

## Gwaye Da Tayegu: An Initial Ritual of the Samyaka Guthi

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For the Newars of Nepal, the gwaye dā tayegu is a ritual announcement of a later, larger ceremony. This article discusses the rituals carried out in the gwaye dā tayegu ceremony which took place on Magh 1, 2035 (January 15, 1979). The rituals served to announce the Samyaka ceremony, which was observed on Magh 1, 2036 (January 15, 1980). The present discussion of the rituals is based on my own field observations of the gwaye dā tayegu and consultation with key informants who are in charge of the Samyaka ceremony. After describing the rituals, I discuss some of the key elements in relation to other features of religious and social life of Newar Buddhist.

The Samyaka is one of the Buddhist Newars' guthis. The guthi, an integral part of the Newar society, can be defined as an organization in which members belonging to one caste and sub-caste get together to perform certain religious rituals or social welfare activities. In general, all members of the guthi get together once a year, and on these occasions feasting is always involved. The economic foundation of most guthis is the organization's land. One of the members or a group of members takes charge of the guthi and assumes overall responsibility.

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Members of the guthi serve in this way on a rotational basis. The rules of the guthi are very strict, and no member can overlook his duties without the sanction of a fine or loss of membership.

Among the Newars there are different types of guthis each of which serves a different purpose. A few of the main ones are bājā guthi, sii guthi, sanā guthi, hichā guthi and busā dā guthi. Some guthis are more religious in nature while others are oriented toward social welfare.

### The Samyaka Guthi

The Samyaka guthi is an important religious guthi. This is one of the largest and most formal guthis which is ceremoniously convened once every twelve years. It is a Buddhist guthi in which the King, the Buddhist priests and lay Buddhist Newars are involved. As most Buddhist Newars are followers of the Vajrayāna sect, the rituals carried out in this ceremony are based on the Vajrayāna rules and regulations. In the Vajrayāna rituals the priest plays a leading role along with the eldest members of the guthi.

Two priests are needed for the Samyaka ceremony - one for performing pujā (worship) and the other for reading out the invitation scroll. For the performance of the pujā, the family priest of the eldest members of the guthi is responsible, while for the recitation of the scroll, another priest is appointed by the Samyaka Committee members on the basis of a person's good voice and skill in reciting.

The purpose of the Samyaka guthi is not in clear agreement. Some lay Buddhists believe that this guthi is similar to the Sanghāyāna<sup>1</sup>, whose purpose is to gather the monks and discuss and evaluate how properly Buddhism is being lived among its adherents. Therefore at the time of the Samyaka all the Buddhist priests from different viḥāras<sup>2</sup> (monasteries) come together. These Buddhist priests are well known by the names of Gubhāju and Bare among the Newars. Since the Buddhist Newars are the followers of Vajrayāna, their concentration is on the images of gods and goddesses and worshipping these images. Thus at the time of the Samyaka the images of Dipankar Buddha<sup>3</sup> and other gods and goddesses are assembled, and the King takes part in this ceremony. The service to the guthi activities are provided by the lay Buddhists.

Vajrayāna Buddhism entails three main types of ritual - pujā (worship), dān (gift), and bhojan (food offering). Among the various types of pujā, Sakhwāpā pujā is the highest; among the gifts, pancha dān (gift of five kinds) is the highest; and among the offered foods, the Samyaka bhojan is the highest. To observe the Samyaka guthi is to offer Samyaka bhojan to the Dipankar Buddha and the Vajrachārya priests. The Buddhist tradition is to offer bhojan to the monks. In the Samyaka, only the priests are offered bhojan by the lay Buddhists.

There is no record available to confirm when the Samyaka guthi came into existence in Nepal. The Buddhist Newars believe that it has been held from time immorial. According to Indian historical source, the Samyaka dates back to the time of Harsha Vardhana, 1300 years ago. Harsha Vardhana, the king of India, was the contemporary

of Amsuvarma, an early seventh century king of Nepal. Harsha Vardhana used to observe this guthi every five years. However, my informants (1979) assert that the Samyaka guthi in Nepal has never been held regularly, on account of periodic political and social problems in the country.

Before the unification of Nepal under King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Samyaka guthi is said to have been held in Kathmandu every four years. The members of the guthi came from three vihāras - (a) Lagan Bahāl (b) Wotu Bahāl, and (c) Itum Bahāl. Each vihāra used to organize the guthi by turns.

During the period when Prithvi Narayan Shah was unifying Nepal, the Samyaka guthi had to be put off due to the unstable political situation. Then King Prithvi Narayan Shah, after unification of Nepal, formed a committee to keep records and look after all guthis of the Newars. This committee was named Guthi Jānch Kachauri. He also came to know that the Samyaka guthi had not been observed for a long time so he sent for all the members of the guthi and ordered them to register the guthi under the Guthi Jānch Kachauri. Moreover, he also made the members of the guthi pay a fine of Rs. 160/- (called pān phul kharcha) for not having observed the Samyaka guthi in due time. He had the three groups of members from Lagan Bahāl, Wotu Bahāl, and Itum Bahāl combined together and ordered them to organize this guthi once every twelve years. However, any person, whether or not a member, can hold it any time if he is willing to sponsor it.

Gwaye Dā̃ Tayegu as a Ritual

Whoever sponsors the Samyaka guthi, the gwaye dā̃ tayegu ritual must be observed one year before the date when the Samyaka guthi is going to be held.

In Newari, gwaye literally means 'nuts'; dā̃, 'coin'; and tayegu, 'offering'. In the context of Newari culture, giving gwaye plays a very important role in announcing a decision to hold a formal ceremony. In marriage, for example, a would-be-groom's family sends gwaye to a prospective bride's family to announce that the marriage has been arranged. Similarly, gwaye is also offered to temples and the royal palace before the Dikchhyā (Dekhā)<sup>4</sup> ceremony and in many other ceremonies.

One main purpose of the gwaye dā̃ tayegu ritual is to announce the date when the Samyaka guthi will be held and to invite the King and the images of the Buddha. The ritual is carried out by the members<sup>5</sup> of the Samyaka guthi. The treasurer is involved in managing the guthi, but all the religious activities are carried out by the guthi priests.

Observations

The gwaye dā̃ tayegu ritual was held on the following day, time, and place:

Date: Sanlhu, 1099; Magh 1, 2035 (January 15, 1979)

Day : Sanlhu; Makar Sakranti

Time: 10:30 A.M.

Place: Swayambhu

All the members of the guthi and their relatives gathered on the top of the Swayambhu hill. The group of women, close relatives of the guthi members, arranged trays with several ingredients of pujā. At the same time a group of men were busy arranging pujā offerings. Meanwhile the guthi members and their relatives were going round and round the stupa of Swayambhu with the gulā bājā<sup>6</sup> (musical band) ahead of them. The head priest was



#### Ingredients of pujā

busy setting up the materials for worship at the mandala<sup>7</sup> (circle) in front of the Amitābhva (image of the Buddha) All the participants had badges, some yellow and some pink, that had been distributed among the guthi members and their close relatives. Those with pink badges were registered to pay homage to the King. Those with yellow badges could enter the Royal Palace but would not get an

audience with the King.

The head priest, who was sitting in front of the mandala was wearing a red band of cloth, about five inches wide, around his shoulder. The materials for kalashcharan puja were set out on the mandala in front of the Amitābhva shrine facing the west. Included were a kalash (jar for holy water), pasukā (a ball of five different coloured threads entangled together), dipa (a butter lamp) and dhau pati (yoghurt). The red band worn by the head priest stands for the cheevara which is worn by the monks. Theravada monks wear yellow cheevara, but the Vajrayāna priests put on red cheevara to perform pujā.

Wearing the red band, the priest performed kalashcharan puja on the mandala. It is an initial pujā in the gwaye dā tayegu ceremony. This pujā is often done in the beginning of any



The kalashcharan puja at the mandala.

religious ritual. It carries a special reference to the myth of Karunamaya, a god of compassion (Locke, 1973). According to the myth, Karunamaya was brought to Nepal with the combined effort of King Narendradev of Bhaktapur, a iyāpu (farmer) from Lalitpur and a priest from Kāntipur. The priest, by means of a tantric mantra (formula of words), called upon Karunamaya who turned into a bee and got into a kalash. In this way Karunamaya was brought to the country. The Newars say that if a priest chants a mantra and performs kalashcharan puja gods and goddesses required for occasion come into a kalash. The kalash can then be taken to any place where the auspicious rituals will occur.

As the gwaye dā tayegu ceremony is a ritual invitation to gods and goddesses to attend the Samyaka Guthi, the kalashcharan puja was done in front of Amitābhava, the main image of Lord Buddha at Swayambhu.

For the performance of the kalashcharan puja, one kalash for pure water and a ball of pasukā (five coloured threads), a butter lamp, and dhau pati (yoghurt) are needed. Each coloured thread represents each of the five meditating Buddhas - Amitābhava, Ratna Sambhava, Achhyovya, Amongh Sidhi, and Bairochan. Their colours are red, yellow, blue, dark blue, and white respectively. These five coloured threads make a ball of pasukā; its full formal name is pancha sutra kā. Its function in the puja is to pull the god out of the temple to the mandala.

Dhau pati is a pair of two small bowls joined together, each filled with yoghurt. They represent the sun and the moon that are called down to the earth from the heaven to witness the puja.



The head priest did the pujā with little bell in his left hand ringing it almost constantly and at the same time occasionally sprinkling rice from his right hand. This is the common procedure for making offerings to the image in the Vajrayāna. During this pujā, the eldest members of the guthi were sitting next to the head priest.

In the middle of the pujā the priest asked three principal members of the guthi to come near him with their wives. One of the characteristics of the Vajrayāna pujā is that in order to make a major offering, a man and his spouse must participate together. If the man is without his spouse, he can ask another, a wife of his elder or younger brother, to join him in the pujā.

Three couples and the treasurer went up to the head priest and formed a semi-circle. Women were dressed in colourful clothes and the men were also dressed up formally for the occasion. The priest put a betel-leaf, ten gwaye (nuts), and a coin on their palms and chanted a mantra. In the meantime, the other priest with the red band of cloth across his shoulder appeared with a scroll. He started reciting the dānpatra, an invitation card meant to be read out. He read out the date, the name of the King, the name of the place, and the names of the guthi members. The text of the dānpatra invited all of these people to attend the Samayaka guthi in the coming year.

When the priest finished reciting the dānpatra, the couples went to the image of Amitābhva Buddha and placed the gwaye dā (gift of nuts) at the shrine. They also offered kislee and nislā to the image. A kislee is a



The recitation of the dānpatra.

small vessel full of rice in which are placed an incense stick, a coin, and a nut. The vessel is made of clay, about two inches and a half in diameter. It is round and looks like a bowl and saucer. A nislā is a plate full of husked rice or beaten rice with any kind of sweetmeat on it. It is generally offered to the temples and the priests as dān (alms).

After making offerings to the image of Amitābhva, the eldest guthi couple offered arga when the head priest, who was still chanting mantras, instructed them to do so. The people involved in offerings to the god cannot do anything without the priest's cue because he is the only one who can provide a link between the worshippers and the god.



The guthi members offering a nislā to Amitābhva

The arga offering consists of water, cow's milk, situ (doop grass), and dāpha swā (a kind of jasmine). These are put into a conch shell and poured out in front of the gods and goddesses while the priest chants mantras. The cow's milk and doop grass are considered signs of purity. Dāpha swā, a kind of jasmine, is a special flower required for arga because this flower was offered for the first time to Swayambhu by Vishwabhu Tathāgata when he came to pay homage to the Swayambhu stupa (Shakya, Nepal Era 1098). This arga pujā is performed to ask the earth to be a witness of what is being done.

The main party, a group of guthi members and their wives, moved to the images of Amoghśidhi, Achchyovya, Bairochan, Ratnasambhava, and the other four images of Saptalochani, Māmaki, Pandura, and Tārā to offer kislee. Meanwhile the remaining party offered the sweets, fruits,

rice and so on to the image of Amitābhva. Amitābhva is the main image of the meditative Buddha, so kalashcharan puja was performed for him only. Then the party moved to Azimā<sup>8</sup> (the female deity situated at the Swayambhu hill) and performed the puja of gwaye dā, arga, dānpatra recitation, offering of kislee, nislā and so on. Then they went to a special image of Buddha, which is brought out on the occasion of Samyaka to offer kislee.

Then the whole group moved over to Shantipur<sup>9</sup> which is located a few steps down from the proper Swayambhu stupa in a north-west direction. Here a different type of puja was carried out. The puja is called lassiwā jwalan and is done with buffalo meat, beer and liquor. This puja is, of course, done only to the deities who accept these substances and it is never done to non-tantric images of Buddha.

When this puja was finished, the offering of gwaye dā, the arga puja, recitation of the dānpatra and offering of kislee were performed as had been done earlier to other images of Buddha. The group then came back to Swayambhu and headed from the east steps<sup>10</sup> towards the Vijeshwari temple at the Vishnumati to offer the gwaye dā puja to the goddess Ākāsh Jogini there. In the same way they went to Machhendra Bahāl, Itum Bahāl, Lagan Bahāl, the Royal Palace and Wotu Bahāl where the same puja was carried out. The chart on the following page shows the places, the names of the images and the type of puja done in the gwaye dā tayegu ceremony.

The chart showing the type of pujā done, the names of the images, and the names of places:

Type of <u>pujā</u>	Name of the images	Name of places
<u>Gwaye dā̃</u>	Azimā	Swayambhu
i. <u>lassiwā</u> ii. <u>gwaye dā̃</u>	Shāntipur	Swayambhu
<u>Gwaye dā̃</u>	Special Image of Buddha	Swayambhu
i. <u>Kalashcharan pujā</u> ii. <u>Gwaye dā̃</u>	Amitābhva	Swayambhu
<u>Kislee</u>	Ratna Sambhava	Swayambhu
<u>Kislee</u>	Achchyobhya	Swayambhu
<u>Kislee</u>	Amogh Siddhi	Swayambhu
<u>Kislee</u>	Bairochan	Swayambhu
<u>Kislee</u>	Saptalochani Māmaki Pāndurā Tārā	Swayambhu
i. <u>Kislee</u> ii. <u>Gwaye dā̃</u>	Ākāsh Jogini	Vijeshwari
<u>Kislee</u>	i. Kwāpā deo ii. Tārā deo	Itum Bahāl
i. <u>Gwaye dā̃</u> ii. <u>Arga</u> iii. <u>Kislee</u>	The King	The Royal Place
<u>Kislee</u>	Karunamaya	Machendra Bahāl
<u>Kislee</u>	Buddha	Lagan Bahāl
<u>Kislee</u>	Buddha	Wotu Bahāl



Participants with nislā on the way to the Royal Palace

For gwaye dā tayegu, there is no strict route to follow to go to the temples or make offerings, and any gods and goddesses can be offered gwaye dā.

After visiting all the places the party separated. As mentioned earlier, the three principal members of the Samyaka guthi invited their relatives to join the procession. The procession then separated into four groups - the three principal groups and one group with the treasurer. The members reported that in the older days all the participants of the gwaye dā ritual used to feast together, but these days the group separates into smaller groups and each has a separate feast at its convenience. The gwaye dā ritual was completed with the grand feast.

One notable characteristic of the Newar Buddhists in this ritual is the participation of the relatives of the officiants. Although the relatives are not involved in the pujā itself they are there to make a pleasant gathering and to participate in the feast.



Worshipping the King on the occasion of the gwaye dā̃ tayegu ceremony.

### Conclusions

Gwaye dā̃ tayegu is a ritual proclamation that the Samyaka guthi is going to be held after one year. The Newars observe this ceremony not only in Samyaka but also in other ceremonies such as Dekhā, Bratabandha, Sichchā puja<sup>11</sup> and for weddings.

According to the mangal sutra<sup>12</sup> of Vajrayāna, auspiciousness is symbolized with dadhi, phal, kusuma. In Sanskrit, dadhi is the yoghurt, phal is the fruit, and kusuma is the flower. These three items symbolize auspiciousness throughout Newar rituals. Gwaye (nuts) is classified as a fruit. Gwaye is used as the ritual 'fruit' because of its ever-lasting quality<sup>13</sup>.

The starting pujā of the gwaye dā̃ tayegu ritual takes place at Swayambhu because the Buddhists in Nepal believe that the origin of the human settlement in the Kathmandu valley started from the Swayambhu hill (Shakya, Nepal Era 1098). To represent the four Yoginis<sup>14</sup>, Ākāsh Yogini is offered gwaye dā̃. It was not offered to the other three Yoginis because only Ākāsh Yogini is on the way to the town from Swayambhu. In addition, people say that one of the Yoginis represents the other three and that one Karunamaya represents all four Karunamayas. Karunamayas are located at Patan, Nālā, Chovār and Matsyendra Bahāl. Gwaye dā̃ is offered only to the one at Matsyendra Bahāl, Kathmandu. The King is offered gwaye dā̃ as well. He is considered as a protector of the country, as are other gods and goddesses, as well as the head of the nation<sup>15</sup>.

The gwaye dā̃ ritual is observed exactly one year before the date of the Samyaka guthi. Samyaka can be observed by any one who is interested in it and wealthy enough to sponsor it, but two Samayakas in the same year are forbidden. Therefore one year before, a person who wants to sponsor the ceremony has to announce it through the gwaye dā̃ ritual. Once gwaye dā̃ is offered, the Samyaka guthi is confirmed to be held in the coming year. These days the Samyaka guthi is confined to three



particular bahāls - Lagan Bahāl, Wotu Bahāl, and Itum Bahāl because the people from these three bahāls fund this guthi. The guthi is still running with their money invested in land.

The gwaye dā tayegu ritual reflects the life style of the Buddhist Newars. Although the ritual is just one part of the Samyaka ritual it gives a panoramic view of Vajrayāna Buddhism and the social organization of the Buddhist Newars.

The Buddhist Newars of Kathmandu are organized as a well-knit society. Gods and goddesses are inseparable from their life. Their treatment to them is similar to their treatment of important human beings. In any formal ceremony, invitation cards are issued, and in the Newar Buddhist society the invitation is given with special ritual without distinguishing the human beings from gods and goddesses. The invitation scroll (dānpatra) contains a theme similar to that of invitation cards for social occasions among people. Vajrayāna Buddhism has been heavily influenced by tantrism, so the rituals are carried out through symbols like dhau pati (signifying sun and moon) and pancha sutra kā (signifying the five threads that 'pull' the god from the temple). The gwaye dā tayegu ritual also gives a clear picture of the main difference between Theravāda Buddhism and Vajrayāna Buddhism. Theravāda stresses self-purification leading to Niravāna while Vajrayāna focuses on the worshipping of gods and goddesses, which leads to Niravāna. The former attempts to minimize social entanglement while the latter maximizes social activities, packed with tantric decoration. The gwaye dā tayegu itself is an example of the latter.

The Vajrayāna Buddhists have faith in priests as mediators between gods and human beings. Therefore their religious life is marked by the performing of very formal rituals. In addition, compared to many other Asian societies, Vajrayāna Buddhists give more equal ritual status to men and women. In the gwaye dā tayegu ritual a pair of man and woman is required to offer arga pujā. In any formal ritual men and women go hand in hand because the Vajrayāna Buddhists believe that the whole universe is created with pragya and upaya<sup>16</sup>, symbolizing female and male energy. The three senior pairs who participated in the gwaye dā tayegu ritual performed the arga pujā. These three male-female pairs are considered superior to all other during this ceremony.



Offering of dānpatra to the King after its recitation.

Social activities of the Buddhist Newars concentrate on gods and goddesses, priests, and relatives. These three entities are so intertwined that absence of any one will be considered out of order. As shown here, gods and goddesses, priests and relatives of the guthi members were all ceremoniously invited during the gwaye dā̃ tayegu ritual.



The head priest and the thākuli entreating the King to attend the Samyaka guthi.

#### Notes

1. Sanghāyāna is a Pali word. It means a conference in which the monks gather together to discuss ways to improve and flourish the religion. According to the.

Theravāda text, soon after the death of Buddha, Bhikkshu Mahākāsyapa held Sanghāyāna under the management of the contemporary King Ajātsatru. It was held in Saptapāni Guphā, the cave which is still preserved in Rajgriha, India.

2. Vihāra means a place where the monks live. According to one theory in the early days these viharas (bahāls) were all places for celebrated monks to live in.
3. According to Buddhist history, Deepankar Buddha is the fourth Buddha and Gautam Buddha is the 25th one. He is regarded as one of the human gods. According to the Sumedha Jātak, Deepankar was the teacher of Gautam Buddha in his previous birth. Whoever organizes Samyaka must have an image of Deepankar made. When the pujā in Samyaka is to be offered to the special image of Buddha, the organizer gets into the image of Deepankar Buddha and performs the pujā. All the images of Deepankar Buddha are gathered at the time of the Samyaka ceremony.
4. Dikkshyā is one of the formal rituals of the Vajrayāna Buddhist (Allen, 1973). With this ritual people are supposed to become more spiritually advanced than other lay Buddhists. When the people who have undertaken this ritual pass away a special kind of ritual is performed before cremation.
5. The members are all from the Newar and Vare community while the treasurer is from the Uray community.

6. This is a special kind of musical band which is one of the main bands the Newars use for their religious activities. During the month of Gunlā, which falls in July-August, the band goes to Swayambhu early morning. There is a guthi for this kind of musical band in many Newar settlements.
  
7. Mandala is a circle in front of the main image of the gods. Mandalas are made of brass or stone. They are used for pujās which call upon gods. The outer rings of mandalas differ according to the type of gods. For those gods who take meat and drinks the outer ring has six corners (khatkona) while a mandala for Buddha has petals of lotus.
  
8. Azimā is a female deity who is worshipped by Hindus as well as Buddhists. She was formerly a gaintess who lived on human children. She has many children but she loves her youngest one most. One day Buddha hid her youngest child. She looked for her child crying desperately. She came across Buddha and asked him for her dearest child. Then Buddha gave her enlightenment. With the words of Buddha she stopped eating human children and started utilizing her mystic power to help direct the agricultural activities. She then became a care taker of all children, too. One can see people worshipping Azimā before plantation and after harvesting. And when children get serious illness one goes to offer pujā to this goddess. Her temple is at the right side of Amitabhva, facing south.
  
9. Shāntipur is a well-known sacred cave for Buddhists. It is not open for the general public, either Buddhists non-Buddhists. It is believed that there are seven

rooms one after another in the Shāntipur temple. In the pujā meat and drinks are offered because evil spirits (bhut pret) and tantric deities are believed to reside in the seven rooms

10. There are three different steps leading up to Swayambhu, one facing the east and the other two facing west. The steps facing east are the main entrance and the other two are the back entrances. The main steps are longer and steeper. According to the religious concepts of the Buddhist Newars, these steps are the most auspicious. Therefore, for any formal religious activities the people climb up to Swayambhu by these eastern steps.
11. This one of the formal and biggest pujās in Vajrayāna. In this pujā the stupa of Swayambhu is completely covered with flowers made out of wax. People believe that one needs tantric power to perform this pujā. The person must be thorough in tantrism and must be at the height of enlightenment so that after performing this pujā, he can pass away from the mortal body to eternity. After 300 years later this pujā was performed by a Guruju at Swayambhu on October 5, 1979.
12. According to Buddhist belief, mangal sutra contains the good things in life. Among these yoghurt, fruit, and flowers are also signs of good luck. Newars wish for good luck by offering these three things, known as sagan.
13. For the announcement of the engagement of marriage, gwaye is given to a bride. For the introduction of a new bride to the family of the groom, gwaye is also

given by the bride to members of her new family, wishing an ever-lasting relationship.

14. The followers of Vajrayāna place a high religious value on Swayambhu and the four Yoginis - Guheshwari, Ākāsh Yogini, Khadga Yogini, and Vajra Yogini.

Washing the King's feet with the water from Indra Kalash, symbolizing a ritual 'bath'.



15. According to oral tradition, in the age of Tretā Yug one Bodhisatwa called Manjushree established a city and named it Manjupatan. He also appointed the king, Dharmākar, by inviting all the gods from the heaven including the king Indra. Dharmākar was bathed with water from the Indra kalash. Since the, inviting the

King to the Samyaka guthi apparently came into practice. The ritual of giving the King a ritual 'bath' from the Indra kalash is still done during the Samyaka guthi.

16. Pragya, the female part, stands for the wisdom of Vajrayāna while upaya, the male part, for the method or practice of wisdom (Allen, 1973).

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