

chromatography that keeps musicians and  
 social entertainment (bars, clubs, etc.)  
 and are crucial for the client's social  
 distinction. While they certainly share  
 new musical tastes and tastes that respond  
 ing to the larger, commercial musical land-  
 scape, transnational mobility and interac-  
 tion with lower-caste is an important  
 element of the band members' lives and  
 everyday life. The wedding bands and  
 their music are a cultural and social  
 for research on ritual dynamics as a source  
 and indicator of cultural-social dynamics.

It sounds like a joke I am praying I do not get  
 this music on my wedding Ceremony.....  
 it sounds like they are celebrating for the  
 QUEENS 50TH BIRTHDAY.

what a fuck is this newari wedding a hindi  
 sound track????????

that's mangal dhun  
 is this klezman?

that music has to go off its too loud I have never  
 seen a marching band at a newari wedding,  
 and I am married to a newari at least did it  
 with some nepali folk.

what are we going to learn but original  
 songs are the best we don't have to borrow  
 this stupid band and hindi songs from some  
 other country to make our weddings memo-  
 rable. where is danda baje???? (Comments, ac-  
 cessed on 15.8.2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MNa1MaXGQ>)

Here, instead of caste discrimination (glo-  
 balized) class distinction and a revitalized  
 ethnic and 'nationalistic' ethos take over.  
 The bands might not be 'import' any more,  
 but they are looked down on as 'unsophis-  
 ticated', 'backward', and thus 'unsuitable'  
 for 'modern times'. The stigma of Nepal as  
 a backward country impacts on the view of  
 these people, possibly Nepalis living abroad,  
 who have stopped seeing the bands as an  
 'authentic' and essential ingredient of mar-  
 riage rituals – not just as decoration. Possibly,

largely because they have ignored the  
 local people's ability to adapt to modern  
 and middle modernizing to various  
 reception parties with a DJ at posh hotels that  
 serve multi-cuisine buffets instead of Nepali  
 food where the guests are also invited to  
 and white wine in addition to whisky. This  
 The wedding bands in the Kathmandu Valley  
 show a strong tendency to show a mixture  
 of Indian and Nepali music. But we have  
 deployed their own tunes and styles  
 regarding brand involving local traditions  
 The bands are also about  
 towards cultural heritage: there are several  
 complaints that the music played in the vid-  
 eo is not Newari but Indian, that the instru-  
 ments used are not Newari but western, that  
 the wedding ceremony thus can clearly not  
 be Newari but Indian. This returns us to the  
 previous elaborations on 'origins' and 'au-  
 thenticity' in the case of the Jugi and the Da-  
 dal musicians (p. 64). To be sure, some of the  
 music played by the brass bands are Indian film  
 songs, and the bands were only formed in the  
 1970s. But like the brass bands, the *pallo* band  
 too is neither 'genuinely' Newari nor Nepali  
 but has been introduced from the Sultanate  
 and Rajput courts in India and subsequently  
 'indigenised'. And the founders of the brass  
 bands were former Jugi musicians, thus New-  
 aris. The 'fusion' of different caste members  
 and members of ethnic groups as well as of  
 music styles, and as much as there are shifts  
 and battles of distinction among those musi-  
 cians, there seem to be ongoing negotiations  
 among the publics consuming their products.  
 In many ways, this microcosm mirrors con-  
 flictations within Nepal on a larger scale. It  
 mirrors the dynamics of rituals between in-  
 clusion and exclusion, for revitalization and  
 innovation, as we could see in the case of the  
*newari* band at the marriage procession of  
 Kailash Dhaubajjar in 2011 (p. 72-3).

Wedding bands will survive, in whatever

**Bhaktapur**

*The marriage of Rupesh and  
 Sajani (from Kathmandu,  
 Kvābāhā) Bajracharya on 18  
 November 2005.*

*During the ritual act of hvākegu  
 hands are joined with the palms  
 upwards: at the bottom the  
 palms of the groom's mother  
 Surya Sobha, followed by his  
 father Dibya Ratna, the groom,  
 the bride and on top the right  
 hand of the paternal aunt (nini)  
 Bimala.*



introduction  
in the following  
description of a  
of a Buddhist  
This description  
part with a  
rites that we  
Tajpur and  
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Introduction  
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## Part II

### THE RITUALS



Introduction  
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## Introduction

In the following we shall present a detailed description of a marriage from a Hindu Chatharīya context in Bhaktapur (which is also documented on the enclosed DVD). This description is supplemented and compared with a number of other Newar marriages that we have observed, mostly among Jyāpus and Kasāis in Bhaktapur as well as in a Buddhist Śākya context in Patan and at a Buddhist Citrakār marriage in Bhaktapur. The Chatharīya and Kasāi marriages are predominantly seen from the groom's perspective, the Jyāpu and Śākya marriage from the bride's.

### A Newar Hindu Marriage in Bhaktapur

In this section we will describe in detail the marriage between Mahesh Bhakta Bhaju and Benela (pronounced Benīla) Joshi. We will first elaborate on the background of the two families and the preliminary rituals, then describe the wedding rituals, and finally the rituals that follow the wedding.

The two families – status of sub-castes and marriage alliance

The two families belong to the two high-ranking status groups of former courtiers and traders. Members of the Chatharīya caste group of the Newars rank only second to Brahmins. These are former courtiers such as Malla, Rajbhaṇḍārī, Hādā, Jośī, Pradhānāṅga, Tīmīlā, Pakuvā, Saīju, and finally also Bhaju or Bhaukaji. This kind of ranking does not claim to rest on any authority. It reflects rather the majority view, which can however easily be contested.

The following, second-ranking group of Pāñcharīya are Tantric priests such as

Karmācārya, traders, (Banepāli, Kachīpati, Palikhel, Dristī), and even sweet-makers (Mādhikarmi). Often members of these sub-castes claim a higher status in order to justify an expected marriage alliance. For example, a Jośī is not necessarily a Jośī by descent. There is in fact a large lineage of Jośīs whose ancestors were Karmācāryas. He claimed the status of a Jośī because he had adopted the trade of astrologer. However, as most people would agree, Karmācārya share rank with the Pāñcharīya and Bhaju. Both groups often join the same funeral associations.

It is important to note that this characterisation is only applicable to Bhaktapur. There are also Malla and Amātya in Kathmandu and Patan, but Kachīpati are from Bhaktapur who migrated to Kathmandu. The Chatharīya sub-caste of Śreṣṭha is known in Patan and Kathmandu but not in Bhaktapur, where they are pejoratively classified as Chi-pi.

Such uncertainties surface in the history of the family of Mahesh Bhaju, whose wedding is described below. His grandfather, for example, was a member of a *siguthī* with 21 members from Chatharīya sub-castes such as Palikhel, Munankarmi, but also Amātya, Bijukchē, and Tuitui, who rank as of Pāñcharīya status. Lineages (*phukī*) often split across these borders on the occasion of marriage alliances. Should a Chatharīya Bhaju marry a Karmācārya, as the groom's grandfather did, his status can be contested, because the Pāñcharīya wife is considered an unequal match with the inherent danger of downgrading the entire lineage. The groom's father married a Saīju from Banepa, the sister of his eldest brother's wife, while another brother also married a Saīju from Banepa, a distant relative of the other two. The sub-caste of Saīju is ambivalent because it has members in both status groups. Although Banepa is located only ten kilometres to the east, such a distance places a welcome

names of the groom's mother  
Bhaju's father, followed by his  
mother, Daryāi Khatwa, the groom,  
the bride and on top the right  
hand of the paternal aunt (matni)  
Bhatu



veil around the family history of the wanted bride.

Three brothers of the groom's father married Śreṣṭhas from Kathmandu – a title that claims a high status but in most cases is adopted by high status families whose traditional name (such as Dhaugoda) is not known beyond their ancestral settlement. Moreover, mobile professionals tend to adopt the title of Śreṣṭha because it allows them to be easily identified as Newars. A third category of families adopts the title Śreṣṭha in order to veil a *mésalliance*. For the period of a generation people have stopped asking who a Śreṣṭha “really” is. More important are economic considerations. Imperative is also the proof that the two families have not intermarried for seven generations or at least as far as living grandfathers can remember.

Mahesh's sisters married a *Dristī* (of *Pāñchhariya* status) and a *Jośī* (of *Chathariya* status). Two of his paternal aunts, who have moved to the USA, married a *Pradhān* and a Śreṣṭha – both titles which in general communicate a broad social and territorial mobility. In an American context, questions of status compatibility finally lost their impact, because membership in Newar social organisations such as lineage and funerary association has no meaning.

A distant relative of the groom, whose house is located almost opposite his parental home, identifies himself not as Bhaju but as Bhauju, and still claims *Chathariya* status because his grandfather caused the lineage to split when his brother married a *Karmācāryā*. Offsprings of the present generation have been married to *Pradhānāṅga* and *Kāyastha*, thus demonstrating a “purer” status. Bhaujus and Bhajus do not therefore join in the annual rituals for the ancestral deities, but are members of the same funeral association.

The bride's paternal uncles married *Amātya*, *Kāyastha* and *Karmācārya*, their sons and daughters *Pradhānāṅga* and

*Mulmi*, but also *Pradhān* and Śreṣṭha and one cousin engaged in an intercaste marriage. Her maternal aunts married *Amātya* and *Pradhānāṅga*, her sisters *Pradhān* and Śreṣṭha. This pattern reveals major changes in the present generation. A generation or two ago, alliances aimed strictly at preserving a widely accepted status.

The Bhaju family of the groom from Bhaktapur

The groom, Mahesh, aged 32, is the only son and last child of Keshav Bhakta, a retired teacher at Sharada High School, and his wife Rajmaya (born Saīju). He still lives in the house of his grandparents at *Sukhuldhvākā* which was divided between his father and father's younger brother. Mahesh works at the branch of the “Navadurga Finance” bank in Banepa, serving as a teller. He has two sisters who both are married. Mahesh comes from a large family: his father has six brothers of whom three have already expired, and three sisters. The brothers married wives from different areas, their sons and in-laws partly work abroad (see table). Most of them including their children and grand-children appeared at the wedding and almost all at the ensuing party.

The Bhajus believe that their ancestors originally were high-ranking and occupied some important post at the court of *Raṇajit Malla* (1722-1769), the king of Bhaktapur. For unknown reasons they must have fled the Valley after the conquest by *Pr̥thivī Nārāyaṇa Śāha* (1769-1775) and sought refuge in remote areas of Nepal, where they established trading posts. One wing of the family established a trading house at *Sanguthar* along the *Sunkoshi* River in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From there, the great-grandfather of Mahesh Bhaju moved to *Batteduku*, a cluster of houses southeast of Bhaktapur, along the old trading route from Kathmandu via Banepa to



Shigatse and Lhasa. His grandfather Krishna Bhakta (1920-1995) married a Karmācāryā and established a partnership with six other traders from Bhaktapur in the 1940s. Another trader, Pashupati Bhakta Pradhananga, who had previously supplied the royal court with yoghurt from Bhaktapur, the once famous *jujudhau*, used his connections to secure contracts with the army and the police to supply clarified butter (*gyah*) and other provisions. Similar to Ratna Bahadur Dhaubanjār, who also joined the partnership, Krishna Bhakta used his connections to the hinterland of Banepa and Dhulikhel to procure provisions. The partnership was obviously a welcome opportunity to establish a marriage alliance: Dhaubanjār's elder brother's son married Krishna Bhakta's older brother's daughter. It was this woman, Tulsi Maya, who as the oldest woman of the Bhajus was present when the groom Mahesh left his house in Bhaktapur, heading for the *svayamvara* ritual at the bride's house.

The groom's grandfather, Krishna Bhakta, moved with his family to Bhaktapur to occupy the maternal house of his Karmācārya wife, whose parents had passed away without male issue. This house was later divided among Keshav Bhakta, the second son, and Rajabhai Bhakta, the fifth son. The eldest son inherited a house in the same neighbour-

hood, the second son built his house south of Bhaktapur, at Jagati, the sixth son inherited one part of the house which the trading partners had acquired in Kathmandu as the base for their business, while the youngest inherited the paternal house at Batteduku on the periphery of Bhaktapur.

Keshav Bhakta, the father of the groom, had worked as a teacher and so had Jujubhai. The other brothers had taken up their father's business as traders. In the present generation two are running a hotel at Nagarkot, one owns a travel agency in Kathmandu, and one works as a chartered accountant.

While the men of the present generation turned out to be mobile professionals, the females of the earlier as well as the present generation joined the trend of global migration. Two of the groom's paternal aunts (*ninis*) and three daughters of his paternal uncles have migrated to the USA, four of them married Newar husbands, one a Bāhun (Parbatiyā Brahmin).

The two youngest children of Krishna Bhakta, daughters who are married to a Pradhan and a Shrestha, have taken up residence in the USA. The eldest daughter married a Hyanju in Kathmandu and remained in Nepal, while three of her four daughters have moved with their husbands to the USA.



## The groom's father's family

Krishna Bhakta Bhaju (1920-1995) ∞ Cameli Karmacharya

### Sons:

1. Surya Bhakta (1935-1978) ∞ with a Saiju from Banepa (sister of Keshav's wife): son Ramesh Bhakta and three daughters. Ramesh has three daughters (studying in Australia) and one son.
2. Narain Bhakta (1937-2007) ∞ with a Saiju from Banepa, his son Suraj lives in Jagati
3. **Keshav Bhakta** (b. 1946) ∞ with a Saiju from Banepa, her brother Suresh (Mahesh's *pāju*) and her sisters Kalpana and Lakshmishwari Palancoke come from Banepa  
Son: **Mahesh**  
Daughters: 1. Anita ∞ R. K. Dristi in Baneshwar; 2. Manita ∞ R. Joshi
4. Pashupati Bhakta (1947-1978) ∞ (love marriage) with a Śreṣṭha from Kathmandu, (no son); she re-married after his death
5. Rajabhai Bhakta (b. 1950) ∞ with a Karmācāryā from Bhaktapur, lives next to Keshav; son Osis (married to a Dutch woman) built a new house down the road in 2010; second son Niba; daughters Paramita Pasakhala, Himali Prajapati
6. Jujubhai Bhakta (b. 1952) ∞ with a Śreṣṭha from Kathmandu, inherited the house in Yethka; he owns one of the two shops in Keshav's house and he alone remains a member of the *siguthī*. His son Sudhip is a chartered accountant; two daughters (Sajuma Pradhan, Jasmin Malla) live in the USA
7. Govinda Bhakta (b. 1956) ∞ with a Śreṣṭha from Kathmandu, inherited the property at Batteduku (near Jagati); his daughter married a Bahun, moved to the USA

### Daughters (Mahesh's *ninis*)

8. Radha (b. 1954) ∞ with a Hyanju in Kathmandu, four daughters (three are married in the USA)
9. Kamala (b. 1958) ∞ with a Pradhān from Kathmandu, one son, one daughter, living in the USA (arrived for the party on 25 November)
10. Rita (b. 1960) ∞ with a Śreṣṭha from Thamel, one son, one daughter, lives since 2010 in the USA (did not come for the party)

The family of the bride (Jośī) from Patan

Benela, aged 25, is the daughter of the late Balaram Man Joshi, one of four brothers whose ancestral home (*kulchē*) is located in Nyauta in the north-eastern quadrant of Patan. Keshav and his two older brothers were born by the Kāyastha wife of his father. After her early death their father married a Śreṣṭha, who gave birth to Hari Man, who in the marriage ritual acts as the eldest (*nāyalaḥ*) of the lineage because his three half brothers had already died. Sharad, the son of the oldest brother acted as helper and was present at all

stages of the marriage. He is the only one who still occupies the ancestral home in Patan.

The oldest brother was engaged by the Department of Education as an Assistant Planning officer, the second one by the Roads Department and the third one, Benela's father, by the Nepal Electricity Authority. The fourth one joined the Irrigation Department.

These Jośīs belong to a group of some 100 Jośīs who keep their tutelary deity at an *āgāchē* (which in a more general way is called *guthīchē*) in the Ilanhe courtyard between Nāgbāhā and Kvābāhā. None of the group continues to receive initiation, which means



that nobody has taken *dīkṣā*, but once a year, on the occasion of *vijayādaśamī*, they convene there to share the annual feast. Their ancestral deity (*dugudyah*) was originally located on Caṅgu Hill, but it was relocated to the sanctuary of Koṭeśvara at some time during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Benela's mother Alakananda belongs to a Kāyastha family in Capagaon, a small Newar settlement some 10 kilometres south of Patan. It is said that her father's ancestors came from Bhaktapur to settle in Capagaon, while her mother's ancestors were Śreṣṭhas from Sankhu.

Alakananda chose to stay at her maternal home (*thachē*) with her only brother, who as the bride's maternal uncle (*pāju*) bears ritual obligations. As such he was supporting her when she was carried by her father's half

brother from her house to the car that took her to Bhaktapur.

Only occasionally did Alakananda stay with her husband at Trishuli, where he worked at the power plant. Benela grew up in Capagaon as the youngest of five daughters. Her younger brother is still studying hotel management in Australia and did not return to join the marriage party. Benela works for a medical insurance corporation in Kathmandu.

In 2008, Alakananda sold part of her husband's property and built a new house within the newly developed urban belt south of the historic core of Patan in an area called Hattiban. Eventually, her son will take over this house. Since she now lives there alone, one of the bride's four sisters will take turn on a weekly basis to take care of her.

### The bride's father's family

Bed Man Joshi (1905-1991) ∞

1. Mathura Kayastha (1-3, died 1943)
2. Nani Baba Shrestha (4, b. 1916)
3. Balaram Man Joshi (1938-1995)

Brothers:

1. Keshav Man (1935-1965) ∞ Balini Pradhan (Kathmandu)  
his daughters Sobha Pradhan and Rina Shrestha,  
son Sharad Joshi ∞ Mulmi (Patan)
2. Narain Man (1937-2001) ∞ Junu Amatya (Kathmandu)  
his son Nabin ∞ Sabanam Rai, his daughters Nabina  
Pradhananga (Bhaktapur), Nalina Pradhan (Patan),  
Mamata Kayastha (Bhaktapur)
4. Hari Man (b. 1942) ∞ Indira Pradhananga (Kathmandu)  
his daughter Irina (unmarried)

Badri Mehar Kayastha (1922-1994) ∞  
Mathura Shrestha (1922-1976)

1. Alakananda Kayastha (b. 1957)

Her sisters and brother:

2. Radha ∞ Karmācārya
3. Sarada ∞ Gurubacharya
4. Aruna ∞ Amatya
5. Narain Mehar Kāyāstha  
(*pāju* of Benela)

Daughters and sons

1. Anju ∞ Basu from Kathmandu
2. Anajana ∞ Śreṣṭha from Patan
3. Anjani ∞ Śreṣṭha from Patan
4. Lily ∞ Pradhān from Kathmandu
5. **Benela** ∞ **Mahesh Bhaju**
6. Arun Man, unmarried, studies in Australia



## Preliminary Rituals

### Betrothal

It took a few years to “find” a spouse for Mahesh. He had been shown several photographs of girls but either he or the girl refused to meet. After his elder sister Anita had shown him a photograph of Benela, which she received through a friend of Benela’s sister, both agreed to meet. Mahesh came to the meeting, “to see the body” (*mha sva yagu*) on June 18 at the Bālkumārī temple on the outskirts of Patan with his sister and her husband Ramesh Kumar Dristi, while Benela came with her sister Benita and her husband. When asked, Mahesh insists that he had never seen her before. One month later, on July 20, 2010, the formal “engagement” – the English term being used for this innovative event – took place at the Café de Patan. Mahesh came with his sisters, uncles and cousins and their families, some 30 persons, while Benela came in the company of 15 relatives to share together a decorated cake.

The two parties fixed the date of the marriage, in this case the earliest possible date at the beginning of the marriage season in the month of Maṅśira (November/December). Enlarged photos of this ceremony had been fixed on the walls of the bride’s house.

### The principal marriage participants

Bride: Benela<sup>1</sup> Joshi (from Hattiban)

Groom: Mahesh Bhakta Bhaju (from Bhaktapur)

Bride’s father: Balaram Man Joshi, died 1995 (deputised by his half-brother Hari Man Joshi)

Bride’s mother: Alakananda Joshi

Groom’s father: Mahesh Bhakta Bhaju

Groom’s mother: Rajmaya Bhaju

Bride’s maternal uncle (*pāju*): Mehar Kayastha (from Capagaon)

Groom’s maternal uncle: Suresh Sainju (from Banepa)

Groom’s paternal aunt (*nini*): Radha Hyanju (from Kathmandu)

Wife of the oldest male (*nakhī*) of bride’s father’s lineage: Indira Joshi (Pradhananga)

### Preparations for the marriage

On November 17, 2010, the intensive phase of the marriage preparations begins in the groom’s house. Invitation cards have been printed ready for distribution. With these cards the parents of the groom “cordially request the pleasure of your grateful company on the auspicious occasion of the Happy Wedding Ceremony of their son Mr. Mahesh Bhakta Bhaju with Miss Benela Joshi (Daughter of late Balaram Man Joshi & Mrs Alkananda Joshi).” The marriage, i.e. the procession of the groom’s party to the bride’s house, is in five days, the feast in eight days, but the invitation cards have not yet been distributed and sent.

The invitation to the marriage procession five days later will be sent to all members of the lineage group (*phukī*), i.e. close agnates up to the third generation who share the same lineage deity (*dugudyah*) and other close relatives (*bhvaḥ pāhā*), as well as some neighbours and friends; the invitation to the feast also includes distant relatives (*yākā pāhā*) and friends, some more neighbours, important persons and business partners. Mostly only the head of the family receives an invitation card but the invitation is extended to all members of his family if the wife of the invited person is also mentioned.

The family is waiting for the *sāit*, the astronomically calculated auspicious moment, for the wedding (*svayaṃvara*) to be obtained from an astrologer on the next day. Then the exact time for the ritual and the feast will be inserted on the invitations by hand. Only relatives living far away have been informed

<sup>1</sup> Speak (as written in Devanāgarī): Benīla.



beforehand. Some hundred cards have been printed. Whoever gets an invitation is obliged to show up during the feast or, in some cases, can send one member of his family. If one does not appear one cannot expect the invitee to come to the marriage of one's own children. The bride's family will distribute similar invitation cards to their relatives and friends for their party on the day preceding the actual wedding (*svayamvara*).

The groom's family has prepared three trays with cosmetics (creams, brush, hair straightening machine, nail polish, towel, eye liner, lipstick, whitening soap) and adornments (*tika* stickers, earrings, bangles) for the bride. It will be brought along with more gifts and ten betel nuts on Friday, November 19.

Also ready are the *masala* pouches: one for the members of the bride's party, and a bigger one for the *khvāḥ soa vanegu* (Nep. *mukherne*) day, when the bride's relatives come to see her at her new place.

**Mr. Keshav Bhakta Bhaju & Mrs. Rajmaya Bhaju**  
cordially request the pleasure of your graceful company  
on the auspicious occasion of the  
**Happy Wedding Ceremony**  
of their son Mr. **Mahesh Bhakta Bhaju**  
with Miss. **Benela Joshi**  
(Daughter of Late. Balaram man Joshi & Mrs.  
Alkananda Joshi)  
**With Best Compliments from**  
Entire Bhaju Family

**Programme:**  
Procession : Nov 22nd, 2010  
Time : .....a.m.  
Feast(Dinner) : Nov 25th, 2010  
Time : .....p.m.  
Venue : Shree Padma Higher Secondary School  
Durbar Area, Bhaktapur  
Contact : 6610032, 9851061827

श्री गणेशाय नमः  
मंगलम् मंगलान् विष्णुः मंगलम् गरुडवज्रः  
मंगलान् पुण्डरीकेशः मंगलान् ततोहरीः

हागो आयुष्मान् सुपुत्र श्री **महेश भक्त भजू** को  
सुश्री **बेनीला जोशी** (स्व. बलराम मान जोशी तथा  
श्रीमती अलकानन्दा जोशीका आयुष्मती सुपुत्री)  
का साथ सु-सत्पन्वन हुने  
**शुभ-विवाह**  
को सुखद उपलक्ष्यमा यहाँको उपस्थितीका लागि  
हार्दिक अनुरोध गर्दछौं ।

**दर्शनमिलाषी**  
सम्पूर्ण भजू परिवार

**प्रार्थी**  
श्री केशवभक्त भजू  
श्रीमती राजमाया भजू

**कार्यक्रम :**  
वरियात : २०६७ मंसिर ६ गते, सोमबार  
समय : बिहान ..... बजे  
प्रीतिभोज : २०६७ मंसिर ८ गते, बिहीबार  
समय : साँझ ..... बजे  
स्थान : श्री पद्म उच्च मा. वि., प्राङ्गण  
दरबार एरिया, भक्तपुर  
सम्पर्क नं. : ६६१००३२, ९८५१०६१६२७

शुभ-विवाह  
**WEDDING**

Top  
Invitation to the procession on 22 November  
and the marriage party of Mahesh Bhaju and  
Benela Joshi on 25 November 2011.

Bottom  
Invitation card to a marriage party in a  
Buddhist context in January 1999, decorated  
with the Pañcabuddha. The central of the  
Pañcabuddha not with dharmacakra- but  
namaskāramudrā



Bringing offerings to the bride  
(*gvē yēkegu*)

These ten nuts were brought to the house of the bride in an act of assurance that the wedding would take place three days later. On the actual wedding day the bride returns the plate to the groom. It is taken back to the future home of the couple and kept carefully.

Film still, 19 November 2010



Bringing offerings to the bride's house  
(*gvē yēkegu* or *lākhāmari covayegu*)

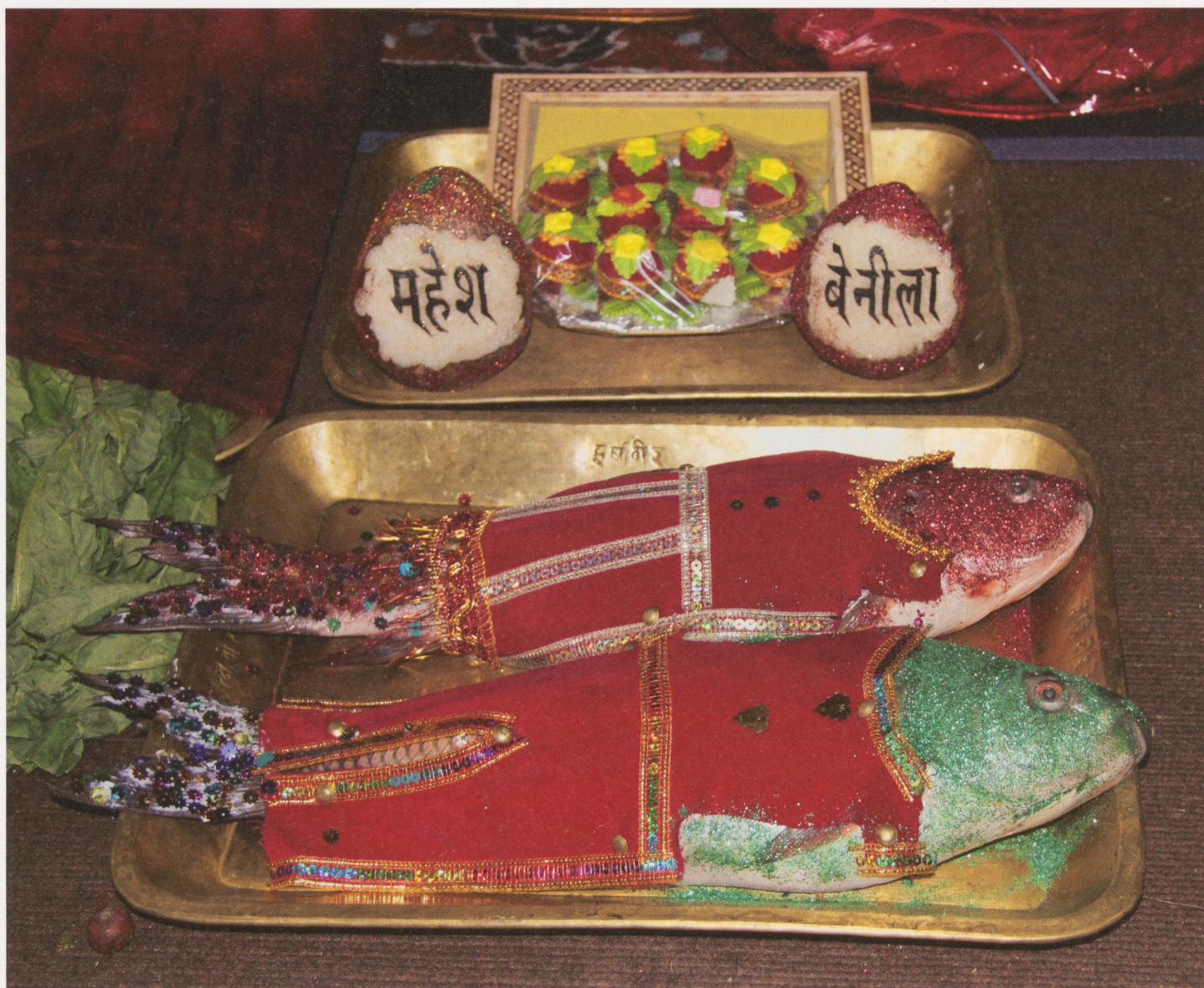
Two days later, in the early afternoon of November 19, around 40 trays with a variety of items wrapped in cellophane have been prepared in the groom's house. There seems to be no hierarchy or order to the display. Only later, when they are re-arranged in the bride's house, does it become apparent that some trays are more important than others (see below). All of the trays will be brought to the bride's house or rather to her mother's house, where the groom's party will be received.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century brass trays mostly bear the name of the owner, his father and other male members of the family, so that they can be returned. Thus one tray belongs to the family of Sukuldhvākā's Vidyapīṭh, inscribed on all four sides with the names of

the owners, Ratna Bir, and his sons Siddhi Bir, Harka Bir and Jog Bir. Nowadays it is also possible to rent these plates from professional marriage organisers. Most items will be brought back to the groom's house four days later when the bride's relatives come to the now son-in-law's house to see the bride in her new environment.

The trays basically contain fruits, vegetables, sweets, cosmetics, and clothes. There are trays with sugar cane, raddishes, spinach, green peas, pineapples, apples, pomegranates, pears (from China), tangerines, and two pomelos (*bogate*) decorated with paper flowers; and there are trays with 32 or sixty-four sweetmeats such as *nimki* (white flour coloured orange), *phini* (wheat flour in ghee), *kajuri* (wheat flour in ghee and sugar), *svari* (wheat flour), *sayguli* (small pieces of *lākhāmari*), *lākhāmari*, and four paper trays with *masala*.





### *Soayamvara*

The most meaningful offerings that are brought from the groom's to the bride's house three days prior to the actual marriage ritual (*soayamvara*): Ten decorated betel nuts and two shelled coconuts (inscribed Benila, right and Mahesh, left) are placed on the framed *sait*, the calculation of the auspicious time to solemnize the marriage. A pair of fish is presented on a

brass tray, borrowed from the *Karmacaryas* of the *Vidyapith*. The female is dressed in a skirt, the male in trousers. The tail fins are decorated with tiny coloured stars while the heads are covered with glitter, red for the female, green for the male.

Photograph 19 November 2010



All items are placed in an even number. Especially prominent is the tray that bears:

- Two shelled coconuts on which the names of the couple, Mahesh and Benela, have been artfully inscribed. Later two of the groom's paternal uncle's wives (Sañju from Banepa) further decorate these coconuts with powder of glitter;
- one framed *sāit* sheet; the auspicious moment has meanwhile been fixed by the astrologer at 10:53-11:05 on November 22, i.e. the following Monday;
- ten betel-nuts wrapped in gold and green paper.

The act of handing over of the betel nuts is crucial because it determines the new role of the bride. If, for instance, between handing over the betel nuts and the *svayamvara* ritual the bride dies, it is the groom's party who has to perform the death rituals. In this case, the betel nuts are a symbolic expression of an alliance to be formed and affirmed.

### *Sāit sheet*

*Svasti śrīmaṅgalamūrtaye namaḥ. ādityādigrahaṣarve | jyotiścakraḥ nivāśitaḥ, abhiṣṭasiddhi kurvantu yaśyaisāṃ la | gnapatrikā, 1. Śrīsubha samvat 2067 sālā maṅ | śira 6 gate somavāra prātaḥ 10:53 vaje uprānta 11:5 | vaje yāvāt pūr-vābhimukhe gāndharvikaivāhakarmāṅga | svaya mvarakarmasumuhurtam astu | śubhaṃ.*

Wellbeing, salutations to the glorious (one who is the) embodiment of auspiciousness. When the planets beginning with the Sun, reside in the luminary circle, make successful what is desired of this paper (which contains) the auspicious moment for the marriage. Let the moment be the auspicious time of the *svayamvara* (to be performed) facing east (and which is) a part of the *gandharva* marriage ritual in the glorious auspicious year 2067, on the sixth day of the month of Maṅgsīra, on Monday during 10:53 to 11:05 a.m. Hail.

Also important are three trays each with four<sup>2</sup> deep-fried sweet loaves in the form of a frog, fish and pigeon, and one tray with two dead fishes that are “dressed” and ornamented by the sisters of the groom's father's wife with powder or glitter: the male fish with green powder, the female with red powder. Fishes are regarded as auspicious in a Newar (Hindu and Buddhist) context, but the function of the pigeon and the frog remains unclear. Other significant trays are:

- one tray with a brocade marriage sari, a blouse length and a shawl on which a hundred rupee note plus a coin is placed;
- one small silver plate with a silver box of vermilion (*sinathala*) and a red cloth to cover the bride's face;
- one tray with shoes and a handbag, another with bangles and *tikā* appliances, and two trays with make-up equipment;
- one silver *pūjā* plate with a vermilion container (*sinhamhū*), ritual mirror (*nhāykā*) and *sukūda* oil lamp;
- one large earthenware plate with yoghurt (*dhaukala*) decorated with two stylised palm-trees made from coconut pieces, almonds, cashew nuts and raisins, and five candles made of nuts.

After a while Mahesh brings a glass with four small living fishes that he has bought from an untouchable (Pvaḥ, Nep. Poḍe) for 200 Rupees. The Pvaḥ originally were fishermen. They raise ducks and pigs, braid baskets and are hired as sweepers

Around four in the afternoon, all these items are stowed into cardboard boxes and brought to a bus for the marriage party to go to Hattiban, but there is a delay of about half an hour because the bus driver has got lost. The sisters carry the *pūjā* plate and the *sukūda* with fresh flowers and go together with the father to a private car. The other relatives and friends travel on the bus or, in the case of the older sister and her husband and son, by motorbike. The groom stays at home.

<sup>2</sup> In any case it has to be an even number.



The fact that the father accompanies the group meets with some surprise because up until a few years ago it was not the custom. Only the matchmaker (*lami*) would go with some friends and bring these gifts. However, the *lami* has lost in significance in some Newar castes (see above pp. 21-22). Suresh, a distant relative, tells the story of one Joshi who was erroneously married several years ago because the matchmaker confused him with another Joshi with exactly the same name. When at the *svayamvara*, the bride's side discovered this, it was impossible to dissolve the arrangement.

On the way back, another helper and distant relative, Suresh Dhaubanjari, stops at a shop in Sakvatha to pick up the marriage cake in the shape of two entwined hearts on which "Mahesh weds Benela" has been written. Until recently, such cakes had to be ordered from Kathmandu, but now two shops in Bhaktapur provide them. Nowadays cake motifs with a house and a car are favoured.

The marriage party reaches the bride's house in Hattiban near Patan after an hour. First Mahesh's sisters carry the small tray with vermilion and a silver *kalaśa* straight away into the newly built, painted and furnished house. Then his cousins and friends bring all the other trays and the women display them in the living room on the first floor. The three trays with the fishes, pigeons and frogs made out of deep-fried dough are placed directly in front of the bride. Another tray with the sari, a blouse, a shawl, a hundred rupee note and two boxes with gold bracelets are of prime importance.

After very brief greetings, the men take a seat on the sofa while the women chat a bit. In general, the atmosphere is distanced. The parties do not talk much with one another and wait for the ritual to start. The situation is not tense, but emotionally intense. After all, they do not know each other. The only person who knows both bride and groom

is the bride's elder sister's friend who had brought the couple together.

When the silver *sukūda* lamp is lit, the bride comes out of the room where she had been dressed and adorned and takes her seat on one of the four cushions on the western side of the room where the trays have been laid out; sitting to her left are four little girls. Then the *nakhī* worships the bride by applying vermilion to her hair parting and giving a *tikā*. To her right Indira Shrestha, the bride's sister's mother-in-law, an elderly experienced woman, assists her and gives instructions for the ritual actions. She also presents the bride with special flowers that Indira sticks into the bride's hair: a dried white narcissus (*gunakera*), a violet aster and a colourful decoration, *jhumakhā*. Then the woman hands the bride the tray with the sari on which one gold bracelet has been laid as an offering from the groom. Touching it with her forehead, she accepts the gift. Her sister helps the bride to put on this ornament. Afterwards the two women give a mark (*sinha*) from the *pūjā* plate to all of the participants.

This is followed by the act when the bride slices the marriage cake to the laughter and applause of the people next to her – a ritual element that was introduced about ten years ago. The very first little piece is dedicated to Gaṇeśa, represented in the *sukūda* lamp. Then the bride receives the second and third bit, which she is fed by her sister sitting to her right. In this way she is made to eat the first food sent by the wife-taker. Then three pieces are put aside for the groom so that – in a way – bride and groom share food for the first time. Afterwards small pieces are distributed on paper plates among the participants.

In between, a maternal aunt brings the four live fish that are swimming in a stainless steel bowl of water and a flower. The bride now has to catch each fish and touch it to her forehead. However, since the little fishes are slippery, one of these escapes from her hand and ends



*Patan, Hattiban*

Three days before the marriage ten decorated betel nuts and the astrological calculation for the auspicious moment and a pair of inscribed coconuts (to be seen on the brass plate to the right of the bride) have been brought to the bride's house, in the company of other offerings. The wife of her deceased father's youngest brother acts in place of her mother, worshipping her with vermilion and handing out *svagā* (abir powder with rice and yoghurt), which she will throw up at the ceiling.

The bride sits framed by her sister and the daughters of her elder sisters.

Photograph 19 November 2010



*debet. The mother gives *hava* (the *svagā*) and a flower garland and fruits, the group from Bhaktapur is led to the first floor and offered*



up on the wedding cake. Everyone enjoys this scene enormously and laughs. Her second attempt is more successful, and after the bride has touched one fish they are placed back in the vessel. They will be released in a nearby river or simply cast away. It seems (and is claimed by people from Bhaktapur) that this “fish *tika*” is only known to people from Bhaktapur.

Now all trays are stored in another room for the next three days. The bride poses with her sister and her future husband’s sisters for photos. A video filmmaker from Dattatreya Square in Bhaktapur is acting rather discreetly and takes photos upon request by the groom’s sisters.

Interestingly neither the groom’s father nor the bride’s mother observe the ritual: the father because he traditionally should not be there, the mother because she is a widow. It is believed that her widowhood is inauspicious, so she stays in the background or in the adjacent room, clad in a black shawl, and only occasionally peers round the corner to observe what is going on. She is there but does not participate in the ritual.

Finally the groom’s party is invited to a dinner reception on the roof of the house where whisky, beer and soft drinks are offered along with sausages, finger chips and the traditional Nepali meal (Nep. *dāl-bhāt*). Again both parties form separate groups and hardly communicate with each other. The groom’s father sits between the bride’s brother and his sister’s husband. There are about three women and eight men from the groom’s side, and eight men and women from the bride’s side, prominently the *nāyāḥ* and *nakhī* of the bride’s paternal lineage.

Immediately after the dinner, around seven in the evening, the groom’s party bids farewell and proceeds to the vehicles. On the way down they pass a gallery of four photos of the bride’s deceased father with her mother in her youth, as well as two other family photos from olden times – a moving scene (without being darkened by sorrow), which acknowledges the virtual presence of the bride’s parents beyond the usual death rituals (*śrāddha*).

Only at the very end, as the groom’s two sisters (Anita and Manita) and the granddaughter of the eldest paternal uncle (Surya Bhakta) are leaving with the pieces of the decorated cake for the groom, only then does the mother stand on the staircase to see them off. As if accidentally, the bride’s mother and the groom’s father meet and greet each other on the stairs. Only at that time and moment is a photo of the bride and her mother, her aunts and sisters possible.

#### Ancestor worship (*śrāddha*)

On the morning of the following day, November 20, a *śrāddha* is performed by the groom’s father at his home. He does not allow outsiders to observe this.

#### Marriage feast at the bride’s family (*bhyaḥ bhvay*)

In the evening a farewell party has been organized in the bride’s house, where she receives blessings and presents from her relatives, friends and neighbours. The party is accompanied by disco music and a feast.



## The Wedding

### Farewell of the groom

On November 22, in the early morning, the groom bids farewell in order to proceed to the bride's house for the *svayamvara*, i.e. the central marriage ritual for which the *sāit* had been fixed by the astrologer. The priest from the groom's house, Shiva Raj Subedi, has arrived specially for this ritual. He represents Miketan Raj Sharma from Khauma (see Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 36 and 2008: 26), the family priest, who had some other obligation. Later in the evening he assumes his duty.

A distant relative, Suresh Dhaubanjari, helps the groom put on a coloured Nepali cap (Nep. *topi*) while he remains seated on a mattress, facing east in third-floor kitchen. He is dressed in a newly-made western suit and wearing a tie. Around his left wrist he wears a large watch. The Brahmin priest takes his place in front of the groom, assisted by the wife of Keshav's younger brother Rajabhai. Also present are the widow of Keshav's eldest brother and Keshav's cousin, the daughter of his paternal uncle, who is married to a Dhaubanjari from Tibukchē (the sister-in-law of Suresh, who is present on certain occasions).

After a while the mother worships the *sukūda*. She touches the *pūjā* plate and offers two apples to Mahesh. All of the women present take some popped rice (*pratiṣṭhā*) and throw it over the groom. She then feeds him the usual ritual food offering: *khē svagā*, a round loaf of bread or pancake (*vaḥi*), a piece of meat, a small fish and some liquor (*ailā*) from a small clay cup, which she first holds to her right temple. He takes some yoghurt before he worships the ancestors by laying water, rice and flowers on the ground (*yavodaka*). The mother gives him a *tikā* (*svagā*) and a garland with yellow, white and lilac flow-

ers. While he eats a bite of the snack, each time interrupted by a sip of alcohol, he keeps his legs covered with a yellow towel to protect his new suit.

Half an hour later the groom's party leaves for Patan. The entrance of the groom's house has been decorated with paintings on paper depicting Gaṇeśa, Brahmā, Umāmaheśvara, Viṣṇu and Sarasvatī above the lintel, and pairs of parrots, eyes and sacred pots on the sides. Two decorated brass pitchers without handles (*lighaḥi*, Nep. *gāgrī*), each covered with a bowl of yoghurt and flowers, frame the doorway. As the groom leaves the house he throws two "golden" one-rupee coins into the vessels after the priest has lifted the yoghurt bowls.

The groom then sits in the back of an undecorated car. He is accompanied by the priest, his best friend Sabin Sakah who acts as the *lami*, his elder sisters, and their husbands and sons. Due to heavy traffic and congestion, the journey to Hattiban takes more than an hour, but the party reaches its destination just in time for the auspicious moment (*sāit*).

### Choosing the groom (*svayamvara*)

A party tent has been erected in front of the bride's house that was also used for the farewell party the day before. Hari Man Joshi, the bride's paternal uncle who is the (most senior) eldest man (*nāyāḥi*) of her clan and who acts in place of her deceased father, receives Mahesh. Also present is the son of her father's oldest brother, Sharad Joshi. The *nāyāḥi* leads Mahesh to the entrance where his wife, the *nakhī*, and one of the bride's maternal aunts ritually welcome him (*lasaḥi kusaḥi*). Already waiting inside the house is a priest from the bride's side, Bala Mukunda Rajopadhyaya from Capagaon. After the *nāyāḥi* has welcomed the groom with a *tikā*, a flower garland and fruits, the group from Bhaktapur is led to the first floor and offered



a seat on the sofa in the living room. Waiting in a neighbouring room is Benela, the bride.

On the ground floor, the Rājopādhyāya priest and the *nāyaḥi* perform the usual preliminary rituals: the Brahmin gives a *tikā* to the *nāyaḥi*, prepares a seat (*āsana*) by drawing a *svastika* with red and white powder under the cushions for the couple, worships Gaṇeśa in the form of *sukūda* and the ancestors (with *yavodaka*), the *kalaśa* with the garland of *ḍubo* grass, and the framed *sāit* sheet. He also briefly and quietly utters the ritual intention (*saṃkalpa*).

At 9:45 the bride and groom are brought downstairs and take their seats, the groom to the right side of the bride. They are ritually welcomed by the Rājopādhyāya priest while girls from the bride's side attach posters with photos of the betrothal on the wall, on which is printed: "Happy Wedding. Mahesh with Benela." Both ritually wash their hands and worship the ancestors (*yavodaka*), the *sukūda*, the *pūjā* plate and the *kalaśa*. Both give themselves a yellow *tikā*, throw some flowers on their hair and touch the *pūjā* plate.

Shortly before the *sāit*, both stand up. Benela circumambulates the groom three times holding a garland of *ḍubo* grass while both priests recite *om svasni* (sic!) *no mimīta*... (RV 5.51.11, transl. Wilson/Arya):

May the Aśvins contribute to our prosperity: may Bhaga and the divine Aditi (contribute) to our prosperity: may the irresistible Viṣṇu, the scatterer of (foes), bestow upon us prosperity: may the conscious Heaven and Earth (bestow upon us) prosperity."

When we later asked the priests which mantra they were reciting and what the main mantra is, the Rājopādhyāya priest said that *svasni no mimīta* is the main mantra probably meaning *svasti no mimītām* (RV 5.51.11) – a mantra that is often recited for well-being.

The bride then stands in front of Mahesh, garlands him and touches his feet with her forehead, gently guided by her sister. Many participants applaud. She also returns to him the ten colourfully decorated and packed betel nuts, which had been brought to the house three days earlier by the groom's friend who acted as the matchmaker. The act of returning the nuts demonstrates once more the acceptance of the alliance.

Mahesh then receives the small silver pot (*sinhathala*) from which he takes some vermilion on a small leaf plate, and at 9:54 he rubs it onto the forehead and into the parting of Benela, whose face is covered by a red embroidered cloth. Both the small pot and red cloth had arrived at the house of the bride three days before from the house of the groom. Mahesh follows the instructions of the Subedi priest who whispers a mantra starting *om mā sinduram* (cf. Dkv<sub>3</sub> 26<sup>r</sup> – 26<sup>v</sup>). First he draws a horizontal line on the bride's forehead, then a line back to the middle and up into the parting. This is done three times. Confusion arises to the amusement of all the participants because the groom has to be instructed and corrected several times by the priests. Benela then throws some *akṣatā* on the vermilion container before he hands it over to her.

The approximately fifteen participants, mostly women, applaud again as she touches Mahesh's feet with her forehead, and also when Mahesh presents Benela with a golden bracelet, twelve golden bangles and a ring for the ring finger of her left hand. Including the ring that had been offered on the occasion of the betrothal, she has received twenty *ṭola* of gold worth 800,000 rupees (approx. 8,000 euros). Afterwards Benela presents Mahesh with a golden bracelet and two rings. Both sit down again, Benela this time to the left of Mahesh.

The following sub-rituals are performed under the guidance of the Rājopādhyāya



Patan, Hattiban

Performing the decisive act of the marriage ritual, the groom marks the bride's forehead with vermilion at the auspicious moment according to the calculations of the astrologer.

He starts at her left temple, marking her forehead with thumb and ring finger, turning back to the middle and then up into the parting of her hair.

Photograph 22 November 2010



priest. However, the Subedi priest from Bhaktapur often helps him and even tells him how to do certain actions. The Brahmin from Bhaktapur acts as a kind of know-all and as such dominates the scene. His never-ending instructions not only confused the groom but resulted in arguments about how things should be done. Such arguing and even quarrelling is an inseparable part of many rituals. The participants all enjoy the opportunity to make comments. Nobody feels that the ritual is disrupted. By contrast, the Brahmin from Capagaon acts without many suggestions and does not necessarily feel subordinate to his "colleague" from Bhaktapur.

First comes the worship of the couple with the wooden measuring vessel and key. Then the *nakhī* gives herself a red *tikā* and afterwards a *tikā* each to Mahesh and Benela, who both touch the *pūjā* plate. The *nāyahī* also gives himself a *tikā*, worships the *kalaśa* and throws *svagā* (*abīr*, *dhau*, *jaki*, *tāy*) for the gods up to the ceiling, aiming at heaven (*svarga*).

Then the *nakhī* showers the couple with flowers from the wooden measuring vessel while they touch their heads together (*hvākegu*) with the assistance of a sister of Benela. The Subedi priest fills the vessel with fruit and the *nakhī* pours it again over Mahesh and Benela. The couple is then worshipped with light (*dīpa*), incense (*dhūpa*) and popped rice (*pratiṣṭhā*). The *nāyahī* applies a *tikā* to both of them and the priests. He also shows the ritual mirror to them and all of the participants so as to make them witnesses. Originally this mirror was a simple disc of bronze with a wooden handle, or a framed disc mounted on a short stand. As a demonstration of affluence, mirrors are now often made of silver. Neither the newly wed couple nor the participants really look into the symbolic mirror. In death and initiation rituals the mirror is held by the Brahmin. In the case of the marriage ritual it is held by the representative of the bride's lineage. The mirror becomes a medium to testify to an important



change: bride and groom turn into wife and husband and will soon be mother and father. The fact that the mirror is turned round may be understood as inviting the participants to all witness the decisive change the couple has undergone.

Following almost each act, Mahesh and Benela offer bank notes (five to ten Rupees) to the *sukūda* lamp, the *kalaśa*, the mirror and the priest (hundred to two-hundred Rupees). Mahesh receives the banknotes from his friend, who sits at his side to assist him. This worship is repeated several times in various forms.

At the end, the Subedi priest gives a piece of banana to Mahesh and asks him to take a portion of it and afterwards to feed Benela. This sharing of food will happen more often during the following sub-rituals. Sharing the same food (*cipā tikegu*), which inevitably becomes polluted after it has been touched, constitutes the alliance of man and woman. Not that it will ever be done again in this form later in life.

During these ceremonies the groom's father is not present. His friends and uncles are enjoying snacks and drinks in the party tent in front of the house. Afterwards they pose on the first floor for photos, variously seated or standing. When Mahesh is asked to lay his arm around Benela he hesitates, but since his friends insist he does so. Both look with a smile into the cameras.

Marriage procession (*janta vanegu*, Nep. *janti*)

Shortly before noon on the same day, the marriage procession (*janta vanegu*) starts to the bride's house from the groom's house in Bhaktapur. For this an old Mercedes car has been rented at a price of 6,000 rupees. It is decorated with white flower garlands, red roses and a large bouquet on the bonnet. "M + B" is written in flowers on the rear window.

The procession is led by the groom's brother-in-law, who directs the way and determines the speed, followed by the Guheshvari Brass Band of fifteen musicians (five drums, four trumpets, two clarinets, four bass-horns and a rattle). The bandleader, who plays the trumpet, and one clarinet player wear grey jackets; all other musicians wear red jackets.

The band is followed by young Jyāpu men, two carrying torches with large red candles, and two holding large *sukūda* lamps. An old Gāthā woman carries a plate with unhusked betel nuts (*pāgvē*), white jasmine (*daphaḥsvā*), dried white narcissus (*gunakera*) and what is possibly narrow-leaved mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*, *dhācasvā*), wrapped in red cloth. Her husband carries a pair (*jvalḥ*) of large deep plates (*kvataḥ*) – *jvalḥkvataḥ* – in the traditional way over his shoulder. These, like all the other ritual implements, have been borrowed from the Karmācāryas of Vidyāpīṭh and include the container for betel nuts (*gvēbatā*), a mirror and stand for vermilion and yellow powder (*sinhatāla*) and cups for yoghurt (*dhaupatu*), a *masalā* pouch, sweets, flowers and incense. Whatever these six people carry is collectively called *bihajvalā* – the set (*jvalā*) needed for marriage (*biha*).

The participation of the couple from the sub-caste of Gāthā vaguely mirrors the complex relationship they have not only with families of high-caste status but even with farmers. Gāthā belong to the marginally pure "nine castes" (*nau jāt*, Gutschow/Michaels 2008: 23), which have ritual obligations, such as barbers or funeral torchbearers, or who supply items needed in a ritual context, such as painters and dyers. Gāthā women supply the entire city with flowers, which they either grow on fields on the periphery of the city or collect in forests. At the very least on the occasion of the great annual urban or life cycle rituals they supply the necessary flowers to the families

*One of the two jvalḥkvataḥ, large, c. 15 cm deep bowls, prepared at the groom's house and carried along in the marriage procession (janta vanegu) by a member of the sub-caste of Gāthā. The rim is inscribed with the words svargiya śrīmati Rukmanī Karmācārya ko samjhana, 19 Maṅgsūr, BS 2060, Śanivāra (in memory of the late Rukminī Karmācārya, 4 December, 2003). It contains an earthenware bowl with yoghurt, marked for the festive occasion with red powder colour, the vermilion container (sinhamhū), a large cup of bronze for yellow powder (mhāsusinhā), two small cups, one with red powder still packed in paper, and one with deep fried wheat flour (nimki). On one side (top) a flower, popped rice with red powder, incense wicks and a pouch with sweets and nuts can be seen, on the other side three pieces of different deep fried flour on a small leaf plate and a variety of flowers such as hibiscus and narrow-leaved mugwort. Photograph 22 November 2010*





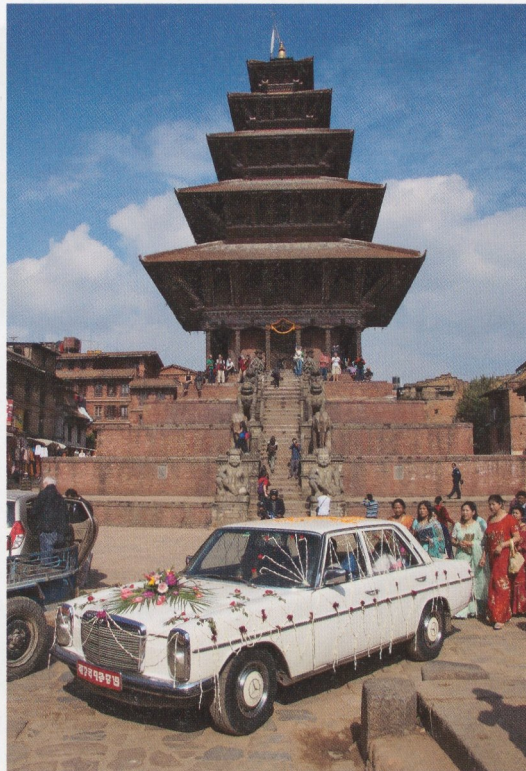


with whom they have a hereditary relationship. In the case of marriage, the narcissus is mandatory for Newar weddings. If fresh narcissus (which only flowers in January) is not available, dried blossoms are used. Gāthā men also perform as deities in the masked Navadurgā troupe. Moreover, they were formerly obliged to carry the bride to the groom's house. Gāthā also used to carry the torches (*musyapā*) and lamps. These days men do not want to be seen in such subservient roles. So four youngsters from the sub-caste of farmers joined the procession in return for a small remuneration and a good meal. The whole group returns every item to the groom's house in Bhaktapur and the Gāthā woman will dispose off the share of the ritual meal offered to the bride on the absorbing stone (*chvāsah*).

Following behind the music band and the Gāthā couple is the Mercedes, in which children and elderly ladies are seated, and walking behind that are the family members, first the ladies, then the men, altogether more than 60 well-dressed people. They walk from Sukhuldhvākā via Taumādhi Square to Dudhpāṭi at the western end of Bhaktapur's main street, where they board buses and private cars.

#### Distributing betel nuts (*gvē sālegu*)

In the early afternoon, at two o'clock, the procession reaches the house of the bride in Hattiban, eagerly awaited by the relatives of the bride who are standing on the balconies watching the scene. The lamps and *pūjā* plates are quickly brought to the room on the ground floor. Those who came in the procession are invited for a snack in the party tent, where they first receive the *masalā* pouches from the groom's side and then from the bride's side. The musicians and the people carrying the torches and the *sukūdas* also receive one package each.



*Bhaktapur*  
Marriage procession of the Bhaju family from Bhaktapur in front of the Nyatapola temple. Decorated with flowers, the prestigious white Mercedes will bring the daughter-in-law together with her husband to her new home in Bhaktapur.  
Photograph 23 November 2010

Meanwhile Mahesh's friends have gone to the first floor to see him and pose for photos. The bride, however, has been taken back to her room.

On the ground floor the Rājopādhyāya priest, the *nāyah* and three women prepare the site for the distribution (*sālegu*) of the betel nuts. The two torches are placed in front of the mattresses for the bride and groom, together with the *sukūda* lamps, one plate and a container with betel nuts (*gvēbatā*): the plate bearing twelve clay cups with ten betel nuts each for the twelve suns (Ādityas) who act as witnesses. One of the Brahmin priests explains that these have later to be offered to the *pañcāyana* deities, the shrine room (*pūjākvatha*) and the store room (*dukutī*) of the house, the ancestral deity (*dugudyah*), the *kalādyah* (represented by the *chvāsah*, the absorbing stone at the crossroads), the Gaṇeśa temple in the local neighbourhood, and finally to the share (*bva*) of food dedicated to Sūrya.



## Offerings

## Right

Twelve earthenware cups (*kisli*) with five betel nuts each and offerings of a flower, a sacred thread and a coin are assembled on a steel plate so as later to be offered to the deities of the house (*Sūrya*, *Gaṇeśa*, *dugudyah*) and the temples and shrines in the bride's locality.



## Left

Twelve lumps of a mixture of flattened rice and yoghurt on a leaf plate, offered to the Sun (*Sūrya*) and the *Pañcāyana* deities on the roof terrace.

Photographs 22 November 2010



The other pot contains brocade pouches with five nuts each (in the old days these were four full nuts and one half nut) and a large number of unpacked betel nuts. The nuts in the pouches are classified as *putugvē*. Anyone who accepts the pouch will be polluted for four days if there is a death in the household of the son-in-law (now called *jicābhāju* in Bhaktapur). Whoever refuses the pouch will not be polluted and is free of any obligation.

After a while the veiled bride is asked to take her seat again in the ground floor room. Helping her to her left are her second eldest sister Anjana and the daughter of her maternal uncle. Benela now bids farewell from the close family members and relatives (both from her *phukī* and her mother's side) by handing them ten betel nuts (*gvē*, Nep. *supāri*). Just three relatives present traditional household items to the bride in quick succession, while the others present money. But first she offers two cups (*kisli*) of ten betel nuts and a package of five betel nuts (*putugvē*) each to the ritual mirror and vermilion container. In completion of the exchange of gifts and nuts, these are handed over to her by her paternal uncle, the *nāyahī* (mirror) and his wife (container) – after sharing food and after a bangle has been tied to the bride's ankle.

First come two of her maternal aunts to present a brass pot and two cooking bowls (*kēsi*) and receive ten betel nuts each in return. Then Benela's sister helps her to put a number of portions of betel nuts and pouches aside according to a list prepared by the son of her father's late eldest brother. These are put aside for those relatives who could not come: altogether nine families with 43 persons. Her mother presents a *kalaśa* and likewise receives ten nuts in return. At this moment Benela (but not the mother) starts to cry. She is expected to do so in order to show her sorrow at now having to leave her parent's house. If she did not weep people would believe that she will not be faithful to her husband. In some cases she is forced by the women sitting beside her to hand over the betel nuts because she is reluctant to make the separation.

Benela continues weeping when her maternal uncle and his wife present her with a large copper pot (*sijatepa*), the traditional container for water. It is the compulsory offering of the *pāju*, at least among high status sub-castes. Among farmers, the offering of the maternal uncle was until recently a goat or a sheep. One after the other her relatives come to bid her farewell: her mother's four sisters



and their husbands – each handing over the individual parts of a full set of *pūjā* utensils in silver, such as the Gaṇeśa lamp, a vermilion container, a mirror, yoghurt cups and a plate. While she hands out the betel nuts the band plays auspicious music (*maṅgaldhūn*).

Afterwards the money presented to Benela is collected, counted and put in her bag. This and the presents as well as the gold ornaments are her personal property which she can claim if she divorces or simply separates.

After having distributed the nuts, the groom takes his seat next to her, led by the paternal uncle, who acts in the role of her father. The Rājopādhyāya priest now worships them both again. He also worships the betel nuts intended for the suns, using red and yellow petals, a thread and a coin, and puts 21 portions from the yoghurt plate aside for the *pikhalākhu*. However, instead of continuing the ritual, suddenly – one and a half hours have passed since the arrival of the procession – some people demand a break for the lunch that is waiting in the party tent.

After half an hour the worship of the plate with the betel nuts continues. The suns receive a holy thread (*yajñopavīta*) and *masalā* pouch, the bride touches the plate with her forehead, and the *nakhī* worships them as well.

#### Joint meal (*thāybhū nakegu*)

Around four in the afternoon, a special plate (*thāybhū*) is brought in on a tripod bearing various articles of food – eggs, liquor, bananas, coconut pieces, spinach, beans, breads, beaten rice (*ciurā*), fish, yoghurt, potatoes, pumpkin, seasoned vegetable leaves, a small cup of yoghurt and another with ketchup, on top deepfried bread (*phini*), etc. – and placed in front of the couple. The priest asks the bride and the groom first to put five pieces of food on a *jēlāapte* leaf for the *pañcayātana* deities, i.e. Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devī, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa and

the *iṣṭadevatā*. Then both are asked to pour water for the ancestors (Skt. *tarpaṇa*) from their right hands onto the leaf and onto the ground.

After these and other preliminary rites, Mahesh and Benela eat from the same plate in the *pañcagrās* manner (see below). They first take a piece of *dhaubaji*, a mixture of yoghurt and beaten rice, then egg, fish, meat, and finally they share a betel pouch (*pān*). At the same time both priests recite mantras. From now on the couple will share the grievances and joys of life.

#### Eating with five fingers (*pañcagrās*)

*Pañcagrās* means to eat with the five fingers of the right hand in a special manner: first with thumb and ring finger, then with the little finger, then with the middle finger, then the index finger, then with the thumb and all the other fingers. According to priest Hari Sharan, these five fingers are related to five vital breaths, elements and *cakras*; when used he utters corresponding mantras: *prāṇāya svāha* etc.:

*prāṇa*: Ether and the *viśuddha* or throat *cakra*

*apāna*: Earth and the *mūladhara* or base *cakra*

*udāna*: Fire and the *maṅipura* or solar plexus *cakra*

*samāna*: Water and the *svādisthāna* or cranial *cakra*

*vyāna*: Air and the *anahata* or heart *cakra*

“Eating”, says Hari Sharan, “is not exclusively meant to feed the body but to respect and worship the body because the body in itself is god.” He also emphasises that a number of deities are incorporated in the body: the teeth, for example, are Kaumārī, the tongue Sarasvatī (related to speech), etc.

To eat using the five fingers is done by Rājopādhyāya Brahmins every morning, by other people on the occasion of a *vrata*, an observance which includes fasting, as for instance on *ṭhulo ekadaśī* in Kārttika, on full-



moon days or Saṃkrāntī. Girls have to eat that way on the occasion of Bāhrā and Ihi, children on the occasion of Annaprāsana (in this case the *nāyah* will do that for them), and the bride and groom on the occasion of *svayaṃvara* (from the *thāybhū* plate).

The ritual meal continues with feeding *khē svagā* to the couple in the customary way. It is said that bread, fish, egg, alcohol and yoghurt represent the five elements. Both also take something of their own choice: Mahesh a bit of *pān*, which he shares with Benela.

Then the *nakhī* feeds *dhaubaji*, both mark the circle of the *thāybhū* plate with water from their hands, rinse their mouths and receive some rice (*kigah*) from the Rājopādhyāya

priest, which they throw onto the *thāybhū*. Again auspicious music is played outside. Two women bring the rest of the plate to the *chvāsah* at the next crossroad.

Finally the couple under the guidance of the *nakhī* worships the *sukūda* lamp and other *pūjā* items from the *pūjā* plate that the Gāthā woman has brought from Bhaktapur. The *nakhī* gives a flower and betel nuts to Benela, which she puts on the lamp. She holds a flower on Benela's forehead and throws it afterwards for the gods to the ceiling; the same is repeated by the priest with the *svagā* mixture. Finally she gives a *tikā*, a red cloth and money to the bride. Afterwards the priest wraps the *pūjā* plates in a red cloth; it will be brought back to Bhaktapur.



The ritual meal, offered to the bride by her parents (thāybhū nakegu) on the occasion of the marriage of Sajan and Subin Chitrakar in Bhaktapur on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

The three central items are an egg (1), a dried fish (2) and a small pancake made of black lentils (3, māyovā): it is the so-called well-wishing food (svagā).

On one side of the plate are nine kinds of meat from a buffalo:

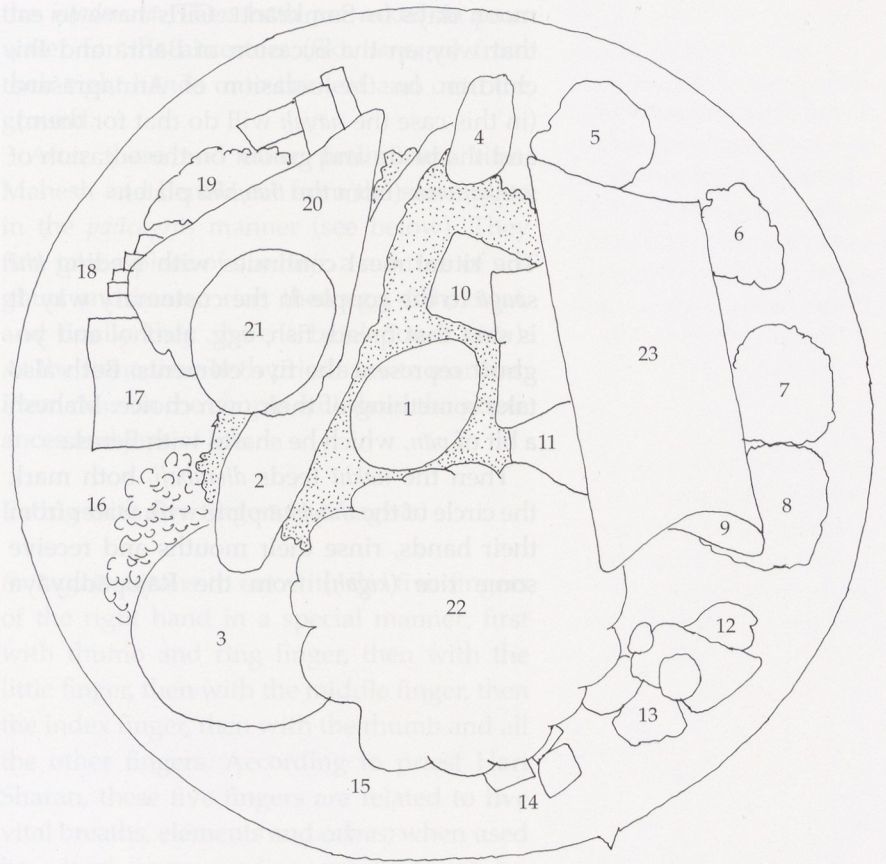
4 *dulā* (cooked and fried meat); 5 *hīlā* (cooked meat, mixed with brown sesame and yoghurt); 6 *pālā* (cooked trachea); 7 *kaygulā* (cooked meat with peas and dried radish); 8 *saphulā* (cooked third stomach); 9 *hamvalā* (cooked meat with brown sesame); 10 *gvapuka* (cooked intestines); 11 *śepuka* (cooked liver); 12 *nhepu* (cooked brain). Only three pieces are identifiable of what collectively is called *butā* (13), entrails such as liver (*śe*), lung (*svā*), stomach (*pvā*), intestines (*āti*), kidney or heart (*nuga*) which are first boiled and then fried in mustard oil.

Besides the already mentioned pancake of black lentils, six kinds of vegetables are essential: 14 *palu* (raw ginger), 15 *musya* (uncooked soybeans), 16 *kasu* (uncooked peas), 17 *chyepe* (raw pumpkin, cut to square size), 18 *chyepe* (raw pumpkin cut to rectangular shape), and 19 *dhaugasā* (radish mixed with yoghurt).

Optional are sweets of deep fried whole wheat flour such as *nimki* (20), *khajuri* (21), and *lākhāmari* (22). As final additions come a packet of sweets, nuts, herbs and spices (23, *masīpva*) and *pan* (24, *gva* – an areca nut and spices, packed in betel leaf).

All food items are placed on flattened rice (*baji*) which is taken for granted and not counted. The bottom of the bronze plate is covered by leaves from a plant of the curcuma variety (*jēlāapte*).

Not yet added to this plate is *dhaubaji* (a mixture of yoghurt and flattened rice), *kegu* (small green peas) and *laī* (radish), *gājar* (carrot) and apple (*śyāu*).











Patan, Hattiban

After performing the essential marriage rites, the bride dissociates herself from her natal home by offering ten betel nuts (gvē) as well as five more betel nuts (putugvē) packed in a pouch to her parents. In this specific case the nāyah of her lineage, the younger half-brother of her late father offers her the ritual mirror and his wife the vermilion container, both crafted in silver. These two items, which are also identified with the goddesses Śrī and Lakṣmī, as well as the sukūda lamp with Gaṇeśa are mandatory for the performance of rituals and will be taken to her future home.

Photograph 22 November 2010





Demonstrating “treasures” on 22 November 2010.

The groom’s father unfolds the “treasures” with the help of the Brahmin priest. Unhusked betel nuts (*pāṅṇvē*), and auspicious flowers such as white narcissus (*gunakera*), narrow-leaved mugwort (*dācasvā*) and white jasmine (*jisoā*) with the aim of reinforcing the marriage alliance.



Handing over the bride (*bhamcā lalhāna biyegu*, Skt. *kanyādāna*)

The *nāyaḥ* and the groom’s father take their places in front of the couple and the groom’s friend. Keshav, the father, performs a series of preliminary rites, such as ancestor worship (*yavodaka*), offering of banknotes to the priest, meditation (*nyāsa*), mouth rinsing (*ācamana*), etc. He then offers a one thousand rupee note to the *sukūda* and places “golden” coins (one rupee) on the *sukūda* and the ritual mirror. He also offers ten Rupees from Mahesh to the *kalaśa*. He worships the Subedi Brahmin, gives him a *tikā* and presents 400 Rupees to both priests. Meanwhile the Rājopādhyāya worships the *nāyaḥ*. Mahesh and Benela also present 200 rupees each to the priests.

Then *nāyaḥ* and *nakhī* sit to the left of the bride. The *nāyaḥ* even asks Benela to sit on his lap. Sitting in front of them are the groom’s father and the Rājopādhyāya priest, behind them the Subedi Brahmin from Bhaktapur. The large *pūjā* plate is now removed and substituted by a small *pūjā* plate.

These acts are sometimes also known as “gift of the girl” (*kanyādāna*). But since this ritual has already been practiced in the Ihi ritual it is not repeated at marriage by most Hindu Newars. It is said that a gift cannot be presented twice. However, some people denote this subritual as *kanyādāna* (cf. Gellner 1991: 116).





Offering of ankle bangles on 22 November 2012.

In a singular gesture of respect and welcome, the father of the groom touches the feet of his daughter-in-law while symbolically offering her broad ankle bangles (*tutibaki*). The bride rests on the lap of the wife-giver, in this case the youngest half-brother of her late father as representative of the lineage. He ties the bangles to her ankles.

#### Tying on bangles (*tutibaki nyakegu*)

In the late afternoon a bundle with ten unhusked betel nuts, and a variety of flowers wrapped in red cloth, are handed over by the Gāthā woman. She had carried the “precious bundle,” which is borrowed from the Vidyāpīṭh Karmācāryas, all the way from Bhaktapur. A helper unwraps the bundle before Keshav shows it to the bride in an act of demonstrating the wealth and status of her future husband’s family. According to Hari Sharan Sharma, the bundle should include five items: besides the unhusked betel nuts, which he terms *pāgvē*, and the flowers mentioned above, narcissus and mugwort, there should be unbroken ritual rice (*ake*), a silver coin, one *mohar* (half a rupee), and, as the most rare and precious item, *kasturi*, the scrotum-shaped musk bag of a musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*, probably from Skt. *muṣka*), the greasy secretion of which has a powerful odour. The priest presents a mugwort to Ma-

hesh, which he puts on his black cap. Then the priest adds twelve coins to the betel nuts and has everything wrapped up again. The Gāthā woman will take the bundle home and return it together with all other items such as the candlesticks and the *sukūda* lamp to the Karmācārya owners.

Afterwards the groom’s father hands two broad golden anklets (Nev. *tutibaki*) to the Brahmin priest who whispers a mantra which is difficult to understand. Through this mantra the wife-taker assures the wife-giver that he will treat the daughter-in-law as his own daughter. At this moment the brass band outside begins to play the popular Nepālī folk song called *Maitighar* (“the house of the maternal side”) in which the sorrow of leaving one’s home is expressed. With the help of the wife-giver the wife-taker ties the bangles to the ankles of the bride, who is now his daughter-in-law, first the left foot then the right. This is the only time when the wife-taker touches her feet, which are placed on a leaf plate.



The daughter leaves the house at Hattiban, Patan on 22 December 2010.

In place of her late father, the *nāyāḥ* of the lineage carries the bride three times around the conveyance, a white Mercedes, which brings her to her new home in Bhaktapur. She is supported by the son of her late father's eldest brother (right) and her paternal uncle (*pāju*).



Once this has been done, the groom's father presents some money (*dakṣiṇā*) to the priest. Then the silver *sukūda* is put aside. In a final gesture of farewell, the *nāyāḥ* as the representative of the wife-giver and his wife present the weeping Benela with a silver ritual mirror and a silver vermilion container and each receive from her ten betel nuts and a pouch with five more nuts (*putugvē*). At the beginning of the process of giving away nuts, these were put aside in a clay cup in front of the vermilion container and the mirror. Both objects as well as the *sukūda* are part of the gifts (*kośa*) and will be taken to the in-laws' house and respected as her personal property.

Once again to the sound of the brass band playing auspicious music (*maṅgaldhān*), the *nāyāḥ* in his role as wife-giver carries his elder brother's daughter Benela out of the house on his back, following Mahesh, who is led by his friend. For the first circle around the car the *nāyāḥ* is accompanied by her father's eldest brother's son, who claps her back and

encourages her to express her grief: "You must weep more, weep more!" She again cries and weeps. During the last round she is accompanied by her maternal uncle and her grand-uncle's grandson. Women throw flowers from the roof. They circumambulate the Mercedes three times. She has to refuse in a way to enter the car, and be mildly forced to do so. In contrast to the traditions of Patan, in Bhaktapur it is the maternal uncle (*pāju*) who has to carry his niece (*bencā*) around the car.

The groom's father places a brocade cloth (*dugū phāgā*) on the roof of the car while the sisters of the bride's mother throw flowers on the vehicle. The mother has not been seen any more and does not show up in this farewell moment. For a while, the father sits in the front seat beside the driver. The couple takes their seat in the back, the small *pūjā* plate with the unhusked betel nuts wrapped in red cloth beside them. The bride is not – as was until recently the custom – accompanied by an aunt or friend.



The music band again plays auspicious tunes and the procession leaves the bride's place in the same order as it arrived.

#### Formal talk at the Gaṇeśa shrine (*khā lhāyegu*)

After covering the first five-hundred metres, the procession stops at the nearest Gaṇeśa shrine, where, under the guidance of both priests, the groom's father once again assures in his role as wife-taker the *nāyahī* as the wife-giver that his family will always take care of the new daughter-in-law, and in fact treat her like a daughter. The priests instruct the fathers what to say. The Rājopādhyāya priest tells Keshav: "The girl is inexperienced in the kitchen so you should not shout at her but treat her like your own daughter". The Bhaktapur priest then occupies the front seat of the Mercedes and the other family members as well as the brass band enter the four buses.

#### Welcoming the bride (*bhamcā dukāyegu*)<sup>3</sup>

Two hours later in the evening the procession arrives back in Bhaktapur and returns by foot along the same route to the groom's house. Especially the young men are in a festive mood; tipsy as they are, some of them dance. When the couple leaves the car, auspicious music (*maṅgaldhūn*) is played. The *nakhī* and the paternal uncle's wife are waiting at the entrance of the house to welcome the daughter-in-law (*bhamcā*). Now the family priest, Miketan Raj Sharma (the Subedi priest has left the procession), draws two *yantras* on the ground and places two wooden planks (*āsana*) on them. Also placed at the entrance are the two large torches, the large *sukūda* lamps, the silver *pūjā* plate and a measuring vessel with an iron key.

As Mahesh leaves the car, his still dancing friends welcome him loudly and accompany him to the entrance in the narrow lane. Walking in front of them is Benela. She comes



The formal talk at the Gaṇeśa shrine on 22 November 2010. In conclusion of the actual marriage ritual, the father of the newly married husband (left, Keshab Bhaju) assures the representative of the newly married wife (in this case the youngest brother of her father, right) of her wellbeing. The Brahmin priest (centre) of her family mediates between the two parties.

alone, without anybody from her family. She brings two suitcases and a beauty case. Both stand on their prepared places, where they are welcomed by the *nakhī* of the house with the usual *lasakusa* ritual, during which she also showers flowers over the couple's joined heads.

Afterwards the *nakhī* extends her left hand and grasps her daughter-in-law's sari with her thumb and index finger, while the daughter-in-law grasps in turn the old iron key of the house with her left hand (by mistake she first used her right hand). The daughter-in-law is thus guided into her new home. When Mahesh wants to enter the house, his friends try to hold him back, bursting into raucous laughter. They follow him, carrying his wife's suitcases.

The bride is led to the kitchen on the top floor and sits on a cushion on the ground, with Mahesh to her right and his paternal

<sup>3</sup> Lit. to receive the daughter-in-law inside [the house] and *hvākegu*, which refers to bringing the heads of the couple together.



The arrival of the bride in Bhaktapur on 22 November 2010.

As soon as the bride arrives at her husband's house, her mother-in-law grasps her with her right hand, in which she holds the key of a traditional lock, taking the bride's left hand and the seam of her sari and slowly dragging her into the house.



aunt (*nini*) to her left. The daughter-in-law humbly keeps her eyes lowered. Then the groom's father worships the *sukūda* etc. On the ground is a tray with twelve clay cups each filled with ten betel nuts, which will later be distributed to the deities of the house and the neighbourhood. The first ten nuts that the bride receives are from her husband's paternal aunt, and are placed by her on the ground for Gaṇeśa.

Handing out betel nuts by the daughter-in-law (*bhamcā yagu gvē sāyegu*)

The daughter-in-law bows to the Brahmin and then gives ten betel nuts each to her parents-in-law (*sasubau* and *sasuma*), the younger brothers of Keshav, the son of his deceased elder brother, and to their wives and sons. Also included is the daughter of the grandfather's first wife's daughter, who is married to a Dhaubanjār. In the end come two of Mahesh's sisters, their husbands and children

and his paternal aunt, the *nini*, who helped count the betel nuts. She bows and receives money and a small box with ornaments.

In this way the daughter-in-law gets acquainted with each member of her new family. The *nini* introduces the family members to her, sometimes asking others for the correct name. If somebody does not show up at this ceremony, it means that he is separated from the family. In cases of death, he or she does not need to mourn then for eleven days but only for four.

Some family members keep the betel nuts, some return them to the *nini* saying that one does not need to give betel nuts to one's own people. The money given to Benela is counted and put in her handbag.

Afterwards the bride and groom again share food from a *thāybhū* plate with the same varieties of food that were offered in the bride's house. They also receive once again *khē svagā* (egg, fish, bread and liquor), of which Mahesh consumes a bit whereas Bene-





The welcome of the daughter-in-law in her new home on 22 November 2010.

*Top*

Upon their arrival at the husband's house, the newlywed couple shares food from a *thāybhū* plate as well as *khē svagā* (egg, fish, a pancake made of pea flour) and brandy. Sharing food, which has been touched by her husband and thus is polluted, constitutes a singular act of uxoral solidarity. The husband's paternal aunt (*nini*) acts as companion and helper.

*Bottom*

In an act of union the heads of husband and wife are brought into contact by the husband's cousin while his mother showers the couple with flowers and rice from a wooden container.



Let us receive the daughter-in-law inside the house and welcome, which refers to bringing the heads of the couple together.



la just pretends to eat it: by touching the food, ritual requirements are fulfilled. A separate leaf plate with food (*bva*) is dedicated to the sun and is thus brought to the roof terrace. The leftovers from the *thāybhū* meal are taken by the Gāthā woman and disposed of at the nearby *chvāsaḥ* stone, which absorbs ritual waste. The *nakhī* brushes the ground with a broom behind her. The *thāybhū* is polluted (*cipā*, Nep. *juto*) and as such the removal requires precautions – as in any other instance of removing the leftovers after a feast. The broom symbolically removes potential leftovers and has to hit the stairs three times.

The couple receives two trays with clothes, a ten rupee note and two betel nuts on top. They are asked to join their heads while the *nakhī* once again showers flowers onto them from the measuring vessel. Both give a *tikā* to the Brahmin, who hands over some “golden” coins to Keshav, the *sukūda*, the *kalaśa* and the twelve Ādityas. The couple offers coins to the Brahmin in return and gives water with white flowers to the *nakhī*. The Brahmin gives *tikās* with white flowers to them.

A *masalā* pouch is presented to the Brahmin

and the Ādityas. He takes four clay cups for himself and asks Keshav to send the remaining eight to Sūrya, Lakṣmī and Gaṇedyah, *dukuti* (the *pūjā* room), the *dugudyah*, and two more Gaṇeśas from Bhaktapur (probably these are the ones which will be visited by the couple in the *caturthī* ritual, but certainly the Cvāga Gaṇeśa on the western periphery of Kvapade, the urban realm). The Brahmin takes all of his gifts and leaves the house at about nine in the evening.

Finally the mother-in-law again offers *khē svagā* to the *sukūda* lamp, to her son and her daughter-in-law (who this time eats a little bit), and to her husband and all the other participants. She insists that it really has to be eaten, not merely touched symbolically. In the end a full meal is served with beer to all of the participants in the adjoining kitchen belonging to Keshav's younger brother.

Meanwhile Mahesh has changed his clothes and is wearing a sports suit. He brings in a he-goat from outside and ties it to the railing on the first floor. It was bought a day earlier for 7,000 rupees and will be sacrificed the following day.



## Post-nuptial rituals

Worship at the shrine of the goddess  
(*pīṭhapūjā*)

Around nine in the morning of the following day, the bride sits in the dining room of her new home and helps to prepare food for the day while downstairs Mahesh writes invitations to his party. In the kitchen the Tantric priest (*ācāju*), Moti Karmacharya from the locality of Khichē, prepares cones of rice (*gvajā*) for the worship of the *pīṭha* goddess Tripurasundarī.

The worship of the non-iconic locational deity characterises most life-cycle rituals of the Newars. On the occasion of the first feeding of solid food to a child, the *Macā jākva* or *Annaprāśana* ritual (Gutschow/Michaels 2008: 40-51), the child is brought to the *pīṭha* to touch the *locus* of his future life in the form of a stone. The stone represents a defined territory within the complex urban realm. In some cases a goat is sacrificed to the deity, who is identified either as the Mother Goddess (*māṭṛkā*), Gaṇeśa or Bhairava. Blood is shed in a powerful confirmative act. On the occasion of a boy's initiation (*Kaytāpūjā*, *ibid.* 59-83), a proper *pīṭhapūjā* requires even more – best of all the sacrifice of five different animals (*pañcabali*). The boy virtually stands in blood while receiving a loincloth from his maternal uncle to confirm his arrival in the community of males of his lineage. In the case of the girl's marriage to the *bel* fruit, the *Ihi* ritual, a goat is sacrificed to the locational deity and at large rituals the acting Tantric priest, the *Pīṭhācāju* or *Ācāju*, even visits the nine principal non-iconic deities of Bhaktapur in a continuous circuit (Gutschow/Michaels 2008: 126).

Among sub-castes of high status Hindu families of Chatharīya and Pāñcharīya status does the sacrifice of a goat on the day after *svayamvara* and *hvākaygu* (the handing



Offerings to the local deity  
The Tantric Karmācārya priest  
prepares seventeen cones (*gvajā*)  
of rice flour, twelve flat pieces  
of rice flour, a black soya bean on top  
and one large pancake-like item  
with three beans.  
These are vaguely identified  
with unnamed deities and spirits  
and later offered to the shrine of  
Tripurasundarī on the day after  
the wedding, 23 September 2011.

out of betel nuts by the bride to the groom's relatives) confirm the arrival of the bride in her new location, the house, the quarter and the city at large. The locational deity of the Bhaju family of Sukhuldhvākā in Bhaktapur is Tripurasundarī, the ninth of the principal Mother Goddesses who occupies the centre of the urban realm. On minor occasions the family goes to the shrine of Dahivināyaka, the quarter's Gaṇeśa, but on major occasions the shrine of Tripurasundarī is preferred, around which the majority of Bhaktapur's eighteen Tantric priests (Karmācārya) live (see map, Gutschow/Michaels 2008: 27).

The ritual starts with the priest shaping cones of rice flour (*gvajā*). These are carefully arranged on a plate with an outer ring of seventeen cones, of which some have a pointed tip, and twelve flat, cookie-shaped objects in an inner circle. He does this beside the house deities, which are kept in the kitchen. The family has arranged eight trays with fruits, flowers, sweets, and a pair of pomelo (*bogate*) fruits as well as a basket with *pūjā* material.

For the following ritual *Benela*, the new daughter-in-law, and the eldest woman of the family (Kis Maya, widow of Keshav's eldest brother), turn to the east, the priest faces north, and the Keshav's wife in her role as



On the day after the marriage, a goat is sacrificed at the an-iconic shrine of Tripurasundarī, the ninth of Bhaktapur's protective Mother-Goddesses.

The head of the sacrificial animal, the hoofs and the neck are symbolically offered to the goddess along with sweets. Later that day the head is divided into eight parts, of which the newly wed couple receives the privileged parts, i.e. the left and right horns and eyes.

The ensuing feast welcomes the daughter-in-law into the clan of her husband.



*nakhī* of the household faces south. Left of Benela is the *sukūda* lamp, to the right the plate with the rice cones. In the centre are a container with a handle (*kālāli*), and a plate for *pūjā* material. The three women touch the *pūjā* plate while the priest mutters the ritual declaration (*saṃkalpa*). During the act of worship the priest sends a woman to garland and worship the he-goat, which is kept on the first floor.

Ten minutes later, the male family members leave to worship the goddess and perform the sacrifice. Outsiders are asked by the groom's father not to touch any member of the family or the *pūjā* plates.

The procession to Tripurasundarī is led by a Jyāpu who pulls the goat along and holds a large knife in his hand. He is followed by the priest, the groom's father, the groom with the *pūjā* plate and the father's youngest brother, who carries the plate with the rice cones. One more brother comes and the sons of the three brothers, while the third brother

joins the group later at the shrine. All walk barefoot and carry a tray with *pūjā* material: mainly fruits, and sweet loaves, popped rice, incense, two pomelos decorated with flags, alcohol, a *masalā* pouch, red cloth, clay cups, oil, flags, flower garlands and a leaf plate with small cotton threads.

At the *pīṭha* of Tripurasundarī the priest prepares the *yantra* with *abīr* in front of the Goddess's representation in the form of a stone and arranges the rice cones and two eggs accordingly. The two *bogate* fruits and one citrus fruit (*taḥsi*), which is often required in Newar rituals, are decorated with flags and pendants of coloured paper. After a while the newly-married Mahesh and his father sit behind the priest. A woman who enters the shrine and performs her own *pūjā* does not disturb them at all. Facing in the same direction as the priest, they join in worshipping the goddess. Meanwhile the brothers and other participants sit in the arcaded building (*pāṭī*) next to the shrine, reading the





At the shrine of Tripurasundarī on 23 November 2010  
The newlywed husband Mahesh (left) and his father Keshab (middle) share ritual food (*svagā*) according to the instructions of the Tantric Karmācārya priest (right).

newspapers, which report on the disputes at the Maoist party convention in Gorkha.

Before noon, the animal sacrifice begins. The Jyāpu helper enters the shrine with the goat. The priest worships the animal and the knife, as do the sacrificers, i.e. Mahesh and his father. The goat is released for a while in order to accept the sacrifice, which the animal expresses by shivering. The priest helps to evoke this sign by sprinkling water on its hindquarters and ear. Finally, some young men help hold the goat from the back while the Jyāpu helper cuts its throat and sprinkles the blood on the aniconic representation of the goddess and around the shrine. Then the Jyāpu helper cuts off its head and tail and places both on a plate in front of the goddess. He sticks the tail into the mouth and lights a light on it which the participants hold their hands over before then touching their head. Later the tail, the feet, and the intestines, which have been inflated to form a garland by Mahesh, are also offered to the goddess.

All sixteen participants, the three brothers of the sacrificer, their sons and the son and wife of the second brother and the widow of the eldest brother's son take *tikā* of blood from the goat's neck. The sacrificer and his son receive *samay* from the priest, i.e. a ritual meal of bread (*vah*), flat bread made of rice flour (*catāmari*), fish, ginger and black soy beans, within the fenced precinct of the sanctuary before it is handed out to everybody else. To finish, vermilion is applied to the forehead along with a stripe of lamp black (*mvaḥṇi tikā*) from a fire in a clay cup that burned during the ritual, and a strip of red cloth, together with a garland and a piece of fruit to confirm participation in the sacrifice.

Three hours after the priest arrived at the house, the party again reaches the house, where the tip of the goat's tail is fixed to the lintel of the doorway. Almost all of the participants reassemble on the top floor of the groom's house, where the priest gives a *tikā* and the *mvaḥṇi* stripe along with fruit and



red cotton strips to the *nakhī*, the groom's mother, and the other women in the house, and finally to the bride, who also receives a jasmine blossom (*daphaḥsvā*) to fix in her hair. This anchors her to the locality to which she now belongs.

#### Distribution of the sacrificial animal's head (*syūkabhvay*)

At the end of the day, all of the members of the lineage join in a feast. The central act of this feast is the distribution of the head of the sacrificial animal (*syū*). In deviance from the usual distribution of nine parts according to seniority (Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 121), the newly married couple leads the sequence: the husband receives the right horn and eye, his wife the left horn and eye. The parents of the husband and the Tantric priest follow. The sixth to ninth places are held by the father's three younger brothers and the son of the deceased eldest brother. The feast (*syūkābhvay*) confirms the acceptance of the couple by the lineage.

In the case of the Bhaju family, the distribution of the *syū* still demonstrates a certain cohesiveness, although only one of the younger brothers is still a member of the funeral association and there is no organisation of the formal lineage to worship the ancestral deity. Both institutions seem to have become obsolete. Local endogamy was already abandoned generations ago because the Bhajus returned to Bhaktapur after they had been away for about two hundred years. Conformity with the traditional institutions – “the single most stressed value in Newar society” (Quigley 1986: 83) – is no more. Funeral associations do not respond to cases of death outside of Kvpade, the ancient territory of Bhaktapur, ritually defined by two rivers to the north and south. And the lineages of the once privileged sub-castes experience the joint rituals and feasts as a burden and an un-

necessary cause of inter-familial squabbles. Marriages seem to be the rare occasions for the once cohesive lineages to join and share the sacrificial animal. The fact that the husband joins the *dhīr cakaygu* ritual, the handing out of betel nuts to the members of his wife's lineage a few days later, likewise fulfils the ritual requirements, although he may possibly never assume the duties of a wife-taker (*jicābhāju*).

#### Gaṇeśapūjā (*caturthī*)

Two days after the wedding, early in the morning of November 24, the bride is introduced to the local Gaṇeśa. Two non-iconic shrines are worshipped on the periphery of the urban realm, possibly in an act of gratitude which acknowledges that everything has gone well so far and the bride has become an integral part of the family. A small party comprising the newly married couple, the husband's mother, his eldest sister and his deceased elder paternal uncle's son went by car first to Sūrjebināyak, then to Cvāga Gaṇeśa. Sūrjebināyak (Skt. Sūryavināyaka) is one of the four Gaṇeśas that in theory (but not in topographical reality) mark the cardinal directions in the Valley. It is one of the most popular shrines of the Valley and attracts throngs of visitors, especially on Tuesdays, the day sacred to Gaṇeśa. The second shrine is located at the western end of Kvpade's territory within the pine forest Sallāgharī (see map in Gutschow/Michaels 2008: 74). This worship is called *caturthī (pūjā)*, the worship that should take place on the fourth day after the *svayaṃvara* or *vivāha*.

#### Seeing the bride in her new environment (*khvāḥ soa vanegu*)

In the evening of the same day, the bride's party – some thirty paternal as well as maternal relatives – arrives in Bhaktapur for a



visit to the now daughter-in-law in her new environment. This ritual is called *khvah̄ sva vanegu* (lit. “going to look at the face (of the bride)”); Nep. *mukh herne*<sup>4</sup>). It is said that previously the bride was veiled during the marriage ceremony and only on this day visible for the relatives of both sides. Since the house of the groom is too small for such a ceremony, the reception, hosted by the wife-taker’s family, takes place at Hotel Sweet Home in the quarter of Yalāchē.

The wife-taker welcomes the party at the entrance of the venue. They arrive with almost everyone carrying one of the trays, still wrapped in cellophane, that were sent to them five days before. However, there are some significant additions: trays with strawberries, two pots with sweets (*rasbari* and *lalbari*) and mustard apples (*nakapaisi*) – so that now there are a total of 47 trays. The trays with the two inscribed coconuts, a new bowl with yoghurt, a new wedding cake, a tray with a new sari, cloth for a blouse, a brocade shawl with a hundred rupee bank note on top, a tray with silver *pūjā* items (ritual mirror, vermilion container, *sukūda*) and a *pūjā* plate are placed on a small stage in the room that is intended for conferences and meetings.

Twenty minutes later the bride arrives, led by her substitute father who brings her to a mattress on the stage where she takes a seat, flanked by her sisters Anju and Anjana. In front of her sits the eldest male of the Jośī lineage into which her mother married, the *nāyah̄*. Her newly wedded husband is not supposed to appear during this ritual. She smiles on seeing her relatives again, who are sitting on chairs along the sides of the room, the female members separated from the males. The Jośī *nāyah̄* worships her briefly with *tikā*, flowers, *sukūda*, and incense, mixes *svagā*, offers it to Gaṇeśa and his niece’s forehead. He touches her right temple with the bowl of yoghurt.



“Seeing the daughter in her new environment” (*khvah̄ sva vanegu*) on 28 November 2010. Her relatives come to be hosted by her husband’s family. Among the offerings brought along is an earthenware plate with yoghurt, colourfully decorated and inscribed “Happy Wedding, Benela with Mahesh”.

After a few minutes, Benela changes her dress and returns wearing the new sari brought by her family. Meanwhile the groom’s party has had some drinks outside while the bride’s party is offered snacks inside. Once again, the two parties scarcely communicate.

This is followed by cutting the wedding cake – an exercise that repeats the act performed earlier at her house. Her oldest sister Anju guides her hand while cutting the cake. Again the first slice is offered to the *sukūda* lamp representing Gaṇeśa, Benela receives the second piece served by the *nāyah̄*, the third is dedicated to Mahesh and put aside, the fourth goes to one of her nieces. The rest is kept aside and later offered to the other children. The *nāyah̄* then holds the tray with the bangles to her right temple.

Distributing the cake is followed by offerings of jewellery and money by Benela’s relatives. The *nāyah̄* is first and offers a thousand rupee note, followed by his deceased elder brother’s son, who offers an envelope with money. Then come Benela’s four sisters offering a bracelet, a bangle, a ring and an arm bracelet, all of gold. Next come the three maternal uncles, the maternal aunts, the husbands of the sisters (in order of seniority),

<sup>4</sup> However, in the Indoparbatiyā tradition *mukh herne* denotes the first visit of the newly married couple to the bride’s parental home.



and their older sons and daughters. Since they are wearing fancy shoes (“Guci” – sic!), her nieces prefer not to take them off and have to bend over the edge of the podium to present their banknote – in a strange position that causes everybody to laugh. Altogether twenty-five members of her family show up and present money openly or in airmail envelopes.

Afterwards the *nāyaḥi* and his brother’s son have to count the money five times to arrive at the exact sum. Besides the ornaments, Benela receives around 45,000 rupees. The amount is put into a fancy decorative envelope and handed over publicly in a formal gesture to her now father-in-law. He will act as caretaker of the money, which belongs to his daughter-in-law. In case of separation, she has the right to demand it back.

In the meantime Benela has touched the trays with fish, pigeons and frogs made of deep-fried dough, which are now given to the children. The first tray the children unwrap is the one with strawberries. One tray with a fish, a pigeon and a frog made of dough is given to Benela. Her sisters place the ornaments on this one.

Finally a buffet dinner is served, which Benela also joins, and after two and a half hours her old family leaves, not before everybody again receives a packet of sweets and herbs (*masīpva*) from the host’s family together with a pack of *pān*.

Accepting the son-in-law (*jilancā du kāyegu* or *dhīr cayekaygu*)

Later in the night, the newly-wed couple arrives in the company of Mahesh’s friend Sabin Sakah at the house of Benela’s family. Some ten friends and relatives are already waiting. He first sits on the sofa on the first floor. It is now time for him to be officially introduced to the bride’s family. This is again celebrated by offering betel nuts as a sign of commit-

ment, alliance and solidarity. The terms used for these rituals describe the opening of his wife’s house (*cayekegu* – to open) to him, or the taking in of the son-in-law into the house (*du kayegu* – to take inside). Inviting the son-in-law to the family to meet his wife’s entire *phukī* is the minimum requirement when a marriage happens without any formal ritual. *Dhīr cayekaygu* has to be done some time after the actual marriage to prepare the son-in-law for his role as *jicābhāju*. For the husband it is absolutely essential prior to the great festivals such as Bisket or Dasāi that he pays a formal visit to his wife’s family and hands out betel nuts to his father-in-law and the members of his *phukī*. On the other hand, the newly married wife will only now be entitled to ritually join her husband’s family and to act as the *mhaymacā* in bringing offerings (*pekī*) for the death rituals of her paternal *phukī* members. Both these roles of the couple as *jicābhāju* and *mhaymacā* define their obligations in the life-cycle rituals of her maternal home (*thachē*, lit. your own house).

For this, Mahesh sits on the ground, on his left his best friend Sabin whom he knows since childhood. Benela watches the ceremony from the entrance. He has brought the same container with betel nuts (*gvēbatā*) that was used earlier. Sabin hands over ten nuts with both hands to Mahesh, who offers these for a token sum of money to fourteen members of his wife’s family. The first nuts are offered to his wife’s mother, followed by her four sisters and their husbands, one maternal uncle without a wife and one maternal uncle and his wife, and finally her father’s elder brother’s son and his wife. The younger brother of her father who acted as the wife-giver had returned directly to Patan, not caring to receive the offering of nuts. Benela’s eldest sister had formally introduced all the relatives to Mahesh. In the end Mahesh’s friend counts the money – approximately 10,000 rupees – and keeps it for Mahesh.





Accepting the son-in-law on 24 November 2010. Two days after the actual marriage ritual, the newlywed husband visits his wife's family together with her. He offers ten nuts each for a token sum of money to her mother and her near relatives in an act of accepting his duties as a wife-taker. As *jicābhāju* he will have to assist his in-laws on various occasions.

Benela's eldest sister Anju concludes the ritual by again worshipping Gaṇeśa (*sukūda*) and offers a separate portion for the *pañcāyatana* deities on the *joēlālāpte* leaf (which is discarded on the threshold guardian, the *pikhālākhu*). Mahesh, his friends and all the others present on the occasion receive *tikā* and *khē svagā*, the ritual food that includes egg, fish and liquor. While Mahesh accepts the food by eating a bit, his friends only symbolically touch it with their lips.

After some time Benela takes her seat beside Mahesh and receives a *tikā* from her eldest sister. She also receives a packed present (seemingly a green bathrobe). Mahesh receives a suit and deep-fried sweets (*lākhāmari*). As the oldest in the room, Suresh Dhaubanjari also receives packed presents.

To conclude, everybody is invited to dinner in the kitchen. However, since the wife-taker had already offered a buffet dinner in Bhaktapur, the people only take a small bite. Some of Mahesh's friends even refuse to take

that much and leave the house, which causes some distress among the women who had carefully prepared everything. Only after they are called by Mahesh's older brother-in-law do they come up to eat some sweets or yoghurt, but without touching the *dāl-bhāt*. In the end, Benela, now dressed in an everyday sari, hastily eats a plate before she and Mahesh's party enter two cars to return to Bhaktapur.

The groom's party (*bhoj*)

The most festive part of the marriage is the final party for relatives, friends and neighbours hosted by the groom's father three days later, on November 25. Presents are not expected, but quite a few near relatives of the category of *bhvaḥ pahā*, those who are expected to bring the entire family along, bring modest gifts in the form of cloth. Others bring bouquets packed in transparent paper.

The party is arranged by Govinda Catering in the school courtyard at the Shri Padma





The groom's party on  
25 November 2010.

A few days after the marriage the relatives and friends of the newlywed husband are invited for a party. The couple poses in a decorated pavilion on throne-like chairs to receive bouquets of flowers and to be photographed, in this case with two aunts and a niece.

High School. Some 700 people have been invited, most of them show up, if only briefly. The party lasts from four in the afternoon till ten in the evening. Everybody is welcomed by the groom's father and sometimes also by his brother. The newly married couple sits on two thrones surrounded by armchairs where many close female relatives take their seat in continuously changing order. They also come to pose for photos with the couple.

The venue is nicely lit and well prepared, with hundreds of plastic chairs, tables with tablecloths at various food stalls. Young boys offer snacks and drinks (beer, local whisky, wine). In one pavillion is a DJ playing loud Hindī and Nepalese film music and western pop songs. In the centre around a fountain

is a small podium where three singers – one girl, two boys – sing popular tunes.

Everybody is in a good mood and as the evening develops more and more men get drunk and start dancing in front of the sound machines. Later some ladies join them, but only after they have more or less been coerced by the men.

Mahesh sometimes leaves his place to mingle with the party members, but Benela remains on her throne. Sometimes she smiles, sometimes she looks exhausted. On the next day, she will have to integrate herself into the normal life of her new family.

Mahesh had organized the party. He drew up a contract with Govinda Catering from Thahiti in Kathmandu and brought their regular set price of 850 rupees down to 500 with the assurance of paying for 700 participants. The total price of 350,000 rupees includes snacks and food as well as the entire set up with tents and pavillions. In the end only some 650 meals were counted from the plates that had been used. Drinks were paid separately. All-in-all 84 litres of McDowell whisky, 360 bottles of beer, 40 litres of wine ("for the ladies") and 216 litres of Fanta, Mountain Dew, Coca Cola and Soda had been consumed. Thus, some 150,000 rupees were spent on drinks. Mahesh also organized the music, at a cost of 15,000 rupees. The sound system was rented from Bhaktapur, attended by three sound engineers, and four singers were hired from Patan. A total of 5,000 euros was spent on the party.



## Summary

The marriage described above covers many features of Hindu Parbatiyā marriage rituals, e.g. engagement rituals, choosing the groom (*svayamvara*), giving the daughter as a gift (*kanyādāna*) with circumambulation of the groom, touching his feet, mutual offering of ornaments, recitation of auspicious verses and mantras, marriage procession, reception of the bride in the groom's house, visit to the bride by her own family to see her in her new environment, visit by the new husband to his wife's parental home, and festive meals.

However, several elements deserve special attention, since they are peculiar to the Newars, e.g. the extensive use and offering of betel nuts as a sign of alliance and stability of relations, the tying on of bangles, the role of *nāyah* and *nakhī*, the animal sacrifice, or the special welcoming rituals (*lasakusa*, *svagā*), and the peculiar forms of *tikās* and marks on the body. With the exception of the animal sacrifice, most of these sub-rituals are also to be found in a Newar Buddhist context.

Interestingly, several elements that are central to a Parbatiyā context cannot be found in Newar marriages, or only in different ways. These are: the holding hands by the couple (*pāṇigrahana*), the seven steps (*saptapadī*), the circumambulation of the fire (*agnipradakṣiṇa*), the stepping on a stone (*aśmārohaṇa*), the oblation cast into the fire with roasted rice (*lajāhoma*), the viewing of the Pole Star (*dhruvadarśana*), and the cohabitation (after *caturthī*). Even the choosing of the husband (*svayamvara*) is a fairly recent addition or different form of practice for the Newars, and the gift of the girl (*kanyādāna*) is celebrated in a completely different way. These variations have to do with the fact that Newar girls have already married at an early age in the Ihi marriage to the bel-fruit, where most of the above mentioned sub-rituals are performed and thus have not to be repeated in the marriage to a human partner.

Despite such variations, Hindu marriages remain a combination of rites of separation, affiliation, fertility, and protection. For Hindu women, the wedding is their initiation. It is the most festive and costly event in the life of a Hindu, celebrated with many guests in their best clothing and jewelry.

The exchange of gifts between the marriage parties begins at the betrothal, and continues after the wedding. The gifts are to be propitious, bring the bridal couple blessings, and allow a good, fertile marriage. Fruits, coconuts, dried dates, betel nuts, gold (and/or money), bracelets, forehead marks (*tikā*) and other presents or symbols aim to fortify the bridal couple. For the same reason, the bride and in some cases the groom, are oiled, rubbed with earth and henna, washed, adorned with garlands, crowned and dressed expensively.

By the repeated exchange of goods and presents between two localities, both parties or clans demonstrate their status. "Daughter, son-in-law, and their children, these three are not part of the family," says a northern Indian proverb. The daughter is considered one's own, but also from the beginning as someone who is to be given away. She is married off to another family, if possible a family of higher status or standing. In Newar culture the daughter is explicitly sent away (Nev. *biyāchvayegu*, *bhamcā lalhāna biyegu*). Despite this slightly lower status of the wife-givers, both parties try to downplay this hierarchical aspect during the wedding.

The one who gives a woman might have a lower status because, in sacral terms, the woman forms a "breach" in the (patrilinear) line of descent. The bride is integrated into the fictional descent of the husband as a stranger. Thus, a problem arises similar to that of adoption rituals (Jolly 1986: 71ff.), and in fact, in some aspects the two rituals are alike.

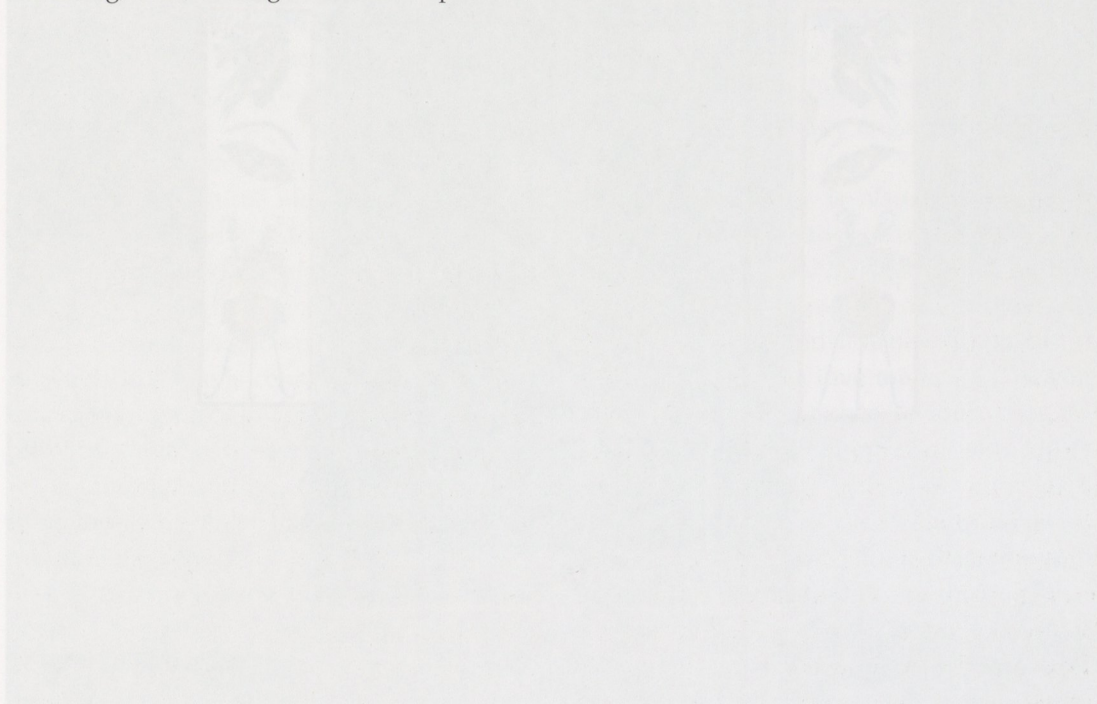
The social aspects leave little space for intimacy or emotional feelings between the



couple. Hindu marriage is less a love event for the couple than an initiation ritual for a new member of the clan (*phuki*), i.e. the bride.

We also noticed a number of ritual changes that have occurred in the past few years. In general, the ritual aspects seem to have become less prominent in comparison to the festive elements. Just a very few participants, above all women, watch what the priests are doing, even during the central episodes,

whereas at the processions, receptions and parties many people show up. It also seems that the traditional distance between wife-takers and wife-givers is fading. This was visible when the groom visited the bride's house for the *svayamvara*, or when the father accompanied the matchmaker during the betrothal. A few years ago, such behaviour would have been impossible.



(Asha Kaji 2010: 28)

Such views are sometimes superimposed on what basically follows the pattern of a Newar Hindu wedding.

In the following we shall describe the marriage between Navesh Shukya and Rashmi Shukya in Patan. For comparative reasons the focus is on the wedding rituals that took place in the night of November 28/29, 2010. Preliminary rituals such as the mediation of the *lani*, sending and presenting betel nuts and trays with gifts, the bride's feast, or the farewell of the groom are omitted. The same applies to subsequent rituals such as the

an astrologer. We walk to the bride's house, which is kicked when we arrive, and astonishingly not decorated. Only after some time do people arrive from the farewell party that the bride's party had organised in a nearby party palace.

The first impression is that not much has been prepared in the house. Hastily the women open the doors to the house and prepare a room on the terrace for the rituals. This room has been decorated with balloons and plastic or paper garlands. The walls are painted a dark red. On the eastern side hangs a *thangka* of Rabula, son of the Buddha; the couple's initials set inside two stylised paper

\* See, however, the long and impressive description of the Buddha's (Newar) marriage in Chitrakhar Hridaya's *Sacred Seasons* (ch. 7).





## Patan

Three painted panels flanking the jambs and the wooden cornice of a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century door at Bhūchēbāhā, installed on the occasion of a marriage.

The horizontal panel depicts the Pañcabuddha, from left to right Ratnasambhava (yellow, south), Akṣobhya (blue, east), Vairocana (white, centre), Amitābha (red, west) and Amoghasiddhi (green, north). The pointed ends of the panel bear symbols of the Sun (Sūrya) and Moon (Candra), the spaces between the Buddhas are occupied by the eight auspicious objects – the endless knot, lotus, parasol and sacred vase in the sky, yak-tail whisks, fish, banner and conch shell in front of the green mountains.

The vertical panels bear parrots with triple flowers, eyes and a sacred vase on a tripod, incorporating the eight auspicious objects.

Photograph 11 November 2010

circumambulation of the fire (*agnipradakṣiṇa*), the stepping on a stone (*śikharāvṛṇa*), the oblation cast into the fire with rice (*śukhama*), the viewing of the Pole Star (*śukraśaravṛṇa*) and the cohabitation (*śrīraśaravṛṇa*). Even the choosing of the husband (*śyāmarāga*) is a fairly recent addition or different form of practice for the Newars, and the gift of the girl (*śyāmarāga*) is celebrated in a completely different way. These variations have to do with the fact that Newar girls have already married at an early age in the first marriage to the befitting, where most of the above mentioned sub-rituals are performed and thus have not to be repeated in the marriage to a human partner.

the daughter is explicitly sent away (*śyāmarāga*, *śyāmarāga*, *śyāmarāga*). Despite this slightly lower status of the wife-givers, both parties try to downplay this hierarchical aspect during the wedding.

The one who gives a woman might have a lower status because, in sacred terms, the woman forms a “breach” in the (patrilineal) line of descent. The bride is integrated into the fictional descent of the husband as a stranger. Thus, a problem arises similar to that of adoption rituals (Jolly 1985: 71ff.), and in fact, in some aspects the two rituals are alike.

The social aspects leave little space for intimacy or emotional feelings between the



## A Marriage Among Newar Buddhists (Śākya) in Patan

### Introduction

Notwithstanding the Buddha's abscondence from marriage,<sup>5</sup> Newar Buddhists value wedding ceremonies as much as anywhere else. For Pandit Vaidya Asha Kaji (1008-1992) alias Ganesh Raj Vajracharya, Ayurvedic doctor, Tantric practitioner and Buddhist teacher, it is even regarded as a special "path" (*yāna*) for "peace and happiness":

The union of male and female is considered to be important in the life of Buddhist Newars in general and Vajrācāryas in particular. When the married couple live in peace and happiness through their conjugal life, the living of such a life is known as *sahajayāna kriyā*. A married couple is considered to be one in *sahajayāna* ["path of union"]. A striking example of this unity of a married couple is shown when the bride and bridegroom eat together from the same plate (New. *thāybhū*) in the matrimonial ceremony. As a married couple they learn to overcome the problems and difficulties of domestic life through which they must pass in order to be well experienced in the wordly hardships of ups and downs. (Asha Kaji 2010: 28).

Such views are sometimes superimposed on what basically follows the pattern of a Newar Hindu wedding.

In the following we shall describe the marriage between Naresh Shakya and Rashmi Shakya in Patan. For comparative reasons the focus is on the wedding rituals that took place in the night of November 28/29, 2010. Preliminary rituals such as the mediation of the *lami*, sending and presenting betel nuts and trays with gifts, the bride's feast, or the farewell of the groom are omitted; the same applies to subsequent rituals such as the

handing out of betel nuts by the daughter-in-law (*bhamcā yagu gvē sālegu*), worship of the *digudyaḥ* or the party of the newly married boy, which were not observed.

Rashmi, aged 21, is the younger of two daughters of Shobha Laxmi Shakya, whose husband died a few years ago. Rashmi has three older brothers; her eldest brother, Vidya Roshan, takes the role of the wife-giver in place of her deceased father, sometimes supported by her grandfather. Rashmi works as a schoolteacher at New Sumnima (High) School. The family lives in Simcāhiti in Patan and is traditionally engaged in lost-wax bronze casting.

Naresh, aged 24, is also a teacher specialised in mathematics. His family lives in Ikachē in Patan. Rashmi's father has no relatives anymore because they all lost their lives 47 years ago in a landslide near Tatopani.

The marriage is a love marriage. The couple has known each other for four years and first met on the badminton court at the Rotaract Club, Patan.

It is about nine in the evening when we meet with the priest Dipak Bajracharya at Sincāhiti. He is the founder of the Bajracharya Pujavidhi Adhyayan Samiti, a Buddhist organisation that trains young Vajrācāryas in the performance of rituals. He also works as an astrologer. We walk to the bride's house, which is locked when we arrive, and astonishingly not decorated. Only after some time do people arrive from the farewell party that the bride's party had organised in a nearby party palace.

The first impression is that not much has been prepared in the house. Hastily the women open the doors to the house and prepare a room on the terrace for the rituals. This room has been decorated with balloons and plastic or paper garlands. The walls are painted a dark red. On the eastern side hangs a *thangka* of Rahula, son of the Buddha; the couple's initials set inside two stylised paper

<sup>5</sup> See, however, the long and impressive description of the Buddha's (Newar) marriage in Chittadhar Hṛdaya's *Sugata Saurabha* (ch. 7).



hearts are fixed to the walls on the northern side. The priest sits on the eastern side facing west; the seats for the bride and groom are prepared on the northern side.

The worship of Guru Vajrasattva (*guru-maṇḍalapūjā*)

Half an hour later, the priest starts with the usual *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*,<sup>6</sup> also known as *gurumaṇḍalārcana*, a ritual that is performed during almost all Buddhist life-cycle rituals and daily by very devout Buddhists.

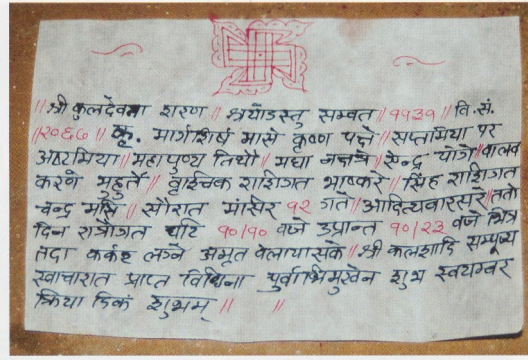
He is assisted by the *nāyāḥī* Hira Ratna Shakya, the eldest man of the bride's father's lineage. The *pūjā* follows the *Vajrayāna-pūjāvaidhi-saphū* (VPS), Pt. 2 – a text edited and translated below in Part IV.

The *pūjā* lasts about an hour. Then the *nakhī*, the seniormost married woman of the household, is sent out for the Gaṇeśapūjā. This should have been done in the morning but was forgotten. The calculated auspicious moment (*sāit*) for the *svayaṃvara* is 10:10 to 10:23 p.m., but since the groom has not yet arrived the *pūjā* continues.

### Sāit sheet

śrikuladevatā śaraṇa, śrayostu samvat, 1131, vi. sam. | 2067, kr. mārgaśīrṣa māse kṛṣṇa pakṣe, saptamiyā para | aṣṭmiyā, mahāpunya tithau, maghā nakṣatre, endra yoge, vālava | karaṇe muhurte, vṛścika rāśigata bhāṣkare, siṃha rāśigata | candra masi, saurāta māmsira 12 gate, ādityavārasare, tato | dina rātraugata ghaṭi 10.10 vaje uprānta 10.23 vaje bhitra | tadā karkaṭa lagne amṛta velāyāsake, śrī kalaśādi sampūjya | svācārāta prāpta vidhinā purvābhibhimukhena śubha svayaṃvara | kriyā dikam śubham.

Note: the underlined times appear in the ms. in red ink.



Lagnapatrikā:

Sheet of paper, announcing the auspicious moment (*sāit*) for the *svayaṃvara* rite on Vikram Samvat 2067 Maṅsira 12 (November 28, 2010).

Refuge to the tutelary deity. (On the) auspicious year (Nepal Era) 1131, the Vikram Era 2067; on the great auspicious day of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> day of the dark part of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa; at the moment (*muhūrte*) when the lunar mansion is *maghā*, the yoga is Indra, the *karaṇa* is *bālava*, when the sun (*bhāskara*) has entered the zodiacal sign Scorpio (*vṛścika*), when the moon has entered the zodiacal sign Leo (*siṃha*), on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the solar (*saurata*) month of Maṅsira; on Sunday; at the night time of that day during 10:10 to 10:23 PM (which is) on the intersection called *karkaṭa* – that immortal time is auspicious (to perform) the auspicious *svayaṃvara* ritual (which should be performed) facing east after worshipping the glorious flasks and so on according to the rules. Hail.

Reception of the groom (Nev. *lasakusa*)

Later that night, the groom arrives dressed in a light grey suit, a red tie, a traditional Nepalese cap and a yellow flower garland. Some eight friends accompany him, also mostly dressed in western suits, together with a woman who acts as the *lami*.

Also with them are a Jyāpu woman who carries the large *sukūda* lamp, and a Jyāpu man carrying two large *pūjā* plates (Nev. *javākvataḥ*) that are to be used later. The *javākvataḥ* contain red vermilion, flowers, rice grains, fruits, incense, large sweet loaves (*lākhamari*) and two brass *daṃbātā* containers

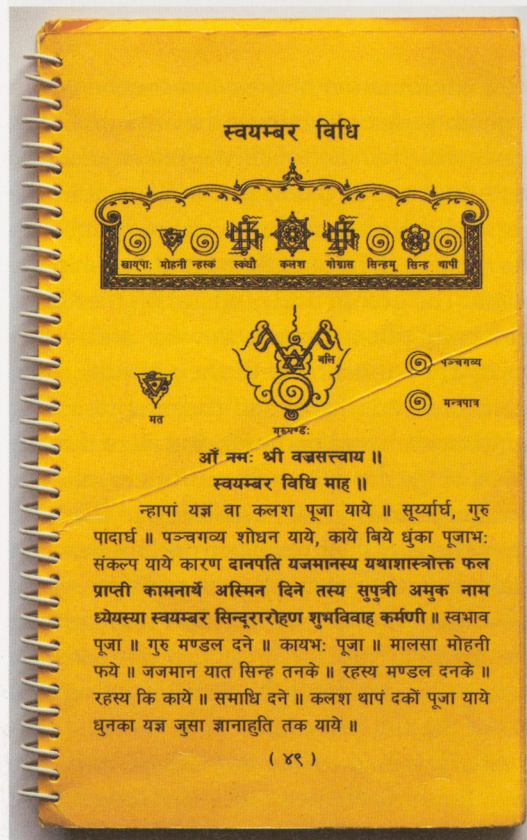
<sup>6</sup> For descriptions see M. Bajracharya 2005 (with edition and translation of a ritual handbook), Gellner 1991a, Locke 1980, Shima 1991.



The ground is prepared for the *svayamvara* rite, with the sacred vase (*kalaśa*), the decorated ten betel nuts and a frame with the *lagnapatrikā* in the centre. Two seats in the background are prepared for the marrying couple.



Printed notebook (*pūjāvīdhi-saphā*) that guides the Buddhist Vajrācārya priest through the rituals.



of which one contains yellow vermilion paste and the other camphor, a banana leaf folded to resemble a flower, and some herbs to be used later for rubbing the hands of the bride's family members. They also carry a *dhusaḥ-mhicā* which is a bag made of red cloth containing ten unhusked betel nuts, a metal container (*nyāsaḥbātā*) wrapped in red cloth and filled with sweets, and another metal container (*sambātā*) filled with smaller betel nuts.

The groom is received at the threshold of the house, which is decorated with two vases (*kalaśa*) on each of which a plate with yoghurt has been placed. A Jyāpu woman pours water from a brass container to purify his hands. In front of the entrance Rashmi's mother gives him a *tikā* and places a white and a red flower (jasmine and aster) in his hands. Her older brother, Vidya Roshan, representing the deceased father, garlands him and also places a *daphasvā* in his hands. Then he takes him by the hand and leads him and his friends to a room on the first floor where they are placed on the ground and pose for photos.





The ritual objects – the sacred vase in the centre, flanked by a mirror and a vermilion container – are prepared and covered by cloth to invoke the tantric deities such as Vajravārāhī.

### Choosing the husband (*svayamvara*)

Shortly after the groom is brought to the top floor where his body is symbolically purified. This sub-ritual, called *balīpiyegu* (lit. “warding off evil spirits”), implies that the *nakhī* touches the right shoulder of the groom and the left shoulder of the bride with pieces of rice cones (*gvajā*).

After five minutes, the bride appears dressed in a red brocade sari, with a large number of ornaments and a special golden hair decoration, almost a crown, that covers most of her hair. She stands shyly beside her prospective husband

Both enter the *pūjā* room. They take their seat on mattresses on the northern side of the room: in the centre Naresh, to his right the *lami* and to his left Rashmi.

Under the guidance of the priest, who more or less follows the *Vajrayāna-pūjāvidhi-saphū*, and the *lami*, both start with preliminary rites for the central *svayamvara* ritual, which

are a continuation of the *gurumaṇḍalapūjā*. In a quick series of actions, they symbolically wash their hands, touch the *kalaśa* and *pūjā* plate in front of them, throw flowers in the air, fold their hands, throw rice (*akṣatā*) onto the *maṇḍala* in front of them, and worship the *kalaśa*. The groom draws a *nāga* on the *kalaśa*, and both put a thread, flowers and water on it. They touch it with their temple, then their forehead, throat and chest representing mind, speech and body. During all of this the priest rings the *vajra* bell and utters mantras and auspicious verses according to the VPS. They then lay their hands on one another and make a circle around the *maṇḍala* on which they again throw several petals representing the cardinal directions of the *ratnamaṇḍala* with Vajrasattva and the Ten Protective Deities of the Ten Directions.

Afterwards they lay out *samāy*, *khāy*, rice beer, liquor (*ailā*), peas, incense (*dhūpa*), light (*dīpa*), rice (*akṣatā*), water and other items on the ground. They also offer a twenty rupee

<sup>14</sup> For descriptions see M. Karandhara 2005 (with edition and translation of a ritual handbook) Gellner 1991a; Locke 1980; Ghose 1991.



The Vajrācārya priest marks the palms of the marrying couple with a svastika in preparation of the following *kanyādāna* ritual – the “gift of the daughter”.



note and two one rupee coins as *dakṣiṇā* to the *maṇḍala*. This is an offering to the protective deities, starting with Indra. Then they offer two times a mixture of rice, flowers and water to the ground as offerings to the Lokapāla deities and to Amṛtakuṇḍali.

Following this, the *nakhī* does the *nirājana* sub-ritual, i.e. waving a small clay saucer with burning coals towards the couple in order to ward off evil and protect them. A burning wick is then put over the *nirājana* clay saucer and sent to the threshold of the house. Then she takes the measuring vessel, the lamp, the *vajra* and the key and waves them together towards the *kalaśa* in front of the priest and then towards the couple. She touches the head and the right shoulder of the groom thrice with the *vajra*. She repeats the same for the bride by touching her head and the left shoulder with the *vajra*. The same is repeated with the iron keys.

Narasi and Anirni Shakyas  
joining their heads during  
the preliminary rites of the  
saptasvara

The gift of the daughter (*kanyādāna*)

The following ritual is called *kanyādāna*, the “gift of the daughter”, in which the father hands over the bride to the groom. The Bajrācārya priest first draws a *svastika* in vermilion on the right-hand palm of the groom and the left-hand palm of the bride. The *nakhī* then places a bel-fruit wrapped in a *jvālalapte* leaf together with ten betel nuts in the bride’s left hand; her brother adds a hundred rupee banknote. Now the bride’s mother appears for the first time. As a widow she is supposed to remain in the background. Together with her son she holds her daughter by the hand. The Bajrācārya rings the bell again when all the hands are joined with the groom’s hands. He then recites a long ritual commitment (*saṃkalpa*).

Now the bride, guided by her brother and mother, places the bel-fruit and the betel nuts in the right hand of the groom, so that his right hand is joined with her left hand. The



priest then makes the mother and Vidya Roshan repeat the *kanyādāna* verses. At the end, the groom puts everything into the pocket of his jacket.

Subsequent to this, the groom stands in front of the bride, who circumambulates him and the *gurumaṇḍala* three times holding a garland of *ḍubo* grass and another garland of marigold flowers in her hands. She then hangs the garlands round his neck so that he is now wearing four garlands. At this moment all of the participants applaud and once again the friends of the groom make jokes, also when Rashmi touches the right and the left foot of her future husband.

Immediately afterwards Naresh fixes a golden necklace round Rashmi's neck, again to the sound of applause and jokes. While he also puts a gold ring on her left ring finger, one of the friends ignites the four balloons hanging on the ceiling, from which some glitter falls down. This rather funny action, resembling a Western child's birthday party, is repeated three times while Rashmi puts a ring on Naresh's right ringfinger, and hands him the ten large betel nuts (which were presented to her earlier) and touches both of his feet with her head.

Meanwhile the mother has left the room and the friends sing a popular song. The bride tries to look sad but occasionally she has to smile – not least when the groom whispers something in her ear.

To conclude, Naresh parts Rashmi's hair, applies vermilion to her parting three times in a vertical line while keeping her face covered with a red cloth. For this he receives the silver vermilion container from the priest, – an act that is accompanied by clapping and laughter. He then returns the vermilion container.

### Joining heads (*hvākegu*)

After the Bajrācārya priest has handed over the ritual mirror (*nhāykā*) and the vermilion container (*sinhamhū*), Naresh shows Rashmi the mirror.

When the couple has taken their seats again, the *nakhī* comes with a bowl of yoghurt to perform *dhau svagā*. Both worship from the *pūjā* plate with yoghurt, rice, yellow and red powder and flowers – throwing them all into the air and onto the ground. They give themselves a yoghurt mark at the temple: the groom on his right, the bride on her left temple. After receiving a *svagā* mark on the forehead from the *nakhī* consisting of a red *tikā* with rice, the couple's heads are gently pressed together and the *nakhī* showers flowers on them three times from the measuring vessel after having also showered the *pūjā* plate.

Then the bride's mother presents the ritual mirror on a flat brass plate on which the Bajrācārya priest has drawn a *maṇḍala*. Her grandfather pours water over the couple's joined hands, which are holding ten betel nuts, while the bride's brother and her mother hold the plate on which a banknote has been added by the brother. The heads of the couple are still touching one another. The priest recites for a second time the *saṃkalpavākya* of *kanyādāna* during the sub-ritual. Afterwards the bride gives the betel nuts and the banknote to the groom. The brother takes a flowering twig of white jasmine (*dāphvasvā kacā*) and sprays water from the plate at all of the participants.

This is followed by the dismissal (*visarjana*) of the *gurumaṇḍala*. The *nakhī* brings the remainder of the *pūjā* to a nearby Gaṇeśa shrine.





*Naresh and Rashmi Shakya,  
joining their heads during  
the preliminary rites of the  
soayamvara*





The rite of joining (*hvākegu*) the couple.

The eldest member of the clan (*nāyah*) pours water onto the right hand of the groom and the left hand of the bride, holding betel nuts and bank notes.

#### Joint meal (*thāybhū nakegu*)

Another essential part of the marriage ritual is the joint meal of the couple from a special plate, the *thāybhū* which is placed on a tripod in front of them, and which contains vegetables, breads, meat, pumpkin, boiled eggs, dried fish and flattened rice (*ciurā*). This is the first and only time that the two will share food and a symbolic expression that they will share everything in future.

First the couple gives some parts of the food on a leaf plate for the deities. Then the couple eats together *khē svagā* while the Bajrācārya priest sings an auspicious song (*maṅgalagāthā*). Naresh takes three sips of liquor from the clay cup and in between he lets Rashmi drink from the same cup (*kisli*).

Afterwards he divides the food on the *thāybhū* plate into two halves and both eat from it, first some flattened rice, then a little of the egg and the bread. Meanwhile the priest and the *nāyah* recite *svastivākya* verses, sometimes interrupted by the groom's friends who keep teasing him. The *nakhī* adds flattened rice, a plate with banana (*sisābusā*) and yoghurt as well as a *masalā* pouch. The couple eats only a very little of it.

Finally the *nakhī* brings the plate to the Bajrācārya, who worships it with water from the conch, incense, flower petals and rice, and then sends the rest on the leaf plate to the *kalādyah* – represented by an absorbing stone – while the *nāyah* brings the *pūjā* plate to the quarter's Gaṇeśa. Naresh's friends are now in a lively mood and joke loudly from the roof terrace, but nobody admonishes them.



### Concluding rites

Finally all of the participants in the room including the mother and the brother throw popped rice at the *gurumaṇḍala* and with this they send the deities off. The *nāyaḥ* now gives the Bajrācārya a yellow and red *tikā* with his ring finger and thumb and some money. The Bajrācārya gives the *pūjā* plate and himself a black *mvaḥṇi*.

The brother tears the red cloth that has partly covered the nine deities on the *gurumaṇḍala* into strips. The Bajrācārya offers a strip to the *gurumaṇḍala* and then to himself, binding it around his neck together with the five-coloured thread that encircled the *gurumaṇḍala*. He does the same to the *nāyaḥ*, *nakhī* and her helper, the bride's brothers, her paternal aunt (*nini*), the groom and the bride, and then all of the other persons who are present. They all receive a red *tikā* and black *mvaḥṇi*, and give some money in return. Afterwards a small clay cup with meat and another with brandy is served to all.

### Distributing betel nuts (*gvē sālegu*)

Shortly after midnight, the separation ritual follows in which the bride bids farewell to her family by distributing betel nuts. It starts with the worship of the large *sukūda* lamp and the large ritual plate (*jvaḥkvataḥ*) that has been brought by the groom's family members, who in the meantime have appeared. The family did not employ a brass band because the bride's great-grandmother is very sick. Presumably this is also the reason why the façade of the house had not been decorated with lights.

The importance of the worship of and with the *sukūda* is stressed by Pandit Vaidya Asha Kaji, who – in a daring etymology – regards it in marriage rituals as a symbolic representation of the sun:

*Su* means auspicious good omen, *kundā* means triangular lamp. So *sukundā* literally means auspicious light-rays of the sun, which is very vital. The one who holds such a *sukundā* is a *bodhisattva* named Dharmapāla, having the face of an elephant. That is why *sukundā* has the image of Dharmapāla (in Hindu marriage it is Gaṇeśa) (Asha Kaji 2010: 126).

The *sukūda* lamp is certainly an essential part of many Newar rituals, but its identification with the sun, Gaṇeśa or Avalokiteśvara (cf. Kölver 1992: 221) is open to various interpretations.

All the members of the procession (*janti*) receive a *masalā* pouch and a festive meal.

The bride takes a seat on the ground in the living room of the second floor in front of a cupboard on which a multi-coloured bag hangs. Sitting to her left is a friend and to her right side the *lami* with a big pot of betel nuts in front. They are surrounded by a number of older men – relatives of the groom including his father.

After the worship of the *sukūda* and the *jvaḥkvataḥ* has been performed, the *nakhī* and her helper give *svagā* to the bride.

The Bajrācārya priest performs the ritual intention (*saṃkalpa*) and a mental commitment (*nyāsa*). When the *nakhī* applies a *tikā* with flower petals to the deities, the priest and several men sing auspicious *svasti* verses. The bride places most of the items from the large *jvaḥkvataḥ* on a leaf plate, which is sent to the house shrine. The bride receives a *tikā* from the *nakhī* and puts a yellow narcissus in her hair.

This now heralds the distribution of the betel nuts (*gvē*), which the *lami* gives to the bride who distributes them among their relatives. First come the *nāyaḥ* and the *nakhī*, who both receive ten betel nuts. Then three men and one woman approach the bride presenting large brass bowls or a packed pressure cooker; they receive five (woman) or ten (men) nuts, which





they return to the *lami*, who gives them again to the bride. The *lami* then offers to each of the other relatives five small brocade pouches containing four betel nuts, along with up to five sweets and one rupee coins. Each time Rashmi touches and in that way accepts the presents.

While Rashmi has kept calm during this exchange, she starts weeping the moment her eldest brother appears. He presents a large packed gift and receives ten nuts from his sister, which he returns immediately to the *lami* who then gives him ten brocade pouches, a sweet and a coin to which the priest adds another ten unpacked betel nuts. Rashmi hesitates to give the nuts and both hold hands for quite a while, sniffing and weeping. He then kneels again in front of her sister and this time

he receives ten packed and ten unpacked betel nuts plus ten sweets from the *lami*. Again Rashmi does not want to part from him and holds his hands tightly.

This is followed by other family members: *nāyah*, *nakhī*, brother of the *nāyah* and helper of the *nakhī*. When the *nāyah* returns with a brass container as a present, the bride starts crying. From now on she must be increasingly forced by her sister, the *lami* and later the *nakhī* to hand over the betel nuts. Several relatives show up and present brass utensils, among them a large copper container, as well as other packed presents. Finally her mother comes and presents a silver ritual mirror and vermilion container, both placed on a brass plate. By now both the bride and her mother are weeping out loud.

*Having given away betel nuts to her relatives to confirm her parting, the bride turns to her consoling friend in an overt gesture of grief while the groom is not involved.*



After a while the groom takes a place beside his new wife, who still covers her face with a handkerchief to hide her tears, assisted by her friend. Again the men sing the *svasti* verses. The *nakhī* gives both a red *tikā* and the newlywed couple worships the *sukūda* etc., but actually Rashmi's friend is doing this by guiding her hand, because she is still crying and covering her face.

Then Naresh and Rashmi stand up. Both hold two containers (*daṃbatā*), one with some brown herbs and pieces of camphor, the other with a yellow paste. Her friend has still covered her face with her handkerchief, and when she asks Rashmi whether she can remove it, Rashmi tells her "no" by shaking her head.

The main participants provide themselves with *tikās* and rub their hands with the herbs after smelling them. Then the groom's grandfather as the *nāyaḥ* of the wife-taker shows the ten unhusked betel nuts placed on the *dhusaḥ mhiḥā* bag that was all the time hanging behind the bride. Again Asha Kaji provides us with an esoteric interpretation:

This is called *depau* (New.) and consists of 10 betel nuts, an betel nut with husk, a silver coin, a *dāphwaḥ* flower (white jasmin), a rice-flower, rice-grains and musk. ... The *depau* means the following: the ten betel nuts are the ten component parts of the body (*daśendriya*), the flowers, rice-flower and rice-grains are the symbols of Buddha, Dharma and Saṃgha, the silver coin represents the king, the musk represents the earth, and the betel nut with husk represents the groom. So this *depau* expresses the idea that the bride is taken in the witness of the Buddha, Dharma, Saṃgha, king and earth, to be the wife of his son, the groom. (Asha Kaji 2010: 127)

The groom's grandfather hands over to the bride's older brother the *nyāsaḥbātā* which is a red bundle filled with sweets.

Afterwards the bride's older brother takes Naresh by the hand, and her younger brother supports Rashmi, who is still weeping and almost collapses. Both are led out of the room and the house. At the entrance Rashmi cries very loudly and refuses to leave the house. She is more or less forced to do so. Outside a car is waiting decorated with flowers. The groom is led two times round the car, while the bride is carried three times supported by her brothers and crying loudly. Again she demonstrates that she does not want to leave and must be forced to enter the car, where the worried groom takes her in his arms and tries to console her.

While Naresh's friends shout, sing and dance in front of the car, his brothers fix a length of red brocade fabric on top, but when the procession starts they quickly take their motorbikes to follow.

Formal talk at Gaṇeśa shrine (*khā lhāyegu*)

The procession makes a halt at the crossroads in front of the nearest Gaṇeśa shrine. Flanked by the bride's brother and the *nāyaḥ*, the Bajrācārya priest tells the groom's priest, flanked by the groom's father and grandfather to treat the bride properly. The priest says:

In my patron's family, there has been this daughter who is beautiful and possessed of virtues. It is a duty of the parents to marry such a daughter when she has reached an appropriate age. Consequently, your patron asked for the *kanyādāna* from my patron. Then my patron, after examining the son of your patron and realising that he is an appropriate groom with whom the bride can have a good future, committed to do the *kanyādāna*. Eventually, we have given you our daughter on today's auspicious occasion. Since our daughter has been brought up in an environment where she could do whatever



she wished, and she is still very young, she has a lot to learn. There might be some differences in customs between your family and our family. Therefore, we wish that you will keep her according to your custom, teach her duties, and protect her properly.

The groom's priest affirms this in a formal way; see VPS pp. 53-4 for the formal talk of both priests (cf. also Asha Kaji 2010: 128).

It is late in the night when the procession disappears into the dark and brings the bride to the groom's house. There she is received by and introduced to her new family.

### Summary

The Newar Buddhist marriage basically resembles Newar Hindu marriages. Once again we find engagement rituals, choosing the groom (*svayamvara*), giving the daughter as a gift (*kanyādāna*) with circumambulation of the groom, touching his feet, mutual offerings or ornaments, recitation of auspicious verses and mantras, marriage procession, reception of bride in the groom's house, worship of the

the groom's lineage deity by the bride and thereby formal integration into his lineage, seeing of the bride in her new environment by her own family, visit of the new husband to his wife's parental home, festive meals etc.

So it would seem that Newar marriage practices are broadly independent of religious belief or ideology. The same acts that are given a Hindu meaning in a Hindu context become Buddhist in a Buddhist context.

This especially concerns the worship of Guru Vajrasattva in the *gurumāṇḍalapūjā* and the use of Buddhist verses, mantras and *dhāraṇīs* as well as ritual paraphernalia such as the *vajra* bell during the rituals. Apart from these differences, there is little Buddhism in a Newar Buddhist marriage ritual.

Compared to Newar Brahmin Hindu priests in Bhaktapur, Buddhist Bajrācārya priests in Patan seem to be better trained. They follow a standard handbook, the *Vajrayāna-pūjāvidhi-saphū* (VPS), and recite the texts loudly and precisely. This text contains much more detailed prescriptions for Newar ritual elements than the handbooks used by Brahmins.



## A Marriage Among the Sub-caste of Butchers (Nāy, Kasāī)

### Introduction

The marriage of Sangita and Lakshmi Prasad Shahi on November 23, 2008, both from the sub-caste of butchers (Nep. Nāy, Nep. Kasāī), is presented here because no priestly intermediary is needed to confirm an alliance between two families. A short overview is intended to point out marked differences to those cases which have been presented in more detail.

Butchers, like tailor-musicians (Jugi) and drum-makers (Kulu), belong to the polluting, “unclean” castes, placed between marginally pure castes such as barbers and painters and the untouchables at the bottom end of the hierarchy. Originally, butchers lived on the periphery of the historic core of Bhaktapur (Gutschow/Michaels 2005: 59), but, marked by affluence, both families have built houses beyond the original ten clusters with, as counted in 1974, 135 families. For death rituals, butchers are served by Buddhist priests from the marginally pure sub-caste of Taṇḍukār, who live exclusively in the neighbouring town of Patan, while untouchables (Pvah) act as purity specialists for paring the toenails.

### Bringing offerings to the bride’s house (*gvē yēkegu*)

Seven days prior to the actual wedding, the groom’s party of about eighteen people (of whom only seven are male) arrives in the early evening in two buses from Jēlā at the wife-giver’s house in Mulḍhokā, beyond the north-eastern edge of the historic core. They come with 24 trays, boxes and dishes as offerings to the wife-giver:

- 1 Pomegranates (Nep. *anar*)
- 2 Chinese pears
- 3 Oranges (Nep. *mausam*)
- 4 Oranges (Nep. *suntala*)
- 5 Peas
- 6 Deepfried sweets (*kajuri*)
- 7 Deepfried sweets in sugar water (*jeri*)
- 8 Sweet loaves (*svari*)
- 9 Triangular shaped deep-fried bread (*nimki*)
- 10 Round sweet loaves (Nep. *phini*)
- 11 Apples (Nep. *syau*)
- 12 Sugar cane (*uku*) and papaya (*meva*)
- 13 Paper bags with sweets and herbs (*masīpva*)
- 14 Eggs (*khē*) and dried fish (*kvāga*)
- 15 Four paper boxes with Indian sweets (*barfi* etc.)
- 16 Deep fried wheat flour sweetmeat (*lākhāmari*)
- 17 Bananas (Nep. *kerā*)
- 18 Betel nut and spices packed in pan leaf
- 19 One dish of yoghurt (*dhau*) inscribed in coloured sugar “Lakshmi Prasad weds Sangeeta”
- 20 Decorative cake inscribed “Lakshmi Prasad weds Sangeeta”
- 21 A shawl and fabric
- 22 One large plate with cosmetic articles and a handbag
- 23 A pot (*āti*) with liquor (*ailā*)
- 24 A silver box with betel nuts (*gvē*)

The guests take their places in a rather small room, cigarettes are offered, only the bridegroom’s father and one elderly woman smoke.

After about a quarter of an hour the bride enters the room, to her right sits the *lami*, a woman from nearby Lamugaḥ, who acts as the mediator, to her left the groom’s mother.

In contrast to the other cases discussed above, the groom’s mother’s role is not confined to welcoming the daughter-in-law at the threshold of her new home, but plays a



decisive role in the wife-giver's house. She first worships Gaṇeśa at the *sukūda* lamp. Then she smears vermilion three times into the bride's parting without covering her face (as is done in other cases, including Ihi). She applies *dhau svagā* to her left temple and offers egg, dried fish (with her left hand) and liquor (with her right hand) to the deity before handing over the same to the bride, while keeping her hands crossed. The bride does not touch the offerings with her mouth but places them on the tray with the *sukūda* lamp.

The bride formally accepts all of the trays by simply touching them prior to receiving offerings of jewellery. Her mother-in-law offers bangles for the right, then left arm, and then a necklace.

#### Receiving betel nuts (*gvē sāyegu*)

First the bride's future father-in-law offers one handful of nuts to Gaṇeśa, and one handful to her. She lets the nuts slowly pass through her hands into the brass vessel. Then a second handful is offered to her, mixed with coins of the 25 and 50 paisa denomination. Finally he offers her a thousand rupee note. Her future mother-in-law follows offering three handfuls of nuts.

Then the decorative cake is placed before the bride. The wife-taker produces a small pocket-knife and joins his right hand with those of the bride and of his wife to cut the cake: the first slice is offered to Gaṇeśa, the second to the bride who just touches it with her lips.

In the meantime all of the offerings brought by the groom's party have been removed. However, sweetmeat is offered together with liquor to the bride's relatives in the usual hierarchic order.

An entire hour passes with the wife-taker's party dominating the ritual action. The two parties do not engage in conversation. They

are all there to perform and watch a ritual act, the room serving as a small stage.

#### Distribution of betel nuts (*gvē sālegu*)

In the late evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November the bride returns from the party tent, where she had been attending the noisy party which started in the afternoon. She had sat there on a decorated throne to receive presents from friends and distant relatives. An open plot, which will remain public within the guided land development programme in the east of the city, served as the place for the party.

Usually, the bride's farewell party takes place on the evening preceding the actual wedding ceremony. In this case the party is also meant to host the 25 relatives of the wife-taker, who arrive two hours before midnight.

This time they carry just fifteen plates of offerings, bags with sweets, sweetmeats, apples, ritual food (egg and fish), fruits, a *pūjā* plate, a plate with sari and shoes, and a pot with liquor.

The groom's mother repeats the *pūjā* she offered a week ago, including scattering ritual rice over the bride, sprinkling water, putting a mark on the forehead, a dash of yoghurt (*dhau svagā*) on the left temple and finally giving with crossed hands liquor, egg and fish, first to Gaṇeśa, then to the bride.

Then the bride cuts another decorative cake and offers a tiny piece to Gaṇeśa.

After midnight the decisive ritual in the house of the bride starts: quite a number of household items such as containers, ladles, pots and pans, all in brass, are handed to the bride by members of her family. The eldest woman of the clan (*nakhī*) comes first, followed by the bride's mother and father, brothers and sisters. The items are handed out to the participants by the *lami* woman, while the bride offers in return the betel nuts that she received earlier from the groom's parents. Sitting on the left of the bride is one



Sending the daughter in her new  
entertainment (*khush suk namgu*)  
on 24 November 2008.  
A decorative cake is brought and  
cut jointly by the newlywed couple.  
The hand of the husband is  
guided by his father-in-law, the  
hand of his wife by his mother,  
and the hand of his father-in-law  
by the hand of the matchmaker  
(*lami*).

of the three sisters of the groom's father, who puts the household and kitchen items away on her side. She also receives the keys the bride's father has presented for a new cupboard, which is part of the dowry.

The atmosphere is calm, with a sense of melancholy as the moment is nearing when the bride has to leave her family. She weeps silently but when it is her mother's turn to receive the nuts, both are almost wailing.

#### Formal talk at a Gaṇeśa shrine

The bride is guided by the three sisters (*ninis*) of her father-in-law. Her maternal uncle (*pāju*) is waiting in front of the house to lift her onto his back and carry her three times round a taxi. The groom's father spreads a simple red cloth sheet across the car, vaguely reminiscent of the fancy brocade fabric (*dugū phāgā*) that covered the carrying pole and the bride in former days.

The car drives less than hundred metres to stop in front of a newly-established temple dedicated to Bhagavatī and Gaṇeśa. Waiting in front of the temple are the bride's father and grandfather, facing the father and grandfather of the groom. They exchange stereotyped messages assuring that all will be done to make the life of the newlywed woman a happy one.

Both the car and the bus hurry to reach the wife-taker's new house, a three-storeyed reinforced concrete structure, which he had built at some distance to a small cluster of butchers at the south-eastern periphery.

The house was built two years ago, and buffalos are still kept on ground floor level. The old house stands up the slope on the southwest corner of the pond in the quarter of Jēlā. The days are gone when milk was produced here and pigs raised. Not a single pig is to be seen in Jēlā. Even keeping buffalos in the house has become a rarity. They are now bought from dealers who deliver them

in trucks from the lowlands, the Terai, to meet the growing demand for meat. While in 1970 there were less than ten stalls offering meat for two hours in the early morning, there are over eighty shops today. In 2011, even members of the sub-caste of farmers started to run butcher shops. The *lami* woman mentioned that she runs a shop in the morning at the eastern end of town while her husband runs a shop in Dubakoṭ, some five kilometres northwest of Bhaktapur.

#### Welcoming the bride (*bhamcā dukāyegu*)

At the threshold stone which absorbs impurities from the house (*pikhālākhu*), the groom's mother welcomes the bride while offering rice, water, fire and flowers to the stone. The bride grasps the key to the house, which her mother-in-law produces in her outstretched right hand. Slowly she guides her daughter-in-law into the house and up the stairs. The groom's paternal aunts (*ninis*) are in an exalted mood and start singing Nevārī songs.

#### Bride and groom "coming together" (*hvākegu*)

Once the party enters the house, the depressed atmosphere is totally gone; even the groom's father is smiling for the first time. Much time is needed for photographs, first the bride alone, then with the groom who appears for the first time and takes a seat to the right of the bride.

The following actions, the *pūjā* performed by bride and groom, the sharing of food, rubbing vermilion on the bride's forehead (*bhuisinha chāygu*), exchanging garlands, touching the feet of the groom and his family members (*bagya yāgu*) are all part of the "coming together" of the couple: the term *hvākegu* is derived from *hanegu*, to put together, like threading flowers on a string (*svāma hanegu*). Robert Levy identifies this sequence as "the actual marriage ritual" (1990: 675). Although



Levy identifies “the bride’s giving of betel nuts to the groom and her eating of his *cipa* [food polluted by him]” as “focal and essential elements”, the presentation of ten nuts to the groom could not be observed during the marriage of Nāy.

First, one of the *ninis* moves the heads of bride and groom together – to the laughter of the whole family. Even the bride gives a grin. Then the groom’s mother performs the usual *pūjā*, and offers ritual food, i.e. egg, fish and liquor (*khē svagā*). The newlywed husband picks up an egg, takes a bite and hands it over to the bride, who also takes a bite. This sharing of the same food (*cipā tikaygu*) is never done again in the life of the couple. Both may only share the food of their parents.

In a concluding gesture the bride does a round, touching first the feet of her husband, then of his father, his mother, maternal uncle, grandfather, paternal aunts, sisters etc. Most of them would not allow her to really touch their feet and make a gesture to rebuff her advances as she bows her head.

In the early morning, two hours past midnight, three plates with flattened rice (*baji*), *nimki* and four kinds of cooked beans are set out, one for Gaṇeśa, one for the groom and one for the bride. Both eat a tiny little portion of beans, but they do not touch each other’s plates.

After a short while, the three plates are taken and discarded at the stone for absorbing ritual waste (*chvāsah*), in this case a large stone in the middle of the road, a few steps up the hill.

Seeing the bride in her new environment (*khvaḥ sva vanegu*)

Four days after the arrival of the bride in her new home, the wife-giver’s side has prepared fifteen plates with fruits and sweets, almost identical to the offerings received from the

groom’s side sixteen days before. The decorative cake is now inscribed “Happy Wedding Sangita/Laxmi Prasad”. A large plate with yoghurt is inscribed with the same sequence of names, but in Devanāgarī.

There is also one plate with pouches containing herbs and sweets, two plates with shawls for the daughter, one plate with two pieces of cloth for the son-in-law (*jicābhāju*), one plate with ritual food (*khē svagā*), and one plate with cosmetics – the plate which was brought by the groom’s party earlier.

The entire party is squeezed into a micro-bus, which arrives in Jēlā in the early evening. There, the bride stands to the right of the door with a *sukūda*, the groom stands on the left. Upon the arrival of the party, they step out and frame the threshold stone, which 24 members of the wife-giver’s family step across to enter the house. A plate with cigarettes, betel nuts, cloves and cardamom has been prepared to welcome them.

The newlyweds take their seats on the second floor, facing west, the wife’s father sits to the right of the groom, his mother to the bride’s left. At times the daughter of her father’s brother sits beside her as the “friend” (*pāsā vanegu*), who has been with her since she left her home and who will return with her this night to her parental house for a period of four days.

First, her grandmother – in her role as the oldest woman from the wife-giver’s house (*nakhī*) – performs *pūjā* in the usual sequence. Then the groom receives a plate with cloth, the bride receives two plates with shawls. The remaining offerings are given to them collectively, i.e. they both touch the following plates with their foreheads.

In a concluding act, the husband has to cut the decorative cake in the shape of a heart, his hand now guided by the hand of his father-in-law, the hand of his wife by her mother. The hand of his father-in-law is guided by the matchmaker (*lami*). Then he is fed by



Seeing the daughter in her new environment (*khvāḥ sva vanegu*) on 24 November 2008.

A decorative cake is brought and cut jointly by the newlywed couple. The hand of the husband is guided by his father-in-law, the hand of his wife by his mother, and the hand of his father-in-law by the hand of the matchmaker (*lami*).



his father-in-law, while his wife is fed by her mother.

After about an hour, the ceremonial part of the visit is over. Now tea is served and the atmosphere starts to relax. The guests sit along the walls, somehow encircling the new son-in-law, while his family members keep to the background. Although it is not silent, people speak in low voices, mostly the children, who turn the scene into a kind of performance. Everybody seems to know exactly what will happen. A sense of ease spreads, a kind of happiness with the establishment of a new alliance between two families.

Later that evening the daughter-in-law returns with her parental relatives to her natal home for a period of four days. Four days later, somebody from the wife-taker's family will bring her back to her new home. Only then is the marriage consummated.

### Summary

Marriage among Newar butchers seems to preserve traces of the old rituals. Most im-

portantly, the groom does not appear in the bride's house. His parents play prominent roles on the occasion of the bride receiving betel nuts from her future parents-in-law, and a couple of days later when the bride distributes betel nuts to her family members. Already on the first occasion it is not her future husband who smears vermilion on her forehead, but his mother. No priestly intermediary is necessary "to tie the knot" – in Nevārī "to come together" (*hvākegu*) – accompanied by the muttering of auspicious mantras. The wife-taker simply appears with his family and clan members and brings the bride to his house to join his family and his clan.

Surprisingly, the *hvākegu* ritual did not involve the returning of those ten betel nuts the bride would earlier have received from the groom.

It is also remarkable that Gaṇeśa alone in the form of the *sukūda* lamp graces the event. Other religious, moral or transcendent connotations are hardly apparent.