Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters

SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC ROLES OF HIGH-CASTE WOMEN IN NEPAL

Lynn Bennett

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, through a special grant, has assisted the Press in publishing this volume.

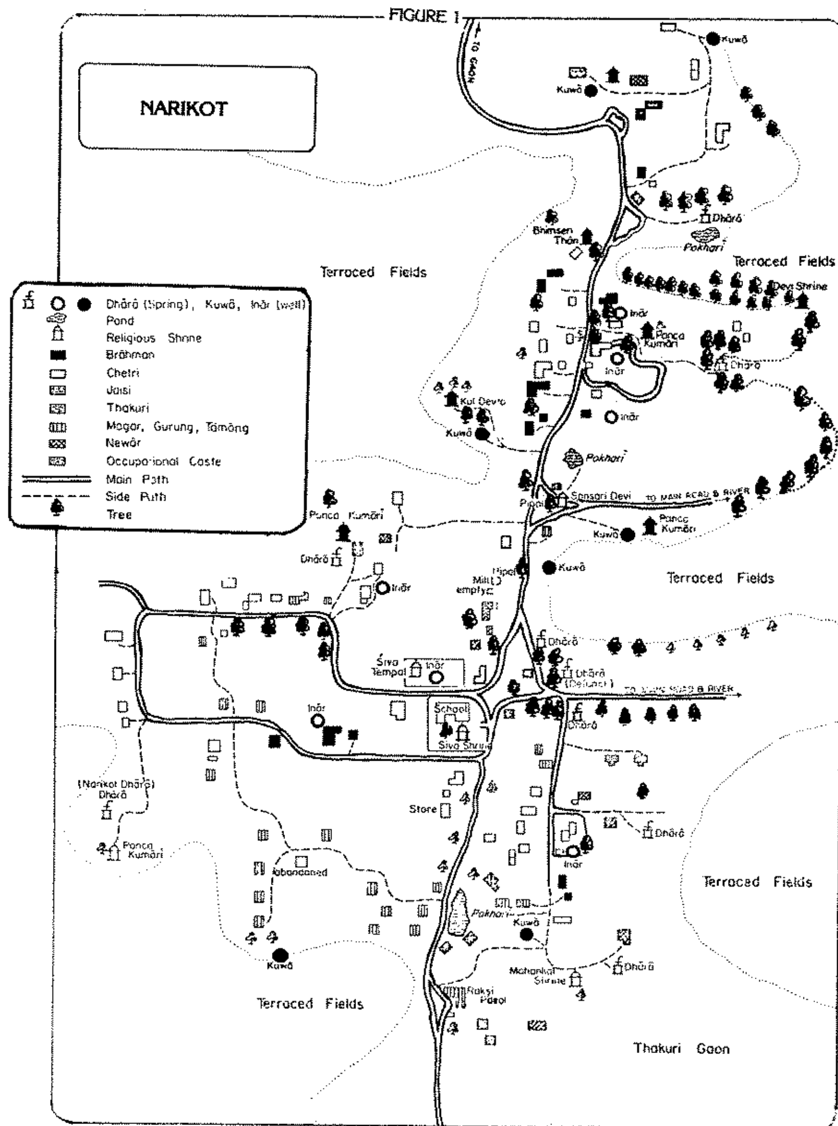
Copyright © 1983 Columbia University Press
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America
Columbia University Press
New York Guildford, Surrey

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bennett, Lynn, 1945–
Dangerous wives and sacred sisters.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Women—Nepal—Social conditions. 2. Women—Nepal—Religious life. 3. Sex role—Nepal. 4. Kinship—Nepal. 5. Goddesses—Nepal. I. Title.
HQ1735.9.B46 1983 305.4'2'095496 83-7528
ISBN 0-231-04664-2

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2



CHAPTER 1

Village and Family: The Socioeconomic Context of Women's Lives

Narikot is built along the spine of a ridge that drops 200 feet to a large river on one side and slopes up over a series of plateaux and connecting ridges to the valley rim on the other. The village pictured on the map no longer exists as a political unit. Since the advent of panchayat democracy,[1] in the early 1960s, it has been divided up into wards and, along with adjoining areas, become part of a new village panchayat whose official center is beyond Narikot. But the residents, especially the women, still use the old village name to designate where they live.

As the map shows, the high castes have tended to cluster together around the central school, the teashop, and along the path to the northeast end of the village, while the middle-ranking castes are grouped mostly at the southwest corner of the village. It is also evident that there are very few (three) untouchable households within the village bounds—though several families of untouchable blacksmiths and leatherworkers who serve Narikot patrons live in adjoining villages.

Private Spaces

There is little neighborly visiting in the Brahman-Chetri hamlet. Relatives (unless they are having a dispute) may make casual

visits to one another; but villagers are reluctant to go uninvited or without specific purpose into the courtyard of a nonkinsman. They do not want to appear to be idly loitering or expectantly waiting for something. Often, in fact, visiting neighbors do want something—a cup of milk to make tea for an important visiting relative, some cucumbers to make pickles—and are willing to humble themselves on such occasions to get it. The only adults in the village who move freely from house to house are the few poor old women whose prestige is already so low that they have nothing to lose by asking for vegetables or a few handfuls of corn from their better-off neighbors.

Casual conversation and exchange of news tends to take place during chance encounters in public spaces. If one enters another's private space, one is suspected of having a motive for doing so. Villagers worry about theft and about witchcraft from their uninvited visitors. For example, when an old woman from the village came upstairs in a neighbor's house to ask for a handful of spinach greens, her request was granted in a friendly manner. But as soon as she had turned to leave, the head woman of the house told her son in an urgent whisper to follow the old woman downstairs and see that she didn't steal any brass cooking vessels on her way out.

On another occasion, I was sitting in the courtyard enjoying tea with the women of one household when a neighbor woman entered and began to talk. Though the other women were friendly and chatted with her, they did not offer her tea, but casually covered the tops of their glasses with their hands and patiently waited until she left. When she had gone and I picked up my glass, they urged me in excited tones not to drink until I had touched the glass with my big toe. The woman was a witch, they said, and since I had neglected to cover my glass, I now had to remove any possible spells before drinking.

Both these encounters reveal not only the sense of distrust which pervades many village interactions, but also the habits of courtesy and politeness which often mask this distrust.

Since villagers are aware that uninvited visiting might inspire suspicion, they consider "dropping in" an undignified thing to do. Rather than be called a busybody (or worse) it is better to stay in one's own courtyard. This sentiment is particularly acute among women. Men, who are involved in village government, who must arrange the schedules for planting and harvesting and find buyers for cash crops, have more legitimate reasons

for being out and about than women. Of course, women too have much legitimate work which takes them out of their courtyards. It is their job to fetch water from the village tap or spring. They should not linger, but if they have a heap of laundry or if they must wait in a long line to fill a water vessel, they will have a chance to exchange news with the other women there. And during the peak agricultural seasons, the women see more of their neighbors, since most of them participate in labor exchange groups that plant, weed, and harvest the crop together. Nevertheless, the proper demeanor for women—especially those married into the village—is *laj manne,* "modest, shy, ashamed." This refers not only to reticent, self-effacing behavior in the presence of others but also to general shyness about going out in the village alone. A phrase often used to compliment a woman's behavior is that she "sits and says nothing" (*cup lagera basne*). The opposite is the contentious, noisy, immodest woman who "says what she likes and goes where she likes" (*je pani bhanchi, jaha pani hirchi*). There are strong overtones of sexual looseness attached to such bold behavior, especially in a young woman. Except when their work or religious activities take them outside, Brahman and Chetri women tend to spend most of their time in their own houses and courtyards.

Houses in Narikot vary greatly in size and construction. A few are just tiny, one-story mud-wattle huts, while others are four stories, built of baked bricks over cement foundations, with beautifully carved windows and tile roofs. Most, however, are two-story houses of mud brick with steep thatch or tile roofs. All the houses have courtyards where grain is dried, children play, weddings are performed, and people sit to warm themselves in the cold sunny winters. Some courtyards are made of baked tile bricks, but most are dirt covered with a paste of cowdung and mud (*gobar*). Courtyards are surrounded with low walls of brick or stone, or sometimes just a hedge. Always there should be a place for Visnu's sacred *tulsi* plant in one corner.

Usually there is a raised veranda in front of the house. This will be spread with a smooth coat of red mud paste and covered with mats when people sit there to work or talk. Often a basket will be hung from the eaves of the veranda where a small baby sleeps while its mother works. There may be a footmill, or a grinding stone which the women use for the unending task of husking and grinding grains.

Most houses have an animal shed attached to or near the

main house where whatever goats, cows, and buffaloes the family owns are kept. There is usually a kitchen garden too, where vegetables are grown and sometimes a few fruit trees are planted.

The floor plans of the houses differ. One of the most important variations is the placement of the kitchen. The kitchen is the purest part of the house, where the ritually significant staple food *dal-bhat* (lentil broth and boiled rice) is cooked and eaten. If their house is big enough, Brahman and Chetri families prefer to cook on a higher floor or the top floor of the house. Dogs, chickens, lower-caste workers, etc. are less likely to stray upstairs and pollute the cooking space. There is also better ventilation, since most houses have only very small latticed windows on the ground floor. Poorer families, however, must make do with a dark corner on the ground floor separated from the livestock by a low mud-brick wall. Wherever the cooking area is located, near it are squares outlined by ridges in the mud floor. Each adult male in the family usually has his own eating square, where his wife also eats after he has eaten. Small children may eat anywhere, but by the time a child can feed himself he usually has a regular place.

Twice a day, after the morning and evening rice meals, the women clean and purify the kitchen area, including the low mud stove and the eating squares. First, a moist ball of cowdung is rolled over the floor to pick up spilled food and bits of leftover rice, which are *jutho* or polluting to touch. Then the ball is thrown out into the garden or scrap pit. Next a paste of fresh mud and cowdung is spread over the entire area. Though a few houses have a cemented drain area for washing dishes indoors, most women must wash dishes outside—a cold dark task on a winter's evening—and then bring the dishes back to dry in the kitchen area where they are less likely to be defiled.

While rice meals must be cooked in the sacred hearth area, snacks and tea can be prepared outside it on a separate fire—sometimes over a three-legged metal stand in a portable clay basin. Larger houses may have a fire pit downstairs where mash for the animals is prepared as well as the afternoon snack of popped corn or roasted soybeans.

Every house has at least one storeroom where supplies of grain, spices, oil, and extra vessels are kept. The storeroom door is always locked, and the key kept with the head woman of the household. Nonvaluable items like old shoes, tin cans,

A Chetri woman prepares the family meal in her kitchen. *Photo by author*

broken vessels, pieces of window frame, or tool handles are stored in the eaves, or under the stairs.

Furniture is minimal, but almost every house has at least one wooden bed and a dowry chest, since brides must bring these articles when they are married. Standing wardrobes or cupboards, wall mirrors, tables, straight-back chairs, and radios are luxuries owned by a few. Most living is done on floors covered with straw mats or woven cotton carpets and perhaps spread with a thick rug or blanket of natural-colored wool (*radi*) or some thin cushions. Walls are painted with either a gray mud wash or distemper—sometimes in a garish metallic green or blue. The walls are full of niches and rough built-in shelves where dirty clothes, useful rags, and tattered school notebooks are stored. Valuable clothes, jewelry, and makeup are kept under lock and key in a chest or standing wardrobe. Holy books, wrapped carefully in cloth, are stored on the top of the wardrobe or on a high shelf where children can't tear or otherwise defile them. Around the walls are bright colored pictures of gods, a few formal family photographs, and possibly a family-planning poster or a Nebico Biscuit calendar featuring a plump young woman in a clinging sari.

The husband sleeps on the bed that his wife has brought

as dowry; and she—if she is the favored wife—sleeps on a mattress at the foot of his bed. The older wife, in cases of polygamous marriage, will be given a room of her own, usually containing the marriage bed she brought as a bride, which is visited less frequently now by her husband. The sleeping patterns of the children vary with the size and number of rooms in the house. Children from infancy until at least the age of six or seven sleep with their mother in her bed. If a new infant comes along, the older child may be sent to sleep with siblings in another room. But children in small houses sleep all in a line with their mother and sibings until they are twelve or older. Brahmans and Chetris think it unkind to make a child of any age sleep by itself in a room, and even adults prefer not to sleep alone.

Public Areas and Community Interaction

As I have noted, the isolation of the courtyard does not affect men and children as much as it does women. Men congregate at the tea stall near the schoolhouse and sometimes at the mill to smoke and talk. There is also the panchayat building—but since the panchayat is large and its headquarters more than a mile and a half away from Narikot, it has not become an active social center for Narikot men. Villagers do, however, participate in the panchayat cooperative, which purchases and advances fertilizer and improved seeds and also sells cooking oil, rice, and other basic household supplies at the low government rates. The panchayat also maintains a breeding buffalo and runs periodic innoculation campaigns for both humans and livestock. It was through a collective panchayat effort several years ago that Narikot and the surrounding villages got electricity.

But for most of the more immediate and localized needs like water supply (Bennett 1973), road repair, education, and even entertainment, there are various smaller groups of men—both formal and informal—which work to get things done. One of the formal groups is the five-member school committee that in the early fifties organized Narikot's first public school. In the beginning, school was taught on the green in front of the teashops under a great pipal tree, but later, a small two-room house with a straw roof was built. When that collapsed, the students

were again out on the green until the late sixties when the school committee raised Rs. 4,200[2] and the necessary voluntary labor (*sramdan*) to build the two-story cement and brick schoolhouse which serves Narikot today.

Another formal group in Narikot is the Bandu Mandal, or youth organization. Led by an energetic and talented Brahman man, it was formed in 1972 and has about thirty members. This youth organization meets once a month—though attendance is irregular, since many of its members work or study in Kathmandu and return to the village only on holidays. It is divided into four special-interest committees: culture, sports, agriculture, and education/library. The sports committee recently raised money for a volleyball net and the education/library committee has managed to start a small library in one room of the school building. But the most active part of the Bandu Mandal is the cultural committee, which for several years in a row has produced well-rehearsed, well-attended plays in the schoolyard at the major fall festival of Dasai (see Bennett 1974).

The members of the Bandu Mandal raise money for its activities by singing from house to house in the traditional caroling (*deusi khelne*) during the festival of Tihar in November and by occasional fund drives for specific projects like the play. Fund drives are also organized by informal groups in Narikot for repairing roads, improving water supply, or perhaps putting doors and window frames in the school building, since there are no panchayat taxes to provide funds for such projects. Village families are expected to give according to their means—some giving two or three rupees, others ten and twenty.

The men who collect the funds and organize the voluntary work groups for such projects are for many purposes the effective village-level government. They are the village *thulo manche* (big men) whose age, wealth, and personalities make them the informal leaders of the Narikot "neighborhood" within the larger, somewhat unwieldly panchayat unit. Two of the thulo manche of Narikot are also ward representatives to the panchayat council, representing the two wards that fall within the old Narikot boundaries.

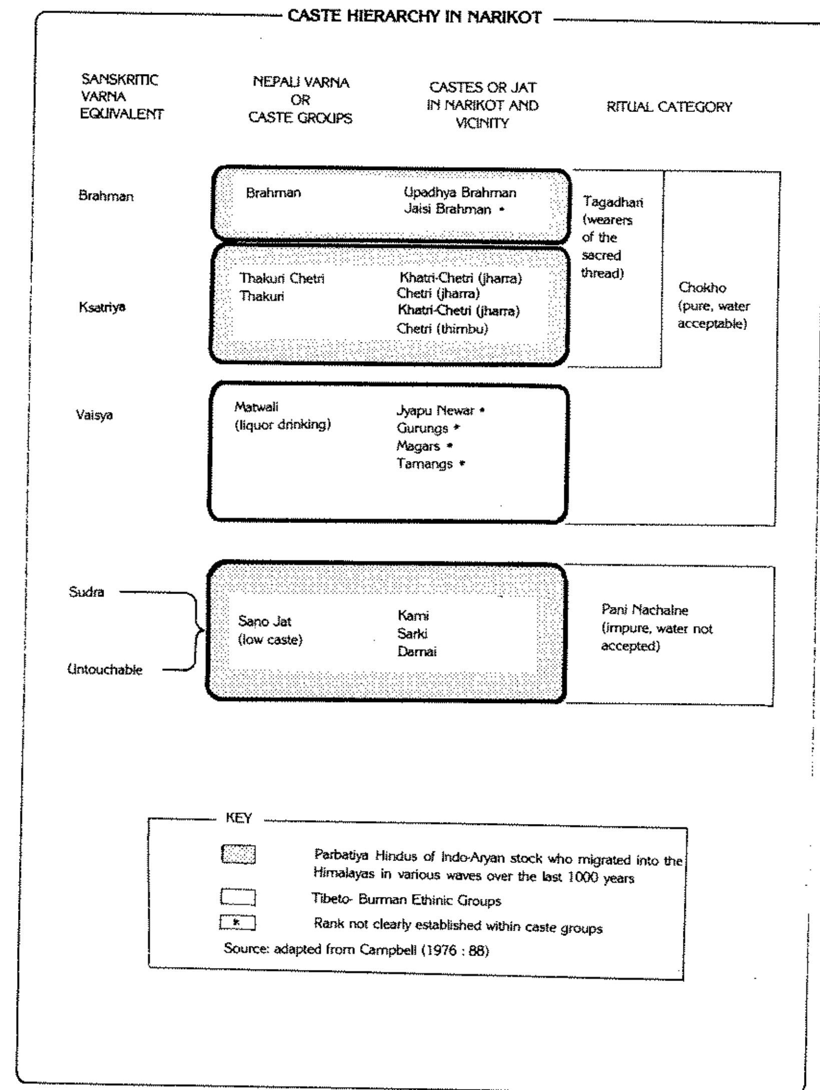
Such thulo manche increase their prestige by using their influence to benefit Narikot whenever they can. For example, one man was able to get tarpaper roofing for the school through his relative in the Electricity Department. The authority of Narikot's thulo manche is often sought in the mediation of quarrels

and minor land disputes. One of the ward representatives, for example, was called on many occasions during my research period—once when two neighbor women had come to blows over their quarreling children; once when a widow claimed she was being beaten by her brother-in-law who wanted her land; and once when an untouchable man came for advice on how to get his wife (whom he had beaten) back from her parents' house. But, in turn, the representative had to call in a respected elderly Brahman to arbitrate when the representative's own son wanted to partition the family land and live separately with his wife. Neither son nor father was pleased with the property divisions, and the son at one point even threatened a lawsuit. But in the end both accepted the old Brahman's authority. Such internal solutions seem to be common—indeed, the older men in the village say they can't remember a single case (out of the many threats) where villagers actually went outside Narikot to the police or government courts.

Caste

The Nepali version of the Hindu caste system marks one important framework within which the people of Narikot relate to each other. Caste defines certain groups in a hierarchy of ritual purity and pollution and prescribes intergroup behavior in certain spheres, particularly marriage and commensality. The simple diagram of the caste hierarchy presented in figure 2 cannot be accurately characterized as *the* Nepali version of the caste system. For that the best source is Höfer's (1979) comprehensive analysis of the caste hierarchy as it was set forth in the National Legal Code of 1854.[3] The code encompassed and ranked not only the Nepali-speaking *Parbatiya* or hill Hindu castes which are our main concern here, but also the numerous Newari-speaking castes of all ranks, the many Tibeto-Burman or "tribal" ethnic groups such as the Gurung and Tamang, the Tibetan-speaking *Bhotia* groups from the high Mountain Regions, as well as the Muslim, Hindu, and indigenous populations of the Southern Terai belt. However, the citizens of Narikot, though diverse, do not encompass the full variety of Nepali peoples; hence the simpler scheme presented here is adequate for understanding the caste hierarchy as it functions in the village.

FIGURE 2



Like any other local system in Hindu South Asia, the organization of castes, or *jat*, in Narikot is loosely based on the classical varna system. At the top are "those who wear the sacred thread" (*tagadari*). This group encompasses the Brahman and Ksatriya varnas who traditionally filled the role of priests and warriors, respectively. The Chetris, whose name is derived from Ksatriya, fall into this group, as do the Thakuris. The middle-ranking group, roughly comparable to the Vaisya in the varna system, are called *matwali* or "those who drink liquor." At the bottom of the scale are the low caste or *pani na calne jat*—"those from whom water is not accepted." As Campbell (1978:87) has noted, this version of the varna model, which prevails throughout much of rural Nepal, differs from the classical Hindu system in that it collapses the two lowest categories: the Sudra who in the classical model were touchable and inside society and the untouchables who were outside it. In fact the distinction is present in Nepal, as Höfer's work (1979:45) has shown. In the old legal code the impure or "water unacceptable" castes are further subdivided into those who are touchable and those who are not. However, since most of the members of the former low-caste but touchable group are Newar service castes, who generally inhabit only the more highly diversified urban areas, the distinction has little significance in most rural hill communities such as Narikot, where only untouchable Parbatiya low castes are found.[4]

The women I studied were Brahman and Chetri members of the high-caste tagadari group. Brahmans and Chetris are viewed by themselves and others as in some sense forming an identifiable group sharing a single cultural heritage and social structure. Among all but the highest Brahman group, some degree of intermarriage with other ethnic groups has been tolerated; nevertheless, the Brahman and Chetri of Nepal have largely retained the features of their Indo-Aryan ancestors (see Haimendorf 1966). According to their own traditions, sometimes recorded in long genealogies, they, along with some of the untouchable service castes, are the Parbatiya or "people from the hills." Both high-caste and untouchable Parbatiya are the original Nepali-speaking peoples, who, the tradition continues, migrated to the Himalayas from northern India at different periods and eventually formed the bulk of the conquering army of Prithivi Narayan Shah, when he invaded the Kathmandu Valley in the eighteenth century. The account of K. B. Bista (1972) while supporting this view, presents a considerably more complex picture. Bista contends that "It is a difficult matter with a few exceptions to know the original status" of most Chetri, and points out that certain family names could originally have been Rajput, Magar, or even Tibetan (1972:16). But despite such early looseness in the criteria for membership in the Chetri caste, the language, religion, and social structure of the Parbatiya Brahman and Chetri leaves little doubt that, as a group, they are linked with the Hindus of North India[5] and distinct from the high-caste Newari Hindus of Kathmandu Valley's ancient urban centers.

At the apex of the caste hierarchy are the Upadhaya Brahmans, who alone may serve as hereditary priests (*purohit* and *puret*) for Chetri families. Since they embody and maintain the highest ritual purity—in terms of both marriage and ritual food restrictions—all other castes will accept dal-bhat cooked by Upadhaya Brahmans.

The offspring of a union between an Upadhaya Brahman man and a Brahman widow or divorcee are known as Jaisi Brahman. The status of this fairly numerous group is definitely lower than that of the Upadhaya Brahmans. Jaisis may not serve as priests or accept certain ritual gifts (*dan* or *daksina*). But there is some ambiguity about the Jaisi's standing with respect to other "twice born" castes, because while they refuse to take dal-bhat from Chetris, Chetris also refuse to eat this food when cooked by them.

A further division among the Brahmans, and one which cuts across the Upadhaya/Jaisi division, is that between the Purbiya and the Kumai Brahmans, who trace their origins respectively from the East and the West. Once again, the relationship between these two groups is not clear, and each claims superiority over the other. In Narikot, where there were only Purbiya Brahman residents, that group was considered higher, and village Chetris said that they would call only Purbiya as their priests.

Next to the Brahmans in rank are the Thakuris. They, like the Chetris just below them, belong to the second of the four varnas, the Ksatriya or warrior caste, and they count the royal Shah clan in their number. However, as Haimendorf (1966) has pointed out, in their more Mongolian features and in their social structure (notably the permitting of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage) they differ from both the Brahmans and the Chetris.

Among the Chetris too there are numerous subdivisions resulting from irregular marriages of various types. The children

of a Brahman man and either a Chetri or Matwali woman are known as Khatri (or Khatri Chetri or K.C.). They take the surname of their Brahman father but rank as Chetri. As with the Jaisi Brahmans, this reduction of status is usually a permanent one for the descendants of the union, although I found in a Nepali book on the subject a statement implying that offspring through the female line can eventually be reinstated as Brahmans:

> When a daughter is born of such a marriage [Brahman husband, Chetri wife] then she should be married according to tradition. And in this manner when such marriages [presumably to Brahman males] of such daughters have been performed for seven generations, then the daughter of the seventh generation becomes a Bahuni [female Brahman] instead of a Chetrini [female Chetri]—and this directive is also found in the shastras. [Sharma n.d.: 23, my trans.]

A further division in the Chetri caste is that between *jharra* and *thimbu* or "pure" and "mixed" Chetri. Jharra Chetris are the offspring of orthodox Hindu marriage (*kanyadan biha*) between jharra men and women. Thimbu Chetris are born from several different types of irregular unions. One example would be the union of a Chetri man with a Chetri widow or a Chetri woman who has left her first husband. In this case both husband and wife may be themselves pure full-status Chetri to begin with, but the fact that orthodox marriage must be a *kanyadan* or literally the "gift of a virgin" obviously precludes second marriages for women. Although a man who makes a second marriage retains his full ritual status, a woman loses her caste standing on her second union, and so this union and its offspring cannot be given full status. A second type of irregular union might be one between a Chetri man and a woman from the middle-ranking Matwali castes. As long as a man never takes dal-bhat cooked by such a wife he retains his full caste status, and his children, though thimbu, are still Chetri.

Though Narikot villagers know the thimbu or jharra status of every Chetri, this makes little difference in daily interaction. There is, however, an important difference in ritual status. Jharra Chetris will not take boiled rice from thimbu Chetris, nor will they give their daughters to them except, perhaps, when a thimbu family is extremely rich and powerful. In such cases, as Haimendorf (1966:53) points out, the thimbu Chetris are trading their worldly prestige and wealth for the ritual status of a full-caste bride (usually from a poor hill family) in the hopes that such a

match might eventually help restore jharra status to their descendants. One other ritual occasion in which jharra/thimbu status is important is in the annual or biannual celebration of *devali* when the lineage gods are worshiped (see chapter 4). At that time only jharra males may actually perform the sacrifice and worship ceremonies.

Leaving aside the question of the higher twice-born Newari castes, who exist in a kind of "separate but parallel" status with respect to the high-caste Parbatiya the remaining castes and ethnic groups all fall under the rubric of Matwali or "liquor-drinking." From the Brahman-Chetri point of view this large middle-ranking group includes most Newar and other Tibeto-Burman peoples such as the Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Limbu, Rai, Sherpa, and Tibetans. It also includes anthropologists and other foreigners.[6] Members of this group are *cokho* (clean, pure). They are touchable, and water, as well as cokho food (uncooked food, or food cooked with clarified butter) can be accepted from them by high-caste individuals. Women from this group can also be kept by high-caste men as second-class wives.

Below the Matwali group and at the bottom of the hierarchy are the untouchable *pani na calne* or *sano jat* (low caste) groups. As their name quite literally suggests, other groups will not take water that they have touched. In this group are the three major untouchable Parbatiya artisan castes, the Kami (blacksmith), Sarki (leatherworker), and Damai (tailor-musician) groups. It also includes untouchable Newari groups such as the sweeper (*cyame*) and butcher (*kasai/pore*) castes, though no members of these groups live in Narikot.

In Narikot, relationships between Brahman-Chetri and members of the Matwali group are quite relaxed and informal. Unlike such middle-ranking groups in most rural Indian communities, the Tibeto-Burman Matwali groups of Nepal remain to varying degrees outside the Hindu system. It is true that many (especially the Magar and Gurung) have adopted all the parts of the Hindu tradition in a process that seems roughly similar to Srinivas' (1966) "sanskritization" in India. But in most groups these Hindu traditions are tempered with strong elements from their persisting Buddhist beliefs and less rigidly hierarchical social structures. Indeed, among certain groups like the Sherpa and other Tibetan peoples from Nepal's northern border regions, Hindu ideology seems to have had little effect at all, except perhaps in the acknowledgment of certain groups as untoucha-

bles. At any rate, whatever respect a Tamang or Gurung from around Narikot might show to a Brahman would be the result of the Brahman's age or wealth and political power rather than his ritual or caste status. Of course, the hierarchical Hindu ideology remains the given framework for certain kinds of interaction between high-caste and middle-caste individuals. No Matwali, no matter how wealthy (and there are some wealthy Matwali in adjoining villages), would expect even the poorest Brahman to eat dal-bhat cooked by his hand. But outside the ritual sphere, deference in daily interaction is a function of more secular factors.

Such an essentially secular or "democratic" relationship does not hold, however, between high-caste and untouchable parbatiya groups. Although many untouchables of the younger generation in Narikot have sought less demeaning, or at least more anonymous, employment outside the village, their elders still maintain their inherited service/patronage relationships with high-caste families. This is the system known in India as *jajamani* and which Bista (1972) calls the *kamaune* system in Nepal. Here, each service-caste family performs its specialized tasks for one or more high-caste patron families in return for a biannual grain payment. In addition, untouchables are given a rice meal whenever they come to work and uncooked provisions whenever they do extra work or give special service at a family celebration (like the Damai musicians at a wedding). The principal difference between Indian jajamani and kamaune in Nepal is that the latter is much simpler, usually involving only three untouchable service castes: the Sarki for leatherwork and carpentry; the Kami for ironwork; and the Damai for tailoring and occasional music. In India the number of service castes is often much greater, including the sweepers, barbers, washermen, and potmakers, as well as barber or sweeper women who serve as midwives.

As I mentioned earlier, Brahmans and Chetris do avoid the touch of the service castes.[7] They also use non-honorific forms of address to them and do not generally allow them inside their houses. Likewise, the demeanor of untouchables toward their high-caste patrons is often tinged with obsequiousness—a behavior totally absent in the interaction between Matwalis and the higher castes. The most extreme example of such subservient behavior I observed in Narikot was that of a thin, middle-aged Damai widow who had two young children

to support. She had almost no land and very little skill as a seamstress. Had it not been that her patron families felt obliged to employ her despite the badly sewn garments she made, she would, as she herself openly acknowledged, have been reduced to beggary.

A similar hereditary relationship exists between Chetri *jajman* ("he who sacrifices") and their Brahman *puret* (priests). Such family priests are expected to officiate at certain calendrical festivals and at important family ceremonies such as weddings, naming ceremonies, funerals, and the like. In return for his ritual expertise and his ability (however marginal) to read the sacred Sanskrit texts, the puret is regularly given a payment during the Dasai festival. He also receives a small gift of money, *daksina,* and uncooked or ritually pure foods whenever he presides at a ceremony. Even though daksina and other occasional religious gifts, *dan,* given to Brahmans are meant to acknowledge their higher ritual status, some Brahmans—especially if they are wealthy or highly educated—feel that it is somehow demeaning to accept them. The priest of one village family is now such a wealthy man that he will come only for the most important ceremonies. At other times the family must call on poor neighboring Brahmans who are glad to give ritual service in return for daksina.

The Brahmans and Chetris who form the subject of this study include both Upadhaya and Jaisi Brahmans, Khatri Chetris, and Chetris of both pure (jharra) and mixed (thimbu) status.[8] Despite these internal subdivisions in terms of pedigree, the Brahman-Chetri are a recognizable cultural unit sharing essentially the same mythic and social structures. Of course there are divergences. Brahmans do some things differently from Chetris, but they share an ideology that accounts for these differences—i.e., the Hindu caste ideology that places Brahmans at the ritual apex (as priests) and Chetris (as warriors) below them. Thus, for example, although Brahman women do not wear stitched blouses when cooking while Chetri women do, both groups understand that this difference is a function of the greater purity required in Brahman cooking. Likewise in Narikot only the Chetris include in their weddings the separate *swayambar* ceremony where the bride "chooses" her groom (see chapter 3). This ceremony is recognized as appropriate to them and not to Brahmans because in the old texts only the daughters of Ksatriya kings had such rites. For the most part, however, the description

and analysis in this book applies equally (unless specifically noted) to all the subdivisions within the Brahman-Chetri group.

Patrilineal Organization

Besides the vertical stratification of caste with its subtle internal gradations in ritual status, Brahmans and Chetris are also divided horizontally into agnatic units called *thar* and *gotra*. Every Brahman and Chetri belongs to a thar and a gotra. Men become members of their father's thar and gotra; women assume their husband's. As Haimendorf (1966:30) has pointed out, these units are not ranked hierarchically: "No [Chetri] *thar* is inherently superior or inferior to any other Chetri clan [*thar*]." The same could be said of Brahman thar and gotra. The fact that a Brahman man gives his Khatri children (from whom he cannot take boiled rice) his own thar and gotra suggests that neither are primarily indices of ritual status. In fact, almost all gotra and many thar[9] cross-cut caste boundaries. Thus, for example, an individual belonging to the Bhandari thar and Bhardwaj gotra could be anything from a full Upadhaya Brahman to a Jaisi, a Hamal (with Brahman father and Thakuri mother), or a jharra Khatri-Chetri or even a thimbu Khatri-Chetri—depending on how far afield his ancestors had married.

But beyond such general definitions it becomes difficult to say with much preciseness just what thar and gotra are. Informants tend to conceive of both loosely as agnatic descent groups. This belief is especially strong with regard to gotra because of the tradition of the gotra rishi: each gotra bears the name of an ancient sage or rishi who is somehow considered to be the patrilineal ancestor of everyone born into that particular gotra.[10]

These mythological rishis are ideologically important to Brahman-Chetri agnatic organization in that they provide conceptual basis for the cherished ideals of patrilineal continuity and purity of descent. These ideals are expressed in individual genealogical records (*bamsawali*). Families take pride in the length of their genealogies. Yet, although some I collected spanned seven or eight generations (and one spanned fourteen), most village families had records of only the last four or five

generations. Beyond these specific genealogies, lineages depend on their gotra affiliation which links them (however obscurely) with a rishi ancestor of unimpeachable purity and makes them part of a patrilineage older than the Vedas themselves. Gotra provides a kind of "spiritual pedigree," and many religious ceremonies, especially those honoring the ancestors, require the invocation of one's gotra name to establish one's ritual legitimacy before the gods and ancestor spirits.

Because of the conceptual importance of gotra as a "spiritual" descent group, it is considered a sin to knowingly marry within one's own gotra. The definitive text on the subject, the *Gorkha Thar Gotra,* states quite plainly that

> it is not permissible to give a bride to a member of one's own gotra. . . . If a son is born [from such a marriage] then [that son] will most certainly be one who is accursed, damned (*candal*). . . . He will take you to hell and he will destroy the heaven of both the mother and the father. When one marries with a member of his own gotra then society will spit upon him, and the one who has married thus will not show his black face and will hide. [Sharma n.d.:18, my trans.]

A further quotation from this passage specifies that gotra endogamy is banned because it is seen as a kind of incest. "If one does marry [a woman of one's own gotra] without knowing and then finds out . . . one should not sleep in the same place with her. The shastras advise that such a wife is to be treated as if she were one's sister" (Sharma n.d.:19). For marriage purposes then, the gotra is treated as if it were in fact a single agnatic group descended from the same forefather.

Yet, despite the conceptual importance of gotra, some informants—many of them women—were unable to give their own gotra name when questioned. With considerable embarrassment they had to ask a relative or even wait to consult the family priest. Probably this is because the gotra has little use in daily life. It is not used for identification: people use their thar rather than their gotra as a surname. Nor do members of the same gotra automatically have any genealogical links with each other or any mutual economic, ritual, or social obligations. In fact, beyond the observation of strict gotra exogamy, members of the same gotra do not constitute a kin group in any behavioral sense. Like caste, gotra is a pan-Hindu phenomenon, with the same named units appearing throughout India. What T. N.

Madan (1962:67) writes about Brahmanic gotra in Kashmir holds for the Brahman and Chetri of Nepal: "The *sagotrā* (of the same *gotrā*) Brahmans of a village may be an agnatic kin group with known genealogical ties but Brahmanic *gotrā* are distributed all over India and are not kin groups in any specific sense." In short, belonging to the same gotra is a necessary but by no means sufficient criterion for determining social agnatic relationship.

The same could be said about thar membership. Although villagers sometimes refer to their thar as if it were a clan or even lineage unit, *thar*, strictly speaking, is really nothing more than a last name shared by many different descent groups. Individuals with the same thar may or may not be agnatically related. Yet because of the vague sense of the thar as an extended patrilineage, there is a preference to marry outside one's thar. Unlike gotra exogamy, however, there is no specific marriage prohibition here, and I encountered several cases of thar endogamy in the genealogies I collected.

The largest functional agnatic unit in Brahman-Chetri society is the *kul* (clan, lineage), whose members not only share the same thar and gotra but, more important, worship the same *kul devta* or lineage gods. The obligations which kul members have toward each other—in terms of observing birth and death pollution and performing communal worship of the lineage gods—sharply distinguish the kul from either gotra (which requires only exogamy) or thar (which requires nothing).

Theoretically, a single kul could continue to grow for centuries, so that its members—on the model of "descent" from the mythic gotra rishis—could trace their patrilineal descent in an unbroken line for many generations. In this ideal expansion the kul embodies, more vividly than even the gotra, the central Hindu values of agnatic solidarity and purity of descent.

Despite these values, however, actual kul seldom span more than five or six generations. Quarrels, migrations, and lack of fastidiousness in maintaining genealogy records all contribute to the process of fragmentation whereby a single lineage group splinters into new kuls. In fact, the kul unit is also called "branch" or "limb" (*sakha, haga*), revealing an image of the kul as an offshoot of some larger, less defined patrilineage. Thus, the actual size and generational depth of a kul can vary from the minimum of a single family or household to the ideal of a large clan.

Often very large or prestigious kuls within a thar are

named after the location of the *kul ghar*, ancestral home (such as the Sijapati Bista, the Bista lineage whose ancestors came from Sija in the far west). Kuls may also be named after a famous person in their ranks, like the Jung Thapa, whose ancestor married the granddaughter of Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana. Many smaller, less famous lineages, however, have no names. Likewise, in time, the larger named lineages fragment again into several new kuls, each having the same name but worshiping their lineage gods separately. It is the group whose members worship lineage gods together at a single shrine and observe at least minimal death and birth pollution for each other that forms the structural basis of the kul, rather than the named lineage whose significance in most cases is now only historical.

The organization of Brahman-Chetri patrilineal descent groups can be schematically represented by a series of widening circles surrounding an individual (see figure 3). The larger thar and gotra units are represented by circles *asymmetrical* with respect to ego and his kul, since both his thar and his gotra may contain individuals to whom he is not actually related.

Within the intersection of the two circles representing thar and gotra are a series of *concentric* circles surrounding ego. Individuals within these circles have the same thar and gotra as ego and are at least potentially members of ego's own kul.

At the closest range, usually spanning between two and four generations, is the *parivar*, family or household. This group, which holds property jointly and observes most life-cycle and calendrical rituals together, is by far the most important patrilineal unit in Parbatiya society. The clearest single indicator of proximity of agnatic relation is the length of time that one is obliged to observe birth and death pollution for another. Members of the same household must observe the maximum ten days for birth and thirteen days for the death of a member.

Beyond the parivar are units of increasing generational distance and proportionally decreasing ritual obligation. In the ideal scheme represented in figure 3, death pollution observances vary only with the proximity of agnatic relation. In fact, of course, such observances vary also according to the orthodoxy and respective caste status[11] of the families, the geographical distance separating households,[12] and above all, whether the two families are members of the same kul.

Theoretically then, the *sapindi bhai* (lit. brothers sharing in the same rice ball offering), which encompasses five genera-

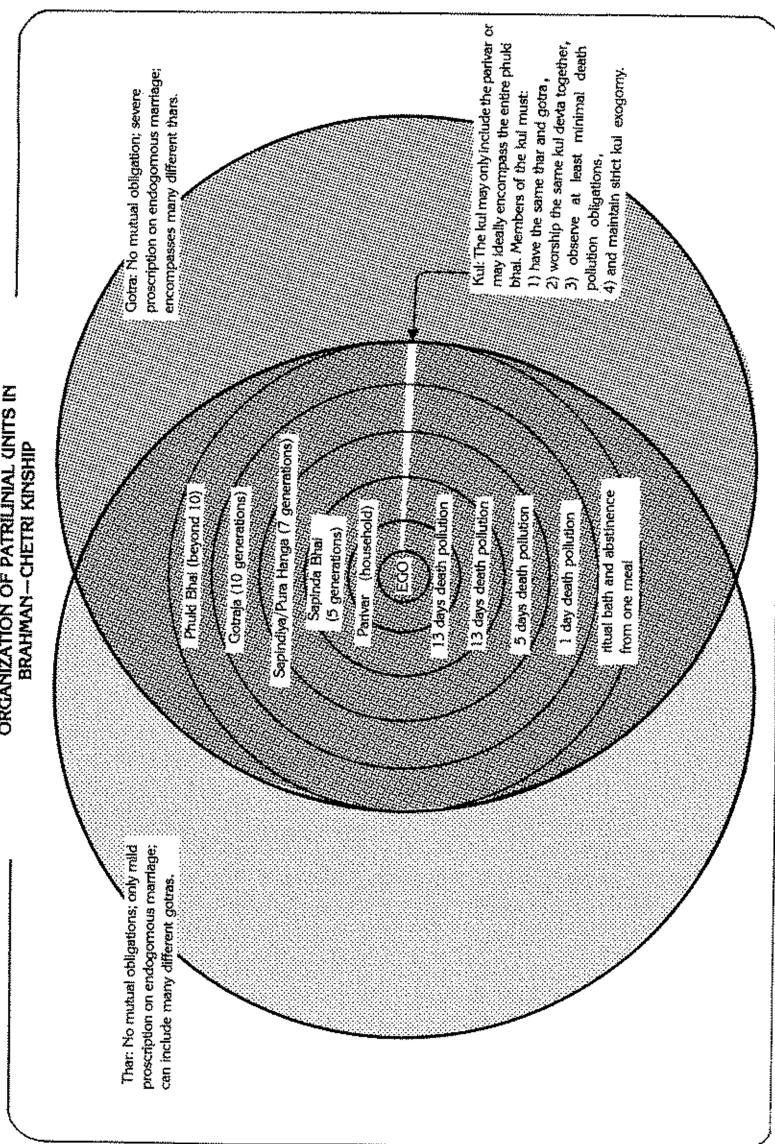


FIGURE 3
ORGANIZATION OF PATRILINIAL UNITS IN BRAHMAN–CHETRI KINSHIP

tions including ego, are linked by the mutual obligation to observe thirteen days' death pollution and by the fact that they must all offer *pinda,* a ceremonial rice ball, to the same great-great-grandfather. This offering takes place during the ceremony on the twelfth day after a death in the family of a member (see chapter 3). Agnatic relatives up to and including seven generations removed are called either *sapindiya* or *pura haga* relatives. They should observe five days' death pollution for each other. Agnatic relatives between eight and ten generations removed are called *gotraja* and receive one full day of mourning. Relatives separated by more than ten generations become *phuki bhai,*[13] for whom one merely observes the rituals of bathing and abstaining from one meal after news of the death is received (*chak khalko*).

This scheme was given (with absolute confidence) by a respected and very learned Brahman pandit who occasionally served some of the more important families of Narikot. Other informants, however, were less certain about these divisions and their ritual obligations. Though they all knew in general that obligations decreased in proportion to the distance between ego and the relative in question, many gave different answers to questions on ritual obligation or said they would have to consult their family priest for the specifics. In addition, Bista (1972:40–41) reports another version of the birth and death pollution obligations, as recorded in the National Code of 1955.[14]

The reason for this apparent confusion lies, I believe, in the fact that ultimately death and birth pollution obligations are not solely determined by such idealized schema. A more significant factor in determining these ritual obligations is the actual extension of the kul.[15] And the kul, in response to the kinds of fragmenting tendencies mentioned earlier (i.e., disputes, migration, and blurring of precise records), can vary in size from the ideal of the open-ended phuki bhai grouping to the minimum of a single parivar unit. Members of a kul spanning only five generations would not observe the funeral obligations beyond the sapindi bhai even in the unlikely event that they were aware of their distant extra-kul relatives. The rules given here, then, come into play only for a large kul whose family priests have maintained precise records and whose members continue to reside close to the ancestral home. Otherwise, kul members who can no longer trace their precise interrelations simply assume the phuki bhai relation and observe the minimal restrictions. Prob-

ably no family actually lives up to—or even knows—its full phuki bhai obligations. Nevertheless, even though these rules are not consistently observed, they still serve to substantiate the concept of an unbroken patriline, much the way gotra exogamy does.

However, it is the parivar or family which most fully embodies the patrilineal ideals of male authority, respect for elders, and agnatic solidarity. For in addition to the kinds of ritual obligation which bind members of the kul together, the parivar also shares a common economic base. As in many peasant societies, this most important kinship unit is also the major unit of production and consumption in rural Nepal. Members of one parivar hold and work land as a group. They also generally share a single hearth and live under one roof. Members are hierarchically organized under the eldest male, who is the focus of authority and respect. To most perfectly express the ideal of agnatic solidarity the parivar should be a joint or extended family consisting of a man, his wife or wives, his brothers, their wives, all their unmarried daughters, sons, sons' wives and their children. Yet in fact the collateral joint family with adult married brothers living together after the death of the father is an almost unknown phenomenon. Even the lineal joint family—a man and his married sons—is a highly mutable structure which, despite the ideological pressure for remaining together until the death of the father, often fragments before that event into separate parivars or household units based on the nuclear family.[16] Like the kul then, the parivar varies greatly in size, with the ideal being large and the reality often much smaller.

The Household Economy

As might be expected in such a strongly patrilineal society, the authority over household and property management rests nominally with the senior male. Of course, in the reality of daily decisions about work, food distribution expenditures, and long-term property management, seniority and maleness are not the only principles behind authority. Especially in large extended families, women and junior males use many strategies to influence these decisions. In later sections of this book I will focus

on these strategies and their effect on family and kinship structures (see also Bennett 1981:93–107). At present, however, we will be concerned with the less political side of how a household runs, in terms of financial management and the kinds of tasks assigned to men and women, respectively.

The household economy in Narikot is based firmly on agriculture. Though only a minority of households grow enough produce to sell for cash, all but a few raise most of their own food.[17] There would be more surplus to sell were it not for the fact that all but four Narikot families share-crop at least part of their agricultural land and hence must turn over 40–50 percent of its yield to their landlords.

The main crop is rice, which is transplanted in the irrigated bottom lands before the onset of the monsoons and harvested four months later. Rice cannot be transplanted to nonirrigated, terraced land until the rains have begun. Corn is planted in the early spring on high or sloping nonirrigated land and harvested in midsummer. Sometimes beans are planted between corn rows and allowed to grow up the stalks after the corn has been cut. Other topland fields are plowed after corn harvest and planted with a crop of barley, millet, soybeans, or peanuts. Bottom land is planted in winter wheat in the late fall, and the wheat is then harvested in April–May. Potatoes are also planted on bottom land in January and harvested in late April.

After the winter wheat is planted, there is a slack period of several months. From then on, and especially in the peak May–June rice planting period, villagers are particularly busy in the fields.

The senior male in the family organizes and oversees the agricultural work. He must meet with the other village farmers to set up his planting schedules, and then make sure he can hire any extra labor he will need on his planting days. In the parma system each household sends several members (usually women) to whomever is planting (weeding, harvesting) on a given day. In return, that household gets an equal number of free laborers when its planting day comes. Members of poorer families with less land to cultivate often work for wages instead of labor exchange. The wage for a male laborer in 1975 was six rupees and two measures of flattened rice plus midday snacks and a few cigarettes each day. Women earned only three rupees and one and a half measures of flattened rice for a day's work.

The amount one must work in the fields is a clear mea-

sure of one's status. Any man who can afford to pays someone else to do the heavy farm labor for him. None of Narikot's respected elders, nor indeed any of the younger generation of men who have gone to school, would demean themselves by doing physical labor.[18] Senior affinal women in high-status families and married daughters on short visits to their parents are not sent to the fields, and favorite wives are sent less often than other wives and daughters-in-law.

Certain agricultural tasks are categorized as either men's or women's work. Men drive the oxen[19] and do the plowing (except for Upadhaya Brahmans, whose caste status bars even the poorest of them from this particular job). Men turn over the soil in dry fields or in the irrigated paddies to prepare for the planting of rice seedlings. They build and maintain the irrigation ditches and the mud walls between the paddies, and they do the first threshing of the wheat. Most of the agricultural work, however, is done by *parma* or labor exchange groups, and the major responsibility for arranging and scheduling the work of these groups falls to women (Bennett 1981:93). It is women's job to prepare a ploughed field for planting. This is done by pounding the rough dirt clods with wooden mallets. Women must also transplant the individual rice seedlings, and it is usually their job to carry manure to the fields. Harvesting, carrying crops to the house, weeding, and hoeing the soil are done by both men and women. Animal husbandry also is not linked to any particular sex, though usually it is a daughter-in-law's job to cut the huge loads of grass and fodder needed daily for each cow or buffalo. Pasturing goats and cows and bathing the water buffalo in the river or pond during the warm season are considered easy tasks which older children can perform.

In addition to their substantial input in the fields, women are also responsible for the storage, processing, and preparation of what is harvested. They must spread the grain out to dry, raking it frequently to see that it all gets exposed to the sun and hauling it inside if rain threatens. They must remove the corn from its stalk, storing some in neat bundles hung from the house eaves or from a tree and husking and shucking some for storage in baskets inside the house. They must also thresh the wheat straw a second time by beating the stalks on flat stones to shake loose any grain that is left.

A major part of women's work in food processing is husking the raw paddy to get edible grain and grinding the corn,

Women return from cutting grass for the family livestock. *Photo by Ane Haaland*

wheat, etc. into flour. Twenty years ago all rice had to be husked either by hand, using a heavy wooden pounder tipped with a metal ring, or on the footmill (*dhiki*). It takes three people to operate the footmill at maximum efficiency, and even then it takes three hours to process 25 kilograms of rice—barely enough to last a family of ten for seven meals. Most households in Narikot now take paddy to the electric mill which was opened in the early seventies and processes paddy for five paisa a pathi (approximately 2½ kilograms). But households with enough female labor still use the footmill to save money. Corn and wheat is now all ground at the village mill for twenty-five paisa a pathi. In the old days women had to transport the grain to and from water mills that were several miles away and took payment in grain rather than cash.

One of the most time-consuming female tasks is cooking the two daily meals. Women must first make the fire with wood they have chopped (though men may have helped with this) or with cowdung chips they have collected and dried. Families that can afford it prefer to eat rice or unleavened wheat bread as their staple diet. Others must eat either unleavened bread made of barley, millet, or corn, or *dhiro*—a thick mush made of boiled corn or wheat flour that is considered the poor man's food. Along with this, *dal* (spiced lentil soup) is served and, if the family can afford it, one or more vegetable curries and a raw vegetable condiment. Families that can afford meat more than two or three times a year are very rare; but when meat is cooked it is the men's job to slaughter the animal and cut it into small pieces. In those households where women, for religious reasons, will not cook or eat meat, the men must cook it themselves outside. If there is extra milk from the livestock the women must churn it to make butter and then refine it into clarified butter. Even for a small family on an ordinary day, cooking a meal takes at least two hours, and cleaning up another forty-five minutes to an hour. During the rice-planting season women must also prepare and carry to the fields large amounts of spicy condiment and popped corn or roasted soybeans as an afternoon snack for the people working in their family's fields that day.

Child care is primarily a woman's job. But older men who spend a great deal of time around the house enjoy playing with toddlers and young children—teasing them, singing to them, and getting them to dance. The less pleasant tasks like feeding, cleaning up after messes, bathing and oiling children usually fall to women—though I have observed fathers bathing their children. If the mother of a nursing child has to work in the fields, she might strap the child to her back with a shawl. But if there are other women at the house to look after her child she may leave it there, and return during the day to feed it. Some adult villagers whose parents lived in a small nuclear family remember with a vivid horror being tied up and left at home when their mother had to work in a distant field. But usually there are many women in a household, and child care is a task happily shared by all.

The women in Narikot have few crafts to occupy them during the slack agricultural season. They do make floor mats out of braided rice straw, and cushions out of corn husks or sacred *kus* grass. Some women have learned how to knit, and though they can seldom afford good wool they often pull apart tattered sweaters and reknit them. Many women are also adept at simple sewing—making pillows, baby mattresses, and even mosquito nets from old saris. They may also remake their husband's torn clothes to fit a child. A few women from high-status homes know how to embroider pillowcases and sari slips, though their output is limited by the high cost of thread. The main avenue of aesthetic expression for Narikot women seems to be in religious worship which, as we will discover in the next chapter, is also largely their responsibility.

Women do the housecleaning. As a daily task this starts with the application of a fresh purifying coat of cowdung mixed with mud (*gobar*) to the door posts and front porch—an unpopular early-morning job that, significantly, must be done by daughters-in-law and never by daughters. Women sweep, hang out quilts to sun, and straighten the beds. They also do the laundry. Yet all these tasks around the house are considered preferable to being sent out to the fields to do farmwork or cut grass. Work in the home is considered easier and more refined, and the number of women a family can keep at home is a sign of their wealth and status.

Another responsibility of the senior woman, who carries the keys to the storeroom, is to keep track of the family's supply of cooking oil, salt, spices, etc. She has no money to buy these supplies herself, but must inform the household head when something is running low so that he can bring it from the bazaar. She must also inform him of any ritual supplies like incense, special fruits, etc., that may be needed for an approaching festival.

The household head is responsible for providing the cash

needed to buy these and other items that cannot be produced by the family. If he heads a family that has surplus grain to sell for cash, he will merely sell some of the grain, usually to a familiar Newari merchant[20] in a nearby bazaar town. Narikot farmers try to store their grain and delay selling it as long as possible, since aged grain brings a higher price. Furthermore, the longer they can wait after the harvest seasons, the less grain is available to drive down the market price. In storing the grain themselves, however, they risk theft and loss by rats.

The heads of less fortunate families must bring in the necessary cash by other means. If they or their coresident adult sons have education or influence, they will try to get work in town with the army, government service, or some private firm. Only a few men of Narikot have very important or lucrative jobs. Most work as accountants, clerks, cooks, or drivers and some have only a night watchman's post. For almost all such men, the village continues to be the center of their lives—even if they can only return on Saturdays and holidays. An older man is often content to give up his own job as soon as his son has found one. In fact, many more young men who are still living with their fathers have jobs in town than do the older heads of households. This pattern perhaps relieves some of the inevitable tensions of the extended family, because the son, off in town living in a barrack or inexpensive rented room, has some measure of independence. On the other hand, this independence sometimes generates new problems. The son begins to want some of the expensive pleasures of town living—such as cinemas, good clothes, hotel-restaurant meals, perhaps even a second "love-marriage." He may resent having to turn over most of his salary to his father for the support of his mother, wife, and children back in the village.

Those people who have neither sufficient land to feed themselves nor the education or influence necessary to get a post in town must work as occasional laborers. A few of the poorest must work as full-time servants. Members of this unfortunate latter group are those marginal individuals without families or land—deserted and divorced women, widows, and people who cannot marry because they are physically handicapped. Behind their backs they are called *bhat-mara* because they have no source of rice (*bhat*) but what others will give them for their labor. They are given room, board, and clothing, but usually little or no money.

It is difficult to get reliable figures on income and expenditures for Narikot households. Villagers do not ordinarily think in terms of annual or even monthly budgets, nor do they keep records of such things. A sum of money from grain sales or someone's salary is simply spent as household needs arise until it is gone. To give some idea of household economics, however, chart 1.1 presents the approximate expenses as reported by the head of a typical, fairly comfortable ten-member Narikot household. The account covers one year when the family had no special expenses.

Such a household would probably sell almost Rs. 3,000 worth of grain, earning the rest of its income through the salaries of its working members and by selling milk, eggs, etc. A poorer and more typical family could reduce its monthly expenses to Rs. 60 by cutting out tea, sugar, tobacco, and other luxuries. Less would be spent for the Dasai festival and the family's new clothes. With fewer fields there would be no cost for field hands—though the family might have to spend some money for food grains.

Usually only the household head (or one of his adult sons to whom he delegates the authority) actually makes any purchases. Other members of the family approach him with their requests and he decides the priorities. Certain things must come first, like cooking supplies and laundry soap for the women, school fees, fertilizers, medicine for a family member who is sick, basic ritual supplies, and tobacco. At Dasai the household head's burden is especially heavy because every member of the

Chart 1.1 Estimated Living Expenses for a Ten-Member Household, 1973

Monthly	*Rs.*	*Annual*	*Rs.*
Oil	30	Field labor (including cigarettes and rice beer)	1,300
Jira, mirch (spices)	3	Fertilizer: Rice	400
Salt	4	Wheat	100
Sugar/Tea	26		
Milk	14	Festivals	
Puja (worship items)	6	*Dasai* (including new clothes)	1,100
Soap	15	*Sraddha* (including payments to Brahman and priest)	200
Tobacco	16	Others	200
School fees	15		Rs. 3,300
Hair oil and cream	2		
Medicine	10	Monthly expenses	1,692
Monthly total	Rs. 141	Annual total	Rs. 4,992

family expects a new set of clothes, while at the same time the family must slaughter a goat and prepare special costly food for visiting relatives. At rice planting time too, the household head must buy new blouses for all the women in his house, pay the wages of the extra laborers he needs, and provide cigarettes and rice beer for those of his field hands who drink.

But even aside from Dasai, there are always requests: the household head's youngest wife asks sweetly for a new sari, his twelve-year-old son for pocket money at school, and his shy, sullen daughter-in-law hints indirectly that her little daughter needs new shoes and she herself could use some hand soap. Then the roof on the cowshed caves in, the buffalo dies, or it is time his eldest daughter was married and a good proposal has come. There is never enough money for all these things. In some years if the crops are poor or he loses his job, even basic expenses are difficult to meet. And the cost of a modest wedding (which on the average is at least double an annual family budget) can rarely be paid without borrowing. As a result, most villagers are involved in a network of interest-free loans with friends and relatives.

It is difficult for an outsider to understand why anyone gives such friendly loans, since (having given a few myself) they are seldom paid back promptly and one risks losing a friend in the process of dunning him for payment. Nevertheless, most villagers say they feel an obligation to give a loan of two or three hundred rupees if they have the money and there is a real need. It is also clear that such generosity is required if one is to achieve and maintain the status of a respected elder in the village.

For larger sums one must go beyond the village. Sometimes Newari merchants will make a loan at between 25 and 40 percent interest a year. The government's Agricultural Bank may loan large sums at lower rates if they can be convinced that the money will be used for agricultural purposes rather than to finance a wedding. Men who have been in the army or government service a number of years are eligible for an advance on their future salary. Otherwise a valuable piece of the wife's wedding jewelry may have to be pawned, though men say they feel ashamed to do this. And as a last resort there is always the dreaded prospect of selling or taking out a mortgage on one's land.

As a footnote to this brief look at household economics and as a prelude to our subsequent study of conflict in the joint

family, we might note the high incidence of domestic theft in Narikot. During my period of research several fairly large sums of money or grain were stolen *within families*. There is a general atmosphere of distrust—even of young children—in one's own extended family, and everything that can be is kept under lock and key. Predictably, it is the relatively powerless members of the household who tend to steal: children, servants, and daughters-in-law. Children's thefts (usually of food or petty cash) are viewed more or less as naughty pranks until the age of twelve or so. But thefts by servants or daughters-in-law are considered serious offenses. Resentment is probably a major motivation in such cases, since both servants and daughters-in-law are in some sense "outsiders" in the family. They labor the hardest and yet have the least say in how the family resources are spent. At the same time, the high value placed on the internal solidarity of the family usually protects the domestic thief from serious legal consequences. Rather than lose face in the community by seeking police action, the family invokes its own sanctions against the offender.

Notes

1. The panchayat system in Nepal is essentially the same as that in India except that political parties are not permitted. The system consists of a series of elected councils or *panchayats* at the village, district, and national level. For a discussion of panchayat democracy in Nepal see Rose and Scholz (1980:41–57, 83–93) and Borgström (1980).

2. The main impetus for the fund drive came from a group of young men not actually on the school committee who got together and made up a list of what they thought each villager could afford to pay. Several who were on the school committee were assessed very large sums, up to Rs. 300 each, which they had to and did pay to maintain their prestige in the village.

The current value of the Nepali rupee is 13.10 to the dollar.

3. Höfer (1979:136–41) points out that the hierarchy presented in the Mulki Ain is not always consistent or unambiguous—especially with regard to the placement of the higher Newari castes.

4. The exception may be certain hill communities where the Muslim Curaute caste are residents. Since this group belongs in the category of touchable but water unacceptable (Höfer 1979:136), the distinction would no doubt be important in such communities. (See also Harvey Blustain, 1977.)

5. For discussion of similarities in the kinship structures of high-caste Hindus in North India and the Brahman-Chetri of Nepal, see Bennett 1978.

6. Apparently this latter group has enjoyed a certain upward mobility within the caste hierarchy during the last century. In the National Code of 1854 all foreigners (Mlecck) ranked at the very bottom of the impure but touchable castes from whom water could not be accepted (Höfer 1979:45).

7. If contact occurs, the affected high-caste person must be purified by a simple ceremony called *cito katne,* in which a person of equal or higher ritual status sprinkles the polluted person with pure water.

8. The term Khatri or Khatri-Chetri is ambiguous. It means specifically only that an individual is descended from a Brahman father. But (like the term Chetri) it says nothing about the individual's jharra or thimbu status, which depends (as for Chetri) on the status of the mother. Thus, it is possible to have a Khatri-Chetri of thimbu status (Brahman father, Matwali mother) who has no Chetri blood at all.

9. That is to say, any Brahman thar by the process of crosscaste marriage can have Khatri-Chetri members and thus, over time, can become Chetri thar as well. Only a few Chetri thar (among them Thapa, Basnet, Bista, Karki) are exclusively Chetri, having no Brahman ancestry.

10. The number of rishis usually cited in Hindu mythology is seven. The seven sages are Jamadagni, Gautama, Bharadvaja, Atri, Viswamitra, Kasyapa, and Vasista. However, there are many more than seven gotras, and thus presumably many more than seven founding gotra rishis. The *Gorkha Thar Gotra* (Sharma n.d.) lists 36 gotras as current in Nepal, but gives no indication as to whether the list is considered complete. G. S. Ghurye (1972) says the number of existing gotras reaches into the hundreds in some of the traditional treatises. He, however, believes that the "long list of gotras with 800 units or more such as Baudhayana presented in his 'Pravaradhyaya' [must incorporate] a large number of lineage names, names of units forming preceptor pupil successions of various schools of vedic learning and even the names of the original clan-units of the indigenous people who secured admission into the ranks of Brahmins!" (Ghurye 1972:226).

11. For example, a Brahman family observes only nine days of death pollution for its Khatri relatives even at close proximity. Likewise, Khatri offspring cannot offer pinda made of rice to their Brahman ancestors, who are purer and of higher ritual status than they. Instead, they must offer pinda made of barley flour.

12. If news of a distant relative's death arrives after the thirteen-day mourning period following his death, then only the *chak khalko* (abstaining from one meal) restrictions are observed.

13. The term *phuki bhai* is also used for individuals with whom ego has no known genealogical ties, who are not members of ego's kul, but who have the same thar and gotra as ego. In such circumstances there are no mutual death pollution obligations.

14. Bista (1972) has constructed the following table from the *Mulki Ain,* v.s. 2012 (1955), "Asoc barneko" section, pp. 93–111:

Relation	*Days of Pollution for*	
	Birth	*Death*
(a) members of the same lineage after thirteen generation	0	0
(b) between 8 and 13th	0	3
(c) between 3 and 8th	3	10
(d) separated by 3 or less	10	13

15. Residential proximity is also a factor. Members of the same village who share the same thar and gotra but belong to separate kul and have no known genealogical connections may observe chak khalko restrictions as if the deceased were a phuki bhai relation.

16. A survey which I conducted as part of the USAID-funded Study on the Status of Women in another Parbatiya village related to Narikot through marriage revealed that only about 36 percent of the high-caste households were extended families (Bennett 1981:45).

17. In 1975 one household in Narikot sold between Rs 8,000 and 9,000 worth a year, seven households sold between Rs 2,000 and 3,000 worth annually, and ten households sold between Rs 200 and 300 worth annually. The rest broke even or had to supplement their own harvest with purchased grain. Only the two Damai households and one Chetri family are completely without farmland in the village.

18. For further discussion, see Stone 1975.

19. Narikot shares two pairs of oxen, which in 1975 rented with their plowman for Rs 16 a day.

20. Recently several Narikot farmers trusted an unknown dealer who had just settled in a nearby village and who had promised a larger percentage of profit. The man decamped in the night with the grain, leaving his wife (who was almost stoned out of the village) and the enterprising Narikot farmers several thousand rupees poorer. Even in a case of such blatant wrongdoing, the villagers would not call the police.

CHAPTER 2

Religion: Conceptual Framework and Some Central Oppositions

The Concept of Dharma

The Brahmans and Chetris of Narikot are Hindus. As they put it: "We follow/obey the Hindu religion," *Hamiharu hindu dharma manchau.* I have translated *dharma* as "religion" here, but it has a much broader meaning than "religion" has in contemporary usage, where it tends to be confined to the realm of the theological and spiritual. As Mary Douglas has pointed out, religion in contemporary Western thought has been increasingly considered a matter of belief and individual intellectual commitment, specifically opposed to ritual conformity, which is often considered empty of meaning and "not compatible with the full development of the personality" (Douglas 1970:22).

For the Hindus of Narikot, ritual and belief are still unselfconsciously integrated—so much so that villagers tend to speak of dharma in terms of action, as something one *does* (or at least should do), rather than something one believes in. In Nepali usage the word *dharma* encompasses the performance of specified rites and ceremonies, and obedience to ritual prescriptions appropriate to one's place in the social structure, as well as general ethical behavior covering individual actions of compassion, honesty, etc. Whether it is the result of ritual conformity or individual decision, dharmic action grows out of, harmonizes with, and is indeed part of the social, moral, and metaphysical order of things.[1] Dharma is *duty,* compelling because it

is conceived to be grounded in the nature of reality. In this sense, the statement that Clifford Geertz made about religion could also serve as a definition of dharma:

> Never merely metaphysics, religion is never merely ethics either. The source of its moral vitality is conceived to lie in the fidelity with which it expresses the fundamental nature of reality. The powerfully coercive "ought" is felt to grow out of a comprehensive factual "is" and in such a way religion grounds the most specific requirements of human action in the most general contexts of human existence. [Geertz 1973:126]

Because village Hinduism is so involved with ritual and the "specific requirements of human action," some anthropologists have stopped at this level in their interpretation of it. S. C. Dube writes:

> Clearly Hinduism as it is practiced in the village is not the Hinduism of the classical philosophical systems of India for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstract content of the latter. It is a religion of fasts, feasts and festivals in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life . . . spiritualism cannot be said to be the keynote in the life of the community; far from it, the religion appears to be a practical one. [Dube 1967:93]

But even the sheer practicality of Hindu dharma depends on its metaphysical meaning for the people who follow it, and is thus inseparable from their spiritual and philosophical concerns, their conceptions about "the most general contexts of human existence." In other words, village rituals command the authority to "cover the major crises of life" *by virtue* of the fact that they are symbolic expressions of the very "abstract content" Dube would deny them. Despite the difference in the way they are articulated, the fasts and festivals of Narikot and the "classical philosophical systems of India" share certain basic Hindu values and concepts about the structure of reality. They are varied forms of a single dharma which unifies all aspects of Hindu experience from the social to the spiritual.

The Samsara/Mukti Opposition

The Hindu world view is structured by certain fundamental conceptual oppositions. One of the most pervasive is the opposi-

tion between *samsara,* the phenomenal world, and *mukti,* release or salvation. To my informants samsara (or *sansar,* as they called it) means the world as they, in their unenlightened state, experience it. Turner's (1931) Nepali dictionary describes samsara as "the round of birth and death." Transmigration of the soul, however, is only one manifestation of the general instability and contingent nature of samsara. Village informants described samsara as an unending and untrustworthy fluctuation between different physical, emotional, ritual, social, and economic states. These states tend to be cast as opposites of one another: happiness and sorrow, hunger and satiety, wealth and poverty, pleasure and pain, and, in the longer range, birth and death. Despite its uncertainty, samsara is ultimately just, because it works according to *karma,* the law of moral cause and effect whereby an individual's evil actions are eventually repaid through his own suffering. But the individual, limited by the finite consciousness of his present incarnation, often experiences the fluctuating fortunes of samsara as arbitrary. The working of karma is so subtle, and its time scheme so vast, that the individual could never hope to grasp the detailed moral accounting which has brought about his present state.

The villager's emphasis on instability is consistent with the dominant Hindu conviction that samsara is ultimately unreal. In Hindu metaphysics, change and its concomitant multiplicity belong to the realm of "conditional reality." It is "delusion" resulting from individuation and the subjective consciousness. Informants, of course, never described samsara to me in such abstract terms; nor would they dismiss the phenomenal world as unreal. But they have expressed it as provisional—as in some sense an obfuscation of a higher level of reality.

This is, I think, what one village informant meant when she spoke of the need to look at the world with "the mind's eye" as well as one's "outside eyes." We were speaking about dharma in its broader sense and about how one determines ethical or "right" action in areas not prescribed by ritual dharma. She quoted a proverb, "Sri Ram says, Sri Ram says, keep the inner and outer consciousness open; Keep both eyes open" (*Sri Ram bol, Sir Ram bol; Caitya bhitro bahiro rakne khol; Duwai akkha khol*). And then she went on to explain:

> This means open your eyes which are on the outside and those which are inside and look. And then meditate upon God's name. If you stare only on the outside, then there's nothing within—you are empty. But when you open your mind's eye and look, then you know if you do this, then this is what will happen and if you do that, then that is what will happen. . . . They say that when such a person dies [who has thus meditated and assessed the true karmic results of her actions in samsara], then that person doesn't have to be reborn as a human being, that person will live in heaven (*swarga*). A life like this, in which one has a son but hasn't money, will not have to be suffered.

The final portion of her explanation reflects the fundamental Hindu belief that under certain circumstances an individual's soul (*atman*) can attain *mukti* or release from samsara into transcendent reality. However, village concepts about the nature of this reality are hazy and often blend with beliefs about what happens to the ordinary, unenlightened soul after death. Some, like the informant quoted above, seem to conceive of transcendence rather literally as entry into *swarga,* "heaven"—that pleasant celestial realm of the gods that villagers have heard described in vivid and luxuriant detail whenever religious texts are recited.

Most villagers, however, tend to see swarga and *narka* or hell as part of the samsaric round. One earns swarga or narka as one earns a good or bad rebirth in the next life. Both are conceived as karmic reward for one's actions. As one old woman explained, "there is no such thing as swarga. This is swarga, this is narka. If you have done dharma then after you die you become human. Haven't you seen people who are born without eyes, hands, or feet? They are all people who have committed sin (*pap*) in their past life."

In the course of my work two distinct modes or levels of immortality emerged, each with its own dharmic path: the transcendent immortality, or true mukti, for the enlightened soul; and the "conditional immortality" of the unenlightened individual still bound into samsara. It became clear that *swarga* is used in reference to both types of immortality. It stands as a kind of literal equivalent for the abstract concept of mukti, and it also represents one version of conditional immortality—a kind of reward in the afterlife for the unenlightened but reasonably virtuous individual.

Village concepts about conditional immortality center on the belief that after death the ordinary individual is transformed, through the ritual ministrations of his or her son, into an ancestor spirit, *pitr,* and goes to dwell in the *pitrlok,* the abode of the

fathers. The exact nature of existence in the pitrlok varies among different informants. Many speak of it as a pleasant place equivalent to heaven or swarga. Others seem to conceive of the pitrlok as a kind of neutral limbo where one exists prior to rebirth. Still others thought that some spirits who had not been virtuous in their previous lives, or who had died in a state of ritual impurity, would not be allowed to enter the pitrlok at all, but would instead either have to go to hell or haunt the world of the living in the form of a "hungry ghost." We will explore these ideas in more detail in the section on death rituals in the next chapter. But it is clear that ideas about the nature of conditional immortality are complex, and in some respects mutually inconsistent. For example, informants were never very certain about how the idea of transmigration dovetailed with their belief in the soul's existence in the pitrlok. Yet most of them were quite comfortable with a certain looseness of fit between different belief structures and levels of conceptualization. And from a certain perspective, transmigration and existence as an ancestor spirit *are* consistent representations of the essentials of conditional immortality. Neither releases the soul from the needs and desires, the suffering and uncertainty of samsara. Just as the newly reborn soul is once again subject to its bodily needs and dependent on its parents for sustenance, so the ancestor spirits are still subject to the same needs in the afterlife, and dependent on their own living progeny to "feed" them in annual commemorative rituals.

Although villagers are uncertain about the exact nature of conditional immortality, they are confident about how it is achieved. They must follow the rules, rituals, and morality of conventional Hindu religion and they must produce male offspring. This, in essence, is the "householder's path" (*grhastha dharma*). Here the ideals are those of social and familial responsibility. The householder must earn a living because, as one informant reported, "it is the duty of the householder to support everyone—from the insects to the gods." The householder is also expected to marry and have a family. Because of the importance of having sons to perform the funeral ceremonies necessary for the soul's admission to and continued sustenance in the pitrlok, the householder's path coincides to a large extent with the values of patrilineal ideology—especially regarding the importance of maintaining lineage continuity.

According to the householder's dharma then, one contributes to and participates in samsara and receives his rewards there—whether it is a pleasant sojourn in swarga or a high rebirth. But even as they faithfully and scrupulously follow this path, most villagers are aware that this path shares the provisional nature of samsara and that true *mukti* or release is something categorically different from swarga or any kind of rebirth no matter how magnificent. They know that ultimately release is achieved not by the rituals of conventional religion, nor through the mediation of the patriline, but by abandoning the family, caste, and worldly wealth of their present birth and renouncing samsara altogether. The same woman who spoke above about doing dharma to receive a good rebirth went on to express her concept of mukti. We were discussing whether she would prefer rebirth as a woman or a man in her next life. She said:

> But if it were possible for me to do great dharma, then I wouldn't be a man or a woman. I would try to receive mukti. Mukti means—it is better to keep the soul (*atma*) away from all the *maya* [infatuation, magic, love; used colloquially to mean love] for the husband and for the children. If you are too immersed in maya then you are too caught up with your husband and your children and you come back again. Sometimes you are born in your own children's wombs. . . . It becomes peaceful if the soul is kept apart. But you must work very hard for this. I think that the *mahatma* [great souls, saints] receive it—this mukti. They spend a whole month in meditation, neither eating nor drinking. They don't even sleep. They don't move at all. They receive the vision of God in peace. After they die they will not be born again. . . . They are ascetics (*tyagi*). There is one mahatma. He had a very big and beautiful house in Balaju, and others in Chetrapati and Dhoke Dhera. But he has forsaken all of these. He became an ascetic at the age of thirteen. His dharma is very great.

Village informants, then, seem to conceive of two levels of immortality and two approaches to dharma: one based on participation in and contribution to the ongoing processes of organic and social life; and the other—ultimately higher—based on control, withdrawal, and final denial of these processes. The ascetic's path to transcendent immortality (*sanyasi dharma*) is in many ways the opposite of the householder's path. The ascetic seeks to escape from samsara by strictly controlling the needs and desires of his body and the emotions that perpetuate his involvement in the unceasing round of birth and death. The as-

cetic must renounce family, caste, and all the pleasures of the flesh to become a celibate, homeless mendicant. He must wander from house to house, begging for food, and he must practice harsh forms of austerity (*tapas*) to discipline his senses and wean himself away from samsara.

In Narikot there are no ascetics. No one has left home to become a naked *sadhu* or holy man. And in the course of my fieldwork no one—male or female—expressed the intention or even serious desire to take up the ascetic path.[2] Although, like the informant quoted above, villagers believe in principle that great spiritual powers and ultimate mukti can be achieved by the ascetic saint, most are very skeptical about the actual sadhus who come begging at their own doors. They would often claim that most such "ascetics" were either lazy, untrustworthy charlatans who were unwilling to earn an honest living with their own labor, or that (especially in the case of female ascetics) these unfortunate individuals had been driven to a life of mendicancy by financial necessity rather than by a genuine desire for mukti.

Narikot is a village of solid householders. Yet, paradoxically, conventional village religion is itself deeply permeated by ascetic values. Through its symbolic forms—the myths and rituals which express the householder's view of samsara and structure his passage through it—the householder's path incorporates the contradictory values of the path of the ascetic.

The Symbolism of Purity and Pollution

One of the clearest instances of the penetration of ascetic values into conventional religion occurs in the rules of purity and pollution that structure so much of village thought and behavior. To the outsider first encountering village Hinduism, the preoccupation with ritual purity seems almost obsessive and its meaning obscure. But once it is placed in the context of asceticism and the samsara/mukti opposition, the parallel opposition between pollution and purity (jutho/cokho) assumes central symbolic importance.

The very organic processes that the ascetic seeks to control—eating, urination, defecation, copulation, menstruation, birth and death—are what the village householder perceives as polluting. The villager, of course, cannot avoid his involvement with these life processes. They are the very basis of his individual existence, of the collective existence of the patrilineal unit and, indeed, of the entire society of which he is a member. His constant fluctuation between states of purity and pollution is symbolic of his entanglement in the instability and unreality of samsara. Through the rituals of conventional religion he attempts to maintain the balance in favor of purity. But for the householder, purity—symbolic of renunciation and release into transcendent reality—is always a fleeting state, achieved with effort and soon lost again.

In the course of a normal day the Hindu villager is constantly affected by varying degrees of pollution which, to follow his dharma, he must counteract with appropriate ritual purification. When he awakes the clothes he has slept in are mildly polluted (*bitulo*), and so is his body after his morning trip to the fields. He counteracts this impurity by washing (though not always with a full bath), cleaning his teeth, even scraping his tongue and gargling out "old" saliva, and then putting on another set of clothes. If he is a Brahman, he must put on a dhoti (which is wrapped, rather than sewn, to cover the lower half of the body) to prepare himself for the next two events in the day—worship and eating. For these activities he must be in a relatively high state of purity, and stitched clothing is considered less pure than unstitched clothing. Then, before the morning meal, while he is still in a state of purity from all-night fasting, he should perform the daily worship of the household gods (*nitya puja*). Actually, except in certain orthodox Brahman households where a fossil stone sacred to Visnu (*saligram*) is kept, this worship is usually performed by women, who must also have bathed and changed clothes. Even the gods are slightly impure after they have "slept" at night and must be bathed before they can be "fed" grains of rice, fruits, fried breads, or sweets and then offered fresh flowers.

Next comes the morning meal. Eating a rice meal is not a leisurely, convivial event.[3] Although a good host will tell his guest to eat slowly so that he might have room for more, in fact family meals are eaten rapidly with little unnecessary conversation. There is a sense of vulnerability which pervades the cooking and eating of *dal-bhat* (lentil broth and boiled rice), the ritually relevant foods. For one is liable to pollute others or be

oneself polluted—even to the point of losing caste—if the conditions under which the meal is cooked and served are not carefully regulated.[4]

To get a sense of the complex logic of pollution beliefs, let us look in some detail at the ritual surrounding the morning and evening rice meals.

The hearth where rice is cooked must be kept extremely pure. No one of a caste lower than that of the household, no one in a state of temporary impurity, and no one who is wearing shoes may enter the hearth area. Gobar (cowdung mixed with mud paste), used in many contexts to create a pure or sacred space, must be spread over the entire cooking and dining area after every meal before another meal can be cooked. Peripheral tasks like cutting vegetables, carrying water—even cooking roti (unleavened bread) and curries—may be performed by unmarried girls, uninitiated boys, or members of clean Matwali castes. Lentil broth and boiled rice, however, can only be cooked by a full-status adult member of the family's caste or above. If the family is Brahman, then the woman who cooks must remove her blouse (which has been stitched, and hence is not entirely pure) and wrap the end of her cotton sari around her breasts. The cook may not eat or even taste the food until she has served everyone else. For if she were to do so she would be polluted by the contact between food and the saliva of her own mouth, and if she again touched the food then it would all become jutho or polluted and hence inedible for all members of the family who have achieved full adult caste status (see chapter 3). For the same reasons, those who are eating are careful not to touch anyone else or any common vessel. Each stays in his own eating square, and second helpings are dropped or poured onto the plates from a safe distance by the cook.

At the beginning of the meal, people wash their hands and feet so that nothing unclean will be brought into the eating square; and when the meal is over, people wash their hands, mouth, and feet to remove the impure leftover food. Though these pollution rules are more lax for children, they begin to learn them almost before they are toilet trained. Adults' reaction to being approached by a toddler with rice still smeared on his hands and face is as strongly negative as their reaction to an unwashed bottom.

To villagers these daily rituals of purification hardly seem like ceremonies but are more like simple acts of bodily hygiene, personal grooming, or dining etiquette. Unless there is accidental contact with some unclean object, with a person of untouchable caste, or for an adult male with a menstruating woman, these rituals are sufficient for the kind of neutral purity required on an ordinary day.[5] But when the family is observing some auspicious life-cycle or calendrical rite that requires a higher state of purity, or when death or childbirth has put the family (or one of its members) in a state of severe pollution, strong purification rituals are required. As we will learn, these rituals can be long, complex, and taxing to perform.

Hindu ritual contains a whole symbolic arsenal of purifying activities. Specifically *ascetic* activities like fasting (full or partial), sexual abstinence, all-night vigils, and even temporary vows of silence are extremely powerful. There are various types of ritual gifts, such as *daksina* (gift of money), *sidha* (gift of one measure of uncooked rice, curd, fried breads, vegetables, and spices—i.e., all the ingredients of a meal), *godan* (literally, the "gift of a cow," usually represented by a leaf plate with some coins on it), and other kinds of *dan* or religious gifts. All bring merit and purification to the donors when given to ritually superior individuals (i.e., Upadhaya Brahmans and certain categories of kin). The utterance of certain mantras has a purifying effect, as does contact with *prasad*, the offerings of fruit, flowers, rice, red and yellow powders, etc., made to the gods and then received back by the donors as a kind of blessing.[6]

In addition, almost every category of physical object or substance seems to be ranked in the conceptual hierarchy of purity and pollution that structures samsara. This means that some elements, such as fire, water, gold, and in some contexts earth, have active purifying powers that can be used to nullify pollution. Other substances in this category are the five products of the cow (milk, curds, clarified butter, dung, and urine) as well as certain plants (such as kus grass, dubo grass, the tulsi plant, the pipal tree, etc.)

Besides these few items that have active purifying powers, many other physical substances and objects fall into one of two ranked categories: those which are less permeable to pollution and hence can be purified, and those which must be destroyed once they have been in contact with a polluted object. For example, a clay pot which has been touched by a low-caste person or a menstruating woman must be thrown out, while a metal pot may be purified with water and used again. In other

words, metal is purer than clay. Among metals, gold is ranked highest, then silver, copper, brass. Likewise, wool is considered more pure than cotton; baked brick purer than unbaked; running water purer than stagnant water; uncooked food and food cooked in clarified butter purer than cooked food—especially boiled rice and lentil broth, which as I mentioned earlier is particularly vulnerable to pollution. The list goes on and expands to classifications of such diverse things as the parts of the body, the cardinal points, the directions left and right, the male and female sex, the days of the lunar fortnight, the months of the year, the kinds of supernatural beings, even the kinds or castes of human beings—all of which are ranked according to their relative purity and auspiciousness.

The many Hindu purification rituals are all based on this conceptual framework, using, for the most part, the same symbolic vocabulary of ritual acts (fasting, bathing, etc.) and physical substances (fire, gold, cowdung, etc.) in different combinations and strengths. Ritual purification is extremely important in village religion as a means by which the opposing values of asceticism are symbolically incorporated into the householder's life. Ritual purity, attained by obeying the rules and performing the ceremonies of conventional religion, is at least on one level a metaphor for ascetic purity attained through renouncing samsara and performing harsh austerities. Both kinds of purity require discipline and set limits to the bodily and egotistical desires of the individual. Significantly, the strongest rules for maintaining ritual purity have to do with the regulation of sex and eating, both areas where the desires of the flesh are strong.

Means to Conditional Immortality

The householder's dharma involves several other strategies for achieving conditional immortality, all of which are themselves deeply entwined with concepts of ritual purity. One important strategy which I touched on earlier is the effort to build up merit (*punya*) or "good karma" during one's present lifetime. Whether this merit is believed to earn a better rebirth or a pleasant sojourn in heaven (or perhaps some combination thereof), there are two principal ideas about how it is accumulated.

One way is through the performance of not only the required rituals (which merely keep the "karmic score" even), but also special rituals that either increase the balance of merit or, if one has committed a specific sin (*pap*), cancel out the sin and restore the balance. Some of the special ceremonies that took place in Narikot during my fieldwork were *Satya Narayan puja* (worship of Visnu), *Rudri* (worship of Siva), *Saptaha* (reading of the *Bhagavata Purana* by seven Brahmans in seven days) and *Navaha* (nine days of readings from sacred texts). The first two are modest domestic rituals that usually employ only the family priest and perhaps an assistant. They can be completed in a few hours and involve only minimal expenses for offerings to the gods and gifts or payments to the priests. The Saptaha and Navaha rituals, however, are much more arduous and expensive to perform. A special enclosure must be erected, a more learned priest must officiate, more lavish offerings and ritual gifts must be given, and the whole village is invited to attend. But of course the merit earned from these rituals is also proportionately greater.

It is usually women who urge that family resources be used to sponsor these special rituals. Although male Brahman priests must be called in to officiate, it is the senior women of the patron family who organize and run the event. They find out exactly what ritual materials and offerings will be needed, what purifications must be done, and what special foods must be prepared. They recruit husbands and sons to make the necessary purchases and to construct the ritual enclosures, and they call upon neighbor women to help prepare food and make ritual leaf plates. These special rites, along with major life cycle ceremonies such as weddings, give women an important opportunity for self-expression beyond the immediate family—one of the few legitimate "public" areas in which women can seek to enhance their prestige at the community level.

As has been observed of the Hindu women of North India (Lewis 1958; Luschinsky 1962; Jacobson and Wadley 1977), the women of Narikot are responsible for most of the ritual activities within the household. Although the textual traditions have generally been the exclusive preserve of male Brahman priests and although there are certain important patrilineal rituals which can only be performed by initiated males, women have their own areas of ritual expertise. Daily worship of the household gods and celebration of the numerous minor calendrical festivals, as well as the essential maintenance of the ritual purity of

On a freshly plastered circle of cowdung a woman ends her religious fast with an offering to the sun god Surya. *Photo by author*

the family kitchen, are all in the hands of women. Women seem to derive great satisfaction and pride from performing *puja* or worship ceremonies for the gods, though these rituals often involve rising in the pre-dawn darkness to bathe in an icy river, making a long trip on foot to a distant temple, or fasting for a full day. In fact, as men will readily admit, in most households the women are far more fastidious about ritual purity and far more involved in religious and devotional matters than men are. For example in Narikot it was usually women who undertake voluntary religious fasts (*barta*) on a weekly or monthly basis. On any given Sunday, Tuesday, new moon, or full moon day (as well as countless other auspicious days during the year) one would find many Narikot women abstaining from their regular meals and taking only a little fruit or milk in order to earn merit.

Merit can also be gained outside the ritual context by moral behavior, such as honesty and marital fidelity, and through simple humanitarian acts of kindness and compassion. Villagers frequently mentioned the giving of alms as a way to build up merit. Informants believe that God (Bhagwan) keeps a very strict account of what one gives, and one woman told a kind of King Midas story to illustrate her belief. The story was about a rich man who had given an entire house of gold to a Brahman as dan. After this magnificent gift he felt his charity obligations were fully discharged and henceforth refused to give anything to the many starving beggars who came to his house. His wife however, was a very religious woman who followed not only the rituals but also the spirit of dharma. Whenever her husband wasn't looking, she would sneak out and give at least a handful of barley flour to the beggars. When the man died and reached the afterworld, he found only his cold and empty golden house. There were no beds, no clothes, and no food. It was only because a woman's merit is transferred to her husband that this man was spared hunger and misery in the afterlife: in one room of the golden house he found the barley flour his wife had secretly managed to give away as alms.

Another related path by which the householder can seek conditional immortality is through devotion to God or even to the many personified forms of God. In many ways this strategy overlaps with the quest for merit. Indeed, all the special meritorious rituals listed earlier, as well as most of the normal calendrical rites, bring merit *because* they are dedicated to the gods. For the villager, to whom the concept of mukti is rather remote,

God or Bhagwan is a more congenial cipher for ultimate reality, and the *devta*, or personified forms of Bhagwan, are a more comprehensible focus for religious efforts.

Villagers have little difficulty combining a firm belief in the unity of God with the blatant multiplicity of the forms which the deity takes for those enmeshed in samsara. As one woman explained to me:

> All the devta are the same for us. Only their names are different. But if one devta eats meat [i.e., takes blood sacrifice] and another doesn't; if one is strong and another isn't—what is there to say? Devi [the goddess] eats meat and Mahadeo [Siva] doesn't. Ganes eats and Kumar doesn't. The Panc Kumari [five virgin goddesses] accept *bhog* [blood sacrifice]. It is just a matter of whether they take bhog or not. But Bhagwan is the same. Now, you and I are different and we are different from the Damai [untouchable tailors], but all this is only a difference of color and caste. All our souls are the same. It is the same with Bhagwan. Only the name differs.

Despite this metaphysical unity of Bhagwan and the devta, there is a definite practical difference between them in village religion. Bhagwan is the name used to refer to the deity in ethical contexts. Almost like a personification of karma, Bhagwan is believed to keep track of one's good and bad deeds—the accumulation of merit and sin—over the countless incarnations of the soul. One pleases Bhagwan by ethical and humanitarian acts rather than through the performance of ritual. It is the devta who are the object of the constant puja ceremonies that take place in the homes of Narikot Hindus.

Puja is a central feature of the householder's religious life. It is a means for achieving a good rebirth or entrance to heaven in the afterlife and also a means for achieving one's worldly goals in this life—though some informants claimed that one had to choose whether to reap the fruit of one's merit in this life or to save it for the afterlife. The concept of puja is simple: one pleases the gods by sharing one's resources with them, and they reciprocate according to their varying powers and natures.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a hierarchy of spiritual beings in Hindu thought,[7] and villagers relate differently to each level of the hierarchy. For the few priests in the village who have some Sanskrit training, *Atma* or the universal soul (with which the individual soul or *atma* is joined when true mukti is attained) is the highest and most undifferentiated form of divinity. However, very little attention is given to this vague metaphysical entity. For most villagers the highest form of divinity (in the sense of the most abstract and universal) is Bhagwan. At the next level, among the devta who must receive worship, Visnu in his ten incarnations (including Ram Chandra and Krisna), Siva, and the many forms of the goddess Devi are the highest. When pleased, these deities are able to help their devotees, granting wealth, sons, and protection in this life and also granting conditional salvation, i.e., admission to swarga, in the next life. Below these three principal gods are Surya, the sun god (also a form of Visnu), and Agni, the fire god, both of whom are powerful in granting purification to their devotees. Kumar (the six-headed warrior son of Siva) and Ganes (Siva's elephant-headed son) are at about the same level in the hierarchy as Agni and Surya. These are all Great Tradition gods that are found throughout Hindu culture.

The next form of divinity, the kul devta, is specific to each lineage group or kul. These gods display a much more demanding nature, and their powers seem to be largely confined to affecting the present life of their devotees. The great gods, of course, can be demanding too, but the kul devtas are particularly so. As one woman explained:

> If I don't respect/obey (*mannu*) the kul devta, if I have no consideration and forget to offer up what I've cooked . . . , then there will be trouble. There will be pain for my body; there will be losses in the house. If the kul devta becomes angry it will cause trouble for the members of the family and bring harm to the children. Whatever is cooked must be offered up to the kul devta—but it is sufficient just to think about Bhagwan and remember his name.

In the intermediate levels between gods and men are various beings such as the *nag* (snake godlings), the Seven Rishis, Bhumi, the earth god, and of course, the pitr or ancestor spirits. These must all be worshiped to avoid or counteract misfortunes in this life that occur if they are neglected. But these beings have no power to affect the villager's existence in the afterlife or to help villagers achieve conditional immortality.

Finally, at the lowest level of the hierarchy are the *bhut* and *pret*. These are malevolent spirits of the dead, who have been unable to enter swarga or the pitrlok. They must be propitiated with offerings of food, etc. But they are propitiated only after they have caused trouble to the living.

To become a devotee of Bhagwan or one of the three great gods is one of the householder's principal means of achieving conditional salvation. In fact, according to some of my informants, if an individual's *bhakti* or devotion is fervent enough, that bhakti itself can be an alternate path to unconditional salvation. Just as the ascetic frees himself from his attachments to samsara through austerities that control the senses and emotions, so the devotee loses his attachments by becoming totally absorbed in his passionate devotion to the deity. For most villagers, however, worship is more a matter of respect and obedience, perhaps mingled with some fear and gratitude, than a matter of fervent bhakti.

The final means of achieving conditional immortality in the householder's path is one we have already encountered: the production of male offspring who will perform the ceremonies necessary to insure the soul's admission and continued sustenance in the pitrlok. These four interrelated strategies—the maintenance of purity, the accumulation of merit, devotion to the gods, and the production of male offspring—serve as alternatives to ascetic renunciation. In the following chapter we will see how these alternatives are articulated through the symbolic forms of the life cycle rites (*samskara*) of the householder.

Notes

1. "Order" is, in fact, one of the Sanskrit meanings of *dharma:* "that which is established or firm." In certain technical philosophical usage *dharma* means "the nature, character . . . or essential quality of a thing" (Monier-Williams 1959).

2. Several women did express interest in eventually becoming disciples of a religious master (*guru*) and possibly even going to live in an *asram* under his guidance as a member of a religious community. But these women all stressed the devotional rather than the ascetic nature of this kind of religious life.

3. Poorer families will have the cheaper wheat or corn mush (*dhiro*) instead, the rules for which are slightly more lax.

4. Interestingly, one is also vulnerable to witchcraft at mealtimes. The most common way of casting a spell over someone is to put something in their food or simply to recite a spell while looking at the food which will be eaten by one's victim.

5. If there is physical contact with an unclean object (such as human excrement) the affected part must be washed. Though it is not a conscious ritual, the automatic reaction of a villager to the sight or smell of unclean things seems to be to clear the throat and spit as if to dissociate themselves from the offending presence by cleaning the mouth of saliva. Ritual purification after contact with an untouchable, as I mentioned earlier consists of a simple ceremony in which the person is sprinkled with pure water

(*cito katne*). The impurity of contact with a menstruating woman must be removed by bathing, changing clothes and sacred thread, and drinking water that has been touched with gold (*sun pani*), the purest of metals.

6. The great purity of prasad is further attested by the fact that (except for prasad of food or water, which should be consumed) it is placed atop the devotee's head, the purest part of the body.

7. The basic outlines of this hierarchy are taken from J. G. Campbell 1976.

CHAPTER 3

Life-Cycle Rites for the Householder's Path

The central oppositions and some of the harmonies we saw in the last chapter are expressed most clearly in the completed ceremonies surrounding birth, death, and the transition to adulthood—the *samskara* or life-cycle rituals of Narikot's Brahman-Chetri community. In tracing these ceremonies it is possible to learn a great deal about Hindu kinship—especially about the ideology and behavioral obligations of the patriline, which appear to be the dominant concerns of the orthodox samskara. It is interesting that most of the formal life-cycle rituals described here center on males. For example, initiation with the sacred thread is exclusively for males, while the menarche rite which in many ways marks the equivalent transition to adulthood for females (to be discussed later) is not even considered a samskara. Likewise most of the wedding rituals and particularly the long and complex death rituals are predominately expressive of the male point of view. Nevertheless, by noting the roles women play, and more important, the roles they do not play in these rituals, we can begin to ascertain how women are viewed—at least in terms of the dominant patrilineal institution.

Birth Pollution (*Sutak*)

Since birth, like death, is one of the most radical assertions of man's involvement with the organic processes of life that gov-

ern samsara, it is consistent with the Hindu world view that birth should create severe pollution. This pollution, however, affects only the new mother. The infant has not really activated its karma and entered fully into samsara; thus the ordinary rules of purity and pollution do not yet apply to it. This is not to say that the infant is without karma. The very situation of its birth—its sex, the caste and wealth of its family, its physical and mental equipment—all these things represent the results of good and bad actions in past lives. However, because the infant is not yet socially or spiritually responsible for its actions, it cannot yet generate *new* karma. The first three of the five major rites pertaining to the life-cycle (*samskara*) are directed toward bringing the child into samsara, into full responsibility for its ritual purity and its social and ethical actions. This state of full adult responsibility is appropriately called *karma caleko* or "activated karma."

But before tracing the child's development into full religious and social being, let us look at the effects of its birth on the ritual purity of its mother and family.

Ideally, one Brahman priest told me, purification should begin with conception, but in village practice there are no prenatal ceremonies.[1] Pregnancy is ritually recognized after the fifth or sixth month, when the life breath (*sas*) is believed to have entered the embryo. The woman then becomes "two-bodied" (*duijiu*) and is barred from participating in religious ceremonies, especially memorial rituals for the ancestor spirits (*sraddha*), and from cooking boiled rice for adults. This latter restriction is not always followed in poor families where there is a shortage of female labor.

The formal period of birth pollution (*sutak*) begins with the cutting of the cord and extends until the morning of the eleventh day after birth.[2] During this period patrilineal relatives within five generations may not worship their household gods, participate in rituals honoring the lineage gods, or perform any other religious ceremonies.[3] But they are not themselves in a negative state of pollution. They may move freely among other members of the community and need not observe food restrictions. Only the mother is untouchable. In fact female family members and midwife attendants *do* touch her to oil, massage, and generally assist her. But they must bathe and change clothes before touching others.

Several minor ceremonies occur during the ten-day birth pollution period.[4] In most families an astrologer, usually of Jaisi

A newly delivered mother suns herself and her infant during the eleven-day period of birth pollution called "sitting in a corner." Once she has borne a child she need no longer feel shy about exposing her torso and breasts as she rubs oil on herself and her baby. *Photo by author*

Brahman status (*jyotis*), will be consulted to make sure that the child was not born under a sign hostile to his father. Only then is the father allowed to see his child.[5] The cutting of the cord involves certain ritual elements. It must be cut over a coin or a betel nut, tied off with new undyed thread, and buried by the mother herself if she is able. A votive light must be left over the spot. On the sixth night, when Bhabi, the goddess of fate, comes to write out the child's fortune on its forehead, a pen, a book, and a lamp must be placed beside the sleeping child. The lamp must be kept burning all night so the goddess can see to write out a long future for the child.

Name-Giving (*Nuharan*)

The first formal rite in a child's life is the name-giving ceremony (*nuharan*), which is performed on the morning of the eleventh day. On this day the family priest gives the infant its secret religious name. The child's father will also give his thar and gotra name to the child, thereby accepting it into the family's caste and patriline. This ceremony marks the end of the birth pollution period. The new mother can leave the dark room in which she and the child have been staying. As preliminary steps in her purification, she must bathe and wash her hair, clothes, and bedding. The child's father must also bathe and change his sacred thread.

Before the morning meal the family priest arrives, and inside the house on the ground floor he prepares an auspicious astrological design made with rice flour (*rekhi*) on an area which has been freshly spread with a purifying coat of cowdung paste. Here he will perform a Vedic fire ceremony (*hom*) and call upon various gods to bless the child. At one point in the fire ceremony the priest asks the exact time of the child's birth and then consults his astrological almanac to determine the letters that will begin the child's name. The father then tells the priest his thar and gotra and gives him *tika*, an auspicious mark of blessing which is placed on the forehead. The priest writes the child's name with yellow saffron paste on a pipal leaf, which is placed on the child's bed, after which he whispers the child's name into its ear three times. The priest then holds the child over the sacrificial fire and bounces it in the air three times.

The next part of the ceremony seems to be the village equivalent of the "first outing" (*niskarmara*) which in orthodox tradition was celebrated, like the prenatal ceremonies, as a separate rite (Pandey 1969:89). The child's mother or grandmother covers it with a shawl and carries it outside, places its feet on the ground, and then removes the shawl, allowing the child its first view of the sun.

Next, the priest gives a tika mark to the baby, the father, and other members of the family. He then prepares a mixture of ghee, curds, cow urine, milk, and honey with great purifying powers (*panc amrt*). This is offered to the lineage god and the household god to purify them and then given to each family member to drink. The family members, thus purified, come to the Brahman to have protective yellow strings tied to their wrists. The child's father must then give tika and *daksina* (a small gift of money to a ritually honored person) to the daughters of the house. The family may also have the child's horoscope written out by their astrologer on the naming day.

With the name-giving, which establishes the child as a

member of its father's patriline, the child's entry into this particular rebirth has begun. As yet, however, the concern with purity and pollution which characterizes samsara only peripherally affects the child. Until the child receives its first rice at the age of six months (see the next section), the nursing link between mother and child seems to protect it from pollution. Mother's milk is an extremely pure food, and informants explained that infant feces and urine are not so polluting as those of adults because the infant's only food is its mother's milk. Nursing children are not affected by the pollution of birth or the menstrual pollution of their mothers.

The baby's lack of involvement in purity and pollution is apparent in the funeral rites which are appropriate for an infant who dies before the age of six months. It is buried instead of cremated in the usual Hindu manner; and distinction is made between a premature stillborn child and one who has had a name-giving ceremony and has lived for several months. After the burial hole is dug, a dish of milk is placed at the bottom and buried with the child or fetus. Five days later milk is again placed over the grave, and a new set of clothes is given as dan to a Brahman child of the same sex as the deceased. During these five days the child's mother and father may eat only once a day, avoiding salt or oil, and may not worship the gods. Other close patrilineal relatives eat only one meal on the first day; after bathing the next day, they are again pure.

The symbolism involved in burying the very young child becomes apparent when we note other kinds of individuals who are buried rather than cremated in Hindu society. J. G. Campbell (1976:118) has noted that besides infants, honored saints and smallpox victims are also buried. He suggests that all three of these categories are in some way outside the community for whom normal Hindu ritual applies. The saint because he achieved mukti, and the smallpox victim because he is believed to be possessed by the smallpox goddess (Sitala), have both transcended the normal human state. They no longer need the final symbolic purification of the body which the cremation fire brings. Infants do not need this purification because they have not yet fully reentered the samsaric involvement with purity and pollution.

First Rice (*Pasne*)

In time, of course, the nursing link must weaken and the child become a separate social and ritual entity. The beginning of this process is celebrated in the second life-cycle rite, the rice feeding ceremony (*pasne*), where the child receives its first rice meal. The rite is performed at five months for a girl child and six months for a boy.[6] The ceremony is simple. A priest or astrologer is asked to consult his astrological calendar and name an auspicious day and hour for the child to be given his first rice. Sometimes the family cooks a rich milk-and-rice pudding (*khir*), which is first offered to the gods in a public temple before being fed to the child. Often, however, the ceremony is performed at home, either with rice pudding or an ordinary rice meal. The child, dressed in new yellow clothes, receives its first rice from a senior male member of its father's household. This person usually scoops the rice onto a coin and then into the child's mouth. The coin is then given to the child. All the other assembled relatives "whom the child must respect" then feed it in order of their rank. First the child's paternal relatives take their turn. Next its mother's brothers (*mama*) and any other maternal relatives who have been called to the ceremony feed the child.

As we have seen, cooked rice is a particularly vulnerable channel for the transmission of pollution. It is a key cipher in the symbolic structure of caste organization. Status in the complex hierarchy of ritual purity is determined and expressed by the giving and acceptance of cooked rice. The eating of its first rice, then, signals the child's initial involvement in the sphere of purity and pollution. Villagers say that a child's first teeth come in at the time of its rice-feeding ceremony. In fact, teething may occur later, but these two events are conceptually associated. If a child dies after the first teeth appear (some informants say after the rice ceremony), it will be cremated with the same rites given to any other individual who has not reached full adult status (i.e., boys who have not had their initiation ceremony and unmarried girls). The child's parents will observe five days' death pollution (rather than the full thirteen days for a full-status adult) and the rest of the paternal relatives will observe only three days. What is important here is the association of the child's first food pollution with the fact that, in the event of death, the child's body now requires the stronger ritual purification of cremation.

The burial rituals which sufficed before are now symbolically inadequate.

The full transformation from a nursing infant to a karmicly responsible adult member of the Hindu community is a slow process that follows the same pattern which can be observed in the progression from the naming ceremony to the rice-feeding ceremony: increasing vulnerability to pollution, coupled with increased responsibility to participate in the rituals of purification offered by the householder's path. Children, as I have said, are exposed to pollution beliefs from a very early age, but the rules which apply to them are much more lenient than those which apply to karma caleko adults. Although they are discouraged from doing so, children may even eat rice from an untouchable until their adult teeth come in. As one woman recalled of her childhood:

> They say that I used to go to the house of a Damai even and eat there! Mother used to tell me that I shouldn't eat in such persons' homes, but I used to go to the Damai's house and say, "Sister-in-law, give me some rice. Put some clarified butter in it." Mother used to say that when your baby teeth fall out and new teeth grow, then from that time you mustn't eat from the hands of an untouchable or you will lose your caste. She used to say that if I did eat then she wouldn't let me back into our house. She used to teach me in this way, and if I didn't listen to her then she would scold me and beat me.
>
> The Newars in our village used to say "Bring the children of the Lieutenant (*laftan sab*). We shall give them food." And they used to give us food. I have taken liquor and rice beer also during the festival of Sansari Mai. You are allowed to drink until you are married. Once I was drunk and they had to carry me back, but I don't remember. I was quite small then.

While this woman's mother was obviously uncomfortable about her child taking food from untouchables, she was not concerned when her child took food and liquor from Newars, even though Brahmans and Chetris (especially women) are strictly forbidden to take liquor. Until a male has been initiated and until a female is married—that is, until they are karma caleko—they may take liquor and cooked rice from any of the clean castes. By the same token, such individuals cannot, as we mentioned, cook rice for those of their own caste who are karma caleko.

Initiation (*Bartaman*) into Caste and Patriline

Before I describe the initiation ceremony, which is the next life-cycle rite for the Hindu male of Narikot, I should mention that there is an important female rite that will be described in detail in my discussion of female body symbolism in chapter 6. This rite, which occurs at menarche, is called colloquially "staying in the cave" (*gupha basne*). It is not considered one of the orthodox life-cycle rituals (*samskara*), though certainly it conforms to the pattern of initiating increased responsibility for pollution and consequent involvement in purification ritual. Women however, have no real equivalent to initiation. They become karma caleko only through their marriage ceremony, whether it occurs after or before the menarche rite.

The rituals I am describing in this chapter are all part of the dharma of the householder, which strives toward the perpetuation of the patriline and the attainment of individual "conditional immortality" through one's progeny. Both these related goals would seem to be antithetical to the path of asceticism. Yet, if we look at the symbolic means by which the householder attempts to achieve these goals, we see that these life-cycle rituals represent a continual process of compromise with—one could even say co-optation of—the ascetic path that the householder has chosen not to follow.

One of the basic compromises is the cycle of the four *asramas* or life stages. As Wendy O'Flaherty (1973:78) put it:

> The tension which is manifested in metaphysical terms as the conflict between the two paths to immortality, between Release and *dharma* of conventional society (in particular, the *dharma* of marriage and procreation) appears in social terms as the tension between different stages of Hindu life. These four stages provide a superficial solution in temporal terms: first, one should be a *brahmacārin* (chaste student), then *grhastha* (married householder), then *vanaprasthā* (the man who dwells in the forest with or without his wife), and finally the *sanyāsin* (the ascetic who has renounced everything).

This traditional schema attempts a resolution of the conflicting dharmas or paths by making the householder's dharma govern only a certain portion of a man's life. However, in the Hinduism of Narikot the last two stages of increasing renuncia-

tion are hardly ever realized. There are no ceremonies practiced to initiate the *vanaprastha* and *sanyasi* stages of life. In fact, the vast majority of villagers look forward to spending their last days in as much comfort as their sons can provide. There is a marked tendency for older people to spend more time in religious activity, but this almost always takes conventional forms of piety, rather than ascetic renunciation.

For a high-caste male of Narikot, who will in all probability spend the rest of his life as an ordinary householder, the *brahmacarya* stage remains as the one brief period in his life during which his conduct fully expresses the values of asceticism, as opposed to the worldly values and concerns which will henceforth tend to dominate his life. During the *bartaman* or initiation ritual, all the tension between the two paths is focused on the contrast between the initiate's role as chaste student and his upcoming role as a householder. Traditionally, a boy[7] was to leave his own parents' home during this stage to live and study in celibacy in the house of his guru. He was to return home to be married and become a householder only when his studies were complete. But like many other aspects of the asrama theory, the actual experience of the brahmacarya stage in Narikot is very different. For village boys Vedic study and the ascetic life are only symbolically enacted during the bartaman ceremony that initiates this stage. Although this ritual is sometimes performed several years in advance of a boy's wedding,[8] very often the bartaman is performed just a day or so before the marriage ceremony. Here it becomes a necessary preliminary rite within the wedding ceremony.

None of this, however, lessens the conceptual importance of the brahmacarya stage or of the bartaman ceremony as its symbolic enactment. For the ascetic purity that the initiate achieves in his bartaman is essential to the many changes that the ceremony will bring about in his status. With his bartaman a boy becomes karma caleko—ritually and morally responsible for his own actions. This means that the merit and demerit of all his actions begin to matter in the final accounting of his karma, which will then determine his next rebirth.

As part of his karma caleko status, the initiate also assumes full membership in the two groups which largely identify his place in Hindu society: his caste and his lineage. Since caste membership is based on the maintenance of purity, it is consistent that the purification achieved by passing through the brahmacarya stage is part of the initiation into full caste status. Once he has received his sacred thread at his bartaman, a Hindu must observe all caste restrictions at the peril of losing his own caste status. From people of castes lower than his own, he must take only pure food (*cokho,* food which is uncooked or cooked with clarified butter). He must refuse liquor and certain kinds of meat, and he may not take water from or allow himself to be touched by untouchable castes or menstruating women.

With regard to initiation into the lineage, however, the reason for this emphasis on ascetic purity is less obvious. Had we not already had some intimation of the paradoxical interpenetration of ascetic and householder ideals in Hinduism, we might reasonably expect the lineage, with its absolute dependence on progeny, to be utterly hostile to celibate asceticism. But this is not the case. O'Flaherty has demonstrated in her study of Siva mythology that asceticism and fertility are closely related in Hindu thought. "Although in human terms, asceticism is opposed to sexuality and fertility, in mythological terms, *tapas* [asceticism, austerities] is itself a power-creative force, the generative power of ascetic heat" (O'Flaherty 1973:41). Though householders and ascetics use the power of tapas in different ways, it is a means to both their respective modes of immortality. They share the idea that control/abstinence produces purity/power. Within this ideological framework spiritual power and sexual power are conceptual equivalents.

In a sense, the whole set of purity and pollution rules that we encountered in the householder's daily life represent a kind of minimal tapas—the imposition of some restraint and control on natural man. But it is tapas aimed not at the ascetic's radical goal of direct individual release but at the conventional goals of the householder—chief among which is immortality through offspring. Hence the tapas of sexual restraint that a boy enacts during his initiation can be seen as favorable to the interests of the lineage because it prepares him for the subsequent stage of marriage. As O'Flaherty puts it (1973:56), "Since one of the most important requirements of a bridegroom is his virility (the purpose of marriage being to beget children), the man of chastity is a good choice by virtue of the sexual powers amassed by his continence."

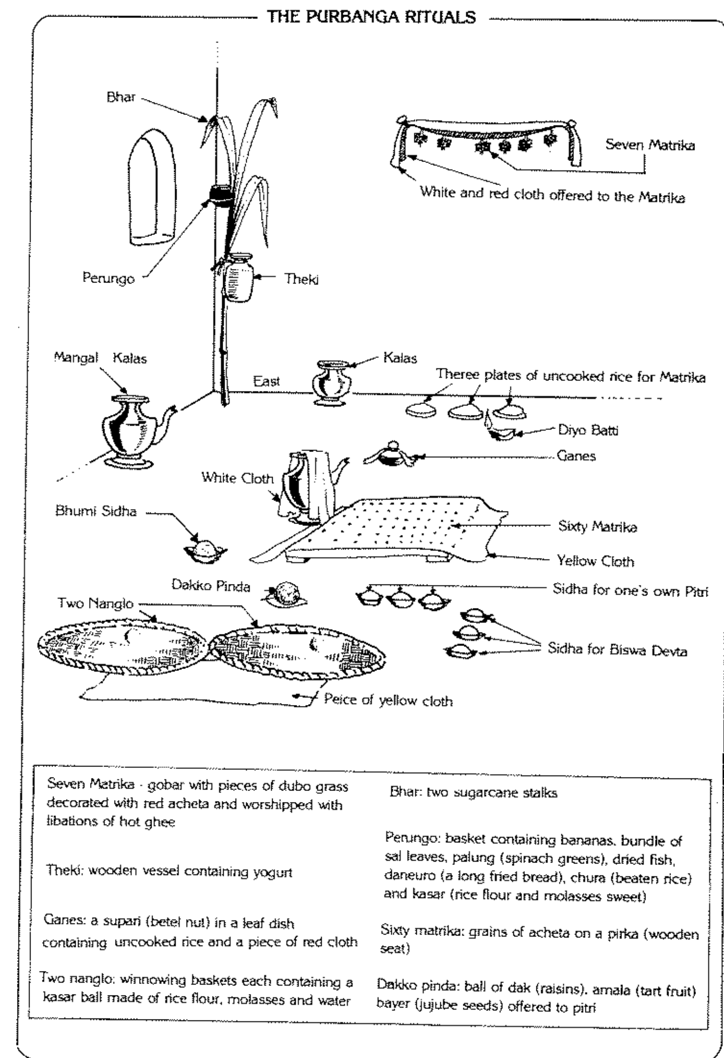
The Preliminary Rituals (*Purbanga*)

Let us look now at how the values of asceticism are integrated into the life of the householder through the symbols of the bartaman rituals. On the day before the bartaman certain rituals collectively called *purbanga* (preliminary), must be performed.[9] After the purbanga rites the bartaman cannot be delayed by pollution from a death or a birth in the family.

In the first of these preliminary ritual activities (called the *bhar bandan*), an altar is built for worship of the *matrka* or mother goddesses, the ancestor spirits, and various other gods. (See figure 4.) The northeast corner of one room is purified with cowdung paste, and seven dobs of cowdung, representing the seven matrka, are placed on the eastern wall of the room. Each dob is decorated with a piece of sacred dubo grass, rice grains, and auspicious red powder. As shown in the figure, sixty other matrka[10] are represented by grains of red-colored rice, or in some houses, more dobs of cowdung, placed on a low wooden seat. Two Brahmans must place two stalks of sugar cane, onto which a container of yogurt and a basket of dried fish have been tied, in the corner of the room where the matrka are represented. These stalks with the container of auspicious items are called the *bhar*. When the bhar is in place, the family priest worships the two sets of female goddesses with a ritual called *matrka puja:* first a sari (which later goes to the wife of the priest) is offered to the sixty matrka on the wooden seat; then the seven matrka on the wall are worshiped.

The initiate's father next offers a single *sidha* (a leaf plate with the ingredients of a meal) to Bhumi, the earth god, as "rent" for using the earth during the ceremony. He then offers three sidha to all the gods and three to the collective ancestor spirits. Then comes *abhyudayika sraddha*. This last ritual in many ways represents the reverse of the death rituals or *sraddha* which will be described at the end of this chapter. Unlike the death ceremonies, the abhyudayika sraddha performed before bartamans, weddings, and certain other special meritorious rituals is auspicious. The rice ball fed to the ancestors during the death sraddha is replaced with a festive variant made of raisins. The sacred thread of the person making the offerings remains in its auspicious normal position, and red powder, associated with fertility, replaces the ascetic yellow powder used in death ceremonies. Also, the ancestor spirits, who are generally viewed as irascible and vaguely threatening beings, are believed to be pleased by

FIGURE 4



the bartaman. After a boy has been initiated he is eligible to perform death ceremonies and have this done for him in turn when he dies. The ancestors are pleased that a new male relative will be able to feed them with annual offerings as long as he is alive, and when he dies, join them in pitrlok.

After the abhyudayika sraddha, there are two rites performed by two married Brahman women which are devoted to the decoration and worship of a holy water vessel (*mangal kalas*) and the preparation of special sweets called *kasar* made of flour and molasses.

Next comes a ceremony called "digging pure earth" (*cokho mato korne*). For this two unmarried Brahman girls (*kanya keti*) must go out to the fields to get the earth needed to build the sacred enclosure where the bartaman will be performed.[11] Two virgin Brahman girls are also required for another ritual in which the rice that will be used in the upcoming bartaman ceremony and the subsequent feast is brought out into the sun to dry. The girls must also perform a ritual in which turmeric, saffron, and mustard seeds are roasted in a clay pot and ground into a paste. This paste will later be rubbed over the initiate's body by his sisters before the bathing ritual which takes place the next day.

Finally, the family Damai is called for a ritual in which he ceremonially finishes sewing clothes required the next day for the bartaman. Some time after these purbanga ceremonies the sacred enclosure (*jagge*)[12] is established in the family courtyard.

One preliminary rite remains. In the evening the initiate's father or the family priest must prepare the boy's hair for ceremonial tonsure the next day. A brass tray is brought to the room where the matrka puja was performed. On it are scissors and an iron razor for cutting hair, a porcupine quill that is white in three spots and black in two, twenty-seven pieces of kus grass, two brass cups containing butter, yogurt, clarified butter from a cow, and dung from a red calf. There are also three pieces of yellow cloth which have been made into bundles each containing mustard seeds, barley grains, dubo grass, sandalwood powder, curds, rice grains, and cowdung. These bundles are tied into the boy's hair by his father or the priest, one by each ear and one at the back of his head. Then a yellow turban is tied around the boy's head and he can go to sleep.

Hair Cutting (*Chewar*)

The day of the bartaman begins as the priest conducts a vedic fire worship ceremony inside the sacred enclosure and supervises the initiate's father in offering seven *godan*. Each godan is a leaf plate containing money which is offered to the priest. Each represents an occasion in the initiate's life when ideally a fire ceremony should have been performed.[13] Thus on the day of the bartaman the father compensates for his previous lack of orthodoxy and prepares his son ritually for the subsequent steps of his initiation.

The tonsure is the first rite actually requiring the son's participation. The boy sits in his mother's lap faced away from her "toward the moon." His sisters sit beside them (see figure 5) with a brass tray which has been given by the boy's maternal uncle to catch the cuttings of his hair. Now the father[14] comes and sits before the boy, still in his mother's lap, and wets the boy's hair with warm water. He removes the yellow cloth bundle tied near the right ear, and with the porcupine quill from the brass tray prepared the night before, he divides that hair into three strands. Three pieces of kus grass from the twenty-seven pieces on the tray are then braided into the strand nearest the top of the boy's head. At the auspicious moment set by the astrologer, the father takes the razor in his left hand and touches it to the boy's head and then takes the scissors in his right hand and cuts the strand braided with kus. Meanwhile, the priest is chanting mantras and performing a fire ceremony in the altar at the center of the jagge enclosure. The same fire altar is used throughout the entire bartaman, but the different stages of the ceremony (each of which in orthodox practice would have been a separate rite with its own fire worship) are represented by different bricks to the south and north of the central altar.

The rest of the boy's hair is ritually sheared in a similar way until all twenty-seven pieces of kus have been braided into the boy's hair and cut. After this the father rinses the boy's head with hot water and then (if the village has one) he calls the Nau (barber) who finishes shaving the boy's head, leaving only the Hindu top knot (*sika*).

The boy's sisters (real or classificatory) must catch all the hair in the brass tray and wrap it in yellow cloth with a mixture of yogurt, flattened rice, sweet fried bread, and some of the kasar sweets made during the purbanga ceremony. (Then the sisters must take the bundle down to be washed away by the

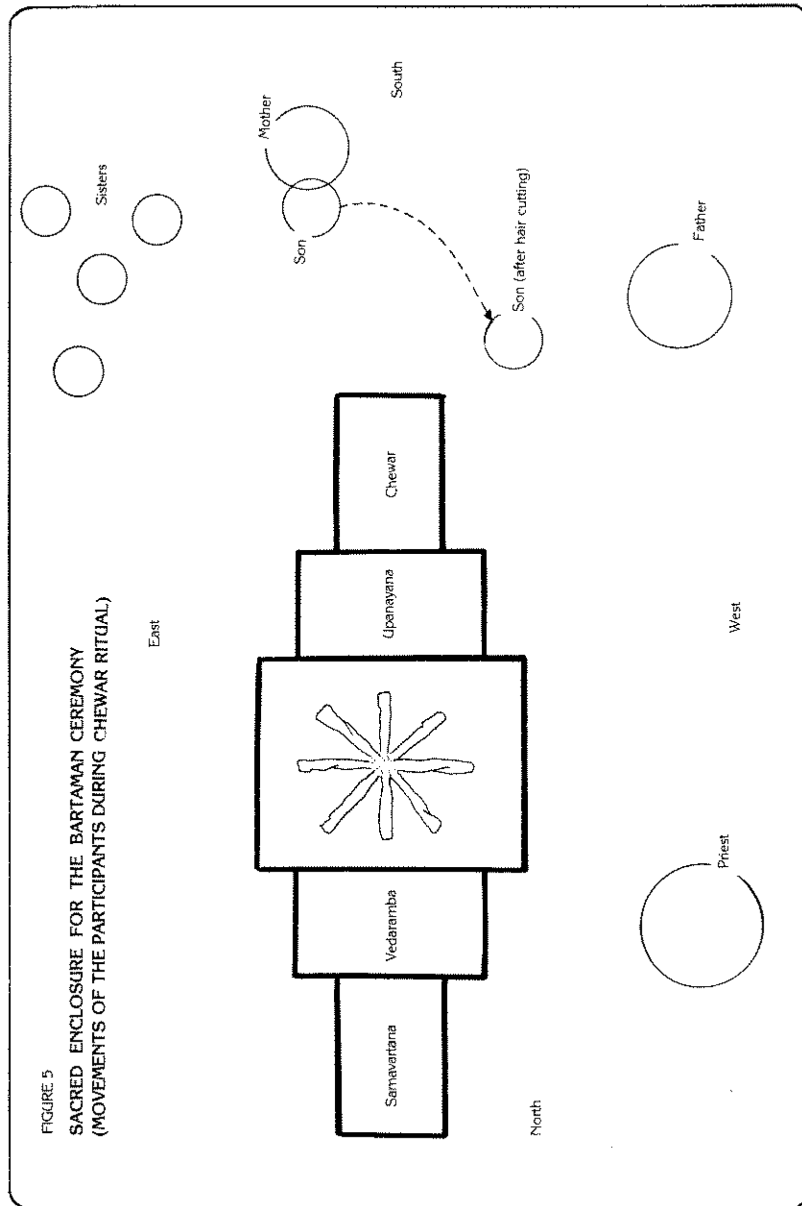


FIGURE 5
SACRED ENCLOSURE FOR THE BARTAMAN CEREMONY
(MOVEMENTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS DURING CHEWAR RITUAL)

river. Finally they rub their brother's body with the yellow paste which was prepared the previous day and bathe him in a large copper vessel.

Investiture with the Sacred Thread (*Upanayana*)

After he has been bathed, the boy must feed the sons of three Brahmans with a special sweet (*dai pera*). Then the boy and his father take seats beside the priest and offer three more special godan. These purify the boy of three kinds of pollution incurred during his lax and carefree childhood, when he wandered where he liked, said whatever he wanted, and ate what he pleased. The rituals also serve to instruct the boy that he must henceforth behave strictly according to caste rules.

Next, the person who is playing the role of the boy's guru—his father if the boy is a Brahman, or if he is Chetri the family priest—gives the boy the items he will need as an ascetic student or *brahmacarin*. He receives the skin of a black deer (preferably with horns, feet, and tail intact) to be used as a bed. This is worn over one shoulder. Around his waist a rope of sacred *mudje* grass is wound three times and knotted three times while the priest reads a special mantra. He is given a loincloth made of wild ginger leaves to wear on the rope, and a poncho-like garment of yellow unstitched cloth. Then he is given a wooden staff in his right hand, and a bag, with separate compartments for dal, rice, and alms, is tied to a stick and placed in his left hand. Finally, a yellow cloth is tied around his newly shaven head.

In a later part of the ceremony (*upanayana*), the guru invests the boy with his sacred thread (*janai*). Both boy and guru then drink three times from water poured into their hands. The boy presents his guru with gifts[15] and offers him godan. Then, at the auspicious time, the guru teaches the boy the most sacred verse in Vedic literature, the *gayatri* mantra.

Begging for Alms (*Bhiksa Magne*)

After the guru completes his sacrifice to the fire, it is time for the boy to go on his rounds as a yogi begging for alms (*bhik*) in the *bhiksa magne* ceremony. At this point there is an interesting change in the father's role. Until now (at least among the Brahmans) he has aided his son in becoming an ascetic brah-

macarin. He has cut his son's hair and given him the accoutrements of ascetic life. But now the father's role is reversed. The father becomes anti-ascetic and begins preparing his son for life as a married householder. Informants say the boy must "sneak away" from his father to become a yogi "just as Sukla Dev left his father in the middle of his bartaman because he wanted to continue to study rather than get married." The myth of Sukla Dev which one informant told to explain this part of the ceremony is perhaps worth recounting here.

The boy Sukla Dev left his bartaman because he decided that he did not want to marry. He would be a pure ascetic untainted by contact with women and other worldly pleasures. So his father Bias sent him to study with a wise king, having already told the king of his son's stubbornness. When Sukla Dev arrived at the king's palace, the king said he would accept Sukla Dev as a student only if he could pass a test. He told Sukla Dev to take a vessel filled to the brim with milk and circumambulate the palace and the palace gardens without spilling a single drop. Sukla Dev did so, walking slowly and concentrating with all his might on the vessel of milk so as not to spill any. When he had completed the circuit he returned to the king quite pleased with himself, for he hadn't spilled a drop. But the king asked him what he had seen on his tour. Had he seen the lovely fruit gardens or the beautiful women leaning from the harem windows? Sukla Dev had to admit that he had seen nothing but the vessel of milk. The king laughed and said that he was not ready to be a true ascetic until he could carry the milk without spilling it and see the beauties of the palace women and gardens at the same time.

The myth makes it clear that the bartaman must prepare a boy to be pure (preserving the bowl of milk) and fertile (enjoying women and fruit gardens) at the same time—which is, of course, the ideal of the householder stage. Sukla Dev's father and the wise king work together to balance the boy's somewhat smug ascetic fanaticism. This need to balance the opposition between asceticism and fertility helps to explain the father's double role in the bartaman. As "great teacher" (*maha guru*) and representative of the ancient rishis, the father leads the boy into a life of celibacy and Vedic study. But when the boy's asceticism threatens to become too extreme during the alms-begging ceremony, the father, as representative of the patriline, tries to lead his son back to householder values.

Among the Chetri the division of these roles is sharper because the family priest, not the father, takes the part of the pro-ascetic guru who teaches the gayatri mantra, leaving the father alone to disapprove of his son's symbolic departure from home as a yogi. But Brahmans are nonetheless consistent about maintaining the opposition of roles, even if both are played by the same person. The father alone among all the relatives does not give alms to his own son. When asked why, informants at a Brahman bartaman gave two reasons. They said the father does not give because, as representative of a patriline ideally supposed to provide for all its members, "He is ashamed that his son is so poor he has to beg, so he must ignore him." Other informants said that the son may not beg from his father because the father is his guru, and it is not respectful to beg from one's guru. Instead, one must offer the guru gifts, as the boy did before the guru taught him the gayatri and as he does again at the end of the alms ceremony when he places everything he has collected at the feet of his guru-father.

This interpretation of the opposing roles of the father is further supported by the fact that there are abrupt reversals of a similar nature in the roles of two other principal actors in the bartaman drama: the boy's mother and his maternal uncle. At the beginning of the alms ceremony the uncle comes forward to give a small plate for collecting the alms (*bhiksa patra*) and a large cone-shaped basket in which to keep them (*soli*). The uncle accompanies the boy on his three begging trips around the sacred enclosure and carries the basket for him. At this stage of the bartaman the mother's brother is clearly pro-ascetic and antagonistic to the boy's father (or in the case of the Brahmans, that part of the father's role which is pro-fertility). However, in the final stages of the bartaman, the uncle's role also switches, and in the end it is he who convinces the boy to return and be married.

Likewise, the boy's mother at first appears to support her son's career as a wandering ascetic. In each of the three trips around the sacred enclosure, she is first to give alms. After her, the boy's sister, his father's sister (*phupu*), and then other relatives and neighbors in turn offer their alms. Yet the mother will be the first to welcome her son back to his home and to eventual marriage after his "religious journey." She alone will receive her son's *bheti* (gift of money to respected person), and he will touch her feet with his forehead (*dhok*) in respectful

greeting on his return. When asked why the mother and not the father received this respectful greeting, one informant explained that it was "because weddings and household affairs are the business of the women."

The Beginning and End of Vedic Study (*Vedarambha* and *Samavartana*)

When the boy has completed his three begging rounds he places the uncooked rice, money, fruit, and pure fried food he has received as alms at his guru's feet. After receiving his guru's permission, he eats some of what he has collected. The boy offers another godan to the family priest (who for Chetris is also the guru), then performs the special fire ceremony which is supposed to mark the beginning of a four- to twelve-year study of the Vedas (*Vedarambha hom*). Immediately after this ceremony, however, another godan and fire worship are offered marking the end of studenthood (*samavartana*). The boy touches the feet of his guru, adds fuel to the sacrificial fire, and then bathes in water from eight different vases placed on the circumference of the sacred enclosure.

After the boy has bathed, his father gives him luxurious new clothes that he will need as a householder.[16] His sisters decorate him with yellow and red tika or forehead marks, black kohl around his eyes, garlands of flowers and dubo grass, and, if the family can afford it, a golden armlet and a necklace. But the boy has still not been drawn back fully into "worldly" life. In the final scene of the drama he is carried off on a "pilgrimage to Banaras" to worship at a local temple lying somewhere east or north of his home. His mother's brother goes with him and, as we noted earlier, convinces him to return home and marry the beautiful girl his parents have selected.[17] On his return, after first touching his mother's feet, the boy gives tika marks and daksina to several Brahmans and to his sisters. Then the family feasts all the relatives and neighbors who have given alms to their son.

Marriage (*Kanyadan biha*)

Marriage, as we have already seen, marks the beginning of the productive and socially responsible householder stage for which, in the case of males, the bartaman is a necessary preparation. As such, marriage is a major expression of the value of fertility and conventional religion in the continuing Hindu conflict between the ideals of the householder and those of the ascetic.

Besides this, marriage also reveals a great deal about the relative status of men and women, and about the structures of caste and kinship. These social dimensions of marriage are also "religious," in that they are deeply involved in the symbolic structures of Hinduism and expressive of the Hindu world view. Nonetheless, in this section I have not fully expanded the analysis of marriage to all these levels of meaning, but rather present the wedding rituals with a minimum of interpretation. To more adequately "unpack" the meanings of marriage in Narikot, we will need to return to it again in the contexts of kinship and women's status.

There are several kinds of marriage of varying degrees of formality, but the orthodox marriage described here (*biaite* or *kanyadan biha*) is the most important and the only one that qualifies as a full life-cycle ritual. *Liaite* marriage where the man simply "brings" the woman into his household, either as a first or as a second wife, is also common. Liaite unions with a previously unmarried woman are ritualized by a simple ceremony involving the worship of a sacred water vessel with votive lamps (*deo kalas puja*) or by the *swayambar* ritual (to be described below) where the bride places a garland around the groom's neck. In the case of a woman who has been married before, there is only the "changing of clothes" (*luga pherne*) ceremony in which a woman simply puts on a new set of clothes given her by her new husband. Children of such a marriage, as we saw earlier, are of less than full caste status.

Orthodox marriage in Narikot is always arranged between the parents of the bride and groom. Though the potential groom rarely takes an active role in the search for a suitable girl, he does retain a much greater freedom to reject his parent's choice than the girl does. The idea of courting is completely antithetical to the structure and ideals of *kanyadan* marriage, which is based on the father's gift (*dan*) of his virgin daughter

A new bride decorated and ready to be given in marriage as a "virgin gift."
Photo by author

(*kanya*) to the groom's family. Nevertheless, the boy may well get a chance to look over the girl who should not (but usually does) know she is being "seen."

Agreeing on the Match (*Kam Kuro Chinne*)

If the boy considers the girl attractive enough, and more important, if the two families find each other's caste and social standing acceptable, the parents set a time for the *kam kuro chinne* ceremony to formalize the agreement. This ceremony can take place at either the bride's or the groom's home or some neutral place like a temple.[18] The bride's and groom's family priests are there, and they settle on a mutually agreeable auspicious date for their clients' wedding. With great diplomatic tact the father of the bride tries to find out how large the groom's party (*janti*) will be, since he must feed them all lavishly, and what kind of work his daughter will be expected to do in her in-laws' house. When these matters have been agreed upon, the bride's father says to the groom's father, "From today I turn over my daughter to your son" (*Aja dekhi mero chori hazoor ko chora lai takrae*). This is a momentous statement, for once it is said, if anything should go wrong causing the marriage to be cancelled, the girl's reputation is compromised and it will be difficult to find her a suitable husband.

The bride's father then gives the groom's father a leaf plate containing pan, a banana, and a betel nut. Then he gives tika to his prospective son-in-law, places sacred dubo grass in his hands and touches his feet.

"Choosing" a Husband (*Swayambar*)

The *swayambar* or "self-choice" ceremony in which a girl "chooses" her husband is in Narikot only done among Chetris, because, they explain, their Ksatriya forefathers made this type of marriage, as is recorded in the Puranas.[19] Puranic swayambars were grand affairs where thousands of princes and their armies turned out in hopes of being chosen by the princess. A Chetri girl in Narikot, on the other hand, is presented with but a single suitor whom she is probably too embarrassed even to look at during the ceremony.[20] Yet it is a revealing ritual, because it seems to express a very different (and rather romantic) view of marriage and of the bride's role than is evident in the

principal rite of the wedding, the bride-giving or *kanyadan.* In the kanyadan ritual, marriage is clearly conceived of as the transfer of an item of property (the bride) from one agnatic group to another.

The swayambar also brings about an important change in the bride's status. It is the bethrothal ceremony, and after her swayambar a girl is considered to be a member of her husband's gotra rather than her parents'—though there is some uncertainty about whether the transfer is complete until after the kanyadan ceremony. All informants agreed, however, that if the bride should die after the swayambar,[21] the groom's family must perform funeral ceremonies and observe a full thirteen-day death pollution. This means that not only has her gotra changed, but she has became karma caleko, a responsible adult, and thus is entitled to adult funeral rites. At the same time, if the groom should die after the swayambar, his death pollution affects the girl and she becomes a widow.

The ceremony, which takes place at the bride's house, is simple. The groom arrives with his family priest and a small party of male relatives. The bride (her face hidden with the end of her sari) sits with the groom before a purified area in the bride's courtyard. Here the bride's priest and the groom's priest together worship the god Ganes, a burning votive lamp, and a sacred water vessel (*kalas*), and then give tika to the bride and groom. Then the bride must take a brass water vessel (*karuwa*) with a spout that has kus grass in it and walk three times around the groom clockwise pouring water. This is called *ayu baras* ("extending the lifespan") and is meant to ensure her husband a long life. She must then put a garland of dubo grass around the groom's neck to signify that she has chosen him as her husband. At this point the groom's friends may clap and cheer. Then the groom puts a flower garland, a ring, and a red tika mark on the bride. She gives tika in return, bows (*namaste*) to the groom, and withdraws. The bride's people then feed the groom's party with yogurt, flattened rice, tea, and other pure foods before they depart.

Preliminary Rites and Erection of the Sacred Enclosure (*Purbanga* and *Jagge Halne*)

The purbanga ceremonies for the wedding are basically the same as those described for the bartaman, except that they

Chart 3.1 Marriage Sequence

Rituals in the Groom's House	*Rituals in the Bride's House*
Agreeing on the match (*kam kuro chinne*)	
Initiation with sacred thread* (*bartaman*)	
	Betrothal—"choosing the husband" (*swayambar*)
Preliminary rites (*purbanga*)	Preliminary rites (*purbanga*)
Erection of the sacred enclosure (*jagge halne*)	Erection of the sacred enclosure (*jagge halne*)
Propitiation of the planets (*graha santi puja*)	
	Food gifts to the bride (*sai pata*)
Departure of the groom (*janti jane*)	
"	Arrival of the wedding party (*janti parsane*)
Women's night of festivities (*ratauli*)	
"	Welcoming (*barani*)
"	Washing the bride's feet (*gora dhune*)
(Women in groom's house join two wicks together)	The gift of a virgin (*kanyadan*)
"	Secret oblation (*gupti ahuti*)
Ratauli continues	Worship of the grinding stone (*sila puja*)
"	Playing with dice (*pasa khelne*)
"	Looking in the mirror (*aina herne*)
"	Roasting the puffed rice (*laba bhutne*)
"	Feeding curds (*maur khuwaune*)
"	Putting vermilion in the bride's hair (*sidur halne*)
"	Exchanging places (*thau sarne*)
"	Groom's feast (*janti bakhri*)
"	Bride's feast (*runce sapro*)
"	Farewell to the bride (*dulai anmaune*)
Waving the lamps (*arti syauli*)	
Barring the door (*dhoka chekne*)	
Joining the braids (*cultho jorne*)	
Filling up the grain measure (*pathi bharne*)	
Showing the storeroom (*bharar dekhaune*)	
Looking at the bride's face (*mukh herne*)	
Fire ceremony (*cathurthi hom*)	
Ritual games in groom's enclosure	
Catching fish (*macha marne*)	
Eating the polluted food (*jutho khane*)	
Drinking water from the groom's foot (*gora pani khane*)	
Bride's feast (*bahu bhater*)	
	Return of the bride and groom (*dulan pharkaune*)
	Feeding a snack (*khaja khuwaune*)
Meeting the in-laws (*sasu/sasura cinne* or *samdhi/samdhini bhet*)	

*This ritual may have been done several years earlier.

must begin simultaneously in the bride's and the groom's houses. (See chart 3.1, the marriage sequence.) To effect this a paper is sent from the groom's side specifying the time that his astrologer and priest have picked as auspicious for beginning the ceremonies. This can be as many as seven days before the kanyadan—though it is usually done the day before the groom's party leaves for the bride's house.[22]

The other purbanga ceremonies take place at both the bride's and groom's houses much as they are described in the section on bartaman.[23] However, if the groom is undergoing his bartaman immediately before the wedding, the purbanga rituals are only performed once at his house and not repeated for the wedding.

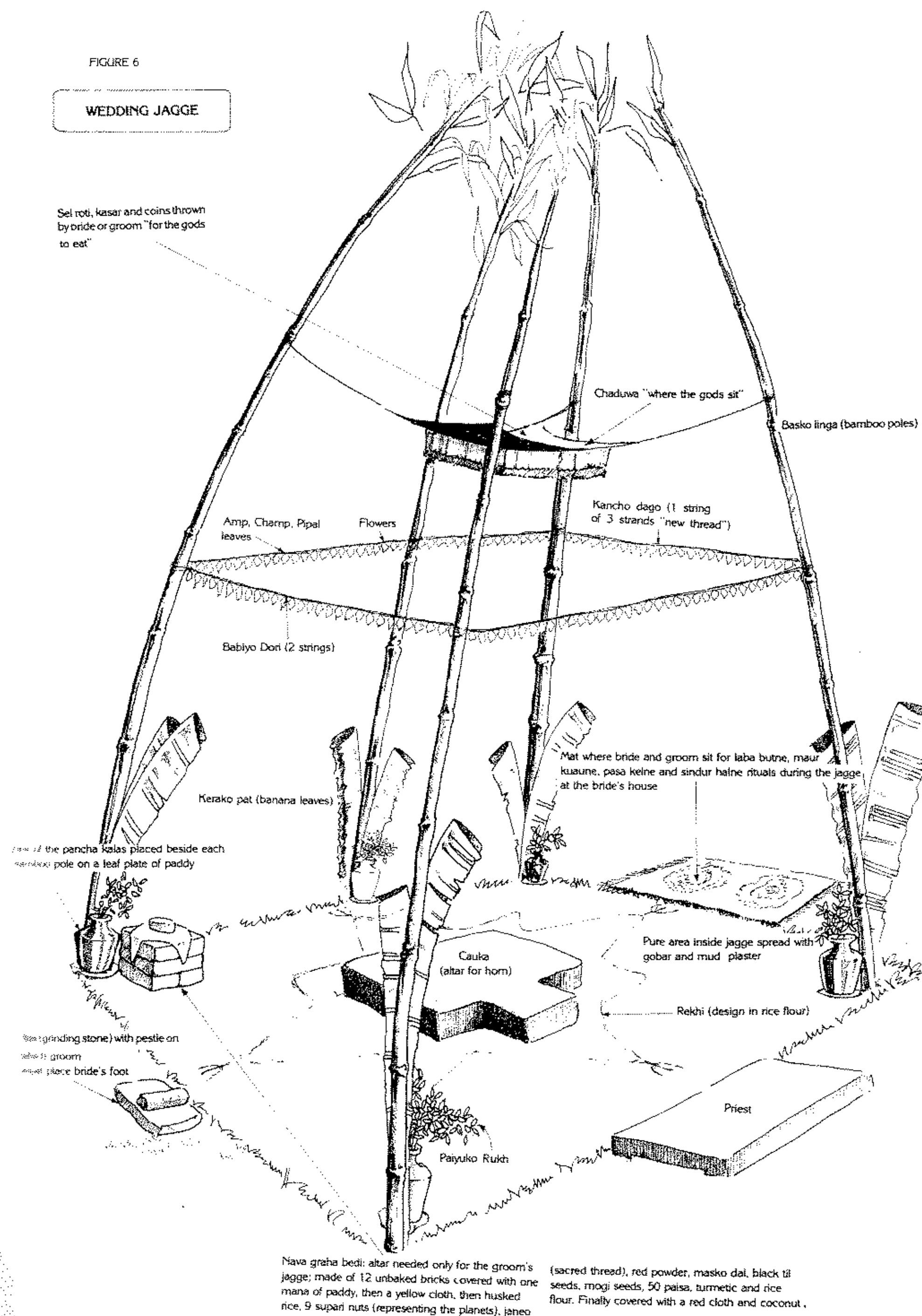
The establishment of the sacred pavilion in the bride's and groom's family courtyards (*jagge halne*) can be done anytime after their respective purbanga ceremonies are complete. Despite the apparent informality of this procedure—friends and neighbors all participate and discuss what should be done—there are definite ritual specifications as to how the sacred enclosure is to be built. For brevity many of these have been recorded in the drawing of a typical wedding enclosure in figure 6. During the course of the wedding many items are added and taken away from the pavilion as they are needed, but this simplified drawing presents the basic points.

At the groom's house a ritual to propitiate the nine planets (*graha santi puja*) must be done in the groom's newly erected pavilion. This is to protect the groom by ensuring that the nine planets (*graha*) and the gods they represent are all pacified or favorably disposed toward the groom and his upcoming marriage. Toward the end of the worship of the planets there is a ritual where the groom must see his face reflected in melted clarified butter contained in a leaf plate. As the groom stirs the butter with a piece of kus grass, the officiating priest asks him if he can see his face, prompting him to say yes, since that will mean that the planets are set right and the gods are pleased.

Departure of the Groom's Party (*Janti Jane*)

During the final stages of the propitiation of the nine planets the Damai musicians arrive, along with the men who will carry the groom in his sedan chair, the trunk of clothes for the bride, the groom's bhar (tied sugarcane stalks from his altar

FIGURE 6



room) and his sacred water vessel (*mangal kalas*). The musicians are fed with pounded rice, curries, and curd outside the house and given a cash payment of about fifteen to twenty rupees. The Damai who usually serves the family is also given a large turban. The bride's trunk of clothes is covered with red cloth and bound to a bamboo pole so that it can be carried by two men. The water vessel is also covered with red cloth and decorated with garlands of puffed rice and streaks of red and yellow powder. The groom is dressed in entirely new clothes—usually the traditional Nepali tunic and pants (*mayalpos-suruwal*) with a modern suit coat on top, socks, shoes, and a new cap (*topi*). If possible, he wears a watch, a fountain pen stuck in his suit coat pocket (to show that he is literate), and perhaps sunglasses to complete the sophisticated image. Even his sacred thread must be new. His sisters will have given him a garland of flowers and one of kus grass. After emerging from the house dressed in splendor, he must circle the pavilion three times behind the man who carries his bhar and water vessel, sprinkling red rice grains and water as he goes. Then the groom sits in his sedan chair and his mother feeds him a curd mixture (*sagun*).[24] He gives her a gift of some coins (*bheti*) which she will later pay to his bride for the privilege of seeing the bride's face. The motley Damai band has begun to play, and the groom with his party of male friends and relatives sets off for the bride's village.

Women's Night of Festivities at the Groom's House (*Ratauli*)

The next event which takes place in the groom's house after the men's wedding party has departed is *ratauli*. This is not a ceremony so much as a night-long celebration for the women of the groom's family and their female neighbors. The occasion is a joyous one. The women of the groom's house must stay up all night, keeping a light burning and the door of their house open. In addition, two small wicks of mustard oil are placed in the kitchen and joined together into a single flame at the precise moment that the kanyadan ceremony is scheduled to take place at the bride's house.[25] The most important part of the ratauli, however, is the dancing, male impersonation, and sexual joking that take place. It is ordinarily considered "shameless" (*laj namanne*) for a woman to dance or sing, but on this night the groom's mother and sisters *must* dance. Other women join them and the festivities last on and off through the whole night and the next day until the wedding party returns with the bride.

Food Gifts to the Bride (*Sai Pata*)

Meanwhile, the focus of the wedding has shifted to the bride's house. Sometime before his party actually arrives the groom must send *sai pata* to the bride's house. The *sai pata* is a gift of food, including *masala* (a mixture of coconuts, betel nuts, raisins, nuts, and sweets) curd, fried breads, spinach greens, *kasar* (the molasses sweets prepared during the purbanga ceremonies), fruits, and other pure foods. These are all arranged on trays for maximum show and carried to the bride's house, along with the groom's sacred vessel and his bhar. The groom's bhar and vessel are carried into the room in the bride's house where worship of the mother goddesses took place, the *matrka puja* room.

On one of the trays is a piece of paper giving the time of the party's arrival and the auspicious time for the kanyadan ceremony. Along with it is a collection called literally the symbols of a woman with a living husband (*saubhagya saman*) and consisting of red bangles, red hairbraid, a comb, a mirror, a box of red powder, and red beads; there is also a piece of cloth on which the groom's handprints have been impressed in yellow turmeric. Under the direction of her family's priest, the bride must place her handprints on the cloth, thus signifying her acceptance of the groom and his party. This cloth is then placed in the matrka puja room.

Arrival of the Wedding Party (*Janti Parsane*)

As the party approaches the bride's house with horns blowing and drums beating, the bride's father (who has bathed and put on a dhoti) goes out to the main village path for the arrival ceremony. Preceded by a woman carrying the bride's sacred water vessel and a man with the bride's bhar, the bride's father must circle the groom clockwise three times, sprinkling him with flowers and rice grains. Then the bride's family and village friends all join in throwing rice on the groom's party as it enters the courtyard of the bride. The groom's bhar and water vessel are brought out by the bride's people and placed in the sacred enclosure.

Welcoming (*Barani*)

Now the *barani* or the welcoming of the groom takes place. The groom stands outside the pavilion in the bride's

courtyard while the bride's father (or her elder brother) circles the groom three times pouring water from a copper vessel. Then after the bride's father and priest have worshiped a fire lamp, the water vessel, and the god Ganes, a yellow cloth is held up between the groom and bride's father while the priest chants the appropriate sacred verses. This is called "putting up an obstacle" (*cheka rakhne*). The groom passes some money under the cloth, which the bride's father doubles and passes back. Then the bride's father brings the groom into the sacred enclosure (if the groom is young enough he is carried) and seats him facing east on a wooden stool covered with yellow cloth. The bride's father sits on a round mat of braided kus grass facing the groom and begins to sprinkle him with kus grass and puffed rice. He then gives a tika mark and two garlands to the groom (one of flowers and one of dubo grass). The groom then cups his hands and receives a large leaf plate. In it is a new dhoti, an unshelled coconut, and two bundles tied in the corners of a yellow cloth, each containing kasar balls, pan, a sacred thread, betel nut, and a tiny piece of gold.

Then the bride's father takes a conch shell containing water and touches the groom's hands, shoulders, stomach, knees, and ankles. Informants say that this is to make the groom's body pure. The groom gives tika and prasad to the bride's father, who then takes him by the thumb and leads him forward.

After the welcoming ceremony there is usually a hiatus in ritual activity while the bride's people feed the groom's party and the other wedding guests. The bride remains hidden inside her parents' house, resting for the kanyadan ceremony, which often occurs in the early hours of the morning. The bride's parents, if they are doing the kanyadan that night, must fast to be ritually pure for this most meritorious of all religious acts. The groom sleeps outside the bride's house or on a porch of a neighbor's house. The rest of his party, if they sleep at all, do so huddled on porches, under trees, or in a nearby tea stall.

The Gift of a Virgin (*Kanyadan*)

The kanyadan ceremony usually takes place on the first floor of the bride's house. There the bride's people have set out a bed complete with mattress, sheets, quilts, pillows, and mosquito net which will be given to the groom as *sayya dan* or the "gift of a bed." There is also a chest—or among the more

wealthy, a wardrobe—containing saris, blouses, petticoats, a shawl, umbrella, etc. for the bride. And there is a trunk with a set of clothes and shoes, perhaps even a watch or radio, for the groom. Tethered in a corner is a cow, which must also be given to the groom. All this, plus whatever jewelry her parents can afford to give her, and the gifts given to her by the relatives who must wash her feet (see below), make up the bride's dowry (*daijo*).

It is important that the kanyadan be performed at the auspicious astrological moment (*lagan*) as determined by the priest. Sometime before that moment the priest begins performing the preliminary fire-worship ceremony, and the bride's women friends wake her and begin to prepare her. This is called "decoration" (*sinar garnu*), and is a very important part of the wedding for the women. Using makeup, hairpins, ribbons, and so on they dress the bride's hair and do her makeup with great care and lavishness. They dress her in the sari—always red or pink—that her father has given her, and put a red net veil embroidered with sequins over her head.

The bride is led downstairs and seated on the bed to the right of the groom for the foot-washing ceremony (*gora dhune*). Her father places a large copper vessel[26] before the couple and they put their feet in it. He then pours water over the hands and then the feet of his daughter, catching the water and sprinkling it back on himself; then he pours more water over her feet and drinks of it three times. Then he gives his daughter some money, she bows (*namaste*), and he bows deeply to her, touching his forehead to her foot (*dhok*). The bride's father then washes the groom's hands and feet in the same way[27] and then gives a red tika mark to both bride and groom.

This procedure is repeated by the bride's mother, her mother's co-wives, her father's brothers and their wives, her father's sisters, her brothers and elder sisters, her mother's brothers and their wives, sons, and daughters (if they are older than the bride), and, if they are present, her mother's sisters. Women do not actually touch the groom's feet (as they may only touch the feet of their own husbands). Also some relatives wash the bride's feet but not the groom's, since only those who must call the groom "son-in-law" or "brother-in-law" (*juai*) must wash his feet.[28]

Each relative who honors the bride by washing her feet must also offer a gift of money, household utensils, clothing, or

ornaments to the bride (*gordhuwa*). By participating in the foot-washing ceremony they receive some of the religious merit which the bride's parents get by doing the kanyadan.

After the bride's and groom's feet have been washed by her relatives, the groom presents the bride with wedding gifts from his family. This will include a trunk of saris, petticoats, etc. and a smaller box containing makeup, hair oil, and whatever jewelry the groom had bought (or borrowed for the occasion) to decorate the bride. The most important gifts are the wedding sari (always red or pink) and a necklace of red beads which the groom places around the bride's neck after the foot-washing ceremony. The red beads, usually divided in the middle by a small cylinder of beaten gold, are one of the principal signs of a married woman.

For the kanyadan ceremony the couple remain seated on the bed. The bride's father takes his daughter's right hand and holds a conch shell above her hand with his other hand. The groom places his hands beneath those of the bride and her father to receive the *kanya* (virgin, daughter). The bride's mother then pours water, which falls onto the conch shell, over the father's and bride's hands, and then into the groom's hands before reaching the large copper pot below. The mother must continue pouring the water while the priests chant a Sanskrit recitation of the bride's and groom's male ancestors for three generations (*sakhacarna*). It begins by stating that the bride is the great-granddaughter of her father's father's father whose name, thar, and gotra were such and such; then on to her grandfather and father. This is all repeated three times. Then the great grandfather, grandfather, and father of the groom are also repeated three times in the same way with their names, thar, and gotra. When this recitation is finished, the kanyadan is complete, and the bride's father hands her over to the groom, who grasps her thumb.

Meanwhile, an assistant priest will have been worshiping the sacred knot (*lagan gatho*), which is tied during the kanyadan. This knot is made of two white pieces of cloth, one given by the groom's side, the other given by the bride's people. The cloth from the groom's side must form the top of the knot. A sacred thread, betel nut, and a rupee note must be bound up in the knot, which is then tied around the bride's waist after the kanyadan.

The final rite in the kanyadan, which is almost an echo

of the kanyadan itself, is the *gai dan*. Here the bride's father gives the groom a cow. First the cow is worshiped by the bride's father, who sprinkles it with water, rice, and red powder. Then he puts over the cow's back a red cloth (the equivalent of the bride's wedding sari) with some money tied in one corner (the equivalent of the relatives' gifts to the bride). Then, taking barley grains, sesame seeds, and kus grass in his hands, he grabs the cow's tail (as he earlier took his daughter's hand) and gives it to the groom while a chanting priest pours water over their joined hands.

After this ceremony the groom returns to his friends in the wedding party and the bride is taken upstairs to rest. She will later be decorated and dressed once again, this time in the sari and jewelry given by the groom, for the ceremonies which take place outside in the pavilion the next day.

Status Reversal in the Bride's Pavilion

The dynamic of a Brahman-Chetri wedding is probably most clearly expressed by the progression of rituals which take place after foot-washing and kanyadan in the bride's pavilion. During the course of these rituals the bride's status undergoes a reversal with respect to the groom—a reversal that will hold for all her future relations with him and his family. During the foot-washing ceremony the bride's status was elevated above all her consanguineal relatives, who washed her feet. During the kanyadan she, as the virgin daughter being given as a religious gift, is at the height of her purity and sacredness. At the beginning of the pavilion rituals her status with respect to the groom is also high. The couple sit together on the southern edge of the sacred pavilion with the bride in the place of honor on the groom's right, as she was during the kanyadan. But as we shall see, the bride does not remain in this position for long.

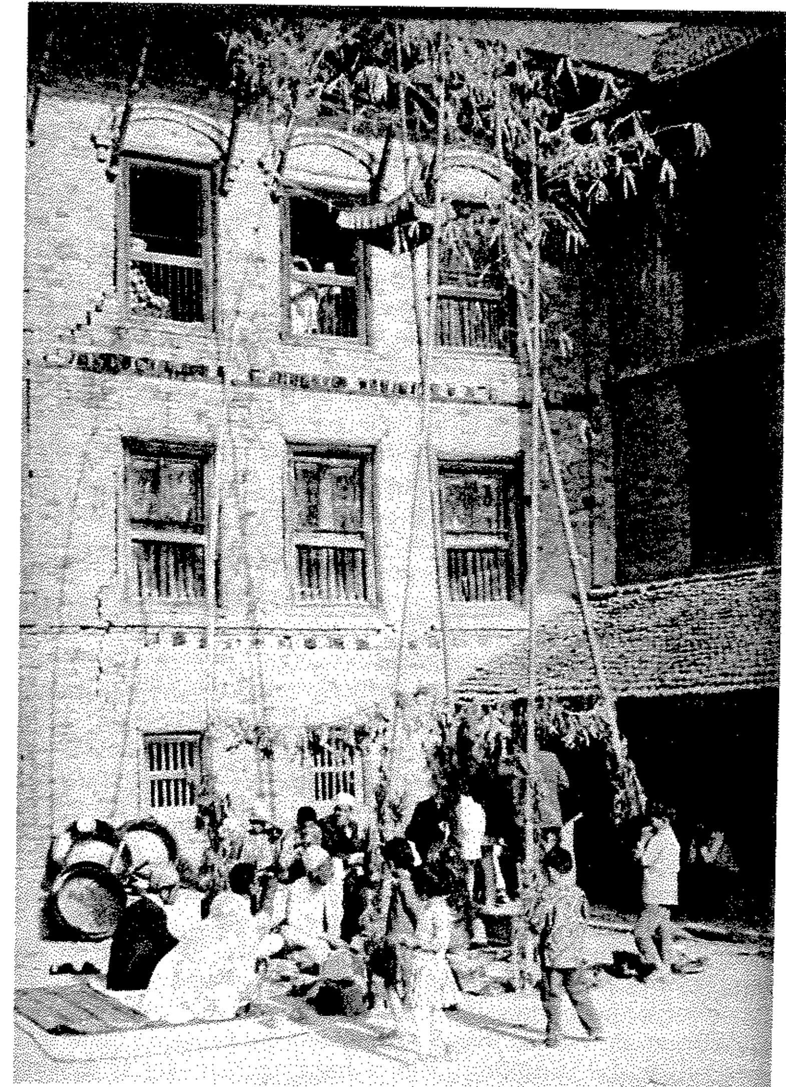
For the first ritual the priest sits on the western side of the pavilion and a shawl is held up hiding the couple from him and from the sacred fire. This is called the "secret oblation" (*gupti ahuti*). Informants explain that the cloth is held up because it would be disrespectful to the fire god Agni, "who is like a guru," were the bride and groom to look at each other instead of at the fire. The priest then instructs the couple, thus hidden from Agni, to look at each other (which the bride rarely has courage to do). Then, as he chants and offers clarified butter and barley

seeds into the fire, the bride gets up and leads the groom (who is holding on to the "tail" of her sacred knot cloth) around the fire clockwise to the western side of the pavilion. There the bride's brother gives her a handful of puffed rice. The groom puts his hand on the bride's shoulders while she throws the puffed rice on the fire. Then the groom takes the bride by the hand and leads her to the northern side of the pavilion. There, where the priest sits, is a grinding stone and pounder decorated with three stripes of vermilion powder. The groom must now touch the bride's foot and place it on the pounder. In several of the weddings I saw (including pictures of the king's wedding) the groom touched the bride's foot with a handkerchief rather than with his hand. When I asked an older priest about this, he expressed great impatience with the present generation of young men whose pride would not let them touch their wife's foot with their bare hands even during this important rite. He went on to explain that the purpose of this rite was to ensure that the wife would henceforth be subservient to her husband. By showing respect for his bride while she still has the high ritual status of a virgin girl, the groom validates his right to receive respect from *her* during their subsequent married life, when she is no longer a virgin and has thus lost her initial high status. The priest blamed the fact that men nowadays seemed to have more trouble keeping their wives in line on the modern groom's reluctance to do this rite properly.

After this ceremony the couple continues (with the bride in front) circling clockwise around the pavilion. They make two more trips, the bride first offering the puffed rice given by her brother to the fire and the groom then touching her foot at the grinding stone each time. After the third trip, the couple sits down again at the southern side of the pavilion for the ritual games.

Informants explain that these games are to cheer the bride, since she is unhappy about leaving her parents, and yet it is inauspicious for her to leave her natal home weeping after kanyadan. At the weddings I observed, the brides, their heads still covered with a gauzy veil, were very subdued during these rites. However, the groom's party and the bride's wedding guests did socialize and joke during this period.

The first game is usually "gambling with cowries" (*pasa khelne,*) which informants say is done in imitation of the divine couple Siva and Parvati, who are fond of gambling together. The bride and groom "play" by tossing betel nuts or cowrie shells



Ritual games between the bride and groom are conducted in the sacred enclosure (*jagge*) at the bride's house after the *kanyadan* ceremony. *Photo by author*

onto the mat before them. In this game, as in all the others, a victory for the bride means she will bear a son; if the groom wins, she will have a daughter. But from my observation the bride is usually too reticent at this point to really compete seriously. While the couple are playing, they are supposed to look at themselves in a mirror that has been placed on the mat between them. "Looking in the mirror" (*aina herne*) is supposed to indulge their youthful vanity by letting them see themselves adorned in wedding finery. Also during the gambling a woman from the bride's side who has been engaged as a ritual servant[29] and one from the groom's side stand over the couple with a piece of new cloth stretched between them. On the cloth are grains of puffed rice, which the two servants jiggle by moving the cloth back and forth. This is called "roasting the puffed rice" (*laba bhutne*). The gambling ends abruptly with puffed rice spilling all over the couple when one of the women succeeds in yanking the cloth out of the hands of her opponent.

The next game is "feeding the *maur*." Here a brass plate containing *maur*—curds, sugar, and sesame seeds—is set between the bride and groom. The bride must divide the maur into two portions with her fingers and then offer some to the gods. Then she and the groom compete to see who can feed the other first.

The next rite is a more serious one: "putting on the vermilion powder" (*sidur halne*), which marks the climax of the rituals in the bride's sacred enclosure and the point at which the bride's status vis-à-vis the groom undergoes a radical reversal. The groom offers vermilion powder first to Ganes, then to the sacred fire, and then to his sacred vessel, which has been placed in the northeastern corner of the pavilion. A white cloth is extended from this vessel, into which all the groom's house gods have been invoked, to the bride's forehead. The groom then sprinkles a line of vermilion powder from the vessel to the bride's forehead, where he places a red line in the part of her hair. So important and powerful is this line of vermilion that no one except the bride's immediate relatives are allowed to see it. As soon as she has left the enclosure the bride's female relatives cover the vermilion with a handkerchief—for if a witch should see the first vermilion mark, she could easily curse the bride to be barren or to be possessed by an evil spirit. The next morning (at the groom's house), only after the bride has bathed and put on fresh vermilion, the handerchief can be removed.

As Campbell (1976:92) has suggested in his analysis of Kangra Rajput weddings, the red powder in the part of the bride's hair symbolizes the groom's sexual possession of her. It is said that only after the groom has placed the vermilion mark can the bride call him husband.[30] Though Brahman and Chetri women never interpreted the mark itself in sexual terms, they did speak about the sexual connotations of the marriage rituals:

> If the husband wants sex and you refuse, that is definitely a sin. Because while you are being married then all the rites are performed. The groom touches your breasts and feeds you his polluted food. All these things are done then, and if you don't [let the husband have sex] later, then it is a sin. . . . When our marriage is being performed then the father of the bride has to touch the feet of the groom. Then the priest tells him to touch the groom's knees and here and here and finally the conch shell is placed on the groom's navel. That embrace, the touching of the breast—all this is done to show that all bonds have been broken.

Two things support the interpretation of the vermilion mark ritual as symbolic of the bride's defloration. One is the fact that the bride's parents may not witness the ritual. The second is the fact that afterward, the bride's status vis-à-vis the groom has been reversed. She is now definitely *lower* than him. The change in the bride's status is immediately expressed by the "changing place" rite (*thau sarne*) which comes next. The groom stands and removes the bride from her seat on his right to the less honored position on his left. The bride must then grasp the groom's coat and ask him to sit (on her right). She then touches his feet (*dhok*). From now on she will always sit on his left and greet him by touching his feet.

Two Feasts (*Janti Bakhri* and *Runce Sapro*)

After the pavilion ceremonies are concluded attention shifts to the wedding feasts. Two separate feasts are prepared. One, the "portion of the groom's party" (*janti bakhri*) is cooked and eaten by the groom's side on some public land in the bride's village from supplies given by the bride's family. The party sends one leg (*sapro*) of the goat to the bride's feast, which is called the "tearful leg" (*runce sapro*). The groom must eat twice; once with his own friends and once again with the bride at her feast. After the wedding couple have eaten, the bride's guests are fed in order of caste rank.

The Bride's Farewell (*Dulai Anmaune*)

Then it is time for the saddest part of the wedding, the "farewell to the bride" (*dulai anmaune*). Once again the bride's women friends decorate and dress her in her wedding finery. They take extra pains now, because they know that the women of the groom's house will give the bride a very critical inspection when she arrives. They also tie seven knots in the drawstring of her petticoat, which the groom must untie that night.

Then the couple enters the matrka puja room, where the bride performs a final worship of her family gods. The bride's mother then ties pan, betel nut, and a rupee note very tightly into the groom's waist cloth. This knot will later be untied by the bride's new mother-in-law (*sasu*) and the contents used in the ritual games in the groom's house. Then the bride's mother says to the groom, "If you kill her the sin is yours, if you keep her the merit is yours" (*Mare pap, pale punya*). The bride's father gives a tika mark and a garland to the groom and then the bride. Both are fed curds, then the bride's bhar and ritual vessel are taken out in a procession around the pavilion. Behind follows the father,[31] carrying or leading the bride. As the Damai band plays, father and daughter circle the pavilion three times and then the bride's father puts her into the sedan chair brought by the groom's party. With the bride in the front and the groom behind (in his own sedan chair) the wedding party leaves the bride's village. At this point, even though informants say one should not weep at a kanyadan, almost all the bride's relatives and friends and the bride herself are weeping.

Arrival: Waving the Lamp and Barring the Door (*Arti Syauli* and *Dhoka Chekne*)

Before the party returns with the bride to the groom's house, the groom's sisters decorate their foreheads with a special tika mark of white rice flour and water. When the Damai band accompanying the party can be heard, a circle is purified with cowdung paste in the sacred enclosure erected earlier in the groom's courtyard. A copper tray with five compartments (*panc pala*), a ritual vessel, and a special "lamp" made of seven rice-flour cups, each containing clarified butter and a wick, are placed in the circle. The bride's sedan chair is carried over the spot and held there while the groom's sisters do a brief ritual called "the shadow of the lamp" beneath her (*arti syauli*). It involves waving a lighted lamp before the vessel and worshiping it with flowers, rice grains, and dubo grass. Then the bride is lowered and the sisters circle her sedan chair three times clockwise, with the sister in the lead pouring water from a spouted water vessel. The groom's sisters then give tika, a flower garland, and curds first to the groom and then to the bride. The bride is helped out of her sedan chair by her husband's paternal aunt (*phupu*) and led toward the house. She is preceded by the groom's vessel and bhar. On reaching the door, however, the bride finds the way blocked by the groom's sisters. This is a kind of ritual joking called "barring the door" (*dhoka chekne*.) Only after the bride has promised them each a new blouse (which she must give formally at a later date) is she allowed in the house. Inside the door seven piles of paddy have been heaped on the floor leading to the family altar (usually in the kitchen area) where the matrka puja was done during the purbanga ceremonies in the groom's house. Each pile is topped with a leaf plate containing a lighted wick, which the bride must extinguish with her foot as she steps on the piles of grain to reach the altar. Then with the help of the groom's priest, the couple worships the vessel and the seven matrka.

Games with the New Mother-in-Law

In front of the matrka the "joining of the hair-braids" rite (*cultho jorne*) is done. The bride and her new mother-in-law put their heads together, and strands of their hair are entwined and anointed with clarified butter by the priest. Narikot informants say this is done so the two women will not quarrel.[32] If there are co-wives of the new bride, the rite must be done with them also.

Now the bride goes to the door while her mother-in-law remains at the altar and they both sweep the piles of grain toward each other. Then the two women play the ritual "filling a grain measure" game (*pathi bharne*). The groom's mother fills a measure with grain and hides in it the money, sacred thread, and betel nut which the bride's mother had tied into the groom's waist band. Then the grain is dumped out into a winnowing tray, and the two women compete to see who can find the objects first. This must be done three times. Then the paddy is heaped on a winnowing basket, and bride and mother-in-law

carry it upstairs alone to put it away in the storeroom, a rite called "showing the storeroom" (*bharar dekhaune*).

Looking at the Face of the Bride (*Mukh Herne*)

The final ceremony of the day—and perhaps the most uncomfortable for the new bride—is the *mukh herne,* "seeing the face." The bride is seated, always slumped over with downcast eyes, while the women of the family, starting with the groom's mother, lift her veil to look at her face. They must place some money in her lap, and for that they buy the privilege of being as critical as they like in their comments about her. After her mother-in-law has seen her face, the bride must touch her mother-in-law's feet with her forehead (*dhok dine*). The other women of the family also have their feet touched by the bride. And then it is time for the neighbor women to come and see the bride and evaluate the new member of their village.

Fire Ceremony and Ritual Games in the Groom's Pavilion

The next day the final rituals in the groom's pavilion begin with a special fire ceremony called the *caturthi hom.*[33] This fire ceremony is not strictly part of the marriage; some poor families do an abbreviated version on "rented" land in the bride's pavilion. But most families do it, because it is "custom" and because it is an auspicious way to say farewell to the gods who were invoked for the wedding.

Then when the fire ceremony is complete, family and neighbors gather for the final ritual games. The bride and groom are seated once again on the southern side of the pavilion. A large copper vessel is placed before them filled with muddy water, leaves from used leaf plates, and stones. The priest takes the paper on which the auspicious time for the kanyadan was written and wraps it around a stone to make the "fish" for the "catching fish" game (*macha marne*). First the groom hides it in the vessel among the dried leaves and the bride searches for it. Then the bride makes the groom search. This ritual is accompanied by much joking and teasing from the groom's village friends and the groom himself. At one wedding I observed, the groom tricked the bride by only pretending to hide the fish in the vessel. He held it in his hand where all the villagers could see it while the bride searched and searched in the muddy waters of the pot.

Next comes the "eating of polluted food" ritual (*jutho khane*). Several ball-shaped sweets (*kasar*) are placed on a tray before the couple. The groom takes a bite out of one, thus making it jutho or ritually polluted, and the bride must finish it. This is repeated several times; it expresses the bride's subservient status and respect for her husband. The groom then gives her some money. From this day on she will always take her food from the jutho plate of her husband, and he will often leave some special food on his plate for her as a gesture of affection.[34]

As a final expression of the bride's subservience to her husband, another foot-washing ceremony (*gora pani khane*) must now be performed. Two days before in her parent's home the bride's feet were washed by her relatives. Now her position is completely reversed, and she must wash her husband's feet and drink the water. After she has done so she is supposed to grab the groom's big toe and refuse to release it until he gives her money. Henceforth she must wash his feet and drink the water before every rice meal where her husband is present.

After these ceremonies comes the bride's feast, where the groom's family first eat dal-bhat cooked by the bride. The bride and her mother-in-law together must cook some *khicari,* rice and lentil cooked together, at the family hearth. This signifies that the bride is now karma caleko, and that all members of her husband's family may eat from her hands. At the bride's feast the bride and groom eat together, and they are served first. (Ordinarily the daughter-in-law eats alone after everyone else has been served.) The bride is given food on two separate leaf plates. She takes a little from each and the jutho leftover food is thrown away. The groom's family must feast the friends, relatives, and neighbors whom they invited to the wedding. Everyone will be served in order of caste rank. If the groom's family is Chetri, they will have called in a Brahman to do the cooking so that their Brahman neighbors may also eat the food.

The Bride's Visit to Her Natal Home (*Dulan Pharkaune*)

The main wedding ceremonies are now complete, but there remains the bride's subsequent return to her natal home, or *maita,* with her new husband. This journey is called "the return of the bride" (*dulan pharkaune*) and by orthodox account the bride should return to her maita only after the fifth night after the kanyadan—the night during which according to orthodox tradition the marriage may be consummated.[35]

Before the couple returns to the groom's house, the bride's family must give them at least a measure of rice, some lentils, and a tray of *masala* (lit. "spices") including a sacred thread, betel nut, and pan as well as sweets. Various curries, pickles, and fried breads are sent. They must also return an amount of money greater than the sum their daughter received during the ceremony when the groom's female relatives paid to see the bride's face. These ritual gifts to the groom's family are called "feeding a snack" (*khaja khuwaune*).

The Bride's Father Visits His In-Laws (*Samdhini/Samdhi Bhet*)

As a final gesture of good will and generosity, the bride's people, if they can afford it, may do a ceremony called either "meeting the mother and father-in-law" (*sasu/sasura cinne*) or "meeting the child's mother and father-in-law" (*samdhini/samdhi bhet*). For this the bride's father journeys to his daughter's house and presents his *samdi* or child's in-laws with a tray of spices and sweets as lavish as he can afford and a new sari, blouse-piece, and petticoat for his child's mother-in-law. Until this is done the bride's new mother-in-law must hide from the bride's father if he should visit his daughter's house. The point of the ceremony is to ease the relationship—which tends to be formal and strained—between the two families.

Death Ceremonies

Four Levels of Ritual Obligation

The ceremonies of the final life-cycle rites—those concerned with death—are in a sense never really complete. Theoretically death observances, *sraddha,* continue forever through phases of lessening intensity and individuality. The most personal and demanding are those during the first thirteen days after death, *kirya basne*. Then there is a period of regular monthly rituals and mourning, *masik sraddha,* during the first year after death. A third phase of annual rites—*ekodhista sraddha*—is observed on the lunar anniversary of an individual's death by his or her male descendants for three generations. Finally, there is a collective honoring of all the ancestors, *sora sraddha,* during the fortnight preceding the fall festival of Dasai every year for as long as the lineage itself survives.

Indeed, the death rituals taken collectively embody with extreme clarity the belief already stressed as so central to village Hinduism: that the householder attains immortality, albeit "conditional" immortality, through his or her progeny. The rituals express village ideas about the nature of this mode of immortality and about the responsibility of the living patrilineal unit toward its deceased members.

The Ancestors' Place in the Hierarchy of Spiritual Beings

As mentioned earlier, the pitr or ancestor spirits are immortal—but theirs is a circumscribed and somewhat contingent immortality, very different from the transcendent immortality of the devta, gods, or mahatma, saints. In village conception the pitr are clearly neither gods nor saints. They are firmly described as "dead people" (*moreko manche*). They are still involved in the periphery of the samsaric round, dependent on their patrilineal descendants for sustenance and comfort in the afterlife. Devta, on the other hand, have never been caught up in samsara, except for an occasional incarnation as part of their divine play; and the saints have achieved release and thus escaped samsara altogether through their austerities and ascetic renunciation.

Gods are free of the needs and, to a large extent, of the emotions, which control human beings. Of course they still enjoy the pleasant sights, smells, and food offered to them in puja. But they do not *need* these things as the pitr need the food and water which their descendants offer them in sraddha. Also, though the gods do feel pleasure and anger (which is occasionally expressed in the good and bad fortunes of men) their emotions are not as petty and vindictive as those of the pitr. As one village saying goes: "The gods give but the ancestors destroy" (*Devta haru dinchan; pitr haru harchan*). I was first confused when informants repeatedly told me that the pitr were bigger or greater than the gods (*pitrharu devta bhanda thulo chan*). But they explained that this meant that the pitr are more likely to give them trouble than the gods. They are more dangerous, not because they are higher or more powerful but because they are still under the control of samsaric needs and emotions.

This differentiation between saints and gods on the one

hand and pitr on the other is reinforced by the distinction which is sometimes made between swarga, heaven, and the pitrlok, the abode of the ancestors. As we saw earlier, swarga is conceived by some villagers as a kind of literal equivalent to the metaphysical concept of mukti, release or salvation. It is the reward for fastidious obedience to the householder's dharma just as true mukti is the reward of strict adherence to the discipline of the ascetic's dharma. Swarga is the splendorous realm of the gods, and its inhabitants want for nothing. The pitrlok, however, with its continuing dependency, is more like an extension of samsara than a transcendence of it. As one village man explained: "If I could be sure that my mother had gone to swarga, I would not do sraddha for her. She would not need it there. But who can see the results of karma? She may be going hungry and thirsty in the pitrlok if I don't do her sraddha."

The Pitr and the Patriline

Another facet of the pitr's peculiar nontranscendent immortality is their continuing connection with their patrilineal unit. Each pitr or group of pitr is known and honored by only a small segment of Hindu society, while the gods are more accessible and worshiped much more widely.[36] Those who honor the same pitr are somehow related. There are many levels of ceremonial obligation which reflect the proximity of relation to the deceased and to the other individuals who honor the deceased as one of their pitr. Indeed, exactly who has what ceremonial obligations to which specific pitr is one of the clearest indicators of (1) the ideology of mutual rights and duties within the patriline; (2) how the living members of the extended patriline are organized into family units; and (3) how a patrilineal unit is connected to other patrilines through marriage.

There are roughly four levels of ceremonial obligation towards one's pitr which, as I mentioned before, are marked by decreasing intensity and individuality. (See chart 3.2.) The first three levels (i.e., kirya basne, masik sraddha, and ekodhista sraddha) are confined to pitr from one's own patriline—who by birth or marriage share one's own gotra and thar. The fourth level of obligation extends not only to all deceased karma caleko members of one's own lineage for three ascending generations, but also to women who have married out of the lineage and certain close affinal relatives. The affinal and more distant consanguineal relationships included at this level seem to be largely coextensive with the category of more distant relatives whom one calls *natadar*.

The performance of the first three kinds of ceremonies is a matter of clear undisputed obligation. A man who fails to perform his father's or mother's kirya, for example, automatically loses caste. Performance of the first three levels is seen as a duty connected with the right to inherit land, which is preeminently the son's right. In the absence of sons, the principles determining who does kirya, and the closely related question of who inherits the land, can become confused. The latter especially is an area of ambiguity and stress in Brahman-Chetri family structure to which we will return in our discussion of kinship.

At the moment let us look briefly at who is responsible for kirya and who is eligible for land inheritance. Informants tend to speak as if the two were always the same, but in reality the order of precedence does not exactly coincide. For example, in the absence of wife or son, a deceased man's widowed daughter-in-law stands to inherit his land, but one of his brothers should do kirya for him. If, because of some particularly bitter quarrel with the deceased, the brothers refuse, the daughter-in-law of the deceased could simply pay a male Brahman to observe the rituals in her stead. Although a wife does inherit a share in her husband's ancestral property equal to her son's share, women are not considered as efficacious as men in performance of the rituals, since "a woman might menstruate and become impure during the thirteen days of kirya basne."[37] Even if a bereaved woman were past menopause however, villagers preferred a male as chief mourner. Informants said that, except for cremation (which is an all-male ceremony), a woman *could* perform kirya if there were no one else, and if she were too poor to pay a male Brahman to stand in for her. But no villager could recall ever seeing a woman do the kirya rituals.

The order of precedence given here for inheritance of ancestral property (*ansa*) holds largely for kirya responsibility *if the women are removed*. The order of inheritance which villagers tended to give for the death of male ego is the following:

1) wife (equally with the sons)
2) sons
3) son's sons
4) son's wife
5) daughter (with permission from ego's brothers)[38]
6) brothers
7) brother's children.

Chart 3.2 Sequence of Death Rites: The Four Levels of Ritual Obligation*

Level of Ritual Obligation		Sequence	Ritual
First level: *kirya basne*		before death	dying person moved to river or Tulsi; given water to drink and cow's tail to hold
		death occurs	women of the household lament; wife removes bangles and unbraids hair; chief mourner shaves his head
	day 1	as soon as possible	*malami* (all-male funeral procession)
		" "	cremation
		first night after death occurs	*ksetrabas/koro barne*
	day 2	morning of day after death	*dhikuro sraddha*
	day 3	third day after death	" & *asthiasanchayana*
	day 4		*dhikuro sraddha*
	day 5		" "
	day 6		*dhikuro sraddha*
	day 7		" " & *pateya sraddha*
	day 8		*dhikuro sraddha*
	day 9		" "
	day 10		destruction of *dhikuro*
	day 11		*egharau sram* (& *abyabdika sraddha*)
	day 12		*sapinda sraddha*
	day 13		*suddha santi*
Fourth level: *sora sraddha, abhyudayik sraddha, tarpan*		theoretically, in perpetuity during the lunar fortnight before Dasai (on the lunar date which corresponds with the death of the father of the male household head).	1. *sora sraddha*
		before auspicious family rituals such as weddings and bartamans.	2. *abhyudayik sraddha*
		every day (in orthodox families), and as part of all *sraddha* rituals.	3. *tarpan*
Second level: *barakhi* or *masik sraddha*		beginning of the first year after death (day 11 of *kirya basne* period)	*abyabdika sraddha*

Level of Ritual Obligation	Sequence	Ritual
	29 days after death	*unamasik sraddha*
	1 month " "	*duitya sraddha*
	45 days " "	*tripaksika sraddha*
	2 months " "	*tritiya sraddha*
	3 months " "	*caturtha sraddha*
	4 months " "	*pancama sraddha*
	5 months " "	*sasta sraddha*
	6 months " "	*unasarna sraddha*
	7 months " "	*saptama sraddha*
	8 months " "	*astama sraddha*
	9 months " "	*nauma sraddha*
	10 months " "	*dasama sraddha*
	11 months " "	*ekadasa sraddha*
	1 day less than a year after death	*unabdika sraddha*
	12 months—first anniversary of death	*duwadasa/barakhi sraddha*
Third level: *ekodhista sraddha*	subsequent lunar death anniversaries for next three generations	*ekodhista sraddha*

*See text for explanation of terms.

For a woman's death, the sequence of inheritance is:

1) sons
2) sons's sons
3) husband
4) co-wife's sons
5) co-wife's son's sons
6) daughter (with permission from husband's brother)
7) husband's brothers
8) husband's brother's children
9) own brothers.

This order is by no means universally applied, since in the absence of a spouse or direct male descendant, sentiment and sheer politics come into play. For instance, a powerful sonless widow who hated her co-wife's son could maneuver to pass her share of her husband's ancestral property on to her own daughter instead. Nevertheless, if we leave the politics of land inheritance aside for the moment, the order of precedence for kirya responsibility itself gives clear expression to the Hindu ideals of the parent/son bond and of patrilineal solidarity.

The First Level of Obligation: The Thirteen Days of Death Pollution (*Kirya Basne*)

Even after the most peaceful death of an elderly person, there is a transitional period during which the deceased becomes a *pret*—a ghost or malevolent spirit—and for thirteen days hovers in vague discontent near the family home. This is the period of death pollution (*sutak*) for the family of the deceased and his close agnatic relatives. It is also a time of severe austerity and social isolation called "sitting in mourning," *kirya basne*, for the chief mourner (*kirya putra*). The main rites of the kirya basne period center around four transformations: (1) disposing of the corpse, (2) feeding the pret and reconstituting its "body," (3) changing the pret into a pitr, and (4) purifying the family and the chief mourners, and in the case of a father's death, recognizing the chief mourner's new status as head of the household.

Cremation

As soon as the life breath has ceased, the body becomes a dangerous and highly polluting object.[39] It is immediately wrapped in new white or saffron-colored cloth,[40] sprinkled with yellow powder, kus grass, and tulsi leaves, and tied to one or two bamboo poles so that it can be carried to the river. Only male caste fellows may make up the funeral procession (*malami*), and they must be barefoot and clad only in a dhoti or shorts.[41] They walk in silence except for the periodic blasts from a conch shell, which is sounded to warn others that the inauspicious procession is coming. Until the corpse has been cremated, the members of the funeral procession cannot speak to, or touch, anyone of lower caste than themselves. Likewise, the corpse itself must be carefully guarded against pollution from the touch of an animal, an untouchable, or anyone of caste lower than the deceased.

The corpse is bathed in the river. One measure of rice and some money are tied in a white cloth and placed on the corpse's chest, and a small piece of gold is placed in the mouth to purify it. When a man dies, his widow's bangles and marriage beads (which she is no longer privileged to wear) are also placed on his chest. Napthalene (*kapur*) and clarified butter are also put on the body, which is then wrapped in new clothing.

Meanwhile, the funeral pyre (*cita*) is being prepared. It must contain at least a small piece of the sacred sandalwood and *tulari* wood, as well as some kus grass. Then the corpse is carried once counterclockwise (*ulto*, backwards, the inauspicious direction) around the pyre, placed on top, and sprinkled with yellow powder, kus and tulsi leaves. One member of the funeral procession removes a small portion of the flesh from the corpse and buries it in the sand near the river. This is the share for the demon who eats corpses (*krbyad rakhsa ko bhag*). If this is not given, one informant explained, the demon will be angry and will return with the funeral procession to trouble the bereaved family.

The chief mourner, who had shaved his head before he left the house with the funeral procession, now bathes in the river. Then, taking a firebrand (*dag batti*), he walks counterclockwise three times around the funeral pyre. Then he puts the firebrand into the mouth of the corpse. He lights the bundles of straw on the rest of the pyre while the family priest recites a mantra invoking the fire god Agni to burn the corpse. Finally when the corpse is burnt a piece of bone (*astu*) is taken. This is wrapped in white cloth and thrown into the river, where it will be "carried to heaven."[42] What is left of the funeral pyre is cleared away and the ground beneath it washed with purifying river water and sprinkled with cow's milk. The chief mourner must then bathe and offer six cremation rice-balls (*cita pinda*) of uncooked rice to the deceased on the site of the funeral pyre.[43]

Before returning, the chief mourner must again bathe and change to a fresh dhoti. The members of the funeral procession also bathe. A new fire is built and sprinkled with clarified butter, and a thorn branch placed on the ground beside it in the direction of the path back to the village. The chief mourner and the members of the funeral procession must walk over the fire and the thorn branch on their way back to the village "so sickness and demons cannot follow them back to the house from the burning ground." As they walk they reverse the normal order, with the youngest men in front and the oldest man in the rear.

The Mourning Enclosure (*Ksetrabas*)

When the chief mourner returns he enters a room which has been purified for him with gobar. He will spend the rest of the day and night in severe mourning called *koro barne* or *kse-*

trabas (literally "staying in a field of purity"). He is separated from all other members of the family within an enclosure of new, undyed string (*kacho dhago*) which is strung around the room.[44] Within the enclosure, on the south-facing side, a clay pot (*ghaito*) filled with water and milk is suspended over a "cup" made by hollowing out a mound of ritually pure cowdung. A small hole is made in the pot and stuffed with kus grass, thus allowing the water and milk mixture to drip slowly into the cup of dung. Beside it is placed a clay dish containing seven kinds of grains and seeds (*sapta dhanya*) on top of which is a sesame oil lamp, which is kept burning. The family priest must offer a *pinda* or rice-ball beside the dish of seven grains.

On the day of death during the koro barne period when he remains within the ksetrabas enclosure, the chief mourner may not take rice.[45] His only food may be fruit and sugar water. For the next nine nights he must sleep within the enclosure with his head to the north on just some straw and a woolen blanket.[46] He may not drink water from a glass or metal vessel. Instead, water is brought from the well or a spring and poured into small cups called *khoca*, each made of a single sal leaf. The chief mourner must untie the knot in his *sika* (lock of hair which Hindus may not cut). He may not wear any stitched clothing—only a dhoti, a shawl, and a handkerchief as a head covering on his newly shaven head. He may not touch anyone, enter other people's houses, or even speak to individuals of castes lower than his own. Nor may he say the sacred gayatri mantra which he was given at his initiation or participate in any kind of worship beyond the kirya ceremonies.

New widows observe the same restrictions as the chief mourner. They may, however, wear a stitched blouse—so long as it is turned inside out. They do not generally shave their heads (unless they are very old or very orthodox), but refrain from oiling, combing, or braiding their hair.

In terms of purity and pollution these kirya basne restrictions can be looked at in several ways. Though they are similar in many respects to other sets of temporary ascetic rules aimed at making the individual pure before a certain religious act,[47] they have another important aspect. For besides protecting the chief mourner from pollution by outside forces, the restrictions also protect others from him, because he is in a state of extreme pollution (*bitulo*). The death of a close relative has severely lowered his ritual status. He is deeply involved with the deceased in his ceremonial obligations and has, in a sense, taken on the pollution of the corpse itself. Hence he must practice this strict asceticism both to purify himself so that he can resume his normal status and to purify the deceased, who exists during the mourning period as a ghost dependent on the chief mourner's ministrations for release. The pret itself is an unclean being—somewhere between a corpse and a pitr on the ritual scale, and if there is any irregularity in the chief mourner's observation of kirya basne, the deceased will not be freed from its ghost form.

Reassembling the Body (*Dhikuro Sraddha*)

On the morning of the first day after death, when ksetrabas fast is over, the nine days of *dhikuro sraddha* begin, when a mound (*dhikuro*) is built on which the deceased will be ceremonially fed. During this time the chief mourner is feeding the spirit of the deceased each day in its ghost form, and also assembling a new "body" for the deceased. For the pinda which he offers—cooked rice formed into a ball with curd, sugar, bananas, and black sesame seeds—are both the food and the body of the deceased.[48] The pinda offered on the first day forms the head and throat. The second day's pinda becomes the chest, and so on until the back, genitals, upper legs, calves and feet, hands, and male or female "seed" are formed on successive days. Finally on the tenth day with the final pinda the reassembled "body" of the deceased, said to be about eighteen inches high, gains the power to breathe and eat and is ready to make the year-long journey to the pitrlok.

The first day's dhikuro sraddha begins when the chief mourner bathes in the river or any running water. During this bath he offers sesame seeds and water to the deceased. He finds a stone and sprinkles it with kus grass, sesame seeds, and water and then fills a copper vessel with water for the sraddha and his own use.

Under the direction of the family priest (who never enters the area), the chief mourner clears an area on public land near the water, covers it with a cowdung paste, and makes the dhikuro or mound of dirt where the spirit of the deceased will come as a ghost to be given food and water.

This feeding must be repeated for nine days or up to the tenth day after death. A tripod of sticks is placed over the mound, and a clay pot with a hole in the bottom—the same one used

in the ksetraba enclosure—is suspended over it. (See figure 7.) The pot is filled with a mixture of water and milk so that it will drip steadily over the dhikuro mound. Within the purified area a fire is built on which the chief mourner must first cook rice for the pinda offering and then for his own single daily meal. Only after offering pinda to the ghost (as well as substances like sandalwood paste, sheep's wool, raw sugar, and a piece of iron) may the chief mourner cook his own sparse meal of rice and clarified butter. The meal is eaten on leaf plates and stirred with a piece of wood, which are all thrown away after the meal because of the extreme impurity they have absorbed through contact with the chief mourner.

When he is finished, he fills the vessel suspended over the dhikuro mound with water, removes the pinda, and throws it into the river. Then he spreads the whole area with a fresh coat of cowdung paste, places thorn branches over the tripod to keep the animals from polluting the dhikuro, and goes home.

After the last dhikuro sraddha is completed on the tenth day after death, the dhikuro must be destroyed. First the string and the plate of seven types of grains are brought from the koro barne room in which the chief mourner has been sleeping and placed on the dhikuro mound. Then the chief mourner offers sweets to the dhikuro and removes the tripod and its suspended clay pot. After dividing the mound into four sections with a piece of gold wire wrapped with kus grass, he breaks up the mound, shatters the clay pot, and snaps the koro barne string. If the deceased was his father or mother or anyone to whom he owed respect, he must break up the mound with his head—as if touching his head to the deceased's feet one last time. If the deceased was the chief mourner's wife, he uses his chest to push away the mound, and for his younger brother or any other junior person, he need only use his knee. Then he takes some dirt from the dhikuro mound and mixes it with the seven kinds of grain. He walks several paces away from the abandoned mound and, turning his back on it, he walks backwards, throwing dirt and the mixed grains behind him until he has reached the place where the mound was.

Informants explained to me that during the period of mourning following death, "everything is backwards." That is somewhat of an exaggeration. The reversals are not always so graphic as in the ritual destruction of the dhikuro, but certainly many behavioral norms are suspended. The ritual status, clothes,

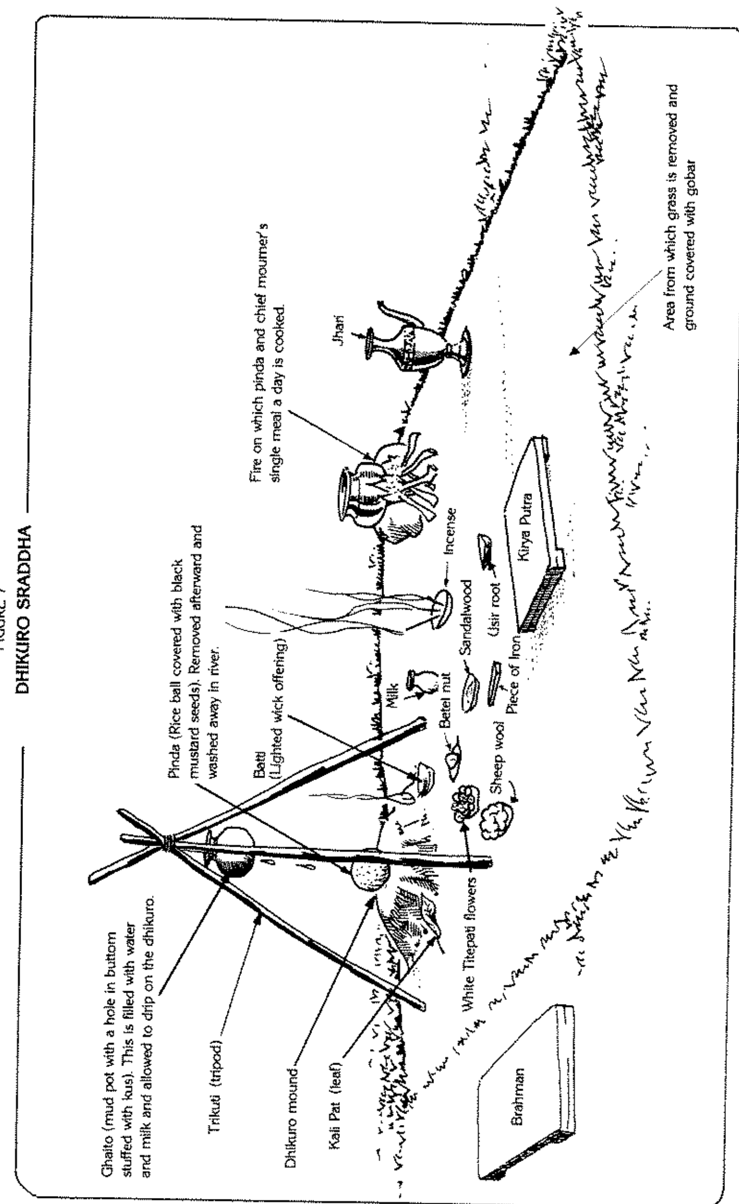


FIGURE 7
DHIKURO SRADDHA

food, speech, and even sleep of the chief mourner (and to a lesser extent the family and wider kin group) have been drastically altered. He has been in what Van Gennep (1909) describes as a "liminal state," cut off from the gods and from his fellow villagers, involved almost exclusively with the spirit of the deceased.

With the dismantling of the dhikuro, however, the return to normality begins. During the next three days the chief mourner and his family will be drawn progressively back into ordinary social intercourse. As soon as he has destroyed the dhikuro, the chief mourner bathes in the river, shaves his head again, drinks purifying cow urine, and changes his sacred thread. He is now pure enough to end his most acute separation from society by touching first a cow and then his Brahman priest with a piece of kus grass in his hand. From now on he may touch members of his own caste and those above him. The restrictions against touching lower but normally touchable castes still remain until the thirteenth day, though he may at least speak with them now. Also, after the tenth day he no longer has to eat outside but may begin to take his food in the house.

The Eleventh Day (*Egharau Sram*)

On the eleventh day after death a series of other ceremonies are performed. These ceremonies are largely intended to help release the deceased's soul from its worldly sins and to assist the soul in reaching the pitrlok rather than hell. On its quest to reach the pitrlok, however, the soul must undertake a very difficult and dangerous journey through the other world. Several features of the eleventh day rites, therefore, are geared toward providing the soul with the necessary supplies it will need: food, clothing, a bed, even a toothbrush. By giving these to the officiating priest as *sayya dan* (literally "gift of a bed") it is believed that they are transferred to the deceased. Very poor families may give replicas of the more expensive objects such as the bed, but often the sayya dan is quite lavish and constitutes one of the major expenses of the initial death rituals. After the sayya dan a series of rice-ball offering are made—seventeen in all—which initiate and prefigure the offerings that will be made periodically throughout the upcoming year of mourning.

The Ghost Becomes an Ancestor Spirit:
The Rice-ball Ceremony (*Sapinda Sraddha*)

On the twelfth day one of the most important of the death rituals is performed: the *sapinda sraddha,* in which the deceased in transformed from an inauspicious ghost to an ancestral spirit. This is done by mixing his or her pinda with pinda representing the family's three most honored patrilineal ancestors.[49] Once again the chief mourner must bathe in the river and drink cow's urine to purify himself. Then he prepares an area by sprinkling it with "white" mud and sesame seeds and dividing it into three separate areas (areas A, B, and C in figure 8) with lines of white rice flour. Area A is for the gods. Kus grass figures placed in plates of uncooked rice are set out, one representing Bhuswami (the late father of King Birendra) and three representing the *biswadeva,* all the gods. Area B is for the pitr of the chief mourner. Three kus grass figures are set out to represent the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of the deceased. In area C a single kus figure is set out to represent the deceased, who is still a ghost.

Several offerings are made to these throughout the sapinda sraddha. The significant feature of these ceremonies is that in the beginning after each offering the chief mourner makes to the ghost in area C, he must purify himself (by drinking cow's urine) before crossing over to area B or A to worship the pitr or the gods. The deceased in ghost form is still unclean, and this impurity must not be transferred to the gods or the pitr. During the course of the ceremony, however, the offerings to the ghost and those to the pitr are ritually joined. Water from the ghost's leaf cup is poured into leaf cups containing water offered to the pitr. Likewise, the pinda of the deceased is divided into three parts, which the chief mourner must press firmly into the three pindas that have been offered to the deceased person's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Thus symbolically the distinction in ritual purity between the deceased and his ancestors has been removed. The deceased is no longer a pret, but has become a pitr ready to begin the journey to the pitrlok. Now the chief mourner returns home and a feast is given in which twelve Brahmans are fed (*baun bhojan*). Up to this point, no auspicious worship had been done in the bereaved household, but now that the deceased has been released from ghost form, the ban on worship is lifted. So before the feast the auspicious elephant-

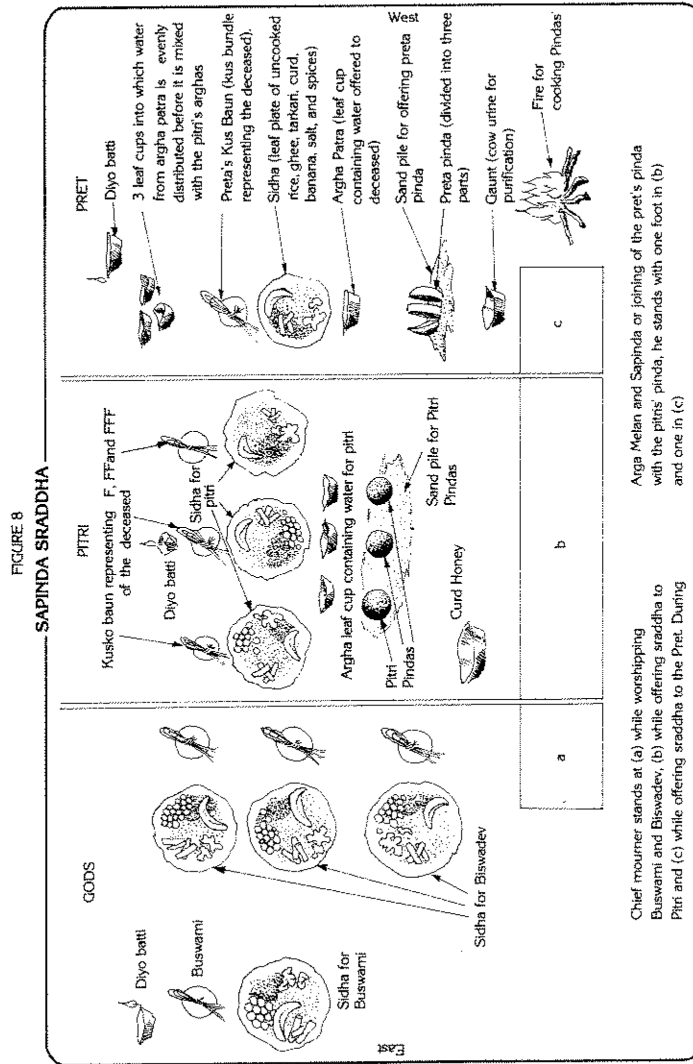


FIGURE 8
SAPINDA SRADDHA

headed god, Ganes, is worshiped. The chief mourner may also retie his topknot.

The period of death pollution ends on the thirteenth day with a series of rituals called literally the "pure and peaceful" (*suddha santi*), which must be completed before midday. A simple sacred enclosure is constructed in the family courtyard, and a fire worship ceremony is performed. Then "in case anything has been forgotten" in the kirya basne rituals, a golden vessel (actually it is usually a clay pot containing a tiny piece of purifying gold) filled with curds, clarified butter, and milk is given to a Brahman. This is the "ghost vessel" (*pret ghara*) intended to insure the release of the deceased from the ghost form. Then, after certain gifts are given to the family priest, a feast is prepared and given to the members of the funeral procession.

The Second Level of Obligation: The Year of Mourning and Its Monthly Rites (*Barakhi* and *Masik Sraddha*)

After the ceremonies on the thirteenth day the chief mourner and his family are once again pure (*cokho*). The chief mourner can now mix freely with others and eat all the ordinary foods, except that he must refrain from milk for a year in the case of his mother's death and curds in the case of his father's death. He may wear stitched clothing and shoes again—but the clothes must all be white, and the shoes only of cloth or rubber rather than leather. Widows also must wear white for a year and never again wear red—even as a tika mark or hair braid. They should not oil or braid their hair for a year and should not see any males from their natal home (*maiti*) for a year.

The chief mourner may do daily household puja if there is no one else, but he may not use red powder in the worship. Nor may he receive anything but yellow tika during the year. He should not enter a temple or take prasad. Likewise, neither he nor the members of his household may go to other households to receive tika during the Dasai festival. He may attend weddings, but no weddings or initiations should be performed in his household. The one exception here is in the case of the widower, who may marry and bring home a new wife forty-five days after his first wife's death.

At intervals during the year of mourning a series of monthly rites or *masik sraddha* must be done to assist the deceased on his journey to the pitrlok and make sure he has sufficient nourishment on the way. As can be seen from chart 3.2 at the beginning of this section, there are actually sixteen rather than twelve masik sraddhas. As mentioned earlier the first of the memorial offerings (adyabdika sraddha) which marks the beginning of the year after death is actually performed during the kirya basne period on the eleventh day after death.[50] The actual cycle of monthly offerings however, begins one day short of one month after the death (*unamasik*) and is completed on the first anniversary of death (*barakhi sraddha*) when the year of mourning is over.[51]

During the year of mourning the normal annual memorial ceremony (ekodhista sraddha) of other deceased relatives of the same generation as the person who died, but junior in age/sex ranking, are not performed. Thus, when ego's mother dies he may do his deceased father's ekodhista sraddha during barakhi, but not the reverse.

Except for the final barakhi sraddha, none of the monthly sraddhas involves rice-ball (pinda) or water offerings (*tarpan*) which are so central to most sraddha ceremonies. The deceased, represented by a figure made of grass, is worshiped with offerings of a lighted wick, a clay pot full of water, and two plates of *sidha* or uncooked food.

The barakhi sraddha, however, which marks the end of the year of mourning and the arrival of the deceased in the pitrlok, is more elaborate. It is similar in structure to the annual ekodhista sraddha and sora sraddha rituals to be described below. In fact, the barakhi marks the transition between what I have called the second level of obligation and the third. It is actually the first of the ekodhista sraddha, which are henceforth to be performed every year on the lunar death anniversary of the deceased as long as his or her son, grandson, or great-grandson is alive.

The Third Level of Obligation: Annual Commemoration (*Ekodhista Sraddha*)

The ekodhista sraddha obligations are more diffuse than those for kirya basne or barakhi and more dependent on the particular

organization of family units within the patriline. For example, if all a man's sons are living in a single household (the ideal situation), when he dies they will all cooperate in a single joint ceremony for his death and subsequent annual ceremonies. But if, as usually happens on the death of the father, the brothers separate into individual households, then after the kirya and barakhi ceremonies, which are done jointly in the house of the eldest, the subsequent annual memorial for the father will be done separately by each of the brothers in his own household.

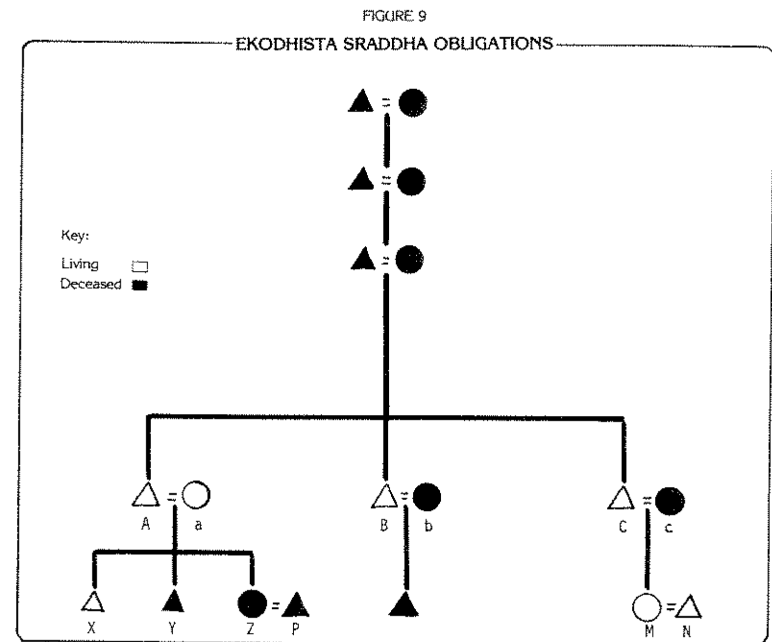
Figure 9 illustrates some of the principles which regulate these shifts in responsibility for ekodhista sraddha.

When three brothers A, B, and C share a single household they do ekodhista sraddha together for their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. They also participate together in the sraddha for B's and C's deceased wives and A's deceased son Y. (No sraddha is done for A's daughter Z because she was married and is now the responsibility of her husband P's patriline.)

After the brothers A, B, and C divide the joint patrilineal estate and set up separate households, the situation changes.

FIGURE 9

EKODHISTA SRADDHA OBLIGATIONS



A man makes offerings of food to his father's spirit during the annual *ekodhista sraddha* ceremony. *Photo by author*

Though all the brothers continue to perform separate ekodhista sraddha in their respective households for their father and mother, in many cases only the elder brother A, as senior representative of the patriline, will continue the observances for the grandfather and great-grandfather with their wives. A's brothers B and C will also cease to participate in the sraddha for A's son Y. And B and C will each do their own wife's sraddha alone without the help of the other brothers.

The number of individual pitr whom a given family must honor with separate annual ceremonies, then, usually depends on the family's generational depth and on whether its household head is the eldest living brother. For male ego B (who is not a senior brother) ekodhista obligations may extend minimally to his father, his mother, and his wife and son, since they predeceased him. Other factors, however, can increase the ranks of the household's dependent pitr who must be ritually "fed" once a year on their death anniversaries. For example, when B dies his ekodhista will probably be done by A and after him by A's son X, since B had no living offspring of his own. Otherwise one does not do sraddha for one's brother or uncle. C's sraddha, on the other hand, will probably be done by his daughter's husband N. N belongs to another patriline, but since C had no

male offspring, N has, in opposition to the usual patrifocal practice, gone to live with his wife's father and become a "house son-in-law" (*ghar-juai,* one who lives with his wife's parents). Though C's brothers must give their permission,[52] N will inherit C's property and do sraddha for him.

Although at least the eldest brother's family should perform ekodhista for three ascending generations, many families cease doing the full ceremony to be described below for their great-grandfathers. Instead of offering the usual rice ball and water libation they simply offer a plate of uncooked rice, spices, vegetables, curd, and fried bread called *sidha* to their family priest on the great grandfather's death anniversary. Those who are well off or very orthodox perform the full ekodhista sraddha, since it is felt to benefit the family if the great-grandfather's spirit is happy. As the village saying goes: "If you want to become wealthy, perform your great-grandfather's sraddha" (*Dhan kamāunu paryo bhane kupro bā ko śrāddha garnu*).

The Fourth Level of Obligation (*Sora Sraddha, Abhyudayik Sraddha,* and *Tarpan*)

The most important among the fourth-level death rituals is the sora sraddha, which is performed once in every Brahman-Chetri household during the lunar fortnight before the annual fall Dasai festival.[53] It is a collective ceremony in which food offerings are made to many ancestors at once. These same ancestors should be remembered with daily offerings of water (tarpan),[54] and again with occasional offerings of food and water during the abhyudayik sraddha described earlier as a necessary preparation (purbanga) for any auspicious family ritual such as an initiation or a wedding.

The fourth level—consisting of these three observances—is the most open in terms of the range of kinship categories which can be included and one's freedom about whether or not to maintain the obligation. A list is given later in this section of some twenty-five categories of pitr—many affinally related in collateral and ascending generations and even some fictively related—which *may* be included in sora sraddha and tarpan observance. In practice villagers are quite haphazard and

casual about keeping the record of names and gotras of the pitr which the priest must recite during the sora sraddha and tarpan ceremonies. Some villagers showed me their lists and were somewhat embarrassed to see that the lists were actually incomplete—with many of the gotras of affinal relatives unknown and even their names missing. Since the kin terms are given in Sanskrit and the priest recites all the names, villagers pay little attention to the specifics of which pitr are being invoked. When the priest does not know the name or gotra of a certain ancestor he addresses it as "what's his name" (*yatha nam*) and gives the gotra as *kasiv*, which is a "catch all" gotra for those who have no gotra. One family showed me a rather sketchy list of twenty-three ancestors which their priest had written out for sora sraddha. The head of the household was surprised when I mentioned that at the sora sraddha ceremony I had observed he had only offered sixteen pinda instead of the required twenty-three. The oversight of seven pinda was blamed on the family priest, who, my informant complained, "is always in a hurry and does sloppy work." Nevertheless, the incident indicates a certain laxity in keeping up sora sraddha and tarpan obligations, and it is easy to see how names get dropped from the list after a generation or two.

This blurring of connection and obligation is part of the phenomenon described earlier that occurs between members of the wider patrilineal kin groupings. As the genealogical chart in figure 10 illustrates, mutual observation of death pollution restrictions for deceased members drops from the full thirteen days among *sapindi bhai*, agnatic relatives within four generations, to a simple observance of bathing and abstaining from a meal (*chak khalko*) among *phuki bhai*, agnatic relatives ten generations removed and beyond. After five generations (i.e., beyond the sapindi bhai grouping) precise connections tend to be lost, and unless contact has been maintained through residential proximity, even these attenuated obligations usually lapse unless the relatives are members of a single kul. Members of a kul group know vaguely that they share common pitr. This is, after all, the basis of their relatedness. The obligation to observe death pollution for a deceased member (however minimal it may be) is an acknowledgment that the deceased is in some peripheral way one of their pitr.

Among the sapindi bhai, however, the relationships and their concomitant obligations are much clearer. They are, as we

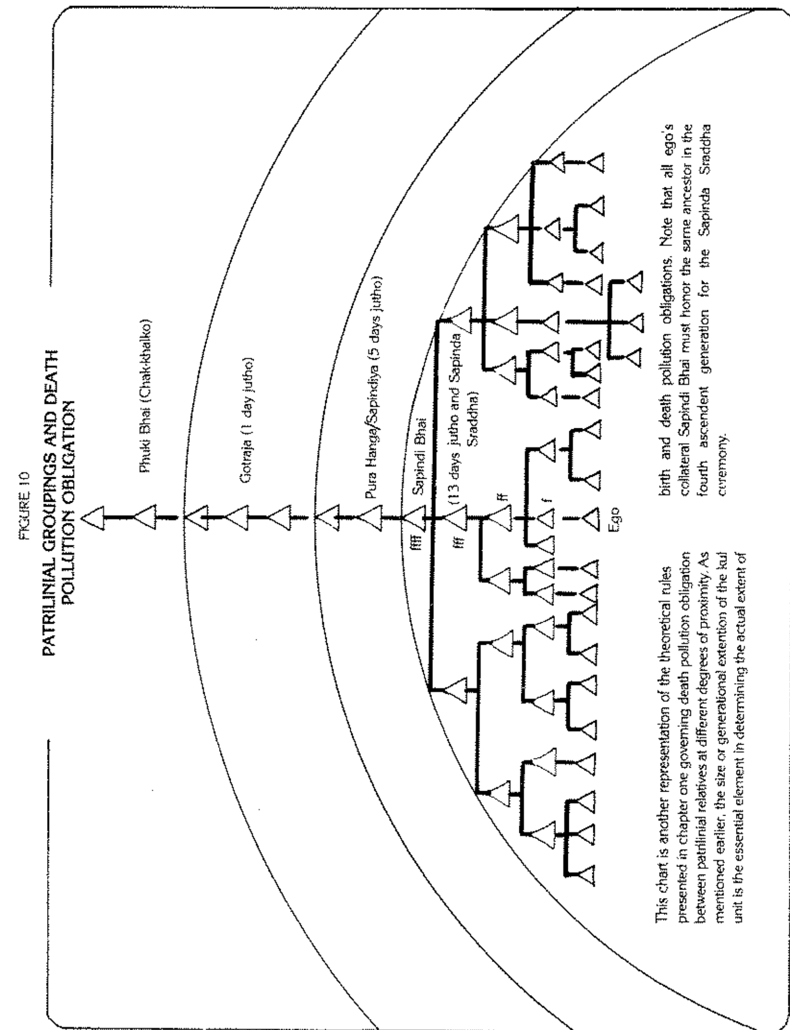


FIGURE 10
PATRILINIAL GROUPINGS AND DEATH POLLUTION OBLIGATION

This chart is another representation of the theoretical rules presented in chapter one governing death pollution obligation between patrilinial relatives at different degrees of proximity. As mentioned earlier, the size or generational extention of the kul unit is the essential element in determining the actual extent of birth and death pollution obligations. Note that all ego's collateral Sapindi Bhai must honor the same ancestor in the fourth ascendent generation for the Sapinda Sraddha ceremony.

have seen, ritualized in one of the most important death ceremonies, the sapinda sraddha, where the pinda offering to the deceased is ritually joined with the pinda of his three ascending patrilineal ancestors—those for whom the deceased had to do ekodhista sraddha during *his* lifetime. As the simplified diagram in figure 10 shows, this means ego offers a pinda to his paternal great-great-grandfather for the last time during the sapinda sraddha ceremony. This pitr, who is the common ancestor of all ego's sapinda bhai, will no longer receive separate ekodhista sraddha from ego and the other members of his generation. His immortality continues vaguely in the pitrlok. But his living descendants' direct memory of him has faded, and their specific obligations to him are finished—just as their connections and obligations to each other through him will be lost and attenuated in succeeding generations.

The ritual forms of the sora sraddha ceremony (to be described below) clearly express the status of the pitr vis-à-vis their living descendants and the gods. The person performing the sraddha plays a subservient but succoring role toward the pitr—very much like the Hindu host/guest relationship. The pitr are honored and their needs lavishly attended to through water libations and offerings of sidha and pinda. But, like a guest, the pitr should not remain too long. There is a certain relief on the part of the participants when the ceremony is over and the pitr sent back to the pitrlok. For the family has satisfied its obligation and feels that, since they have made the pitr "happy," the pitr now have a reciprocal obligation to make the family prosper—or at least not to be angry with them—during the coming year. This belief is expressed toward the end of the ceremony when, before bidding the pitr farewell, the individual performing the ceremony takes the pitr's blessing and asks that they help the family (here gotra) to increase and prosper.

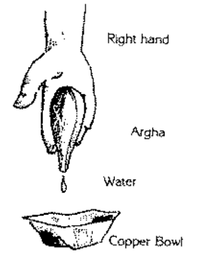
Besides expressing the somewhat uneasy relationship between the pitr and its living relatives, the symbolic forms of the sora sraddha—indeed of all types of sraddha—also articulate the position of the pitr with respect to the gods. As figure 11 shows, there are several ways to offer the *tarpan* or water libations which are part of most sraddha rituals. The different parts of the hand from which the libation is poured are ranked with respect to purity and auspiciousness. That which is dedicated to the gods (the fingertips) is the purest; that which is dedicated to the pitr (the space between the thumb and forefinger) is the lowest. It is

FIGURE 11

RITUAL FORMS EXPRESSING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN GODS (DEVTA) AND ANCESTOR SPIRITS (PITRI)

TARPAN: libation of water poured from a spouted copper vessel (argha) containing kus grass, sandalwood, rice grains, sesamum seeds, barley and flowers. Different hand positions are used when offering tarpan to:

1. Devta — Straight from fingers — Auspicious

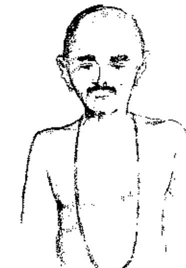


2. Sanakadi (mind born sons of Brahma) — from little finger side, Kayatirta — Intermediate

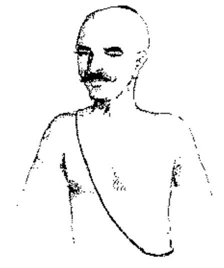
3. Pitri — From between thumb and forefinger — Inauspicious

Janai (sacred thread) worn in different positions when worshipping:

1. Devta
Sabhya
Auspicious



2. Sanakadi
Intermediate



3. Pitri
Abasabhya
Inauspicious

the same with the position of the sacred thread. The reverse of the ordinary auspicious position, over the right shoulder (*sabya*) must be worn when approaching the pitr. There is considerable emphasis on reversal and inauspiciousness throughout the various stages or levels of the death ceremonies, used to express the separation (from living humans on one side and the immortal transcendent gods on the other) which death has imposed on the pitr. For example, sora sraddha may be done only after midday, while the gods are usually worshiped early in the morning. Anything offered to the devta is offered with the palm facing downward and preferably to the east or west;[55] offerings to the pitr must be made with the palms facing up and toward the south. Likewise, the gods may be offered barley grains (which are planted and sprout during Dasai, symbolizing fertility and renewal) while the pitr are said to prefer black sesame seeds as offerings. We have already encountered one of the more vivid indications of the separation imposed by death in the strict ban on the color red in the worship of the pitr (except for abhyudayik ceremonies performed for weddings and other joyful occasions). Red powder (which symbolized the sexual possession of the bride in the marriage ceremony) may not be mixed with the unbroken rice grains (*acheta*) given to the pitr, as it usually is when offered to the gods. No red flowers may be offered, nor may red tika marks be given during or after the ceremony. Informants explain that the ancestors don't like the color red. They like white and above all, yellow. Hence all flowers and tika given during the sraddha are yellow or white—colors associated not only with death, but with ascetic withdrawal and purity.

On the day before sora sraddha the person who will be performing the ceremony (ego in figure 11) must purify himself with a ritual fast.[56] On the morning of the sraddha he bathes himself without soap because soap is impure (*bitulo*) and "the pitr don't like the smell of soap." He puts on a fresh dhoti and a new sacred thread. The women of the household are busy preparing a special meal—usually with the favorite sweet rice-milk pudding called *khir*—for as many Brahmans as they can afford to invite. Villagers say that the pitr are pleased when Brahmans and the family's young children are fed during a sraddha. The Brahmans are believed to somehow transmit the food they receive to the pitr. In fact, during the ceremony itself a Brahman (sometimes several) must be fed while sidha plates of uncooked food are being offered to the pitr. As one Chetri

woman explained, "When the sraddha is being performed . . . they feed the priest with fruits, pickles, and curries. If the priest is fed, then it is like feeding the pitr." Another informant from Nuwakot district explained the Brahmans are like visible pitr during the ritual feeding.[57]

Before the actual sora sraddha ceremony begins, the householder who is performing the ritual greets his priest and the other Brahmans he has invited[58] by washing their feet and drinking some of the water as a gesture of respect. Then he enters the sraddha area (see figure 12) and purifies himself by drinking cow urine, dung, milk, curds, kus grass, and water (*pancagabya*) and by performing the *prayascitta godan*, a gift of a cow or coins symbolizing a cow, made for expiation of former sins.

Then it is time for the series of tarpan or water offerings mentioned previously. The first is offered in the auspicious manner (see figure 10) to Brahma and all the other gods. Ego pours the water while the priest recites the names of the gods. Then ego changes his sacred thread to the intermediate position (like a garland round his neck) and offers tarpan to the Sanakadi, the seven ascetic, mind-born sons of the Brahma. Although the sons of Brahma are human, they are so removed by their ascetic purity from samsaric change and pollution (i.e., they were not born of women; they do not marry; and they remain forever at the innocent age of five) as to be semidivine—which is the way they are treated in the symbolic forms of sraddha.

The third libation is offered to the seven *dibya pitr* or *kabyabat*. These beings are definitely below the Sanakadi, but sometimes they are described as kings of the pitr and sometimes as the pitr's servants who bring sraddha offerings from the world of men back to the pitrlok. At any rate, for their tarpan the sacred thread is switched to the inauspicious *abasabya* position over the left shoulder.

Finally tarpan is offered to ego's own pitr, not only in his own thar and gotra, but those from his mother's brother's side, other affinal relatives, and even special fictive relatives. It is perhaps worth giving the long list of possible pitr categories here in the order in which they would be recited by the priest. Each male pitr is invoked together with his wife (*sapatni*) and each female with her husband (*sadaba sapatya*)—though in a few cases important spouses are mentioned separately. The actual number of pitr categories, then, is almost double the list given here:

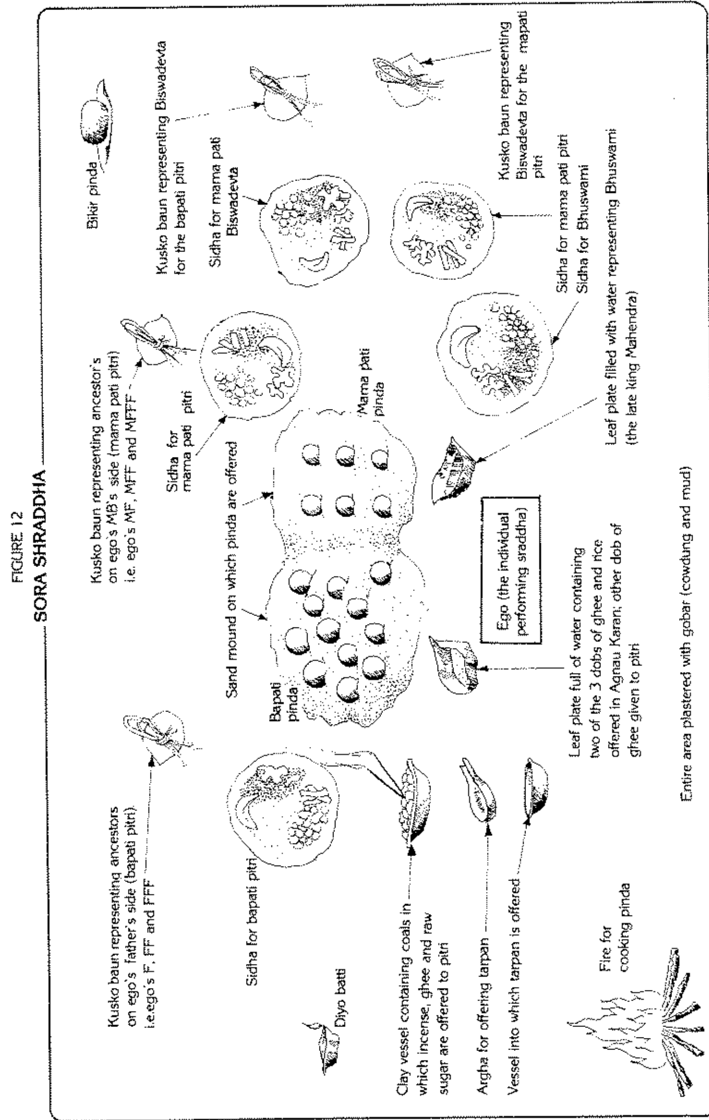


FIGURE 12
SORA SHRADDHA

1. father (*pitr*)
2. father's father (*pitamaha*)
3. father's father's father (*prapitamaha*)
4. mother (mata)
5. father's mother (*pitamahi*)
6. father's father's mother (*prapitamahi*)
7. mother's father (*matamaha*)
8. mother's father's father (*pramatamaha*)
9. mother's father's father's father (*brida pramatamaha*)
10. wife (*patni*)[59]
11. son (*choro*)
12. daughter (*chori*)
13. father's brother (*thulo/sanoba*)
14. mother's brother (*mama*)
15. brother (*daju/bhai*)
16. brother's wife (*bhauju*)
17. father's sister (*phuphu*)
18. mother's sister (*thuli/sani ama*)
19. sister (didi/bahini)
20. wife's father (*sasura*)
21. wife's mother (*sasu*)
22. the person who taught ego the gayatri mantra (*gayatri guru*)
23. person who gave special initiation (*diksa guru*)
24. persons initiated by ego (*cela*)
25. ritual friend (*mit/mitini*)
26. ritual friend's son or daughter (*mit chora/chori*)
27. those who have no living relatives (*aputra pitr*)

Probably no one has dead relatives in all these categories and, as we said, there is a certain laxity in keeping up the complete list. Nevertheless the list presents a clear picture of how extensive the fourth level of obligation can be. Also whereas in the first three levels of the death rituals the emphasis has been predominantly on patrilineal linkages, here we see that several categories of affinal relatives have been included. Indeed, as can be seen in figure 12, there is a careful symmetry in the sacred enclosure and in the sora sraddha ritual itself between the patrilineal ancestors (*bapati pitr*) and those on the mother's brother's side (*mamapati pitr*)—and by extension all other categories of affinal relatives. All the offerings which are made to conclude the sora sraddha ceremony, including sandalwood

paste, flowers, grains, strips of cloth representing clothes, clarified butter and, of course, the pinda, are given separately to the two groups of pitr.

Notes

1. According to the orthodox Brahman traditions, as explained to me by a village pandit, a father should perform the propitiation or expiation ritual (*prayascitta*) whereby he takes a purificatory bath before going to his wife to beget a child. Then during the time of conception itself the family priest should be performing a Vedic fire sacrifice (*hom*) in the family courtyard, with a special ceremony called *garba dan*, "placing the seed in the womb". During the pregnancy two other ceremonies should be performed: one called "quickening a male child" (*pumsa bana*) and one in which the pregnant woman's hair is oiled and ceremonially parted by her husband (*simantonnayana*).

In fact, this same informant explained, these ceremonies are only performed ex post facto and in a much abbreviated form many years later during the initiation of a male child.

2. As Höfer has pointed out, *sutak* refers to "the state of impurity a) of a woman in confinement and b) of the bereaved after the death of one of their relatives" (1979:50). However, it was my observation that people generally used the term *jutho* to refer to death pollution and *sutak* to refer to birth pollution—perhaps because of the association of the latter with the term *sutkeri*, which refers to the new mother during her confinement.

3. If the family is in the midst of a wedding or some ceremony which would be costly to cancel, they leave the cord uncut until the ceremony is irrevocably under way.

4. The descriptions of these and the *nuharan* and *pasne* ceremonies are largely taken from Bennett 1976.

5. Informants reported that if the child's sign was unfavorable he would be sent away to live with another family and not allowed to see his father until the number of years specified by the astrologer has elapsed. I know of only one case where a child was sent away to live with his mother's family because of such an incompatible sign.

6. Females are usually connected with odd numbers and males with even in Hindu symbolism. For example: coitus on odd number days after the menstrual period is said to result in a female child, even days a male; girl babies start to move in the womb during the fifth month, boys during the sixth.

7. According to my pandit informant the ceremony could be performed for males between the ages of 5 and 16 for a Brahman, 8 and 22 for a Chetri. And in fact the age range for performing the initiation ceremony displayed a wide variation.

8. An early bartaman may be done by a wealthy family that can afford two separate ceremonies or by a poorer Brahman family hoping for extra income after their son has been initiated to full caste status and is eligible to perform sacrifice for his patrons and receive religious gifts.

9. For weddings the same purbanga ceremonies are done simultaneously at the groom's and the bride's houses.

10. Some informants said there should be sixty-four piles of rice and that they represented the sixty-four female ascetics who accompany Siva (*causatthi yogini*) rather than the matrkas.

11. The girls are supposed to use a small golden hoe (*kuto*) and a silver mattock (*kodali*) which, of course, are not found in village homes, so they use their hands, which because of their virginal state are equally pure.

12. See figure 6 and description in the section on marriage.

13. Besides the prenatal ceremonies mentioned earlier, there are three other occasions for which a fire ceremony and appropriate religious gifts to Brahmans *should* have been offered. Of these the *jatakarma* (in which a symbol of the goddess Saraswati—*bij mantra*—is written on the child's tongue in honey and clarified butter with a piece of gold wire) is observed, if at all, by the simple custom of putting clarified butter and honey or sugar water (*bakut*) in the mouth of a newborn child. The first rice (*annaprasana*) is done but usually without a fire ceremony, and the ear piercing (*karna vedha*) may or may not be done as part of the name-giving but is not marked by a separate ceremony. In fact, to this point the only hom that has been offered for the child was at his name-giving.

14. Some informants reported that tonsure was performed by the priest; others said that the boy's maternal uncle performed this rite.

15. A white dhoti, a shawl called an *uparna*, and, if the family can afford it, a golden ring.

16. Traditionally this was a turban, a special shawl called a *dosala*, shoes, tunic, and pants, and an umbrella.

17. This scene is enacted even when the boy is very young and his parents have not even begun to look for a bride.

18. If the families are poor they may arrange for the entire wedding to take place at a temple and thus save on the expense of feeding their village neighbors.

19. Less conservative Brahmans in the Trisuli area, however, have begun recently to perform the swayambar when the bride and groom are past puberty. They say it is done to ensure love between the bride and groom and is "like a love marriage." Linda Stone, personal communication.

20. No informants could recall any instance of a groom being refused, though some of the women seemed pleased with this novel idea.

21. The swayambar can be done several months or weeks before the main wedding ceremony or combined with it (which reduces expense and risk to the girl) but it must be done before the *kanyadan* ceremony.

22. As in the bartaman, after the purbanga ceremonies birth, death, or even the bride's menstrual pollution cannot cause the marriage to be postponed.

23. There are some variations between families and villages in the way the matrka puja is done. But the giving of a sari and various other offerings to the matrkas seems to be the central feature. The bhar are also consistently present at the altars in both the bride's and groom's houses.

24. Among the Brahman-Chetri of Nuwakot district the category of women who must feed the groom sagun is larger: MFBW, FZ, MZ, MM. Linda Stone, personal communication.

25. Linda Stone, personal communication.

26. This copper vessel (*karkaulo*) is also part of the bride's dowry, a gift from her parents.

27. Informants explain that after the bride's parents die, the groom must offer them a libation (*tarpan*) during the yearly *sora sraddha* because they have washed his feet during this ceremony. (See the last section of this chapter.)

28. Linda Stone reports an exception. The bride's elder sister, who must call the groom "brother-in-law," does not wash his feet.

29. The bride's servant (*lokanti*) usually accompanies her to the groom's house, returning with her for the ritual visit home (*dulhan pharkaune*).

30. Linda Stone, personal communication.

31. It can also be her mother's brother (*mama*) or elder brother but it must be "someone who loves her."

32. Linda Stone reports a different explanation from informants in the Nuwakot area, who say this rite is to make the bride "similar to the groom's mother" who used to do all washing, cooking, and other work for the groom. This work must henceforth be done by the bride.

33. A pandit informant said that the *caturthi hom* should be done on the fourth day after the kanyadan, as its name indicates. But almost always it is done on the first day after the wedding party returns, when the village is feasted by the groom's family.

34. In a joint family, where the women eat last, the tastier, better-quality foods are often finished before the women eat. A husband can see that his wife gets some by leaving some on his own plate.

35. In fact my informants told me the marriage is often consummated earlier, on the first night in the groom's house when the couple are given a room together.

36. The one exception that comes to mind here is the kul devta, who is also linked to a specific patrilineal unit, and shows the same irascibility that the pitr do.

37. Though most sraddha symbolism seems to confirm that the pitr have lower ritual status than the devta, they are in one important sense considered more fastidious (or perhaps simply more vulnerable to pollution) than the devta: a woman can worship the gods six days after beginning her menstrual period; but she may not cook, carry water for, or participate in sraddha until the seventh day. As in so many of the restrictions surrounding the pitr, the rule is explained in terms of the pitr's anger.

38. Informants were apparently unaware of the recent amendments in the Nepalese National Code which place the daughter unequivocably before brothers, thus doing away with the need for the brothers' permission. Likewise, when asked about inheritance, no villagers mentioned the new law (passed in 1975 International Women's Year) giving unmarried daughters over the age of 35 equal inheritance rights with sons.

39. Linda Stone reported to me the interesting procedure followed among Brahmans and Chetris of Nuwakot district when in the case of an accidental death or suicide, the body cannot be recovered. On inquiry I found the same procedure is followed in Narikot.

After several days of search have proved ineffective, an image or *putali* (doll) of the deceased is made with kus grass and wheat flour and it is burned in place of the actual body. Coconut bark is used for hair, a piece of banana for the nose, pomegranate seeds for the teeth, *ritha* berries for the eyes. The sexual identity of the image is important; if the deceased was a woman, the image is given a piece of new red cloth for a sari, marbles for breasts, and a banana is placed horizontally between the legs to indicate the vagina. Men's images are dressed in yellow cloth and the banana is placed vertically to represent the penis. Mercury is placed between the legs of both male and female images to represent male and female seed (*bij*), respectively. Despite the substitute ritual cremation, a person who has died under such circumstances is almost certain to become a pret.

40. A woman who dies while her husband is still alive is wrapped in red.

41. If the deceased had no male descendants or collaterals, his wife or daughter must pay someone of his own caste to burn the body.

42. For the wealthy and for the king, a Brahman wearing a dhoti goes all the way to Banaras or Ridi Bazaar, where he places the astu in the Ganges. For a poor man any river will do, since it is believed that all rivers are the Ganges.

43. Cita pinda are offered to various places that the corpse has polluted: the place of death (*mrtusthan*); the door (*dhoka*) through which the corpse was carried if death occurred indoors; the places where the funeral procession rested on its way to the cremation ground (*bisramsthan*). Three pinda are offered to the cita, or funeral pyre itself.

44. If the deceased had more than one son, all are chief mourners and participate in the following rituals together. If he has no sons, his widow will still observe koro barne, though a male will probably do most of the other rites. For Brahmans the string enclosure is in the shape of a triangle; for Chetris it is a square.

45. If the death occurs late in the day after a rice meal has been eaten, the first day does not count as ksetrabas. The chief mourner must remain in the enclosure that night, the following day and through the second night without eating rice.

46. Ordinarily villagers never sleep with their head to the north, since that would put their feet towards the abode of Yama in the south and their head towards the pitrlok in the north, which is considered an inauspicious alignment.

47. One of the strictest and most important of these is the *havisyak basne* or *havasya basne* fast. This fast is observed before worship of the lineage gods (kul devta), foot-washing (gora dhune), and other occasions when the individual must reach a state of great purity. The person, if male, must shave his head (though few observe this now), cut nails, bathe, wear freshly cleaned clothes, and avoid sexual intercourse. He or she may eat only one rice meal a day of pure vegetarian food.

48. *Pinda* in Monier-Williams' Sanskrit dictionary is given not only as "ball" and "roundish lump of food," but also as "body" and "embryo in early stages of gestation." Informants also describe the pinda as the body of the pitr to whom it is offered. One priest even went so far as to explain that the black sesame seeds were the pitr's "hair."

49. If the deceased is a male this would be his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. If the deceased is a woman, the pitr involved would be her mothers-in-law for three ascending generations (H F W: H F F W: H F F F W). When a young man dies whose father is still alive, the pitr involved are his grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather.

50. At that time seventeen rice-ball offerings are made: one for the abyabdika sraddha and sixteen others in a ceremony called *sodasi sraddha* (literally, "sixteen offerings") which prefigures the entire masik sraddha cycle.

51. *Barakhi* refers to the ceremony which completes the year of mourning and to the year of mourning itself.

52. Should A or B object to the property moving into another patriline and refuse permission, other villagers will bring pressure on them to allow the property to go to M and her husband N. The brother's permission here seems to be mainly a bow to the concept of patrilineal solidarity in the face of the general consensus that a direct lineal descendant—even if female—has more claim to the individual's property than the individual's collateral relatives do.

53. The lunar fortnight actually makes up only fifteen of the sixteen (*sora*) days during which *sora sraddha* may be performed. The sixteenth day falls on *ghata stapana*, the beginning of Nauratha (nine nights of Durga) of the Dasai festival itself. The only sraddha which may be done on this final day is the *mahatmya sraddha* for ego's mother's father. However, only one pandit informant knew of this and none of the villagers questioned said they had ever performed it. Each family does *sora sraddha* on the lunar date (*tithi*) during the fortnight which corresponds with the death of the father of the male household head.

54. Only in a few very orthodox families, water libation to the ancestors is performed every day when the household gods receive worship. In such households (almost always Brahman) men do the daily nitya puja rather than women. In most households tarpan is offered along with the pinda given during sora sraddha and abhyudayik sraddha.

55. Women also face either east or west when giving birth, as these directions are considered auspicious.

56. The havisyak basne described in note 47.

57. Linda Stone, personal communication.

58. In addition to their regular family priest, Brahmans can also call their son-in-law (*juwai*) or sister's son (*bhanij*) to serve in the ritually superior position of priest. If possible, they call other relatives in this category for sraddha. For Chetris any full Upadhaya Brahman may be invited for the ritual feeding.

59. Though technically speaking, ego could be female, my priest informant assumed ego was a male and gave all the kin terms from a male point of view. If a female did the ceremonies, she would begin with her husband's father, etc., and continue in the same order as above. The first ten kin terms here were given in Sanskrit, the rest in Nepali.