

## Part II

### THE RITUALS





## Introduction

Newar life-cycle rituals as performed by Rājopādhyāya Brahmins follow a certain pattern or basic structures that are given in the normative texts and widely followed in the ritual practice (partly also by Buddhist priests).

Any ritual starts with a more or less extended preparatory phase which includes fixing the auspicious moment (*sāit*), purifying (*nisi yāyegu*) the specialists and family members involved, arranging the sacred place with sacred vases and pots, and drawing diagrams on the ground. Part of these preparations also consists of the ritual commitments made by the priest and ritual specialists: the ritual bath (*abhiṣeka*) with water from a certain pot (*arghyapātra*), mental commitment (*nyāsa*), and the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*).

Among the preliminary rites, the worship of the ancestors (*nāndī-* or *vṛddhiśrāddha*), the worship of the sacred vase (*kalaśapūjā*) or the Buddhist *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*, and the fire sacrifice (*homa, yajña*) are the most elaborate.

The actual ritual normally begins with handing over the sacred vase (*kalaśa*) and a plate with flowers and other items to the priest, who then recites the *puṣpabhājana-mantra*.

I salute the sacred vase which is full with water from all the religious places, which is decorated with many leaves (and flowery garlands), which is the object of sacrifice in a sacrificial ritual, which is eulogised by the sages (and) which has the presence of Śiva and Śakti. (Dkv<sub>1</sub> 8<sup>v</sup> *et passim*)

This is followed by the invocation and salutation of the sacred vases, which represent deities, with flowers. Afterwards a share of the *pūjā* is sent to the local Gaṇeśa shrine. Then the main participants are ritually welcomed (*lasakusa*) by the senior-most male

(*nāyah*) or female (*nakhī*) elder of the clan or household, during which the priest recites the *mantra asuraghnam* (RVKh 2.4.1b). After that the smoke of mustard seeds on charcoal is wafted over the sacred place and participants in order to ward off any evil influence; the priest then recites *rakṣohanam* (VS 5.23).

An essential part of the rituals is the constant use of light (*dīpa*). Mostly it is provided in the form of oil lamps or the *sukūda* lamp accompanied by reciting *tejo 'si* (VS 22.1). In addition, quite frequently a clay cup with fire, together with other things, is sent to the protective and absorbing stones in front of the house (*pikhālākhu, chvāsaḥ*). Also common is the sprinkling of purifying water while reciting *devasya tvā* (VS 1.10) and the auspicious worship with a lamp, a wooden measuring vessel, and iron key(s) mostly reciting *agnir mūrdhā* (VS 3.12), *trātaram indram* (VS 20.50) and *asuraghnam* (RVKh 2.4.1b). This is performed by waving all three items together over the head of the person concerned. Another purifying sub-rite is the offering of *svagā* with *dadhi krāvṇo* (VS 23.32) and an oil-cake reciting *kāṇḍāt kāṇḍāt* (VS 13.20) or *dirghāyutvāya* (KS 3.9.6), often followed by the recitation of the *ratnośadhi* hymn (see Dkv1 fol. 8v). Fragrant materials as well as the application of a *tikā* made of sandalwood (*candana*) paste given to the deities is mostly accompanied by *yad adya kac* (VS 33.35), whereas the *tikā* made of vermilion and rice is more often than not applied to humans while reciting *tvam yaviṣṭho dā* (VS 13.52). A regular part of worshipping deities and persons is the use of husked, uncooked and unbroken rice (*akṣata*), quite often while reciting *askannam adya* (VS 2.8) or *dirgāyutvāya* (KS 3.9.6). Also quite frequent is a change of the dress or the presentation of new clothes to the priest or participants while reciting *vasoḥ pavitram asi* (VS 1.3).

The main parts of the ritual, such as the initiation or the marriage rites, are followed by a



number of recurrent ritual elements: sending leftovers to the absorbing stone, waving the wooden measuring vessel with *yāḥ phalinīr* (VS 12.89), or the lamp with *tejo 'si* (VS 22.1). Frequently performed is a rite called *pratiṣṭhā* in which the participants scatter popped rice over the deities, the sacred place and the ritual specialists while the priest recites *mano jūtīr* (VS 2.13). A feature of the concluding rites is *annasaṃkalpa*, literally “the decision for food,” but in practice a kind of offering of rice to the Brahmin priest, whereas the *dakṣiṇā* mostly consists of an offering of money. At the end of a ritual follows *āśīrvāda* or the blessing of the participants by the Brahmin priest. In the final rites, the sacred vases and other holy items are removed (*visarjana*), a *tikā* is given to the participants reciting *devasya tvā* (VS 1.10), and a mirror is shown to everybody to clean their soul or as a witness of the change. Finally the witness deities such as the Sun or Viṣṇu are released and a share of the *pūjā* material is sent to the Kumārī or any other Mother Goddess shrine. The very last part is *khē svagā*, the offering of eggs and alcohol, or a joint meal (*bvay*, Skt. *bhojana*).

This procedure frames the life-cycle ritual, which is itself framed or introduced by accompanying rites such as the fire ritual (*homa*), the ancestor rituals (*śrāddha*), or the Buddhist *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*. All life-cycle rituals are characterised by some special features or by core events which are related to age, function and social group. In the following we will chiefly concentrate on these characteristics.

## Pregnancy and Birth Rituals

Newars generally do not perform the various pre-natal rites prescribed in the Dharmasāstra (Hüsken 2008). However, it is quite common to offer yoghurt and flattened rice along with

*yāḥmāri* and sweets during pregnancy in a rite called *dhau baji nākegu* (lit. “the feeding of yoghurt and flattened rice”) or *dhau baji nāke vanegu* (“to go to feed yoghurt and flattened rice”). The ritual is normally performed a few weeks before delivery. The food, which also includes meat, eggs and sweets, is then sent from the wife’s house to the husband’s house. The pregnant woman can also demand food she is especially fond of. It is believed that the foetus refuses to be born “unless the mother is adequately fed with *dhau* and *baji*” (Nepali 1965: 88). The food is offered by the wife’s natal women relatives.

It has been argued that the giving of yoghurt is a substitute for the pre-natal *pumsavana* rite (Pradhan 1986: 77), because yoghurt in Newar rituals stands not only for auspiciousness but also for male semen. However, even Pradhan’s informants reject such generalisations.

Birth is regarded as impure in Hinduism. According to wide-spread Brahminical views it is only the ritual birth or second birth, i.e. the initiation, that purifies the boy. In general, Newars also regard birth as polluting, and thus one is born polluted and becomes purified only after the *macābu byēkegu* (Skt. *jātakarma*) rite on the fourth, sixth or tenth day after childbirth. This pollution affects the families of both the mother and the father. Only after sending sweets, nutmeg, ginger and other food items to the mother’s natal home – the first of a series of affinal gift exchanges – does the family become pure.

The birth rituals include the delivery with the (ritual) help of the midwife, who among other things worships the Chvāsaḥ Ajimā; the cutting of the umbilical cord (*pī dhenegu*) done by the Śuddhakār women, of whom only one family is now left in Bhaktapur; the birth purification (*jātakarma*, *macābu byēkegu*); the sixth day ritual (*chaitihī*), when the father’s sister (*nini*) worships various deities, among them the Ṣaṣṭhī goddess; and



various affinal gift exchanges. Brahmins say that they used to go to the newborn and touch its tongue with a golden needle (*vācpūjā*) in order to enable the child to speak and to make him or her intelligent.

Among the Jyāpu of Bhaktapur the name giving ceremony (Nev. *nā chuyegu*, Skt. *nā-makaraṇa*) is celebrated without a Brahmin priest, sometimes without any ritual. It often takes place on the day of birth purification when the eldest of the patrilineage, the *nāyaḥ*, whispers a real and a secret name into the child's right ear, if it is a boy, or into the left ear if it is a girl. The secret name, written in the horoscope, is never revealed to strangers. Sometimes the public name is also given or announced during the rice-feeding ceremony. According to Dkv<sub>2</sub>, the name is written on a betel leaf, and the Jośi has the right to write the name on the horoscope and the eldest member of the clan, the *nāyaḥ*, whispers the name in the ear of the child:

After smearing ghee on a betel leaf, write the name (of the child on it). Place the betel leaf on the sacred vase. The Jośi has the right to write the name of the child with sandalwood paste on the horoscope. The *nāyaḥ* should spell the name in the ear of the child. The *nāyaḥ* should feed (the child) with ghee (and the *mantra*) **prāṇāya svāhāpānāya** ... (Dkv<sub>2</sub>, fol.2<sup>v</sup>)

The child is then fed with ghee and receives a new dress on which is placed a *gvēsvā* flower and a small clay saucer with oil, rice, a ring and a case with black soot (Skt. *añjana*). Afterwards the child gets a betel leaf besmeared with ghee.

## The First Feeding of Solid Food: Macā jākva or Annaprāśana

The Macā jākva or Annaprāśana ritual<sup>11</sup> is a joyful event in which lots of family members come together in order to celebrate the child's first feeding of solid food as a sign and wish of his or her future strength and prosperity. It is a ritual in which the child is transformed and transferred on various levels, from mother (or mother's brother) to the father, from the female side to the male side, from naked to dressed, from being fed with breast milk to being fed with solid food and alcohol, from a presocial to a social being, from impure to pure, from a human being to a deity.

The ritual is probably celebrated among all high caste Newars but only Chathariya and Pañchthariya Newars perform it according to Brahminical prescriptions. In Bhaktapur, Jyāpu rarely perform the Macā jākva ritual. If so, they worship the Gaṇeśa shrine of their quarter and bring rice from the Taleju temple after feeding rice pudding to the child. The barbers or Nau never employ a Rājopādhyāya, but instead "fallen" Brahmins, so-called *lākhe bhājus* or Dvivedīs.

When a Rājopādhyāya Brahmin priest is involved, the Macā jākva normally takes place during the sixth or eighth month after delivery in the case of a boy, and during the fifth or seventh month in the case of a girl.

### The Setting

The following description is based on the Annaprāśana ritual of Ishan Joshi, son of Ishvarananda Joshi and his wife Sahan Shila. It took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2006 at Sukuldhokā in Bhaktapur. The Brahmin priest was Lava Kush Sharma, a Rājopādhyāya; the *nāyaḥ* was Damodhar Joshi. The ritual text used by the priest was the Daśakarmavidhi (Dkv<sub>2</sub>).

<sup>11</sup> Nep. *pasni*, also called Nev. (*macā*), *jā nakegu*, "to feed cooked rice (to the child)", or *cipā thiyakegu*, "to feed", lit. "to make impure" (*cipā*); for further descriptions see Pradhan 1986: 88-95, Shakya 2006: 101-102; for a comparative study see Parpola 1986.



A few words on the family background and on the ritual situation may be useful to introduce the setting. Three generations ago, at the time before the 1934 earthquake, three brothers shared a house near the Bhusanani, a courtyard behind Sukuldhokā, one of the main market places along the main street of Bhaktapur. To this day, the grandchildren refer to this house as their ancestral home (*kulchē*). One of the three brothers, the grandfather of Ishvarananda, was allotted the plot along the main road to build a new building after the earthquake, which houses a pharmacy on ground floor level. Even today the inhabitants of the new house discard their ritual waste (like *kalah* *vayegu*) on a stone (*chvāsaḥ*) in front of the ancestral house, although the new location is usually connected to a stone located nearer to the house (see map).

Ishvarananda's father Kamalananda was born in the ancestral house in 1911, but married in the new house. His first wife was Tulsi Maya, whose son Charananda died in an accident in the Terai. His second wife, Ganesh Maya, had two sons, of whom the first, Damodar, acts as the *nāyaḥ* of the lineage, the *phukī*. To date he has remained unmarried, so the wife of his brother Bimalananda acts as the mistress of the household (*nakhī*). Kamalananda's third wife, Nhuche Maya – now 86 years old – has no more ritual role to play since her husband died in 1988, one month after his *jākva* was celebrated on the occasion of his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Nhuche Maya had eight children, of whom two died at the age of two and five years. Of the remaining six sons, besides Ishvarananda, four were present on the occasion of the rice feeding ceremony of Ishan. Since the two sons of the second wife have moved to a new location at Surya Binayak south of Bhaktapur, it is Hiranya, the eldest son of the third wife, who guides the rituals of the house. He has to be asked first, and if he says that the child's maternal uncle, the *pāju*, is not to be invit-

ed to carry the child to be introduced to the quarter's main deity, Dahibināyak, his word is binding. His decisions or orders are never discussed but accepted at once. His wife, Ramani, is actively involved in the ritual as she will accompany the *nakhī* to discard the food (*kalah*) dedicated to the ancestors at the absorbing *chvāsaḥ* stone. Hiranya also carries the water pitcher (*karuvā*) with which he marks a line of water that leads to that stone.

The second brother, Padma, carries the used bodice of the child to discard it at a street crossing. Surendra and Jagya, the two following brothers do not have any specific role but they constantly caress the child. Ishvarananda, the fifth of the six brothers and father of the celebrated boy has no role in the ritual except to ceremoniously receive his son from the *nāyaḥ*. He is busy with his digital camera and has repeatedly to promise his second daughter ice cream or sweets to pacify her as she jealously tries to occupy her mother's lap.

His younger brother, Nirmalananda, did not attend the occasion because he has not been on speaking terms with Ishvarananda for many years. He has established his own kitchen, which also serves his brother Jagya, who is not yet married. Hiranya established his own residence in Kathmandu years ago, and Padma as well as Surendra have built their own house south of Bhaktapur. Their children stay with their grandmother, while Ishvarananda has moved to a new location east of Bhaktapur.

Although five of the six brothers have now moved from the parental house, they return there for life-cycle rituals and they continue to occupy some symbolic space to indicate their presence and thereby their right to inheritance. Thus, only two of a total of eight brothers remain in the parental house, but all of them pretend to live under one roof. It seems impossible to start the process of dividing up the parental property while the mother is still alive.



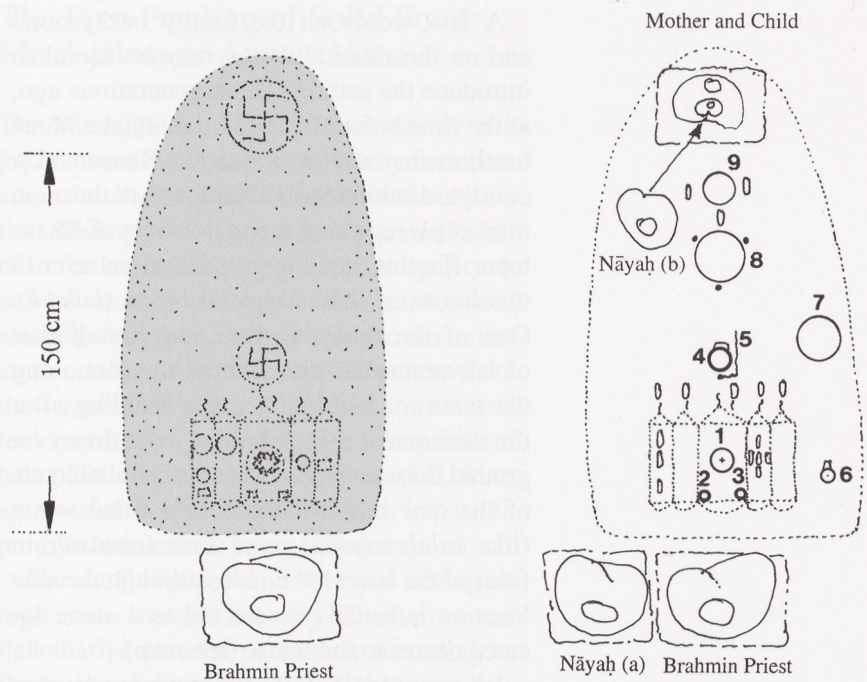
Besides the five brothers, their wives and five children, three researchers from Heidelberg were present on the occasion of Ishan Joshi's Annaprāsana. Ishvarananda has learned German at the Goethe Institute in Kathmandu and came to Germany in 1998 as the guest of Niels Gutschow. Since 2003 he and his wife run an orphanage called *Kinderhaus* for a charitable organisation from Cologne. (A few of the children of that orphanage had been invited to watch the ceremony, but preferred to watch TV in another room.) Axel Michaels has known Ishvarananda for a decade, Katharina Weiler, a PhD student in Art History from Heidelberg, has already been staying in Bhaktapur for several weeks.

Three people photographing, making notes and repeatedly interrupting the Brahmin priest to identify all the items used in the ritual and not to miss the right sequence in the preparatory stages – all this added to the elevated spirit of the event. Almost twenty people, a Brahmin and a drake acting in a small space of some twelve square metres produced an intense atmosphere without the slightest feeling of disturbance.

### The Preparations

Before the priest arrived, the eldest housewife had already purified the floor of the kitchen with cow dung and red mud. The ritual thus takes place in that part of the house where traditionally the pure and auspicious rituals are performed: the kitchen on the top floor (*baigah*). It is the place where family members share food, thereby constituting and demonstrating social unity.

The priest takes his seat at the western wall, facing east, and prepares a *yantra*, which the women of the household identify as (Nev.) *mandah* irrespective of the fact that the diagram is not based on a circle (*maṇḍala*). He uses fine rice flour (*pacū*) the colour of which changes to light yellow when some



turmeric is added, and in a second go he adds a dark red pigment (*abīr*), which is usually employed for the *svagā* mark painted on the forehead above the *tikā*, mixed together with yoghurt and popped and husked rice. In a finishing gesture, the priest scatters a handful of popped rice across the diagram.

The diagram is made up of three rectangles of equal size: on the central one he draws a lotus flower (*padma*), onto which the priest later puts a heap of unhusked rice which later on receives the sacred vase, the *kalaśa*, bearing a twig of jasmine (*daphaḥsvā*). The rectangles to the left and right are divided into two equal parts, thus producing a total of five rectangles, with triangles to the east, representing the *pañcāyatana* group of deities present in many rituals: from south to north *Sūrya*, *Sadāśiva*, *Nārāyaṇa*, *Lakṣmī* and the lineage deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*) of the extended family (*phukī*). An offering of watered rice is given to these deities on a piece of the *jēlālapte* leaf. In addition, rice is offered on the tips of the triangles (*akṣata*). The central tip – called *gajura*, like the pinnacle of a temple – of the central tri-

The site of the Annaprāsana ritual for Ishan Joshi at Sukuldhoka in Bhaktapur on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

### Left

The purified site with yantras made of fine rice powder mixed with turmeric.

### Right

Location of ritual instruments: 1 sacred vase (*kalaśa*), 2 mirror (*javālanhāykā*), 3 vermilion container (*sinhamhū*), 4 wooden container (*kule*) filled with husked and unhusked rice, 5 key of the house (*tācā*), 6 lamp (*sukūda*), 7 plate with items for "the examination of life" (*jīvana parikṣā*), 8 plate with full meal (*thāybvah*) on a tripod, 9 stainless steel bowl surrounded by lumps of mashed banana, the one in the axis is dedicated to the child. The head (*nāyah*) of the clan acts beside the priest (a) or face on to the child (b).



The Brahmin priest Lava Kush Sharma prepares the ground with the wooden container bearing the face of Bhairava.



angle remains without any offering as it indicates the location of the sacred vase. Below the sacred vase, two squares called *bhūpura* are formed, which serve as the base for the mirror (left/north).

Within the northern rectangle a *svastika* is inscribed, and on the far left a *kalaśa*, receiving an offering to Kumārī, while an offering to the cow called *gogrās* is placed below. A square at the bottom indicates the place for

an offering dedicated to Gaṇeśa. A circle on the rectangle south of the centre indicates the fivefold sacrifice (*pañcabali*) dedicated to Bhailaḥḍyaḥ (Bhairava). A square to the far right (south) indicates the position of the *sukūda* lamp, which is included in all rituals to demonstrate the presence of the sun-god Sūrya as a witness and Gaṇeśa for success and auspiciousness.

All thirteen offerings made on fragments of *jēlāapte* leaves include watered husked rice (*jāki*) and watered flattened rice (*baji*). Ritually speaking, these are *kigaḥ* and *nijā*, unbroken rice and cooked rice (see Levy 1990: 640f.). Being watered with pure water (*ninā*), the husked rice attains the quality of unbroken rice and the flattened rice attains the quality of cooked rice.

The priest also uses yellow and red pigment to create two seats (*āsana*) in the shape of a *svastika*, contained within a circle. One seat is dedicated to a wooden measuring vessel or container (*kule*) measuring two *mana* (1 *mana* = 0,545 litre or ca. 0.5 kg), one to the place where mother and child would sit.

To the north he places two cups with soybeans (*musyā*) and ritual, unbroken rice (*akṣata*). To the south the ritual lamp and a plate with various offerings representing the future ownership of land (a lump of black mud), house (a piece of a fired brick), food (unhusked rice), a knife for the way of the warrior, a garland with auspicious things (teeth of animals etc.) as protection against ghosts (*rākṣasa*), and a pen and a small booklet (Bhagavadgītā). These objects are for a sub-ritual in which the child has to choose his or her future (see below).

The wooden container measuring two *mana* is filled with *vāki jāki* (mixed husked and unhusked rice) and on top of it a coin and the iron key of the main door of the house, the shelter of the extended family, in many cases the fragmented lineage (*phukī*) which welcomes the child as a social being on this oc-



casation. On one side of the container the priest moulds the face of Bhairava in cooked rice, complete with nose, soybeans as eyes, *tikā*, and red lips. The Daśakarmavidhi<sub>1</sub>, says:

Make the eyes on the Bhairavī (or Bhairava?) out of watered beaten rice (moulded on the body of the wooden measuring vessel). Hang the garland related to the Navagraha (*grahamālā*) on the *kalaśa*. (Dkv<sub>1</sub>, fol. 8<sup>r</sup>)

The requisite ritual paraphernalia and items have already been brought and arranged by the family. In a corner of the room are about ten plates and baskets containing items that will be used during the ritual: cooked food, fruit, clothes, different kinds of rice, flower garlands etc., as well as the above-mentioned plate with a silver garland, etc. The boy's father, Ishvarananda Joshi, says that the priest's requirements are unpredictable. The latter had said that for the first ritual a living drake would be needed. He therefore went to the quarter of the untouchables who raise ducks and asked for one. They however had demanded 300 rupees (ca. 3 Euros) to use the drake for just one hour. He went home and saw a drake on the road that belonged to a farmer. The owner allowed him to "use" the drake for an hour and did not ask for any payment.

### The Ritual

The priest comes into the house of the family concerned about an hour before the auspicious moment (*sāit*) ascertained by the astrologer: quarter past ten on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, 2006. He arrives at his clients (*yajamāna*) with only the manuscript or text, his personal Daśakarmavidhi, which has been edited in the present volume (for Annaprāśana see Dkv<sub>2</sub>, fols. 8<sup>r</sup> to 10<sup>v</sup>).

After half an hour the eldest man of the lineage (*phukī*), Damodar Joshi, takes his seat north of the priest, who then prepares him-

self and the other participants for the ritual by mental commitment (*nyāsa*), hand gestures (*mudrā*), and by the exchange of *tikā*: the priest gives him as the head of the family (*nāyah*) a *tikā* on his forehead, while he in turn places a *tikā* onto the forehead of the priest. The priest then formulates the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) in the name of the *nāyah* according to the handbook (Nev. *thyāsaphu*), asking for the name of the boy.

Afterwards he worships the deities and decorates them with flowers, ritual rice (*akṣata*), and a sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*), and recites *mantras* from the manuscript which he places to the left on his lap. This is almost the only time during the ritual when he consults the text. He also hangs a garland of nine pipal leaves representing the Nine Planets (Navagraha) around the central *kalaśa*.

After about fifteen minutes, the mother, Sahan Shila, and her son Ishan, almost naked and wrapped in a towel, take their seat ready for the ritual. The mother wears a red sari and precious ornaments, among them a ring. In a first act, the mother removes the child's ornaments from his toes and returns them to his 86 year-old grandmother, Nhuche Maya, who stores them in one of the small bags (*mhecā*, Nep. *tailī*) in her wrapped cloth-belt. The mother has applied big lines of black soot around the eyes of the child. Naked as the boy is, he is setting out into a new phase of life.

Meanwhile a used small bodice (Nev. *bvato*) has been placed on the wooden measuring vessel. This bodice is traditionally given by the father's sister (*nīni*) on the sixth day after delivery, i.e. on Chaithī. The bodice the boy has used till now will later be discarded on the absorbing-stone (*chvāsah*) of the house – like the clothes of the deceased during the death rituals.

Following the instructions of the priest, the *nāyah*, who now sits between priest and child, gives a *tikā* to the boy and pours water on the



child's hands, mouth and head. He receives the water from the eldest married woman of the clan, the *nakhī*.

About ten minutes later the feeding of the boy with fruits commences. This part of the ritual is called *phalaprāśana*, which is not performed as a separate ritual as described by some Gr̥hyasūtra or Dharmasāstra texts. Three heaps of mashed banana are placed around a bowl – which is used for cleaning the fingers – on small pieces of *jēlālapte* together with a seed of betel (*gvēmū*) and a kernel of the coconut (*mākyāmū*). The priest (later) says that this is to prepare the child's stomach for the solid food, which it would otherwise vomit. He then lights a wick in front of the child.

The boy is fed by the *nāyaḥ* five times from the heap placed on the central axis. Following the instructions of the priest, the *nāyaḥ* feeds the boy, always using different fingers which he cleans afterwards in the water bowl: 1<sup>st</sup> thumb and ring finger, 2<sup>nd</sup> thumb and small finger, 3<sup>rd</sup> thumb and middle finger, 4<sup>th</sup> thumb and index finger, 5<sup>th</sup> all fingers together. This way of feeding in five handfuls is called *pañcagrāsa*, which according to the priest responds to the five vital breaths (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *udāna*, *byāna* and *samāna*).

Meanwhile somebody has prepared two leaf plates (*kalaḥ*) with cooked rice, *vaḥ* (a kind of pancake), *khē* (egg), potato, *kasu* (pie made of small dried and ground peas), *mū* (green lentils), *māy* (black lentils), *nyā* (fish), *mhay yayegu la* (buffalo meat), and blood cake (Nep. *ragat*). There now follows the Macā jākva ritual. A large ritual plate (*thāybhū*) with not only these food items but also the head of a wild chicken or bird (*gūka*) is placed on an iron tripod (Nep. *trikuṭṭe*) in front of the child, on which in other rituals the *kalaśa* is placed. The tripod is regarded as a symbol of the domestic fire since in earlier times food was cooked on it. The food is supposed to consist of eighty-four varieties

(*cyepetā ghāsā*, Nep. *caurāsī byañjan*), but the main part consists of boiled rice.

It is said that the food is *cipa*, “polluted”, the moment the boy touches it with his mouth. Similarly, the food of a single plate, from which the newly married couple takes food, is also called *cipa*. It is also said that the boy eats the leftovers from the deities. In Nevārī “to feed” literally means to make impure. After feeding the boy, the *nāyaḥ* takes three handfuls (*vīragrāsa*) from the plate. This portion is later sent to the absorbing-stone (*chvāsah*); the rest eats the mother.

The *nāyaḥ* also hands the child (or rather the mother) a plate with new brocade dresses, a cap, a flower garland and the sheet of paper bearing the auspicious time (*sāit*), which is later fixed on the wall of the kitchen after the priest has first drawn a red *svastika* on it.

There now follows a sub-rite called *sparśaphala*, “touching the fruits (of life)”, in Dkv<sub>2</sub> fol. 9<sup>r</sup> or *jīvana-parīkṣā*, “examination of the (future) life” (Pradhan 1986: 91). In this sub-rite (see also Pandey 1969: 46, and Parpola 1986: 78-79), the *nāyaḥ* hands over to the mother the plate with various items of which one is to be chosen by the boy. He grabs this and that, clings to the knife, but the plate is turned around until he grabs the small booklet of the Bhagavadgītā. All items symbolise the future life: the brick means that the child will not lack a house, the soil that he will have or own a lot of land, the knife that he will become strong, the pencil that he will become a poet, the ornaments that he will be rich. The book means that he will be learned (*vidvān*) and follow the pious path of *dharma*. According to the Daśakarmavidhi<sub>1</sub> the items bear the following fruits:

When he or she takes the rice, then (he or she will have a lot of food in her future life); if he or she takes the book, he or she will become the king of poets; with (taking) the ornaments he or she will be lucky; if the pen (is chosen),



he or she will be respected; if clay is taken, he or she will get land; such as the child takes. (Dkv<sub>1</sub>, fol. 9<sup>r</sup>)

The *nāyaḥ* feeds the child five times with cooked rice (dedicated to the five deities or *pañcāyatana*) in the way described above. Taking the plate, he feeds the child *va* (a kind of bread), egg, fish, meat and ginger as well as pieces of boiled eggs, fish, yoghurt and vegetables, again using all five fingers of his right hand in the prescribed way. Afterwards other members of the family, especially the mother and the brothers, feed the child, although the child eats only tiny little parts of what it is offered. The priest says that previously others were not allowed to feed the child.

By now about one and a half hours have passed. The nephew of the father, replacing the mother's brother who was not allowed to show up, brings a drake representing the goose (*haṃsa*), the vehicle of Sarasvatī. The *nāyaḥ* takes the drake's mouth and touches it to the boy's mouth. It is believed that by this kiss the breath of the *haṃsa* will enter the child so that he or she becomes strong and will not lack wisdom in his or her life:

(Now) the worship of the white goose.<sup>12</sup> Touch with the mouth of the goose the mouth of the child. Imagine this as the taking of the (inner) fire of the goose (and giving it to the child). (Recite) *īrmāntāsaḥ* ... (VS 29.21). (Dkv<sub>1</sub>, fol. 10<sup>v</sup>)

Afterwards the child is again fed five times with rice and other food (dedicated to the five deities). Finally yoghurt is added to the full plate of food, as is always done at the end of a *thāybhū* meal. Particularly noteworthy here is the costly head of the wild chicken and the right eye<sup>13</sup> of a goat that the *nāyaḥ* presents to the boy. The goat had been sacrificed at the temple of Taleju three days earlier by the neighbouring Karmācārya. The *nāyaḥ* also



gives the boy a small brass cup filled with milk as a declared substitute for alcohol.

Then new clothes are handed over, and the mother clads her son with the new brocade dress bought by the parents, along with ornaments, i.e. silver anklets around the feet, bracelets around the wrists and the traditional safeguarding necklace (*rakṣamālā*). Afterwards the grandmother worships the child, followed by the brothers of the father, who also feed the boy again.

*The Annaprāśana ritual for Ishan Joshi at Sukuldhoka in Bhaktapur on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2006.*

*Above*  
By kissing the beak of a drake, the breath of *haṃsa* is believed to enter the child, making him strong and wise.

*Below*  
The head of the lineage feeds the child with mashed banana, phalaprāśana.

*Opposite*  
Ishan Joshi on the lap of his mother Sahan Shila, dressed in brocade and complete with his cap, anklets and a protective necklace, *rakṣamālā*.

<sup>12</sup> The *haṃsa* is the vehicle of Sarasvatī.

<sup>13</sup> The right eye is the privileged part of *syu* – the head of a sacrificial animal; see Gutshoew and Michaels 2005: 121.







While the ritual of feeding continues, two leaf plates bearing rice, meat and fish are brought from the back: one is dedicated to Sūrya (given to the pot with waste water and the earlier leftover food (banana)), and one to *kalahḍyaḥ* – the usual plate set aside for the ancestors, always offered to the absorbing stone (*chvāsaḥ*) at the end of a collective meal, an action called *kalaḥ vāygu*. The *nakhī* of the household and the second oldest woman take the brass container and the three handfuls of the *thāybhū* mentioned above together with the T-shirt (*bvato*) outside the house. The food is discarded at the *chvāsaḥ* of the ancestral house, a large moulded stone, whereas the uncle of the boy discards the bodice on a crossroad (unmarked by a stone) that is identified as the *chvāsaḥ* of the new house (see map). The father takes photographs, while three of his brothers accompany the women; one leads the group with a pitcher of water, helping to clean the plates at the *chvāsaḥ*.

Afterwards the *nakhī* hands out flowers and popped rice to all of the participants to scatter on the boy. In an almost final act the *nāyaḥ* takes water that has been poured onto the mirror (*ḵvālānhāykā*) by the priest and sprays it in the direction of the boy. Then he shows the mirror to the boy and in a hectic gesture to those round about. Subsequently the Brahmin takes the jasmine twig from the sacred vase and sprinkles water into the crowd, thereby bringing the main ritual to its end (*visarjana*). He again gives a *tikā* to the *nāyaḥ*, and the *nakhī* offers another *tikā* to the child. The priest hands over the garland of the main sacred vase to the *nāyaḥ* and gives *tikās* and flowers to all the participants, in return for which he receives between five and fifty rupees as *dakṣiṇā*.

In an important gesture the *nāyaḥ*, the eldest man in the household, takes the boy from his mother and hands him over to his father, who has had no part to play during the entire ritual. In most cases, it is the mother's brother

(*pāju*) who hands over the child, since he also has to carry the child out of the house. In the ritual described here, this was done shortly after by Manish Joshi, son of Hiranya. This part of the ritual is known as (Skt.) *niṣkramaṇa*, the first outing of the child and showing him or her to the sun. Traditionally, the child does not leave the house before Macā jākva, but this does not hold true for Bhaktapur today. Sometimes it is held to be necessary that the mother takes a *tikā* from the dust of the feet of the child before leaving the house.

A small procession which is joined by the father and his brothers (but not by the *nāyaḥ*) leads to the Gaṇeśa in the adjoining courtyard, where the boy is also made to touch the *śivaliṅga* with his head. The *liṅga* is called Bhūpateśvara, Lord of the Earth, established by the ancestors of the Joshi clan. In reference to this *liṅga*, the place is called Bhusanani.

Meanwhile the *nakhī* brings leftovers, which had been forgotten earlier to the *chvāsaḥ*. She takes the symbolic key of the main door of the house and knocks the *chvāsaḥ* to announce “the end”. According to the *nakhī*, this deity is half deaf and has to be woken up. Apart from the deity, the ancestors are also addressed. By saying “the work is done” (*jyā sida la*) she announces the successful end of the ritual performance. The procession then heads to Dahibināyak, the Gaṇeśa of the Ilākā, the larger area of Tibukchē. The boy is made to touch the stone of the deity with his head.

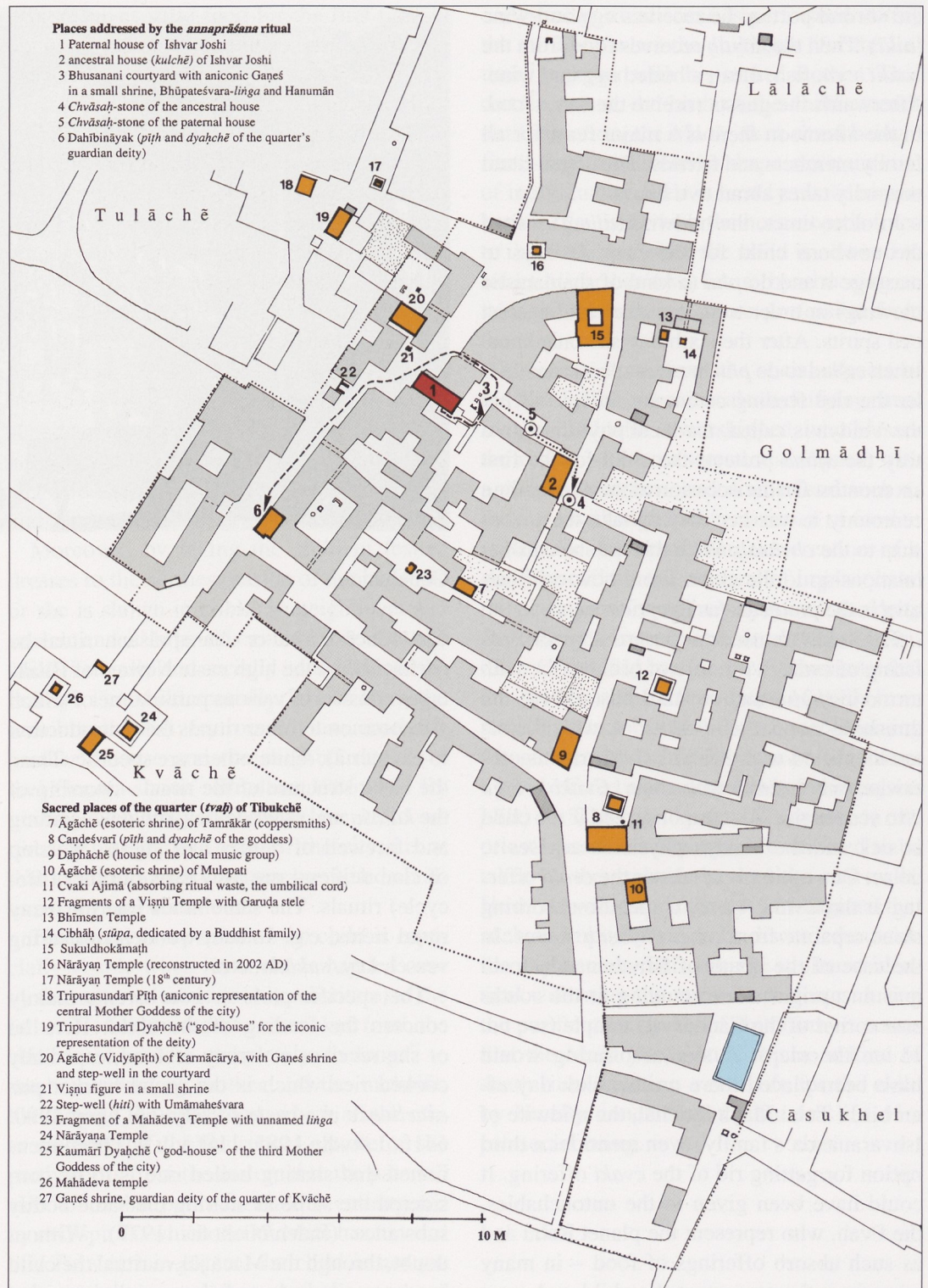
Until the 1970s the child was not only taken to the neighbourhood deity but also to Taleju, the royal goddess. The paternal uncle carried the child under a ceremonial umbrella and the procession was headed by Jugi-musicians playing shawm, drum and cymbals (see illustration).

After returning to the house, the boy is again offered food, the usual *khē svagā*, which is blessed by the *nāyaḥ* before it is distributed. The first portion the boy only touches because it is dedicated to Bhagawan, “god”. From



Bhaktapur, religious infrastructure of Tibukchē, one of the city's 24 quarters. For life cycle rituals people either turn to Dahibināyak (no. 6 on the map) or Caṇḍeśvarī (no. 8), the two non-iconic shrines of the quarter.

In the case of the Annaprāśana ritual of Ishan Joshi on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2006, the boy was first carried from his parental house (no. 1) to Bhusanani Gaṇeśa (no. 3) and then to Dahibināyak. The non-iconic representation of the deity is located on ground floor level in an open arcade, the iconic representation on first floor level. Part of the first meal offered to the child was discarded on the *chvāsah* stone (no. 4) in front of the ancestral house (no. 2), while the old bodice was discarded on a different *chvāsah* stone (no. 5), located in between the old and the new house.





the second portion he receives egg and wine (*ailā*). Then the *nāyaḥ* receives food from the *nakhī-va*, fish, meat, a boiled egg and wine. Afterwards the guests receive the same food. In the afternoon there is a major feast for all family members and friends. The actual ritual normally takes about two hours.

In older times, the midwife (*ajimā*) visited the newborn child for the first six days to massage it and do *phu* (a kind of shamanistic blowing) in order to protect the child against evil spirits. After the sixth day she only came when called to do *phu* in cases of sickness. After the rice feeding ceremony, instead of her the Vaidya is called, the local physician. In a way the *ajimā* protects the child for the first six months. On the occasion of the rice feeding ceremony it was her duty to take the *bvato*-shirt to the *chvāsaḥ*. With this act she cuts her relationship to the child. From now on Bhairava is the protector (as the priest says).

The midwife used to discard a special offering of *cvaki*, a mixture of broken rice with turmeric (*halu*) and mustard oil (*cikā*) at the threshold stone, the *pikhālākhu*, which is often identified with Kumār. *Cvaki* rice is otherwise only used to make beer. *Cvaki holegu* (“to scatter rice”) is also observed if the child is sick and the Vaidya physician advises to do so. One option is to scatter the *cvaki* offering at the *Cvaki Ajimā*, a specific absorbing stone separate from other *chvāsaḥ* stones. In the case of the house of Ishvarananda Joshi it is an upright stone standing at the south-east corner of the Caṇḍeśvarī temple (see no. 11 on the map). A similar offering would have been placed there on the sixth day after birth. Tulsi Maya Rajchal, the midwife of Ishvarananda’s family, even mentions a third option for getting rid of the *cvaki* offering. It could have been given to the untouchables, the *Pvaḥ*, who represent the planet Rahu and as such absorb offerings of food – in many cases in order to protect the child and avert bad luck.



### Conclusion

The Macā jākva or Annaprāsana ritual as performed by the high caste Newars of Bhaktapur consists of various parts, some of which are common to other rituals (see introduction to chapter 2), while others are specific. Thus, the basic structure of the ritual – worship of the *kālāśa* and other deities, ritual welcoming and farewell of deities and guests, worship of clan deities – are also parts of other (life-cycle) rituals. The same holds true for many ritual items, e.g. *kālāśa*, wooden measuring vessel, key, *sukūda*, etc.

The specific parts or core events mainly concern the feeding of the child. Here he or she receives a variety of food, especially cooked rice which is the social marker *par excellence* in a caste society (cp. Levy 1990: 641f., Löwdin 1985: 118f.). It has been mentioned that sharing boiled rice is to be considered the same as sharing the same bodily substance (Inden/Nicholas 1977). Without doubt, through the Macā jākva ritual the child becomes a member of the social group that shares cooked rice. By this ritual the child not

*Bhaktapur, Annaprāsana ritual on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1971. After having fed the child with its first solid food, the maternal uncle carries it across the square of Khaumā to the Taleju and Bhairava temples for darśana. The maternal uncle is accompanied by the child’s grandfather, Padma Sunder Malla (with flower garland), a helper from the Jyāpu caste carrying a ceremonial umbrella, Ekchatra Rajopadhyaya as the acting Brahmin priest (to the right of the grandfather), and Ganesh Man Karmacharya (behind the umbrella carrier) as assistant priest. Five musicians from the Jugi caste (purity specialists) playing shawm, cymbals and drum are heading the procession.*



only receives solid food for the first time in her or his life, he or she also becomes socially accepted as a member of the family.

This is clear from the fact that normally children before Macā jākva are buried without further death rituals and agnates observe only one day of pollution and mourning rules, whereas after Macā jākva the child is cremated and a mourning period of four days is observed by the closest family members. Sharing cooked rice is also used legally to demarcate the border of a caste or subcaste. This is clearly expressed in the Mulukī Ain of 1854, where social groups are *inter alia* separated by the expression *bhāt calne* (or *nacalne*) *jāt*, i.e. castes with which one can share boiled rice or not (see Höfer 1979/2004 and Michaels 2005b).

Moreover, by taking the child in festive dresses to the shrines outside of the house he or she is shown in public to neighbours and others, and it is by this ritual alone that the child is ritually and socially accepted into the family. The child spatially “shifts from the womb to the delivery room, house, mother’s brother’s house and the neighbourhood [of the] Gaṇeśa shrine” (Pradhan 1986: 94). By visiting Dahibināyak’s shrine the child arrives in his quarter (*tvāḥ*) of the city, i.e. at that location which will later be visited on almost all ritual occasions.

The social acceptance of the child is especially visible when he or she is handed over by the maternal uncle (or his substitute) to the father. Before the feeding of cooked food, the child more or less completely “belongs” to the breast-feeding mother and the midwife, but through the solid food, which all the other members of the household eat, he or she partly shifts from the maternal to the paternal side. Until that point the child is endangered by evil spirits, which the midwife has to ward off. To a certain extent, the child is not yet born, and the new clothes symbolise perhaps the birth as a new family member.

A similar ritual scene is performed during the initiation when the child eats “for the last time” together with his or her mother. To a certain extent, the birth of the child extends until initiation, the Macā jākva ritual being a ritual step in-between to shape a certain kind of individuality. This is best symbolised perhaps by the part where the horoscope is fixed to the wall, and when the child is allowed to select his or her own future by choosing an item that indicates a future profession from the plate.

However, apart from the social aspects of the Macā jākva ritual it is also a deifying ritual for the child who is worshipped, who blesses the *svagā*, is given a sacred seat (*āsana*) with a *svastika* diagram, and divine food such as the plate with eighty-four varieties of food.

No less important than the creation of a god-like child is the removal of impurity and the placation of the Chvāsaḥ Ajimā, the deity that absorbs impurity at death rituals. Pradhan (1986: 91) reports for Kathmandu that the mother adds a few drops of milk from both breasts to an iron measure containing the garment the child has previously worn. This is offered along with food offerings (*sisā pālu*) to Chvāsaḥ Ajimā. According to the priest Lava Kush Sharma, it even used to be taken by the midwife beyond the city walls. He never witnessed this, but he imagined that such an impurity has to be discarded outside the city bounds. This sub-rite is almost identical with what the midwife performs during the purificatory rituals of childbirth. It seems that the Macā jākva ritual is also a kind of death ritual creating a new life for the child by ritually concluding the former life of a pre-social being.



## The Birthday Ritual

Celebrating birthdays is by no means a common event in South Asia. Among the Jyāpu of Bhaktapur, however, it is usual to celebrate the second (*nedapunhi*) and fourth (*pedapunhi*) birthdays. The grandmother of the boy or girl brings a *pūjā* and an outer garment from the maternal home. Should the grandmother have died, this is done by the mother's sister (*tāmā*). And should the maternal home be polluted by death, the paternal grandmother brings the *pūjā*. This was the case on the second birthday of Anis Yakami on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2005.

On the second birthday a shirt with two knots above each shoulder, called *pvācā*, is presented. Small children sometimes wear a garment that is open underneath to allow defecation at any time. On the fourth birthday the first formal jacket with four knots, called *phutunā*, is given to the child – two inner knots and two outer knots each made in two strips of cloth. Often, this total of eight strips is seen as a representation of the Aṣṭamātrkā, the Mother Goddesses that guard the city's space.

For these birthday rituals the household will prepare offerings to the boy or girl, which must include sugar cane, peas and radish. *Dhaubaji*, yoghurt mixed with flattened rice, is prepared and offered on a separate dish to all of the guests present. It is distributed from the stone that guards the entrance of the house. The grandmother paints a red mark on the forehead of the boy or girl. In addition, boys receive a stroke of yoghurt on their right temple, girls on their left temple. After the *pūjā* the boy receives the jacket, trousers, two or four cones of steamed rice flour filled with cream (*yaḥmāri*), and a coin as a ritual gift (*dakṣiṇā*). The paternal grandmother also presents a shawl (*gācā*) to the boy. Finally, she offers *svagā*, ritual food that includes a boiled egg, liquor (*ailā*), beaten rice, fish, ginger and black soybeans.



Bhaktapur, birthday celebrations.

Top and middle  
Fourth birthday (*pedapunhi* – lit. “fourth full moon”) of Anis Yakami on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2005 (Maṅgśir, Śuklapakṣa, caturthī).

The boy (left his father Mohan, right his aunt, father's sister) wears for the first time a jacket with four knots (*phutunā*). He is garlanded with flowers, has a mark of vermillion with cooked rice and curd on his forehead and a stroke of curd on his right temple.

Three plates with special offerings characterise the fourth birthday: below carrots, radish and orange, right sugar cane and peas, left *dhaubaji*, a mixture of flattened rice and curd, with a bit of black sesame. *Dhaubaji* is offered to all the visitors before they enter the house.



Bottom

Celebrating the 39<sup>th</sup> birthday of Bijay Basukala on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2000.

His wife Kalpana presents him with a new shirt, with fruit and flowers, after he has placed offerings dedicated to the ancestors on a *jēlāapte* leaf. Wrapped into the leaf, these offerings will not be discarded but kept under the ceiling.





As in many other life-cycle rituals, it is optional to make a round to the Eight Goddesses that guard the urban space at the periphery (*pīṭhapūjā*).

The subsequent offering of a T-shirt (*bvato*), a shirt with two knots (*pvācā*) and a jacket with four knots (*phutunā*) demonstrates the process of growing up. Obviously at the age of four, the boy or girl has reached the age in which they can control their excretions. The second and fourth birthdays mark stages in the development of the individual as a social being. Offerings of clothes are not gifts given according to personal likings. The following birthdays are less important, but it is worth noting that up to the sixth birthday, cones of steamed rice flour (*yaḥmāri*) are offered.

Later birthdays are often not celebrated at all. It depends on family tradition whether rituals are performed, although it becomes almost compulsory if a person is of a sickly disposition. We can look at the 39<sup>th</sup> birthday of Bijay Basukala on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2000 as a case in point. His wife, Kalpana, had been visiting the astrologer to find a suitable date for the initiation of her son Bibek and the seclusion ritual of her daughter Benita. (Both rituals are documented in the present volume.) On

that occasion she asked for advice concerning her husband's birthday. The astrologer asked her to visit the three important shrines of her neighbourhood, Chumā Gaṇeśa, Mahākālī, the seventh, and Indrayānī, the sixth mother goddess, whose shrine was within easy reach. As it was a Saturday, she was asked to prepare offerings in black in order to appease Sanaīścara, the powerful and often threatening planet Saturn. Full – not half – lentils of black colour were to be offered to Mahākālī, and black cotton thread and lights lit with black wicks. The three shrines received an offering of an egg, and three more eggs were offered to a medium, a young lady who is believed to be possessed by the Bhīmsen of Dolakha. She is known for her healing powers, so Kalpana visited her to gain protection for her husband. The eggs were dedicated to Śiva, Viṣṇu and Bhīmsen.

At home, Bijay performed the usual *pūjā* for Gaṇeśa and offered food and vermilion on a *jēlālapte* leaf to feed and honour his ancestors. He received a *tikā* from his wife who in a concluding gesture touched his feet. She took the leaf, folded it into a small packet and stored it above the ceiling joist to ensure well-being (*svagā kāygu*).



## The First Shaving of a Boy's Head: Busā khāyegu (*cūḍākarāṇa*)

The tonsure or first head shaving of the boy (Skt. *cūḍākarāṇa*, Nev. *busā khāyegu* or *busākhā*) is mostly performed at the ages between five and nine. It depends on caste and religion whether this rite is performed as an independent initiation ritual or as a preliminary rite to the fixing of the loincloth (Skt. *mekhalābandhana*, Nev. *kaytāpūjā*), or the Hindu girding with the sacred thread (Skt. *upanayana*, *vratabandha(na)*; Nev. *buhrā tayegu*, Nep. *bartamān*), or the Buddhist monastic initiation (Skt. *pravrajyā*, Nev. *bāre chuyegu*).

Members of all castes below the status of Brahmin, Chatharīya and Pañchārīya (see list on page 23, groups I-IIa and c) perform the first head shaving on the occasion of the knotting of the loincloth (*kaytāpūjā*). Members of those castes who consider themselves to be of “high” status perform the first head shaving a couple of years in advance of being girded with the sacred thread (Skt. *upanayana* or *vratabandhana*). Few sub-castes such as the Kayasthā and Hada do not perform a sacred fire on the occasion of Cūḍākarāṇa, with the consequence that assistant priests such as Jośi and Karmācārya are not needed.

### The Ritual

The following case was observed on the fourth day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Caitra, on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006. Nimesh Joshi of Svamalā lane near Taumādhī, the central square of the lower town, was undergoing the ritual at the age of nine.

In the evening of the day of preparation (*dusva*), the Brahmin priest (Mahendra Sharma) first arranges the site of the sacred fire and the seat (*āsana*) for the sacred vase (*kalāśa*) using unfired bricks, before then attending to the ritual of identifying the tuft of hair

that will be left after the boy's head is shaven on the following day. The Brahmin himself takes no active part in this. Taking his seat north of the initiate, his reading of *stotras* provides the singular sound that accompanies such rituals.

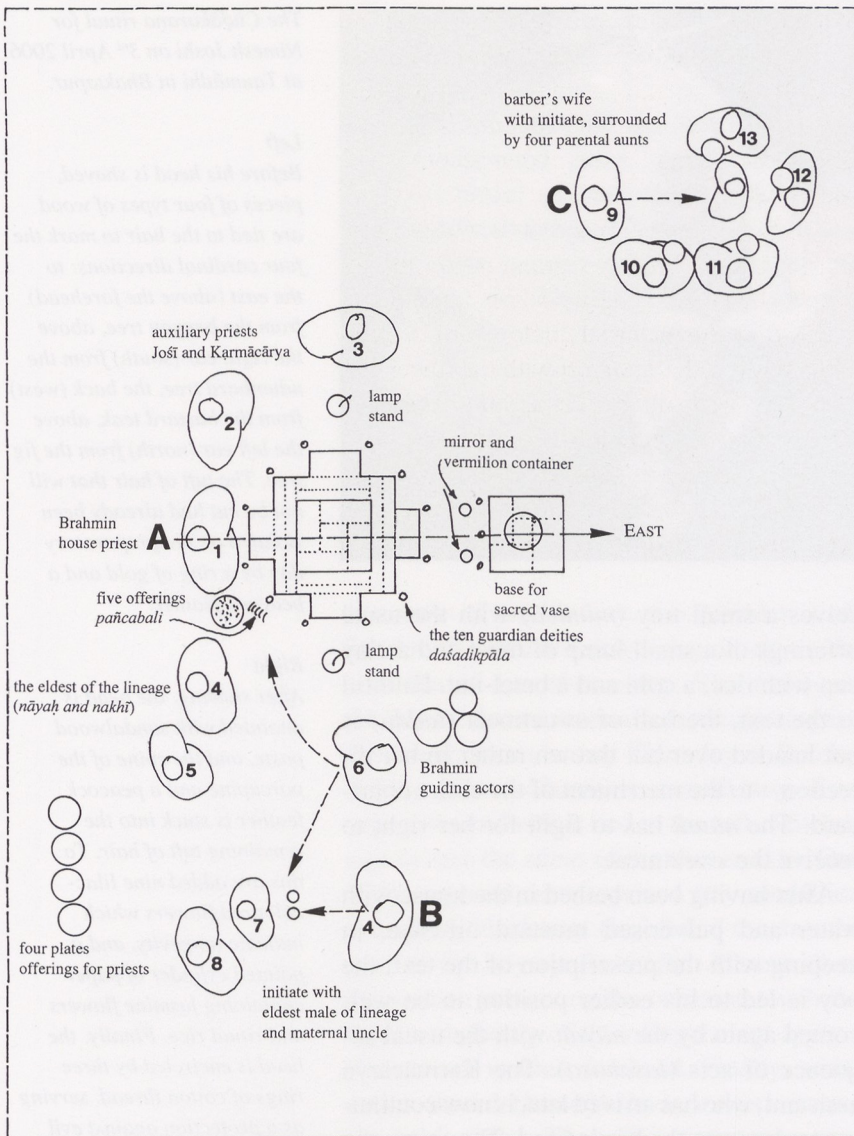
The boy takes his place on a wooden seat and turns east while his grand uncle, the eldest of the household, first offers him *pūjā*.

It is now the maternal uncle's turn to identify the tuft of hair (*śikhā*) with the lower end of a peacock feather. This should have been done with a porcupine bristle (*dumsi cyusapa*) but as none was at hand, a peacock feather was used instead. Tying a golden ring with nine jewels (*navaratna*) to the tuft required the help of many hands. Finally, the eldest of the patrilineage offered *pūjā* to the boy. The father of the boy had no role whatsoever in this preparatory act.

Early in the morning of the following day the Brahmin priest had prepared the ritual place with the help of the *nāyaḥ* and a Jośi as well as a Karmācārya as assistant priests. The seats of the ten regional guardians, the Daśadīkṣāpālas, were marked out around the firepit by means of circles in yellow flour, while one more diagram in the south marked the seat of the teacher, Brahma, and a diagram in the north the seat of Viṣṇu. Since no tripod of the right size was available, the sacred vase was placed on top of a heap of unhusked rice. Then a mirror and container with vermilion were arranged between the sacred vase and the firepit, representing the ever-present goddesses Śrī and Lakṣmī.

The sacred fire was lit early – at seven in the morning, so twenty-six minutes were left to reach the auspicious time (*sāit*) for the act of shaving the head. First, the *nāyaḥ* leads the initiate to his seat (see B in the site plan) and performs the welcoming ritual (*lasakusa*): he touches the boy's head, shoulders and knees with the key of the house and produces smoke from an offering of rape and mustard seeds





5.50 m

The Cūḍākaraṇa ritual for Nimesh Joshi on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006 at Taumādhi in Bhaktapur.

Site plan of the ritual place, identifying three separate sites for ritual actions: **A:** The performance of the sacred fire (homa) by a Brahmin priest (1) facing east, with two assistant priests, a Jośi (2) and a Karmācārya (3). The eldest male person (nāyaḥ, 4) of the lineage and his wife (nakhī, 5) take their seat on the right. The second Brahmin (6)

reads texts and guides the initiate (7). **B:** The ritual welcome by the nāyaḥ (4) for the initiate (7) is performed at the southern edge of the courtyard; there, the maternal uncle (8) touches the initiate's head with a razor. **C:** The nāyaḥ leads the boy to the northern edge of the courtyard, where the barber's wife (9) shaves his head. Four paternal aunts (10, 11, 12, 13) surround the initiate with plates to receive their share of his hair.

(ikāpakā) in an earthen cup, as well as raw cotton and charcoal in a second cup. Both the welcoming ritual and the production of smoke to ward off evil spirits are preparatory steps prescribed by the ritual “grammar”.

The following step, tying four curls of hair, turns the head into an image of the cosmos. The use of four pieces of wood from different trees that are tied in the four directions once again mirrors a particular item of the “grammar” that ensures protection and well-being. Leaves from these trees, for example, form a garland that surrounds a new house when a placatory ritual (*chēbau biyegu*) is performed. Identifying the four directions of an object or hanging a garland around it has an identical purpose: it demarcates the object or the realm that is purified.

The acting Brahmin priest is very specific in his guidance and relies on his text, which reads:

Bind wood and leaves (in the hair). (For) it is said: ‘In the east (above the forehead, a piece of) the banyan tree (Skt. *vaṭavṛkṣa*, syn. *nyagrodha*, Nev. *bar*, cl. Nev. *barhasi*; *Ficus bengalensis* L.), in the south (above the right ear, a piece of) the country fig tree (Skt. *udumbara*, syn. *sadāphala*, Nev. *dubasi*, cl. Nev. *dumbalasi*; *Ficus racemosa* L.), on the left (i.e. north, above the left ear, a piece of) the bo tree (Skt. *aśvattha*, syn. *pippala*, Nev. *valasi*, cl. Nev. *varangatasi*; *Ficus religiosa*), in the west also (above the right ear, a piece of) the bastard teak or flame of the forest tree (Skt. *palāśa*, Nev. *palasi*, cl. Nev. *palāsasim*, *lāhāsi*; *Butea frondosa* L.). (Dkv<sub>1</sub>, fol. 1<sup>r</sup>)

The priest then utters a *mantra* while binding the wood: at the auspicious moment, the initiate's maternal uncle touches the boy's hair with an old-fashioned razor at the very spot where the barber's wife, the *naunī*, starts her work. The boy is led to her, who in the meantime has taken a seat at the edge of the





The Cūḍākarāṇa ritual for Nimesh Joshi on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006 at Taumādhī in Bhaktapur.

#### Left

Before his head is shaved, pieces of four types of wood are tied to the hair to mark the four cardinal directions: to the east (above the forehead) from the banyan tree, above the right ear (south) from the udumbara tree, the back (west) from the bastard teak, above the left ear (north) from the fig tree. The tuft of hair that will not be cut had already been isolated on the preparatory day by a ring of gold and a peacock feather.

#### Right

After shaving, the head is anointed with sandalwood paste, and the spine of the porcupine and a peacock feather is stuck into the remaining tuft of hair. To this are added nine lilac-coloured flowers which indicate longevity, and a painted cylinder of paper containing jasmine flowers and ritual rice. Finally, the head is encircled by three rings of cotton thread, serving as a protection against evil spirits.

courtyard, at due distance from the sacred fire (see C on the sketch). Four paternal aunts (*nini*) virtually encircle the boy so as to fulfil their duty of receiving a share of the boy's hair on plates.

Finally the *naunī* should pierce the boy's earlobes with a needle (*mulu*), which is then put aside on a plate next to a number of offerings dedicated to her, the Brahmin and his assistants. According to Dkv<sub>1</sub>, a golden needle should be used for the right ear and a silver needle for the left. The actual action, the piercing of the earlobes (Skt. *karnavedha*), proves to be much more profane. A helper is sent out and returns with a motorbike a few minutes later with a young man from a jewellery shop. The maternal uncle marks the spots on the ears with a ballpoint pen while the young boy pierces the ears with a pistol. The paternal aunts produce balls of cotton (*katu*) that are hung across the earlobes and never stop asking whether the piercing was painful. Originally, the cotton thread had to pass through the earlobes. The modern pistol inserts a metal pin into the hole, thus reducing the cotton thread to a mere decoration.

Having finished the two central acts of the day – shaving and piercing – the *naunī* re-

ceives a small tray (*mimicā*) with the usual offerings of a small lump of meat and a clay cup with rice, a coin and a betel-nut. Faithful to the text, the ball of sweetmeat (*laddu*) is not handed over but thrown rather in her direction – to the merriment of the entire courtyard. The *naunī* has to fight for her right to receive the sweetmeat.

After having been bathed in the house with water and pulverised mustard oil-cake, in keeping with the prescription of the text, the boy is led to his earlier position to be welcomed again by the *nāyaḥ* with the usual sequence of acts (*lasakusa*). The Karmācārya assistant, who has arrived late, is now continuing to decorate the boy's head. The spine of a porcupine (*dumsi cyusapa*) and the shortened feather of a peacock are stuck into the tuft of hair. Nine betel-nut flowers (*gvēsvā*), braided and sold by the women of the sub-caste of Gāthā, are tied to the tuft and to a peculiar cylinder made of paper. The purple betel-nut flowers dry very slowly and are thus considered to symbolise longevity. The paper cylinder (*cvaphī*) is painted by a Citrakār with a svastika and trident (*triśul*) at the bottom end and filled with jasmine flowers (*daphaḥsvā*) and ritual rice.



The previous action is prescribed in the  $Dkv_1$  as follows:

Draw on the head of the boy a *svastika* with sandalwood paste. Apply this (sandalwood paste) on the whole head (reciting) *gandhadvārām* (RVKh 2.6.9)<sup>14</sup>. Place some white sesame on the head (of the boy). Bind the *kumbhakā* thread<sup>15</sup> (around on the head with) *rakṣohanam* (VS 5.23). Bind a silk thread (around the head with) *pavitre 'stho* (VS 1.12). Stick a porcupine bristle, stick a traditional comb (usually made of ivory), stick a piece of *kuśa* grass (in the hair again with) *pavitre 'stho*. ( $Dkv_1$ , fol. 2')

A couple of weeks later, the cylinder is offered to the ancestor deity (*dugudyaḥi*) on the occasion of annual worship. The family of the initiate do not reserve a particular day for this event; it can be any Thursday or Sunday in May or June. Moreover, a small strip of orange-coloured silk is tied to the tuft, which is said to ease the stress of the shaven skin. One of the paternal aunts opens a tiny medallion containing black soot (*kajal*) and touches the eyes of the boy symbolically. Almost all of the women present on the occasion touch the *kajal* with the tip of their fingers and apply a black mark to their forehead. Finally, white cotton thread (*kumaḥkāḥ*) is wound around the boy's head. The officiating priest confirms that the thread protects the boy against evil spirits (*rākṣasa*).

The ritual ends with the offering of new clothes, all ready-made and imported from China. To the surprise of the German field worker, the boy first puts on a white T-shirt and on top of it another T-shirt with the strange inscription "NSU-Kettenkrad", alluding to a German military motorbike invented in 1943 and equipped with a chain track to negotiate the morass in Russia. Since the end of the 1990s, clothes are no longer ordered

from the nearby tailor and priests have given up protesting against unsuitable garments. With his black jeans and traditional Nepalese cap, the boy has become part of global youth.

The following thirty minutes are devoted to exchanging gifts. The two Brahmins and the Jośi as well as the Karmācārya receive a piece of cloth and 101 rupees. Everybody throws rice into the fire and takes *prasād* from the ladle and *tikā* from the vermilion container. The entire ritual takes little over two hours.

Later in the day a goat is sacrificed at the nearby shrine of Bhairava and a feast will conclude the day.

### Conclusion

With the shaving of his head, the boy grows up. He becomes male, because only males are regularly shaved. The ritual is a gendered and gendering ritual that marks, to a certain extent, the end of childhood. From now on he is identified as a potential member of his clan for which he has to assume more and more duties. The Cūḍākaraṇa ritual is not an educational *saṃskāra* as Kaytāpūjā and Vratābandhana are – at least theoretically – when the boys assume ritual and moral obligations and observe purity rules. The Cūḍākaraṇa also does not yet stand for full membership of the boy to his clan or sub-caste. However, boys who have undergone the Cūḍākaraṇa have to shave off their hair as part of the purificatory rites when a death or birth occurs in their lineage.

The close relationship of the Cūḍākaraṇa to lineage and clan is also seen by the importance of the tuft of hair that is not shaved off in the Hindu variant of this ritual. In ancient India, the tuft of hair was a clear sign of distinction between Brahmin subcastes or schools. Some wore it on the right, others on the left. In the Sanskritic-Brahminical tradition, the tuft is the sign of the paternal

<sup>14</sup> Śrīsūkta: "I shall invite the goddess who is as patient and forgiving as the earth, who is always prosperous, and who is the supreme mistress of all creatures."

<sup>15</sup> The white or yellow cotton thread measuring one-hundred-and-eight times the height of the boy or – as in the Ihi ritual – the girl. For this, a stick is placed on their head and underneath their feet and the thread is wound round them 108 times.



line. According to a prevalent belief, the individual soul escapes from the body through the crown of the head during cremation to begin its journey to the forefathers. Cutting the tuft (by the maternal uncle) means cutting the patrilinear line and keeping the ancestors in a deplorable in-between state, unable to get to heaven. Cutting the tuft also means cutting the Vedic sacrifice and giving up the domestic fire because the lock of hair, like the Sacred Thread, increasingly came to be identified with the right to sacrifice. Those who want to renounce this life and the obligations to the forefathers have their heads shaven com-

pletely. Accordingly, in the Newar-Buddhist monastic initiation boys have their tuft of hair cut off at their consecration, even though the other parts of the rite are based on the Hindu initiation.

From the time of the tonsure until his new birth from the Veda, i.e. the Kaytāpūjā or Vratibandhana, in ritual terms the initiate is a kind of embryo that requires special protection. He is in a liminal state that is overcome by the initiation through which a boy becomes a man entitled to take part in or exercise the domestic sacrificial rituals, and the marriage and death rites.



## The Boy's Hindu Initiation: Kaytāpūjā or Mekhalābandhana

The Kaytāpūjā (Skt. *mekhalābandhana*), the “worship of the loincloth (*kaytā*)” or “binding (*bandhana*) of the girdle (*mekhalā*)” is the boy's initiation ritual performed by almost all Hindu and Buddhist Newars at an odd-numbered age, mostly between three and eleven. It is one of the major life-cycle rituals and transforms a boy into a man and a full member of his clan and caste. The ritual is celebrated with a lot of preparation, numerous subrites, and considerable financial outlay.

The loincloth ritual is part of a stratified system of Newar initiation: some lower castes do not perform it at all, Jyāpu castes perform it as their major initiation ritual, higher Hindu and Buddhist castes have it as the first part of a twofold initiation – first Kaytāpūjā, then the Hindu investiture ritual (*vratibandha* or *upanayana*), or first Kaytāpūjā, then Buddhist monastic ordination (*bāre chuyegu*) – and some Hindu and Buddhist castes (Ācāju, Vajrācārya) go additionally for a Tantric initiation (*dīkṣā*, *abhiṣeka*).

The celebration of the Kaytāpūjā therefore varies considerably, but the binding of a loincloth is an essential part of all variants. It depends on caste whether the Kaytāpūjā is an independent ritual, celebrated separately, or part of the investiture ritual, i.e. the binding of the sacred thread. Both rituals are sometimes called *Vratibandha*, although the term *kaytāpūjā* is more often used when the initiation does not include the investiture with the sacred thread. However, the usual invitation cards (*nimantraṇā*) for a Kaytāpūjā (without sacred thread) also invite the recipient to a *śubha vratibandha*.

Among Chatharīyas and Pañcharīyas, Cūḍākaraṇa and Kaytāpūjā are often combined or performed with only a few days in between. The Rājopādhyāya Brahmins, Joṣi,

Tini and Ācāju generally separate Cūḍākaraṇa and Kaytāpūjā and perform the Kaytāpūjā when the boys are much older. The higher castes (Tini and above) are also invested with the sacred thread and combine Kaytāpūjā with the *upanayana* ritual. However, as mentioned in the Preface, we will refrain from describing the girding with the sacred thread (*vratibandhana*) because this ritual has been dealt with elsewhere (Michaels 2004: 71-110) and will be part of a separate study by Christof Zotter.

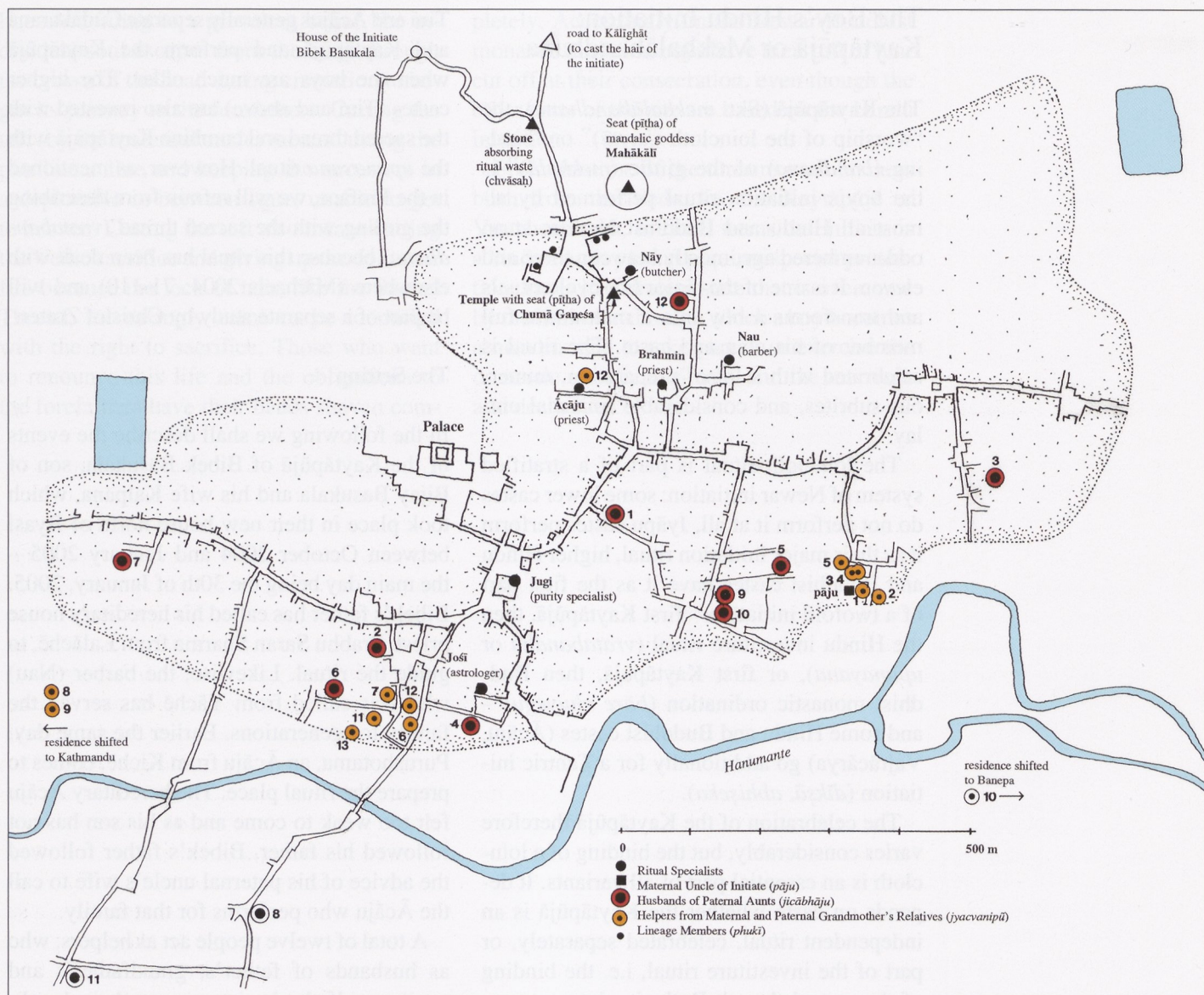
### The Setting

In the following we shall describe the events of the Kaytāpūjā of Bibek Basukala, son of Bijay Basukala and his wife Kalpana, which took place in their new house north of Byasi between October 2004 and January 2005 – the main day being the 30th of January, 2005. Bibek's father has called his hereditary house priest, Prabhu Saran Sharma from Lalāchē, to guide the ritual. Likewise, the barber (Nau) who was called from Yāchē has served the family for generations. Earlier the same day, Purushotama, an Ācāju from Kichē, comes to prepare the ritual place. The hereditary Ācāju felt too weak to come and as his son has not followed his father, Bibek's father followed the advice of his paternal uncle's wife to call the Ācāju who performs for that family.

A total of twelve people act as helpers, who as husbands of father's, grandfather's and great-grandfather's sisters or as their daughter's husbands qualify as *jicābhāju*. They are those who took wives from the lineage of the initiate and thus are obliged to return service on the occasion of life-cycle rituals.

Thirteen more helpers come from the initiate's mother's house, the *thachē*: these are her father, his four brothers from Khālā, plus three maternal uncles (*pāju*) and two sisters from Tālākvā, Kathmandu and Banepa. Moreover, his mother's maternal uncles and aunts from Tālākva were also present.





Initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005.  
 Location of ritual specialists: priests (Brahmin, Ācāju and Joṣī), barber (Nau), butcher (Nāy), purity specialist (Jugi) and the maternal uncle (pāju) as the key person.  
 Location of lineage members (phukī), husbands of paternal aunts (jicābhāju) and maternal brothers/uncles as well as father's maternal uncles as helpers (jyaḥcvanipū).

Paternal aunts (nini), whose husbands (jicābhāju) act as helpers: Father's sister (1), grandfather's sisters (2, 3, 4), their daughters (5, 6, 7), great-great-grandfather's niece (father's niniāji, 10) and her daughter (9), great-grand-uncle's daughter (8), great-great-grandfather's grand-niece (11) and great-great-grandfather's daughter (12).

Helpers (jyaḥcvanipū):

Maternal: mother's father (1), his four brothers (2, 3, 4, 5), her maternal uncles (6, 7, 8) and maternal sisters (9, 10).

Paternal: father's maternal uncle (11) and his cousins (male: 12, female: 13).



### The Preparatory Phase

A number of activities foreshadow the event four months in advance, involving maternal as well as paternal relatives of the initiate. Already in early October, the liquor making had to be planned: 50 kg of wheat was bought – in the case of Bibek Basukala from his maternal grandfather – as well as raw sugar. In early November the fermentation allowed 40 litres to be produced on a fire that was fed from two o'clock in the morning for a period of over eighteen hours. This was done in the house of his paternal aunt because she was known for her experience in this field. At that time 500 kg of husked rice (*jāki*) was bought to produce flattened rice (*baji*) later on, and the same quantity (of the *tāichin* type) to make beer.

Also, an advance payment was made to the musical group (*bhajan maṇḍal*) of the Mahākālī shrine to reserve the adjacent ground for the planned feast, since a large space of more than 300 square metres was needed to host 650 people.

In mid-November the lists of invitees were prepared: first the father's grandmother was asked to figure out which of her relatives qualifies for such an invitation, then the father's maternal uncle (*pāju*), in whose house the initiate's father spent many years as a young boy in the early 1970s. That was not at all difficult, because the uncle's father had died the year before and lists of relatives had been prepared for the ensuing feasts. In fact the uncle seems to love such lists, which he constantly carries in his shirt pocket. It even mentions people who were considered relatives, although the common ancestor lived four or five generations earlier and could no longer be named. Some people keep an updated list of deceased relatives to be named on the occasion of the annual ancestor worship (*sohraśrāddha*) in the dark half of the moon in September (*pitṛpakṣa*). In mid-

November the wife of the father's maternal uncle, the *maleju*, came to plan the brewing of the beer. The making of red beer (*hyāūtvā*) had to be started soon, while in winter normal beer needs only three weeks before it is ready for consumption.

By the end of November it was decided to invite the Navadurgā troupe, the deities who effectively protect the city and its people against evil influences, for the day following the offering of the loincloth. Moreover, the butcher was booked to make sure that an expert is present to sacrifice the five animals (*pañcabali*) at Mahākālī's shrine (*pīṭh*) on the day of Kaytāpūjā.

In early December the family had to solve an important problem of succession that would enable them to handle the forthcoming rituals. The head of the lineage, the *nāyaḥ*, had died a year earlier and it was now time to discuss the succession. The initiate's father was the eldest male of four families that constitute this lineage, but as the father's grand-uncle's son belongs to the previous generation, the family priest advised that he should be appointed as the officiating elder of the lineage, who would first have to enact the ancestor ritual (*sohraśrāddha*) before Bibek's initiation could be performed.

More preconditions had to be fulfilled as the family moved to its new house: the house had to be consecrated on the day before the dark moon in early January (*lukhāpūjā* and *chēbau biyegu*), and the day before the following full moon the family priest had to come to perform the *rudrī* ritual and purify the house by sprinkling water from the sacred vase and fanning fumes (the usual offering of *ikhāpakā*, not cotton) to banish and ward off evil spirits. This smoke has to be kept going for eight days. A fivefold *pasukā*-thread was tied to the ceiling and connected to the sacred vase to turn the house into a livable space, ready now to be entered by the family (*gṛhapraveśa*). The thread was later torn into



pieces to be tied around the neck of each family member.

By mid-December a group of flute players (*bāsurībājā*) was booked for the procession to bring the Navadurgā to the ancestral quarter of Bhaktapur, Byāsi, and to lead the procession of all lineage members and helpers to Mahākālī's shrine. A friend had to go to Thimi to order a cotton shawl (*pugācā*) for the initiate, because that is where the only two remaining households of weavers (Tati) are located that still produce this kind of shawl, which is used exclusively for rituals.

The initiate's mother went once again to the astrologer to confirm the auspicious time frame for the offering of the loincloth, but was told to come back three days before the event to ask for the exact time. She also bought cloth for the clothing that will be handed over to the five wife-takers, the *jicā-bhāju*, saris for the seven paternal aunts, and the length of golden silk for the loincloth. Named *pitambar*, this special cloth is also used by Brahmins to wrap their books. The initiate is taken to a tailor by his paternal aunt to take his measurements for the suit that will be needed.

Also in mid-December thoughts had to be turned to setting up the temporary kitchen that would be required. It would be necessary to fell two of the large willow trees (*tisima*) that line the water channel in the father's fields, and all of the paternal aunts (*nini*) were invited to discuss the duties of their husbands as wife-takers. By the end of December almost all of the material preparations had been made. The search for a ram in the nearby villages was commenced early on, but proved to be difficult. Not before mid-January was the ram brought from the village of Jaukhel and the goat from the neighbouring town Thimi, while for the piglet (*bahan*), which was to be offered to the Navadurgā troupe, an advance payment had to be handed over to the butcher, who would also supply two buffalos. A to-

tal of 45,000 rupees (equivalent to 500 euros) were spent on the five sacrificial animals and in addition for one cock and a buffalo for the feasts preceding the final celebration when 650 guests will be hosted.

In early January the Jyāpu Ācāju, whose duty is to prepare the ritual ground and to introduce the initiate to the deity of his urban quarter, the *ilākā*, and who prepares the offerings to the spirits (*gvajā* and *bau*), came to discuss the requisite items with the parents. This was also the time to have the initiate's clothes readied, to prepare the garlands of popped rice (*taymālā*), which were to be offered to the Navadurgā and to the shrine of Mahākālī, and to bring the flattened rice from the mill. Quite a few evenings were spent writing the invitation cards and once again discussing who had to be invited and how many friends or colleagues from the mother's governmental department should be invited to the feast.

A week before the initiation the father invited key persons from the lineage, the wife-takers and the wife-givers to discuss the various duties in the forthcoming event. The following days saw many people joining the household to prepare paper flags (*kaypakhā* and *kalāpakā*) as offerings for the Navadurgā and Mahākālī, bringing nine flower pots with paper flowers, large leaves from sal trees which had been ordered well in advance, and five bunches (*mutha*) of *ḍubo* grass needed to garland the sacred vase of the ritual made by the initiate's maternal aunt. The large garland of *ḍubo* grass provided for the initiate by his father was brought by his paternal uncle in Kathmandu the day preceding the initiation.

Seven days beforehand, the initiate's mother sewed the seams of the loincloth by hand – a sewing machine would never be used in a ritual context. The following day she bought the cap for her son to complete the boy's outfit.

Four days before the ritual the household was bustling with visitors. The wife-takers



arrived to build the temporary kitchen, and the eldest of them was formally requested to take responsibility for the offerings to the Navadurgā troupe, the *dyaḥ bvaḥkegu*. The maternal aunts came to clean the house and all the plates that would be used in the ritual, and to wash the family's clothes. It was such a challenging task that they engaged a professional woman from the farmer's caste. In the late 1990s the last family of the washermen (Dhobi) sold their house in a prime location and left Bhaktapur. Finally, the eldest woman and the eldest man of the lineage came to inspect the site and to make sure that all of the arrangements had been made. The *jyāḥcvanipū*, the husbands of father's and grandfather's sisters, who as wife-takers act as helpers, joined the inspection and started constructing a temporary kitchen. The pots with *dhācāsvā* and *musvā* flowers that are needed for the ritual were brought by a Yakami neighbour. The initiate's mother contacted her maternal uncles to confirm the invitation and his father visited his father's and grandfather's sisters to confirm the invitation.

Three days before the ritual, the initiate's mother visited the astrologer again, who gave her a sheet of paper that announced the *sāit*, the auspicious time, for presenting the loin-cloth as 9:28 to 9:34 on 30<sup>th</sup> of January in the morning. The same day, a member of the lineage known for his professionalism in performing sacrifices and slaughtering animals bought two buffalos in Bhelukhel, the animal market south of Bhaktapur, and the cotton shawl was brought from Thimi and handed over to the maternal uncle of the initiate.

#### Expenditure

By mid-January, not only had the sacrificial animals been obtained, but also 65 items were bought for the final feast at a price of 20,000 rupees (250 euros). During the following two weeks, 22 bowls of yoghurt, vegetables,

beans, potatoes, red pepper, eggs, cooking oil, chicken meat and fish were bought. Adding the costs for preparing rice beer and liquor, cold drinks and the catering for 650 guests, 130,000 rupees (or 1,500 euros) were spent. To sum up, a total 2,350 euros was spent on feeding the wife-takers and wife-givers, the Navadurgā troupe, and 650 guests.

Catering was hired to provide services that included cooking at the price of less than half a euro per person. The initiate's family was in charge of providing the raw material for cooking, beer, liquor and soft drinks.

The second group of expenditures pertains to offerings of clothes to various relatives. The initiate's grandmother received a blouse, two saris, a petticoat and a shawl at the expense of 2,370 rupees, the five husbands of his father's paternal aunts and paternal grandfather's aunt (the wife-takers, *jicābhāju*) received a set of shirt and trousers (*suruvāl*), the eldest of those received a safari suit and an additional two shirts, amounting to 2,922 rupees. The initiate's mother received a blouse and a blue sari, his sister clothing and shoes for 3,500 rupees, and his paternal aunt, his father's three paternal aunts and his grandfather's paternal aunt as well as his great-granduncle's daughter one sari each at a total cost of 6,200 rupees. The initiate himself received a suit, shoes, a jacket and a cap. Moreover, white cloth for his turban (*betali*) was needed and the golden cloth (*pitamber*) for his loin-cloth, costing altogether 5,395 rupees. The paternal aunt, who has to receive the initiate's hair and toenails, received a sari, a shawl together with the plate needed to receive the body's impurities, toenails and hair. In this way about 250 euros was spent.

The third group of expenditures concerns *pūjā* material and fees (Nev. *desnā*, Skt. *dakṣiṇā*) paid to the ritual specialists. Fruit (*khāīsī*), small cups (*sinhathala*), plates (*kvataḥ*) and a small pot for the ritual use of liquor, a tray (*hāsāḥ*), a broom (*tuphi*), sweets



and nuts as *masala* gifts, incense, vermilion and a coconut amounted to a cost of 4,315 rupees. Cloth of five colours (*pañcaraṅgī*) for the flags dedicated to Mahākālī had to be bought, white cloth for the 10 turbans for the Navadurgā troupe, red cloth for the lineage's eldest woman, the *nakhī*, and on the occasion of ritually closing down the store (*bari tanegu*) 32 pieces of red cloth were distributed among the female relatives and 32 caps to the male relatives – the twelve wife-takers each receiving a cap at the cost of 90 rupees each, while the 20 wife-givers received a cap costing only 50 rupees. In addition, they all received a gift of 101 rupees each. The main gift (*mūdakṣiṇā*) of 600 rupees was received by the officiating Brahmin, 600 rupees by the Ācāju, who prepared the ritual ground, 250 rupees by the barber and his wife and 100 rupees by the Tvāju (as the *juginī* is usually called) who came to collect the *jugibvaḥ*, a plate of food dedicated to the ancestors. The Navadurgā received a lump sum of just 300 rupees, while Kumārī received 1,500 and Bhairava 1,000 to meet the costs of a new skirt. Moreover, 2,500 rupees had to be spent for the sacrificial animal offered to the Navadurgā. It was a piglet ordered weeks in advance from the butcher, the heart of which is extracted by Bhairava from the living creature. Finally, the butcher was paid 1,500 for his work sacrificing the second buffalo at the shrine of Mahākālī. A total of 17,500 rupees (190 euros) were spent for material, offerings and monetary gifts.

To sum up, over two thousand five hundred euros were spent for the ritual, the main feast (*mūbhvay*) in which the wife-takers and wife-givers joined, and the final feast (of *bhoj* character) for 650 guests.

#### The Death Ritual on the First Day

The first day is dedicated to the performance of a death ritual in a bid to propitiate the an-

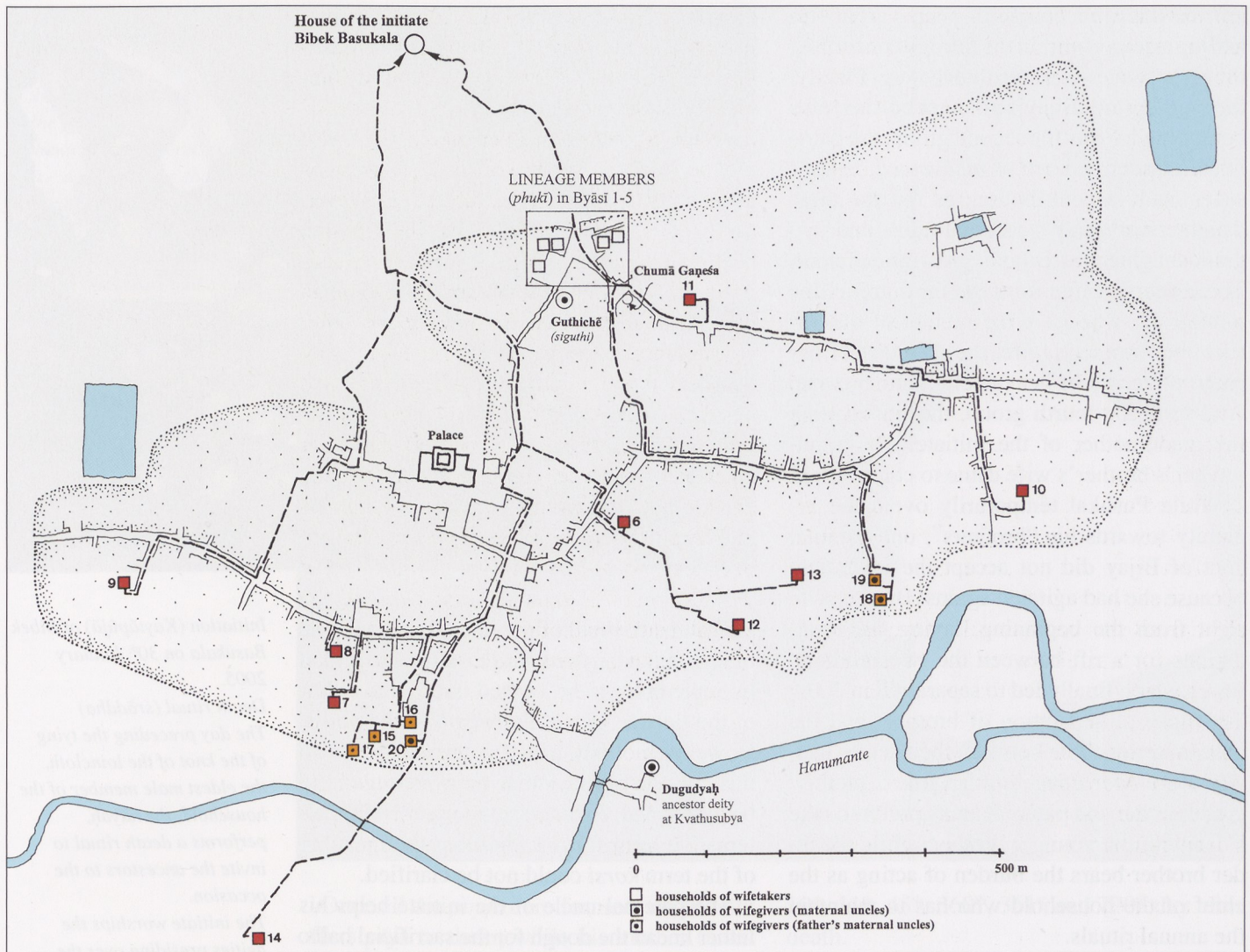
cestors and probably also to prepare them to incorporate the present initiate, Bibek Basukala, into their community. Without a loin-cloth, a *kaytā*, a male person is not a potential ancestor. Should such a person die, the house will be purified after five or six days; no sacrificial balls (*piṇḍa*) will be offered. However, a symbolic cow is offered on the occasion of Gāijātrā in August to cross the frightening river Vaitaraṇī into the underworld on an otherwise unspecified journey to the other world. Once the loincloth is offered, the boy qualifies as a full member of the lineage and as a bridegroom. In case of the death of the boy, the usual rituals will be performed for a period of two years until *nedatithi*, and the death ritual after twenty-four months, including the prescribed offering of *piṇḍas*. The annual death ritual will not be performed, but he will be remembered on the *sohraśrāddha*, the annual death ritual of the lineage.

The father of the initiate, Bijay, is guided by his family priest, in this case Prabhu Sharana Sharma from Lalāchē, the youngest of three brothers practicing as priests.

In the early morning, women arrived at the house to deliver their share of *peki*, the raw material needed for the making of the *piṇḍas*, namely wheat flour, flowers and a coin. In contrast to other, similar occasions when *peki* is brought, not only the three members of the lineage, the *phukī*, contributed *peki*, but also the married women of the past four patrilineal generations. In an exceptional act of respect to the initiate, the extended family of his mother, those who had given a wife to the family, contributed as well. These were her father, his four brothers, her three maternal uncles and two sisters of her mother.

In reality, instead of 29 women, only seventeen appeared with their contribution to the sacrificial balls: the wife (*nakhī*) of the eldest of the lineage, his mother in place of his unmarried brother, his cousin Purushottam, and even Purushottam's brother Pushkal, who had





Initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*) of Bibek Basukala.

The origin of the offerings (*pekhi/pinḍa*) for the death ritual (*śrāddha*) on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2005, the day preceding the offering of the loincloth.

The first offerings are brought by the five households of lineage members (*phukī*). The remaining offerings are from eight households of wife-takers (paternal aunts 7, 8, 9, 10, father's great-grand-aunt 11,

grand-aunts 12, 13 and grand-niece 14) and six households of wife-givers from the paternal grandmother's side (father's maternal uncle 15, his cousins 16, 17) and from mother's side (maternal uncles 18, 19 and grandmother's maternal uncle 20).

The initiate was introduced to the ancestor deity on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2005 as a full member of the lineage. He also became full member of the death association (*siguthi*).



left the lineage a couple of years earlier following a quarrel within the lineage concerning the right sequence of turnholdership. Finally, the wife of Anil, Bijay's younger brother, also contributed. From the second group, the patrilineal married women or *mhāymacā*, Bijay's sister made a contribution, as did the three daughters of Bijay's paternal aunts and two granddaughters of Bijay's great-grandfather. Three people came from the third group, the wife-givers who gave the mother of the initiate: her brother's wife, the daughter of her paternal uncle and her father's mother came. And from the fourth group, those who gave the grandmother of the initiate, the grandmother's brother's wife came to contribute.

While Pushkal temporarily overcame his enmity towards his "brothers", one paternal aunt of Bijay did not accept the invitation, because she had agitated against Bijay's wife right from the beginning, laying the foundations for a rift between the two brothers' wives which finally led to separation in 2003. The story of separation of brothers and the inevitable squabble between their wives usually develops along similar lines: mother, grandmother and paternal aunts prefer to take sides with the younger brother, while the elder brother bears the burden of acting as the chief of the household who has to maintain the annual rituals.

The initiation of the son is one of those events when enmities are overcome. The joint efforts of the paternal uncles – those who have taken women – and the maternal uncles of the mother and father of the initiate – those who have given women – make the initiation possible. The maternal uncle of the initiate is the unquestioned temporary master of the entire household, but all the others, the *jyāḥcvanipū* (Nev. *jyā*, "work", *cvanipū*, "to be present") help to prepare food, serve food and make sure that *pūjā* materials and offerings to the goddess Mahākālī are at the ready.



The death ritual follows exactly the scheme of the annual *sohraśrāddha* after full moon in September, to be carried out by the eldest of the lineage group, the *nāyaḥ* of the *phukī*. However, nobody uses the term *Śrāddha* in this context but says that *korsi pyātagu* is to be performed. *Pyātagu* is the usual Nevārī alternative term for *Śrāddha*, but the meaning of the term *korsi* could not be clarified.

The paternal uncle of the initiate helps his father knead the dough for the sacrificial balls. First the *bikalapiṇḍa*, the *piṇḍa* for the "unhappy" (i.e. unknown deceased and miscarriages), is shaped and put aside for the unknown dead, the five *piṇḍas* are made by his father, who dedicates these to his mother, father and, as his grandmother is still alive, only his grandfather as well as his great-grandfather and great-grandmother. Some 30 small *piṇḍas* are added for identified as well as unidentified deceased. The entire set-up is framed by three unshaped lumps of dough, dedicated to those who suffered an untimely death. The lumps also serve to frame the heap of sacrificial balls, as one is put beyond and two placed flanking it.

*Initiation (Kaytāpūjā) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005.*

*Death ritual (śrāddha) The day preceding the tying of the knot of the loincloth, the eldest male member of the household, the nāyaḥ, performs a death ritual to invite the ancestors to the occasion.*

*The initiate worships the deities presiding over the death ritual with rice, flowers and dakṣiṇā.*

*His father has finished making the sacrificial balls, and raises his right knee in reverence to the ancestors.*



Initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

At the end of the death ritual on the preceding day, the nephews and nieces receive *pūjā* – a red mark on the forehead, flower petals and rice. Bijay Basukala, the father of the initiate, has invited the sons and daughters of his sister (Anis, Anisa, Elisa) and his paternal aunt's grandchildren (Rohan and Lepisa).



Once all the *piṇḍas* are formed, the initiate offers *pūjā* to them, while his mother raises her hands in a gesture of salutation. Similarly, Bijay lifts his right leg in an effort to prepare for *nāmakaraṇamudrā*, the gesture of salutation.

In a concluding rite, Bijay worships the four sons and one daughter of his sister and his paternal aunts (*bīcāpūjā*). The children of those who took women of his family are thus blessed as if to pay tribute to those who in future will be of help (as *jicābhāju* or *mhāymacā*) to the family in case of a death. It is they who will be only marginally polluted and thus fit to contribute to the performance of the necessary rituals on the 7<sup>th</sup>,

10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup>, 360<sup>th</sup>, 361<sup>st</sup> and 720<sup>th</sup> day after death.

The procession to Kālīghāt to cast the sacrificial balls into the river is headed by Pushkal, the former member of the lineage group, bearing the *bikalapiṇḍa* in a brass container. Bijay, the father of the initiate, follows with the *piṇḍapātra* or copper bowl containing the five *piṇḍas*, the three lumps and 30 small *piṇḍas*. Third in line is Tulsi Suval, the husband of one of Bijay's paternal aunts, with the *khusibvah*, a full meal (*bvah*) dedicated to the ancestors but offered to the crows as messengers of death on the banks of the river (*khusi*).

Bijay's younger brother Anil and the *nāyaḥ* Julum also join the procession. Upon their



return from the river, Bijay as the acting *śrāddhayaimha* (*yaimha*, “the body that is doing something”) throws *kigaḥ* rice onto five leaf plates of food, which are collected by the Jugi, the purity specialist who absorbs impurities. The plate dedicated to the river as well as those collected by the Jugi had been cooked by one of Bijay’s paternal aunts, a *nini* who cooks the food dedicated to the ancestors for all of the death rituals. As the *mhāymacā*, the daughter or sister of the deceased who prepares the *nhenumhā* food, she is only marginally polluted by death and returns to the state of purity on the fourth day after using pulverised oil-cake in an act of purification and after having her toenails pared by the *naunī*, the wife of the barber.

Only after the Jugi has removed the *jugibvaḥ* from the house is *samaya* food offered to all of the lineage members and all of the helpers present. In the evening, a feast is offered to the lineage members in which the helpers also join in: it is always said that joining the *kalaḥ vayegu bhvay* is auspicious, it brings luck. However, the male lineage members alone leave part of their food to be put with the leaf plate (*kalaḥ*) that is reserved for the protective stone on the nearest street crossing, the *chvāsah*. The mistress of the lineage will discard this plate with all the leftovers on that stone at midnight.

### The Rituals of the Second Day

#### Purification: Shaving the Head and Paring the Toenails

The main ritual begins early on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2005 in the new house of Bijay Basukala north of Byasi. Shortly after midnight, the husband of Bibek’s *nini* brings water from the Kasankhusi River for the initiate’s ritual washing, which follows later.

At five o’clock, the *Ācāju* arrives to prepare the diagram (*yantra*) for the *kalaśapūjā*, with three heaps of unhusked rice and one

lampstand each at the sides and, in the middle, the sacred vase (*kalaśa*) representing the deities and the *pūjā* plate with *ḍubo* grass, a banana, the loincloth, ear decorations (*tāsvā*), *kisli* cups, wicks, popped rice and a coin. Behind the *kalaśa* he places the *pūjā* plate with *ḍubo* grass and other ritual items required by the Brahmin priest. The *Ācāju* will not show up again until the early afternoon.

Around seven o’clock, the barber enters the house with his wife and son to shave Bibek’s head. A few minutes later, Ujul Prajapati arrives, the maternal uncle (*pāju*) and most important family member for the ritual. He immediately unpacks a miniature golden knife that he had bought from the goldsmith.

After a short while, the *pāju* touches Bibek’s head with the small knife (*kvacā*). Theoretically it is he who has to cut off the first lock of hair after he has touched the latter in the four directions. According to Dkv<sub>1</sub> (fol. 2<sup>v</sup>), in that moment he has to recite a verse addressing the barber:

O Barber! You are the cutter of the hair. Cut and shave the head of the child with that swift soft razor. Do not decrease (cut or shorten) the child’s life. (Aśvalāyanagrhyasūtra 1.17.15)

The *pāju* then hands over the knife to the barber, who shaves the boy’s head (*sā kayegu*) – all except for the tuft of hair (*śikhā*). The *nini*, Anita Makaḥ, holds a plate (*kaybhū*) under the boy’s face in order to collect the shorn hair. On the plate are several gifts for her: a shawl and a sari, a piece of white cloth in which the hair and the toenails are bound and later brought to the nearby river, as well as 105,25 rupees as *dakṣiṇā*.

As soon as the hair is cut, the participants laugh all and make jokes. Some say that Bibek now looks like a member of the Krishna Consciousness Movement, which is also active in Bhaktapur. The barber receives 55 rupees, to



*Initiation (Kaytāpūjā) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005.*

*Upper left*

*The maternal uncle touches the initiate's head symbolically with a golden knife before the barber shaves his hair.*



*Upper right*

*In an act of purification, the initiate's father takes ḍubo grass, meat, cow-dung and svāvā rice from the offerings to the barber's wife and places it onto his shaved head.*



*Below*

*The barber's wife pares the toes of the initiate while his paternal aunt, the nini, holds a plate below his feet to collect the waste. A small leaf plate with curd and beaten rice is added in place of the hair that should have been kept from his first haircut at the age of 18 months.*







which the *pāju* adds another 105 rupees, but the barber asks for more. Finally, Bibek's father gives him 100,25 rupees.

A few minutes before nine o'clock, the Brahmin priest commences the ritual. After his purification, he purifies the hands of the *naunī*, the barber's wife, and the sharp chisel (*caḥlā*) with which the *naunī* is about to pare the boy's toenails. Meanwhile the senior-most male elder of the lineage, the *nāyaḥ*, binds five *kisli* cups filled with ritual rice, a betel-nut and a coin into white cotton cloth and hangs them on a wooden scaffold in order to ward off the ghosts and evil spirits in all four directions and in the centre. In a traditional house, these cups would actually be fixed to the ceiling joists.

There now follows a rite during which the father lets his son touch an iron key, the symbol of a Newar household. Bijay, the father, also takes a *mimicā* tray and places all the items on Bibek's head: some *ḍubo* blades, a piece of meat, rice (*svāvā*) and a piece of cow dung which the son gives to the barber.

Afterwards the *naunī* pares the toenails with a sharp chisel (*caḥlā*) that the Brahmin



has purified. The clippings fall onto the *kaybhū* plate held by the *nini*. The *naunī* also colours the boy's feet with red pigment. Then the boy takes off his clothes, and the *nini* puts *khau*, pulverised oil-cake, on his head. He is now washed by the *nini* with the water that the *jicābhāju* brought early that morning and with pulverised oil-cake.

#### The Girding of the Loincloth

In the meantime the Brahmin has placed a *kisli* cup on the sacred vase together with a *taḥsi* fruit and a garland of jasmine twigs which connects the *kalaśa* with the ceiling. He asks for *ikāpakhā*, rape and mustard seeds which are burnt in a clay pot with charcoal. The father takes this pot, touches it to the body of his son, and then places it on the *pikhālākhu* stone in front of the house. Bijay now touches his son again with the iron key and the wooden measuring vessel filled with fruits, which are supposed to ensure longevity or even immortality. These include bitter orange (Skt. *dantaśa*, Nev. *khāīsī*, Nep. *kīpa*), Indian *jujube* (Skt. *badara*, Nev. *bayar*), sugar-cane (Nev. *tu*, Nep. *ukhu*) and emblic

*Initiation (Kaytāpūjā) of Dayaram Duval on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2004.*

*Left*  
The wife of the barber pares the initiate's toenails, while his paternal aunt, the *nini* Vishmukeshari receives the waste on a plate.

*Right*  
The paternal aunts of the initiate cast away hair and toenails at the embankment of Pekhilācā – the place, where on the tenth day after death purification rituals are performed.



myrobalan (Skt. *āmalakī*, Nev. *āba*, Nep. *amalā*). He then also touches the boy with the *sukūda* lamp and throws popped rice (*tāy*) over him.

After a while, Bijay hands a plate with a yellow loincloth, an earring (*tāsvā*) and *ḍubo* grass to the Brahmin for consecration. The boy now stands naked on a wooden seat (*āsana*) under which the Brahmin has drawn a *svastika* diagram.

In the meantime the Brahmin recites *mantras* and the boy performs *pūjā* to the sacred vase (*kalaśa*).

As Bijay, the father, starts to bind the loincloth brought by the maternal uncle (*pāju*), he realises that the cloth is wet and asks for some charcoal to dry it before he can fix it. After a while he fastens the loincloth and worships the knot at the right hip with vermilion, ritual rice (*akṣata*), flowers (*svā*) and a small sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*) which, however, should not be confused with the long sacred thread that hangs over the left shoulder of a twice-born Hindu. He gives him a *tikā* and at 9.28 a.m., the auspicious time (*sāit*), he binds the cloth through the boy's crotch and folds it around the thread above his hindquarters, an act called *kaytā ciyegu*. The elaborate worship of the knot is obligatory:

The *nāyaḥ* should place the boy on the seat (marked) with a *svastika* by pulling (his) hand. Let the nails (of the boy) be pared (by the barber's wife). The father's sister should collect the cut nails. After a ritual bath bring (the boy) by holding (his) hand and place (him) on the seat (marked) with a *svastika*. Purification etc. as mentioned above. Hand over the silk loincloth (with) flowers (reciting) **vasoḥ pavitram asi ...** (VS 1.3). At the (calculated) auspicious time the loincloth should be tied by the *nāyaḥ* (around the hip of the boy). Keep the knot on the right side (reciting) **svasti no mimītam** (i.e. *svastivācana*). Sprinkle water on the knot (reciting) **devasya tvā** (VS 1.10).

(Worship the knot with) sandalwood (reciting) **yad adya kac** (VS 33.35). (Worship the knot with) vermilion (reciting) **tvam javiṣṭha** (VS 13.52). (Worship the knot with) flowers (reciting) **yāḥ phalanīr** (VS 12.89). Worship with *akṣata* (reciting) **jenendrā** (AV 1.9.3). (Dkv<sub>1</sub>, fol. 20<sup>v</sup>)

The boy now receives new clothes: a shirt and trousers, a vest, a jacket, a tie, a cap (*ṭopi*), two earrings (*tāsvā*) made of lilac strawflowers (*gvēsvā*) which earlier had been ordered from the Māli women from the sub-caste of the Gāthā. The *nini* helps the boy to dress. Subsequently, the garland of *ḍubo* grass is hung around his neck. *Ḍubo* grass is believed not to wither and thus often represents longevity and even immortality. Finally, Bijay and the priest bind a white turban for Bibek. Dressed now in worldly clothes, the father showers popped rice from the wooden measuring vessel over his son (*siphāрати*).

The maternal uncle then hands over the cotton shawl from Thimi to the boy. The son is worshipped with a *kisli* cup held at his right temple. This cup is then given to the *nini*, who now carries the hair and toenails to the Kālighāt, north of Byāsi. Various items are added to the plate: a piece of white cotton, which is used later to wrap up the hair, a leaf with a small lump of cow dung, and a small leaf plate with a mixture of flattened rice and yoghurt (*dhaubaji*). This offering replaces the hair that had been cut by the maternal uncle at the age of eighteen months. The first hair that is cut after birth should in fact have been kept for this occasion. As the parents of the initiate had forgotten to keep the hair, the pure quality of *dhaubaji* makes up for this deficit symbolically.

Normally, the hair is simply dumped by the river banks with an offering of light, but in other cases it is discarded into the flowing water. In the Kaytāpūjā for Jewal, the son of the *nāyaḥ* of Bibek's *phukī*, two *ninis* care-





fully put the hair onto a small piece of white cloth and made a bundle, closing it with a thread. They then made a small pit in the sand of the river, and placed the white bundle inside as if burying something precious, something that has indeed been part of the boy's body. In this case it looked like a meaningful ritual act: the *ninis* put some *dhaubaji* (yoghurt with flattened rice) onto the spot, then discarded the rest and let the leaf plate flow away. Finally, a *kisli* offering was placed on the spot. Before returning home, the *ninis*



crossed below the bridge to the *ghāṭ*, purified their bodies, stepped up the embankment and worshipped the *liṅgas* on top of the platform of Kālīghāṭ.

Shortly after, the Brahmin leaves the house because he has to go to another ritual, but after forty minutes he appears again to complete the ritual. He still has to perform the concluding rites, among them the offering of light, *āraṭī*, with three thin sticks inserted into a fruit; this will afterwards be brought to the *pikhālākhu*, the guardian stone in front of the house.

Initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

Left  
The initiate offers *pūjā* to the *kalaśa* to the instruction of the Brahmin priest before receiving the loin-cloth.

Right  
The initiate with the first, golden loin-cloth and a new cap. On his right can be seen the knot that has been worshipped by his father.



Initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

Left

The father of the initiate holds a threefold torch (top) as an offering of light (*āraṭī*), which is placed beside the guardian stone of the threshold, the *pikhālākhu* (bottom).

Right

The Brahmin priest consecrates the mirror with vermilion (top) and the initiate's father exposes it to sunlight before he asks him to look into it (below).

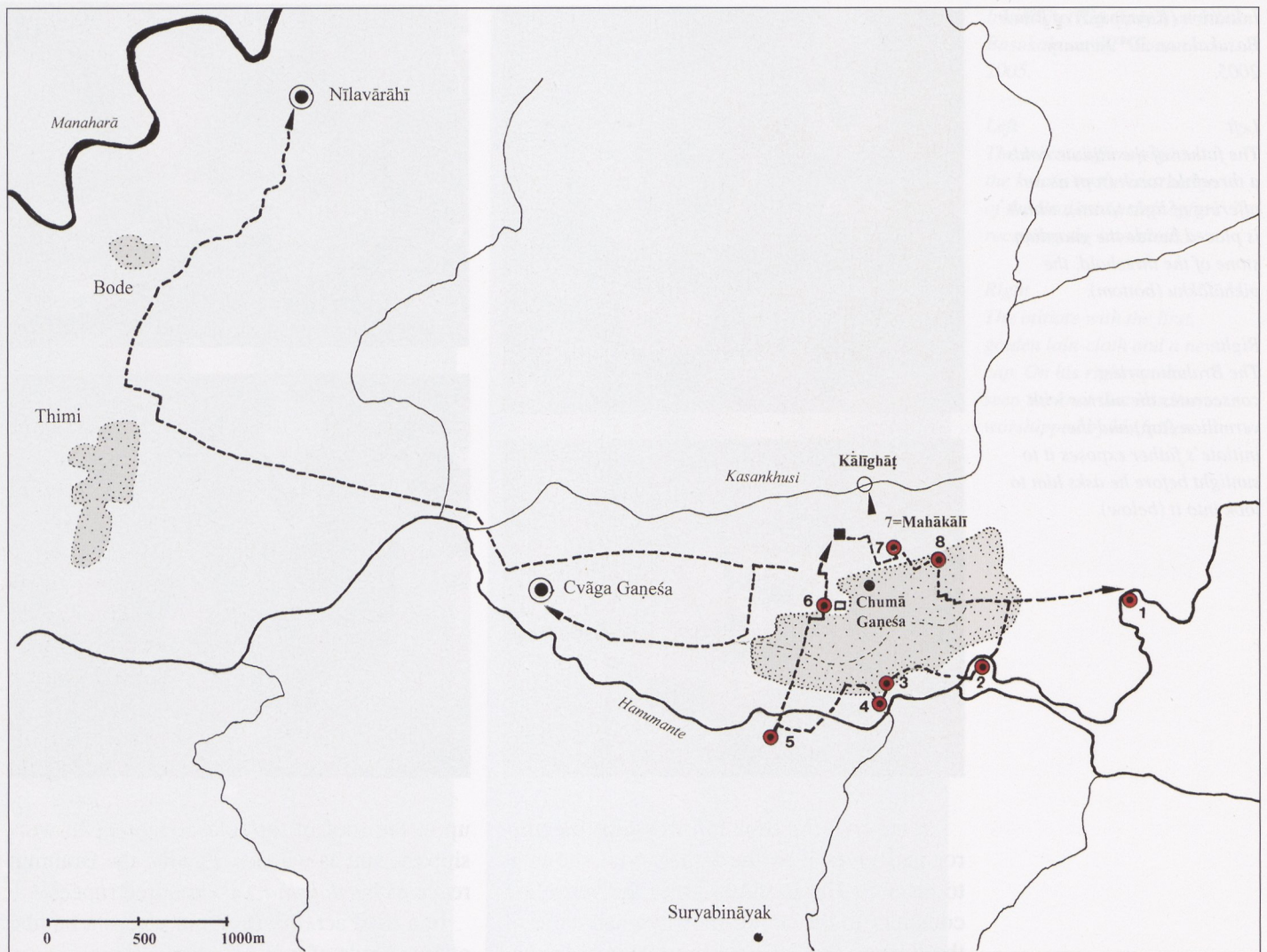


At the end, the Brahmin worships the mirror and gives it to the father, who shows it to his son. The Brahmin gives the vermilion container to the senior-most woman elder of the lineage (*nakhī*) who touches it to the sacred vase (*kalaśa*). After that, the *kalaśa* is carried away. The Brahmin sprinkles water using the jasmine twig from the sacred vase on to all the participants, who then throw popped rice on to the boy, before he is taken

up to the roof of the house in order to worship the sun as witness. Finally, the Brahmin receives his *dakṣiṇā*, two hundred rupees.

In a final act, the Brahmin places a bundle of five kinds of wood (*pañcapallava*) on top of the sacred vase. A few minutes later, Bijay takes the bundle and a hammer to nail it into the lintel of the ground floor doorframe to protect the house from evil influences.





Offerings to Nīlvārāhī in Bode and Cvāga Gaṇeśa

While the house prepares for the procession to the seat of the goddess, Mahākālī, to which the household is tied through its specific location, two groups of helpers are heading for two separate shrines with small offerings to ensure the well-being of the initiate and the smooth running of the forthcoming rituals. The first destination is the non-iconic shrine of Nīlvārāhī in Bode, some five kilometres northwest of Bhaktapur. There is no clear-cut answer as to why this particular shrine is vis-

ited. But as the deity is also known under the name of Dhanvārāhī, the family speculates that the goddess must grant affluence (Nep. *dhani*). Visiting the shrine is not an option. By noon more than one hundred *pūjā* offerings have arrived from the entire district of Bhaktapur. Many helpers enjoy a rest in the forest around the shrine with a light meal (*samaya*), which is inevitably offered in the context of a *pūjā*. The second group heads for the shrine of Cvāga Gaṇeśa, whose non-iconic representation is located in an inconspicuous structure in the pine forest west of Bhaktapur, high

*Initiation (Kaytāpūjā) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005. In the early morning the Ācāju priest worships the Aṣṭamātrkā, whose non-iconic shrines encircle the city. The hair and toenails of the initiate are carried to Kālīghāṭ to be cast into the river. Around noon a helper carries pūjā to the shrine of Nīlavārāhī. At the same time, another helper heads for the shrine of Cvāga Gaṇeśa.*



Initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*) of Bibek Basukala on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

The initiate received a second white loin-cloth from his maternal uncle at the seat of *Mahākālī*, the deity that presides over the city quarter of his home. He stands barefoot in sacrificial blood.



above the confluence of the two rivers that demarcate the wider territory of Kvpade. In this case it is said that an offering to Gaṇeśa ensures an abundance of well-fermented rice beer, which will be served the same evening.

The *Mahākālīpūjā* and the Girding of the Second Loincloth

At 12.10 the entire group sets out for the second *Kaytāpūjā* at the seat (*pīṭh*) of *Mahākālī*. The *bāsurībājā* music group – twelve musicians with flutes, drums (*dholak*) and cymbals – leads the procession. The subsequent line of twelve people walking barefoot and carrying offerings is led by the head of the lineage (*nāyaḥ*), followed by the *Ācāju* as the ritual specialist. Then come the two sons of the initiate's father's grand-uncle, who carry fruits and flowers, as well as the initiate's

father with the *sukūda* lamp and pure water (*jal*), and his paternal uncle. Behind these representatives of the lineage come the sons of the wife-takers and wife-givers with flower pots and garlands of popped rice and leaves of the white butterfly bush (Nep. *sinhasvā*, Nep. *bhimsen pate*).

A large crowd is waiting for them by the seat of the goddess on top of a hill crowned with large trees populated with crawling crows (for the site plan see Gutschow 1996a: 204): the fivefold sacrifice of a buffalo, a ram, a goat, a duck and a cock is to be celebrated. It takes almost an hour for Bibek's group to enter the inner space of a fenced-off area surrounding a couple of stones, a couple of sculptures of frightening ghosts, and several swords that symbolise the Great *Kālī*. The *Ācāju* and the *nāyaḥ* offer *pūjā* to the deity, Bijay places the decorative offerings in the corners of the quadrangle, and a lineage member installs the fire to collect soot (*mvaḥni*) while the five animals are sacrificed.

Almost unnoticed but of immense importance is the offering of small plates of gold and silver measuring three by four millimetres to the unworked stone representing *Mahākālī*. Later, the *Ācāju* confirms that these pairs of small silver and gold sheets are used exclusively for the *Ihi* ritual and for *Kaytāpūjā*. The incorporation of the two plates in initiation rituals of both sexes hints at a layer of meaning that reaches beyond the "Golden Boy" (*Suvarṇakumāra*) of the *Ihi* ritual. Girls are said to get married, but what happens to the boys on the occasion of reaching symbolically at least manhood when they receive the loincloth? Does the deity (not all of these deities have a female connotation) represent a chthonic power that stands for creativity and fertility? The small folded packet in which the two sheets of gold and silver are sold is marked with a stamp, saying *pratimā*, thus indicating the "image" (of a deity). The image or the images have no particular names.



It is a unique offering that marks the decisive step from undifferentiated childhood to becoming a social being with rights and obligations within the lineage and among the wider family of wife-givers and wife-takers.

As soon as the sacrifice is completed and more groups are about to storm the narrow space, Bibek steps into the quadrangle and the Ācāju consecrates his palms and gives the plate with a white loincloth to his mother's brother, the *pāju*. While the initiate's father helps undress the boy in the midst of the crowd, the *pāju* girdles the loincloth and worships the knot. Then the initiate leaves the shrine proper and completely changes his clothes by putting on the ones brought by his *pāju*.

The whole party now moves down the hill. Some 60 people – the entire families of the lineage members and all the helpers (*vyāhvanipū*) with their wives and children – are presented *tikā*, a black stroke (*mvaṇi*) made of the soot that had been collected during the blood sacrifice and a *tikā* from the blood of the sacrificial animals. In the end the whole crowd including the Ācāju and the musicians takes a seat in two long lines to engage in a modest feast that includes beer and liquor.

Late that evening, the entire party meets again for the main feast (*mūbhvay*) of the Kaytāpūjā, at which meat from all five sacrificial animals is collectively consumed. The head of the billy goat is divided into nine pieces (Gutschow and Michaels 2005: 121) of which the Ācāju receives the right horn and the initiate the left horn. The remaining seven parts are distributed among the lineage members according to seniority. A slight problem arises when the second most senior not only claims the right ear but also the right leg of every sacrificial animal. The *pāju* intervenes, arguing that each participant in the feast will receive only one piece. Nobody is drunk at this time, so the customary quarrelling fails to emerge; everybody is happy to close the day in peace. Most rituals tend to be accom-

panied by arguments and even quarrels. One could say that the group's unity and identity has occasionally to be contested in order to go through a crisis. The crisis reflects a certain chaos, which could include physical violence, but all this has a welcome cathartic effect that ends up in reconfirming group solidarity.

It is indeed a busy day in Bhaktapur: the 30<sup>th</sup> January (the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Māgha) 2005. More than one hundred Kaytāpūjās were performed, along with numerous marriages and two Ihi rituals with 30 and 128 participants. The music of the Jyāpus fills the air of urban space.

In the evening of the second day, the maternal uncle formally sets up a store (*bhāri svanegu*; from *bhāri*, “cook”, and *svanegu*, “to instal”) with all the provisions needed for the various feasts over the coming days. The helpers have been busy the whole time setting up a temporary kitchen and cutting up the second buffalo. In addition to the provisions that have been secured during the preceding weeks, the maternal uncle brings large quantities of cooked foodstuffs, which are required for providing all the helpers with *syūkābhvay* at the feast on the final day. Moreover, he brings *khē svagā* and *dhau svagā*, varieties of ritual food with egg and yoghurt. The maternal uncle places a plate with food, beer and liquor in a corner of the room. It is dedicated to the gods but without specifying any designation. Early in the morning of the next three days he enters the room to which he alone has access and renews the water in a sacred vase (*kalaśa*), and in the evening he lights the wick on a lamp stand (*tvarivā*).

Besides taking care of the foodstuffs and worshipping the god who presides over the room, the uncle has brought the set of clothes for the initiate which he offered on the occasion of girdling the white loincloth at the shrine of Mahākālī. Pieces of cloth were presented to the boy's parents, his great-grandmother, and to the boy's paternal uncle.



### The Third Day

The Feeding of the Navadurgā Troupe (*dyahḥbvaykegu*)

At the end of the third day, *pūjā* offerings are again sent to the shrines of Nīlavārāhi near Bode and Cvāga Gaṇeśa at Sallaghari (see map). To conclude the offerings to Mahākālī, a cock is sacrificed at the goddess's shrine.

In addition to the lavish sacrifices, the initiate's family wants to add a special event to the Kaytāpūjā. The motives for such a costly event are certainly twofold: it demonstrates the family's social status, and ensures the well-being of the initiate. On that day the Navadurgā gods have to respond to a total of five invitations. In the evening twenty of the initiate's relatives follow a group of musicians with two people waving large incense vessels and the initiated boy carrying incense sticks to meet the gods and lead them to the house in which the boy grew up before moving with his family beyond the limits of the historic urban core. The gods move in a festive procession to their destination, where a piglet is sacrificed and twenty trays with a large variety of food (*dyahḥbvaḥ*) are offered: the first four to the oleander goddess (*sipha-dyahḥ*), Mahālakṣmī, the skull cup and Śiva, then to Bhairava and one to Chumā Gaṇeśa, the powerful deity of the quarter (*ilākā*) whose shrine is located nearby. The following four trays are offered to the four musical instruments, the mistress (*nakhī*) of the deity's household, and to the ten remaining deities of the troupe.

These offerings to each of the divine objects or deities are followed by the formal introduction of the initiate to the Navadurgā. A helper of the Navadurgā troupe hands an egg and fish to the boy, who presents it to the deity. The boy's father, other members of the lineage and even the paternal aunts follow with offerings of beer, thick beer, red beer and finally milk. The formal offerings at the feast, of which the

gods do not eat anything, are concluded by an offering to Bhairava of *dhaubaji*, a mixture of flattened rice and yoghurt. All of the people present, including the neighbours from the lane, happily receive some *dhaubaji* as divine food, while Bhairava and Mahākālī just act as if they were doing the same.

### The Fourth Day

The Formal Feast (*bhoj*)

Following the initiation, more than 600 guests are invited to attend a large feast (*bhoj*). Two kinds of guests are invited. All of the members of the first group, the *bhvaḥ pāhā*, are invited. These may be as many as 20 or more people when brothers have not already divided up their property and households. Of the second group, the *yākā pāhā*, only a single representative is expected.

The initiate's parents have already booked the ground below the shrine of Mahākālī for the feast, to which the families of the lineage, maternal relatives, friends and colleagues are invited in their hundreds. But later the place seemed too small, so the parking lot that is normally reserved for tourist traffic during the daytime was hired from the municipality. A kitchen is set up by the catering agency together with a large tent with hundreds of chairs in long rows.

The initiated boy will be seated together with the eldest woman of the family, who in this case is his great-grandmother, while his father and mother receive the guests. Hundreds of presents pile up and a lot of people put 50 or 100 rupee notes into the pockets of the boy's suit. A generation ago this would have been one or five rupees, and just a simple length of cloth rather than fancy clothes from China.

Invited Families (*bhvaḥ pāhā*)

The male agnates of the initiate, the *phukī*, are essentially part of the ritual scene; they



are there to fulfill their duties, without a formal invitation.

Father's sisters, grandfather's sisters, great-grandfather's sisters and his brother's daughters, great-great-grandfather's brother's daughters and likewise great-grandmother's brother's (pāju) and her parent's male descendants qualify as *bhvaḥ pāhā*. Thirty-two families qualified as such.

Two of the paternal grandfather's four sisters and the paternal grandmother's sister did not take up the invitation because they disagreed with the way the initiate's mother had led the household before his father separated from his brother. The initiate's grandfather and grandmother died early at the ages of 48 and 45, before his father Bijay had married. After he had married a girl of his choice from the sub-caste of potters (Kumaḥ/Prajāpati), access of his paternal aunts to their paternal house, the *thachē*, became more restricted. They left in bitterness and never returned. Only after Bijay split from his younger brother and left the house have they started to return regularly to their parental home for annual events. One more case needs to be mentioned: one of the great-greatuncles daughter's (see Tvati in the diagram) sons married the daughter of the sub-caste of Jugi, the purity-specialists. This misalliance has had disastrous consequences, for now he is never invited to any of the feasts.

#### Invited Individuals (*yākā pāhā*)

Other relatives who qualify as *yākā pāhā* are expected to send only one representative, either female or male, to attend the feast. These 51 guests are invariably from the families of the daughters of grandfather's or great-grandfathers grandnieces and their female as well as male descendants.

## The Fifth Day

### Closing down the Store (*bhāri thanegu*)

The final day of the Kaytāpūjā is dedicated to closing down the store and the concluding distribution of *syū* or parts of the sacrificial animals. The verb *thanegu* suggests a variety of actions in Nevārī: to resolve, to close, to complete while *bhāri* is the cook. In this case, some ten helpers acted as cooks, while the maternal uncle controlled the room in which the foodstuffs and *pūjā* items for the entire period of five days were stored. The act of closing down restores the room to the household, marks the end of the ritual, and expresses gratitude to all of the lineage members, the *jyāḥcvanipū* helpers, and their wives.

Before these 40 people gather together for the final feast, a few distant relatives, who did not have the chance earlier to welcome and acknowledge the initiated boy as a member of the larger group, arrive to meet the family and to hand over presents. It is in fact their duty to appear. The presentation of apples, grapes and sweet cakes may indicate a newly developed demonstration of affluence that the rising middle classes have embraced. Nevertheless, marking the forehead with vermilion (*tikā*) and the temple with yoghurt (*dhau svagā*) is a ritual act that confirms their relationship to the initiated boy, his great-grandmother and his father. The prescribed present is no longer a piece of cloth but readymade clothes in fancy wraps. By this time, there are already piles of such presents in the house.

Early in the afternoon the *juginī* also appears, the wife of the purity specialist who regularly absorbs ritual waste in the context of death rituals (Gutschow and Michaels 2005: 62) and who collects her share of food (*jugibvaḥ*) on six festive occasions of the year. On the first day of the Kaytāpūjā she had already come to collect her share after the death ritual that had been performed by the

#### Opposite

*Chart of the initiate's relatives from his paternal father's line.*

*18 families are identified (printed in bold) who are invited to the feast at the conclusion of the initiation as bhvaḥ pāhā, i.e. all members of the family are expected to accept the invitation.*

*22 more families are invited as yākā pāhā, i.e. only one member of the family is expected to join the feast.*

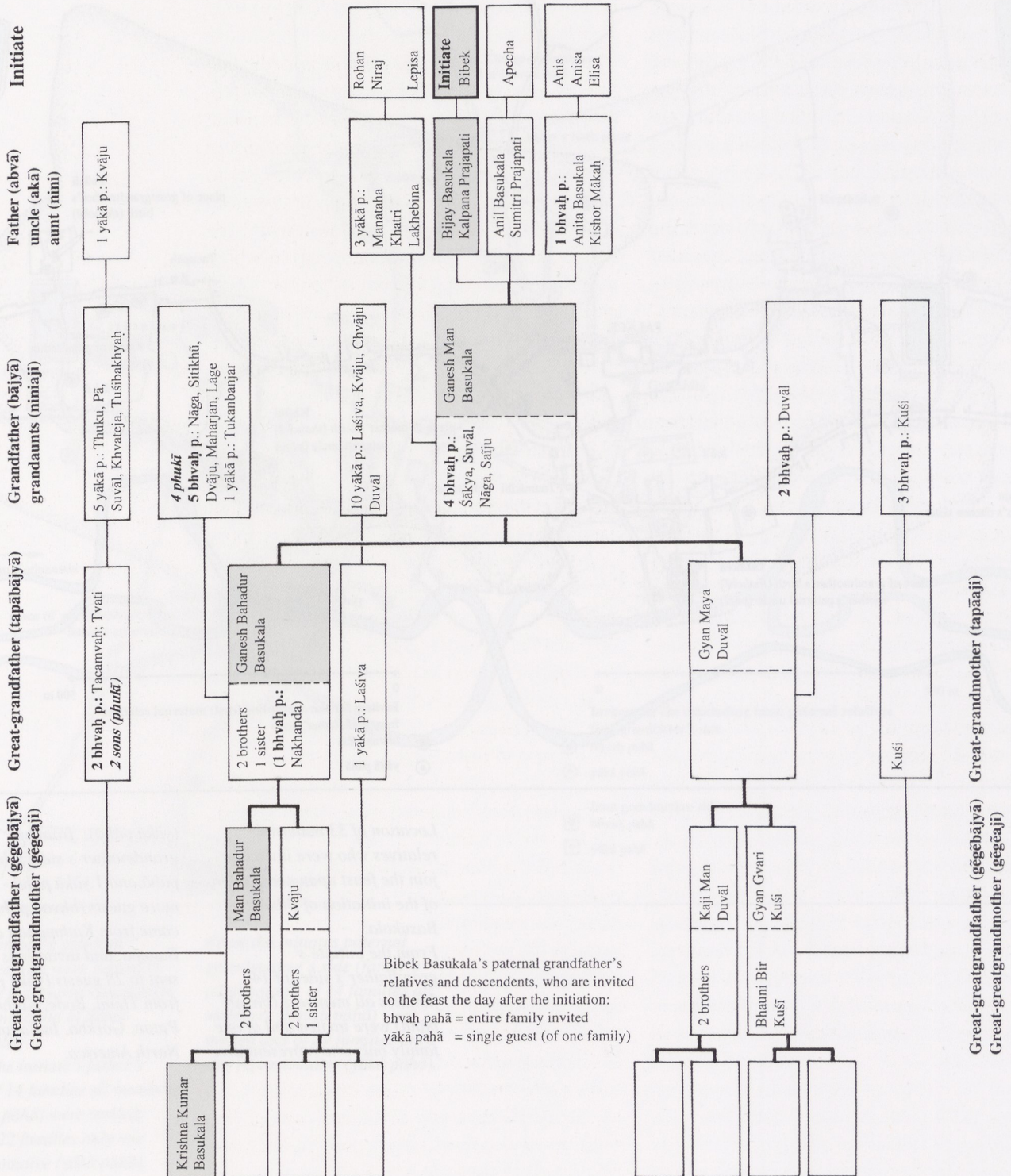
*Bvaḥ pāhā are the sisters of the initiate's father and grandfather, the daughters of great-grandfather's and great-great-grandfather's brothers, as well as great-grandmother's brother's sons and her mother's brother's grandsons.*

*To the lineage (phukī) belong the father's brother and the great-grandfather's brother's sons.*

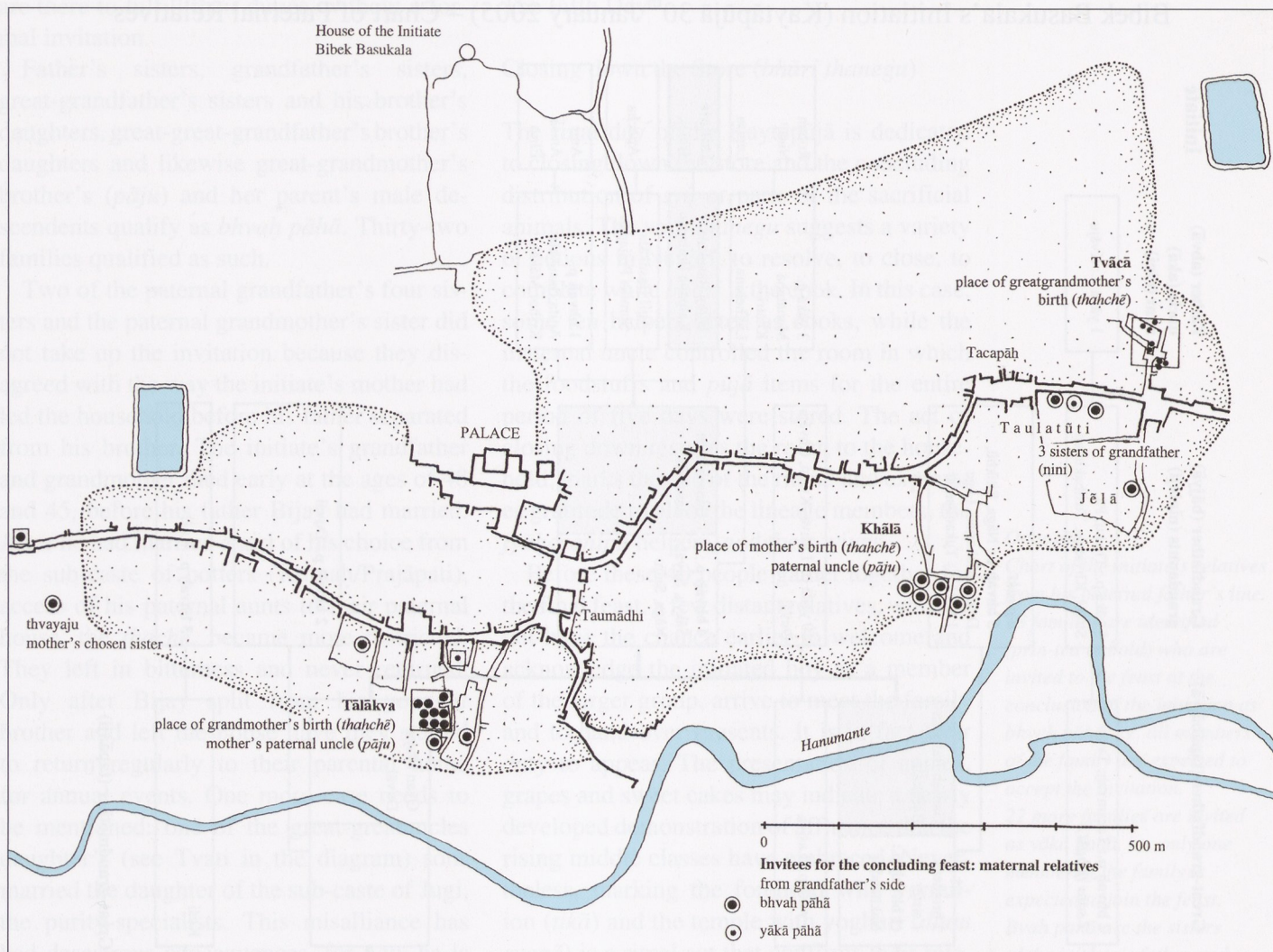
*Four such charts would have to be presented in order to identify all guests related to the initiate's two grandmothers and two grandfathers.*



Bibek Basukala's Initiation (Kaytāpūjā 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005) – Chart of Paternal Relatives





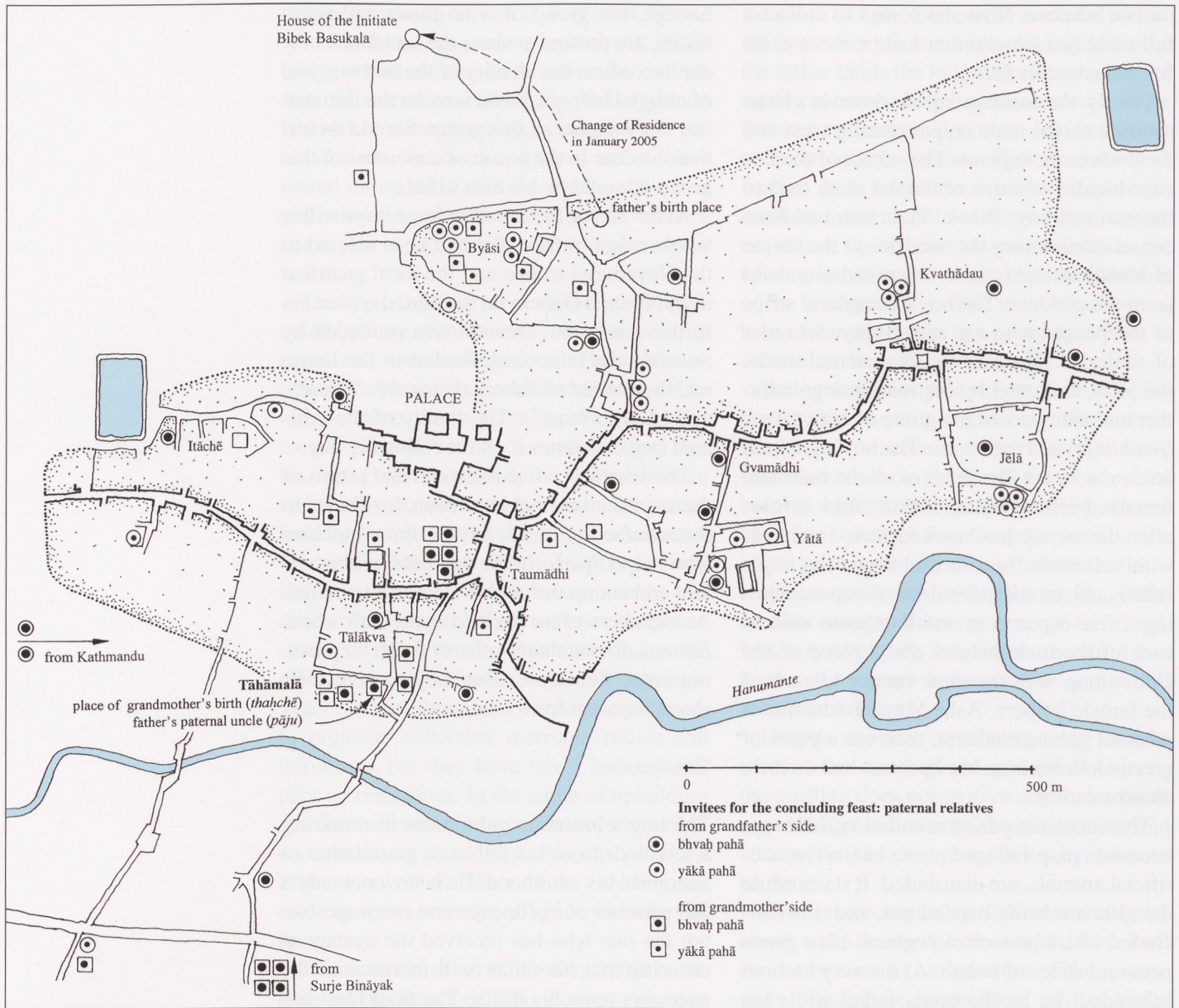


Location of 33 maternal relatives who were invited to join the feast upon completion of the initiation of Bibek Basukala.

From the initiate's grandfather's side: of 14 families all members (bhvaḥ pāhā) were invited and of one family only one representative

(yākā pāhā); from his grandmother's side: 9 bhvaḥ pāhā and 1 yākā pāhā.- Three more guests (bhvaḥ pāhā) came from Kathmandu and Banepa, and invitations were sent to 28 guests (yākā pāhā) from Thimi, Bode, Kathmandu, Patan, Gorkha, India and North America.





Location of 79 paternal relatives who were invited to join the feast upon completion of the initiation of Bibek Basukala.

From the initiate's father's side: of 14 families all members (bhvaḥ pāhā) were invited, and of 22 families only one representative (yākā pāhā).

From the initiate's paternal grandmother's side (father's pājukhalah): of 14 families all members (bhvaḥ pāhā) were invited and of 29 families only one representative (yākā pāhā).



initiate's father. Now she comes to collect a full meal (*jugibhvaḥ*) that had been set aside for the ancestors (*pitṛ*).

Finally, the entire group sits down in a large room, with the male helpers facing west and their wives facing east. The *nāyaḥ* of the lineage hands out strips of the red cloth (*tul*) to the initiated boy, Bibek. The cloth had been consecrated during the sacrifice at the shrine of Mahākālī and is now welcomed as *prasād* from the goddess. The boy offers these strips to the people who are seated there in order of seniority. The first is his maternal uncle, the *pāju*, followed by his maternal grandfather and members of the group of wife-takers (*jicābhāju*) and their sons. The boy's paternal uncle marks the foreheads of all the male and females present, again with a black stroke, after the *nāyaḥ* has marked their foreheads with vermilion. In a second round the boy's father and mother distribute a cap containing a five-rupee note and five paisa coin to each of the male helpers and a piece of red cloth along with the same money to each of the female helpers. Asha Maya Tachamva, a paternal great-grandaunt, receives a piece of green cloth because her husband had died six months earlier.

The concluding feast is called *syūkābhvay*, because *syū*, privileged pieces of the five sacrificial animals, are distributed. It starts while the gifts are being handed out, and it is concluded with a portion of yoghurt, a few green peas and slices of radish. At the very end *syū* is handed out by the boy's father while his wife pours out liquor. The boy's maternal uncle receives the head of the drake, the maternal uncle the head of the cock to honour the representatives of the wife-givers. Others receive unidentified pieces as well as the eyes of the buffalo.

Those few helpers who could not attend the feast get a plate set apart, complete with the offering of the cap or piece of cloth. The message is that in theory, all members of the

lineage, the group of wife-givers and wife-takers, are present to share the sacrifice in order to confirm the identity of the larger group of obliged helpers. From now on the initiated boy is a member of this group. Should an initiation occur in the house of a member of this group it would be his turn to help.

At the end of the day, two large trays with a whole range of food that had been offered to the Navadurgā troupe and the local guardian deity, Chumā Gaṇeśa on the third day, remain in the storeroom. One set was produced by mistake; the other is dedicated to the house and thus called *chēbhvay* (from *chē*, "house", and *bhvay*, "feast"). The family of the initiated boy consumes it on the following day.

The feast has come to an end and pieces of the sacrificial animal have been distributed to the satisfaction of all, but the three butchers who helped perform the sacrifice of the buffalo and cut up the corpse have still to be fed. As members of an unclean caste with whom farmers do not share water or food, they cannot enter the house. But they receive their share, separate from all the others.

### Conclusion

The boy's initiation culminates in receiving a loincloth from his father or grandfather to announce his adulthood. He is now not only a full member of his lineage and marriageable, but the one who has received the agency of ensuring that his father will merge with the ancestors upon his death. The final feast has to be seen as a powerful demonstration of this agency. These happy tidings have not only to be brought to the notice of relatives of both categories – those who are invited with their entire family (*bhvaḥ pāhā*) and those who are invited individually (*yākā pāhā*) – but to friends and colleagues alike. Such a feast reconfirms relationships that might turn out to be vital to the new member of the lineage. The list of invitees is considered for days and



weeks to ensure no one is forgotten. Those who should be but are not invited will inevitably understand this as an active discontinuation of an earlier relationship. Relatives and friends are never forced to come, but the paternal aunts, the much respected and at times feared *ninis*, will carefully watch who came and who did not come. It is not an offence not to join the feast, but a sense of disrespect is felt.

The western observer is all too often fascinated by the expenditure involved in meeting ritual and social obligations. The opulence of a feast seems irrational but rituals are irrational practices that develop their own dynamics. The advent of a son who ensures that his father will eventually be turned into an ancestor is reason enough to ruin the household economy. We have earlier documented (Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 198) how local initiatives have moved to discontinue the tradition of inviting relatives to feasts on the occasion of death rituals. This move has never affected the initiation of boys and marriage. The newspapers regularly report on attempts to organise collective marriage rituals and initiations, but they have never had any impact on Bhaktapur. In the name of upholding “traditions”, various associations proposed to economise on rituals, but this has provided little or no relief. There is no avoiding the ensuing feasts with the obligatory number of invitees.

The main ritual act of the Kaytāpūjā is the tying of the loincloth. This does not involve any educational aspects, such as are prevalent in the *upanayana* ritual for members of high castes, where the sacred thread stands for the Veda: in this case the sacred thread is more or less an umbilical cord which binds the initiate to the sacrifice and the Veda. It symbolises the right to sacrifice, to light the domestic fire and to study the Veda. The Jyāpu Kaytāpūjā, however, has a different atmosphere. The girdle around the boy's hips together with the

loincloth can also be seen as a second birth – the boy, after all, is completely naked before the father binds the loincloth – but the initiate neither receives a Vedic *mantra*, nor does he threaten to leave his parental house and become an ascetic (*brahmacārin*) and study in foreign parts (*deśāntara*) under a (spiritual) teacher, rather than his father. What is more important for the farmer community is the celebration of pubescence and membership of the lineage. It is a ritual in which all members of the *phukī* join in a communal feast in order to welcome a new member.

As in many life-cycle rituals, the role of the cognate relatives is of great significance. In the Hindu initiation it is the maternal uncle (*pāju*) who not only cuts off the first lock of hair but who also brings the loincloth. In one case we observed that the *pāju* marked the boy's penis with vermilion before the loincloth was girdled. Marking the penis certainly demonstrates the very core of the ritual, which symbolically transforms the child into a sexually mature being and as such a full member of society.

Despite the rich symbolism that can be seen in the many plants and ritual objects, the girdling does not require any understanding of religious content. The initiates are told what to do and they never ask why it has to be done.

Given the complexity of Newar ritual elements used during the Kaytāpūjā, this ritual cannot be seen as an imitation of the *upanayana* ritual. It is independent of the Vedic initiation, although Vedic *mantras* are used. The initiates become a member of a social group that defines itself by rules of purity and commensality, and they also acquire the right to perform many domestic rituals, including the death rituals.



## The Boy's Buddhist Initiation: Kaytāpūjā

Newar Buddhist initiation is threefold: one is the Kaytāpūjā ritual performed by Buddhist castes such as the Citrakārs (painters), Divākār, Rañjītkār and Nakarmi; it resembles in many aspects the Hindu Kaytāpūjā, although it is performed by a Buddhist priest.<sup>16</sup> The second initiation ritual is Bāre chuyegu, the monastic initiation for Śākyas and Bajrāchāryas, and the third is the esoteric Tantric initiation (*ācālyegu*) for the Tantric masters which, however, is not necessarily a youth ritual (and will therefore not be treated here). The ritual seems already to have been practiced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in much the same way as today (von Rospatt 2005: 210f.).

### The Kaytāpūjā

The Kaytāpūjā among Buddhist castes is predominantly performed by a Vajrācārya priest who is the family's house priest. The ritual is mostly carried out in the private house of the initiate's father, but sometimes also in a monastery courtyard. Despite the many variations, common to all Buddhist Kaytāpūjā celebrations is that the boy's hair is (again) cut, that he is introduced into the *āgāchē* or the Gaṇeśa temple of the lineage or city quarter, that he receives a bow and arrow, pretends to run away but is held back by the maternal uncle who also presents him with his loin-cloth, and finally the procession through the city quarter.

### The Ritual

The following is the description of a Kaytāpūjā of two Citrakār boys that took place at Yata in the quarter of Tacapaḥ on 28 January 2007 (Māgha *śukla daśamī*) in the house of their grandfather Ram Chitrakar. Ananda Muni Bajracharya of Paśubāhā acts as Bud-

dhist priest. Two boys of the house, Pranaya (aged around ten) and Prasun (aged around eight) receive various loin-cloths. The Nau barber appears to shave their heads and their *pāju* (maternal uncle) goes with them to the adjoining terrace to assist washing them with *sarvakhau* (pulverised oilcake). For Pranaya his *pāju* was Jagat Krishna from Thimi and his father's sister (*nini*) was Sarda from Mashangalli in Kathmandu.

The ritual starts with the *gurumaṇḍalapūjā* and other preparatory rites. After this the boys are ritually welcomed by the *nakhī*, the eldest woman of the lineage (*phukī*). The shaving of the boys' heads is performed by the Nau barber after his hand has been venerated and empowered by the Vajrācārya priest. However, it is the maternal uncle who cuts off the first lock, using a small golden razor blade. The hair falls on a plate (*thāybhū*) bearing a red cloth and a five-rupee banknote, which is held by the boy's father's sister. Importantly, the tuft or topknot (*śikhā*) remains unshorn. This demonstrates that the boys are not being initiated into a monastic order (*saṃgha*), although afterwards they are asked by the priest to worship the Three Jewels – Buddha, Dharma and Saṃgha (see also KMB pp. 2f.).

The head shaving is completed by 9:15. The paring of the toenails is simply ignored because a butcher (Kasāi) woman, whose duty this would be, is no longer called in: having a Kasāi woman enter the house would be deemed by Citrakārs to be highly polluting and a great stigma. The hair is discarded by the two *ninis* at Hanumānghāt.

After the mothers have washed their boys, the *nakhī* of the lineage performs the *lasakusa* ritual for them with the *siphā* container, the iron key, and a *vajra*, the Buddhist sceptre. The boys wear red cotton shawls but no robes. They are taught to perform the worship of the sacred vase (*kalaśapūjā*).

At ten minutes past ten, the *nāyaḥ* hands over the loin-cloth to the boy while the *pāju*

<sup>16</sup> For a description according to a Jātakarmavidhi manuscript see Lienhard 1999: 106-112; cf. also Toffin 1984: 139f.



Buddhist initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*) of Pranaya Chitrakar of the sub-caste of painters on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

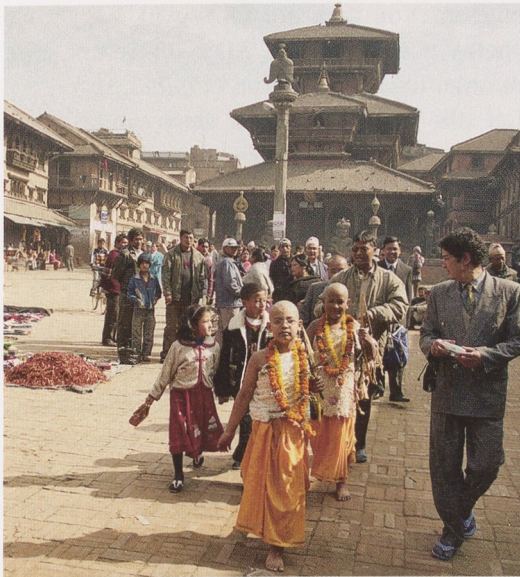
Above

The initiate is instructed by the priest how to hold bow and arrow, while his maternal uncles are helping.



Below

Having worshipped the local Gaṇeśa temple on the formal journey to the forest, the two initiates return home across the Dattātreya square in the company of paternal as well as maternal relatives.



worships the knot. What is peculiar to the Citrakārs is the offering of a white cotton loincloth and, in addition, a belt made of five times double red threads interwoven with pieces of cotton wool. A similar rite can also be seen in the monastic initiation described below. A small bundle is fastened at the knot containing a coin and a betel-nut.

The priest offers *dhau svagā* with his right index finger and a yellow *tikā* with his central finger and red *tikā* with his ring finger.

The boys are then clad in a golden *dhoti* and a shawl of raw cotton. One of them has been borrowed from Krishna Ram Chitrakar at Nāgpūkhū, the other one comes from the *pāju*'s house in Patan. They are also presented with a garland of flowers (*mālā*).

After forty minutes, three handfuls of rice are offered together with oranges and bananas, first to the priest, then to the boys. The marks for the “Seven Steps” (*saptapadī*, Nev. *nhepālā*) are now prepared with powder by the priest. On each of the lotus-like diagrams he places pipal leaves, a coin and a betel-nut. The boys carry a stick containing provisions in two bags, a bow and an arrow, and a deer-skin. A small piece of (Nep.) *jamāne māndro* (*Mahonia nepalensis* DC.) has been attached to the wrapped skin: this is not a flower, but a stick – the same stick that was fixed to the *kumākāḥ* thread of the Ihi girls. The boy walks along these Seven Steps, which are sometimes said to mark the Seven Worlds (*loka*, see Pradhan 1986: 108).

The entire group heads for the Salan Gaṇeśa temple, which houses the non-iconic representation of the deity. The temple is entered by the boys for worship. In front of the temple, the boys shoot arrows whose tips have been coated with an undisclosed substance by the priest. One shot is fired upwards, one to the east, and one straight to the south – i. e. to heaven, to the netherworld, and to the earth. The text says:

After reciting auspicious verses (*svasti*) and offering a jasmine flower (*daphaḥsvā*) to the *pikhālākhu* (threshold stone) let (the boy run away) casting an arrow each to the heaven, the netherworld and the earth. (KMB p. 7)

Then the boys step forwards, starting their formal journey to the forest, but the maternal uncle catches them immediately – to the laughter of the crowd. This episode is part of a dialogue in the *Kaytāpūjā* texts, which



are sometimes read or related by the priest. The son threatens to leave his home and his parents to become an ascetic in the forest. In the Brahminical context this is the period of *brahmacarya* that involves studying the Veda with a teacher at his place. However, the maternal uncle has to catch him and to remind him that the son has first to fulfill his domestic duties. The problem is solved by the “Seven Steps”, which might be seen as a symbolic way into the forest and giving alms to the son. In the Kaytābīya-Mekhalābandhana, the text used during the ritual, the dispute between the boy and the parents and guru is given in the following dialogue:

‘O teacher, you must do me a favour. I wish to perform *vanavāsa* (i.e. live in the forest), so allow me to leave.’

‘O boy, o disciple, you are only five or six years old. You cannot go for *vanavāsa*. You must not talk about it.’

‘O teacher, o mother, o father, you must not worry about anything. Is not there (a) god to protect me?<sup>17</sup> Please do not stop me. It is time for me to go.’

‘O disciple, going for *vanavāsa* is very dangerous. (You do not know) how dangerous it is. O boy, if you go out from the house, there will be no friends. There will be dangers from rivers, streams, mountains (and also) dangerous animals like tigers, bears, elephants, lions, black cobras, and crocodiles. [During the Kaytāpūjā of the Citrakārs in Bhaktapur, the relatives teased the boy by pointing to the dangers of the Maoists living in the forest.] Are you able to face such a danger? If you are, only then it is good to go for *vanavāsa*, o boy.’

‘O teacher, o mother, o father, you do not have to worry. If there is a danger of an ocean (or) a river, I will cross it by creating a bridge with (my) bow (and arrow). I will hit all the animals with (my) bow. The local Gaṇeśa and other gods will protect (me). The forest god

will also compassionately protect a boy like me. You should not worry. Let me go.’

‘O son, o boy, who will run away from the house, the lineage (and) the *dharma* of lineage (*kula*)? A son must do this (sort of duty), o son.’

‘O mother, o father, it is God who let (you) care for the *dharma* of lineage. It is God who gives birth and death. It is God who gives plenty of grains (food). Nevertheless, one has to go for *vanavāsa*. It does not matter whether one should go now or later. One shall not (always) stay (at home). O mother, o father, I am going to leave (now) for *vanavāsa*. Let me go. Do not worry at all. O mother, o father bless me.’

‘O son, wherever you go, nothing bad may happen. You may not fall down. May your enemy not defeat you. May you return soon in order to continue your *kuladharmā*.’

Let (the boy) take seven steps while sprinkling water. Recite *svasti* verses by sweeping a broom (in front of the boy). The mother, father and maternal uncle should give three times alms. (KMb pp. 5-6)

The procession turns towards the house along the southern edge of the pond, towards Milakva where the small temple of Seto Bhairava is circumambulated. Reaching again the house, the boys stand on the *pikhālākhu* threshold stone, facing the house, to receive the golden loincloth from their maternal uncle and another set of new “Western” clothes including a cap (*topi*) that from now on has to be worn on many ritual and official occasions. Fully dressed, they enter the house.

### Conclusion

It seems the Kaytāpūjā of the Citrakār boys does not contain many Buddhist elements. Most of the rites – the ritual welcoming, cutting off the hair apart from the tuft, washing and purifying oneself with oil-cake, the *tikās*,

<sup>17</sup> The fact that Buddha is not mentioned here as a protector makes it likely that this part has been taken from similar Hindu texts, e.g. Deśāntarakathā: see Boullier 1985 and Michaels 1986.



the loincloth, the “Seven Steps”, the alms-giving and the new clothes – parallel the Hindu Kaytāpūjā. Different in part are deities that are addressed, the *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*, and the *mantras* recited. Moreover, the Buddhist Kaytāpūjā or Mekhalābandhana of the Citrakārs does not point to any monastic or esoteric background, does not refer to Buddhist doctrines, and does not include the worship of Buddhist shrines in the vicinity. In the Kaytāpūjā, the boys do not really become monks or take the five *upāsaka* vows. It is not an initiation into Buddhist life, into a *saṃgha* or monastic order. It is the initiation into the clan, into the central social group of the Newars. To a certain extent this also holds true for the Buddhist monastic initiation.

## The Boy's Buddhist Monastic Initiation: Bāre chuyegu (*pravrajyā*)

The ritual of shaving the head, as performed by Rājopādhyāya priests, looks as though it could be a purely Vedic Hindu ritual: the use of Vedic *mantras*, the significance of the tuft (*śikhā*) as part of the Hindu lineage (*gotra*) system, and the celebration of the entrance into the first life-stage (*āśrama*) are all too evident. After all, it is the *śikhā* that is cut by Daśanāmī ascetics when they enter into their monastic order and become full ascetics. The Vedic fire and the *śikhā* best symbolise the life of a twice-born Hindu.

However, the Cūḍākaraṇa or Cūḍakarman ritual is also part of the boy's monastic initiation among Buddhist Newars, especially Vajrācāryas and Śākyas. This transformation, called *bāre chuyegu* (Skt. *pravrajyā*), “becoming a monk (*bāre*)”, provides an excellent example of how ritual sequences can be transformed into a new religious context and thus give space for new interpretations. It is a ritual through which all male member of a *saṃgha* become a monk for three days, after which they disrobe to live the life of a Buddhist householder. However, more than that it is a ritual by which certain boys become full members of their caste. Consequently, this is more a life-cycle ritual than a ritual based on the individual's decision to become a monk.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that a boy only becomes a member of a *saṃgha* by patrilineal descent; in other words, the father has to be a member of the same “monastery”. It must also be taken into account that Newar Buddhists do not have the institution of vocational monks. The Bāre chuyegu initiation does not lead to full ordination (*upasampadā*). Thus, the status of the initiation has far more to do with caste and social implications than with esoteric Buddhist doctrines, as was aptly shown by Alexander von Rospatt (2005). In



the following, we shall try to underline the overall importance of membership to lineage groups or clans that characterises most adolescence rituals. We will refer to a text, the Kaytābīya-Mekhalābandhana[pūjāvidhi], used during Bāre chuyegu rituals in Bhaktapur and a more elaborate performance in Patan. However, we will not include the variants, subrites and Tantric elements that are performed prior to, during and after the main rites, because these aspects are mostly beyond the scope of our book.

### The Ritual

The following short description<sup>18</sup> is based on a Cūḍākaṛaṇa and Bāre chuyegu ritual that took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2006 in Patan at Ukubāhā or Rudravarṇa Mahāvihāra, and focuses on those rites that are most important to make comparisons. A total of 21 boys, all from Śākya families from Ukubāhā, were initiated by Vajrācārya priests from Bhīchēbāhā. The ritual started at around 9:45 in the morning although 9 o'clock had been given as the ritually auspicious time (*sāit*). Due to the cold weather it was postponed so that the children would not catch a cold while they are being shaved and undressed during the ritual. Only the three Vajrācārya priests and some elder men (*nāyaḥ*) from the community were present in the morning, because the ritual starts with the usual *gurumaṇḍalāpūjā* and the *dharmadhātupūjā* that frames many Newar Buddhist rituals (see Gellner 1991a, Locke 1980, Shima 1991), among them the Ihi ritual (see below).

The Cūḍākaṛaṇa ritual begins with the *aśmāropaṇa* rite, in which black lentils are ground. On their way to their tonsure, the boys step on a mortar and pestle and grind black sesame seeds three times in order to destroy all evil. This rite is also celebrated in other Hindu and Buddhist rituals.

Shortly after comes the tonsure. The com-

plete head of hair apart from a topknot (*śikhā*) is shorn off by the barber and his wife. As in the Kaytāpūjā, the hair is collected on a plate (*thāybhū*) on a tripod and afterwards cast off by the father's sister (*nini*) in a nearby river. The plate bears a piece of cloth with money (generally a hundred rupees) as a gift to the *nini*, as well as a girdle with white and red cotton strings, which will later be bound around the boy's hips, plus another small plate of reed (*mimicā*) bearing in turn a betel-nut, unhusked rice, a piece of ginger, oil in a clay saucer, wheat flour, salt, and money for the barber (but no meat, as in the Hindu rituals, where the *mimicā* is also used). The barber's wife also symbolically pares the toenails and colours the boys' feet with red pigment – again a rite that parallels Hindu variants.

Afterwards the boys are taken by their mothers, who are dressed in their festive red saris, together with the *nini* into a special room in the monastery where they are prepared for the monastic initiation. Up until this point they are still laymen (*upāsaka*); in a way they are even Hindus because the barber has not cut of the tuft (*śikhā*, *cūḍā*) on their heads, which is a traditional mark of being a Hindu.

At the entrance of the room the boy is received by the *nakhī*, who pours water and some oil over the boy after he has been completely undressed by his mother. Naked, he is then taken by hand into the room by the eldest woman of the *saṅgha*.

The boys all sit on long mattresses in a row, in order of age, the oldest being six years, the youngest only fourteen months. With them are their mothers. For the time being they only wear a yellow or orange towel to protect them against the cold and out of modesty. Set out in front of them on various trays is the material for the ritual elements to follow: a plate with the robe and paraphernalia of a Buddhist monk, the usual *pūjā* plate with vermilion and turmeric, a ritual lamp and mirror, and flowers and fruits.

<sup>18</sup> For more detailed descriptions see Gellner 1988 and Lienhard 1999: 54-102; for other photographic documentation see also Mühlich 2004.





Buddhist initiation, Bāre chuyegu, on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2006 at Ukubāhā in Patan. The *thakālī*, the head of the Śākya community associated with the monastery cuts the tuft of hair of the neophyte symbolically with a golden razor blade. The actual cutting is done by a helper.

After a while the *nakhī* performs *siphārati* as another means of purification. Some mothers tie a golden ring to their son's topknot and declare it to be Buddha's jewel (*cūdāmaṇi*).

This is followed by the cutting of the tuft by the *nāyaḥ*, who wears a black brocade jacket. He is very old so he only cuts the tuft symbolically – with a small golden razor blade. The actual cutting is done by a helper. The hair is simply left on the ground and not removed afterwards.

Then the mother binds the girdle around the boy's hip. Afterwards the boy is taken out to the courtyard of the monastery where four *thakālīs* in white robes and no jackets or head covering are waiting in the northeast corner. They are holding small copper vessels (*kalaśa*) each containing a twig of flowering white jasmine. The water is from the main sacred vase (*mūlakalaśa*) of the *gurumaṇḍalapūjā* and represents the water of the four oceans (*catuḥ-samudrajala*). The naked boy now stands under a provisional brass canopy erected for this

purpose, and the four *thakālīs* pour the water on him. This (Tantric) ritual element is also called *catuḥsāgara-abhiṣeka*, “washing with water of the four oceans”.

Back in the dressing room, the *nakhī* hands the boys the monastic ochre robes (Skt. *cīvara*) together with a small brocade bag (Nev. *jholā*). Directly after this, the mothers dress their children in a skirt, shirt and a shawl. The youngest monk even wears a Pampers nappy.

The main Vajrācārya priest who had performed the *gurumaṇḍalapūjā* now marks the head of the boys with a *svastika*. For this, he uses cotton strings dipped in turmeric paste. The boys also receive a thread with white cotton strips bound around their head.

Then the *nāyaḥ* hands over the ritual paraphernalia, especially the ascetic's staff (Skt. *khakkara*) and the begging bowl (Skt. *piṇḍapātra*), which were lying on a tray in front of the boy.

After a little while, the *yajamāna*, in this case the father of the eldest boy, marks the foreheads of all the boys with a black *tikā* made of the ashes from the *homa* fire.

This is followed by *siphā luyegu*, which is conducted by the main priest. He uses the *vajra* bell to pour popped rice, fruit pieces and flowers three times over the boys' heads. After this, a woman from the household blesses the boys with *svagā* on the right temple and a *tikā* on the forehead. She receives a piece of cloth and some money from each in return.

Meanwhile the *homa* fire has been rekindled and a triple deity called the Three Jewels, or Buddha, Saṃgha and Dharma, has been brought from the *āgāchē*. However, the focus of attraction is now a ritual element that is called *saptapadī*, “Seven Steps”. For this, a *svastika* with a curved line and seven marked spots has been drawn on the ground along the western front of the courtyard. The boys stand there with their mothers behind





and an honorific parasol (Skt. *chattrā*) above them. The boys put wooden chapals on their feet, and with the sceptre and the begging bowl in their hands, they execute the “Seven Steps”. It is believed that this commemorates the first seven steps of the Buddha after his birth. Meanwhile the main Vajrācārya priest pours water onto the diagram. At the end, the mother’s brother (*pāju*) welcomes the boy and leads or carries him into the main shrine of the monastery compound, where a statue of Buddha Śākyamuni is kept and where the caretaker, a Śākya, receives the children one by one. For the first time in their life, they are now allowed to worship and to circumambulate the statue.



Buddhist initiation, Bāre chuyegu, on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2006 at Ukubāhā in Patan.

Left  
Ritual welcoming (*lasakusa*) of the neophyte by the eldest woman (*nakhī*) of the Śākya community at the threshold of the secondary courtyard of the monastery.

Right  
Performance of the seven steps, *saptapaḍī*, believed to commemorate the first seven steps of the Buddha. The Vajrācārya priest pours water onto the diagrams marking the seven steps. The neophyte in a saffron robe and his head marked with svastika of turmeric paste, carries the sceptre and begging bowl. As the golden mark, *suvarṇatilaka*, the svastika is regarded as one of the auspicious signs of the Buddha.

After a while, the concluding rites commence. First comes the *pūrṇāhūti* where all the ritual specialists throw grains into the fire to *mantras* spoken by the chief priest. Afterwards the priest gives a *tikā* to the *yajamāna* and receives *dakṣiṇā* in return. Both perform the *visarjana*, i.e. the release of the deities and the cleaning of the sacrificial place. Somebody is sent with a lump of cooked rice (*balī*) dedicated to Bhairava and a painting depicting the deity to the *pikhālākhu* stone in front of the monastery.

Finally, the boys, the main Vajrācārya priest, the ten eldest of the monastery, the caretaker of the temple, the barber and the musicians sit or stand in a row in order to re-



ceive *kisli* as well as rice and money from the women of the participating households. This is considered to be the first alms-giving (Skt. *bhikṣā*) activity by the new monks.

At the end of the day, all of the boys along with the ritual specialists and the umbrellas proceed to a few shrines nearby and join in a feast. Some are carried by their maternal uncles.

Three days later, they disrobe.

### Conclusion

Newar Buddhism has often been declared to be “Buddhism without monks” (Allen 1973) – a phrase that is appropriate if one considers monkhood as an ascetic stage of life, which Newars do not aspire to. Śākyas and Vajrācāryas see themselves rather as “monks who have turned householders without really giving up their identity as monks” (von Rospatt 2005: 219). For them initiation means both a rite de passage and a new identity. Consequently, Bāre chuyegu has two parts: firstly all of the initiate's hair is cut off apart from the tuft (*cūḍākaraṇa*), then he is asked if he really wants to go forth (*pravrajyā*). The first part is adopted from the Hindu variant and only slightly transformed into a Buddhist ritual by addressing Buddhist deities and using Buddhist ritual objects. The second part is the act by which the initiate is cut off from Brahminical society. It is similar to Hindu, especially Daśanāmī ascetic practice where the tuft (and the sacred thread) is also cut before renouncing the world.

There are also several other Hindu ritual elements that have been transformed here into a Buddhist context. Thus, the offering of water from the four oceans replaces the ritual bath after the tonsure; the immediate disrobing could be seen as a parallel to the *samāvartana* or *deśāntara* part of Hindu initiation, which also condenses an ideally long period to a short moment. The “tonsure is ritualized as

in Brahminical practice” (von Rospatt 2005: 212), and that also holds true for the incorporation of the “Seven Steps”, and the tying of the girdle – all rituals that do not really make sense in a Vinaya-Buddhist context.

So in Bāre chuyegu the boy does not really become a monk, just as in the Vratibandha rituals of the Hindus the boy does not really become a Vedic student. If at all, through Bāre chuyegu the boy is transformed to the status of a married monk – even if the marriage only happens later. Despite the fact that the boy receives monastic paraphernalia such as a robe, alms bowl, water pot and staff, the Bāre chuyegu does not reveal any Vinaya context; the full ordination (*upasampadā*) is never performed, and the Bāre chuyegu itself transforms the initiate into a full member of the lineage responsible for death rituals, but not into the intermediary status of novice.

It must be concluded that the social implications of the initiation ritual are stronger than the scholastic and esoteric connotations structuring and accompanying the ritual. What is modelled after the initiation of the religious virtuosi is in fact the celebration of the social status of the initiate and his social and kinship group. In other words, what is called “becoming a *bāre* or monk” is in fact becoming a marriagable male adult.

As in all male initiation rituals, this celebration of sexual maturity is extremely important. The boys have to become temporarily chaste, symbolised by the ascetic loincloth, before being transformed into an adult, symbolised by the worldly clothes of the male adults, especially a cap (*ṭopi*), suit, and sometimes tie. However, the actual way in which the ritual is performed marks social differences. The boys do not become a member of a religious community or church, as in the Protestant confirmation or Catholic baptism; they become members of their social group that regards itself different from similar and neighbouring groups.



**नेत्र ध्याय या लागि**

**पाठ पुजा गाय धारः**

**मु कलहा विदुषः**  
 धौपीत - ह्यक सिन्धु - १  
 चापु - १  
 इनाय कुतिलका - १  
 गण्ड - १  
 स्वाम ॥ इय  
 दिव्यशक्ति - २  
 चक्षु अक्षी - २  
 मल नीलरत्ना - १  
 सुकुहा

**अनुवा**  
 १. सिंहाय कु, चिह्न पात्र  
 २. लु सिन्धु  
 ३. सुडाकर्म वस्त्र  
 ४. लिचिचा  
 ५. को निचक  
 ६. दे जाली

**कलहा**  
 १. कलहा  
 २. धौपीत  
 ३. हायक  
 ४. सिन्धु  
 ५. सुकुहा

**पुजा सामग्री**

१ मोलाभ-२	किंशा हा विना	१ सोना	कोलफल	१ दाधे स्वौ	१ चक्र प्रौह
२ अमिर	२ सोना	२ सोना	प्रियमु	२ चक्र प्रौह	२ चक्र प्रौह
३ सोय सिन्धु	३ सोना	३ सोना	उद्यु	३ चक्र प्रौह	३ चक्र प्रौह
४ मसु	४ सोना	४ सोना	सुपाट	४ चक्र प्रौह	४ चक्र प्रौह
५ सोय-आह्वो	५ सोना	५ सोना	सुपाट	५ चक्र प्रौह	५ चक्र प्रौह
६ ध्याय	६ सोना	६ सोना	सुपाट	६ चक्र प्रौह	६ चक्र प्रौह
७ पुस्तकिका	७ सोना	७ सोना	सुपाट	७ चक्र प्रौह	७ चक्र प्रौह
८ सोना पा	८ सोना	८ सोना	सुपाट	८ चक्र प्रौह	८ चक्र प्रौह
९ सादक ध्यो-कलि	९ सोना	९ सोना	सुपाट	९ चक्र प्रौह	९ चक्र प्रौह
१० सो-व सा सो	१० सोना	१० सोना	सुपाट	१० चक्र प्रौह	१० चक्र प्रौह
११ मह-सामात	११ सोना	११ सोना	सुपाट	११ चक्र प्रौह	११ चक्र प्रौह
१२ सिंधि - ४०	१२ सोना	१२ सोना	सुपाट	१२ चक्र प्रौह	१२ चक्र प्रौह
१३ नै-पिल	१३ सोना	१३ सोना	सुपाट	१३ चक्र प्रौह	१३ चक्र प्रौह
१४ लु पिल	१४ सोना	१४ सोना	सुपाट	१४ चक्र प्रौह	१४ चक्र प्रौह
१५ सिन्हा सि-२	१५ सोना	१५ सोना	सुपाट	१५ चक्र प्रौह	१५ चक्र प्रौह
१६ इवा - १०८	१६ सोना	१६ सोना	सुपाट	१६ चक्र प्रौह	१६ चक्र प्रौह
१७ अर्जका १०८	१७ सोना	१७ सोना	सुपाट	१७ चक्र प्रौह	१७ चक्र प्रौह

**इकायु विधि**

**जाल तः**  
 १. मि सोले  
 २. इका, पका  
 ३. सोला  
 ४. इका-जाति  
 ५. सुकुहा  
 ६. इला  
 ७. लाम

**अन्ये चक्र**  
 १. अद्वैतम् २. पुत्रं  
 ३. अक्षयम् ४. अक्षयम्  
 ५. अक्षयम् ६. अक्षयम्  
 ७. अक्षयम् ८. अक्षयम्

**अन्ये चक्र**  
 १. अक्षयम् २. अक्षयम्  
 ३. अक्षयम् ४. अक्षयम्  
 ५. अक्षयम् ६. अक्षयम्  
 ७. अक्षयम् ८. अक्षयम्

**अन्ये चक्र**  
 १. अक्षयम् २. अक्षयम्  
 ३. अक्षयम् ४. अक्षयम्  
 ५. अक्षयम् ६. अक्षयम्  
 ७. अक्षयम् ८. अक्षयम्

Buddhist initiation, Bāre chuyegu, on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2006 at Ukubāhā in Patan. Diagram used by Bijay Raj Bajracharya from Bhūchēbāhā to prepare the ritual place. Above left "cuḍākarmayā halaṃ jvalaṃ" with the objects left of the mukalaṣa and right of the vijayakalaṣa; below the row the fire pit (jajñāśālā) surrounded by the right protectors. Below right the diagram for the seven steps to be performed by the neophytes.



## The Girl's Hindu Marriage to the Bel Fruit: Ihi

Ihi is a ritual in which girls of certain Newar castes are married to the *bel* fruit or a deity called Suvarṇakumāra, who is mostly regarded as Viṣṇu or Buddha. The ritual is commonly denoted as a mock marriage, but we will argue that in fact it is more a kind of initiation ritual. In the following, we shall present general material on Ihi with regards to the placement of the ritual in time and space as well as to organisers, participants and ritual specialists, before turning to the description and analysis of a particular Ihi event that took place in December 2006. The Ihipūjāvidhi and Suvarṇakumāravivāhavidhi of Part III, texts that were used during the rituals described in the present volume, are the first Ihi manuscripts ever to have been edited and translated.<sup>19</sup>

### The Timing: Framing the Season

Like other life-cycle rituals, the Ihi marriage must be performed either within the first three months of the year from Vaiśākha to Āṣāḍha (14<sup>th</sup> April to 15<sup>th</sup> July) or in winter and spring (14<sup>th</sup> November to 15<sup>th</sup> December and 14<sup>th</sup> January to 13<sup>th</sup> March). In rare cases an auspicious date is also found in the month of Pauṣa (December/January). The season for Ihi usually starts on a day of the first month, the “Indestructible Third” (*akṣaya tṛtīyā*) of the bright half of the moon in April, the very day the mythic beginning of the Golden Age is remembered. It was on this day that the Gaṅgā waters descended from heaven and it was Śiva's hair that had distributed the waters. In a reference to this myth, the chariot of Matsyendranātha, the powerful rainmaker of Nepal, starts his ritual journey on this day in Patan – a lengthy journey on a chariot that should be completed by the onset of the rains. In Bhaktapur, this day assumes additional

significance because it heralds the beginning of the season for worshipping the ancestor deities (*dugudyahpūjā*).

The end of the season is equally strict. By mid March the full moon of the month of Phālguna, Holipunhi, marks the end of the period. Occasionally – as in 2004/2005 (V.S. 2061) the season was even more restricted and ended a month earlier with the Spring's Fifth (Basant- or Śrīpañcamī) of the bright half of the moon in the month of Māgha. In 2004, for example, the Indestructible Third fell on 22<sup>nd</sup> April while Śrīpañcamī fell on 13<sup>th</sup> February, thus limiting the period for the performance of Ihi to a mere 140 days. Apart from the Indestructible Third and the Spring's Fifth, the remaining ten days of that season that qualify for the performance of Ihi rituals fell exclusively in Mārgaśīrṣa/Maṅgśīr (November/December) and Māgha (January/February). While the initiation ritual for boys (*kayāpūjā*) is occasionally scheduled by the astrologers for the month of Caitra (March/April), neither the Ihi marriage, nor marriages or pre-menarche rituals (*bārḥā*) are performed in this month.

In 2003/2004 (V.S. 2060), a total of eleven days were considered auspicious for Ihi and fourteen days for the initiation of boys. In 2004/2005 (V.S. 2061) twelve days were auspicious for Ihi while the situation for the initiation of boys was somewhat dramatic. Apart from the four fixed dates (*akṣaya tṛtīyā*, *dasāīdaśamī*, *bibāhapañcamī*, *śrīpañcamī*), only three other days were designated by the astrologers. Many families underwent a lot of stress trying to find a suitable day in a dialogue with the astrologer. The problem of finding such a day becomes all the more pressing if the boy's or girl's birthday falls in Vaiśākha or Māgha, because initiation rituals have to be avoided in such months. In 2005/2006 (V.S. 2062) the ratio was twelve days for the Ihi rituals to thirteen days for the initiation of boys. Against these few days,

<sup>19</sup> According to an unpublished overview of approx. 58 Ihi manuscripts microfilmed for the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, the earliest such manuscript dates back to N.S. 724 (1605 A.D.).



the days designated by the regular calendar for marriage ceremonies were 45 days in 2004/2005 and 48 in 2005/2006. Moreover, in that season two days (29 Jyestha = 12<sup>th</sup> June and 26 Māgha = 8<sup>th</sup> February) were also designated for marriage as well as for the boys' initiation, while in the following year four such days occurred. Similar overlappings happen with Ihi. In 2005/2006, for example, of the designated twelve days for Ihi seven were also considered auspicious for marriages.

For economical and organisational reasons it is highly desirable to perform as many of those life-cycle rituals that are fixed according to the horoscope – i.e. the rice feeding ceremony (*annaprāsana*), Ihi, the boys' initiation (*kaytāpūjā*) and the marriage (*bibāha*) of sons, daughters and grand- and great-grandchildren within a single family – all on the same day. In rare cases the astrologer finds a way to reconcile the client's needs with the position of the planets. Sometimes, for one or even two of the initiates the prescriptions of the horoscope have to be stretched and liberally interpreted. Such was the case of Tulsi Bahadur Duval, a farmer from Itāchē in Bhaktapur, in December 2004. On 9<sup>th</sup> December his two grandsons received their loincloth (*kaytā*) at the auspicious time of 9.45 in the morning, while the formal “offering of the virgin” (*kanyādāna*) was enacted an hour later. Tulsi Bahadur acted as the organiser and principle worshipper, the *kāji* of the Ihi ritual. His granddaughter and sister of one of the two boys who were initiated had the privilege of presiding over the long row of Ihi girls as mistress (*nakhī*). The *nakhī* and four more girls who collectively were addressed as the “five virgins” (*pañcakanyā*) were positioned east of the sacred fire, while two long rows formed by the remaining 108 girls and their mothers (and later also their fathers) framed the wide lane in front of the organiser's house. On the following day,

### Kaytāpūjā and Ihi: designated auspicious days in the period of 2003-2007 AD

BS 2060=2003/2004 BS 2061=2004/2005 BS 2062=2005/2006 BS 2063=2006/2007

	kaytā	ihi	kaytā	ihi	kaytā	ihi	kaytā	ihi
April								
	<i>akṣaya tṛtīyā</i>							
	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
May	●	●			●	●		●
June	●				●		●	
July	●							
August								
September								
	<i>vijayadaśamī</i>							
October	●		●		●		●	
November								
	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
December			●	●	●	●	●	●
January		●						
	<i>śrīrañcamī</i>							
February	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
March	●	●			●	●		●
April					●	●	●	●
	4+10	3+8	4+3	3+9	4+9	3+9	4+8	3+8



Days designated for the performance of *Kaytāpūjā* and *Ihi* from April 2003 to April 2007.

Two days in the year – *Akṣaya tṛtīyā*, the Indestructible Third and *Srīpāñcamī*, the first day of spring, are freely chosen without consulting an astrologer.

*Vijayadaśamī*, the Victorious Tenth is reserved for *Kaytāpūjā*.

*Kaytāpūjā* is mostly performed in the month of *Māgha*, but also in *Phālguna* and occasionally in *Jyeṣṭha*.

The “season” for *Ihi* begins with the Indestructible Third in April/May and resumes after a gap of six months either the day after full moon in November (*Kārtikpūrṇimā*) or a month later. Most *Ihi* rituals are performed in the months of *Māgha* and *Phālguna*.

Tulsi Bahadur's daughter married. The organiser and his two sons had to work hard to feed 900 guests. The *Ihi* girls also had to be fed two times and offered the obligatory vest with four knots (*putunā*). The costs exceeded two thousand euros, enough to buy more than twenty water buffalos.

In a similar case, the officiating *Rājopādhyāya* priest brought eight boys and eight girls together for the performance of initiation rituals on the platform of the *Navayoginī* temple in Kathmandu (see also p. 156). The initiation of the boys was performed on the preparatory day (*dusva*) of the *Ihi* ritual on the occasion of the Indestructible Third (*akṣaya tṛtīyā* = 30<sup>th</sup> April 2006), while the “Gift of the Virgin” (*kanyādāna*) was performed the following day.

A more complex case was also observed in November 2005. In the house of *Divya Bajracharya* at *Nāpūkhū* in *Bhaktapur* the old-age ritual (*jākva*) was performed for his ninety-four-years-old grandmother *Pancamaya* at the same time as his son was married. For one of his granddaughters the *Ihi* marriage was performed and for another granddaughter the rice feeding ceremony. Likewise, *Bagat Bahadur Lava* organised an *Ihi* ritual in *Sano Byāsi* on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006 for three granddaughters, an initiation for two grandsons (*kaytāpūjā*) and a marriage (*hūkegu*) for one grandson, the decisive actions for all events being performed within a period of two hours.

### The Ritual Places

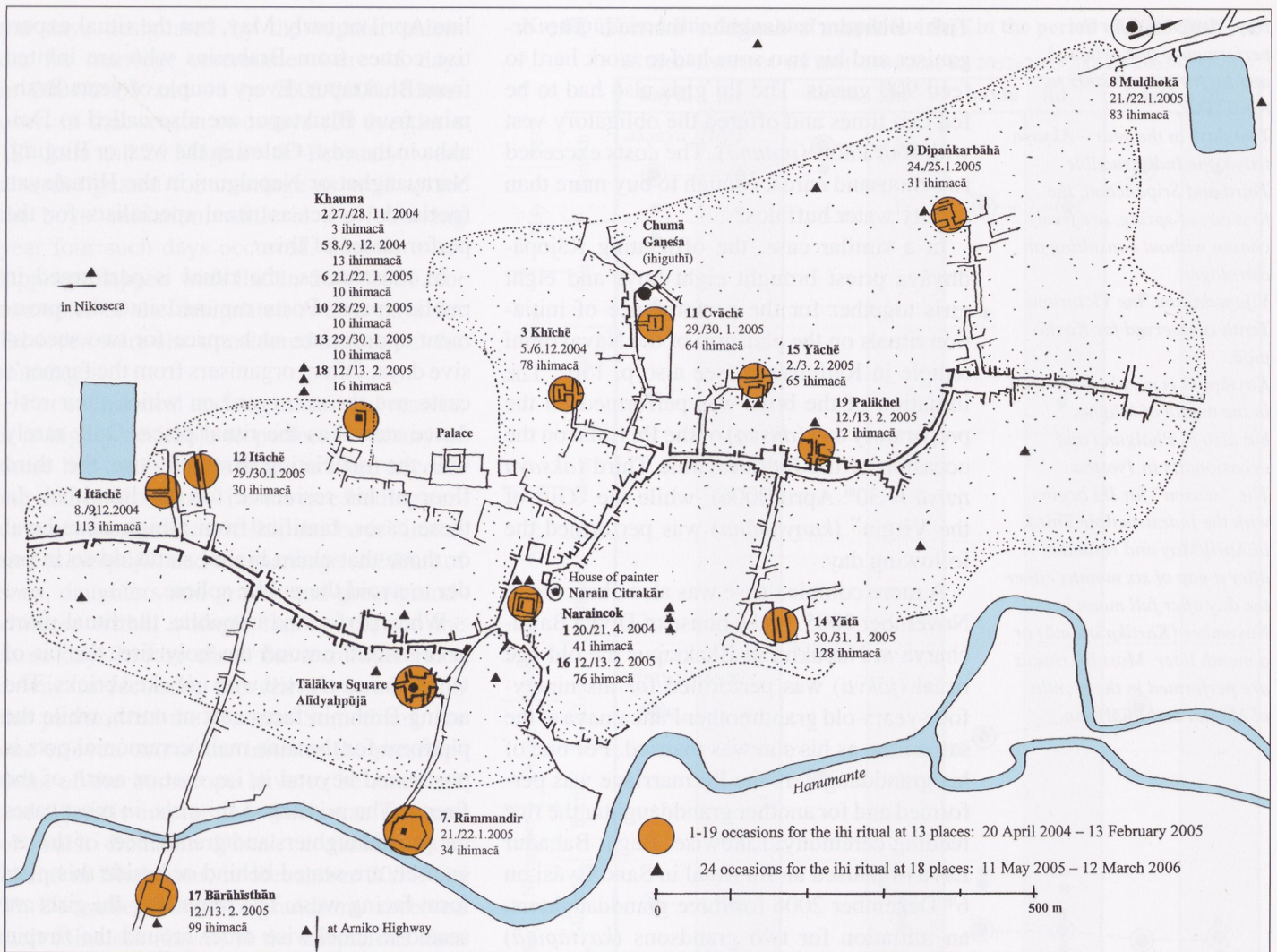
*Ihi* rituals are chiefly performed in *Bhaktapur*, *Kathmandu* and *Patan*. Families from neighbouring towns and villages, from far-away districts of *Nepal* or from overseas are free to join in on any such occasion in these main cities, which stand for the urban culture of the *Newars*. In places like *Thimi*, *Banepa* and *Panauti* *Ihi* marriages are organised on the occasion of the Indestructible Third in

late April or early May, but the ritual expertise comes from *Brahmins* who are invited from *Bhaktapur*. Every couple of years *Brahmins* from *Bhaktapur* are also called to *Dolakha* in the east, *Gulmi* in the west or *Birgunj*, *Narayanghat* or *Nepalgunj* in the Himalayan footlands to act as ritual specialists for the performance of *Ihi*.

In most cases, the ritual is performed in public space. Posts rammed into the pavement appropriate such space for two successive days. Often, organisers from the farmer's caste use the courtyard on which their residence stands as the ritual place. Only rarely will the officiating *Brahmin* use the third floor of his residence for the *Ihi* ritual. In these cases, families from a high caste level or those that claim higher status do so in order to avoid the public sphere.

When performed in public, the ritual place is organised around the holy fire, the pit of which is constructed with unbaked bricks. The acting *Brahmin* faces east or north, while the platform for the nine main ceremonial pots is positioned beyond it, i.e. east or north of the firepit. The privileged *Ihi* girls, in most cases the granddaughters and grandnieces of the organiser, are seated behind or beside this platform facing west. The remaining *Ihi* girls are seated in clockwise order around the firepit. There is no obligatory scheme for the seating. According to the number of participating girls, they may either be placed in long rows when the site is in a narrow square or courtyard, such as at *Yāchē* (see the site plan), or arranged in a square around a centre, as for example at *Naraincok*. At the latter the pit for the fire and the platform for the nine ceremonial earthen pots are actually indicated in the pavement of the courtyard. At the *Navayoginī* temple in *Kathmandu*, the platform for the three copper vases has even been raised to form a kind of altar while the shape of the firepit has been cast in brass to allow a cursory fire that produces little waste that has to be cast into the river.





Place, date, organiser and number of initiates (ihimacā)

1 Naraincok, Taumādhi, 21/22 April, Vaidyaguthī, 41 girls; 2 Khaumā, 27/28 November, house of Mahendra Sharma, 3 girls; 3 Kichē, 5/6 December, Tirnalal Karmacharya, 82 girls; 4 Itāchē, 8/9 December, Tulsi Bahadur Duval, 113 ihmācā; 5 Khaumā, 8/9 December, house of Mahendra Sharma, 13 girls; 6 Khaumā, 21/22 January, house of Mahendra Sharma, 10 girls; 7 Rāmghāt, 21/22 January, Tulsi Madhikarmi, 33 girls; 8 Muldhokā, 21/22 January, Punyaram Lavaju, 83 girls; 9 Paśubāhā, Kvathādau, 24/25 January, 31 girls; 10 Khaumā, 28/29 January, house of Mahendra Sharma, 10 girls; 11 Cvāchē, 29/30 January, Premal Thusa, 60 girls; 12 Itāchē,

29/30 January, Mohan Duval, 30 girls; 13 Khaumā, 29/30 January, house of Mahendra Sharma, 10 girls; 14 Yātā, Golmādhi, 30/31 January, Lakshmi Bhakta Tajale, 137 girls; 15 Yāchē, 2/3 February, Samaj Sewa Samiti, 65 girls; 16 Naraincok, Taumādhi, 12/13 February, Śrī Tilamādhava Nārāyaṇa Bhajan Maṇḍal, 76 girls; 17 Bārāhīsthān, 12/13 February, Bārāhī Pūth Bikas Samiti, 99 girls; 18 Khaumā, 12/13 February, house of Mahendra Sharma, 16 girls; 19 Palikhel, Golmādhi, 12/13 February, Tejbahadur Pailikhel, 12 girls.

Location of places for 19 Ihi rituals for 924 initiates (ihimacā) in 2004/05 (performed in 2061 VS, from akṣaya tṛtīyā, 22 April 2004 to Śrīpañcamī, 13 February 2005).

The Viśvakarma guthi of 11 Citrakār families perform the concluding pūjā at the shrine of Chumā Gaṇeśa. The Alīdyahpūjā is invariably performed on the square of Tālākva.



In Patan, a Buddhist school of ritual was recently initiated at Nyākhācuka, the Vajrācārya Pūjavidhī Adhyayana Samiti, with the aim of maintaining Newar traditions. Posters advertised the Ihi ritual on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2006 weeks in advance. Girls from 46 Vajrācārya and Śākya families convened, together with one sole girl from a Rajkarnikār family. Similar to the practice of the associations recently founded in Bhaktapur, the principle worshipper was chosen from the school's teachers.

In the season 2004/2005 nineteen Ihi rituals were performed in Bhaktapur for 839 girls at thirteen places, of which only Bārāhīsthān, the square in front of the seat of the goddess Vārāhī is located outside of Kvapade, the extended territory of Bhaktapur. In the following season (V.S. 2062) the twenty-four Ihi rituals were performed at eighteen places, of which one was located at Nikosera, a small potters' settlement three kilometres west of Bhaktapur, and at the new settlement along the highway that has run past Bhaktapur since 1972. Six places were utilised for the ritual in both seasons. These were those six at which the organisation is always in the same hands: at Naraincok and at Palikhel since decades in fulfilment of a vow, at Yāchē and at Bārāhīsthān within the context of a recently registered society, and at Dipaṅkarbāhā as an institutionalised event put on by Bhaktapur's Buddhist community. In 2004/2005, six rituals were performed in Khaumā at the house of a Brahmin priest, Mahendra Sharma; in 2005/2006 only three such rituals were performed in the Brahmin's house. While in public or semi-public squares twelve to over 130 Ihi girls may be seated, only three to sixteen girls convened in Mahendra Sharma's house. In 2006/2007 (V.S. 2063) fourteen Ihi rituals were performed for 685 girls at ten places, albeit none of these in the Brahmin's house.

## Ihi Organisations

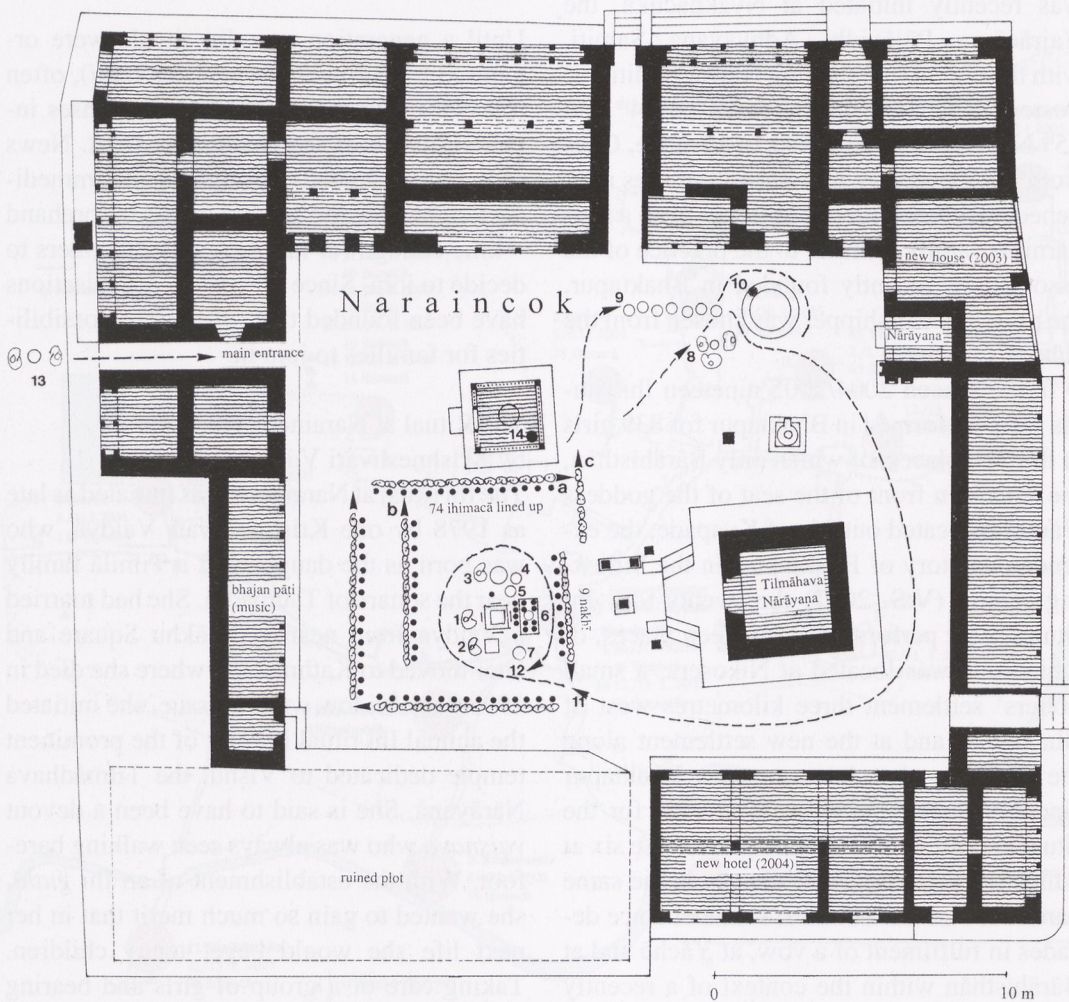
Until a generation ago, Ihi rituals were organised by individual organisers (*kāji*), often following a vow to bear all the expenses including those of the concluding feast. News of the event spreads throughout the immediate neighbourhood several weeks beforehand – time enough for families with daughters to decide to join. Since the 1970s, organisations have been founded that offer more possibilities for families to join in.

### The Ritual at Naraincok (initiated by Krishneshvari Vaidya)

The Ihi ritual at Naraincok was initiated as late as 1978 by one Krishneshvari Vaidya, who was born as the daughter of a Timilā family near the square of Taumādhī. She had married a Vaidya from nearby Bālākhū Square and later moved to Kathmandu, where she died in 1999. As a widow without issue, she initiated the annual Ihi ritual in front of the prominent temple dedicated to Viṣṇu, the Tilmādhava Nārāyaṇa. She is said to have been a devout *vaiṣṇava* who was always seen walking barefoot. With the establishment of an Ihi *guthī*, she wanted to gain so much merit that in her next life she would beget many children. Taking care of a group of girls and bearing the costs of the ritual turned them symbolically into her own children, if only temporarily. She established a *guthī* association with 25,000 rupees, and appointed fifteen members to take care of the annual performance. Her younger brother was the leading member, followed by the acting priest and his assistant priests, a Rājopādhyāya from Taumādhī, a Jośī from Lākulāchē, a Śivācārya from Vajrankhāl, and a Karmācārya from Taumādhī. The first Ihi ritual was performed in 1978 in Krishneshvari Vaidya's presence on the occasion of the Spring's Fifth (Śrī- or Basantpañcamī) in early February. At that time, her younger brother's daughter acted as the



## T a u m ā d h i S q u a r e



*Ihi ritual on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> February 2005 at Naraincok. The ritual place is prepared on the axis of the Tilmādhav Nārāyana temple:*

- 1 the Brahmin at the sacred fire, facing east, 2 the chief worshipper, performing nāndikaśrāddha, 3 the Śivācārya performing the belpūjā, 4 the Gaṇeśa pot, 5 the Alīdyah, 6 the pūrṇakalaśa (Brahmā) surrounded by the aṣṭamaṅgala pots, in front yakṣa/yakṣiṇī, Lakṣmī/Śrī and Nāgarāja, 8 the barber's wife paring nails, 9 a pot with sarvakhau for purification on the rim of a well, 10 performing the seven steps, 11 returning to the ritual place, 12 circumambulating the fire, 13 welcome ritual for the Alīdyah, 14 final place for the Alīdyah.*

*mūnakhī*, the privileged Ihi girl who heads the row of girls.

Newar organisations in Bhaktapur often do not last long. The annual meetings are often dominated by debates about the correctness of the accounts and the rules of seniority and membership, and may well end up in quarrelling. The quarrels tend to intensify with the amount of alcohol consumed. They rarely lead to a consensus, but rather to the decision to adjourn the debate to the following year. In the case of the Ihi *guthī* initiated by Krishneshvari Vaidya, her brother who acted in her place already faced a crisis in the third

year. He wanted to reserve the right to appoint the principle worshipper and his wife who perform the preceding death ritual, roles normally reserved for the eldest male (*nāyah*) of the lineage and his wife (*nakhī*). The local community, however, demanded that this couple should be selected from among themselves. As the donor family outrightly rejected the proposal, the association split. The original donor family started to call in Mahendra Sharma from Khaumā to officiate as priest and appointed a potter from Tālākva as helper (*mhaynāyah*) together with a barber. Finally, the association of painters (Citrakār)



was invited to join. In 1995, a new conflict arose when the painters did not receive their regular share. However, since the Ihi *guthī* of the painters monopolises the supply of painted earthenware necessitated by the ritual, the organisers promised to abide by the rules. The ritual was subsequently shifted to the Indestructible Third of the bright half of the moon in early May. In 2004, forty-one Ihi girls participated in the ritual, in 2005 there were only 33 girls and in 2006 the ritual was cancelled.

The original deposit had vanished by 2004. In the following year, fees were collected to meet the expenses for the ritual specialists and the painters. For the first day each girl had to pay fifty rupees and ten rupees for the services of the female barber. On the second day, the girls had to pay 100 rupees. The ten privileged girls, called *nakhī*, paid twice the amount. Moreover, each girl had to offer twenty *mana* (c. ten kg) of rice. The entire income was divided into nine shares. The first eight shares went to the Brahmin priest, his wife, the Jośi (astrologer), the Karmācārya (Tantric priest), the Śivācārya, the painter's association, the helper (*mhaynāyaḥī*) and the barber. The final share went to the association.

#### The Ritual at Naraincok (organised by Bhajan Maṇḍal)

An association established in 1980 centres around the music group of the locality that goes under the name Śrī Tilmādhav Nārāyaṇ Bhajan Maṇḍal. The ritual is performed annually on the Spring's Fifth in early February. In 2004, 76 girls joined the ritual, in 2005 there were 85 girls and in 2007 there were 72. While in 2003 only 100 rupees were charged, the fee rose in 2005 to 150 rupees. In addition, sixteen *mana* (c. eight kg) of rice had to be offered. A substantial income of 8,400 rupees was raised from the fee the nine privileged girls had to pay – ranging from

the privileged *mūnakhī* who paid 2000 to the ninth girl who paid 400 rupees. In 2007, the rates were the same. The income was divided into nine shares of which two went to the organisers.

#### The Ritual at Bārāhīsthān

A third Ihi *guthī* was established in 1997 by Ratna Gopal Sainju from the quarter of Nāsaḥmāna, who mobilised quite a number of people from the western quarters of Bhaktapur – Nhesaḥtvāḥ, literally “the 700 quarters”. Ratna Gopal calls himself a “social servant” (*samāj sevā*), who established the Bārāhī Pīṭh Vikās Samiti, the “Committee for the Development of the Area (around the) Seat of Vārāhī”. The guiding wish was to reduce the burden of expenses incurred by life-cycle rituals. At the same time, the committee takes care of the seat of the goddess, rents utensils needed to perform sacrifices, and provides shelter (*dharmasālā*) for those attending the ensuing feast. A pamphlet dated November 1999 justifies the establishment of the committee and presents the accounts. It says that the collective ritual is performed annually on the occasion of Spring's Fifth (Śrī Pañcamī) in early February in order “to stop the discontinuation of an ancestral tradition, to enact these rituals according to tradition but in harmony with modern times, to avoid unnecessary expenditures for such a ritual act, and to initiate social reforms.” The document states that the initiation was performed in 1998 for 126 girls and for sixteen boys. Donations were received and spent for its performance, and the remaining amount of 22,476 rupees (at that time some 300 euros) deposited in a bank. The minutes of the meeting in the following year state that the ritual was performed for 85 girls and 25 boys in the presence of the priest (*purohita*), the astrologer (Jośi), the ritual expert who consecrates the *bel* fruits (Śivācārya), the painter (Citrakār), the barber (Nāpit) and the helper



of the priest and his wife, *mhaynāyaḥ* and *nakhī*. The document again stresses the need to keep up traditions, to avoid unnecessary feasts in view of increasing prices, and to perform lifecycle rituals in an economical way. A mass meeting was held on the occasion of which a number of officials of His Majesty's Government stressed the need for the continuation of the Ihi and Vratibandha rites. The document lists nineteen persons who donated the sacrificial goat, rice, vegetables, yoghurt, milk and sweets (Nep. *jeri*, *haluvā*, *lāmohan*, *roṭ*, *khajuri*, *peḍā*, *guḍapāk*, *besanako laḍḍu*) and 90 persons who made cash donations. The largest sum came from a brickmaker in Degamana, who gave 5,025 rupees. For the following season in the year 2000, a document states that the ritual was performed for 85 girls and 25 boys. Donations came from 109 persons, the balance at the bank rose to 75,000 rupees.

The ultimate aim of the committee is to accumulate enough money to meet all the expenses for the entire ritual solely from the interest on the deposit. In 2005, every girl or boy had only to pay 110 rupees (little more than one euro), of which ten rupees went to the committee's expenditures. The fee included the payment of the barber's wife who pares the girls' and boys' toenails, but not the five rupees that every girl hands over to the painter who prepares and hands out the block print that she fixes to her forehead. The sacrificial goat for the boy's initiation would cost the family some 5,000 rupees (60 euros), a heavy burden for people who rarely earn that much in a month. The goat for the collective ritual at the seat of Vārāhī is normally donated.

On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2005, 99 girls and 50 boys participated in the ritual. Along with the contribution in cash, every girl had to bring two to three kilograms of sweets, four *pāthi* (corresponding 4.36 l) of rice, and 50 to 60 coins that are needed as donations (*dakṣinā*)

to the priest. Weeks in advance a banner advertised the "simple and economical" performance of the Ihi marriage (*belbibāha*) and the boy's initiation (*vratibandha*), organised by the Bārāhī Pīṭh Bikās Samiti. In the early morning of the first day (*dusva*), an even longer list documented donations in cash and kind. A considerable income was once again secured from the nine privileged girls, whose parents had to pay between 2,500 rupees for the first seat (*mūnakhī*) and 110 for the ninth seat. The Committee covers the entire costs for one or two girls from a poor background. The income from the Ihi girls is divided into nine shares, of which seven shares are divided between the Brahmin priest and his wife, the three assistant priests (Jośi, Karmācārya, Śivācārya), the barber, the Brahmin's helpers (the *mhaynāyaḥ* and his wife, the *mhaynakhī*), and the associations of painters.

The person behind these activities at Bārāhī Pīṭh, Ratna Gopal Sainju, says that the aim of his first initiative in 1997 was to bring a number of couples together for a group marriage. The couples agreed but complaints from the parents caused him to give up. Similarly, he also did not succeed in organising a collective old age ritual (*jākva*). Collective Ihi rituals seem to have been performed for many generations if not for centuries.

It is different with the collective boys' initiation. A barber from Bhaktapur tells stories of collective initiations at Paśupatināth and at the village Bāgeśvarī (east of Bhaktapur), with over 70 boys participating. Returning to Bhaktapur, the boys were – with reference to the sacred fire, which is unusual for the initiation of boys in a Newar context – teased as "*kotihom*, *kotihom*" (thus referring to the sacred fire entertained on that occasion) and eventually the initiation had to be performed again in the parental house under the direction and with the support of the lineage members.

Ratna Gopal presented another story in some way to justify his initiative. Often told,



this story could rise to the status of a legend. The story goes, “once (upon a time) a boy met the mayor of Bhaktapur in search of a job. While enquiring into the boy’s background, the mayor realised that since the boy was an orphan he needed money to have his initiation performed.” Ratna Gopal points to the fact that due to a lack of funds, boys are often initiated not before but after puberty, even at the age of eighteen. Despite all efforts, the organiser did not succeed in persuading families to have their boys take part in a collective initiation. Thus, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007, 111 girls participated in the event, but no boys.

#### The Ritual at Palikhel

A fourth Ihi *guthī* is performed annually in the area of Palikhel and Gvamādhi by a Palikhel family, who belong to the status group of Chatharīya. The present caretaker of the Ihi association, Tej Bahadur Palikhel, has to organise the ritual every ten years. It was the grandfather of his grandfather, Dhanca Thaku who initiated the annual performance. This must have been some 150 years ago, as Tej Bahadur is already 71 years old and his father died at the age of 98. As the founder had no children he donated some land, and with the income from it the descendants of his two brothers had to perform the annual death ritual (*śrāddha*) for him on the day of *kijāpūjā* in November (the second day of the New Year according to Nepāl Saṃvat), which is dedicated to the worship of brothers. In addition, the descendants had to finance an annual Ihi ritual on the Spring’s Fifth in early February (*Śrīpañcamī*). The founder also built a well on the square behind his house and two shelter structures (*sattal* and *pāṭī*) at Kamalbināyak, one of the important non-iconic shrines dedicated to Gaṇeśa. One of Dhanca’s brothers had four descendants, the other eight. Thus the caretakership between the two branches of the family for the ritual rotates on a ratio of one to two. Since the land reform of 1962

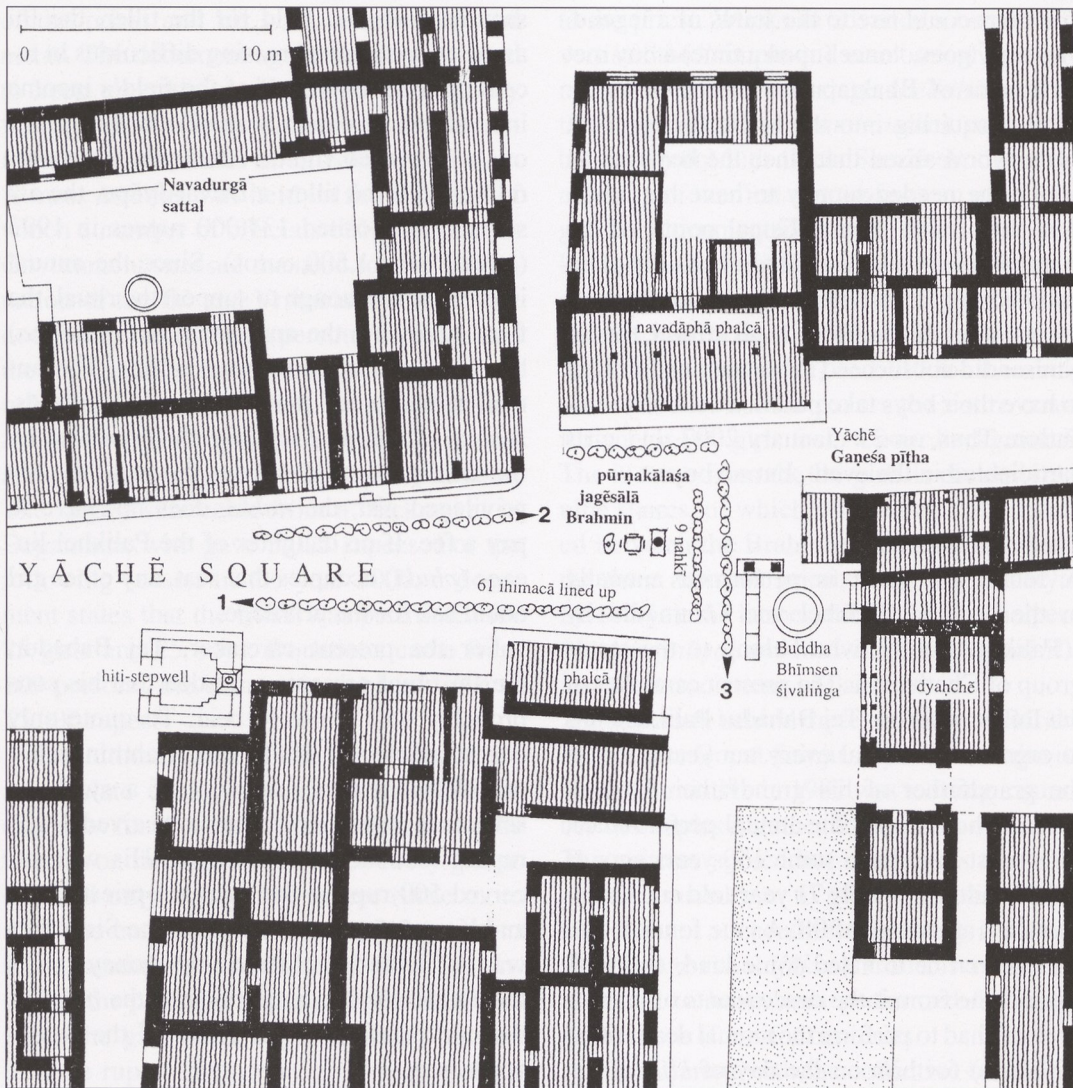
secured half of a field for the tiller, the Ihi association faced increasing difficulties in receiving the second half of the field’s income in kind, because there was no adequate proof of the inherited rights. After years of quarrelling with the tiller, a Duvāl-Jyāpu, the association deposited 134,000 rupees in 1993 (at that time 1,500 euros). Since the annual interest is not enough to support the ritual, the feast following the ancestor ritual (*śrāddha*) has been cancelled to save money. The annual caretaker has to meet the missing funds. A special feature of the Ihi ritual organised by the family from Palikhel is the fact the only privileged girl, the *nakhī*, does not have to pay a fee. If no daughter of the Palikhel lineage (*phukī*) occupies that seat, any other girl could ask for the privilege.

For the present caretaker, Tej Bahadur, the Ihi ritual presents a burden that his sons probably will refuse to bear. To quote only one example: in 1988, the Brahmin priest received a reward (*dakṣiṇā*) of a symbolic seventeen paisa; in 2006, he received 1,000 rupees without being satisfied. His wife received 500 rupees, the assistant priests (Jośi and Karmācārya) 500 each. As the Śivācārya was not invited in order to save money, it was the Karmācārya who performed the *belpūjā*, the consecration of the fruits of the wood-apple tree.

However, Tej Bahadur is also proud of the fact that in the past decades the Ihi ritual at Palikhel was a famous event to which girls came from as far as Barabise and Kakani participated. However, in February 2005, only eleven girls participated: besides a Jośi girl (the *mūnakhī*) there was the Karmācārya daughter of the priest, four more girls of Pañtharīya status, four Jyāpu girls (Sulu from Lakilagaon near Jaukhel) and a dyer’s daughter (Rañjītkār).

In February 2005 the ritual faced a small crisis that could eventually be solved by relocating the place for its performance to the





*Ihi ritual on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2005 on the square of Yāchē, one of those squares that define the centre of an urban quarter, with the non-ionic shrine (pīṭha) of Gaṇeśa and the adjoining god-house as the principal religious infrastructure. Since 2004 the Samaj Sewa Samiti, a social service committee organises the event, in which 61 girls have taken part. The Brahmin maintains the sacred fire facing east, while the nine principal girls, the nava nakḥī behind the pūrnakālaśa face west. The remaining girls are lined up in four groups along the borders of the square.*

courtyard of a nearby former Buddhist monastery (*bāhā*). The caretaker's mother had died fifteen days before and, since he had had the *latyā* ritual performed, he was no longer polluted (*dumha*). The relocation of the place was nonetheless necessary to keep a distance to the place where death had occurred. In January 2007, the ritual returned to the monastery courtyard, with 28 girls participating.

#### The Ritual at Yāchē

A fifth Ihi ritual has been performed every year since February 1994 at Yāchē Square.

The organiser, the Samāj Sevā Samiti, brought together 34 founding members from the quarter of Yāchē. Among these were ten members from sub-castes of Pañcthariya (like Jośi, Piya, Mul, Saīju etc.), eight farmers (Jyāpu), eight barbers (Napit), two carpenters (Śilpakār), two dyers (Rañjītkār), and one blacksmith (Nakarmi). The only painter (Citrakār) is Purna, who lives in the nearby Dyaḥsattal, a house in which one wing is reserved for making the masks of the Navadurgā. In contrast to the committees at Bārāhīsthān and at Narañcok, the Samāj Sevā Samiti has no Brahmin



priest as a member, although the performing priest is always called in from the neighbouring Lalāchē Square.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2005, a total of 61 Ihi girls convened on the square, of which nine obtained the privileged role as *nakhī*: two Śreṣṭha, one Nakarmi (blacksmith), one Śilpakār (carpenter), one Rañjītkār (dyer) and four Jyāpu (farmer). The sequence demonstrates that traditional caste barriers do not exist in such a ritual, at least not among farmers and occupational castes. In Bhaktapur, the designation Śreṣṭha does not indicate a superior status because it is a name that is adopted to veil an intercaste marriage. The sequence of girls from the families of a blacksmith, a carpenter and a dyer is easily concluded by four daughters from farmers' families. Among the Ihi girls there was even the daughter of a Vajrācārya, the community of Buddhist priests. For unknown reasons she obviously missed the annual Ihi ritual performed exclusively for the Buddhist community. Her presence demonstrated that the ritual has neither a Buddhist nor a Hindu core. It is a life-cycle ritual that enables the girls to cross a decisive threshold to enter into the father's lineage – a community to which she belongs until her marriage with a human groom.

On the second day of the Ihi ritual, photographs of the first day documenting the tying of the yellow *kumaḥkāḥ* thread were exhibited on the wall of a neighbouring house, together with a list of donors. An advertisement in a nearby shop invited all of the participants to order a VCD that documents all the stages of the ritual.

#### Individual Organisers and Participants

Most families try to have two or three daughters join the same ritual. It is said that the horoscopes must match but there are obviously very few restrictions. Economical con-

siderations, not the age of the girls inform the planning of the event. The ritual cannot, for example, be performed in the month the girl is born. For families in Dhulikhel or Pantauti whose daughters are born in the month of Baiśākh (mid April to mid May) this may cause additional difficulties, because the only available date for the performance of the ritual in these villages is the Indestructible Third, which always falls in Baiśākh. They will have to join an Ihi ritual in Bhaktapur. In Thimi, the annual Ihi ritual in a Hindu context is performed on Spring's Fifth in the month of Māgh (mid January to mid February), in a Buddhist context it is performed only every two to three years.

The astrologer of the family concerned knows well in advance where an Ihi ritual will be performed in the forthcoming season from November until February. There is a certain choice: one might, for instance, prefer to join a place in the near neighbourhood or the intimate companionship offered by a Rājopādhyāya Brahmin priest from Khaumā, who organises the ritual in his house with three (as for example on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2004 and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2006) to sixteen participants (on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005). In the season 2004/2005 six such occasions occurred, in 2005/2006 only three and in 2006/2007 none. Often, families of Chatharīya and Pañcharīya status and in particular Śreṣṭhas, whose children's status as offspring of an intercaste marriage remains ambiguous, prefer the privacy of the Brahmin's house. The Brahmin arranges everything, pays the painters and the assistant priests directly and charges his clients a lump sum. He does not invite the Śivācārya to consecrate the *bel* fruits with the simple excuse that the Śivācārya is a thief.

Besides the Brahmin in Khaumā, the Vajrācārya at Dipaṅkarbāhā and the organisations at Naraincok, Bārāhīsthān, Palikhel and Yāchē, there were seven rituals in 2004/2005 that were organised by individuals, fourteen



in 2005/2006 and nine in 2006/2007. In such cases the organiser bears the basic costs, while the participating girls pay the barber's wife, the painter, the Brahmin and his wife and the assistant priests directly in cash and in kind – a mixture of husked and unhusked rice, fruits and sweets. No more than 1,000 rupees (c. ten euros) had to be borne by the family of the girl, to which came only the cost of the marriage sari, the gift of new clothes and the feast offered to those who had fed the girl on the days preceding the ritual.

The organiser calls the barber couple with whom he has a hereditary client relationship. Both are needed for purificatory performances. He also calls his family priest, who not only brings his wife along, but in the case of many participants also his brother, son, or nephew. It is his duty to call in the assistant priests – the Jośi and the Karmācārya or Jyāpu Ācārya – who usually cooperate with him in Ihi rituals.

The granddaughter of the individual organiser will inevitably occupy the place of the most privileged girl, the *mūnakhī*. Four or eight girls, who are more privileged, will be found sitting at the top of the row or even forming a separate row (see the site plans for Yāchē and Naraincok). No class distinctions could be observed in the 2004/2005 season. However, if the organiser is a farmer no family of higher status would join the ritual. The ritual organised in December 2006 in Sano Byāsi by a Jyāpu prompted only a few girls of carpenter status to join in, and on the second day five Gāthā girls joined. Of ten rituals for which a detailed survey of the participants' family background was undertaken, the daughters of those families that are considered to be high status (Chatharīya and Pañcharīya) mixed easily with the daughters of blacksmiths, barbers, potters, brickmakers and carpenters. The farmers (Jyāpu), who represent the majority of the city's population, dominate the majority of rituals, consti-

tuting up to 84 percent of the participants (as at Yātā on 30<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup> January 2005).

Of the 74 girls who convened at Naraincok on 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007, eight girls were of Chatharīya status while 29 registered under the name of Śreṣṭha. Exceptional was the participation of the daughter of a Buddhist Śākya family, which would usually belong to the goldsmiths community. As an offspring of an interethnic marriage, the girl retained her father's name but her participation in the Buddhist Ihi ritual was obviously rejected by the officiating priest.

#### The Making of the Marriage Sari (*ihiparasi*)

A few days before or during the period of feeding the Ihi girls (*ihimacā nakegu*), the special sari for the girls, the *ihiparasi*, is woven by a relative. The woman weaving the sari should do so in one go in the early morning, without stopping. She should also fast during the process, i.e. she is not allowed any food before she has finished the task.

Since weaving has largely been given up as a result of imported readymade clothes, nowadays women only produce the *ihiparasi* in response to an order from those few shops which sell the saris. One of these women is the wife of a carpenter, Satya Maya Shilpakar in Bharbacva, who weaves *ihiparasi* for a shop in Nāsaḥmana. During the season of 2006/2007 she made 150 *ihiparasi* for the shop and 40 as personal orders. The shop gives her twenty rupees per piece, for ordered ones she charges 100 rupees, which also covers the expenses for the material. To complete one sari, she works from 5:30 to 8:50 in the morning, i.e. more than three hours. The *ihiparasi* is 305 centimetres long, which is *sāt hāt* (seven ells). The five black lines with red stripes on both sides represent *pañcadyaḥ*, five deities, whose names cannot be named. It is probably the *pañcāyatana* configuration Gaṇeśa, Sūrya, Nārāyaṇa and Durgā, with



**समाज सेवा समिति**  
याँचे-५, खवप  
समुह 'क'  
नं. ५०

**इहि मुनाज्याः गवसामि -**

इहि नचा या नाः .....

ने.सं. ११२५ पोहेलागा, अष्टमी - तवमी  
खि.सं. २०६१ माघ २०-२१

शिवराम पिआ  
इहि मुनाज्याया नाय  
समाज सेवा समिति

**गवसाखलः पाखे वियगु सामान**

१) सलापा -१  
२) सापाख्वा -१  
३) वेल -१  
४) मिमीचा -१

**इहिमचा पाखे हैयमागु सामान**

१) सर्वोखी  
२) कुसुम चन्दन  
३) दुसोका खे हानेगु सामान  
४) चि, पालु, चाकु, मिकली, आखे, गोगुवें, जेलापते, सुजफो, मलेफो, ताय, सङ्गा,  
५) वाकिजाकि  
६) कान्चिगु ला आधा पाउ

नोटः बी जुपिस कन्यादान फेयल तपुली पुयो भ्यायत इनाप यड च्वना

**रवसाखलः**

Ihi ritual at Yāchē,  
7<sup>th</sup> February 2005,  
ticket for participation.

samāja sevā samiti  
yāchēṃ-5, khvapa  
samuha 'ka'  
naṃ 50  
ihim munājyāḥ gvasāmi -  
ihim macā yā nāṃ: .....  
ne. saṃ. 1125 pohelāgā, aṣṭamī - navamī  
bi. saṃ. 2061 māgha 20-21

śivarāma piyā  
ihī munājyāyā nāya  
samāja sevā samiti

gvasākhalah pākheṃ viyagu sāmāna

1) salāpā -1  
2) sāpākhvā -1  
3) vela -1  
4) mimicā -1

ihimmacā pākheṃ heymāgu sāmāna

1) sarvokhau  
2) kusuma candana  
3) dusokā khe hānegu sāmāna  
4) ci, pālu, cāku, mikusī, ākhe, gogugvē,  
jēlālapte, sujapho, malepho, tāy, sāngā,  
5) vākijāki  
6) khācigu lā ādhā pāu

notā: bau jupisaṃ kanyādāna pheyta  
tapulī puyo jhāyta ināpa yaṅa cvanā  
gvasākhalah

Translation:  
Social Service Committee  
Yāchē - 5, Bhaktapur  
Group 'A', No. 50  
Volunteer Group for Managing Ihi  
Name of Ihi girl: ... ..  
(On the) 8-9<sup>th</sup> day of Pohelāgā, NS 1125 (or)  
20-21<sup>st</sup> day of Māgha, VS 2061  
Sivarāma Piyā,  
Head of the Ihi Organising  
Social Service Committee

(verso)  
Materials which are supplied by the Managing  
Committee:

1 salāpā (earthen plate) -1  
2 sāpākhvā (block print) -1  
3 bel fruit -1  
4 mimicā (bamboo plate) -1

Material which should be brought by the Ihi girls:

1 sarvakhau (pulverized oil cake for purification)  
2 flowers, sandal wood paste;  
3 materials to be knotted to the dusokā thread;  
4 salt, ginger, raw sugar, mikusī stick (jamāne māndro), unbroken husked rice, betel-nut (gogugvē), a large leaf used to serve cooked rice at a feast (jēlālapte), Cardiospermum halicacabum (sujapho), an unidentified fruit (malepho), popped rice (tāy), dried fish (sāgā)  
5 mixed husked and unhusked rice (vākijāki)  
6 200 gm of raw meat (kācigu lā)

Note: We request the fathers who are offering their daughters as a gift (kanyādāna) to wear a (Nepali) cap. Managing Committee.

one black line defining the centre (representing Śiva), and with lines on either side at a distance of 77 centimetres and two at the ends at a spacing of 72 centimetres.

### Acquiring Ritual Items

Once a proper group and place has been identified by the girl's family, the organiser, called the *kāji* or *gvasa khalah*, responsible for the enactment of the ritual hands out a list of items required to ensure the ritual runs

smoothly. In Kathmandu, the acting Brahmin priest is often also the organiser. As such he provides the necessary items, of which he keeps a substantial stock. In Bhaktapur, however, the organisers even issue orders regarding the etiquette: the numbered ticket (see illustration), which gives the name of the girl, asks the accompanying father to wear a cap on the occasion of the "Gift of the Virgin" (*kanyādāna*). A good example of this kind of organisation is presented by the committee (Samāj Sevā Samiti) of the quarter of Yāchē,



where the Ihi marriage was performed on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2005 (the ticket mentions the lunar days as *aṣṭamī* and *navamī* of the month of Pohelā in the year Nepāl Saṃvat 1125, and as days the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of the month of Māgha in the year Bikram Saṃvat 2061). The ticket lists the four items which the organiser will provide: the earthen bowl (*salāpā*), the block print which is fixed to the girl's forehead (*sapākhvaḥ*) – both being supplied by the painter who for that season is the caretaker of the organisation of painters – the *bel* fruit and the small circular trays (*mimicā*) which are woven by a butcher from bamboo or reed. Six more items and groups of items are listed which the Ihi girl should bring along. These are crushed oilcake for purification, sandalwood paste, the yellow thread, and eleven food items: salt, ginger, raw sugar, sticks from the *mikusī* plant, ritual rice, five betel-nuts, two mysterious fruits (*sujaphva* and *malephva*) which are never used in the domestic context, popped rice and dried fish (*sāgā*), and husked and unhusked rice (*vākiḥāki*).

The woven tray is needed for the first day, when it is handed over with offerings to the barber's wife after the purifying act of paring the girl's toenails. Half a *pau* (100 g) of raw buffalo meat (*kāciḡu lā*) is the required offering to her.

The earthen bowl is handed over on the second day, the Citrakār or the organiser hands out the block print for an offering in cash, while the Śivācārya – or in his absence the Jośi or the helper – hands out the *bel* fruit after a collective consecration of all *bel* fruits by the Śivācārya.

About a week before the event, the organiser will inform the potter and the painter how many *salāpā* bowls will be needed beside the obligatory Gaṇeśa pot, which has to be painted in advance in order to be available in the early morning of the preparatory day. All other pots will be carried to the house of

the organiser to be painted on the spot by representatives of the eleven member families of the Ihi *guthī*.

### Painting the Ritual Pots

In the evening of *dusva*, the first day of the Ihi ritual, the potter has to bring fifteen pots to the organiser's house where they are to be painted by the Citrakār. Moreover, every family attending with their Ihi girls has to bring an earthen bowl called *salāpā*, which can be bought at any time in a shop specializing in ritual pots, cups and baskets – products of Kumāḥ (potters) and Pvaḥ (sweepers). In many cases, the organiser supplies the earthen bowl.

### The Citrakār of Bhaktapur

Each extended family of Citrakār has to deputise one member to participate in the collective exercise. In the season of 2005/2006, eleven painters turned up to perform what is their duty, because already in the 1960s the city's community of painters, the *deguthī*, (Nev. *de* = the place of origin, also "country", "city" or "territory" as in Kvaḡade) decided to form an Ihi *guthī*, to which all families are tied. This community of 16 painter-families convenes once a year for a collective ritual at Sūrjabināyak, a non-iconic shrine dedicated to Gaṇeśa as guardian (*vināyaka*) and located south of Bhaktapur. Those who do not fulfill their duty have to pay a fine that is increased every year – money that is added to the income of the *guthī*, which is divided up equally at the end of the ritual season six days after full moon in March (Holipunhi).

In contrast to the rather strict organisation of the painters' community in Bhaktapur, the scene is quite different in Kathmandu and Patan. There it is the organiser who orders the painted pots and bowls from a Citrakār of his choice. Very few Citrakār from Maśangalli in Kathmandu still supply the necessary *salāpā*



bowls or the pots according to requirements. More often, the organiser buys *salāpā* bowls and in many cases a simple painting is pasted onto the bowl as a substitute for the work of the Citrakārs (see illustration). The acting priest keeps a stock of such objects, which the Citrakārs call “fake” and he readily supplies the Ihi girls with simple paintings of a bell to substitute the *sapākhvaḥ*, the blockprints that have to be tied to the girls’ foreheads. The Citrakārs of Patan still hold command over their traditional trade, but often the earthen bowl is substituted by a brass plate, on which a version of the *svastika* is painted.

#### The Sketchbooks of the Citrakārs

Every Citrakār family owns a variety of sketchbooks (also called model books or notebooks), which have been handed down through the centuries and are regarded as treasures. Ever since Brian Houghton Hodgson began collecting manuscripts in the 1840s, these sketchbooks came to be regarded as objects of art and with that sold. Scattered across collections and museums all over the world, we find examples of these books (cf. Blom 1988) that guided the painters and sculptors as well as carpenters on iconographical matters. The earliest dated copy is ascribed to one Jivarama and probably made for a Kagyu client in Tibet in 1435<sup>20</sup>. Other model books from the Jucker Collection or the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and record iconographical drawings in black and white; they identify specific hand gestures (*mudrāprakaraṇa*)<sup>21</sup>, or present the major scenes in the life of Kṛṣṇa in rough outlines. Many such iconographical drawings contain notes concerning the required colours. Syllables indicate the colouring: *ri* blue, *pi* yellow, *ra* red, *tu* white and *va* grey<sup>22</sup>. The first published model book, which presents symbols representing the ten guardians of the directions (*daśadikpāla*, the cardinal and intermediate directions, nadir and

zenith) and the Nine Planets (Navagraha), was edited by Anne Vergati (1982a: 34-38), albeit without fully identifying it and without presenting the ritual context. Vergati received the sketchbook in 1975 from Bishnu Bahadur Chitrakar in Bhaktapur, the father of Surje Chitrakar, whose paintings are published in the following. These recent sketchbooks, also partly reproduced here, are richly coloured to guide the next generation in painting the pots needed for life-cycle rituals like Ihi, Jākva, Bāre chuyegu, and *pūjās* to Nārāyaṇa. Surprisingly, this collection of symbols does not include the iconography of Gaṇeśa and Brahmā that is painted on the large pots. The eight auspicious signs, which in all cases surround the central sacred vase, the *pūrṇakalāśa*, always appear arranged in a fixed sequence in a circle around a vase. The symbols to be painted on the pots representing *yakṣa/yakṣī*, Śrī/Lakṣmī and Nāgarāja are also depicted in a fixed sequence: either on pots or as isolated symbols. In Buddhist Ihi rituals and in old age rituals, the ten guardians of the world mark the corners of the firepit that is shaped like a twenty-cornered *maṇḍala*. In the sketchbooks, their symbolic representations are either framed by a radish (Gaṇeśa) and book (Guru) (Vergati 1982a: 37 and 38) or in addition by a skull-staff (Kṣetrapāla) and skull (Yoginī). A specific Newar tradition can be seen in the depiction of a citrus fruit (*taḥsi*) representing Kubera, who guards the north and is widely worshipped as the lord of wealth. This citrus fruit stands for longevity and fertility and in Ihi rituals is often seen on top of the central vase. The symbols representing the nine planets are presented in a circle and are only painted on pots in the context of old age rituals. In Ihi rituals an offering to Jupiter (Bṛhaspati) might be performed by individual girls, but not collectively. A regular feature of the sketchbooks appears also in the shape of five serpents representing *pisamudra*, the five oceans that – painted on small

<sup>20</sup> Jivarama’s notebook is kept in the S. K. Neotia collection, Calcutta. See Huntington/Bangdel 2003:136 and Lowry 1977.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Pal 1985:153-181 and Krejger 1999: figs. 48-51. See also the dissertation by Margriet L. B. Blom (1989), who mostly relies on model books in the possession of painters and carpenters in Bhaktapur.

<sup>22</sup> See the iconographical drawings in the possession of Madhu Chitrakar: Gutschow 2006: 29-34.





pots – are invoked on the occasion of age-old rituals.

### The Two Main Pots of the Ihi ritual

#### The Main Pot Dedicated to Gaṇeśa

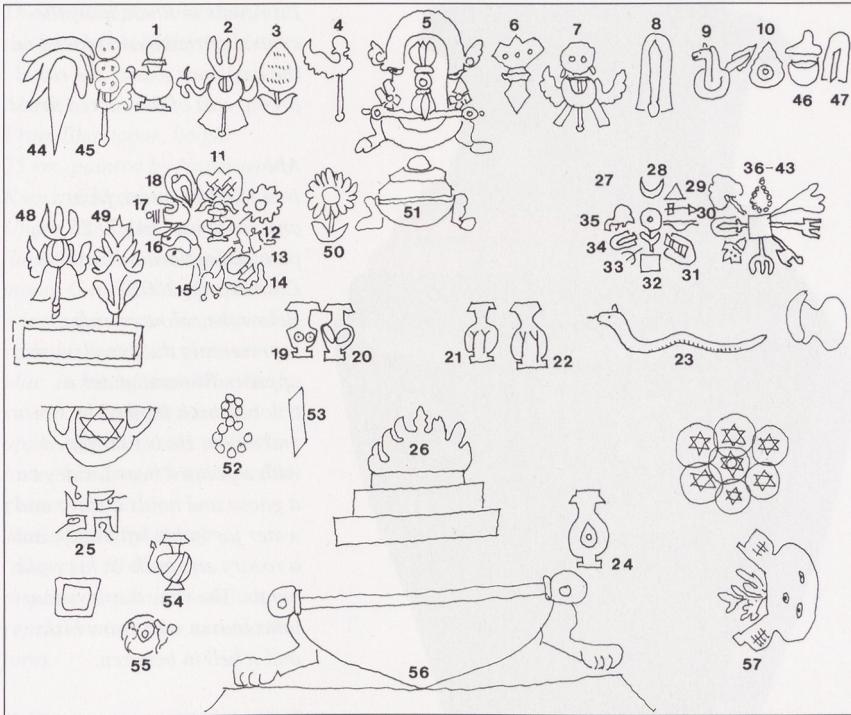
The first pot has to be brought to the Citrakār by the principle worshipper, or, if an organisation is in charge, the potter himself. To ensure that the pot is painted, this is done a day or two in advance of the ritual. After having been collected from the painter in return for

the gift of a *kisli* cup with rice, a betel-nut on top and a coin, the pot is taken by the Karmācārya or Jyāpu Ācāju to the Inagaṇeśa at the western periphery of the town (see map) for the *pratiṣṭhāpūjā*, which turns the object into a deity prior to the opening of the eyes on the first day of the Ihi ritual.

The fourhanded Gaṇeśa is seen under a trilobed arch with his mount, the shrew, in blue. He carries an axe (*paraśu*) and sweets (*ladḍu*) in his left hands. The upper right hand holds a rosary (*akṣamālā*) while the lower one is seen

*Detail of a sketchbook in the possession of Surje Chitrakar from Tacapaḥ with an inventory of symbols, 25 of which are also used on gapacā pots on the occasion of Ihi and Bāre chuyegu.*





in the gesture of protection (*abhayamudrā*). Similar Gaṇeśa pots in Patan (see illustration) depict the deity with a radish (Nep. *mūla*) in the lower right hand, while in Bhaktapur the radish appears in the cup that covers the pot. Within the context of Newar rituals, the radish invariably represents Gaṇeśa, even if a real radish replaces the painted form, which is never pure white in colour but the variety with a dark red pointed base.

The Central Pot (*pūrṇakalaśa*): Brahmā or the Blue Vajra (*nīlavajra*)

In Bhaktapur, there is a fundamental distinction between the pots dedicated to the Hindu or the Buddhist versions of the ritual. For Hindu rituals, the central sacred vase, the *kalaśa*, bears the image of Brahmā, the god of creation. Four-headed, he is seen on his vehicle, a “milk-white” gander, the sunbird. In his four hands he carries on his right a string of beads (*akṣamālā*) and a sacrificial ladle or spoon (*śrīvā*), and on his left the triple-pronged stave (*tridaṇḍa*) and the water jar of

Tracing from the sketch book in the possession of Surje Chitrakar from Tacapaḥ, 18.6 by 7.9 cm. All 54 depicted symbols are painted on pots in old-age rituals (*jākva*).

Nos. 11-24, 44 are used for the Ihi ritual in a Hindu context in Bhaktapur; in Kathmandu the Navagraha (nos. 27-35) are added. Pots displaying the *Daśadīkṣpāla* (nos. 1-10) are optional for the initiation of boys in a Buddhist context (*Bāre chuyegu*).

*Daśadīkṣpāla*: 1 Brahmā (*kamaṇḍalu - jar*: Zenith), 2 *Īśāna* (*triśūla-trident*: northeast), 3 Kubera (*taḥsi-citrus fruit*, north), 4 *Vāyu* (*dhvāja-banner*: northwest), 5 Indra (*vajra-sceptre*: east), 6 Agni (*fire*: southeast), 7 Yama (*khaṭvāṅga-staff*: southwest), 8 *Nairṛta* (*khaḍga-sword*: south), 9 *Varuṇa* (*nāga-serpent*: west), 10 *Ananta* (*cakra-diskus*: nadir). *Aṣṭamaṅgala* (as attributes of the *Aṣṭacīraṅjīvi*): 11 *granthi* (endless knot), 12 *padma* (lotus), 13 *chattrā* (umbrella), 14 *kalaśa* (jar), 15 *camara* (fan), 16 *matsya* (fish) 17 *dhvaja* (banner), 18 *śaṅkha* (conch).

Six *gapacā* pots for Ihi: 19 *yakṣa* (circular patterns indicate a male vegetal godling) 20 *yakṣiṇī* (oblong patterns indicate a female vegetal godling), 21 *Sarasvatī*, 22 *Lakṣmī*, 23 *nāga*, 24 *Viṣṇu* (guru); 25 *sālāpāḥ-tray* (svastika, yantra in the shape of a cross). Sacred fire (26 *kuṇḍala* for jage).

*Navagraha*: 27 *Āditya* (flower-Sun), 28 *Candra* (crescent-Moon), 29 *Maṅgala* (triangle-Mars), 30 *Budha* (bow and arrow-Mercury), 31 *Bṛhaspati* (book-Jupiter), 32 *Śukra* (rectangle-Venus), 33 *Śanaīścara* (trident-Saturn), 34 *Rāhu* (sword-ascending node), 35 *Ketu* (*makara/crocodile-descending node*).

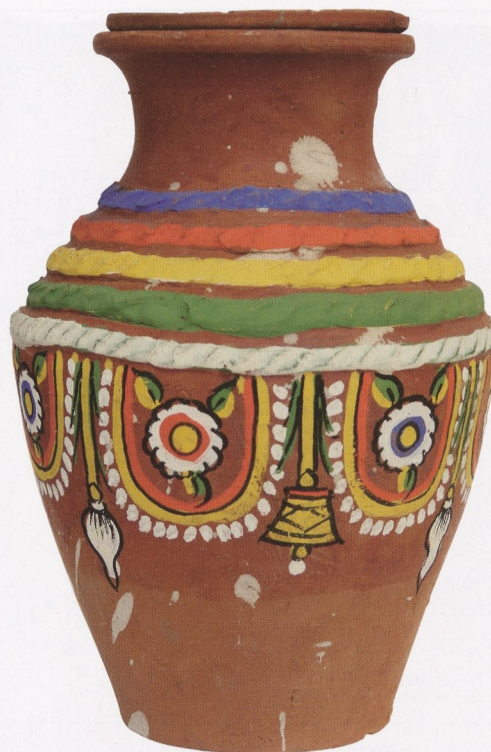
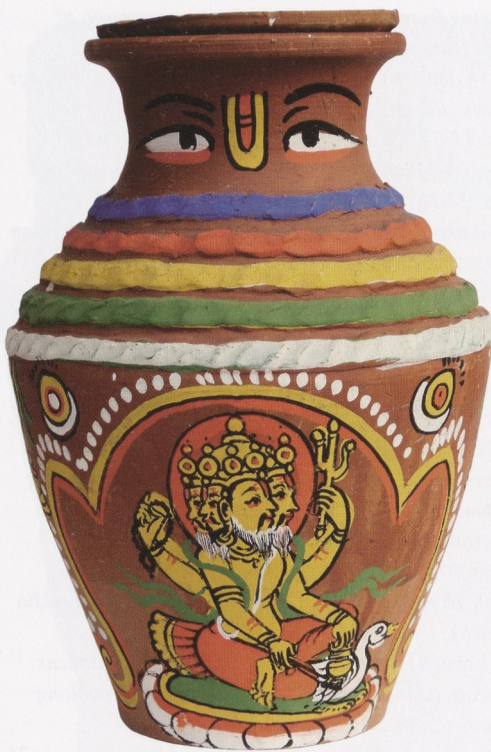
36-43 Eight attributes of the *Aṣṭacīraṅjīvi*: 36 *Aśvatthāman* (sword), 37 *Bali* (jewel), 38 *Vyāsa* (*jaḡmala*), 39 *Hanumān* (trident), 40 *Vibhīṣaṇa* (club), 41 *Kṛpācārya* (axe), 42 *Paraśūrāma* (bow), 43 *Mārkaṇḍeya* (umbrella).

The frame: 44 *Gaṇeśa* (radish) and 45 *Kṣetrapāla* (skull-staff), 46 *Yogiṇī* (skull), 47 *Guru* (book).

48 *Śiva*, 49 *Śakti*, 50 *nīrjyā* (blue lotus), 51 *sarjyā* (bed).

Added later in black: 52 *sinitu* (*mālā=rosary*), 53 *pustīnī* (book), 54 *Mṛtyuṅjaya* (*kalaśa - jar*), 55 *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍā*, *padma*, 56 *āsana* (platform); 57 *deśabali* (*bau = offering of cooked rice*).



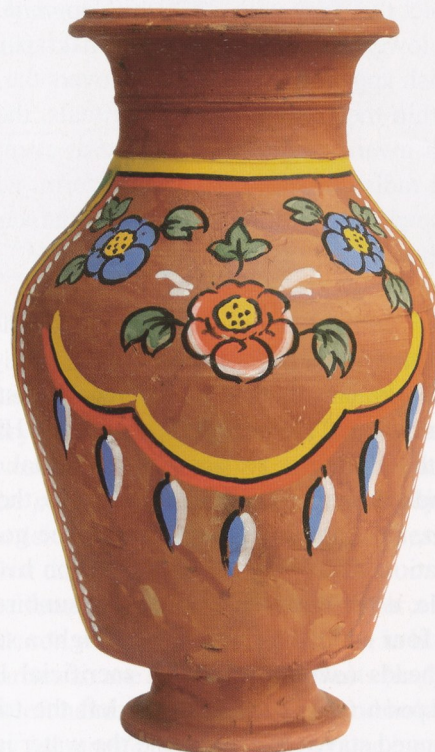
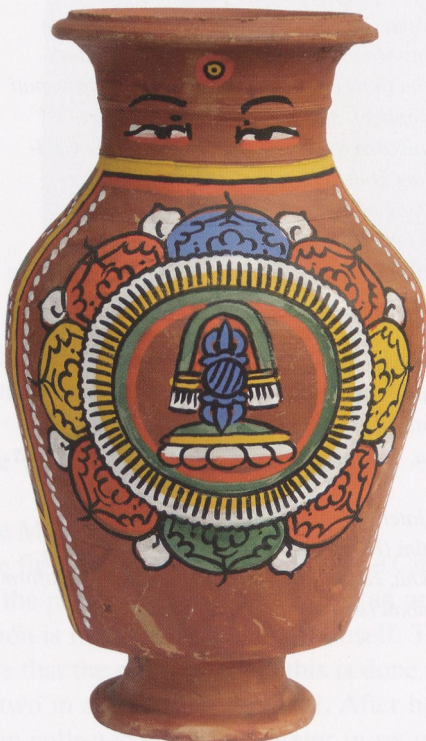


*Iṭhi rituals in Bhaktapur, the central puṛṇakalaśa placed on the east-west axis of the ritual arena, east of the sacred fire.*

*Above*  
*In a Hindu context, front and rear view, height 25 cm, painted by Narain Kumar Chitrakar in 2005.*  
*Below the coloured rings, representing the five elements, appears Brahmā under a trilobed arch flanked by sun and moon. He is four-faced with a pointed beard, rides on a goose and holds a staff and water jar in his left hands, and a rosary and ladle in his right hands. The rear displays four lotus leaves with two whiskers and a bell in between.*

*Below*  
*In a Buddhist context at Paśubāhā. The puṛṇakalaśa, front and back view, height 26 cm, painted by Surje Chitrakar in 2005.*  
*The blue sceptre (nīlavajra) in the centre of an eight-petalled lotus on the front, and the circular mark between the eyes indicate the Buddhist context.*

*Bottom*  
*Top view of the Brahmākalaśa covered by a small cup with a painted banner.*



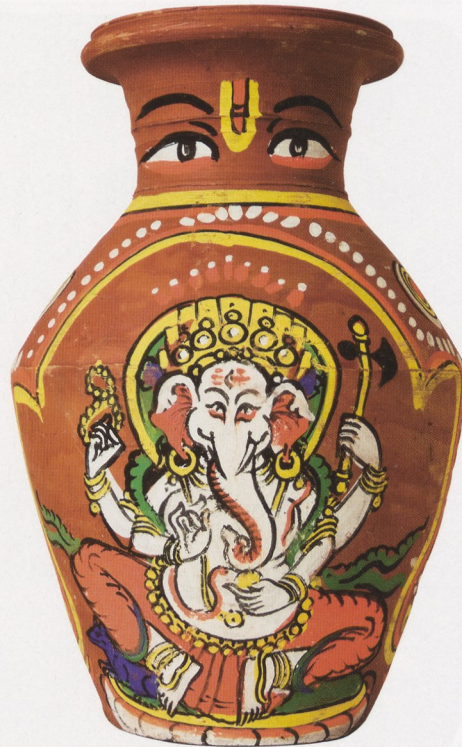


The Gaṇeśa pot, essential for the enactment of Ihi rituals.

Above

From Bhaktapur, height 25 cm, painted by Narain Kumar Chitrakar, 2005. Under a tri-lobed arch, flanked by the sun and the moon, Gaṇeśa is supported by a lotus flower, to his proper right his mount, a shrew in blue. In his left hands he holds sweets and an axe, in his upper right a rosary while the lower hand makes a protective gesture.

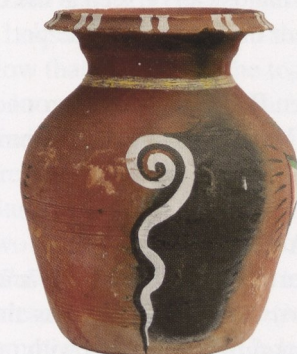
The cup placed on top (diameter 10.8 cm) displays a radish, Gaṇeśa's representation in a non-iconic form.



Below

From Bhaktapur, height 18 cm, from the Ihi ritual performed for the pratiṣṭhāpūjā of the caityas at the Hyatt Hotel on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2000 by a Vajrācārya priest from Bhīchēbāhā.

Gaṇeśa's body is seen in the playful posture (līlāsana) on a lotus throne with a background of red and blue. In his left hands he carries sweets and an axe, in his right hand a rosary and a long white radish. The rear face of the pot shows a curl which serves as a symbol of invitation. On either sides are painted large eyes.





an ascetic (*kamaṇḍalu*). Placed under a tri-lobed arch, Brahmā is flanked by the moon and the sun – the moon having a white central dot, the sun a red one. Four lotus leaves cover the back of the earthen body, with bell or yak-tail whisk motives in between. Five circular mouldings mediate between the body and the neck in white, green, yellow, red and blue, representing the five *mahābhūta* elements: wind (air), fire, water, earth, and ether (the blue *ākāśa*). The sequence of colours, which stand for the elements, varies and no Citrakār is in the position to attach each of the elements to their specific colours. The lid on top is painted with a banner (*dvāja*).

Beyond the iconographic prominence of Brahmā (who also appears in Buddhist and Jain rituals) it is the U-shaped *bindu*, the dot or drop between the eyes that characterises all the pots used in Hindu contexts. Apart from the *bindu* it is the shape of the eyes – fully opened with circular pupils – that testifies to this particular context.

For Ihi rituals in Buddhist contexts, the body of the vase is decorated with the blue *vajra*, the symbol of the adamantine truth. Placed under a shawl and on the pericarp of an eight-petalled lotus, the *vajra* symbol stands for Akṣobhya, the Tathāgata of the eastern direction. The *bindu* is circular (often pointing slightly upwards) and not placed between the eyes but higher up. The eyes are partly hidden behind undulating lids (see the illustration). In Bhaktapur, a Vasundharā figure with six hands can be seen at the centre of a lotus flower on the back of the pot.

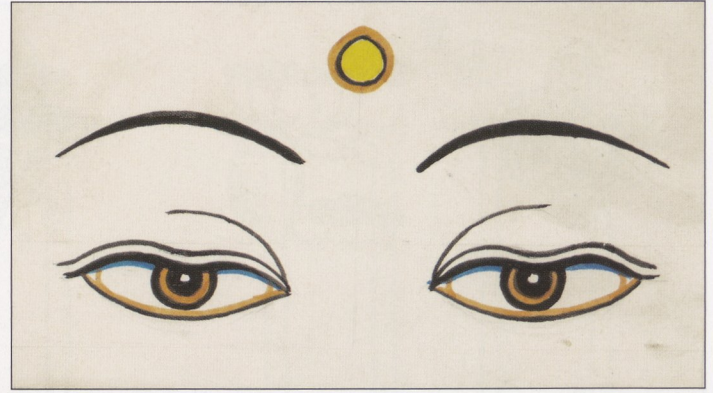
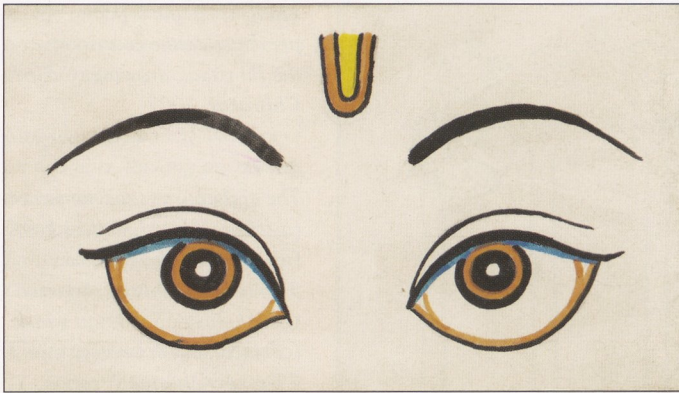
The Fourteen Pots (*gapacā*) Surrounding the Central Vase Dedicated to Brahmā and the Sacred Fire

The Eight Auspicious Signs

The platform on which the Śivācārya has marked a *svastika* in its centre as the *āsana* of the *pūrṇakalāśa* is covered with unhusked







Variation of the representation of eyes and bindu on gapacā pots on the occasion of Ihi and Bāre chuyegu.

Left for Hindu rituals with U-shaped bindu and large eyes with fully developed pupils, right for Buddhist rituals with a circular, slightly pointed bindu and eyes half submerged behind the lid.

rice, on which he places smaller pots with depictions of the eight auspicious symbols (*aṣṭamaṅgala*). In Surje Chitrakar's handbook, the eight symbols are shown arranged around a vase at the centre (see illustration), with the endless knot at the top and the seven remaining symbols placed in clockwise order. In a second handbook, the eight symbols are seen arranged in a row, following the same sequence: beginning with the endless knot, this is followed by the lotus flower, umbrella, vase, a pair of yak-tail whisks, a pair of fish, a banner and a conch.

#### Spirits (*yakṣa/yakṣiṇī*)

Five more pots are placed in front of the platform. Four of these depict the respective deities – not in iconographic form but as symbols: stylised leaves in circular and elongated form (probably signifying gender associations) represent *yakṣa* and *yakṣiṇī*, a pair of spirits that are thought to frequent fields and forests, and since they are considered either benevolent or malevolent it is considered essential to propitiate them. Both are associated with fertility, but since *yakṣiṇīs* symbolise the life-sap of trees it is believed that they would make barren women fertile (Stutley 1986: 345). Most pots depict the leaf motives three-fold, while the handbooks either depict the pots with just a pair of leaves, or triple leaves without pots, or single leaves in more detail, showing a twig with four green leaves – a

motive that Surje Chitrakar varied as leaves floating freely around the dominant representations of the tree spirits. Another early 20<sup>th</sup> century handbook, in the possession of Indra Bahadur Chitrakar in Kathmandu, shows a more naturalistic approach: a pair of red flowers as *yakṣa* and the three blue flowers representing *yakṣiṇī*.

In Patan, the particular role of *yakṣa* and *yakṣiṇī* as guardian spirits of the ritual place is manifested inasmuch as the pair is represented by a cross fashioned on the surface of the pots. The vertical bulge represents the nose, while the horizontal one establishes a connection between the large eyes. Terrifying canine teeth demonstrate their apotropaic nature. The male version bears a moustache, the female a hint of rouge on her cheeks.

Mirror (*ḡvālānhāykā* = Lakṣmī) and

Vermilion (*sinhamhū* = Sarasvatī)

Even more abstract than the representation of the guardian spirits is the depiction of Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī by three or four shafts in white and yellow that open up to the top, forming a triangle in red. Surje Chitrakar's handbook emphasises the conical opening, while the shaft is reduced to a stump. In the ritual place itself, Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī are duplicated as the two pots – Sarasvatī on the right of the *pūrṇakalāśa* and Lakṣmī on the left – and are also represented by a mirror (*ḡvālānhāykā*) and a vermilion container (*sinhamhū*).

Opposite

Details of a folded sketch book in the possession of Surje Chitrakar.

Above the five serpents symbolizing the five oceans, on the second page above the ten guardians (*daśadikpāla*) respectively of the ten directions, below the signs symbolizing the nine planets (*navagraha*), on the third page above the eight auspicious signs (*aṣṭamaṅgala*), on the fourth page above the symbols signifying Lakṣmī, Śrī, *yakṣa*, *yakṣiṇī* and *nāga*.





Motifs on gapacā-pots presented in the context of the Ihi ritual, drawings Surje Chitrakar, 2005

Above  
The eight auspicious markers (aṣṭamaṅgala): 1 endless knot (granthi), 2 lotus (padma), 3 umbrella (chattra), 4 sacred vase (kalaśa), 5 yak-tail whisk (cāmara), 6 fish (matsya), 7 banner (dhvaja), 8 conch shell (śaṅkha).

Below  
Yakṣa (male), yakṣiṇī (female), symbolic representations among green leaves and nāga (serpent) as the guardian of jewels, with pairs of earrings.

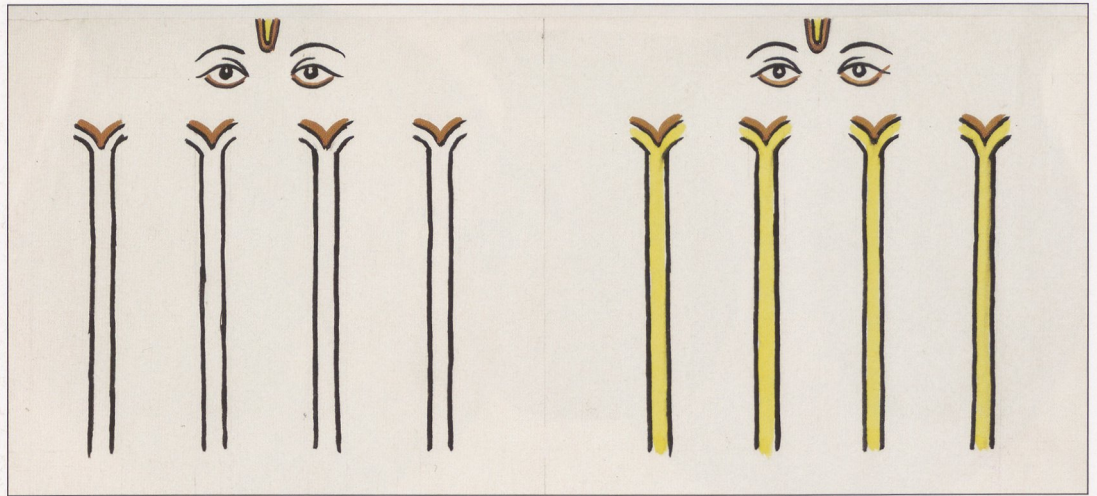




Motifs on gapacā-pots presented in the context of the Ihi ritual:

Non-iconographical markers on two pots flanking the mirror and vermilion container, left Sarasvatī (or Śrī), right Lakṣmī, drawing Surje Chitrakar, October 2005.

A pair of gapacā pots (height 11 cm) representing yakṣa and yakṣiṇī, painted by Surje Chitrakar, October 2005.



#### Viṣṇu and Nāgarāja

Finally on the far left of the vase a pot is placed with the representation of the king of the serpents, the Nāgarāja. The serpents are believed to be the guardians of the mineral wealth of the earth, so the creature's winding body is accompanied by representations of jewellery, namely earrings.

The fourteenth pot to be painted on that same evening is not placed in the constellation of the platform, but on the western axis of the pit of the sacred fire. Usually addressed as *praniti*, which in Sanskrit (*praṇītā*) is nothing more than "a pot used for rituals", it is understood as representing Viṣṇu, who is believed to preside over the scene as the teacher, the guru.





*Ihi ritual in Patan  
Pots (height 8.6 and 7.6 cm)  
representing the guardian  
spirits in the form of faces,  
with a moulded cross,  
indicating the nose and a  
bar between the eyes. The*

*male yakṣa (left) is seen  
with a moustache, the female  
yakṣiṇī with rouge on her  
cheeks.  
Painted in August 2000 for  
the ritual consecration of nine  
stūpas at the Hyatt Hotel.*



*From a sketchbook in the  
possession of Amir Citrakar in  
Kathmandu. Leaf motifs with  
blue and red centres identified  
as "yakṣa (and) yakṣaṇī kalasa".*



Bowls (*salāpā*) used in Ihi rituals in Kathmandu.

Left

Bowl (diameter 22.5 cm), painted by Amir Chitrakar, November 2005.

The dominating symbol is a *svastika* in the shape of a cross with the legs bent at right angles in clockwise direction. At the centre a lotus flower, on the arms *bel* fruits, at the end of the arms *jasmin*, at the angles of the cross *pomegranate* seeds, at the end of the arms symbols designating the moon (white crescent) and sun (red crescent). Curls in the diagonals indicate a gesture of inviting the gods into the bowl.



The *Salāpā* Bowl

The shape of these bowls varies. They all reach a high a height of 8 to 8.5 centimeters. Those from Bhaktapur (diameter 22.5 cm) and Thimi (25.5 cm) have a bulbous form with a pronounced rim, while those from Patan (32.5 cm) and Kathmandu (33.5 cm) have a wide opening and are designed more as a means of presenting their contents.

The basic and prominent motive of the painting on the bottom of every bowl is a *svastika*. Also common to all are the curls between the four arms of the underlying cross. They represent a gesture of invitation. The entire pantheon, not only with the moon (Candra) and the sun (Sūrya) but also Indra and especially Br̥haspati, the celestial priest and *purohita* of the gods, is invoked. The 28 divisions of the lunar zodiac, the *nakṣatras*, are invited to grant blessings and well-being – as are the seven seers, the *saptaṛṣi*. As the 86-year-old Indra Bahadur Chitrakar from Kathmandu explained in 2005, the idea is that the gods and the asterisms are invoked to protect the Ihi girls throughout their lives. Even if their husbands die they will remain under the protection of the gods. This supports the idea that Newar girls, married to



Viṣṇu in the form of a *bel* fruit, enjoy a particular protection that retains its power even in widowhood.

Beyond the *svastika* and the curls, the four bowls display a wide variety. Sun and moon are seen on the bowl from Kathmandu as white and red crescents at the bottom of the arms of the cross, while the example from Patan (where the bowl is called *ihipā*) shows four identical crescents in red. No such motif can be seen on the bowls from Bhaktapur or Thimi. Placed at the centre is either a lotus flower that looks rather like marigold, or a book as a symbol of Brahmā. The motifs found in the arms and feet of the *svastika* differ considerably, demonstrating a creative freedom to play with the grammar of form and meaning. The example from Bhaktapur remains rather non-specific, with nine large dots (referring possibly to the Navadurgā) in red, green and blue, and four small dots in blue and green. Likewise, the bowl from Thimi presents a variety of flowers and green leaves. The example from Kathmandu presents four *bel* fruits on the arms and four white *jasmine* flowers (*daphaḥsvā*) at the ends of the arms, and in one case eight green *pomegranate* seeds (Nep. *dhale*, Nep. *anār*), which are characteristic offerings to Gaṇeśa. The

Right

Bowl with a sheet of painted paper, roughly indicating a *svastika*, curls and the crescents of moon and sun. Such products are sold to avoid the service of a Citrakār. This bowl was made and painted in 2003.

Below

Painting (20 x 20 cm) on paper of a *svastika* in a square frame, used in Patan on metal dishes to substitute an earthen bowl, April 2006.







two bowls from Patan (see illustrations) present either flowers or the twin book and rosary motifs, which are both attributes of Brahmā. Just as the circle of the rosary stands for the cycle of time, the written words of the book represent the origin of all manifestations: both symbols convey the creativity of the supreme deity. Such sophisticated connotations do not have to be known, neither by the Citrakār, nor by the officiating Brahmin priest. Symbols are used in a large variety of contexts to ensure general auspiciousness. By provid-

ing the ritual place and the objects needed for the ritual with a host of symbols, the action is linked to a larger framework with potentially unlimited layers. To return to the example of *salāpā* bowls: the white strokes on the rim represent the origin of all manifestations: both symbols convey the creativity of the supreme deity. Such sophisticated connotations do not have to be known, neither by the Citrakār, nor by the officiating Brahmin priest. Symbols are used in a large variety of contexts to ensure general auspiciousness. By provid-

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*Bowls (salāpā) used in Ihi rituals in Patan, Bhaktapur and Thimi.*

*Above*  
Bowls (diameter 32.5 cm) from Patan, painted by Ishworbhakta Chitrakar of Sundhara in November 2005 (left) and used for the consecration of stūpas in August 2000 (right). The arms of the svastika bear either the symbol of a book or a rosary, with a lotus flower or book at the centre. At the end of the arms appears either the moon (white crescent) or the sun (red crescent). The curls in the diagonals do not extend across the rim. They represent the gesture of invitation to the deities to enter the circle of the earthen bowl.

*Below left*  
Bowl (diameter 22.5 cm) from Bhaktapur, painted by Madhu Chitrakar in October 2005. Thirteen blue, red and green dots fill the space of the arms and legs of the svastika without conveying a particular significance. In contrast to the trays from Kathmandu and Patan, however, the white strokes on the rim symbolise the presence of the *nakṣatras*, representing the divisions of the lunar zodiac.

*Below right*  
Bowl (diameter 26 cm) from Thimi, painted by Purna Krishna Chitrakar in December 2005. The arms of the svastika are exceptionally wide. Similar to the scheme from Bhaktapur, nine non-descriptive flowers and eight leaves populate the arms of the svastika. Simple curls in white and red extend across the rim.



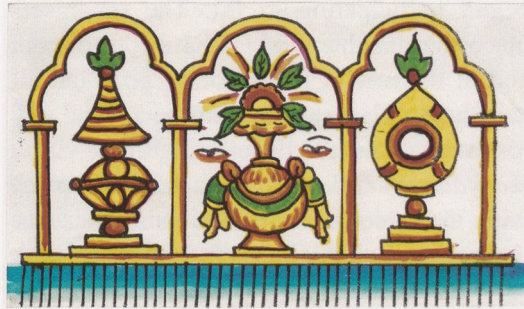
Block prints attached to the forehead of Ihi girls (*sapākhvaḥ*), printed and coloured in 2004.

From, top to Bottom

1. From Bhaktapur (17 x 12.5 cm): below a course of lotus leaves the sacred vase of plenty (*kalaśa*) in the centre, seen on the left a citrus fruit (*taḥsi*), on the right a water lily (*utpala*), both symbols of longevity and wisdom.



2. From Patan (16.5 x 9.5 cm): trefoil arches architecturally frame the sacred vase at the centre, the vermilion container (*sinhamhū*) to the left, the mirror (*jvālānhāykā*) to the right – symbols of the goddesses Lakṣmī and Śrī.



3. From Patan (16.0 x 7.5 cm): separated by columns supporting fragmented arches the sacred vase in the centre, left the mirror (*jvālānhāykā*), right the vermilion container (*sinhamhū*).



4. From Thimi (15.0 x 10.0 cm): above a course of lotus leaves in the centre the sacred vase, left a citrus fruit and right a fully opened lotus flower.



Right

From Kathmandu, a *sapākhvaḥ* (13 x 17 cm) painted by Indra Bahadur Chitrakar, November 2005. The vase of plenty (*kalaśa*) figures prominently on a lotus base under a ceremonial shawl, framed by the moon and sun in the upper corners.



simple *svastika* is placed on top of the dish, painted on paper in a square, triple-coloured frame (19 x 19 cm). The longish feet of the *svastika* support identical Candra/Sūrya motifs, and curls done in blue convey the inviting gesture.

The Block Print (*sapākhvaḥ*)

On the second day of the Ihi ritual the girls receive a coloured block print (10 to 13 x 9.5 to 17 cm), either from the hands of the Citrakār or from the organisation in charge, which has bought the prints from the painter in advance. The block print is laced under a headband to cover the forehead, and completes the ritual outfit. Earlier the girls had put the *kumaḥkāḥ* thread around their neck, and had their forehead and parting smeared with vermilion, and were clad with the *ihi-parasi*, the sari offered on this occasion. A wide variety of symbols appear on the block prints, with an overt emphasis on fecundity and general well-wishing.

The block print from Bhaktapur is divided into two registers: A row of seven lotus leaves



at the top and below it the “vase of plenty”, prosperity and wealth (*kalaśa*) flanked by a citrus fruit (*taḥsi*) and the water lily (*utpala*). The citrus fruit stands for longevity and the water lily for wisdom. The citrus fruit plays an important part in many Newar rituals: as an offering on the occasion of *mhāpūjā*, the worship of the body in November, and as an offering by the Navadurgā troupe to the people of Bhaktapur after the rebirth of the deities on the Victorious Tenth of the Dasāī festival in October.

The block print from Thimi has the same basic structure, but places the *kalaśa* at the top. While the prints from Bhaktapur and Thimi are standardised, those from Patan and Kathmandu will vary the themes or are altogether different. Those from Patan place the sacred vase at the centre, flanked by the mirror (*javālanhāykā*) and vermilion container (*sinhamhū*), two objects representing Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. Together with the *sukūda* lamp, these two objects are present in almost every proper ritual. The three objects are seen under more or less articulated trilobed arches bearing symbols of the moon and the sun, while the *kalaśa* is flanked by a pair of eyes which, in Bhaktapur, can be identified as conveying a Buddhist background.

Organisers from Kathmandu often order pots and block prints from Bhaktapur. Designs painted in Kathmandu display a *kalaśa* under a ceremonial shawl and flanked by moon and sun, or simply a bell (*ghaṇṭā*).

#### Purification: Paring the Toenails

Until very recently, members of marginally pure and impure sub-castes were not supposed to participate in Ihi rituals. The dividing line can be identified by the activities of the barbers. A male barber will shave the heads of people from marginally pure sub-castes, but for the paring of toenails a butcher’s wife has to be called in. The families concerned never

admit this, and it can only be observed in their houses. Eight sub-castes such as Mānandhar (oilpressers), Citrakār (painters), Rañjītkār (dyers) and Nakarmi (blacksmiths) are treated by the barbers as marginally pure, but have participated in the full scope of the Ihi ritual for many generations, including participation in the concluding feast on the first day (*dusvajā*). Such commensality is unthinkable on any other occasion.

The Gāthā, families who perform as deities of the Navadurgā troupe, have only recently begun participating in Ihi. The organisers place the daughters of Gāthā at the bottom end of the row of participating girls and allow them only to appear on the second day for the enactment of the offering of the virgin (*kanyādāna*). They arrive at the ritual place with their toenails already pared, because the barber’s wife would refuse to touch their feet.

Girls with Buddhist backgrounds – from the Rañjītkār, Nakarmi, Śuddhakār and sometimes even Mānandhar – mix freely with other sub-castes under the guidance of Brahmin priests. Most Mānandhar and Citrakār, however, prefer to join the annual Ihi ritual at Paśubāhā, a Buddhist monastery in Bhaktapur’s eastern quarter of Kvathandau. Until recently, the toenails of Vajrācārya and Śākya were pared on such occasions by a female barber, while the toenails of those girls from the seven marginally pure Buddhist sub-castes were pared by a female butcher outside the monastic courtyard. A remarkable change could be observed in February 2007 when all of the participating girls arrived with their toenails already pared at home. A major distinction in terms of purity was thus quietly overlooked. Apart from two Buddhācāryas, a total of seven Vajrācāryas, two Śākyas, two Citrakārs, eighteen Mānandhars, two Bālāmīs and even one Śreṣṭha participated on that occasion. Surprisingly, almost half of the participating girls came from other settle-



ments such as Thimi, Banepa, Namobuddha and Naya Baneshwar.

Until recently, paring the toenails for the first time in the girls' life on the occasion of Ihi marked the passage from an "innocent" childhood to a ritually accepted personality. Paring the toenails, being clad in a special sari (*ihiparasi*), and being offered to the deity Suvarṇakumāra as a bride, qualifies the girl as a member of the parental lineage (*phukī*) which she will leave only when she is married to a human groom.

### The Setting

The Ihi ritual is a complex initiation ritual that takes several days, of which two are reserved for collective celebrations. It is celebrated in various forms, but with core elements common to all social and religious groups, regardless of whether Buddhist or Hindu.

These elements include preparatory rituals among them, the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) or the worship of the ancestors (*śrāddha*); supplementary rites such as the ritual welcoming (*siphārati*, *lasakusa*), the measurement of the girls or the worship of the deities in the flasks (*kalaśa*); core elements, e.g. the "gift of the virgin" (*kanyādāna*), the "seven steps" (*saptapadī*) or the circumambulation around the fire; and concluding rites such as the feast (*bhoja*).

In the following we will describe the Ihi ritual or girl's marriage with the *bel* fruit that took place in the quarter (*tvāḥ*) of Byāsi on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December of 2006, the first and second day after full moon, in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa/Maṅṅsir, called Yaḥmāripunhi. We shall further include material from other Ihi celebrations.

The organiser, principle worshipper (*yajamāna*) and chief sponsor of the Ihi ritual described here in detail is Bagat Bahadur Lava. He is 65 years old, his wife Tulsi Maya 64. He tries to veil his name by claiming Suvāl

### The Main Events of Ihi

Preparations  
Feeding Girls (*ihimacā nakegu*)  
Other preparatory rituals

1<sup>st</sup> Day (*dusva*)  
Ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*)  
Ancestor worship (*nāndīśrāddha*)  
Worship of Alīdyāḥ  
Siphārati etc.  
Measurement rite (*kumaḥkāḥ*)  
with yellow or white threads  
Joint feast for the girls (*ihi jā*)  
Painting of pots

2<sup>nd</sup> Day  
Gurumaṇḍalapūjā (Buddhist)  
or fire sacrifice (*homa*)  
Kalaśapūjā  
Welcoming (*lasakusa*)  
Oil on head  
Purification: Paring the toenails  
Opening of the eyes by the Citrakār  
Fire sacrifice (*homa*)  
Presentation of the Ihi sari (*ihiparasi*)  
Vermilion on hair parting  
Block print on head  
Distribution of bread and milk  
"Gift of the Virgin" (*kanyādāna*)  
Grinding lentils (*māy ghiri-ghiri yāye*)  
"Seven Steps" (*saptapadī*)  
Circumambulating the fire  
Taking alms (*bāhrā chuye*)  
Fictive kinship or ritual friendship (*tvāy*)

3<sup>rd</sup> Day  
Kumārī- and Gaṇeśapūjā  
Well-wishing food (*khē svagā*)

*These subrites hab been tagged on the DVD so that one can access them directly.*



status, while his wife is of Dyaḥḷa descent but claims Duvāl status. Suvāl as well as Duvāl are among those farmers who claim the highest status and to be on a par with Basukala and Ācāju. The designation *dyaḥḷa* (lit. “caretaker of a deity”) identifies Tulsī Maya as a daughter of those Jyāpu who take care of one of the most powerful Gaṇeśas of Bhaktapur, Chumā Gaṇeśa of Cvāchē. On the occasion of the initiation, their sons are introduced to the iconographic representation of the deity on the first floor level of the god-house (*dyaḥchē*) in a secret Tantric ritual performed by an Ācāju, the “Master of Rituals” from the farmer’s caste.

Bagat Bahadur has eight sons, of whom only the eighth shares his food with him, while the first seven have set up their own kitchen in a double-house complex that extends along an entire block and almost fifteen metres from the road. The central bays of the cavernous house are completely dark and are only accessible with the lights permanently on – meaning they turn into a trap whenever the electricity fails during one of the notorious cuts.

Bagat Bahadur’s sixth son is Ganesh Kumar. His son Pradip and Nisan – the son of the eighth son, Ganesh Man – had to have their initiation performed. The son of Biswo Ram – the first son – Krishna Prasad was to be married, but the main motive for organising a collective event was the performance of the Ihi ritual for the three daughters of Ganesh Prasad, the seventh son.

Two thoughts or wishes guided the grandfather in performing the collective ritual on the 5<sup>th</sup> December. For the past twenty years he had already been inviting three times to partake in an Ihi ritual in front of his house in Byāsī, and he wanted to continue this tradition. Moreover, he had long ago vowed not to send his daughters or granddaughters to take part in a ritual that he himself had not sponsored. The present fourth ritual had been

planned since summer 2006 with the hope of his seventh son begetting a son.

The prevailing notion is that sponsoring an Ihi ritual or feeding and worshipping virgins (*kumārīpūjā*) is auspicious, it is “good work” (*gingujyā yagu*). Dedicating a ritual to virgins probably addresses the potential mother, because the day before the formal “Gift of the Virgin” (*kanyādāna*), the girls enjoy the last day of their identity as Kumārī. Ganesh Prasad was very afraid of sponsoring the ritual because he would have to take out a loan to meet the expenses. But his father generously assured his support and spent more than 250,000 rupees, which would have been even more if he had had to buy the necessary grains. He bought two buffalos, two goats which were sacrificed at Balakhu Gaṇeśa, the shrine of the quarter, and beyond that 15 *dhārni* (c. 36 kg) of buffalo meat. Three hundred litres of liquor had to be brewed.

### The Preparatory Phase

#### Feeding the Girls (*ihimacā nakegu*)

A few days or a week before the Ihi ritual, the girls are offered *svagā* – a mark on the forehead made of popped rice mixed with yoghurt and dark red pigment. This mark, offered by the eldest married woman of the lineage (*nakhī*), signals the approaching event and opens up the short period in which the girls are formally introduced to and accepted by close relatives. Until *dusva*, the day of preparation for the Ihi ritual, the girls will take no food in their parents’ house except a glass of milk in the early morning. Each day they will be met at home by a female relative and guided to their house.

The first visit leads to the house of the *nakhī* of the girl’s father’s lineage, often followed on the same day by visits to the houses of lineage members, i.e. her father’s brothers and grandfather’s nephews and their sons. Beyond the members of the lineage, the *phukī*,



The offering of ritual food (*svagā*) to the Ihi girl (in this case Benita Basukala) by the eldest married woman of the lineage, the *nakhī*. Marks of vermilion and yoghurt on the forehead and the left temple initiate a period of a few days or a week during which the girl leaves her house to be fed by members of the lineage and maternal relatives.  
Photo 15 January 2001.



these visits lead to the paternal aunts (*nini*) of three generations (which includes father's and grandfather's paternal aunts) and their daughters and granddaughters, the maternal uncles (*pāju*) and maternal aunts (*taḥmā*) of their grandmother as well as their maternal uncles (*pāju*) of three generations.

In the case of the ten-years-old Benita Basukala (see map), this sequence was initiated by the eldest woman of the lineage, the *nakhī*. The second visit led to the neighbouring house, in which her granduncle's son lived as the third member of the lineage. The joint great-grandfather's house, which was built on the periphery of Bhaktapur's northeastern quarter in the 1950s, was divided up in the 1970s. Further visits included the four sisters of her paternal grandfather (*nini*), two of their daughters, the daughter of her paternal grandfather's brother and the paternal grandmother's sister. From her mother's side she visited the house of her grandfather, which he shares with his son (the initiate's *pāju*), and her mother's maternal uncle (*pāju*). She did not visit her father's sister (her *nini*), because the sister had not accepted her role at that time, avoiding as she did her elder brother who had begun the process of separation from his younger brother. Nor did she visit her father's maternal uncle, because his granddaughter was participating in the same Ihi ritual. In two cases she visited two houses and in three cases she had to go beyond the

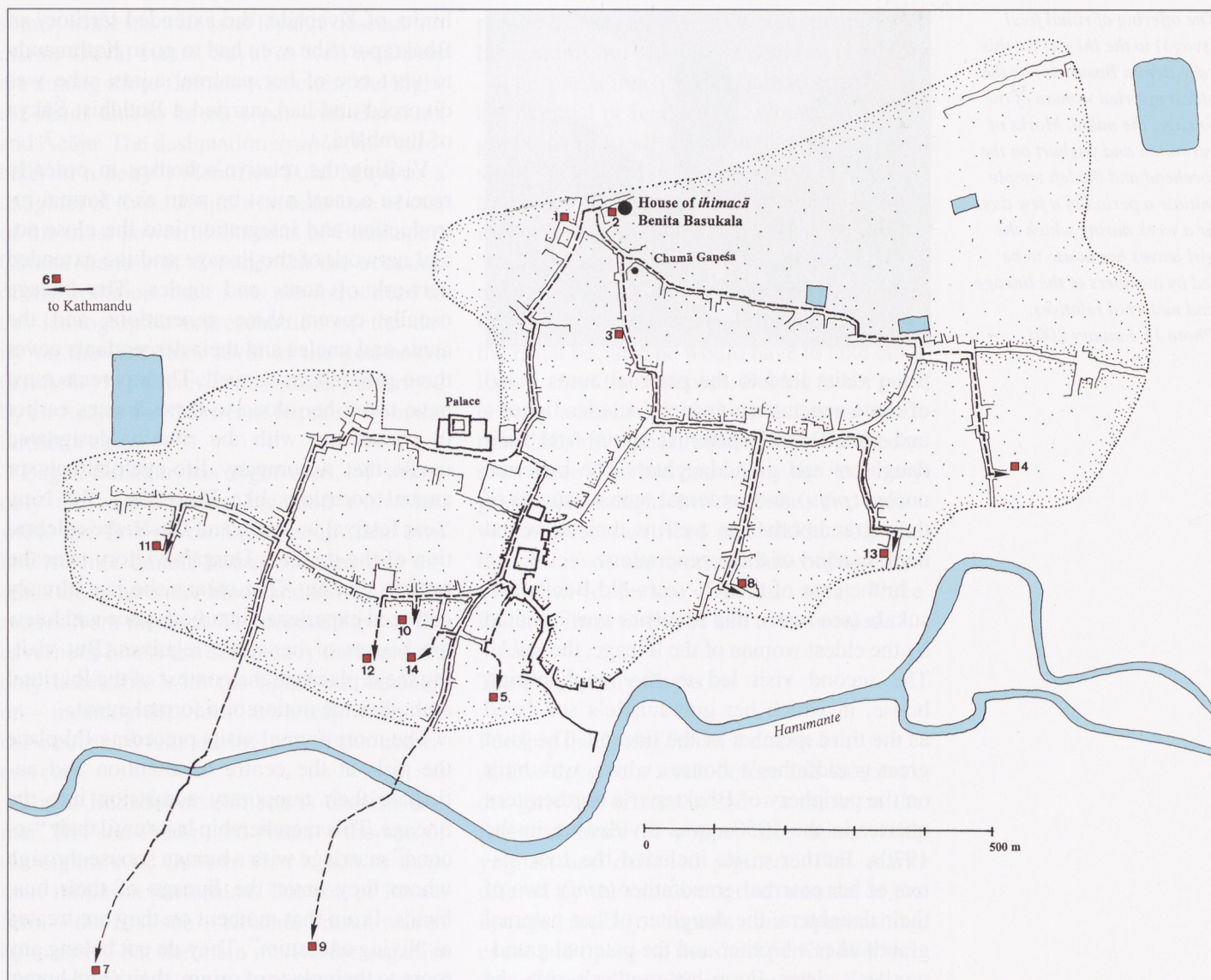
limits of Kvapade, the extended territory of Bhaktapur. She even had to go to Kathmandu to visit one of her paternal aunts, who was divorced and had married a Buddhist Śākya of Itumbāhā.

Visiting the relative's houses in order to receive a meal must be seen as a formal introduction and integration into the close social network of the lineage and the extended network of aunts and uncles. The lineage usually covers three generations and the aunts and uncles and their descendants cover three generations as well. Their parents must have taken her along to these houses earlier in connection with the ritually designated meals that accompany life-cycle rituals or annual occasions like Bisketjātrā, the New Year festival in April, and Dasāi, the celebration of the goddess Durgā's victory over the buffalo demon. That means she had already gathered experience in urban space and knew the houses of her close relatives. But visiting these places in the context of the Ihi ritual embodies the notion of a formal event.

The more formal visits preceding Ihi place the girls at the centre of attention and anticipate their temporary admission into the lineage. This membership lasts until their "second" marriage with a human spouse through whom they enter the lineage of their husbands. From that moment on they are treated as "living ancestors". They do not belong any more to their place of origin, their natal home. But in an expression of sororal solidarity they do return in their new role as aunt (*nini*) or "elder mother" (*taḥmā*).

One more aspect of the manifold journeys of the potential Ihi girls must be underlined. They move in urban space in order to get acquainted with the realm of their later life. Until very recently, daughters of farmers (Jyāpu) never married into other settlements of the Kathmandu Valley, but they crossed – as the map documenting Benita Basukala's journeys demonstrates – the narrow limits of





*Bhaktapur: visits by Benita Basukala to relatives (ihimacā nakegu, lit. feeding the Ihi child) prior to her Ihi marriage on 29 January 2001.*

*On the second day of the month of Māgha (15 January) she visits the eldest woman of the lineage (nakhī, 1).*

*During the following week she visits the only other lineage*

*household (2), the parental great-grandmother's nephew (3), four parental aunts (nini, 4-6, 10), female relatives of the parental great-grandfather (8, 9), two daughters of the parental aunts (11, 12), her maternal grandfather (13) and her mother's maternal uncle (pāju, 14).*



their quarter. In a way the city can be called the “greater house” which the girls inhabit as ritually mature beings after the Ihi marriage. The outer limits of Kvapade, the extended territory of Bhaktapur as defined by two rivers, are only transcended when accompanying the parents to work in the fields. The ritual space is protected by the seat of the Eight Mother Goddesses, the Aṣṭamātrkā, and the inner space is literally occupied by the girl's paternal and maternal relatives.

The Preparatory Ritual (*pīṭhapūjā*)  
on the Day before Ihi

In the early morning the Ācāju, the Master of Rituals of Jyāpu status, goes to the house of the organiser and principle worshipper Bagat Bahadur in Byāsī to prepare all the *gvajā*, the moulded cones of cooked rice needed for the following day.

The eldest of the wife-takers and husband of the organiser's sister, the *mhāynāyaḥ* meets the Ācāju priest at Kichē in the early morning. Bagat Bahadur, the principle worshipper, recalls that he is a farmer named Kavā from Gvaḥmādhi, but he cannot remember his first name. People are rarely remembered or called by their name, but rather by the designation of their role. As a wife-taker he is only marginally polluted if death comes to Bagat Bahadur's family. That allows him to play an important role in many life-cycle rituals, especially in death rituals, when he has the potential to take over the role of the Bhā (funerary priest) in the purification ritual of the tenth day, and of the Śivācārya (purity specialist) on the occasion of the purification of the house. Bagat Bahadur calls the very few members of these two classes of purity specialists greedy. Thus for the first time he had not invited the Tini to hand out the bel fruit to the Ihi girls. Instead, the *mhaynāyaḥ* has taken over.

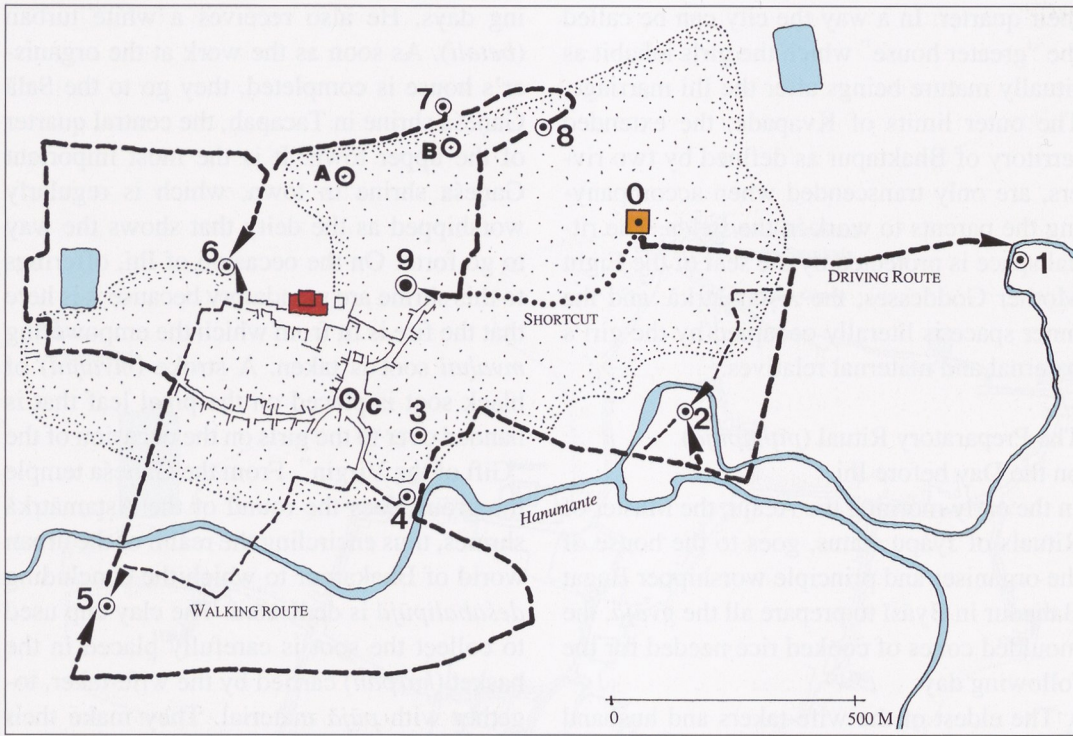
The *mhaynāyaḥ* receives a set of new clothes, which he will wear on the follow-

ing days. He also receives a white turban (*betali*). As soon as the work at the organiser's house is completed, they go to the Salā Gaṇeśa shrine in Tacapaḥ, the central quarter of the upper town. It is the most important Gaṇeśa shrine in town, which is regularly worshipped as the deity that shows the way to go forth. On the occasion of Ihi, offerings to this shrine are mandatory because it is here that the fire is lit from which the empowering *mvaḥni* soot is taken. A stroke (*mvaḥni*) of black soot is placed on the pipal leaf that is handed over to the girls on the occasion of the “Gift of the Virgin”. From the Gaṇeśa temple the group does the round of the Aṣṭamātrkā shrines, thus encircling the realm of the urban world of Bhaktapur to which the concluding *deśabalipūjā* is dedicated. The clay cup used to collect the soot is carefully placed in the basket (*karpan*) carried by the wife-taker, together with *pūjā* material. They make their way to the easternmost of the shrines (*pīṭh*) of the Eight Mother goddesses, Brahmāyaṇī, and from there they continue their round, visiting the remaining seven shrines while the fire constantly produces soot.

On 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007 the performance of the prescribed *pīṭhapūjā* could literally be seen to be driven by a new dynamism. The organising party of an Ihi ritual performed on the same day in Cvāchē had a Toyota pickup parked on the square in front of the temple. The acting assistant priest, a Karmācārya from Kichē, carefully carried the *mvaḥni* cups from the seat of the deity to the car. While he and the *mhaymacā* took the front seats, the *mhaynāyaḥ* accommodated himself and the *pūjā* material on the loading area at the back of the car. Following an unconventional route by car and crossing the Hanumante river four times, the group was able to cover the seats of the Aṣṭamātrkā as well as of Tripurasundarī in less than an hour (see map).

In yet another expression of contemporary dynamics, the route of the *pīṭhapūjā* could be





*Bhaktapur, alternative routes to perform the pīṭhapūjā:*

- 1 Brahmāyaṇī,
- 2 Mahēśvarī,
- 3 Kaumārī,
- 4 Vaiṣṇavī,
- 5 Vārāhī,
- 6 Indrāyaṇī,
- 7 Mahākālī,
- 8 Mahālakṣmī,
- 9 Tripurasundarī.

The nine places were visited by foot on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2006 by a Jyāpu Ācāju, in the context of an Ihi ritual in Byāsi (see A on the map). The goddesses were visited by a Karmācārya in a car on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007 prior to an Ihi ritual in Cvāchē (see B), and on 22<sup>nd</sup> January a Karmācārya chose a shortcut, leading directly from the pīṭha of the Salā Gaṇeśa (O on the map), to the shrine of Tripurasundarī (no. 9) in the centre of town, in the context of an Ihi ritual at Naraincok (see C).

covered in less than ten minutes. The Karmācārya, who was acting as an assistant to the Ihi ritual at Naraincok (see the film attached to this publication), was busy with rituals somewhere else and could not perform the *pūjā* in time. During *dusva*, the first day of the Ihi ritual, he could slip away for an hour while a Jośi assistant and the Śivācārya were completing the preparations for the ritual place. He performed his duty at the *pīṭh* of Salā Gaṇeśa and reduced the entire circumambulation of the historic core area of Bhaktapur by turning to the central ninth shrine dedicated to Tripurasundarī.

Visiting the shrines of the Aṣṭamātrkā is indeed a preparatory ritual observance that is mandatory for many festivals. By keeping the fire alive and adding mustard oil in case the flame dwindles, the soot represents the essence of the urban habitat. The goddesses not only guard this space – they collectively represent the energy or *genius loci* that enables the urban society to function. By using

the soot collected while circumambulating this space to mark the girls' foreheads, they are invited to become members of society. Gracing the pipal leaves that are dedicated to Viṣṇu, the “offering of the virgin” participates in the power of Durgā in her eight manifestations.

From the eighth goddess, Mahālakṣmī, the path leads to Tripurasundarī, the central ninth goddess in Tulāchē and to the Gaṇeśa shrine in nearby Bālākhu, the shrine of the non-iconic deity which presides over the area (*ilākā*), and to which the house of the organiser belongs. Returning to the house of the organiser, the group is received by Bagat Bahadur at the main entrance and is served *khē svagā*, a light meal with flattened rice, a boiled egg and liquor.

On the day preceding the first day of the Ihi ritual (*dusva*), the chief worshipper and sponsor, collects an earthen pot from a potter in Tālākva and hands it over to the painter, the Citrakār who in the season concerned is



entitled to paint a four-handed representation of Gaṇeśa onto the front. In a symbolic gesture, prior to handing over the pot, a *kisli* offering (a small cup with rice, a betel-nut and a coin) is presented. In addition, the painter prepares a small plate serving as the lid for the pot with a white radish, the unmistakable symbolic representation of the deity. In case of the ritual documented on the following pages, the chief worshipper brought the pot to a Citrakār of his choice near Nāgpūkhū. He should, in fact, have carried it to Surje Chitrakar, who for that season was the caretaker of the Ihi *guthī*, into which twelve active member families of painters are organised. The following day the chief worshipper collects the Gaṇeśa pot at the painter's house and carries it back to the potter's quarter, where an assistant priest had already prepared the ritual place for a complex ritual that lasts for an hour.

#### The First Day (*dusva*)

The day preceding the "Gift of the Virgin" (*kanyādāna*), in some way the climax of the Ihi ritual, is dedicated to preparatory ceremonies that ensure the ritual place is free of pollution. The word component *du* indicates an imminent danger of pollution. The death rituals prescribe an elaborate purificatory ritual on the tenth day called *du byēkegu*, literally "to cause to become untied of pollution". Death had in fact caused pollution and the ritual is designed to return to an at least partial state of purity. In annual death rituals, the day preceding the actual ritual is called *dusva* (Classical Nev. *dusala*, "the first day of a rite"). This day involves having one's head shaved and toenails pared. A ritual bath is compulsory, as is a fast after the morning meal. Fasting characterises the day to such an extent that it is usually called in short the *ek cak*, literally the day on which only "one portion" of food is taken.

In the context of initiation rituals, the preparatory actions include the paring of the toenails for both the boys and the girls. Boys have all of their head shaved except for a small tuft symbolizing their lineage. In both cases, death rituals are performed, which allow the ancestors to be present in the ritual and to anticipate potential pollution by unforeseen deaths, which would force the ritual specialists to cancel the entire ritual.

In the early morning a goat is sacrificed at the area shrine, Bālākhū Gaṇeśa. The soot (*mvaḥni*) gathered during the sacrifice is used by the Citrakār on the second day to open the eyes (*mikhā kākegu*) of the painted pots, i.e. to empower the vessels for the ensuing ritual. A portion of raw meat is later taken to Tālākva to be offered to the potter who had moulded the Alīdyāḥ. The nine pieces of the head of the sacrificial animal (*syū*) are distributed among the nine privileged Ihi girls (*nava nakhī*) during the feast that concludes the first day's ritual.

#### The Arrival of the Girls

On the cold and foggy morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, the Ihi girls get up early, most of them shortly after five o'clock, to be dressed and made up with rouge and lipstick. In many cases young professional beauticians are asked to help prepare the girls. Red blouses with gold threads are kept by the families concerned to be used ever again on such occasions. As for the jewellery worn on the girl's head and the bangles and anklets – only a few families possess a full set. If more than one girl of the extended family joins the Ihi ritual, the jewellery has to be borrowed from relatives or friends or – against a small fee – from the shop of a goldsmith, a Bare. If the decision to join the ritual is made late, it is almost impossible to acquire a full set. In that case it has to be ordered a month in advance and made by the goldsmith. The fine *repousseé* work of thin brass is no longer



gilded. A set of necklet, hairnet and frontlet, for example, could be ordered in 2006 for 2,500 rupees (25 euros). Absolutely essential is the frontlet (*śribhaṅgi*) because it is needed to hold the block-print that is handed over by the painter a few minutes prior to the “offering of the virgin”. Second in importance is a net of five chains (*ngapusikha*). Often, the symbolic tip of a pigtail (*sātupākhā*) is added in the shape of a fish with a bunch of cones in silver, shaped as a bell to create a soft sound when the girl shakes her head. Instead of the tip of a pigtail, a golden flower (*lūsvā*) or circular hair-slides with depictions of the moon (Candra) and the sun (Sūrya) can be inserted into the hair. Also a broad necklet on a red velvet base is worn as a demonstration of opulence. Bangles (*mhu*), often with small bells (*chuyasā ghāganghala*) and anklets (*kali*) – both worked in silver – complete the outfit.

The mood is gay and joyous, as the girls are looking forward to being the centre of attention for the next two days. In a final act the forehead is smeared with vermilion, the edges of which being carefully marked with small red dots. Between six and seven in the morning, the mood is frantic as the mothers compete to arrive early enough at the ritual area in order to secure a good place – which means close to the sacred fire where the privileged girls sit and where the Brahmin priest acts.

Later in the morning, before seven o’clock, 129 girls appear with their mothers for a kind of ritual notice or invitation ritual for the gods – at an auspicious time given (*sāit*) by the Jośi and calculated according to the horoscope of the daughter of the principle worshipper (*yajamāna*) and chief sponsor. The girls aged approximately between four and nine are mainly from the farmers’ sub-castes. They were also later joined by a few carpenters’ daughters and Banamāla (Gāthā) girls, but only on the following day.

### The Ritual Place

The ritual place, i.e. the place for the ritual fire and the seats for the girls, is a small lane in the quarter (*tvāḥ*) of Byāsī, which is now almost totally occupied by the ritual. The girls take their places on cushions and mattresses in three long rows separated into two groups by the sacrificial place that will be prepared for various sub-rituals and sacrifices on the second day.

In front of them are the things they have been asked to bring with them: a *pūjā* plate (*kvataḥ*) with material for incense (*dhūp*), i.e. twisted cotton wicks and oil, light (*dīp*), fruits and sweets (*naivedya*), and for the *tikā* a small container for red (*abīr*, Skt. *sindūra*) and orange powder (*bhuisinha*) as well as four small clay saucers with yoghurt. Also on the plate are a *kisli* clay saucer with rice, a betel-nut and a silver coin, small pieces of fruit, popped rice, and flowers, mostly *lalpate* (Euphorbia). The children also bring a vase (*kalaśa*) filled with water and with a flower inside, the traditional *sukūda* lamp, as well as a larger clay bowl (*salāpā*) in which two bamboo sticks, a *bel* fruit, and a long wound-up length of white or yellow thread have been placed.

While the girls are sitting on the mattresses, some of them sleeping on the laps of their mothers, an elderly woman cleans a spot on the ground for the sacred place. On it the Jośi draws a diagram (Nev. *mandah*) in white and red powder for the Nāndīmukhaśrāddha worship which purifies the house, pacifies the ancestors and prevents possible impurity during the Ihi ritual, such as when a relative dies during the ritual (see below). The *śrāddha* is performed by Bhakta Bahadur Lavaju, the head of the principle worshipper’s lineage, on the directions of the Brahmin priest, but the place is prepared by the Jośi. The square diagram is divided into 16 smaller squares with four triangles on each side dedicated to



the 16 Mothers Goddesses (Ṣoḍaṣamātrkā). The Jośi sits on a small mattress in the south facing north. He places nine clay saucers on the northern triangles and puts two betel-nuts and a wick in each. When asked who these clay saucers are for, one priest said for Indra etc., i.e. the protector deities of the directions (*dikpālā*), the other for the Nine Durgās. He also places some unhusked rice and a wick on each of the 16 fields. North of the square diagram he draws three further diagrams for Gaṇa (Gaṇeśa), Gogrāsa (cow) and Kumārī, as well as a further *svastikayantra*, and places on it *dhaupati* for the Aṣṭacīrañjivīs, the Eight Immortals, represented by a leaf plate with rice and two pairs of small clay saucers filled with yoghurt. In front of the central *svastikayantra* he draws five symbols for five deities (*pañcāyatana*, i.e. Sadāśiva, Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gṛhalakṣmī and the *iṣṭadevatā*, the ancestral deity of the worshipper) and places fragments of green banana leaves on them. Below the diagram for the Sixteen Mothers, a seat (*āsana*) is marked to represent the seven gates (*saptadvārā*) of the heavens.

Assisted by the Ācāju, the Jośi then moulds cooked rice into conical forms (*gvajā*) and places them on the three central diagrams; he does the same with two smaller *gvajās* each placed on the *pañcāyatana* positions. Finally he decorates each of the places with a marigold and sticks *lalpate* in the larger rice cones (*gvajā*). He then places a large vase with white jasmine in it between the square diagram and the other diagrams, to the west a *sukūda* lamp and the *pūjā* plate to the north. The whole site is encircled by a long garland of betel-nut-shaped lilac flowers (*gvēsvā*, Nep. *makhmalī*), which the Jośi lays on the ground.

After a while the husband of the worshipper's sister appears as the most senior man (*mhaynāyaḥ*) of the group of wife-takers of the principle worshipper and organiser-cum-

sponsor of the Ihi ritual. He comes out of the house situated behind the place that has been prepared. On his shoulders he carries the traditional bamboo pole with two trays (*khaḥm-hū*) containing the material for the worship of the Alīdyah (see below). In the left tray is the wooden measuring vessel, a plate with three large and 27 small *gvajās*, a *kisli* saucer, a large number of *masala* packs (with a clove, a dried raisin, a cardamom, one small piece of candis sugar, coconut, cinnamon and betel-nut, as well as one popped white corn) and betel pouches. In the second tray are new clothes and further *pūjā* material, such as coloured *naivedya* breads (*marhi*), fruits, powder, incense and rice flour.

The *mhaynāyaḥ* places the baskets temporarily on the sacrificial place while the girls ritually hand over their *pūjā* plate to the priest and make a ritual decision for the ensuing worship. They light the *sukūda* lamp, pour water into the vase, and touch the *pūjā* plate with their right hand – in which they also hold some rice, barley and sesame seeds, as well as water and flowers. For these subrituals, called *puṣpabhājana* and *saṃkalpa*, the seats of the nine first girls (*nava nakhī*) are re-arranged. They are now asked to sit west of the sacrificial place rather than in a row with the other girls. Originally it was planned that only five girls (*pañcakanyā*, cf. Vergati 1982a: 276, Pradhan 1986: 114) would sit in this manner, but after a long dispute four more were allowed to sit in this privileged form. All of these nine girls, now declared as “presiding” women (*nakhī*) are from the farmers' community, five from the Suvāl *thar* – among them the *mhaynakhī* Raslila Suval, the daughter of the principle worshipper – one from the Kvaju lineage (*thar*), one from the Sukhupāyo *thar*, and two from the Ghaymvasu *thar*.



### The Mysterious Alīdyah or Clay Deity

After the ritual decision, a small procession-  
al group is sent to the Jetha (Jeṣṭha) Gaṇeśa  
Temple in the potters' quarter (Tālākva) to  
perform the worship of the Alīdyah, the Clay  
Deity of ambiguous identity. The group is  
led by the two Brahmin priests, the princi-  
ple worshipper, the *mhaynāyah* carrying the  
*sukūda* lamp, and the *mhaymacā*, the sister  
of the worshipper carrying the *pūjā* plate, as  
well as other elderly participants. They are  
accompanied by a group of musicians from  
the Jyāpu caste: eight men playing the bam-  
boo flute, two drummers, and one man with  
cymbals.

### The Duty of the Potter

About two weeks before any Ihi ritual the  
*mhaynāyah*, the chief of a group of tillers  
dependent on the officiating Brahmin or the  
eldest of the principle worshipper's group  
of wife-takers, will carry a *kisli*, a small cup  
with rice, a betel-nut and a coin to a potter  
in Tālākva, which indicates the act of order-  
ing the 16 pots and one small bowl necessary  
for the enactment of the ritual. The potters  
mostly keep a stock of these pots in three or  
four different sizes. Should some be missing,  
this allows enough time to produce, sun dry  
and fire them.

Only the potters of the lower town in Tā-  
lākva are entitled to produce blackware. This  
reserves for them the privilege and duty of  
producing containers and jugs as well *ga-  
pacā* pots and *salāpā* bowls as redware for  
ritual use. The potters of Tālākva are not or-  
ganised into a formal *guthī*, but they share  
dietary restrictions regarding duck meat and  
eggs, which they are not allowed to consume.  
A widely known legend says that once upon  
a time the potters of the lower town were  
trying furiously to produce their wares, but  
whenever they opened their kilns all they  
found were broken pots. One day a duck was

found to have survived in one of these bro-  
ken pots, and was making a repeated noise  
that sounded like *phi, phi*, which in Nevārī  
means "sand". Sand had to be added to the  
black clay to produce durable pottery! Since  
then the duck is considered to be Biśvokarma  
(Skt. Viśvakarman), the tutelary deity of all  
crafts in Bhaktapur.

Earlier in the morning the potter had shaped  
a lump of black clay (*hākucā*) into a cylinder,  
allegedly Śiva's *liṅga*, with a disc of clay  
attached to one side probably depicting his  
hairknot. Although the ritual specialists in-  
volved agreed that the black cylinder repre-  
sents Śiva, a wide range of names were of-  
fered, including Agni and Bhairava. The Jośi  
acting on the square in November 2005 was  
absolutely sure that it was Anantaliṅgeśvara,  
to whom a temple is dedicated southwest of  
Bhaktapur and of which a replica is to be  
found within the city at Khaumā Square. A  
certain affinity to Śiva is demonstrated by the  
fact that after the completion of the Ihi ritual,  
the lump of clay will be discarded at a nearby  
temple dedicated to Śiva – which is conse-  
quently home to a *liṅga*. The Brahmin, how-  
ever, named the lump of clay "Agnidyah",  
which refers to the god of fire, while the pot-  
ter changed this designation to "Egindyah",  
admitting that he had no idea what kind of de-  
ity this might be. Most clients referred to the  
*liṅga* as Alīdyah, the name under which the  
lump of clay is also widely known in neigh-  
bouring Patan, where in a Buddhist context it  
represents a *caitya*, the symbolic representa-  
tion of the Buddha and his teachings.

### The First Ritual Dedicated to the Lump of Clay

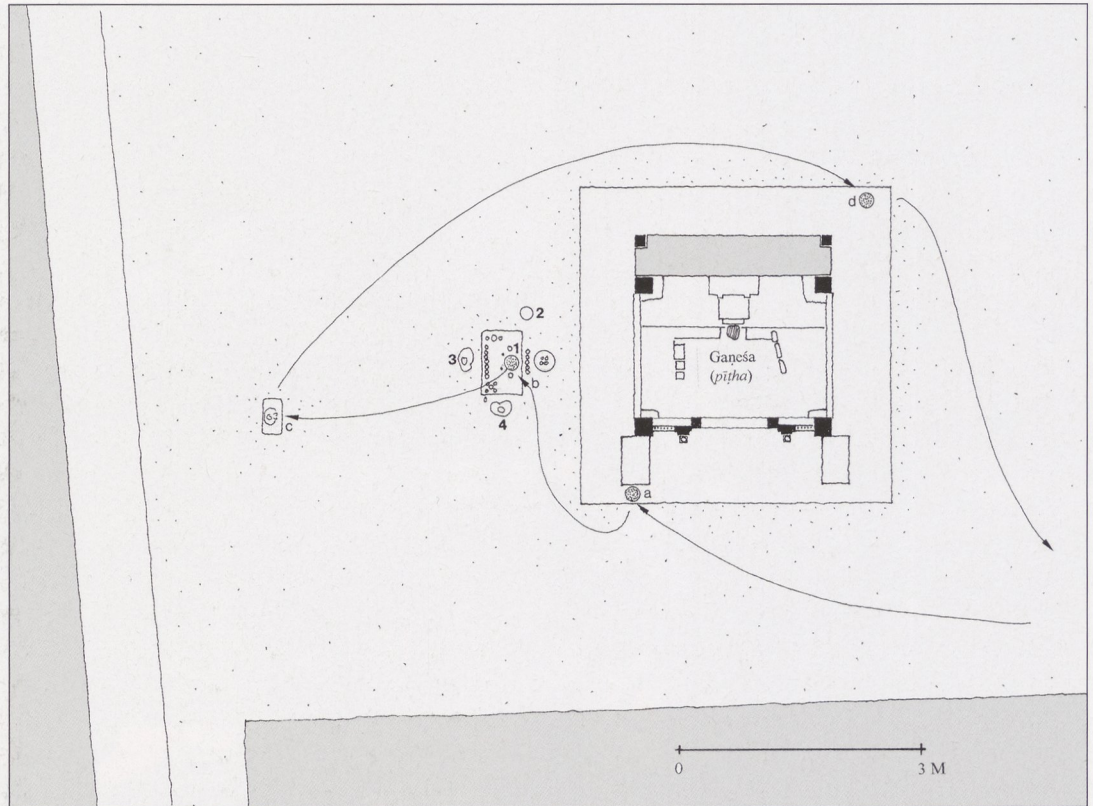
The site of the ritual is clearly marked by a  
flat stone west of the Jetha Gaṇeśa temple  
measuring 49 by 82 centimetres (see site  
plan). The central position is taken by the  
Alīdyah, while the acting ritual specialists,  
the Jośi and the Brahmin, take their posi-



*Alīdyahpūjā at Tālākva on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004, ordered by Mahendra Sharma.*

A lump of black clay shaped as a cylinder is brought by a potter and placed on the southwestern corner of the Gaṇeśa temple (a). The assistant priest, Govinda Joshi puts it on the ritual place which is marked by a large flagstone (b) and hands it over at the end of the ritual to the potter's grandson, who stands on a wooden platform (āsana) that is situated on a second flagstone (c). The twelve-year old young boy carries it to the northeastern corner of the temple's platform (d), where it is taken by his grandfather for further refinement.

The cylinder of clay (1) forms the centre of the arena, while the Gaṇeśa pot (2) guards the space at a little distance. The officiating Brahmin (3) faces east, while his client, Pushpa Narayan Shrestha (4) faces north.



tion and turn to the east. After the *liṅga* is placed on a large leaf of *jēlālapte*, the Jośi fixes three eyes, rhomboid silver sheets with black pupils at the centre, on the front and five coloured flags (*pañcapatra*) are stuck onto the top. The affixing of the eyes seems to transform the lump of clay into the deity. However, no clue is given as to the role Śiva plays in this particular ritual. Is he introduced as the ultimate witness, or perhaps even as the bridegroom?

To the left of the *liṅga* the Gaṇeśa *kalaśa* is placed with its radish-plate on top. Behind the *liṅga* five cones of cooked rice (*gvajā*) are placed together with small *kisli* cups containing rice, a betel-nut and a coin, representing the *pañcāyana* deities, i.e. Sūrya, Nārāyaṇa, Gaṇeśa, Durgā and Sadāśiva. Set behind the *pañcāyana* ensemble are a plate of unhusked rice (*vā*) and four cups of yoghurt, representing the seven seers. The *liṅga* is flanked by

two more *gvajā*, said to act as *dvārapālas*, the guardians of the site. The *liṅga* is also flanked by a mirror and a vermilion container, representing in this context the goddesses Śrī (or Sarasvatī) and Lakṣmī. Also on the left is the triple offering (*tribali*), which is dedicated to Kumārī, *gogrās* (represented by a *kisli* cup), and Gaṇeśa. Placed to the right is an arrangement that is identified either as *pañcabali* (five offerings), Aṣṭabhairava, or Kṣetrapāla. Unambiguous is the presence of Gaṇeśa in the form of light: the *sukūda* lamp is placed to the extreme right, together with incense. A certain ambiguity is widely found in many rituals because precise identification is not obligatory: *kisli* cups or *gvajā* cones are used in a variety of contexts with vague connotations. The seers, the *pañcāyana* deities, Bhairava and Kṣetrapāla are somehow summoned to protect the place, in the centre of which the Alīdyah demonstrates his pre-





sence. Śrī and Lakṣmī, two aspects of the Devī grace the scene. What seems important is the fact that all of the deities are present in a non-iconic form. They cannot be recognised and gain their “individuality” through the words of the officiating Brahmin alone.

The lowest line of the ritual place is made up of seven small leaf plates with the inevitable auspicious offerings: fish, *akṣata*-rice, yoghurt, fruits, meat, *māri* sweets and popped rice. Rape and broad leaf mustard seeds (*ikā-pakhā*), the compulsory offerings to the ghosts, are offered as an initial act of a ritual.

While the acting auxiliary priests – a Jośi, a Śivācārya, a Karmācārya, or all of them – are preparing the ground, the wife of the potter who had shaped the Alīdyaḥ places incense

into the nearby Gaṇeśa temple to propitiate the evil spirits who might haunt the site. She also has to supply a straw mat and cushions for the actors. Finally, a Brahmin priest takes over and reads out from the *Suvarṇakumāravivāhavidhi* the declaration of ritual intention in the presence of his client, the *jajmān* (Skt. *yajamāna*), who acts as the organiser and principle worshipper, the *kāji*, of the entire ritual. His daughter has obtained the privileged role of the *nakhī*, who sits on first place in a row of up to 140 *ihimacā*. At the end of the ritual the client receives a red mark on his forehead from the Brahmin while he hands over *dakṣiṇā*.

In a second stage the Śivācārya or the Jośi acts again as an assistant. He hands over a new

*Alīdyaḥpūjā* on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

A *linga* shaped from black clay (*hākuṣā*) is decorated with five flags and red flowers (*lalpate*), flanked by the mirror (*jvalanhāykā*, representing the goddess Śrī) and a vermilion container (*sinhamhu*, representing Lakṣmī) and two cones of cooked rice (*gvajā*).



*Alīdyaḥpūjā on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004.*

*The acting assistant priest, the astrologer Govinda Joshi hands over the Alīdyaḥ to Udayacandra Prajapati (the grandson of the potter who shaped the liṅga), who wears a turban und stands on a designated stone on Tālākva square.*

*Photos 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004*



cap to the son or grandson of the potter who had shaped the Alīdyaḥ. The boy duly stands on a wooden plank on top of a small flagstone in the pavement that has been purified with cow dung and designated by a *svastika* diagram done in rice flour. The plank serves as the “platform”, *āsana*. Once the boy is standing on this platform, the Jośi binds a white turban around the new cap, and the wife of the *mhaynāyaḥ* performs the usual welcoming ritual (*lasakusa*) to the instructions of the Brahmin, who is still present. This includes a mark being placed on the person’s forehead in vermilion and yoghurt, and flowers and rice being showered over their body. In this case the ritual includes the act called *siphā luyegu* (lit. “to pour from a wooden container”), in which flowers and ritual rice are poured thrice over his body from a container. This is also done on many other occasions, such as during the boys’ initiation.

Carrying the Alīdyaḥ, the principle worshipper is now instructed by the Śivācārya to lead the boy to the northeastern corner of

the Gaṇeśa temple while pouring water from a *kalaśa*. The moment the boy places the Alīdyaḥ there in its rough form, the children of the square rush up and rip off the decorations. Within a second the consecrated deity is transformed into a lifeless, meaningless lump of clay that waits to be reshaped into a more sophisticated form.

### Shaping the Alīdyaḥ

The potter then takes the Alīdyaḥ to his workshop, where he gives it a proper shape and adds eight serpent bodies along the shaft in an effort to frame it. He also fashions four small cups from the lump of clay, which are later placed on the outer border of the firepit.

Later that afternoon, the Karmācārya and the *mhaynāyaḥ* leave the house of the principle worshipper with the sacred vase that bears a representation of Gaṇeśa, and turn to a non-iconic Gaṇeśa shrine at Inaygaḥ, located in a pit (*gaḥ*) a few steps beyond the western edge of the historic settlement. There the pot is empowered by a Tantric ritual and taken to the square of the potters, where the potter is already waiting with the refined clay object, the Alīdyaḥ. The ritual, similar to the one in the morning, is now repeated. The deity with its multiple identities is once again given eyes, flags, and also yellow thread of the kind that had earlier been handed out to the girls participating in the Ihi ritual. The potter’s wife receives a ritual meal of *samaya* (soybeans, ginger, meat, flattened rice, fish and egg) and *bikūbaji*, an offering of about four kilos of rice.

With the vase of Gaṇeśa in one basket and the Alīdyaḥ in another, the *mhaynāyaḥ* heads for the ritual place in the company of the Karmācārya. At the entrance to the site the Karmācārya prepares a *yantra* on which he places the Alīdyaḥ and offers rape seeds and broad-leaf mustard (*ikāpakhā*) seeds, which are burnt on charcoal to produce a smoke that purifies the access to the ritual place. The





wife of the officiating Brahmin priest appears to perform a welcoming ritual (*lasakusa*) before leading the two with their ritual objects to the scene. The potter follows suit, carrying the remaining sixteen pots in two baskets.

The principle worshipper and sponsor, Bagat Bahadur, refers to the ritual on the Tālā-kva square of the potters simply as *cā phyāgu* (lit. “to mould clay”). He compares the gift of unmoulded clay to the potter with the “Gift of the Virgin”. The lump of clay is worshipped in the usual sequence of flower, incense, a bunch of keys and offerings from the *siphā*

vessel by his sister, who represents the paternal aunts, the *ninis*. The *ninis* are called “living ancestors” (Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 115) because they no longer belong to the paternal lineage but continue to visit their maternal home (*thachē*). All Ihi girls will eventually leave their maternal home to become a “living ancestor”. Worshipping the lump of clay as a preparatory ritual prior to the “Gift of the Virgin” might hint at an identity that nevertheless remains veiled. The potter to whom the principle worshipper hands over the lump of clay with the help of the *Tini* or Śivācārya

*Ihi* ritual in Bhaktapur, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2007.

The making of the *Alīdyah* on the preparatory day (*dusva*). For the first ritual in the early morning, a roughly shaped cylinder of black clay (1) with the indication of a hair knot is brought with charcoal and a wooden seat (*āsana*) and placed on the plinth of the *Gaṇeśa* temple.

For the second ritual, the lump of clay is taken by the potter to his wheel (2) to provide a more sophisticated yet non-ionic shape with a pointed top. Placed in a bowl together with four small cups, the moulded lump is surrounded by eight snake bodies. The wife of the potter places the *Alīdyah* on to the ritual place and binds yellow *kumahkāh* thread around it (3). The *Karmācārya* assistant priest sticks auspicious flags into the body of the deity and adds three eyes onto the surface to provide orientation. The *mhaynāyah* helper carries the *Alīdyah* and the *Gaṇeśa* pot to the entrance of the ritual place to be formally welcomed by the wife of the acting Brahmin (4). The potter follows with the remaining 15 pots which have to be delivered to the site to be painted there the same evening.



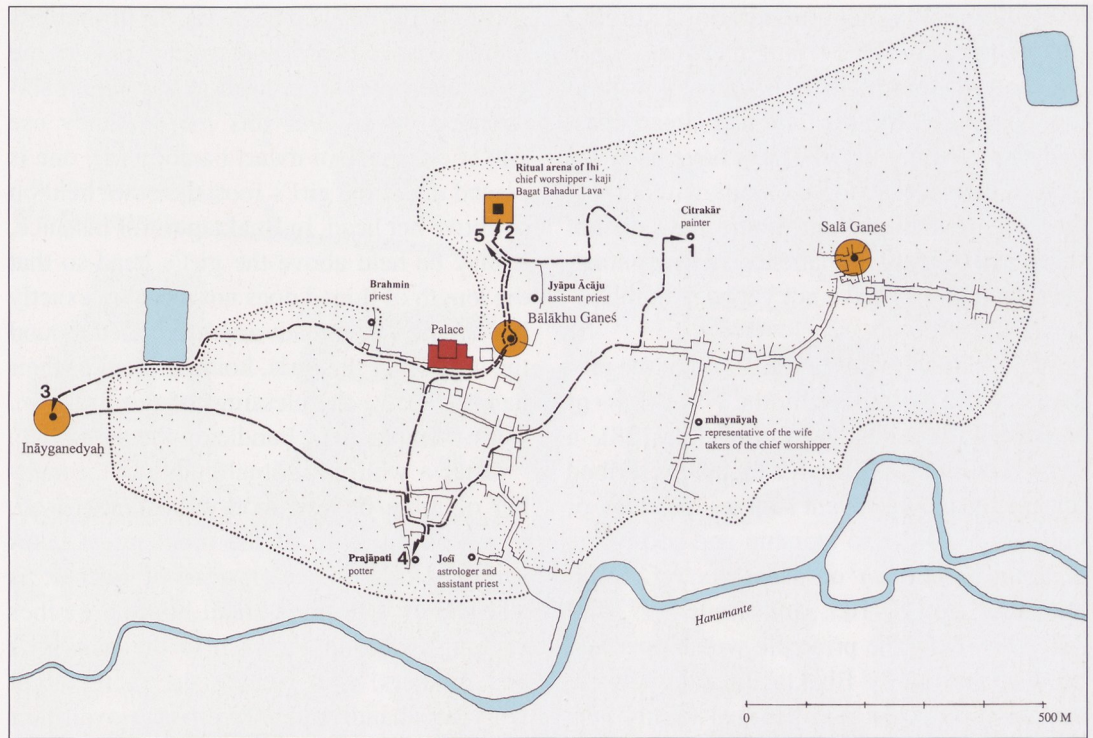
Bhaktapur, Ihi ritual on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006 in Byāsi, organised by the chief worshipper, Bagat Bahadur Lava.

The day preceding the preparatory rituals (*dusva*), the chief worshipper turns to a potter (*Kumaḥ*) at Tālākva square to collect a pot which he hands over to a painter (*Citrakār*, no. 1 on the map) to be painted with Gaṇeśa. Early in the morning of the *dusva* day he collects the pot and takes it home (route no. 2). The representative of the wife-takers of the chief worshipper's family, the *mhaynāyaḥ*, carries the pot in the company of the acting assistant priest (*Ācāju*) to the shrine of Ināygaṇedyah (route no. 3), located beyond the western edge of the city. There the pot is filled with water and thus empowered by the Tantric priest.

From Ināygaṇedyah the group turns to the potter (route no. 4) to collect the Alīdyah deity, which has been elaborately moulded from the lump of clay that had been worshipped earlier that morning.

Upon the return to the chief worshipper's house (route no. 5), both of the divine objects, the pot representing Gaṇeśa and the clay object representing Alīdyah (Śiva, Agni or Bhairava) are welcomed at the threshold by the wife of the acting Brahmin, Kalpana Sharma, with a *lasakusapūjā*.

In the meantime, the Brahmin priest and his Jośi assistant have prepared the ritual place.



(the purity specialist who later worships the *bel* fruits) or, in his absence, by the Jośi, is identified by the principle worshipper as Dakṣaprajāpati, the demiurge or sun genius and son of Brahmā, whose daughter Pārvatī or Satī was married to Śiva. On one occasion, the principle worshipper declares that Dakṣaprajāpati failed to offer Śiva a share of a sacrifice that he offered to all the other gods. Assuming the form of Vīrabhadra, Śiva killed him but restored him to life, albeit with a goat's head. It is difficult to say whether this weird myth has any connection to the ritual. Others do not share the explanation given by the principle worshipper, but the openness of this ritual allows many different meanings. Thus, Bagat Bahadur immediately identifies the lump of clay as Agnidyaḥ and never refers to Alīdyah, Śiva, or Bhairava. According to him, the transformed and skilfully moulded lump of clay that is brought to his house represents the fire that is needed to kindle the sacred fire the following day.

In the evening of the *dusva* day, the *mhaynāyaḥ* brings the artistically moulded Alīdyah deity and the Gaṇeśa pot to the house of the sponsor, who worships him while standing on the threshold stone, the *pikhālākhu*. After this, the Brahmin priest's wife appears to take his hand and lead him into the house of the sponsor, who has to feed him *dusvajā*, cooked food that will be shared by all the Ihi girls that same day. Normally, a Suvāl farmer would not share cooked rice with a Kumaḥ potter, in particular with one to whom he is not related by marriage. Sharing *dusvajā* demonstrates a rare transgression of the otherwise strictly observed borders of commensality.

#### The Worship of the Ancestors: Nāndīśrāddha

After the worship of the Alīdyah, the participants of the procession return to the place where the Ihi ritual is performed – passing



a rest house in which the buffalo is still being prepared for the evening meal (*dusvajā*). All the girls and mothers have been waiting there patiently. By this time it is already past midday, meaning that the girls have been sitting on their places for six hours without any meal. During these long hours they do not show any sign of impatience or discontent, even though they have not yet been at the focus of attention.

What follows is the continuation of the preparatory rituals, especially the Nāndī(ka)- or Nāndīmukhaśrāddha (see above p. 128), a ritual that is not specific for Ihi but prescribed for any auspicious event such as marriage or initiation in order to worship and pacify the *nāndīmukhapitarah* or ancestors (cf. Śrādhavidhi, pp. 87-105, and Kane 1973/IV: 526-528). Now the principle worshipper and head of the family Bhakta Bahadur Lavaju, the Brahmin priest and the Jośi jointly perform the worship of the deities.

After a few minutes one Brahmin priest asks the girls to stand up while his elder brother continues guiding the Nāndīmukhaśrāddha, also called Vṛddhi- or Ābhyudayikaśrāddha. It is said that an even number of Brahmins should be invited to perform the *śrāddha*. During this the priest asks the *nāyāḥ* to place *bayar*, dried fruits from the *jujube* tree (*Zizyphus jujuba*), and blades of *ḍubo* grass (on the seats arranged on the diagram. These represent *piṇḍas* to the ancestors (*pitṛ*). The girls are also asked to worship the ancestors and all deities by throwing rice and flowers at the sacred place.

#### The Measurement of the Girls (*kumaḥkāḥ*)

Afterwards the girls are measured 108 times or more from feet to head with the yellow or white thread they have brought and placed in the *salāpā* bowl. This sub-ritual is called *kumaḥkāḥ*, “the thread of the Kumārī”, or *satbhṛndikā*, lit. “pure thread”. The *nakhī*, to-

gether with the women from the Brahmin’s family and the assistant priest enfold the girls nine times from head to toe with a six-stranded thread. For this purpose they use two sticks made of dwarf bamboo (*ti*): one is placed under the girl’s foot, the other held on or above her head. In Bhaktapur, for instance, it may be held above the girl’s head so that the length of thread does not measure exactly her height. The threads are then coiled around the sticks and the girls, holding them in their hands, receive the blessings of the Brahmin. They then place the bundle on the *pūjā* plate.

After a while the ritual ends with a number of more or less short sub-rituals: *āratī*, in which the wife of the main priest takes a special ball of rice (instead of *sukūdā*, as elsewhere) with three small burning torches sticking in it and shows it to the nine girls and mothers, who receive the sacred light with their hands and then direct it over their heads. The Ācāju shows the light to the other girls. Then the Brahmin does his rounds, collecting the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*) in a large plastic bucket. This is quickly followed by a ritual decision to present food (*annasaṃkalpa*), which is formulated by the priest in the name of the children, blessings (*āśīrvāda*) in the form of verses (*śāntika-puṣṭikamantra*) spoken once again by the priest, the release of the sun as witness (*sūryasākṣī*), and, finally, the priest and his helpers ritually cleaning the sacrificial place.

In the late afternoon the girls are fed with a meal (*dusvajā*) cooked under the guidance of the Brahmin’s wife and served on a special plate, the *thāybhū*, for the nine privileged girls and on *jēlālapte* leaves for the other girls. It is regarded as the virgin’s last meal. The food includes boiled rice, meat, vegetables and lentils, as well as many other items including *pañcāmṛta* (milk, yoghurt, ghee, sugar and honey) and *khē svagā* (meat, fish, bean cake, egg, alcohol), considered to make up the standard 84 varieties (*cyepetā ghāsā*,



*Ihi ritual at Naraincok on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2007. Measurement of the nakhi, the privileged girl of the group from feet to head with the kumahkãh thread on the preparatory day (dusva). The Brahmin's wife provides the thread which is coiled around bamboo sticks.*





Nep. *caurāsī byañjan*). In addition, the nine privileged girls (*nava nakhī*) are served with *syū*, i.e. the nine parts of the head of the sacrificial animal (see Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 121). The girls must eat the dishes alone and take at least five handfuls (*pañcagrāsa*) in the traditional way, i.e. with thumb and ring finger, then thumb and small finger, thumb and middle finger, thumb and index finger, and finally with all fingers together. In this ritualistic way they demonstrate that they have become independent and no longer need anybody to feed them. It is also remarkable that the girls are almost totally by themselves, i.e. without any adults; the priest alone tells them what to do. Only mothers with small children will help their daughters. The leftovers are brought to the nearest absorbing stone (*chvāsah*). From now on the girls are not allowed to eat any food, especially salt, until they are served light food and tea the next morning.

#### Preparing the *kumaḥkāḥ* Thread at Home

On returning home with the *kumaḥkāḥ* thread, the girls' mothers work hard under the guidance of the other women of the house to prepare the twelve objects that have to be knotted into the thread. These are: 1 piece of ginger, 2 flattened rice, 3 betel-nut, 4 raw sugar, 5 a copper coin, 6 four grains of unhusked rice, 7 salt and ginger, 8 four pieces of popped rice, 9 fish, 10 a short twig of *miciki* (Nep. *svasthanisvā*, Nep. *jamāne māndro*, also *daruhaldī*), 11 *sujaphva* (Skt.  *jyotiṣmatī?*) and 12 *malephva*. The first nine items are regularly kept in a Newar household. A twig of *miciki*, the flowers of which are needed for the observance of *svasthānī* in January/February, is not for sale in the market and has to be obtained from a farmer or the women of the Gāthā, who supply the city with flowers for rituals throughout the year. *Sujaphva* and *malephva* are on sale at the shops that supply the materials needed for annual and life-cycle

rituals. *Sujaphva* is a small dried flower, while *malephva* is a walnut-size fruit that could not be identified. Nobody in Bhaktapur has ever seen the bush or tree bearing these fruits.

The question arises as to why these twelve items are knotted into the thread. The inclusion of rice, ginger and salt hint at provisions for a journey similar to the *deśāntara* journey undertaken by initiated boys. These boys even receive a *miciki* stick that is tied to the bundle they carry on their shoulders. If the girls are being equipped for a journey, is it the anticipated journey to the realm of the future human husband or is it the journey to the world of the divine husband, Viṣṇu?

#### Painting the Pots and Bowls by the Citrakār

In the evening of the first day every painter family has to send a representative to the principle worshipper's house to paint the fifteen pots needed for the ritual on the coming day. The Gaṇeśa *kalaśa* has already been painted and taken earlier to the ritual place in the company of the Alīdyaḥ. A potter brings the remaining pots to the site in the morning.

Experienced painters such as Surje Chitrakar or Narain Krishna Chitrakar will attend to the *pūrṇakalaśa* that will bear Brahmā. The others take care of the representations of the *aṣṭamaṅgala*, *yakṣa/yakṣiṇī*, Śrī/Lakṣmī, *nāgarāja* and *praṇītā*. Young, inexperienced boys are left the task of painting the *salāpā* bowls, of which six to 140 are needed.

#### The Second Day

On the early morning of the next day the ritual place is freshly prepared for the forthcoming consecration of the sacred vases (*kalaśārcana*) and the domestic fire sacrifice (*homa*, *havana*, *yajña*), as well as another worship of the ancestors (*nāndikaśrāddha*). For this purpose the sacrificial area has been shifted a few metres in order to use the limited space to best effect. It is the place around which



a number of sub-rituals will take place, including the climax, the “Gift of the Virgin” (*kanyādāna*).

#### The Fire Sacrifice (*homa*, *yajña*)

The consecration of the vases, in which the gods are invoked, is a ritual that precedes the fire sacrifice – which itself precedes the main ritual event (*viśeṣakarma*). The *homa*, which has little to do with its Vedic antecedents (van den Hoek 1992, Gray 1979), is not significantly different from other *laukika*-, *samana*- or *sāntihoma* rituals, as performed by Rājopādhyāyas during various life-cycle rituals and other occasions such as the consecration of a house. For an event to be auspicious, it is essential to invite a host of deities – the main (*mūla*- or *pradhāna*-) and accompanying (*aṅga*- or *parivāra*-), the personal (*iṣṭa*- and *kula*-) as well as the local (*sthāna*- and *deśa*-) deities (*devatā*) – and to pacify the ancestors and possibly malevolent deities.

All in all over one hundred gods are to be invited and fed – among them the respective central deity (*mūladevatā*), Gaṇeśa, Brahmā, Agni, Mṛtyuñjaya and Amṛteśvarī, the five Gomātrkas, Śrī, Lakṣmī, Kumārī, the *pañcāyatana* or *parivāradevatā* group (Sūrya, Śiva, Gṛhalakṣmī, Varuṇa, Nāgarāja), the Aṣṭamātrkā, the Yoginīs, the four Vedas, the Ṛṣis, the Navagrahas, the *kṣetrapālas*, *dikpālas* and *lokapālas*, *kālapatis* (deified “time rulers” such as the months, *tithis* or *nakṣatras*), *iṣṭadevatās* and *kuladevatās*, and local deities (*sthāna*-, *deśadevatā*).

The *homa* ritual lasts for about three hours. The Jośi has already prepared the fireplace with unbaked bricks on the evening of the first day. He first purified the ground with a mixture of cow dung, red clay and water. Afterwards he arranged the bricks for the firepit in two layers in a quadrangular form with two additional bricks each in the four directions. To the north he had also built a rectangular

one-layered platform of unbaked bricks for the nine sacred vases that have been described above. To the east he made similar platforms for the Nāndikaśrāddha. These bricks have been brushed with mud and cow dung.

Early in the morning of the second day, four bamboo sticks, sugar canes and banana poles are erected at the corners of the sacrificial place. They are connected with four thinner bamboo branches on which several flower garlands, pipal leaves and coloured paper flags have been hung. This construction is supposed to form a kind of sacrificial canopy above the fireplace (*yajñamaṇḍapa*). Fixed to the corners are banana leaves, and sacred vases (*kalaśa*) are placed on the grounds in the four directions.

The Jośi then places a layer of unhusked rice as seats for the sacred vases and the eight vases representing the *aṣṭamaṅgala* on the rectangular platform in the north. In addition he places the mirror (*javālānhāykā*) to the east and the vermilion container (*sinhaḥmū*) to the west, together with an earthen vessel for yoghurt (*dhaupati*). The sacred vases (*kalaśa*), especially the main vase (*pūrṇakalaśa*), are filled with water and milk and covered with a clay cup with a piece of white cotton, a betel nut, rice (*akṣata*) and a coin.

The Jośi also strews with white and red powder to create several diagrams on the altar (*vedi*) and on the ground, thus marking the seats for the deities. *Yantras* indicate the seats for the offerings dedicated to various deities. Thus a *tribali* is prescribed for Gaṇeśa, *gogrāsa* for Gomātrkā or Aṣṭamātrkā, or a *pañcabali* for Sūrya, Śiva, Gṛhalakṣmī, *iṣṭadevatā*, Varuṇa or Nāgarāja.

He continues by making an octagonal lotus (*aṣṭapadma*) diagram round the firepit and *svastikas* or various other circular and rectangular diagrams for the sacred vases in the north and for the ritual items such as *sukūda* or *argyhapātra*. For the seat of Viṣṇu, one of the earthen vases is placed to the east; a



red disc in a green frame indicates his presence as *praṇītā*. For Brahmā, a bundle of two pieces of wood used to sprinkle holy water (*prokṣaṇī*) is placed in the west.

The seats for the priests and the *nāyaḥ* are in the south, facing north. The Jośi places a straw mat for himself on the ground and arranges the necessary ritual items on and around the altar, placing among them pipal leaves with *akṣata* for Agni at the centre of the firepit, pipal leaves with sacred threads and *kuśa* grass for the four Vedas on the four bricks at the sides, as well as on the sacrificial ladles, various plates with grains and flowers, and a vase with purified water (*jalakalaśa*). He also hangs a copper vessel (*ghṛtadhāra*) over the fire altar, from which liquid ghee will later be dripped into the flames.

Mukunda Sharma, the younger brother of the main Brahmin priest Mahendra Sharma, who performs the *homa*, uses a modern “spiral pad” as his handbook in which he has copied on 36 pages the main ritual events (Nevārī, red ink) and the *mantras* (Sanskrit, black ink). For the Nāndīkaśrāddha he uses a similar handbook. The priest performs and combines the following ritual elements or steps:<sup>23</sup>

- Preparations: purification (*ācamana*, Nev. *nasalā*), worship of Gaṇeśa, worship of Viṣṇu with water (*arghajala*), ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*), worship of the *maṇḍala* in the firepit with water and flowers, spiritual and ritual preparation of the priest (*nyāsa*, *tikā*, water from the *arghyapātra*) and the sacrificer (*yajamāna*), worship of two pieces of firewood and two *kuśa* blades.
- Worship of deities: worship of *sukūda* and Gaṇeśa; worship of Gaṇeśa, Yoginīs, Durgā, and *dikpālas* at a diagram on the southwest corner of the sacrificial space.
- Preparation and worship of the firepit (*yajñakuṇḍa*): The priest begins with incense etc. (*atra gandhādi*), he looks (*nirikṣaṇa*) at the altar reciting the *gāyatrī*

*mantra*, he touches the altar, sprinkles water on it, smooths the ground (*mūlepana*) and worships the altar with unhusked rice, flowers (marigold) and *kuśa* grass. He then encircles the altar with three strings of cotton thread (*trisūtra*), and performs a Lakṣmī- and Vāgīśvarapūjā by creating two small heaps of *akṣata* and placing pieces of sugar cane on them.

- Piling up firewood: The priest takes one piece of *aśvattha* wood, sprinkles *argha* water on it, recites once again the *gāyatrī-mantra* (*gāyatrīśodhana*), and finally places four times four and three times three, a total of 25 logs of wood in the form of four squares and three triangles on the ground.
- Kindling the fire (*agniprajvalana*): The priest touches his eyes with water, takes a small piece of wood, places a small cotton wick on it and lights it with a lighter, again reciting the *gāyatrī-mantra* and other verses. He then lights the fire.
- Worshipping sacred vases (*kalaśārcana*) and all other deities on the sacrificial place with water, rice (*akṣata*), incense (*dhūpa*), popped rice and/or sweets (*naivedya*).
- Feeding the fire with oblations and inviting the deities (*devapraṭiṣṭhā*): ritual cleaning of the three sacrificial ladles (*śrīvā*, Nev. *dhagaḥ* and *catuvā*), cooking ghee, pouring ghee with the *dhagaḥ* into the fire, throwing ghee-saturated blades of *kuśa* grass into the fire, performing the ten life-cycle rituals (*daśasaṃskāra*) for the fire by reciting appropriate *mantras*, offering eighteen kinds of wood with ghee, offering ghee with the *catuvā* ladle and *caru* – a mixture of several grains – for all present deities, mixing seven kinds of grains (*saptadhānya*) and offering it to the fire three times reciting the *gāyatrī-mantra* and three times in the name of Agni, Gaṇeśa, Durgā, the *kṣetrapālas*, Brahmā, Viṣṇu (Praṇīta), the ten *dikpālas*, the four Vedas, the Navagrahas, the Aṣṭacirañjivis, the seers (*ṛṣi*), the family

<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed description of such rituals see Kropf 2005: 384-406. Handbooks similar to the private copy of Mahendra Sharma include Rājopādhyāya N.S. 1102, and the Agnisthāpana manuals of the Pūrbīya tradition, e.g. the popular edition of Buddhisa-gara Parājūli, n.d.



gods (*parivāradēvatā*, viz. Sūryanārāyaṇa, Sadāśiva, Gṛhalakṣmī, *iṣṭadēvatā*, Varuṇa, Nāgarāja), Gaṇeśa, the five Gomātrkās, the Aṣṭamātrkā, Śrī, Lakṣmī, and all other gods. In the course of offering the grains the priest throws them into the fire as well as onto the seats of the deities.

During the *homa*, the principle worshipper (*nāyaḥ*) again performs the Nāndīkaśrāddha by throwing dried fruits of the *jujube* tree and blades of *ḍubo* grass to the ancestors (*pitṛ*) on the diagram.

The *homa* frames the main ritual event. It will be concluded after the Ihi ceremony with elements that will be described below. It is a ritual by which the totality of deities is invited for the protection and welfare of the main ritual event (*viśeṣakarma*). It resembles the social structure of the initiation rituals when the totality of relatives, neighbours and friends is invited to join and witness the transformation of a member of the clan. Both *homa* and Ihi are integrating rituals.

#### The Welcoming (*lasakusa*)

The girls appear with their mothers at around seven in the morning, once again dressed in festive bridal clothes and wearing all the jewellery from the previous day. On this day six more girls show up. They are from the Gāthā caste and are not allowed to participate on the first day and its concluding meal, the *dusvajā* (see above). The main ritual event is the marriage (*ihi*, Nep./Skt. *kanyādāna*), when the girls will be presented by their fathers to a deity called *suvarṇakumāra*, the “Golden Boy”, who is regarded either as Viṣṇu or Śiva.

The *nakhī* and/or the wife of the priest receive the girls with a traditional welcoming ritual (*lasakusa*) at the entrance to the sacrificial place. Using a piece of *ḍubo* grass, the welcomer(s) sprinkle(s) water onto the girls. Afterwards the first girl is taken by the hand

and led round the fireplace. The wife of the Brahmin then offers another welcome to the girls using ritual rice, the *sukūda* lamp and the iron key.

#### Bodily Purification

The girls first have to undergo bodily purification. The Jyāpu Ācāju (or the Brahmin priest) consecrates the hands of the girls' paternal aunts (*nini*), who carry a small braided bamboo tray (*mimicā*) bearing the offerings for the barber's wife: a piece of buffalo meat, some grains of a variety of rice that is only used in ritual contexts (*svāvā*, literally “flower-rice”, see Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 65), a small lump of cow dung, a small cup containing mustard oil, and a cup (*kisli*) with rice, a betel-nut, a coin and a stylised jasmine flower (*daphaḥsvā*, Skt. *kuṇḍāpuṣpa*) made of silver (*jonā*) and fixed to a toothpick, and a small sacred thread. Only the nine privileged girls receive the *mimicā* tray from the hands of the Brahmin's wife. Before taking the first nine girls to the barber and his wife, she raises the Alīdyah high above the girl's heads and allows everybody to view (*darśana*) the mysterious deity, which somehow acts as witness.

Then all of the other girls follow with their paternal aunts; it takes almost an hour to pare the toenails (*lusi dhenegu*) and colour the feet (*ala tayegu*) of all the participating girls. The barber's wife does this work while her husband asks for a fee of forty rupees and the already mentioned *mimicā* offering. The woman pares the toenails above a (bronze) plate bearing a piece of red cloth and some money. This plate is held and afterwards taken away by the girl's respective paternal aunt (*nini*), who adds some uncooked and cooked rice to the nails and takes them to the Kālīghāṭ, the place specified for the house of the sponsor as the place for discarding ritual waste. In exchange she receives the length of cloth.



While the girls are still having their toenails pared, the Jośi prepares the ritual for empowering the vermilion powder (*sinhapūjā*). The wife of the Brahmin priest goes round and collects some powder from each of the girls, which she adds to the powder that the Jośi has put into the small bowl depicting a radish – the symbol of Gaṇeśa. He spreads out the red cloth that is later used to cover the girls' faces while colouring their foreheads. Uttering a few mantras, he performs the *pūjā* while the principle worshipper is engaged in his *śrāddha* and the Brahmin starts the sacred fire.

The Jośi continues making further preparations, such as placing *kisli* cups on the fourteen pots. The pot dedicated to Śrī had been filled with white husked rice (*jāki*), the one dedicated to Lakṣmī with brown unhusked rice (*vā*). The colour of the rice mirrors the colour of the non-iconic symbols painted on the pots. The Jośi also empowers the hands and the brush of the painter, the Citrakār, who now opens the eyes on the neck of the pots with tiny strokes. For this act of turning the earthen pots into ritual objects imbued with life (*prāṇapraṭiṣṭhā*) he uses the soot (*mvaḥni*) that was collected during the sacrifice of the goat on the first day.

### Preparing for the Marriage

Having returned to the ritual place, each girl is presented with the painted *salāpā* bowl, and a special sari (*ihiparasi*) with red and yellow stripes, which is only worn during Ihi, during the subsequent worship of the lineage deity (*dugudyaḥpūjā*), and occasionally up until Bārhā tayegu. The presentation of the bowl follows the parting of the hair (*sinču phāyegu*), which is performed by the wife of the chief Brahmin priest. She takes some vermilion (*sinhamhū*) between her right thumb and her middle and index fingers and smears it from the centre to the left temple, and then to the right across the girl's forehead, return-



ing to the middle and finally without any interruption into the girl's parting. This gesture marks the girl's married status because only married women have vermilion in this form in their hair. During this process the girl's eyes are covered with a piece of red cloth in order to protect them from the powder.

Afterwards the girls receive a coloured paper block print (*sapakvaḥ*) bearing auspicious symbols: in the centre a sacred vase (*kalaśa*), on the left a citrus fruit (*taḥsi*), and on the right the blue lotus or water lily (*utpala*). A fee of seven rupees has to be paid to the Citrakār. The mothers fix the picture carefully with a red thread (*pasukā*, Skt. *pañcasūtra*) to the girls' foreheads. It is believed that the future husband will be harmed if the picture falls down during Ihi. They also receive a garland in the form of coiled yellow or white thread in which the twelve offerings were bound (see above p. 138).

*Ihi ritual at Byāsi on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006.*

*The Brahmin's wife raises the Alīdyah to allow the girls and their mothers to view the mysterious clay deity.*



Ihi ritual at the house of Tirna Lal Karmacharya on dusva, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

Above  
The Brahmin priest presents *pūjā*, vermillion, flowers, coins and couch grass to the hands of Narain Chitrakar, who holds a brush and a pipal leaf in his hands.



Below  
Narain Chitrakar opens the eyes painted on all 16 pots behind the sacred fire. He touches the eyes painted on the neck of the pots with the tip of the brush with soot that has been collected the preceding night by the Karmācārya at the shrine of Indrāyaṇī, the goddess presiding over the northwestern direction.



Ihi ritual at Mahendra Sharma's house in Khaumā on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2004.  
The Brahmin's mother smears vermillion with her right thumb from the centre to the left temple, and then to the right across the girl's forehead, returning to the middle and finally into the parting of her hairs. This gesture marks the girl's married status.



Then all of the girls receive some bread (*phalīmarhi*) and some milk. A helper goes round and distributes the bread to each of the girls while another helper hands out a plastic cup into which he pours water with milk. The girls enjoy the food for they have not eaten anything since the previous evening.

Meanwhile the priest has started the fire sacrifice, during which he also worships one *bel* fruit. At the same time, the Ācāju performs a *deśabalipūjā*, with *gvajās*, which he cannot identify as individual deities. However, the large *bali* (of cooked rice, often with facial features in vermillion representing Bhairava) is placed in a copper container, the *kvalaḥ*, which otherwise is used exclusively in death rituals to arrange the *piṇḍas*. The main offering during this worship is represented by a duck's egg (*haykhē*). Shiva Ram, the officiating Jyāpu Ācāju, insists that in this case this *bali* was offered to the Bālākhū Gaṇeṣa. In other cases it is discarded on the nearby *chvāsaḥ* stones, thus establishing a link to the *piśācas* – unpacified souls, which are fed at these places.

Shiva Ram is of the opinion that the Joṣī must have performed the *belpūjā*, but we did not see him doing so. In other cases the Śivācārya performs the *belpūjā*. Shiva Ram also was not aware that the Brahmin offers *mvaḥni* to the *pipal* leaves (as Bagat Bahadur had mentioned the other day). The *mvaḥni* soot produced during the circuit to the nine protective deities and the *mvaḥni* of the *deśabalipūjā* is mixed and offered as a black stroke to the girl's foreheads in a gesture that concludes the Ihi ritual.

It takes about an hour and a half before the Ihi ritual slowly reaches its climax: the Gift of the Virgin (*kanyādāna*). The girls have now been sufficiently purified and are ready to be married. However, this central ritual event is delayed by two other rituals that have been inserted on the occasion described here, a Kaytā-pūjā of two grandsons and a marriage of one of





the sponsor's grandsons. Both rituals are performed by the ritual specialists in a quick and rather simple manner, and the newly married couple scarcely manages to circumambulate the fire three times because the priests immediately continue with the Ihi ritual. It is not unusual to combine life-cycle rituals because this helps to save resources and effort, but in this case the Ihi ritual dominated everything else.

In the concluding parts of the fire sacrifice, the wife of the chief priest offers *siphārati* to all of the girls. First she worships the girls by means of the wooden measuring vessel, an iron key and the *sukūda* lamp, and then she showers flowers, rice, and pieces of fruit over the girls while touching their head and

shoulders. After that the Ācāju once again raises the conical rice ball (*gvajā*) with the three burning torches up on high, and all of participants wave the light symbolically over their eyes and over their head.

Finally the worshipper together with his wife, which is to say the grandparents of the main girl, hand both priests, the Jośi and the Ācāju and the *jiċābhāju* two lengths of cloth and some money as *dakṣiṇā*.

#### The Gift of the Virgin (*kanyādāna*)

It is already afternoon when the girls' fathers appear. Up till now the scene has been entirely dominated by female participants. Apart

*Ihi ritual at the house of Tirna Lal Karmacharya on kanyādāna, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2004.*

*Narain Chitrakar hands out the coloured block print (sapākhvaḥ) to the Ihi girls.*





*Ihi ritual at Naraincok on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007. The Brahmin priest entertains the sacred fire (homa) while he faces east. The chief worshipper and his wife are seen to his right, stretching their hands to receive offerings, prasāda.*

from the ritual specialists and the helpers, as well as the observing field-workers, only women and girls have been present. The fathers – or in those cases where they have died, are absent to attend office, or are working in foreign countries, uncles or grand-fathers – stand behind the girls and wait for the auspicious moment (*sāit*) when the priest is ready to announce the moment of *kanyādāna*.

Earlier, during the fire sacrifice, the Śivācārya (or Jośi) has already briefly worshipped a basket with some 200 *byā* fruits (Nep. *bel*, Skt. *bilva* or *śrīphala*, “the fruit of wealth and fortune”) with *mantras* and *pañcāmṛta*. He also places a tiny piece of gold in the basket. The wood-apple tree (*Aegle*

*marmelos*) is widespread throughout South and East Asia. It is popularly known as Bilva, Bilwa, Bel, or Beli fruit, Bengal quince, stone apple, and wood-apple. The juice is strained and sweetened to make a drink similar to lemonade, and is also used to make a refreshing drink by mixing the pulp with tamarind. The young leaves and small shoots are eaten as salad greens. The cricket-ball-sized fruit is eaten fresh or dried and used as a remedy for various diseases. In Hinduism, the tree and its dried fruits are mostly assigned to Śiva because it is believed that he lived under such a tree.

Now the *mhaynāyaḥ* takes the brass container with the *byā* fruits on his shoulder and





the Jośi goes around twice to all the girls. During the first round the girls and fathers all worship the *bel* fruits, during the second the Jośi takes one fruit from the basket without looking into it and hands it over to the girls, who keep it in their hands. Contrary to what is often the case in the Buddhist context in Patan, Kathmandu, or Bhaktapur, their hands are not tied together. It is said that the size of the fruit resembles the size of the future husband. In this instance the Jośi replaced the Śivācārya, whose duty is to worship and distribute the fruits.

Subsequently the fathers worship the *bel* fruit, which in this context is declared and believed by most participants to be Suvarṇakumāra or Viṣṇu. The Ihipūjāvidhi says that the “Golden Boy” helps to destroy the sins (of childhood or the father’s sins?):

This form of the Golden Boy (Suvarṇakumāra) destroys the greatest sin. A glimpse of (this boy) destroys the sins (performed) in this and earlier births. (Ipv Nr. 21)

*Bhaktapur, Ihi ritual, belpūjā on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007 at Naraincok.*

*Bikhulal Shivacharya acts as assistant priest, who offers pūjā to the bel fruits, covers them with white cloth and empowers them in a Tantric ritual.*



*Ihi ritual at the house of  
Tirna Lal Karmacharya on  
kanyādāna, 6<sup>th</sup> December  
2004.*

*Above*

*The Tini hands out a sprig of  
couch grass to every Ihi girl  
and instructs them how to  
place it across the bel fruit,  
which is already covered by  
offerings of black sesame and  
barley (hāmvaḥ-thecva).*

*Below*

*The father's hands support his  
daughter's hands, which in  
turn hold the bel fruit across  
which a sprig of couch grass  
is firmly pressed. This gesture  
demonstrates the final "gift  
of the virgin" to the deity,  
Suvṛṇakumāra.*





The fathers standing behind the girls take some sprigs of *kuśa* grass in their hands, together with a mixture of barley and black sesame seeds (*thecva-hāmva*), the *bel* fruit, and some small square platelets of gold and silver wrapped in a piece of paper on which the word *pratimā*, “image”, has been stamped by the shopkeeper. Apparently the plates are regarded as deities. The fathers also receive a ring from the priest made of *kuśa* grass, which they put on the ring finger of the right hand. Then the Brahmin’s wife pours water and the principle worshipper’s wife pours milk from a vase over the hands of father and daughter, thus worshipping Viṣṇu represented by the gold (Pradhan 1986: 111), while the priest formulates the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) for the *kanyādāna*. The father also utters his name and the name of his ancestral lineage (*gotra*), as well as the name of his daughter. This is the auspicious moment when daughter and “husband” get married. For this purpose the Śivācārya lays a blade of *kuśa* grass over the *bel* fruit signifying a long life, since *kuśa* grass often stands for immortality.

During the whole *kanyādāna* part of the Ihi ritual, both priests sing the so-called *kanyādāna-veda* hymn(s):

*oṃ agnaye tvā mahyaṃ varuṇo dadātu so  
'mṛtatvam aśīya-/  
āyur dātra edhi mayo mahyaṃ pratigrahītre  
// 1 //*

*rudrāya tvā mahyaṃ varuṇo dadātu so  
'mṛtatvam aśīya /  
prāṇo dātra edhi mayo mahyaṃ prati-  
grahītre // 2 //*

*bṛhaspataye tvā mahyaṃ varuṇo dadātu so  
'mṛtatvam aśīya /  
tvag dātra edhi mayo mahyaṃ pratigrahītre  
// 3 //*

*yamāya tvā mahyaṃ varuṇo dadātu so  
'mṛtatvam aśīya /  
hayo dātra edhi mayo mahyaṃ pratigrahītre  
// 4 // (VS 7.47)*

To Agni, yea, to me let Varuṇa give you. May I gain life that shall endure for ever. Be you strong vital power to him who gives you, and comfort unto me the gift’s receiver: To Rudra, yea, to me let Varuṇa ... for ever. Be you the breath of life to him who gives you, and vigour unto me the gift’s receiver. To me Bṛhaspati let Varuṇa ... for ever. Be you covering skin to him who gives you, and comfort unto me the gift’s receiver. To Yama, yea, to me let Varuṇa ... for ever. Be you a steed to him who gives the guerdon, and vital power to me the gift’s receiver. (Transl. Griffith/Arya)

Afterwards the participants throw popped rice and red powder onto the participants and deities in a common sub-ritual called *pratiṣṭhā*.

Subsequently the father or mother fixes the gold platelet (*pratimā*) on the girl’s forehead and the silver platelet on the *bel* fruit. Often the gold platelet, which costs around forty rupees, falls straightaway to the ground. Sometimes Viṣṇu is engraved or believed to be engraved on the gold piece.

This is followed by the blessing of the girls by the senior-most woman with *siphārati*, then the ritual payment (*dakṣiṇā*) of the priest. After the “Gift of the Virgin” the exchange of alms, *bārā chuye*, lit. “to give alms (Skt. *bhikṣā*)”, takes place. Using both hands, the mothers offer their daughters three times *vākijāki*, a mixture of husked and unhusked rice, and add a coin, a bank note (five or ten rupees) and a piece of cloth. In recent times the length of cloth has been replaced by a Chinese-made garment, which is much cheaper than having a blouse specially tailored. Then the mothers do their rounds presenting three *kisli* cups of rice grains to all of the other 129 girls. The final offerings of three handfuls are dedicated to the deities present on the occasion, represented by the sacred vase, the *kalaśa*.



*Ihi ritual at Naraincok on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007.*

*The offering of the virgin, kanyādāna. Lipisa Lakhebindyo holds the bel fruit with both hands which in turn are held by her father's hands in a gesture of offering. On her forehead can be seen the golden platelet, representing one form of the deity. Her mother is seen on her right.*



*Following pages  
Seven of the privileged nine  
girls facing the sacred fire.  
Wearing a new cap, their  
fathers hold the bel fruit prior  
to handing it out to the girls.*







Those wives in the neighbourhood who have remained childless also present the same kind of alms. Feeding the Ihi girls is understood as an act of devotion, which in turn will result in being blessed with pregnancy. The feeding of the virgins (*kumārī*) may also be performed in other ritual contexts. In neighbouring Banepa, for instance, a *kanyāpūjā* is annually performed in the month of Śrāvaṇa. Hundreds of virgins will line up in the main street to receive offerings such as rice, sweets or small gifts.

At this point the girls are taken to the fire where they stand one after the other on the north side of the fireplace facing east. They perform the so-called “Seven Steps” (*sapta-padī*), accompanied by the *mantra* “One for sap, two for juice, three for the prospering of wealth, four for comfort, five for cattle, six for the seasons. Friend! be withseen steps (united o me). So be thou devoted” (PG 1.8.1-2), but not with wooden sandals as in the case of the Buddhist boys’ initiation. This is followed by grinding black lentils (*māy niyayegu*), a rite that the girls perform with both feet using a stone pestle and mortar in order to wipe out all their sins. Having completed the “Seven Steps”, the girls touch the Alīdyah, which is brought there by the daughter of the Brahmin priest. Immediately afterwards they walk three times around the fire. The “Seven Steps” and the circumambulation are both part of any traditional Hindu marriage ritual.

### Concluding the Ritual

The ritual is concluded by the usual ritual closure (cf. Kropf 2005: 398-400) of the fire ritual (*homa*). The following steps are performed: worship of the Brahmin by the sacrificer or *yajamāna* (*brāhmaṇapūjā*), giving coins to all the deities in the sacrificial area and then to the priests and the Jośi, blessings (*āśīrvāda*, *svastivācana*) and giving a flower

to the sacrificer, recitation of the peace-giving *śāntipāṭha* (VS 36.17) by pouring ghee into the fire with the *śruvā* ladle, giving a *tikā* with oil from the sacrificial ladle to the sacrificer and all participants, sacrifice of various substances such as *sarvausadhi* by putting them into the fire in order to help Agni digest the sacrifice, *pūrṇāhuti*, the Brahmin giving a *tikā* from the ashes (*agniloḥa-rakṣā*) of the fire to the sacrificer and himself, throwing the pipal leaves representing the *dikpālas* and the Vedas into the fire, presenting his hands to the fire and then touching them to his head, placing the *arghyapātra* upside down, throwing the pieces of *prokṣaṇī*-wood, the rest of the rice (*vrīhi*) corns and the remaining ghee into the fire (*śeṣāhuti*), then the look into the mirror with the *pūrṇacandramantra* and the ritual release (*visarjana*) of the deities.

This is followed by the *dāna* or *dakṣiṇā* element: As a kind of *dakṣiṇā*, the Ācāju receives a towel (*rumāl*) and a *dhoti*. The cash is divided into two halves. The Brahmin, together with his brother, his wife and his daughter-in-law, receives one half. The second half is divided into thirds: the Brahmin gets one third, the Jośi and the Ācāju share the second third, and the third one is divided equally among the Brahmin, the Jośi and the Ācāju. In this way the Ācāju received 4,500 rupees (50 euros). Of the *vākijāki* offerings (mixed husked and unhusked rice) seven equal shares are set apart. The Brahmin receives two shares, while the Jośi, the Ācāju, the Nau (barber), Citrakār (painter) and Kumah (potter) receive one share each. One share amounted to 30 *pāthi* or c. 135 kg of grains.

After the *dakṣiṇā*, the priest takes the main vase and pours water from the roof of the main donor’s house on to the worshipper and his wife, as well as on to the girls and other participants, in a rite called *brahmāvisarjana*.

At the end of the long day, all of the participants receive a meal, sponsored by the donor, in which flattened rice (which can easily be



shared by everybody across caste divisions) is served with meat.

Returning home as late as half past seven in the evening, the Ihi girls are welcomed at the threshold stone of their home. Together the female members of their respective lineages, of which they will become members on the occasion of the forthcoming worship of the ancestral deity (the *dugudyaḥ*), offer them four *mana* (c. 2 kg) of rice and a piece of cloth. At the same time all of the females of the maternal home (*thachē*) of the girl's mother – the grandmother, grandaunts, mother's sisters and mother's brother's wives – offer one *pāthi* (c. 4.5 kg) of rice, a piece of cloth and a symbolic coin or banknote.

Having returned home, the girl is disrobed by her mother so that she may put on the colourful and ornate dress she is presented with on this occasion. The *bel* fruit, the *kumaḥkāḥ* garland and the blockprint are kept by her grandmother in the storeroom, the *dhukuti*, where not only provisions are stored but also objects that are to be kept safe, away from daily life. The *bel* fruit is now considered to embody a special quality, equal to a deity, a *dyah*. Menstruating women should not touch these objects and in case of a death in the house, the *bel* fruit, the garland and the blockprint should be moved to a neighbouring house to avoid pollution. The other sacred objects may be kept in the house but should not be touched during the first ten days of impurity. The earthen *salāpā* bowl is stored in a niche in the room that can be easily reached, because more relatives will be coming to offer three handfuls of unhusked rice, a piece of cloth and a five rupee banknote.

After the Ihi girl has entered the house, a feast is offered to the lineage members and all those from the mother's maternal home who had invited the girl for *ihimacā nakegu* during the days preceding the Ihi ritual. Thus the rounds of feeding and being fed are brought full circle for a distinct social group, to which

the girl now firmly belongs. As a Kumārī she was more or less a generic female being, albeit with a positive, auspicious notion. With the Ihi ritual she remains a virgin, but she loses the specific quality of a Kumārī upon entering the circle of the lineage and establishing firm links to the female world of her mother's maternal home – a bond that will shift to her own natal home after her marriage to a human groom.

### The Third Day

Early in the morning, the mothers of the girls for whom the ritual of the “offering of the virgin” was performed the day before go to the Gaṇeśa shrine of their quarter to offer *pūjā*. Gaṇeśa is inevitably addressed in every ritual event: either at the very beginning or, in the case of ancestor worship (*śrāddha*), at the auspicious moment indicated by the Brahmin priest.

### Kumārīpūjā

Having returned from the shrine, the mother will dress and make up the girl in the same way as was done on the preceding days. Dressed in the special sari, the *ihiparasi*, which demonstrates the girl's new status, she is paraded from her house through the lanes and streets of the city to the seat (*pīṭha*) of Kaumārī, the third of the Eight Mother Goddesses (Aṣṭamātrkā) who guard the urban space along its historic perimeter. The goddess is represented at her seat in a non-iconic fashion by a stone, which was found there at the time. By now, a few more stones have been added which collectively represent the Eight Goddesses. Along with the remaining seven goddesses and the central Tripurasundarī, Kaumārī had been worshipped on the day preceding the Ihi ritual by the Ācāju as part of the *pīṭhapūjā*. On the third day, however, she is the sole focus, because she is also identi-



fied as the seat of Kumārī, the virgin goddess. The offerings to the deity include ritual rice, popped rice, flowers, an egg and even a citrus fruit (*taḥsi*), which represents longevity and fertility. One of the three objects on the block-print fastened to the forehead prior to the act of the “offering of a virgin” was also that singular and remarkably sour citrus fruit that is consumed exclusively on the day of *mhāpūjā*, the worship of the body on the first day of the Newar New Year (Nepāl Saṃvat). In a decisive gesture of worship, the mother touches her forehead to the stone representing Kaumārī and asks her daughter to do the same.

The caretaker of the deity’s seat is a Pvaḥ, from the community of sweepers who live in a settlement beside the shrine. He receives offerings of rice and soybeans. As they return home, the mother throws a few grains of rice to the shrines and temples they pass. Passing the temple of Bhairava at Taumādhi Square, the mother turns to the tiny iconic representation of this powerful deity and asks the girl to touch it with her head in a gesture of reverence. The route home never follows a straight line, but rather the prescribed ritual route, which takes in temples and shrines that are regularly worshipped by the families of the particular quarter. Adults and children are taught early on to follow the “correct” route. Not that there is any notion of the direct route being “forbidden” – quite simply, returning from rituals is such a frequent occurrence that movement within urban space takes on a special quality, different from that when pursuing profane matters.

#### Returning Home: Worshipping the Ancestors

Having returned from visiting the seat of Kaumārī, the *ihimacā* is offered the ritual welcoming meal (*khē svagā*) which includes a boiled egg, a small dried fish, small pieces of buffalo meat, soybeans, raw ginger, flat-



tened rice and, decisive in a ritual context, brandy. The egg and brandy are received with arms crossed; three initial sips of brandy and a few small bites of egg are compulsory. In this case, deep fried sweets were added because they are easily available on such festive days during Yaḥmāripunhi, the full moon in early December, which is celebrated by all families by consuming rice from the recent harvest. It is a day similar to thanksgiving, on which many death associations also have the annual conventions.

Still fully dressed, the girl receives the egg and brandy from the eldest woman of the lineage, in this case the grandmother – the wife of the principle worshipper. The girl does this for the first time in her life, demonstrating her passage into a new world in which she acts as a member of the patrilineage. Equally important is that she first offers food to the ancestors (*dyaḥ cayegu*) before she starts eating. Tiny heaps of flattened rice and bits of egg and meat are placed on a leaf in front of her.

Before Ihi the girl was a child without social duties. Through her marriage to the *bel* fruit she has turned into a member of society and as such of the lineage. She shares her food with her great-grandparents who are still known by name.

*The third day of the Ihi ritual on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2007.*

*For the first time in her life, Lipisa Lakhebindyo receives food from the eldest women of the lineage which includes brandy – see the small earthen cup beside her dish. She also offers food to the ancestors for the first time before she starts eating. Tiny heaps of food are placed on a leaf in front of the plate.*



### Variations Demonstrating the Dynamics of the Ihi Ritual and a Shift in Meaning

While Bhaktapur's ritual tends to be performed in a rather conservative manner, the practice in Kathmandu has been greatly simplified. The case presented here was observed on the Indestructible Third (*akṣaya tṛtīyā*), which may be used for Ihi rituals, Kaytāpūjā and marriages without the necessity of consulting an astrologer.

On 30<sup>th</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006 eight girls and eight boys convened in front of the Tara-keśvara temple, built c. 1800 by Raṇa Bahādur Śāha on Kathmandu's Darbār Square as a long, two-storeyed structure on a stepped plinth. The priest, Vasanta Rajopadhyaya, is not only the caretaker of the temple, he also lives there and performs the ritual there several times a year.

To justify changes in the organisation of the ritual, the priest told us stories filled with a sense of magic. Thus, originally five girls had the privileged role of the five virgins (*pañcakanyā*). Some girls became sick, at which the priest grew alarmed and introduced nine Kumārīs, reflecting the nine Durgā (Navadurgā, also named Navayoginī) of the temple. The wife of the Brahmin later admitted that the local Cleaning Club (young boys who keep the place clean) persuaded them to alter the pattern. The Alīdyaḥ is no longer prepared and the ambiguity of the deity has finally been resolved: it is the Tarakeśvara that is worshipped in the temple by the girls as Alīdyaḥ. The sacred vase dedicated to Gaṇeśa is also no longer required, because Gaṇeśa's presence in the temple fulfils the need. Some fifteen years ago the arrangement of earthen pots was replaced by three unpainted copper *kalaśas*: the central one represents Brahmā, to the god's left a *kalaśa* dedicated to the Eight Gods (Aṣṭavasū, alternatively identified as Maheśvara), to his right by the Nine Planets (Navagraha, alternatively identified

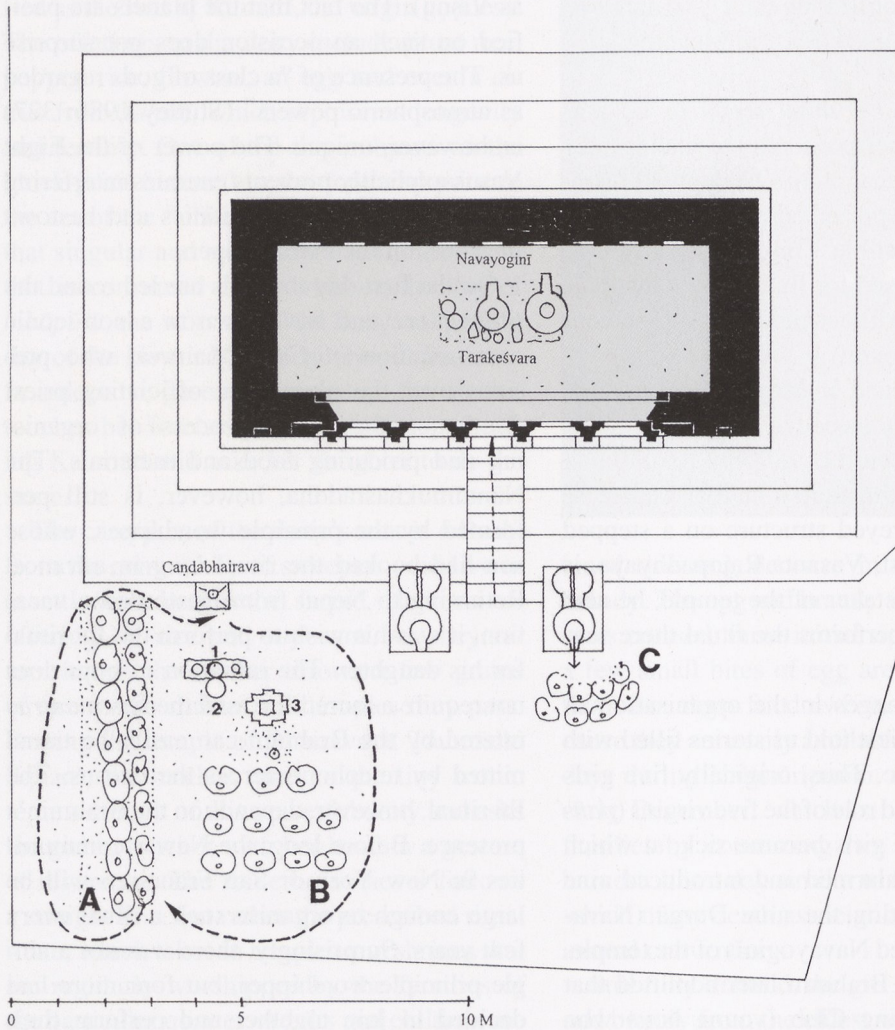
as Viṣṇu). The fact that the planets are pacified on such an occasion does not surprise us. The presence of "a class of gods regarded as atmospheric powers" (Stutley 1986: 327) is, however, unique. The power of the Eight Vasus explicitly prevents enemies interfering in sacred rites and ceremonies and bestows treasures on their worshippers.

On the first day the girls are led round the ritual place and bow down to a non-iconic representation of Caṇḍabhairava, who presides over the place. The officiating priest dominates the entire process of organising and procuring food and materials. The Nāndīmukhaśrāddha, however, is still performed by the principle worshipper, whose son had booked the ritual long in advance. Returning to Nepal from Boston on a vacation, it was his wish to perform the Ihi ritual for his daughter. The initiation of boys does not require a sacred fire, and the few *mantras* uttered by the Brahmin can easily be transmitted by telephone across the oceans. The Ihi ritual, however, depends on the Brahmin's presence. Before long, the Newar communities in New York or San Francisco will be large enough to organise such a ritual every few years. Surprisingly, there was not a single principle worshipper, but four more had decided to join together and perform their own Nāndīmukhaśrāddha.

On the second day, the girls are again led round the ritual place before having their toenails symbolically pared. The woman barber had been called in by the priest and paid in advance. She was offered neither a bamboo tray with the prescribed offerings nor *dakṣiṇā*.

For the final "Gift of the Virgin" (*kanyādāna*), the girls wear the yellow thread (*kumaḥkāḥ*) without the prescribed offerings woven into it. A piece of paper decorated with a painted bell (*sapākhvaḥ*), which is fixed to the hair, and just a short length of cloth of the prescribed pattern (*ihiparasi*) add to the economical trappings of the ritual – every item





### Kathmandu

The second day of the Ihi ritual at the Navayoginī temple in Kathmandu,

1<sup>st</sup> May 2006 (the day after Akṣaya tṛtīyā).

The central Tarakeśvara liṅga replaces the usual Alīdyah liṅga. The eight participating Ihi girls are first lined up (A) along a north-south axis and then circumambulate – guided by the officiating Brahmin's wife – the ritual place, offering worship to Caṇḍabhairava. The copper pots (1) are placed on a flag stone in front of the shrine: in the centre Bhairava, to the west Viṣṇu and to the east Mahādeva. The copper vessel (kvalaḥ) with a representation of Survaṇḍakumāra is placed in front of these (2).

Later (B) they face north, lined up behind the organizer's parents (nayāḥ and nakhī) and the Brahmin who maintains the sacred fire. (3) In a final act (C) the Ihi girls assemble below the guardian lion across which the Brahmin's helper pours water.





*Kathmandu, Ihi ritual, kanyādāna on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006 at the Tarakeśvara temple.*

*Left*

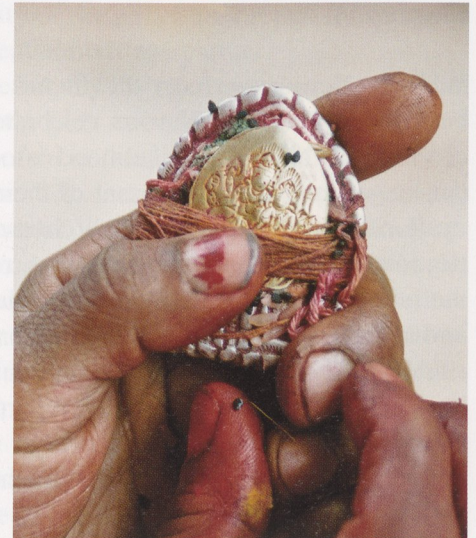
*The Ihi girl holds the bel fruit in her left hand while her father holds the thumb of her right hand.*

*Middle*

*The priest's wife holds the copper vessel with an image of Viṣṇu. The father induces the thumb of the girl to touch a golden plaque of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa.*

*Right*

*A small golden plaque depicting Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa is tied to a larger one in silver. By touching this emblem, the marriage to Suvarṇakumāra is carried out.*



is reduced to a symbolical minimum. The sacred fire is maintained only symbolically in a ready-made pit cast in brass.

The “Gift of the Virgin” displays an impressive variation. The girls hold the *bel* fruit in their left hand while their fathers hold the thumb of the right hand in their right fist, together with *kuśa* grass and the usual mixture of barley and black sesame. The priest goes around carrying a copper vessel with a figure of Viṣṇu buried beneath flower petals and a small, seven-centimetre-long silver medallion, to which a four-centimetres-long plaque in gold is tied, depicting Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa. The fathers guide the thumbs of the girls in their efforts to find and touch the plaque.

In the end, the girls are guided round the ritual place to the location where they grind black lentils, but without having performed the “Seven Steps”. Finally the Brahmin's helper showers water from the eastern lion guarding the plinth of the temple (*brahmāvisarjana*).

The disappearance of the Alīdyaḥ, and the reduction in both the endowment made to the ritual site and in the girls' paraphernalia is part of a well-known phenomenon of economisation. Symbolic representations do no more than recall the original costumes.

The priest constantly explains his actions in Nepālī, he tells jokes, laughs and uses even English terms to entertain the crowd of mothers and fathers as well as the foreign field worker. The ritual proper seems to fade away even though the prescribed steps are followed faithfully. One of the paternal aunts, for example, did not appear in time to receive her niece's toenails, which are not in fact pared in reality but merely touched with a knife. The crowd got nervous and even angry when she could not be reached on her mobile telephone. A relative had to go and search for her as her mere presence was vital. She was no longer necessary in functional terms, but she had to be there in her role as paternal aunt who has to share certain duties in the future of the girl's social life.

The appearance of a duality, the *bel* fruit of the left hand symbolising the presence of Śiva as a witness and the gold platelet bearing Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa – together forming a couple to be touched with the thumb of the right hand – seems to be revealing. In Bhaktapur, the *bel* fruit and the gold platelet are joined to produce an ambiguous entity. In Kathmandu the ambiguity is resolved.



## Conclusion

Why do Newars perform Ihi? It has often been noted that only Newars celebrate this ceremony, which in all likelihood is one of the longest and most important of their life-cycle rituals. So Ihi is clearly a characteristic part of Newar identity. Newars regard the non-performance of Ihi as inauspicious, and a Newar girl who has not undergone the ritual would have problems finding a suitable husband. G.S. Nepali (1965: 107) reports that Newars from Kathmandu refused to intermarry with some Newars in Birgunj who had given up Ihi.

It is also true – on the whole – that only Newars perform Ihi. However, there are two exceptions. Firstly, not all Newar castes perform it (cf. P. Śreṣṭha V.S. 2062: 85, Gellner 1991: 120f.). This holds true in Bhaktapur for the Nāy (butchers), Jugī (musicians), Dvā (musicians), Kulu (leather workers), and Pvaḥ (sweepers) (Levy 1990: 665), and perhaps also for the Balāmī, Gopālī (cowherds), and Dui castes living on the periphery of the other Newar cities. Levy (1990: 665) also says that Rājopādhyāyas of Bhaktapur did not use to perform Ihi. According to Mahendra Sharma, the reason for this was that they practised child marriage and regarded the boy as Suvarṇakumāra. Secondly, in rare cases castes other than Newars join modern Ihi parties. Thus, in an Ihi performed on *akṣaya tṛtīyā* 2006 in Kathmandu (Maru tvāḥ), a Pūrbīya Brahmin girl (Baral) was also among the total of eight girls. Asked for the reason, the parents said that she has an extremely inauspicious birth horoscope, which predicts the death of her future husband. In order to avoid this, the parents decided to have Ihi be performed for her since a god-husband cannot die.

This motive – first noticed by Hamilton (1819: 42-13) – is also the one chiefly mentioned when Newar participants are asked why they perform Ihi (see also Gellner 1991:

110f.). It is repeated time and again that the girls are married to a god (including Buddha) and therefore cannot become a widow. Consequently, the “real” marriage with a human groom is regarded (at the time of Ihi) as a secondary marriage. This means that the term “mock marriage”, probably introduced with reference to Ihi by Allen (1982) who took it from Gough (1955), and which many scholars have now used, is not at all appropriate because a girl cannot survive in traditional Newar society without Ihi, but can do so without getting married to a human husband. Seen from the ritual point of view, Ihi (Pāli *bihi*, Skt. *vivāha*) is a real marriage. In Nevārī, it is the same term that is used for the marriage with a human husband, and the essential parts of it – *kanyādāna*, *saptapadī* and the three-fold circumambulation of the fire – are the same. Consequently, these sub-rites, which are inevitable in a Hindu marriage, are lacking in a Newar marriage preceded by Ihi.

The fact that the girls are married to a deity does not necessarily mean, however, that the role of Newar women is less demanding than that of women in other Hindu communities. There are probably as few re-marriages among the high-caste Newars as among other groups (Gellner 1991: 110 and 1992: 204). Rajendra Pradhan has deftly refuted the often-expressed view<sup>24</sup> that Ihi has meant that Newars have lax sexual standards, divorce easily and readily allow widows to remarry by arguing that “this view cannot be derived simply from the prevalence of *ihi*, unless other ethnographic evidence is presented” (Pradhan 1986: 113). This also holds true for the view that the mortal marriage is delayed by Ihi – “often long after it” (Levy 1990: 666). It is not the ritual that generates different gender roles. Newars, especially the educated, regard Ihi as an expression of a different attitude towards girls and women. And it is indeed significant that Newar girls are honoured by such an important (initiation)

<sup>24</sup> See Dumont 1964, Vergati 1982, Allen 1982, Bennett 1978, Levy 1990: 665, Kunreuther 1994.



ritual that equals if not surpasses the boys' initiation (Kaytāpūjā) with regard both to the amount of ritual material and paraphernalia involved, as well as to the number of ritual specialists and participants. So it is not too misleading to say that Ihi expresses a certain respect for the female members of Newar social groups, although it should be added that this mainly concerns the status of virgin girls. In fact, Newars preserve a special cult of the virgin goddess, the Kumārī (see Allen 1976). It was again R. Pradhan (1986: 111) who pointed to the important difference between *kanyā* and *kumārī*. Both terms mean "(pre-pubescent) girl, maiden, and virgin," but only *kumārī* connotes a "married" virgin. Thus, only through Ihi do virgins become virgins who are marriageable for human and divine beings. Only through this ritual can they become a member of the extended family or – to be precise – of the father's lineage group. And after Ihi girls are no longer eligible as an incarnation of a goddess (*kumārī*) because, ritually and socially (see below), they have now become adults.

It is also stated that the girls' sexuality comes under control through the Ihi marriage and that "*kumārīs* and not *kanyās* are considered dangerous unless their sexuality is controlled" (Pradhan 1986: 112). This view is accompanied by the underlying notion of the male fear of female sexuality in Hindu societies. We do not reject this concept in principle, but it is difficult to see this manifesting in the Ihi ritual. To be sure, in the Dharmaśāstra it is often stated that a girl has to be married before her menarche, otherwise it would tantamount to the murder of an embryo. Levy (1990: 665) even says that the Rājopādhyāyas started to celebrate Ihi only after girl-marriage was banned in Nepal in 1951. However, it is rather problematic to reduce a complex ritual – one that is basically rooted in parts of one ethnic community and probably older than the Dharmaśāstra rules – to the gender

identity of the girl, who through Ihi becomes a potential marriage partner.

The heavily disputed question about which deity the girls are married to is a great source of confusion (see, for example, Levy 1990: 764 fn. 23). In a Hindu context, the majority favours Viṣṇu or Kubera, while in a Buddhist context mostly Buddha or Jambhala, a Buddhist equivalent of Kubera (Gellner 1991: 112), is mentioned. The texts, however, refer to Suvarṇakumāra, the "Golden Boy", without specifying his identity. As already mentioned, for most Newars Viṣṇu is the marriage partner whom most believe to be present in the *bel* fruit, whereas others see him in the gold platelet, or in both. It can also be heard or read (e.g. Levy 1990: 668) that the *bel* represents Śiva or his son Kumāra, and that the golden "image" (*pratimā*) represents Viṣṇu, or that Śiva is the witness of the marriage with Viṣṇu. Allen (1982: 190) reports that during Ihi ritual he observed in the Khusibahī in Kathmandu, a golden statue named "Suvarṇa Varṇa Kumāra" was set up and worshipped by both the Buddhists priests and the girls. But, Allen continues:

Kumāra is, of course, the eternal bachelor son of Śiva who is often represented as thoroughly disliking women – a seemingly curious husband for the daughters of Buddhists priests. (Allen 1982: 190)

Interestingly, there is almost no written source that preserves the myth of this marriage. What is narrated resembles Puranic myths, but these have not (yet?) been found in the vast corpus of mythological sources contained in the (Sthala-)Purāṇas or eulogies (Māhātmya). The most coherent version we know is found and quoted in a booklet that was given to us by Surje Bahadur Chitrakar during an Ihi celebration (Shing V.S. 2057:39). It runs as follows:



Once upon a time lord Śiva and Pārvatī were walking at the Āryaghāt (at the Paśupatinātha temple: Michaels 1994 and 2008). At that time they saw a woman lamenting a dead body. When Pārvatī saw this crying woman and asked Śiva about it, he told her that she is crying because her husband died. Then Pārvatī requested Śiva to prevent in future widowhood. According to her wish, Śiva revealed her a way how women would never become a widow. Śiva let her know about a marriage ritual with Viṣṇu in his outward form (*pratīk svarūp*) of Suvarṇakumāra. In this way (people) started to marry their daughters with an icon of Viṣṇu after they have had prepared a golden icon of Viṣṇu (*Viṣṇuko suvarṇako pratimā*). (However), the boys then started to fear to marry those girls married to lord Viṣṇu. They began to cover their faces in front of such married girls because of the fear that the lord (Viṣṇu) might get angry. As a result the population decreased. After a long time, Śiva and Pārvatī passed again by. They found the population had become much less than before. Therefore Pārvatī requested Viṣṇu (to prevent such consequences). Viṣṇu told her: 'I am (always) hiding in the mind of men; therefore marrying a man should be regarded as marrying me.' It is said that when Śiva heard this answer (to Pārvatī's request), he arranged a form of a marriage ritual (*vivāha saṃskāra*) with pure water filled in a vase (*kalāśa*) and *mantras*. From that time this ritual has been practised in its traditional form (*paramparāgata rūpamā*) as described in the Hindu Dharmasāstra.<sup>25</sup>

The myth repeats the above-mentioned topos of avoiding the dread consequences of widowhood (cf. Vergati 1982: 283) in a society that does not allow re-marriage, and relates it to Pārvatī and the Himālaya (or Nepal) as her natal home. However, it remains a fact that the god to whom the girls are married has no clear identity. In the Buddhist context, it

is generally said that the marriage partner is Buddha, and "Suvarṇakumāra" an expression of Buddha, but it is difficult to find this epithet actually related to Buddha. Unless more material is found, most likely in manuscripts, the only thing that holds true in this question is that the divine bridegroom has no clear and generally accepted identity.

The notion of uncertain identity also applies to a deity that plays a major role during Ihi, especially on the first day: the Alīdyaḥ, which has been widely neglected or overseen in the literature on Ihi. Our description of the ritual leaves many open questions regarding the nature of the lump of clay and Śiva's presence, the role of the potter's son and the welcoming ritual dedicated to him. The ritual specialists involved have no ready answers. Our questions seem rather irrelevant to them: whether it is Śiva or Agni or another deity makes no difference. Important is the involvement of a priest and his helper, an assistant priest and the craftsmen, a painter and a potter. In a concerted effort they literally create the Alīdyaḥ ritual in all its details. Equally important is the definition of the choreography on the urban square. For barely one hour, a few square metres of public space turn into ritual space. Markers in the pavement ensure that the choreography within the confined space within a wider continuum is remembered by the actors. The Gaṇeśa of the temple in the potters' quarter presides over the place, standing there as an immovable peg in the urban landscape. Invisibly tied to Gaṇeśa are two stones that are purified on fifteen to twenty occasions during the annual Ihi-season, which covers a few days in early May and the period between November and March. It appears that the ritual place is inscribed onto urban space. Texts preserve the sequence of individual actions, ritual specialists inherit their roles, and urban space provides a fixed location for the ritual to be enacted.

The *alīdyaḥpūjā* is a unique feature of the Ihi ritual in Bhaktapur. In Kathmandu the

<sup>25</sup> Shing refers to *Rehanā vānu: nepālī saṃskṛti-vidhi pakṣa* Kathmandu: H.M.G., Publication Department (Sukanā Vibhāg), V.S. 2038: 119-120; a similar myth is given by Levy 1990: 666.



Alīdyah as an independent object has disappeared altogether, while in the Buddhist contexts of Bhaktapur and Patan the Alīdyah is identified as the Pañcabuddha in the shape of a small *caitya* either of clay, or in the form of an object cast in metal, while an even more mysterious Phalīdyah is identified as the Pañcatārā in the shape of a ring of paper.

The Hindu Newars in Bhaktapur identify the Clay Deity as Śiva, Bhairava, Gaṇeśa or Agni, but call it mostly by the Nevārī name. The priest Mahendra Sharma, who says that *alīdyah* is a short form of *amūrtiṅgamahādyah*, i.e. Śiva in a non-iconic form, gives the most plausible philological explanation. Physically and iconographically it is not much more than a lump or shaft of clay that resembles to some extent a *liṅga*, especially when shaped in the afternoon of the first Ihi day. At the back there is kind of round tuft which Mahendra Sharma explains as being Śiva's twisted locks of hair (*jaṭā*). The Suvarṇakumāravivāhavidhi (fol. 14r) also identifies Alīdyah with Śiva by reciting *śivo nāmāsi* (VS 3.63) when waving the Clay Deity.

There are several possible explanations for the identity of the clay shaft. The clay could, for instance, be related to the traditional *mṛdāharaṇa* part of Hindu marriages, when some clay is brought to the ritual place:

A few days before the wedding, the ceremony of *Mrdāharaṇa* (bringing some earth or clay) ceremony is performed. The origin of this ceremony is popular and it does not find mention in the ancient scriptures of the Hindus. The Jyotiribandha quoted by Gadādhara says, 'In the beginning of [a] very auspicious ceremony sprouts should be used for Maṅgala decoration. On the ninth, seventh, fifth or third day before the marriage, in an auspicious moment with music and dancing, one should go in the northern or eastern direction of his house to fetch the earth for growing

sprouts in pot of clay or a basket of bamboo'. (Pandey 1969: 209)

Interestingly, the passage quoted by Rajbali Pandey is from Gadādhara, a commentator of the *Pāraskaraḡḡhasūtra* which is widely known in Nepal. The rule of getting clay for a marriage is only found in some *Gṛhyasūtras* when the girls are asked to select from a plate of different forms of soil and clay (e.g. *AśvalāyanaGS*) in order to examine the future (similar to the *Annaprāśana* ritual). The clay as such might represent the kitchen utensils, which are regarded as a necessary part of the marriage, and the Alīdyah might in fact represent the fire that is the centre of any kitchen. However, the apparent equation of the Alīdyah and the clay in the *mṛdāharaṇa* ritual is questioned by the simple fact that the Alīdyah is also sometimes used in other rituals that require a *dusva* or *pūrvāṅga* ritual, i.e. other life-cycle rituals, especially the *cūdākarāṇa* and *vratibandhana* initiation rituals as well as the old age rituals (*jākvā*).

Another interpretation could be that the clay is used to make the fire altar in which the sacrificial fire is lit and around which the marriage vow is made. However, the unfired clay or mud bricks for the *vedi* are not taken from the potters. So it seems likely that Alīdyah is in fact a local form of Śiva who has to be present during the ritual as a witness.

### Multiple Identities

The multiple or vague identities of Hindu deities is not a problem for the participants, but only for the Western observer. Obviously, the ways of identifying a deity in South Asia do not work very well when it comes to Hindu deities (the following is partly taken from Michaels/Sharma 1996: 332-4). To identify a deity, more often than not scholars either reduce the god or goddess to certain aspects – in which they either display a preference for textual sources (sometimes just one group



of texts) or are overly influenced by field observations, especially festivals – or they mistake historical evolution for systematic argument. Western scholars of Hinduism have been more concerned with questions of origin than identity. However, neither the reductive model nor the historical model is ultimately satisfying. Both neglect more or less overtly the fact that many Hindu deities, especially the goddesses, still have (and probably always have had) various identities at the same time.

Another problem is that “identity” is a term usually understood in the framework of Western psychological categories. Somebody’s identity is strong if he or she has set boundaries and limitations in his or her behaviour, if she or he can separate herself or himself from others, if he or she shows a differentiated, individual, unique character. In this sense, many Hindu deities have many and sometimes even contradicting identities, but not an identity in Western terms. Judging them in Freudian terms, many of these deities could never be strong because they do not know who they are, and are full of contradictions.

Why is it then that so many deities have an oceanic, almost unlimited identity? In our view, Hindu deities are often “allowed” to have precisely that. This notion reflects, in sharp distinction to Western concepts of identity, the Hindu belief in the power of primary, pre-verbal, pre-conscious experiences of reality. What makes Hindu gods, especially goddesses, powerful lies beyond words, theories, analyses, separations, and boundaries – beyond identity.

As with all rituals, the Ihi is full of further, in principal unlimited interpretations and associations. Thus, there is a host of speculation about the colours red and yellow that can be found in many ritual items and much of the paraphernalia: the sari, the vermilion and other powder, the threads, etc. Some have seen red

as the colour of menstrual blood and as a sign of sexuality or fertility, and the colour yellow as symbolising asceticism. We regard these kinds of symbolism as problematic. We feel that not enough evidence can be forwarded to reduce such manifold associations with colours. The red and yellow colours could just as well be an expression of festivity, joy (as in Holi), purity or auspiciousness, and yellow must not necessarily be connected with asceticism – although this is an aspect that should not be overlooked because at the end of the second day the girls do indeed receive alms (*bhikṣā*).

For us, Ihi like all Newar life-cycle rituals cannot be seen as an event focussed on an individual. We regard such events rather as links in a chain that runs through the individual’s life and connects him or her with other rituals and with the social group. Ihi, for instance, must be seen as a ritual that is connected with the menarche rituals (*Bārḥā tayegu*) and the marriage with a human groom, as well as a ritual that transforms the individual to a member of certain social groups. The first aspect will be elaborated on in the next chapter, the latter is indicated by a number of clear, yet hitherto frequently ignored factors. Firstly, it is remarkable that the Ihi ritual takes place in public and not within the house or a courtyard of a monastery, as in the Buddhist monastic initiation. Ihi is a social event, which is never performed for individuals, an event that takes place on the street or in public places and is often organised by social organisations. It is an event, which blurs the caste order because many castes sit together, often without any hierarchal order – such that the girls even consume boiled rice together, which they would never do in any other context. Ihi brings together members of different castes, lineage groups and extended families. Although by definition a life-cycle ritual, it is performed as a trans-familial ritual.



*Digudyaḥpūjā at Bisinkhel  
across the Hanumante river on  
22<sup>nd</sup> April 1999.*

*Two girls pose with the yellow  
kumakhāḥ thread and block  
print on their forehead at the  
lineage deity (dugudyaḥ).*

*They are offering him the  
salāpā bowl with the bel fruit  
to which they have been tied  
by marriage. Until they marry  
a human bridegroom they are  
members of the lineage.*

*On the left is a boy who had  
joined the lineage on this  
occasion. He is shaved for the  
second time in his life and with  
that becomes a full member.*





### From Childhood to Adult

Another important implication of this is the fact that through Ihi, the girls become not only marriageable candidates but also members of their father's lineage group or extended family, the *phukī*, i.e. the main and most active social group in Bhaktapur society. This is especially evident in the rituals following the core Ihi days, because the girls lose their status of being a virgin (*kanyā*) and qualify themselves for membership in the *phukī*. The membership initiation takes place during the following joint worship of the lineage deity (*digudyaḥpūjā*) when they have to offer a duck and hand over the *bel* fruit to the lineage deity. The caretaker of the shrine returns the fruit to a shop in the city, which sells it in the following season to other customers. Thus, only after the Ihi ritual do girls become a member of the lineage with all its rights and obligations, and seen from this perspective Ihi is more an initiation than a marriage rite. Moreover, girls are only members of the father's lineage for a few years, the period between Ihi and marriage – when they become a member of their husband's lineage. Boys, on the other hand, become a member of the *phukī* not only through Kaytāpūjā but even beforehand, i.e. as soon as they are able to walk independently. They then go to the lineage deity and offer husked ritual rice (*kigaḥ*) and popped rice (*tāy*) and perform *darśana* (Nev. *bhāgye yayegu*, lit. “to bow down”). This ritual encounter with the *digudyaḥ* is called *dūp tayegu*, and after that the boys are members of the *phukī*. In contradistinction to the “real” marriage to a human husband, the girls do not change their lineage through Ihi. On the contrary, the Ihi marriage “reaffirms the girl's ties with her father and confers on her full membership of his caste” (Allen 1982: 192).

The assumption that girls after Ihi are – ritually and socially – adults is strengthened by the fact that in case of death prior to Kaytā-

pūjā and Ihi, four to six days of mourning are required for both boys and girls, but after Ihi the full period of mourning is needed. Interestingly, the pre-menarche ritual (*Bārḥā*) has no influence on this mourning period. Thus, Ihi is a life-cycle ritual that celebrates not a biological but a social change; and it is not so much a ritual that makes a girl marriageable but eligible to the most vital social group, the extended family and lineage group. This is overwhelmingly demonstrated by the offering of *vākijāki*, a mixture of husked and unhusked rice by the lineage members (*phukī*) and the maternal relatives upon entering the house at the end of the ritual. Thus the Ihi ritual fits well into Fuller's distinction between first and second marriages: in the first marriage girls become an adult, in the second the offsprings are legitimised (Fuller 1976: 105).

To sum up, Ihi is to be regarded much more as an initiation than as a marriage ritual. No wonder Ihi is said to be the girls' *vratabandhana* or *upanayana* (cf. Allen 1982: 192). With the Ihi ritual, the girls take a first step towards womanhood. But more than that, it confers lineage and caste membership, enabling and strengthening social ties and identities based on ancestor and clan deity worship, commensality and ritual solidarity, especially in the occurrence of death.



Poster advertising the Ihi ritual at Nyākhācuka, Patan, on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2006:

“Om salutation to Ratmatraya. Coming N.S. 1127 (2006), on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> day of the bright half of the lunar month of Thimlā (on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> day of the solar month of Maṃsir 2063 V.S.) a combined Ihi ritual (is going to be held). All parents are welcomed to bring their girls who have to perform Ihi.

Contact place:

Vajrācārya Pūjāvidhi

Adhyayana Samiti

Nyākhācuka, Patan.

Phone no.: 5554268 (from 5-8 pm)

Rajbhāi Vajrācārya,

Nyākhācuka

Phone: 5534650

Organizing Group:

Vajrācārya Pūjāvidhi

Adhyayana Samiti

Nyākhācuka, Patan.

Phone no.: 5554268”

॥ āṃ namo ratna trayāya ॥  
thvahe vaigu ne. saṃ. 1127  
thimlāthvaḥ cauthī va vivāha-  
pañcamī / (2 063 maṃsira  
8 va 9 gate) kunhu juigu /  
sāmuḥika ihi / jyājhvaḥsa ihi  
yāyemānipiṇṭhaḥ mhayāy  
macāta ihi / yāy hayeta sakala  
mahānubhāvapinta/ lasakusa  
yānācvanā |

/ svāpū tayegu thāy:

/ Vajrācārya Pūjāvidhi

Adhyayana Samiti

/ Nyākhācuka, Yala

/ phona lyā: 5554268,

(bahāisiyā 5 bajasinem

8 baje taka) / Rājabhāi

Vajrācārya, Nyākhācuka

/ phona: 5534650

gvasāḥ khalah:

Vajrācārya Pūjāvidhi

Adhyayana Samiti

Nyākhācuka, Yala |

55-54268

## The Girl's Buddhist Marriage to the Bel Fruit: Ihi

Not only Hindus but also Buddhists marry their girls to the *bel* fruit. We will only present here selected details from rituals staged in November 2006 at Nyākhācuka in Patan and in February 2007 at Paśubāhā in Bhakatapur in order to highlight the differences in terms of organisation and ritual performance.

The Ihi Ritual at Nyākhācuka in Patan, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2006

The ritual was organised by the Vajrācārya Pūjā Vidhi Adhyayana Samiti, a Buddhist association that was established in 2003 to teach ritual to the sons of Vajrācārya. It was felt that there was a lack of young blood to uphold the traditions and to perform the life-cycle rituals. The head of the school, Buddha Ratna Bajracharya, said that people were very frustrated because it was difficult to find priests willing to perform the rituals: most of them have joined the modern working world, which places regular demands of attendance on them.

Weeks in advance a poster announced the performance of the Ihi ritual and invited participants to enroll in advance. The day before the ritual, 48 girls had enrolled at a fee of 1,000 rupees (10 euros). The receipt informed the parents as to what the participants needed for the ritual: *pūjā* material, a vermilion container, the *sukūda* lamp, the *thayabhū* plate with tripod, and ten betel-nuts. All other items, namely the *hipā* bowl, the *bel* fruit, a *jēlāapte* leaf, a handful of unhusked rice, the *sapākhvaḥ* block print and a rope of straw to bind the girl's hands were supplied by the organisation.

On the eve of the first day, five young men aged between 17 to 22 are busy painting the *hipā* bowls under the instruction of the teacher. The pair of pots designated

॥ ओं नमो रत्न त्रयाय ॥  
श्वहे वड्गु ने. सं. ११२७ थिंलाध्वः चौथी व विवाहपञ्चमी  
(२०६३ मंसिर ८ व ९ गते) कुन्हु जुड्गु  
**सामुहिक इहि**  
ज्याइवः स इहि यायेमानिपिं थः म्हाय्य म्चात इहि  
याय हयेत सकल महानुभावपिन्त  
लसकुस यानाचचना ।

आय वोगु धाम्:  
बज्राचार्य पुजाविधि अध्ययन समिति  
चलाकु, यला ।  
फोन नं. : ५५५४२६८ (सुदीपित ५ बजेति ८ बजेत)  
राजभाई राजाचर्य, चलाकु  
फोन : ५५३४६५०

गुवाः सलः  
बज्राचार्य पुजाविधि अध्ययन समिति  
चलाकु, यला ।  
५५-५४२६८

for *yakṣa/yakṣī* is likewise painted and the *Alīdyah* fashioned out of clay. Painters and potters are no longer needed. The entire ritual agency is monopolised by the school of ritual, which also engages one member as principle worshipper with the duty of performing the *Nāndimukhaśraddha*.

There is a conspicuous hierarchy in the way the girls are placed. Each seat has a number and a helper keeps the list with the corresponding names. The daughters of Vajrācārya priests are seated first, followed by the Śākya girls, and finally a Rājarnikār girl and five girls from the sub-caste of farmers (*Maharjan*).

The arrangement of the central *pūrṇakalaśa*, pots and ritual objects (see sketch) differs considerably from the arrangement observed in Hindu contexts. The central square platform bears the sacred vase with water (*kalaśa*), and the *vijayakalaśa*, representing the Pañcabuddha and the Pañcatārā. These vases are flanked by miniature baskets filled with husked and unhusked rice, symbolizing the sun and the moon. These are followed by pairs of vermilion container and mirror in one of two forms, either in bronze or as earthen pots, and which are accompanied by a pair of *yakṣa/yakṣiṇī*. The southern end is marked by the *Alīdyah* in the shape of a lump of clay and a wooden container which stands for Vasundharā, a female deity who ensures well-being. The northern end is marked by the female



counterpart of Alīdyah. As Phalīdyah, the deity is shaped as a painted cylinder of paper, representing the Pañcatārā. Three earthen pots follow, representing the king of serpents (*nāgarāja*), Akṣobhya (seen as a blue *vajra*), and his Śakti, represented by a blue water lily (*upasvā*, Skt. *utpala*).

### The Ihi Ritual at Paṣubāhā in Bhaktapur, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2007

The Paṣuvarṇa Mahāvihāra in the north-eastern quarter of Bhaktapur houses one of the five Dipaṅkara Buddhas of the town, which constitutes a frequent destination for Tibetan pilgrims. This deity is, however, only marginally involved in the course of the Ihi ritual.

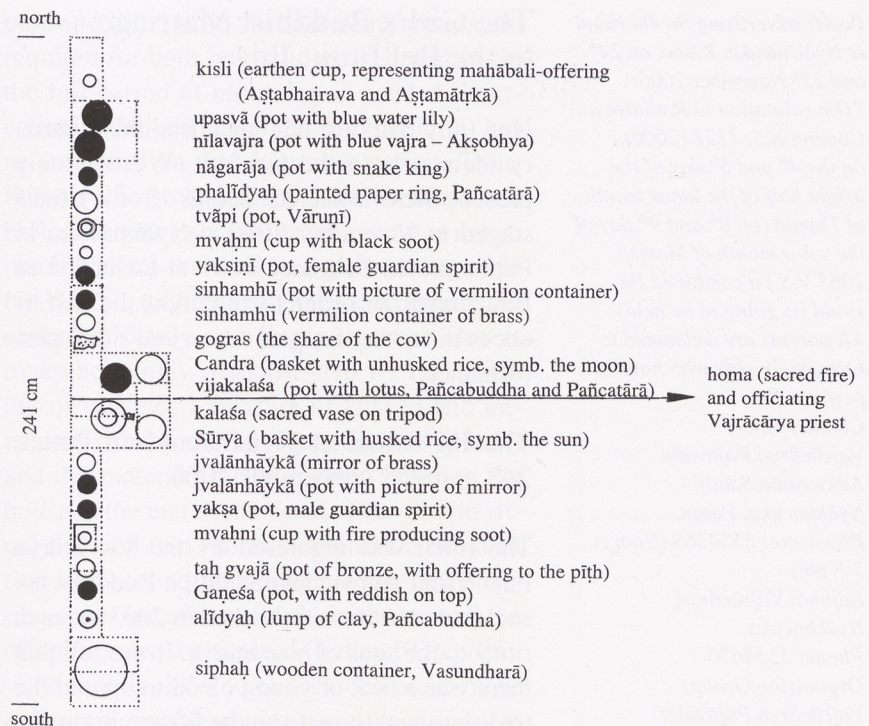
We will not portray the customary framing rites such as *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*, the worship of the sacred vases (*kalaśapūjā*) and the fire sacrifice (*homa*).<sup>26</sup> Instead, we shall concentrate on Buddhist variants in the Ihi ritual. The text used by the priest is the Pāṇigrahaṇavidhi (Pgv), “The Rules for the Joining of Hands” (i.e. marriage), a *thyāsaphu* manuscript with fourteen folios.

A total of 34 girls were initiated by the priest Jnanaratna Bajracharya and his son Mahesharatna Bajracharya. Each girl paid 60 rupees for the *bel* fruit, the pots (*ihipā*, *sapākhvah*), the thread (*kumaḥkāḥ*) and other *pūjā* materials, as well as 100 rupees as the ritual fee (*dakṣiṇā*) to the Vajrācārya priest. The privileged girl leading the row of participants (*mūnakhī*) had, however, to pay 200 rupees as *dakṣiṇā* and 1,000 rupees for the *pūjā* materials.

The sacrificer (*yajamāna*) and father of the leading girl is Ramesha Buddhacharya from Sūryavināyaka in Bhaktapur. The family originates from Panauti and belongs to the Buddhācārya caste.

### The First Day (*dusva*)

The rituals of the first day start with the invocation of Vajrasattva and his worship in the sacred vase (*kalaśapūjā*), the worship of the



clan deities and the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) being made by the priest together with a *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*.

At around nine o’clock in the morning, the *gurumā* (the wife of the priest) welcomes the 34 girls with their mothers and in some cases their sisters or other, mostly female, relatives to the monastery (*vihāra*). She performs the purification rite, *nirañjana*, a kind of apotropaic rite in which charcoal is lit with mustard seeds, a flower and rice in a clay cup and brought to the absorbing stone (*pikhālākhu*) at the entrance of the courtyard.

The girls all arrive after having had their nails cut at home, which means that there is no barber present in the *vihāra* for the Ihi ritual.

The girls are from Buddhācārya (2), Vajrācārya (7), Śākya (2), Śreṣṭha (1), Citrakār (2), Balāmī (2), and Mānandhar (17) families. Their present residence is mostly in Bhaktapur, but some families have come from Thimi, Chabahal, Kathmandu, Sankhu or Banepa.

*Patan, Ihi ritual on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2006 at Nyākḥācuka, organised by the Vajrācārya Pūjā Vidhi Adhyayana Samiti for 47 girls. On a platform of fifteen and a half unfired bricks 23 objects have been placed including nine earthen pots. The central pair of sacred vases (kalaśa and vijakalaśa) are flanked by two guardian spirits, yakṣa and yakṣiṇī, also identified as Simhīnī and Byaṅgīnī, the guardians of Tantric Buddhist shrines. The pair of mirror and vermilion container – identified as Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī – are present as ritual objects in bronze and as images painted on earthen pots.*

<sup>26</sup> For this see Locke 1980: 104-114, Gellner 1991a and 1992: 157-159, Kropf 2005: 406-431.



*Buddhist Ihi ritual at the house of Divya Bajracharya in Itāchē on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2005.*

*Above  
The parents, Rachana and Dharma Bajracharya hold the hands of their daughter Lasta while the chief worshipper pours water over the bel fruit from the sacred vase.*

*Below  
Measurement of a girl with the yellow kumahkāḥ thread. In a specific Buddhist variation, the arms of then girl are stretched out, her father coils the thread.*







The ritual begins with the invocation of Vajrasattva. After the *kalaśapūjā* follows the measuring of the girl's body length by means of a yellow thread (*kumaḥkāḥ* or Skt. *śatabr̥ndikā*). After measuring her body 108-fold, the thread is wound up and kept for the next day. In contrast to Hindu versions, the girls are measured with their arms extended and the thread touching their fingers.

While the *kalaśapūjā* in the monastery continues, the eldest woman of the lineage or the wife of the acting priest (*gurumā* or *nakhī*) of the *vihāra* worships the Ihi girls at their seats with the Gaṇeśa *kalaśa*, Alīdyah in the shape of a *caitya* cast in bronze and milky water from the conch.

She then applies vermilion three times vertically to the parting in each girl's hair – a rite called *sinha chā* (offering of the *sindūra*). During this rite the girls sit on their mothers' laps, holding a red cloth on which the traditional mirror, ten rupees and a coin are placed. After receiving the vermilion they hand over the money to the *nakhī*.

The brother of the main priest then performs *siphārati*, showering fruit and flowers

from the wooden measuring vessel (*phā*) over the girls' heads by way of welcome.

Meanwhile the priest offers rice (*akṣata*) to the deities and gives blessings (*āśīrvāda*) to all of the participants.

In contradistinction to the Hindu Ihi at Byasi, this Buddhist Ihi ritual finishes early in the afternoon. No food is given to the participants or family members.

#### The Second Day: The Gift of the Virgin

In the morning, at around half past seven, the *gurumā* worships at a small Gaṇeśa shrine in the monastery with a Gaṇeśa *kalaśa*. Three women, Padmakeshari, Lakshmeshvari and Nita Vajracharya, help the *gurumā* as they did the day before.

Gradually the girls arrive with their mothers and relatives carrying a basket with the required items and the sacred vase (*kalaśa*) and the *sukūṇḍā* lamp from their home. Adorned and dressed in red and gold clothes, they take their seats, which have been prepared with a *svastika* as on the day before. The first girl, sitting to the left of the Vajrācārya priest (*gurūju*), is called the *mūnakhī*. She is followed

*Bhaktapur, Buddhist Ihi ritual at Paṣubāhā, kanyādāna on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2007*

*Right*

*The girl holds the bel fruit in a jēlāapte leaf while her wrists are tied with a braided straw rope.*

*Left*

*Rear view of the platform for the arrangement of the sacred vases and pots. The centre is occupied by the pūrṇakalaśa, the sacred vase with a depiction of a four-armed Vasundharā. A shaft is emerging from the vase with five ceremonial umbrellas in the colours of the Pañcabuddha; to the left the pair of yakṣa/yakṣiṇī, followed by the pot of the serpent king (nāgarāja) whose paper cylinder covers the vermilion container. To the right a regular kalaśa, the pair of pots representing Śrī/Lakṣmī, a caitya in bronze representing the Alīdyah, the mirror and the Gaṇeśa pot.*



by her mother and her younger sister, while sitting to the right of the priest is her father who serves as the *yajamāna*. Another seven girls sit inside the temple, the others in a rectangular arrangement on mattresses and cushions outside in the courtyard.

The ritual starts by worshipping the sun and the clan deities, mental commitment (*nyāsa*) of the priest, the ritual decision, and one more *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*. It is significant in the arrangement of the sacrificial place that the Alīdyaḥ – the Clay Deity in the Hindu version – is a small brass *caitya* with a small bamboo stick with five leaves (*pañcapallava*) attached to it. The Pāṇigrahaṇavidhi lists the ritual items to be placed and the deities to be invoked:

On the next day, first display whatever is necessary for the sacrificial fire (such as) the flask (called) *bīja*, the main flask, Śrī (and) Lakṣmī, Yakṣa, Yakṣiṇī, Alīdyaḥ, the flask (representing) Gaṇeśa, the flask (representing) the serpent (deity), the Great Offering (*mahābali*),<sup>27</sup> ritual mirror, vermilion pot – place whatever is necessary (in the sacrificial area). (Pgv, fol. 3)

Set in front of the girls are a *kalaśa* with jasmine twigs and leaves, *sukūda* lamps, the *pūjā* plate with two *kisli* cups, two cups with diluted yoghurt, incense, rice, fruit, leaves, flowers, red and yellow powder, a package of decorative material, and rice cones (*gvajā*) for the Three Jewels, i.e. Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha.

The next step is for the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) for *gurumaṇḍalapūjā* to be made by the sacrificer, and for the girls to touch the *pūjā* plate and lighting the *sukūda* lamp. The girls then worship the *gurumaṇḍala* and the priest.

The Pāṇigrahaṇavidhi (fol. 4-8) inserts here a dialogue between the girls and the priest in which the girls ask the priest to perform the initiation (*upanayam*, sic!, read *upanayanam*)

for them by marrying them to a handsome (*dhanya*) boy. This Ihi story (*kathā*) is read out to the girls by the priest.

After this comes the grinding of black lentils (*māy niyayegu*): in the south-western corner of the courtyard is a mortar with pestle, framed by three long, slender bamboo poles tied together at the top and attached to this a *kisli* cup wrapped in a white cotton cloth. Three women and one girl stand at the corners holding the main Gaṇeśa *kalaśa*, a winnowing tray painted with a *svastika* diagram, a brush (Nep. *kuco*), the wooden measuring vessel with an iron key, and the *sukūda* lamp – as well as the Alīdyaḥ. They touch the Ihi girls with the brush, tray and wooden measuring vessel before the girls grind black lentils under the tripod of bamboo sticks by moving the pestle in the mortar with their left feet. Meanwhile the son of the priest recites *sarvāpā mārdaya mārdayo huṃ*, “May all evil be destroyed”. Finally, the girls are touched with the *kalaśa* and the Alīdyaḥ Caitya.

Immediately after this ritual to remove impurity, the Ihi girls are purified in a rite called *khau kāyegu*, “to take *khau* (ground sesame with oil-cake and water)”. The *gurumā* or one of her helpers pours water with sesame, oil and *sarvakhau* over the hands of the girls and sprinkles a few drops into her hair.

Meanwhile a woman helper prepares the painted bowls for the *bel* fruit by placing a *jēlālapte* leaf, the block-print, and a rope of straw in them. At the same time, preparations begin for the *homa* in the rectangular firepits. Assisted by his wife, the priest decorates the place and assembles the necessary material and ritual objects. The purpose of the *homa* is to invite the fire god (Agni).

The priest's son then touches the girls' foreheads while holding a *vajra* and the iron key in his right hand. This is followed by another *siphā luyegu*: pouring fruit, peas, carrot pieces, popped rice, and flowers from the wooden measuring vessel over the girls' heads.

<sup>27</sup> Offerings to Nine Mother Goddesses and Bhairava as a protector of the area (*kṣetrapāla*).



Afterwards an assistant Vajrācārya priest distributes the painted pots with the *bel* fruit to the girls while another helper collects the pieces of wood that the girls have brought for the fire sacrifice. Then the *gurumā* worships the girls with *kuśa* grass and milky water from a copper container. Meanwhile the preparations for the *homa* continue. The principle worshipper (*yajamāna*) now acts on the command of the priest and lights the fire.

Two elderly Tibetan pilgrims appear with a lama to worship the Dīpaṅkara Buddha, almost without noticing the Ihi ritual.

There now follows the Gift of the Virgin (*kanyādāna*): the *gurumā* places a *jēlālapte* leaf – Pāṇigrahaṇavidhi (Pgv) fol. 12: “with (its) stalk (facing) inside (i.e. to the body of the girl)” – the *bel* fruit – Pgv fol. 12: “with (its) stalk upwards (on the leaf)” – and a bank note in the girl’s hands. Pgv indicates that the leaf is to be regarded as the female (*śakti*) principle and the *bel* fruit as the male principle.

The *gurumā* then ties the girl’s hands together with the rope while the mother fixes the block-print into her hair, without using any special yellow thread. No gold or silver platelets are attached to the *bel* fruit at this point. Then father and mother (!) hand the girl over to the fruit. The Pāṇigrahaṇavidhi says: “Here then follows the worship of the *bel* fruit (in its) real (form)”, but does not reveal the esoteric meaning of the fruit.

The parents then hold the hands of the girl as follows: first the left hand of the mother, then the left hand of the father, then the child’s two hands, then the right hand of the mother and on top the right hand of the father. Sometimes it is the mother who encloses the hands of the child and the father. An assistant priest pours milky water three times from a *kalaśa* from head level over the hands into a brass vessel in which afterwards the parents throw some money. At the same time the priest recites the *kanyādāna* verses (see Pgv fol. 13):

Afterwards all the girls circumambulate the burning *homa* fire three times – adorned now with the yellow thread (*kumaḥkāḥ*) from the first day. They are again worshipped (touched) with the wooden measuring vessel and the *sukūda* lamp (inside the temple) as well as with Alīdyah, the Gaṇeśa *kalaśa*, the winnowing tray and the brush (in the courtyard). The Pāṇigrahaṇavidhi (fol. 14) includes a kind of joke here, because the priest should ask the girls what they have stolen, because with their hands tied together they look like prisoners. Subsequently the assistant Vajrācārya unties the rope, touching it with the sacrificial ladle (*śrurvā*) from the fire sacrifice.

Now the girls receive milk and biscuits. The main priest ties a multi-coloured thread around a *bel* fruit, worships it, marks it with a *tikā* and fixes a small piece of gold to it. He does the same with a small citrus fruit (*khāīsī*). Afterwards the mother of the main girls throws both pieces of fruit into the fire. A folded piece of paper containing a collection of herbs (*yajñōṣadhi*) is also consigned to the fire in order to help it digest the many oblations.

This is followed by *dakṣiṇā*, collected on the sacrificial ladles by the assistant Vajrācārya, and pure food (*nislā*) being given to the *mūnakhī*; after this comes the “full oblation” (*pūrṇāhuti*), when all of the remains are thrown into the fire.

Subsequently *bārā tayegu* or *chuye*, “alms giving”, is performed: women and a few men bestow various things (coins, sweets, fruits, packaged fruit juice etc.) to the Dīpaṅkara, the main *kalaśa* with a depiction of the blue *vajra* at the front and Vasundharā on the back, to the fire, to the priest as well as to his wife and son, the assistant Vajrācārya, and finally to all girls. In addition, rice is given to the girls using the wooden measuring vessel.

The concluding rites entail *tikā* and again *dakṣiṇā*: The son of the priest and the assis-



tant priest give all the girls a *tikā* from the sacrificial ladles and receive *dakṣiṇā* in return. The mothers give *tikā* to the girls and place yoghurt on their right temples. The *yajamāna* gives a *tikā* to the priest and his assistants. The main priest gives a *tikā* to the mothers and fathers of the Ihi girls and receives *dakṣiṇā* (money) in return. He gives all of the girls a *tikā* together with a five-coloured thread (*paśukā*, *pañcasūtra*) which they bind around their necks. He also receives *dakṣiṇā* in return.

Then the priest worships a wooden image of Jagannātha brought by a neighbour wrapped in cellophane and worships it with a *tikā*, thus giving soul (*prāṇapraṭiṣṭhā*) to the not yet vitalised image. Such a ritual should be done with *homa*, so the neighbour took the opportunity of using the *homa* of the Ihi ritual to have his image sanctified, something that may often be seen at Ihi rituals.

It does not matter whether the sacred fire ritual is performed by a Buddhist or Hindu priest. The fire empowers any ritual object, be it a deity or the copper bowl, which is reserved for ritual use in death and purification rituals.

Even the remains of the firepit, the green bricks forming the *maṇḍala* shaped frame, embody a special quality. They are not discarded in the river but presented to a relative or friend who had asked for the bricks long in advance so as to use them in the foundations of a newly built house.

Finally, the area is ritually dissolved (*visarjana*). At around three in the afternoon the ritual is finished.

## Conclusion

Ihi rituals are performed with many variations depending on the locality and the organisers. Sometimes sub-rituals are performed on the second day rather than the first and *vice versa*. Thus, the paring of the toenails and the smearing of vermilion on the parting were performed on the first day at the Buddhist Ihi in Patan, Nyākhācuka. And at the Ihi ceremonies in Patan and Kathmandu, the Citrakār were seen performing the opening of the eyes on the Ihi pots.

The main variation, however, is the difference between Buddhist and Hindu Ihi rituals. The Ihi ritual as performed by the Buddhists in Bhaktapur parallels in many aspects the Hindu versions that have been described above. On the surface it could be seen as a Buddhicised ritual, but that is assuming that it was originally a Hindu ritual. This, however, is more than doubtful. It rather looks as though a tribal substratum ritual has been transformed into both a Hindu and Buddhist life-cycle ritual, absorbing elements from other rituals such as the *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*, the fire ritual (*homa*), ancestor worship (*nāṇḍimukhaśrāddha*), the worship of the sacred vase (*kalaśapūjā*), the "Seven Steps" (*saptapadī*), the circumambulation of the fire, and the almsgiving rite (*bārā chuyegu*).

This view is supported by the fact that several elements are not to be found in the Sanskrit tradition, especially in the texts on domestic and life-cycle rituals, the *grhya-sūtras* and *dharmaśāstras*. The feeding of the girls (*ihimacā nakegu*), the ritual welcoming (*lasakusa*), the *siphāрати* element, the worship of the Alīdyah, the measurement rite (*kumaḥkāḥ*) with yellow or white threads, the purification by applying oil on the head, the grinding of black lentils, or the Kumārīpūjā make for a typical Newar ritual without any direct links to the Great (Sanskrit) Tradition.



The Buddhist variant of the Ihi ritual is characterised by a number of special features that are related to the Buddhist context. Buddhist deities are worshipped and accordingly other *mantras* are used, especially during the specific *gurumaṇḍalapūjā* and *kalaśapūjā*. No *śrāddha*, and no meat or animal sacrifices

are incorporated into Buddhist Ihi rituals. Moreover, some details are different. Thus, it is significant that the girls do not wear the special Ihi sari (*ihiparasi*), that the “Seven Steps” (*saptapadī*) are not performed, and that collective meals for the girls are not served on both days.





The *bārhā pāsāḥ*, the “friend in seclusion”, kept to make up an even number of persons during seclusion, is 17 centimetres long, and carved from wood.

## The Girl's Seclusion: *Bārhā tayegu*

After the Ihi marriage and before the onset of menstruation, a Newar girl generally has to undergo ritual seclusion for twelve days. She is kept in a room that is not necessarily dark but cut off from all males and from the sunlight. The ritual is called (Nev.) *Bārhā chuyegu* or *Bārhā tayegu*, “to place in seclusion or a cave”. On the 12<sup>th</sup> day, the girl has to worship the sun. It is a pre-menstrual ritual similar to the *Pūrbīya* seclusion ritual (Nep. *guphā basne*), which secludes girls from society in order to open up a new perspective. Viewing the sun again after the meaningful period of twelve days (which reflects the twelve months of the year), the girls are in a way reborn so as to be mothers before long.

### The Preparations

The ritual is normally performed between the ages of eight and twelve. Should menstruation occur unexpectedly prior to the performance of the ritual, the girl will immediately be secluded for the prescribed twelve days without first consulting the astrologer to find an auspicious time.

As with many other lifecycle rituals, the preferred time is winter and spring, from November to March (*Māgha* to *Phālguna*). In exceptional cases it can also be performed in summer. One family always takes the lead in asking the astrologer for an auspicious time (*sāit*). In order to approve the suitability of the room, the astrologer also scrutinises clay or dust collected from the four corners of the room that will serve for the seclusion. The horoscopes of the other girls will also be put before the astrologer in order to realise a rare planetary opposition.

Usually, up to six girls from relatives join in. Should only three or five girls enter the seclusion, a fourth or sixth “companion” has to join, a *bārhā pāsāḥ* (Nev. *bārhā*, “cave”,

*pāsāḥ*, “friend”), which often is a twenty-centimetres-long wooden female figure or a puppet made of cotton, covered with brightly coloured cloth. The number of girls in seclusion must be even. Such puppets are called *katāmari*. While these puppets are ritually treated as girls, a second category of *bārhā pāsāḥ*, mothers or friends of the girls in seclusion act as mediators between the secluded room and the outer world of light and sun. The twelve days of seclusion are regarded as an impure time, which makes ritual purification (*bārhā byēkegu*) mandatory on the morning of the twelfth day.

The girls' toenails have already been pared by a barber's wife, a *naunī*, on the occasion of the Ihi marriage, although the Ihi ritual is not regarded as an impure event. Impurity occurs also after giving birth: *macābu byēkegu* is performed on the fourth or sixth day after birth. The *naunī* arrives to pare the toenails and the woman in childbed is offered the same food the girls in seclusion are offered on the sixth day. The juice and bread made of the *isicā* root is served exclusively on the occasions of *bārhā byēkegu* and *macābu byēkegu*. The root is served to potential mothers and mothers in childbed.

The period of impurity restricts the social life of all lineage members if the daughter of a single lineage member is in seclusion. No *pūjā* can be performed; no invitations are accepted even to feasts. The lineage members are under the powerful spell of *aśuddha*, impurity. During menstruation, the period of impurity extends over four days. No *pūjās* are performed, no temples are visited, and houses where the regular death ritual is being performed may only be entered after the final offering has left the house to be discarded on the stone that absorbs ritual waste.

During the second half of the twelve days of seclusion, relatives and friends of the main girl come with various items of food. The characteristic offering includes six types of



grains and pulses (*nasā*) such as flattened rice, popcorn, wheat, soybeans, peas, and large beans. Milk and raw sugar with butter (*gyaḥ-caku*) have to be added. Chickpeas and groundnuts as well as sweets are optional. The relatives of the other girls bring these offerings to their parental homes. Their mothers or grandmothers will carry a share of these grains to the seclusion room, the *bārhā kvathā*, to be offered to the room's ghost, the *bārhā khyāḥ*.

On the final day the family of the main girl will call in the Brahmin priest and the barber's wife with whom they have an inherited client relationship. Among the sub-castes of farmers and potters it is not compulsory to call in a Brahmin. More often, the eldest woman of the lineage, the *nakhī*, will perform ceremonies and she will receive the due offerings of food and coins (*dakṣiṇā*).

It is said that if a girl dies in seclusion, she will become a malevolent ghost (*bārhā khyāḥ*) and her dead body will have to be buried in the ground below the seclusion room. The body cannot be carried down the staircase so the floors have to be broken open to transport the body straight down to the ground floor.

### The Ritual

The following description is based on three sources. In January 2003 Bijay Basukala documented the concluding day of the period of seclusion of his daughter Benita, whose brother's initiation in January 2005 is described in a previous chapter. In December 2005 and January 2006 Tessa Pariyar had access on three occasions to groups of confined girls from sub-castes of farmers. Since men cannot enter the room with the secluded girls, our account of this period depends on her observations. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2007 we were able to document the twelfth day of the *Bārhā tayegu* ritual on the roof terrace of a house in the quarter of *Kvāchē* belonging to

Mahendra Sulu, whose wife Mangal is the daughter of Bijay Basukala's maternal uncle, his *pāju*. A third girl, Rasina, joined their daughters Manisa and Shrisa. As her father had died a few years ago, it was her uncle Ram Gopal Sulu who acted in his capacity as the head of the lineage (*nāyaḥ*) throughout the entire ritual as chief sacrificer (*yajamaṇa*). Our account here draws on a number of different occasions; we are not presenting a single case – as has been done for example for Annaprāsana.

### The First Day

On the first day of the seclusion the girls enter the "cave" (*bārhā*) at the auspicious time that was asked for from the astrologer, the *Jośi*. The girls first have to clean their bodies, but this is often reduced to quickly washing their hair. It is said that they are locked up in the room (*bārhā kunegu*), which should not allow any sunlight to enter. Candles may be lit and electricity used, but sunlight has to be avoided at all costs. Male persons are not allowed to enter the room except small boys who have not received their loincloth as the symbol of procreative energy.

The situation is of an ambivalent character: the girls should not see men, but likewise men have to avoid seeing the girls when they leave the room to be guided and guarded on their way to the toilet by a companion. In older times nature was relieved using brass pots within the room, thus reducing the danger of contact. There is a notion of danger emanating from the girls in seclusion, which men have to avoid.

The eldest woman of the lineage performs the usual *pūjā* at the auspicious moment of the first day in the presence of a *Gaṇeśa* lamp, the *sukūdā*, and places a red mark on the girl's forehead. Ritual food, *samaybaji*, is offered which includes flattened rice, egg, dried fish, raw ginger, black soybeans and alcohol.



### The Second and Third Days

The second and third days pass without any special occurrences. Visitors may occasionally enter the room to entertain the girls, playing cards or carom or even watching television. Although it is said that the *bārhā* ghost appears only from the sixth day on, the girls may decide to summon the ghost earlier and force him to come out (Nev. *bārhā khyāḥ pikayegu*). One of the visiting elder girls switches off the light and the girls will listen in the dark for any unusual noises to ascertain the presence of the ghost. The scene ends in them teasing and tickling each other. Once the light is on again, one of the girls will admit to having seen the white shadow of the ghost and any disorder in the room will be attributed to it. The ghost is neither male nor female but neuter. It is regarded either as a protective agent or as a threatening one that represents the procreative powers of men, whom the girls explicitly avoid by being confined. Michael Allen goes as far as to interpret the ghost's presence as a deflowering agent, symbolising incipient sexuality (Allen 1982: 193; Kunreuther 1994: 343).

On the first three days, the girls are fed solely with cooked rice and milk (*duruḷā*), thus reflecting the period of six months after birth during which they are fed solely on milk and a paste of rice. Only after the ritual feeding of cooked rice will salted vegetables also be offered.

### The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Day

On the morning of the fourth day, the girls take the first salt of the period, which is first exposed to the sun. Ginger and soybeans are offered with flattened rice and raw sugar with butter. The sun god Sūrya receives the same offerings – as does the ghost, which is only manifestly present from the sixth day on. This dietary restriction up until the fourth day might also reflect the period of impurity during the menarche.

The fifth day also passes without any special occurrences. But the sixth day halfway through the overall period is of great importance. The eldest woman of the lineage enters the room early in the morning, purifies the girls and the corners of the room with fresh water and performs *pūjā*. The essential offering of this day, *bvaḥcābaji*, a small (*cā*) dish of food (*bvaḥ*) with flattened rice (*baji*), is presented on a *jēlāapte* leaf, which is always used in the ritual context instead of a copper or brass plate. Twelve lots are prepared, reflecting the twelve suns (*āditya*). These represent “the whole range of phenomenal manifestations, each individual aspect of it being generally assigned to a particular *āditya*” (Stutley 1986: 3). The number twelve stands for the months of the solar year. As aspects of light they are collectively regarded as one, the sun.

The single-most important food item on the sixth day is *isicā*, a root similar to ginger but with far larger tubers, growing some 40 centimetres below the ground surface. It is not available in regular vegetable shops, but must be obtained directly from farmers who grow the roots on the edges of dry fields. Only women consume *isicā* on two occasions. It is offered to women after childbirth at the end of the period of impurity, and in the context of the girls' seclusion after six days and at the end of the impure period. The juice of the root is occasionally consumed as medicine when the body feels “hot”. The cause for this might be a cough or even the consumption of chicken meat, which is believed to create heat. The root is smashed, mixed with salt, cumin and turmeric, and fried in mustard oil in the shape of small pancakes, the product being called *isicāva*. In addition, a small pancake of peas (*kasuva*) is offered as well as a paste of peas mixed with salt, red pepper and cumin (*kāghasāḥ*), fermented spinach (*sīke*), soybeans, ginger, buffalo meat, flattened rice (*baji*) and fried rice (*sabhū*).



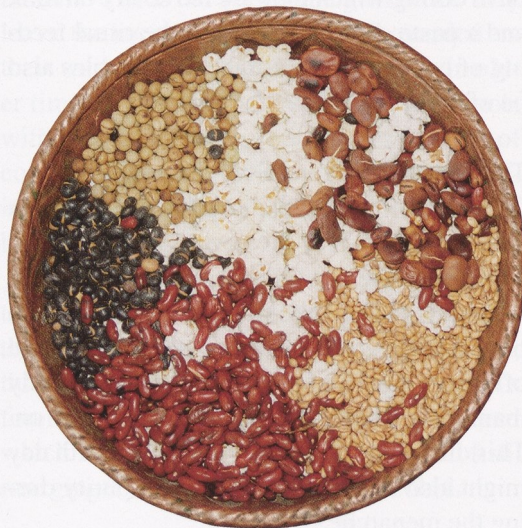
The tray with all twelve dishes is brought to the roof terrace to be exposed to the sun in a gesture of obeisance. One dish is offered explicitly to the sun by placing it on the parapet of the roof terrace or directly on the roof. The second dish is offered to the ghost (*khyāḥbvaḥ*) in the room of seclusion, whose presence by now is localisable in a wall niche or in a basket (*kalāli*) that is normally used to carry *pūjā* materials. The remaining ten dishes are distributed among the girls in seclusion and their friends.

If the Brahmin house priest is involved, he has to be offered twelve betel nuts, twelve cloves, some *khvaḥ* paste and yellow paste (*mhasusinhaḥ*). Some of the *khvaḥ* paste is brought back from the Brahmin as a consecrated gift, *prasāda*. Having distributed the twelve *bvaḥcābaji* dishes, the girls in seclusion apply a special make-up to their faces with a paste (*khvaḥ*) that is produced on the spot from fried and ground grains. The ingredients for the paste are mustard seeds (*pakā*), toasted wheat (*chusya*), barley (*thecva*) and corn (*laja*). Flattened rice (*baji*) is optional. The ingredients are all fried and ground into a fine meal a week beforehand. On the morning of the sixth day they are put into a special container called *khvaḥkvalaḥ*, and water is added. The girls smear the paste over their faces and wait until it dries and crumbles off. Looking at one another they unanimously declare that they look fairer than before. This paste is only applied once in their lives in a ritual context. Otherwise it may be used again in winter to soften dry skin. A small portion of the paste is also offered to the ghost.

The Seventh to Eleventh Days (*nasā nakegu*)  
From the seventh to the eleventh day of their seclusion, the girls' relatives come and visit the *bārḥā* room. Most of them receive a formal invitation. Any female member of the invited household may represent the entire family and may be joined by children. In



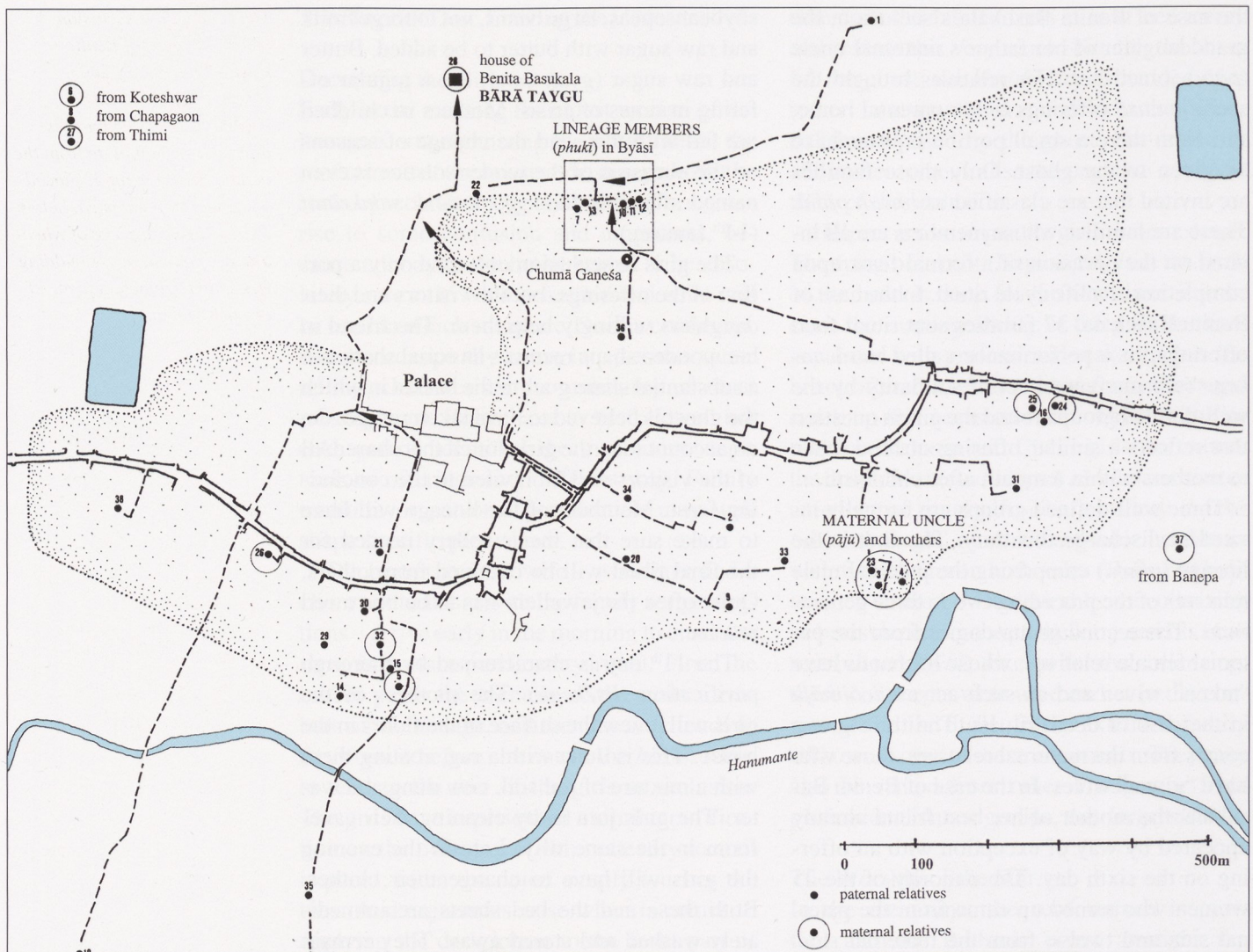
The twelve days seclusion (*Bārḥā tayegu*) of Benita Basukala, January 2003. On the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> days a special dish, *bvaḥcābaji*, is offered on a leaf plate from the banana tree. On top is placed the essential item, *isicā*, below flattened rice, a piece of wheat bread, spinach, pease pudding, fermented spinach, a piece of dry fish and ginger.



Six different grains and pulses, *nasā*, are offered by relatives on the 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> days: above centre (white) flattened rice, clockwise large beans, wheat, red beans, soy beans and chick peas.

Photographs Bijay Basukala, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2003





The twelve days seclusion (Bārhā tayegu) of Benita Basukala, January 2003. Feeding the girls (nasā nakegu) in seclusion on the 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> days (9-14 Jan.) by relatives: on the first day the mother of Benita's friend

(no. 1 on the map) arrives, then five lineage members (7, 10-13), 20 parental relatives (nini, 20, niniāji, 31, 29 etc.) and 11 maternal relatives (grandfather, 3 and granduncles, 4, 23, mother's sisters, 24-25 etc.).



the case of Benita Basukala's seclusion, the granddaughter of her father's maternal uncle (*pāju*) joined her. Her relatives brought the specific *nasā* offerings to her parental home, and from there a small portion is brought to be given to the ghost. Only those families are invited that are classified as *bvahaḥ pāhā*. These are families whose members are all invited on the occasion of a formal feast upon completion of a life cycle ritual. In the case of Benita Basukala, 37 families sent ritual food offerings, in a performance called *nasā nakegu* (see map) – an act of solidarity by the well-defined group around the girl in question that reflects a similar offering of food made to mothers within a month after childbirth.

Three well-defined groups are formally invited to discharge this duty. The first is the lineage (*phukī*) comprising the paternal male relatives of the preceding two to three generations. The second group comes from the paternal female relatives, whose husbands have "taken" wives and as such act as *jicābhāju* in the case of death rituals. The third group comes from the maternal relatives, those who have "given" wives. In the case of Benita Basukala, the mother of her best friend already appeared by way of exception with an offering on the sixth day. The majority of the 25 women who turned up came from the paternal side and twelve from the maternal side. Her father's family covers five lineage members, father's sisters (her *nini*), grandfather's sisters (*niniāji*) and their daughters. Others came from her father's maternal side, the *pājukalaḥ*. From the third group, mother's sisters, her grandmother and her grandmother's sisters and brothers (her *pāju*) came to present the prescribed offerings. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the seclusion five women came to visit the girls (nos. 2-6 on the map), on the 8<sup>th</sup> day only three (nos. 7-9), on the 9<sup>th</sup> day 24 (nos. 10-33), on the 10<sup>th</sup> four (nos. 34-36), and on the 11<sup>th</sup> four (nos. 37-40). The nine essential food items are flattened rice, popcorn, wheat,

soybeans, peas, large beans, not to forget milk and raw sugar with butter to be added. Butter and raw sugar (*gyaḥ-caku*) are a regular offering in times of crisis. Mothers in childbed are fed with this, and the change of seasons on the occasion of the winter solstice is even named after this food: *gyaḥ-caku saṃkrānti* (14<sup>th</sup> January).

The girls in seclusion consume only a portion of the offerings, but the visitors and their daughters willingly help them. The friend in her wooden shape receives an equal share and a substantial share goes to the basket in which the ghost is believed to have taken refuge. On no account may the girls touch this share. All of the visitors will be invited to the concluding feast. Members of the lineage will have to make sure that the jewellery needed for the final ritual will be obtained from others. Quite often the jewellery has to be borrowed at a fee.

The 11<sup>th</sup> day is characterised by thorough purification (*byēkegu*). The mothers of the girls will renew the surface of the floors in the house. This is done with a rag, coating them with a mixture of red soil, cow dung and water. The girls join in by cleaning their cave-room in the same way. Late in the evening the girls will have to change their clothes. Both these and the bed sheets are immediately washed and stored away. They remain impure and can only be exposed to the sun and dried after completion of the concluding ritual, which signals their arrival in society as sexual beings. At the end of the day the girls are led to the bathroom on ground floor level amidst great precautions to prevent even a chance encounter with a male. The cleaning of the body is once again confined to washing their hair and their head down to the neck with soap.



## The Twelfth Day: Leaving the Cave

### Decorating the Girls

Early in the morning the eldest woman of the lineage starts organising the ritual site on the roof terrace of the house, one storey above the room of seclusion. Organising the place gives rise to some confusion and arguments, because nobody in the house seems to be absolutely sure as to what is needed and what will be used in which sequence. Such a confusion, which occasionally turns into serious quarrelling, characterises the ambiguity of ritual prescriptions. Rules have to be followed but each person identifies the mandatory steps, tools or offerings in a different way. Family tradition or personal predilection may well shape specific procedures.

The barber and his wife – who have had a client relationship with the family for generations – arrive early in the morning to enact the most important purificatory ritual. First, the barber pares the toenails of the male members of the lineage, and then his wife tends to the women before she enters the *bārhā* room to tend to the feet of the girls in seclusion. The girls have experienced a similar purification on the occasion of Ihi: not every toenail is pared; often the *naunī* simply touches the toes. And arguments arise when it comes to applying the dark lotion to the front part of the feet and outlining the feet with a red line as to how to make the colouring desirable or attractive. Some mothers are particular about producing a skilful line, which they consider an essential part of beautifying the girl. In the end, the *naunī* receives part of the grains used to make the beautifying paste (*khvah*) and a small bottle of mustard oil as remuneration, along with a few banknotes as a ritual gift (*dakṣiṇā*). Inevitably she will complain and demand more (in 2006 it was up to 300 rupees, approx. three euros). On this occasion in particular the clients are scared of the *naunī*'s complaints. Her purificatory act is absolutely

essential; the family feels it is at her mercy and resents this very much. Finally, the share for the ghost, the *khyāḥbvaḥ*, is handed over to her. In a way the *naunī* absorbs the potential threat posed by the ghost. Her impurity allows her to neutralise the negative connotations of the seclusion.

Helpers arrive to put the girls' hair in shape. The tying of a knot (Nep. *saṭāṅgi*) at the back of the head is done for the first time: it indicates the marriageability of the girl. Her face is painted with professional make-up, but she is not offered a set of red bangles, mirror and comb on this occasion – in contrast to the ritual for Brahmin and Chetri girls, for whom the auspicious (*saubhāgya*) *sāmān* constitutes an essential ritual gift. The jewellery (*bārhā tisā*) is brought, of which a double headdress with five chains on both sides (*nyāpu sikhaḥ*) is much desired. Also desirable is a collar ring of brass depicting the snake king and his consort (*nāga/nāginī*). Except for the collar ring, these ornaments were used earlier in the context of the Ihi ritual. Every extended family still owns some of these ornaments. They may also be rented from other lineages or from professional dance groups, the *devīpyakhā*.

### The Worship of the Sun

In the meantime, the roof terrace is purified and the Brahmin priest arranges the ritual place. The customary sacred vase in the centre, the *kalaśa*, placed on unhusked rice, represents the presence of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa. A twig of white jasmine (*daphvaḥsvā*) has been inserted inside it. It is flanked on the left (as seen from the Brahmin) by a mirror and on the right by a vermilion container, representing the goddesses Śrī (or Sarasvatī) and Lakṣmī. Behind them are eight *kisli* cups, and five heaps of beaten and watered rice (*phyaybaji*) which are dedicated to the *pañcāyana* gods, as well as five similar heaps to the east for Bhairava and to the west for Kaumārī. Set in front of the *ka-*





*Bārhā tayegu ritual at the house of Mangal Sulu at Kvāchē on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2007. Three girls are led to the roof terrace under a red shawl to view the sun for the first time after twelve days of seclusion.*



The twelve days seclusion (*Bārhā tayegu*) of Benita Basukala, January 2003. The Brahmin priest prepares the ritual place on the 12<sup>th</sup> day. The sacred vase of jasmine is placed on the central axis amid a pile of unhusked rice on a tripod. To his right the vermilion container (representing *Lakṣmī*), to his left the mirror (representing *Śrī* or *Sarasvatī*), on his far left offerings dedicated to him and the sacred lamp, *sukūda*, representing *Gaṇeśa*, and on his far left the wooden container, *siphā*. In the foreground two unbaked bricks which serve as platforms for the offerings dedicated to the sun, *Sūrya*. In between is the *Śrīyantra* diagram, indicating the location of a copper bowl. Photo Bijay Basukala, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2003

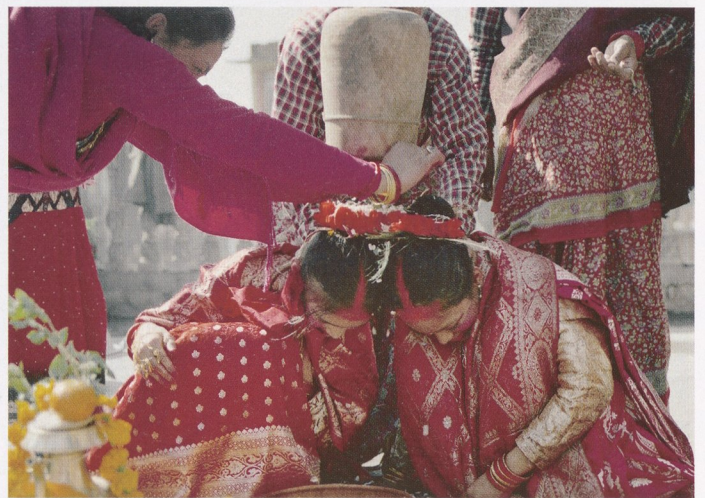


*laśa* is a copper or brass container in which a representation of *Sūryanārāyaṇa* is placed, or simply a mirror. Sun-dried bricks are either placed directly below the *kalaśa* so as to be touched and worshipped by the girls collectively, or each girl has a brick of her own. In some cases two bricks are placed in front of each girl and covered by a large *jēlāapte* leaf, which is the preferred base for ritual offerings. If there are an uneven number of girls, one brick is dedicated to the wooden doll, the *katāmari*. The Brahmin marks each brick with twelve dots and places flower petals on every dot. The priest then takes the stalk of a rose flower and paints with it an *om* sign on the mirror, after which he commences the ritual with the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) and the worship of the vase (*kalaśapūjā*).

After a while the girls appear on the roof terrace covered in a red shawl and led by the *nakhī*, the eldest woman of the lineage. The moment the shawl is removed under which the girls have been led up to the roof terrace, the girls fold their hands with the palms directed outwards in such a way that a small hole remains through which the dazzling sun may be viewed for the first time after twelve days (*bārhā pikāygu*). The brightness on the light, which the girls have not seen for twelve days, means that they take merely a brief glimpse of the sun.

They are then led to their seats facing east on the west of the terrace. Squatting on a wooden base whose position had earlier been defined by a *svastika* fashioned with rice flour, the girls first offer *pūjā* to the sacred vase and the lamp, under the directions of the







The twelve days seclusion  
(*Bārhā tayegu*) of Benita  
Basukala.

Six essential steps make up the  
ritual on the 12<sup>th</sup> day:

1 (above left) the participants  
throw rice and flowers towards  
the sun;

2 the mirror in the container,  
which represents the sun,  
Sūrya, is lustrated with water  
and milk poured from a conch  
shell;

3 while the face of the initiate  
is covered with a red cloth  
the parting of her hair is  
given vermilion powder three  
times from the left hand of her  
mother;

4 the two participants are  
showered with flowers and  
popped rice by Benita's  
mother;

5 the twelve dishes of special  
food including *isicā* are offered  
to the sun, the two participants  
and other girls present;

6 Benita receives an offering  
of husked and unhusked rice  
from her relatives.

Photos Bijay Basukala,  
14<sup>th</sup> January 2003

priest, who carefully avoids looking at the girls. Ritual rice and flowers are also offered to the sky. The girls finally present the usual offering of a small cup (*kisli*) with rice, a betel-nut and a coin to the vase and add marks of respect (*tikā*).

The girls also receive a package from the *nakhī* containing a little comb, a small box with a mirror and bangles – beauty products to equip them for adult womanhood.

In a decisive act the girls now receive vermilion (*bhvā sinha*) as a symbolic transformation of the girls into sexual beings. While the mothers cover their daughters' faces with red cloth, the eldest woman of the lineage spreads red powder across the parting of the hair (*bhvāsinha tekegu*), which has been carefully separated with a porcupine quill (*dumsika*). Both sides of the parting and the forehead are also coloured with three times vermilion. The quill is fastened to the girl's hair, as is a peacock feather (*mhaykhāpāpu*).

After an hour the priest puts some vermilion on the right thumb of the *nakhī*, who gives it to the girls, followed by marking the left temple with yoghurt (*dhau svagā*). She also presents them with new clothes, including modern Chinese jeans. The girls touch them with their right temple.

The marking of the hair is followed by gestures of acceptance and welcome. Popped rice, flowers, sugar cane, peas (*sutibaye*) and fruits are poured (in an action called *siphā luyegu*) from a wooden container onto the mirror as the symbol of the sun deity Sūrya, and then onto the heads of the girls. This showering of fruits and flowers – which is sometimes performed later, after the worship of the twelve Ādityas – is followed by the offering of a mixture of husked and unhusked rice (*vākijāki*). This action of offering had already been performed at the end of the Ihi ritual and is similar to the offering of alms on the occasion of the initiation of boys. The first handful of rice goes to the officiating

Brahmin priest, and only then are three handfuls offered to the girls. The first offering comes from the girls' natal home, and then other relatives join.

The rice offerings are followed by gifts of readymade garments such as jeans, together with a five rupee banknote and leaves of butterfly bush (*sinhasvā*), often with disgruntled remarks by the priest because the clothes offered on ritual occasions should be "pure", preferably hand-sewn and not imported. The first offering of clothes comes from the mothers, the second – often a shawl with a betel nut – from the eldest woman of the lineage. Later in the day presents are also handed over by all those who had brought food over the preceding days.

After the customary lengthy worship of the spouted vase, the girls mark the bricks twelve times with vermilion and add twelve sacred threads (*yajñopavīta*), twelve wicks, and twelve coins as *dakṣiṇā*. This is done collectively as and when the bricks are arranged under the vase, or individually on a single brick or the leaf on top of the brick. The *nakhī* also places a *kisli* cup with milk, butter and honey (*gyaḥ-kasti*), *ḍubo* grass, betel nut and a coin on each pair of bricks.

Having identified the bricks with the twelve forms of Āditya or the cycle of time, a second sequence of worship is directed to the container with the mirror. The girls are given a conch (*śaṅkha*) with *kuśa* grass, milk and honey (*gyaḥ-kasti*) and a flower from the sacred vase, and while the eldest woman of the lineage pours milk and water into the conch, the girls direct the stream on to the mirror in the container in a performance called *arghya biyegu*. Having now done this for the first time in their life, they have managed another transformation from a pre-pubescent girl to a fully acknowledged ritual being, similar to their brothers through the acceptance of a loincloth.

Following the worship of Sūrya, the eldest man or woman of the lineage (or her





husband, the *nāyah*) will take the mirror, expose it with outstretched arms to the sun and then ask the girls to look one by one into the mirror. By looking indirectly at the sun the girls are finally purified, the period of impurity (*aśuddha*) is transcended. Similarly, their brothers looked into the mirror after receiving the loincloth, as do the members of the lineage who, after looking into the mirrors, have achieved the first step of purification on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the death ritual (*du byēkegu*) after having shaved their heads.

Finally, some five hours after the girls started their purification and dressing up, the eldest woman of the lineage appears with twelve portions of *bvaḥcābaji* on a tray. These are the same food items as on the sixth day. The girls offer ritual rice and vermilion to the tray before it is touched to their foreheads in a gesture of offering. The first portion is now offered to the sun, the remaining ones are taken as *prasād* by the girls and those who attended the ritual.

*The twelve days seclusion (Bārhā tayegu) of Benita Basukala.*

*The initiate with a peacock feather and a porcupine spine in the bun of her hair. The parting of her hair has had vermilion applied to it, while a white and a red thread frame her head.*

*Photo Bijay Basukala, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2003*



Turning the bricks upside down or placing the two bricks one on top of the other demonstrates the completion of the ritual. The girls then receive a mixture of milk and water from the sacred vase, which they sprinkle about the house using sprigs of *ḍubo* grass in an act of purification. Continuously sprinkling, they are led to the Gaṇeśa shrine of their neighbourhood by the eldest woman of the lineage. The non-iconic representation of the deity is worshipped according to the instructions of the eldest woman of the lineage. Still sprinkling along the return route, the girls are offered *khē svagā*, the first food of the day, which is of a ritual character. After that each girl will receive a full plate of food (*bhvay*), although very little of it is consumed.

The remainder will be discarded at the absorbing stone at a nearby crossing, which takes the ritual waste of a well-defined number of households. Being termed in this case a *kalaḥ vāygu* action, there is a notion on this occasion of feeding the ancestors. In the meantime the mother of the main girls together with a female helper has been to the nearest river embankment to cast the ritual waste – such as the green bricks and leaves – into the river. Every household of Bhaktapur follows a prescribed route to one of the seven embankments along either the Hanumante River in the south or the Kasankhusi River in the north. These are the places where the purificatory rites on the 10<sup>th</sup> day after death (*du byēkegu*) are observed and where the offerings to the ancestors (*piṇḍas*) and the hair of initiated boys are discarded.

The day ends with a feast (*bhvay*) to which only those families of *bhvaḥ pāhā* status appear who had contributed *nasā* food on the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> day of the seclusion. A small portion of each food item is set aside and dedicated to the ghost, who seems to be still around. The transformation of the girls into ritual and sexual beings is completed, but they will spend the 12<sup>th</sup> night again in their “cave”

and consume the food that was meant for the ghost.

### Conclusion

The pre-menarche ritual extends over twelve days – a period that reflects the general cycle of time. Representing time, the sun is present in its twelve manifestations.

The fundamental transition “from a pre-sexual to a sexual being” (Bennett 1978: 33) is accompanied by a demonstration of solidarity, in which the lineage, the wife-takers and the wife-givers participate. The potential mothers, the girls in seclusion, undergo a sequence of events within a symbolic period of growth: they enter the “cave” as if into a womb, where they are fed like infants for a quarter of the period. After half of the period they consume food that is otherwise prescribed for mothers in childbed, and for the five days to follow they enjoy the solidarity of relatives in much the same way a mother does after childbirth. For twelve days the girls are potential mothers, then to appear before the sun or be “born” as mothers – fully dressed and with their forehead and parting coloured fully in red (*bhvā sinha*). It is the same colour that is used for Ihi, the marriage (*biha*), as well as for the marks on the forehead at blood sacrifices, while on regular *svagā* occasions the deep red of *abhīr* is used.

Inside the cave the girls have to control the dangerous forces of the ghost, which threaten to make them pregnant. But as presexual beings they entertain an ambiguous relationship to the ghost, which is also a playmate that receives an equal share of all the offerings. The final absorption of these offerings by the barber's wife suggests once again the polluting if not dangerous character of the ambiguous ghost. Allen (1982: 194) suggests that the ghost or Sūryanārāyaṇa are even believed to deflower the girls during their seclusion, but Rajendra Pradhan (1986: 133), who is of the



opinion that the *bārhā khyāḥ* is female, rejects this argument.

Leaving the cave and being led upwards under a blanket to finally view the sun as the manifestation of time through a hole that is formed with the help of the two hands comes across as a gesture of opening up. Symbolically, the girls have transformed into sexual beings, ready to be impregnated.

The seclusion of girls among the Newar reflects an almost identical ritual among Brahmins and Chetris in Nepal. But contrasting elements reveal a remarkable shift in meaning. No doubt, menarche in all societies is “associated with the beginning of a girl’s fertility”, as Lynn Bennet (1978: 37) says. But among the Brahmins it is the husband’s group that “is threatened by the sexuality and fertility of its incoming brides”. Even if the daughter is already married, she will receive clothes and red pigment from her consanguine males on the occasion of her menarche. She is married before the onset of puberty to allow her emerging sexuality to be controlled. The following period of twelve days seclusion (Nep. *guphā basne*) in her husband’s house is less rigorous than a premarriage seclusion in her father’s house. Unattached sexuality is seen as “an anomaly which endangers herself and her male consanguinal relatives” (Bennett 1978: 37). The seclusion is “a ritual attempt to protect the purity by establishing a symbolic barrier between the girl’s sexuality and her consanguine male kinsmen” (ibid., 39). The notion among Newars of separation between the male lineage members and the girls in seclusion reflects this barrier, although their sexuality is only a potential one. They are never immediately married. Neither the father nor the head of the lineage has any part in this ritual. Instead, the wife of the head of the lineage, the *nakhī*, attains a priestly role, which she only delegates to a Brahmin if the family feels the need to demonstrate status. By putting vermilion into the parting of the

girl’s hair, she probably shows her solidarity with the girl’s potential sexuality.

Since Bārhā tayegu is clearly a pre-menarche ritual it can be undergone in groups at an auspicious moment. The menarche itself causes impurity but not the necessity of another purifying ritual. While for Brahmins vermilion in the parting of the hair “carries a strong connotation of the groom’s impending sexual possession of the bride” (Bennet 1978: 39), the identical act by a woman among the Newars can be understood as an acknowledgement that the girl has reached a marriageable age, or, as Robert Levy says, has become a “notionally sexually mature girl, with religious and social forms and controls” (Levy 1990: 672).

The liminal period of seclusion transforms the girls symbolically into sexual beings. Such a symbolic enactment of a rite allows the girls a playful *passage* during their liminal isolation and frees them from the dreadful experience Pūrbīya Brahmin girls are exposed to when the sudden appearance of menstrual blood enforces action. Having transformed only symbolically into a sexual being, the girl’s danger fades away, she is readily reintegrated into the lineage until her “true” marriage separates her from her natal group in order to become part of her husband’s patrilineage.

The marriage of pre-pubescent girls to the *bel* fruit and their subsequent pre-menarche rituals are designed to strengthen ties to their natal home, their *thachē*. Their prominent role in the death rituals of their consanguine kin, their demonstration of what Levy called sororal solidarity, their return on the occasion of a great many feasts, can be seen as evidence of ties unknown to Parbatīya Chetri or Brahmin. As in-laws, their husbands bear well-defined responsibilities. As wife-takers they return ritual obligations. The marriage to a deity and their menarche ritual before their transition to a sexual being – both performed with mother



or grandmother as guardians – are achieved under the protection and shield of the natal home and the entire lineage. Eventually they will marry and subsequently belong to a new lineage. For the paternal lineage they are lost, but they are still present to such an extent that they are called “living ancestors”.

These relationships distinguish Newar women from Parbatīya women. In both groups, there is a deep concern with purity and protec-

tion from the dangers arising from sexuality and menstruation. But on the whole “Newar women have, in reality, relatively high status, a large degree of involvement in economic life, and regular and secure ties to their natal homes” (Gellner 1991: 115). Newar women and men remain in their own way influenced by Brahminical values, and yet are independent in many social and ritual aspects.

### The Dynamics of Newar Childhood Rituals



don from the dowry, giving them a special and meaningful status. But on the whole, they are women born in elite, elite or high status, a large degree of inheritance is preserved, the inheritance and status is maintained. (Kishore 1991: 113) In fact, women and men are in their own way, influenced by historical, social and cultural changes, but in many local and rural settings, again.

The seclusion of girls among the Newar reflects an almost identical ritual among Brahmins and Chetris in Nepal. But contrasting elements reveal a remarkable shift in meaning. No doubt, menarche in all societies is "associated with the beginning of a girl's fertility", as Lynn Berger (1978: 37) says. But among the Brahmins it is the husband's group that is threatened by the sexuality and fertility of its incoming brides. Even if the daughter is strictly married, she will receive clothes and food gifts from her consanguine males on the occasion of her menarche. She is married before the onset of puberty to allow her offspring's sexuality to be controlled. The following period of twelve days seclusion (Nepali: *badhi*) in her husband's house is less rigorous than a premarriage seclusion in her father's house. Unattached sexuality is seen as "an anomaly which endangers herself and her male consanguine relatives" (Berger 1978: 31). The seclusion is "a ritual attempt to protect the purity by establishing a symbolic barrier between the girl's sexuality and her consanguine male kinsmen" (ibid., 39). The notion among Newars of separation between the male lineage members and the girls in seclusion reflects this barrier, although their sexuality is only a potential one. They are never immediately married. Neither the father-in-law nor the head of the lineage has any part in this ritual. Instead, the wife of the head of the lineage, the *matā*, attains a priestly role, which she only delegates to a Brahmin if the family feels the need to demonstrate status. By pulling vermilion into the parting of the

on the other hand, the seclusion of the girl under the protection and shield of the male lineage and her subsequent pre-menarche rituals are designed to strengthen ties to their natal home, their *matā*. Their prominent role in the death rituals of their consanguine kin, their demonstration of what Levy called social solidarity, their return on the occasion of a great many feasts, can be seen as evidence of ties unknown to Parbatya Chetri or Brahmin. As in-laws, their husbands bear well-defined ritual obligations. The marriage to a deity and their menarche ritual before their transition to a sexual being – both performed with neither

The liminal period of seclusion transforms the girl symbolically into a sexual being. Such a symbolic enactment of a girl allows the girl's play (and) during their liminal isolation and frees them from the dreadful experience Parbatya Brahmin girls are exposed to when the sudden appearance of menstrual blood entails a ritual. Having transformed only symbolically into a sexual being, the girl's danger fades away, she is readily re-integrated into the lineage until her "true" marriage separates her from her natal group in order to become part of her husband's patrilineage.

The marriage of pre-pubescent girls to the *devi* and their subsequent pre-menarche rituals are designed to strengthen ties to their natal home, their *matā*. Their prominent role in the death rituals of their consanguine kin, their demonstration of what Levy called social solidarity, their return on the occasion of a great many feasts, can be seen as evidence of ties unknown to Parbatya Chetri or Brahmin. As in-laws, their husbands bear well-defined ritual obligations. The marriage to a deity and their menarche ritual before their transition to a sexual being – both performed with neither

*Opposite*  
*Bodhnāth, consecration*  
*(pratiṣṭhāpūjā) of nine caityas*  
*(stūpas) in the courtyard of*  
*Hyatt Hotel on 25<sup>th</sup> August*  
*2000.*

*In the context of a sacred*  
*fire, a Vajrācārya performs*  
*a ritual that transforms the*  
*built objects into ritual beings.*  
*That includes performing the*  
*daśakarma rituals, both male*  
*and female and among those*  
*the Ihi marriage, for which a*  
*salāpā bowl with a bel fruit*  
*is placed on the periphery*  
*of the ritual place. Lined up*  
*are objects and household*  
*utensils which are vital to lead*  
*life. From left the alms bowl*  
*(bhikṣāpātra) to a bed (śaya)*  
*on the right.*