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Early Childhood Rituals among the Newars and Parbatiyās in the Kathmandu Valley

1 Introduction

This study is concerned with the early childhood rituals currently performed by the Newars and Parbatiyās in the Kathmandu Valley. Childhood rituals of the Newars have been dealt with in a monographic study by Gutschow & Michaels (2008) and as part of more comprehensive publications by for instance Nepali (1965), Greenwold (1974), Toffin (1984), Löwdin (1985), Pradhan (1986), Lienhard (1986 and 1999), Gellner (1992), and Ishii (1995). Bennett (1976 and 1978) studied the life-cycle rituals of the Brahman-Chetri community in Narikot.

The study of life-cycle rituals is strongly influenced by the pioneering work of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, who have introduced the key terms for the discussion of rituals: “rites de passage”, “rites de séparation”, “rites de marge”, “rites de agrégation” or “liminality”; further “communitas”, “social drama”, and “anti-structure”. Van Gennep (1909) argues that all “rites de passage”, which for him include life-cycle rituals and calendrical rituals, follow the scheme of separation or pre-liminal rites, rites of transition or liminal rites, and rites of reintegration or post-liminal rites. Turner understands “liminality” as those parts of rituals that are not everyday but instead are reversible, paradoxical, playful and sometimes absurd. He especially relates this to life-cycle rituals. Rituals that fall in those categories have mostly been understood either as hierophanic events, or as events which help to overcome life crises, or to strengthen the solidarity of a social group, or to build up identity and personhood.

Gutschow & Michaels (2005: 6–7; 2008: 7–8) have developed a more complex theory of ritual acts, which concentrates on polyvalent and polythetic aspects and the specific components of rituals. They suggest that “ritual acts are mostly 1) formal, stereotypical, and repetitive (therefore imitable); 2) public; and 3) irrevocable; in many cases they are also 4) liminal. So they may not be spontaneous, private, revocable, singular or optional for everyone. Ritual acts are not deliberately rational; they cannot simply be revised to achieve a better or more economical goal. Therefore, formalism constitutes a central criterion in most definitions of ritual” (Gutschow & Michaels 2008: 7). Further “rituals are not limited to just one meaning or purpose, such as auspiciousness. They are complex events in which actions and words are constantly adapted to situations, needs, ritual specialists and other persons involved” (ibid.: 8).

The number of the *saṃskāras*, the life-cycle rituals laid down in the Sūtras range from the eleven mentioned in the *Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra* up to more than forty in the

Dharmasūtras.¹ Out of these *saṃskāras* sixteen are the classical *saṃskāras* although the enumeration differs in the ritual manuals (*paddhatis*). These are: *garbhādhāna* (conception), *pūṃsavana* (encouraging the birth of a male child), *sīmantonṇaya* (hair parting), *jātakarman* (birth rituals), *nāmakaraṇa* (name-giving), *niṣkramaṇa* (the first outing), *annaprāśana* (first feeding of solid food), *cūḍākaraṇa* (tonsure), *karṇavedha* (piercing the ears), *vidyārambha* (learning the alphabet), *upanayana* (initiation), *vedārambha* (commencement of Vedic studies), *keśānta* (shaving the beard), *samāvartana* (end of studentship), *vivāha* (marriage), and *antyeṣṭi* (death ritual).

One point in common is a list of “Ten Rites” (Skt. *daśakriyāḥ* or *daśakarman*). The (so far) oldest dated source in Nepal dealing with this subject is the *Daśakarmanpaddhati*, written in A.D. 1176 in Newari (NGMPP B 36/1). A modern list of the *daśakarman* performed by the Newars counts: 1) *jātakarman* (birth rituals), 2) *nābhicchēdana* (severing the umbilical cord), 3) *chaithī* (the sixth day ritual), 4) *āśauca* (impurity, especially the period of mourning), 5) *nāmakaraṇa* (name-giving), 6) *annaprāśana* (first feeding of solid food), 7) *cūḍākaraṇa* (tonsure), 8) *vratabandha* (initiation), 9) *bibāha* (marriage), and 10) *antyeṣṭi* (death ritual).² Rites 1–8 of this list are performed during the childhood of a male person. Actually, during the performances the Newar priests mostly use handwritten ritual manuals that are passed down in the family. For the performance of rituals, Hindu Newars engage Rājopādhyāya Brahmins and Buddhist Newars Vajrācāryas. Gellner points out: “Each caste, and indeed each local clan, has its own traditional ways of performing these rites. Ordinary Newars, particular Maharjans, carry out birth purification themselves, without calling a priest. Śākyas and Vajrācāryas call a priest only for the first rice-feeding of the first child: subsequent children receive their first rice not from the priest, but from the Maharjan midwife (*didi aji*)” (1992: 200). The Parbatiyā Brahmins mostly use ritual manuals published in India.

The aim of my paper is to give a more detailed account of the ritual acts performed during the period from the birth of a child up to *nāmakaraṇa*, the name-giving ceremony. For Newars these are above all the affinal gift-exchange and the rituals connected with it, *macābu byēkegu* (the birth purification), *chaithī* (the sixth day ritual), and *nā chuyegu* (name-giving). The rituals of the Parbatiyās I shall deal with here are *ṣaṣṭhī-pūjā* (the sixth day worship) and *nāmakaraṇa* (name-giving). In the case of the Newars, only the rituals of the Hindu Newars will be taken into consideration. This paper is a supplement to studies done by Gutschow & Michaels (2005 and 2008), von Rospatt (2005a and 2005b), and Zotter (2009).

Three methods have been used to obtain data for the paper: 1) participant observation, 2) interviews, and 3) studies of the relevant ritual manuals and secondary literature. The fieldwork was done in August/September 2008. The author has taken all the pictures in the paper. When not otherwise mentioned, all terms are given in Newari (New.) as spoken by the farmers (Jyāpus) of Bhaktapur.

1 See Pandey (1969: 17–23) and Kane (1968ff.: II, 189–201).

2 Prepared and published by Jośi Samāj (Jośi Society) 2000.

2 Impurity through birth

The Hindu concept of pollution is based on two kinds of impurity: Firstly, impurity that is collective and permanent, and secondly, impurity that occurs temporarily and personally. Although the first kind of impurity is closely connected to a caste, caste group or caste category, the second kind (which will be the concern in this article) is independent of caste status and results from certain actions and events during the life of an individual. These can be events such as birth, death, menstruation, and a girl's menarche seclusion. Besides that, temporary and personal impurity can be caused by contact with substances that are regarded as contaminating, e.g., bodily excretions like faeces, urine, saliva, blood, fat, marrow, nails (clippings), mucus, sweat, semen, and menstrual blood (cf. Kane 1968ff.: IV, 311–6). In the context of life-cycle rituals there are three *samskāras* that cause temporary and personal impurity: birth, death, and menarche seclusion. In the following, I will show the effects of impurity caused through birth, and the steps to avoid and remove this impurity.

2.1 Impurity through birth among the Newars

The general term used for impurity in Newari is *cipā*, for impurity through birth *jayabili* or *jebeli*. Not only the individuals immediately involved in the event of birth, death and menarche seclusion are contaminated for a number of days, but also those around them in their environment (i.e. relatives). The impurity in these cases affects the relatives automatically—even without any physical contact to the mother, the newborn, or the girl in seclusion or, in the case of death, the corpse. Impurity can also be transferred from a person already affected by it to outsiders by physical contact or acceptance of food such as cooked rice and water (cf. Höfer 2004: 61).

The period of impurity is a liminal one that begins with the occurrence of the event or action causing impurity and ends as soon as the purificatory rituals have been performed. During this time of impurity, those immediately affected—in the case of birth pollution mother and child—as well as the members of the child's patrilineage have to remain separated from the rest of society. They are obliged to follow restrictions to avoid any transfer of the impurity. Thus they avoid any contact with outsiders, and do not perform or participate in any pure or auspicious rituals such as initiation, marriage, religious vow taking (Skt. *vrata*), festivals, or *durgāpūjā*. During the impure time, they may not enter temples, monasteries or any other sanctuary. The contacts to benevolent cosmic deities (such as Viṣṇu, Śiva or Gaṇeśa) have to be minimized, while at the same time the worship of ambiguous or malevolent deities like Chvāsaḥ Ajimā, the grandmother goddess of the crossroads, is increased (see Pradhan 1986: 67).

At the end of a period of impurity, purificatory rituals are performed. These rituals are of two kinds: mechanical procedures such as removing dirt from surfaces (e.g., ritual cleansing of the house) and the purifying of a person by taking a ritual bath, cutting their toenails and painting the toe tips, wearing freshly washed clothes, tonsure, sexual

abstinence, fasting, and the avoidance of any contact with persons, substances or objects in an impure state. To what extent these steps are performed depends on the status of the person, the kind of impurity, and the status of purity that will be obtained, e.g. to restore ordinary purity by removing impurity or to remove ordinary purity to become ritually pure for a ritual performance. The formalized purificatory rituals for the body are called in New. *byēkegu*, literally “to cause to become untied”, which means to become freed (from impurity). For the purification of objects or places the ordinary term *saphā yagu*, literally “to clean or to arrange neatly” is used. With the performance of the purificatory rituals a person is freed from impurity—which means from the restrictions imposed on him or her during the liminal period—and reincorporated into society.

The impurity caused through birth starts for the mother as soon as labour sets in and for the child at the moment of birth. Their impurity lasts until the twenty-first day if the child is male, and for one month if the child is female. The effects of this impurity for the mother are partial separation from the family (especially from male relatives), and a prohibition on entering the kitchen³ and touching food and water that may be consumed by the relatives.⁴ The severing of the umbilical cord (*pī dhenegu*) marks the beginning of the impure time for the child’s father’s patrilineage (*phukī*). Married daughters and father’s married sister(s) are not contaminated by this impurity because they belong to the *phukī* of their respective husband. In older times, a woman of the butcher caste (Kaṭaḥ) usually severed the umbilical cord some days after the delivery and disposed of the placenta either on a *chvāsaḥ* stone or at a crossroads if there was no *chvāsaḥ* stone nearby.⁵ Nowadays many butcher women refuse to conduct this highly impure act. The impure time for the *phukī* lasts till the performance of the purificatory rituals on *macābu byēkegu*, which is done between the sixth and the tenth day after birth. For the close relatives, such as the child’s father, grandparents, and father’s brothers and unmarried sisters the impure time ends on the twelfth day when, in the higher castes, the name-giving ritual (Skt. *nāmakaraṇa*, New. *nā chuyegu*) is conducted.

The Rājopādhyāyas (a wholly endogamous caste who act as the domestic priests of high-caste Hindu Newars and temple priests) and partly the Chatharīyas and Pāñc-tharīyas (families of high status who traditionally work as courtiers, merchants, and assistant priests) perform a particular ritual to avoid impurity through birth—a form of

3 The reason for this prohibition is that the fireplace in the kitchen is considered to be sacred and thus has to be protected from impurity. This segregation also includes menstruating women.

4 For the relatives the impure period ends on *macābu byēkegu*, usually performed between the fourth and tenth day after birth.

5 A *chvāsaḥ* is a spot marked by an uncarved stone usually buried partly in the ground, although in some places it is located below the surface. The *chvāsaḥ* protects a defined area around it and can be found at major crossroads inside Newar settlements. It is considered to be a divinity itself or a seat for a deity, or often regarded as a female mother or grandmother deity (Aji, Ajimā), which is often called Chvāsaḥ Ajimā. It is also believed that the ancestors (Skt. *pitr*) and ghosts (Skt. *piśāca*) reside there (see Gutschow & Michaels 2008: 426). Since umbilical cords are also disposed of at these spots, the *chvāsaḥ* is connected to early childhood and often identified with Hārītī, the Buddhist goddess of smallpox. Cf. Gellner (1992: 81) for Patan.

ancestor worship (Skt. *vrddhiśrāddha*, also called *nāndīmukhaśrāddha*).⁶ After this ritual, the *phukī* members are in a ritually pure state for the next six days. Since these castes are involved in the role of priests, assistant priests, and astrologers in various ritual performances, such as private rituals, temple rituals and during the innumerable festivals, the avoidance of impurity is necessary for the maintenance of religious life of Newar society. According to the information of Kedarnath Rajopadhyaya of the Ipāchē Rājopādhyāya clan in Bhaktapur, the procedure is as follows: Before the umbilical cord is severed, which in former times was done between the second and the sixth day (nowadays shortly after delivery), all *phukī* members have to be informed about the birth of the child in order to perform the *nandīmukhaśrāddha* in good time. The agents of this ritual distribute water to all *phukī* members who need to stay in a pure state. By accepting the water, they will not be contaminated by the impurity. Afterwards, they have to leave their houses and stay in a different locality. In older days, a *sataḥ*, a religious building used for shelter or a feast was employed for the purpose. If someone decides to stay away from home during this time, he may accept neither food nor water from his house, and not have any physical contact with members of his *phukī* who are in an impure state, otherwise the impurity would be transferred to him.

2.2 Impurity through birth among the Parbatiyās

In contrast to the Newars, the Parbatiyā husband and his relatives are not contaminated by the impurity through birth, which is called in Nepali *sūtak* (Skt. *sūtake* or *jananāśauca*). No restrictions are placed on them regarding physical contact with outsiders or food. But, after the umbilical cord is severed, they may not worship benevolent cosmic deities—neither at home nor in temples—until *nāmakaraṇa*, the naming ceremony of the child is performed, which is usually done on the eleventh day after birth. Furthermore, they may not perform or participate in any auspicious rituals such as marriage, initiation or festivals. According to the sources of Classical Hindu law, a woman becomes touchable ten days after delivery. However, she may not participate in religious performances for thirty days after giving birth to a son and for forty days for a daughter. If a woman delivers her child at her husband's house, her father and brother(s) are not contaminated by the impurity, but if she delivers in her father's or brother's house, then her parents and all of her brothers living in this house become impure for one day (see Kane 1968ff.: IV, 275–6). The *Mulukī Ain*, the legal code of Nepal from 1854 states that after a delivery, not only is the mother impure, but also the child's father, the father's brother, and also classificatory brothers together with their wives, sons and unmarried daughters. For them the period of impurity lasts ten days if the woman in confinement is of the same caste as theirs, and for three days if she is of a lower caste or has undergone a decline in her feminine status (Höfer 2004: 62). During the impure time the woman is free from impurity for two short periods: Firstly, between delivery

6 I have no information as to whether a similar ritual is performed among the Parbatiyās.

and the severing of the umbilical cord, and secondly, on the sixth day after delivery on *ṣaṣthīpūjā*, because in both periods physical contact with the mother cannot be avoided (ibid.).

Due to the highly polluting character of birth, men are strictly excluded from the delivery site. Furthermore, children and all those women who have not yet delivered are excluded, too. It is said that if the latter group is present at the delivery site, it will make the woman's labour longer and more painful (Bennett 1976: 24). When delivery takes place at home, as soon as the labour starts particular high caste Hindus send women either into a separate delivery room in the house, or to a hut near the house. During the impure period, a woman is untouchable for all, especially men. Only the female members of her husband's family and the midwife can touch her so as to help and massage her. However, after having touched the birthing mother, these women have to wash their body and hair and put on freshly laundered clothes before eating and touching a man (ibid.: 29). I doubt that all these points are nowadays followed so strictly, especially in urban centres where a family often lives together in one or two rooms. According to Bennett, the child is not considered to be contaminated by impurity and can be touched by men. But the mother may not hand over the child directly. She has to place it first on the neutralizing earth or on a floor that has been purified with cow dung (ibid.). I suppose that nowadays this is only done by orthodox families and in rural areas. When a woman gives birth in a hospital, some members of the husband's family and often the husband himself take care of her—at least during visiting hours—after she has left the delivery room. The family members take the child directly from the mother's hands.

When at the end of the time of impurity, the woman leaves the delivery room or the hut, she has to perform certain rituals to remove the impurity. These rituals include cleaning the house and especially the delivery room or the hut using a coat of clay and/or cow dung on the floor, washing all the clothes and bedding the mother came in contact with, and washing the mother.

3 Affinal gift-exchange before and after a childbirth among the Newars

The affinal relations between a wife's natal home and her conjugal home are often close.⁷ According to Löwdin, "the stream of gifts between the two households should preferably be to the advantage of the husband's household" (1998: 109). The occasions on which gifts are sent are life-cycle and certain calendrical rituals. In the following section, I will concentrate on the gifts sent between a wife's natal and conjugal home shortly before and after the birth of a child. However, this can only be a general description because the gifts differ according to locality and caste.

7 See Toffin (1984: 165–7 and 413–8) for the relations between affines in Pyangaon and Panauti; Löwdin (1998: 98–123) for affinal relations in Sunakothi; Quigley (1984: 261–2) for Dhulikhel; and Ishii (1995: 127–37).

3.1 The ritual of feeding yoghurt and beaten rice – *dhaubaji nākegu*

Especially during the first years of marriage, a wife frequently visits her natal home, and spends even more time there after the birth of her first child. However, her natal relatives usually do not visit her in her conjugal home during the period between her wedding and an advanced stage of her first pregnancy. A few weeks before the expected date of the delivery, usually in the eighth or ninth month of pregnancy, the ritual of *dhaubaji nākegu* (“feeding yoghurt and beaten rice”), alternatively called *dhaubaji nakah vanegu* (“going to feed yoghurt and beaten rice”) is performed. For that, female relatives of the pregnant woman’s natal home—such as her mother, her sister(s) and her brother’s wife—come to visit her. They bring nourishing food to feed her including yoghurt (*dhau*), beaten rice (*baji*), eggs (*khē*), fruits (*sisā busā*), *mār* (a kind of sweet-meat), *yaḥmāri* (cone shaped sweets made of rice flour filled with molasses [*cāku*] and black sesame seed [*hāku hāmo*], which are offered on birthdays and during full moon in November), liquor (*ailā*), and different kinds of meat such as buffalo meat (*mey/mesyāgu lā*), goat (*khasiyāgu lā*) or nowadays especially among the Jyāpus (the agricultural caste) chicken (*khāyāgu lā*). Among the Śreṣṭhas (who are divided into two sub-castes, Chathariyā and Pāñcthariyā)⁸, the pregnant woman goes to her natal home and is fed there (Ishii 1995: 130). In older days it was the custom among the high castes (Rājopādhyāya, Chathariyā and Pāñcthariyā—former ritual specialists, courtiers and merchants) to send expensive goat meat (*khasiyāgu lā*) for the occasion. In addition, the natal relatives bring a red cloth and a piece of fabric for the expectant mother and a piece of fabric for the son-in-law. The natal relatives then feed the pregnant woman with the food they have brought. The Newars believe that by feeding a pregnant woman with nourishing food sent from her natal home, the delivery will be easier, faster and less painful. It was believed in older times that without this meal the child, who expects to be fed before being born, would refuse to be born or become a glutton (see Nepali 1965: 88).

After feeding the pregnant woman, her mother will perform the *svagā* ritual, a ritual expressing a wish for auspiciousness.⁹ The *svagā* ritual on *dhaubaji nākegu* consists of two steps: first, the *dhau* (yoghurt) *svagā* is performed, and then *khē* (egg) *svagā*.

For the *dhau svagā* ritual, the mother of the pregnant woman takes a seat opposite her daughter facing east. The *sukūda*, the ritual lamp pot that represents the god Gaṇeśa is placed to the daughter’s left. Nowadays it is usual for the son-in-law to also join this ritual. He sits next to his wife on the floor. The mother gives a ritual plate (*pūjā bhaḥ*) to her daughter and son-in-law, who each touch the plate with their right hand. The plate contains yoghurt (*dhau*), beaten rice (*jāki*), deep red powder (*abīr*), flowers (pre-

8 See Quigley (1995: 80–108).

9 “*svagā*” is the name given to a ritual for someone who is undergoing a major juncture in his or her life, as for instance an auspicious life-cycle ritual, regardless of whether it is associated with pure or impure events, a long journey, birthdays, a marriage etc. This ritual consists of a ceremonial meal of one hard-boiled egg, a small dried roasted fish and liquor; see Lienhard (1986: 7); Pradhan (1986: 70).

ferably red) and fruit (*sisā busā*). The mother mixes the yoghurt, beaten rice, vermilion, and petals and puts some of this mixture three times on the floor in front of her daughter and her son-in-law. Then all three of them offer a small portion of the mixture to Gaṇeśa by putting it on the *sukūda*, an oil lamp with a receptacle for storing oil and adorned with an image that represents the gods Agni, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa or Śiva and Śakti. After that, the mother throws a portion of the mixture up to the ceiling to worship the goddess Gṛhalakṣmī. She then takes some more of the mixture with her right hand, applies it as *tikā*, a mark on the forehead worn as a sign of having done *pūjā*, to the foreheads of her daughter and son-in-law, and puts vermilion and petals on their heads.

This is followed by the *khē svagā* ritual. On offering *khē svagā* at the end of a ritual, a person is freed from all restrictions imposed on him or her, especially those regarding food. For that the mother takes a plate with an egg (*khē*), a small dried roasted fish (*sukhunyā*), meat (*lā*), and a small cup of liquor (*ailā*). If dried fish is not available on the market, ginger (*pālu*) can be used as a substitute. Among the Rājopādhyāyas milk (*duru*) is used instead of liquor. The daughter and son-in-law touch the plate with their right hands. Then the mother distributes the goods on the plate to all the family members attending the ritual.

The *dhaubaji nākegu* ritual marks an important change in the relationship between a wife's natal and her conjugal home. On this occasion, gifts from the wife-giving side to the wife-taking side are sent for the first time after the wife's wedding. Not until the *svagā* ritual has been performed on the day of *dhaubaji nākegu* during a woman's first pregnancy will her natal relatives accept food and water in her conjugal home. This rule is compulsory for the high caste Rājopādhyāyas and mostly in operation among the Chatharīyas and Pāñctharīyas. Jyāpus and castes below them seem only partly to follow this rule; they often accept food and water after the wedding of their daughter in the in-law's house. Nevertheless, the younger sibilants of a married woman are usually permitted to eat and drink there before the *dhaubaji nākegu* ritual is performed. On that day the son-in-law's relatives have to prepare an elaborate meal for the guests from the woman's natal home. Most of my informants were of the opinion that there is no reason to cultivate any food or exchange relations to their son-in-laws house before the daughter is in an advanced stage of her first pregnancy.

3.2 The announcement of childbirth

On the day of the birth, *macābu kanke chvayegu* ("sending [a messenger] to announce the childbirth") takes place. In former times, in case of a home delivery it was usually done before the umbilical cord was severed, but at the latest before *macābu byēkegu*, the birth purification ritual. According to the information of women who had just given birth and their relatives, who were interviewed at Thapathali Maternal Hospital in August/September 2008, the procedure for announcing a childbirth is as follows: The mother's conjugal relatives send a messenger to her natal relatives to inform them about

the childbirth. This job is done by Jyāpus (agricultural caste) or Duīs¹⁰ (farmers and manufacturers of grain products) whose caste role includes acting as messengers, bearers, and attendants in life-cycle rituals, feasts, and festivals.¹¹ Nowadays, a woman from the mother's conjugal home often informs the natal home about the birth. The messenger brings a basket or a small packet filled with the following items: areca nut (*gvē*), a slab of molasses (*cāku*), ginger (*pālu*), vermilion (*sinhaḥ*), celery seeds (*īmu*), clove (*lavā*), and a coin. The content of the basket or packet reveals the sex of the child. According to my information, two practices are common: If the child is a boy the molasses are shaped into a round ball and the areca nut is unbroken. For a girl the molasses will be formed into a flat cake and halved. Alternatively, an areca nut is halved. If the child is a boy one half of the areca nut is put with the conical side up in a small bowl filled with some unbroken rice, if it is a girl then the cut side of the areca nut faces up. The symbolism behind both methods is the same: the roundness of the slab of molasses and the conical side of the areca nut represent testicles; the flatness of the flat cake and the cut side of the areca nut represent the vagina. The information about the sex of the child is important for the mother's natal relatives because the number of items that have to be sent on *macābu byēkegu* depends on it. On the same day, the mother's natal relatives have to return the same kind of items, but twice the amount.

3.3 Visits from and to the mother's natal home

One or two days after birth, *ghyaḥle siyā baji nakaḥ vanegu* ("going to feed beaten rice parched in clarified butter"), alternatively called *cāku baji nakaḥ vanegu* ("to go to feed molasses and beaten rice") takes place. For that, the mother's mother and other women of her natal home visit her and feed her with parched beaten rice, molasses, clarified butter, and celery seeds. According to my informants, this visit is not obligatory, but it is still usually performed. Around one week after *macābu byēkegu*, which will be dealt in greater detail later, the mother's mother visits her daughter and feeds her meat, beaten rice, beans, bread, and liquor. This visit is called *lā nakaḥ vanegu* ("going to feed meat"). She visits her daughter again between the fifteenth and twentieth day after birth to feed her molasses, clarified butter, beans, vegetables, etc. on the occasion of *cāku nakaḥ vanegu* ("going to feed molasses"). Those visits should on the one hand ensure that the daughter receives nourishing food, and on the other hand provides psychological support. The mother in her weak condition after delivery is frequently surrounded and taken care of by the persons she loves and grew up with. Around one month after the birth of a child, the mother goes with her child to her natal home where she stays for at least one month, which is called *macābu lahī yanegu* ("taking out the child"). In her parents' home the mother is taken care of. She can rest, does not have to do any hard work, and is given nutritious foods. Traditionally, her husband may not

10 This caste is extinct in Bhaktapur. Nowadays, the announcement of a childbirth is done by Jyāpus.

11 For Jyāpus as tenants and ritual specialists see Gellner & Pradhan (1995: 169–74).

visit her there but nowadays this rule is rather lax. However, on one occasion her mother-in-law will come to visit her and bring her food such as meat, clarified butter, beaten rice, pulse, vegetables, sweets, liquor, and rice beer. Additionally, she brings a special sweet called *pvastigā*, which is made of molasses and milk and is regarded as very tasty and fattening.¹² The purpose of this visit might be to show that the mother's paternal relatives also take care of her, and of course to find out about the mother and child's health.

4 The purificatory rituals after childbirth among the Newars – *macābu byēkegu*

The time of impurity after a childbirth is brought to an end for the patrilineage of the child's father (*phukī*) by a ceremony called *macābu byēkegu* (literally “becoming free of the impurity through birth” (*macā* – child; *bu* [from *buye*] – to give birth) which has to be performed. There is no common agreement about the specific day for performing *macābu byēkegu*. The ceremony takes place between the fourth and the twelfth day after the birth of a child. Generally it is said that for a son it should be held between the tenth and the twelfth day, and for a daughter on the fourth, sixth or twelfth day. According to Nepali (1965: 92), the ceremony is performed for the first child on the sixth day and for subsequent children on the fourth day.¹³ All of my informants agreed in that the day of *macābu byēkegu* should have an even number (counted from the day of delivery). Mostly, the day of this ceremony depends on family tradition rather than on caste. In individual cases *macābu byēkegu* is performed as early as possible if the *phukī* has religious obligations that demand they have to be in a ritually pure state. It is tradition in some families that an astrologer (Jośi) fixes the time for this ritual. A woman of the family—usually one of the father's sisters (*nini*)—visits the astrologer to inform him about the date and exact time of the child's birth. He will at least prepare a provisional horoscope for the child.

The performance of *macābu byēkegu* does not follow any standard pattern, neither in its course nor in the day it is held or in the ritual agents who attend it. *Macābu byēkegu* seems rather to be performed according to the respective family traditions and the current circumstances. During my fieldwork, I observed four different *macābu byēkegu* ceremonies and took many interviews. Despite the divergences in the manner of performance, the following seem to be essential features of *macābu byēkegu*:

In the early morning, the preparatory rituals such as ritually cleaning the house and purifying the *phukī* members by taking a bath, paring and colouring the toe-nails, dressing in clean clothes, burning the straw, and bathing and massaging the child with oil are all performed. Later that morning, the mother's natal home sends gifts, at least for the first-born child. Several *pūjās* are performed during the course of which mother and

12 As Löwdin (1989: 112) recorded for Sunakothi (near Kirtipur) in the years 1982–83.

13 Nepali concentrated his study on Kathmandu and Panga.

child are ritually purified. Then the child's father announces his paternity. Afterwards, the senior-most woman of the household (*nakhī*) distributes *dhau svagā* to all the participants at the ceremony. My informants agreed that during *macābu byēkegu*, at least the following persons should be present: The baby, the mother (if she had died during or after the delivery, a woman of the household who takes the mother's place), the performer of the *pūjā* who can be a priest, the senior-most woman of the household (*nakhī*), the midwife ([*didi*] *aji*) or somebody who acts for her, and ideally the child's father.

4.1 *Macābu byēkegu* in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu

Because of the variety of ways that *macābu byēkegu* may be performed, a general description of this ritual seems impossible. Therefore, I will describe a *macābu byēkegu* ceremony I observed that was held on the 20th August 2008 in Kamal Vinayak, a quarter in the outskirts of Bhaktapur. I have chosen this ceremony for two reasons: Firstly, it was performed for the first-born son who is also the first child of the parents, and secondly, it provides a vivid example of the ceremony's flexibility and adaptability to the family's circumstances and of the ritual agents who perform this particular ceremony. The family belongs to the Bakhādyos, a Jyāpu (farmer) sub-caste. The ceremony was held on the tenth day after the delivery of the child. The child was born by caesarean section in the maternity hospital in Thapathali/Kathmandu. Mother and child had been discharged just the day before the ceremony took place. The mother was still weak and uncomfortable during the *macābu byēkegu* ceremony. As a result, the whole procedure, which started at 7 o'clock in the morning, lasted almost seven hours until 1.45 p.m., for it included several breaks for the mother to rest. As already mentioned, the performance of the *macābu byēkegu* ceremony differs from family to family. The members of the Bakhādyo household in Kamal Vinayak did not perform certain steps that I have observed in other *macābu byēkegu* ceremonies. For this reason, I will give these steps as I observed them during a *macābu byēkegu* ceremony performed by a Jyāpu family on the 6th September 2008 in Baphal, a quarter in the western part of Kathmandu. It was held for the second child, like the first-born a son who was likewise born in the maternity hospital in Thapathali/Kathmandu. I mentioned earlier that the number of the day on which *macābu byēkegu* is held should be even. In this particular case the ceremony was held on the eleventh day after the child's birth because the *aji* (midwife) who performed parts of the ceremony had been busy the day before, the day the family would have preferred. The ceremony started at 7.45 a.m. and finished at 11.30 a.m.

4.1.1 Preparatory rituals

In the early morning, women of the household in Bhaktapur ritually cleaned the house by spreading a mixture of red soil (*sīcā*) and cow dung (*gobar*) on the floors and stairs. The mother washed all the clothes she had used and come in contact with during the

days after the delivery. The father's sister then washed all the clothes the family members used during the cleaning of the house. The whole family, including mother and child, took a bath in the morning and put on clean clothes. Then the family members had to sprinkle themselves with *pañcagavya*, a mixture consisting of the five purifying products of the cow (cow's urine, cow dung, milk, yoghurt and clarified butter) as part of their ritual purification. Since cow's urine and cow dung are difficult to obtain in cities, the sprinkling of *pañcagavya* was not carried out in either of the ceremonies I observed. The *naunī*, a woman of the barber caste (Nau) arrived, pared the toenails (*lusi dhenegu*) of each member of the household, and coloured their toe-tips red (*alah taye-gu*).¹⁴

Burning the straw

The next step is a left-over from older times when women always delivered their children at home. The delivery took place in a small room, which most of the time had been used as a storeroom. Shortly before the expected delivery, it was cleaned with red soil and cow dung and a bed of straw was prepared for the birthing women. Traditionally, on *macābu byēkegu* the mother and child left the delivery room for the first time. The bed of straw, which had been used by the mother during this time was taken out of the house and burned. The tradition of the Rājopādhyāyas differs on this point. They do not take out and burn the straw until the twelfth day after delivery when they perform *nāmakaraṇa*, the name-giving ritual. Nowadays, the majority of women in the Kathmandu Valley give birth in maternity hospitals. When they return home from hospital, they use an ordinary bed. Additionally, often a whole family living in a modern house has just one or two rooms, without any possibility of making space for a separate bed. However, after the mother and child return from hospital, some straw is put below the mattress of the bed they use. This can be understood as a symbolical act, which allows, under modern living conditions, a well-defined part of the bed to be prepared for the mother and child during their ritually impure period and to purify this very place on the day of *macābu byēkegu* by removing the straw and washing the bedding. So, in the course of the ritual purification of the house in the morning the straw is taken outside by a woman of the family (usually one of father's sisters) or by the *aji* in case she already arrived at the house.

The family in Bhaktapur did not call their *aji* on that day because she is already 85 years old and was feeling ill. Instead, they called for a woman from the neighbourhood who does the traditional oil-massage of babies for her livelihood. This is an adaptation to modernity: since almost every woman in Bhaktapur nowadays goes to a maternity hospital for delivery, fewer women than in older days work as an *aji*. Moreover, their payment is low and the younger generation is not attracted to the job, which they con-

14 As in case of other specialists, the Nau women pass on their patrons as a kind of property. As Gellner (1995: 23) points out, a person cannot change the specialist without the risk of alienating for example all the barbers.



Plate 1: *Macābu byēkegu* in Kamal Vinayak/Bhaktapur 2008: The straw from below the mattress is burned in the courtyard. The mother (middle) purifies herself by waving smoke over her body. The masseuse (left) brings kitchen utensils to be waved and purified in the smoke.

sider to be old fashioned. Media such as TV, newspapers and magazines distort the image of the traditional *aji* and favour trained midwives and nurses. The woman who was called in by the family belongs to the caste of the oil-pressers (Sāymi). Unlike an *aji*, she neither helps during deliveries nor takes part in the ritual performances during *macābu byēkegu*. She will come twice a day for three months—once in the morning and once in the afternoon—to give the baby an oil massage. The family addresses her as *tamā* (lit. “mother’s elder sister”), a title of respect. After she arrives at the family’s house early in the morning of *macābu byēkegu*, she helps the mother to wash and dress. The father’s mother takes the straw to an already erected heap of straw at the back of the house and burns it together with some clothes the mother had used during the last few days. The mother comes near and circles the fire in a clockwise direction. She purifies herself by waving smoke with her hands from the fire over her body. The father’s mother then brings some kitchen utensils to the fire and waves them up and down in the smoke (see plate 1). These utensils are representative for all the kitchen utensils of the household, which are ritually purified by waving them in the smoke.



Plate 2: *Macābu byēkegu* in Baphal/Kathmandu 2008: The *aji* stands on the rooftop terrace and shows the sun to the child (*sūrya jo[jala]pegu* or *macāyāta sūrya kenegu*). The saucer in her left hand is filled with a mixture of broken rice, which she throws up into the air to worship the sun.

4.1.2 Showing the sun to the child – *macāyāta sūrya kenegu*

The members of the household in Bhaktapur did not perform the ritual of showing the sun, so I shall describe the ritual as I saw it in the Jyāpu family in Baphal/Kathmandu. Before the *aji* (midwife) burns the straw she performs a ritual called *macāyāta sūrya kenegu* (“showing the sun to the child”), or alternatively called Skt. *sūryadarśana* (New. *sūrya jo[jala]pegu* – “worshiping the sun”) (See Lienhard 1986: 9). According to Lienhard, this ritual was performed in former times in India and Nepal between the third and the fourth month after birth as part of the Hindu life-cycle ritual *niṣkramaṇa* (New. *pājuyā thāy vanegu*), the child’s first outing (ibid.: 9–10). However, nowadays *macāyāta sūrya kenegu* and *pājuyā thāy vanegu* are performed on different dates. The child’s first outing is performed on an evening between the third and the fourth month. The women of the family (grandmother and/or older sisters) throw rice onto every threshold of the house and draw a line of rice from the house to the *pikhālākhū* (the stone guardian of the house) situated in front of the building. Lienhard assumes that the *niṣkramaṇa* performed by the Newars is actually *candradarśana*, the showing of the moon, which in former times in India was performed after *sūryadarśana*, but is no

longer practised. On *macāyāta sūrya kenegu*, the baby is ritually shown the sun for the first time. In former times and even today in cases of home deliveries, the baby is then taken out of the house for the first time. Nowadays, the babies who are born in a maternity hospital have already been outdoors when they are taken home after being discharged. In these cases, this ritual is more a symbolical act.

The *aji* in Kathmandu takes the child up to the rooftop terrace, holds the baby in her arm and throws a mixture of broken rice (*cvaki*) onto the baby's forehead and then up into the air, which means to the sun (Skt./New. *sūrya*) (see plate 2). This ritual was not performed during the *macābu byēkegu* ceremony in Bhaktapur because the *aji* was not present and as the *nakhī*—the senior-most woman of the household who later during the *pūjā* acted as *aji*—told me after the ceremony, she had simply forgotten to perform it. A short debate arose and the family decided that the baby had already seen the sun on the way from the maternity hospital to the house and therefore no further complications would arise for the child by not performing this ritual.

As can be seen from the description, the preparatory rituals of the two ceremonies were almost the same—with the exception of the ritual of showing the sun to the child. They only varied in their order of performance and in their agents.

4.1.3 The offering of gifts

Having finished their purification over the burning straw, the women of the household in Bhaktapur start to prepare the spot for the subsequent *pūjās*. The family lives in a traditional Newar house where the kitchen is situated under the roof. In this house, the kitchen was the only room with a floor made of tamped clay. As a result, the front part of the kitchen is used for all the indoor rituals because the floor can be traditionally purified by spreading a mixture of cow dung (*gobar*) and red soil (*sīcā*) on it. Then mats and pillows are put around the *pūjā* spot (*bā thilegu*). If a priest performs the *pūjās*—as is done at least among the Rājopādhyāya families—he draws diagrams (Nep. *rekhi*) on the floor to serve as seats for the gods, plates and ritual agents. A *cauki*, a square diagram on which later the *sukūda* (“ritual lamp pot”) is placed, is drawn in detail to the right of the mother's place, a *svastika* (Skt. “a kind of mark on persons or things denoting good luck”) on which the wooden seat (*kupu*) for the mother is placed, and a lotus diagram (New. *palesvā*; Skt. *padma*) as seat (Skt. *āsana*) for all the deities.

In the morning hours but before the *pūjās* start, porters bring gifts (*ku hegu*) from the mother's natal home to her conjugal home. Usually, the mother's mother (*tā māñh*), the mother's older or younger sisters (*tari māñh* or *ciri māñh*) or mother's brother's wives (*maleju*) come on this day to join the *pūjas*. The women of the mother's natal home put the gifts inside the conjugal house on plates and baskets and place them in a ritually cleaned spot. Afterwards, the members of the mother's conjugal home come and check whether the items are complete and in a proper condition. The variety of the gifts differs according to the sex of the baby and whether or not he is the first-born son. For a first-born son, the maternal uncle has to send the head of a buffalo. If the first-born is a girl, only half a buffalo's head is sent. In that case, the maternal uncle has again to send



Plate 3: *Macābu byēkegu* in Kamal Vinayak/Bhaktapur 2008: On the floor are the gifts that have been sent by the child's mother's brother. On the left side is the buffalo head that is sent for a firstborn son. Behind it are bedding and in the middle foodstuffs and gifts for the child's parents.

items when the next child is a son. If the subsequent children are female or a son has already been born, no further items have to be sent. The items can be divided into those for the child, those for the mother, those for the father, and those for the use of all paternal family members, such as foodstuffs.

On the *macābu byēkegu* ceremony in Bhaktapur, the mother's mother arrived at 9.40 a.m. For this she took a taxi. Since she came alone it took her a while to arrange all the items on the living room floor. The following items were brought (see plate 3):

- Items for the child: a buffalo head (will be prepared and eaten during the feast by the family), *kāy khvalā* – a small bronze cup, *kāy gilās* – a bronze tumbler, *bhvay jvalam* – a set of dishes, *vātā* – a storage pot made of brass or copper, *khvalā* – a small cup, *tapes* – a bowl-shaped pan with a handle used to heat water for bathing the child, *sābun* – soap, *sukū* – a straw mat, *silah* – a quilt, *phvāgā* – a pillow, *macā kusā* – a sunshade made of three pieces of bamboo reed that is threaded together at one end, set up like a tripod and covered with a piece of cloth, *vaḥ macā aṅgū* – silver rings for the baby (sometimes even golden (*luṃ*) rings are given), *vaḥ macā ajaḥ vaṭṭā* – a small silver box for soot used as eye-liner around the eyes, a white and a yellow cloth called *vaḥ icā* and *luṃ icā* (lit. “silver cloth” and “golden cloth, the term *icā* stands originally for a ragged cloth

used as a diaper or nappy for babies)—these two gifts have a more symbolical character—and finally a baby outfit.

- The gifts for the mother were a length of cloth for clothes. The father received some ready-made clothes such as a pair of jeans, sweaters and a jacket.
- The items for family use consisted of foodstuffs such as *kaygū* – peas, *vañcā* – green vegetables, *tusi* – cucumber, *ālu* – potatoes, *vā* – unhusked rice, *jāki* – uncooked rice, *baji* – beaten rice, *būbaḥ* – cereals, *gaṃji* – hemp, *cikā* – oil, *gyaḥ* – clarified butter, *dhau* – yoghurt, *mey/mesyāgu lā* – buffalo meat, *khāyāgu lā* – chicken meat, *ailā* – alcohol, and *masalā* – spices.

After the paternal family members had inspected the gifts, the father's sister and his mother tidy them away. They arrange some of the items around the place where later the *pūjās* would take place. Perishable goods such as meat are taken into the kitchen. Parts of the buffalo and chicken meat are cooked and fried for the *pūjā*.

4.1.4 The *pūjās* performed on *macābu byēkegu*

On *macābu byēkegu* several *pūjās* are performed one after another. In detail these are *sukūdapūjā*, *chvāsāmāipūjā*, *sūrya bvaḥ* and *dhau svagā*. Because the *pūjās* are done according to the respective family tradition, there are large variations in the performances. Additionally, even in the same family this ritual is done every time in a different way, depending on the respective ritual agents.

The pūjās performed in Bhaktapur

The preparations for the *pūjās* in Bhaktapur start at 11.40 a.m. The father's mother (*tā māḥ*) and father's sister (*nini*) put the materials used during these *pūjās* around the already purified *pūjā* spot (*bā thilegu*) in the kitchen. The ritual agents performing in the rituals are the mother's mother, her mother-in-law, and the senior-most woman of her conjugal home who will act instead of an *aji*. The mother sits down on a pillow in front of the *pūjā* spot and puts the baby on her lap. Her mother-in-law takes a seat on the opposite side. The materials that will be used during the ritual are placed on plates on the *pūjā* spot. The mother-in-law starts with the *sukūdapūjā*. She worships the *sukūda*, the ritual lamp pot by applying vermilion powder (*sinha*) mixed with yoghurt to it. Then she wraps a sacred thread (Skt. *yajñopavīta*) around the *sukūda*, throws some unbroken rice (Skt. *akṣata*, New. *kigaḥ*), and puts some petals on it. In a similar way, she puts the yoghurt-vermilion paste, the sacred thread, unbroken rice and petals on a leaf placed on the *pūjā* spot in front of the mother. This leaf represents a seat (Skt. *āsana*) for all gods and goddesses. After this, she mixes a paste with her right hand consisting of water, unbroken rice and vermilion powder, applies it as *tikā* firstly to the child's, then on the mother's and at last to her own forehead, and puts petals on each *tikā*. She lights some wicks on the *sukūda*. While holding the burning wicks with her left hand she touches her own forehead once with her right hand and throws some yoghurt mixed with vermilion and unbroken rice up to the ceiling. This is done to worship the goddess *Gṛhalakṣmī*, the *iṣṭadevatā* (Skt. "a deity chosen as the personal deity") and the *kuladevatā*

(Skt. “the lineage deity”, New. *dugudyah*). Then she takes the burning wicks with her right hand and worships the *sukūda* and the child by circling the burning wicks in a clockwise direction in front of them. The masseuse then takes a bundle of new clothes for mother and child and gives it to the mother.

Then the mother’s mother takes a seat opposite the mother. She worships the *sukūda* and the leaf in front of the mother with flowers and coins. She puts an apple on the leaf as a food offering (Skt. *naivedya*) and throws yoghurt mixed with vermilion and unbroken rice up to the ceiling. After this she applies *tikā* paste made of yoghurt, vermilion and unbroken rice to the foreheads of the mother and child and places petals on both of their heads. She gives two plates to the mother: one for the child containing fabrics for baby clothes, baby oil, silver rings (*vaḥ macā aṅgū*), and a small silver box for soot used as eye-liner (*vaḥ macā ajah vattā*). From now on, the child will wear kajal round its eyes. On the second plate are fabrics for the mother. Now the mother’s mother applies a *tikā* to the father’s forehead and places petals on his head. He receives a plate with gifts: a jacket, a pair of jeans, sweaters and money. Then she puts some oil on the child’s forehead and money (banknotes) on top. The masseuse will collect the money, which is put during the ceremony on the child’s forehead. In this way, an *aji* is traditionally paid for her service.

In this family the following rituals are usually done by the *aji*. As she was unable to participate in this ceremony, it was performed by the *nakhī*, the senior-most woman of the household, who acted in her place. The *nakhī* was the only woman present who knew how to perform the *aji*’s part in the rituals, because, due to her approximately 70 years she had seen the rituals many times. She sits down and starts to prepare twelve portions of food on a tray made from a banana tree for the sun god Sūrya. This food offering is called *sūrya bvaḥ* (“feast for Sūrya”). The twelve portions represent the twelve suns (Āditya) (Gutschow & Michaels 2008: 175).

The *nakhī* puts twelve leaves from a *jēlālapte* tree onto the tray and on each of these a portion of the following items: beaten rice (*baji*), small pancakes made of peas (*kasuva*), fermented spinach (*sīkē*), fried rice (*sabhū*), a paste made of peas mixed with salt, red pepper and cumin (*kāgasāḥ*), ginger (*pālu*), soybeans (*musyā*), pieces of buffalo meat (*mey/mesyāgu lā*), a piece of dried fish (*sāgā*), raw sugar (*cāku*), and *isicā* (spiral ginger).¹⁵ She puts a small amount of each item in a metal bowl as an offering to the ancestors. Having done this she then worships Sūrya—represented by the twelve portions and the *sukūda* lamp pot—with unbroken rice, vermilion, a holy thread, petals, burning wicks and *tikā* paste. The child’s father takes the tray, opens the door to the rooftop terrace and dedicates the portions to the sun. He then takes the tray out of the

15 This root is used in two rituals. Firstly, it is offered to women on *macābu byēkegu* and secondly, after six days and at the end of the girl’s seclusion (*bārḥā tayegu*) performed after the mock marriage (*ihi*) and before the onset of menstruation. On both occasions, the smashed *isicā* root is mixed with salt, cumin and turmeric, formed into small flat cakes and fried in mustard oil. Cf. Gutschow & Michaels (2008: 175).



Plate 4: *Macābu byēkegu* in Kamal Vinayak/Bhaktapur 2008: The *aji* worships the deities who are represented by different plates, pots, bowls etc. The mother with the child is sitting in the background.

house and distributes these portions to children calling out: *āgā bvah kā vā masta* ("Children, come and take *āgā* food!").¹⁶ At the same time, the *nakhī* carries the metal bowl with the offering for the ancestors to the next crossroads and discards it there on the *chvāsah* stone.

At the end of the *pūjā* the mother again receives presents for the child, this time bedding and a sunshade. The *pūjā* concludes half an hour after noon.

The pūjās performed in Kathmandu

The *pūjā* performed by the family in Baphal/Kathmandu differs in most of the steps. The reason for this comes from differences between the local and the family traditions. Apart from that, here the *aji* functions as one of the main agents in the ceremony. Actually, neither the mother's mother nor the father's mother plays an active part. The per-

¹⁶ Here *āgā bvah* stands for food, which is consecrated and dedicated to any deity at the ritual. In other contexts, the term can also stand for the food consecrated and dedicated to *āgādyah*, the esoteric deity of the clan.

formers are the mother with her child, the *aji*, the father and at the end of the ceremony the *nakhī*. The participants all gather together in the living room where the *pūjā* takes place. All the materials and utensils that are used during the rituals have been placed at the *pūjā* spot next to the wall. On the left side of the *pūjā* spot the tray is placed bearing the twelve portions for the sun god Sūrya, and next to that three plates which the *aji* will later take for herself once the ceremony has finished. In the middle of the *pūjā* spot is a plate with offerings for Chvāsaḥ Ajimā and on the right hand side are the *sukūda* lamp pot, some plates, and bowls containing materials used during the ritual. The *aji* sits in front of the *pūjā* spot facing the wall; the mother with the child on her lap sits on the right side of the *aji*. Firstly, the *aji* worships the *sukūda* with *tikā* paste made of vermilion, unbroken rice and yoghurt, a sacred thread and petals. Then she worships in the same manner the plate for Chvāsaḥ Ajimā and then one by one all the other plates. After this, she waves burning wicks in a clockwise direction over all plates, and then she does the same with incense sticks. For *naivedya* she puts yoghurt, a mixture of vermilion, and popped rice (*tāy*) on each plate (see plate 4).

In the next step, the *aji* purifies the mother. For that, the *aji* takes a pot of cow milk and sprinkles this over the mother's body using some pieces of *ḍubo* grass (Skt. *dūrvā*; *Cynodon dactylon* [L.] PERS.). According to this family's tradition, the mother is now sufficiently purified to be able to use the kitchen. However, to worship the gods and enter temples she has to wait until the twenty-second day after birth. The *aji* again worships all the plates and the *sukūda* with burning wicks, incense sticks, petals and the mixture of vermilion, unbroken rice and yoghurt.

Then the *kulī bau pūjā* is performed, a *pūjā* exclusively for Chvāsaḥ Ajimā. The *aji* and the mother worship the goddess with a mixture of broken rice (*cvaki*) and mother's milk. For that, the mother drops milk from her breasts onto the plate with the offerings for Chvāsaḥ Ajimā. Then the *aji* applies a *tikā* to her forehead. After that, she gives first the child and then the mother *tikā* and petals on the forehead and *dhau svagā* on the temple—for the child on the right temple (because he is male) and for the mother on the left.

After that, the *aji* presents the plate with the offerings for Sūrya to the mother and carries it out of the house. She puts one portion on the side of the nearby main road. Because the family lives next to an industrial estate there is neither a *chvāsaḥ* stone nor a crossroads where ritual leftovers can be placed. She distributes the other eleven portions to children.

The participants of the ceremony in Bhaktapur didn't perform the announcement of the child's paternity by putting the child on its father's lap. But the father held the child during the *pūjās* when he sat next to his wife. During the ceremony in Baphal/Kathmandu the announcement of the paternity was done as follows:

The *aji* now puts a plate with *pūjā* materials (petals, flowers, wicks, incense sticks, vermilion and unbroken rice), a water vase, a *sukūda* and a plate with presents for the child (a small bowl with mustard oil, a piece of cloth, some money and a areca nut) in



Plate 5: *Macābu byēkegu* in Kamal Vinayak/Bhaktapur 2008: The *aji* puts the child on its father's lap. With this the father publicly announces his paternity of the child. In front of him are a *sukūdā* lamp pot and a bowl containing a small bowl with mustard oil, fabrics, and money, which will be presented to the child.

front of the father on the purified floor. The *aji* first applies a *tikā* to the father's forehead and gives him a flower, and then applies a *tikā* of yoghurt to his right temple. After that she takes the child from the mother and places him on his father's lap (see plate 5). By holding the child on his lap, the father announces his paternity of that child. The father puts some money on the child's forehead, which is collected by the *aji* as part of her payment. The *aji* then applies a *tikā* to the child's forehead.

Finally, the *nakhī* takes over. She receives a *tikā* applied by the *aji*. Then the *nakhī* applies a *tikā* to the child's forehead. She gives a plate with presents for the child to the father. With her right hand, the *nakhī* takes some mustard oil and drops it on the child's fontanel, puts some unbroken rice on it and places money on the child's forehead (see plate 6). She gives a *tikā* to the *aji*. Then everybody who has been present during the ceremony receives a *tikā* applied by the *aji*. In return, the participants use their right thumb to apply mustard oil to the child's forehead and put some unbroken rice and



Plate 6: *Macābu byēkegu* in Kamal Vinayak/Bhaktapur 2008: The *nakhī*, the senior-most woman of the family applies *tika* to the child's forehead and puts a flower on its head. The child's mother is sitting to the right.

money on that spot. After everybody has received a *tikā* the *nakhī* puts a golden ring on the third finger of the baby's right hand. The ring is a symbol of the child's prosperity. After a moment, she takes the ring back. In the late morning, the ceremony is finished.

The rituals on *macābu byēkegu* are performed by the *aji* whose services include—besides the oil massages for the child up to the fifth month after the birth—the performance of rituals. Usually the *aji* belongs to the Jyāpu (farmer) caste. The lower castes call upon women of their respective caste. The *aji* is the ritual specialist for the worship of Chvāsaḥ Ajimā after the birth of a child. Apart from the women of the child's family, she is the only one who touches the mother and child during the impure period. During this time, she performs daily worship to Chvāsaḥ Ajimā or Hārītī, who is represented in the house by an iron measure (*kukecā*) filled with beaten rice, mustard oil, and clarified butter, and in the *chvāsaḥ* stone at crossroads. After worshipping the goddess, the *aji* distributes *prasāda* (Skt. food offerings blessed by a deity) containing *sisāpālu* (ginger, molasses, and beaten rice) to the members of the family where the birth took place.

Macābu byēkegu marks the end of the impure time after a birth for all members of the clan (*phukī*). They are freed from the restrictions imposed on them during the last days and reincorporated into society. For the child this ceremony means the incorporation into the patrilineage. This is expressed in the public announcement of paternity by the child's father and by the distribution of *dhau svagā* and *tikā* to the child by the senior-most woman (*nakhī*) of the paternal family. Besides the purificatory aspect of *macābu byēkegu*, the announcement of the paternity and the giving of *tikā* to the child by the members of the father's patrilineage can be interpreted (for those who do not perform *chaiṭhī*) as the first step towards the child's integration into its father's patrilineage.

5 The ritual on the sixth day after childbirth – *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā*

The goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī*(devī), who is worshipped during the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* and who is also known by the name *Devasenā*, is the protective deity of children and bestower of offspring. *Ṣaṣṭhī* is the personification of the sixth day after the birth of a child and so she is worshipped in a ritual performed in the night from the sixth to the seventh day. Because the sixth day can also mean the night from the fifth to the sixth day, the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is partially done on that night, too. Her name derives from her origin. She is called *Ṣaṣṭhī* because she was born out of 1/6 part of the original matter (Skt. *mūlaprakṛti*). Her antiquity may be traced back to the Ancient Period (see Bhattacharya 1956: 57). However, *Ṣaṣṭhī* is also referred to in a few later Purāṇas such as the *Devibhāgavata* and the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* (see S.R. Das 1953: 37), which are dated not earlier than the 12th–13th centuries, and in the mediaeval Bengali literature.¹⁷ Through her husband *Kārttikeya* (alternatively called *Kumāra* or *Skanda*), the war god, she is associated with *Śiva*. R.S. Freed and S. Freed (1998: 122–3) assume that she is worshipped in areas especially where the worship of *Śiva* and related deities dominates, and replaced by *Bemātā*, the midwife of the god *Kṛṣṇa* in areas where the worship of *Kṛṣṇa* dominates. *Ṣaṣṭhī* has close affinities to goddesses like *Manasā* and *Śitalā*, ambivalent goddesses who are associated in their dangerous aspect with infectious illness such as smallpox and snakebites, and in their benevolent aspect grant protection against these misfortunes.¹⁸

Slusser (1982: 120–1) traces the worship of *Ṣaṣṭhī* in the Kathmandu Valley back to the reign of *Aṃśuvarman* (A.D. 605–621). She presumes that a minor shrine dedicated to *Sīṭhīdyo*, as Newars call both *Kārttikeya* and *Ṣaṣṭhī*, which is situated in the heart of Kathmandu in *Kelāycho*k, a small domestic courtyard, is what now remains of a temple to *Ṣaṣṭhī*.

17 For an overview of the Bengali sources see Maity (1989: 159, n. 62).

18 Cf. Wadley (1980: 33–62). For *Ṣaṣṭhī* worship in India see also Gadon (1996).

5.1 *Ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* among the Newars

It has become apparent from my fieldwork that nowadays *chaiṭhī*, as the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is called in Newari, seems to be performed only among the Rājopādhyāyas. The *chaiṭhī* ceremony has been performed at least since the late Malla period, as a *pūjā* manual from that time shows.¹⁹ It is not clear whether the non-performance of this ritual among the majority of the Newars is a recent development, or was never practiced by them to any large extent.

Pradhan (1986: 81–4) describes the rituals done on the sixth day but unfortunately does not mention to which castes his account refers. According to Pradhan, four different rituals are performed on that occasion. Firstly, in the morning of the sixth day various deities are worshipped such as Viṣṇu, Kumāra, Ṣaṣṭhī, and Chvāsaḥ Ajimā. During this ritual, the goddess Ṣaṣṭhī is represented by two heaps of fresh cow dung and the goddess Chvāsaḥ Ajimā by an iron measure. Secondly, in former times the umbilical cord was severed between the third and the sixth day after birth. If it was done on the sixth day, it coincided with *chaiṭhī*. In the meantime, the placenta had been kept in a small bamboo basket (*dālā*) and covered with a cloth. It was believed that if anyone except the midwife touched the placenta the mother might go mad (Dhungel 1980: 41). Traditionally, women of the butcher caste (Kaṭaḥ) performed in many places and for all castes the cutting of the umbilical cord. Among the Kaṭaḥ themselves, this is done by the senior-most married woman of the household or *phukī*, or sometimes by the midwives (see Gellner 1995: 273). The Kaṭaḥ women in Bhaktapur abandoned the task of severing umbilical cords approximately ten years ago because nowadays women go to hospital for delivery. Thirdly, in the evening a ritual is performed during which one of the child's father's sisters (*nini*) sits on purified ground surrounded by six oil lamps with her brother's child on her lap. She applies oil to the child's head, black soot paste mixed with oil round the child's eyes, and dresses the child in new clothes and ornaments sent by the mother's brother (*pāju*). Fourthly, late at night a few grains of paddy, a pen, and a notebook are put under the child's pillow. For the entire night a light is kept burning near the child.

5.1.1 *Ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* or *chaiṭhī* among the Rājopādhyāyas of Bhaktapur

I was unable to observe the different rituals on *chaiṭhī* which Pradhan has mentioned. The following description is an account of the rituals on *chaiṭhī* as they are performed among the Rājopādhyāyas of the Ipāchē clan, who live opposite the palace in Bhaktapur. The source of information is a series of interviews with Kedarnath Rajopadyaya of the Ipāchē clan, and videos of the *chaiṭhī* ceremony filmed by a member of that clan in 2005.

The *chaiṭhī* ceremony of that clan consists of the following elements: purificatory rituals and preparing the *pūjā* spot, *nārāyaṇapūjā*, *brāhmaṇapūjā*, *ṣaṣṭhīmaṇḍalapūjā*,

19 This ritual manual is in the personal keeping of Kedarnath Rajopadhyaya in Ipāchē/Bhaktapur and had been written in the 16th/17th centuries.

shaping a doll out of cow dung and placing a burning lamp next to the child during the night.

In the late evening, the relatives of the newborn gather together. Besides the child's relatives, a Rājopādhyāya priest, an assistant priest (Jyāpu Ācāju), an astrologer (Jośi), and the *aji* have to be present during the ceremony. The mother's natal relatives do not attend the *chaiṭhī* ceremony but they do have to send material for the *pūjā*, including silver jewellery, which is put on the child during the ceremony. All relatives attending the ceremony have to take a ritual bath earlier in the day. The *aji* bathes and then massages the child with mustard oil (*paḥkā cikā*). Because the room that is used by the mother and the child during the period of birth pollution is too small for the relatives, the ceremony takes place in a living room. The *pūjā* side is purified with a mixture of red soil (*sīcā*) and cow dung (*gobar*). Then two water vases (Skt. *kalaśa*) representing the god Śiva and his female Śakti, a *sukūda* lamp pot, and plates with material for the *pūjā* are put on the *pūjā* side. The priest who performs the following ritual must not be contaminated by the impurity brought about by the birth. So either a priest related by marriage (a son-in-law, brother-in-law or nephew) will perform, or a male *phukī* member who has arranged not to be contaminated by the impurity (as mentioned above). In the actual ceremony, a nephew was called in. First, a share of the offerings (Skt. *bali*) is carried to the *pikhālakhu*, a stone set at the threshold of houses and temples that absorbs ritual waste.

The pūjās performed by the priest

In the next step the priest performs a *nārāyaṇapūjā* during which the god Viṣṇu is worshipped. On this occasion two representations of Viṣṇu are worshipped: the Nārāyaṇa of the Cāṅgunārāyaṇa temple, which is situated on a hill about four miles east of Bhaktapur, and the Nārāyaṇa of the Tilmādhava temple in Taumādhī/Bhaktapur. Nowadays, these two gods are worshipped only symbolically during the *pūjā*; they are represented by two small Nārāyaṇa statues placed on the *pūjā* spot—on the right Cāṅgunārāyaṇa and on the left Tilmādhavanārāyaṇa. However, in former times a “storekeeper of the lock” (*tālcā bhaḍel*) went to the Cāṅgunārāyaṇa temple, worshipped the god there and carried a small brass statue of the God to the riverside of the Kāsān Khusi, a rivulet between Bhaktapur and the Cāṅgunārāyaṇa temple. The rivulet marks the eastern border of Bhaktapur. The storekeeper of the lock stopped there, not crossing the rivulet yet. The priest who was to perform the *nārāyaṇapūjā* went there accompanied by musicians to welcome the god. The storekeeper then carried the statue into the courtyard of the house where the child was born. After worshipping Cāṅgunārāyaṇa there, the storekeeper, the priest, and the musicians went to the Tilmādhava temple, worshipped the god there and likewise carried a small brass statue of Tilmādhavanārāyaṇa into the courtyard. Then the *phukī nāyaḥ*, the senior-most man of the *phukī* worshipped both of the gods.

As Kedarnath Rajopadhyaya confirms, at the present time the following steps are performed inside the house. After finishing the *nārāyaṇapūjā*, the *brāhmaṇapūjā* is performed, the worship of the Brahmin. The *phukī nāyaḥ* then draws a *ṣaṣṭhīmaṇḍala*, a lo-

tus shaped diagram made of a mixture of *pvatāy* (flour of parched rice used during rituals to draw diagrams on the floor) and yellow powder (*halū*) on the floor, spreads paddy (*vā*) and yoghurt (*dhau*) on it and finally places an oil lamp on this diagram. Then he performs the *ṣaṣṭhīmaṇḍalapūjā* by worshipping the goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī* with vermilion, unbroken rice, flowers, fruits, light, and incense. Again, a share of the offerings is sent to the *pikhālakhu* stone.

The ṣaṣṭhīmaṇḍalapūjā performed by father's sisters

For the next step the ritual agency passes to father's sisters, who will be supervised by the senior household members and the priest. Now the father's sisters (*nini*) sit down in a row in order of seniority. Should a man have no sisters or his sister(s) are unable to attend the ceremony, any of his female relatives can act instead. Six burning oil lamps representing the goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī* should surround each of the *ninis*. In reality there is only one oil lamp in front of each *nini*. The senior-most *nini* puts the child on her lap, rubs the child with mustard oil, and then applies eyeliner round the child's eyes. The eyeliner is a paste mixed from soot she has taken from the oil lamp in front of her and oil. The black soot paste is applied round the eyes as protection against evil spirits. Then she puts money on the child's forehead. Afterwards, the *aji* who attends the ceremony will collect the money as part of the payment for her services. The senior-most *nini* dresses the child in a *pvānaṃ*, a shirt with two knots tied above the shoulders.²⁰ This procedure is done one by one by all the *ninis*. Once the *ninis* have finished, the child's paternal grandfather distributes money and gifts to them. A female relative gives a small amount of molasses (*cāku*), ginger (*pālu*), and salt (*ci*) to each of the *ninis*. On this day the mother is fed celery (*īmu*), which is only eaten by women after delivery, molasses, ginger, and salt. The *ninis* then go to the courtyard and place burning oil lamps in each of the entry gates. Traditionally 108 oil lamps have to be placed on the threshold of the entry gate(s) and in the courtyard, but nowadays it is custom to place only one oil lamp at every gate. In former times, the *mhenāyah*, the senior-most of the tenants cultivating the fields owned by the landholding high castes was called in for *chaiṭhī*. He had to protect the entry gate of the courtyard while holding a sword in his hands.

Performances in the late evening

Later, after the *ninis* have returned from the courtyard, they make a small ball out of cow dung. The assistant priest and the astrologer then shape a ball into a doll called *katāmarī* ("a rag doll"; "a doll of a human figure"), which represents the goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī*. They wrap the doll in a red cloth and mark its eyes with cowrie shells. Then the sisters bring the doll to the room where the mother and the child are staying. It is kept next to the bed until the child is fed its first cooked rice (Skt. *annaprāsana*; New. *macā jākva*). On that occasion, it is put by a river bank, a common procedure when discard-

20 It is customary for a child to receive another such a shirt on his/her second birthday, but this time from the mother's natal relatives.

ing things and substances that have a sacred quality, as for instance ritual leftovers, ritual masks, cut hair, etc.

Later in the evening, some cow dung is smeared on the wall just above the bed in which the mother and child sleep. Then a small doll made of a ball of cow dung wrapped in a red piece of cloth is attached to this thin layer of cow dung. The doll represents an unidentified goddess named Śaktidevī, who is supposed to protect mother and child.

When the child is put to bed, the mother places an oil lamp on the floor next to the child's bed. In this context the light, which symbolizes longevity for the child, is intended to protect the newborn from evil spirits. So the mother keeps a vigil and makes sure the oil lamp burns the whole night long; it is considered inauspicious for the child if the flame goes out. In addition, the mother or a female relative puts a pen, a notebook, and a few grains of paddy under the child's pillow (see also Pradhan 1986: 83). It is believed that on this night of Candragupta, the messenger of Yama (god of death) comes to write the child's future in the notebook.

Chaiṭhī according to a ritual manual from Bhaktapur

Chaiṭhī is mentioned briefly in a ritual manual, which is in the possession of the Ipāchē Rājopādhyāya clan in Bhaktapur. According to the manual, one should perform this ritual on the sixth day after the birth of a child by worshipping Nārāyaṇa and Śaṣṭhī. They did not use it during the ceremony described above. Gutschow and Michaels (2008: 204–26) published a *Daśakarmavidhi* that contains *chaiṭhī* in more detail. It is written in Newari by an anonymous author dated *saṃvat* 2005, on Tuesday, the 23rd day of Caitra (1948 A.D.). This ritual manual is the personal handbook of the priest Mahendra Raj Sharma, Bhaktapur. Here is the section concerning *chaiṭhī* from this manual.

The Night Vigil for the Goddess Śaṣṭhī (*ṣaṣṭhījāgarāṇa*, New. *chaiṭhī*):

Now the rules for the night vigil for the goddess Śaṣṭhī (in the sixth night after delivery). Let the child take a bath. Wherever Viṣṇu is established (i.e. the place where the ritual is commenced), exactly there the ritual dissolvment (*visarjana*) should be performed. Send a share of the offerings (*balī*) to the absorbing stone (*pikhālakhu*). Make a ritual bath of (the statue of) Nārāyaṇa. Welcome (the child with a white cloth) at the auspicious time. Give a finger to the boy (to welcome him). Place (a person) on the door holding a sword. Here hand over the flower basket. Worship (Viṣṇu) according to the custom (i.e. with) incense, light, recitations (and) prayers. Worship the Brahmin. (Recite the) *śāntikapuṣṭika* (mantras with) *svasti no mimītā...*; *kanikrada...*; *āśuḥ śisāno...*; *yaj jāgrato...*; *sahasra-śīrṣā...*; *agnes tanūr...* (and) *vayaṃ soma...* Worship at the birthplace (of the child) in the temple of Śaṣṭhī at the auspicious time. Place a grinding stone. Offer a lamp with six (wicks) to the Śaṣṭhī goddess. Offer fragrant materials etc. Recitation and (the following) prayer: Śivā, Śambhūti, Prīti, Saṃtati, Anusūyā and Kṣemā—these are (the names of) the Śaṣṭhī goddess. Offer fragrant materials etc. Give flower during the (recitation of the) *śāntikamantra*. (Make) the ritu-

al decision for food. *Dakṣiṇā* (should be given to the gods and priest). (Auspicious) recitations. Blessings from the gods (in the form of *prasāda*). Release (the deities). Send a share of the offerings (*bali*) (to the *pikhālākhu*). Ritual washing. Fragrant materials etc. Blessings. Speak (a few pleasing words) to the newborn child. Here end the rules for the night vigil for the goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī*. Hail.²¹

A comparison of the instructions in the ritual manual and the above description of the ceremony I watched on video in Bhaktapur in 2005 reveals that most of the features are similar. The brief instructions of the above manual can serve only as a memory aid for the priest.²² The only ritual agents mentioned in Kedarnath Rajopadhyaya's ritual manual are the child, the person with the sword, and indirectly the priest as the performer of the *pūjās*, another person who bathes the child, and someone who makes the ritual donation. The manual cannot provide much information about the interaction of the ritual agents and about the acts in which the priest is not directly involved.

Chaiṭhī as currently performed can be interpreted in different ways. As long as the umbilical cord is not severed, the child belongs to the mother's lineage. The acceptance of the child by the father's sister(s) by putting the child on their laps and taking care of it by oil massages, dressing it, applying eye-liner etc. is the first in a sequence of steps in which the newborn child becomes a full member of the patrilineage, a process that is completed after the initiation rituals (cf. Pradhan 1986: 81–2). The acceptance of the child by the father's sister(s) within the first days after birth is even more important due to the high mortality rate in former times among women who had recently given birth. On the other hand, the *chaiṭhī* is a ritual of protection for the child, as shown by the making of the dolls.

5.2 *Ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* of the Parbatīyās

In contrast to the majority of Newars, Parbatīyās all seem to perform a ceremony called *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* on the sixth day after the birth of a child. There are several ritual manuals available on the markets, in which the performance of the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is elaborately described. To my surprise, I could hardly find anyone who actually performed the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* the way it is described in these ritual manuals. It seems that *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is only performed at length by the upper classes. The majority performs a brief ceremony, which is not even mentioned in the ritual manuals but is widespread among Hindus in India. In distinction to the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* of the ritual manuals, the brief ceremony does not require a priest because the mother or a woman of the family performs it. Since I was unable to observe the elaborated *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā*, I will give an account of it as described in a ritual manual from Nepal. Afterwards, I will make some additional remarks – such as that at some points my priest informants perform this ritual in a different way. At the

21 Translation by Gutschow & Michaels (2008: 218).

22 The cursory instructions are typical of ritual manuals. Only the most important features are mentioned, the priests perform the rituals largely by heart.

end, I will describe the brief ceremony that is done in the majority of households and which I have observed two times.

5.2.1 *Ṣaṣṭhīpūjā according to a ritual manual*

In 1971, Paṇḍit Kṛṣṇaprasād Bhaṭṭarāi published the *Śrīḥ pūrvāṅgavidhiyukta garbhā-dhānādi-annaprāśanānta saṃskārapaddhati*, a ritual manual of life-cycle rituals which includes the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* at length.²³ The chapter concerning *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* contains not only the mantras but also more elaborate instructions in Nepali for each step of this ceremony. In the introduction to this chapter we read that *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is performed out of joy at the birth of a son. On the sixth day after birth, every relative and friend should be invited, especially the child's mother's natal relatives.

I will give an overview of the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* as described in this ritual manual. The ceremony consists of the following steps: 1) preparatory rituals (making a small packet [Nep. *poṭalikā*], worshipping Kṣetrapāla, the Seven Dvāramātrkāś, and Gaṇeśa, the ritual decision, worshipping the light, establishing the sacred vase, preparing the seat for the goddess Ṣaṣṭhī, and the invocation of the Eight Cirañjīvins), 2) the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā*, and 3) the performances in the late evening and during the night.

Preparatory rituals

The evening is the time to perform the preparatory rituals. The child's father ritually purifies himself and the *pūjā* spot. It is explicitly mentioned that a Brahmin should be called to act as priest for the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā*. The father should make a small packet (Nep. *poṭalikā*) out of a piece of cloth and attach it to the lintel over the door of the room where the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is later performed. He should go out of the house and bring a share of the offerings (Skt. *bali*) to Kṣetrapāla (the guardian of the courtyard or square). On his return he should worship the seven Dvāramātrkāś (the seven Door-Mother Goddesses, whose names are Kumārī, Dhanadā, Nandā, Vipulā, Maṅgalā, Acalā, and Padmā) at the door of the above-mentioned room. The father should then worship an idol of Gaṇeśa at the door. On the right side of the door he should worship Kṣetrapāla and Durgā. This is followed by the ritual decision (Skt. *saṃkalpa*), the worship of light (Skt. *dīpa*), the establishing of the sacred water vase (Skt. *kalaśasthāpanā*), and the worship of Gaṇeśa. After that, a seat for the goddess Ṣaṣṭhī should be prepared. For that, a lotus shaped diagram with eight petals (Skt. *padma*) is drawn with sandal paste (Skt. *candana*) on the *pūjā* spot. In the middle of this diagram a small heap of unbroken rice (Skt. *akṣata*) or a leaf plate (Nep. *thālī*) should be placed for Ṣaṣṭhī. Then the Eight Cirañjīvins, who are represented here by the eight petals of the lotus diagram and who stand for long life, should be invoked. The ritual manual mentions alternatives: One can make sixteen small images of cow dung and mark the eyes with cowrie shells. Then the Eight Cirañjīvins and Ṣaṣṭhī should be worshipped.

23 Bhaṭṭarāi, Kṛṣṇaprasād: *Śrīḥ pūrvāṅgavidhiyukta garbhādhānādi-annaprāśanānta saṃskārapaddhati*, pp. 215–67.

Ṣaṣṭhīpūjā

Different ways to establish the image of Ṣaṣṭhī are mentioned in this ritual manual, depending on the respective family tradition. The image of Ṣaṣṭhī can be placed either in the middle of the lotus diagram or on a separate leaf plate, or on a wooden seat. It can be made of cow dung with cowrie shells for eyes, or can be a golden image or a small heap of unbroken rice. After the invocation of the goddess, she should be worshipped by a sixteen-step service (Skt. *ṣoḍaśopacāra*). After that, the gods Skanda and Pradyumna are to be worshipped. Then a sword (Skt. *khaḍga*) and a bow and arrow (Skt. *dhanurvāṇa*) should be worshipped. In the next step, the father's sister takes the child from the mother's lap and gives it to the father or puts it next to him. The father lifts the child together with a fan of peacock feathers, holds the child with its head to the feet of the image of Ṣaṣṭhī (or lets the child touch the heap of unbroken rice), and requests Ṣaṣṭhī to give protection to the child. The Brahmin then gives the child back to the father's sister who again hands it over to the mother.

Performances in the late evening and during the night

After finishing the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā*, the priest should write the twelve names of the god Viṣṇu on a small piece of yellow cloth, which is touched with a thread while the priest recites for example the twelve names of Viṣṇu. The thread is then given to the child. Either a garland of eight *bārā* (Nep., a kind of cake made of pulse and oil) or of eight *phulauro* (Nep., a kind of cake made of ground pulse with oil or clarified butter) should be placed around the neck of a black male goat tied to the doorframe. Then the right ear of the goat is pulled until it screams out in pain. Everybody should receive a *tikā* and *dakṣinā* (Skt., ritual donation) should be given to the priest. All the relatives should have a feast together.

In the late evening, the small packet that was made by the father in the preparatory phase is attached to the door lintel. Men should then shoot at with arrows until it falls down. A light should be kept burning throughout the entire night and men armed with weapons should protect the child. The relatives should spend that night dancing and singing.

A number of priests who were consulted in this context agreed with most of the points in this ritual manual. One of them actually uses this manual to perform the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā*, whereas the others perform this ceremony without referring to any ritual manual. Their performances differ in the following points: There are even more ways to establish the image of Ṣaṣṭhī. The image can be made of a ball of cow dung with areca nut (Nep. *supāri*) for eyes and blades of *ḍubo* grass marking the ears. The image is placed on a wooden seat besmeared with cow dung standing on a lotus diagram. Alternatively, two more balls of cow dung but without "eyes" and "ears" can be placed on both sides of the image of Ṣaṣṭhī. In that case, the image on the right side represents the god Skanda and the image on the left side the god Pradyumna. Ṣaṣṭhī can also be represented by a heap of barley (Nep. *jau*) instead of unbroken rice. There are diverging opinions about the order for worshipping Ṣaṣṭhī, Skanda and Pradyumna. In contrast to



Plate 7: *chaiṭhī* in Balaju/Kathmandu 2008: The mother has placed a notebook and a pen above the child's head. A leaf plate filled with husked rice and an oil lamp, which the mother keeps burning for the entire night, are located on top of the shelf unit.

the above mentioned ritual manual, the priests I consulted begin by worshipping of Skanda, then Pradyumna and at the end *Ṣaṣṭhī*. According to the ritual manual *Ṣaṣṭhī* is worshipped first. The custom of shooting arrows at the small packet seems to have been abandoned. The reason for hurting the he-goat is that its screams ward off all evil spirits such as *bhūta*, *preta*, and *piśāca*. So, to make the he-goat scream as long and as loud as possible its ear is squeezed and tugged very hard or even cut with a knife. Some priests perform this step before *naivedya*, the ritual food offering that is given to *Ṣaṣṭhī* during her worship. But they denied that the he-goat was a sacrifice in any sense.

5.2.2 *Ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* in Balaju/Kathmandu

As already mentioned there seems to be a general tendency among the Parbatiyās of Kathmandu Valley to perform only a brief ceremony in the evening on the sixth day after the birth of a child. I will describe here a *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* that was held in Balaju, a quarter on the south-eastern rim of Kathmandu on 7th of September in 2008. This ceremony was performed for the first child, a son, of a Davadi family (Parbatiyā Brahmins). The parents of the child live in a small room in a newly-built house. The brief ceremony

was performed by the child's mother, Mina Davadi, and attended by some women living on the same floor. The child's father was absent.

In the evening the mother washes the child and massages him with oil. Then she dresses him in new clothes and puts him to bed. In the meantime, a woman staying on the same floor is sent to buy a notebook and a pen. After she returns, the mother puts the pen and notebook next to the child's pillow in such a way that the pen points to the notebook. Sometimes the notebook is put on an *om* drawn with vermilion powder and a small paper with the child's date and time of birth, but that was not done in this place. Then the mother places a leaf plate filled with unbroken rice beside the bed on a shelf and puts an oil lamp on top of it (see plate 7). She lights the oil lamp and worships it with vermilion powder (Nep. *abīr*), unbroken rice (Nep., Skt. *akṣata*) and flowers (Nep. *phul*). According to the mother, the oil lamp is a representation of the goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī*. The mother keeps the oil lamp burning for the entire night while she keeps a vigil. During this night the female neighbours attend to her.

It is believed that in the sixth night after childbirth *Bhāvī*, the goddess of destiny comes to write the future of the child on its forehead. For that, the mother or a woman of the household puts a notebook and a pen next to the child's bed. An oil lamp is placed beside the bed and is worshipped either as the goddess *Bhāvī* or *Ṣaṣṭhī*. According to the particular family tradition, a simple act of worship is performed to the oil lamp. The lamp is kept burning for the entire night. It is said that the goddess needs light to write the future and she will write as long as the oil lamp burns, implying a long life for the child. The pen and the notebook are kept next to the child to inspire her.

In its elaborated form the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* of the Parbatīyās serves two purposes. It is a ceremony performed to protect the child from malevolent spirits. This is clearly shown by requesting the goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī* to protect the child, by applying eye-liner round the child's eyes, by making the he-goat scream, by shooting arrows at the small packet, and by placing armed men next to the room where the child sleeps. It is believed that the child is extremely vulnerable to attacks by evil spirits, who can inflict illness and death on the child. The child has thus to be protected. Further, the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is a ceremony during which the first in a sequence of steps is done to incorporate the child into its father's patrilineage. This is symbolized by handing over the child to the father's sister, who then puts it on the father's lap or next to him on the purified floor. According to Veena Das, "the rituals within the first forty days, the period for which the impurity of the mother and child lasts in most communities, emphasize the incorporation of the child as part of the cosmic design" (1977: 125). Das continues that on the sixth day after birth, the child is ceremonially offered to *Ṣaṣṭhī* and the god Brahma comes in person to write the future of the child. During the *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* the child is presented for the first time to the gods, who write out the future and ordain the individual biography of the child.

The beginning of the incorporation of the child into the father's patrilineage on the sixth day is celebrated in some parts of India and Bangladesh by observing a nocturnal

vigil. Musicians are invited and the women spend this night dancing and singing.²⁴ This custom seems to have been abandoned in the Kathmandu Valley, but elderly people can still remember it. I was told that this custom is still followed in some parts of the Terai region along the border to India. According to Pradhan (1986: 84), it is the custom in some families among the Newars to keep a vigil for the entire night and sing religious songs to ensure that the oil lamp does not go out and to welcome Citragupta (who attends Yama, the god of death and records every man's good and evil deeds) to write the child's future.

6 The name-giving ceremony

Before describing the *nāmakaraṇa* or *nā chuyegu*, as it is called in Newari, the name-giving ceremony as the Newars and Parbatiyās currently perform it in the Kathmandu Valley, I will give a brief summary of the history of this classical *saṃskāra*. In the beginning, the *nāmakaraṇa* seemed to be more a custom, which in the course of time was included in the *saṃskāras*. Although there are already references in the *Ṛgveda* to the as many as four names a person can have, which is reflected in the *Aitareya-* (1.3.3) and *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (3.6.2.24; 5.4.3.7; 6.6.1.3.9), a naming ritual is not mentioned.

According to the sources of classical Hindu law, a person should be named. However, there is great divergence in opinions about the time when a child should be named, the composition of the name, and the number of names given to a person. Many sources agree that two—at least—names should be given: one for common use and the other a secret name which only the child's parents will know until *upanayana*, the initiation of a boy during which his secret name is divulged to him. According to the *Brhat-saṃnyāsa Upaniṣad*, *Āśvalāyana-*, *Śāṅkhyāna-*, and *Kāthakagṛhyasūtra*, the child is named on the day of birth. Other *Gṛhyasūtras* such as those of *Āpastamba*, *Baudhāyana*, *Pāraskara*, prescribe the tenth day, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* the eleventh day, *Baudhāyana-* and *Vaikhānasagṛhyasūtra* the tenth or twelfth day (see Kane 1968ff.: II, 234). *Manu* prescribes the tenth or twelfth day or an auspicious *tithi* (lunar day), *muhūrta* (a period of 48 minutes, an auspicious time or moment), and *nakṣatra* (lunar mansion) thereafter. Sources such as *Gobhila* and *Khādira* prescribe the naming process in a vague fashion: It should take place after ten nights, one hundred nights or a year (*ibid.*: 238–40). In *Mānavadharmaśāstra* (2.30) it is said that the birth rituals (Skt. *jāta-karman*) can therefore be performed during the impure time after birth; *nāmakaraṇa* may be performed on the tenth day.

The prescriptions about the time when a secret name is given also differ according to the source. According to the *Gṛhyasūtras* (except *Pāraskara* and *Mānava*), parents give a boy a secret name. *Gobhila* and *Khādira*, quoting *Soṣyantīkarma*, say that the secret name is given at birth. Other *Gṛhyasūtras*, such as *Āpastamba*, *Baudhāyana*, and

24 For Bangladesh see e.g. Blanchet (1987: 108), for the Central Himalayan region see Primdahl (1993: 15–7).

Bhāradvāja prescribe the tenth day or the twelfth day when *nāmakaraṇa* is performed (ibid.: 246). Gobhila says a boy is told his secret name by the *ācārya* (teacher) at the time of his *upanayana*. Khādīra on the other hand says that the boy already receives his secret name from his parents and is informed by the teacher on the occasion of *upanayana* (ibid.: 247).

In the Sūtra and later periods, rules were laid down for the composition of the name. Despite all the divergent opinions in the sources, there is agreement that a boy's name has to consist of an even number of syllables and a girl's name an uneven number with three or five syllables. This prescription derives from the Vedic literature where most of the mentioned names follow this scheme (ibid.: 243f.). The *Pāraskaragṛhyasūtra* (1.17.1) says that the name has to be of two or four syllables, must begin with a sonant, should have a semivowel in it, and has to end with either a long vowel or *visarga*. According to Baijavāpa (Pandey 1969: 133–4) there are no restrictions on the number of syllables. However, Vāsiṣṭha says that the name should be composed of two or four syllables and endings in “l” or “r” should be avoided.²⁵ The *Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra* (1.15.4–10) attributes different kinds of merits to different numbers of syllables. Therefore, the name of a person who desires fame should be composed of two syllables and of four syllables if one desires holy lustre.

There are twenty-seven *nakṣatras*, each of them associated with a god, e.g., *kṛttikā* with the god Agni or *śravaṇa* with the god Viṣṇu. One way of composing the name was to make a compound with the name of the *nakṣatra* of birth in the first element and *kumāra*, meaning son or boy at the end. For instance, a boy born in *āśvinī* would be named “Āśvinikumāra”. Another method described in great detail in the medieval works on Dharmaśāstra and Jyotiṣa (treatises on Hindu law and astrology) and still practiced today is as follows: Each *nakṣatra* is divided into four parts (Skt. *pāda*) and each *pāda* has a specific letter of the Sanskrit alphabet assigned to it. Since there are only twenty-seven *nakṣatras* but fifty-two letters, each lunar mansion is associated with more than one letter. For instance, the letters of the four *pādas* of the *nakṣatra* *āśvinī* are *cū*, *ce*, *co*, and *lā*. Therefore, a child born under this constellation would be named accordingly, e.g. Cūḍāmaṇī, Cedīśa, Coleśa and Lakṣmaṇa (see Kane 1968ff.: II, 248–9 and Pandey 1969: 137–8). Most of the sources either agree that the secret name derives from the *nakṣatra* of birth or from the deity associated with the particular *nakṣatra*. The reason why the *nakṣatra* name has to be kept secret might be so as to prevent magical practices being used against a person (Kane 1968ff.: II, 248). Furthermore, a child's name can be selected according to the family deity or the month in which the child was born. The twelve months of a year are associated with the twelve names of the god Viṣṇu as laid down in the *Brhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira.²⁶ Divergent prescriptions are given for the composition of a girl's name. According to *Mānavadharmasāstra* (2.3 and 3.9), the name should be easy to pronounce, not hard to hear,

25 *Vāsiṣṭhadharmasūtra* 4.

26 Kane 1968ff.: II, 249–50. The twelve names of Viṣṇu are: Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhusūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, and Dāmodara.

should have a clear meaning, be charming and auspicious, and end in a long vowel. Furthermore, it should contain some blessings. The name should not indicate a constellation, a tree, a mountain, a river, a bird, a servant, or a terror.

The number of names a person can have is not fixed. According to the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* (6.1.3.9) a son should be named (by his father) after birth to drive away the evil that might attack him. Additionally, he is also given a second and even a third name. In the *Rgveda*, frequent references are made to the different names of a person. A boy should be given a secret name by his parents, derived from the *nakṣatra* on which he was born, and an ordinary name for public use. He can bear a third name by having a sacrifice performed later in his life and could even obtain a fourth name by these means.²⁷ The system of fourfold naming was not yet fully developed in the pre-Sūtra and Sūtra period. Only by the time of the later Smṛtis and astrological works was the system fully worked out. The reasons for this may lie in the rise of religious sects and astrology (see Pandey 1969: 136).

6.1 *Nā chuyegu* – the name-giving ceremony among the Newars

In contrast to the Parbatiyās, for the majority of the Newars the naming of a child does not involve any particular ritual. A child is given two names: a secret name based on its birth horoscope (*jātaḥ*) and a public one. Usually, after the birth of a child the child's father's sister (*nini*) informs the family astrologer, who belongs to the astrologer caste (Jośi), about the date and the exact time of the birth. She functions as the ritual protector of her brother and his children. The close relationship between brother and sister shows itself in certain ritual roles a brother and his sons perform towards her and her children (see Pradhan 1986: 80). The astrologer calculates the horoscope and matches it with the parents' horoscopes to see if the child may cause them harm or even death. In such cases, the family will "sell" and later "rebuy" the child, or it will be sent to its maternal uncle's home or even given away for adoption. In his general observations on Kathmandu in the mid-eighties, Pradhan (ibid.) assumes that propitiatory rituals may be performed to appease the gods and the nine planets to ward off any further mischief to the child.

The senior-most man (*nāyāḥ*) of the household or *phukī* performs the act of naming by whispering the child's secret and public name into its right ear if it is a boy, or into its left ear if it is a girl. According to Gopal Nepali (1965: 98), the father's sister does the naming. It seems that there is no fixed date to name a child. Sometimes the secret name is given to the child between drawing up the birth horoscope and *annaprāśana*, the first feeding of cooked rice performed between the fifth and eighth month after the birth. The public name is given any time before the child's second birthday, mostly on *annaprāśana* (ibid.).

27 *Rgveda* 8.80.9, 9.87.3, 10.54.4, and 10.55.1–2.

6.1.1 *Nā chuyegu in Bhaktapur*

In this section I shall give an account of the rituals performed on *nā chuyegu*, as done by the Rājopādhyāyas of the Ipāchē clan who live opposite the palace in Bhaktapur. My source of information consists of interviews given by Kedarnath Rajopadhyaya and ritual manuals that are in his keeping. The name-giving ceremony as performed in the Ipāchē clan comprises the following steps: writing the initial letter of the child's secret name on a leaf, the welcoming ritual for mother and child, the worship of the child, and the naming of the child.

Writing the initial letter of the child's secret name on a leaf

The ceremony starts with *kalaśasthāpanā*, the establishing of the sacred vase (Skt. *kalaśa*). For that, all materials for the worship are arranged on and around the *pūjā* spot. The *phukī nāyaḥ*, the senior-most man of the *phukī* who will act as *yajamāna* (Skt. "sacrificer") during the ceremony, takes a betel leaf (*gvāḥ*) and spreads it with clarified butter (*ghyaḥ*). Then he mixes yellow powder with water or milk and writes the initial letter of the child's secret name on the betel leaf with a golden needle (*luṃṃ mulu*). In the days following the birth of a child, the father or one of his sisters goes to visit an astrologer (Jośi) to prepare the child's birth horoscope. The initial letter of the name results from the astrologer's calculation. Sometimes a *svastika*, a kind of mark on persons or things denoting good luck is also drawn on the leaf. The *svastika* represents here the Eight Cirañjīvins, the semi-immortals who symbolize long life. The *phukī nāyaḥ* covers the inscribed leaf with a blank one and puts them on top of the *mūlakalaśa*, the main sacred vase. The two leaves are considered to represent Śiva and Śakti; the cover leaf represents Śiva, who protects the inscribed leaf representing Śakti. By covering the inscribed leaf the horoscope remains undamaged during the following ritual. The letters are said to be representations of Sarasvatī, the goddess of speech and learning. Then the *phukī nāyaḥ* performs *kalaśapūjā* (worshiping the sacred vase), *navagrahapūjā* (worshipping the nine planets), and *aṣṭacirañjīvipūjā* by offering flowers, sandalwood and vermilion paste, light, incense, food offerings etc.

The welcoming ritual for mother and child (lasakusapūjā) and the worship of the child

After this the priest performs *lasakusapūjā*, the welcoming ritual for the mother and child. He draws a *svastika* on the *pūjā* spot and puts a wooden seat (*kupu*) on it. With his left hand he takes some husked rice (*jāki*) and a long iron key (*sāṃ taḥcā*) and with his right hand he grasps a *karuvā* (a spouted metal water pot) filled with water. In the meantime, the mother stands some metres away holding her child. The *phukī nāyaḥ* goes to her and pours a circle of water on the floor with the *karuvā*. From his left hand he throws *jāki* on it. Then still holding *jāki* and the iron key, he grasps the mother's left arm with his left hand and "pulls" her to the wooden seat, while continuously pouring water onto the path they walk along. He stops before they reach the seat, pours another circle of water on the floor, and throws *jāki* onto it. Finally, the mother sits down on the wooden seat with the child on the *pūjā* spot. By pouring water and throwing *jāki*, the path to the seat is purified and evil spirits are warded off.

After the mother has taken a seat, the *phukī nāyah* puts charcoal (*hēgvā*) into a small earthen saucer (*salīcā*) and lights it. He puts the saucer in front of mother and child on the floor. Then with his two thumbs and both of his second and third fingers he takes a small amount of a mixture of yellow mustard seed (*īkā*) and dark reddish brown mustard seed (*pakā*) and uses it to draw a circle in a clockwise direction around all the pots, vases, and plates on the *pūjā* spot representing the various deities that had been invoked for the ceremony. Then he puts the rest of this mixture into the burning charcoal. This procedure is done three times. The *phukī nāyah* again takes some of the mixture, sprinkles it first in a circle round the mother and child, and then puts the rest into the burning charcoal. This is done three times, too. After that, he applies three *tikās* to the child's forehead, one of *candana* (sandalwood) or yellow paste, one of vermilion and one of yoghurt (*dhau svagā*). The saucer with the burning charcoal is sent to the *pikhā-lakhu* (the guardian of the house and absorbing stone) in front of the house. Then the *phukī nāyah* takes a big wooden measurement pot (*sīyāgu pāthī*) and fills it with flowers, fruits and popped rice (*tāy*). He grasps the rim of the pot with his thumbs, second and third fingers and throws its contents first three times over the sacred vase and then three times over the child who has been covered beforehand with a shawl for protection. He does this very carefully so as not to throw out the iron key, which is still in the measurement pot. He lights a small oil wick on the *sukūda* lamp and worships the main sacred vase (Skt. *mūlakalāśa*) and the child by waving the oil lamp in front of them in a clockwise direction. Then he puts the small oil lamp (*matā*) on the floor in front of the baby. To bless the child, all the participants throw popped rice at the child, who is once again covered by a shawl. Then the *phukī nāyah* presents a plate to the child bearing a golden and a silver ring and a *macālam*, an infant dress with four knots. A areca nut rests on top of the gifts that are given by the father's sister, along with a *gvēsvā* (a lilac flower shaped like a areca nut representing longevity), and some money.

The naming of the child

Afterwards, the *phukī nāyah* takes the betel leaves from the *kalaśa* and touches the child with them. If it is a son, he touches him on three points on the right side: the right side of the head above the ear, the shoulder, and the knee. If it is a daughter he touches her on the corresponding three points of her left side. He then whispers the name three times into the child's ear, if it is a boy into his right ear, if it is a girl into her left ear. Immediately after the naming, the horoscope (*jātaḥ*) containing the secret name is written with the golden needle using sandalwood or vermilion paste on white nepali paper (*nepālī bhom*). The parents will keep this horoscope. Then women of the *phukī* take the betel leaf inscribed with the horoscope and present it in the *āgāchē* (tantric god-house) to *āgādyah*, the Āgamic or tantric deity of the *phukī*. In the meantime, the *phukī nāyah* again throws flowers, fruits, etc. from the big wooden measurement pot over the child and then waves the oil lamp. All the participants throw popped rice onto the child, which marks the end of the ceremony. Later that day, all of the *phukī* members (except the mother who is still impure) bring the child to *āgādyah*. There the child is introduced to *āgādyah* by performing a ritual called *macā thā taygu* (introducing the baby to the

gods). Only once this particular ritual has been performed is the child allowed to enter the tantric god-house.

The family celebrates this day with a feast to which at least one member of the *phukī* is invited, along with all the married sisters and daughters of the family.

6.2 *Nāmakaraṇa* ceremony among the Parbatīyās

In Kathmandu Valley the Parbatīyās usually perform *nāmakaraṇa* or in Nepali *nvāran/nvārān* on the morning of the eleventh day after birth (counting from the day of birth). The family priest performs the rituals. The description of the naming ceremony is based on my observations of five *nāmakaraṇa* ceremonies during my fieldwork in 2008 in the Kathmandu Valley.

The naming ceremony consists of the following steps: Preparatory rituals, a fire ritual (Skt. *homa*), the preparation of the child's horoscope, giving the child its name (*nāmakaraṇapūjā*), *sūrya dekhāune* (Nep. "showing the sun"), lifting the child over the fire, and concluding rituals.

Preparatory rituals

Before the naming ceremony starts, several preparatory rituals have to be performed in the morning. The child's mother takes a bath, and washes the clothes and bedding she has used over the last few days. In former times the straw on which the mother had slept since the child's birth was burned. The child's father must also take a bath in the morning, wear freshly washed clothes, and put on a new sacred thread (if he belongs to a cord-wearing caste). Should the father be absent from the *nāmakaraṇa*, a deputy father will take his part during this ritual. Traditionally, the ritual is performed on the ground floor of a house. Because a fire ritual is performed during *nāmakaraṇa*, the *pūjā* spot has to be fireproof. The ground floor of an old house is made of tamped clay but the ground floors of newly built houses are often used as flats or shops and cannot be used for the performance of a fire sacrifice. In these cases either the courtyard or the rooftop terrace is used. As soon as the priest arrives at the house, the preparations for the *pūjā* spot are done. First, this area has to be cleaned first by dusting it and then by a woman of the family spreading cow dung mixed with water on it. If no cow dung is available, it is purified by water alone.

The priest then prepares the fire pit. For this he places six bricks in a square in the middle of the *pūjā* spot. After that, he draws *rekhīs* (Nep. "lines" made of flour drawn in the course of a ritual; Skt. *rekhā*) on and around the fire altar. The flour can be mixed with red (Nep. *abīr*) or yellow powder (Nep. *keśarī*). The *rekhīs* have the form of diagrams and are drawn according to the prescriptions in the ritual manual the priest uses

during the ritual.²⁸ He then piles up firewood on the bricks. During the next step, he purifies the *pūjā* spot by sprinkling *pañcagavya* (Nep. “mixture of the five products of a cow: dung, urine, milk, yoghurt, and clarified butter”) and *jautil* (Nep. mixture of “barley and sesame seed”) on it while uttering the *gāyatrī*. To sprinkle the mixture he uses *ḍubo* grass. Then the materials for the ritual are put on the *pūjā* spot. The family members and the priest place leaf plates (large size – Nep. *ṭaparī/ṭaparā*, small size – Nep. *botī*, and small ones in a round or rectangular form – Nep. *dunā*) on the diagrams, which function as seats (Nep./Skt. *āsana*) for the deities invoked during the ritual. The leaf plates are filled with unhusked (Nep. *dhān*) or husked rice (Nep. *cāmal*) into which the rice from beneath the lamp on *ṣaṣṭhīpūjā* is mixed. The water vases, the oil lamp, and several bowls are placed on the leaf plates on their respective place, which is laid down in the ritual manuals for performing a fire sacrifice.

The fire ritual

After all the preparations are finished, the priest takes a seat facing east and proclaims the ritual decision (Skt. *saṃkalpa*). Then the *yajamāna* (Skt. “sacrificer”) sits down south of the *pūjā* spot. If the child’s father is the senior-most man of his family who is present, he acts as the sacrificer. If not, his father or grandfather or older brother will act. The priest and the sacrificer invoke and then worship the deities on the *pūjā* spot. Afterwards, the priest lights the wood in the pit and starts the fire ritual. During the course of a *homa*, the priest and the sacrificer pour clarified butter and throw grains and other ingredients such as fruits, milk, yoghurt, and lentils into the fire. The priest recites Vedic mantras for each single action. For that, the ritual manual is put next to him on the ground or he holds it with his left hand while doing the offerings with the right. The *homa* performance lasts between approximately thirty and ninety minutes. During this time, the mother and child do not have to be present. After the *homa* is finished, and before *visarjana* (Skt. “emitting”, “sending away”) —a ritual releasing of the deities—takes place, the naming of the child is performed.

The preparation of the child’s horoscope

The priest asks the father or grandfather for the exact time of the child’s birth and consults his astronomical almanac (Nep. *pātro*) to determine the initial letter of the secret name for the child. The initial letter results from the lunar mansion (Skt./Nep. *nakṣatra*) and more precisely, from the particular part (Skt./Nep. *pāda*) under which the child has been born. If the parents have already visited an astrologer to prepare the birth horoscope (Nep. *janma kuṇḍalī*), or at least a provisional version, the priest will check it carefully.

28 In all five *nāmakaraṇa* ceremonies I have observed, the priests used for the fire ritual the ritual manual *Saralikṛtaḥ agnisthāpanā viddhi* by Madhusūdana Suvedī. This ritual manual is widely used in the Kathmandu Valley and easily available on the market.

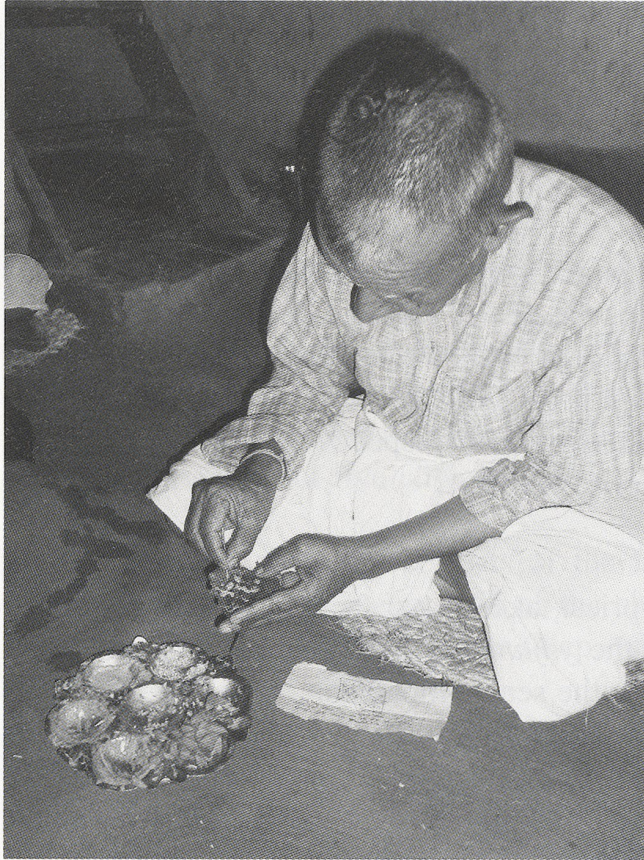


Plate 8: *Nāmakaraṇa* in Mulpani 2008: The priest writes the birth horoscope of the child on a pipal leaf using a blade of *kuśa* grass as the brush. On the floor in front of him is a slip of paper with the details of the horoscope he prepared earlier that day.

First, the priest asks for two *pipal* leaves (*Ficus religiosa* L.) that have to be fresh and immaculate. He cleans the leaves with water and puts them in front of him on the ground. Then he mixes yellow powder (Nep. *keśarī*) symbolizing gold with water and draws the child's horoscope and the initial letter of the child's secret name on both leaves. For that, he uses a stalk of *kuśa* grass (*Desmostachya bipinnata* [L.] STAPF) as his brush (see plate 8). By way of example, the horoscope of a child born on 19th August 2008 would be:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>svastika</i> | a kind of mark on persons or things denoting good luck |
| <i>oṃ namaḥ</i> | <i>oṃ</i> salute |
| <i>tesro pāu</i> | the third part (= noon) |
| <i>bhādra nakṣatra</i> | the lunar mansion Bhādra |
| <i>kumbha rāśī</i> | the astronomical house (is) Aquarius |
| <i>ā. dāna</i> | the initial letter (is) "d" |

Sometimes the horoscope is written on only one of the leaves and a *svastika* drawn on the second. According to my priest informants, only one leaf is actually needed and the second leaf is merely there as a replacement if the first leaf breaks or the colour fades. Furthermore, as already mentioned in the naming ceremony performed by the Newars, the two leaves are considered to represent Śiva and Śakti. The leaves are kept until the astrologer makes a birth horoscope on a sheet of Nepali paper, which is kept by the parents.

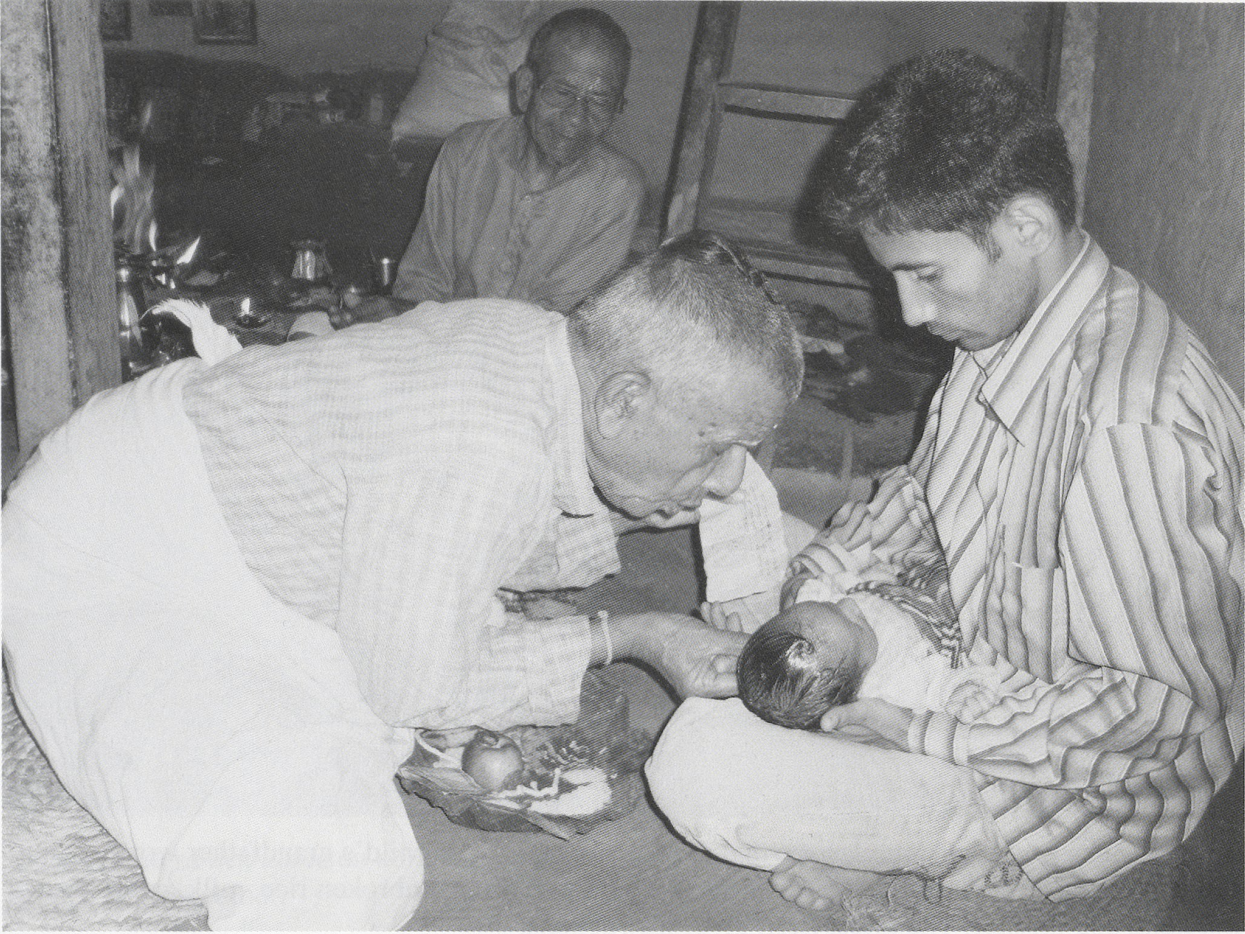


Plate 9: *Nāmakaraṇa* in Mulpani 2008: The priest whispers the name three times into the child's left ear. The child is held by his father. The person in the background is the child's grandfather who acts as *yajamāna* during the ceremony.

The priest puts both leaves and the slip of paper with the provisional horoscope made by an astrologer or by the priest himself on a leaf plate (Nep. *ṭaparī*) or a brass dish (Nep. *kāṃsako thāla*) that is filled with husked rice (Nep. *cāmal*) and fruit. The child's father puts some money on it and then the priest worships it.

The name-giving of the child (nāmakaraṇapūjā)

Afterwards, mother and child are called upon to take a seat south of the *pūjā* spot. Sometimes, the father will act instead of his wife during the ensuing ritual. The family and the priest discuss the secret name for the child. Once they have finished, the priest takes a seat on the left side of the mother (or the father) with the child on his or her lap. The priest touches first the head of the child and then the mother with a *suro*, a kind of ladle used in sacrificial rituals. In order to get the attention of the child the priest rings a bell or strikes a brass bowl three times with an areca nut to make a sound. Then he breathes two times onto the child and whispers three times the secret name or the initial letter of the name into the child's left ear (see plate 9) by uttering: “(the child's name)



Plate 10: *Sūrya dekhāune* on *nāmakaraṇa* in Mulpani 2008: The child's grandfather worships a ball of cow dung representing the pit of the sun with vermillion, unbroken rice, milk, curd, flowers, light, and incense. The priest (left) gives instructions.

nāmāsi bālaka tvaṃ dīrghāyurbhūyāḥ ("Oh Boy, who is called ... May you be one who lives long!") if the child is a boy. For a girl he speaks "(the child's name) *nāmnī asi bālike tvaṃ dīrghāyurbhūyāḥ*". The priest again breathes onto the child and then sprinkles some unbroken rice (Skt./Nep. *akṣata*) over the child's head. After this, the priest calls the father to come and explains the child's horoscope to him. With this act, the *nāmakaraṇapūjā* is finished.

Showing the sun – sūrya dekhāune

On the occasion of the name-giving ceremony, *niṣkramaṇa* (Skt. the child's first outing) is performed. According to the sources of classical Hindu law, this classical *saṃskāra* is performed between the eleventh day up to the fourth month after birth (see Pandey 1969: 146; Kane 1968ff.: II, 225). Among the Parbatiyās of Kathmandu Valley the ritual is called *sūrya dekhāune* (Nep. "showing the sun"). In former times, on *niṣkramaṇa* the child was taken out of the house for the first time. Nowadays, when the delivery takes place in a maternity hospital the child is taken out for the first time when child and mother are discharged. In the following, I will describe *sūrya dekhāune* as I observed it in Mulpani, a small village situated on the eastern rim of Kathmandu Valley on 2nd of September in 2008 in a Khadka family (Parbatiyā Brahmins).



Plate 11: *Sūrya dekhāune* on *nāmakaraṇa* in Mulpani 2008: The priest shows the sun to the child carried by his mother.

After finishing the *nāmakaraṇapūjā*, a small area in the courtyard of the house is ritually cleaned and a circle of cow dung spread over it. The priest forms a small ball of cow dung, makes a small hole in it with the thumb of his right hand, and puts it in the middle of the circle used as the *pūjā* spot.²⁹ The ball is called *sūryako kuṇḍa* (Nep. “the well of the sun” or “the pit of the sun”) from which the alternative names of this ritual *sūryako kuṇḍapūjā* or *gobar* (cow dung) *kuṇḍapūjā* derive.³⁰ Before a child can be shown the sun in the sky, it first has to worship the sun. The priest and the sacrificer worship the *sūryako kuṇḍa* with a simple *pūjā* in five steps. The priest pours yoghurt and milk into the hole of the *sūryako kuṇḍa* and offers unbroken rice, vermilion powder, *ḍubo* grass, fruits, flowers, a coin, and incense sticks (see plate 10).³¹ The child is brought to the *sūryako kuṇḍa* and the priest pours the offering of milk and yoghurt onto the child’s right hand from whence it flows onto the ball of cow dung. In this way, the child itself worships the *sūryako kuṇḍa*. Then the child is shown the sun represented by the *sūryako kuṇḍa*. For that the mother first touches the child’s head to the *sūryako kuṇḍa* and then the child’s feet. After that, the mother circles the *sūryako kuṇḍa* three

29 A member of the household can make the ball of cow dung, too.

30 The term *kuṇḍa* describes in that context “a well consecrated to a deity”.

31 Sometimes the offerings include *jautil* (Nep. a mixture of “barley and sesame seed”), *kuśa* grass, and *sarsium* (Nep. “rape seed”) as well.

times in a clockwise direction while holding the child in her arms. Only then does the priest standing next to the mother, who is holding the child in her arms, show the sun in the sky to the child by raising his arm to it (see plate 11). Finally, the mother applies a *tikā* of yoghurt from the *sūryako kuṇḍa* to the child's forehead as a blessing.

Lifting the child over the fire and concluding rituals

After showing the sun, the priest and the parents with the child go back to the *homa* site. The father, the mother, or the priest lifts the child three times up and down over the fire (see plate 12). The reason for this is to purify the child in the smoke—an act associated with the purifying quality of fire. It is believed that this will make the child brave. Then the priest pounds some charcoal he has taken from the fire pit with the ladle he used during the *homa*. He touches the father on the head and shoulders with the ladle and applies first a *tikā* of charcoal to his forehead and then a *tikā* of vermilion and *akṣata* above that. After this, the priest ties a *raṅṣābandhana*, a ritual thread around the father's right wrist. He repeats this procedure for the mother, child, and all the participants of the ceremony, one-by-one. Sometimes the priest only applies *tikā* to the child while the mother ties the thread. In the ceremony that I observed in Mulpani, the mother tied the thread around the child's wrists and ankles and around the belly so as to protect it against malevolent spirits (see plate 13). Then the priest distributes *prasāda*, auspicious food that is first offered to the deities before being given to all of the participants. He takes the two *pipal* leaves with the child's birth horoscope, places them together with a sacred thread and a areca nut in a cloth and ties it up. The parents of the child will keep this.

Finally, the priest performs *visarjana*, the ritual release of the deities who had been invited to the ceremony. He puts out the fire and family members clean the *pūjā* spot.

7 Conclusions

As the accounts of the rituals dealt in this paper have shown, there is a great deal of diversity in the way they are performed. Not only does each caste have its own traditions for performing these rituals; even within one caste the performances differ according to the particular family clan and the locality. For example, *macābu byēkegu* is often celebrated on the fourth or sixth day after the birth of a child in Thimi, but it is usually performed on the sixth or tenth day in Bhaktapur. Especially the high Newar castes perform the early childhood rituals more elaborately and hire a priest to perform the *pūjās*. I doubt that the majority of Jyāpus and lower castes had ever performed *chaiṭhī* and *nā chuyegu* in the past. I agree with Gellner who says: "It is unlikely that the sacred texts describe a state of affairs once general but now abandoned; it is more probable that the texts and the *paṇḍits*' schemas describe an ideal which those of high status (particularly kings) might enact in full, but which were never wholly practised by the vast majority" (1992: 198).



Plate 12: *Nāmakaraṇa* in Basbari/Kathmandu 2008: The child's father encourages his wife to lift the child up and down over the fire pit three times. The two priests hired to perform the ceremony are sitting in the foreground.



Plate 13: *nāmakaraṇa* in Mulpani 2008: The mother ties the sacred thread around the child's wrists, ankles and around the belly.

The early childhood rituals are performed for two reasons: Firstly, to remove the impurity caused by birth. As I have shown among the Newars, the whole *phukī* is affected by it. The rituals, which are done on the first days after the birth of a child, are clearly a women's affair. During this highly polluting period only the women of a family and the *aji* are able to touch a woman. Therefore, the *aji* is the main ritual agent at this time. She is the one who performs daily worship to the goddess Chvāsaḥ Ajimā or Hārītī for protection of the mother and child. Both mother and child are in great danger during this stage from attack by malevolent spirits. And it is the *aji* who performs the rituals on *macābu byēkegu*. The removal of the impurity accrued by birth is not expressed so strongly among the Parbatiyās, because none of the family of a newborn child—except its mother—is affected by it. However, they ritually cleanse themselves, their clothes, and the house before the *nāmakaraṇa* is performed.

Secondly, the early childhood rituals locate the child within society. The child is given a name and a local habitation. As long as the umbilical cord has not been severed, the child belongs to its mother. Its severance marks the beginning of the process of the child's separation from its mother. Before the umbilical cord has been cut, the child is considered to be caste-less and could be adopted by anyone. With the severing of the cord the child becomes a matter of its father's patrilineage, which for its part becomes attached to the child by the impurity of birth that lasts until the purification rituals on *macābu byēkegu*. Because of the child's affiliation to its natal lineage up to the announcement of the paternity, it is the *aji* who hands over the child to its father. Only once he has accepted the child by putting it on his lap does the senior-most woman (*nakhī*) of the household take over. She applies *tikā* to the child's forehead and massages its head with oil. For me this act clearly shows the ritual welcoming and the beginning of the incorporation of the child into its patrilineage. The acceptance of the child by the father's sisters (*nini*) is expressed on *chaiṭhī* (which is not performed by the majority of the Newars) when—one-by-one—they put the child on their laps, rub it with mustard oil and apply eye-liner round its eyes. Given the high mortality rate in former times experienced by women during and after a delivery, the acceptance of the child by the *ninis* is very important. Should the mother die, they will take care of the child. The newborn is also embedded in its natal family, which is expressed by the gifts the mother's brother (*pāju*) sends during the period between the delivery and *macābu byēkegu*.

In the vast majority of cases Newars do not perform an elaborate version of the name-giving ritual, which is usually performed among the Parbatiyās on the eleventh day after birth. The exception among the Newars is formed by members of the high castes. The Newars usually call in a priest for the first time on *annaprāsana*, the first feeding of solid food to a child. By then at latest the child is named. The reason why the naming among the Newars is often performed by the senior-most man (*nāyaḥ*) of the household, or *phukī*, or by the child's father's sister instead of a priest might be due to economical factors. In former times the mortality rate of newborns was high, so the families may have refused to perform a costly ritual involving the services of a priest.

Since only the Parbatīyā and the Hindu Newar rituals have been dealt with in this paper, I hope that further research will outline the rituals of the Buddhist Newars, especially on *nā chuyegu*. That would constitute a great enrichment of our knowledge of early childhood rituals.

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