FOREWORD

Outline of the Book

The present account of childhood and youth rituals is the second volume in an attempt to provide a comprehensive study of life-cycle rituals among the Newars of Bhaktapur. While *Handling Death*, the first volume, focussed on the dynamics of death and ancestor rituals among the Newars of the ancient city of Bhaktapur in Nepal, particularly on the (Nev.) *latyā* or (Skt.) *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* rituals, the present volume deals with a number of rituals between birth and initiation. The male initiation rituals themselves, especially the Hindu *upanayana* – in Nepal mostly called *vratabandha(na)* or (Nep.) *bartamān* – have been omitted here because they will be treated in a separate work by Christof Zotter on *vratabandha* among the Bāhun-Chetri of Kathmandu. In our planned third and final volume we will concentrate on marriage rituals.

The first section of the present volume contains a general overview of studies on Hindu life-cycle rituals, and more specifically childhood and adolescence rituals in Nepal, based on textual and ethnographic material from various sources. Some of them have never previously been described. This is followed by a brief survey of life-cycle rituals among the Newars. A further introductory chapter focuses on the relevance of ritual time.

In the second section we present as a model a more detailed description of several adolescence rituals, especially the Kaytāpūjā, the "worship of the loin-cloth", for boys and the Ihi, the "marriage" ceremony for girls, which are both particularly important rituals among Hindu and Buddhist Newars. These rituals are also documented on the DVD included in this book.

In the third part, we have edited and translated the texts used by Brahmin and Buddhist Vajrācārya priests during these and other rituals. Most of these texts have been chosen because of their significance for the textual histories of their genres. Some of them are unique. A specimen of the texts for the Ihi ritual, for example, has never been previously published. This combination of textual and contextual approaches – which we call the ethno-indological method – has been theoretically elaborated elsewhere (Michaels 2004a and 2005a). We shall try to show that the texts are not liturgical and normative in nature and thus not a restraint on action, but on the contrary texts that leave space for many variations and alterations or even *ad hoc* inventions which make for the dynamics of the ritual.

In our ethno-indological studies, special attention has been paid to the local handbooks and manuals of the following categories:

• Personal handbooks belonging to the priests, rarely published but occasionally microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project: such texts are written in a mixture of Sanskrit, Nevārī and Nepālī;
• Printed manuals in Sanskrit, often published with a commentary or translation in Nepālī;
• Elaborate ritual texts in Sanskrit, written by learned scholars and locally published by the Mahendra-Saṃskṛta-Viśvavidyālaya, Tribhuvan Viśvavidyālaya, Nepāla Rājakīya Prajñā-Pratiṣṭhāna, or private publishers;
• Ritual texts in Sanskrit belonging to the great tradition, with a pan-Indian distribution;
• Documents from private persons or from the Guṭhī Saṃsthāna related to the rituals performed;
• Grey literature (pamphlets etc.) from ritual organisations.

Our main intention is to understand both the agency in rituals and the function of texts in their context. We hold that the agency is not only exercised by the priest (*pūjārī*) but also the sacrificer (*yajamāna*) and his family, the spectators of the ritual, and even trans-human agents. From this point of view, we find rituals as well as ritual texts much less formal than they might at first appear.

By way of conclusion, we shall try to reinforce our point that rituals and their texts have to be seen in a new light, because they offer far more freedom than has generally been accepted. Although it is true that such rituals are formalised, they are by no means strict, stereotypical, and unchangeable. As with most rituals, Newar rituals follow their own dynamics, and are as Don Handelman terms it "rituals in their own right" (see the introduction to the 2nd edition of Handelman 1998 and 2004) because they depend on situational factors.
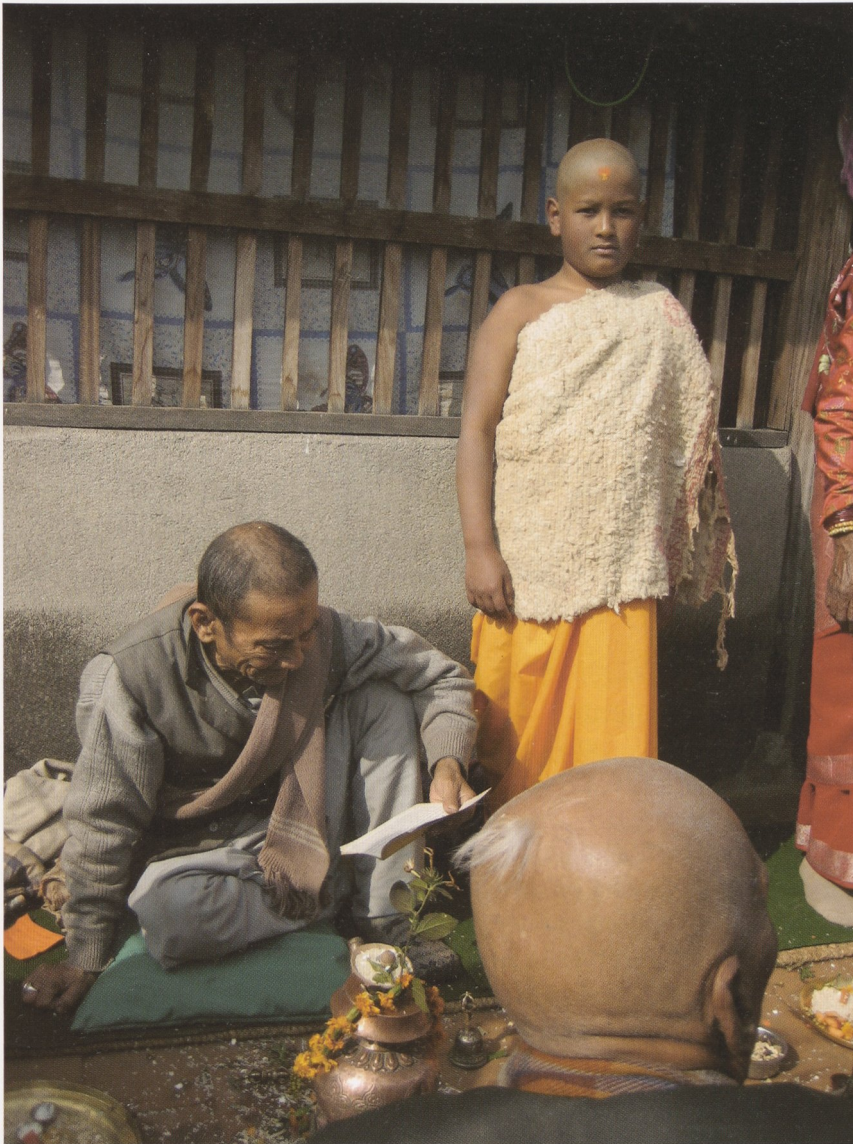
It has been argued by M.N. Srinivas (1952) as well as Dumont and Pocock (1957, 1959) that the rituals in the Sanskrit texts and the rituals in the local context are more or less different forms of the same religion, and that what is fixed in texts will vary in practice. This is why one often finds different forms of Hinduism being constructed – e.g. Sanskritic versus popular Hinduism. However, such distinctions are problematic when it comes to rituals as was first and aptly noticed by Stanley Tambiah: "It is surely inappropriate (…) to talk of popular Hinduism and Sanskritic Hinduism as separate levels, when the local Brahmin priest and perhaps educated members from other castes with literary traditions are active members in the local community and are using texts and orally transmitted knowledge which are directly or indirectly linked to the classical forms" (Tambiah 1970: 372).

This is even more so when – as often in Bhaktapur – local Brahmin priests and un-educated members from "lower" castes come together. Both refer to Sanskritic texts (mixed with Nevārī instructions), but a great portion of the ritual knowledge is transmitted without in fact using the texts. This by no means makes these rituals (or texts) inferior, as is more or less directly insinuated by authors who refer to the "corrupt" form of the texts, "ignorant" priests, or "illiterates" participating in the rituals. On the contrary, seen from the perspective of practice, the reason why texts often look thin is not because of their bad Sanskrit, but because they lack the many sub-rituals, details and facets that actually take place. Rituals, as we see them, are only fully understood by outsiders if both text and context come together, if the priests and other ritual specialists are accepted (and respected) as ritual experts with an agency of their own that allows them a great number of variations, and if the participants are not only seen as passive partakers, but as active contributors who are in a constant verbal and ritual exchange with the priests and other ritual specialists.

Actors and Places

In this book, we continue our practice of naming the actors and places involved. In the foreword to "Handling Death" we argued that ethnographic research has tended to anonymise places and persons, purportedly out of respect for those who were involved and whose actions were documented to support a more general analysis. We, however, feel that the observed ritual stands in its own right. It is the example *par excellence* in time and space. The dynamics of ritual are discussed from the perspective of an identified case, the prescriptions of the Brahmins, and the textbooks of the high culture. Rituals, then, show their "individuality", their uniqueness as a specific event – despite the fact that they belong to categories and genres.

ment of what is textually prescribed, but a ritual performance in its own right. This also means that we do not regard the ritual texts as secondary or corrupt simply because their Sanskrit or Nevārī does not follow certain rules of spelling and grammar.

At the same time we do not feel prey to the confusion that arises when it is mooted that there is a realm of privacy that should be left untouched. The families concerned agreed to be filmed, and close-up photographs were only ever taken after an affirmative gesture was given. We will also often introduce the family background to a described ritual in order to bring out the peculiarities and sometimes problems relating to the family or clan involved. In addition, we have maintained a long-standing relationship with most of the families whose rituals are documented in this volume. We feel that the identification of an actor and his or her place in time, space and society is an open expression of respect. The actors have been freed of the veil of anonymity in order to underline that they are not simply objects of research and victims of theory, but subjects, agents, often even ritual artists.

Spelling and Transcription Rules

If not otherwise indicated or evident from the context, all terms and place names given here are based on Nevārī (Nev.) or Nevāḥ as spoken by farmers (Jyāpu) in Bhaktapur. The majority of these terms are also listed in the glossary. Some more common names and terms have been spelt in their anglicised form, i.e. without diacritics.

We are aware that there is neither a standard Nevārī language nor a standard spelling (cf. Gellner 1992: xxi-xxii and 35-38). Variations are commonly found among the different communities and especially between the urban and rural dialects of Kathmandu Valley. This variety is also reflected in the way

Buddhist initiation (Kaytāpūjā) of Pranaya Chitrakar of the sub-caste of painters on 28th January 2007.
The initiate stands clad with a saffron dhoti and a shawl of raw cotton, the priest Ananda Muni Bajracharya recites from a text, the head of the lineage with his shaved head in the foreground.

So once again our method is to focus on individual rituals and then try to understand them by using the priests' texts and the locally used or distributed texts of the so-called Great Tradition. This method is thus inductive rather than deductive. Our starting point is – as we must repeat – the actual ritual practice, and we do not consider these rituals or so-called "corrupt" texts as deviant, but as authentic. What happens *in situ* is for us not a more or less accurate realisation or enact-

rituals are performed. Some of the problems of spelling and transcription stem from the language itself, others from the various techniques for reducing the language to writing, no matter whether Devanāgarī or Roman script, whether old or new.

Few of these issues were solved for the *Dictionary of Architectural Terms*, presented in 1987 by Niels Gutschow, Bernhard Kölver and Ishwaranand Shresthacarya. For example, the question of the high vowels, the *i/e/ya-* and the *u/o/va-* series: alternations within the series are a characteristic of Classical Nevārī manuscripts and persist to the present day. More worrying, because indubitably cutting across a phonemic opposition, are alterations between the low front and the low back vowels *ā/a* and *a/a*. In most cases we prefer to transliterate the closed *a*-vowel by *va*, pronounced *o*, e.g. *tvāḥ = toḥ*.

Sometimes the spelling is a matter of preference, and depends on the importance given to a term. Thus, since there are no retroflex sounds in Nevārī, loan words from Sanskrit or Nepālī can be regarded as foreign words or as incorporated words. In the first case one would, for example write (Nep.) *ṭikā* or (Skt.) *tilaka*, in the second (Nev.) *tikā*. We have mostly opted for the Nevārī version when it refers to a ritual context and to the Sanskrit version when the term appears in a textual context.

In addition to this are the effects resulting from the loss of certain consonants in the word-final position, which lead to compensatory lengthening – a process which some words appear to have undergone repeatedly, producing chains such as *cākala-* (obl.): *cākaḥ, cāka, cāḥ*, all of them renderings of Skt. *cakra*. Rules about which stem to select in compounds have yet to be discovered.

With regard to terms that have been recorded from an oral context, every single one was pronounced several times by native speakers from Bhaktapur and then noted down by Nutan Sharma.

Sanskrit or Sankritic (Skt.) terms and names are transcribed according to the standard conventions. However, at times it depends on personal choice and the meaning whether one regards a term as a *tatsama* (loan word from Sanskrit to be written in the standard form) or as a tadbhāva (loan word from Sanskrit that changes its spelling and meaning). Thus, (Nev.) *mandaḥ* is not always the same as (Skt.) *maṇḍala*, but it is almost impossible to find coherent rules for such cases. Moreover, the inherent *a* in names of deities has mostly been spelt, although in spoken language it might not be heard (e.g. Gaṇeś versus Gaṇeśa). As for Nepālī (Nep.), mostly the transcription follows the *Bṛhad Nepālī Śabdakoṣa* or Ralph L. Turner's Dictionary.

Acknowledgements

Two Brahmin priests, Lava Kush Sharma (left) and Hari Sharan Sharma (right) studying and discussing text which had been handed down since generations. Photograph January 2007 in their residence in Lalāchẽ

the Newars of Kathmandu – as well as to Kathleen Gögge, Anand Mishra, Astrid Zotter and Christof Zotter for their cooperation in preparing the edition and translation of the texts, and their help in identifying *mantras* and preparing the bibliography, index and glossary. Our thanks also go to Tessa Pariyar (Fischer) for her assistance in the fieldwork and Stanisław Klimek for providing several of the plates. However, it goes without saying that we alone are responsible for any mistakes that may arise in the present volume.

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