Part I

BHAKTAPUR
THE URBAN FABRIC, RITUALS AND RITUAL SPECIALISTS

BHAKTAPUR – A NEWAR TOWN IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

Introduction

The origin of the Newars, the inhabitants of Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, Patan and a few smaller towns and villages of the Valley, still remains obscure. Consequently we know little about the background from which their specific urban life-style and their clustered settlement pattern developed. The structure of their language points to Tibeto-Burman origins, but since they settled in the Valley roughly two millennia ago, the urban culture of the Newars has also been strongly exposed to southern influences. Buddha Śākyamuni was born at the foothills of the Himalaya. His religion and the Brahmanic culture travelled up from the Gangetic plains, and represented the Great Tradition. From the 7th century AD on, the Newars brought in turn ideas and crafts to the Tibetan Plateau, to the court of Kubilai Khan, and to Mongolia.

By the end of the first millennium AD, three urban centres had developed around royal courts – as centres of small, independent, and since at least the 14th century competing kingdoms with little hinterland but a strong agrarian base. A specific townscape with a host of public squares, temples and shrines developed. Complex urban rituals were sponsored by the kings and enacted to observe the cyclic character of time: chaos and renewal of the social order, the death and birth of the gods.

A specific townscape dotted with imposing temples dedicated to the personal gods and goddesses of the kings and many open, small shrines housing the non-iconic Lords of Place – preferably named Gaṇeśa or Bhairava – produced an intensive dialogue or even discrepancy between the narrow private courtyards and the extended public spaces that served as the stage necessary for urban rituals (see Auer/Gutschow 1974). According to the annual calendar, at times these rituals involve the entire population – children being carried on their parents' shoulders. In the early 18th century the calendar of such events probably reached its apogee under the much-remembered King Bhūpatindra Malla. That time saw the extension of the palace and the construction of a towering, five-storied pagoda that was to become the built symbol of an extended Nepal which was shaped, in its present boundaries, at the beginning of the 19th century.

No other imposing landmark has been added since then to the townscape, but the intensity of the annual festivals has kept increasing since the early 1970s, when a German-funded urban development project financed the renovation and reconstruction of some two hundred religious and public structures and ensured sustainability by modernizing the technical infrastructure and renewing the traditional brick pavement throughout the entire town. The character of the urban rituals has changed because the centralized religious trust lacks the necessary resources and sometimes is even unable to supply the required sacrificial animals. This shortcoming is, however, compensated for by an ever-increasing number of participants who celebrate the various New Years (in April and November) and the birth of the city's tutelary gods in October. Almost every year new gods are installed and incorporated into

the circumambulatory procession after New Year; new processions have been inaugurated in which the individual quarters of the city attain an hitherto unknown prominence (see Gutschow 1982).

Finally, even political demonstrations of power or protest are named "processions", and follow the age-old processional route as its accepted stage. In March 1990 agitated masses moved along this route in Bhaktapur calling for free elections, and in June 2001 thousands of young boys followed this route – shaved, as it were – to express a rare kind of collective mourning after King Birendra and his family were murdered.

Although essentially urban in character, more than half of Bhaktapur's population is still engaged in agriculture. Public space turns red when pepper is dried in August, it is used as a winnowing ground when the rice comes from the threshing ground in the fields, and it becomes full of dust when the wheat is dried in May. Not only farmers work in the fields; craftsmen also farm fields which also came into their ownership after the land reform of 1962. The use of fertilizers has led to higher yields of ever new varieties of vegetable crops which are marketed in Kathmandu.

Although we do not know much about the economy in historic times, the rise of the small kingdom of Bhaktapur and its affluence in the 18th century may have been based on trade along the route between the Gangetic Plains and Tibet. Specialized crafts and even the export of oil products must have provided enough income for the king and his nobility to donate temples and wells: at that time probably the only way to ensure and demonstrate status.

Today, Bhaktapur has a thriving construction industry, providing fifty percent of the fired bricks that are needed for the present dynamics of urbanization (see Gutschow/ Kreutzmann 2002). Surplus income seems to be invested in hotels in the expectation of a growing tourist industry, as well as in private schools in response to the government's failure to ensure basic education. Thousands of commuters travel daily to Kathmandu to work in government offices, attend schools and to trade. The express dream of the leader of Bhaktapur's unique Peasants and Workers Party is to turn Bhaktapur into a centre of learning, science and education (Bijukche 2002).

Probably by the 6th century AD Buddhism had been widely adopted in the Valley of Kathmandu, while divine kingship was patterned by a Hindu High Culture that had fanned out from the plains to reach even the remotest valleys of the Himalayas. Apart from very few fragments and a couple of *śivaliṅgas*, hundreds of 7th to 8th century Buddhist votive structures (*stūpas* or Nev. *cibhaḥ* or *caitya*) have survived as the only remaining material manifestation of the early urban development. Both of these structures are not only representations of Śiva or Buddha but also monuments dedicated to the dead. A *śivaliṅga* receives offerings in the course of the *śrāddha* death rituals, while a *cibhaḥ* in most cases was dedicated by a donor or group of donors to a deceased family member – all of them depicted on reliefs fixed to the plinth of the structure.

To this day priests from both religions perform death rituals in an almost identical fashion. Sometimes certain groups such as the brick-makers engage a Buddhist priest for death rituals and a Brahmin for the remaining rituals of passage. In the ritual dedicated to the lineage deities, priests from both religions even join forces in a concerted performance.

The promulgation of a stratified society beginning in the 14th century resulted in a caste system which designated ritual specialists engaged in death rituals as "unclean". Only since the 1970s have these specialists started to discontinue their ritual obligations. Within a decade or two these rituals will either disap-

The urban fabric, map on the basis of a survey in 1979
Clusters of houses around courtyards form extremely dense quarters for farmers (Jyāpu) and potters (Kumaḥ) along the periphery, while the quarters of the Brahmin and former courtiers around the palace square with its many temples tied to the royal cult incorporate gardens.

pear, or vital functions like the preparation of the ritual ground on the 10th day after death and purification of the polluted house on the 12th day will be performed by the in-laws of the chief mourner, the *jicābhāju*.

The urban fabric

The spatial pattern of Bhaktapur mirrors to a large extent a hierarchic principle of order that centuries earlier had grown into a theory that found expression in diagrams: ideal cities are ordered around a centre with the status of the inhabitants diminishing towards the periphery. Often, reality mirrors only traces of this theory. In Bhaktapur, the palace is placed along the periphery, unfolding on the plateau of a ridge. The settlement extends some 1600 metres along a southern slope towards a river that flows from east to west. The idea of the palace as the centre becomes manifest through the social topography. Opposite the palace is the quarter of the Brahmin priests, surrounded by the spacious three-storied residences of former courtiers which were developed around large courtyards. Based on both sides of the main road – which in a way turns the classical street cross into a linear pattern – are the farmers and craftsmen (carpenters, brick-makers, potters, coppersmiths). The periphery is marked by clusters of "unclean" butchers who as owners of buffalos were also the main suppliers of milk. At

The quarter of the untouchables (Pvaḥ). Until the early seventies single storied houses with straw roofs formed a separate settlement, and with that demonstrated their stigmatised status. In the upper left the five-storied pagoda and the Bhairavnāth temple dominate the city skyline.
Photo 8th April 1974

the periphery of the urban space, but clearly beyond it in ritual terms, are the settlements of the untouchables, who collect the leftovers at the cremation site, traditionally cleaned the latrines, weave baskets (also needed in death ceremonies), raise ducks (needed as sacrificial animals), and engage in fishing (a mandatory item in ritual feasts).

Not clearly confined in clusters but scattered rather across the entire city are members of other low status castes with ritual obligations, such as painters (Pũ), or purity specialists such as barbers (Nau), torch bearers (Cālã), washermen (Pasi) and auxiliary priests (Bhā and Jugi).

Until the 1970s urban space could clearly be experienced as a created and essentially ordered world, in opposition to the unordered and potentially chaotic continuum of fields. The inner, urban world is felt to be protected by the eight shrines of the powerful Mother Goddesses, the Aṣṭamātṛkā, while the outer world is without protection, and thus easy prey to demons and ghosts.

Newar cities were never walled, for the encircling deities were regarded as forming an immaterial wall that would be even more effective in warding off immaterial enemies, unidentifiable evil influences, and spirits for which no death rituals had been enacted.

The division of urban space

As in many cultures developing in a landscape amid mountains, the basic classification of place distinguishes between "up" and "down". Bhaktapur too is divided into an upper town and a lower town along a ritually defined and annually reaffirmed borderline. The opposition of the two entities attains an antagonistic touch on the occasion of New Year. A fight ensues between the two halves of the city, thus demonstrating the crisis that erupts when ritual time is on the verge of

Opposite
Taumādhi, the central square and ritual arena of the lower town.
The ritual chariot is seen collapsed on the main road (lower left of the picture).
Photo 18th April 1973

coming to an end. Only with the erection of the World Tree on New Year's Eve and the rebirth of those deities who accept blood offerings is the accepted order reinstalled. A new cycle of time is set in motion, time is made to continue. The entire urban ritual extends over seven days – a by all means meaningful span of time. On the last day, iconic representations of all the non-iconic gods that accept blood sacrifices are worshipped by each and every family in a procession that leads through urban territory. The processional path neither defines a centre nor does it enclose a spatial entity. Instead, it stands for an integration of deities and inhabitants, urban space and its quarters.

Clusters and quarters

If we define a quarter as an entity different from the quadrant of a square city based on a street crossing, it is clear that Bhaktapur has 24 of such quarters (*tvaḥ*). As a multiple of four the number alone justifies the use of the term "quarter". Being also three times eight and two times twelve it reflects a complex notion of time and space of universal validity. Every quarter constitutes a part of a meaningful whole. In itself, each quarter develops as a microcosm, with temples and shrines that are needed for the daily rituals. Invariably the quarters are centred around a public square. Many of these squares are hemmed in by arcaded public buildings: to shelter the old or to be used as playgrounds by children; to shelter travellers or mendicants or to house a temporary butcher shop in the early morning. Here, music groups convene at night or priests read out sacred texts according to the season.

A shrine of Gaṇedyaḥ – the dominant guardian deity in a non-iconic form in the shape of an unhewn stone that once was "found" – represents ideally the concept of "place". As such it forms the focal point of the quarter and is worshipped every morning and at the beginning of almost every ritual. Visually unimposing, but none the less powerful, is the level of chthonic guardian deities, various classes of ghosts and demons which are pinned down by stones. Only recognizable by the offerings that are made in cases of death or sickness, these stones absorb ritual waste and propitiate evil spirits.

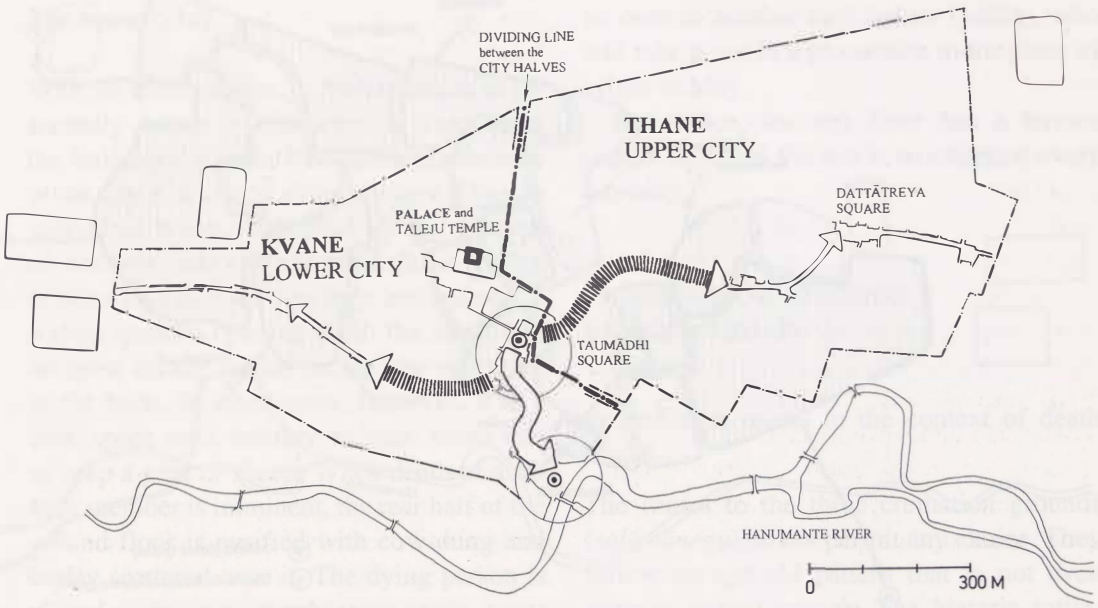
The essential clue to the delineation of the boundaries of the quarters is provided by the processional routes to the three cremation grounds beyond the river in the south. Only unclean castes have their cremation grounds north of the river. Specific rules govern the passage of the corpses, which are carried on biers along prescribed lanes and streets. Every household is very aware of the direction the procession must take. There is no institution there to ensure that the procession's movements adhere to the rules. The rules are inscribed rather in the memory of a static society based on social and subsequently topographical immobility.

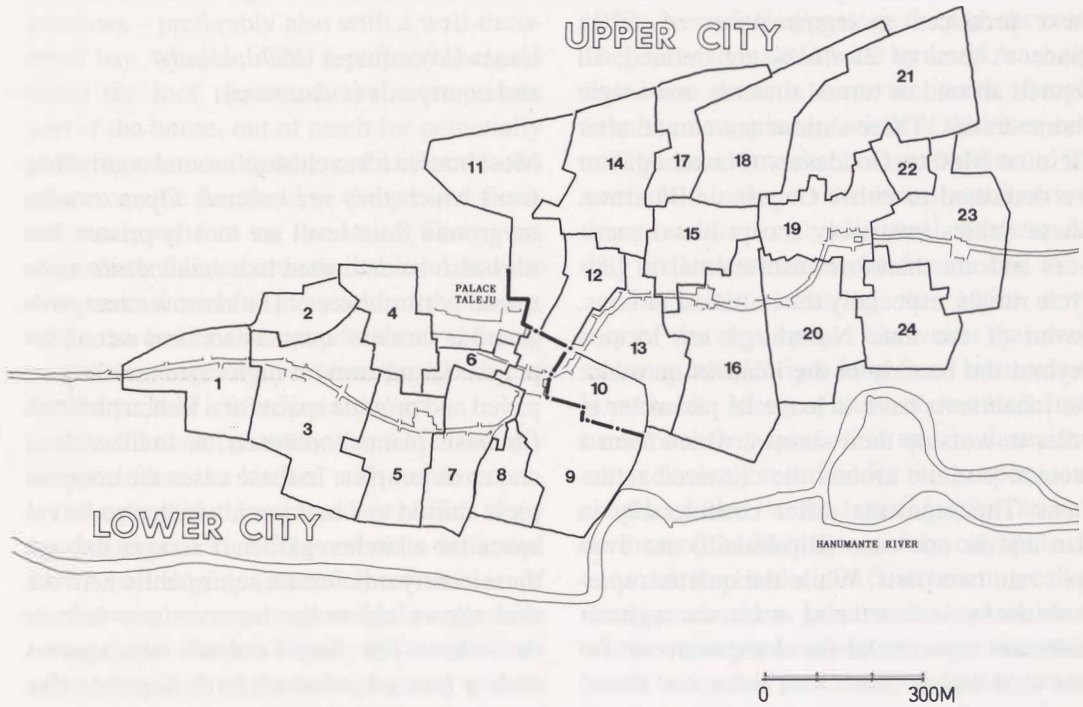
The processions of the "living" Mother Goddesses, the Navadurgā, to the 24 quarters – a sequence of elaborate rituals enacted between Māgh Saṃkranti (winter solstice) and some time in June – further help identify the territory of the quarters. Acting from the central square of the quarter in question, the mask bearers visit the people at its threshold, at times marking the imagined border to the neighbouring entity with an oleander twig.

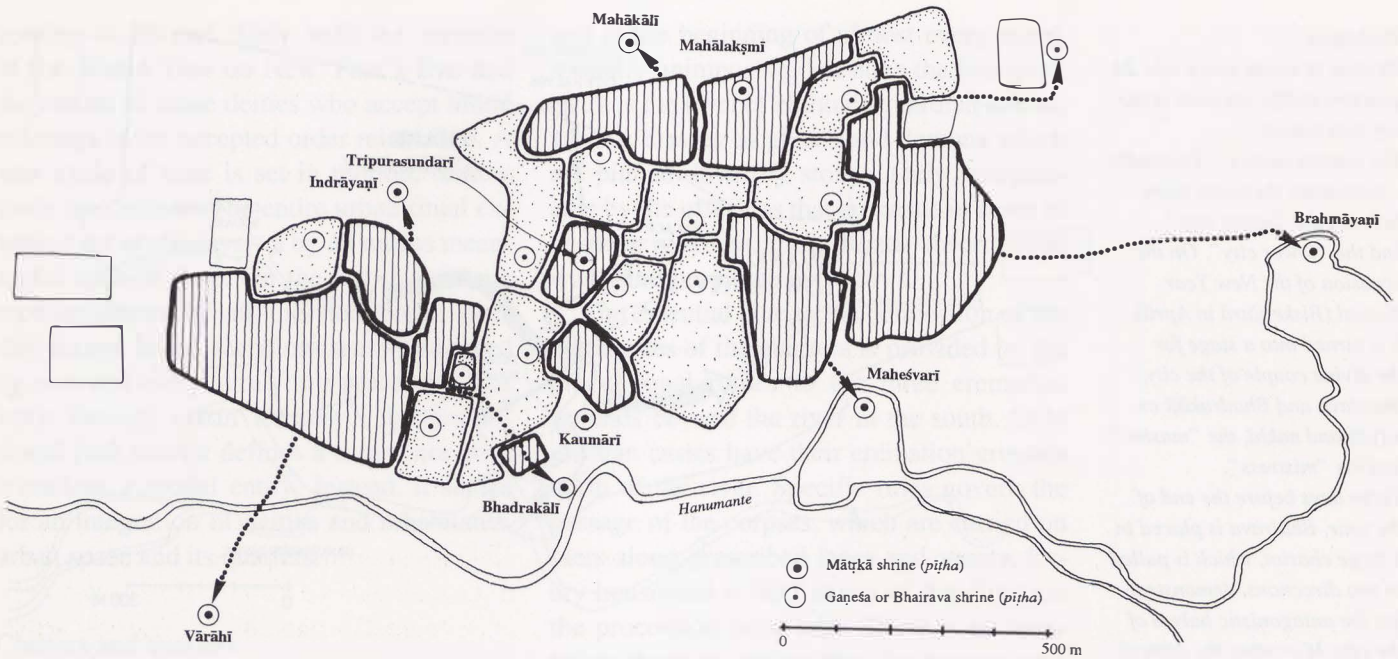
Few ritual specialists in Bhaktapur perceive the complex territorial network, which mirrors a hidden cosmic order and reveals itself in sacred diagrams. This order remains unknown to the individual, whose ritual needs and roles are tied to the infrastructure of his respective quarter.

It is largely the mind of the western scholar – architect or anthropologist – that transcends the narrow boundaries of time and space, society and ritual as experienced by the individual.

Bhaktapur, division of urban space into 24 quarters (tvāḥ), division of the city into halves. The central square – Taumādhi – represents the nodal point between the "upper city" and the "lower city". On the occasion of the New Year festival (Bisketjātrā in April) it is turned into a stage for the divine couple of the city, Bhairava and Bhadrakālī or nāyaḥ and nakhī, the "master" and his "mistress". Three days before the end of the year, Bhairava is placed in a large chariot, which is pulled in two directions, demonstrating the antagonistic halves of the city. Mirroring the critical event of the end of time, this competition turns into a battle of stone-throwing, regularly resulting in casualties. On New Year's Eve the chariot of the divine couple has to reach the ritual ground on the southern periphery, Yaḥśīkhyaḥ, to witness the erection of a long pole, which stands for the world tree.







Division of urban space into segments (ilāka) centering around or referring to essential shrines dedicated to non-iconic representations of the Mother Goddesses (mātṛkā), Gaṇeśa, or Bhairava, which receive blood sacrifices on the occasion of life-cycle rituals.

Segments of urban territory (*ilākā*)

Beyond the quarter, another territorial element produces a segmentation of urban space. A total of 21 *ilākās* are defined, all centred around or turned towards non-iconic shrine deities. These shrines are named after the nine Mother Goddesses (Navadurgā) or are dedicated to either Gaṇeśa or Bhairava. These deities invariably accept blood sacrifices and are therefore instrumental in life-cycle rituals, especially the initiation of boys. Seven of the nine Navadurgā are located beyond the bounds of the *ilākā* in question: the inhabitants have to leave its perimeter in order to worship their shrines, which form a protective circle around the clustered settlement. The segments differ considerably in size and in one case (Bhadrakālī) are even split into two parts. While the quarter represents the basic structuring order, the segment addresses a particular ritual requirement. As was said before: the order does not reveal itself visually, but every ritual actor (*nāyaḥ*) or actress (*nakhĩ*) of the household knows his or her own ritual sense of belonging, based on experiences that start with the rice feeding ceremony, for which the child is placed in front of the deity at the age of six months.

Lanes (*lā*), squares (*lāchi*, *khyaḥ*) and courtyards (*cuka, nani*)

Most houses form clusters around courtyards, from which they are entered. Open arcades on ground floor level are mostly private, but may also be dedicated to a small shrine or to music performances. The narrow courtyards found in farmers' quarters serve as a compost pit, the larger ones of high caste families are paved and provide space for a well, a platform for basil plants (*tulsīvedī*) or small shrines and even temples. In these cases the compost pit is shifted to a backyard, which also leaves space for a kitchen garden. Passages through these courtyards form a semi-public network that allows short-cuts between one lane to the other. The lanes extend into squares with a host of infrastructural elements like step-wells (*hiti*), drinking water fountains (*jaḥdhũ*), and platforms (*dabu*) for the performance of dramas or annual rituals.

The house (*chẽ*)

With its three storeys, a Newar house is essentially urban in character. In rare cases the buildings will be free-standing, because urban space develops along clusters. Thus an individual house is defined by the number of window axes. The ground floor (*chẽḍi*) is often less than six feet high and may have a shop (*pasaḥ*) opening on to the street and an open arcade (*dalã*) facing the courtyard at the back. In most cases, however, it is a dark space used entirely to store straw and to keep a goat or sheep. When death of a family member is imminent, the rear half of the ground floor is purified with cow dung and barley scattered over it. The dying person is placed on this area, head facing south. Since the ground floor is always damp, it is never part of the living area, which consists of the first (*mãtã*) and second floors (*cvatã*), and which open up with increasing numbers of windows – preferably also with a well-decorated bay window. The top floor (*baigaḥ*) under the roof represents the most private part of the house, out of reach for potentially polluting visitors. Members of unclean castes may cross the threshold to the ground floor, but never set foot on the stairs. The seven steps that mediate between one level and the next are reserved for the world of the living, while the ladder that attracts the wandering soul in the shape of a *preta* on the 10th day of the death ritual has only six steps.

A small chamber under the roof is usually set apart from the kitchen with (until recently) its open hearth and bundles of rice straw needed to cook rice. This room is dedicated to the worship (*pūjākvathã*) of deities of one's own choice, as well as the lineage deity (*dugudyaḥ*), which is kept by the annual caretaker, the *pālāḥ* of the lineage group (*phukī*) for the term of one year. On the occasion of full moon in December (Yaḥmāripunhi) the deity, symbolized by a silver crown, is handed over to another turn-holder (*pālāḥ*), who will take it out in a procession to the place of origin in May.

By choice, the top floor has a terrace (*atāli*) on which the sun is worshipped every morning.

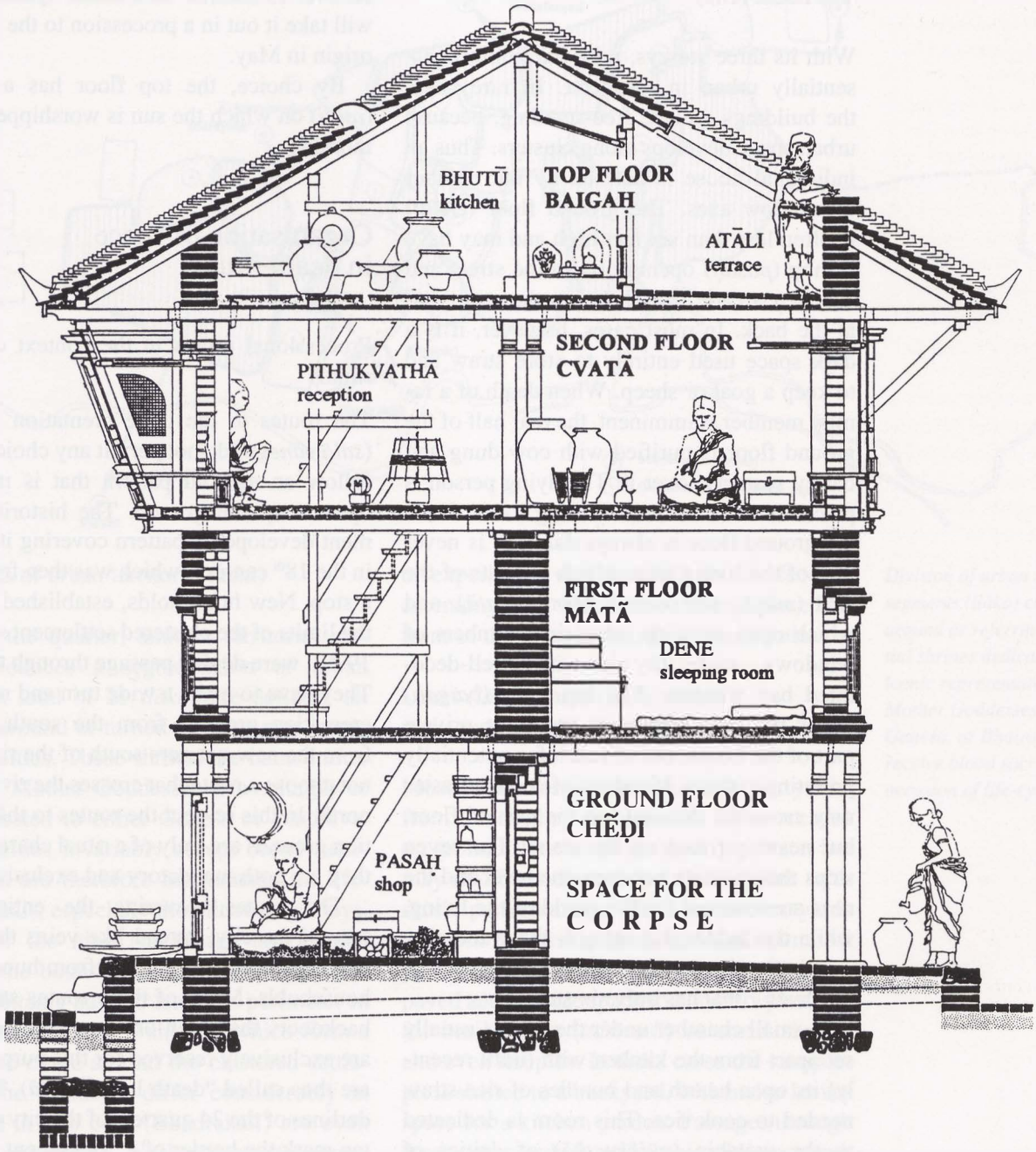
Organisation of space in death rituals

Processional routes in the context of death rituals

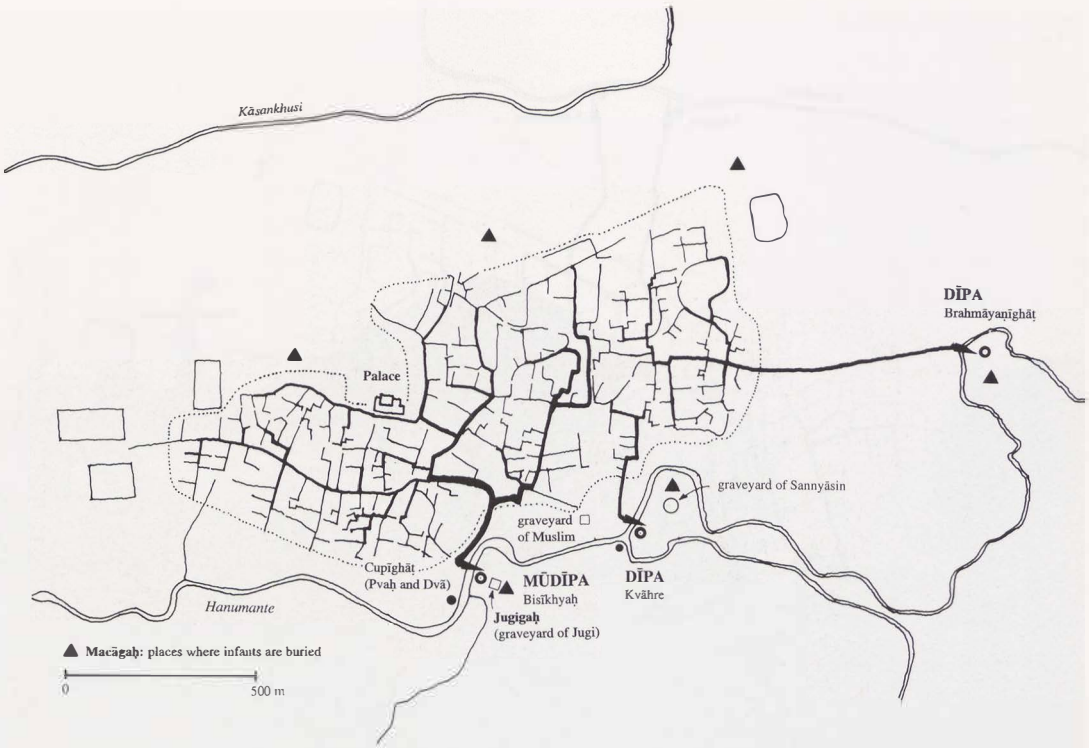
The routes to the three cremation grounds (*salã vānegu*) do not permit any choice. They follow an age-old pattern that is not even open to spatial growth. The historic settlement developed a pattern covering its extent in the 18th century, which was then freezed to a stop. New households, established beyond the limits of the clustered settlement since the 1970s, were denied passage through the core. They have to make a wide turn and reach the cremation grounds from the south. People from the new quarters south of the river cannot choose a route that crosses the river to the north. In this respect the routes to the cremation grounds are truly of a ritual character, for they are both mandatory and exclusive.

The routes, covering the entire territory of the city, spread like veins that drain a human body, originating from hundreds of households. Many of these routes start from backdoors that open on to narrow lanes that are exclusively reserved for this purpose, and are thus called "death lanes" (*silã*). The borderlines of the 24 quarters of the city quite often mark the border of a "catchment area" of death processions. In some cases one side of a lane turns north, while the other side turns south to meet a few hundred metres further down, merging into a main route.

Three quarters of the city faces the main cremation site, the *mūdīp*, at Cupĩghāṭ, close



The Newar house (chē), section drawing (after Auer and Gutschow 1974: 73)
The damp ground floor is usually reserved for storing straw and agricultural implements. When death is imminent, the body of the dying person is placed on purified ground. The first (mātā) and second (cvatā) floors are dedicated to sleeping and storing valuables in boxes, while the top floor (baigaḥ) with the kitchen and the room of worship represents the most private and ritually pure part of the house.



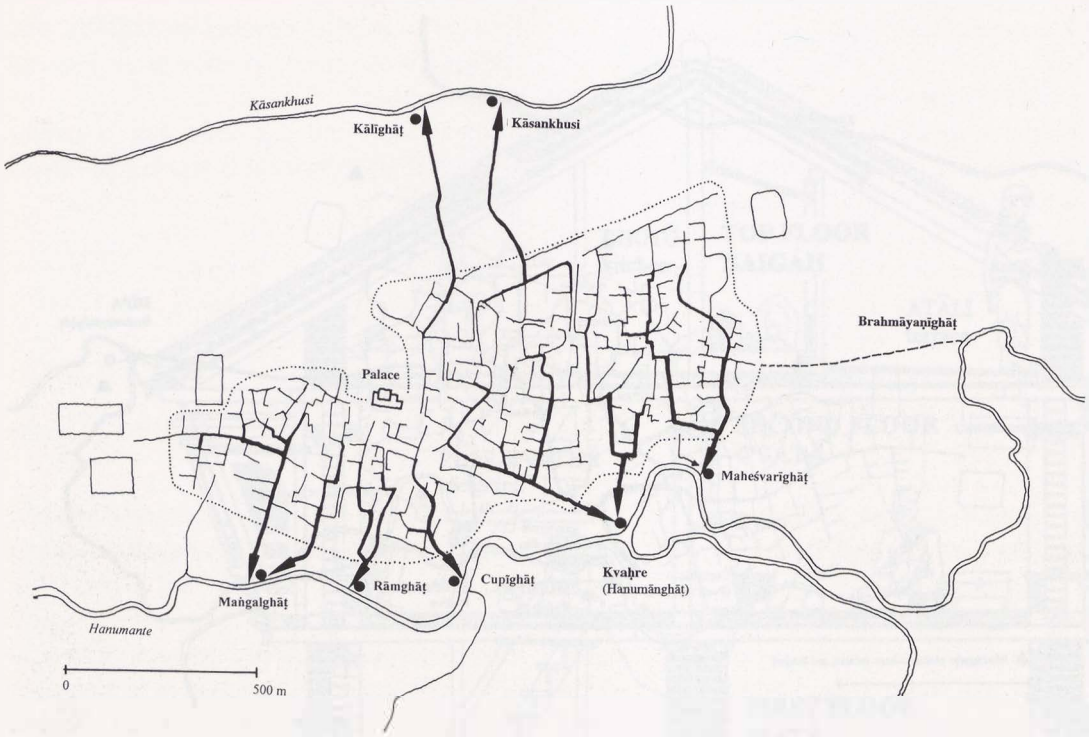
Processional routes to the cremation grounds (salā vānegu). All funeral associations follow a compulsory route carrying the corpse to one of the three cremation grounds across the river: Cupīghāṭ and Bisīkhyaḥ attract more than two-thirds of all households, in disregard of the otherwise decisive border between the lower and the upper town. Kvaḥre has a small catchment area that is confined to only one of the 24 quarters, Inācva. People who die in the hospital or directly at the ghāṭ are also cremated here. Members of unclean sub-castes are cremated at Cupīghāṭ before crossing the river. The eastern part of the upper town faces Brahmayāṇīghāṭ in the east.
The burial place of the Jugi (jugigaḥ or dīpa) is located at Cupīghāṭ beyond the cremation place, while Sannyāsin or members of Mahantā families are buried along the ghāṭs, preferably at Kvaḥre.
Five other burial grounds (macāpvāgaḥ) are designated for children who have died prematurely before the age of three months.
A small graveyard behind the mosque serves the small Muslim community of bangle makers.

to which the Jugi – purity technicians for death rituals – are buried (*jugigaḥ*). Only the households of the five easternmost quarters face the cremation ground at Brahmāyaṇī, half a kilometre beyond the city limits to the east. One of the 24 quarters, namely Inācva, enjoys for unknown reasons the privilege of facing onto the most sacred site along the river at a confluence. Located there at Hanumānghāṭ or Kvaḥre, is the plot where ascetics and *mahantās*, the priests of the 12 *maṭhas* of the city are buried.

Six more places for the burial of children (*macāgaḥ*) who died before having undergone the rice feeding ceremony (*cip tikegu*) at the age of three months are located beyond the city limits, in close neighbourhood of the shrines of various Mother Goddesses (NW: Indrāyaṇi, N: Mahākālī, NE: Mahālakṣmī, E: Brahmāyaṇī, SE: Maheśvarī and SW: Bhadrakālī). These children are named *mĩ mapumhā*, literally "bodies (*mhā*) that are not exposed to the fire (*mi*)" of the pyre. They are buried hurriedly without any ritual and in the absence of the parents.

Children who have not been initiated (*ihi* for girls and *kaytāpūjā* for boys) are cremated, but with no other rituals being performed. On the 5th day, however, a Brahmin boy of the same age is brought to the parents of the deceased child to receive an offering of fruits. On the occasion of *soraśrāddha* a small *piṇḍa* is dedicated to the child, but no other *śrāddha* is performed.

The designation of cremation places according to the location of households is overlapped by a second order which concerns all members of what Robert Levy called "marginally pure" (1992, 361) and unclean castes, such as Gāthā, Bhā, Cālā, Nau, Kau, Pũ, Sāymi, Chipā, Nāy, and untouchables like Dvā and Pvā. Constituting more than ten percent of Bhaktapur's population, their deceased family members are cremated opposite the main cremation ground – either just below the shrine of Bhadrakālī or, in the case



Pekhi vāygu – routes to cast away the offerings of balls (Nev. pekhi; Skt. piṇḍa) made for the forefathers (pitaraḥ). Located around the town are eight places where the offerings are cast into the river: two in the north along the Kasankhusi, and five to the south along the Hanumante. While the three cremation grounds are located across the river to the south – in association with the realm of death – the casting of the balls is enacted before crossing the river. The north-eastern embankment with a relatively small catchment area of households is not even named, but the path leading there is known as pekhilācā, the "ball-offering-lane".
The route is compulsory and preconceived for every household. In some cases an invisible borderline runs down the middle of the road. Kvaḥre, which in case of cremation has a small regular catchment area, attracts more than half of the households of the upper town when it comes to casting the offerings to the dead.

of the untouchables, 100 metres down the river beyond the two 19th century Śivālayas. The butchers (Nāy) and barbers (Nau) of the eastern periphery do follow the route of the eastern quarters to be cremated at Brahmāyaṇīghāṭ. Three groups enjoy the privilege of facing onto the cremation site of Kvaḥre: the drum-makers (Kulu), those who cut the umbilical cord (Kataḥ), and those who carry the torch at the head of death processions (Cālā).

In order to discard the *piṇḍa* (Nev. *pekhi),* which are made in the context of death rituals (any *śrāddha* for an individual or *soraśrāddha* by the *nāyaḥ* of the *phukī*), a small procession heads out to what could be called the nearest place along the two rivers running parallel to the settlement to the north and the south. This activity is called *pekhi vāygu* (lit. "to cast the sacrificial balls"). Seven places are defined for this purpose and these are also the places where the purificatory rituals are performed on the 10th day. The locations of the main cremation grounds beyond the river to the south allow an association with the world of Yama, the Lord of Death. The *piṇḍas*, however, are cast away at paved *ghāṭs* along the embankment of the two rivers, five at Hanumante in the south and two at Kāsankhusi in the north. Surprisingly, Brahmāyaṇīghāṭ is not visited for this purpose. Roughly speaking the households of the five eastern quarters all face Maheśvarīghāṭ. Hanumānghāṭ attracts by far the largest number of households, while only the households of Taumādhi and Lākulāchẽ face towards Cupīghāṭ. A further, separate area of households faces a small and in fact unnamed *ghāṭ* at Kāsankhusi river. The small path leading to this *ghāṭ* is called *pekhilācā*, literally "the path along which the rice balls of death rituals are carried". The catchment area of these households is not defined along the borders of the 24 quarters but overlaps them to establish yet another kind of territorial division.

Mūdīp, the main cremation ground at Cupĩghāṭ. Photo 7th December 1971

Absorbing ritual waste – the *chvāsaḥ* stones

Beyond their active participation in death rituals, the Jugi are responsible for removing, using or absorbing the polluting qualities of ritual waste that is discarded on specially designed places within the city. These places are identifiable by stones with clearly defined functions. Their general function is to mark and protect the boundaries of a realm that allows people to be safe. The boundary markers "keep things out, rather than in", as Robert Levy (1990: 263) said. The settlement is guarded against a potentially chaotic continuum by a group of Mother Goddesses. The other boundary is between below and above, in this case referring to the paved ground of the urban space. Hundreds of boundary stones can be found with a variety of functions.

A *pikhālākhu* in front of each house guards its threshold, and marks the borderline between inside and outside as well as between above and below. Its ambiguous powers are propitiated each day by an offering of flowers, vermilion and food. In return it absorbs impurity in cases of death and all other life-cycle rituals.

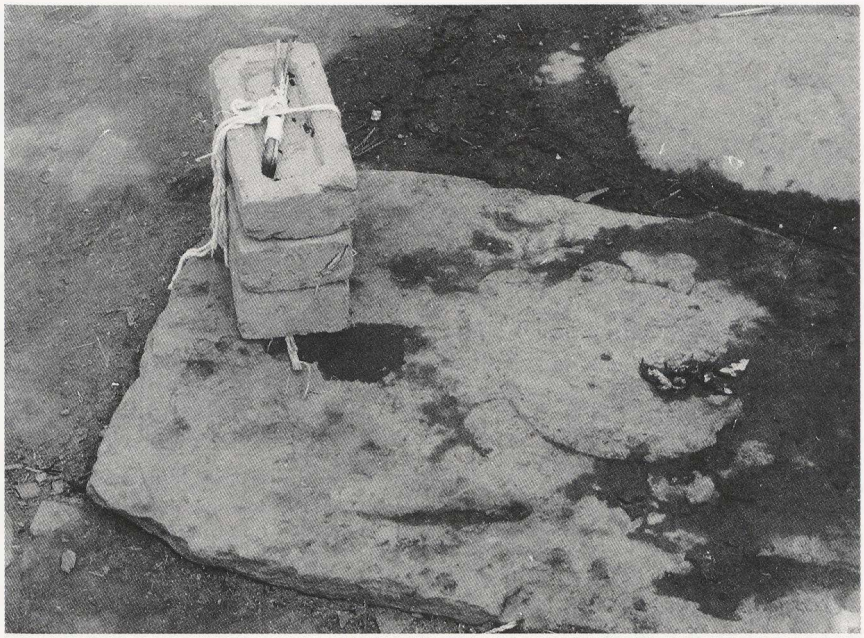
A second class of stones is named *kṣetrapāla*, literally the guardians of space (Skt. *kṣetra*, "field"). These stones may be carved as lotus flowers, especially when they are located in the courtyards of Buddhist monasteries – and every monastery has to have one to absorb the impurity of the sacrificial balls on the occasion of death rituals. But they are also identified as Bhairava, inevitably so in those cases where they complement a non-iconic representation of a Mother Goddess.

All other stones are called *chvāsaḥ*, but in some neighbourhoods they may have different names according to their specific function. The *chvāsaḥ* that "absorbs" the umbilical cord and the afterbirth (*pi vāy yẽkegu*) is called *cvakiajimā*, referring to the legendary grandmother *ajimā*, who has the power of a witch. When identified as *kalāḥajimā*, the stone absorbs the polluting qualities of offerings like *bibau* (beaten rice, black soy beans and fish) in cases of sickness, and the inevitable last plate on the occasion of a feast. In the latter case the plate is offered to the ancestors of the family collectively. The act of such an offering is invariably called *kalāḥ vāygu*. This occurs after a feast on the occasion of a regular annual *śrāddha*, but also at the end of a day that was devoted to the worship of the ancestor deities (*dugudyaḥpūjā*). The same offering is also made on the occasion of life-cycle rituals, like the menarche ritual for girls, the initiation of boys, and marriage (on the occasion of *gvẽsabhvay* – celebrating the distribution of betel nuts).

At the conclusion of a *śrāddha*, all attending male lineage members place small morsels of each dish to one side. All of the leaf plates are placed on top of the meal that has been reserved from the outset for the *pitṛ* in a brass container (*batāḥ*). After offering light and *pūjā*, this mass of food – two to ten kilograms – will collectively be discarded at the *chvāsaḥ* concerned.

In the case when a bereaved family is still polluted during the first year, relatives from the in-laws' side will bring food on the occasion of the New Year (*bisket*) and Dasāĩ (Nev. *mvaḥni*). Part of this food is set aside for the *pitṛ* and deposited on the *chvāsaḥ* the next morning. It should be noted that food for the *pitṛ* can only be cooked and handled by persons who no longer have any parents.

Sickness is often said to be caused by unpacified *preta*, for whom the death ritual has not been performed in all its necessary detail. Hence they turn into evil ghosts, *piśācas,* to trouble the family of the deceased, causing stomach ache and nausea. While the *preta* leave the *chvāsaḥ* after they have turned into a *pitṛ*, the *piśācas* are destined to remain there forever and are collectively propitiated by an offering of cooked rice on the occasion of



Discarding three unbaked bricks (kāciapā vāygu) on a chvāsaḥ stone, offered immediately after death to the spirit of the deceased in the form of a hearth.
Photo 29th December 1971

Piśācacaturdaśī (Nev. Pasacahre), new moon in March. It is the same day that the hidden Śiva (called Lukumahādyaḥ) absorbs waste in the Buddhist courtyards of Kathmandu (see Michaels 1992).

Finally there are those stones on which the wife of the chief mourner, the *mitamhā*, places the three unfired bricks (*kāciapā vāygu*) which the *preta* and later the *pitṛ* will use for a hearth. Some people also argue that these bricks could serve as the house of the *pitṛ*. At the same time the wife of the chief mourner or a daughter-in-law will discard there the clothes of the deceased, together with a small mat symbolising the bed. In most cases the *chvāsaḥ* also represents the *kalāḥajimā* (absorbing the food dedicated to the *pitṛ*) and the *cvakiajimā* (absorbing the umbilical cords). 134 of such stones have been identified in Bhaktapur, each having different sized catchment areas of households.

Before we look in detail at the organisation of the removal of ritual waste by the Jugi, a number of explanations should be given here in order to convey the potential power with which these places are imbued. It has elsewhere been noted that the ground below the pavement is considered to be the realm of pollution and also death. Occasionally a ghost appears from underground at a *chvāsaḥ*. For instance, people in Gvaḥmādhi agree that an emaciated face of the size of a child regularly emerges. This is a well-known apparition that is classified as *kavãcā*, the motif of which is widely used for apotropaic purposes in architecture. Likewise tall ghosts clad in white and almost touching the sky are a recognisable form of spirit.

Another class of ghosts, the *bhūt* – an unknown power that inhabits the corpse until cremation – creates strange noises and is said to inhabit another class of stones, the *dhvākhā* that are found at crossroads.

The *chvāsaḥ* awaken a variety of associations, which necessarily reflect the status of the person. The general user of the *chvāsaḥ* has no associations whatsoever. Those who fulfil their duty perform the required action without any afterthought. The person involved simply does what has to be done. An experienced midwife who also advises in case of sickness, an *aji* of Byāsi, integrates the *chvāsaḥ* into a wider worldview and recalls that a trinity of deities reside on or in a *chvāsaḥ* stone: to the right she identifies Pūcvanakhī, at the centre Gurumahārāj, and to the left Dhanacva. Surprisingly, the landscape of the entire valley of Kathmandu is formed by this trinity. The Pūcvanakhī is the main tutelary goddess, the Mūajimā of the Valley on top of the mountain that dominates the southern rim of the valley. Gurumahārāj is identical with a powerful protector near Bungamatī, Siddhigaṇeśa. Dhanacva is another mountain to the southwest, inhabited by a powerful goddess, Campadevī. The *aji* is of the opinion that this trinity is successful in controlling *bhūt*, *pret* and *piśāca*. They are pinned down and made immobile in order to prevent their harmful journeys through the city's streets and lanes.

Ratnarāj Rājupadhyaya, a learned and much respected Brahmin of Bhaktapur, maintains however that the *chvāsaḥ* represents Śiva in the form of Bhūtanātha and Mātaṅgī. As "Lord of the *bhūtas*" Śiva haunts cremation grounds while Mātaṅgī, one of the Ten Mahāvidyas (the ten forms of transcendent knowledge and magical power), represents all-powerfulness. The *chvāsaḥ* attracts all those offerings the greedy spirits expect and really need: "Who else than Bhūtnāth could absorb these offerings", comments the Brahmin.

The spatial unit of a *chvāsaḥ* – the Jugi and his clients

In marked contrast to the Brahmin, a Jugi[2] expresses utter disgust with his obligations. He would rather leave his duties and stop receiving what his wife collects from the *chvāsaḥ* and the respective clients on the occasion of deaths. But he feels compelled to continue doing so in fear of the revenge the *piśācas* would inflict upon him. He has no doubt about the consequences.

Every *chvāsaḥ* stone has a defined catchment area comprising a definite number of households that will come to discard unbaked bricks and clothes for the deceased during their state of *preta*, and food on all those occasions described above during their state of *pitṛ* or as a potential *piśāca* – the wandering soul of a person for whom the death rituals have not been performed or not in the prescribed order.

Some catchment areas are large, like the one in Bãsagopal, some comprise less than a dozen households like those in Tibukchẽ or Kvathãdau. The *chvāsaḥ* of Bãsagopal is a large, prominent stone at the centre of a street crossing. Others are represented by inconspicuous stones set in the pavement, recognizable only when a *bau* or *kaḷāḥ vāygu* offering has just been made. Some clearly embody an ambivalence: the large stone a few steps west of Mahālakṣmī's *pīṭha* is identified as the consort of the goddess in the form of Bhairava; but at the same time the stone functions as a *chvāsaḥ* to absorb the offerings of more than a hundred households. Strangely enough, in two cases the stone is located inside the neighbouring unit. The stone in Kvāchẽ is set beside the cluster of associated houses, in the middle of the road that is used by death processions as they move towards the town's main cremation place.

The seat of the spirits

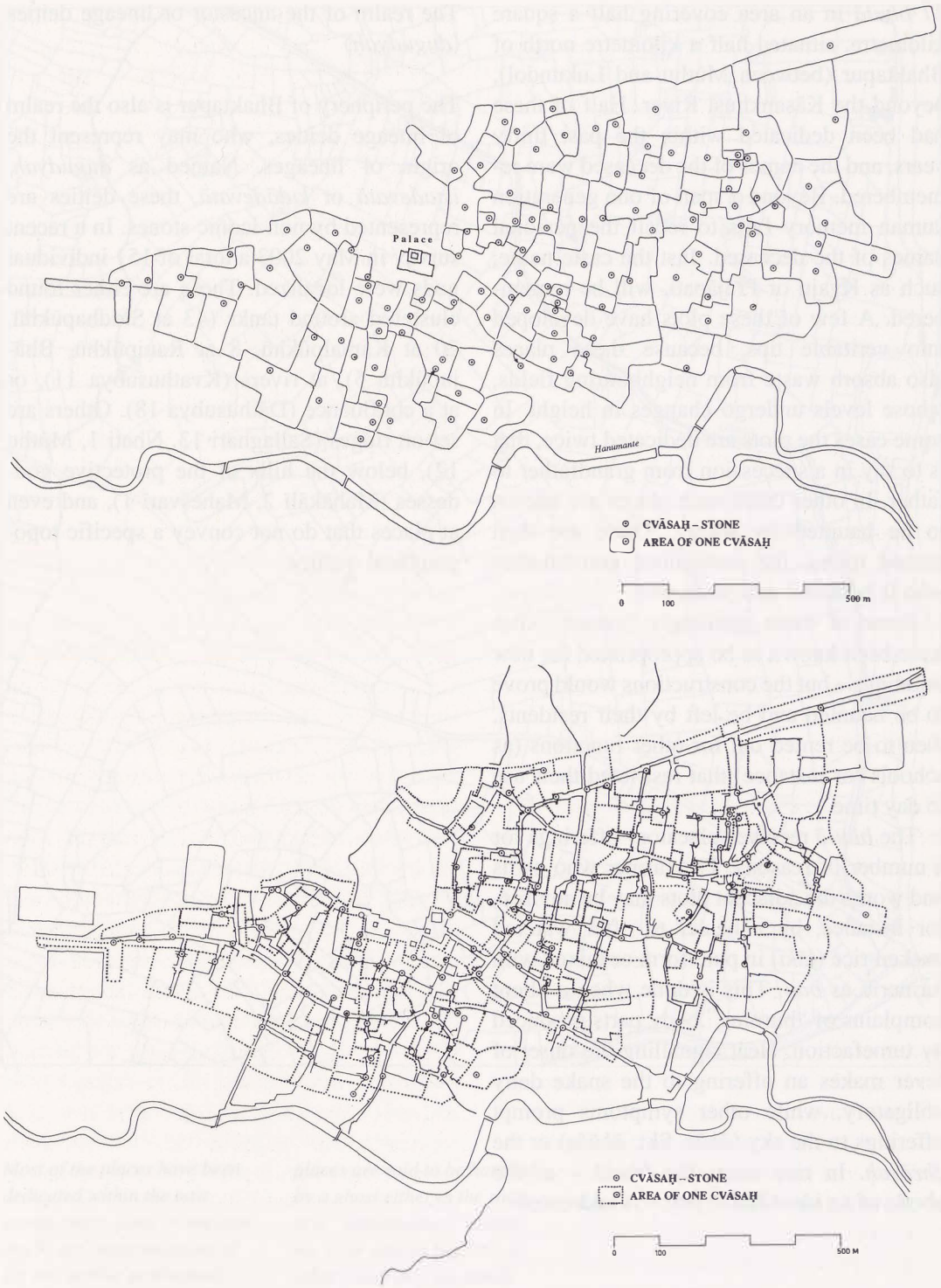
On the 7th day of the death rituals, which is dedicated extensively to feeding the *preta* (*nhenumhā*), the chief mourner may dedicate a small piece of agricultural land to the spirit of the deceased who, after cremation, has attained the form of *preta*. Immediately after death, the chief mourner will take a cotton strip representing the *preta* and measure the length of the corpse seven times. The resulting measurement dictates the size of the plot that is dedicated to the spirit.

An unpolluted relative (preferably the *jicābhāju*) takes a short-handled spade, marks the boundaries of the small plot and offers *bibau* to it. The act is similar to that when offerings are made over the area of the Śleṣmāntaka forest and Kailāsa mountain on either side of the Bāgmatī at Deopatan on the occasion of Bālācahre in early December. The short handle (*kūcū*) of the spade has to be left behind. The plot is dedicated once and forever to the deceased and may never be touched again by a spade or appropriated for other purposes. It is believed that the *pitṛ* uses this plot to grow grains and vegetable.

More than one thousand such plots may be found around Bhaktapur, clearly "beyond" the urban realm marked by the protective Mother Goddesses. A recent survey located

[2] In November 1987 Bishnu Prasad Shrestha conducted an interview with Chandranath Kusle, who died in September 2003.

Territorial units of 134 chvāsaḥ stones.
Territorial units of varying size are identifiable throughout the town by stones which symbolically absorb ritual waste – especially three unbaked bricks, and the mattress and clothes of the deceased which are discarded immediately after death.
Most of these stones are found in the middle of streets and lanes, on squares or – most characteristically – on crossroads where unpacified souls – bhūt and pret – haunt these places as ghosts with often a well-defined shape.
Representing a catchment area with a definite number of households, the stones are located in the middle of these units, at the periphery or – in two cases – even beyond.
Survey spring 1987.



27 *bhulã* in an area covering half a square kilometre, situated half a kilometre north of Bhaktapur (between Mūthu and Lukuṇḍol), beyond the Kāsankhusi River. Half of these had been dedicated within the past thirty years, and the names of the deceased were remembered. Beyond a span of one generation human memory fails to recall the personal names of the deceased. Just the caste name, such as Kvaju or Prajāpati, will be remembered. A few of these plots have developed into veritable tips, because these places also absorb waste from neighbouring fields, whose levels undergo changes in height. In some cases the plots are dedicated twice, that is to say in a succession from grandfather to father. In other cases such places are known to be haunted by spirits. These are then named *ajimā*, the ambiguous grandmother who is both evil and protective.

Some of these seemingly "vacant" sites have been known to be appropriated for new buildings – but the constructions would prove to be haunted and be left by their residents, then to be rented out for other functions (as schools for instance) that restricted their use to day time.

The *bhulã* receives placatory offerings for a number of reasons. The farmer who owns and works the adjacent plots may be advised, for instance, by a healer to offer watered husked rice (*jāki*) in pure form or mixed with turmeric as *bau*. This is done when a client complains of "burning" body parts produced by tumefaction. Heat signalling the onset of fever makes an offering to the snake deity obligatory, while other symptoms prompt offerings to the sky (*ākās,* Skt. *ākāśa*) or the *chrāsaḥ*. In rare cases the *bhulã* – as the abode of an identifiable *pitṛ* – is addressed.

The realm of the ancestor or lineage deities (*dugudyaḥ*)

The periphery of Bhaktapur is also the realm of lineage deities, who may represent the origin of lineages. Named as *dugudyaḥ, iṣṭadevatā* or *kulādevatā*, these deities are represented by non-iconic stones. In a recent survey in May 2003 a total of 151 individual gods were localized. These are either found clustered around tanks (43 at Siddhapūkhū, 20 at Kamalpūkhū, 8 at Raṇipūkhū, Bhājupūkhū 5), at rivers (Kvathusubya 11), or at a confluence (Dāthusubya 18). Others are set on ridges (Sallaghari 13, Nhati 1, Mūthu 12), below the hills of the protective goddesses (Mahākālī 2, Maheśvarī 1), and even at places that do not convey a specific topographical quality.

Bhulā – places for the spirits (preta) of deceased.
Between Mūthu and Lukuṇḍol north of Bhaktapur is an area measuring 730 by 820 metres (600 hectares or 1,500 acres), in which 27 small plots of two to five square metres can be identifed:

1 Ajimābhulā
2 Chvāsaḥkhvasa
3 Mukti Bāsukala
4 Kvajubhulā
5 Bhakti Maya Bāsukala, 1992
6 Hira Devī Bāsukala, 1991
7 Sankha Bahadur Suvāl, 1988
8 Krishna Bāsukala, 1976
9 Lura Duvāl, 1983 and Sirman Duvāl, 1962 father and grandfather of Ram Prasad Duvāl
10 Śanta Maya Duvāl, 1998
11 Lavante's father
12 Kiskuvar Duvāl, 1973
13 Avaḥ
14 Purna Kesari Duvāl,1995
15 Latan Bir Rājcal, 1994
16 Tulsi Bhakta Suvāl, 1995
17 Punya Suvāl, 1999
18 Nhuche Maya Rājcal, 1999
19 Kisan Suvāl, 2000
20 Latan Bahadur Lasiva, c. 1985
21 Prajāpatibhulā
22 Bhairav Bahadur Bāsukala, January 2003 (husband of 5 and 6)
23 Laita Lasiva, 1999
24 Tej Maya Lasiva, 1995
25 Nhuche Bahādur Bāsukala, 2002
26 Apsarabhulā
27 Bāsukalabhulā

Map based on the cadastral survey of 1966 of Jaukhel (ward no. 8, areas kha, ga, cha), survey of places by Mohan Yakami, January-May 2003.

Most of the places have been dedicated within the past twenty years. Only in one case (no.9) are representatives of the two earlier generations remembered, who reside at the same place. In other cases the memory vanishes and the places are said to be haunted by a ghost either in the shape of a "grandmother" (ajimā, no. 1) or apsara (no. 26). In other cases only the family names are remembered, such as Kvaju (no. 4) or Prajāpati (no. 21).

PRIESTS AND PURITY SPECIALISTS IN DEATH RITUALS

Bhaktapur's society is, as Robert Levy (1990: 363) puts it, "ordered through the idiom of purity". The Brahmin occupies the supreme position while others whom Levy terms "covert para-priests" protect the Brahmin's position. They perform the polluting actions that "the civic ritual requires". Other historians of religion have termed these ritual specialists "contra-priests". Dumont and Pocock made a point of saying that "by virtue of their specialized ritual functions, [they] live permanently in the state of impurity which they help others to abandon as rapidly as possible" (1959: 18). The following account presents many of the para-priests of Bhaktapur, who unlike the Brahmins live in a permanent state of impurity.

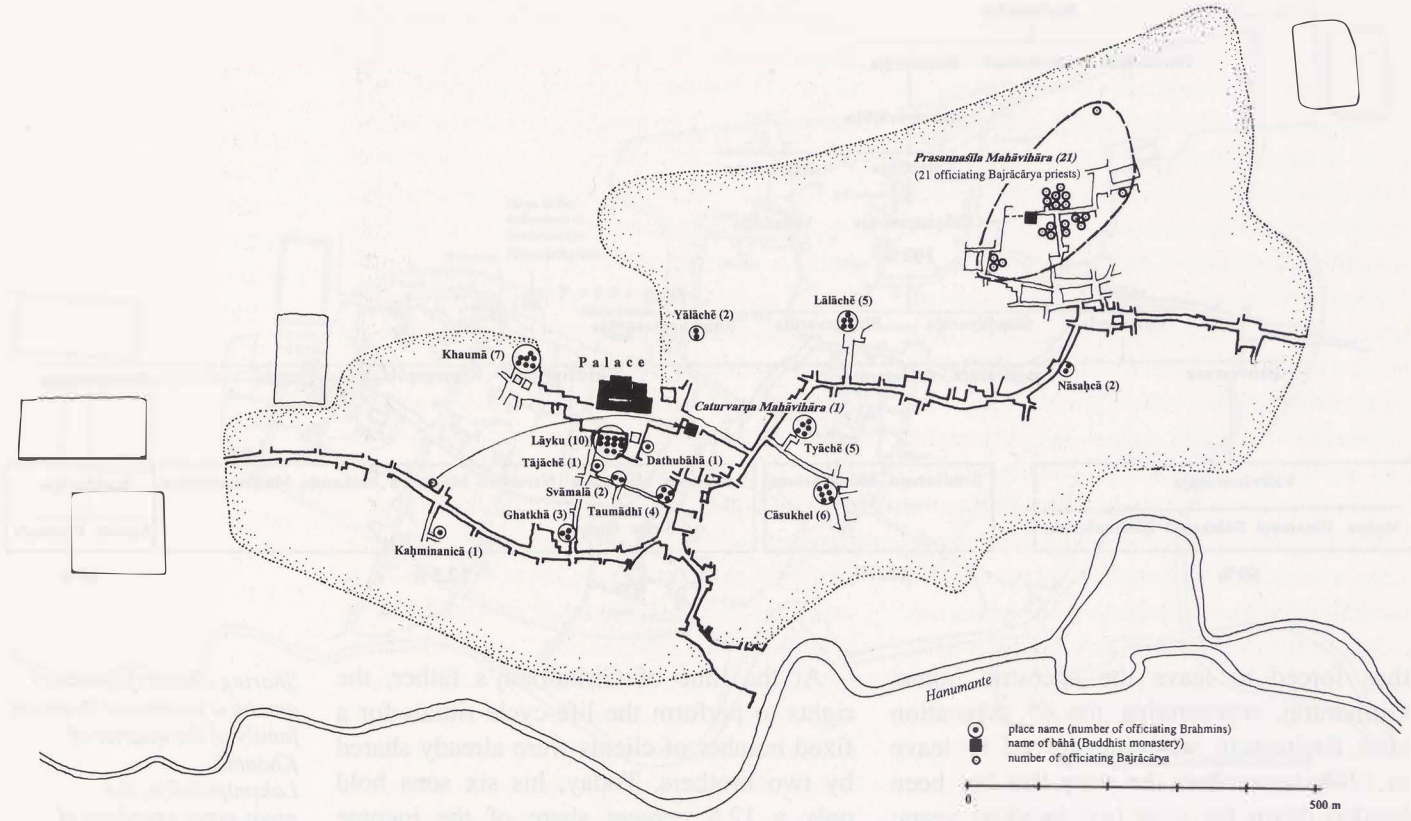
Brahmin – Hindu priests

Until recently, death rituals for the Newar sub-castes of Bhaktapur were the exclusive domain of Rājopādhyāyas (Witzel 1976, Toffin 1996). These are Newar-Brahmins, also called *Deobhāju*, who immigrated from India to the remote valley of Nepal with its non-Aryan population. It is not known when the Brahmins migrated to Nepal: inscriptions testify to their presence since the beginning of the second millennium AD, but Brahmins must also have performed the necessary royal rituals since the beginning of the first millennium AD. By the 14th century these Brahmins must have been assimilated to such an extent that they can be considered Newars.

Other groups of Brahmins migrated to Nepal from neighbouring areas as well as from South India: the Kumãi-Brahmins came from Kumaon, Bhaṭṭa-Brahmins, who officiate at the Paśupatināth temple, still come from Karṇātaka in South India, the Pūrbīya-Brahmins came from Bengal, and the Tirhutya-Brahmins from Tirhut, an area on the other side of the present south-eastern border of Nepal. The Tirhutya-Brahmins (Jhā or Miśra) migrated first to Bhaktapur, bringing with them the tutelary goddess of their King Harisiṃha in 1327 AD. Like the assimilated Mahantā, they speak Nevārī, but they do not act as hereditary family priests.

Only recently, with the growing unavailability of Rājopādhyāya priests in Bhaktapur, the Tirhutya-Brahmins have started to be called on ad hoc to perform the necessary rites. Since there is only one Śivācārya left in Bhaktapur to perform the purificatory ritual (*ghāsu*) on the 12th day after death, these Jhā and Miśra have largely taken over the task. As an alternative, the purificatory rituals of the 10th and 12th days are performed by the *jicābhāju* – either the son-in-law or husband of the sister of the chief mourner.

Today, a total of 43 Brahmins officiate over the death rituals for some 10,000 households or 90 percent of the entire population of Bhaktapur. They are either called to the houses of the deceased or, in the case of a regular annual *śrāddha*, to the respective *ghāṭ* at one of the two rivers on the occasion of the *nhenumhā* offering on the 7th day to instruct the chief mourner in the offering of water, rice and *kuśa* grass, and on the occasion of *du byēkegu* on the 10th day to guide the offering of 10 *piṇḍas*, which constitute the body of the *preta*. The Brahmin appears



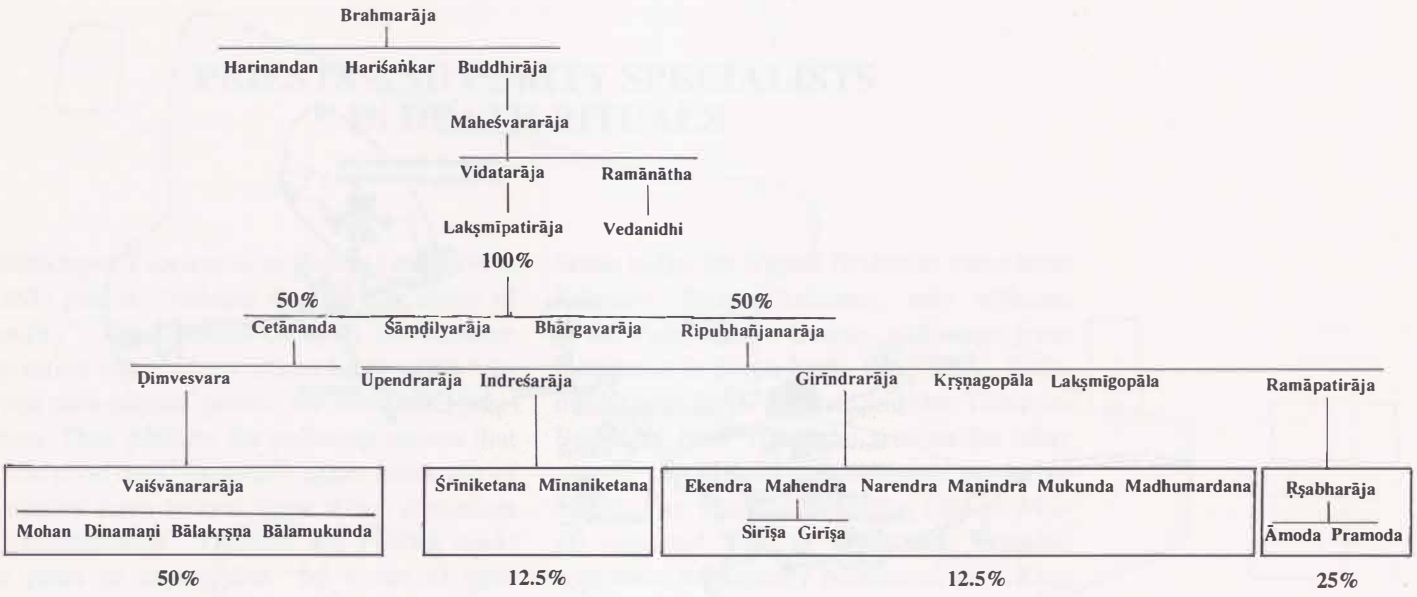
Location of 43 Brahmin priests (Rājopādhyāya) and 23 Buddhist priests (Bajrācārya) who officiate over death rituals.
Brahmins (in Khaumā for example seven Brahmins as descendants of the same great-grandfather) living in thirteen localities that form a crescent around the palace perform death rituals for almost 90 percent of the population.
The Bajrācārya priests, who are attached to only two Buddhist monasteries, perform death rituals for Bajrācāryas, Śākya and members of the various sub-castes related to crafts (dyers – Chipā, painters – Pũ, torch bearers – Cālã, brick makers – Avaḥ), constituting one tenth of the entire population.

again on the 45th day on the occasion of the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, the merging of the *pitṛ* with the ancestors, and on 13 more occasions up until the end of the mourning period. Twelve of these 13 occasions are often avoided by the clients and replaced by an offering of water and wheat flour (*nislā biyegu*), which is taken to the house of the Brahmin. In less than three minutes the client is free again for his worldly pursuits. Such offerings are brought by the clients to their respective house priest on three particular occasions: Māgha Saṃkranti (15th January, the day marking the winter solstice), Mātātīrtha aũsī, new moon in April/May, in memory of the deceased mother, and Gokarṇa aũsī, new moon in August/September, in memory of the deceased father. Only a few people join the annual pilgrimages to Mātātīrtha and Gokarṇa, substituting the ritual journey by the offering to their house priest.

In the year 2003, the 43 officiating Brahmins lived in 13 different locations, with between one and seven brothers and cousins – all descendants of the same great-grandfather – living together in a single household or house.

A group of 10 officiating Brahmins in Lāyku, who live in a block just opposite the palace of the Malla kings, trace their origins to a common progenitor, Uhlāsarāja, who – according to a document kept by the family – died in 1576 AD (Witzel 1976: 158) during the reign of Tribhuvana Malla (1561-1610). Currently officiating are the members of the 21st generation after Uhlāsarāja. Until the defeat of Raṇajīt Malla in 1768, when the Śāha dynasty took over and established a greater Himalayan kingdom, Uhlāsarāja's descendants acted as the royal mentors (*rājguru*) of the king.

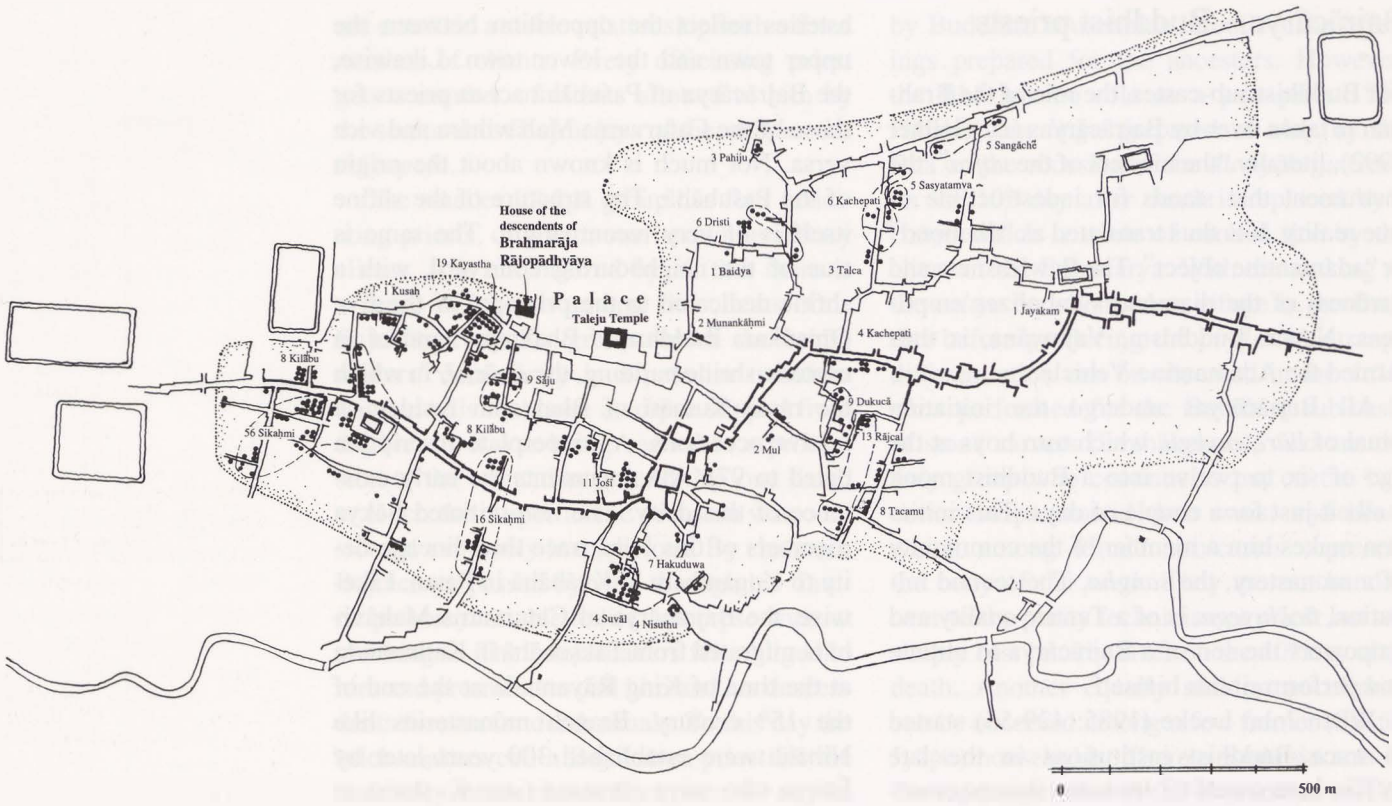
A branch (*kavaḥ*) of this family was deprived of its property by the new rulers and



Sharing clients (jajamāna) among a prominent Brahmin family of the quarter of Khaumā.
Lakṣmīpatirāja, the great-great-grandson of Brahmarāja who lived in the middle of the 18th century, owned an unknown number of clients who in the course of 250 years represent more than 1200 households. While two of Lakṣmīpatirāja's four sons divided the number of clients into two, today one share of 50% is owned by four brothers, while the second half is divided up into two equal shares of 12.5% and one share of 25% because, being with a male issue, Kṛṣṇagopāla, one of the six sons of Ripubhañjanarāja gave his share to his nephew Ṛṣabharāja.
The three sons of Girīndrarāja (born in 1917 AD), Mahendra, Mukunda and Madhumardana, who officiate in their ritual capacity, regularly respond to the call of 343 clients – as counted and mapped under the guidance of Mahendra in November 2001.

thus forced to leave the ancestral home. Girīndrarāj, representing the 6th generation after Brahmarāj, who was forced to leave in 1768, remembers the story that has been handed down for over two hundred years: Buddhirāj, son of Brahmarāj, is said to have been the devotee of Sarasvatī, whose shrine is located just two hundred yards east of the former residence. By the grace of the goddess he is said to have been able to buy the humble house of a butcher right at the periphery of the city. Within a generation the family was well established, and in such a way that King Girvāṇayuddha Bikrama Śāha, who ascended the throne in 1799 as a two-year-old infant, granted the family the right to organise the annual *jātrā* in honour of Indrāyaṇī, the 6th of the eight Mother Goddesses who guards the north-western sector of space. Girīṇdrarāj keeps and regularly worships the iconic, portable version of the deity in his house, where he also acts as the caretaker of a Tantric deity entrusted to him by a community who had given up the esoteric shrine house (*āgāchẽ*), where such deities are usually kept.

At the time of Girīndrarāj's father, the rights to perform the life-cycle rituals for a fixed number of clients were already shared by two brothers. Today, his six sons hold only a 12.5 percent share of the income from the clients, like his brother Indreśarāja. Ṛṣabhrāja, the son of his youngest brother holds 25 percent, because Kṛṣṇagopāla gave his share to him when he had no male issue. Only three of Girīndrarāja's six sons officiate as priests, serving more than 350 clients, most of them located in the lower town. Almost 25 percent of the clients, mostly Kayastha, Jośi, Kacepati and Munankaḥmi, belong to the upper levels of the social hierarchy, labelled Chathariyā and Pañcthariyā; 45 percent are farmers (Jyāpu) and 30 per cent carpenters (Sīkaḥmi and Kilābu). Only one client belongs to the traditionally underprivileged sub-caste of Kusaḥ, carriers of ceremonial umbrellas who used to officiate as priests for the unclean sub-caste of butchers (Nāy). Quite a number of clients have moved to new residential quarters in Thimi, Kathmandu and Patan. This keeps the Brahmins on the move, because people will not stop being their cli-



Bhaktapur: 323 jajmānas of a Rājupadhyaya family

Location of 343 clients (jajmān) of the sons of Girīndrarāja Śarmā. Almost half of these belong to the sub-caste of farmers, while one quarter follows the trade of carpentry and one quarter belongs to upper status groups, including astrologers.
Dense clusters of clients are located in the western quarters of the lower town, within easy reach of the officiating priests, and none is located in the eastern quarters.

ents and make an alliance with a new priest. Those who have migrated elsewhere from Bhaktapur will only return to the town for the worship of the unnamed ancestors on the occasion of *dugudyaḥpūjā* in May or June.

The relationship between family priest and client is hereditary. The priests do not keep a list of their clients because they can be sure that they will be called upon. Clients enjoy a certain freedom to chose between the branches of an extended family, for their favourite priest will not necessarily be available.

Bajrācārya – Buddhist priests

For Buddhist sub-castes, the role of the Brahmin is taken over by Bajrācāryas (cf. Gellner 1992), literally "the masters of the *vajra*", the instrument that stands for indestructible or true reality. It is thus translated as "diamond" or "adamantine object". The flawlessness and hardness of the diamond symbolizes emptiness. Newar Buddhism, Vajrayāna, is thus termed the Adamantine Vehicle.

All Bajrācāryas undergo the initiation ritual of *bāre cuyegu,* which turn boys at the age of six to twelve into a Buddhist monk – albeit just for a couple of days. This initiation makes him a member of the community of a monastery, the *saṅgha*. The second initiation, *ācāluyegu*, is of a Tantric quality and empowers the son of a Bajrācārya to initiate and perform rituals himself.

When John Locke (1985: 429-55) started to trace Buddhist institutions in the late 1970s, he counted 23 monasteries and courtyards (*bāhā, bahi, cuka*) with Buddhist associations in Bhaktapur. A few of these were only known by name, others had become defunct long ago. Locke was not able to clearly define the hierarchy that ties so-called branch monasteries to the main ones.

The *saṅghas* were no longer functioning because their members moved away from Bhaktapur in the middle of the 20th century. The Bajrācāryas kept on performing the initiation rites in their respective monasteries, but only a few of them kept performing life-cycle rituals. The Bajrācāryas of the Lokeśvara Mahāvihāra and Akhaṇḍaśīla Mahāvihara withdrew from their duties in the early 1990s.

The situation has become even more fragmented a generation later. In 2003 only 21 Bajrācāryas of the Prasannaśīla Mahāvihāra (or Paśubāhā), as well as one from the Caturvarṇa Mahāvihāra (or Tadhichẽ), still officiated in death rituals. These two monasteries reflect the opposition between the upper town and the lower town. Likewise, the Bajrācārya of Paśubāhā act as priests for those of the Caturvarṇa Mahāvihāra and vice versa. Not much is known about the origin of the Paśubāhā. The structure of the shrine itself is of very recent origin. The same is true of the neighbouring courtyard, with a shrine dedicated to the principal of the five Dīpaṅkara Buddhas of Bhaktapur, and of an esoteric shrine building, the *āgãchẽ,* in which the main Kumārī of Bhaktapur resides on festive occasions. A copperplate inscription dated to 978 AD documents the early existence of this deity. The non-initiated Śākya members of this *bāhā* trace their lineage deity to Yogambara in Kvābāhā in Patan. Likewise, the Bajrācārya of Caturvarṇa Mahāvihāra migrated from Takṣebāhā in Kathmandu at the time of King Rāyamalla at the end of the 15th century. Branch monasteries like Nibāhā were established 300 years later by Śākya who were attracted from Kvābāhā in Patan by King Raṇajīt Malla for their skills in metalwork.

At Paśubāhā, two sections (*kavaḥ)* of a common lineage perform death rituals. The Yātā-āgã group performs for some 50 Bajrācārya (from Caturvarṇa Mahāvihāra), 290 Śākya, 60 Buddhācārya (said to be Bajrācārya descendants without *ācāluyegu* initiation), 518 farmers (Jyāpu), 15 carpenters (Sikaḥmi), 62 brick-makers (Avaḥ, only from the upper town), 370 potters (Kumhaḥ), 20 oil-pressers (Sāymi), 132 dyers (Chipā), 18 painters (Pũ), 21 funeral torch bearers (Cālã), 15 purity technicians (Bhā), and 24 blacksmiths (Kau) – altogether more than 1500 clients. The largest numbers of more than 400 clients are shared by four brothers and their cousin, as well as by three sons of the Yātā-āgã group. It is not really clear how the acting priests share the clients on a rotational basis on the occasion of the December full moon (Yaḥmārhipunhi). The priests do

not entertain a stable relationship with a fixed number of clients. Every officiating priest gets a number of clients allotted to him by the senior-most Bajrācārya of the *saṅgha*, the *thāyapaju*.

The smaller Itā-āgā group has four officiating priests, of whom one has no hereditary clients. It is emphasized by all that there is a sense of choice among the clients. One Bajrācārya of this group serves the brick-makers' community in a peculiar tradition. Legend tells that once a corpse slipped from the bier as it was being carried in a procession to the cremation ground. No one dared to touch the corpse as the occasion was considered extremely inauspicious. By chance, a Bajrācārya passed by who through his Tantric powers was able to lift the corpse without touching it. The brick-makers felt obliged to him and promised to call him and his descendants forever for death rituals. To this day the brick-makers call a Bajrācārya priest for the necessary death rituals from the 10th day to the 12 months (*dākilā*) ritual. For all other annual *śrāddhas* a Brahmin is called.

Until a generation or two ago the caretakership of the main deity of the Caturvarṇa Mahāvihāra, the *kvāpāḥdyaḥ,* rotated among the six lineages of the *saṅgha*, for which John Locke noted 82 households and five to six hundred initiated members (Locke 1985: 449). In the 1960s only four Bajrācārya households continued to officiate at death rituals. One of these gave up in the late 1990s. The only remaining officiating priest is Hiracandra Bajrācārya, who now has a monopoly on over 150 clients, more than half of them oil-pressers but also stone carvers (Lvahākaḥmi) and Nibāḥ, those metal workers who migrated from Patan in the early 18th century.

The sequence of death rituals to be performed for Bajrācāryas follows essentially the same sequence performed by Brahmins. Throughout the year, the Jugi is also called by Buddhist households to collect the offerings prepared for the ancestors. However, the Bhā has no role as a para-priest. The Hāṭakeśvara *liṅga* prepared of clay by the Bhā on the occasion of the *du byẽkegu* ritual on the 10th day after death is replaced by a *caitya* which is made of cooked rice by the client of the Bajrācārya. With the making of the *caitya* the client takes refuge in the Buddha before producing the *piṇḍas*. A strange differentiation can be observed in the *śrāddhas* performed for the Buddhist sub-caste of stone carvers (Lvahākaḥmi), who are the only group who continue to put on the two cotton strips around their waist and head, which among Hindu sub-castes represent the body of the *preta.* They are not handed over to the purity technician or priest but are simply cast into the river on the 10th day after death. Another equally striking peculiarity can be observed among a few farmer (Suvāl-Jyāpu) households. There a Brahmin acts as the regular priest, but the Bajrācārya acts as the Ghāsu-ācāju on the 12th day to complete the purification by a sacred fire of all the lineage members – who in this context are called *dumhā* – polluted bodies. The house of the deceased is also purified on this occasion.

For Buddhist sub-castes, the annual ritual of *soraśrāddha* has to be performed by the eldest (*nāyaḥ)* of the lineage (*phukī*) during the dark moon in the month of Āśvin (in September). It is usually enacted on one of the embankments of the two rivers south and north of the town. The client casts the *piṇḍas* directly into the water. *Piṇḍas* of regular *śrāddhas*, however, are brought to the nearest *bāhā* and cast onto the protective stone representing *kṣetrapāla,* the guardian of the courtyard.

Death rituals performed by Buddhists largely follows the sequence of Hindu death rituals. But every detail discloses a decisive Buddhist context.

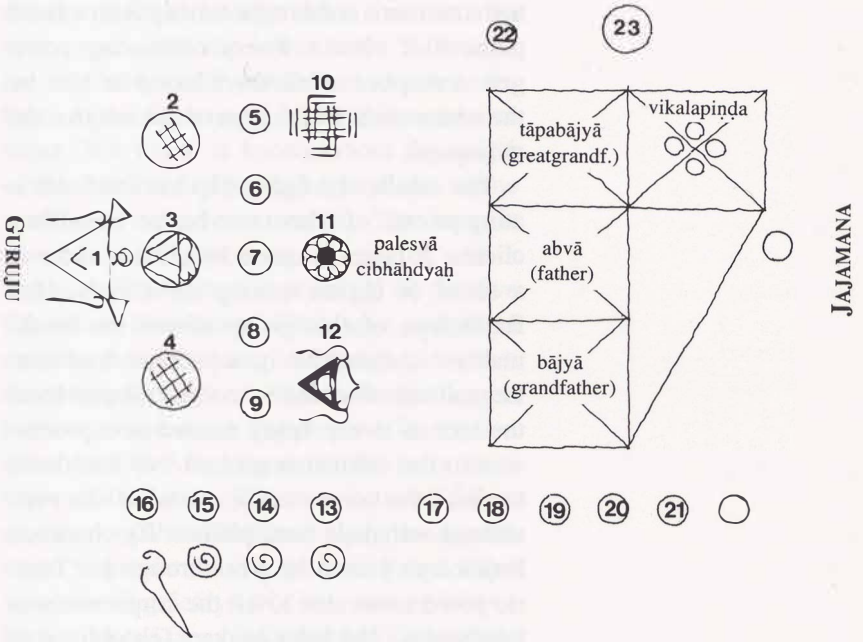
Thus, the *kalaśapūjā* at the beginning is dedicated to the Pañcabuddha. The priest identifies himself with Vajrasattva and equates the central unnamed deity with emptiness (*śūnyatā*), reflecting the basic concept of the absolute in Vajrayāna Buddhism, which is characterized as transcending duality and being without empirical forms. The priest prepares the *gurumaṇḍala* to initiate the ritual.

In a second step a miniature *caitya* is made from the dough that has been kneaded by the client's wife.

Prior to forming the *caitya,* the priest invokes Vairocana, the transcendent Buddha of the centre. Later he places five grains of rice and five popped rice grains into the base of the *caitya* while uttering the *mantra "oṃ supratiṣṭhita vajre svadhā"*. The *caitya* is then consecrated while invoking the four remaining transcendent Buddhas. From now on the *caitya* is addressed as *dharmadhātu-caitya,* which stands for the *sarvadurgati-pariśoḍanarāja.* The further ritual identifies the *caitya* with Mahāvairocana, who in turn is equated with the *durgapariśoḍanacaitya.*

The priest arranges in front of him small heaps of rice, leaves and clay cups in a special configuration, representing a universe of its own. First comes the *ratnamaṇḍala*, then on three leaves *pañcagavya* (the five products of the cow), *mandaḥpatra* and *indrabali*, then a row of five cones of dough (*gvaḥja*) representing (from left to right) Āyuvṛddhi, Gaṇeśa, *kalaśa*, Mahākāla and Gomāta. Then come *svastika*, *palesvã* (lotus leaves/*cibhaḥdyaḥ)* and Bālkumārī. To his left are placed four cones representing (from top to bottom) the trinity of *dharma* (identified as Svastidevatā or *kvāpāḥdyaḥ),* Buddha (*kuladevatā* or *āgãdyaḥ)* and *saṅgha* (*iṣṭadevatā* or *dugudyaḥ)*. Finally, Vaiśvānara is added in the shape of a lamp (*sukuṇḍã,* representing Sūrya).

The client produces three *piṇḍas* representing the three generations preceding him.



A fourth one, called *vikalapiṇḍa (*also short *"bikva")*, is placed in the lower right. Literally, the *piṇḍa* for those who are "deprived of something" is dedicated to the known and unknown miscarriages of the family of the client (*kula*). In a wider context, this *piṇḍa* is dedicated to the unknown deceased for whom a proper death ritual had not been performed.

After the *piṇḍas* have been made, the priest invokes the transcendent Buddhas through offerings made to the *piṇḍas*, for example Akṣobhya by means of milk, Amitābha by means of water offered from a conch shell; and a number of the group of twelve philosophical deities who represent cardinal human virtues carried to perfection in one birth, for example Kṣāntipāramitā by clothes, Prajñāpāramitā by flowers and Praṇidhāna by light.

All these offerings are made to reduce the karmic impurities and to reduce the impact of sins (*pāp*). Obviously the offerings are intended to help the *pitṛ* attain a better status, and bring them nearer to ultimate liberation. The *piṇḍa* not only represent food offered to

Opposite
Configuration of a Buddhist death ritual (śrāddha) according to the tradition of Hiraratna Bajrācārya from Bhaktapur.
To the left the priest (guruju) takes his seat, to the right his client (jajmān). The client first prepares a cibhāḥdyaḥ (stūpa, 11) from dough and places it on a symbolic lotus flower (palesvā). He then forms balls (piṇḍas) for his father, grandfather and great-grandfather and places them on large leaves (kusā lapte). The final vikalapiṇḍa is dedicated to unknown deceased.
1 ratnamaṇḍala, 2 pañcagavya, 3 mandaḥpatra, 4 indradibali, 5 Āyurvṛddhi, 6 Gaṇeśa, 7 kalaśa, 8 Mahākāla, 9 Gomāta, 10 svastika, 11 palesvā (cibhāḥdyaḥ), 12 Bālkumārī, 13 dharma, 14 Buddha, 15 saṅgha, 16 Vaiśvānara (represented by sukuṇḍā/ Sūrya), 17 butter and honey (gyaḥ-kasti), 18 milk (duru), 19 curds (dau), 20 beer (tvā), 21 spirits (eila), 22 light (māta), 23 incense (mi sali).

the ancestors but also represent the ancestors in bodily form.

Jośi and Karmācārya – Assistant priests

Astrologers (Jośi) and Tantric priests (Karmācārya) are "overt auxiliary priests" (as termed by Levy 1990: 353) and perform preparatory functions in a number of rituals. While the status (*thar*) of Jośi is of the highest level of the Chathariyā, Karmācārya belong to the next highest group, the Pāñcthariyā. Often considered as "kinds of Brahmans" (Levy 1990, 354), their powers and skills are considered to have been passed on to them by the Rājopādhyāya Brahmins some time ago.

The astrologers prepare a written chart (*jātaḥ)* that records everybody's time of birth and the related position of the planets. Thus they refer to the macrocosm which represents an order "beyond Bhaktapur's civic mesocosmic systems" (Levy 1990: 355). On the basis of this chart, the Jośi determines the auspicious time span for life-cycle rituals and other important events, such as laying the foundations of a new building. He also acts as a healer, advising his clients on the colour of the wick to be used for light offerings to the Mother Goddesses, or the type of precious stone to be worn in a ring on a certain finger of the right hand. After death, the *jātaḥ* is placed on the forehead of the corpse on the pyre.

In death rituals, a Jośi appears simply as an assistant to the officiating Brahmin when preparing the necessary *yantra* on the ground and when worshipping a small double-cupped stand (*dhaupatu*) containing curds and rice grains. Nowadays, only four Jośi continue to be engaged in the preparatory work for death rituals. One of these serves only families of the Malla sub-caste. Similar to the function of the Jośi, the Karmācārya "prepares the ground work for the actual rite" (Regmi 1965-66/II: 715). He acts as an assistant priest to the Brahmin and is responsible for the "Tantric and sacrificial components" (Levy 1990: 357) of elaborate rituals. For example, as priests of Taleju, the tutelary goddess of the former Malla kings, it is their obligation to prepare the offering of cooked rice on every Dark Fourteenth (*cahre*), which is then distributed (*bau hālegu*) on as many crossroads of the town as possible in order to propitiate *bhūt*, *pret* and *piśāca* – a host of evil spirits haunting the town. On the occasion of Pasacahre (new moon in the month of Phāgun) in March this ritual is performed in a grand manner: rice is cooked at the golden gate of the temple and a black goat is sacrificed. It is said that in particular the spirits of those who committed suicide and of those who had died without any offspring are propitiated by this.

Karmācārya are also needed for other rituals that require cooked rice, like the ritual after the completion of the construction (*chẽ-bau biyegu*) of a house.

Like the Jośi, the Karmācārya serve as clients (*jajmāns)* of Chathariyā level: these are Malla, but also Rajbhandari, Jośi, Kayastha, Hada, Timilā, Baidyā and Munankaḥmi. In death rituals they act ideally together with a Jośi as assistant to the Brahmin. In this case they prepare the *yantra* and perform the *pūjā* that is dedicated to the *pañcāyatana* deities, namely Sūrya, Nārāyaṇa, Gaṇeśa, Kumārī and Sadāśiva.

Nowadays, only 20 Karmācārya continue to assist in death rituals. Most of them belong to the privileged group of members who have been initiated at the Tripuravidyāpīṭh – in the only group in town that has not a lineage god located beyond (*pine*) the city's limit. Instead, they consider their esoteric god, the *āgãdyaḥ,* as their lineage god, which they worship as such only in the context of the *bel*-fruit marriage of girls (*ihi*).

Tinī – Priests in death rituals

Also called Śivācārya (lit. "the master of Śiva") or Ghāsuācāju (lit. "the master of the fire"), the Tinī has been termed "a kind of Brahmin" by Robert Levy (1992: 358). From the perspective of the "true" Brahmins, the Tinī ranks below other sub-castes with priestly obligations, such as Karmācārya and Jośi.

The purificatory and thus potentially polluting character of the Tinī's engagement in death rituals must at one time in history have caused the formation of a separate, specialized sub-caste. The Tinī is called in by the chief mourner on the 12th day after death to tend to the purification of all *phukī* members as well as of the house. To this end he keeps a fire (*homa*) burning that is supposed to reach up to the outstretched hands of the lineage members (*lhā panegu*). An alternative term (*suddha vākegu*) stresses the return to the state of purity (*suddha*).

Of the two Tinī households that could be located in 1974, only one continues to officiate. A regular *jajmān* relationship has long since ceased to exist. Many families in Bhaktapur do not even know the exemplary role of the Tinī in the *lhā panegu* ritual. Either a non-Newar Jhā Brahmin is called to perform, or an in-law of the chief mourner fills the position – proof of an ongoing process of "privatisation" of death rituals.

Cyaḥ – Attendants to the pyre

Brahmin families and those who belong to the sub-castes (*thars)* of Chathariyā status – former courtiers like Malla, Kayastha etc. – used to call a helper from the farmers community to take care of the pyre at the cremation place. The designation "Cyaḥ" (lit. "slave" or "servant") hints at their original obligation to offer their services at cremation places. However, this is only remembered as a duty that their great-grandfathers had to carry out. They were given the name Phasikaḥ (lit. "the hard remainder of a cooked pumpkin") or Phasikavã (lit. "pumpkin-faced"), but at present they call themselves Suvāl in an effort to escape their stigma and attain the highest status level among farmers.

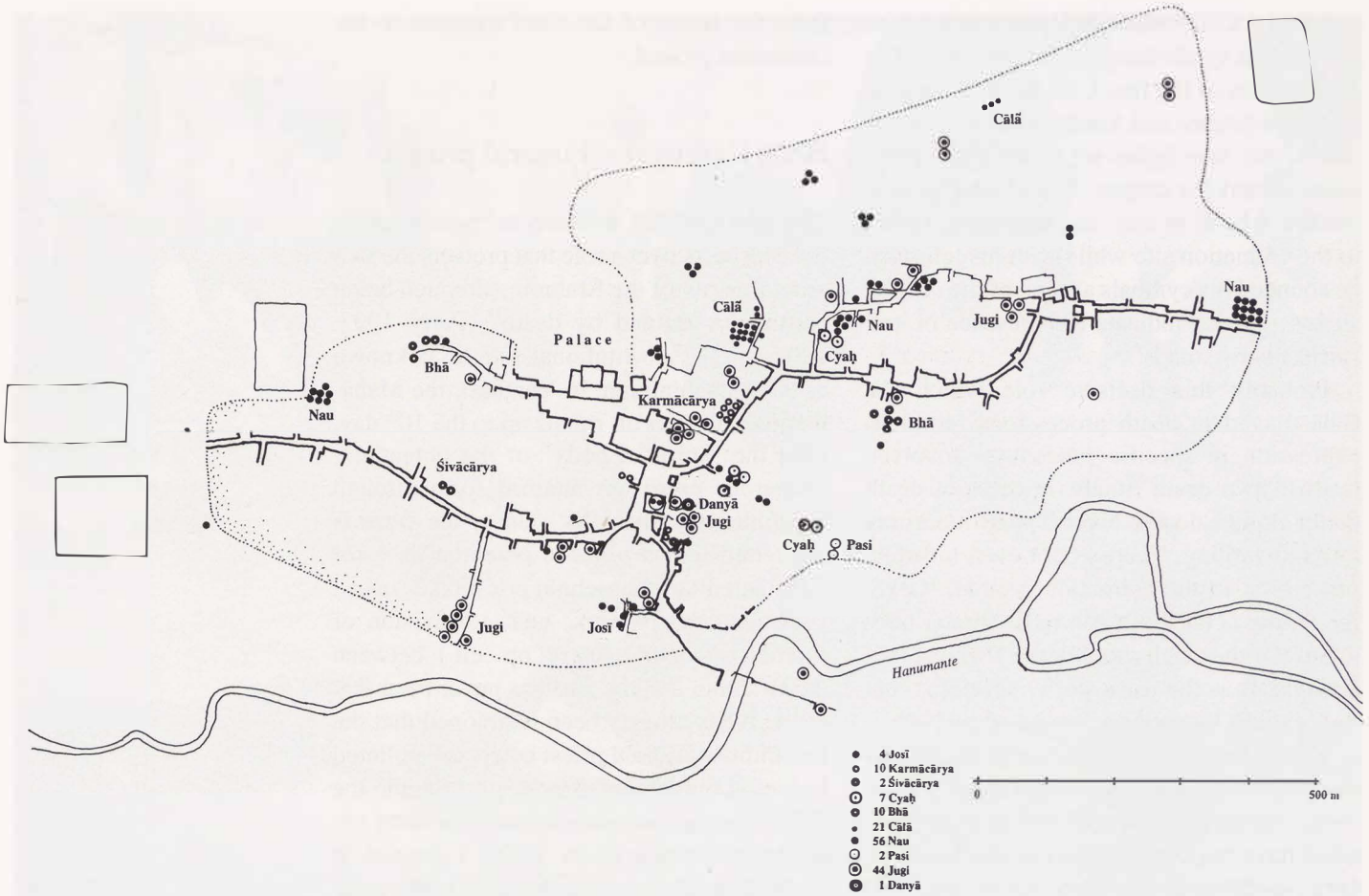
There are two lineages (*kavaḥ)* of Cyaḥ with altogether eight families in Kvāchẽ, Casukhyaḥ and Lālāchẽ.

Cālã (Divakār) – Funeral torch bearers

Until recently the Cālã headed the processions to the cremation ground, carrying a torch and cymbals.

A total of 21 Cālã households can be identified in Bhaktapur, clustered around the *āgãchẽ*, the "house" with the esoteric deity of the community, in the quarter of Tulāchẽ. An additional, though small cluster of three Cālã households is to be found on the northern perimeter. The community is organized around two funeral associations (with 14 and 7 members), but all male members have access to the esoteric deity without any formal initiation (*dekhā*). The caretaker (*pālāḥ)* of the deity rotates with each *cahre* (the night before new moon), and on the ninth day of the Durgāpūjā ritual the newly-born male members of the community are granted formal access to the deity. The community is exogamous – a fact that forces them to marry the daughters of Pulu or Pulpulu (Toffin 1987: 222) who observe similar obligations in Patan and Kathmandu.

A legend, told by Hari Govinda Rañjitkār (December 2003), says that "in old times" the Malla kings use to head all the death processions to the cremation site. With the growth of Bhaktapur, taking part in the growing number of processions proved to be a great burden. Subsequently, the king



Locality and distribution of para-priests and purity specialists engaged in death rituals, as surveyed in 2003.

Four Jośi and about ten Karmācārya officiate as assistants to Brahmin priests in the sapiṇḍikaraṇa ritual. Two Tinī / Śivācārya / Ghāsuācāju (father and son) continue to perform the purificatory fire (ghāsu) on the 12th day after death. The Cyaḥ do not provide any more assistance at the pyre to families of Chathariyā status.

Only two persons of the ten Bhā households are still engaged in the purificatory ritual on the 10th day.
Only one person of the twenty-one Cālā households still leads the procession to the cremation ground, carrying a torch and a cymbal.
The spreading of 56 barbers (Nau), whose male members tonsure the heads of their clients and whose female members cut the toenails of their clients on the occasion of a death ritual and any other life cycle ritual, demonstrates the frequency with which their services are needed.
Two Pasi families, who had to wash the clothes of the polluted family members and the cotton strips representing the preta on the 10th day, do not perform their duty any more.
The 44 households of Jugi, who perform the cakrapūjā for the nhenumhā offering on the 7th day, are more or less scattered along the main road.
A single household of Danyā serves the Jugi community for the 7th day nhenumhā ritual.

assigned a Cālã to head the processions with the cymbal symbolizing royal presence. The descendants of the first Cālã had to appear at bereaved houses and kindle a torch *(divã)* at one of the four lights set in the four directions around the corpse. After fastening this torch to a bowl of clay, he led the procession to the cremation site while with his left hand he sounded his cymbals at each of the *dhvākā* stones – which indicate the presence of evil spirits at crossroads.

Probably this decisive role which the Cālã played in death processions found its expression in specific procedures involved in their own death rituals. In cases of death their families do not express their mourning through wailing. There is not even a formal procession to the cremation ground. Rather the corpse is taken unseen to Kvaḥre at midnight. For the death ritual of the 7th day a Jugi is engaged as the usual purity specialist, but the people's toenails are not pared by Nau.

This secretiveness gave rise to the rumour that the corpses of this community are secretly buried in their *āgãchẽ*. If at all, this must have happened many generations ago because up until the early 1970s the Cālã used wood for their cremations, which was supplied by one of the funeral associations of Chipā, the dyers of Bhaktapur. Instead of the obligatory annual rice offering to the Cālã, the Chipā made wood available in a jointly used storehouse, a *gusīpakva* along the road to the cremation ground.

Some Cālã remember that it was the duty of their community to provide seven torches for Taleju, the tutelary goddess of the former kings, on the eve of the rebirth of the Mother Goddesses, the ninth day of the Durgāpūjā in October.

Since the late 1980s, the Cālã are no longer seen heading death processions. Considered a "low prestige" activity with a potential of pollution, it has been given up. Now, a member of the funeral association carries a torch from the house of the chief mourner to the cremation ground.

Bhā (Kārāñjit) – Funeral priests

Similar to the Tinī, who acts as "para-priests", the Bhā takes over a role that protects the sacerdotal purity of the Brahmin, although being constantly "tainted by death" (Parry 1993, 180). In this substitutional role he is known as the Mahābrahmin. In Vārāṇasī, the Mahābrahmin handles all rituals up to the 10th day, until the "spiritual body" of the potentially dangerous *preta* has attained form through a definite sequence. As soon as the *preta* is converted into a *pitṛ* – a potential ancestor – the hereditary household priest takes over.

Among the Newars, such a "division of mortuary labour" (Parry op. cit.) between the Brahmin and the Bhā has never been that strict. It has already been mentioned that the Brahmin household priest enters the polluted house on the 7th day after death to guide the chief mourner in worshipping the food offerings dedicated to the *preta.* Likewise, it is the Brahmin who has the lead role on the 10th day when purifying the members of the *phukī.* The "mortuary labour" of the Bhā supports rather the Brahmin. In this role he prepares the ritual ground at the *ghāṭ* and supplies a miniature *liṅga* of clay representing Hāṭakeśvara, the Lord of Vitāla, one of the seven nether regions (Skt. *pātāla*). Three cups of clay containing cow milk and water are placed to the sides and on top of the configuration. The Bhā then marks the spots on which the *piṇḍa* offerings are to be made by the chief mourner by means of three circles of rice powder.

The most challenging and polluting task the Bhā had to perform until a few decades ago occurred on the following night. He had to appear in the house of the chief mourner to accept substantial gifts – such as clothes

Opposite
A Cālã, the caretaker of the Kvathusubya temple at Cupĩghāṭ, cuts off the right feet of the sacrificial goat as his fee on the occasion of dugudyaḥpūjā.
Photo 21st April 1988 – taḥdī, "the great day", on a Thursday or Sunday after akṣaya tṛtīyā.

and household items, as well as food that included cooked rice – a highly polluting activity indeed. These days a *jicābhāju* (the son-in-law or the brother-in-law of the chief mourner) takes a large leaf plate with cooked rice, clothes and eleven small cups filled with milk, water, liquor and beer to the house of the Bhā at around midnight. He will also hand over the *nāḥkāpaḥ*, the strip of cotton which the chief mourner has worn around his waist since the cremation of the deceased. As only very few Bhās continue to act as auxiliary priests, this offering – prepared by the *mhāymacā* – is now often cast into the river in the early morning, before starting the purificatory ritual of the 10th day.

Other obligations of the Bhā are often named, but it remains unclear whether these were ever performed in actual practice. It may suffice to cite associations that have stigmatised the Bhā. It is said that the food offered to the Bhā contained a piece of the brain of the deceased, similar to the piece that a Brahmin has to digest when the king dies (Kropf 2002). Other sources tell us that the food had at least touched a fragment of a bone of the deceased corpse. Robert Levy quotes his informants as saying that this ingestion by the Bhā was "to ensure the *preta*'s eventual reincarnation in a human rather than an animal form", or that "the spirit itself has completed its change from preta to human-like form" (Levy 1990: 361).

Gerard Toffin adds another version from his informants in neighbouring Panauti, saying that the Bhā is engaged for the ritual feast in order "to evict the spirit of the dead ... chasing it from the house by 'identifying' it with the Bhā" (Toffin 1984: 290).

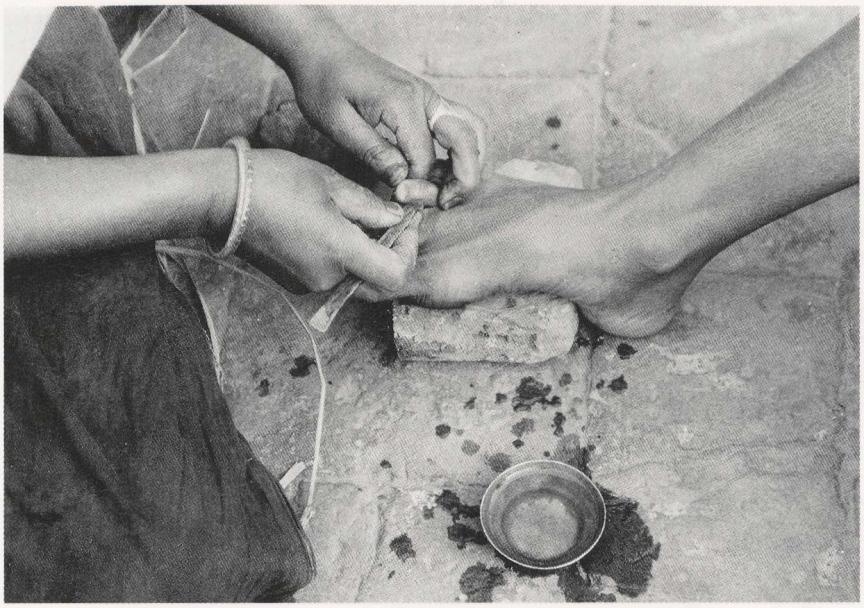
A survey of Bhā households spotted a cluster of four in the lower town (in Itāchẽ) and a second cluster of five in the upper town (in Gvamādhi). In 2003 only one Bhā from each cluster still performed in his ritual capacity. Similar to the association of the Jugi with the non-iconic seats of the Mother Goddesses and ancestor shrines, the Bhā also acted as *dyaḥpālāḥ,* and as guardians (*pālāḥ*) of the ancestor deities (*dugudyaḥ*). Especially at those shrines where the deity has its seat in a built structure, the Bhā sacrifices the goats on behalf of his clients and receives in turn the two right feet and bits of the intestines.

Pasi – Washermen

Pasi once formed the sub-caste of washermen, whose ritual duty was to wash the clothes of the chief mourner and the members of the lineage on the 10th day after death, before these were handed over to the barber as a gift in exchange for having tonsured them all on that occasion.

The Pasi's highly polluting obligation, however, was to wash the *nāḥkāpaḥ,* the two strips of cotton in which the *preta* had taken refuge after a symbolic piece of the cremated bones of the deceased had been cast into the water. The chief mourner wore these strips around his waist and head on the day of death and on the 7th day. On the 10th day one strip is absorbed by the Bhā and the second one by the Brahmin on the occasion of the union of the *pitṛ* with the forefathers.

Nowadays the clothes of the chief mourner are simply discarded and the strips of cotton are washed by the chief mourner. Two Pasi households have been found at a location named after them, Pasikhyaḥ, but only a faint memory persists of their former duties.



Sarasvatī Nāpit pares the toenails (lhusi jeneu) of a hereditary client with a chisel-like tool as a purificatory act performed prior to participating in any death ritual. A small bowl with water is set aside to wet the tool.
Photo 27th October 1988

Nau (Nāpit) – Barbers

Classified as para-priests by Robert Levy (1990: 355), barbers purify people in a non-sacred procedure. In death rituals they enable their clients to overcome their liminal status as bereaved members of the wider clan, transcending the narrow confines of the *phukī*. Paring their toenails and shaving them either on the 4th or on 10th day represents the first decisive step. For two more days *phukī* members are no more *dumhā*, but they remain impure (*aśuddha*) for they are not supposed to touch the gods in temples or to take food from others. Apart from the chief mourner, they only return to the realm of purity after having received *samay*, the ritual food of egg, fish, ginger, soy beans, beaten rice and fried rice from the Ghāḥsu-ācāju on the 12th day.

Male and female Nau have to trim the hair of their male clients and pare their toenails, while only females (Naunī) pare the toenails of women. Mostly the toes are simply touched by the chisel-like cutting instrument in a waving gesture. The actual paring is done on other occasions.

On the occasion of *du byẽkegu* on the 10th day after death, the barber plays an important role because he brings along the mirror (*jvālānhāykã)* that the Brahmin holds up, asking every polluted male member of the *phukī* to look into it as a concluding gesture to the purificatory rite. After the chief mourner has received new white clothes from the hands of the Brahmin he immediately puts them on, offering his used and potentially polluted clothes to the barber. Since the 1970s, the barber refuses to absorb the pollution of his clients by receiving their clothes. Instead, he receives some cash as compensation.

Barbers pare the toenails of those considered higher status, while those considered "below" the latter – mostly Buddhist sub-castes engaged in death rituals like Bhā and Cālã as well as Pũ, Sāymi and Kau – have their toenails pared by members of the sub-caste of butchers (Nāy).

Altogether 67 barbers are organized into four funeral associations with 12, 15, and in two cases 20 members. Some *guthīs* count all (initiated) male members of a household as members, others refer to the hearth as the decisive entity, because in the barbers sub-caste brothers do not separate as often as members of other professional groups. In recent decades quite a few barber families have moved to the rural periphery. Significant clusters of barbers remain though in Yāchẽ (13), Sujāmādhi (11) and Itāchẽ (7). The remaining 25 households are evenly scattered across the urban space without demonstrating any pattern.

Barbers were and still are frequently needed in cases of pollution by death. However, no obvious pattern of spatial relationship between a barber and his clients is recognizable. Turning to the example of Kṛṣṇa Gopāl Nāpit and his three brothers from Yāchẽ (see map), their 90 clients live within a perimeter of 400 metres in significant clusters. More than 100 clients live beyond the city's limits in sur-

rounding villages. Every client used to offer five *pati* (17 kg) of unhusked rice at the time of harvesting, not merely to the barber but to all those who act as purity technicians in cases of death. For Kṛṣṇa Gopāl and his brothers it means that some 350 kg would make up the demand of almost an entire year.

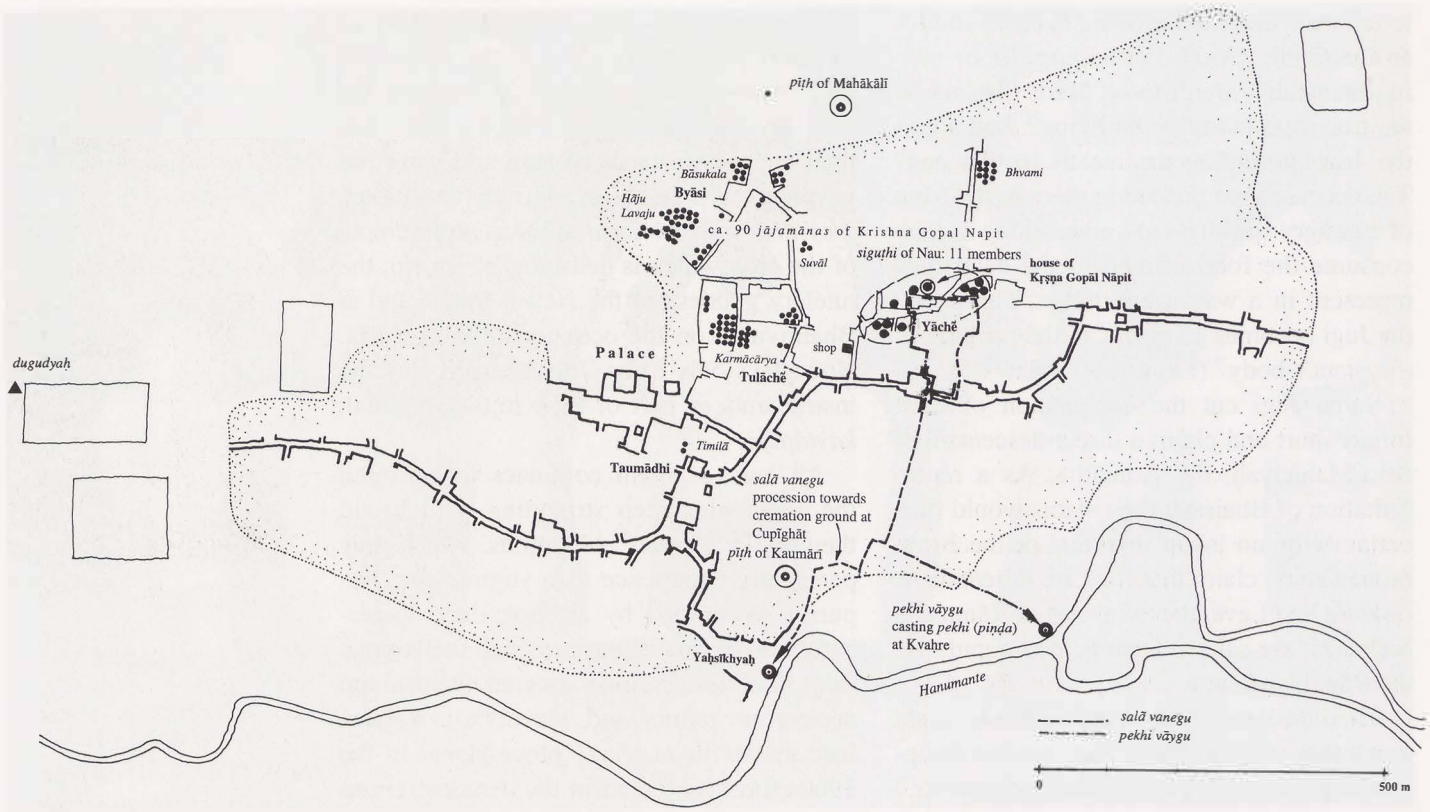
Kṛṣṇa Gopāl runs a rented barber's shop at nearby Lālāchẽ Square and turns up at Kālīghāṭ north of Bhaktapur whenever he is called for a *du byẽkegu* ritual on the 10th day after death. Most clients come to his shop to be shaved for the annual *śrāddha* rituals. One brother works in a barber's shop in Kathmandu on a daily basis: 40 percent of his income remains with the shop owner. The youngest brother joined the traffic police. Their father, Bakhat Mān, had served for many years as barber to the Royal Guards, a service that provided him with the opportunity to see much of the country. A faint memory survives that their ancestor was once called to Bhaktapur from Palpa by a Malla king to cure the broken leg of a horse. To this day barbers are famous for handling fractures and sprains. They also act as healers and usually advise offerings of *bau* (rice husk) or even *samaybaji* to the Ākāśabhairava or a Kṣetrapāla, guardians of space in the neighbourhood of the patient.

Until recently, Kṛṣṇa Gopāl's *phukī* had nine members from three families. The inevitable process of fragmentation resulted in a split from his cousins, who live next door. Together with his brothers he worships the lineage god at Siddhapūkhū on the day after Bhailaḥdyaḥ's annual *pūjā*. On the occasion of life-cycle rituals, sacrifices are performed at the *pīṭha* of Mahākālī, while his funeral association meets at the non-iconic seat, the *pīṭha* of Kaumārī three times a year. The family's cremation site is at Yaḥsīkhyaḥ while *pekhi vāygu*, the disposal of the *piṇḍas*, is performed at Kvaḥre.

Only recently has an association of barbers (*nāpit saṅgha*) been founded to identify and defend the interests of their trade and unify the tariffs for their services. They also demanded that their members should stop going to their clients' fields to receive their annual share in a way that they considered humiliating. Instead, they now demand unhusked rice or cash. Since the late 1990s barbers visit their clients' houses after harvest to collect 340 rupees (in 2003 equal to 4 Euro).

Bakat Mān Nāpit (1934 – 2001) from the quarter of Yāchẽ, receiving the annual gift of unhusked rice from a Bāsukala client on a field north of the Kāsankhusi river. The client pushes the grain onto a white cloth spread out by the barber.
In 1987 Bakat Mān had 104 clients.
Photo, 4th November 1987

Opposite
The urban world of a barber: Kṛṣṇa Gopāl Nāpit from Yāchẽ.
Krishna shares the inherited house with three brothers. From their father they inherited c. 90 client-families (jajmāns) in the northern sector of the upper town and close to a hundred in villages north (Jaukhel), east (Bageśwori), south (Chaling, Katunje) and west (Thimi) of Bhaktapur. Apart from two Timilā, two Baidye and 20 Karmācārya, all clients are farmers.



The eleven members of his funeral association (siguthī) live close to each other in Yāchẽ. Three times a year the guthīpūjā is performed at the seat (pīṭh) of the goddess Kaumārī. The processional route in cases of death leads through Lālāchẽ to the cremation ground at Yaḥsīkhyaḥ, while the ball offerings (piṇḍa) of the subsequent death rituals are discarded at Kvaḥre. Kṛṣṇa Gopāl Nāpit runs a rented shop in nearby Lālāchẽ. The lineage god is located at the western end of Siddhapūkhū. Mahākālī is the goddess who receives blood sacrifices on the occasion of life cycle rituals.

Jugi (Kusle, Kapāli, Darśandhārī) – Tailors and musicians

The origin of the Jugi

The Jugi play an important role in death rituals – so much so that it might be argued that they represent the deceased in the shape of *preta* as well as *pitṛ*. They literally absorb the food that is offered to the *preta* on the seventh day after death. They also participate in the annual offerings to the dead because each family is tied to a set number of clients, *jajmāns,* from whom they collect the *jugibvaḥ* – the share for the ancestors that is kept aside on the occasion of formal feasts (*bvaḥ*).

The origin of the Jugi remains obscure. A number of the explanations that are given upon questioning opens up, however, a wealth of associations. The most frequent explanation is that the Jugi have descended from Kānphaṭa Yogīs, an order of ascetics founded by Gorakhnāth, a *yogin* of the Nātha cult who lived between the 9th and 12th centuries AD. This order considered Śiva as the Ādinātha, the Supreme Divine Source of Perfection, while Goraknātha appears as a direct descendant of the Ādinātha. Not only might the designation as "Jugi" (or Yogī) suggest that there is some historical truth in such claims. Among the urban society of Newars Jugi are, like *yogīs* (and Mahantās, who are also considered to be *yogīs*), the only ones who are not cremated but buried. Gorakhnātha is worshipped as their tutelary and ancestor god. Moreover, the rite on the 7th day after death requires a *cakrapūjā,* which usually is only performed by Kānphaṭas. What is even more striking are the abilities that are traditionally attributed to Gorakhnāth. His yogic powers not only enabled him to withhold rain, but he is also said to have been able

to raise the dead and prolong his own life for an indefinite period. Prolonging life or raising the dead – aren't these deeds that mirror the true aspirations of the living? And aren't the Jugi presenting the means to that end? The deceased are present in them in the form of a hungry spirit (*preta*), and as long as they consume the food offered to the dead they represent in a way immortality. Ultimately, the Jugi becomes an agent "in the forming of the preta's body" (Levy 1990: 682).

Some Jugi cut the explanation of their origin short and claim a direct descent from Śiva/Mahādyaḥ, the Ādinātha. As a representation of Bhairava their status would then certainly be no lower than that of the Brahmins. Others claim that they are descendants of Kuśa and Lava, the twin sons of Rāma and Sītā, who are said to have helped popularise the Rāmāyaṇa epos.

Their designation in Nepālī as Kusle might recall this version, while their present designation as Kapāli (lit. "adorned with skulls") refers once again to Śiva-Mahādeva, who at the destruction of the universe will wear a garland with skulls "symbolizing the endless evolution and devolution of the universes, and indicating the inseparability of life and death" (Stutley/Stutley 1986: 141).

Profane and ritual duties and rights

As tailors, the Jugi also acquire the name Darśandhāri. Ritually speaking, the most important task of the male members of the community, however, was – and for very few still is – to play a kind of shawm named *mahalī*, which music historians identify as having been imported from Gujarat as late as the 17th century. Whether the players came along with the instruments or whether the kings of Nepal felt inclined to add to the variety of instruments played at their court cannot be said with certainty. Since the early 17th century, dedicatory inscriptions on religious buildings mention how many Jugi had to play in the early morning to wake up the deity, and they mention the payment that was due for their service. Since most temples have lost their supporting basis of land and since the payment has never been adjusted to inflation, they now only perform at the central temple of the city, which is dedicated to Taleju, the tutelary goddess of the Newar kings, and at Bhairavnāth on the occasion of Bisketjātrā. Nowadays only a few Jugi learn to play the instruments as part of their initiation ritual, *kaytāpūjā*.

An aura of myth continues to surround the Jugi, who keep struggling hard to rid themselves of their obligations, which they personally experience as a stigmatising impurity. Weakened by alcohol, they desperately seek a final departure from the stigma: they have successfully entered mainstream society as tailors and players of western instruments in marriage processions. In the 1960s the Jugi joined in the demonstrations to enforce access to temples, and today their leading figures have studied abroad and serve as ministers.

In order to convey the complexity of the life of a Jugi, it is worth looking here at the fate of Chandranāth Kusle, who was interviewed on 31st October 1988.

Shortly before the great earthquake of 1934 his father came to Bhaktapur to marry the sister of a deceased Jugi. Thus he inherited the obligations and rights of his brother-in-law. This act had to be confirmed by adding a handful of sand with a coin to the deceased's grave and offering food to him for the following four days. Chandranāth was born in 1944 and at the age of sixteen he married a fourteen-year-old girl from Maṅgalāchẽ (at the south-western periphery of Bhaktapur). His four elder sisters were married in Kathmandu. The rights of his father were divided between two brothers: Chandranāth received the right of guardianship of the south-eastern

Four Jugi performing on their shawm at the quarter of Yāchẽ. The third from left is Chandranāth Kusle. Photo 17th April 1986

Mother Goddess, Maheśvarī, his brother of the north-eastern one, Mahālakṣmī, whose seat is located right next to the arcaded rest house, the first floor of which is to this day occupied by his entire family.

Chandranāth played the shawm in a *dhalcā* musical group on various occasions: on the eighth day of *mvaḥni* in honour of Mahālakṣmī, who is worshipped on this day by thousands of devotees; on the tenth day in Sujamādhi on the large eastern square to welcome the newly born gods of the Navadurgā dance troupe; and on the following two days when an auspicious *taḥsi* fruit is offered by the Navadurgā. For this service, the performance's donors presented him with a very symbolical reward of slightly less than 500 grams of *vākijāki*, a mixture of husked and unhusked rice.

During the sacred month of the Buddhists, Gũlā (in August), Chandranāth used to play each day as a member of a group of Śākya from Inācva. Until the seventies he also played early each morning in the company of eight other Jugi in front of the Golden Gate, the *lũdhvākhā* of the Taleju temple. For this service the donor's descendants offered almost 150 kg of paddy, which had to be collected on the field after harvest in November. In the seventies he also had the duty of cleaning the so-called "pumpkin temple" (Phasidegaḥ) on Darbār Square three times a year – a service for which he received a nominal fee from a Rāṇa family in Kathmandu.

The most rewarding activity were the engagements to play in wedding processions. Each spring Chandranāth had up to twelve engagements. As a tailor he would earn cash in a short season lasting three weeks between Indrajātrā and *mvaḥni* in October. And in June he worked as a day-labourer in the fields transplanting rice.

Moreover, Chandranāth owns the right to collect the offerings made to nine lineage gods in Mūthu (north of Bhaktapur), and the full rights at the lower *chvāsaḥ* stone in Vacutvaḥ. Another Jugi shares the rights to the upper stone in Vacutvaḥ with three families, while sharing the stone at Inācva with two other Jugis. His wife or his daughters have the right and duty to collect the offerings made to the *chvāsaḥ* stones and to perform the *nhenumhā* ritual on the 7th day after death for the related households.

Chandranāth's three sons had nothing to share, for the reward or return from collecting coins was nominal. They work as tailors, play the trumpet at marriage processions, and their wives collect *nhenumhā* offerings. Chandranāth was paralysed for years before he died in early September 2003.

Chandranāth Kusle, officiating as caretaker (dyaḥpālāḥ) at the seat of the goddess Maheśvarī on the second day of the Dasāī festival.
Photo 12th October 1988

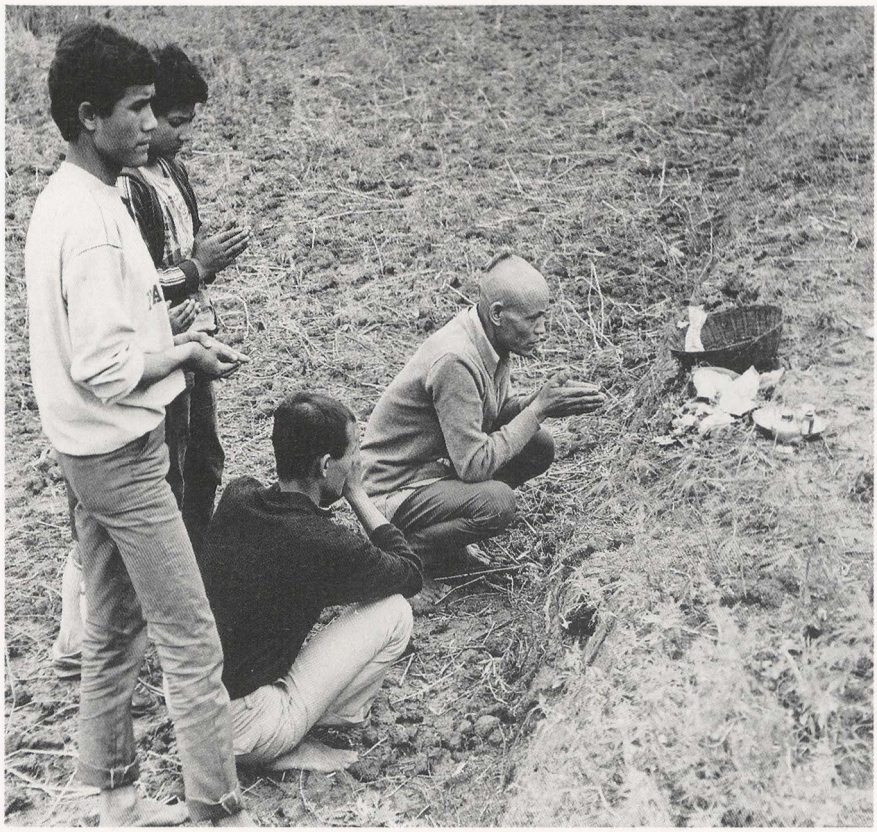
Death rituals for Jugi

A more than legendary association with *yogis* is revealed by their designation in the local idiom as Jugi, as well as in the practice of burial instead of cremation – a practice normally reserved for ascetics. In the context of Hindu society the *yogi* is socially already dead. The separation from the parental household has serious consequences. When he cuts the tuft of hair that had remained after shaving (Nev. *ãgusā*, Nep. *ṭuppī*) he breaks the symbolic tie to his lineage and ancestors. Being already "dead", Newar society identified the Jugi with the death of identifiable persons whose food the Jugi have regularly to absorb. But they also have to absorb the food dedicated to the ancestors during the annual urban rituals. So they became identified with death and ancestors in general.

The social organisation of the Jugi

In 1987 a total of 44 Jugi households were counted, which were organised into six different funeral associations (*siguthī*). Each household (identified by a separate hearth) has to deputise at least one active member to such an association in order to ensure the necessary help to any of its members should death strike the house. The process of carrying the corpse and burying it at a defined ground called *jugigaḥ* (*gaḥ*=literally "hole") is performed by members of the associations, who in that particular case are not polluted. The size of the *guthīs* varies considerably, from four to 16 members.

The settlement pattern of the Jugi is complex in nature. Although members of an unclean sub-caste, they do not mark the edges of the city in the way that butchers or sweepers do, but are scattered across the urban space, being little represented in the east and even less so in the far western quarters.



Ancestor worship (dugudyaḥ-pūjā) in the middle of a field north of Bhaktapur where the non-iconic seat of the deity is not dug up but simply surmised. The son of Chandranāth Kusle on the left is waiting to collect the offerings. Photo 3rd May 1987, on the occasion of taḥdhī, "the great day" on Sunday following the third day of the bright moon in April/May (akṣaya tṛtīyā).

Until recently most of them lived in one-storied huts under a straw roof, very similar to the huts of the sweepers, and they even raised pigs like them. But what is important to note is a concentration right at the centre around the temple dedicated to Bhairava, the master (*nāyaḥ*) of the city who came to Bhaktapur as Kāśī Viśvanāth. In recent times the Jugi were able to construct a few three-storied houses at Taumādhi Square, which became valuable property. Bought by affluent merchants, these plots have been redeveloped to serve the growing tourist industry.

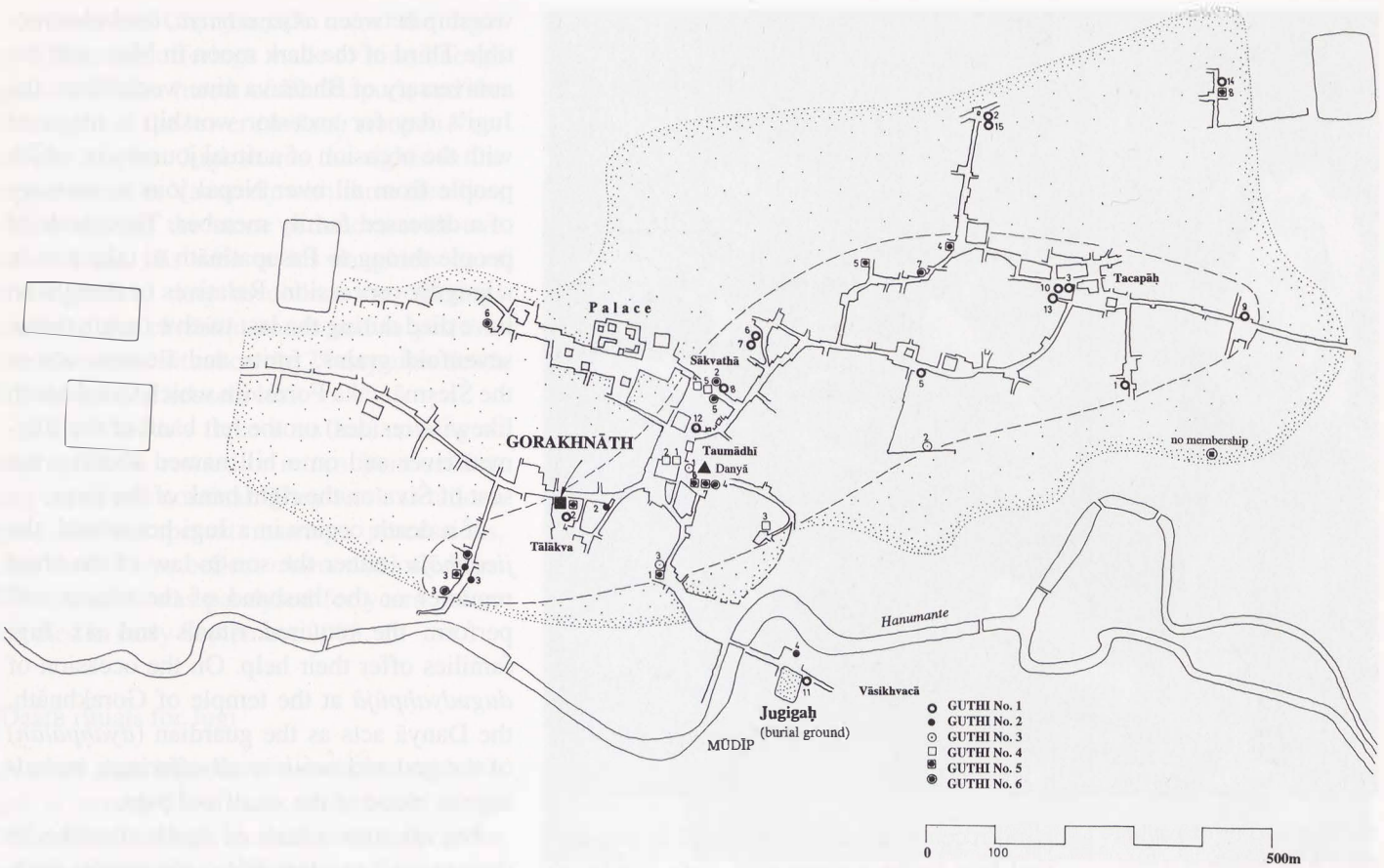
Reflecting the Jugi's role as purity specialists, their tutelary god Gorakhnātha – represented by his footsteps – is located near Taumādhi Square on a small hilltop. There, ancestor worship is performed on the occasion of Bālacaturdaśī, the night before the new moon of December. While all other inhabitants of Bhaktapur perform their ancestor worship between *akṣaya tṛtīyā*, the Indestructible Third of the dark moon in May, and the anniversary of Bhairava nine weeks later, the Jugi's day for ancestor worship is identical with the occasion of a ritual journey in which people from all over Nepal join in memory of a deceased family member. Thousands of people throng to Paśupatināth to take part in a lengthy procession. Relatives of those who have died during the last twelve month throw sevenfold grains, fruits and flowers across the Śleṣmāntaka Forest (in which Gorakhnāth likewise resides) on the left bank of the Bāgmatī river and on a hill named Kailāsa, the seat of Śiva on the right bank of the river.

If a death occurs in a Jugi household, the *jicābhāju* (either the son-in-law of the chief mourner or the husband of the sister) will perform the required rituals and six Jugi families offer their help. On the occasion of *dugudyaḥpūjā* at the temple of Gorakhnāth, the Danyā acts as the guardian (*dyaḥpālāḥ*) of the god and receives all offerings, including the blood of the sacrificed pigs.

For all other rituals of death after the 7th day, as well as other life-cycle rituals, there are two Jugi called either Bramhu or Gubhāju who act as priests. For several years now the Bramhu is even called to guide the performance of *soraśrāddha*, which until recently was unknown for Jugi. This adoption of new rituals can certainly be seen as demonstrating a transcendence of the narrow confines and stigma of the Jugi community. One Bramhu serves members of the groups from the upper town (*thanekavaḥ*), the other the groups from the lower town (*kvanekavaḥ*).

Obligations in death rituals

The duties or rights of the Jugi – he in fact "owns" the offerings which he is obliged to collect – in cases of death start immediately with a death in a family that qualifies as his

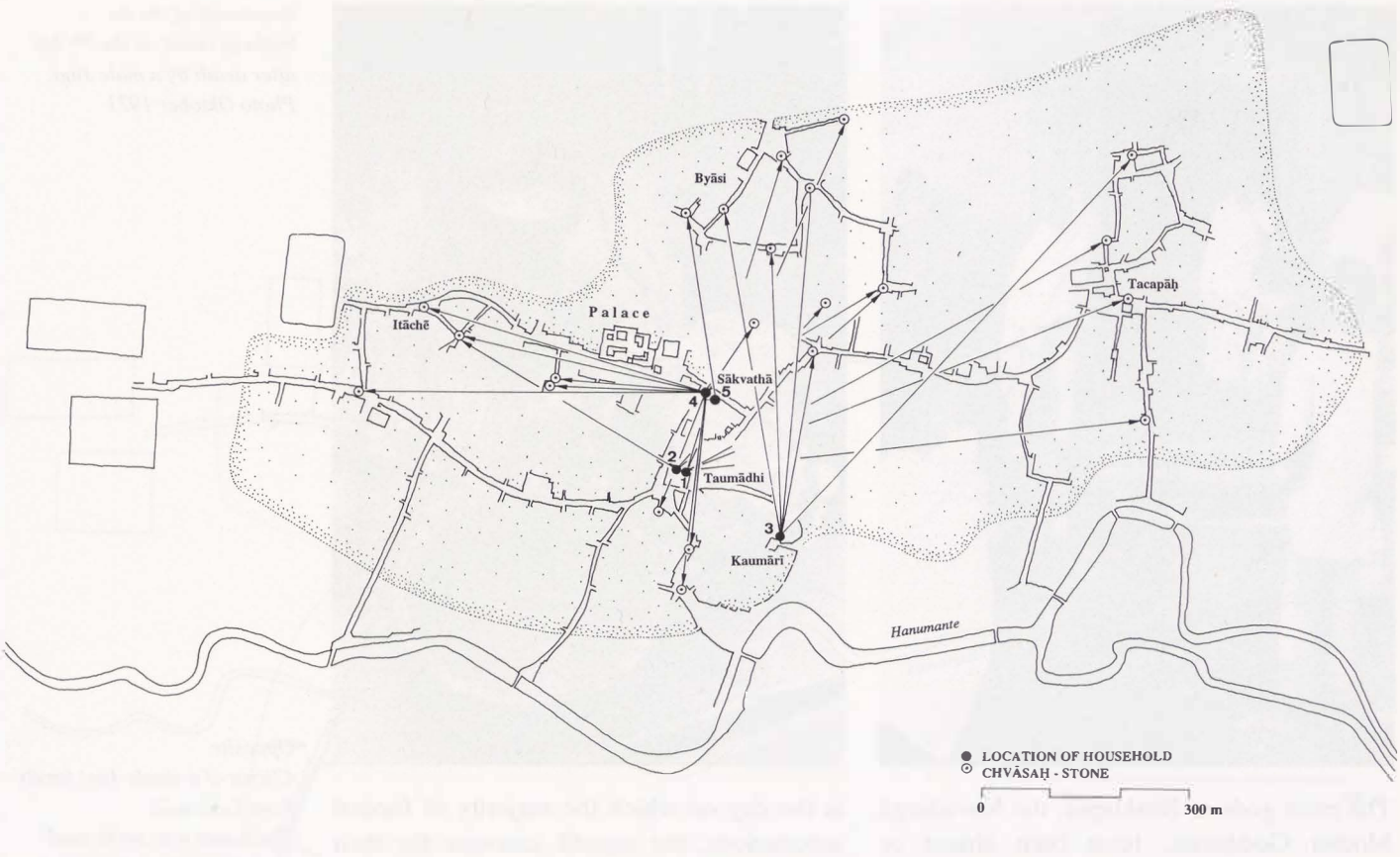


Location of 42 Jugi households, designated according to their membership in six different funeral associations with four (guthī no. 3) to sixteen (guthī number 1) members. Only a few of them live on the periphery. Most of them own modest houses located along the main road and at ritually important squares. The temple of the lineage deity, Gorakhnāth, is located on a small hill south of the main road, the burial ground, Jugigaḥ, across the river behind the main cremation ground.
Survey spring 1987

hereditary client. Before the corpse is carried to the cremation ground, the wife of the chief mourner (who is called in this role *chvāsaḥvāimhā*) discards a woven bamboo mat symbolizing the bed of the deceased and some clothes, in recent times also the left-over medicine, on a particular *chvāsaḥ* stone. Until recently this polluted waste was collected from the stone by the wives or daughters of the Jugi, who had previously to be informed by the bereaved family.

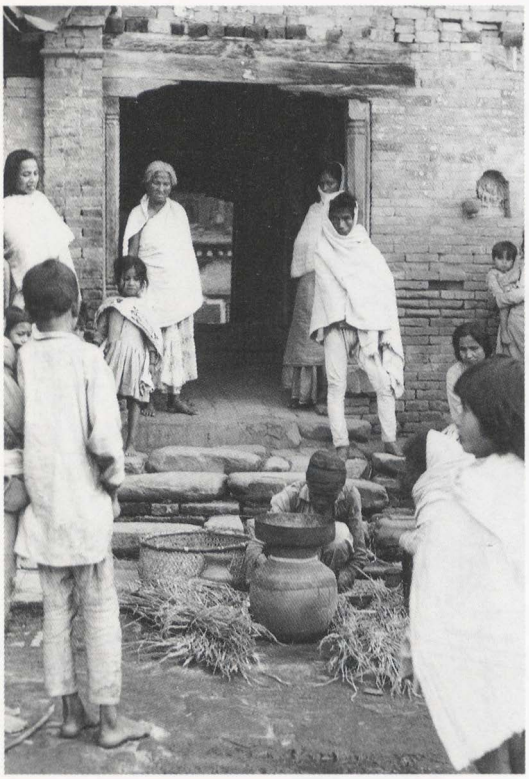
Since every household is aware of the location of the associated *chvāsaḥ*, the Jugi in turn are aware of what kind of rights they own at which stone. In "old times" the discarded objects and food offered to the ancestors constituted an income for the families concerned; it literally fed them. Nowadays, the clothes and the mattress of the deceased are no longer collected by the Jugi, but cleared away by the waste department of the recently established municipality.

The principal duty of the Jugi is to appear on the 7th day after death at the threshold of the deceased to perform the *nhenumhā* rite, literally the offerings to "the body (*mhā*) on the seventh day (*nhenu*)". The Juginī (since two decades always a woman) receives the food from the temporary hearth on the ground floor and carries it outside. She places seven small baskets of cooked rice on seven bundles of rice straw. The principal plate of food, the *nhenumhā bvaḥ* itself, will remain on the threshold to be eaten by the dogs, but all raw food (like salt and turmeric), the cooked rice from the seven small baskets, and a special plate with meat, vegetables, sweets and alcohol, the *jugibvaḥ,* will be taken home by her.



Distribution of shares in 19 chvāsaḥ stones owned by five members of a jugiguthī (no. 4, see map on the opposite page). Household 1 has rights on five stones in the upper town, household 2 on two in the upper town and two in the lower town – two of which are shared with household 4. Household 3 has exclusive rights on five stones in the upper town, household 4 on nine stones, of which only two are located in the upper town. Household 5 owns rights on one stone in Byāsi. Survey spring 1987

This is the first meal (*bvaḥ*) that the Jugi receives in the name of the deceased. The second one on the 13th (or 45th) day (*latyā*) and those on fifteen subsequent occasions follow within the mourning period of one year. The *pitṛ* needs this period to reach the realm of Yama, the Lord of Death. From that time onwards a *jugibvaḥ* will have to be collected on the performance of the annual death ritual, *śrāddha*. Another death ritual is enacted by the elder (*nāyaḥ*) of a group of two to six or sometimes more families that form a lineage, presenting a patrilineal group in a fragmented form. The intention is to offer *piṇḍas* not only to the past three generations, but also to all other ancestors that are remembered. *Jugibvaḥ* is also due at all life-cycle rituals such as birth, initiation, marriage and old-age celebrations (*jākva*). More *jugibvaḥ* are due on a calendar basis, punctuated by important events that mirror the agricultural year and by rituals of renewal. This starts with the end of the lunisolar calendar on Caitra Masanta, the 13th April. By that day, most movable representations of those gods that demand blood sacrifices have returned to their place of origin, marked by a non-iconic stone and the erection of a large pole on the ritual ground to herald the advent of another year. A similar event is marked by the winter solstice on 14th January, Makar Saṃkranti, locally known as *gyaḥcāku saṃkranti*, the day butter and raw sugar are served to overcome the hardships of winter. On the 8th day of *mvaḥni*, the Durgāpūjā festival in October (Āśvina), the Jugi is offered part of the *kuchibvay* – named after the container that is used: the contents of a *kuchi* is equal to two *mana*, which is equivalent to almost one litre. This occasion is likewise associated with death and rebirth.



Enactment of the du byēkegu ritual on the 7th day after death by a male Jugi. Photo Oktober 1971

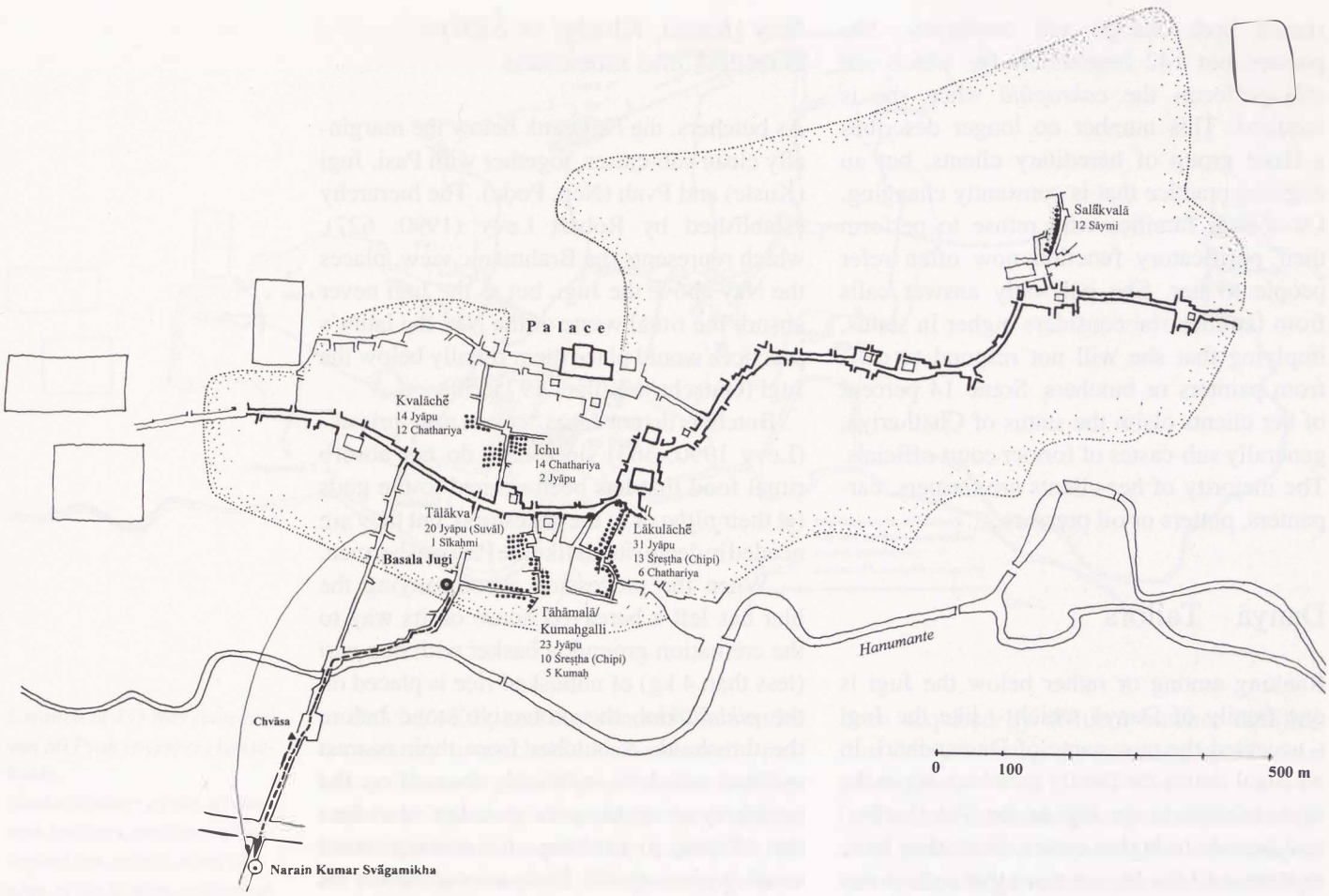
The main gods of Bhaktapur, the Navadurgā Mother Goddesses, have been absent or "dead" for a period of exactly four month during the rains. On the night of the 9th day of Durgāpūjā – the Jugi are supposed to collect their share in the early morning of that day – the gods are reborn, and the next day they are paraded into the city. Six weeks later it is Lakṣmī who graces the households and promises affluence. An occasion on which on consecutive days the messengers of death, the crow, the dog and the liberating cow are worshipped. In the presence of a Yama figure moulded from rice flour, sisters worship the bodies of their brothers in a ritual called Kijāpūjā. The Juginī come to receive the offering dedicated to the ancestors the following morning. Finally, on full moon in November (Maṅgsir) when the new rice harvest is celebrated and small figures, *yaḥmārhi*, are moulded from rice flour, the Jugi pick up their share the following day. It is the day on which the majority of funeral associations, the *siguthī*, convene for their annual meeting.

If one counts 200 *jajmāns* (clients) for every Jugi household, one would end up with some 1200 *jugibvaḥ* per annum – enough to feed the entire family.

However, the *jugibvaḥ* offerings to the ancestors and the offerings made to the *chvāsaḥ* stone (*kalāḥ vāygu*) are no longer collected. Only on rare occasions is this food collected to feed the pigs, chickens and ducks. Since the Jugi have given up raising pigs over the last two decades because it has considerably added to their social stigma, the food offerings have now attained the status of waste.

The sense of rights and obligations at the *chvāsaḥ* stones already faded away in the 1970s. In the course of a detailed survey in 1987 it was almost impossible to establish a reliable "ownership" pattern. The map for one *guthī* discloses that one household might hold

Opposite
Clients of a single Jugi family from Tahāmalā.
The Juginī who performed the cakrapūjā and received the offering to the preta on the seventh day (nhenumhā kāygu) after the death of Rabi Svāgamikha, has 142 clients (survey in July 2002), whose houses are scattered all over the town, with a concentration of houses in Tālākva, Lākulāchē, Kvalāchē and Icchu. A group of 12 Sāymi (oil presser) households alone is located in the upper town. Of these clients, 14% are from families of high status (Chathariyā), almost 63% are from the community of farmers (such as Svāgamikha, Suvāl or Gora), 14% are carpenters, potters or oil pressers, while the remaining 9% are Chipi or Śreṣṭhas who claim high status.



exclusive rights at five stones while another household had to share the rights with others. Such rights were also negotiable. Prem Nāth Jugi, for example, bought the rights of 80 households from the member of another funeral association in 1984 for 500 rupees (at that time equal to 20 Euro).

The ongoing loss of the *chvāsaḥ's* function to mediate between clients and purity specialists reveals a powerful process that is transforming the social and ritual dimension of purity into a profane dimension that is guided by hygiene and cleanliness. Within a few years, the offerings made to the deceased on the 7th day at the threshold of the house will also disappear in a move to privatise the "handling of death".

For the time being, the increasing sums of money being paid by the clients, along with beer for the husband and sweets for the children, almost force a few female Jugi to collect the offerings of the 7th day after death, as well as the regular food offerings (*jugibvaḥ*) made on four festive occasions and on the occasion of the annual *śrāddhas* in memory of the deceased father and mother. Before long the in-laws of the bereaved families will replace the Jugi in the performance of the *cakrapūjā* on the 7th day, and all offerings dedicated to the ancestors will be cast into the river.

The practice of Basala Jugi, the women who performed the *cakrapūjā* for Rabindra Svāgamikha, whose *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual is documented in a following chapter, demon-

strates both change and continuity. She pointed out 142 households for which she still performs the *cakrapūjā* when she is required. This number no longer describes a fixed group of hereditary clients, but an ongoing practice that is constantly changing. Other Jugi families who refuse to perform their purificatory function now often refer people to her. She will only answer calls from families she considers higher in status, implying that she will not respond to calls from painters or butchers. Some 14 percent of her clients claim the status of Chathariyā, generally sub-castes of former court officials. The majority of her clients are farmers, carpenters, potters or oil pressers.

Danyā – Tailors

Ranking among or rather below the Jugi is one family of Danyā which – like the Jugi – accepted the new name of Darśandhārī. In all ritual duties the family members act in the same relation to the Jugi as the Nau (barber) and Jugi do to higher castes. First, they have to inform all the Jugi in town that a death has occurred (*cvaykaḥ vanegu*). The Danyā heads the procession to the graveyard (*jugigaḥ)* with a basket containing wheat flour, cooked rice, a small bag (*mhecā*) with beaten rice and a pumpkin (*laukā*). The corpse is buried in the position of meditation (*samādhi*). For the following four days food offerings are brought to the burial ground, while the Danyā holds a torch of straw.

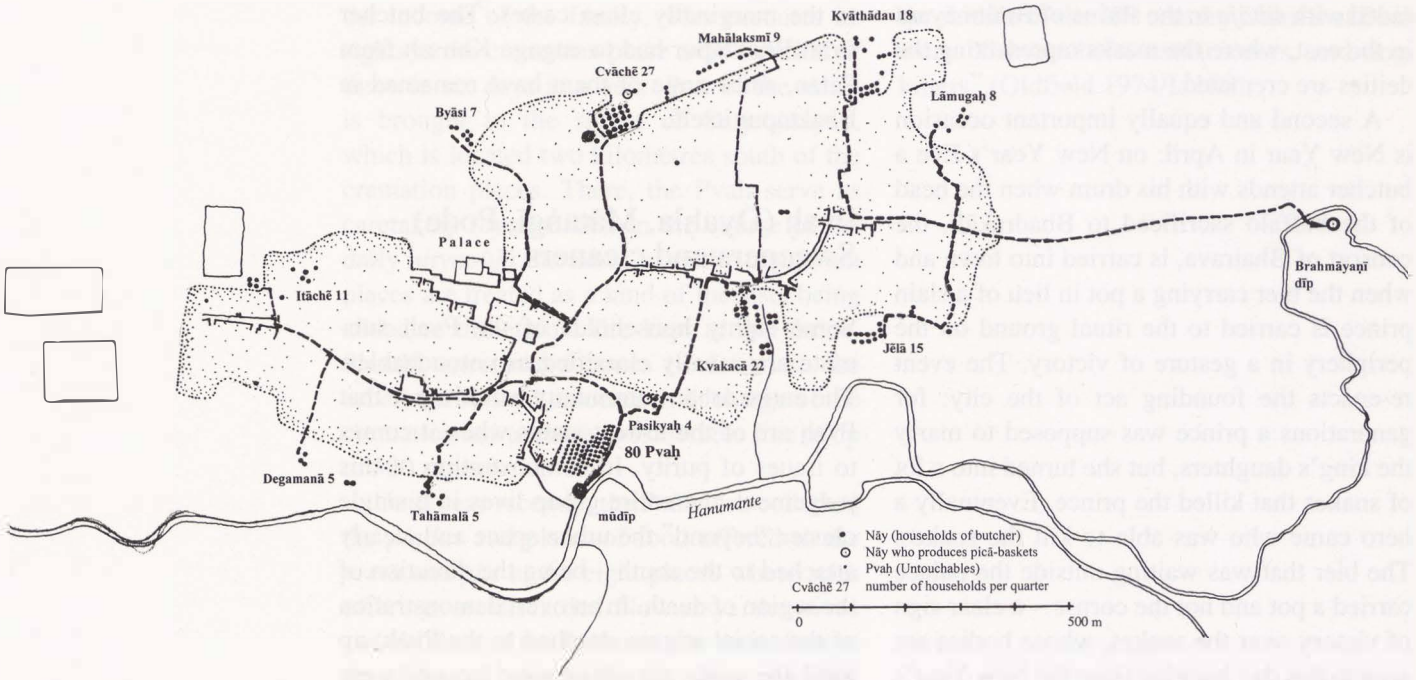
The Danyā shaves the Jugi's hair, pares his toenails and worships and collects the *nhenumhā* offering to the hungry spirit of the deceased. Similarly the Danyā is the only ritual specialist involved in the rituals of the 10th (*du byẽkegu*) and 12th day (*lhā panegu*), during which he sprinkles purifying milk and feeds the purificatory fire.

Nāy (Kasāi, Khadgī or Śāhī) – Butchers and musicians

As butchers, the Nāy rank below the marginally clean sub-castes, together with Pasi, Jugi (Kusle) and Pvaḥ (Nep. Poḍe). The hierarchy established by Robert Levy (1990: 627), which represents the Brahmanic view, places the Nāy above the Jugi, but as the Jugi never absorb the ritual waste of the Nāy the latter's practices would place them ritually below the Jugi (Gutschow/Kölver 1975: 58).

Butchers do not act as "covert para-priests" (Levy 1990: 363) since they do not absorb ritual food that has been offered to the gods (at their *pīṭha* or to the ancestors), but they are needed in death rituals like the Pasi washermen.

When the procession accompanying the bier has left a bereaved house on its way to the cremation ground, a basket with one *pati* (less than 4 kg) of unhusked rice is placed on the *pikhālākhu*, the protective stone before the threshold. A butcher from their nearest quarter, which is invariably located on the periphery of urban space, is called to collect the offering in exchange for making seven small baskets (*picā*) from a local variety of reed (*napaḥ*). On the 6th day he is reminded that he should prepare the baskets that are needed for the following day. Cooked rice will be placed in the baskets and offered to the wandering and hungry spirit of the deceased. Similarly, beer is offered to the spirit on the same occasion in a pot of a specific shape, the *nhenumhā kvãcā*. But while the pot has not to be ordered, being readily available from any of the potters who produce all the many plates and cups that are used only one time in rituals, the *picā* has to be ordered on the basis of a *jajmāna* relationship. The butcher has to fulfil a duty assigned to him as part of a death ritual. Nowadays, only two poor butchers from the Cvāchẽ quarter and one from Pasikhyaḥ continue to produce these baskets.



Location of 135 Nāy (butcher) and 80 Pvaḥ (sweeper) households.
Twelve clusters of two to nineteen butchers are situated not beyond but clearly along the edge of the historic settlement. These clusters are organised into ten musical groups (nāykhībājā). The eastern three clusters turn for cremation to the shrine of Brahmāyaṇī in the east, while all others turn to their specific cremation place at the southern end of the Yaḥśīkhyaḥ square.
The households of Pvaḥ form a single cluster which is separated from the urban space.

Butchers kill, and that renders their entire community untouchable and essentially polluting. These days only poor butcher families undertake the duty of making these special baskets because the polluting quality of this act is clearly perceived. The present generation of butchers has ceased to raise and eat pigs in a move to avoid being associated with essentially unclean animals that will eat faeces. Instead they run modern cold stores and sell chicken meat.

Some twelve clusters with two to 18 households are found on the periphery of the urban space, but within the protective circle defined by the seats of the Mother Goddesses. A survey conducted in 1974 located 104 households, a number that rose to 135 in a recent survey in November 2003. The Nāy live in eleven clusters which still mark the periphery of urban space, where inner and outer space meets. In the western quarter of Itāchē and along the low lying drain of Kvakacā a few houses have occupied space "within" the urban space, and four houses in the east have been acquired by affluent butcher families, thus demonstrating the breaking up of social constraints.

These households are organized into 14 funeral associations (*siguthī*), but more important is their organization into ten *nāykhībājā* groups: butchers (Nāy) whose music (*bājā*) is based on playing a specific double-headed drum (*khī*) of varying shape with a stick and the flat left hand. Others join in with flat cymbals (*sichyāḥ*). This alone may not be of importance in the present context, but the butcher's drum accompanies the death processions of butchers to the cremation ground with a special tune (*sibājā*, lit. "the music of death") (Wegner 1996).

Nowadays, *sibājā* is played only in rare cases to accompany the corpse of a Brahmin or Buddhist monk (as happened in 2002 in Kirtipur). Moreover, on two occasions the butcher's drum was heard during urban rituals of renewal. On the eighth day after full moon in June (Bhagaṣṭi) the protective goddesses of Bhaktapur, the Navadurgā, are pa-

raded with *sibāja* to the shrine of Brahmāyaṇī in the east, where the masks representing the deities are cremated.

A second and equally important occasion is New Year in April: on New Year's Eve a butcher attends with his drum when the head of the buffalo sacrificed to Bhadrakālī, the consort of Bhairava, is carried into town and when the bier carrying a pot in lieu of a slain prince is carried to the ritual ground on the periphery in a gesture of victory. The event re-enacts the founding act of the city: for generations a prince was supposed to marry the king's daughters, but she turned into a lot of snakes that killed the prince. Eventually a hero came who was able to kill the snakes. The bier that was waiting outside the palace carried a pot and not the corpse – a clear sign of victory over the snakes, whose bodies are seen to this day hanging from the New Year's pole that is erected the moment the bier has arrived.

By killing the demon-serpents, the foreign prince conquered a territory symbolized by the unmarried princess. Facing and overcoming imminent death presents the ultimate crisis. The erection of the World Tree demonstrates the renewal of the cosmos. The annual re-enactment ensures the continuity of time.

The death ritual of the butchers reveals their status far more clearly than any self-categorization might do. They go to a barber's shop to be shaved, but they themselves pare their toenails for purificatory purposes. The *nhenumhā* offering is absorbed by Pvaḥ, who mark the bottom end of the hierarchy ever since scavengers have ceased to be found in Bhaktapur. The purificatory ritual of the 10th day and the merging of the *preta* with the ancestors (*sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*) on the 12th day is performed by Buddhist priests from Patan – not by a Bajrācārya, who is instrumental in these rituals for marginally unclean castes, but by a Khusaḥ. This community of ceremonial umbrella-bearers belongs, like the Bhā and Nau, to the marginally clean castes. The butcher from Bhaktapur had to engage Khusaḥ from Patan, since none of them have remained in Bhaktapur itself.

Pvaḥ (Dyaḥla, Mātaṅgī, Poḍe) – Sweepers and cleaners

Some eighty households of the Pvaḥ sub-caste are usually classified as untouchables. The entire urban community would agree that Pvaḥ are of the lowest status when it comes to issues of purity. In demonstration of this judgement, the entire group lives in a single cluster "beyond" the urban space and clearly attached to the south – being the direction of the region of death. In an overt demonstration of the social stigma attached to the Pvaḥ, up until the early seventies most houses were still one-storied, covered by a thatched roof, and had a pigsty at the front.

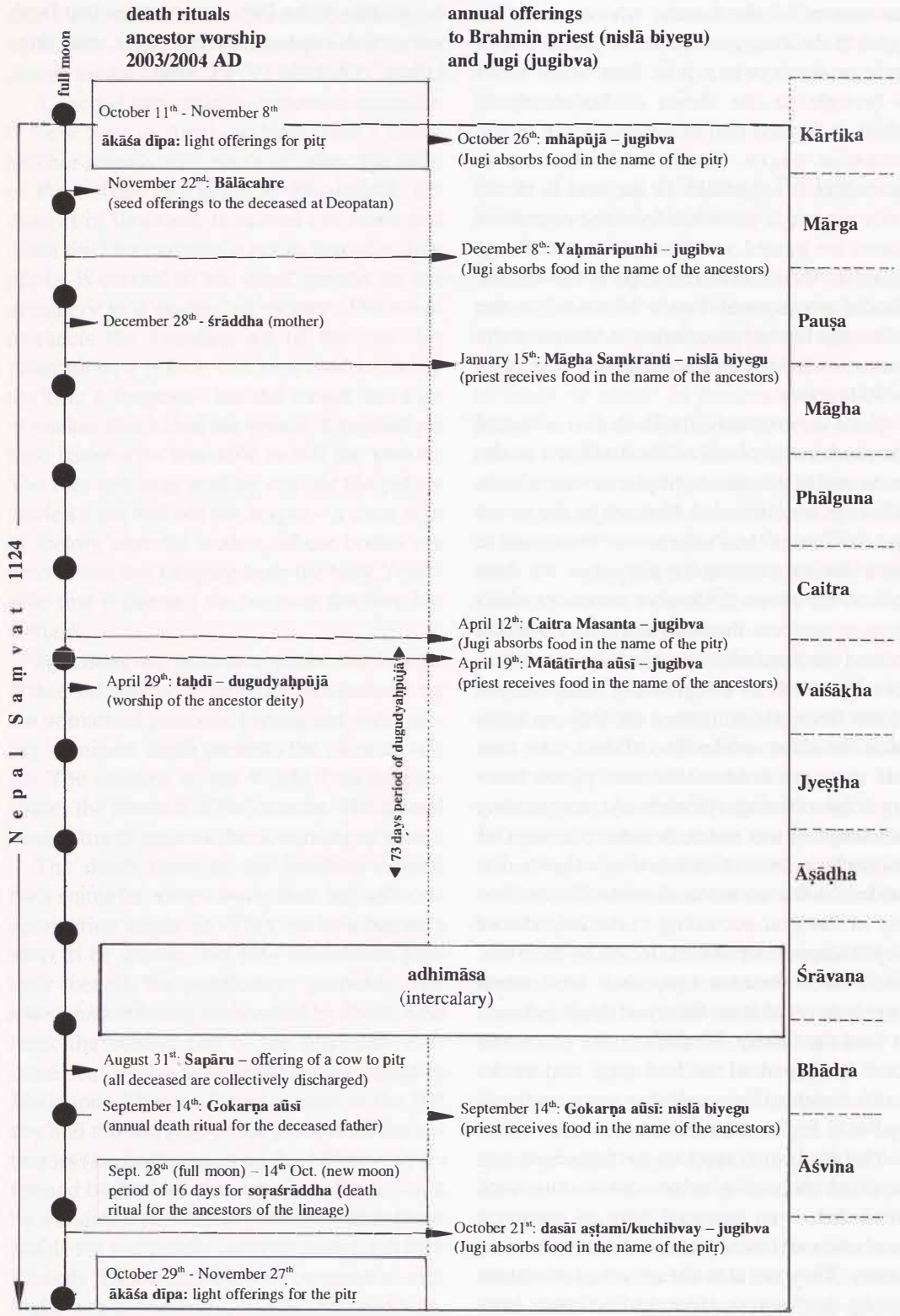
Being associated with the opposite world, the cremation places of all of the marginally clean and pollution-accumulating sub-castes are found directly below the settlement of the Pvaḥ along the embankment of the river. The cremation place of the Pvaḥ is located some 200 metres to the south. In marked contrast, the cremation place across the river serves all the "clean" sub-castes from two-thirds of the town's quarters.

The impurity of the Pvaḥ is based on two notions. As sweepers and cleaners of the latrines of high status sub-castes they deal with waste and faeces. What is more important in this respect is the fact that in their ritual function they are tied to the cremation place. They collect the bier and the white cloth in which the corpse had been wrapped; the half-burned firewood and unused cudgels are left to them because once the firewood has reached the cremation site, it can only cross the river back into town in the hands of a Pvaḥ. Moreover, coins found in the ashes of the pyre add to

the income of the family, who executes its rights at the cremation place over a period of three to six days in a year. Part of the ashes is brought to the shrine of Surjebināyak, which is located two kilometres south of the cremation places. There, the Pvaḥ serve as caretakers (*dyaḥpālāḥ*). In the course of the daily *nityapūjā* the ashes from the cremation places are treated as a kind of incense, being added to the eternal fire kept at the shrine. Should uncremated bones be found in the ashes, the funeral association in charge of the cremation has to pay a considerable fine of up to 500 rupees.

Until very recently, the Pvāḥ also collected the *piṇḍas* and plates of food offered to the *preta* and *pitṛ* at the eight places where such offerings are discarded. Nowadays, the wives and children of the Pvaḥ recover their share at the *ghāṭs* only during the *pitṛpakṣa*, the dark half on the moon in October, when all *phukī* have to perform the obligatory *soraśrāddha* to feed the forefathers and half divine ancestors. Hundreds of kilograms of lump-shaped wheat flour are recovered on that occasion from the river, while the children take care that they get hold of the leaf plates bearing food offerings (*khusibvaḥ)* before they submerge in the water. Similar offerings of *mutumāri* (cones of steamed rice flour), discarded on the occasion of *mhāpūjā*, the first day of the year according to the calendar of Nepāl Saṃvat, are also collected by the Pvaḥ. Until three decades ago, such food items were recovered from the river, dried and used to feed the family. Nowadays, the recovered food is only used to feed pigs and ducks – two "unclean" animals that are raised only by Pvaḥ, Jugi and butchers.

The Pvaḥ also used to be fishermen and supplied the entire urban community with small fish – an essential item of *samay*, a symbolic meal that concludes most household rituals. They are also the only basket makers among the Newars. Historical accounts from the middle of the 19th century claim that Pvaḥ were "fish-catchers, executioners, and dog-killers" (Oldfield 1974/I: 188).



Overview of death rituals Bijay Bāsukala observed in Bhaktapur from 26th October 2003 to 12th November 2004 (Nepal Saṃvat 1024). On three occasions he offered food (nislā biyegu) to his Brahmin house priest, and four times a purity specialist, the Jugi, came to his house to collect the food (jugibvaḥ) dedicated to the ancestors. For his deceased grandmother he visited Deopatan on the occasion of Bālācahre, and a symbolic cow was offered to her on the occasion of Sāpāru in August. For his deceased father he visited Gokarṇa and for his deceased mother Mātātīrtha. The ancestor deity was worshipped in April, offerings were dedicated to the ancestors on new moon in October. Lights had been offered to the forefathers in the month of Kārtika in autumn.

CALENDRIC RITUALS OF DEATH AND RENEWAL

Introduction

The calendar of urban festivals is punctuated by a number of rituals of renewal which are closely related to death. On these occasions regular offerings to the Brahmin or the Jugi are prescribed for every household and dedicated to the ancestors.

Five of these occasions follow the lunar calendar, and two the Indian lunisolar calendar. The most important ones transcend the limits of the individual households and address an urban dimension: the urban space serves as a stage for the enactment of rituals. Robert Levy described the pattern of events that are tied to a temporal system as "the civic performance" (Levy 1990: 401).

The great rituals of renewal are tied to the vernal equinox and the full moon in autumn. The remaining five address the level of lineage and family and are tied to the new moon in October (Kārtika), full moon in December (Yaḥmārhipunhi in Mārga), the winter solstice (14th January), the new moon in May (Vaiśākha), and the new moon in September (Āśvina).

In four cases the ancestors, the *pitaraḥ*, receive a full dish of food. Set aside before the family engages in the obligatory feast, this dish will be collected by the Jugi. His family enjoys a hereditary client-relationship and thus "owns" the offerings (*jugibvaḥ*) made by the respective household to the ancestors.

On these occasions not only the ancestors but also the "living ancestors" (Nev. *māmhā piṭṛ*) are invited to the house and fed in order to satisfy them and renew the ties to their place of origin. These are the married daughters, sisters, aunts and great aunts who had left the house. Having changed their social status and having been introduced to the ancestor deity of their husbands, they are in a way "dead", but they are still tied to their place of origin. The head of the household, the *nāyaḥ* has the duty of issuing a formal invitation. Beside the occasions mentioned, the "living ancestors" are also invited for Sithīnakaḥ, which falls on the eighth day of the waxing moon in June. This is the day the Navadurgā troupe dies and for most lineage groups the last possible day to perform the *pūjā* dedicated to the deity representing the ancestors (*dugudyaḥpūjā*). It is also the day that heralds the advent of the rice-sowing period. Six months and one week later the "living ancestors" become the first to be offered the newly harvested rice on the occasion of Yaḥmāripunhi.

These women assume another important role in the context of certain death rituals, because their offerings add to the raw material that constitutes the body of the *piṇḍa*.

In three cases the offerings (*nislā*) dedicated to the ancestors are not collected by the purity specialist, the Jugi, but carried to the house priest, the Brahmin. The new moons in May and September are dedicated to deceased mothers and fathers in general. The chief mourner and his family may opt to perform a full death ritual (*śrāddha*) at certain designated places (Mātātīrtha and Gokarṇa), but as a substitute for the ritual journey to these places the head of the household can fulfil the annual duty by visiting his house priest.

Svãti – The lunar New Year

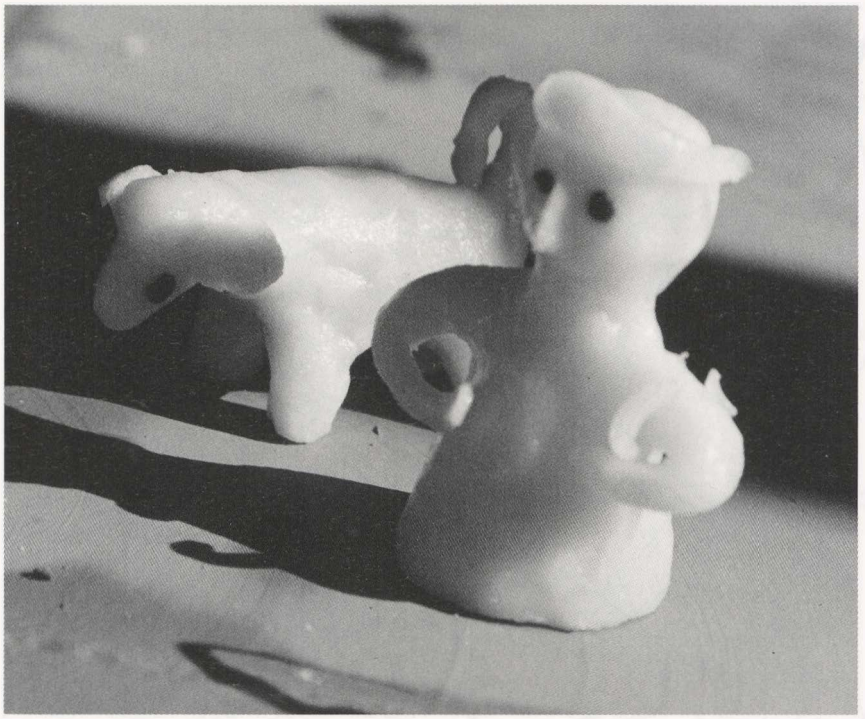
The term Svãti refers to a five-day sequence which frames the beginning of the Newar lunar year. The first three days of the festival, which is also called Tihar, are dedicated to three animals that are closely linked to death. First the crows are worshipped (*kvapūjā*), then the dogs (*khicāpūjā*) and finally, on the day of new moon as the last day of the lunar year, the cows (*sāpūjā*). As messengers of death, the crows receive a portion of every meal on every day, but in this context the offering precludes a formal *pūjā*. Similarly the dogs are believed to represent the spirit of the deceased and as such are fed. Cows are believed to lead the spirits of the deceased across the dangerous river Vaitaraṇī on their twelve-months journey to the city of Yama, the Lord of Death. On this day the thread which had provided protection against evil forces since the August full moon are tied to the tails of cows. New Year's Eve is also dedicated to Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth: she is invited to visit the house and grace the store-room.

On the first day of the new year the mistress of the household (*nakhĩ*) worships the basic tools of the household: broom, circular bamboo tray, water jar, hearth and pots are all worshipped with water, oil, vermilion, flowers, cones of steamed rice flour, rice powder, unbroken ritual rice, popped rice, black soy beans, husk and cotton thread. Occupational groups also worship their implements – such as the potters their wheel. Then the mistress "worships the bodies" (*mhāpūjā*) of all members of the household and offers citrus fruits. Among these a peculiar Himalayan citrus fruit, the *taḥsi,* is of eminent importance. It is this fruit which in other ritual contexts – for example as an offering from the Navadurgā – promises fertility to the recipient.

Apart from the fruits, all of the offerings are swept up and cast into the river the following morning at one of the seven places where the ritual balls of death are cast. The Pvaḥ will have taken up their positions there in time to recover the valuable items. The same morning a Jugi will turn up to collect the offering of food set aside for the ancestors.

The final, fifth day of Svãti is dedicated to the worship of brothers – *kijāpūjā*. The ritual is performed by unmarried and married sisters, and aunts or great aunts from the father's side in a manner similar to the way *mhāpūjā* was performed the preceding day. A garland of flowers (*svã*), purple in colour and shaped like a betel nut (*gvẽ*) (thus called *gvẽcāsvãma),* is presented as a vital offering. The flower signifies longevity because it does not fade in colour when dried. The scene is presided over by figures formed from steamed rice flour: to the right Gaṇeśa and to the left Yamadyaḥ, the Lord of Death in the company of a dog. Coloured block prints, produced by the sub-caste of painters (Pũ), are bought by every household. They depict brothers being served by sisters in the presence of two messengers of Yama, called

Block-print displayed in the house on the occasion of kijāpūjā, the worship of the "body" (mhā) of the brothers by sisters and aunts (depicted in the centre of the picture). The scene is framed by the messengers of the Lord of Death, Yamadūt and Simhadūt. Printed in Bhaktapur in 1974.



Yama, the Lord of Death, in the company of a dog, shaped in steamed rice flour by Bijay Bāsukala on the occasion of Yamapañcaka, "Yama's Fifth" for the performance of kijāpūjā.
Photo 5th November 2002

Yamadūt and Simhadūt, both carrying a club and lasso to capture their victims. Because of Yama's presence, this fifth day of the festival is also called Yamapañcaka, "Yama's Fifth".

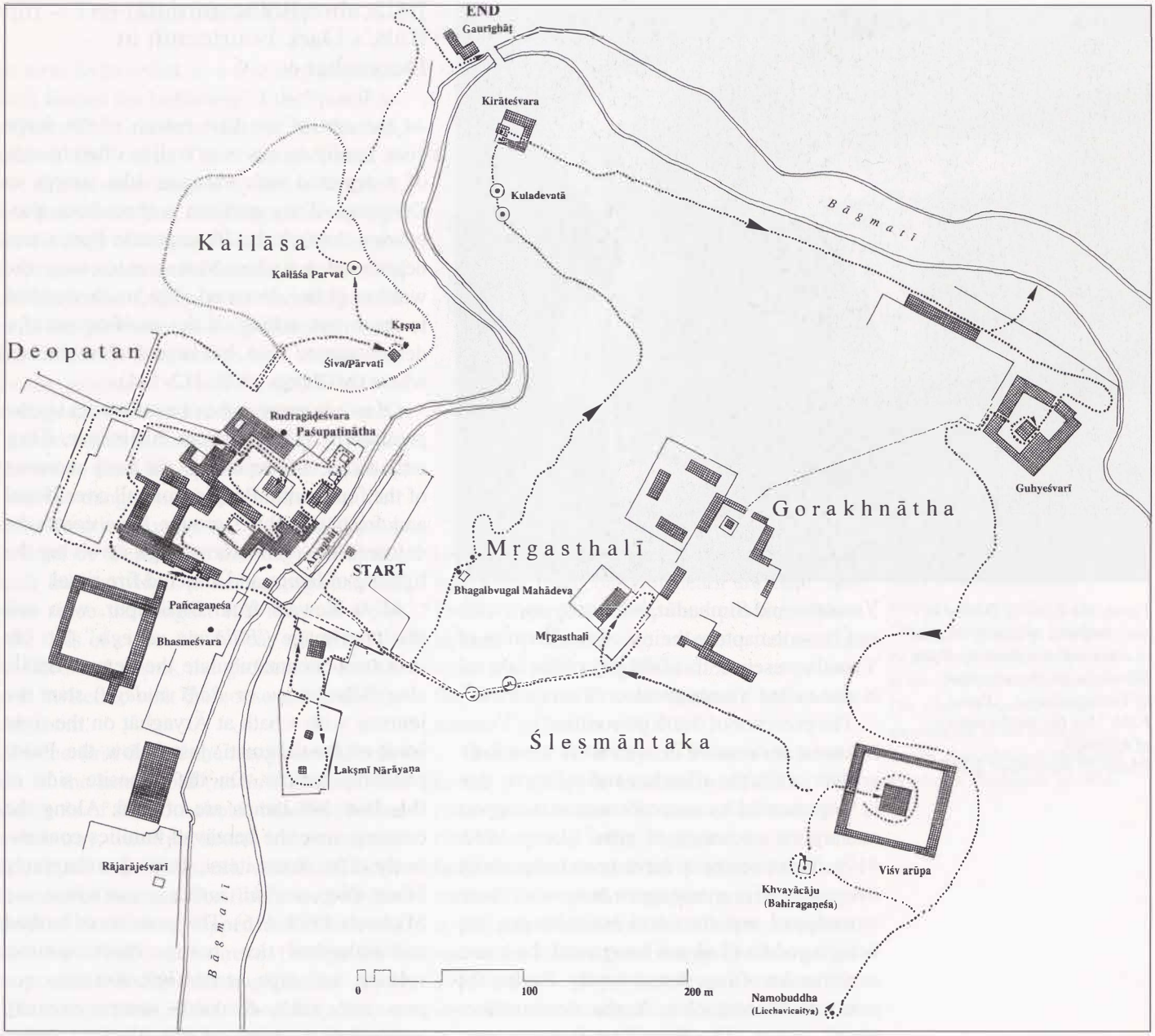
The presence of death personified by Yama has to be understood in contrast to what Robert Levy calls the affection and solidarity that is "represented by sororal emotional support and by the exchange of gifts" (Levy 1990: 417). Yama seems to have been temporarily overcome. His messengers have duly been worshipped and the ideal housekeeper, the benign goddess Lakṣmī has graced the house as the realm of hearth and family. Facing the remover of obstacles, Yama demonstrates moral agency. The New Year is given birth by Lakṣmī, as it were, while Yama already stands for its end. The beginning and the end classifies cyclic renewal.

Bālācahre/Bālācaturdaśī – Bālā's Dark Fourteenth in December

At the end of the first month of the lunar year, family members as well as often friends of a departed visit Paśupatinātha temple in Deopatan. They perform a three-hour procession through the Śleṣmāntaka Forest and neighbouring Kailāsa Mountain to ensure the welfare of the deceased. The myth attached to the event, telling of the pacification of a demon named Bālā, has been dealt with elsewhere (Michaels 1999: 112-134).

Of sole interest in the present context is the practice of pilgrims from Bhaktapur. They only arrive at Deopatan in the early morning of the fourteenth. People from all over Nepal and from all ethnic groups have come the day before for a nocturnal vigil involving the lighting of lamps and a sacred fire ritual.

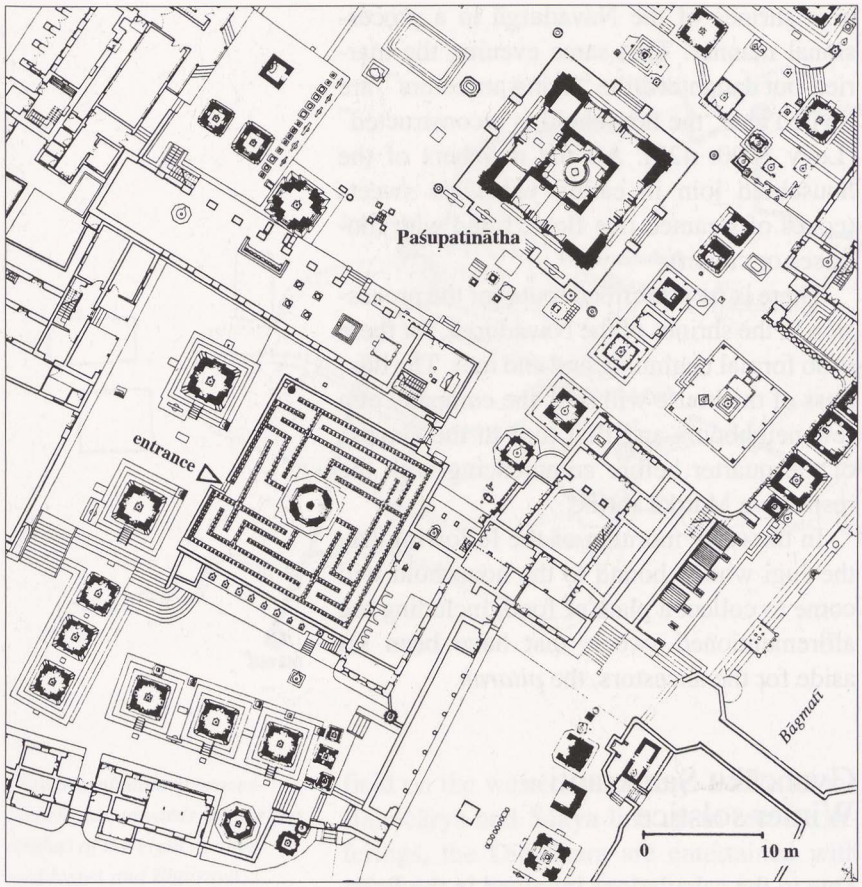
Most Newars from Bhaktapur, who call this pilgrimage *"Bālā mu vanegu"* (lit. "to visit und circumambulate the demon Bālā", also *Bālā hilegu* or *Bālā mulegu*) start the journey with a bath at Āryaghāṭ on the right bank of the Bāgmatī, just below the Paśupatinātha temple. On the opposite side of the river 108 lamps are offered. Along the ensuing route the bereaved families continuously offer seven items, termed collectively *bibau* (Nep. *sadbhī, satbiu or sat(a)byū*, see Michaels 1999: 116). This consists of husked and unhusked rice, barley, black sesame, spinach and rape seeds (*ikā*, *Brassica napus,* and *pakā*, *Brassica juncea rogusa*), and *svāvā*, a variety of rice (*Oryaza sativa*, Nep. *jungadhān*) that is used exclusively in ritual contexts. Representing the essential food items, *bibau* is also offered on the 7th day after death to small plots of agricultural land dedicated to the deceased. Coins and many other fruits (such as guava and citrus fruits), foodstuffs (such as black lentils, wheat flour, sweet potato, radish, maize, tur-

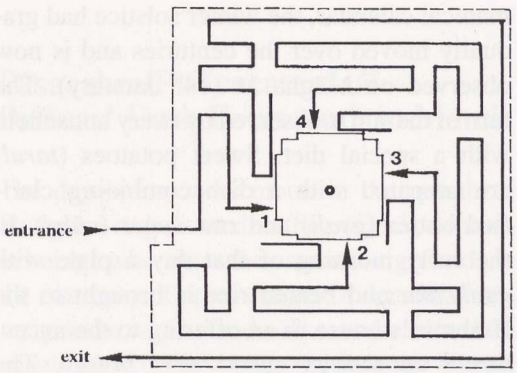


Deopatan: map documenting the processional route, performed by Narain Prasad Svāgamikha and Bikhu Bahādur Suvāl from Bhaktapur on the occasion of Bālācahre, on 3rd December 2002.

meric) and flowers are also scattered across the hill.

The procession then climbs the hill from the embankment of the Bāgmatī, visiting the Bhāgalbugal Mahādeva (where the following night the Bālāguṭhīpūjā is performed, see Michaels 1999: 123) and a "hidden" Mahādeva under the name of Gupteśvara. Passing a few ancestor deities, the path leads up to the western top of the forest and Kirāṭeśvara and down towards Gaurīghāṭ. From Guhyeśvarī the crowd has to climb the hill again in order to turn to a 7th century *licchavicaitya* (a *stūpa* of the period of the Licchavi dynasty) which is addressed as "Nāmobuddha". This designation refers to a Buddhist pilgrimage site





Abhimanyu Yantra or Causaṭṭhī Sthāna, the labyrinth-like structure with 525 liṅgas within the compound of the Paśupatinātha temple at Deopatan, to be passed through on the occasion of the Bālācahre procession.

Above
Site plan

Below
Diagrammatic representation of the fourfold anti-clockwise movement within the labyrinth towards the central temple of Koṭiliṅga, followed by a clock-wise movement towards the exit.

east of Kathmandu Valley which stands for the place where the Buddha offered himself to a lioness who could not feed her cubs. The remaining path leads through the deer forest, Mṛgasthalī, and passes by a loose stone which is addressed as the "deaf grandfather" (*khvayāju*). Shaking the stone is meant to let the deceased, the *pitṛ*, know, that their relatives have come. Returning down to the Bāgmatī, the path leads through the 20th century temples dedicated to Rāmacandra and Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa.

Finally, people have to queue up at the eastern entrance to the temple compound of Paśupatinātha temple. An hour of waiting is needed as the narrow path through Causaṭṭhī Sthāna (for location see Michaels 1994/II: no. III.1.114), a labyrinth-like structure with 525 *śivaliṅgas,* can only be entered singly.

The structure is also known as Abhimanyu Yantra in remembrance of the story of the Mahābhārata, according to which Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna and Subhadrā, entered a labyrinthine structure called Cakravyūha. Following a meandering but continuous path that is directed four times to the central temple of Koṭiliṅga, the pilgrim walks past 525 *liṅgas*. The officiating priest assures the pilgrims that they will be free from another cycle of 84 *lakh* (8.4 million) births and certainly from being reborn as an animal.

The classical Cretan type of labyrinth creates a sevenfold motion and symbolizes a rite of passage as the initiated renunciate enters a separate world. The path from normal existence into the isolated space of the labyrinth signifies death and return through rebirth. In the Christian context the path through the labyrinth became a valid metaphor for the purification of the soul. The labyrinth which pilgrims from Bhaktapur labour through is oriented towards the four cardinal points and offers a fourfold movement of almost identical pattern. Each movement is first clockwise and then anticlockwise, while the overall

movement is anticlockwise. The straight path returning to the exit along a bordering wall is on the other hand clockwise. This constant alternation between a clockwise ("life") and anticlockwise motion ("death") is meant to remind the pilgrims of the frailty of existence.

Freed, almost spewed out of the narrow confines of the labyrinth, the pilgrim climbs onto the Kailāsa, a high plateau beyond the temple. In a final move a rock outcropping is worshipped as a replica of "Kailāsa Parvat" as the seat of Śiva. As everywhere else along the processional path, offerings are collected by members of the Pvaḥ sub-caste.

Yaḥmāripunhi – Full moon in December

Around full moon in Maṅgśīr (November/ December) almost all funeral associations (*siguthī*) entertain their members with a sumptuous feast. On the days preceding full moon the active members engage in feasts after worshipping their respective Ganedyaḥ (Gaṇeśa) and Matṛkā.

On *cahre* (the 14th day) these associations feed their non-active members and receive the annual obligatory offering of three *pati* of rice (some 12 kilograms or 340 Rs or approx. 4 Euro in cash). Only male members are entertained; a second dish is carried home for the remaining members of the family.

On the day of the full moon every family prepares sweet dishes of rice flour to celebrate the end of the rice harvest. Farmers worship the rice that is kept in their storeroom with offerings of sweets. The room is then kept closed for two weeks and re-opened on the day of new moon to repeat the worship.

There is an air of joy in the city for the harvest, heralded by the rebirth of the Mother Goddesses, is now definitely complete. Women will now make their round visiting the nine shrines of the Navadurgā in a processional manner. That same evening the married-out daughters, the "living ancestors", are invited and "the household is reconstructed" (Levy 1990: 423). All the members of the household join in eating *yaḥmārhi* sweets (cones of steamed rice flour, filled with molasses or cream).

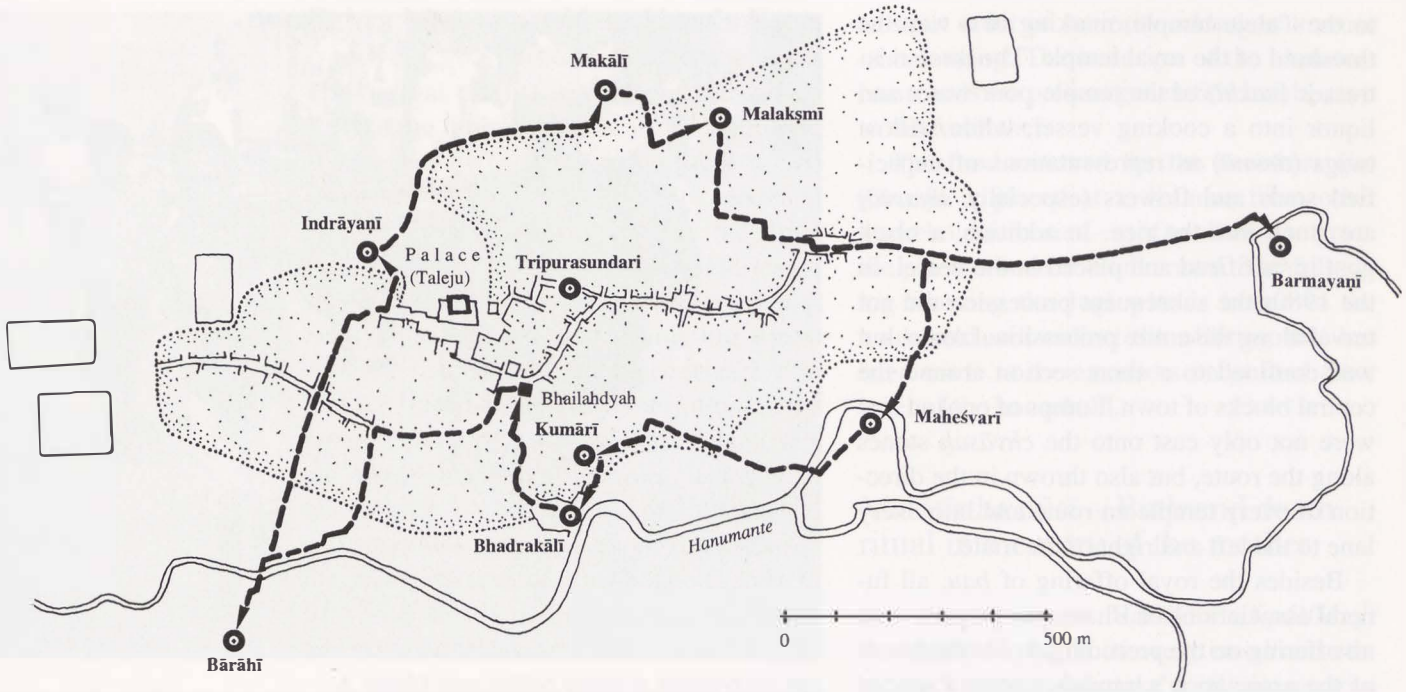
There is no prescribed route for the procession to the shrines of the Navadurgā, for there is no formal beginning and end to it. The mistress of the house will seek the company of a few neighbours and first turn to the Gaṇeśa of the quarter before commencing with the respective Mātṛkā shrine.

In the early morning of the following day the Jugi who is bound to the household will come to collect a plate of food, including the aforementioned sweets that have been set aside for the ancestors, the *pitaraḥ*.

Gyaḥcāku Saṃkranti – Winter solstice

Due to the calculations involved in the Brahmanical calendar, the winter solstice had gradually moved over the centuries and is now observed on Māgha 1st (14th January). The turn of the sun is observed by every household with a special diet. Sweet potatoes (*tarul*) are prepared with a dish combining clarified butter (*gyaḥ)* and raw sugar (*cāku*). In the early morning of that day a plate with *gyaḥcāku* and beaten rice is brought to the Brahmin's house as an offering to the ancestors – an activity called *nislā biyegu*. The Brahmin utters the necessary ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) and asks for the names of the male and female ancestors of three generations past. This short ritual is completed by him handing out a blessed offering (*prasāda*) and receiving a bank note as *dakṣiṇā*.

On the same day the five Dīpaṅkara Buddhas of Bhaktapur are carried to an open



Circumambulatory processional path towards the shrines (pīṭha) of the eight mother-goddesses and Bhairava (Bhailaḍyaḥ), the "master" of the city, on the occasion Yaṃmāripunhi (full moon), to celebrate the annual reconstitution of the funeral associations (siguthī).

field on the western periphery. While all the Bajrācārya and Śākya line up to receive offerings, the Dīpaṅkara are entertained with a feast.

Pasacahre/Piśācacaturdaśī – Piśācas' Dark Fourteenth in March

The day before new moon in the month of Phālguna is dedicated to the *piśācas*, demonic beings who roam the cremation grounds in the company of other classes of demons, *bhūtas*, *pretas*, *vetālas* and *rākṣasas* (see also Michaels 1992). They frequent deserted houses and block the crossroads, where the *chvāsaḥ* stones represent their visible abodes.

Similar to the class of demons collectively addressed as *bhūt-pret*, the *piśācas* are believed to represent those deceased for whom the necessary death rituals were not performed, or not in the prescribed way. These departed have not joined the ancestors, so their existence as a *preta* is not confined to the period of 45 days or twelve months. Not having had the chance to enter into the state of a *pitṛ*, they are condemned to remain in a condition of restlessness. In order to avert their harmful intentions, the *piśācas* have constantly to be propitiated with offerings of cooked rice (*bau*) and meat.

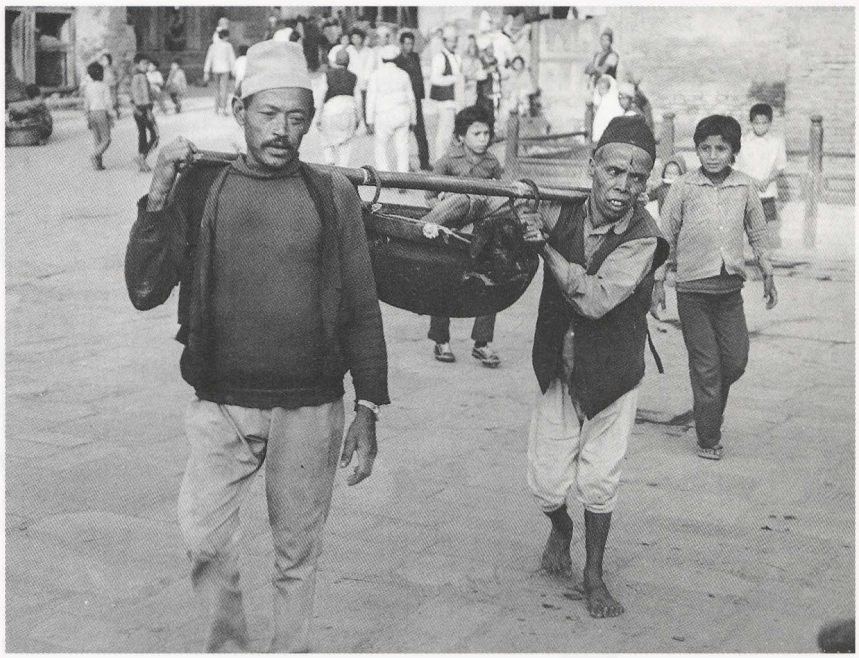
Two generations ago, butchers (Nāy) serving in the temple of Taleju, Bhaktapur's royal goddess, would make their way along the regular processional route on every Dark Fourteenth to cast rice (an action called *bau hālegu*) on all the *chvāsaḥ* stones to feed and thus propitiate the hungry ghosts. In recent decades, this monthly processional offering is done only on the Dark Fourteenth in March – an occasion on which offerings of cooked rice can be seen on most *chvāsaḥ* stones in town.

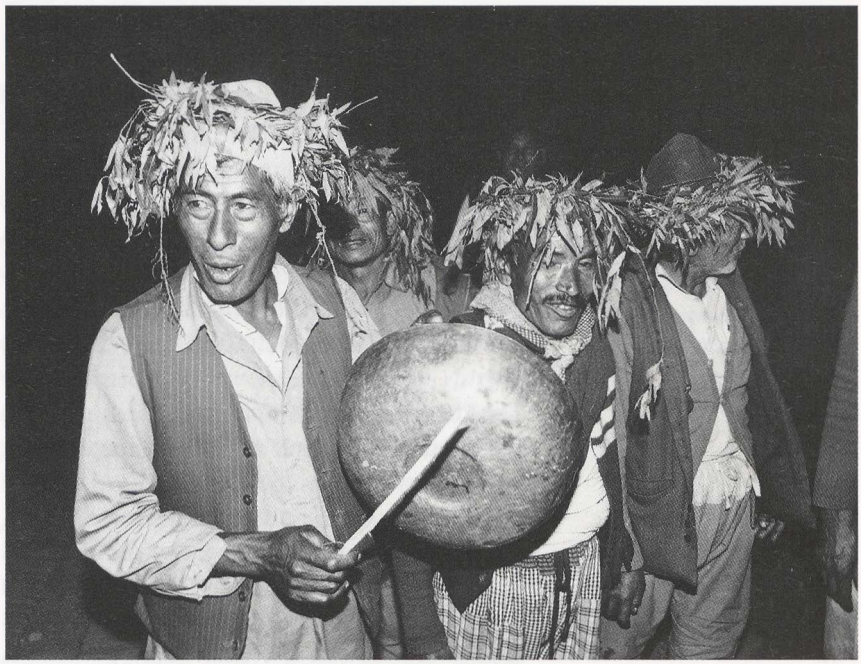
The most prominent *bau* offering of the day is prepared by a Karmācārya priest just behind the Golden Gate, the outer access

to the Taleju temple, marking in a way the threshold of the royal temple. The three mistresses (*nakhĩ*) of the temple pour water and liquor into a cooking vessel, while willow twigs (*tisimā*) as representations of unpacified souls and flowers (especially *sinasvã)* are stuck into the rice. In addition, a black goat is sacrificed and placed in the vessel. In the 1980s the subsequent procession did not travel along the entire processional route, but was confined to a short section around the central blocks of town. Lumps of cooked rice were not only cast onto the *chvāsaḥ* stones along the route, but also thrown in the direction of every temple en route and into every lane to the left and right of the route.

Besides the royal offering of *bau*, all funeral associations of Bhaktapur prepare such an offering on the preceding day in the house of the association's caretaker or in a special building (*guthīchẽ*) that serves the association. The active members of the association leave the house late that night in a jolly mood, carrying straw torches and wearing turbans woven from willow twigs. Fresh willow twigs are collected from trees along the irrigation channels. These fast-growing trees are regularly pruned in February or March and the twigs stored away by the funeral associations for use in cremations. More than one hundred funeral associations are engaged that night in casting the *bau* offerings onto the specific *chvāsaḥ*-stone to which the house of the respective association is ritually bound.

The fact that the funeral associations and not the individual households make the ritual offerings to the unpacified dead gives grounds for the assumption that incomplete cremations would produce a special class of demons that need to be propitiated.





Above
Procession to offer cooked rice (bau halegu) to the unpacified spirits of town on the occasion of Pasacahre.
Photo 28th March 1987

Below
Members of the Bāsukala funeral association wear turbans of willow twigs on the occasion of Pasacahre.
Photo March 1986

Caitra Masanta – New Year's Eve

The festival of Bisketjātrā frames the New Year of the lunisolar calendar. In a sequence of nine days (Caitra 27 to Vaiśākha 5, see Gutschow 1996: 287) the theme of death and rebirth dominates urban space as the ritual arena and is also reflected in the individual household. Due to the nature of the calculations of the Brahmanical calendar, the vernal equinox has moved over the centuries to the 13th April. In almost all cultures of the northern hemisphere the vernal equinox was the ideal occasion to perform festivals of renewal. In Bhaktapur the aspect of renewal finds expression in a variety of ritual acts. In the context of death, we confine ourselves to the reference to a murder that served as the precondition for liberation and creation.

A world tree called *yaḥsī* is erected on the last day of the year, with two banners in the shape of serpents demonstrating the victory over those demonic forces that made ruling impossible. A foreign prince had to receive a sword from the mistress of Bhaktapur, Bhadrakālī, to kill the serpents and liberate an unmarried princess. In memory of those many unsuccessful princes who died, a bier without a corpse is carried to the ritual ground the same night, to the sound of the butcher's death music (Wegner 1996). A pot is carried instead of the expected corpse of another prince. The erected pole demonstrates creation. The founding of the town required a murder: "The prince killed the serpents and liberated the princess, who, in return, provided him with a kingdom" (Vergati 1996: 335).

Every household in Bhaktapur celebrates the victory at home and invites the ancestors to participate in this happy occasion. Chickens or goats are sacrificed at a nearby non-iconic shrine that acts as the place of reference within a section (*ilākā*) of the town. The distribution of the sacrificed animal among the members of the lineage according to strict order of seniority addresses a sense of belonging. The inclusion of the ancestors transcends the present generation and binds it to the forefathers.

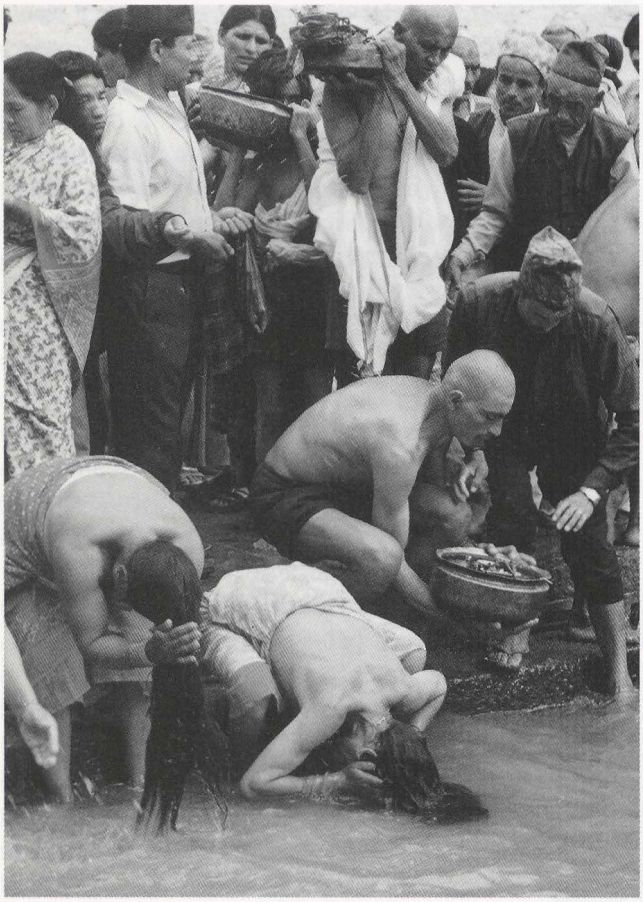
The food reserved for the ancestors (*jugibvaḥ*) is placed at a distance from other household activities – as if to allow it to grace the place unseen and unharmed. The following morning the Jugi who is bound to the household will collect the offering that has been made to the ancestors on ground floor level of the household.

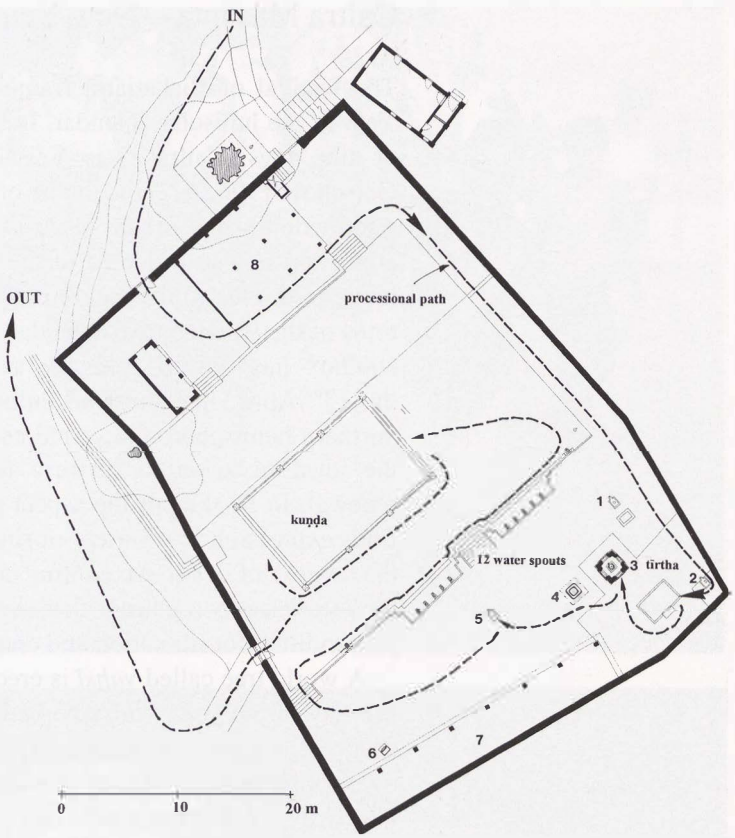
Mātātīrtha aũsī – Bath and death ritual in memory of the mother

On new moon in Vaiśākha (April/May) thousands of people of every creed and ethnic background undertake a pilgrimage to a water source in the south-western section of the Kathmandu Valley called Mātātīrtha. The name of the place indicates that it is a "crossing place" (*tīrtha*), where one may cross over "to the far shore of the worlds of heaven" (Eck 1981: 323). Diana Eck aptly explains that "in this locative form of religiousness, the place itself is the primary locus of devotion" (ibid.).

Situated at Mātātīrtha is a small, architecturally framed tank (Skt. *kuṇḍa*) in the waters of which the pilgrim is supposed to see the face of his or her mother (*mātā*). The reflecting water is experienced as a mirror: it is the mother who returns the gaze into the tank. Or is the pilgrim looking through a window and beyond, into the realm of heaven, the surface of the water marking the borderline of the "crossing"?

The visit to the place is not compulsory for Newars, unlike the visit to Deopatan is in December. But for many it is an annual observance. People choose between three different kinds of rituals. Many people place a simple leaf plate with flowers and incense





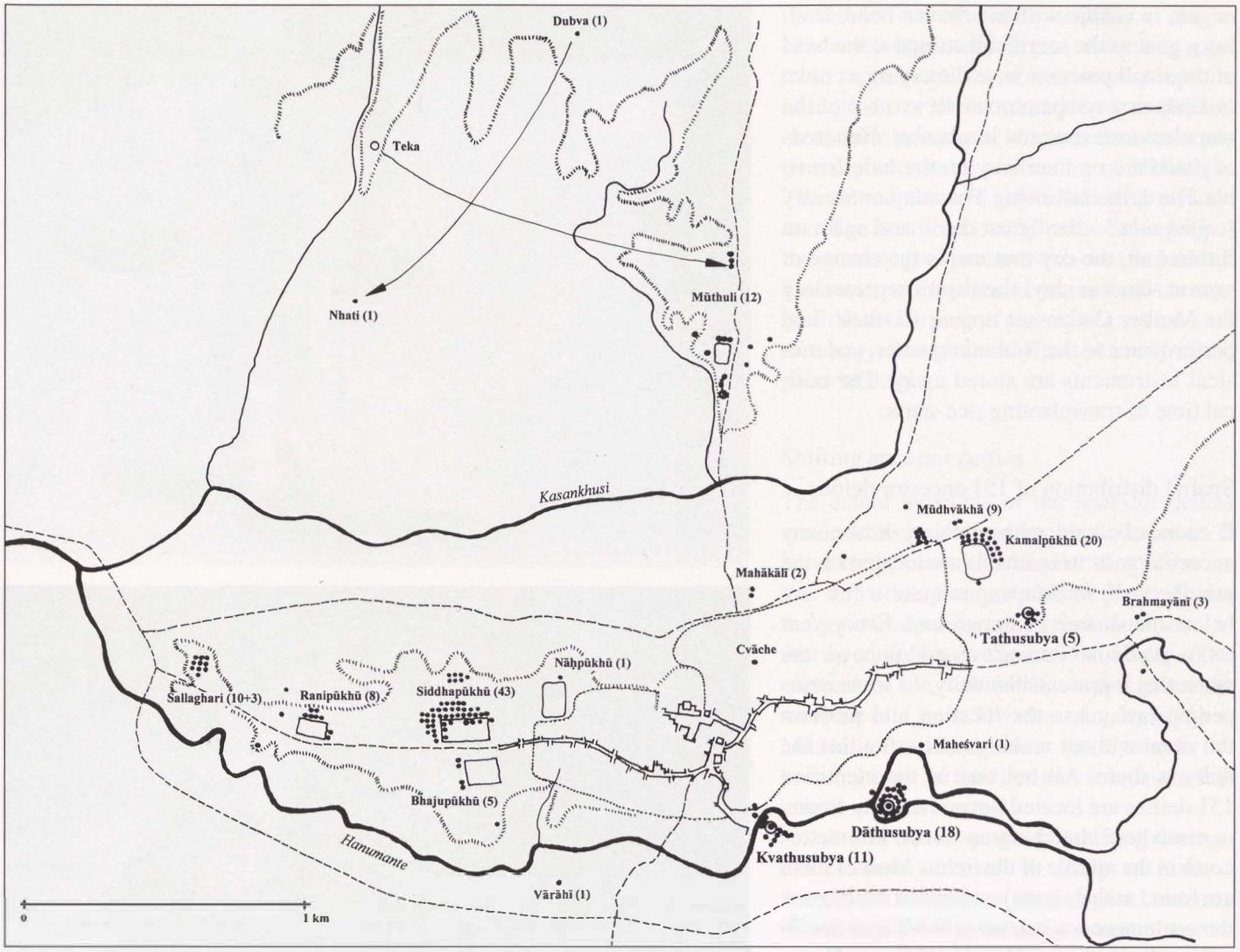
somewhere along the frame of the large tank, without taking advantage of the services of a Brahmin.

Other visitors carry a plate, complete with husked rice, wheat flour, salt, turmeric, lentils and ginger – the usual *nisṭā* offering. This plate is offered to one of the many Brahmins who provide their services. In exchange, the priest recites some *stotras*, asks for the name of the deceased mother, hands out a ring of *dūrvā* grass and performs the symbolical offering of a cow to the deceased (*godāna*). For an offering of a few rupees he marks the client's forehead with yellow paste – the colour of death. The minority of visitors perform a full *tīrthaśrāddha*, the regular death ritual at this specific place. The large balls made of wheat or barley flour are dedicated to the three preceding generations, along with many small ones for unknown ancestors. Finally all of the balls are cast into the large tank, where all of the visitors perform their ablutions.

Inscriptions tell us that in order to channel the gushing water, Queen Viṣṇumatī Devī installed ten spouts in the year 1739 AD. Since the bath enjoys growing popularity, a few shelters (*pāṭi*) have recently been added together with a compound wall. Visitors are carefully guided along a prescribed path.

Left
Offerings made in the context of an ancestor ritual dedicated to the deceased mother are immersed in the kuṇḍa at Mātātīrtha.
Photo 1st May 2003

Right
Site plan of Mātātīrtha



Location of 151 sites of ancestor deities (dugudyaḥ in the company of Nārāyaṇa) near water bodies, shrines of the mother goddesses, and on ridges. A few (see above left) have been relocated in recent times.

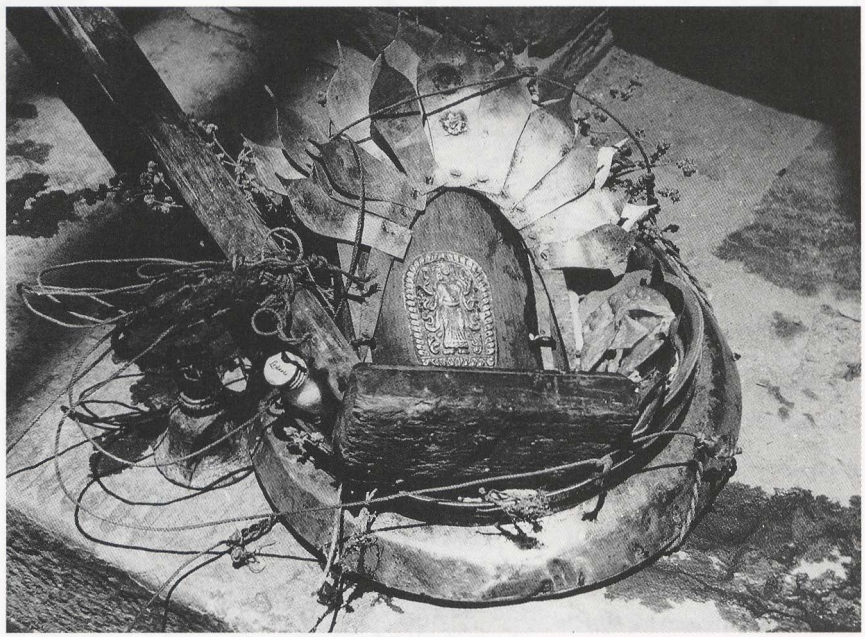
Dugudyaḥpūjā – Ancestor worship in May/June

The time frame

A period of 73 days in early summer is designated for the performance of ancestor worship. The sequence of appropriate days for the enactment of the ritual appears to be complex: the first group of farmers (Tvāyna from Ghatka) start on the second Thursday after full moon in Vaiśākha; the tenth day after full moon is designated as the second day; then comes the Indestructible Third (*akṣaya tṛtīyā*) after new moon and then all the Thursdays and Sundays until Sithīnakaḥ, the sixth day of the bright moon in June. A full month later one further day is reserved for thirteen lineages of barbers from Gvaḥmādhī, Yāchẽ and Taulāchẽ. Thus, in 2003, a total of fourteen days qualified for the performance of ancestor worship.

Very few members of the farmers' lineages can be seen on the first two days heading out to their designated places beyond the city's limits. The head of the patrilineage, the

nāyaḥ, is visible with his shaven head, leading a goat as the sacrificial animal at the head of the small procession, and carrying a crown (*kikĩpā*) or a tympanum as the symbol of the nameless ancestral god in a basket. Hundreds of *phukī* are on their way on the Indestructible Third, the following Thursday or Sunday (called *taḥdĩ* – the "great day") and again on Sithīnakaḥ, the day that marks the change of season. On this day, the masks representing the Mother Goddesses appear for their final performance in the Brahmin quarter, and musical instruments are stored away. The critical time of transplanting rice starts.



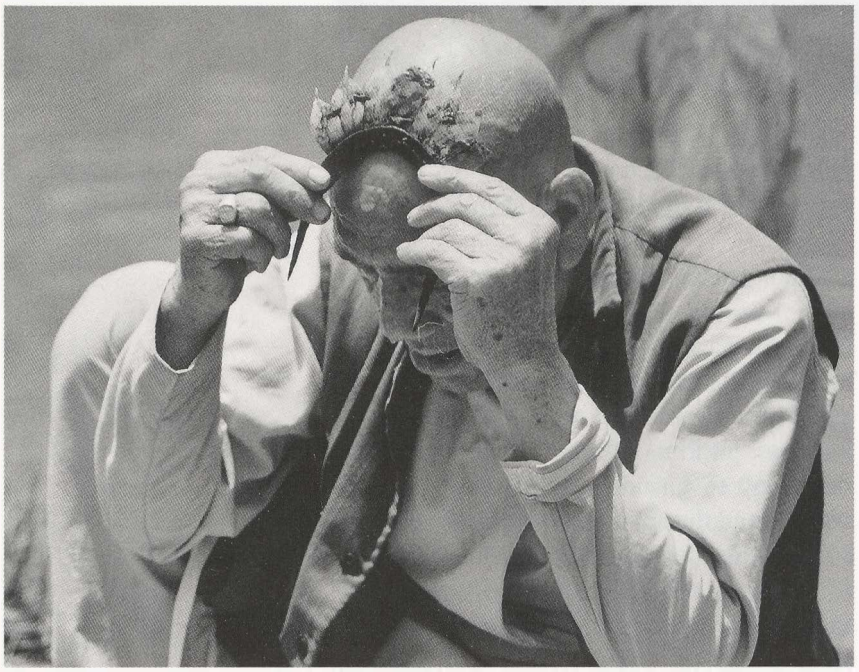
The head of a farmer's patrilineage (phukī), carrying the crown of his ancestor deity (below Nārāyaṇa can be seen) in the company of the sacrificial goat to the site beyond the city's limits.
Photo 1st May 1987

Spatial distribution of 151 ancestor deities

It cannot be said with certainty how many ancestral gods (*dugudyaḥ*) are located on the periphery of Bhaktapur, as quite a few are below the surface of the ground. Every year a few *phukī* have to search and uncover the stone that represents the deity. In some cases people just guess the location and perform the ritual without making really sure that the deity is there. All but one of the identified 151 deities are located beyond the city limits, or elsewhere stretching up to two kilometres north in the middle of the fields. Most of them are found at the ponds just beyond the edge of the settlement – 43 alone at Siddhapūkhū, 20 at Kamalpūkhū – and beyond the river Hanumante, 11 at Kvathusubya and 18 at Dāthusubya. Only one *dugudyaḥ* is located in town, in Cvāchẽ , in the middle of the road.

Neither the specific places nor the nature of the ritual provides any clue as to why they are scattered with a marked predilection for bodies of water – rivers and ponds.

The opposition of outside (the non-iconic stones) and inside (the portable symbol kept by the *nāyaḥ* of the lineage) reflects the dual representation of the divine, which is also known in the case of the Mother Goddesses and all those deities who are propitiated with blood sacrifices. Their non-iconic form protects the settlement on the periphery while their iconic form is kept in a god-house (*dyaḥchẽ*) within the settlement. The iconic form is carried in a procession to the non-iconic stone on the eve of the New Year in celebration of a ritual of renewal. In a way



Above
Members of a sub-caste of farmers (Bāti), have prepared to worship their ancestor deity at a pair of stones in Mūthu.
Photo 3rd May 1987

Below
A potter (Kumaḷi) worshipping his ancestor deity, represented by a crown worked in silver at Raṇipūkhū.
Photo 4th May 2003

the iconic form returns to its place of origin. Likewise, one could argue, the many portable representations of ever more *phukī* are brought from their ordered environment to meet their non-iconic original form in a potentially unordered continuum of landscape. The annual union is celebrated with a blood sacrifice in order to reaffirm the belonging of those many groups that were once separated. The return to the place of origin seems to suggest the recharging of the replica with a kind of energy that obviously persists only at the place of origin.

Shifting ancestor deities

The actual locations of the ancestor deities are never as binding as one might imagine. It is rather the once-identified or "found" stone that embodies the qualities of place. Under the guidance of a ritual specialist it can in fact be shifted to a "better" or simply more convenient site – a ritual act that requires the sacrifice of a goat. The case of a *dugudyaḥ* at Mūthu is described below for it reveals the exact number of families and sub-castes that turn to a specific site.

A few more cases of shifting lineage deities have surfaced. A group of Sulu, a sub-caste of farmers from Byāsi, recently abandoned the original location on a narrow ridge to shift the stones to a place along the road north of the former pond of Mūthuli. It cannot be said with certainty whether the group involved sought a more comfortable location or whether the original place was really under threat from the expanding construction industry, which was exploiting the hill for sand.

In a similar case a group of Suvāl, another sub-caste of farmers from Byāsi, shifted their lineage deity to a small cluster of houses that had developed in the previous generation.

Another case of a *phukī* of Ācājus, parapriests of farmer status, demonstrates how

critical such an intervention can be. It is said that the Ācāju shifted the stone after having duly consulted with an astrologer, but the moment he offered an egg at the new location, a crow – considered to be a messenger of Yama, the Lord of Death – took the egg and returned it to the house of the Ācāju. From that time on the lineage abandoned the "outer" location of the lineage god and now performs the annual ritual on the terrace of the house.

In a rare case a shift of focus was achieved by a group of Rājopādhyāya without any material intervention. Since their lineage god was located in an increasingly militarised zone on the ridge west of Bhaktapur, they decided to perform their ritual at the non-iconic representation of one of the tutelary goddesses of the Malla kings, Duimāju, in the garden behind the former palace. The Rājopadhyāya from Khauma, however, continued to turn to the original place.

The architectural framing of stones

The shape of the non-iconic lineage gods varies greatly. In few cases a single horizontal flag-stone serves the purpose. A row of up to 12 carved lotus flowers indicates its non-secular context. Other stones are upright field stones, rammed into the earth. Often, the configuration of stones is oriented merely by an arch or a U-shaped wall, serving as a kind of backdrop. The scene depicted on the arch follows the standard formula of a Kīrtimukha at the apex devouring two snake bodies, while a pair of aquatic animals (*makara*) are guarding the bottom ends. Should this architectural element also have a rear wall, a triangular hole ensures the unhindered circulation of the spirits that are supposed to haunt the site. In many cases the lineage god is unidentifiable because a number of stones are kept in a row. But at least three of them are named as *dugudyaḥ,* Bhairava and Nārāyaṇa. More often, the stone facing west or east is identified as Bhairava, while a second stone – either upright, or more frequently just a carved horizontal lotus stone – is positioned at a distance of one to five metres at a right angle facing south.

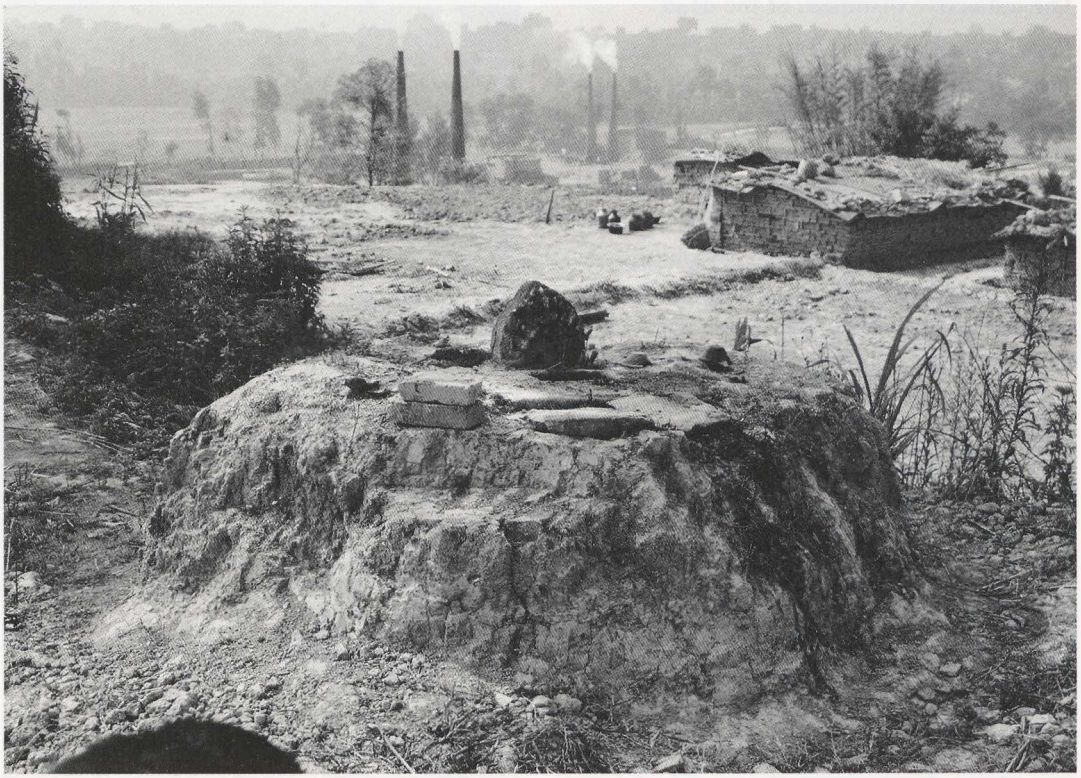
Until recently, three lineage gods were kept under a roofed temple or shrine-like structure, all of them beyond Cupĩghāṭ. A new temple was being constructed in 2003 to house the most important of the 18 *dugudyaḥs* on and at the mound at Dāthusubya, while a simple cemented shrine was constructed below Bhājupūkhū in the 1990s to house the lineage deity of the Nyaichyei sub-caste of farmers. More roofs were under construction in 2003, indicating that the process of architectural framing will accelerate. The Hādā of Chathariyā status even constructed a high wall to delineate a courtyard around their lineage god north of Nāhpūkhū, to which only initiated members are allowed access.

Sāpāru/Gāījātrā – Cow worship in August

Celebrating procreation

Full moon in August, Gunipunhi (Nep. Janaipūrṇimā), is one of the most festive days of the year. Across the entire range of the Himalayas, pilgrims of all ethnic groups make their way to glacial lakes as the source of water – and thus of life.

In Bhaktapur such a pilgrimage is performed in miniature form. In the early morning, a replica of Śiva is worshipped as Silumahādev at a water tank named Kaludaha on the periphery of Bhaktapur. The tank serves as a substitute for Gosainkuṇḍa, the glacial lake high up in the Himalaya where the blue throated Śiva (Nīlakaṇṭha) found relief after swallowing poison. Śiva's survival is celebrated and those who cannot undertake



The site of an ancestor deity survives in the middle of an area at Mūthu. The surface clay in this area is used for brick making.
Photo 11th May 2003

the arduous pilgrimage worship the replica. Brahmanical priests preside over the place, and tie a protective thread around the wrists of their clients.

In the late afternoon, the first procession sets out in anticipation of the Sāpāru festivities on the following day, during which one representation of a cow is carried for each of the deceased of the past twelve months along the regular processional path. Two members of the Cyaḥ sub-caste – those who used to attend the pyre of the Brahmins and members of high status groups – head the procession with drums and cymbals, accompanied by two Jugi playing the shawm. Two persons personifying Khyaḥ-ghosts in black attire and two demons with red hair make obscene gestures to the music produced by 30 youngsters in a stick dance to the onomatopoetic sound of *gẽ-tã-gi-si*. Obscene slogans are shouted, as if to conjure up an opposite world and break the bounds of social conduct. Upon return, the participants of this first procession are served a soup made of nine ingredients, including peas and beans. Nine is the number of the day: one's clothes should be changed nine times, and unmarried boys and girls as well as couples who seek progeny visit Svayambhūnāth in Kathmandu and return home to visit nine step-wells (*gupuhiti*) that same night. With full-moon, a festive period of nine days is initiated.

The number seven permeates the death rituals, referring as it does to the seven generations that are remembered and whose descendants form an exogamous group. "Nine" stands rather for the representation of an oriented space, of which Bhaktapur can be seen as a replica: space within which a procreative world unfolds.

The collective dismissal of the dead

The day following full moon is dedicated to the collective dismissal of the dead, represented in the form of cows, which are instrumental in leading the departed across the dangerous river of the underworld, Vaitaraṇī. The dead are believed to reach Yama, the lord of the underworld within 12 months, passing a terrifying forest, two rivers and 16 cities. After six months the deceased is offered a boat, complete with paddles, during an elaborate death ritual which also involves the offering of water and balls of wheat flour – the dead is in need of cooling water and nourishing food. Notwithstanding this supportive offer to cross the Vaitaraṇī safely, all of the town's deceased are offered a cow to the same end in a collective effort to dispel the potentially dangerous souls from the civic realm of the living. Clinging to the tail of the cow, the helpless soul will be able to cross the river.

Types of cows representing the dead

The cows dedicated to children who have died prematurely before the initiation ritual of *kaytāpūjā* (for boys) and *ihi* (for girls) are of simple design. Called "the little cow" (*sācā*), it is a simple basket of Nepalese style, wrapped in a piece of cloth and decorated with a coloured block print depicting the face of a cow (*sāpākvaḥ*) and a pair of horns on top made of braided straw. The brother of the dead child carries the basket over his head, accompanied by another brother or the father. The accompanying person carries a bag to collect offerings of sweet bread, sugar cane, fruits and coins. All of the bereaved families have prepared such food, which they share with similarly bereaved families. In 1986 almost forty percent (in 2002 only 15 percent) of all 500 deceased (in 2002 we counted 464) were in fact children.

There are four more alternatives for representing the cow. In all cases the Brahmanical house priest, who represents the deceased in all death rituals, is called to receive the gift of a cow (*godāna*). He places himself in front of the client's house beside the guardian of the threshold, the *pikhālākhu* stone. Opposite squats the chief mourner, either below or beside a cow or a structure representing a cow. He performs the *pūjā* to the instructions of the priest and presents the usual offerings of food, fruits and sweets (*sirā* and *nislā*) dedicated to the deceased. The *mhāymacā* again assumes an important role, for she offers flowers and *ṭikā* to both the cow and the pictures of the deceased. She also presents sweets (*svāri* and *malpa*), cucumber and peas as well as *dakabaji*, a mixture of curd and beaten rice to all those who do not belong to the bereaved family. Special care is taken of the helpers who will carry the structure for a day's pay. They are offered food before setting out on the procession, and the offerings (*mari dān yagu*, lit. "to provide offerings of sweet bread") add to their income. The women of the house will wail as soon as the cow is about to leave the threshold. The

Block print depicting a decorated cow, to be fixed to a bamboo scaffold to form a symbolic cow that leads the deceased across Vaitarāṇi, the dangerous river of the underworld.
Printed in Bhaktapur in 1975.

A "little cow", carried along the processional path on the occasion of Sāpāru, the day after full moon in August. The cow is represented by a basket which is carried by the brother of a child that died before having been initiated into the patrilineage. Another brother carries a bag to receive offerings presented by all of the mourning families in town.
Photo 31st August 1985

chief mourner and his brothers accompany the scaffold-cow without performing in any further actions.

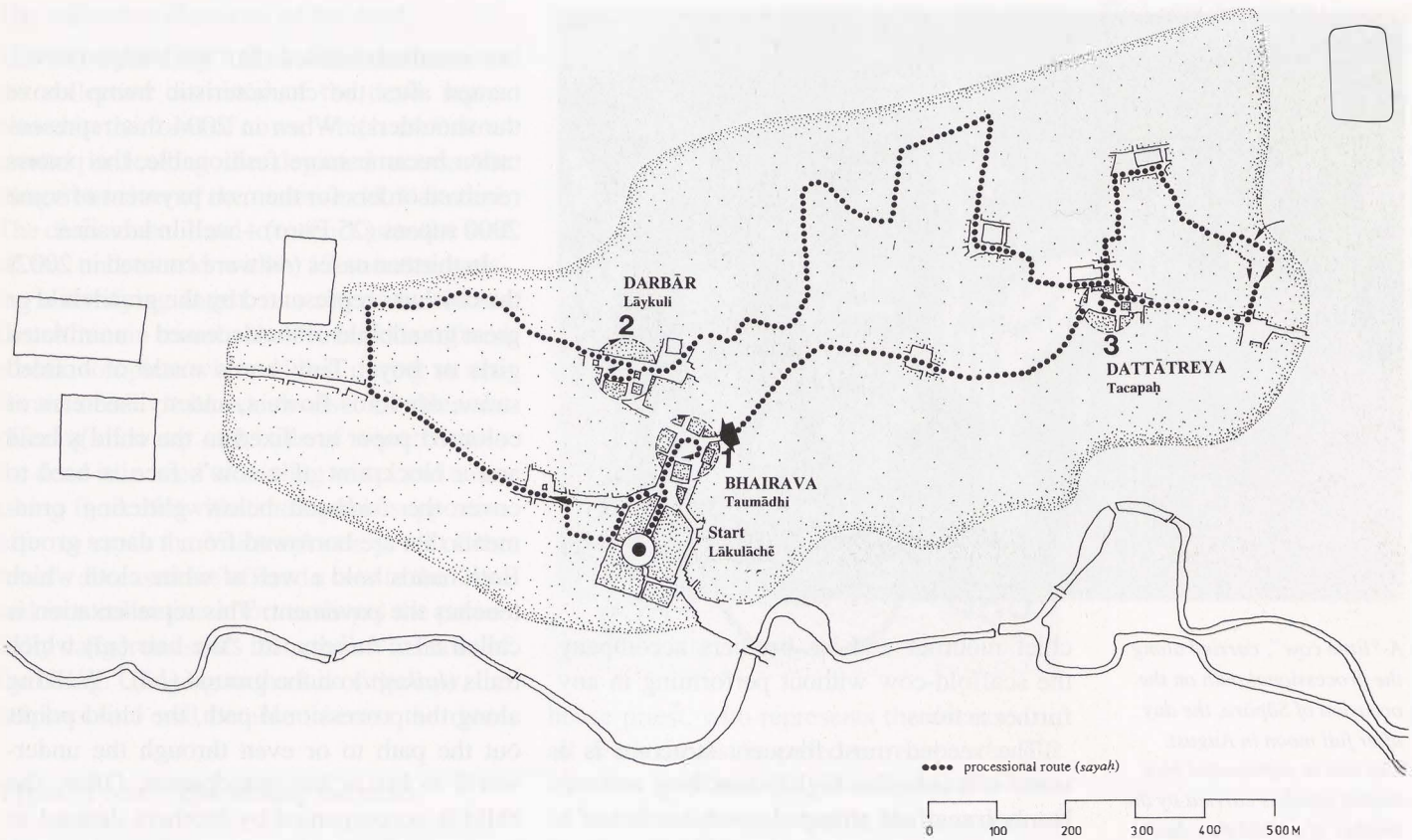
The second most frequent structure is a seven-ells (*nhayku*) high (some three metres) bamboo scaffold wrapped in white cloth if a man has died, or in black cloth if a woman has died. In 1986 half of all cows (in 2002 two-thirds) appeared in this shape (*tāhāsa*). For several decades, probably since photographs have become readily available, pictures of the deceased are fixed to the structure along with colourful prints of deities, preferably depicting Śiva (often in the company of his wife Pārvatī), Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa. The individualization of the dead probably reflects a dynamic trend to transcend the anonymity of death.

In 1986, twenty-four families decided to hire a living cow for this day from a villager or a Brahmin, thus representing a "real" vehicle for the deceased to transcend the dangerous river of the underworld, the Vaitaraṇī. In the same year sixteen potter families shaped a bull in black mud with horns rendered in gold, and placed on a wooden platform that was either carried on people's shoulders, on a cart, or on a three-wheeler. This representation is called *dvãsācā* (lit. "the humped cow", named after the characteristic hump above the shoulders). When in 2004 this representation became more fashionable, the potters received orders for them on payment of some 2000 rupees (25 Euro) – well in advance.

In thirteen cases (44 were counted in 2002) the cow was represented by the grandchild or great grandchild of the deceased – uninitiated girls or boys. Tiny horns made of braided straw, dry lotus flowers, and stylised ears of coloured paper are fixed to the child's head and a blockprint of a cow's face is used to cover the forehead below glittering ornaments that are borrowed from a dance group. Both hands hold a web of white cloth which touches the pavement. This representation is called *bãsã luikegu*, lit. "the hair (*sã*) which trails (*luikegu*) on the ground (*bã*)." Walking along the processional path, the child points out the path to or even through the underworld to his or her grandparent. Often, the child is accompanied by brothers dressed as the couple Śiva and Pārvatī, or as the brothers Rām and Lakṣman.

Few cases can be seen of mothers who died in childbed (in 1986 only four were observed). In such cases a small cow is attached to the large cow representing the mother.

Buddhist priests, goldsmiths, painters, oil pressers, stone carvers, dyers – members of all the Buddhist occupational groups – worship *caityas* instead of offering a cow to their deceased. The *caitya* (or *stūpa*) not only represents the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, but also the *dharmakāya*, his transcendental form. Representing the manifestation of the timeless and permanent, the *caitya* stands for non-duality, the exact opposite of a funerary monument whose very existence bespeaks duality (see Gutschow 1997: 31). All of the *caityas* of Bhaktapur are visited in a continuous procession. Just recently, the oil pressers (Sāymi) have started to shape large *caityas*



Procession of all cows, representing the deceased of the past twelve months on the occasion of Sāpāru, the day following full moon in August. The end of the procession is formed by two large cows representing the divine couple of the town, Bhairava (Suyāma Bhailadyaḥ) and Bhadrakālī. They are accompanied by the cows originating from the quarter of Lākulāchē. The three main squares of the town are honoured with a threefold processional round.

of black clay which are carried along the processional route in the company of the cows. By joining the mainstream, the Buddhist community seems to be succumbing to a social dynamism.

In the neighbouring town of Patan the Buddhist majority dominates the urban rituals. There is a procession of cows that is joined by the Hindu community, but thousands of people join the *matayaḥ* procession on the following day. More than five hundred Buddhist places – *caityas* and temples – are visited in the course of a continuous circumambulation of the urban space.

The unfolding procession

The procession of cows along the processional path (*sayaḥ*) starts shortly after midnight. By nine in the morning most of the cows representing deceased children have passed, while the bamboo scaffolds dance in continuous motion through the town to the accompaniment of stick dancers and musicians. In the afternoon the path is crowded, ever more groups arrive and almost produce jams in the stream of cows. Sometimes an infant is carried in a basket to represent Kṛṣṇa.

Cows from a particular quarter, Lakulāchẽ, leave in a formal group, headed by the divine couple of the town, Bhairava (as the *nāyaḥ*, the "master" of town) and Bhadrakālī (as *ajimā*, his mistress, lit. "grand-mother"). The entire group performs a threefold round of the town's three main squares. The presence of the divine couple can be understood as another demonstration of the continuity of the urban realm of the living. By bringing up

The "offering of a cow" (godāna), performed by the chief mourner under the guidance of his Brahmin house priest on the occasion of Sāpāru.
Photo 23rd August 2002

the rear of the procession, the divine couple has obviously succeeded in dispelling the deceased.

In the early evening political and satirical groups (22 in 1986) do the rounds. Before the uprising in spring 1990, Sāpāru was the only day of the year which was free of restrictions. Hundreds of satirical papers were published making fun of political leaders. At the beginning of the 21st century the scene has radically changed. In 2002 only five groups joined the procession, wearing simple caps of paper inscribed "Deuba" or "Koirala" (two of the leaders of Nepal's Congress Party) in the company of "Hitler" or simply "USA" or "India", the two countries which are always brandished as being "imperialistic". The local communist party paraded Lenin, Marx, Engels and Mao through the town. In 1986 11,025 people were counted accompanying cows and satirical groups, in 2002 only 8,679.

Gokarṇa aũsī – Bath in memory of the father

Similar to the pilgrimage on the day of the new moon in May, which is dedicated to deceased mothers, a second pilgrimage is undertaken on the occasion of the new moon in September. A regular death ritual (*śrāddha*) is dedicated to deceased fathers in Gokarṇa on the banks of the Bāgmatī river. The place replicates a sacred place in the far north of Kerala, which is known as one of the abodes of Śiva. It is named after a sage who was born of a cow and with the ears of a cow (*gokarṇa*). Despite performing the death ritual for his brother at Gayā (in Bihar), the spirit of the departed would not be pacified. The sage was advised to read the Bhāgavata to the departed, unpacified soul. After hearing the text, the departed attained liberation, and the place where this happened was named after the sage (Mani 2002: 293-294).

Pilgrims from Bhaktapur set out either the preceding evening or in the very early hours of the morning on the three hour walk. Most people perform the pilgrimage once, but some do it repeatedly. People from Bhaktapur separate from the other groups and perform the *śrāddha* collectively, according

to the instructions of a Rājopadhyāya priest. The sacrifical balls of the death ritual are cast into the Bāgmatī. Members of the butchers' sub-caste from all of the Newar settlements in the valley line up in a long row to follow the instructions of a Khusaḥ priest from Patan.

After completing the ritual, people worship Śiva in the form of Gokarṇeśvara in a temple high above the river, and then join others gambling and drinking at hot food stalls. The long line of begging Pvaḥ (Untouchables) is a typical sight at a place of pilgrimage. Gambling and begging are two contrasting activities at the conclusion of a ritual that aims at pacifying the dead. The ritual grounds of the dead are always linked to the world of food and fortune.

Gokarṇa.
Farmers from Bhaktapur engaged in a death ritual dedicated to their father on the occasion of new moon in September (Gokarṇa aũsī)
Photo September 1987

Mvaḥni / Dasaĩ

The great festival Mvaḥni (Nev.) or Dasaĩ (Nep.) on the 1st to 10th day after new moon in October recalls the victory of the goddess Durgā over the evil demon Mahiṣāsura in the shape of a buffalo. This demon is also the vehicle of Yama, the Lord of Death – which in this context seems significant. Durgā's victory is celebrated all over the subcontinent in great variety of festivities. Among the Newars of Bhaktapur, the festival extends over the fifteen days of the waxing moon in October, and assumes not only an urban dimension but also an intimate one that fills the individual household. The designation *mvaḥni* refers to the black stroke on the forehead that establishes a link among those who share a blood sacrifice made to Durgā on the *vijayadaśamī*, the Victorious Tenth Day of the festival. It is taken from the lamp-black that was collected while the animal – a duck, a goat or a buffalo – was sacrificed to the vessel in which barley shoots had been growing, as explained below.

To start with, the festival begins the day after the annual period of 16 days designated for death rituals (*soraśrāddha*) that runs during the dark half of the moon in the month of Āśvin. On the first day of the waxing moon barley and maize are sown in black earth kept in a new earthenware pot reserved specially for this purpose. While the barley sprouts over a period of nine days, the vast majority of Bhaktapur's population joins in the processions to the places where the nine representations of Durgā, the Navadurgā, are represented in non-iconic form. In the morning of these days the people take a purificatory bath by the river banks or at ponds that are connected with the seats or *pīṭhas* of the goddesses, and in the evening they turn to the respective shrine itself. On the ninth day the masks of an extended troupe of gods and goddesses (among them the Navadurgā) are ritually stolen, taken beyond the city's limits to the east, to be reborn or reinstated after a period of death that had lasted for two dreadful months. The sacrifice of a full-grown buffalo,

named *khãme*, is instrumental in providing life (Skt. *prāṇa*) to the gods. In the evening of that same day the masks are donned by ritual specialists, the Gāthā, and paraded around town. Over the following five days the gods undergo all the necessary rites of passage to become ritually fully empowered for a period of 10 months, until they die. This process is terminated by the cremation of the masks at the eastern cremation ground.

The sacrifice of the buffalo and the birth of the gods are reflected in household rituals that involve making an offering to the *pitṛ*. On the eighth day of the waxing moon, all of the funeral associations kill a buffalo on the squares of the town and offer mixed portions of meat to their members. In cases of associations with many members, the group of active members buys one buffalo and the group of non-active members buys a second. Three days beforehand all of the members have to submit their demands, for which they are charged. On 3rd October 2003 one portion – which had no specifically determined weight but is weighed in order to produce equal portions of three to five kilogram – cost 200 rupees (in 2004 equal to 2.5 Euro). Slaughtering, distributing the meat and carrying it home into the house (*lā dukaygu*, lit "to bring meat inside") is an activity reserved for males. The meat is welcomed at the threshold of the house by the mistress of the household, the eldest woman. Rice husk is offered to the *pikhālākhu* and small bits of meat are placed on top as an offering to the evil spirits (called *bhūt* and *pret*), who are supposed to dwell there, and constantly threaten the house.

It is ritual meat that is associated with Durgā's victory, and must undergo a purificatory process before it enters the kitchen to be consumed.

On the same day part of the concluding feast – *kuchibhvay* – is offered. It is named after the container that is used. The contents of a *kuchi* is equal to two *mana*, which is almost one litre. A dish of the food that is to be consumed is put aside at a safe distance from the rest as an invitation to the ancestors. In the early morning of the following day the Jugi who is associated with the household will come and collect his share.

The above-mentioned calendric rituals of death and renewal not only address the family of the deceased, but also the city in general. They are collective rituals in which meeting one another, extending invitations and eating common meals, or even – as in the Gāijātrā – competition between the castes and households, all have a significant part. The rituals take place in a public space, visible for all to see; they are related to specific days of the festival calendar; and not only are ancestors worshipped, but also demons are warded off.

In contradistinction to these rituals, the following chapter looks at death and ancestor rituals relating to a specific deceased person. The dates of these rituals mostly depend on the day of the death, and the majority of the rituals are carried out by the family inside or by the house or at the cremation ground.

DEATH AND ANCESTOR RITUALS

In the following we shall describe various death and ancestor rituals that are primarily related to a deceased person and his family. However, one of these rituals, the union of the deceased with his or her ancestors (*latyā*, i.e. Skt. *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*) is described in more detail in the second part of this book. The present chapter opens with some remarks on the funeral associations (*siguthī*), which are essential in many of the death and ancestor rituals.

Funeral associations (*siguthī*)

Funeral association are called *siguthī* (*si* = "death", *guthī* = "association") in Nevārī, and the occasions these *guthīs* meet to discuss the budget and membership issues and join for a feast are simply called *"guthī"*, reflecting the habit of the Newars to reduce a complex meaning to a simplified term. Often the names of funeral associations refer to such occasions, like *śrīpañcamī guthī* (in this case: the beginning of spring in early February). In recent years these associations have also assumed the Nepālī name *murdāguthī* (*murdā*, "corpse, death"). Farmers in Kathmandu are similarly organized into *sanāḥgu* (Toffin 1994: 449), whose members will attend the death procession. The cremation itself is performed by members of a *siguthī*, which Toffin names "cremation society". Among Newar villages the term *sanāguthī* is also widely used (Ishii 1996). In 1984 the first funeral association deliberately ignoring the traditional status hierarchy was established in Satungal under the name *murdāsaṃsthā* (Ishii 1996: 50).

Membership

Each individual family – centred on a hearth – belongs to a funeral association, a *siguthī*. Membership is hereditary and is handed down without any question. The daughters automatically join the funeral association of their husbands – as long as they marry within well-defined sub-castes. Should they marry somebody from a sub-caste whose members consider themselves to be of higher status or from another ethnic group, the annual congregation of the husband's funeral association will discuss the issue and postpone making a decision for many years. For many families this inability or unwillingness on the part of the congregation of elders under the leadership of the eldest, the *nāyaḥ*, is experienced virtually as torture. Should the wife suddenly die the family is rendered helpless. If a woman marries somebody from a group lower in status, she is accepted without any argument. Quarrels over the proper use of the resources of the association or doubtful memberships often lead to the fragmentation of a group. A growing number of marriages across accepted alliances actually forced the affected families in the 1990s to establish new funeral associations.

The *siguthī* is neither an endogamous nor an exogamous group. Matrimonial prohibitions are identified in a way that cuts across locality (unlike Kathmandu, see Toffin 1994: 447), sub-caste (in the case of farmers) and funeral association. It is not permissible to marry into the paternal line inside of six generations and into the maternal line inside of three.

In some cases all members of a sub-caste are members of a single funeral association,

while in others sub-castes whose members consider themselves to be of the same status will join parallel associations. Among the farmers, for example, the Bāsukala sub-caste mixes with Suvāl and Yakami, the association of 36 Suvāl incorporates five Duvāl members. The painters (Citrakāra) split into two groups of 12 and six members, the funeral torch bearers (Cālā) into two groups of 14 and 7 members, 67 families of barbers (Nau) are organized into four funeral associations, and 42 families of Jugi into six.

Quite a number of farmers' funeral associations have over 100 members. In those cases, up to 30 "active" members bear ritual responsibility while the other, "non-active" members pay a higher annual fee. In return for this fee, each family member receives a share of the annual feast and a share of the meat from the buffalo killed the day before the Victorious Tenth during the Dasāĩ festival in October.

The duties of the "active members"

The elder of the association, the *nāyaḥ*, is not involved in the management of the association for it is his privilege to worship the gods on the occasion of the annual meetings. He also presents the city's major deities with the animals that are to be sacrificed. To take the *siguthī* of Bāsukala in Byāsi as an example: the *nāyaḥ* leads the active members of the association out to worship three important Hindu as well as several Buddhist deities. The first visit of the lunisolar year is dedicated to Surjebināyak (Skt. Sūryavināyaka), the important Gaṇeśa shrine south of the city on the occasion of *"subyā"*, the second Thursday after full moon in Vaiśākha (in April/May). The day marks the beginning of the season of ancestor worship. The second *pūjā* addresses Bhairava on the occasion of his birthday (*bhusadhã*) in June/July – not in his prominent temple at Taumādhi Square, but in the form of *bhailaṭhvãpi*, an earthenware pot for the making of beer which is kept in the house of the *siguthī*. The third *pūjā* is offered to the Dīpaṅkara Buddhas on the day before new moon in September (*pañcadānacahre*), the day that concludes the month of Gũlā which is sacred to the Buddhist community.

The annual caretaker (*pālāḥ*) has the duty of informing all of the members the moment a death occurs. While doing his round he carries the "treasure box" of the *guthī* as a token of death. Later, the caretaker will appear at the house of the bereaved with a torch (*musyãpvā*) and a knife (*khukuri*), the two insignia of his duty. The caretaker also has to make sure that all members receive their share of the annual feasts. The day before full moon in December he collects the annual fees and presents the accounts.

The foremost duty of the funeral association's members is to rush to the bereaved house as soon as the news of the death has spread. A few members attend to the preparation of the bier and carry the corpse as well as the firewood for the pyre, which is either kept at the association's house (*guthīchẽ*), or in a special one-storied shelter called *gusīpakva*. The *guthī* also has to bring a torch doused in mustard oil and a torch of straw. The annual caretaker, the *pālāḥ*, carries the treasure box (*dyaḥpālĩcā*) containing a shroud of saffron or red colour that is used to cover the corpse when it leaves the house. The name alone (*dyaḥ*, "deity") suggests the presence of a deity, often identified as Bhairava. In Kathmandu the shroud is either identified with Bhairava or a mother goddess, Bhadrakālī or Indrāyaṇī, and it is said that the annual caretaker is possessed by the divinity during the annual meetings (Toffin 1994: 449). In the case of the Jugi, the annual caretaker of the funeral association keeps the treasure box at home; this box has the feet of Gorakhnāth, the lineage deity of all Jugi, worked into its outer face. In addition, he keeps a small

shrine with the replica of the lineage deity and a beer pot moulded in clay with a representation of Bhairava's face. All of these items are brought to the enshrined lineage deity on the occasion of the deity's annual celebration on the day before new moon in December (Bālācahre).

All active members of a funeral association have to congregate at the cremation site. Only a few of them in fact play an active role, but despite this, failure to appear results in a fine of a couple of hundred rupees. Their presence alone demonstrates solidarity among the group, for the members of the bereaved household and close agnates are not at all actively involved in the process of cremation. Only those four members of the association who carry the corpse are allowed to leave the site immediately.

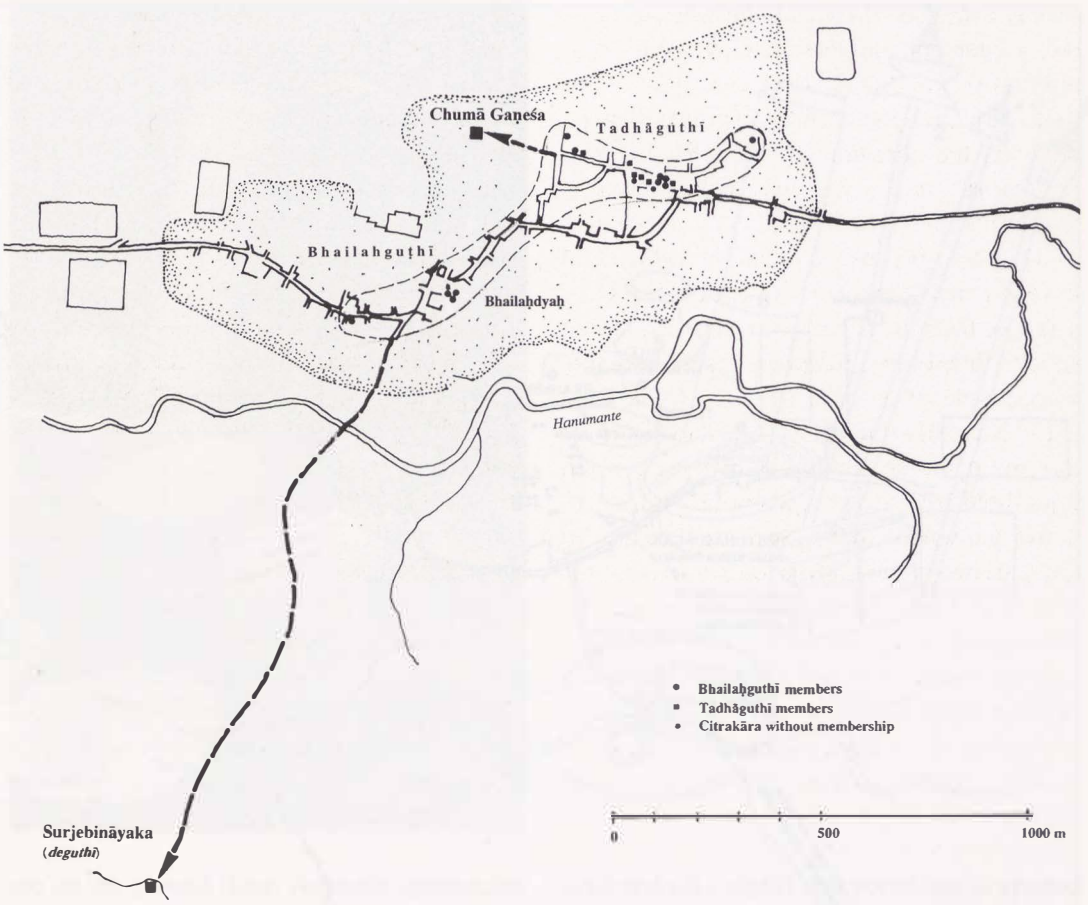
Every funeral association congregates once or twice a year for a meeting which extends over three days, punctuated by a small feast, a sacrifice to a major deity, preferably Bhairava or one of the Navadurgā, and then a sumptuous feast. This is scheduled preferably for the days preceding Yaḥmāripunhi, full moon in December, but it can also be the preceding or the following full moon, as well as full moon in April (Lhutipunhi), the Spring's Fifth (*basantpañcamī* in February), or Sitīnakaḥ, the day in June on which the Mother Goddesses appear in town for the last time. The day before new moon in March, Pasacahre, is equally important for almost every funeral association. Cooked rice (*bau*) and willow twigs are deposited on the *chvāsaḥ*-stone nearest to the place where the association meets. Thus the unpacified spirits of the unknown deceased are propitiated collectively.

Ritual objects kept by Chandranāth Kusle, the caretaker of a funeral association (siguthī no. 1 of Jugi): left the "treasure box" (pālīmhecā) with the footprints of Gorakhnātha, right a beer pot bearing a face of Bhairava and a shrine with the footprints of Gorakhnātha, the lineage deity of the Jugi. Photo 10th March 1983

Examples of funeral associations

The painters of Bhaktapur have already been the focus of research (Gutschow 1979, Toffin 1995). Painters call a Buddhist house priest for all their life-cycle rituals. Their main duty is to renew the masks of the Navadurgā and a number of other paintings in the context of rituals of renewal. Five times a year they produce coloured blockprints which are needed by every family for the enactment of the major household rituals.

We shall confine ourselves here to a look at the two funeral associations of the Citrakār (Nev. Pũ). The memory prevails that there were originally five *siguthīs* of painters in Bhaktapur. But for at least three generations the painters have been organized in only two funeral associations, the *bhaiłaḥguthī* with 12 members from the lower town, and the *taḥdhāguthī* covering the upper town with six members. Two members of the *taḥdhāguthī* left their association over a serious dispute in 1996. At that time the wife of a new member gave birth to a child only six months after marriage. The other members were so enraged that the stigmatised family was expelled and subsequently accepted by the second association.

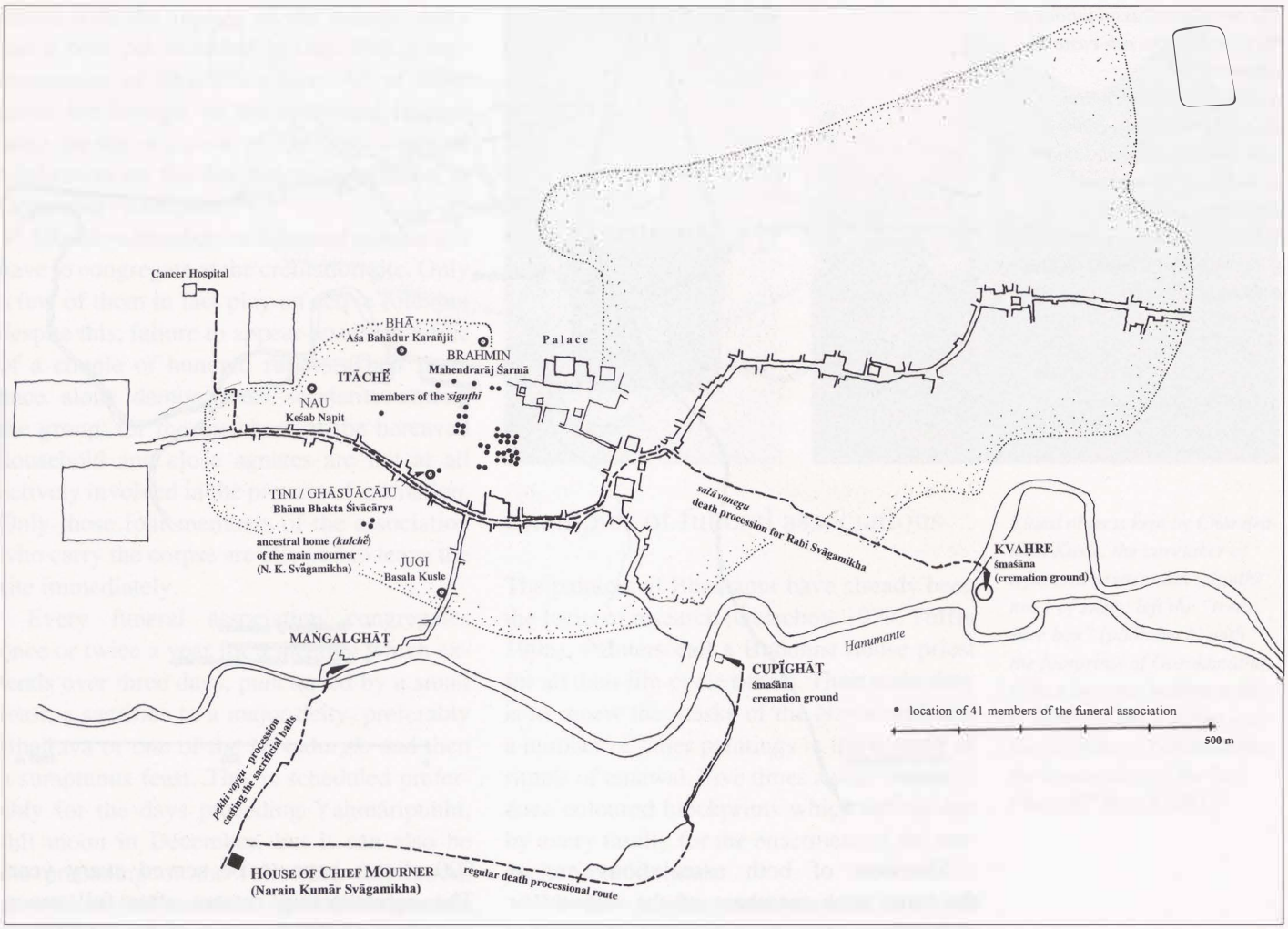


The two funeral associations of the Citrakār, the sub-caste of painters: a total of 18 members live along the main street. The annual meeting of the deśaguthī, in which all Citrakār are members, convenes at Surjebināyak. The bisvokarmaguthī worships Chumā Gaṇeśa in March.

Members of both associations are at the same time members of the *deguthī* or *deśaguthī* – from *deśa*, a spatial denomination covering a range of scales, from country to the quarter of a town or village: in this case the *deśa* is Bhaktapur. Lead by the five seniormost painters, this *guthī* regulates the sharing out of clients among the members. The *guthī* meets annually on the day preceding full moon in December, Pvaylāpunhi. The meeting takes place at Surjebināyak, one of the four prominent Gaṇeśa shrines of the Valley.

All members of the *deśaguthī* are also members of the *bisvokarmaguthī*, whose annual caretaker is entitled to paint a few clay pots and the bowl that contains the *bel* fruit for the girls' mock marriage (*ihi*). Some 800 clients have to be served every year. The caretakership rotates after full moon in March on the occasion of the worship of Chumā Gaṇeśa as Viśvakarman, the universal architect and personification of creative power.

To refer to another example, a small funeral association with fourteen members centres on the seat of the ninth Mother Goddess in the quarter of Tulāchẽ. Seven Karmācārya form the largest faction, besides 4 Jośi, 2 Baidya and one Munankarmi. The annual meetings of this *guthī* take place at full moon in December (Yaḥmāripunhi), full moon in April (Lhutipunhi), and the day after Kṛṣṇa's birthday in September.



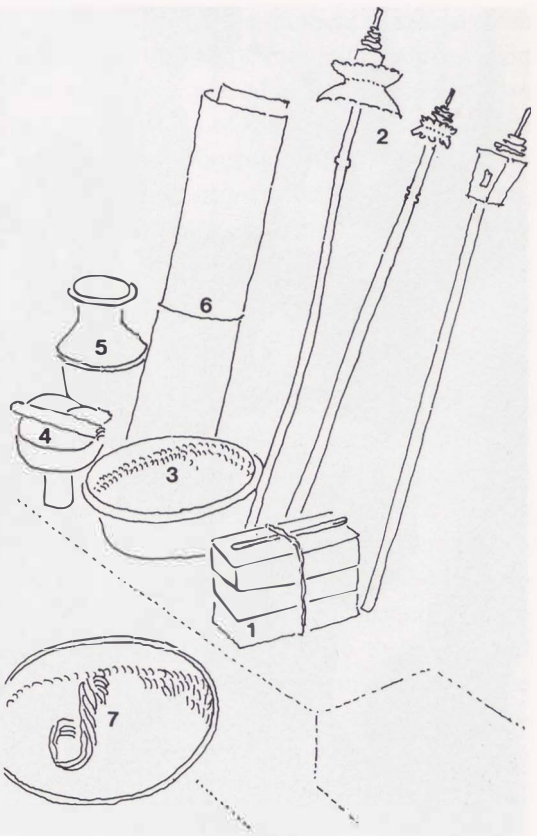
The funeral association of Svāgamikha: all 41 members live in a cluster. Also mapped is the death procession of Rabi Svāgamikha on 8th July 2002 and the location of the Brahmin priest, para-priests (Tinī, Bhā,) and purity specialists (Jugi) who were involved in the subsequent death rituals.

The funeral association of Narain Kumār Svāgamikha

The funeral association of Narain Kumār Svāgamikha, who performed the death rituals described in detail below, has 41 members. Besides 8 families of Svāgamikha, seven other sub-castes of farmers provide members who consider themselves on the same status level. All of them are located in clusters within the lower town. Narain Kumār left his ancestral home and shifted his residence to a new site at Pandau Bazar some twenty years ago. This shift did not affect his client relationship to his family priest, the para-priest and purity specialists, but the dead of his house cannot be carried through urban territory to the cremation place. In terms of space, he has become an outsider. As such he is forced to approach the cremation ground from the south.

Murdā utayagu – Death, funeral procession and cremation

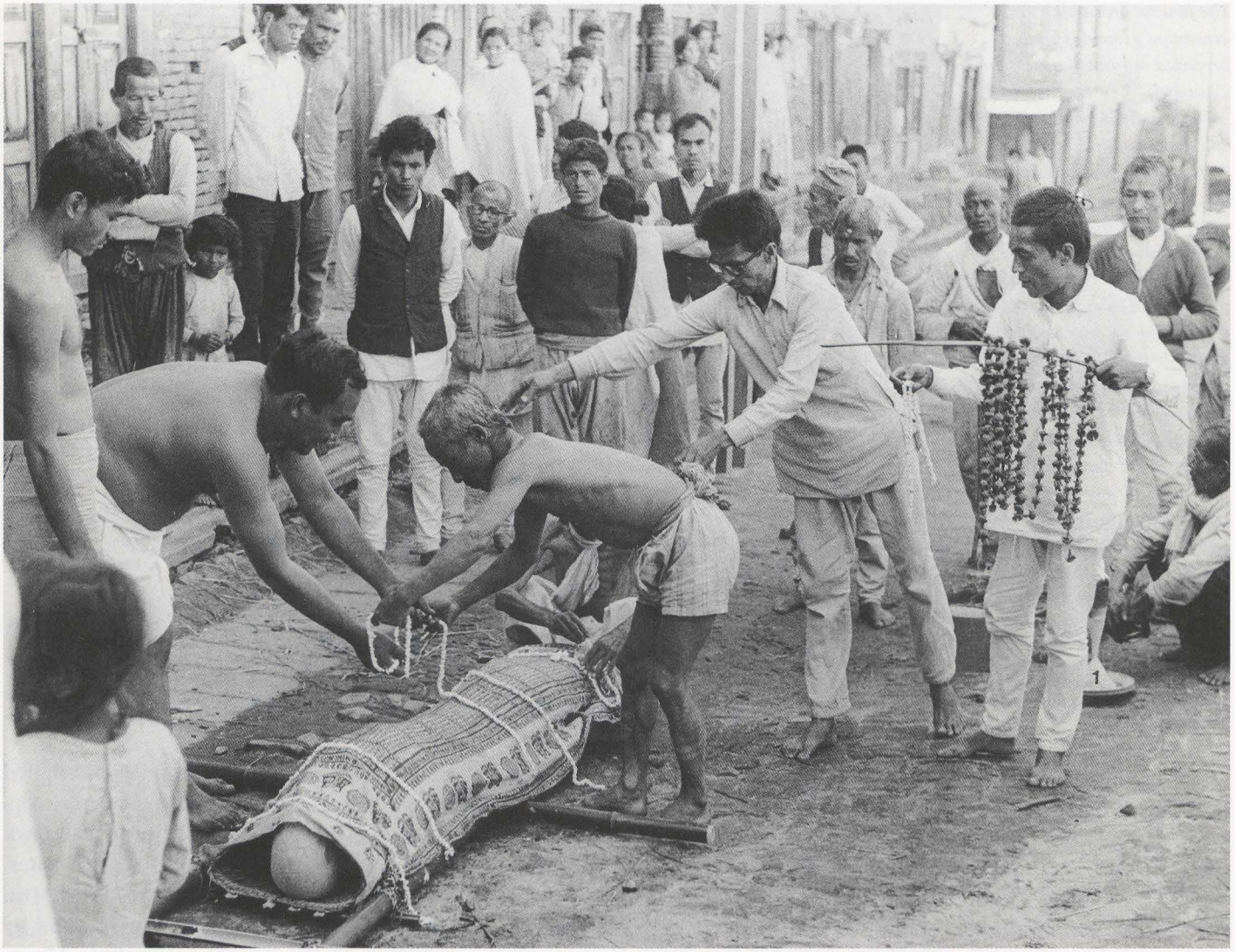
At the time of death the corpse is immediately taken down to the ground floor (*chēḍi*) of the house and placed in such a way that the body faces south. It is best, however, to



The funeral procession to the cremation ground is being prepared in front of a house in Cāsukhel:
1 Three unfired bricks with split bamboo, tied by raw cotton strips – symbolizing the hearth for the deceased; 2 three torches, brought from the households of the daughters of the deceased; 3 earthen bowl with popped rice, to be scattered along the procession; 4 plate with the horoscope of the deceased; 5 container for pouring water at the cremation site; 6 bamboo mat to be placed on the bier; 7 basket with popped rice, on top two cotton strips (nāḥkāpaḥ) which represent the deceased until the 10th and 45th day.
Photo 17th January 1986

die on the ground floor. As death approaches a Baidya is to be called, a local physician of the Ayurvedic tradition who is said to be able to predict the exact time of death. His advice would ensure that the dying person will reach the ground floor in time. In case the dying person is brought to Hanumānghāṭ at Kvaḥre, a Ghāṭbaidya predicts exactly the time when *prāṇavāyu*, i.e. the wind that signifies the soul, will leave the body. Nobody knows where the *prāṇavāyu* leaves the body, but it is believed that experienced people can hear the sound. The most favourite opening is certainly the Brahmarandra, the uppermost of the seven openings of the body. And it is certainly inauspicious if the *prāṇavāyu* leaves through the anus.

The corpse is rubbed down with mustard oil, and a layer of rice flour is added later. The eyes are outlined in black with a mixture of soot and oil (*añjaḥ*) and vermilion is applied to the forehead, and then a coin placed on top. A lotus flower is put into the left hand, basil (*tulsī*) into the right. The feet rest in water. The entire process is called *mhā gekegu* (lit. "to prepare the body"), and is performed by members of the funeral association. Meanwhile the remaining active members of the death association (*siguthī*) arrive to provide help. They carry with them a torch (*musyãpvā*) and the "treasure box" (*dyaḥpālĩcā* or *pālimhecā*) which represents the treasure of the association and is kept permanently in the house of the annual caretaker. This box also contains the yellow or red cotton cloth (*dyaḥbã*) that is used as the shroud to cover the corpse. Wood is also brought from the association's house. Years ago wood for the cremations was stored in small, specially designed huts.



Preparation of the bier with the deceased on Dattātreya square. Placed on a bamboo mat, the corpse is covered by the shroud of the funeral association, and decorated with garlands of popped rice. Behind the man with the garlands is the torch (1 = divã), brought by the Cālã. Photo October 1971

The chief mourner – the *mitamhā* (Skt. *kriyāputra*) – who will light the pyre, has few obligations in this initial preparatory phase. Members of the funeral association as well as neighbours will take care of a number of necessary acts. The bier (*kutva*) is constructed from bamboo sticks bound with raw cotton (*kācikā*), and a torch of rice straw is tied around a stick of sugar cane in a sevenfold manner. The corpse is placed on a bamboo mat that has been procured by the chief mourner. Others bring three unfired bricks (*kāciapā*) to serve as the hearth in which a symbolic fire of three small bamboo sticks is lit to pacify the deceased (Skt. *pretaśāntihoma*, Nev. *kulehoma*). An earthenware pot (*baja*) is taken and the semblance is made of popping rice. Neighbours bring popped rice (*tãy*) in large quantities, for it has to be scattered while walking to the cremation ground – which for members of higher sub-castes, farmers and craftsmen is always located across the river to the south. More torches are brought by the daughters of the deceased.

Before the procession starts, the wife of the chief mourner or the mistress of the lineage

Fabrication of a bier with bamboo for the death procession at Cāsukhel. Photo 17th January 1986

will carry a symbolic mat that represents the bed of the deceased, together with a mattress and some clothes to a stone (*chvāsaḥ*) in the pavement of the neighbourhood where ritual waste is regularly discarded. She is joined by other female members of the household, and all of them keep up an incessant wailing. Every item that the deceased had used in his last hours has to be discarded. In recent times this has also come to include unused medicines. Then the chief mourner joins and carries the pot and the bricks to the ritual stone. At that time he wears the two strips of cotton (*nāḥkāpaḥ*) – one around his waist and one around his head and jaws – which in all probability symbolize the clothes of the deceased, who has now attained the form of a spirit, a *preta*. He waits at the stone marker for the procession to head off along a prescribed route to the cremation ground. Regardless of whether the deceased is male or female, both male and female mourners join the procession.

The procession used to be headed by two Divakār (Nev. Cālã), one with cymbals, and one with a torch (*divã*) stuck into a pot of curds. This practice disappeared a generation ago, because performances in the context of death rituals have increasingly come to be regarded as injurious to personal prestige.

The torch is lit the moment the procession starts from one of the four small cups of light that have been placed at the top and bottom and on the sides of the corpse. The cymbals sound when the corpse is lifted, when it passes the *chvāsaḥ* stone, and at every *dhvākā*, the stones at crossroads that are haunted by ghosts, namely the *bhūt* and *pret*. Finally, the cymbals sound when the corpse reaches the cremation ground, when the chief mourner circles round the pyre, and when he sets fire to the corpse.

This is now rarely done by a Cālã. Nowadays a member of the *siguthī* ignites the *guthī*'s torch (*musyãpvã*). The torch will be used in turn to ignite a torch of straw (*mipunāli*). This torch accompanies the procession down to the cremation ground; its fire constitutes a reserve in case the *musyãpvã* torch goes out. A *guthī* member carries the *mipunāli* over his right shoulder, while a second torch of straw (*dāg*), with seven distinctive knots around the core, a stick of sugar cane, together with a spill of dwarf bamboo, is later used by the chief mourner to set fire to the pyre.

The chief mourner leans back and wails. He expresses his grief in standard expressions while being guided by members of the funeral association. Wailing women also come and join the procession, but they return as soon as the group reaches the bridge crossing the river.

As the group arrives at the cremation ground, the corpse is placed on a stone (called *gayālvahã*) that is named after Gayā, the famous place for the enactment of death rituals in Bihar, North India. In some cases a knife from the household of the chief mourner is placed on the chest of the corpse as a threat. An undefined *vāyu* (wind) is believed to still dwell in the body, so a weapon is needed as a threat to prevent it from rising up again. Then water is brought from the river. A container (*kalaśa*) that had once served in the context

At Kvaḥre cremation ground: The chief mourner, Julum Bāsukala, offers a libation from the right end of the cotton strip (nāḥkāpaḥ) he is wearing round his head to three sacrificial balls of rice husk, placed in front of the feet of his deceased father. The corpse rests on a stone that bears the name Gayā, the place in Bihar famous for death rituals. Photo 21st October 2003

of a sacred fire at home is filled by a member of the *guthī*. Mourning lineage members and members of the *siguthī* hold their hands in such a way that the water runs along their outstretched fingers onto a small earthenware bowl that is placed upside down onto the mouth of the corpse. Wearing the *nāḥkāpaḥ*, the chief mourner finally brings water from the river in his hands, wailing loudly. Having poured the water over the corpse he is led to its feet, where he prepares three times three *piṇḍa* (Nev. *pekhi*) from wet rice husk (*bajimā*), which had been brought in an earthenware cooking pot by the funeral association. The formed *piṇḍas* immediately fall apart because husk is not sticky. According to the Brahmin Girīndrarāj Śarmā, the first is dedicated to the spirit of the deceased (*pretabali*), the second to the dogs *(svānabali*) and the third to the crows (*kva-* or *kakabali*). In a concluding act, the chief mourner dips the right end of the cotton strip around his head in the pot to wet it. Turning around he squeezes the cotton to offer a drop or two to the *piṇḍas* in an act of libation. He finally takes a few threads from the cotton strip and offers them to the three *piṇḍas* individually.

The corpse is now carried by four members of the funeral association who symbolically wear white cloth around their waists, indicating a *dhoti*. They perform three circumambulations of the pyre, which in the meantime has been prepared by other members. The four corpse bearers are appointed *ad hoc* for this task by the head of the funeral association, the *nāyaḥ*. The advantage of this duty is that they may leave the site immediately, while all the others have to remain until the cremation is completed.

The shroud (*dyaḥbã* or *debã)* is removed and the naked corpse placed onto a length of cotton on top of the pyre.

The bier and the lower white cotton cloth are discarded and collected by a member of the sub-caste of Pvaḥ, the Untouchables who live near the river bank, not within the confines of the city but clearly beyond. The right to collect coins, cloth and remaining firewood

Opposite
At Kvaḥre cremation ground: Four members of the Bāsukala funeral association carry the corpse of Rām Bāsukala three times around the pyre. The caretaker of the association, Mohan Bahādur Lagu (right), carries the torch of straw which will ignite a spill of dried dwarf bamboo in his left hand. In his right he holds the pot from which the deceased received water, and in his cotton belt he keeps the knife of the association, which is meant to intimidate the spirit of the deceased.
Photo 21st October 2003

rotates among the Pvaḥ every three days. Every piece of half-burned wood is collected, as are the large cudgels which cannot be taken back across the river into town except if they are carried by an Untouchable.

The shroud is spread out to dry in the sun, then folded and stored in the funeral association's treasure box. Ornaments and watches, items that had remained on the body of the corpse, are removed by the funeral organisation and stored in the same box.

The horoscope (*jātaḥ*) of the deceased is placed on his or her forehead. The chief mourner circumambulates the pyre three time, takes fire from the *divã* or one of the *musyãpvã* torches and ignites a torch of straw (the *dāg*) to which a spill of split dry dwarf bamboo (*tipvay*) is held. A member of the *siguthī* will hand over the blazing spill to the chief mourner, who will then light some camphor, clarified butter and a few sticks of sandalwood that had been placed on the corpse's forehead. It is said that if the Cālã's torch goes out, new fire has to be brought from the temple of Vajrayoginī near Sankhu, several hours walk northeast of Bhaktapur. The chief mourner finally touches the feet of the corpse three times (*tuti bagya yāgu*, i.e. to observe *darśana* of the feet) and is taken away in a gesture of force by a member of the *siguthī*. Only then is the corpse covered with wet straw, which produces thick smoke.

All of the mourning lineage members and members of the funeral association then bathe (or symbolically touch their forehead with water) on the opposite side of the river at Hanumānghāṭ.

Now the chief mourner also turns to the river, unbinds the *nāḥkāpaḥ*, washes it and takes it home. It is widely believed that as soon as the *nāḥkāpaḥ* touches the river the *vāyu* of the deceased – the "wind" which represents the soul – clings to the cotton strip.

For the coming 13 or 45 days the *preta* is embodied in the strips of cotton, one of which is handed over to a purity specialist, a member of the sub-caste of Bhā, on the 10th day, and the second one (worn by the chief mourner around his head) to the Brahmin on the occasion of the ritual of *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, the union of the *preta* with the ancestors on the 13th or 45th day.

The chief mourner will turn to one side and wait patiently for two or three hours until the cremation is completed.

It is the obligation of the members of the funeral association to tend the fire. Quite often the corpse is dismembered to allow a more economical cremation. An experienced member of the association removes the corpse from the fire and renews the pyre with fresh wood to ensure the cremation is performed with as little wood as possible. If, however, the chief mourner wishes that the corpse is not touched he will have to pay a certain compensation to the association.

It is said that when almost nothing of the body remains, the heart and the kidneys (*jalasi*) can be identified as the parts of the body that resist the fire. They are taken out, beaten with sticks and returned to the fire. In reality, the pelvis lasts longest. Traces of bones together with a handful of other ashes are put aside, doused with water and placed on the bamboo mat, the *pulu*, on which the corpse had been borne. One corner of the mat has first to catch fire before immediately being extinguished. The mat is dragged into the river and allowed to float slowly downstream. The aforementioned "wind", which represents the soul, is said to be embodied in the ashes and while floating down the river on the mat it clings to the cotton strips as the chief mourner washes them on the opposite bank.

The pyre is covered once again with straw and left alone, in the hope that the last traces of the corpse will burn. It is the job of the Pvaḥ woman in charge to scrutinize the ashes. In case bones are found the *guthī* has to pay a

Opposite
At Kvaḥre cremation ground: The corpse of the deceased, Rām Bāsukala, is placed on the pyre with his head facing south, the direction of death. The horoscope is placed on the corpse's forehead, the spill of bamboo has already been offered by the chief mourner, and members of the funeral association will now ignite an initial straw fire.
In the background can be seen Kancā Bāsukala, the 78-year-old elder of the association.
Photo 21st October 2003

fine of up to 500 rupees. Parts of the ashes are brought to the shrine of Surjebināyak, two kilometres south of Bhaktapur, where the Pvaḥ serve as caretakers (*dyaḥpālāḥ).*

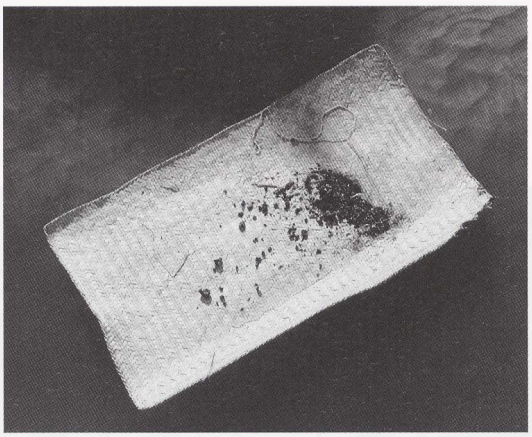
All of the mourners and members of the funeral association touch the water on the opposite river bank again and wave their hands above a fire made of rice straw in a gesture of purification. Headed by the chief mourner, the entire group moves to the house of the deceased.

Upon arrival, the women of the house start wailing again in a formal expression of grief. When the chief mourner arrives in front of the door at the threshold stone, the *pikhālākhu,* he is welcomed by his wife with husk in order to pacify any evil spirits that might be clinging to his body. In order to enter the house he has to step over three small earthenware dishes containing charcoal, raw cotton and an oil wick and producing fire and smoke that is believed to veil the entrance of the house and thus make it invisible to the *preta,* which wishes to return to the house.

Once inside the house the chief mourner is welcomed with raw sugar and water. The two cotton strips are carefully stored away in a hidden place because nobody is supposed to touch them.

All those of the lineage who had been to the cremation ground are offered food that has been cooked in the house. Over the next ten days members of the *phukī* bring food, because members of the house are not supposed to work in the kitchen. From the second day neighbours likewise bring food (*bica vanegu*), which cannot however be consumed in the house but must be reserved for the *nhenumhā* offering to the deceased on the 7th day.

At the end of the fourth day a basket (such as a *dalu*) containing one *pati* of unhusked rice will be placed on the *pikhālākhu* and a nearby butcher (Nāy*)* will be told to collect it in exchange for the seven flat baskets (*picā*)



At Kvaḥre cremation ground: The mat in which the corpse of Rām Bāsukala had been wrapped had to touch the fire of the pyre shortly before ashes and apparent fragments of bones could be placed onto it, and before it is then sent floating down the river. Photo 21st October 2003

made of local reed (*napaḥ)* that are needed three days later for the ritual of the 7th day.

The same night the son-in-law or the brother-in-law (both are called *jicābhāju*) of the chief mourner has to inform both close and distant relatives (*bhvaḥ pāhã* and *yākā pāhã*) that the death has occurred in the household. This is not expressed directly but with the request or even order to purify themselves with oilcake (*khau*) while taking a bath on the following morning. The messenger takes care to go on his rounds late in the evening because such a message would not allow the recipient to take any food on the same day.

One set of the deceased's clothes will be washed by a married daughter on that same day and kept in a corner of the ground floor of the house. It will be put out to dry in the house and is not supposed to be exposed to the sun. Only on the 10th day, after the chief mourner and the house have undergone purification, will these clothes be either deposited on the *chvāsaḥ* or given away.

After the cremation, food is brought to the polluted house of the chief mourner by a member of the lineage. Other members join in during the mornings and evenings of the following days, but each member of the lineage does this only once.

Daśakriyā – The "ten works" of the 1st to 10th day

Upon his personal wish the chief mourner and his brothers or a near relative may decide to stay for the first ten days in a secluded chamber on the ground floor of his house. He will wear only a loincloth and cook for himself, and never touch any other person. He will leave the chamber only to circumambulate the *nhenumhā* food three times on the 7th day. He may also decide to leave the house on the 7th and the following days to offer water and milk to a *bhulā*, a small patch of land set apart for the deceased. In the evening, water, milk and fire are offered to the *pikhālākhu* in front of the threshold which signifies the realm of the deceased.

In former times three *piṇḍas* had to be made every day for the first ten days, but nowadays many find it difficult to move through the city's lanes without touching and thus polluting other people. Therefore, the ritual "work of ten (days)" is mostly confined to the *du byēkegu* ritual on the tenth day (see below).

Lakca – Overt mourning and wailing on the 4th day

The late afternoon of the 4th day after death is reserved for mourning, for which relatives gather at the house. Relatives are all those who belong to the extended lineage, transgressing the narrow confines of the close agnates up to the third generation. Only agnates of this extended group share the same ancestor deity (*dugudyaḥ*). In the case of the death of Rabi Svāgamikha (who will be introduced in detail below), the sons of the chief mourner's great aunt did not come because as followers of the reformed Hindu sect "Oṃ Śānti", they no longer attend rituals. Mourning in front and inside of the house starts only after the female relatives, daughters and aunts have arrived with *lakcabaji*, an offering of beaten rice made to the mourners.

Men arrive at the house quietly and join a group of 50 to 100 people who squat on long mats spread out on both sides of the road by the neighbours. Even the *dumhā,* the polluted members of the household join the group. Small fires are lit on both sides adding to the serene atmosphere of the scene. There is no overt expression of sorrow but a sense of sincerity – of time and space set apart to remember the deceased who is believed to be in the vicinity of the house in the shape of a *preta*. The road or lane is not blocked. People and vehicles pass by without taking notice of those who mourn and without disturbing them. The simultaneity of everyday life and ritual mourning is striking: urban space is indeed ambiguous, being both public and intimate.

After some time all of the women except the wife and/or mother and daughters of the deceased leave the house, walking a few paces down the road. All of a sudden, as if answering a signal, there is a virtual eruption of wailing as an expression of mourning. The group moves slowly towards the house (the decisive action called *lakca vanegu*), clinging to and leaning on each other in groups of two or three. One woman acts more or less as the guide while the other turns her head away and covers her face with a shawl. All of them enter the house and join the womenfolk there in wailing. After a short period of a few minutes they leave the house again, still crying. They stop at a nearby step-well or public tap, wash their faces, stop crying and return to the house.

Less than an hour later, one of the group of men in front of the house rises, slowly followed by the others; they form groups, whisper, and thus return to daily life. The loosely connected community of mourners quietly comes to an end.

Starting on the 4th day female relatives (*bhvaḥ pāhã* as well as *yākā pāhã*), both patrilinear as well as matrilinear, come to offer food to the mourning family on three successive days. Potatoes, vegetables, beaten rice, fruits and sweets are offered in an activity called *byāḥ yẽkegu*. All those who join the mourning family will have to share this food before returning home. Some of the food is set aside and offered to the *preta* on the 7th day, while the remainder is consumed by the family of the chief mourner.

Distant relatives like those who define their common descent beyond the great grandfather and who have long since established their own lineage group (*phukī*) already undertake their purification on the 4th day. They do not do so on the basis of choice. Rather they have an established relationship with the respective family because they have received a couple of betel nuts (*putugvẽ*) on the occasion of the marriage of a daughter or sister of the chief mourner, and they had joined in the feast of that day (*gvẽsabhvay*) which brought people of the same category together. Once invited, they may refuse to accept betel nuts, but once they have accepted them they will also assume the status of *dumhā* (polluted persons) for four days in cases of death.

Among those who undergo purification on the 4th day are the married daughters, sisters or aunts, the *mhāymacā* who will prepare the *nhenumhā,* and her husband, the necessary helper in all rituals, the *jicābhāju*. The observation of four days of mourning is called *penhu dukha cvanegu*. This is the only context in which the term *dukha* (Nep.), "sorrow, grief", appears.

At the end of the 4th day discussions focus on what is needed for the ritual on the 7th day.

Nhenumhā – The ritual of feeding the deceased on the 7th day

In the early morning of the 7th day the same female relatives (from families of *bhvaḥ pāhã* and *yākā pāhã* status) come to bring unprocessed food items as an extended offering dedicated to the deceased – *nhenhumhā yẽkegu*, the ritual of feeding the body (*mhā*) of the deceased on the 7th day (*nhenu*). These items include curds, beaten rice, sweets and small bread made of pea-flour (*kasuvā*).

The food for the ghost body of the deceased, the *preta,* has to be elaborately prepared by the *mhāymacā*, who in this context is invariably also called *nhenumhā thuimhā*, literally "the cook of the food of the 7th day". Her husband (*jicābhāju*) will act as the indispensable helper (*pāsā*) throughout the day. An important precondition, however, is that the *jicābhāju*'s parents have died and thus are already united with the ancestors. It may thus happen that while the married daughter of the chief mourner prepares the *nhenumhā* offering, his brother-in-law has to act as the helper.

The helper brings seven sods of grass (*capu*) in the early morning, from which the *mhāymacā* builds a hearth on ground floor level to cook rice. On payment of extra cash the butcher (Nāy) brings the seven small baskets which were ordered by the chief mourner immediately after the cremation. The cooked rice is distributed among the seven baskets on large leaves, *kusā lapte* – a delicate action that requires utter silence. Using hand gestures, the *mhāymacā* instructs a woman helper to add soy beans, curd, meat and bread (*vā*). Two slightly larger leaf plates are filled with a variety of food, including cooked rice, vegetables, fruits and sweets, meat, fish, milk, water, beer and liquor. One of these offerings (called *khusibvaḥ* or *kvajā*) is taken by the *mhāymacā* to the river (*khusi*) to be offered to the crows (*kva*) as the messengers of Yama, the Lord of Death. The *mhāymacā*

Opposite
The seventh day offering (nhenumhā) for the deceased. Basala Jugi spreads seven bundles of straw in front of the house of the chief mourner, Narain Kumār Svāgamikha. A large beer container with a ritual plate bearing seven cups with milk is placed on the guardian stone of the threshold. Seven baskets with cooked rice can be seen to the left, various food offerings to the right.
Photo 15th July 2003

is followed by the *jicābhāju,* who casts the seven sods of grass into the river.

The second leaf plate, *pākhājā*, is placed below the eaves (*pākhā*) of the house before midnight, for it is believed that the *preta* constantly roams around the house. Since the *pikhālākhu* stone guards the threshold of the house, the *preta* can only reach the space below the eaves.

Once all the food is prepared, the chief mourner enters the room, wearing the two cotton strips (*nāḥkāpaḥ*) around his waist and head. While making a declaration of ritual intent (*saṃkalpa)* he offers water, rice and *kuśa* grass to the two large plates, according to the instructions given by a Brahmin who has just come for that specific purpose. Finally, the chief mourner circumambulates the entire arrangement three times and performs basic worship with the usual offerings while pouring water (*gaṅgājal*).

After the chief mourner has fulfilled his ritual duty, the Juginī is called, who places seven bundles of straw in front of the house on which to place the food. She arranges the latter on both sides of a large clay pot, the *nhenumhā kvãcā*, which is used only once for this specific purpose. To the right she places the seven baskets with cooked rice, on her left ten plates with pumpkin, spinach, beans, potatoes, cucumber, peas, soy beans, buffalo meat, fish, egg, milk, water, beer, liquor, banana, mango, pomegranate and betel nuts. Ginger is offered but not tomato, onion or aubergine.

An earthenware pot filled with beer (albeit represented symbolically by just the ingredients, a mixture of water and some popped rice) is placed on the *pikhālākhu*, the guardian of the threshold which the *preta* is unable to cross. On top of this is placed a copper vessel, *kvalā,* with beaten rice, seven dishes of milk, a handful of biscuits (*svāri*), and a nominal gift of eight rupees. A leaf plate on which the Juginī first places the contents of the first basket is set in front of the pot. She then takes a lump of rice and bread from the remaining six baskets. On top of this she then adds parts of all the food items dedicated to the deceased. Then while performing a *cakrapūjā*, the Juginī places a sevenfold cotton thread around the copper vessel, and offers *sinasvã* leaves and incense. *Dakṣiṇā* is placed between the upper vessel and the lower pot and beneath the lower pot in the form of banknotes. She marks the lower pot and the upper vessel with a trident in vermilion, and sprinkles the beer of the lower pot across the offerings in the upper vessel. According to Basala Jugi, the straw ring (*pecā*) below the earthenware pot represents the snake king (*nāgarāja*), the pot itself Bhairavnāth (since it is filled with yeast, rice and water – the ingredients of beer), and the plate on top Śiva. Complaining that the *nhenumhā* offering is no longer prepared as elaborately it used to be, she explains that "in the old days" 108 varieties of flowers had to accompany the food offering.

The moment the Juginī completes the performance, she gathers whatever she considers usable into a basket: salt, turmeric, potatoes, vegetables, sweets, meat, fish and even the contents of the six small baskets with cooked rice, although in the case of all other *jugibvaḥ* (offerings to the ancestors to be collected by Jugi) she refuses to accept cooked rice. At times large bundles of clothes from the deceased are given to the Juginī, who appears with a woman assistant who helps carry the load.

In a final act the Juginī has to wash all the copper, brass or plastic plates and pots that were used for cooking and the offering. After finishing, the *mhāymacā* and other women of the household repeat the act of cleaning. On returning home, the Juginī performs a purificatory ritual at the threshold of her house (*lukhāpūjā*) before going inside with the food that was dedicated to the deceased.

Opposite
The seventh day offering (nhenumhā) for the deceased. Basala Jugi performs the cakrapūjā for the deceased, Rabi Svãgamikha. The container and the plate on top are marked with a trident symbol in vermilion.
Photo 15th July 2003

The plate dedicated to the *preta* and the seven dishes with milk are left at the site for a dog, also considered to be a messenger of the Lord of Death. If no dog is to be seen, somebody must go and find one. A dog will even be carried to the site because it is believed that the spirit of the deceased takes the form of a dog in this moment.

It is seen as a good sign if the dog at the *pikhālākhu* and the crow at the river take yoghurt first, and if the dog first eats the deceased's favorite food the bereaved feel happy and satisfied that the deceased has accepted the offering.

Until recently the *nhenumhā kvãcā* was always taken home by the Juginī. This is no longer done since the shape of the earthenware pot alone would bear witness to a ritual activity that allegedly has been given up. Meat and sweets, however, and additional money – above all the traditional, nominal gift (*dakṣiṇā)* – are attractive enough for poor families to engage in this ritual on condition they remain unrecognised. Nowadays the pot, the seven bundles of straw and all the other earthenware dishes are simply dumped at a nearby rubbish tip.

At night all of the lineage members are invited for a feast that is prepared by the *mhãy-macā*. She has first to offer food to the chief mourner and his wife, and then to all the lineage members and their wives. Until recently it was absolutely mandatory to join this feast. But with the diversification of lifestyles, in which one lineage member serves in the Gulf, another in an office in Kathmandu and his wife is somehow "busy" or even reluctant to join such a feast because she adheres to a modern Hindu sect, it is almost impossible to have everybody present. The chief mourner's family shows mild embarrassment and keeps asking why some member or other has not turned up. Within the next decade or two the scene will change considerably. For an immobile society, rules of attendance were easy to follow. A changing world brings about mobility which breaks the bonds of the lineage. This mechanism is already inherent in the atomisation of the lineage. It splits up as soon as matrimonial prescriptions are overruled by a generation that meets marriage partners at the university or at work.

Late in the night of the 7th day new clothes have to be sewn for the chief mourner. This can only be done by a person whose parents are already united with the ancestors.

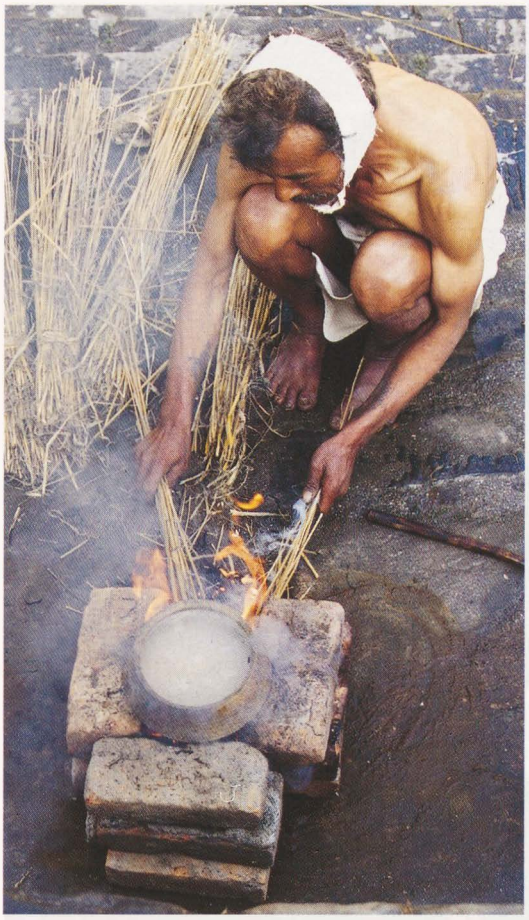
Du byẽkegu – Removal of death pollution on the 10th day

Range of participants

All male members (who have passed the initiatory rites) of the lineage, close agnates up to the third generation, have to undergo the process of purification on the 10th day. Beyond the narrow confines of the lineage, others may join who are distant relatives, such as descendants of the great grandfather's brothers. In theory they belong to the same funeral association and the same ancestor deity.

Quite often, even close agnates will have established their own lineage as a result of quarrels, or have moved to Kathmandu and started to deal with cremation as a more technical event. It may sound contradictory, but the nuclear family as a lineage group has not become a rare exception. As a result, the number of people appearing on the 10th day for the purificatory ritual cannot be anticipated. A certain pressure may exist among the neighbours to appear, but it is by no means compulsory. All those who join the purificatory ritual are *dumhā*, representing "bodies" (*mhā*) polluted by death. Distant relatives and matrilineal male descendants have already terminated their period of pollution by being shaved on the fourth day (*penhu dukha cvanegu,* lit. "to express grief on the 4th day").

Purificatory rituals on the 10th day (du byēkegu): Āśa Bahādur Sitikhu from Cvāchẽ prepares rice at Kālīghāṭ to make three times ten sacrificial balls, piṇḍas. Photo 8th May 2003



The making of *piṃḍas*

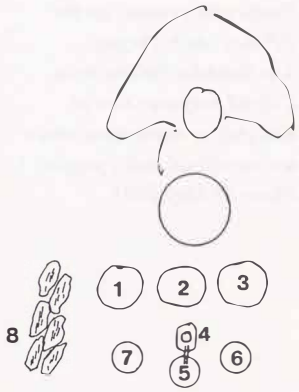
The first ritual sequence involves a Bhā, a member of a sub-caste of funerary priests. He moulds a *liṅga* from black clay and winds *kuśa* grass around it. Quite often hard grey clay (*pa̐cā*) is used – carving the *liṅga* with a knife. He also marks three circles on the top and on the two sides of the *liṅga* with white wheat flour, and three more in front of him.

In the meantime the chief mourner cooks rice on a makeshift hearth in an unpolluted, recently fired earthenware pot. He wears the two strips of cotton (*nāḥkāpaḥ*) in which the *preta* is supposed to have taken refuge around his waist and head. The moment the rice is cooked, the pot is taken to the side and the rice emptied onto the ritual copper plate (*kvalā*). One of the bricks of the hearth has to be moved at once as a signal of its deconstruction.

The chief mourner take the rice and prepares three times ten *piṇḍas* which constitute the body of the *preta*. On top of each *piṇḍa* he places a larger lump which is called "the remainder" (*ses*, Skt. *śeṣa*) – a dedication to earlier generations. As mentioned earlier, it is said that in older times three *piṇḍas* had to be made every day, but nowadays the chief mourner finds it difficult to move through the city's lanes without touching and thus polluting other people. Therefore, the ritual "work of ten (days)" (*daśakriyā*) is confined to one single day.

The Bhā completes his work by sprinkling black sesame (*hāku hāmvaḥ*) over the rice balls. Now the chief mourner turns to the *liṅga*, which represents Hāṭakeśvara, the Lord of Vitala, one of the seven nether regions (Skt. *pātāla*). This is a form of Śiva who guides the deceased through the netherworld where its spirit will unite with the *pitṛ*, the departed's ancestors. Small clay dishes containing cow milk (*duru*) and water (*jal*) with *kuśa* grass on top are placed inside the three circles marked above and beside the *liṅga*. The *kuśa* grass connects the top dish of water (or water mixed with milk) with the *liṅga* in such a way that it is supposed to cool it, as the *preta* permanently suffers from the heat caused by the cremation. The grass connection is called *yamadhārā*, the water spout of Yama, the Lord of Death. Obviously the spirit of the deceased appears as *preta* in a number of forms: it resides in the *liṅga*, in the cotton strip, in the dog and in the crow.

The Brahmanical house priest now appears at the embankment of the river to instruct his client, the chief mourner. He follows the instructions of the *Pretakriyāpaddhati*, written down in a notebook which he carries along. When at home the Brahmin should only study these instructions if and when he him-



Purificatory rituals on the 10th day (du hyēkegu): The chief mourner places in front of him or to his right a copper plate with three times ten sacrificial balls (0), and spreads out three large leaves (kusā lapte) on which the balls are dedicated to the crow (1), the dog (2) and the deceased (3). Placed at the centre of the arrangement is the Hāṭakeśvara liṅga (4), framed by clay cups with milk (6) and water (7); the cup on top (5) is filled with water and connected with the liṅga by kuśa grass. Placed to his right are four small leaf plates with rice and small sweet breads, to be offered to the three piles of piṇḍa and the liṅga.

Satya Narain Hyãju from Jaukhel prepares the ritual arena at Kālīghāṭ after three times ten sacrificial balls have been shaped and put on a copper plate before being placed on three large leaves. Photo 22nd December 2003

self is a *dumhā*. In that case he will put his Sacred Thread that identifies him as twice-born across his right ear – which symbolizes the ocean.

While placing the three large leaves (*kusā lapte*) upside down onto the three designated circles, they are identified as being dedicated to "grandfather" on the left, to "great-grandfather" on the right, and to "father" in the middle. The first *pūjā* is done using a mixture of barley, black sesame and *kuśa* grass. The *liṅga* receives offerings of milk, water, and a strip of cotton which stands for clothes. When the sacrificial balls are finally placed on the large leaves, the set of ten on the left is dedicated to the crow (*kvabali*), those to the right to the dog (*svānabali*), and those in the centre to the spirit of the deceased (*pretabali*).

In an exceptional case it was observed that the Brahmin advised his client to prepare a single large *piṇḍa* from the remaining rice, representing the first of the second set of 16 *piṇḍas*, which are usually prepared on the 11th day. The client followed the instructions but asked the Brahmin nevertheless to turn up the following day to guide the making of the "real" *piṇḍa* of the 11th day.

Three kinds of leaves are placed on their tops: *talāy, bhyalāy* and *sinasvã (Buddleja asiatica)*. The *liṅga* as well as the three lots of balls finally receive a special leaf plate of food with beaten rice, peas and tiny

sweet bread (*māricā*). These items of food have been prepared by the *mhāymacā* and are brought to the river by her husband, the *jicābhāju*.

Finally the chief mourner removes the *nāḥkāpaḥ* strips from his body and puts a mixture of barley and black sesame (*hāmvaḥ-techva*) into the right end of the one he wears around his head. He worships it with offerings of barley, black sesame, *kuśa* grass and vermilion, dips it into the two plates of milk and water, and libates the *piṇḍas* and the *liṅga* which is addressed by the general term *mahādyaḥ*.

The chief mourner now puts the sacrificial balls in three separate lots on the copper plate and casts them into the river: the *kvabali* is placed on the opposite side, then the *svānabali* on this side of the river, and finally the *pretabali* and all the other offerings also on this side after the *liṅga* has been placed on the steps adjoining the embankment. Then he places the two cotton strips on the copper plate or throws them into the river to be immediately recovered by the Bhā or unpolluted male helper, the *jicābhāju*. In "old times" this would have been the obligation of a member of the sub-caste of Pasi, washermen who until two generations ago were engaged as purity specialists. The Pasi would also have had to appear at the chief mourner's house to wash the entire family's clothes as part of the effort to purify the house. At that time the Pasi had to do this for a nominal gift, a *dakṣiṇā* of two *paisā*. As in so many other cases where ritual obligations have been discontinued, the *jicābhāju* has taken over these tasks. He recovers the cotton strips, places them on the copper plate and takes them home.

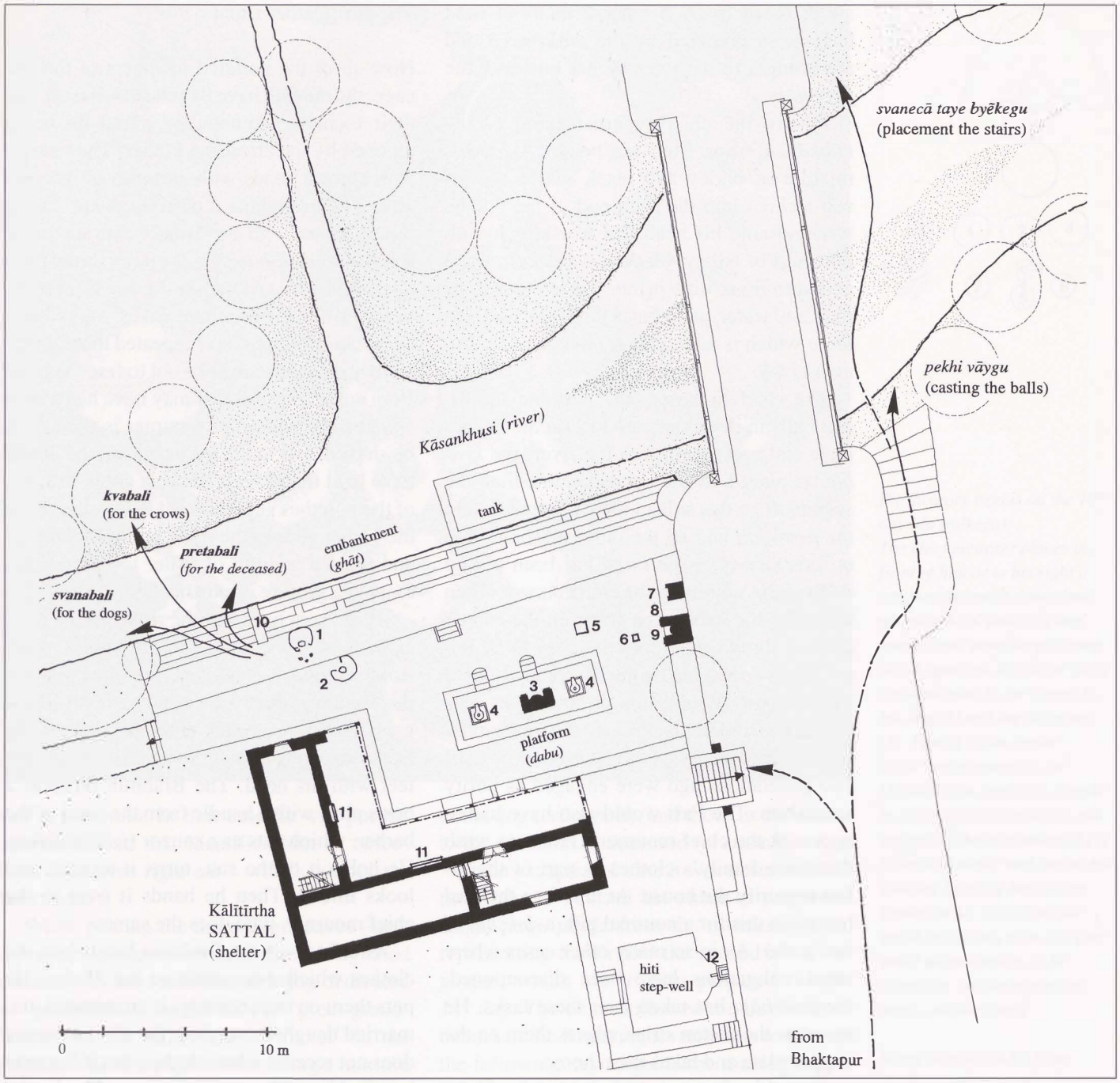
The strip from around the head will be brought to the Bhā late at night, while the one from the waist is stored away, ready to be offered to the Brahmin after the *preta* has turned into a *pitṛ* on the occasion of the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual on the 45th day (*latyā*).

The purificatory ritual

Now all of the polluted members of the lineage, the *dumhā,* have their heads shaved, and their toenails symbolically pared by being touched by the attending barber. They smear their shaven heads with particles of oil cake (*khau*) before taking a purifying bath. In addition, a plate with dried myrobalan and black sesame (*āmvaḥ-hāmvaḥ)* is placed on the river bank. Everybody touches the seeds, spreads them on their heads and takes a symbolic bath – an exercise that is repeated three times. Both ingredients are believed to free the body from any impurities that may have had a negative effect. The chief mourner is the last to be shaved, and in the meantime all the others have held their hands above a straw fire. All of their clothes get sprinkled with water; even the barber goes to the river, sprinkles himself and takes a handful of water to sprinkle his tools in a gesture of purification.

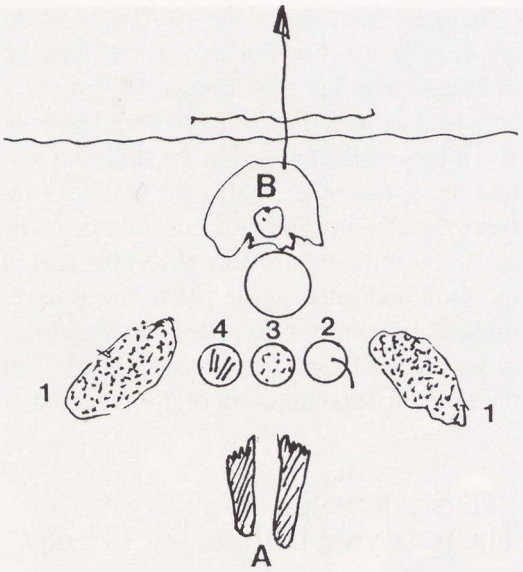
At the conclusion of the ritual on the river embankment the chief mourner takes water from a copper container, circumambulates the Brahmin three times, takes fresh *dūrvā* grass, sprinkles water onto the feet of the Brahmin using this grass, and touches his feet with his head. The Brahmin receives a brass plate with a handle from the hand of the barber, which acts as a mirror (*jvālānhāykā)*. He holds it to the sun, turns it around, and looks into it. Then he hands it over to the chief mourner, who does the same.

As a final act the Brahmin hands him the clothes which were made on the 7th day. He puts them on immediately. If an initiated, unmarried daughter has died, the chief mourner does not receive white clothes, but if his wife has died he will wear a white cap. He should, however, have washed his clothes on the ninth day and appear in fresh attire. Often the chief mourner forgets to adhere to the proper conduct. In that case the priest admonishes him and beats him symbolically with a stick.



Kālīghāṭ at Kāsankhusi, one of the seven places for casting the sacrificial balls and performing the 10th day purificatory rituals:
1 position of the chief mourner
2 position of the officiating priest
3 Viṣṇu/Yamunā
4 śivaliṅga
5 Viṣṇupādukā
6 Hanumān
7 Gaṇeśa
8 śālagrāma
9 Sītā/Rām
10 Brahmanāla
11 inscriptions
12 Umāmaheśvara

The inscriptions date to 1925 and 1946 AD, and list land donations whose revenue is meant to cover the expenses of regular recitations, of tobacco, of oil for lamps, as well as of cleaning and repairing the embankment and the building.



Purificatory rituals on the 10th day (du byẽkegu): Purification of the chief mourner (A) by the mistress of the house (B) upon his return from the purificatory ritual at the river embankment. To pacify and ward off the deceased, she spreads husk (1) on both sides, while three earthen cups with light (2 = mātā), cotton seeds (3= kapāypu) and fire from charcoal (4= mi) are placed in front of him. The smoke produced is supposed to effectively obscure the entrance of the house and make it invisible for the deceased.

Apart from the chief mourner, his brothers are also handed new white clothes. All the other *dumhā* likewise use the mirror to achieve complete purification. Throughout the previous ten days all of the mirrors have been veiled in their houses. A polluted individual should avoid looking into the mirror.

After being purified on the 10th day, all of the lineage members are reintegrated into society after looking into the mirror.

The symbolism of the mirror prompts a number of thoughts. Remarkably, the priest has the power to handle it, but the instrument itself seems to be pollutant and is thus stored away by the barber. Since his knives remove polluted elements of the body, hair and nails, so the mirror seems to absorb pollution accumulated by the organs of perception – sight, taste and hearing. The mirror reflects the purificatory power of the sun and reinstates the totality of the person.

The used clothes are given to the barber. Nowadays the barber refuses to accept polluted clothes and demands cash as compensation.

The return to the chief mourner's house

Upon his return the chief mourner is welcomed by the mistress of the household, the *nakhĩ*. Wailing in a ritualized way to express her sorrow, she pours water onto his feet. He stands on the guardian stone in front of the house (*pikhālākhu)* while the mistress places husk on either side of it to pacify and ward off any evil spirits in his company. To this she adds three small earthenware cups containing fire, cotton and charcoal as another means of warding off evil spirits. The knife that had been placed on the corpse prior to cremation to prevent the deceased from rising up is purified in the flames. Finally, the chief mourner takes two pitchers in his hands and enters the house while pouring water to both sides.

Svanecā taye byẽkegu – The trap for the deceased on the 10th day

A particular ritual on the evening of the 10th day, *Svanecā ta vanegu* or "the placement of stairs", is designed to hurt the hungry deceased, the *preta*. A kind of trap is constructed in which the spirit of the deceased is inevitably caught. This experience should teach the spirit a painful lesson so that it will not try to return to the realm of the living.

A basket normally used to sieve beer (*thvãpicā*) is filled with husks from beaten rice (*bajimā*), the favourite food of ghosts. A long needle without an eye (*mulu*) is hidden among the husks in order to hurt the *preta*.

The *preta* is essentially curious, but in this situation its curiosity is further aroused by three small sacks of which two contain a mixture of wheat flour, husked rice and beaten rice, the favourite food of *pretas*. The third one contains *khalu* (Skt. *kirātatikta, Agathes chirayta*), an extremely bitter herb that is usually prescribed in cases of diabetes or ma-

laria. Also prepared for this purpose are: five small sticks of a local variety of reed (*napaḥ*), four of which filled with water and cow milk, and the fifth filled with the bitter herb and a sharp needle. In order to satisfy his curiosity, the *preta* climbs a tiny ladder prepared from the same reed; this treacherous ladder has only six rungs, whereas the *preta* is absolutely used to the seven-runged ladders found in every Newar household. Attracted by the promising reed containers and the sacks, the spirit of the deceased climbs the ladder and stepping up for the seventh rung inevitably falls into the basket and is seriously hurt by the hidden needle.

In the twilight of the evening the *jicābhāju*, who acts again as a helper, lights a lamp in the basket and carries it to the riverbank, the entire set-up hidden behind a shawl in order to avoid the attention of other people. The chief mourner and other members of the lineage follow him as he crosses the river. A forked twig with the basket on top is rammed into the earth and left there. The mourners offer ritual rice (*akṣata)* to the basket and return across the river. From the far side *akṣata* is offered once again.

Ekādasīcā bvayegu – Offering food to the deceased on the 11th day

Late in the evening of the 10th day a plate of cooked food with eleven cups containing milk, beer and spirits, cooked food as well as offerings of cloth (called the *ekādasīcā*, lit. The Little Eleventh) is placed in a remote corner of the house as an offering to the *preta,* who is still believed to be haunting the house and its neighbourhood in search for food. Early in the morning of the 11th day, before the sun rises, the plate is taken to the river by an unpolluted female relative (preferably the *mhāymacā*) and discarded without crossing the river.

In many cases one of the two Bhā in Bhaktapur, who still practice as funerary priests, indicates that he will accept the offering which also includes a small remuneration. But it is not remembered that a Bhā ever visited the house of the bereaved family to receive the offering and took cooked rice in the presence of the family[3]. By absorbing part of the food dedicated to the *preta,* the Bhā represents the spirit of the deceased. He is more or less chased away after having taken over the mortality and impurity of the deceased.

Svamva luyegu – The purifying bath on the 11th day

Early in the morning of the 11th day all of the polluted lineage members (*dumhā)* and the *jicābhāju* arrive at one of the seven places of Bhaktapur set aside for purificatory rituals. The chief mourner is guided by his Brahmanical or Buddhist house priest as he produces a single *piṇḍa* made of wheat flour. He places it on the ritual copper plate (*kvalā*), goes down to the river and casts it away. To conclude, all of the people attending take a purifying bath (*mva luyegu*). The entire rite takes no more than 45 minutes.

The *jicābhāju* fills a brass container (*nāḥbatāḥ*) with water and places it before the priest, who mixes it with milk and sprinkles the chief mourner and all the other *dumhā* using sprigs of green *dūrvā* grass. The chief mourner sprinkles water along the entire route back to his home. Likewise the entire house is purified and the still marginally polluted lineage members perform the same purificatory rite in their own homes. They have received for this purpose a small container of purifying water from the priest.

The food on this day is still prepared by the married daughters, who return to their maternal home (*thaḥchẽ,* Nep. *maiti ghar*) to fulfil this obligation.

Purificatory rituals on the 10th day (du byẽkegu):
The day's rituals are concluded by setting up a treacherous ladder to expel the spirit of the deceased. A beer sieve filled with husk and a hidden needle is suspended from a forked twig. Four tiny cotton bags and five bamboo sticks contain good and bad food and drinks to annoy the deceased.
Photo 18th July 2002

[3] Toffin reports that the food includes a piece of the skull of the deceased, *kāṭṭo*. According to him, this offering is called *kāṭṭo nakegu* or *pret śayyā*, the *Bhā* himself is known by the nickname *khappar* (Toffin 1987: 228-229). Neither this nickname nor the offering of *kāṭṭo* is remembered in Bhaktapur.

Purificatory rituals on the 12th day (lhā panegu) – exposing the hands to a sacred fire: Jagat Lakṣmī Svāgamikha, the grandmother of the deceased (Rabi) and acting mistress of the household, exposes her hands to the fire in a final act of purification. Photo 20th July 2002

Lhā panegu – Exposing ones hands to the purifying fire on the 12th day

On the morning of the 12th day another purificatory ritual is performed in the house of the chief mourner. A Tinī (also called Śivācārya or *Ghāsuācāju*, literally the "master of the fire") is called in, "a kind of Brahmin" (Levy 1990: 358) whose status within the hierarchy of Bhaktapur's stratified society is considered considerably lower than that of a genuine Brahmin. A true Brahmin would argue that the purificatory character of such a ritual would affect their status and virtually degrade them. In other Newar cities the fire ritual is performed by Karmācārya. As only one Tinī continues to offer his services in Bhaktapur, non-Newar Brahmins or the son-in-law of the chief mourner (the *jicābhāju*) now usually perform this ritual.

An alternative term for this ritual, *suddha vākegu*, is widely used, and expresses the return to the state of purity (Skt. *śuddha*).

The fire is usually set between two unfired bricks. The acting priest continuously adds unhusked rice (*vā*), barley (*techva*), rice (*svāvā,* oryza sativa), mustard and rape seeds (*ikā-pakā*), black lentils (*māy*), lentils (*mu*), peas (*kegu*), soy beans (*musyā*), chick peas (*canā*), white beans (*bhuti*) and finally a mixture of purified butter and honey (*gyaḥ-kasti*). The priest places himself on the axis of the arrangement, opposite the *kalaśa*, a spouted vessel containing water mixed with cow milk, curd and honey. Arranged to his right are five offerings, the *pañcabali* which represent the Five Bhairavas. On the same side is the inevitable ritual lamp (*sukuṃḍā*) with Gaṇeśa who presides over the ritual, and a brass vessel with water covered by flowers (*daphvasvā*). Placed to his left are offerings to Gaṇeśa, Kumār and Bhairava and a plate of rice (*svagāki*) that is used for *akṣata* and *ṭikā*. The twin arrangement of mirror and vermilion container is also found on that side. To his left are the offerings made to the priest:

one container with unhusked rice and four plates with beaten rice and wheat flour.

Purificatory gestures prior to exposing the hands to the fire include taking water from the *kalaśa* and butter-honey three times with the right hand, which is used to touch the head. Finally a yellow mark (*mhāsusinhaḥ)* is put on the forehead and for the first time after the twelve days of mourning a mark in red (*hyāũsinhaḥ).* This mark precludes taking the usual auspicious *samay* food, which includes egg and fish. This is first offered to the fire and then distributed among all those who have been polluted by the death. From now on the consumption of meat, eggs, onions and garlic is permitted.

The eldest woman of the household is the last to undergo purification. She waves a plate and the knife that had been placed upon the corpse across the fire. Finally she waves her palms through the fire and presents *dakṣiṇā* to the priest.

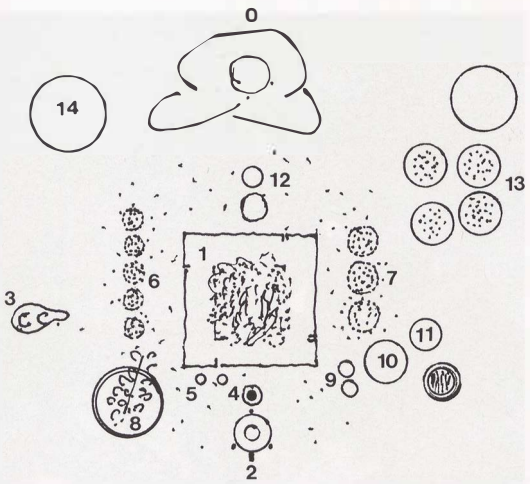
The *jicābhāju* serves once again as the person who clears the site. He collects the unbaked bricks into the brass vessel, adds the leftovers from the ground, carries it all to the river and discards everything from the bridge across the Hanumante while facing west.

Latyā – The union with the ancestors on the 45th day

The ritual of the union of the deceased with the ancestors, *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa,* is dealt with extensively in the second part of the present book.

Khulā and Dākilā – Rituals after six and twelve months

The spirit of the deceased goes on a one-year long journey through the netherworld to reach the Lord of Death for final judgment.

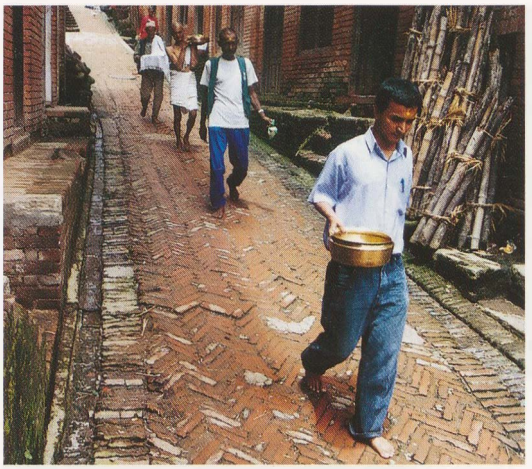


Purificatory rituals on the 12th day (lhā panegu) – exposing the hands to a sacred fire: The officiating para-priest, a Tinī, places himself (1) on the axis of the fire, facing north. Arranged on both sides of the fire are offerings and ritual instruments:

2 water pot (kalaśa)
3 oil lamp (sukuṇḍā)
4 butter and honey (ghyaḥ-kasti)
5 yellow paste and vermilion
6 five kinds of offerings (pañcabali)
7 three offerings for Gaṇeśa Kumār and Bhairava
8 container with water and daphaḥsvā-flower
9 container with vermilion and mirror
10 unbroken ritual rice
11 sweets
12 arghyapatra
13 food offerings for the officiating priest
14 basket with samaybaji, which the priest hands out to all the participants

On 15 occasions cooling water is offered to the spirit as well as gifts such as umbrellas, shoes, sticks and clothes to facilitate the journey. For a full ritual the house priest will have to come to the house of the chief mourner to receive the offerings of water. The two first offerings on the 30th and 45th day are usually performed as part of the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual of the 45th day. After six months and after twelve months sacrificial balls are prepared and dedicated to the father, grandfather and great-grandfather, similar to the offering made in the course of a regular *śrāddha*. The way all the relatives are involved in procuring the foodstuffs used to make the sacrificial balls, as well as the offerings to the crows and the Jugi, follows the scheme observed and described for the occasion of *latyā*.

The offering on the occasion of *khulā* involves a tiny representation of a boat, no more than three centimetres long and worked in silver, with two small paddles made of gold. The priest puts the boat and paddles in a large receptacle filled with water. This offering is meant to support the deceased while crossing the fetid river Vaitaraṇī in order to reach Yama's realm. Boat and paddles do not have to be ordered in advance because the local goldsmith will always have a stock



Khulā, dākilā and nyedātithi – the making of sacrificial balls after 6 months, 12 months and 24 months:
The procession to the river embankment is headed by a married male member from the matrilineage with the first sacrificial ball (vikalapiṇḍa, see below).
Then follows a member of the lineage with pūjā material, the chief mourner with the sacrificial balls representing three generations, and brought up at the rear by the married sister or her husband carrying the food plate (khusibvaḥ) offered to the river.
Photo 21st July 2002, Bikhu Bahādur Suvāl performing the ritual for his deceased father on the occasion of khulā.

of them. The offerings to the dead are in fact constantly rotated. Since the priest represents the deceased, all the offerings are brought to his house. Food items will be consumed by his family, boat and paddle returned to the goldsmith against a small remuneration, while other items like clogs and umbrellas are deemed worthless and thus discarded.

By way of completion of the rituals, the chief mourner worships those nephews (*bẽcā-pūjā*) who are the sons of his sisters, and who are called the "living ancestors" (*māmhā piṭr*) because they have left the lineage. For the sister's sons he acts in the meaningful role of *pāju*. He places a yellow mark on their foreheads, hands over a bank note as *dakṣiṇā* and scatters unbroken ritual rice. The involvement of the nephews can be understood as a symbolic action addressing those of the following generation who do not belong to the lineage of the deceased. Their existence ensures that the daughters of the deceased will one day join the wider community of ancestors.

The procession to the river in order to cast away the sacrificial balls (*pekhi vāygu*) follows the scheme described in the chapter devoted to the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual. Ideally, a nephew whose parents have already joined the ancestors heads the procession with the *bikalapiṇḍa*, a sacrificial ball dedicated to the unknown deceased, followed by the chief mourner with the three *piṇḍas* and the *jicā-bhāju* carrying the plate with food dedicated to the crows. At the river the chief mourner worships a *śivaliṅga* with water, flowers, unbroken rice and fruits.

The day is completed by a feast, attended by those who brought the raw material for making the *piṇḍas*. One plate is kept aside as an offering to the deceased (*kalāḥbvaḥ*) and in the end the leftovers of the close agnates (exclusively members of the *phukī* of the deceased) and the food from the *pūjā*-plate are added and deposited on the *chvāsaḥ*-stone by the mistress of the household in an act called *kalāḥ vāygu*.

After twelve months (*dākilā*), the final offering of *piṇḍas* is made using three lumps of dough. The first lump is used to make the *bikalapiṇḍa*, the second to make the *piṇḍa* dedicated to the deceased father, and the third to make the *piṇḍas* dedicated to the grandfather and great-grandfather, while the remainder is used for three unshaped lumps which demarcate the arena of sacrificial balls in the form of a triangle. The scheduled gifts include clothes and two symbolic beds (*śayyadāna*). It is said that the second bed is offered with the wish to make up for any shortcomings that might have occurred in course of the year. The chief mourner hands over a special

Dākilā – the making of sacrificial balls after 12 months: on completing the period of pollution, the chief mourner receives new clothes and a colourful cap from the priest. Photo 27th December 2002, Bikhu Bahādur Suvāl performing the ritual for his deceased father Jagat Bahādur.

dakṣiṇā representing the symbolic offering of a cow (*godāna*).

To complete the ritual, the priest marks the forehead of the chief mourner with yellow paste using his little finger. Then he offers – for the first time in 12 months – curds and *pan* (betel quid with spices). The chief mourner tastes a bit before offering it to the *piṇḍas*. Not until the following day will he consume the curds. To testify to the end of the mourning period, the priest hands over a colourful cap and new clothes, which the chief mourner only puts on after having cast the sacrificial balls into the river. The clothes are brought from the house of the wife of the chief mourner. In case he is unmarried, it comes from the house of his mother's brother, the *pāju*.

In case the ritual is performed for a son, a coloured cap had already been handed over on the completion of the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual on the 45th day, which marks the union of the deceased with his ancestors. The obvious contradiction between the union with the ancestors and the journey the deceased still has to undertake does not disturb the participants in the ritual. The offerings which conclude the one-year period of mourning and pollution seem to confirm the previously achieved union. The first cap is never used but treated like a symbol, a message reserved for the ancestors.

Cikã taygu – The offering of oil on the 361st day

Some mustard oil, one *pati* of beaten rice (*baji*) and a certain number of green peas (*kasu*) have to be offered to the household of the chief mourner by those households which have been classified as *bhvaḥ pāhã*. Fourteen peas are offered if the departed was an initiated family member, but only twelve peas if the departed was an uninitiated child.

In addition they bring cooked food like spinach, vegetables, fermented vegetable (*sĩke*), pease pudding (*kãgasa*), curd, rice flour (*kva*), beer (*thvã)* and mustard oil (*tu cikã*). It is mandatory to avoid using red pepper for this food.

The person who had prepared the food for the deceased on the 7th day, the *nhenumhā thuimhā*, receives the food offerings and puts a little of each item to one side to be stored away for the deceased who has successfully joined the realm of the ancestors. She then presents the oil to everybody with her right hand: first to the chief mourner, the *mitamhā*, then to his wife (or mother), who had earlier acted as *chvāsaḥvāimhā* and taken the three unfired bricks to the *chvāsaḥ* stone before the corpse was carried off to the cremation ground. Then oil is offered to the members of the lineage, and to all those of the *bhvaḥ pāhã* who had expressed their solidarity by allowing themselves to be shaved on the 10th day after death. Those who had been polluted by the death had not taken oil for the entire year. The only exception to this is that the *mitamhā* and the *chvāsaḥvāimhā* might have been offered oil by the officiating house priest on the 12th or 45th day.

As soon as the oil has been handed out and smeared into the hair, the female members of the household begin wailing for the last time. A female member of the lineage then comes with a plate offering water for them to wash their faces. Only then will the *nhenumhā thuimhā* herself receive oil from her husband, the *jicābhāju*.

After offering the oil, food is presented first to the chief mourner, then to his wife, and finally to the *mhāymacā*.

As a powerful symbol of the completion of the one-year-long period of mourning and pollution, the chief mourner is now allowed to put vermilion on his forehead.

The following morning, the *mhāymhacā* carries the food put aside for the ancestors to the house of the Jugi. This is the only occasion when the Jugi (or his wife) does not come to collect the offering for the ancestor, but receives it at the threshold of his house.

Nyedātithi – Death ritual after twenty-four months

The final death ritual is enacted after twenty-four months. Following the sequence described for *khulā* and *dākilā*, three sacrificial balls are dedicated to the father of the chief mourner, his grandfather and great-grandfather. The day concludes with a feast in which distant and close relatives, all *bhvaḥ pāhã* and *yākā pāhã,* join in.

Soraśrāddha – The sixteen-days death ritual following full moon in September

The dark half of the moon in September/ October is called *pitṛpakṣa* because these sixteen days are reserved for the performance of death rituals. The seventh and ninth days are considered auspicious, but it is the day of the new moon (*aũsī*) that sets the stage for more than one thousand such rituals in Bhaktapur. In case the lineage has been polluted by a death, the ritual has to be postponed and scheduled for any other day before worshipping the lineage deity (*dugudyaḥpūjā*) in May.

Soraśrāddha, the death ritual performed by the head (*nāyaḥ*) of the lineage (*phukī*) within a period of sixteen days following full moon in September, not only addresses the ancestors up to three generations, but all forefathers (*pitaraḥ*), half-divine forefathers (*viśvedevāḥ*), friends, neighbours, and even kings and prominent figures of society. Many people keep lists in order not to forget an ancestor or a friend. In Bhaktapur, miniature *piṇḍas* are dedicated to the famous king of the early 18th century, Bhūpatindra Malla and his wife Viśvalakṣmī, and recently also to King Birendra Bir Bikram Śaha and his wife Aiśvarya.

The elder of the close agnates up to three generations (the *phukī*) has to perform the ritual in the house of the annual caretaker (*pālāḥ*), who keeps a representation of the lineage deity there.

Offerings for preparing the sacrificial balls are brought by the wives of all close agnates. The chief mourner's close female relatives give constant help in kneading the dough and preparing up to 150 *piṇḍas*.

Members of Buddhist sub-castes first shape a *caitya* from the first lump of dough. This is a miniature version of a Buddhist votive structure which represents the Buddha and his teachings. The second lump is used to make the *bikalapiṇḍa*, which is often cast directly into the river since most *soraśrāddhas* are performed on an embankment. There follow six large *piṇḍas* for the males and females of the last three generations, and usually more than one hundred miniature *piṇḍas* for relatives and friends.

In the case of Narain Kumār Svāgamikha (the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual for his son Rabi is described in detail in the following chapter), who performed the *soraśrāddha* on 26th September 2003 at Maṅgaltīrtha, the following sequence was observed: the first *piṇḍa* was dedicated to his father, the second to his grandfather, the third to his great-grandfather, the fourth to his grandmother (as his mother was still acting as the mistress of the household), and the fifth to his great-grandmother. The six slightly smaller *piṇḍas* were made for the male and female members of the last three generations on his mother's side. Then all of the agnates up to six generations were served. Only then was it possible to prepare a small *piṇḍa* dedicated to his deceased son, Rabi. After all the other friends and neighbours had been served, three small balls were separated from the rest and dedicated collectively – without any further definition – to the Śudra, the untouchables.

After all the *piṇḍas* have been placed in the ritual copper container, the priest draws the number 74 on the ground and asks the client to place the container on top. The number 7 resembles the conch shell, the number 4 is identified as the disc – two symbolic objects which are identified with Viṣṇu, who is believed to preside over the entire ritual.

The food that will be cast into the river is now prepared on a separate leaf plate and kept aside while observing silence. At the river bank a female member of the sub-caste of Pvaḥ takes care that the plate does not submerge under the water. She also retrieves all of the *piṇḍas,* which will serve as feed for the pigs. At all seven embankments of Bhaktapur, Pvaḥ take watch on this day to harvest *piṇḍas* from the water.

In some cases up to 100 clients (elders of lineages as *jajmān*) from various sub-castes will have lined up at Kvaḥre to perform *soraśrāddha* under the instruction of a Brahmanical priest, who uses a loudspeaker to address the crowd.

Many priests find it difficult to meet the calls of their clients, for many have moved to Kathmandu while keeping their hereditary relationship. A general strike (*bandh*) lasting three successive days considerably hampered the proper performance of the rituals in September 2003, prompting the newspaper to an-

nounce: "The dead too suffer from bandhs" (*Kathmandu Post*, 19th September). Many rituals had to be directed by phone.

The day of *soraśrāddha* ends with the usual feast, which has to be prepared by the annual caretaker of the lineage. All of the lineage members, male and female, take part. Being tied to the ancestors of their husbands, the married daughters, who are called "living ancestors" (*māmhā pitṛ*) are not only not invited to this feast, they are even not supposed to watch it. A special plate, the *kalāḥbvaḥ*, is set aside for the ancestors and later discarded on the nearest *chvāsaḥ* stone by the wife of the elder.

Dugudyaḥpūjā – Worship of the ancestor deities

Nature and designation of ancestor deities

Every lineage, a group of close agnates up to three generations, the *phukī*, entertains a relationship with a "lineage" or "ancestor" deity, the *dugudyaḥ* (in neighbouring cities called *digudyaḥ* or *degudyaḥ)*. In a non-iconic form, the deity, being neither male nor female, resides in a stone located outside of urban space (the spatial distribution has been dealt with in an earlier chapter). The occupation of prominent places in the landscape mirrors what Diana Eck has called "the 'locative' strand of Hindu piety", as its "traditions of ritual and reverence are linked primarily to place" (1981: 323). A replica, often worked in silver in the shape of a petalled crown, is kept by the annual caretaker (*pālāḥ*) of the lineage in the worship room of his house and worshipped daily.

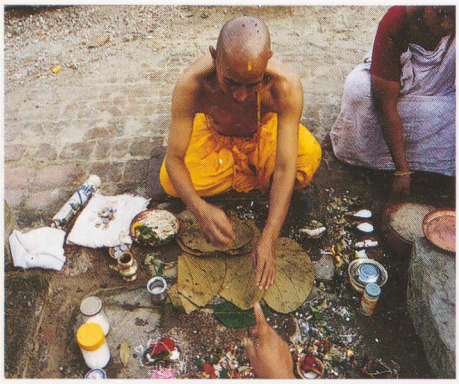
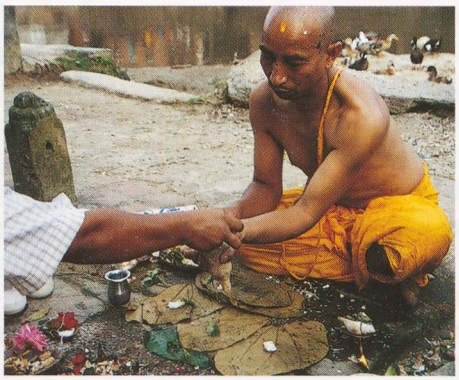
The stone identified as *dugudyaḥ* is always found in the company of a second stone representing Nārāyaṇa, often in the shape of a lotus flower. Nārāyaṇa is never offered sacrificial blood, but flowers, fruits and *akṣata* instead.

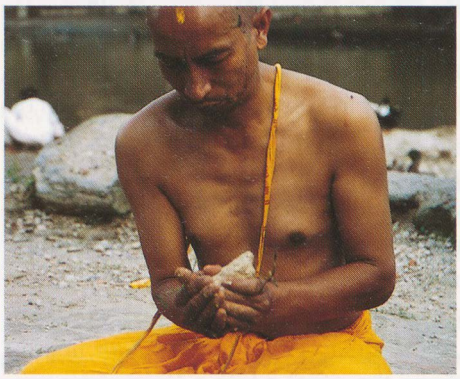
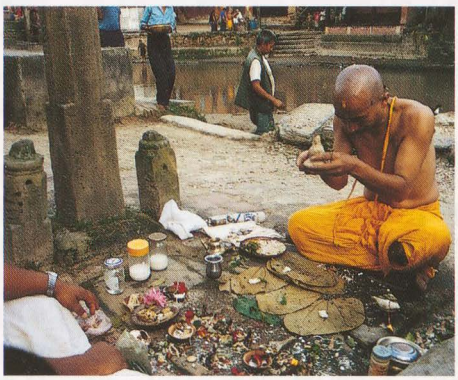
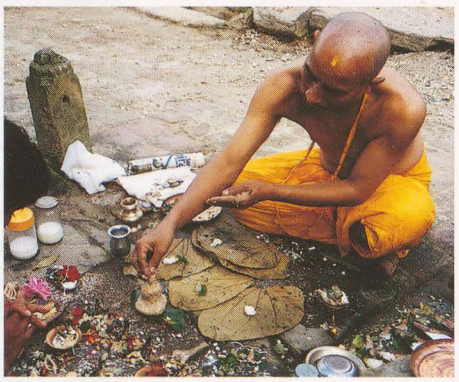
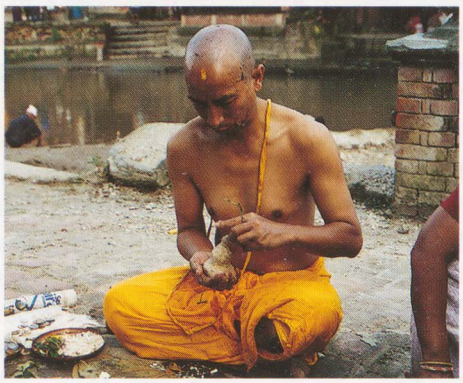
The fact that the lineage addresses the ancestral deity arouses a sense of belonging. Girls who have completed the *bel*-fruit marriage (*ihi*) and boys are first admitted to the lineage deity at the age of four or five with the sacrifice of a duck – a ritual called *dupā taygu* ("to put or be admitted inside"; *du*-inside*)*. After the initiation (*kaytāpūjā*) at the age of between 6 and 12, boys are allowed to appear a second time to attain the status of full members of the lineage. As ritually independent beings they participate in the sacrifices. They are exposed to pollution by death and have to undergo the usual purification rituals (*byẽkegu*). To mark their admission on that day they have to have their head shaved the day before.

Either Buddhist Bajrācārya or Hindu Karmācārya priests may be called to guide the worship of the deity (Vergati 1991: 55). In the case of the potters from eastern Bhaktapur, more than one hundred *nāyaḥ* line up to perform the ritual while a Bajrācārya presides over the worship of the *dugudyaḥ* and a Brahmin over that of Nārāyaṇa. This ambivalent structure does not prompt any reasoning about the nature of the *dugudyaḥ*.

Inscriptions as well as comments from officiating ritual specialists suggest that the *dugudyaḥ* may be identical with the clan deity in Brahmanical contexts. In the latter case the deity is called *kuladevatā*, or *iṣṭadevatā*, "the deity chosen (by the worshipper himself)".

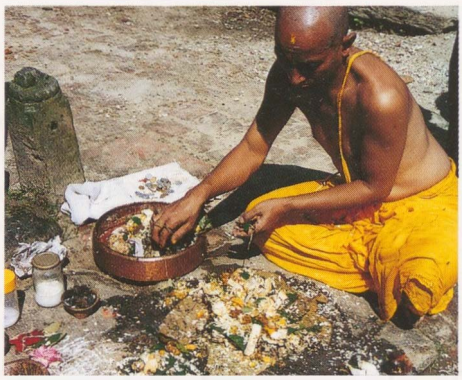
Inscriptions found on stone arches above the deity *in situ* or on portable crowns (*kikīpā*), tympana (*tvalã*), ritual brass containers or bells, offer a variety of designations that hint at the same background. The oldest known inscription is on a crown of a potter's lineage and consists of the words "*śrī 3 degudeva*". It is dated to 1579 AD. The bell of a Jhvãchẽ lineage recalls the donation by one Govinda in 1770 AD and its dedication to "*śrī 3 īṣṭadeguli*" and to a crown – albeit

Soraśrāddha – the "period of sixteen days for performing ancestor rituals":
Madhu Citrakār performs the ritual on 19th September 2003 according to the instructions of his Buddhist house priest, Karṇa Bajrācārya at Kvaḥre.
Phase 1: the making of a caitya.
The elder of the lineage prepares the ground with three large leaves (1), while his wife kneads the dough. He takes a lump of dough and prepares the rough shape of a caitya (2, 3); his priest inserts a few grains of unbroken rice into the womb of the caitya in an effort to present life (jivan nyās) (4). The elder raises the caitya in a gesture of offering (5) and places it beyond the leaves (6). He lustrates the top of the caitya from a conch shell (7) and performs pūjā in all four directions and to the pinnacle, while the priest utters the name of the four Tathāgatas (8). Finally, the four sides are marked with yellow paste (9).









Soraśrāddha – the "period of sixteen days for performing ancestor rituals": Madhu Citrakār performs the ritual on 19th September 2003 according to the instructions of his Buddhist house priest, Karṇa Bajrācārya at Kvaḥre. Phase 2: the making of the sacrificial balls.

Mādhu produces first three large piṇḍas (1 – 4), representing three generations of ancestors, while the priest adds black sesame. Then he prepares some 120 small piṇḍas according to a list of deceased relatives which is read out by the priest (5). The final piṇḍa named bikva is again of large size and placed in the lower right corner as a guardian. Finally all of the piṇḍas are offered food, milk, fruits, sweets and flowers before they are placed on the ritual copper plate (7, 8) and cast into the river (9), where a member of the sub-caste of Pvaḥ waits to recover the piṇḍas.

1 4 7
2 5 8
3 6 9

in the short form *īdevata* – dated 1791. More inscriptions, dated to the 19th and early 20th centuries, refer to an *īṣṭadevatā* (dated 1833, 1849, 1924, 1967 and 1987) and *digudeva* (1944). One vessel is known with a dedication inscribed on its rim to the *devaliguthī* and the date 1943, while another one is dedicated to "*śrī 3 Viṣṇuvī*" and dated 1840. This turned out to be the name of one of the eight protective Mother Goddesses. One hundred years later, a Bajrācārya constructed an arch behind his "*kuladevatā*" at Tathusubya and named it after a Tantric Buddhist deity, Candramahāroṣana. Another arch, constructed in 2003 at Kamalpūkhū, also refers to the lineage deity as "*kuladevatā*". And when the Pvaḥ recently decided to encircle one of their lineage deities with a tiled wall they decided to call it the "*kuladevatā*" of "*dyaḥpālāḥ*" (literally "the clan deity of the gods' caretakers"). Only one inscription, roughly carved into the stone that represents a lineage god, refers to "*śrīdugudyaḥ*" – the most common designation of ancestor deities used in town.

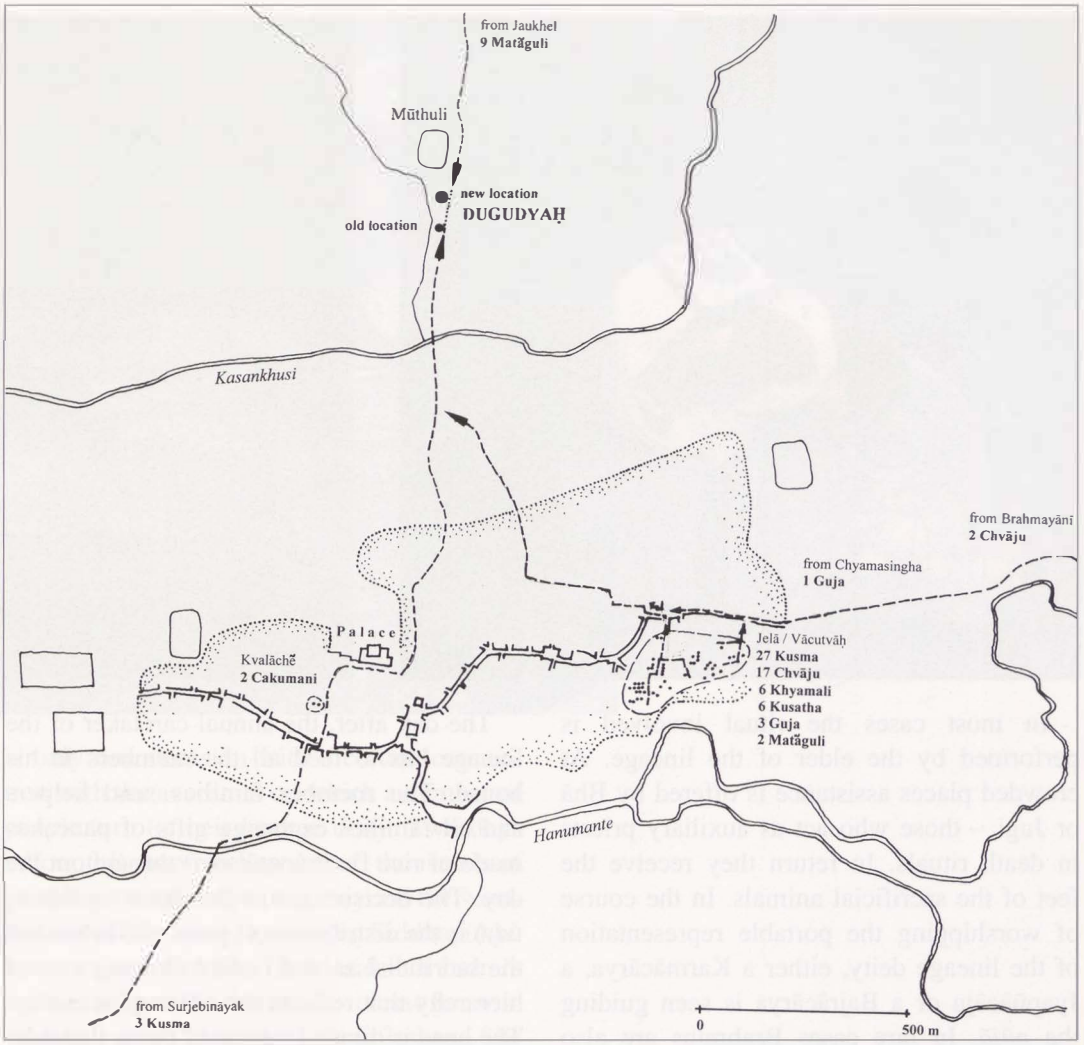
Lineages and their deities

Most *dugudyaḥ* are visited by lineages of a number of different sub-castes. None of the lineages is aware of that variety as the visits to the site stretch over a period of ten weeks. There is a sense of belonging within each individual sub-caste, but no questions arise as to why lineages of other sub-castes come to worship the deity at the same stone. For example, some 40 lineages of Bāsukala from Byāsi worship the same stone in a small temple beyond Cupīghāṭ. At the same time lineages of high status groups, like Hādā and Kasa, offer their goats at the same place. Since on the day of *taḥdī,* the first Thursday or Sunday after the Indestructible Third after full moon in April, hundreds of lineages visit the same place; people virtually wade in blood.

Only in very few cases is it possible to gain an overview of all the lineages involved in one *dugudyaḥ*. In April 2003 a few stones representing the lineage god and the supplementary Nārāyaṇa were lifted from their original place on a steep slope which was threatening to slide. They were shifted to a new location some 50 metres north, just below the former pond of Mūthu. The eleventh day of the dark moon, four days ahead of the Indestructible Third, was considered auspicious enough for such a rare intervention, which also demanded the sacrifice of a goat. When a management committee decided to construct a large cemented shelter (*pauvā*) next to the new platform, a total of 74 families were traced and asked to contribute to the costs. The list of contributors reveals seven different sub-castes of farmer (Jyāpu) status, of which the majority live in the south-eastern quarters of Jēlā and Vācutvaḥ in a pattern (see map) that suggests a close relationship if not a common origin in the distant past. The fact that seventeen families had migrated to villages on the periphery documents a growing mobility that might have already started at the beginning of the 20th century.

In some cases well-defined membership and controlled access to the lineage deity is even more evident. The Karmācārya of the Tripuravidyāpīṭh do not worship any "external" lineage god. They consider their *dugudyaḥ* to be identical with their esoteric Tantric deity, the *āgãdyaḥ*, in all probability representing a female goddess, Kubjikā. Equally valid for this deity is the term *kuladevatā* or *iṣṭadevatā*. Whether it is the esoteric goddess of a clan, a family deity or a personal deity – all are represented as a single identity.

Relocation of an ancestor deity (dugudyaḥ).
A group of 74 farmers relocated a few field stones representing their ancestor deities at Mūthu on 26th April 2003.
The majority of them, such as Kusma and Chvāju, originate from the quarter of Jẽlā and Vācutvaḥ in the upper town – only two families from the sub-caste of Cakumani are from the lower town; seventeen families have migrated to surrounding villages.
The occasion of shifting the ancestor deity was the cause for tracing all of the lineages related to that particular location.



The *dugudyaḥpūjā* ritual

The day prior to the *pūjā,* the elder of the lineage has to have his head shaved, while all the other male members have their toenails symbolically pared. The house has to be cleaned, used clothes washed and fresh clothes prepared. In the evening only beaten rice is permissible for consumption, and no cooked food.

On the second day, the elder of the lineage leads the procession of all of the male members, carrying a brass container with a representation of the lineage god, duck eggs (one for every family of the lineage), unbroken rice and incense. He is followed by a member carrying a plate with a number of clay cups (*kislī*) filled with unbroken rice, a betel nut, a coin and vermilion, one for every member of the lineage, male and female, initiated and uninitiated. A tiny ring with the representation of a flower (*jona daphaḥsvã*) is added as a peculiar offering, the meaning of which has still to be unveiled. Other members drag a goat to the sacrificial site and carry offerings to the deity such as radish, fruits and a specific flower for this occasion, *musvã*. Food and beer are also brought along for the ensuing ritual feast.

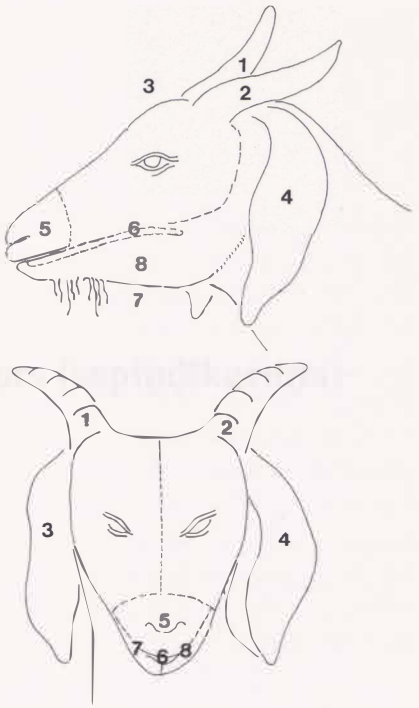
The ritual of worshipping the lineage deity (dugudyaḥpūjā) on full moon in September (Yanyāpunhi/Indrajātrā) at Siddhapūkhū.
Left a Śākya woman touching her head to the treasure vase representing Nairatna Guhyeśvarī, right a farmer, facing west towards Nārāyaṇa in an upright position with his arms outstretched.
Fotos 10th September 2003

In most cases the ritual involved is performed by the elder of the lineage. At crowded places assistance is offered by Bhā or Jugi – those who act as auxiliary priests in death rituals. In return they receive the feet of the sacrificial animals. In the course of worshipping the portable representation of the lineage deity, either a Karmācārya, a Jyapūācāju or a Bajrācārya is seen guiding the *pūjā*. In rare cases Brahmins are also involved. The grand congregation of more than 100 lineages representing the majority of the potter's community from the eastern quarters of the town on the occasion of the Indestrustible Third engages a Bajrācārya when worshipping the lineage god, and at the same time a Brahmin when worshipping the complementary Nārāyaṇa.

The visit to the lineage deity is complete after the male members have received a vermilion mark on their foreheads and a black stroke (*mvaḥni*) signifying the sharing of the blood sacrifice. A limited feast with beer and a small piece of roasted meat from the sacrificial animal concludes the gathering.

The day after, the annual caretaker of the lineage has to feed all the members in his house. The member families send helpers and all families exchange gifts of pancakes made of rice flour (*catāmari*) throughout the day. The decisive act of this feast (*syūkābhvay*) is the distribution of parts of the head of the sacrificial animal (*syū*) following a strict hierarchy that reflects the order of seniority. The head is divided into eight parts: the elder receives the right horn and the right eye, the second one the left horn and eye, the third one the right ear, the fourth one the left ear, the fifth one the snout, the sixth the tongue, the seventh the right jaw, the eighth the left jaw and the ninth the tail. The remaining members receive a portion of meat. The feast ends with a special plate being offered to the new caretaker, who will house the lineage deity for the coming twelve months.

The non-iconic representation of the lineage deity is not regularly visited. But a sense of belonging exists and that causes individual members of a lineage to visit the place in an expression of obeisance. There



The ritual of worshipping the lineage deity (dugudyaḥpūjā) within a period of 73 days between April and June. An offering is brought to the lineage deity in the name of every member of the lineage, male and female, initiated and uninitiated.

Left
The offerings of a Bāsukala lineage with 20 members, brought to Kvathusubya at Cupĩghāḷ.
Photo 18th May 1999

Right
Division and distribution of the head of the sacrificial goat to the members of a lineage on the occasion of dugudyaḥpūjā, or any other ritual involving a blood sacrifice.

is only one occasion with a certain connection with the ancestors on which a number of people turn to their lineage deity. Two days before full moon in September, thousands of people go to the large pond beyond the western tip of the town, known as Siddhapūkhū but also as Indradaha. It is said that Indra's mother begged the demons to release her son, who had come to earth to steal flowers. She promised to take with her all those who had died during the preceding 12 months. The long line of *pitṛ* was unable to cling onto her shawls and fell into Indradaha. After having worshipped Indrāyaṇī, Indra's female representation at the pond, many people visit their lineage deity as if to remember the unhappy ancestors who could not make the journey into heaven.