

INTRODUCTION

The Study of Life-Cycle Rituals

Life-cycle rituals are often regarded as paradigmatic for ritual theory. This is partly due to Arnold Van Gennep's (1909) and even more Victor Turner's (1969) pioneering studies. Both scholars have introduced key terms for the discussion of rituals: "rites de passage", "rites de séparation", "rites de marge" and "rites de agrégation", or "liminality", "communitas", "social drama", and "anti-structure".

Such rituals have mostly been understood as hierophantic events, or as events that help to overcome life crises, or to build up identity and personhood, or to strengthen the solidarity of a social group. In our view, functionalistic theories of this kind are insufficient to grasp the specific elements of such rituals. Instead we propose to concentrate on polyvalent and polythetic aspects and the specific components of rituals that have been outlined in the *Handling Death* volume (Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 6-7). The following is a brief summary of these principles that guide our research.

We think that ritual acts are mostly a) formal, stereotypical, and repetitive (therefore imitable); b) public; and c) irrevocable; in many cases they are also d) liminal. So they may not be spontaneous, private, revocable, singular or optional for everyone. Ritual acts are not deliberately rational; they cannot simply be revised to achieve a better or more economical goal. Therefore, formalism constitutes a central criterion in most definitions of ritual (see, however, Michaels/Buss forthc.). One element of the ritual act is the

formal, usually spoken decision that is required to carry the act out, i.e. the ritual declaration (*samkalpa*) that is found in almost every handbook for Sanskritic life-cycle rituals (see Michaels 2005). Rituals cannot be singular private functions; they can be imitated. Publicity in the sense of inter-subjectivity – even if it concerns only a small secret circle of initiated specialists – is thus another formal criterion. Moreover, life-cycle rituals in particular are effective independent of their meaning: *ex opere operato* (see Michaels 2000). This means that they cannot be reverted, for that requires a new ritual.

Along with these three strict, formal criteria, many rituals also contain another one, which Victor Turner has described as "liminality" (from the Latin, *limen*, "threshold"). In this he refers to the non-everyday and yet reversible, paradoxical, sometimes absurd and playful parts of rituals, especially in life-cycle border situations.

Almost every ritual act also takes place in an everyday context. But whether the act of "pouring water" is performed to clean or to consecrate a statue cannot be decided solely on the basis of these external, formal criteria, but also depends on "internal" criteria regarding intentions, which can relate to social aspects (solidarity, hierarchy, control, or establishment of norms), psychological and more individual aspects such as alleviating anxiety, experiences of enthusiasm, desire, etc., or to transcendental aspects concerning the other, higher, sacred world. In the latter case, everyday acts acquire sublimity and the immutable, non-individual, non-everyday is staged. Although this criterion is particu-

larly controversial, because it links religion with ritual, we hold that the majority of rituals, at least most life-cycle rituals, cannot do without it. Thus we follow Emile Durkheim's (1912: 50) dictum that "the ritual can be defined only after defining the belief".

Finally, life-cycle rituals involve temporal or spatial changes; they refer to biological, physical, or age-related alterations or changes. Consequently, a tangible change is brought about by the ritual. For example, the participants must acquire an ability they did not previously have, or a new social status with new social repercussions: e.g. the initiate becomes a marriageable Twice-Born, the initiated girl a potential mother, the deceased a "departed one" (*preta*) or a forefather (*pitṛ*).

Most important, however, is that rituals are not limited to just one meaning or purpose, such as auspiciousness. They are complex events in which actions and words are constantly adapted to situations, needs, ritual specialists and other persons involved. Only in some cases do the priests or family members know what exactly they are doing and why exactly they are doing it in this or that way. The only thing they know is that they have to get it right, as Pierre Bourdieu aptly remarks:

Rites are practices that are ends in themselves, that are justified by their very performance; things that one does because they are 'the done thing', 'the right thing to do', but also because one cannot do otherwise, without needing to know why or for whom one does them, or what they mean, such as acts of funeral piety. This is what the work of interpretation, which seeks to restore their meaning, to grasp their logic, makes one forget: they may have, strictly speaking, neither meaning nor function, other than the function implied in their very existence, and the meaning objectively inscribed in the logic of actions or words that are done or said in order to

'do or say something' (where there is 'nothing else to be done'), or more precisely in the generative structures of which these words or actions are the product, or even in the oriented space within which they are performed (Bourdieu 1990: 18).

We believe that life-cycle rituals mostly focus on individuals, but cannot be separated from other rituals that take place in the prevalent social groups. So in contradistinction to many similar studies we do not regard them primarily as events in the life of individuals but as events that constitute and reaffirm socio-religious relations and groups. Such rituals deal not only with purity or impurity and auspiciousness or inauspiciousness regarding the initiated or married person, but even more so with the social and psychological identities of the group members. Thus pollution at birth, death or during menarche seclusion affects many natal or conjugal members of a family or clan. Moreover, close or distant relatives, wife-givers and wife-takers, lineage members or members of the same *siguthī* (death association) are variously and to different degrees involved in life-cycle rituals, but also in other rituals and festivities of the households or lineages. So it is just as important to look for comparable structures in these rituals as it is to elaborate on the unique features not only of a certain type of ritual but of the event itself (see Handelman 2004).

This search for a matrix rather than the unique in life-cycle rituals was to a large extent due to the influence of text-related indological studies: See, for instance, Hillebrandt 1897, Gonda 1965 and 1980, Bhattacharya 1968, Kane 1968 ff., Pandey 1969, and Olivelle 1993. The practice of such rituals, however, has only rarely been touched on, or if so only marginally. Even with regards to the so-called educational *saṃskāras*, childhood and youth rituals have

only occasionally been studied on the basis of fieldwork.

Basically the same holds true for Nepal, and even more so for Bhaktapur: “Bhaktapur’s *saṃskāras* are sufficiently complex in themselves, in their social distribution, and in their relations to traditional South Indian [Asian?] versions, that they would warrant a full study in themselves” (Levy 1990: 660).

Childhood rites, especially of the Newars, have so far mostly been studied as part of more comprehensive studies, e.g. Nepali 1965, Greenwold 1974, Bennett 1978, Toffin 1984: 117-82, Pradhan 1986, Levy 1990, Gellner 1992, Löwdin 1985, and Lienhard 1986 and 1999. Some studies have concentrated on such rituals in connection with the *kumārī* cult (Allen 1975 and 1976, Lienhard 1999), the girl’s marriage to the *bel* fruit (Ihi), or the girls seclusion (Bārḥā tayegu: Bennett 1978, Allen 1982, Vergati 1982, Khatri 1983-84, Kunreuther 1994), the Buddhist Tantric initiation (Locke 1975, Vaidya 1986, Gellner 1988 and 1989, Hartmann 1996, Lewis 1994, Lienhard 1999, von Hinueber 2001, and von Rospatt 2004), or the monastic initiation (Greenwold 1974, Locke 1975, Gellner 1988, or the photographic documentation by Mühlich 2004). The study that comes closest to our approach is Gellner’s article (1988) on the monastic initiation, in which he also edited some basic texts.

These publications are supplemented by scholars from Nepal who focus on such rituals viewed from the perspective of the tradition (Bajrācāryya and Bajrācāryya 1962, Prajapati et al. 1997). To our best knowledge, no monographic study on childhood rituals in Nepal has previously been published.

Newar Rites of Passage

Newars nowadays generally observe the following life-cycle rituals:

Childhood and Adolescence Rituals: *macā-bu byēkegu* (birth purification), *nā chuyegu* or *nāmakaraṇa* (name giving), (*macā*) *jākva* or Skt. *annaprāsana* (first feeding of cooked rice), *kaytāpūjā* or Skt. *mekhalābandhana* (initiation, Skt. *vratibandha*), and *ihi* (girl’s marriage to the *bel* fruit) and *bārḥā tayegu* (girl’s seclusion). Most of these rituals will be described in Part II.

Marriage (Skt. *vivāha*, *pāṇigrahaṇa*, Nev. *ihipā*¹) is celebrated in various forms. Core elements include the confirmation of the marriage by the groom’s family giving 10 betel-nuts along with fruits and sweets (known as *lakha*) to the bride, circumambulation of the domestic fire, holding hands, exchange of rings, and a joint meal. It is also common for the bride’s family to visit the groom’s house on the 4th day after marriage in order to show them the bride’s face – a rite called *khvaḥ soye* (“seeing the bride’s face”). These rituals will be treated in a separate volume.

Death rites: the veneration of the aged (*jyaḥ jāko*)² is not always observed by the Newars, but the death rituals certainly are observed, above all the cremation of the corpse (Skt. *antyeṣṭi*, Nev. *sī uyegu*, *murdā utayegu*), the “ten” works (Skt. *daśakriyā*), the feeding of the deceased (*nhenumhā*), the removal of death pollution (*du byēkegu*), the offering of food to the deceased (*ekādasīcā bvayegu*), the purifying bath (*svamva luyegu*), as well as the feast to the relatives, neighbours and friends. These rituals have been studied by Gutschow/Michaels 2005.

Ancestor rites: of the ancestor rites, mostly the following are performed: the unification with the ancestors (Skt. *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, *antyeṣṭi*; Nev. *latyā*), regular offerings to the ancestors (Skt. *śrāddha*, *sohraśrāddha*, *nāndī-* or *vṛddhiśrāddha*), and worship of the ancestral deity (*dugudyahpūjā*). These rituals have also been studied by Gutschow and Michaels 2005.

¹ More colloquially also called (*paynam*) *biyā chvayegu*, lit. “to send for having sex”, or *hvākegu*, “to let (the couple) join.”

² See von Rospatt 2005.

However, many more life-cycle rituals are celebrated, and “traditional” lists contain between ten and over forty rituals, the majority being concerned with birth, childhood and adolescence. Three examples can be given:

Commonly encountered is a list of “Ten Rites” (Skt. *daśakriyāḥ*) that is found in both Brahminical and Buddhist sources such as the 11th-century Kriyāsaṅgrahapañjikā, most likely a text of Nepalese origin (cf. KSP Table 1.1): “1. purifying the womb (*yoniśodhana*), 2. transforming the fruit of love to a male foetus (*pumsavana*), 3. parting the mother’s hair (*sīmantonnayana*), 4. birth (*jātakarman*), 5. naming (*nāmakaraṇa*), 6. initiation (*upanayana*), 7. tonsure (*cūḍākaraṇa*), 8. instruction in post-initiatory observances (*vratādeśa*), 9. end of studies (*samāvartana*), and 10. marriage (*pāṇigrahaṇa*).”³

In a modern list of the ten life-cycle rituals (*nevā daśakarma*) prepared by the Jośi Society (Jośi Samāj N.S. 1129: 1) we find the following list: 1. birth purification (*jātakarma*), 2. cutting the umbilical cord (*nābhicchedana*), 3. sixth day ritual (*chaitihī*), 4. impurity, especially the ten days period of impurity observed after death and child-birth (*āśauca*), 5. name giving (*nāmakaraṇa*), 6. first feeding of solid food (*annaprāśana*), 7. first head shaving (*cūḍākaraṇa*), 8. initiation (*vratibandha*), 9. marriage (*bibāha*), and 10. death ritual (*antyeṣṭi*).

And according to a small Buddhist Newar compendium (Bajrācārya & Bajrācārya 1962, also edited and translated by Lewis 1994) one should practice the following life-cycle rituals:⁴

1. (Introduction on embryology)
2. Cutting the umbilical cord (*nābhikṣedana* [sic], [Nev.] *pī dhenegu*)
3. Birth purification (*jātakarma*, *macābu beṃke*)
4. Name giving (*nāmakarma nāṃchuye*)
5. Showing the sun ([*niṣkramaṇa*], *sūryajope*)

6. First feeding of fruits and cooked rice (*phalaprāśana*, *annaprāśana*, *macājamko*)
7. Protection against the grahas with a necklace (*graharakṣā*, *jamko kokhā*)⁵
8. Opening the throat (*kaṇṭhaśodhana*, *kaṇṭhakhu*)
9. First head shaving ([*cūḍākarma*], *buśakhā*)
10. Initiation (*bartabandhaṇa* [sic])
11. First monastic initiation (*pravaryyā-grahaṇa*)
12. Consecration of a Vajrācārya (*vajrācāryyābhīṣeka*)
13. Marriage of the girl to the *bel* fruit ([=*ihī*], *pāṇigraha*)⁶
14. Marriage ([*kanyādāna*], *satabhedikā taye*)
15. Eating dishes together from the same ritual plate (*nikṣāḥbhū*)
16. Dressing the hair (*keśabandhana*, *saṃḥpyāko*)
17. Girl’s seclusion (*nārī jāti yāta yāyāgu kriyā raja śolā bidhi*, *bādhā taye* [= *bārhā tayegu*])
18. Worship of the aged 1 (*bhimaratha kriyā*, *br[hat] nara br[hat] narī 1 jamko*)
19. Worship of the aged 2 (*debaratha*, 2 *jamko*)
20. Worship of the aged 3 (*mahāratha*, 3 *jamko*)
21. Ripening of the *karma* (*karmavipāka*)
22. First death rites (*utrkrānti*)
23. Death rites (*mṛtyukriyā*)
24. Removal of impure things from the deceased (*chvāse vāyegu*)
25. Fumigation by smoke (*pākhākūṃ thanegu*)
26. Removal from the house and making the litter (*duḥkhā pikhāṃ tiya*, *sau*, *sāyegu*)
27. Death procession (*siṭhaṃ yamkegu*)
28. Rituals at the cremation *ghāṭ* (*dīpe yāyāgu kriyā*)
29. Disposal of the ashes (*aṣṭi parikṣāraṇa*)
30. Drawing a *maṇḍala* to prevent a bad rebirth (*ḍurgati pariśodhana maṇḍala kriyā*)

³ For the *daśakriyā* rites at statues see also Locke 1980: 208-221 and Kölver 2003: 331-334.

⁴ The Sanskrit and Nevārī terms and their spellings are from the text. The numbering follows Lewis 1994.

⁵ Lewis translates “in-House protection (Jamko Necklace)”. However, this ritual is certainly related to *grahaśānti*; cf. Kropf 2005.

⁶ According to Lewis 1994, no. 13 refers to marriage and no. 14 to *ihī*. However, *ihī* is also regarded as a kind of marriage, but only in no. 14 is the bride given away. Moreover, the text mentions under 13. *īparasī*, the *ihī sarī*.

31. Feeding of the deceased (*nhenumā*)
32. Setting out cooked rice etc. for the departed spirit (*pākhājā khāye*)
33. Removal of death pollution (*duvemke*)
34. House purification (*grha sūddha gvāsagam kriyā*)
35. Offering of balls (*piṇḍa*) on ten days (*daśapiṇḍakriyā*),
36. Offering of *piṇḍas* on the 11th day after death (*ekādaśa piṇḍa kriyā*),
37. Further *piṇḍa* rituals (*piṇḍa thayegu kriyā*)
38. Offering of *piṇḍas* to three generations (*lina piṇḍa*)
39. Protection of the guru (*gururakṣaṇa*)
40. Ancestor ritual (*śrāddha*)
41. Removal of the *piṇḍas* (*piṇḍa cuyegu sthāna*).

This text, written in Nevārī with Sanskrit quotations from a number of Buddhist and Hindu texts⁷, is remarkable not only for its detailed list of various life-cycle rituals but also for the mixture of Hindu and Buddhist rituals, the combination of important and obsolete rituals, and for its diligence in certain aspects (e.g. death rituals) as well as its negligence in others (e.g. marriage). However, the text is authoritative only for Vajrācāryas and by no means valid for other castes or locations. For, “each caste, and indeed each local clan, has its own traditional ways of performing these rites,” (Gellner 1992: 200). Some castes call in a Hindu (Brahmin) or Buddhist (Gubhāju) priest for the childhood rituals, others do not. Particularly high castes celebrate them with great outlay involving auxiliary priests such as Jośi and Karmācārya and considerable amounts of food with sometimes hundreds of invited guests. Other castes perform them in a hasty fashion. Some castes, especially the priestly castes, carry out almost all of the prescribed rituals, others only the most important.

With regard to current practice, we have listed the Newar life-cycle rituals in Appen-

dix 2. They bring life into a certain order and represent the social structure of a given society. As mentioned earlier, we refrain from classifying the rituals according to functions because rituals do not fulfil one sole purpose. It is inappropriate to reduce certain initiation rituals, for instance, to the educational aspect, as is sometimes preferred by the Brahminical Dharmaśāstra and Gṛhyasūtra literature or certain priests. Such rituals also mark the boy’s adolescence and social rights.

Finding an Auspicious Date (*sāit*)

In order to define the auspicious moment (*sāit*, Skt. *muhūrta*) for an initiation, a number of criteria regarding age and the auspicious time must be adhered to (cf. Kropf 2005: 54 and 86-124 for details). This allows the individual’s position to be determined within a cosmological system. The position of the planets, the seasons, and the days of the week, even the numbers themselves, are forces and powers that must be used with the help of specialists. Thus, the astrologer usually determines the favourable date for the individual’s ritual in advance by comparing the precise time with that suitable for the ritual, and calculating favourable times. The spring months (Māgha, Phālguna, Caitra, Vaiśākha), when the sun is in the northern, propitious hemisphere, are considered favourable. “Impure” days are avoided, especially eclipses. What is crucial is the time specific to the individual, not a common time for all.

Thus, among the Newars of Bhaktapur it is generally believed that a male initiate should be three, five, seven, nine or eleven years old. Girls, however, can have an even or uneven age for their Ihi ceremonies. These rules are not confirmed through the prescriptive texts used by the Brahmin priests but normally mutually agreed on. On the other hand, boys should be six or eight months old for their

⁷ The authors mention the following: Saṃvaratantra, Mañjuśrīpārājikā, Nemasūtra-pārājikā, Pāṇigrahaṇavidhāna, Kriyāsaṃgraha, Bauddhoktaḥ Saṃsārāmaya and Piṇḍavidhāna.

Macā jākva or Annaprāśana rituals, whereas girls may be five or seven months old.

It seems that this practice of determining the right age sometimes differs from the rules prescribed in the Dharmasāstra (see Kane 1974: 274ff., Pandey 1969: 117ff.), although the picture given in the Dharmasāstra and Gṛhyasūtra texts is far from coherent. According to the majority of texts, the age of initiation should be eight for Brāhmaṇas, eleven for Kṣatriyas, and twelve for Vaiśyas (see for example Manu 2.36). It is, however, a matter of dispute whether one should count the age from the insemination ritual (*garbhādhāna*) or from birth. Moreover, several texts allow for other ages. The Kāthakagr̥hyasūtra (41.1-3), for instance, mentions the age of seven, nine or eleven, the Mānavagr̥hyasūtra (1.22.1) prescribes the age of seven or nine for all Varṇas, the Baudhāyanagr̥hyasūtra (2.5.5) any year between eight and sixteen for a Brāhmaṇa boy.

What are the reasons for these differences? One reason, repeatedly referred to, is given by Medhātithi on Manu 2.36 who links the various ages to the number of syllables in the Sāvitrī verse (RV 3.62.10), which happen to be eight, eleven and twelve, (Pandey 1969: 119), while others have tried to link the age to educational or practical requirements. The age of the Brāhmaṇa could be lower because he has been taught by his father, whereas the Kṣatriya and Vaiśya boys had to leave their paternal home. Another reason mentioned is that the Brāhmaṇa boy had to learn more than the boys from other Varṇas.

None of these arguments really convinces because the options mentioned by the majority of Dharmasāstrins in any case allow for many variations. Thus, Manu (2.37) says that a Brāhmaṇa desiring eminence in Vedic knowledge could be initiated at the age of five, a Kṣatriya aspiring to power in the sixth year, and a Vaiśya seeking wealth in the seventh year. Moreover, it is also often stat-

ed in the Dharmasāstra that the rules of the families, clans or regions also have a bearing. The practice of the Newars in Bhaktapur does not therefore deviate from the great tradition, which has never been homogeneous in this respect.

Other major preconditions concern the number of possible lunar and solar dates, the weekdays and the lunar mansions (*nakṣatra*). In accordance with most Dharmasāstra and Gṛhyasūtra texts (cf. Pandey 1969: 27, Kane 1974: 276ff.), Kaytāpūjā and the Vratibandha generally take place when the sun is in the *uttarāyaṇa*, on its northern course, which is between 16th December and 16th June. Pauṣa/Puṣ, the month preceding the winter solstice, is never considered however for boy's initiation and only rarely for Ihi. Likewise, it is rare for Kaytāpūjā to be performed in the month of Āsāḍha. The best constellations are always found in the months of Māgha and Phālguna, i.e. mid-January to mid-March.

In marked contrast to the Pūrbīya of Nepal, the Newars also perform initiation rituals in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa/Maṅsir (November/December) dedicated to Viṣṇu, which is also the favourite time for the annual celebrations of the death associations around *yaḥmāripunhi* (full moon). It is said that because in old times, lots of people left the valley in December to take care of the crops in the Terai (a journey called *jara vanegu*), one additional month preceding the absence was found to perform such rituals.

The distinction that different seasons are meant for different castes (Baudhāyanagr̥hyasūtra 11.5.6) does not seem to be made among the Newars of Bhaktapur.

Apart from favourable constellations, four days in the year are always auspicious for Kaytāpūjā and of these, three days are also auspicious for Ihi. These days, called "god's days" (Nev. *dyaḥ din*) are the Indestructable Third (*akṣayaṭṛtīyā* after full moon in April), the Victorious Tenth (*vijayadaśamī*, the tenth

day after new moon in October), the Marriage Fifth (*bibāhapañcamī*, the fifth day after new moon in December) and the Spring's Fifth (*śrī-* or *basantapañcamī*, the fifth day after new moon in January/early February). The Indestructible Third, which recalls the beginning of the golden age (*satyayuga*), opens the season for Ihi rituals in Bhaktapur. The Victorious Tenth recalls the victory of the goddess Durgā over ignorance and evil in the shape of the buffalo-demon Maḥiṣasuramardīnī, and the Marriage Fifth the mythic marriage of Rāma and Sītā. The most favoured day is finally the formal beginning of spring (Skt. *vasanta*) in early February.

The number of auspicious days varies considerably with each year. While, for example in 2003/2004 there were – apart from those for *dyaḥ din* just mentioned – ten days defined to perform Kaytāpūjā, there were only three such days in 2004/2005.

Saturdays and Tuesdays, dedicated to the planets Saturn (Śani) and Mars (Maṅgala) and Yama and Skanda respectively, are considered “cruel and violent” (Shivapriyananda 1990: 38) and therefore inauspicious for initiation rituals, while one of the other weekdays has to fall on the second, third, fifth, seventh, tenth or eleventh day of the bright lunar half or on the second, third or fifth day of the dark lunar half.

Moreover, the days of the week and the appearance of the planets have to be in conjunction with the zodiac, an imaginary belt of stars along the ecliptic that marks the annual path of the sun around the earth. Since the zodiac is the fixed background against which the movements of the planets are measured, it symbolises the cyclic nature of the universe (Shivapriyananda 1990: 90). Only 16 of the 27 divisions of the lunar asterisms are considered auspicious. In its journey across the heavens the sun passes $2\frac{1}{4}$ asterisms every month, while the moon travels past over just one asterism every solar day. “The 27 lunar

asterisms symbolise the transcendental aspect of the Universal Being as they are beyond our solar system and therefore unlimited by time and space” (Shivapriyananda 1990: 59).

Finally, some planets are benevolent (*śubha*), others malevolent (*aśubha*). Mercury (Bṛhaspati), sun (Sūrya) and moon (Candra) ensure well-being in conjunction with the lunar day: the first, fifth, ninth, tenth and eleventh are considered excellent, the third, sixth and seventh good, and the fourth, eighth, twelfth and fourteenth inauspicious and malevolent. To perform an initiation ritual on an inauspicious day would mean “to locate one’s ancestor deity in the leg” (Nev. *dugudyaḥ tutipali*). There is a notion among the Newars that the ancestor deity dwells in one’s body, preferably in the shoulders. This is perhaps why the wooden measuring vessel (*siphā*) is touched to the shoulders. The location in the legs is absolutely inappropriate as it is quite unthinkable to touch the gods with one’s feet.

In general, calculating and observing the right moment (*sāit*) brings a number of significant challenges. For example, finding an appropriate day for Bibek Basukala – whose initiation is documented below – proved to be difficult: born on the fourth day of Vaiśākha, the family had to choose a day in winter, because the initiation is not appropriate in the initiate’s month of birth. Moreover, his birth happened in the *brikhalagna* period of the day before new moon (*caturdaśī*), and it was a Tuesday (*maṅgalbar*) in the lunar Zodiac Uttarara-Bhadrapāda. The 17th of the month of Māgha (30th January, 2005) turned out to be the most auspicious day for Bibek: he was nine years old, the sun was on its northern circuit (*uttarāyaṇa*), it was a Sunday, the fifth day of the dark moon, in the Uttaraphalgunī asterism. Mercury was in its seventh position, the sun in its eleventh and the moon in its seventh. The auspicious time for binding the knot (*mekhalābandhana*) of the girdle

was calculated for 9.28 to 9.38 in the morning. However, although it is largely believed that the main ritual act should start at a given time, this often fails to occur due to logistical problems in attending the ritual: participants or priests do not show up, necessary materials have not been supplied, or nobody keeps an eye on the time. So it sometimes happens that the *sāit* is simply ignored, despite being publicly announced on a sheet of paper that is often fixed on the wall of the room where the ritual takes place. Nevertheless, it is believed that the ritual will only be successful if it is performed in the right, auspicious moment, with the consequence that sometimes the moment has been determined by an astrologer but is not observed.



Above
 Bhupendra Raj Joshi with five clients who are seeking an auspicious time and date for an urgent hospital operational, for a journey, and for a marriage. He consults the horoscope and draws up a chart with chalk on a blackboard.
 Photograph 20th September 2005

Opposite
 Bhaktapur, view from the south across the fields and the Hanumante river with the Rāmmanjil. In 1971 the townscape was still intact with its tile roofs. The five-storeyed Nyātāpvala temple dominated the skyline, the pinnacle pointing to the ancient sanctuary of Cāṅgu Nārāyaṇa on top of a hill. In the background the Gosāikuṇḍa range of mountains covered with early snow.
 The historic city had visible edges and did not expand across the river. Kvapade was thus not only a ritually defined territory but a visual entity.
 Photograph 10th December 1971