a separate community and labelled themselves as an independent tribe. This group could have been the ancestors of today's Tharu people.

It is a known fact that the Shakya people practised *gotr* endogamy as written in the Buddhist literatures, however, once the kingdom split and the Tharu ancestors separated, then they must have stopped tribal exogamy with the northerners and began the practice of tribal endogamy as is suspected to have occurred in that far off time, by some scholars. But regarding their entry or migration into Nepalese territory, no definite date can be set on account of lack of evidence so far.

Physical Characteristics

At a glance, these Tharu resemble the Dravidians but on closer inspection a great difference can be seen. While they are physically short in stature and not that heavily built, their facial features are of the mongoloid kind with the depressed nasal roots, resulting in the short low noses (which are sometimes flared at the nostrils), oblique eyes with and without the epicanthic fold synonymous to mongoloid racial stock, skin pigmentation is dark brown to very fair, though there are those who are extremely dark. Lips are of medium thickness and their hair are black and straight or curly at times. Some are seen to possess very prominent malar bones, which accentuate their mongoloidness by stretching the eyes to a slant.

The Dangauriya Tharu are quite different from the others, as they are almost 1.5 metres tall at an average, possess wheat-brown complexions, low nasal roots and the flared flat nostrils with thick lips possessing a slanted integumental lip and an eversion between the two lips, mongoloid eyes and strong wiry but sturdy physiques. Facial hairs are almost non-existent. The Tharu in the Kailali area possess tall statures, dark skin pigmentation Caucasoid type of raised nose bridges with prominent noses, mongoloid eyes, small heads and scanty facial hairs. Their women folks are seen to possess

more prettiness and are more handsome than the men. Such differences in physical characteristics are gradually increasing as these people are heading towards civilisation and mixing through marriages.

Language

It is essential to state that the Tharu do not have a single language known as Tharu *bhasa* or language, as is other case with other tribes, however, whatever they speak is what has slowly transformed from their original language to a mixture of the local languages and dialects, combined to form a sort of mixed tongue with its own speciality as the mixing developed. While the Saptari Tharu are heard speaking with a great mixture of Maithli language which is commonly used in that region, the Tharu of Bara use a language mixed with the locally spoken Bhojpuri and the Tharu of the west, namely Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur speak a mixture of Awadhi. The Dang Tharu speak a language consisting of approximately 40% Nepali, 40% Hindi and the remaining 20% consists of Maithali, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, etc.

Deukhuri Tharu speak more of the Hindi than the other languages and thus their speech is more Hindi than anything else. Among the Tharu of Dang can be found the use of certain ancient words which have almost become extinct in the Nepali language.

Septs(Thars)

Till today, it is almost an impossibility to state the exact number of Tharu septs (*thar*) and sub-septs (*upa-thar*) and it is a matter which requires thorough 'digging'. In spite of the handicap, some *thars* are listed here for an idea: Katriya, Kanphata, Kochila, Kharal, Khawas, Khas, Khan, Khunaha, Khausiya, Gachhdar, Chitauniya, Chaudhri, Jogi, Dangauriya, Tabdar, Thandar, Danwar, Dangora, Parihar, Bardiya, Bhanya, Banth, Bantr, Boksha, Bote, Bhagat, Majhaura, Mrdaniyan, Mahant, Mahauto, Majhi, Morangiya, Rajhtiya, Rajghariya, Rajhatya, Rana, Raja, Rautar, Lampuchhwa, Lalpuriya, Biswas, Sardar, Sunaha, Solriya, Hemjliya and Haldaliya.

It cannot be said that these are all the septs, as one scholar has stated that the Tharu septs are 73 in total. In the region of Dang, the Dangauriya claim to have 13 sub-septs namely : Ultaewa, Satgauya,

Vdhuwa, Rudgauya, Daeth, Chilharwa, Ghtaichwar, Bhaluguni, Mahtan, Vahman, Keta Uchchya, Numka Hathwa, Ghtaichwar.

The septs of the eastern Tharu in Morang and Sunsari districts are: Chaudhri, Biswas, Majhi, Tabdar, Bhotgamiya, Rajhghariya, Ravanrajghariya, Thandar, Kochili, Sardar, Gachhdar, Bhagat, Khawas, Haeljliya and Kharal.

In Kailali are the following: In Raikavar Tappa there are - Rana, Prihar and Boktan Tharu, in Lik Tappa there are the Dangauri Tharu, and in Malbari Tappa there are Malbariya, Katriya and Dangauriya Tharu.

Among these, two are prominent. They are the Rana Tharu who populate the western Tirtiyas region of Kailali district and the Dangauriya Tharu who inhabit the eastern areas of the same district, but there are some of these Dangauriya who are living scattered among the Rana Tharu population. These Rana Tharu claim descent from the Rajputs of India, as opposed to the Dangauriya Tharu who are suspected to be aboriginal and reached Kailali due to multiple migrations each of which carried them further west. This migration from the Dang area occurred it is assumed, because of the launching of the malaria eradication campaign after which the fertile but malarial Dangdunwas occupied by the land less people of the surrounding, hills, and this great influx of aliens instigated the Dangauriya to head west.

Thus we can state that the septs of these people have names of various places, indicating their understanding of their geographical location. As their villages are established, the names of these villages are given from that of the main area they are inhabiting like Chitauniya, Bardiya, Rajhatiya, Dangauriya, etc. and then the sept of the inhabitants becomes the village name.

When we say Kochila Tharu it means that they are somehow related with Koch Behar (which is the name of a place in West Bengal, India).

The Kochila Tharu people populate the area around the Kosi river and further east. Thus should a Kochila Tharu live anywhere he will be associated to the Kosi area from where he is supposed to have migrated. The Khausiya Tharu are also believed to have originated on the banks of the Kosi river. While the Dangauriya and Dang

Bardiya Tharu are aboriginal of the Dang dun. Sunaha Tharu are alleged to migrants from the river banks of the Gandaki and other river systems in the western region, where they were involved in the profession of gold panning, thus the *soonaha* (soon meaning gold in Nepali) is the oral tradition of these people.

The Morangiya Tharu are from the Morang district in the east is quite plain as can be seen from the similarity in the names of the district and the sept. In the same manner, the Chitauniya are from the Chitwan district. The Kanphata, Jogi, Mahant, Bhagat are all connected to the cult of Gorakhnath also known as the Nath Cult. This sort of Tharu are believed to be the product of the union between a Tharu woman and a yogi of the Nath Cult. These Tharu worship Ratna Nath their ancestor even today and when one of their people die, the corpse is cremated in a seated posture as do the Nath yogis, however, this practice is slowly vanishing.

The Boksha Tharu are said to have entered from area known as Kumaon. They call themselves Boktan today. The Bantar Tharu is considered to be of a very low status while the Rana Tharu is considered *kullin* meaning of high status. In spite of such caste stratification even among these Tharu people they do not seem to discriminate among themselves as has been observed.

Family

The Tharu family is an extended structure and remains so for a period of about 3 to 4 generations. The whole family unit is headed by the eldest member whose word is law. In the whole Tharu village there are old wise men among whom one is selected and made the village representative or a sort of chieftain in called *kisan* by them. This person is authorised to again select a group of elders with whom he can sit and discuss various matters pertaining to the welfare of the village and make decisions with their help in the form of suggestions and ideas. This is a kind of Council of Elders and shows that the Tharu society is run like the ancient Greek republics that were the ideal in ancient times. Because of this the Tharu are seen to respect their elders, whether male or female, all the time. The lady who is the chief of the household or domestic front, is called the *Ghar dhurniya*. While the women handle the household chores, the out-side works are done entirely by the men except for the fodder collection done by the village belles.

The women have higher status among the Rana Tharu as stated by many scholars both native and foreign, on the grounds that the women push the plate of food towards their husbands with their feet, and also after the women finish eating their plates are also, pushed towards their husbands with their feet. Another fact is that the Rana Tharu male is not allowed to enter the kitchen which is considered the domain of the female and also maybe because the kitchen may become polluted by the males entering which is another theory placed by some up-coming scholars.

What ever it is the Rana Tharu males are in socially lower position than their women is a fact that cannot be denied after observing them. While the oldest woman in a household handles the domestic works, she hands down some responsibility to the eldest daughter-in-law or *jethi buhari* and who in turn has to be obeyed by the junior daughter-in-laws. The youngest daughter-in-law is limited to kitchen chores and cooking the food.

Houses

Tharu houses are made on both sides of the street that exists in every Tharu village. There are 10 to 20 houses on each side and near every main house there are seen a few small huts where cattle are tethered and food stocks like straw, hay, chaff are stored.

The residential houses are long structures and the sizes depend upon the size of the family. While some measure 30 to 40 feet in length, some even go to a length of 100 to 125 feet and the breadth being 20 to 25 feet. The general structure is single storied though today double storied houses can be seen at various localities. The roofs are made of straw. Their reason for constructing single storied houses is that their god Bhutuwa does not permit them to make and reside in such houses. Those Tharu who construct two storied houses always keep their deities on the ground floor.

The Tharu people are very clean personally and out externally, thus their houses and environs are found to be very clean and healthy. They also have a wall painting culture, and the mud walls are decorated with colourful paintings of elephants, horses, birds (parrots mostly), flowers and such natural motifs, done by the women and girls.

Dress

Because of their area of habitation being the *dun* of Inner Madesh and the *terai* plains, where the temperature sometimes pushes the mercury in the thermometer, they wear very little and light clothes. The male Tharu folks wear a *bhegva* or loin cloth of white cotton cloth and a half or full sleeved *bhoto* called *jhulva*. Today they have begun to wear the modern waistcoats, shirts, and even pants. The waistcoats are also called *jaikot* and are stitched with buttons made from coins. Most of these people wear caps or *topi*. The Tharu of Deukhuri wear longish loincloths while those at Dang wear short ones. This sort of difference occurs in the eastern and central Tharu areas also. They also have a custom of covering themselves with a *chhadari* or a sheet of cloth used as a shawl on top of the clothes already worn.

The women wear the knee length dress which is not much folded in the front and called a *thetuwa gunew*. While young unmarried girls of Batina wear *cholya* or a blouse which has strings on the back to tie it up. Married women have the same blouse but the strings are in the front. The Deukhuri Tharu women wear colourful frocks called *Lahanga*, while those in Dang prefer to wear the sober white or plain *gunew*, as is the case with the Tharu females of Sunsari and Morang. Like the males, the women also cover themselves with a shawl-like cloth called the *gthya*. The clothes worn while dancing called *mawi* are different for each festival.

Ornaments

Tharu women like to adorn themselves with ornaments as in the case with women of almost all tribes. On their ears, these Tharu women wear the *chhataur* or *mundri* on which a silver *jhilmiliya* is hung. On the nostril is a *phuli* or sometimes a *nattha* is also hooked on. On their arms are bangle-like ornaments called *tra* which are made of base metal or silver. They wear shellac bangles on their wrists and at the two ends of this set are placed brass or bronze bangles called *kkhni*. The fingers on the hands and the toes on the feet are decorated with rings too. The most attractive use of ornaments made by these Tharu women is on the neck, where they hang multicolored glassbeads or *pote* necklaces, real or fake *muga* necklaces. East India Company silver rupee coin necklaces, or just ordinary coin necklaces, silver, brass, bronze necklaces called *Suthyu* and necklaces made from pieces of silver called *Thosyu*. They wear *tika*

called *tikuli* on their foreheads but *sindur* or *simrik* are things not used to beautify themselves. It is seen that they use very little ornaments made of gold. Names of ornaments are: *Kura* or *kalli* worn on the ankles and look like large rings, *Thadiya* or armlets, *Hasuli* or necklaces, *Pchhella* or bangles, *Darki* or earrings, *Kangdhu* or girdle, *Nokshakhol* or nose rings.

Married women tatoo not only their hands and legs but also their breasts with elaborate motifs. It is believed that should this not be done, whatever this woman cooks is not worthy to be eaten. Males also tatoo themselves, however, unmarried women are not allowed the luxury of this practice.

The women are experts in styling of hair and even some males are seen to have the long-hair-knotted-at-the-top style, but of late this custom is also seen to be slowly vanishing through disuse. This is seen to be because of the contact with nearby cities and towns, but in places like Dang and Deukhuri this is still seen to be practised by a number of male Tharu people. This type of hair knotted at the top of the head is called *khopa* by the Tharu, but of course the name varies according to the places. There are variety of such *khopa* and the use of various types of clips made of silver or iron at the base of which there are bunches of flowers and fruits made from the same metal as the clips. They are also fond of using the various kinds of tassels for braiding their hairs. During festivals and dances they wear attractive clothes and facial make up is much more vivid and attractive. Males do not go in for any sort of make up but they knot their hair into *khopa* (bun).

Life Cycle Rites

Births

The eastern Tharu are influenced by the Hindu religion and also follow the ancient religions to some extent, hence their life cycle rites are seen to be done in a mixed manner. On the other hand, the western Tharu have different rituals and observe birth pollution only till the time when the piece of umbilical cord dries up and falls off the child's navel. Once the *navi* meaning the umbilical cord falls off, the child and everyone around there is considered purified.

Prior to the actual purification, the child and mother are bathed. Rice flour bread is fried in oil and distributed to neighbours and a feast is

held on the 12th. day with the naming done on this day. Within one to five years age the child has his *chhaewar* or hair shaving ritual which is done by the *nau* or barber, and the *suki* or *tupi* (top knot) is retained.

Among the Tharu of Dang - Deukhuri, the birth of a child is not exactly celebrated as in other tribes, but on the 7th. or 9th. day after birth, their Tharu priest performs a ritual called *Ghatna Karauna*, after which the woman who has given birth will be purified and allowed to touch water without polluting it anymore.

Chhaewar

If the male child is the eldest one, then when he reaches the age of 4 to 5 years, in the month of Falgun and on a Monday or a Wednesday, *puja* is offered to deities worshipped by the family or in other words the *kul devtas*. This is followed by the child's maternal uncle or *mama* performing the ritual called *chhaewar* or hair shaving. This ceremony is succeeded by a grand feast for all those invited and present there. Those Tharu who are affluent perform such ceremonies for all their male progeny.

No such rituals exist for the Tharu girls and even their menarche and later menstrual cycles are ignored and not considered to pollute the family, thus no pollution during monthly menstrual cycles is observed. However, those Tharu living side by side with Hindu neighbours have begun to observe this sort of pollution because they are not willing to be considered unHindu and so observe Hindu rites and rituals to show their Hinduised status.

In the districts of Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur, the birth of a child is an occasion where three days after the birth their deities are offered *bhiu* which is a mixture of roasted maize ground into flour and molasses, and then this is given to the delivered woman to consume. This practice is very popular among the Tharu people inhabiting the Banke area, but to a much lesser degree elsewhere.

Once the child is delivered and unless the after birth does not fall of the woman is left on the ground. Once the placenta falls off, then she is lifted onto the nearby bed. They believe that the placenta or afterbirth must fall on the ground. Purification occurs 9 days after birth if a girl and 10 days if a boy. Tharu priests are used to perform all these ceremonies. *Ghatna Karauna* is performed in a very mixed

manner by the Dang and Deukhuri Tharu people, and also by those at Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur. Among these Tharu also the *chhaewar* or hair shaving is presided over by the maternal uncle or *mama*.

Marriage Practices

Most Tharu marriages occur when the children are quite young. A boy of 8 to 9 years of age will be married off to a girl who is 15 to 16 years old. This sort of unbalanced-age marriage match is done, they explain, because of their practical belief that an extra worker (the woman) is made available by this union. Another reason offered is that the girl's sexual appetite increases as she grows older and the boy will be able to accommodate her as he will also be growing proportionally and thus the balancing of this sexual high is possible. This also serves as a buffer to control the desire for extra-material sex which is supposed to satiate this unfulfilled craving. On the other hand it is also seen that this form of disbalanced age marriage is cause for the girl to have extra marital sexual liaisons on account of the boy's inability to perform at the early age of 8 or 9 years.

As a tribe the Tharu practice *jat* endogamy, but regarding *gotr* endogamy, matrilateral and patrilateral marriages, these are strictly taboo and unthinkable among these people. Thus they are seen to be *gotr* exogamous and sept or *thar* exogamous. In opposition to this sort of social bias, some scholars are of the opinion that there exist some Tharu pockets where this sort of social activity is not considered taboo.

Generally, there are just two types of marriages found among the Tharu people. One is *Magi biwaha* where all the relevant rituals are completed, and the other is the *Chori biwaha* where the female is stolen meaning taken away without consent. Due to, the fact that boys are married off at an early age with girls in their mid teens, there seems to be no question of love marriages and the concept also seems absent among these people.

Magi Biwaha

In such marriages, either the boy's folks or the girl's folks search for a suitable match, but it is mostly the duty of the girl's folks to approach the boy's folks once such a match is located. The girl's father and sometimes the parents go to the boy's house to discuss

this match. If the boy's parents agree, then a ritual to confirm this match is performed, where the boy is handed some money by the girl's parents as a sort of retainer and then they leave.

At a later date, the boy's father or parents go to the house of the bride to be to see what sort of girl their son will be marrying. Should the boy's parents find the girl unsuitable for their son then they are entitled to return the retainer which the girl's father had earlier presented to their son. This indicates that this marriage will not occur. But, if the parents of the boy should find the girl suitable for their son and for their household then the marriage is finalised. This is the green signal and on seeing it, the girl's father or the eldest member of the family places curds and rice-grains *tika* on the forehead of the boy's parents, or should the parents be substituted by a group of the boy's relatives then the eldest among these is honoured with this *tika*. This is done to express their happiness at the sanctioning of the match, as is their custom.

At this time an announcement is made by the girl's father or the chief speaker of that side should the father be unable to attend. It is declared that the girl (her name is said) daughter of (the father's name is said) is given in holy wedlock to (name of boy is said) son of (name of boy's father is said) and all are the witnesses of this declaration. The boy's father or the chief person of the party reciprocates with a similar announcement. Such a gathering is called *dudh daan* by these people. The custom of presenting money to the girl's folks by the boy's folks also exists at places and is known as *jhanga dine*. In some Tharu societies where this ritual is compulsory, the boy who is unable to pay this amount has to live in his *sasurali* (in-laws' house) prior to or after the marriage and work for a certain period in order to pay this amount. This is a sort of temporary uxorilocal residence pattern that seem to be quite prevalent. This *jhanga* can be waived should an exchange or barter marriage occur, where the boy's sister is married to his wife's brother. Thus it is seen that such exchanges in marriages are prevalent in Tharu communities where the ritual of *jhanga dine* exists on a compulsory basis.

Once the marriage is settled the boy-groom has to pray to his *kul devta* and to the knife lying by the side of the deity, on the day of the marriage. The knife must be kept in the room throughout the period of the marriage rituals as is the compulsory custom. After the puja is over, the boy-groom wearing a white frock-like dress and a large

turban has to accompany the marriage procession to the girl's house.

Firstly after the *kul devta puja* is over, the boy-groom goes with the marriage procession visiting and praying at all the shrines of deities within that village and on reaching the girl's village, there also he goes and visits all the shrines of the deities of that village as is the custom prevalent among these people. Now on reaching the girl's village the *janti* or the marriage procession is welcomed and boy-groom is stood in front of the main door, there he is made the centre around which the bride's female relatives rotate things like *lohero* or pestle, *silauto* or mortar and *saedrumthni* or the vessel in which milk is churned to make whey, curds and butter, also called a *theki*. After this mustard seeds or *tori* grains are thrown into the fire. This ritual is called *parsane* or welcoming and is prevalent among the Tharu people of Kapilvastu mostly.

Now the groom is taken into the house and kept in the room called *Deurahar* where they keep their family deities and he is given food to eat. This food must contain some alcoholic beverages also. When this ritual of feeding is over the groom is taken to the place where the *janti* are and he spends the night with them. All the women of the village collect at this place where the groom and *janti* are and they sing and dance, teasing the groom throughout the night.

The next morning, the groom leaves the *janti* there and he goes home and awaits the return of the *janti* along with the bride. Till then he is not permitted to enter his house as is the custom and so he stays outside the whole day. Though the groom leaves early in the morning, the bride is not given a farewell until the moon does not rise or until darkness does not fall. The *doli* (palanquin or sedan chair-like contraption) in which the bride is to ride is beautifully decorated with a rustic touch and she is placed inside this to be carried away to her husband's house. The bride is given an oil lamp and a cup of poison. This they explain is a traditional ritual and means that should her procession be attacked and she has to flee, then she can see the way with the light of the lamp, but should she be unable to flee and there is a threat on her chastity then she has to save her honour by drinking the cup of poison. It is possible that the custom was started by the Rana Tharu and slowly it permeated the whole Tharu society. In Tharu marriages one particular feature that needs to be noted is that should the groom be unable to attend the wedding personally, then the knife in his worship room can be sent along with the *janti* and it fully represents the groom.

Now the bride arrives at the groom's house, where all the groom's female kin are waiting expectantly and they first welcome her and take her inside the house. The groom also enters along with the bride. On the next day, the bride is given a bottle of *raksi* or alcohol, a head of a *sungur* or pig, and a *gundri* or straw mat and she is sent to her *maiti* or parents' house where she has to offer these items to her parents as gifts from her husband and herself. This is immediately followed up by the groom's kin going to the bride's house in a group. This ritual is *nata pherne* meaning changing of kinship terminology as influenced by the marriage. The marriage of the Tharu is over in this manner.

After the marriage, the bride remains with her parents or *maiti* for a period of 2 to 3 years more and only after this is she considered ready to physically live with her husband who has also matured to a degree by this time.

The practice of divorce and *jari* are simple affairs among these people and similar to other neighbouring tribes. The death of an elder brother leads to the younger brother marrying his *bhauju* or elder brother's wife. Should there be no brothers then a suitable male is located and she is married to this man, who must live in the same house as a son (substitute the dead son and husband). There are no objections voiced against this practice and it is prevalent even today. This is called *bhawar posne* and is in prevalence among Tharu people of the Dang-Deukhuri area to a greater degree.

Though basically the principles of marriages are the same, differences exist among the Tharu societies inhabiting assorted geographical regions. Thus marriages are different among the Tharus of the west and east and also among the Tharu pockets where there exist certain unique features.

Death Rites

Death is considered as one of the events of great significance among the Tharu societies as also in the other tribal communities. The rituals of death differ according to the place of habitation. While the eastern Tharu people inhabit areas near the rivers, they cremate their dead on the river banks while those towards the far western areas bury their males face down and their females face up. The Tharu of Saptari cremate their dead. While some Tharu use brahmin priests

and observe death pollution for a period of 13 days and performing the *kam kriya* similar to the Hindu tribes. The Rupendehi Tharu people use their own priests for such rituals. Tharu following the purely Hinduistic rituals break earthenware pots on the day of the death after the cremation and on the 13th. day of *kam kriya* a feast is given to all the funeral goers who are present. Others observe the yearly *barkhi* and only after the annual *sraddha* are the death rites considered over. The economically weak Tharu purify the death pollution on any day within the year. *Sraddha* is performed at the base of a pipal tree.

Those Tharu who do not finish the *kam kriya* on that same day, hang an earthenware pot on the pipal tree for a period of 13 days and every day the *kriyaputri* must pour some water into it. On the 13th. day a feast or *bhoj* is given to the neighbours and priests and the pollution is thus purified. The priest who presides over this ritual is called the *Mahapathak* which is a corruption of the Sanskrit *Mahapatra*. While adults are cremated by the Kapilvastu Tharu people, they bury the children and infants. Their other death rituals are the same as other Tharu people.

Certain Tharu in Dang-Deukhuri areas cremate as well as bury their dead. As earlier stated, the males are buried face down and the females are buried face up. Some Tharu use the seated posture for burials. Prior to the burial, a white cloth is laid inside the grave and the corpse is placed on this then it is covered with the other piece of white cloth. The last rites are presided over by their own priest and he is called by different names depending on the area of his habitation. While some call him *guruva*, others call him *guraun*, *bhrkh*, *sokh*. After the death rites the kin are all seated together and a feast of rice, unpasteurised milk and blackgram is eaten. This feast is called *Dudh mukh barne*. Should a deceased woman not have any husband, son, grandson or other lineage kin, then the *kriya* of such an unfortunate woman has to be performed by her *maiti*. But if this woman is in the unmarried category, then these rituals are unnecessary for she is just taken and buried like a dog, as she is considered unfit for these rituals.

The Tharu of the west i.e. Banke and westwards, perform both burials and cremations. They also follow the face down and face up pattern of adult burials. There are a few cases among these people where a corpse is buried in the seated or lotus posture, and then it is only among the Nath Cultists as earlier stated. The Kanphata, Jogi,

Mahant, Bhagat are the Tharu who exclusively bury their dead in the seated posture, however, today the general trend had caught up with them and as a result they have also started to lay the corpse flat in some places.

During the ceremonies of the death rites, blood sacrifices of roosters and pig are made by their priests or *guruva*. On the day of death the Tharu of this western region, like their brothers from Rupendehi break an earthenware pot. In the event of the death of a household head, whatever items he has used and all his personal effects even the smallest, have to be discarded while the priest drinks alcohol and completes the *kam kriya* on the same day. But there are some cases where 3 to 7, days have been observed for death pollution. Among the Kanchanpur Tharu, after the 5th. day of death, they hold a feast and purify themselves. They observe the annual, *sraddha* where no *pind* is offered, but neighbours and friends collect to sing and dance, which is followed by a feast. This is their annual *sraddha* or *barkhi*.

Food

Most Tharu people are non-vegetarians and their staple food is rice. They consume more fish, meat and alcohol than vegetables, curries and bread. The kinds of meats they eat consists of chicken, pork, rabbits, pigeons, tortoise, etc., and quite recently they have commenced eating chicken eggs too. The food called *kawa* cooked by mixing lentils or pulses and rice, and which is popular in the Chitwan region, is a favourite and special for these Tharu. Breakfast is called *kalewa*, lunch is *migo* and dinner is *baeri*. All three meals consist of rice.

Occupation

The main occupation of these Tharu is seen to be agriculture firstly and then livestock rearing. Since they live at the edges of forests, the males go in search of animals to the forests, trap animals using the *khuduka* and *kawar* (both are traps), search for medicinal herbs roots, and collect fruits. The women catch fish in small rivers, streams and pools using nets.

They rear cows, buffaloes, chickens and pigs, while making things they need at home like clothes, baskets and such with fabrics spun from the forest products. The plough, beds, mats, window frames, doors are also made by these industrious people. Ropes, nets for fishing, cages for using as traps or for keeping domestic animals, leaf umbrellas, *madal*, etc. are some of the things these Tharu are capable of making and have been doing this since as far back as they can remember, so the old timers laugh and say.

Using wheat, barley, paddy etc. the women distil alcohol at home. Very few Tharu people work in government agencies, and while some are seen to work as elephant drivers or *mahout*, others are teachers, lawyers and a few in the Royal Nepalese Army too. Even today the Muslim traders buy their paddy and mustard crops and then supply them with the goods they require.

These Tharu people are seen to practice an ancient form of sustainable agriculture with the breeding of animals on one side while cultivating the land on the other side. Most Tharu families possess 5-6 cows, the same amount of goats, oxen, pigs and a whole lot of chickens. These, they say, must be present for their various *bhoj* and festivals where the demand for blood sacrifices of a variety of animals is essential. These animals are later consumed. Thus it is observed that along with the gains in manure, the compulsory breeding of animals is for fulfilling the religio-social demands of the community.

Religion & Festivals

A person is chosen from among the community and is made to accept the responsibility of performing all religious functions. The Dangauriya Tharu call the person the *banghriya* while he is the *mulmansa* for the Rana Tharu. There are some differences in the religious practices of these two Tharu people, of which the latter is said to be related to be people in the Uttar Pradesh region of India, and with whom even today marriage ties exist. These Tharu do not celebrate Dasai and Tihar, but Holi or Fagu and Teej are their most important festivals. The males Rana Tharu take the *teej brata* or fast and not their females.

The Dangauriya Tharu celebrate the Srawane Sankranti Guriha as their main festival along with Hardawa which is after the rice planting, Aaulo which is after the harvesting and Aitriya after the

threshing. Maghe Sankranti is celebrated for a period of three days. The main *puja* of these Dangauriya Tharu is Hareri when all work is stopped and everyone makes merry with songs and dances. The main dance is the *skhiya nach*, where the *madal* and other instruments are played by the men who are kept in the centre and are circled by the Tharu girls who dance waving the *baeru* or a manjira creeper. Besides this is another famous and popular dance *mahrwa* or *tthhuwa* where the males and females dance in their own rows. The males have sticks in their hands, peacock feathers in their waistbands and arms. The row of females hold *manjira* creepers in their hands which they play and dance.

Another dance is the *kthghori nach* where the males dance using wooden horses, camels, elephants and such. A dance famous among the Rana Tharu is the *banna nach* where 6 males are energetically involved. While 4 sit down and play the *jhyali*, one plays the *madal* and the last one dances. On the day of Holi, the Rana Tharu males dance in a circle while the females also do likewise but only they dance separately. Holi is celebrated for a period of 2 weeks.

Maghe Sankranti is maghi for them and 3 to 4 days prior to the festival these people stop, all work and begin enjoying themselves. The whole night of Poush month's last day, they keep vigil drinking alcohol and dancing. Near the Saewar Khola is a place called Parashaini Purth where a fair is held at this time. On the Laraniya river the Tharu channelise the water to a certain place and there they all bathe after which they pay their respect to the nearby shrine which has been erected after positioning 4 banana stems, within which area is kept a statue of a war horse of Lord Bheruwa, facing the east. The village priest of Mahatuwa performs the *puja* here, and it is mostly couples who pray here, whether thanking the deity for the child they have or asking for a child they do not possess. After they pray they perform *dhog* at the statue and at the feet of Mahatuwa. Bheruwa is appeased and propitiated with blood sacrifices of animals and the flesh is cooked and eaten there, for it is taboo to take any part of the sacrificed animal home. This festival carries on for almost a week.

On Maghe Sankranti, no milking animals like the cows are milked. Even for a short period the Tharu release their livestock so that they too enjoy the freedom for celebrating this festival.

On Saewar and Kattuki, the Tharu girls perform dances and go around the village (carolling) to collect donations, which are used later for a grand picnic. When the song commences, the stick is banged on the earth to set the rhythm which is 'Bhutuwa' and this is uttered to chase the evil witches away. It is during such times that males and females remain in separate rows and sing devotional songs.

One and half months prior to Bada Dasai, all the unmarried girls or *bthini* go to the houses of the village elders and sing devotional songs about the great epic Mahabharat and dances are performed too. On *nawami* and according to their religious customs and traditions, after *tika*, this dance is taken to the nearby town. On this festival these Tharu prepare special foods from fish, which is of a special category called *guita macha* and found only in the Dang region.

Holi is celebrated from Fagu purnima till the next *purnima* i.e. a full month and within this period they neither work for themselves nor for anyone else. Males and females both drink alcohol and plaster each other with all sorts of colours both dry and wet, singing songs and dancing simultaneously. The dance with the males is called *khichti nach*. On this Fagu purnima the Tharu girls are permitted to stop anyone on the road and ask for donations of faguwa and also fool with and colour him too.

The Rana Tharu celebrate Diwali while the other Tharu people celebrate Holi, Maghe Sankranti, Diwali, Vijaya Dashami, Nag Panchami and Krishna Astami. On the day of Krishna Astami they fast. In the month of Srawan when the fields are green with the paddy crop there is a custom for having a feast to celebrate the greening of their lands. Diwali is celebrated as festival where ancestors are remembered and worshipped and they believe that the songs and feasts of this day help their ancestors to reach the higher levels and finally heaven. On Dasai they offer blood sacrifices to goddess Kali and Bhagawati.

Every Tharu village consists of village council composed of a representative from every family called *ghar dhurya*. These representatives get together and select a head from among their midst and he is called the *mahato*. The council under the leadership of the *mahato* decides cases and disputes, irrigation and agriculture, roads and bridges, and also problems pertaining to the worship of *devi-*

devta of the village community. The decision of this council is final and must be obeyed. The *mahato* is not paid a stipulated sum of money for his services, but he is permitted one or two days free labour annually from every house in the village. He does not gain materially, but in the social aspect he is a winner definitely, because his is all the respect, honour and prestige. He is invited to any *puja*, festival or feast that occurs within the precincts of the village.

Badka Itvar is also one of the great festivals of these people. The last Sunday of the month of Bhadra is called Badka Itvar which literally means Big Sunday. On this day they worship their deities, wear new clothes, and eat good food and thus enjoy like the Hindu do in Dasai. Their religious traditions and beliefs are unique and very different. At the bottom of large trees or in bushes they erect stones and mud mounds and it is these that they worship. Though there are no actual statues, they worship deities such as Diuhar, Samaymai, Churiya and Rakshasa, Baira, Dhrchandi. Banaspati, Kara deo. Along the roadside can be seen wooden stumps imbedded into the earth and these represent the form of Dhrchandi. Banaspati is a deity found in the centre of the forest. Deuba is the *kul devta* which is worshipped within the house. Elephants, horses, tigers are made of mud and offered to the gods. They believe that when the gods are angry, then various diseases assail them, and the belief in *bhut-pret* (evil spirits) is extremely high among these simple folks. Thus disease are ascribed to either angry gods or the effect of *bhut-pret*. Their priest called *guruva* or *sokha* act like *dhami* and cast spells, chant mantras and attempt to remove the effect of the *bhut-pret* and parallelly propitiating the gods also.

Brahmasthan is considered their village deity and is also called gau, while the Rana Tharu call it Bhuihar. Community *puja* is done in the month of Chaitra and Bhadra. Burying the top of the plough and leaving a part above the earth, they make it a *jkhin* (*vakshini* - demoness) and worship it. Female deities worshipped are Kali, Bhagawati, Maiya, Gauriya, while Mahadev or Siva is worshipped as Bhairav and Narayan, Ram and Krishna are also given a high status in their pantheon. Bhimsen is also considered a village deity, Madhu is the god of alcohol while protector of cattle and other domestic animals is Dharmaraj or Nagrahi. Other deities are Rathinath, Ganarbir, Bagheswari, etc. The *devtas* of these people are split into 2 groups, the house deity and the deity enshrined at a common village shrine or *than*. The deities within the area of the house are located in the compound, fields, bushes and such

personally owned places. Deurahar is a human image made on a piece of leather which is stitched onto a bag placed at a spot. The soil beneath the bag is taken and Maiya and others are kept there. Besides these are found *bhut-pret*, *boksha* (warlock) and other deities in whose memory horse-like images made of mud can be seen.

During festivals and *pujas*, the stick held by the *guruva* and the *barchhi* in the groom's hand during marriages, are both kept in the room of the Deurahar. Dharmaraj or protector of cattle is placed outside the house, Bgar, one who looks after the animals is found in the bushes. A *rakshasa* (demon) shrine is placed outside their compound if they rear cattle, while in a house where a *kol* is existent then placed near the *kol* in the compound is the Kolhura-Masan. These deities of the animals sheds and houses are offered prayers and devotional songs so that the animals in the family remain disease free and provide the householders with wealth. The setting up of a community god like Brahmasthan is to ensure the protection from epidemics, plagues, famines and such dangers. Either the *mahato* or the *guruva* are the main presiding personnel over *pujas* and festivals. Belief in witches and evil spirits is so great among these Tharu people who are mostly poor and illiterate, thus when any disease hits them it is blamed on either the angry gods or the mischievous *bhut-pret*, and sometimes on the evil-eye of the witches that live or are alleged to live in their surroundings. Thus the custom of *phuk-phak* (healing by blowing *mantras*) by a *guruva* is prevelant.

Tharu people consider animals like monkeys, snakes, cows are sacred so these are not killed by them. The pipal tree is worshipped during the Banaspati *puja* and these worships occur at cross roads, edges of the jungle and on river banks. The *devi* or goddess is offered a chicken blood sacrifice along with alcohol. If anyone falls sick or dies, then the *guruva* goes to that house and blesses it with peace.

There are two types of *guruva* : *desh bandiya guruva* and *ghar guruva*. The former claims to have a *lal mohar* stating his ancestry as the family priest of all Tharus people. The latter is the one who moves in the village performing *puja*, *jhar-phuk* and such works as required by the people. The *desh bandiya* is entitled to receive some paddy annually for services rendered due to the push of his free labour in his alleged *lal mohar*, while the *ghar guruva* obtains a few days of free labour in his fields annually. These *guruva* are mostly

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

male though there are some females ones seen in the Kailali region.

Every Tharu has a household deity called *gun*, who is offered milk and silk cloth, white pigeon and chicken as blood sacrifices. Their tutelary deity is a horse or rather represented by a horse. The shrine of Chvhavar Dhr Chandi is made out of carved wood and there are five wooden pegs, imbedded in the earth near this deity, and they represent the five Pandav brothers. When sickness occurs in the village then these people pray to these gods while the *guraun* (acting like a shaman) performs a *chin ta* ritual, while the *mahatuwa* and the *guruva* perform various social functions.

The Tharu are spread out in the *terai* regions and their rituals, customs, beliefs are not exactly alike as has been seen from the preceding matter, but today, they are beginning to change for the better and are getting a bit more organised among themselves with the development pace of the world growing faster. Today, these Tharu people are gradually merging into the mainstream and applying medical, and educational ideas into their long standing and stagnant socio-cultural structure.

Index

- ago 169
aakhi geda 68
Aam Mahalaune 184, 185
Aamui lae Ho Aamui Lae 280
aanchi 189
Aata 261
Aathubari 187
abhoj 130
abir 31, 132
addhya 93
adi shakti 11
Adibas 183
aebu 12
aela 130
agam 121
agan 228, 319
agan gantho 7
ageno 169, 172, 203
Agni 299
Ahlong 242
ajajyu 136
Aji Halamu 248
akika 106
akolla 132
aksata 6, 31, 32, 66, 67, 69,
125, 132, 301
aksata,. 293
alm gadnu 312
alo path 312
alung 74
amar purus 123
amjiju 136
anahi 65
anchal 86
anggi 241
Angsa 261
ankhora 166
anna 230
anna prasan 145
annaprasan 300
anthayasthi kriya 50
aptn 87
ara 207
arni 64, 65
arti 259
aruwa 88, 227
asan 270
Astami 188
asthi 136
ath anni 74
athara baja 30
atharh 260
atthais 320
attis 70
aunsi 81
bachhi goth 309
bachho 307
bada 310
bado 310
bado 310
badshaha 288
baehasalang 5
Baerati Apit Chaphari 183
baeri 340
baeru 342
baesar 183
baet baegari 262
Bagh daan bolne 302
baghdaan 162, 164
bahal 121, 130
bahals 122
Bahara 124, 125
baharatyug 125
bahini haru 45
bahiri ageno 169
bahiri chulo 169
bahuju 273
bahun 264, 285

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

- bahuns 159, 264
bain 232
baina 4
bais dhare 152
baithak 310
baiyu 256
baja 286
baji 326
bakhri goth 309
bakhu 308
bal 272
bala 67, 286
Baljapati biwaha 198
Balsing 272
Balsing biwaha 272
ban devta 12
ban jhankri 263
ban ko raja 203
ban madu 307
ban than 305, 306, 307
ban thans 305
bandan, dori 303
bandevtas 207
banghriya 341
bangjur 241
bangsa 224
Banko puja 172
banna nach 342
bansuri 237
Bantawa pachha Rai 157
barah 260
baran phukaune 170
barchhi 345
bare chuiga 107
barga 42, 43
Barh Barsah Jatra 295
barkhi 339, 340
barkhi barne 11, 136
barshik karya 303
basine 252
Basyasnan 186
batauli 200
batis thars 41
bel 123, 124, 323
bel 123
bel tree 124
Bel Biwaha 123
bel fruit 124, 131
bel patra 191
belpatra 123, 124, 322
besi 38
betel nut 93
Bhadra sukul pks 287
Bhadrai 285
bhagya 80
bhai bunda 300
Bhairav 152
Bhajan group 192
bhajans 191
bhajn 133
bhaka 270
bhakals 179
bhala 46
bhalaio 33
bhalaji 301, 302
bhanchha 309
bhandar 309, 310, 320
bhanga 323
bhanich 286
bhanja 29, 45, 145, 146
bhanja's mama 29
bhanji 145
Bhar Bhat 183, 186
bhasa 157, 158, 178
bhat 134
bhat khulai 44
bhat khuwai 180, 216
bhat kulai 145
bhat, dal and tarkari 192
Bhati jad 201
bhatkurae 30
bhato 84
bhatualue 65
bhaturaule 65
bhauju 87, 162, 167, 183, 186,
273, 338

- bhauju's 199
bhawar posne 338
bhawar ringyaune 302
Bhdau Gava 289
bhegva 332
bhenajyu 184, 186
bhenajyus 185
bheti 69, 166
bhigal 122
bhitraune 302
bhitri ageno 169, 172
bhitri chulo 169
bhiu 334
bhod 305
bhoj 118, 121, 127, 128, 130,
138, 152, 271, 341
bhoj 135
Bhoj patra 310
bhojini 116
bhoot 48
Bhote bhasa 305
bhote pipaltree 289
Bhote selo 279, 280
bhoto 39, 52, 74, 144, 307,
332
bhoto (vest) 200
bhotos 307
bhrkh 339
bhuji 116
bhujungo 168
Bhume puja 152, 172, 265,
267
bhumi 152
bhut-pret 11, 344, 345
bhut-preth 218
bhutil 259
bhutlae 70
bhuts 188
bhyakur 206, 236, 278
bhytim 294
bidi 206
Bidua biwaha 269, 273
biha bhyo 66
bijuwa 9, 159, 160, 165, 166,
167, 170, 172
binayo 159, 173, 174
biru 259
biwaha karan 183
Biwaha magne 64, 302
biwahadalo 302
bjigal 122
blows 299
bodhisattavs 247
boka 30, 92, 151, 209, 235,
313
boka ko masu 225
bokhu 74, 82
bokkhu 20, 241, 259, 278
bokor 286
boksha 44, 345
bokshi 44
boku 39
boli 43, 155
bolis 155
Bompo 265, 266, 267, 270,
274
Bompos 265, 266, 267, 270,
274
bonga 236
Bonpo 261
borso 309, 310
Bote Selo 280
brahmnal 132
brass 167
bratabandh 4, 45, 56, 64, 65,
107, 126, 146, 181, 197, 207,
242, 286, 289, 300, 301
brechhuigu 126
bride 78
bthini 343
budeuti 67
budo jngko 132
budo pasni 132, 277
buhari 178, 190
buhari 293
bui gal 122

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

- buigal 122, 132
bulaki 16, 39, 159
buraesaenju 74
burka 96
Burki 294
bya 301, 303
byas 301
chachi 66
Chaiti 28
chaitiya 122
chaitiyas 19
Chaitya 265, 277
chaityas 136, 277
chakti 321
chaku 217
Chalni batti 186
chamal kutne 300
chamsur ko sag 217
chana 67
chanden 260
Chandi Nach 172
Chandi puja 172
chandrahār 159, 165
Chandrapuling 158
chanduwa 190
chang 76
changya 63
channa 201
char 162
char anna 167
char daan 167, 270
char dam 320
char jat 260
char jats 56
char kulko rit 163, 164
char kulko rit bujhaune 162,
164
char paisa 270
chaubandi cholo 39, 159
chaur 93
chaurasi bhyanjan 130
chauri 82
chautara 10, 166, 171, 322
chautaras 168
chautari 33, 322
cheli beti 269
chene maiti 320
chepang pareko 163
chepang-pareko 163
chetin 80
chhadari 332
chhadya 309
Chhae Pee 246
chhaedi 122, 125, 132
Chhaewar 4, 28, 45, 86, 126,
146, 161, 197, 207, 268, 286,
317, 334, 335
chhaewar ceremony 286
chhaewars 269
Chhaiti 268
chhang 75, 76, 78, 79, 80
chhap 305
chhapani 310
chhartanae 242
Chhat Pahiraune 185
chhataur 332
chhetap 8
chhipra 72
chhisinge khurpa 159
chhoela 130
Chhoi 268
chhoila 130
Chhou 242
chhtier 226
chhu-achhyut 15
chhuba 20, 39, 81, 241
chhui 301
chhui ghar 301
chhvali 133
chhvas 135
chhyang 242, 243
chi na 123
chibaha 122
chikukonam 259
chillum 168
chin ta 346

- chinda 161, 163, 168, 170, 172
chino 70
chinucamal 37
chirag 190
chirpa 78
chirthova 287
chita 190
chitra 174
chjad 63
chmar 13
chogyan 75
chok 63, 145, 309
choka chak 66
chokfung thim 5
Choki 294
choks 63
cholazz 134
choli 63
cholis 159
cholo 16, 52, 74, 84, 144,
205, 308, 321, 323
cholos 259
cholya 332
chomai 112
chor jh ppi gme 92
Chore ra bya 301
chori 131, 163
Chori biwaha 75, 162, 163,
252, 253, 269, 271, 335
chorten 80, 294
chorten (mane) 17
choru 82
chotti basne 308
chre sewa guthi 139
chtamri 151
chuda karma 300
chudakarma 125, 126
chulesi 170
chulo 164, 166, 169
chumaunu 186
chumma 80, 81
chura 67, 113, 232
churate 113
churi 184, 192
churis 200
chutki halne 14
chvta 122
chwatn 122
chyabrun 6, 7, 165, 174
chyang 244
Chyangla 276
chyaptae soon 16, 323
Chyuba 276
daag batti 32, 91, 150, 168,
218
daan 19, 92, 135, 299, 303,
320
daan daksina 150
dadu 246
Dae chyang 243
Dae Jhaong 246
Daem chyang 243, 244
daewali 136, 138, 267
daewali guthi 139
daewali guthi puja 140
daewali guthi, 140
daewali guthiyar 139, 140
daewali puja 146, 151
Daguba biwaha 181, 187
Dahaeguwa 182, 183
dahakarma 168
daijo 66, 217, 245, 291
daijo 76
daijo dine 302
daitiya 151
dakne 50
daksina 147, 150
daksina 123
dal 134
Dalikhara 182
dalo 67, 293
dalos 256
dama 305
Damai 269
Damai bajas 269
Damdumai biwaha 181, 187

- damfu 174
damphu 269, 279, 280
damphu beaters 270
Damphu nach 280
damphus 279, 280
dangre 305
dangri 69
dankanis 299
darga 103
Darki 333
dasai barne 53
dasha 246
dashara 35
dastoor 230
dau 74
daugari 16
daura 52, 144, 241, 321
daura surwal 323
daura-surwal 16, 159, 165,
286, 307
dautho 66
dawani 179
deo 289
deo-pitra gho cha 169
deorali 166
deota 199, 265
deotas 199
deotis 199, 200
desh 160
desh bandiya 345
desh bandiya guruva 345
desh dulaye ko 300
deshant 300
deshatan 132
deuda 71
deuda khelne 71
Deurahar 337
Dev KumarJatra 286
devar 162, 167, 273, 320
Devar-Bhauju 321
devars 253
devi 23, 92, 323, 345
devi devta 11
devi thans 256
devi-devta 343
devis 92, 187, 209
devn 133, 139
devnagari 116, 225
devta 52, 92, 188, 223
devtas 92, 187, 209, 344
dewa 169
dewa devi 255
dewari 255
dewas 170, 172
dhaedus 206
Dhaenijiya biwaha 181
Dhaenijiya biwahas 187
dhago 184
dhairo 312
dhalot ko hasuli 230
dhami 28, 32, 33, 35, 37, 48,
66, 69, 93, 153, 179, 209,
261, 301, 305, 344
dhami 305
dhami thans 305
dhamis 57, 188, 200, 265, 307
dhan 186, 213, 272
Dhan Nach 4
Dhansing 272
Dhansing biwaha 272
dhara 68, 290
dharamsalas 171
dharma bhai 181
dhendo 323
Dhikur 296
dhikuro 150, 296
dhog 11, 130, 147, 149, 182,
189, 191, 217, 342
dhog bhet 6, 232, 271, 320
dhog-bhet 166
dhokaya 308
dholak 13
dhoti 63, 84, 88, 147, 148,
184, 229, 230, 232, 233, 321
dhotis 192, 200
dhotis 184

- dhuiraina 80
dhujaen 82
dhukse 287, 288
dhukur 237
dhunge roti 318
Dhungri 159, 165
dhupi 150
dhupi 289
dhvja 13, 30, 31, 69, 275, 293,
312
dhvjas 267, 275
dhyan 75
dhyangro 48, 255, 275, 319
didi 87, 186
didi haru 45
didis 184
digro phutaune 33
dih 87
dih milaune 87
diko 116
dimdamdi 228
dimdus 260
Dimzen 294
diyo 186, 191, 299
dmiha 65
do le 163
do wori - niwori 271
docha 20, 63, 74, 241, 259
dochas 308
dofars 308
dojyada 308
doko 67, 174, 237, 319
dokos 256, 278
dola 230
doli 31, 65, 77, 337
dolos 305
Doota geeth 280
Doota nach 280
dora nach 276, 280
dormo 259
doro 94, 148
dosalla 287
dotelo 308
doto 308
drigin 227, 228
dubo 89, 147, 319
dubo karne 302
duchakegu 130
dudh daan 336
dudh ko bhara tirne 148
Dudh mukh barne 339
dudh phora 162
Dukhaer Handi 189
dulahan ko mukh herne 130
dulahi anmaune 46
dulahi bhitraune 166
dulhan anmaune 31
Dulhan phadkaune 32, 320
dulhi ko mukh herne 67
Duma Nakso 255
dun 332
duna 149
duns 325
dupi 248
dura lgaune 88
durbar 94, 313
durbars 94, 278
Durga 188
durgini phadkaune 303
dus (ten) kirant 163
dus daan 303
dus kirant 163, 164
dus rupiya 163
dus thar 1
duva 133
duvo 86
dzo 248
dzuma 82, 248
ek anna 230
ek bihane ghaewa 276
ek dinae 276
ek ratae 276
ek rate ghaewa 276
faguwa 343
falaicha 171
Fawar geeth 280

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

- ful 159
- gaddi 305
- gado 205
- Gaen kutawa 243, 244
- gagro 66
- gagro 229
- gagros 309
- gahu 259
- gai ko masu 225
- gajni 76
- gametill 241
- Gandharva biwaha 162, 163, 164, 318
- gaon ko deota 199
- gaon ko deotas 199
- gaunth 33, 44, 50, 145, 160, 317
- gayo hai 9
- gh 134
- ghada 317, 319
- Ghaepa 247
- ghaewa 275, 276, 277
- Ghaewas 276
- ghaghr 63
- ghagro 308
- ghagros 308
- Ghalu 74
- Ghantu 37
- ghar 63, 149
- Ghar dhumiya 330
- ghar dhurya 343
- ghar guruva 345
- ghar halne 62
- ghar jawai 126, 273
- ghar paincho 300
- ghar than 305, 306
- ghar thans 305
- ghar thans. 305
- ghar-jawai 187
- ghat 190, 191
- Ghat Teknu 185
- Ghatna Karauna 334
- ghatta 206
- ghhata pisne 300
- ghisarne 47
- ghisarne biwaha 47
- ghlek 205
- ghodi goth 309
- ghoom 278
- ghoral 279
- ghoral's skin 279
- ghsu 134, 135
- ght 134
- ghtsudhi 134
- ghutinta 294
- ghyak 246
- ghyampa 277
- ghyampo 134, 320
- ghyang guthi 265
- ghyangling 275
- ghyangs 265, 266, 267
- ghyu 65, 69, 74, 76, 78, 79, 190, 191, 193, 254, 274
- ghyum 268
- Ghyuva 294
- gittha 201, 203, 206, 236, 278
- giyamini 255
- go daan 303
- goba 76
- gobba 213
- Goda dhunae 124
- goda dhune 271, 302
- goji bhrai 67
- golden kantha 165
- gompas 19, 21, 57, 80, 81, 242, 248
- gompas's 19
- gompas 57, 79, 81, 248, 264, 266
- goru 321, 322
- Gosai 179, 181, 192, 305
- Gosai Thakur 184
- gosen 185
- goth 72, 251, 309
- goths 79, 256
- gotr 1, 2, 5, 24, 62, 127, 139,

- 157, 178, 260, 298, 315
 gotr 298
 gotr endogamy 327, 335
 gotr exogamous 335
 gotr exogamy 261
 grahashanti 320
 gram 188
 gram pujas 306
 griha puja 299
 gthya 332
 Gufa Basne 124
 guita macha 343
 gun 346
 guna 206, 212, 213
 gundri 49, 217, 319, 338
 gunew 200, 269, 308, 323,
 332
 gunew-cholo 29
 gunews 308
 gupta basi 304
 gurans 203
 guraun 339, 346
 Gurm-Godali 261
 guru 19, 300
 guru kul 181
 guru purohit 57
 gurubas 200
 guruva 339, 340, 344, 345,
 346
 guthi 131, 133, 137, 138, 139,
 140, 150, 152
 guthi 138
 guthi member 139
 guthi puja 118, 152
 guthi puja, 121
 guthis 140
 guthiyar 139
 gvae kaygu. 128
 gvae viygu 128
 gyan 75
 gyaso 259
 haath 184
 haaths 184
 Haawai geeth 280
 had 128, 164, 229, 315
 had nata jogaune 181
 had phora 162, 315
 hajam 185, 192
 Hakika 105
 halam 241
 haledo 201
 halka 190
 haluva 74
 hami keti ko kura chinaunu
 aako ho 46
 handi 189, 190, 230, 231
 hansuli 165
 haqwala 170
 Hasuli 333
 hat 4, 229
 hat bazaars 14
 hat bazar 232
 hat bazars 232
 hats 163, 174, 193
 hattejada 70
 havan 135
 hazaranna 272
 hiki 265, 277
 hisa banda 62
 hjam 90
 Hla 266
 Hla puja 266
 Hlama 266
 hli 93, 237, 255
 ho 266
 holi guthi 139
 hom 216, 299
 homa 299, 303
 honkegu 129
 hooka 47
 hukka 319
 Hz 102
 I-hi 123, 124, 125, 131
 I-hi, 123
 Iepung daen 8
 Indra baja 133

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

- ingmeba 7
innar 180
ista devta 52, 53
ista devtas 183
jad 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 61, 65,
76, 77, 97, 160, 163, 165,
166, 168, 169, 170, 172, 173,
198, 218, 223, 230, 231, 243,
244, 252, 269, 270, 271, 275,
276, 279, 290, 293, 320, 323
jad-raksi 13
jadutona 188
jagat jannani Bhagawati 247
jaggae 145, 147
jagge 88, 185, 299, 300, 302,
309
jagge goth 309
jagge mandap 185
jaikot 332
jal devi puja 265
jaldevtas 207
jamaro 188, 200
jamindar 155
jamindars 17
jana uti 318
janai 61, 64
janais 307
jangi 309
jantar 259
janti 6, 30, 31, 32, 45, 46, 47,
65, 66, 76, 77, 78, 88, 89, 90,
129, 147, 149, 165, 166, 183,
184, 185, 186, 198, 229, 230,
232, 244, 252, 269, 270, 271,
302, 319, 320, 337
janti 269
janti jane 243
janti jane din 88
janti parsane 30
janti pasarne 147
janti's 65, 165, 186
januzahl 112
jar 67, 68, 149, 162, 301
jar hanne 162
jari 29, 68, 71, 90, 131, 149,
162, 338
Jari biwaha 75, 162, 163, 269,
271, 273, 321
jari cull 8, 78
jari dand 78
jari garne 90
jari kur 149
jari marriage 7
jari tirne 253
jat 56, 225, 305
jat bias 261
jat endogamy. 216
jat endogamy 315, 335
jat ma lyaune 171
jatamasi 70
jati-pati 260
jatra 4, 47, 48, 152, 286, 287,
288, 289, 295
jatras 280
jats 18, 23, 260
jau 145
jaun 218
jawai 5, 27, 33, 62, 149, 184,
192, 293
jawai chela 44
Jawai Kirinok Vapla 231
jawai ko killa kayam garidinu
301
jeevan 184
jeevan churi 184
jethan 32
jethanis 184
jethi buhari 331
jghelo 63
jhakrini 255
jhanga 336
jhanga dine 336
jhankri 8, 28, 33, 35, 37, 48,
66, 93, 153, 255, 274, 285,
293, 294, 316
jhankris 57, 188, 200, 265,

- 274
 jhapn 65
 jhar-phuk 345
 jhar-phukh 200
 jhilmiliya 332
 jhimu 81
 jhopa 322
 jhulva 332
 jhyali 305, 323, 342
 jhyamta 275
 jimawals 266
 jimi 239
 jimidar 155, 239
 jimidars 155, 239
 jimindars 155
 Jitaurae bhoj 271
 jkhin 344
 jngko 127
 jogaune 181
 jogi chodaune 300
 jolu 66
 jumma 98, 99
 jutho 145
 jutho barne 275
 jutho khuaune 271
 juwari 14, 47, 77
 jyotisi 127
 kaan dhungri 159
 kachaura 77
 kachhad 39, 52, 200, 205, 233
 kachila 130
 kacho 184
 kadae 321
 Kaedak 242
 Kaekal 244
 kaera 90
 kaerung 8
 Kahuwa 182
 kaichi mar gunew 159
 Kaike 23, 24
 Kaita puja 107
 kaj kriya 322
 kakha chhodaune 31
 kalas 6, 65, 66, 132, 148, 166, 191, 319
 kalewa 340
 Kali 187
 kaling 77
 kaliya 161
 kaliya halne 217
 kalli 16, 39, 63, 232, 233, 285, 286, 333
 kallis 159, 165
 kalo ghyava 322
 kam kriya 339, 340
 kamlo 308
 kamlos 308
 kamsale 303
 kan phukne 181
 kancha buwa 78
 kandmul 312
 Kangdhu 333
 kangkok 76
 kanta 16, 165
 kantha 159
 kantho 307
 Kanyadaan 124, 148, 185, 270, 290, 291
 karahi 91
 karal 183
 karali bhar 183
 karda 170, 173
 karna chhed 181
 kamavedh 126
 karo 74
 karuva 293, 294, 319
 kasa 183
 kasa kuta 183, 184, 186
 kasa kuta laune 183
 kathiyar 189
 kathiyari 189, 190
 katto 191
 katu ko 70
 kaudi 91
 kawa 340
 kawar 340

- kazi 110
kdm rukh 235
keche 63
kesari 51
khad 63
khadati 307
khadga 30
khadgo katne 49
khami 317, 319, 320, 322
Khamkura 24, 73
khando jaggaunae 130
khappad 80
khappar 188
khar 84
khari 13
kharkulo 217
kharkundo 77
khasto 16, 133
khat 91, 167, 189
khat, bhakari 309
khata 59, 244
khats 309
khe lehi 287
khemjong 7
khichti nach 343
khimi 294
khir 90, 93, 180, 186
Khir Chhuwa 180, 181
khmbh 287
Kholake puja 172
khongkhi 8
khopa 333
khor 309
khr 122
khsi 53, 68, 147, 269, 306
khtna 106, 107
khuduka 340
khukuri 8, 66, 159, 168, 299
khukuris 168, 170
Khul 111
khumichuji 290, 291
khuni 185
khuraank 317
khurpa 312
Khyali 14
kimb 287
kipat 14, 15, 156, 313, 316
kipats 156
Kirin Vahu Vapla 232
kitti sukrae 259
kkhni 332
kmero mato 17
kmij 88
kmiz 232
knn 66
ko tasi 76
ko tika 78
kodali 170, 189
kodalo 190, 229, 230
koga 72
koira 64
koiralo tree 279
kol 345
Konechok Chinduyi 247
kos 313
koselee 34, 162
kosi 213
kota 133
kriya 52, 68, 80, 170, 199,
237, 246, 339
kriyaputri 135, 150, 169, 170,
190, 191, 303, 339
kriyaputri's 190
krta 92
Kstriyas 178
ktaro 66
kthara 217
kthghori nach 342
Ktubakae 276
ktuva 64
kuglo 287
kul 15, 35, 36, 139, 159, 166,
216, 305, 306, 310
kul deota 199, 200
kul devta 35, 53, 90, 129, 172,
176, 266, 293, 295, 336, 344

- kul devta Barha 35
 kul devta jagaia ra 301
 kul devta puja 139, 266, 267,
 293, 294, 337
 kul devta pujas 293, 294
 kul devta than 184
 kul devtas 166, 183, 185, 301,
 304, 334
 kul pitree 255
 Kul puja 172
 kul puja, 118
 kul pujas 159, 172, 266
 Kul Thakurs 183
 kulae 74
 Kulain puja 35, 36
 kuldevta 287
 Kulian puja 35
 kullin 330
 kuls 305
 Kumbh Mela 295
 kuna rakhne. 197
 kunchet 213
 kundals 181
 kundl 286, 287
 kura 147, 333
 kura chhinne 30, 147
 kuras 26
 kuro 33, 190, 218, 303
 kurta 63, 84
 kurta-pyjama 96
 kutiro 301
 kutiro khayoy 301
 kutiro khuaune 301
 kuwa 322
 kyongr 289
 kyuta puja 126
 kyuta puja) 126
 la 262
 labaeda 323
 lachhas 159
 laddu 65, 66, 67
 laddus 300, 301
 lagan 5, 198, 318, 319, 320
 lagan gantho 7
 lagan game 320
 lagan ko kagaz 302
 Lahanga 332
 Lahur 38
 Laiwa 276
 lakha 147
 lakhamari 128
 lakhe nach 307
 Lal Bhat 186
 lal mohar 3, 13, 345
 lama 8, 10, 19, 20, 37, 57, 75,
 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 242, 245,
 246, 247, 248, 261, 264, 265,
 266, 267, 268, 270, 274, 275,
 276, 277, 285
 lama's 57, 80
 lamas 57, 80, 81, 246, 248,
 264, 266, 268, 270, 275, 276
 lami 5, 6, 46, 75, 128, 161,
 182, 229, 230, 269, 318, 320
 lamis 161
 lampicha 128
 langautis 192
 laskari 16
 latarnae 29
 lawa 66, 132
 lawa 230
 lawangfuli 159
 lekh 203
 lekhu 317
 lh chu 90
 Lha chesi 293
 Lha pheva 293, 295
 lha-khang 81
 lho 57
 linga 124
 lisar 318
 lishnu 55, 63, 168, 310
 lishnu 309
 liu 82
 lmaskar 65
 lohoroy 337

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

- lota 85, 86, 191, 229
- lotas 191
- luga chhekne 65
- lukuni 323
- lumbos 17
- Lunglaema Thim 11
- lurka 159
- luto 37
- luto falne din 307
- luto phalne 37
- lveda-surwal 63
- ma dhim 294
- madal 50, 51, 77, 323, 341, 342
- madals 207, 211
- maekae sama 6
- maelaendens 260
- Maelongna 9
- Magarkura 24
- magi 163
- Magi biwaha 75, 161, 163, 198, 199, 207, 217, 252, 269, 271, 272, 335
- Magi Biwaha 252
- Magi biwaha, 181
- Mahapathak 339
- Mahapatra 339
- mahato 343, 344, 345
- mahatuwa 346
- mahout 341
- mahr 110, 111
- mahrwa 342
- mahusa 213
- maiju 32, 180
- maiti 12, 32, 65, 66, 67, 71, 77, 78, 79, 126, 130, 134, 148, 149, 187, 245, 290, 303, 316, 317, 319, 321, 338, 339
- maiti baja 30
- maiti chinnae 32
- maiti mannaune 319
- maiti talo 74
- majh goth 309
- majhe 309
- Maji boli 43, 46
- mala 321
- malami 33, 168, 189, 322
- malingo 173
- malpos 52
- malpoth 296
- mama 4, 28, 29, 32, 44, 45, 48, 78, 126, 127, 129, 145, 146, 147, 160, 161, 180, 181, 268, 269, 286, 317, 334, 335
- mama chela 162
- mama chela - phupu cheli 48
- mama cheli 162, 207
- mama cheli - phupu chela 48
- mama cheli phupu chela 273
- mama's 180, 181
- mana 36, 44, 146, 147, 167, 270, 318, 319, 320
- mana dhan 227
- manas 144, 319
- mandap 66, 67, 124
- mandirs 79
- mandro 174
- mane 265, 277, 294, 315, 322
- Mangaema puja 12
- mangaena puja 12
- mangal gaan 307
- mangba 12
- mani 265
- manjira 342
- manna 67
- mansaunae 12
- mantra 181
- mantra daan 19, 20
- mantra tantra 317
- mantra-tantra 188
- mantras 7, 32, 44, 49, 181, 184, 200, 211, 212, 246, 247, 264, 267, 275, 277, 300, 319, 345
- maramiko 259
- marriage 270

- maruwa 184
 maruwa khuda 184
 masan 218
 mat/mttan/m-tan 122
 maths 19
 mato 309
 matrilineal kin 182
 mavali 319
 mawi 332
 Mcha ga. 134
 mchabu vynkegu 127
 mdva 88, 89, 90
 mdva 88
 meet 181, 183
 mehendi. 109
 mekhli 16, 159
 mela 307
 midwife 228
 migo 340
 ming mama 5
 misther 184
 mithae phapar 82
 mitini 184
 mohar 74, 160, 319
 mohar rupiya 272
 moksha 246
 mollas 18
 molvi 106
 mrcha 54
 mrich 217
 mrja 65
 mt kor 88
 mtan 122
 mudn 86, 228
 mudra 81
 muddyauli 66
 muga 39, 74, 165, 242, 259,
 287, 332
 mujetro 39, 205
 mukh herne 149
 mukh puchhaunni 160
 mukhiya 114
 mul 34
 mul ghar 43, 44, 117, 292,
 294
 mul than 305
 mulghar 62
 muli sdhva 149
 mulmansa 341
 Mulmi 261
 Mulungsema 9
 mundri 16, 39, 63, 165, 332
 Mundum 7, 12, 13, 170, 171,
 172
 mungleri 65, 66
 mungleri mangl gan 65
 mungro 145
 murchunga 159, 173, 174
 muri 65
 musa 83
 Mushr 92
 na paturne 304
 naeserba 82
 naetru 77
 naetru goba 77
 Nag Puja 293, 294, 295
 nag-nagin 11
 nagas 207
 Nahaen 12
 nahangma 12
 nahangma puja 12
 naibaidh 69
 nainasut 286
 nainasut labeda-surwal 287
 nainasuth 321
 najong 7
 nakso 252
 namaskar 65
 namaste 14, 15
 namj 98
 namlos 256
 nand 67
 nanglo 28, 128, 149, 179, 186
 nangoya 241
 Napur 246
 Nara 266

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

- Narayan gosai 305
narsing jhyali 65
narsingha 305
narwhal 82
nas dha guthi 139
nata 181
nata pherne 338
nathha 165
nattha 332
nau 144, 150, 151, 334
nau gaedi 16
naugedi 159, 165
naumati baja 30
navi 75, 333
navi katnae 75
navran 4, 28, 44, 56, 85, 127,
134, 197, 216, 226, 227, 228,
268, 299
nawami 343
neem 227
ni santan hunae 324
nikah 110
nikahnama 110
nikanama 111
ningalo 278
Nirbolok Vapla 231
nirvana 326
nisvat 109
nmaj 98, 99, 100
nmaj 98
Nokshakhol 333
nung churi 144
Odes 310
odro 63
okhal 203, 206, 312
okhl 53, 89
okwama samyang 12
olma 203
Om Mani Padme Hum 57,
265, 277
Om Matrimyae Salaedu 277
ongyon 78
othalo 300, 309, 310
pa-lam 13
paan 90, 93, 109, 182, 185,
186, 191
paan katani 182
paans 182
pachaura 321
pachha 157, 158, 167, 171
pachha's 158
pachhas 157, 158, 172
pachhaura 308
pad 63
padma asana 274
padmachal 70
Pae chyang 243, 244
paetanis 192
pagri 310
paitha 306, 307
pakhi 66
pakho kheti 41
palki 185, 186
palne 50, 51
palne 51
palung ko sag 217
panch 161, 183, 272, 274
panch bali 53
Panch Bhalaadmi 11
panch gans 300
panch pala 293
panch ratna 285
panch vakya 11
pancha baja 30
Pancha.Kanya puja 172
pand 310
pand thadas 310
pande 295
pandero 29, 301
pangden 74, 241, 259
pani 131, 199
pani chalnae 120
pani chalnae jat 39
pani chalne jat) 131
pani na chalnae. 120
pani na chalne jat 179

- pani-na-chalne jat 215
 panta bhat 192
 pari 75
 parpachuke 273
 parsane 31, 337
 Pasing Padang 5
 pasni 4, 28, 56, 86, 132, 146,
 180, 207, 216, 228, 242, 268,
 277, 285
 patakas 267
 Patal deo 12
 paternal aunt 90
 pathi 66, 144, 147, 149, 217,
 318
 pathi ladhdu 93
 Pati 68, 92, 322
 patna 165
 patro 123, 246
 Patuk 242
 patuka 16, 39, 74, 159, 165,
 205, 232, 287, 307, 308, 323
 paturne 304
 paturne devta 305
 Paula Hlasu 267
 pauri 63
 pauva 68, 322
 pavai 61
 pcheni 66
 Pchhella 333
 perungo 46, 146
 phad 142
 phadi 142
 phaerae 82
 Phagu 172
 phalne 50, 51
 phariya 16, 84, 85, 86, 308,
 323
 Phaula Hlasu 266
 phedangma 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10,
 11, 12
 phedangma 7
 pheruva 66
 Pheruwas 200
 Pho Gyu 246
 pho ho ri 141, 142
 phora 315
 phriya 39, 52, 144, 205
 phtiha 106
 phucho-mucho 302
 phuk-phak 345
 phuki 139
 phuli 39, 63, 332
 phulis 200
 phupu 66, 90, 126, 127
 phupu cheli mama chela 273
 phupu char 302
 phupu chela 162
 phupu chela mama cheli 167
 phupu cheli 162
 phupu cheli mama chela 161,
 167
 phupu haru 45
 phupu's 48, 77
 phupu's 78
 phupu-bhenajyu 184
 phupu-cheli 207
 phuru 79
 pina 87, 191
 pind 68, 92, 135, 340
 pind puja 191
 pindi 33, 254, 258
 pipal 171
 Pipla 201
 pitho kutne 300
 pito lagaune 302
 pitree 50, 51, 52, 169, 170,
 199, 234, 265, 276, 293
 pitree deo 294
 pitree puja 136, 293, 294
 planks 63
 Poke Nakso 255
 poon 229, 231, 233
 pote 52, 144, 165, 320, 332
 potes 259
 pou 217
 poyambo 255

- pran 246
prasad 36, 152, 223, 227
Prem biwaha 181, 269, 271
pret atma gho cha 169
preth 48
preths 188
pseudo-mama 181
puja 12, 13, 31, 35, 36, 52,
53, 54, 62, 69, 86, 92, 93,
119, 128, 137; 138, 145, 147,
148, 150, 151, 152, 159, 166,
171, 180, 184, 186, 187, 209,
210, 265, 266, 267, 293, 294,
299, 303, 305, 306, 307, 312,
319, 323, 334, 342, 344, 345
pujari 255
pujari (priest) 199
Pujas 10, 15, 54, 93, 172,
179, 181, 200, 265, 266, 267,
280, 306, 307, 345
pultos 320
punga 259
puparang 4
puredharo 65
purkhaule daap 303
purmunge 204, 207, 212, 213
purnima 73, 78, 152, 209, 343
purnimas 306
purohit 255
Pusti puja 299
putali 303
puthlas 188
pyas 136
pynja 128, 129
ra 262
radi 217, 278, 308
Rai boli 155
raikar 15
Rainis 159
Rajbansi 188
Rajbansi Boli 178
rajbandari 224
raji (willing) 194
rakshas 304
Rakshas biwaha 162
rakshasa 345
raksi 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 45,
59, 61, 77, 97, 147, 161, 163,
169, 170, 173, 198, 199, 217,
252, 253, 270, 271, 272, 276,
279, 291, 321, 323, 338
Ramanth 183
ranga 53, 217
ranke bhut 288
rarsi 112
ras jureko chha 300
raski 269, 272
ratauli 66
ratauli khelne 130
ratilila 258
ratri bhoj 270
rayabarich 229
rayo ko sag 217
rayo sag 29, 319, 320
reji 159
ringa 259
rinopoche 81
rinpoche 265
rit bujhaune 7
ritiaune din 300
rodhi basne 308
Rong 158
roti 31, 65, 151, 242, 317,
318, 323
roza 100, 101
rtjga 106
rumal 88
rupiya 74
ryalo 66
Saangna Maangna 187
sadhu 162, 261
saedrumthni 337
sagun 6, 45, 46, 65, 128, 147,
149, 165, 166, 167, 170, 269,
270, 271, 286, 302, 319, 321
sagun 130

- sahanai 305
 sai 68
 Saimundri 5
 saino tomba. 8
 sait 76, 80, 247
 sajogta 7
 sakeba seelee 172
 sakom 230
 sal 319
 sale roti 30, 32, 64, 192, 269,
 290, 291
 sale rotis 270
 salis 184, 253
 Salki 294
 salla 63, 69
 salla 310
 sallo 203
 samba 12
 Samdahkhung 10
 samdhi 149
 samdhi bhet 149
 Samdhi bhoj 271
 samdhin 109
 same 246
 san 79
 sanan 138
 sanan guthi 140
 Sanan guthi 138, 139
 Sandesh 183
 sang 75
 sanghu 8, 322
 sangteni 285
 sangu 68
 sani ma 3
 sankha 189, 275
 Santhali bhasa 225
 saptok 12
 saptya 130
 sar 57
 Saraswati nach 280
 sari 86, 148
 sasu 67, 187, 217
 sasu guthi 139
 sasura 147, 187
 sasurali 67, 130, 187, 321, 336
 Sat Gurus 183
 Sat Kanya puja 172
 sathi 85
 Satta biwaha 301
 Satti biwaha 198
 sattu 74, 75
 Satyanarayan puja 180
 sauta 302
 Sayaya daan 303
 seer 116
 sehani 77
 serke oljum 74
 Shaetu 247
 shakhr 85
 shakti 34, 92, 187, 234
 shamans 255
 shant swasti 50
 sheda 265
 shezade 110
 shezadi 110
 shirphuli 16
 shupa 179
 Shyama 269
 shyamahu 241
 Shyarku Tiangsi 275
 shyawla 203
 shyo shyo Khumbila 248
 shywla 49
 si 138, 140
 si guthi 138
 si guthi. 140
 siae 163
 Siddha Shikari puja 172
 sika 126
 silajit 70
 silaju 70
 silauto 337
 silo halne 130
 simal 203
 sime -bhume 11
 simrik 333

Tribal Ethnography of Nepal

- sindur 30, 51, 89, 124, 128, 133, 135, 144, 148, 149, 167, 185, 192, 232, 270, 271, 333
sindur 7, 88
sindur biwaha 166
sindur halne 7, 31, 47, 66, 89, 148, 185, 186, 198, 229, 271, 320
singha sardool 122
singikarmu 259
single bado 310
sinhmu 128
Sinjae Chhogyal 246
sino 215
sirbandi 39, 165, 259
sirdars 249
Sirijanga 158
siris 203
sirome 223
sirphuli 39, 259
sisnapat 173
sisnu 322
sisnu 278
siudo 89, 124, 148, 149, 232
siurailni 306
skhiya nach 342
slokas 300
smagatho 150
so ghaewa 276
sodha 12
sohara saraddha 50
sohara sraddha 303
soharani 14, 15
sojo 38
sokh 339
sokha 344
soksae 76
soltinees 199
sondaha 241
Song Taen 11
soon ko phuli 165
soon pani 39
soonaha 330
sora jat 56
sorah jat 260
sote 169
sppa 133
sraddha 50, 92, 132, 136, 170, 200, 202, 339, 340
srujunga lipi 2
sripech topi 287
stnja 85
su 134
Suba Sangsu 248
Subaer paan 182
Subba 295, 296
subh dekha 182
sudeni 85, 179, 299
sudhi 134
sudra 202
sudras 215
suduwad 191
suguth 12
suki 334
sunaulo rit bujhaune 7
sungden 272
sungur 338
sunpani 28
supari 90, 182, 184, 185, 186, 191
supari dine 148
sur chyang 244
surahi 287
suro puro chalaune 320
Sursing biwaha 272, 273
surti 47
suruwal 74, 321
surwal 144, 307
susik 12
Suthyu 332
sutkeri 44
sutras 290
swyambar 128
swyamvar 217, 319

- syabai 74
 syabasipachi swargwa 80
 syalkar 272
 syame phanya 259
 syango 74
 Syavelava 289
 syawli bhanchne 302
 taaga puraune 302
 taages 307
 tabud 112
 tae 75
 Taechogyen 75
 tagadahari 61
 tagadhari 61, 169
 Tagaera 11
 tagaera ningba fuma 11
 Tai khe nan 23
 Takcha 242
 talae 74
 talu 79
 tamakhu 47
 Tamang selo 280
 Tamang selo 280
 Tamangnis 259
 Tamba 261, 269, 270, 271
 Tamba geeth 270
 Tambakaiten geeth 280
 Tambas 270
 tamfungma 12
 tamrapatra 313
 tangdongma 159
 tangkhonbi 159
 Tangsing Khoksing 14
 tankipiwa 59
 tantra-mantra 10, 54, 293
 Tantras 211, 263, 267
 tantric rituals 80
 tapari 146, 160, 161, 170, 225,
 228, 322
 tareko 199
 tariya 200
 taro hanne 57
 tate 65, 67
 tauko uthaune din 53
 taulo 78
 tazia 103
 teej brata 341
 teen dhungae chulo 312
 Teen Sinan 190, 191
 terai 15, 22, 41, 42, 45, 84,
 94, 95, 96, 103, 113, 114,
 174, 176, 195, 197, 220, 325,
 326, 327, 332, 346
 th 282
 thada 63, 66, 310
 Thadiya 333
 Thaemali 192
 thake 243, 244
 Thaksee 244
 Thakur 181, 182, 192
 Thakur's 190
 thal 77
 thalne 50, 51
 Thalu 261
 Thami Bhasa 314
 than 36, 69, 199, 210, 267,
 305, 307, 344
 thans 162, 199, 210, 307
 Thapidine 316
 thar 18, 29, 41, 43, 55, 62,
 167, 170, 197, 207, 251, 260,
 262, 265, 284, 298, 310, 315,
 316, 328
 thar 260
 thar exogamous 335
 thar exogamy 207
 thar endogamy 62
 thar exogamy 216, 228, 315
 thara narak 80
 thars 3, 18, 42, 43, 84, 118,
 157, 158, 161, 167, 168, 170,
 172, 178, 197, 204, 207, 216,
 240, 251, 260, 261, 266, 298,
 315, 328
 Tharu bhasa 328
 theki 29, 30, 64, 76, 272, 301,

- 313, 319, 337
theki 272
themba 243
thetuwa 308
thetuwa gunew 332
Thosyu 332
thuli ama 183
thulo ghyava 322
thulo taulo 77
thumche 174
Thuni Thuniya 183
thuppor chema 7
thuyanla 245
thyamsing 316
tika 5, 6, 31, 32, 34, 49, 67,
79, 109, 113, 133, 188, 192,
200, 205, 208, 210, 271, 286,
291, 300, 319, 321, 332, 336,
343
tika talo 302
tika talo garne 5
tika-talo. 129
tikas 180
tikuli 333
til 145, 218
tilak 88
Tilakhiwar 182
tilhari 16, 39, 52, 144, 159,
165, 320
tip 313
titae phapar 82
titaepati 169
tite pati 312
titepati 33, 51
tithi 303
tithis 303
tilki 323
todor 230
tokri 90
tokris 256
tole 121, 123, 129, 130, 132,
136, 138
tongba 12, 168
tooni 203
topi 39, 45, 63, 74, 96, 146,
147, 308, 332
topi 139
topi dine chalan 45
topi thapae 76
tori 201, 337
torma 246, 256
tormas 19, 319
totola 169
Totuk Shaetu 246
tra 332
trul 201
tsampa 19
tthhuwa 342
tulsi 92
tulsi 91
tuna 159
tunki 230
tupi 28, 126, 334
tutung 241
tyatis koti devtas 287
ubra 309
ubro 310
ubtan 109
Ukjae 276
ukjaes 276
Ul ghalung 74
ulto 168
ulto lishnu 168
ung ko narak 80
unje 19
upa-thar 328
upa-thar 225
upa-thars 56, 157
upa-thars (pachhas) 157
uralera laijane 301
uttis 203
uwa 37, 38
vacan charne 65
vajra 258
vakshini 344
vamsavali 1

vamsavalis 115
varnas 15
varni 319
vicha vnegu. 134
vihars 122
vilauki magne 88
vlesi 150
vsuka 126
wad ama 229
Wuzu 112
wuzu 99
yada narak 80
yaeba samang 11
yagyas 166
yalangma 13
Yangji 244
yarakama 13
yarsa gomba 70
yatra 288
yeaba 12
yeama 12
Yoho 261
yuba samang puja 11
yun 74, 242
zkt 101, 113