

The Role of Kinship in the Formation of Janakpurdham Pilgrim Groups

Richard Burghart

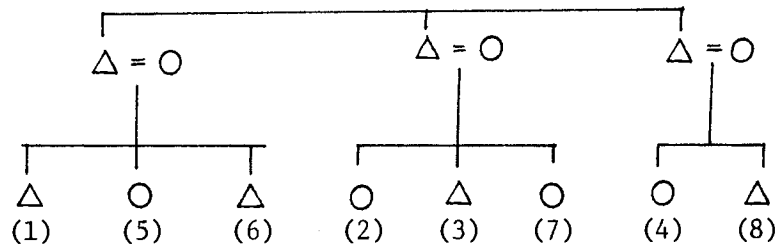
The annual cycle of religious festivals which are celebrated by pilgrims and devotees of the Vaisnavite cult in Janakpurdham include Sri Rām Navmī (Caitra Sukla Paksa 9), Sri Jānkī Navmī (Vaisākh Sukla Paksa 9), Jhūlā (Sraavan Sukla Paksa 3-15), Vijay Daśnamī (Āswin Sukla Paksa 1-10), Diwali (Kārtik Kṛsna Paksa 14), Hanuman Jayantī (Kārtik Sukla Paksa 14), Vivāha Panchāmi (Mārg Sukla Paksa 5), and the Janakpur Madhya Parikrama (Phālgun Sukla Paksa 1-14), plus a number of fullmoon days which have special significance for the Vaisnavites such as Guru Purnima (Asarh Sukla Paksa 15) and Kojagra (Āswin Sukla Paksa 15). On these occasions between ten thousand and two hundred thousand pilgrims from all over Mithila (both Janakpur añcal, Nepal and Muzaffarpur, Darbhāng and Madhubani jillas of North Bihar, India) converge on Janakpurdham to celebrate the dramatic re-enactment of the Ram Lila. Some of the pilgrims come by train or by bus; others by ox cart or foot. Except for sadhus and aged widows, whose life style resembles that of an ascetic, most of the pilgrims travel in groups. The purpose of this report is to describe the role of kinship in the formation of groups of Maithili pilgrims who come to Janakpurdham to celebrate a mela.

1. Maithil Kinship system: It is often said by Maithili that all the people in the world may be divided into three categories: one's inferiors, one's superiors, and one's equals (chota, bara, barābar), and although the thrust of this saying is that all human relations may be so classified, nevertheless the saying may also be applied without too many difficulties to the Maithil kinship system. There are those to whom ego should show respect, those who should show respect to ego, and those whom ego may treat on familiar terms as his equals.

1.2 The first category of those to whom ego should show respect comprise ego's father, ego's mother, ego's father's brother, ego's father's brother's wife, ego's father's sister, ego's father's sister's husband, ego's mother's brother, ego's mother's brother's wife, ego's mother's sister, ego's mother's sister's husband, ego's father's father, ego's father's mother, ego's mother's father, and ego's mother's mother. Among members of ego's own generation he shows respect to all of his brothers and sisters who are senior to him by birth (bhaiya, didi) and all of his cousin brothers and cousin sisters (also referred to as bhaiya and didi) but more particularly as cacera bhaiya, caceri didi, phuphera bhaiya, phupheri didi, mumiyot bhaiya, mumiyot didi, mausiyot bhaiya, mausiyot didi) who are his seniors by birth. Seniority by birth is calculated as comprising all those brothers and sisters of ego's generation who are born prior to ego. The relative seniority of

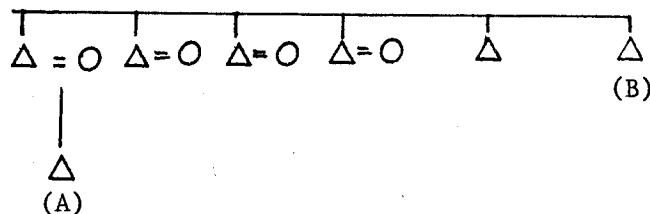
one's parents is not taken into account. Thus in diagram (1), where the numbers indicate the order of birth, son number 3 shows respect to cousin brother number 1 and sister number 2, but he does not show respect to cousin brother number 6 even though cousin brother number 6's father is senior to son number 3's father.

(1)



Among his affines, ego shows respect to his spouse's father, spouse's mother and all of his affines of his spouse's father and spouse's father's father generation living in the village of his spouse's father. Finally if ego is a woman she will show respect to her husband and her husband's elder brothers and elder sisters. In brief the principles underlying respect in the kinship system are the hierarchy of precedent paternal, maternal, and affinal generations and seniority within one's own generation of siblings. Sexuality is the basis for respect in only one case --- that of wife to her husband, and actual age is not a factor at all outside of one's own generation. For example diagram (2), if ego (A) is the eldest child of his father and ego's father is the eldest of six brothers, it may be possible that ego (A) is older than ego's father's youngest brother (B). Nevertheless ego (A) will show respect to B because B is his father's brother.

(2)



1.3 The second category is of those who must show respect to ego; in other words, the converse of all the reciprocal relationships mentioned in the previous paragraph. In ego's generation all brothers and sisters (bhai, bahan) and cousin brothers and cousin sisters (also bhai, bahan) who are ego's juniors by birth show respect to ego. All of ego's own offspring, his brother's offspring (bhatija, bhatiji) and his sister's offspring (baigana, baigani) and their spouses and the offspring of their marriages should also show respect to ego. If ego is a man then his wife will show respect to him and his younger brothers' wives will show respect to him.

1.4. The relationship between ego and his spouse's elder brothers and elder sisters, and between ego and his, the spouses of his younger brothers and younger sisters and his younger brothers' and sisters' spouses' elder brothers and elder sisters is somewhat equivocal, for two respect principles work in contrary senses. For this reason these relationships have been mentioned separately. On the one hand ego (male) must respect his wife's elder brothers and elder sisters for they are senior to his wife. Ego (male) is on equal terms with his wife's younger brothers and sisters and may joke with them, but they may not joke in the presence of their elder brothers and sisters. Thus when ego (male) visits his wife's natal household he is obliged to respect his wife's elder brothers and elder sisters. Moreover some day his wife's elder brother will be the ghar malik of his wife's natal household and property --- a position which ego himself cannot hold unless he himself is the first born in his generation of brothers and sisters. On the other hand members of the family which give the bride in marriage are considered inferior to the members of the household which accept the bride. Gifts (dan, whereby donor and receiver are not members of the same family) are customarily given by inferior to his superior in return for which the superior gives his blessing (asirvad) to the inferior. At the time of marriage samskara, it is the father of the bride who gives his daughter to the father of the bridegroom acting on behalf of his son in the ceremony called kanya dan. Following the marriage the bride is under her husband's father's authority and later under her husband's authority (adhikar). That someone from one family can pass within the adhikar of another family also contributes to the notion that the bride's family is inferior to the bridegroom's family. When two principles of respect conflict with one another in this manner, they do not counterbalance one another and create a relationship of equality. Instead they create a relationship of mutual respect. As far as I have been able to observe, the relationship of wife-giver to wife-taker is one of respect which is expressed mostly in ritual and in offering of gifts. Years after a marriage, ego (male) will continue to offer dhoti and other gifts to his younger sister's husband (bahanoi) when he comes for visit. The respect of ego to his wife's elder brother expresses itself more in the personal conduct of ego when he visits his affines. When I queried men concerning this relationship, all of them said that they must show respect to their wife's elder brother and not vice versa. Yet when I asked them about their relationship with their bahanoi they all said that they must respect their bahanoi because the bahanoi is a wife-taker. When I mentioned that for their bahanoi they will be his wife's elder brother and therefore the bahanoi must show respect to them, they explained this seeming contradiction by saying that in practice the relationship is one of mutual respect but in theory it is always the wife-taker who is superior to the wife-giver. This stigma of wife-taker being superior to the wife-giver also exists in the ego (male) son's or daughter's spouse's father, ego (male) son's or daughter's spouse's mother, ego

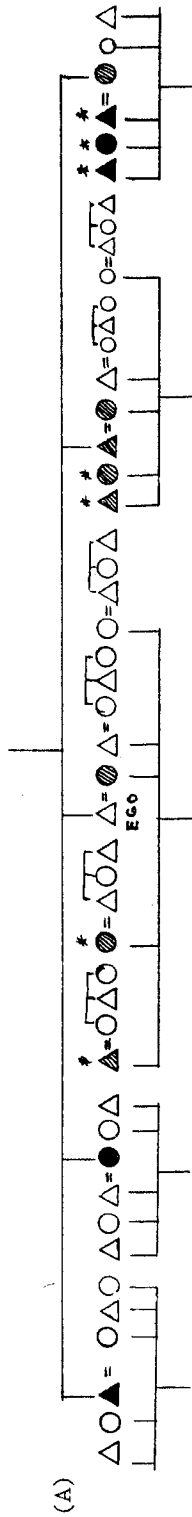
(female) son's or daughter's spouse's mother relationships, but again in practice the father of the bride and the father of the bridegroom treat each other as equals. They may embrace each other with open arms and may joke with one another. So also may the mothers of the bridegroom and bride. The ego's (female) son's or daughter's spouse's father relationship is one of respect, however, and is characterized by extreme avoidance. They may never meet one another and she is not permitted to enter within the family compound of her son-in-law or daughter-in-law. The father of the bride should also not visit his son-in-law's household until his daughter has given birth to a child, nor should he ever accept hospitality and gifts (except for betel, supari, tea, etc.) from his son-in-law, for as a wife-giver it is he who should be giving such things to the son-in-law and not vice versa. This rule, however, is not always obeyed so strictly in practice.

1.5. The third category comprises those people who ego may treat on familiar terms as his equals. It is now clear that ego may find his equals only among the affines of his own generation for all of ego's patrilineal, matrilineal, and affinal relations of previous generations, all of ego's brothers and sisters and cousin brothers and sisters, and all of their as well as ego's offspring and the offsprings' affines are people to whom ego must show respect or who must show respect to ego. Ego's equals therefore comprise his (her) elder brother's wife, elder brother's wife's brothers and sisters, elder sister's husband, elder sister's husband's brothers and sisters, younger brother's wife's younger brothers and younger sisters, younger sister's husband's younger brothers and younger sisters; ego's spouse's elder brother's wife, his (her) spouse's elder brother's wife's brothers and sister, his (her) spouses elder sister's husband, his (her) spouse's elder sister's husband's brothers and sisters, his (her) spouse's younger brother and that younger brother's wife, his (her) spouse's younger brother's wife's brothers and sisters, his (her) spouse's younger sister and her husband, and his spouse's younger sister's husband's brothers and sisters. (See diagram three) Finally as was mentioned in the preceding paragraph the father of the bride and father of the bridegroom and the mother of the bride and mother of the bridegroom in practice treat one another as equals.

1.6. Friendship and companionship must also be mentioned, for even though they are relationships which extend beyond the family and often across caste divisions, still these relationships are referred to in the idiom of kinship and the correct behaviour associated with different categories of fictitious kin is similar to behaviour between real kin. Close friendship with someone outside one's family is sealed on the full moon day of Sravan in the ceremony called Raksika Bandhan during which time a boy (or man)'s sister ties a coloured thread about the right wrist of her brother and offers to him her blessing and in return the brother offers appropriate gifts to his sister. This ceremony normally takes place within the family, but in the case of close friends a woman

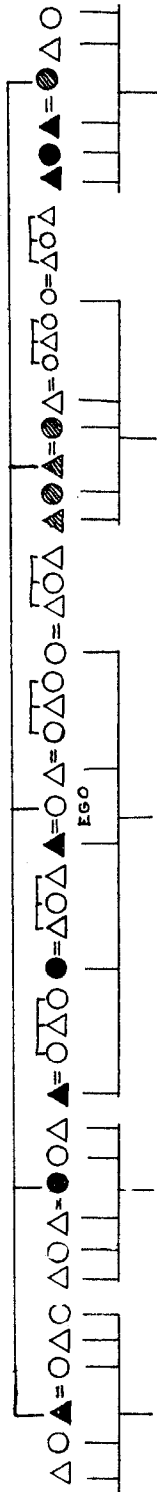
may tie the cord about the wrist of her brother's friend. For example in diagram four, ego (female) (2) ties the cord about the wrist of her brother's friend (3) who offers her suitable gifts. Meanwhile the friend's sister (4) ties a cord around the wrist of ego (female)'s brother (1). Boy number 3 has become the

Diagram (3)



Or if ego is a woman the diagram remains essentially unchanged:

(B)

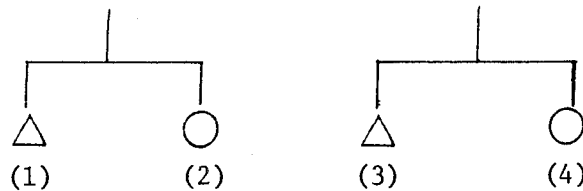


* In practice this is relationship of mutual respect

- ▲ to whom ego shows respect
- △ with whom ego is equal
- who should show respect to ego.

brother of girl number 2. Since girl number 2 is boy number 1's sister, boy number 1 and boy number 3 have become brothers, and, in fact, henceforth the two friends will refer to one another as brothers (bhai).

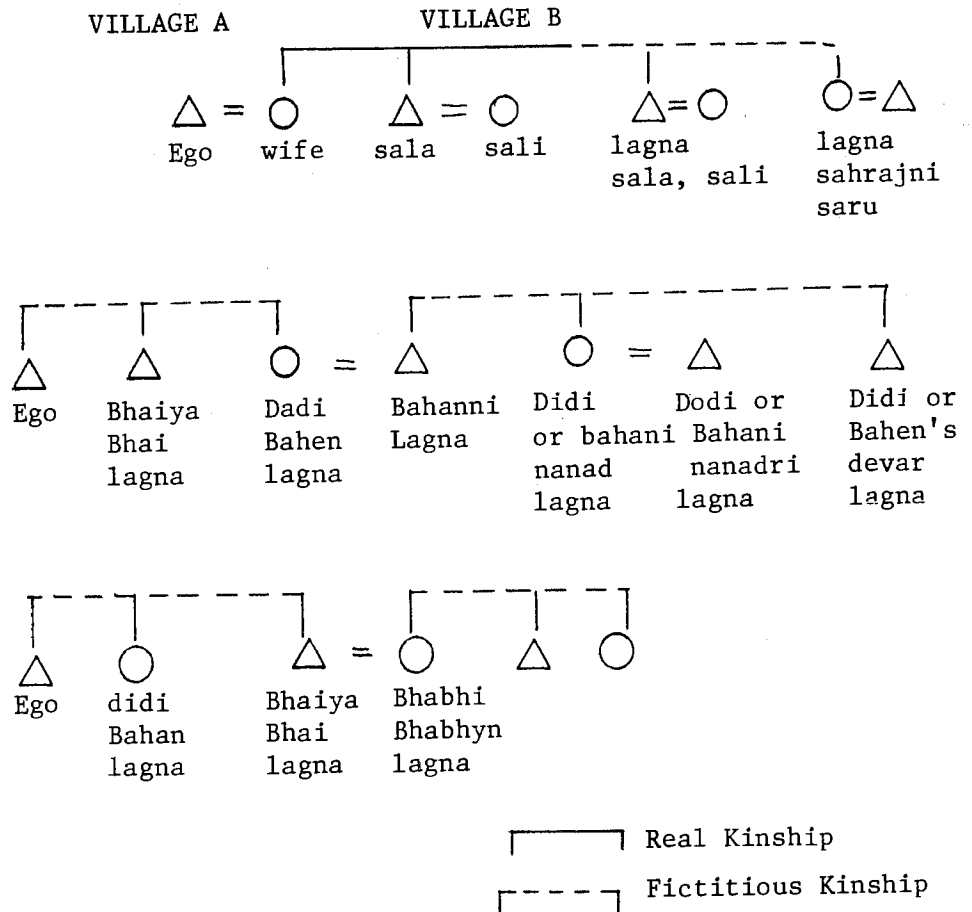
(4)



1.7. Informal bonds of companionship that extend outside one's network of kin and outside one's caste are also thought of in terms of kin categories, especially when one is referring to the people of one's village (gaonwala, gaonwali) vis-a-vis the people of some other village with whom someone in ego's village has real bonds of affinity. The expression gaonwala or gaonwali is used in a variety of senses. It can mean everyone who lives in a village, but usually the word has a more restricted meaning than that. One informant sketched a map of his village whereupon he noted the temples, ponds, and households of the various castes. The Sudra houses built along one side of a pond he referred to as the homes of his gaonwala but the Muslim families living on the other band of the same pond were referred to as Muslims. He explained this by saying that because one does not have relationships (rista) with Muslims, they are not usually considered one's gaonwala. The word gaonwala therefore implies a network of social relationships rather than a geographical entity. Gaonwali is usually used in an even more restricted sense which excludes all women who marry into a village until they have approached middle age; in other words, when their children have grown to adulthood and they may walk freely about their husband's village with the end of their sari pulled down no further to the front edge of their hairline. Until that time, however, women who have married into a village are considered to be the gaonwali of their natal village. With reference to another village, ego will refer to everyone in his own village insofar as he associates with them in the idiom of kinship. Gaonwala and gaonwali (women born in his village) slightly younger than ego will become like (lagna) his younger brothers and sisters, and those slightly older than ego will be his elder brothers and sisters. Men of his father's age will be considered like a father's brother (kaka). People from neighbouring villages with whom someone in ego's village has real bonds of affinity will become like ego's brother-in-law or sister-in-law. For example, ego married a woman from a neighbouring village. One day a boy from ego's father-in-law's village arrived in ego's village. The boy was of approximately the same age as ego's wife and of the same caste but different family than ego's wife. Ego asked the boy, "Ap kaun hai?" and the boy replied, "mujhe sala lagta hai", and for the boy, ego's village was like his bahanaure and ego was like his bahanoi. Just as ego may treat his younger sala as his equal and may joke with

him so also may he joke with the boy from his wife's natal village. Possible fictitious relationships between age-mates of two different villages are sketched below in diagram (5).

(5)



2.1. Correct behaviour between relatives: An understanding of the correct behaviour between relatives would necessitate a description of the rights and duties of each kinship status concerning management of family property inheritance rights, ritual obligations, authority to arrange marriages of offspring, etc., which is beyond the scope of this field report. Therefore correct behaviour between relatives will be described only insofar as it relates to the formation of groups of pilgrims to go to a mela and the arrangements for hospitality that can be made at a pilgrimage centre such as Janakpurdham.

2.2. The relationship of superior to inferior and vice versa is often referred to as gor lagna (to touch feet) and asirvad dena (to give blessing) for the inferior touches the feet of the superior who in turns extends his right arm outward with the palm

of the right hand open in sign of blessing. This is more a symbol of the superior inferior relationship than anything else and as such its use is often reserved for symbolic occasions such as the time of marriage, the time of parting on a long journey, or as an appeal to one's superior for mercy or the favourable settlement of a dispute which it is the authority of the superior to arbitrate. For those vastly superior to ego such as his guru or Bhagawan respect is symbolized by full prostration whereby the inferior lies down on the ground before the superior and touches the ground with eight parts of his body (both feet, both knees, both hands, chest, and forehead). For those only slightly superior to ego, ego will join the palms of his hands together and greet the superior with namaskar, and the superior will return the greeting. If ego should be walking with a superior on the trail, he will follow behind the superior, and if ego and a superior should approach one another from opposite directions on the trail, the inferior will step aside to let the superior pass. If inferior wants to speak to his superior, he should remain at a respectful distance from the superior and await the superior's order (hukum) to approach and speak. If superior is standing, then inferior should remain standing and if superior is seated then upon the superior's order the inferior may sit down at a slight distance and below (the superior will sit on a bed, chair, or blanket while the inferior sits on the ground) his superior. At a bhojan the superior is served food first and no one begins to eat until the superior has begun eating, and no one leaves his place to wash his hands after the meal until the superior has done so. Woman, as inferior to their husbands, will not begin to eat until their husband has finished his meal. In some cases (God - man, guru - disciple, father - wife and children, Brahman - Halkhor, Camar, Dom) the inferior may eat the leavings from the plate of the superior. The inferior should always obey the orders of the superior without questioning the superior's motives. The superior assumes some responsibility for the welfare of those inferiors under his authority or to which he stands in some relation, but outside the family it is often the inferior who gives gifts to the superior in return for the superior's blessing. Rarely would a superior give someone from outside his family a gift of money for the inferior cannot bless the superior. Such transfers of money when they occur usually take the form of loans at somewhat crippling rates of interest.

2.3. The above-described behaviour is correct behaviour in all kinds of superior inferior relationships such as Bhagawan to man, guru to disciple, purohit to client, higher caste to lower caste, zamindar to indebted labourers, Raja to subjects, and so forth. Within the network of kinship, however, a number of factors, such as age, wealth, propinquity, ties of affection, westernized education rather than Sanskritic education, and personal inclination, mitigate the idealized expression of the superior inferior relationship. A child will not show respect to his elder brothers and sisters until he begins to share some of the responsibilities in the

home. A young man may show great affection to his wife in which case the man's mother will complain that he is making his wife superior to his mother (mata ke upar). The relationship of a boy to his mother's brother is characterized by privileged begging and affection and more informality than is possible in a boy's relationship with his father's brother. During the months of quarreling which precedes the division of the joint family property down to the last tree in the garden and the last pot in the kitchen, the younger brothers may not show very much respect to their elder brothers, and after the division of the joint family property the sons will still show respect to their parents but this respect will be diminished somewhat by the fact that the authority to manage the family property has now passed out of the parents' control.

2.4. The inferior superior relationship of a woman to her husband's elder brother, husband's father and father's brother, and husband's father in addition to the description in paragraph 2.2 is also characterized by avoidance. To these categories of men such a woman is considered to be untouchable (acut). She may not show her face to these affines but must always pull the end of her sari down from her hairline to the mouth or to the tip of her nose. She may not directly address these affines but instead should communicate to them through her children, husband's younger brothers, or through her husband. She may not serve food or water to her avoided affines although these affines may drink water fetched from the well by her and may eat food cooked by her. She may not enter a room occupied by these affines and if by accident her husband's elder brother should step into a room in which she is sitting or by accident he should touch her or her clothing then the elder brother must immediately bathe to become pure again. (I have been told that the avoidance between wife and wife's husbands father is less strict than avoidance of wife and wife's elder brother, but I have not yet been able to corroborate this. For example a woman may touch her husband's father's feet but may only touch the ground in front of her husband's elder brother's feet).

2.5. With those people to whom ego may treat as his equals, ego may joke, mock curse, mock fight as well as simply be at ease in a situation of informality. This category of relation is often referred to as one's mazak kerne wale. With his male equals a man may smoke beedis, cigarettes, and ganja or take bhang. Ego may touch his wife's younger sister's body and fondle her or slap and pinch her in mock fighting. He may observe her in half dress, and I was told that some men even have sexual intercourse in a discreet manner with their wife's younger sister if she would be willing. If ego's wife or wife's elder brothers and elder sisters should learn of this, however, they would roundly curse the man, but I was told that the man would not be punished which presumably indicates that such behaviour is vaguely within the bounds of the relationship. (I cannot yet say whether this actually happens or if it is

only the fertile imaginations of several informants who believe it happens). Once ego's wife's younger sister marries, however, such extremes of behaviour would incite a conflict with his wife's younger sister's husband. Still even after her marriage a man may playfully pinch, slap, and touch his wife's younger sister as well as his wife's younger brother's wife. In addition to the times when a man visits his father-in-laws after the marriage, there are a number of regular and occasional situations in which joking takes place. The most notable, of course, is on the Holi festival and also on Jur sital puja on the occasion of the New Year when equals (usually equals between the ages of ten and twenty) toss mud and cow-dung cakes at one another. At the time of marriage while the bride's elder brother is serving food to the bridegroom and members of his party, the bride's younger brothers and sisters and her gaonwala and gaonwali from behind a curtain tease and make fun of the bridegroom's party. One very raucous wedding was described to me in which after the bhojan the bridegroom's party retaliated by tossing coloured powder, curd, and even the leavings from their plates in the direction of the people behind the curtain. As the bridegroom's party left the courtyard thinking that victory was theirs, the bride's gaonwali mounted a second attack and emerging from the kitchen tossed chili powder in the faces of the bridegroom's age mates. The bridegroom's agemates got their revenge several months later.

2.6. A number of factors mitigate the full range of behaviour implied in the joking relationship. First equals should not joke with one another or appear in a state of intoxication or smoke beedies and cigarettes in front of anyone to whom they must show respect. (If a man and his elder brother sit together on the veranda with backs turned, the younger brother may smoke a cigarette). Second as was noted in paragraph 1.2 it is possible that some of ego's equals may be twenty years older or younger than he in which case one's enthusiasm for joking is dampened somewhat. Third, although a woman may joke with her husband's younger brothers and her husband's brother's wives, because they all live in the same compound and share certain responsibilities they are more likely to treat one another as brothers and sisters rather than play practical jokes on one another. Finally the separation of some categories of affines limits the range of joking. For example, ego (female) may joke with her elder sister's husband's sister but after marriage she and her elder sister's husband's sister are likely to be dwelling in distant villages so that only on the occasion of a mela would there be the possibility that ego (female) may meet such an equal and joke with her.

3.1. Formation of groups of kin to go to a mela: Except for the reciprocal relationship of ego (female) son's or daughter's spouse's father whereby extreme avoidance is prescribed, there is no rule which prescribes what kin may or may not accompany one another on a journey outside one's village. The kinds of groups of kin which travel together, therefore, are formed on the basis of preferences

within the framework of the rules of correct behaviour among kinfolk and affines.

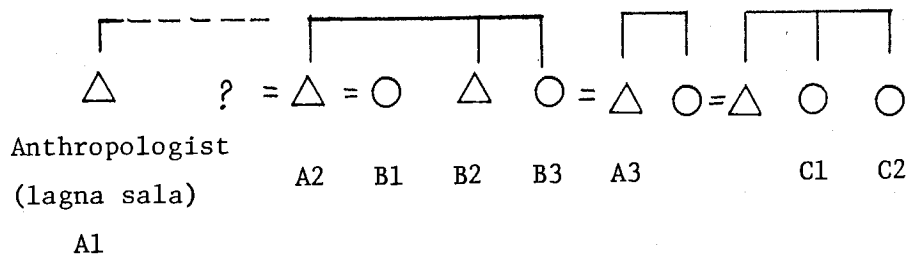
3.2. Permission to go on a mela is granted by the person under whose authority (adhikar) one lies. In principle any man may go to the mela as long as there is money to spare, no pressing agricultural duties, and at least one other man willing to remain behind to guard the household moveable property, and if the harvest is approaching one man is required in the fields to guard the crops from thieves. Permission then for a man to go to a mela would be made by his father or elder brother since they are the adhikari of the joint family household. (The granting of permission is not as formal a process as this description implies. In fact one is more likely not to be "granted" permission than to be granted permission). Permission for a woman to go to a mela would also be granted by the person under whose authority she lies, viz., her father, her husband, her husband's elder brother, or her husband's father. Prior to marriage a girl is under her father's authority, immediately after marriage she is under her father-in-law's authority. Several years after marriage (approximately the time of the birth of her first child) she begins to pass under the authority of her husband. Between the time of her betrothal and her marriage (usually no longer than six months in Mithila) a bride-to-be must conduct herself with more modesty than prior to her betrothal, but her father would not normally forbid her to go to a mela. Indeed there would be all the more reason for her to want to go, for it is often during such an occasion that she, surrounded by her sisters and gaonwali, and her future bridegroom, surrounded by his brothers and gaonwala, will be searching for one another to catch a glimpse from a distance of the person with whom they will pass the rest of their life. During the years immediately following her marriage when a woman is under the father-in-law's authority it would be highly unusual for her father-in-law to grant her permission to go a mela, for she is not normally permitted outside the household. She remains in a room of the house, must bathe and perform her ablutions in the darkness before dawn and after sunset. She must always cover her face, and by her mother-in-law's order only will she be allowed to raise her veil from her face up to her hair line. The only way in which a woman could at this time of her life go on a mela would be if she had, with her father-in-law's permission and her brother's escort, returned to her natal village for a visit of several months. Inside her natal household she may conduct herself as a daughter of the house and a gaonwali of her village. She is free to wander about her village and she need not lower the end of her sari down below her hair line. From her natal village she may go to a mela and at the mela ground she must conduct herself with reasonable modesty (sari pulled down to cover her eyes at least) and remain in the company of her elder brothers and elder sisters or her mother and father. This is not because she is obliged to do so by her own kin, but for fear that members of her husband's family might see her at the mela and tell her husband that she was conducting herself in a manner unbecoming a newly married woman.

3.3. The formation of groups of kin may be influenced by a variety of factors such as the distance of the household from Janakpur-dham, and also by secondary reasons for going to a mela. For example, if the mela is near one's village unmarried gaonwali may go themselves to the mela, but if the distance is great or a bus or train journey is required women will be accompanied by a male guardian. People also come to Janakpur-dham at the time of mela seeking medical care, repair of agricultural implements, markets for farm produce, etc., and these other reasons will obviously influence the arrangement of kinfolk going to a mela. Groups of kin arriving by bus and train will travel together, but if an entire family should walk to a mela or travel by at least two ox-carts then the men and boys will travel together in the one group and the women, daughters, and babies will follow thirty yards behind in a second group. One man will remain behind with the women. In a joint family of three generations it is usually the youngest brother of the middle generation who will remain behind with the women.

3.4. Once a family arrives at a mela site they will usually split up by generation and by sex. Young boys will go with their father or father's brother, young girls with their mothers. If there are no children the family will split up on generation and sex lines. Married women up to the age of forty will be accompanied by one man, however. Most young men prefer to celebrate a mela with their equals with whom they may smoke and chat informally or joke in a moderate way. (One may not joke immoderately at a mela for there may be one's superiors nearby). Since a man must conduct himself in a subdued manner before his elder brothers, often even within the generation the brothers will split up each searching for his gaonwala and gaonwale or his equals among his affines, and the gaonwale of his affinal village. At the month long mela held on the Geruka river on the occasion of the Pratham Bhadra month (the intercalary month of the leap year) a friend (A2), his younger sister's husband (A3) and myself walked to the mela outside Janakpur-dham. (See diagram 6). My friend's sister (B3), wife (B1), and younger brother (B2) went separately, and we never saw them again. After bathing in the river, taking darshan at the temple, and eating ciura and dahi, we walked around the mela ground for an hour while my friend observed the women bathing in the river. Our companion (A3) saw his sister's nanads (C1 and C2) and affected disinterest in them. My friend (A2) wanted to return to Janakpur-dham and so we left but his bahanoi (A3) insisted on stopping for a rest en route and then later to take betel. While taking betel "by chance" we noticed the two women (C1 and C2) only fifty yards down the trail from us. We walked on but our companion's (A3) pace slackened. The two stony faced nanads were only twenty yards behind us. My friend and I stepped up our pace leaving our companion (A3) behind. Further down the trail my friend and I stopped to smoke a beedi and we watched his bahanoi (A3) who had been glum all morning and his sister's stony faced nanads engaging in affectionate laughter. A3 had been wanting to joke with the two

women all morning but he couldn't until he had detached himself from my friend who was his wife's elder brother before whom he could not joke.

(6)



3.5. Though the tendency among men at a mela is to divide into smaller groups or even wander about alone, this is not the case with women. The women generally travel in fixed groups from start to finish while other groups or individuals with whom they may joke join them for a while and then split off. Concerning the formation of these groups of women, no married woman should travel unaccompanied by at least one other woman and unless the mela ground is quite close to one's village or the woman is over the age of forty years no woman should travel unaccompanied by at least one man as her guardian. A young man generally insists on a bodyguard for his wife for several reasons. First they may be distrustful of women who, when left to their own devices, may encourage an affair with another man. Second, a young man often spends part of the mela observing the beautiful women so he knows that other men will be similarly engaged and as much as he may hope for a little dalliance, he does not hope the same for his wife. Finally there is also the more genuine fear since about ten years of roving students from India and goondas who come to the at Janakpurdham and who have been known to rob, rape, and commit indignities before women so a man would want his wife to be adequately protected. Any man of her own generation or prior generation among her kin or affines may act as bodyguard for a woman. Also a "brother" whose wrist she has tied in the Raksika Bandhan ceremony may act as bodyguard; however, her husband will not usually permit a gaonwala of his or hers (i.e., lagna bhai) to act as guardian. The selection of the guardian depends on the availability of men, of course, and also on the husband's trust of his wife. If a man suspects his wife of infidelity, he will make sure that he or his elder brother along with his mother or father's brother's wife will keep a constant eye on his wife because one of the most usual ways in which an unfaithful woman arranges to meet her lover is to tell her husband that she is going to Janakpurdham with her kinfolk (her sister or brother's wife) to practice dharma and then once in town the sisters and/or brother's wife disappear and she meets her lover who has conveniently rented a hotel room for the day. Apart from this consideration, however, both men and

women will have certain preferences as to who will be the bodyguard. A woman prefers not to have her husband's elder brother, husband's father, or husband's father's father as guardian nor would such men want to be her guardian because the avoidance regulations create too many difficulties. Moreover, such a man could not be an effective bodyguard because she must eat and bathe apart from them, and if any emergency should arise, she should not even speak with them. Nor does a young man want to be a bodyguard for his wife because he wants to observe the beautiful ladies at the mela and his wife will curse him if she catches his eye wandering about the crowds. Also the man's gaonwala will laugh at him and call him an old man if he goes with his wife because only older married couples would go to a mela together. I was told that young men living in a city (where one may have a love marriage) would accompany their wives, but this was definitely not the rural way of life. If, however, a man should be obliged to go with his wife, he will prefer to travel apart from his elder brothers or father, for in their company his wife may not speak and he also must conduct himself in such a subdued manner that he will not be able to enjoy himself. Thus according to preferences a woman will travel to the mela and roam the mela ground in a group which may include her husband's brother's wives, husband's sisters, and her sister's husband's sisters, her own brothers' wives and her sisters and as a bodyguard there may be her husband's younger brother or her brothers' or sister's husband or her sister's husband's brother. In all these cases a woman may be relatively at ease and enjoy herself in an informal way although in each of these cases there is a relative degree of familiarity. For maximum joking a woman would travel with her sister's husband's brother. For a minimum of joking yet friendly companionship she would travel with her husband's younger brother.

3.6. If one's home is near Janakpurdham then young women may go to the mela without a guardian. I was told by Sudra informants that this is especially the case with Brahmin girls and my haphazard observations confirmed this. When I asked why this was so, Sudra informants hinted that Brahmin women were less virtuous than Sudra women. A Brahmin informant said, however, that because Brahmin women were virtuous they could travel alone but because Sudra women are likely to have affairs their husbands insist on a bodyguard to accompany them. As for women over the age of about forty they may travel with their sisters, husband's sisters, husband's brother's wives, or with their gaonwali or their husband's gaonwali. In the case of a longer mela like the fourteen-day circumambulation of Janakpurdham they may have a male guardian, but this is not necessary. An aged widow is not under her son's adhikar and it is for this reason that she of all women may travel alone to a mela if she so desires. Moreover, it is enjoined on all widows after one year of widowhood to pass the remainder of her life in meritorious activities such as going on pilgrimage. Many widows come to Janakpurdham for Mas during the month of Kartik, and some settle in Janakpurdham and pass the rest of their lives in the Vaisnavite kuties or the Garib Dharmasala of Ram Mandir.

4.1. The actual role of kinship in the arrangement of hospitality is minimal for two reasons. First most Maithili pilgrims do not have kinfolk or affines in Janakpurdham. Although Janakpurdham is a rapidly growing town, the increase in population has been mostly of Indian businessmen such as Marwari, and of Nepali administrative personnel neither of which a Maithili would be bound to by ties of kinship. Second even if one does have kin or affines in Janakpurdham, to be given a proper welcome by them as befitting one's status may involve a considerable expenditure not only on food but also on dhotis, saris, and other gifts, that a potential guest would not want to put his host under such a financial burden nor would the potential guest want to burden himself with the obligations of some day reciprocating this hospitality. Sometimes even less than full hospitality is a burden to the host. One man told me of the time he met his wife's father, mother, brother and several sisters on the banks of the Dudhmati. His story is worth telling not only to illustrate how difficult it is for some people to offer hospitality but also it illustrates the way in which joking takes place at a mela. On the occasion of Sita's birth (Sri Jānkī Navmī) people bathe in the Dudhmati at a place where it flows approximately one mile south west of town. The man in question comes from a large family with insufficient land so that all but one of the brothers must find non-agricultural work to support the family. The informant arrived at the Dudhmati to bathe in the waters and take darshan at the temple when he observed his wife's family bathing in the stream. Since they had come to Janakpurdham, he felt obliged to offer his affines at least a minimum of hospitality (the husband is not expected to offer full hospitality to his wife's father), but his pockets were empty so he evaded them and bathed several hundred yards upstream. The evasion, however, did not escape the notice of his affines. When he had bathed, his wife's younger sister called to him. He felt trapped and embarrassed. Not to greet his affines would be as much an insult as to greet them and not offer them tea, betel, and supari. His wife's younger sister understood exactly the predicament that he was in. That was why she had called him over. He chatted with his wife's family for a few minutes while his wife's younger sisters fought back their smiles watching his discomfiture. Finally when the conversation stalled, his wife's elder sister suggested he offer them tea and supari upon which this wife's younger sisters giggled and the man (their brother-in-law) turned red with shame. His wife's father suggested that if he would touch his feet then he might give him a blessing. Everyone broke out in laughter. The man touched his wife's father's feet, was given three rupees by him, and went off to buy tea, betel, and supari for his guests.

4.2. If ego's family should come to Janakpurdham as pilgrims and receive hospitality from his father-in-law or mother's brother (his father's brothers are likely to be living in his own village) then one may assume that ego's relatives are rather wealthy or that some other reason for a visit happens to coincide with the mela. The hospitality which a mother's brother or father-inlaw

would offer would be no different than hospitality normally offered except that ego's father's mother could not enter the courtyard of ego's mother's brother's home nor could ego's mother enter the courtyard of his father-in-law's home. Because of this in both cases the men in the party would enter the host's courtyard and partake of the bhojan while the women would remain together in the dharmasala or a nearby orchard. When the men have finished eating, women of the host's household would carry the bhojan to the female guests in the dharmasala or orchard. At nighttime all the male guests and all the female guests who need not avoid the hosts could sleep in the host's household but because some women must sleep outside it is likely that all women would sleep in the dharmasala along with all the men who do not have a privileged relationship with the host. In the case of the mother's brother as host, ego and his brothers may sleep at the hosts houses and in the case of the father-in-law ego and his younger brothers may sleep at the host's house.

4.3. The vows which a man takes upon becoming a bairagi and the vidhi and puja rituals which he performs as an individual are well-formulated and obligatory. There are no regulations concerning the relationship between a bairagi and his kinfolk and although sadhus have various ideas concerning the nature of this relationship, there is no central authority in the sect to ensure uniformity in practice. Thus whatever relationship a sadhu maintains with his family is largely based on his own free will (kusi). In becoming a bairagi, the Ramanandi sect becomes one's gotra, one's guru is like a father, those sadhus initiated by the same guru are one's guru bhai and guru bahan, and one's guru's guru bhai is one's kaka guru. There is no ceremony which cuts a bairagi off from his family although it is generally recognized that a sadhu is outside the adhikar of the joint family in which he was raised as a child. In two kutis I have met the widowed mothers of a sadhu who had come to live with their son upon the death of their husband. Other sadhus never set foot in their natal household upon becoming bairagi and particularly avoid their mother and father. If for some reason they passed through their natal village they would spend the night in a village temple or in the home of a Vaisnavite devotee. One man became a sadhu and built a kuti in a village only one mile from his natal village. For the next forty years until his death he never set foot in the village in which he was born. Thus whether or not the relatives of a sadhu who come to Janakpurdham for a mela will expect hospitality from their relative (as sadhu) depends largely on the particular relationship which a sadhu maintains with his relatives. Moreover, by becoming a sadhu a man acquires status superior to any kinship status; therefore it is the householder who should give hospitality or alms to the sadhu in return for his blessing. In a village ten miles south of Janakpurdham (in Darbhanga jilla, Bihar) a man became a communist, committed robbery in the name of politics, and later fled the region. In Banaras he became a sadhu and ten years later returned to his village and lived in a temple. His father became his disciple. It was the

father who touched the feet of the son (as sadhu), and the son gave the blessing. On several occasions I have seen in kutis the relatives of a sadhu arrive with rice, dal, atta, ghee, sugar, and milk for a bhojan. Their relative (as sadhu) cooked the food, offered it to Bhagawan, and the the family and sadhu ate it as prasad.

In Janakpurdham there are approximately two hundred Vaisnavite kutis. The management of these kutis is diverse: (1) Raj Guthi (Sthan) kutis managed directly by the Guthisansthan, (2) Chhut (Sthan) kutis indirectly managed by the Guthisansthan, (3) Jati kutis managed by a caste or sub-caste council. (4) Ghar kutis managed by the landowner who had built and endowed the kuti and after his death by his descendents, (5) Ghar kutis managed by a family of sadhus (i.e., a man who becomes sadhu after the birth of a son and the son becomes sadhu and inherits the kuti after the birth of a son, and so on), and (6) finally kutis which are managed by sadhus and are passed on to the disciple of the reigning mahant. In the second, fifth, and sixth kinds of kutis the sadhus are both pujari and manager, but in the first, third, and fourth kinds of kutis the status of the sadhu is as pujari/dekhnewala only. He performs puja to Bhagawan in the kuti temple, watches over the kuti moveable property, and prepares food to be served first to Bhagawan and then to himself and the resident sadhus in the kuti. As pujari the sadhu has no control over the management of the kuti funds and landed wealth. He is appointed by the Guthisansthan, caste council, or zamindar and may be dismissed by them. Upon the death of the pujari the management is not obliged to appoint the pujari's disciple as the new pujari. For this reason few pujari dekhnewala sadhus have disciples. As dekhnewala the sadhu is usually not in a position to offer hospitality, and when he does it is to other sadhus rather than his relatives or householders. For example almost one hundred years ago a pious zamindar of Mahottari jilla had a kuti built in Janakpurdham and alienated thirty-five bighas of his land to Ram and Sita. The land was to be used by the kuti but managed by the zamindar and his descendants. At that time the pujari was able to offer huge bhojans at the times of a mela. The zamindar died some years back, and now his grandsons manage the kuti. The grandsons are not interested in dharma and provide the pujari with ninety ser of rice and ten rupess (to buy vegetables and oil) monthly. Since two sadhus and two servants live in the kuti, the ninety ser of rice and ten rupees is just sufficient for their needs. One bigha of land yields annually between twenty-five and thirty-five maund of rice, and the zamindar's grandsons provide the kuti with twenty-seven maunds annually. In other words thirty-four out of thirty-five bighas of land have been diverted by the zamindar's grandsons to serve their personal use rather than for the use of the kuti. (In fact since the land is cultivated under the bateya system whereby the tenant farmer claims half of the yield, only seventeen bighas of net income have been diverted to their personal use). Thus the present pujari lives in a wealthy kuti and is unable to offer hospitality

to anyone all. Of course, not all ghar kutis are manipulated by the management. Still in most cases it is relatives of the management if not the management itself which partakes of the hospitality of the kuti rather than relatives of the sadhu. In the case of the kuti just described at the time of the mela the management arrives at the kuti with an extra ration of food for all the guests. Whether or not this qualifies to be called hospitality is open to question. The guests are often the same people as the hosts.

4.4. People coming to Janakpurdham may also seek hospitality from a kuti which they consider to be their "village kuti". A ghar kuti built in Janakpurdham by a village zamindar is referred to by the name of the village in which the zamindar resides. As was mentioned in paragraph 1.7 the zamindar and his family are linked with their gaonwala in informal ties of companionship which are cast in the idiom of kinship. Pilgrims from the zamindar's village who are like brothers, father's brothers, nephews, nieces, etc., to the zamindar might also receive hospitality at the zamindar's kuti. There is another sense in which the word "village kuti" is used. A man may become a sadhu and come to Janakpurdham to live. The land which he inherited or will inherit as a member of a joint-family is alienated to Ram and Sita and cultivated under tenancy or indentured labour. The income from the land is often sufficient to support the sadhu but not enough to build a kuti (a kuti usually comprises at least a temple, storeroom, and kitchen) and purchase several katta (1/20th of a bigha) or land in Janakpurdham upon which to build his kuti. To raise this money the sadhu will solicit funds from the people of his natal village and the surrounding villages regardless of caste or kinship ties. One sadhu even travelled as far away as Assam to collect funds from the young men of his village who because of lack of land were obliged to migrate to parts of India and seek work in factories. Thus at the time of a mela people from the sadhu's natal village may come to the kuti. In both this case and as well as the former case of the zamindar type ghar kuti the hospitality offered to lagna kinfolk usually amounts to nothing more than a place to sleep and to leave one's belongings. Guests will usually cook their own food in the kuti.

4.5. Those pilgrims coming to Janakpurdham who have no kinfolk or lagna kinfolk in town usually make their own arrangements for sleeping and eating. They may camp in the Tirhutiya Gacchi by Bishara Sagar, under the barsati of Dhanusa Sar or Ganga Sagar, in the dharmasala, or in the courtyard of the Ram Mandir or Janki Mandir. On days of a mela approximately five hundred temporary merchants set up stalls in the bazaar or near the ponds selling fruits, vegetables, snacks, ciura, curd, and so forth as well as flowers and sweets to offer to Bhagawan in the temples. Pilgrims may purchase uncooked food in the bazaar and cook it at their campsite or they may eat ciura and dahi by the roadside. First the men of the party will eat and then after them the women. Women will

not enter a restaurant to eat, but the men will eat in a restaurant and then carry cooked food out to their female relatives who wait for them by a pond. A family may seek hospitality (a place to sleep, leave their belongings, and cook their food) in a kuti with which they have no relationship of caste or kinship, but they must respect the rules of the kuti and the presence of Bhagawan. The rules are not onerous but if the family is undisciplined and the sadhu temperamental, tension may brew. During the Ram Navmi mela a family stayed at a kuti by Bishara Sagar because they wanted a more secluded and protected place for their women and children and the dharmasala was overcrowded. On the principle day of the mela the sadhu at the kuti had engaged a purohit to preside over the annual re-installation of the Hanuman jhanda in the kuti courtyard. The sadhu was upset because the family remained in a corner of the kuti and did not come to observe the ceremony. Later when the family left some leavings of their food on the kuti courtyard without cleaning it up, the sadhu became furious. He announced to the family that a kuti is not a hotel and he is Bhagawan's servant not their servant. If they want someone to clean up their mess, they should check into a hotel where they might pay fifteen or twenty rupees for room charge. The family quickly cleaned up the mess. Wanting to restore good will the family head offered three rupees to the sadhu for the hospitality. The sadhu became even more furious and announced that the kuti and its land was in Ram and Sita's name. He is not Bhagawan's manager, but His servant. The head of the family got the message and laid three rupees at the feet of Ram and Sita in the temple. Within five minutes the family had cleared out of the kuti.

5.1. One of the best descriptions of correct behaviour among kinfolk and affines in Hindu literature is the Ram Carita Manusa by Goswami Tulsi Das and informants often had recourse to this book to illustrate behaviour such as Ram's unquestioning obedience to his father, the respect of Laksman, Bharat, and Satrugm to their elder brother Ram, and the worship by Sita of Ram as her Lord and husband. Just as Sita with her gaonwali went to the Parvati temple at Girijasthan, ten miles south of Janakpurdham, where she first saw Ram, so also may a young woman go with her gaonwali to a local mela or neighbouring temple. Just as Sita was accompanied by Laksman, her husband's younger brother, when they went to the jungle in exile, so also will a married woman go on pilgrimage with her husband's younger brother. The mela and sacred geography of Janakpurdham associated with the Ram Lila also fits in with the Maithil kinship system. The event's of Sita's childhood and her marriage with Ram may be followed by the devotee on a journey to the many ponds and temples within the sacred circle of the town. One may stop to bathe in the pond where Raja Janak washed Ram's feet before the marriage, or where Sita's gaonwali anointed and washed her body during the week prior to the marriage, one may see where the marriage canopy was erected, where the land lay which Raja Janak gave to Ram as part of the dowry, and so forth. There is not one event of the Ram Lila which does not become understandable in terms

of kinship and marriage rules familiar to the people who visit Janakpurdham. Raja Janak, for example, had a pond dug (now called Gordhoi Sar) but no water filled up in the pond. A pandit told him that only when Rani Kausalya, Ram's mother, comes to bathe in the pond will the water seep into the excavated ground. Raja Janak therefore sent for Rani Kausalya. Predictably enough and pond is located two furlongs outside the town limits. The mother of the bride or bridegroom is not permitted to step within her son-in-law or daughter-in-law's household.

5.2. As part of the Vaisnavite sadhana a devotee of the Ramanandi sect will assume a new identity (Bhav) according to his own personal inclinations (also called bhav) in order to enter into a relationship with his tutelary deity, Lord Ram. The most common identities which a Vaisnavite devotee will assume are that of Ram's servant, Ram's brothers or his gaonwala, Sita's sisters or her gaonwali, Ram's father or mother, Sita's father, or Ram's wife, or Ram's guru. Although one may assume any identity, it is particularly recommended that Maithil people enact the Ram Lila as Ram's sister-in-law or Ram's father-in-law. (Men may also take themselves to be Ram's sister-in-law). Some of Janakpurdham's most illustrious sadhus, such as Sri Sur Kisor Das, came from northern India to live in Janakpurdham because their bhav could only be fully expressed in Mithila. Sur Kisor Das took himself to be Sita's father and founded the Janki Mandir in Janakpurdham. He never went to Ayodhya, U.P. because as the father of the maiden Sita he should not visit his son-in-law's home or accept hospitality from him. During the fifteen day circumambulation of Janakpurdham in the month of Phalgun at least two thousand women devotees form the procession behind the Agni Kund kuti and Kacauri kuti murti. The women take themselves to be Sita's sister or gaonwali and accompany Sita to the very places she went in the Treta Yuga with her sisters and gaonwali. During the Vivaha Pancami mela the devotees follow behind the Ram procession or Sita procession according to their bhav, and during the Holi festival devotees who take themselves to be Sita's sisters gather together in the kutis and toss coloured powder onto the idol of their brother-in-law, Lord Ram. For the Vaisnavite devotee at Janakpurdham, therefore, kinship has a more important role to play than merely understanding the deroulement of the annual cycle of melas associated with the Ram Lila. It is through kinship that the devotee creates a relationship to his deity, Lord Ram, and in re-enacting the lila of his deity, it is by means of this relationship that the devotee is transformed by the image of his Beloved and thus becomes part of the divine.