

SACRIFICE, REGENERATION AND GIFTS: MORTUARY RITUALS AMONG HINDU NEWARS OF KATHMANDU

Rajendra Pradhan

Introduction

The Hindu Newars of Kathmandu, like many Hindu communities elsewhere, consider their whole life, and especially the life cycle rituals they undergo, as a preparation for death and, more importantly, life after death.¹ Further, they believe that in cremating the dead they are offering the corpse to the gods (cf. Pandey 1976; Stevenson 1971; Das 1977, 1981; Malamound 1983; Parry 1981, 1982). This is why it is essential that Hindus perform life cycle rituals (*samskaras*)², which purify them and confer on them the necessary social attributes so that when they die their bodies are suitable offerings to the gods³.

For the Hindus, death is not the final end because it leads to life in the other world as an ancestor, to other births in this world, and ultimately, absorption into the Great Absolute (*māhābrāhamana*) or the great Illusion (*mahāmāya*), i.e. liberation (*mukti/moksa*) from the endless cycle of rebirths in this illusory world (*samsāra*). Mortuary rituals are important means of marking this passage from one life to another, from one world to another.

Mortuary rituals mark the termination of the personhood of the deceased person as well as the (re)creation of a new personhood (Carter 1972:132). However, the termination is not instantaneous since death, i.e., social death, is recognised over a long, staggered period (Hertz 1960). Similarly, the recreation of the personhood of the deceased by the chief mourner, by means of the mortuary rituals and mourning practices, is also staggered over a number of days. If the mortuary rites are not 'correctly' performed, the deceased will forever remain a ghost (*preta*) and will not be incorporated as an ancestor (*pitr*), a terrible state for the spirit as well as for the living relatives whom it will trouble.

Although the chief mourner is the main actor in mortuary rituals, he needs to be assisted by his kin and affines, his funeral association (*si guthi*) members, and ritual specialists to be able to perform these rituals correctly. Like the chief mourner, the ritual specialists such as the Bhā

(Mahābrāhmaṇa), the Jogi (Kusle), the Karmācārya and the Brāhmaṇa mediate between the deceased (as ghost or ancestor) and the living. These ritual specialists receive gifts and fees in exchange for the services they provide and in addition they receive gifts on behalf of the deceased.

Mortuary rituals can be usefully analysed in terms of the tripartite structure of the rites of passage formulated by van Gennep (1977), Hertz (1960), Turner (1969), Douglas (1970) and in the Hindu case by Kaushik (1976) and Das (1977). Viewed thus, mortuary rituals may be conveniently divided into three phases which correspond to the three phases of the rites of passage. In the first phase, the body of the dead person is prepared as sacrificial offering and sacrificed on the funeral pyre. Rites of separation predominate in this phase. In the second phase, i.e., the liminal phase, the ghost (*preta*) of the deceased, which is disembodied and disarticulated (Das 1982: 144) is given a new body by the chief mourner. The liminal period is the most dangerous and polluting period for the mourners, who are set apart from the rest of the community. They have to be continuously on guard against the ghost of the deceased person and appease it by various offerings. In the third phase, the *preta* is incorporated as an ancestor by the *sapindikarana* ritual and worshipped as an ancestor, either separately or together with other ancestors. Correspondingly, the mourners are no longer in a liminal state or polluted, and they are reincorporated back into society. However, the mourners are still tainted with inauspiciousness for the whole year; they may not celebrate auspicious rituals such as marriage, initiation, or festivals such as Mohani (Nep. Dashain) and Swanti (Nep. Tihar). As is clear from above, there are many themes in Hindu mortuary rituals. Since it is not possible to discuss all the themes in this article due to space constraints, I will discuss three major themes, each theme in a separate section. In the first section, mortuary rituals are described from a rites of passage perspective, focusing on the termination and recreation of personhood. I argue that cremation is a form of sacrifice. In the second section, the relation between death pollution, mourning practices and the state of the deceased are discussed. I will argue that mourning practices not only express impurity, liminality and inauspiciousness but they are also means of (a) acquiring power to transform the *pret* into *pitri* and (b) of expiating the sin of cremating the deceased. In the third section, I describe the exchange of gifts and services between the chief mourner and the ritual specialists and between him and the deceased. I shall argue that (a) the ritual specialists, who mediate between the living and the dead, receive gifts on behalf of the deceased in addition to the gifts and fees they receive for their services and (b) the Mahābrāhmaṇa and not the Brāhmaṇa is seen as the absorber of the sin of the deceased.

MORTUARY RITUALS AS RITES OF PASSAGE

THE FIRST PHASE: PRELIMINAL STATE

The last moments and immediately after: Preparation of the body for cremation

Although everything possible is done to prolong the life of the dying man (including propitiation of different deities and spirits in consultation with religious specialists), it is believed that if his time is up (*kāl wa sā*), as has been destined for him, nothing can save him.⁴ It is not uncommon to hear of old people awaiting death claim that they feel the presence of the messengers of Yamaraja, the lord of death, who have come to escort the dead to Yamaloka, the land of the dead. One of my informants related an incident he himself witnessed: One of his old uncles, lying on his death bed, shouted just before he expired, " *Kā wala, kā wala* [they] have come to take [me], [they] have come to take [me]".⁵ Commenting on this incident he remarked philosophically, " When one's Time comes (*kāl wa sā*), what is there to do but surrender oneself voluntarily into their hands?" It is said that people who do this die peacefully.

If possible, gifts are presented to a Brāhman priest on behalf of the dying man to add to his store of religious merit (*dharma/punya*) and help him in the other world. The most important items of these gifts are gold and a cow. Ideally these gifts should be given by the dying person himself but if this has not been done, the chief mourner may give these gifts on his behalf. A gift of gold to a Brāhman purifies the donor from his sins (*pāpa*) while *gaudāna* (gift of cow) helps the deceased cross the dreaded Vaitarni river, en route to heaven. Because of the expense entailed, instead of real cows the Brāhmanas are given money in the ritually prescribed manner, similar to the gifting of a real cow.

The dying person is moved away from the auspicious and pure parts of the house because death and mortuary rituals are considered inauspicious and impure events and because the spirit (*preta*) of the deceased has a special affinity for the spot where the death occurred. Sometimes the dying man is carried to the cremation ground adjoining either the Paśupati temple, the Indrani temple or Pacali Bhairava temple, and laid supine on a *Brāhmanāla*. *Brāhmanāla* is a large slab of stone, half immersed in the river, on which dying persons are laid until they expire. The head of the stone is sculpted, depicting Viśṇu reclining on Ananata Nāga. Any person who dies lying on the *Brāhmanāla* is said to be freed from all his sins (*pāpa*). I have heard cases of old, dying people being taken to the Āryaghāt at Pashupati and even to Varanasi and brought back home after a few days or weeks when they did not die, only to pass away at home. This may be because though ideally, a

person should die by a sacred river,⁶ the Newars prefer to die at home surrounded by relatives, especially the womenfolk who are traditionally prohibited from attending the cremation. The dying man, however, is not allowed to pass away peacefully in his bedroom; on the contrary, as soon as it is known that he is dying, he is carried to the ground floor of the house (sometimes hurriedly and unceremoniously) and laid on a straw mat near the stairs. The ground on which the mat is laid is previously purified with cow dung. Great care is taken to ensure that the dying man does not come into contact with polluting objects or persons, such as menstruating women or impure castes, because he has to be as pure as possible at the moment of death.

The eldest son or the wife of the dying man pours a continuous stream of holy water (*jal*) at his feet. This act probably represents, as Nepali (1965:126) suggests, the placing of the dying man on a *Brahmaṇḍala*, half immersed in the sacred river. Close relatives, especially women, pour *jal* (water from the different sacred rivers and ponds in Nepal and India such as Bāgmati, Viśnumati, and the Ganges) into his mouth. This act, called *la twākegu* (offering water), is repeated at the cremation ground (*ghāt*) by the male mourners. These acts purify the body, enable the deceased to 'cross' (*tarejui*), and ensure water for the deceased in the other world. People who are not able to offer water to their dying or deceased relative consider themselves extremely unfortunate; I have heard people bemoan such a hapless fate.

Traditionally, an ayurvedic doctor (*ghāt vaidya*) attended on the dying person and it was he who announced the death of the person.⁷ It is believed that a person dies when his 'vital breath' (*prāṇvāyu*) leaves his body. People sometimes say "his *prāṇa* has left him" to refer to someone's death. It is not quite clear to me as to what else leaves the body along with the vital breath. One cannot find any clarity on the issue from the literature on death.⁸ The popular belief is that the soul (*ātmā*) leaves the body together with the vital breath at the moment of death. Another belief is that the soul leaves the body only when the funeral pyre is lit. According to one ritual expert, when very holy people are cremated, a dazzling light, the size of a thumb, emerges from the body and flies towards the sky. This light is the soul (*ātmā*).

It is widely believed that the *ātmā* can leave and re-enter the body at will, even during the lifetime of a person. This belief is aptly illustrated by the following story related to me by an old informant concerning a person he knew well. It was well known that this person's *ātmā* left his body and wandered around the city as soon as he was asleep. One night his friends decided to play a trick on him and disguised his body so well that the soul

did not recognise its own body when it returned in the morning. Consequently, the soul did not enter the body and the man died. Therefore even though the Newars may say, "his 'vital breath' has left him",⁹ to refer to someone's death, it seems that both the soul and the vital breath have to leave the body for a person to be considered dead.

The important point here is that it is not physical death but the social and ritual recognition and acceptance of it that is significant for the Newars. As among other communities, physical death may precede, as in the normal case, or follow, social death, as in the case of the renouncer who performs his own cremation during his ordination as renouncer (cf. Parry 1982). For the Newars, the crucial moment for ritual recognition of death is when the funeral pyre is lit by the chief mourner. As soon as the pyre is lit, the person being cremated is considered to be dead even in the rare cases where the person is not physically dead. If a person wakes up or shows signs of life after the pyre is lit, he/she is immediately killed and fully cremated. It is believed that spirits of other dead persons may occupy such a body.¹⁰ The *Gwās*, a sub-caste of Jyāpus who specialise in cremation, always carry staves and knives for such purpose. Informants cite many such cases that they have heard about, especially those which occurred thirty years ago or earlier. Strangely, most of these cases are of women who were believed to have died just before or during child birth. I have heard of only one case which occurred about ten years back. In another case, a woman who woke up after the pyre was lit was not killed but she was not accepted back into society and lived as an outcast. She was considered to be of lower status than the lowest, the Hālahulu, who is identified, at least in one festival (that of *Gathā Muga*), with evil spirits. On the other hand, if a person is believed to be dead but his body is not available for cremation, his horoscope and effigy are cremated and all essential mortuary rituals are performed. If such a person should return after his effigy has been cremated, he is not accepted back into society, for he is 'dead' to them. However, in some cases such persons may be accepted back after they becoming 'reborn' by performing again the full set of life cycle rituals, beginning with birth rituals.¹¹

Impure persons and things are not allowed to come in contact with the corpse. The persons who come in contact with the corpse, for example, relatives and the funeral association (*si guthi*) members, have to be of the same caste as the deceased. Others who carry the items required for the cremation, for example, the Jyāpus (farmer caste) are of pure caste. These precautions are taken because the corpse has to be pure to be a suitable offering to the gods. But at the same time, the corpse is considered impure and pollutes all who come in contact with it. Traditionally, all residents of

the building where a death had occurred were mildly polluted until the corpse was removed, even if they were not related to the deceased.

I am unable to say how the Newars resolve the apparent contradiction of the corpse being considered impure and, at the same time, a pure offering of the gods. Perhaps, as Das (1977:124) suggests, the dead body as matter is impure and the dead person as ghost (*preta*) is pure. The corpse as matter is destroyed at cremation. When the skull of the half burnt body is cracked, the ghost (*preta*) is released and offered to the gods. But as Parry (1981, 1982) points out, and this is also common among the Newars, the more popular view is that the *preta* leaves the body at the moment of death.

The women and children begin wailing as soon as they know that the person is dying but the men usually join them in wailing only when the person is believed dead. Through all the weeping and wailing, each calling out to the deceased, "Oh, father!", "Oh! mother!" as the case may be, the body is protected from evil spirits and pollution. Five burning wicks are placed around the body and an iron object placed on the corpse, to prevent evil spirits, including the spirit of the deceased (*preta*), from entering the body.

All the necessary activities required to cremate the body are performed not by the bereaved household but by other relatives and members of the funeral association (*si guthi*).¹¹ The deceased person's relatives and funeral association members are informed of the death as soon as possible to avoid delay in cremating the body, even if it be late at night. This is done not only because death is polluting and inauspicious, and because both the corpse and the living are susceptible to evil spirits but also because a decomposed and impure body is not a suitable offering to the gods.

A wider section of the community, in terms of friends, kin and affines and castes, are involved in mortuary rituals as compared to other life cycle rituals. This is because death is not only a private, domestic event, but also a public, cosmic event which necessitates direct relations with the unpredictable, cosmic forces. As many authors have pointed out, society seems threatened by the loss of one of its members and it has to be recreated in the face of this loss (Durkheim 1976; Das 1986; Bloch and Parry 1982).

The corpse is carefully prepared for cremation. After a lineage member (*phuki*) has washed the dead man's face, the seniormost male member (*thakāli*) of the funeral association or patrilineage (*phuki*) then applies vermilion on the deceased's forehead and ties his horoscope to his neck. This act is called *dukā pikā*. Then the married daughters of the deceased approach the dead body, weeping as they do so, and depart after placing some cotton on it. This act is called *phāngā tayegu* (to keep a shawl or quilt). Finally the corpse is wrapped in a loin cloth, tightly bound with a white cloth (*pongā*)

and then covered with a large cane mat (*ghoom*). Married women are wrapped in the saree which were given to them by their parents at marriage. These symbols, the horoscope, the loin cloth and the saree, recall the more auspicious rituals of birth, initiation and marriage, but only to highlight the reversal. For example, the horoscope which is cast at birth is burnt along with the dead man. However, there are other symbols which express the life of the deceased in other worlds (*loka*). For example, the cotton which the married daughters place on the corpse ensures that the deceased has a shawl or a quilt in the other world.

A simple *srāddha* (offerings of uncooked rice, flattened rice and curd) is performed to the spirit of the deceased person (*preta*) before the corpse is removed to the bier (*kwatā*). As described later, similar offerings are made to the deceased and to other spirits enroute to the cremation ground, and at the cremation ground itself, as a means of appeasing them.

A few members of the funeral association shift the corpse from the ground floor of the house to the bamboo bier placed just outside the main door or gate of the house. The corpse is completely covered with an embroidered shroud (*dewā*). The shroud belongs to the funeral association and is used whenever one of its members die. Puffed rice and vermilion are sprinkled on the shroud just as they would be showered on the cloth (*du*) covering the palanquin or car which carries the bride to the groom's house. Puffed rice and vermilion are symbols of life and auspiciousness. The corpse is about to be carried in the final procession of its life.

Just before the funeral procession leaves for the cremation ground an elderly woman of the household, or a Jyāpu woman traditionally employed by them, offers a garment which was used by the deceased person and the straw mat (*suku*) on which he breathed his last to the goddess of the crossroads, *chwāsa ajimā*. She has to cover her head with a shawl and weep from the moment she crosses the threshold of the house until she returns. Before entering the house she purifies herself with water. There is a marked contrast between the offerings made to the crossroad goddess at death and those made at birth or marriage. At birth the child's umbilical cord is offered to the goddess with joy and future expectations. At death the dead man's garment is offered with sadness and the realization that the future of the person has been terminated. These two offerings are just one of the ways of expressing auspicious and inauspicious events (cf. Das 1983:144).

The funeral procession: *sitā yenkegu*

Well defined customs and procedures help maintain some order amidst the sea of chaos caused by death. Society seeks to impose order not only because it cannot tolerate chaos but also because, as Hubert and Mauss

(1968) pointed out, everything to do with sacrifice (for cremation is a sacrifice) needs to be carefully organised lest dangerous forces become uncontrollable. As with other mortuary rites, in the funeral procession too, the order of the processionists, the route to be followed, the music to be played, and the acts to be performed, etc. are all regulated.

The funeral procession is led by a butcher (Nāy) and a farmer (Jyāpu) who play their musical instruments from the moment the procession begins until the pyre is lit by the chief mourner. They are followed by three or more farmers (Jyāpus). One of them carries the items required for the cremation - an earthen pot (*bhega*) which contains smouldering cow dung from which the pyre is lit, nine bundles of straw and reed, a pot and some *pujā* items. The second Jyāpu scatters puffed rice and vermilion along the procession route. The third, who, informants say, represents married daughters (one person, called *po whaley*, for each married daughter), scatters a mixture of husked and unhusked rice. The above processionists precede the bier carried by four funeral association members. The chief mourner and his brothers walk immediately behind the bier. They are followed by the patrilineage members (*phuki*) and consanguines, affines, friends and funeral association members. Brāhman priests usually do not accompany the funeral procession. When a married woman dies, her parents send a male representative to the procession but he has to return from the *ghāt* without watching the cremation. Women are strictly prohibited from joining the procession or going to the cremation ground.¹²

The funeral routes and the *ghāt* where the deceased is to be cremated are determined by the location of his traditional house and his caste.¹³ Deviation in the route or the cremation ground is not allowed without the prior permission from the Thaku juju (Thakuri king, the descendants of former chief or king of each locality) and the caretakers of the cremation grounds, the Pode, an untouchable caste, until a small fine is paid to them. The Podes have stopped funeral processions from proceeding to a different cremation ground until the fines were paid.

Different caste groups have specified places (*dip*) in the cremation grounds on which they build their funeral pyres. Low castes may not cremate their dead at the *dip* reserved for the higher castes. The higher castes do not cremate their dead at the *dip* of the lower castes for fear of polluting the corpse. These, and other rules relating to cremation, are enforced by the caretakers of the cremation grounds, the Pode, who receive a small fee and the leftovers from the cremation, such as the cane mat (*ghoom*) and the offerings to the deceased. The fee is shared with the Thaku juju.¹⁴ Traditionally, the former received twenty paisa and the latter sixty four paisa for the use of the cremation ground.

By the time the funeral procession reaches the cremation ground some of the funeral association members and the Gwā (a sub-caste of Jyāpus specialising in cremation) have prepared the funeral pyre (*sipha or citta*). The species of wood used for cremation and other sacrifices are similar.

The Cremation (*si uyegu*): Cremation as Sacrifice

Although the Hindu scriptural tradition and the people themselves consider death, and especially cremation, a sacrificial ritual (Pandey 1976; Stevenson 1971; Levin 1930), it is only recently that Indologists and anthropologists (Malamoud 1983; Das 1977, 1983; Parry 1981, 1982, 1985) have again focused their attention on this important theme. Das (1977:122-124), for example, points out that only those persons who are deemed to be suitable sacrificial victims may be cremated and shows parallels between cremation and sacrificial procedures.¹⁵ Among the Newars, ideally and traditionally, babies who have not undergone the *annaprāśana* ceremony, people who have been publicly executed for their crimes, girls who die during their 'menarche' seclusion (*bārhā tayegu*) and victims of accidental deaths may not be cremated for they are considered unsuitable to be offered to the gods. It could be said, following Malamoud (1983) and Das (1983:459-60) that in Hindu thought "death is the perfect sacrifice". Parry pursues this theme further and argues that cremation as a sacrifice regenerates life and maintains cosmic order; as he puts it, "cremation is cosmogony" (Parry 1982:76). Following the lead of these authors, I shall describe cremation rituals as a form of sacrifice.

After purifying themselves in the river, the mourners, including members of the funeral association, bring water in their cupped hands to offer to the deceased person. Starting with the youngest of the most distant mourner and ending with the chief mourner, they pour water into the mouth of the deceased person three times. Water is poured into their hands from a pot for the second and third offerings. This act of offering water to the deceased is called *la twankegu* (offering water). Then either the chief mourner or the Gwā performs a simple śrāddha while sitting on a piece of wood at the foot of the deceased. He offers three pindas consisting of pieces of flattened rice (*coka baji*), uncooked rice and curd, one to the spirit of the deceased, one to the crow and the last to the dog. The latter two are representatives of ancestors and death; in subsequent offerings of *pinda* to the dead person, the crow and the dog are also offered a share each. The Bhā (funeral priest) assists the chief mourner in these rituals. The chief mourner then circumambulates (*cāhilegu*) the pyre thrice clockwise (*nhekhātā*) and thrice anticlockwise (*akhatā*). (Some informants claim that he should circle the pyre only once, anticlockwise, but this seems to be a minority view). The

chief mourner then breaks the clay bowl on the wood he had sat on while offering the *pinda*.

Just as the victim in (animal) sacrifice is consecrated and offered food and water just prior to its immolation so too the deceased is offered food and water just before cremation (cf. Das 1977; Parry 1981, 1982).¹⁶ The chief mourner then, as the chief sacrificer, immolates the victim, the deceased, by lighting the body as an offering to the gods.

The smouldering cow dung in the clay pot, which is brought from the house of the dead person is re-kindled by adding straw and blowing on it. A bundle of straw and reed is lit from the fire.¹⁷ Holding the flaming torch in his right hand, the chief mourner (*mitaimha*: one who lights the fire) circumambulates the pyre clockwise and then anticlockwise, three times each, all the while weeping and calling out to the deceased: "Oh, father!" or "Oh, mother!", as the case may be. The eldest son is the chief mourner for the father and the youngest son for the mother. He then lights the pyre just below the head of the corpse (or in the mouth). As he does so, he is supposed to request the fire (Agni) to be happy with the offering and to take the dead person to heaven. The dead person is thus a sacrificial offering through the fire (Agni) to the gods.

The crucial moment of the cremation is when the chief mourner lights the pyre. As soon as the funeral pyre is lit, the musicians stop playing their instruments and the chief mourners as well as most of the processionists depart for home, after purifying themselves in the river. The *Gwā* and a few funeral association members stay back to actually burn the corpse properly and completely. They add combustible materials such as wood, straw, clarified butter and camphor to the pyre to hasten the cremation and to counteract the stench of the burning flesh. Impure objects such as mustard oil may not be used in the fire because they will pollute the sacrificial offering to the gods.

Once the corpse has been completely cremated, the chief mourner returns to the cremation ground to make an effigy of the deceased person with the ash from the pyre. He worships the effigy, offers food to it and then immerses it in the river.¹⁸ The body of the dead person is thus decomposed into the five basic elements of the universe. An urn of ash and bones are kept aside to be immersed in different rivers and *tirthas* (fords, pilgrim sites) in the Kathmandu Valley as well as India, for example, in Varanasi. The effigy making and its immersion could be interpreted as second 'burial' in Hertz's terms (Hertz 1960).

While cremation destroys the body of the dead person, it also helps in the regeneration of life. The theme of regeneration and fertility through sacrifice (and cremation) is a common theme in Hindu thought (cf. Parry 1982). In

the second phase of the mortuary rites, the body of the deceased person is re-created: this is clearly expressed in the rites of making and offering ten *pindas*, one each day, which is called *daskriya* (ten acts) by the Newars. As Parry (1981, 1982) has shown, the power to recreate the body is acquired through the ascetic practices which the chief mourner undertakes after cremation.

THE SECOND PHASE: LIMINAL STATE

Pinda dāna and the re-creation of the body

The second phase is the liminal phase in which the spirit (*preta*) of the dead person is 'disembodied and disarticulated' and correspondingly the mourners are in a liminal state (Das 1977, 1982; Kaushik 1976; Hertz 1970). Two kinds of rites are performed during this phase: first, rites performed by the chief mourner to re-create the body of the deceased; and second, purificatory rites. During this period all the households related to the deceased as kin or affines present the bereaved household gifts of food (mainly uncooked) as expression of their sympathy and concern (see Appendix I). These gifts are collectively called *bicā*, from *vichār yāyegu*, 'to think about', 'be concerned about'.

In this section I shall describe the rites performed by the chief mourner to re-create the body of the dead man.

The chief mourner and his brothers accompanied by a few helpers and the funeral priest (Bhā or Mahābrāhman), (or nowadays, because of the scarcity of the funeral priest, the Brāhman priest), visit the ghat for ten consecutive days after the cremation to make and offer *pindas* (balls of rice). The chief mourner performs the same acts and rituals every day. First, he bathes and changes into a lion cloth and then facing south, he boils rice in an earthen pot over raw bricks.¹⁹ The unbaked earthen pot, raw bricks and the direction south are associated with death. The boiled rice is allowed to cool in a basin. He then adds the five immortal fluids (*pancāmṛta*: cow's milk, curd, ghee, sugar and honey) and sweetmeats and bananas to the rice and mixes and kneads these food items. The mixture is moulded into three egg shaped *pindas* on which he sprinkles sesamum and black mustard seeds. The *pancāmṛta* represent the hands and feet as well as the nerves of the body, the seeds represent the black parts and the rice the rest of the body. He then worships the three *pindas* and Śiva, here referred to as Adikesvar Mahadev and represented by a small mound of wet clay. These three *pindas* are called *preta bali* (offerings to the spirit of the deceased person), *kāga bali* (offerings to the crow, who represents the ancestors) and *swana bali* (offerings to the dog, who represents Bhairava and Yamaraja).

It is believed that each day's *pinda* offerings to the departed person creates a specific limb of the body and by the tenth day the whole body is recreated. The body that is recreated is not the gross body (*sthula sarira*) but the subtle body (*suksma sarira*) of the deceased. This view, which is based on the scriptural tradition, is common among other Hindu communities (cf. Das 1977, Parry 1982; Inden and Nicholas 1977; Nicholas 1981; Dumont 1983). It is only on the tenth day that the *preta* is conscious that it is dead.

The tenth day is an important marker in the mortuary rituals: though the *preta* is not yet incorporated as an ancestor, it is no longer disembodied and disarticulated because of the body which has been recreated by the chief mourner. There is a corresponding change in the status of the mourners who are no longer in a dangerous conjunction with death, or in a liminal state. They begin the process of purification from death pollution. Further, the first phase of mourning is over on the tenth day but, as Dumont remarks, "mourning in a less intense form goes on for one year" (Dumont 1983:7).

The chief mourner offers *pindas* to the deceased on the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth or fortyfifth day and every month for one year, and finally once a year. According to Dumont (1983:2) there are three types of *pinda* offerings: those made in the funeral rituals, those made in the ancestral offerings and the point where the two meet, at the *sapindikarana sraddha*. The *pindas* offered during the ten days of the mortuary rituals and those offered later differ in at least three significant ways. First, the *pindas* offered in the latter *sraddhas* are made from barley flour and not from boiled rice as in the earlier ones; second, from the thirteenth or fortyfifth day onwards, the *pindas* are offered on the ground floor of the house and not by the river; and thirdly, a Brahman priest presides over the latter *sraddhas*.²⁰

Other types of offerings, in addition to *pinda dāna*, are made to the deceased person, either directly or through an intermediary, such as the funeral priest, the Jogi (Kusle) or the Brāhman. These are items of food, water and other daily necessities such as clothes, shoes and cooking utensils. Some of these offerings are made by the chief mourners while other offerings are made by married daughters and affines as well as *phuki* members (See Appendix I).

THE THIRD PHASE: POST-LIMINAL STATE

Sapindikarana and ancestor worship

In the third phase the dead person is worshipped, not as a spirit (*preta*) but as an ancestor (*pitr*) but this is possible only if the *sapindikarana sraddha* is performed. Traditionally and according to the textual tradition, this was done on the first death anniversary but nowadays it is done on the thirteenth day,

or if the dead man was the head of the household, on the fortyfifth day (*latyā*), after cremation.

On the eleventh and the twelfth days the chief mourner performs *srāddhas* to the dead person at the cremation ground. Unlike in the *srāddhas* performed on the first ten days, the *pindas* for these two days are made of barley flour and not boiled rice, and sixteen instead of three *pindas* are offered.

Though the mourners are purified on the tenth day, the house of the deceased person is purified only on the twelfth day. The rituals performed to purify the house is called *ghasu* (from *ghar suddhi homa*: house purificatory (fire) sacrifice). Since Brāhman priests do not participate in such sacrifices which they consider inauspicious and impure, either a Karmacarya (actually a lower ranking sub-caste sometimes derogatorily called Ghasu or Preta Karmacarya) or a Vajracarya priest performs the sacrifice. The fire of the sacrifice is called Bhairavagni. The sacrifice which is performed on the ground floor purifies the house, subdues the malevolent spirits and brings peace (*śānti*) to the bereaved.

The house of the deceased person needs to be purified because the services of a Brāhman are required and he will not perform rituals in the house until it has been purified. The Brāhman performs these rituals on the thirteenth or fortyfifth day just before the *sapindikarana sraddha* is performed by the chief mourner. The rituals performed by the priest include a fire sacrifice (*homa*), worship of a water pot (*kalasa pūjā*), installation and 'giving life to' (*jivan pratistha*) a new image of Viśnu, which is later kept in the family shrine room, and the *Vrishotsarga* in which a bull calf is branded and set free. Poor families brand and 'set free' an effigy of a bull instead of a real bull.²¹

In the *sapindikarana sraddha*, the *preta* is incorporated as an ancestor in three stages. The chief mourner first makes and worships five *pindas* which are made of barley flour, *pancāmṛta* (cow's milk, curd, ghee, sugar and honey) sweetmeats and bananas. Three *pindas* represent the chief mourner's paternal grandfather, paternal great grandfather (FFF) and great great grandfather (FFFF), assuming that the deceased person is the father. The fourth is the *preta pinda* which is roughly three times the size of the other *pindas*. The fifth is the *vikal pinda* which represents the spirits of dead persons whose mortuary rituals have not been properly performed, for example, children or victims of accidental death. This *pinda* is kept separate from the other four *pindas*.

In the second stage, the chief mourner cuts the *preta pinda* into three equal parts with a gold and silver razor wrapped in *kusa* grass which he holds with both hands. He then joins the three parts of the *preta pinda* to the three *pindas* of the ancestors, one at a time. When this has been done, the *pinda* of the recently deceased father replaces the *pinda* of the paternal great great

grandfather (FFFF) of the chief mourner. The displaced ancestor becomes, for most occasions, part of the unnamed general category of ancestors, the *visve devha*. According to Dumont (1983:3) the term *visve devha* (all-the-gods) actually refers to the divine-fathers, i.e., the unnamed category of ancestors. Thus in the second stage the dead person is incorporated as a named ancestor, replacing his own great grandfather who is then incorporated as an unnamed ancestor. In short, as Dumont succinctly remarks, "The death of a man has thus moved down the entire structure formed by the officiating person (i.e., the chief mourner mentioned above) and his paternal ancestors by one generation" (1983:4).

In the third stage, the deceased person becomes incorporated as a part of the general category of ancestor, more specifically as a *sapinda* (those who share the same *pinda* (body)).²² The chief mourner joins the three separate, named ancestor *pindas* into one *pinda*, the general *pitr pinda*, and worships it again as in the first stage. He then worships the general *pitr pinda* separately on behalf of each of the related (*sapinda*) households. Henceforth the dead man will be worshipped both separately (in the annual *sraddhas*) and as a part of the general category of ancestors.

In addition to the monthly *sraddhas* and the first anniversary *sraddha* which ends the period of mourning, other rituals are performed on behalf of the deceased person to help him reach heaven. First, on the occasion of the 'Cow Festival' (*Sāpāru*), the chief mourner parades a cow, or a young boy dressed as a cow, along the festival route of the city and later gifts a cow to the family priest. This helps the ancestor cross the dreaded Vaitarni river to reach heaven. Second, on the first day of Indra Jatra, the family members of the deceased circumambulate the outer perimeter of the city (known as *upākhu wanegu*). And third, they visit the different *lingas* around Pasupati, on *Bāla cahre* day (cf. Pradhan 1986). All these rituals and gifts (*dānas*) given to Brahman priests are to help the deceased person reach heaven and to have a better rebirth.

DEATH POLLUTION, MOURNING AND THE STATE OF THE DECEASED PERSON

The close correspondence between the state of the deceased and that of the mourners, which Hertz (1960) noted, has been demonstrated for many societies, including those in South Asia (cf. Bloch and Parry 1982; Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Parry 1980, 1985; Kaushik 1976; Das 1977, 1986). In the Hindu case, both the dead person's ghost (*preta*) and the mourners are in a liminal state until the *preta* is incorporated as an ancestor (*pitr*). The impurity of the mourners, which expresses their liminal state,

ends with the incorporation of the *preta* as an ancestor. However, death is conceived to be both an impure and an inauspicious event (Das 1977). The inauspiciousness associated with death extends beyond the liminal phase till the dead person reaches its final destination. Inauspiciousness, in the case of death, is expressed by mourning. I shall argue, following Parry (1981, 1982), that the chief mourner observes certain restrictions to acquire the power to re-create the body for the ghost (*preta*) of the dead man, and as a means of expiation for the sin of cremating (sacrificing) the dead body.

Though death pollution (*dumā*) for all categories of mourners begins at the same time,²³ the intensity of pollution and mourning vary according to the state of the deceased and the relation of the mourners to the dead person. The successive terminations of pollution and taboos on different grades of mourners are marked by different rituals (cf. Srinivas 1952; Dumont and Pocock 1959; Das 1977, 1986). For example, if a pre-initiated child dies, only four days of mourning and pollution are observed by close mourners. Similarly, married daughters and pre-initiated grand children of the dead man observe only four days of mourning and pollution. If the head of the household dies, ten days of pollution are observed by his patrilineage but close mourners (widow, unmarried daughters and married or unmarried sons) observe a less intense form of mourning for a year.

Among other Hindu communities the corpse as well as the mourners are considered polluted when the dead person's vital breath (*prāṇavāyu*) leaves the body. The scriptural tradition and the popular belief differ as to when the vital breath leaves the body; according to the former, it leaves the body when the chief mourner cracks the skull of the half burnt body (*kāpal-kriyā*); according to the latter, the vital breath leaves the body at the moment of physical death. In either case, pollution of the corpse and the mourners begin at the same moment (Das 1977; Parry 1981, 1982). Among the Newars, however, the body of the dead person is considered impure as soon as he is believed to be dead but death pollution (*dumā*) for the mourners begins the moment the five wicks surrounding the corpse are lit soon after death. As in the pollution of birth and menarche seclusion described earlier, there is a time difference between the pollution of the subject of the rituals and his or her relatives.

The mourners rid themselves of death pollution on the tenth day, the males by the river and the females at home. The purificatory rites they perform are known as *du benkegu*, ('to purify oneself from death pollution'). The chief mourner has his head shaved and, if the deceased is the head of the household, his eyebrows and moustache too, by a barber. He then bathes three times in the river: first, after rubbing mustard cake (*khau*) on his body; second, after applying a paste of barley and mustard oil (*kwā chikā*); and,

finally, after having his toe nails pared and then applying *amba* (a fruit) and mustard seeds. The Brāhman priest then sprinkles him with the five products of a cow (*pancagavya*): cow's milk, urine, dung, curd and ghee). Finally he changes into new, white cotton clothes presented to him by his affines (usually bride-givers, and sometimes bride-receivers, to the chief mourners). His soiled clothes are given to the barber. Similar procedures are followed by other close mourners.

Bathing, tonsure and changing into new clothes express change of status and separation of one state from another. In death purificatory rites, these acts express the end of their impure and liminal state. The mourners are freed from most of the taboos they had to observe for the previous nine days (taboos on eating certain categories of food, such as meat, onions, garlic, on performing auspicious rituals; or enjoying themselves). But, as in other Hindu communities, "mourning in a less intense form goes on for one year" Dumont (1983:7). The first grade mourners, especially the household members of the deceased, have to observe a few taboos for the whole year. For example, they may not celebrate any auspicious rituals, such as marriage, or participate in any festival except those related to death, for instance, the Cow festival (*Sāpāru*); and the clothes, shoes, shawls or umbrellas they use, must be white in colour. Further, milk is tabooed for the children of the deceased if the deceased was their mother and curd if he was their father. It is only after the *srāddha* performed on the first anniversary of death that the first grade mourners are freed from all taboos and they are fully integrated into society. This change is signalled by the chief mourner and his brothers wearing coloured clothes.

As Das (1977, 1982) has suggested, death is an event which is considered both impure and inauspicious. Impurity symbolises liminality, i.e., "it marks off the events in which man experiences his social world as separate from the cosmic world" (Das 1977:126). The impurity of death is fully terminated only when the liminal category of *preta* is incorporated as an ancestor (*pitr*). Though the mourners rid themselves of death pollution on the tenth day when the *preta* has a fully recreated body, the close mourners are still mildly polluted until the *preta* is incorporated as an ancestor (see Table I).

However, mourning, which like pollution begins from the moment of death, goes on for a year. The tenth day marks the end of the first phase of mourning, and the thirteenth or, forty fifth day the second phase. The mourners are marked off from the rest of society by the restrictions they observe not only because they express sorrow for the loss of one of their members but also because they are too closely associated with death. As Das (1986) has so persuasively argued, one of the main functions of

mourning is to ensure the correct mediation between life and death. By observing the restrictions imposed on them, such as wearing white clothes and not celebrating auspicious rituals, the mourners neither deny death nor are too closely associated with life. Life and death are kept apart but at the same time mediated by the mourners. When the dead person reaches his/her final destination, the close mourners are freed from their identification with death and they may then resume their pursuit of auspicious life.

Table I: Relation between the state of the deceased and the mourners

Day	State of the deceased	State of the mourners
THE FIRST PHASE (Pre-liminal state)		
Death / cremation	separation of body and <i>ātmā</i> ; destruction of the body	beginning of pollution and mourning and separation from society
THE SECOND PHASE (Liminal state)		
1st - 9th day	the <i>preta</i> is disembodied and disarticulated	intense pollution and mourning; susceptible to danger from the <i>preta</i>
10th day	<i>preta</i> with recreated body	end of death pollution and the first phase of mourning; close mourners still mildly polluted and observe some restrictions
THE THIRD PHASE (Post-liminal state)		
12th day	as above	house purificatory rites (<i>ghasu</i>) performed; all mourners except the widow and children of the deceased are freed from food taboos.
13 or 45th day	the <i>preta</i> is incorporated as an ancestor (<i>pitr</i>)	all categories of mourners are freed from pollution; close mourners continue to be marked off as inauspicious; they may visit temples and worship deities but may not celebrate/ participate in auspicious rituals and festivals.
First anniversary	the deceased reaches the final destination	end of all mourning and taboos; reincorporation into society.

Mourning practices: regeneration of the body and expiation for the sin of cremation.

The restrictions observed for the first ten days are called *du cwanegu* or *dukhā cwanegu* (to mourn). The mourners are prohibited from eating certain categories of food, such as meat garlic, onions and salt; from celebrating auspicious rituals, such as marriage or initiation; and any form of

entertainment. They may also not shave or have their nails pared, and women must keep their hair loose. All of these restrictions express the liminal state of the mourners (Das 1977: 127).

Among all the mourners, the chief mourner (*mitaimha*: the one who lights the pyre) and his brothers observe the most severe restrictions. The chief mourner and his brothers live like ascetics for ten days. In addition to the observances followed by other close mourners, they have to live on the ground floor or the courtyard of the house, in an area specially enclosed, to which others do not have access. They are confined to this area for ten days except to answer calls of nature or to visit the cremation ground to offer *pindas* to the deceased. The chief mourner and his brothers have to cook food (mainly boiled rice) themselves, eat only one meal a day, and avoid contact with any impure objects. They have to remain as pure as possible. Moreover, they may not sleep on mattresses or use pillows; comb their hair or have their toe nails or hair cut; or participate in any rituals except those relating to death.

As other scholars have noted, the practices observed by the mourners resemble those of the renouncers (cf. Dumont 1971; Das 1977; Parry 1981). Dumont notes but does not explain why mourners observe these practices. Das explains these only in terms of the liminal status of both the renouncers and the mourners (Das 1977:126). But as Parry (1981, 1982) argues, the chief mourner takes on the role of the ascetic for two reasons: first, to acquire the power to re-create a body for the deceased by performing austerities (*tapasyā*) and, second, as a means of expiation for cremating (sacrificing) the dead person. Similar views have been expressed by my informants, though they use a different idiom. As one of my learned Brāhman informants put it, "The chief mourner (*mitaimha*) has to perform *vrata* (observances of vows of fast and penance) to re-create the body he has destroyed in cremation".

While an ascetic gains power by performing austerities, a householder achieves similar results by performing a *vrata* in honour of a deity, such as Śiva, Viṣṇu or Durgā. In other words, *vratas* are the householder's substitute for the austerities of an ascetic. It is believed to be possible, for example, to convert a *preta* (ghost) into an ancestor (*pitr*) by performing the *Saptāhā vrata* (the observance of vows for seven days). For this *vrata*, the *Srimad Bhāgavat Purāṇ* is recited by a priest and Viṣṇu is worshipped for seven consecutive days. The *Saptāhā Vrata* is usually performed when there is an accidental death or suicide and the ghost (*preta*) of the dead person troubles the living because proper mortuary rituals were not performed. I know of three such cases, one of suicide and two of accidental death for which the *Saptaha Vrata* was performed.

But even for normal deaths, the chief mourner observes rules which are similar to those observed by an ascetic or a person performing a *vrata*. As in other *vratas*, a Brāhman priest recites a sacred text in honour of a deity. For death, the priest recites the *Preta Khanda* (the section of the ghost) of *Garud Purāṇ* for nine evenings. The main god of the text is Viṣṇu. The chief mourner observes the rules similar to some *vratas* to acquire the power to re-create the body of the dead person.

There is another reason why the chief mourner observes such rules. If cremation is a sacrifice, as I have tried to show, then the chief mourner, as the sacrificer, must undergo purificatory and other rites to expiate himself of the sin of immolating the victim. Hubert and Mauss had observed, "The purifications which the sacrificer had to undergo after the sacrifice resembled moreover the expiation of a criminal" (Hubert and Mauss 1968:33). My informants have never explicitly made the connection between the 'ascetic' practices of the chief mourner and his expiation for the sin of cremating the deceased ('the sin of burning the body hairs of the deceased') as Parry's informants have done (Parry 1982:79). But some of the practices that the chief mourner undertakes resemble those of other expiatory (*prāyascit*) rites (cf. Hoffer 1979:185-190). I had mentioned earlier that according to some of my informants, the *bārḥā tayegu* ritual (menarche seclusion) is a *vrata* in honour of Suryanārayana, one of the forms of Viṣṇu, and it is performed by girls to liberate themselves from the sin of menstruation (*rajasola pāpa mochana*). Some of the observances that the chief mourner undertakes is similar to those imposed on the girl in seclusion.

In short, the mourning practices and the restrictions imposed on the chief mourner(s) on the one hand express impurity, liminality, and inauspiciousness and on the other hand are practices undertaken to regenerate the body of the deceased and expiate the sin of cremating a body.

Gifts, services and sin: the roles of the ritual specialists and the chief mourner in mortuary rituals

In his discussion of the funeral priests of Banares, Parry (1980) questions Dumont's (1970) formulation of the relation between the renouncer, Brāhman, priest and purity. According to Dumont (1970) the categories of the Brāhman and the renouncer are opposed as man-in-the world is opposed to the world renouncer. Brāhman are best represented by priests who, in turn, are equated with purity. Following Heesterman (1964, 1971) Parry argues that the ideal Brāhman is not a priest but a renouncer. Like the renouncer, the Brāhman should be independent from the material and social world; in other world, both the renouncer and the Brāhman represent transcendence. The Brāhman's superiority is based not on priesthood, as

Dumont argues, but on transcendence. However, the Brāhman has to enter into transactions with his patrons and receive gifts from them for his material ends. Parry argues that this relationship with the patrons compromises the Brāhman's status because all gifts (*dāna*) are debilitating. In Parry's words, "...*dān(a)* is bad not just because it subverts their (the Brāhmans') ideal ascetic independence, but more importantly because the acceptance of *dān(a)* involves the acceptance of the sins of the donour" (brackets supplied; Parry (1980:103). The Brāhman who acts as a priest is similar to a person of impure caste in that while the latter removes the 'biological impurities' of his patrons, the former removes the 'spiritual impurities' of his patrons by taking their sins upon himself. Because a priest has to accept gifts from his patrons, his status is equivocal and "he is seen not so much as the acme of purity as an absorber of sin" (ibid:89).

Parry's theory can be questioned on several grounds. First, as Das (1977) has already demonstrated, the relation between the renouncer and the Brāhman is not only that of similarity or opposition but of both similarity (parallelism) and opposition. When the category Brāhman is opposed to the householder, it is similar to the renouncer but when it is opposed to the renouncer, it is similar to the householder. Thus the category Brāhman has the characteristic of both the householder and the renouncer because it mediates between these two categories, which stands respectively for the social and the asocial.

Secondly, and more specifically, Parry's theory that the Brāhman is seen not so much as an acme of purity but as an absorber of sin needs to be modified in the light of ethnographic evidence. Parry lumps together the impure and inauspicious funeral priest (Māhābrāhman) and the pure Brāhman priest under the general category of the Brāhman even though he admits there are significant differences between them in terms of their functions and associations. For instance, he writes, that the Māhābrāhmans "are regarded as *bona fide* Brāhmans - albeit as *pret(a)* Brāhmans", and a Māhābrāhman "is after all a Brāhman, although undeniably an ill-omened one" (Parry 1980:93-94). Further, while the funeral priest receives gifts offered in the name of the *preta* (ghost), the Brāhman priest (*purohita*) accepts gifts in the name of the ancestor (*pitr*) (ibid. 91-92); the funeral priest represents and is identified with the *preta* and the *purohita* with the ancestor. I shall show that the differences between the two categories of specialists are so fundamental that it would be misleading to categorise both as Brāhmans. I shall argue that it is not the Brāhman priest (*purohita*) but the funeral priest (Bhā) who is seen as the paradigmatic absorber of sin.

Further, Parry states that his data and theory contradicts Mauss' theory of gifts because *dāna* does not evoke counter-presentations. I shall argue that he

does not seriously consider Mauss' observations that, (a) counter-presentations need not always be in the form of material things (1970:28), and (b) gifts may be given to a person on the condition that it is transmitted to a third party (1970:22). I suggest that we need to differentiate between, first, the proximate and the ultimate ('the third party') recipient of the gifts; second, the time and occasion of the gifts; and third, the kinds of gifts given and returned. I shall argue later that the gifts given by the chief mourner to the dead person are not so much presentations as counter-presentations.

It is quite clear from my ethnography presented above and from Parry's (1982) own discussion that the funeral priest and the Brāhman priest have different roles in the mortuary rituals and that they represent and are identified with different aspects of the deceased.²⁴ The funeral priest performs his services and receives gifts on behalf of the deceased person only for the first ten days after death, i.e., while the deceased is still a *preta*. The funeral priest (Bhā) represents and, at times, is identified with the *preta*. The Brāhman, on the other hand, though he performs some ritual services, receives gifts on behalf of the deceased person only after the tenth day (see Table II). More specifically, he accepts gifts only on behalf of the ancestor or a living person, but not on behalf of the *preta*. Although the Brāhman recites the *Garuḍa Purāna* for the first nine days after cremation, he does not accept any *daksinā* (ritual fee) or *dāna* for this service for the first ten days. And usually it is not the family priest (*purohita*) but another Brāhman priest who recites the text.

The difference between the Bhā (funeral priest) and the Brāhman is clearly illustrated by the case of the *sayyā* (or *sajjā*) *dāna* (gifts of material required for daily necessities). Though virtually the same items are presented to the funeral priest and the Brāhman, the time, place and the ultimate and proximate recipient of the gifts differ. The funeral priest is presented cooked food and *sayyā dāna* offered to the *preta* (kept in a locked room the previous night) on the eleventh morning before sunrise, on the threshold of the house. The gift of *sayyā dāna* is given by the eldest married daughter, the proximate donor, on behalf of the chief mourner, the ultimate donor. Though it is the Bhā (funeral priest) who receives the gift, the ultimate recipient is the ghost (*preta*) of the dead person. This gift, sometimes called *Māhābrāhman dāna*, is the culmination of the series of gifts to the *preta*, for which the Māhābrāhman acts as the intermediary between the *preta* and the bereaved family. The Brāhman is presented *sayyā dāna*, on the ground floor of the deceased only after the *preta* is incorporated as *pitṛ*. This gift is a part of other gifts he will receive on behalf of the ancestor from the chief mourner, and gifts made on behalf of the deceased by the chief mourner.

Table II: Gifts, services and the state of the deceased

Time	Bhā (Māhābrāhman)	Jogi (Kusle)	Kamāchārya	Brāhman
Pre-death	-	-	-	receives gifts of cow and gold
Death ¹	helps in cremation, and <i>srāddha</i>	-	-	-
Days 1-10 a) rituals	helps in the offering of <i>pinda dānas</i> to the <i>preta</i>	-	-	recites the <i>Garuda Purana</i> ; sprinkles purifying agents on the mourners on the tenth day
b) gifts	cooked food and <i>sayyā dāna</i> meant for the <i>preta</i>	all cooked food meant for the <i>preta</i>	-	-
12th day	-	-	performs the house purificatory (<i>ghasu</i>) sacrifice	-
13/45th day a) rituals	-	-	helps the Brāhman in the rituals	performs rituals to pure gods, presides over the <i>sapindakaraṇa sraddha</i>
b) gifts	-	cooked food meant for the ancestor	<i>paduka dāna</i> (gift of wooden sandals, etc.)	<i>paduka dāna</i> ; <i>sayya dāna</i> ; <i>sida dāna</i> ; <i>gau dāna</i> ; and other gifts
monthly/ annual a) <i>sraddha</i>	-	-	helps the Brāhman	presides over the <i>sraddha</i>
b) gifts	-	cooked food meant for the ancestor	?	various <i>dānas</i> ; feast on behalf of the ancestor

Note

1. The Gwā (sub-caste of Jyāpu specialising in cremation) helps the chief mourner in the cremation. The Ghāt Vaidya (traditional ayurvedic doctor who tends the dying persons) announces the death of his patient.
2. The barbers shaves, tonsures and pares the nails of the mourners.

There are two other categories of ritual specialists who receive gifts on behalf of the dead man.²⁵ The Karmacarya priest (derogatorily called Ghasu (house purificatory) or Preta Karmacarya) deals with the ghost, (*preta*), (in the *ghasu homa* ritual) but receives *pādukā dāna* (gifts of wooden sandals, umbrella, cloth, and water pot) on the day the *preta* is incorporated as an ancestor. The Kusle receives gifts of cooked food meant for the *preta*, and when it is incorporated as an ancestor, for the ancestor. The Karmacarya and the Kusle are thus intermediate categories between the Bhā and the Brāhman in that they either deal with or represent both the *preta* and the *pitr* (See Table II).

The differences between these ritual specialists can be seen in other contexts. The Brāhman is associated with benevolent cosmic forces, such as Viśṇu, Śiva, Kumāri, and with auspicious rituals, such as marriage and initiation. The Bhā, on the other hand is associated only with the ten days of death rituals, the most polluting and inauspicious phase of the mortuary rituals. As far as I know, he has no other ritual function. The Kusle is often associated with the negative forces of the sacred, such as *preta* and other evil spirits; and he is believed to possess powerful 'wrong/bad' knowledge (*kuviddyā*). His patron god is Śiva in his fierce aspects. He 'heals' patients. But the Kusles are also musicians in many temples such as Paśupati, Taleju and Cāngu Nārāyan. The (Ghasu) Karmācārya is associated with ambiguous or malevolent forces such as *preta* or the blood-thirsty gods or goddess. He assists the Brāhman in auspicious rituals. One of his main functions on such occasions is to worship *pitha* deities and offer animal sacrifice.

Parry's theory that the priest is seen not as the acme of purity but as an absorber of sin, which in the Hindu context also has the connotation of pollution (cf. Hubert and Mauss 1968), is valid not so much for the Brāhman but for the Bhā (funeral priest), and to a lesser extent, to the Kusle and the (*ghasu*) Karmācārya. These two categories of priests (with the Kusle and the (Ghasu) Karmacarya as intermediate categories) have different roles in rituals and are associated with different aspects of death. The Bhā is considered to be, to use Parry's term, the 'acme' of pollution and inauspiciousness, whereas the Brāhman, even though he participates in the inauspicious *śraddhas* is considered the acme of purity and auspiciousness for it is he who presides over auspicious rituals, including marriage, initiation and *vrddhi* or *mangala* (auspicious) *śraddha*.

Parry further (1982) contends that, at least in the case of the gifts presented to the priests, his theory contradicts Mauss' (1970) because no counter-presentations are returned. But then he goes on to state, "Nothing is returned precisely because the gift is - as it were - its own counter-presentation, for it relieves the donor of death, impurity and sin" (ibid:105).

But as Mauss (1970) pointed out, and this is implied in Parry's own statement, counter-presentations need not always be material things: "Return of presentations of all kinds, of goods and services, fall into the same categories" (ibid:28). This is especially true in the system of gift exchanges between devotees and gods. According to some informants, Brāhmanas are representatives of Viṣṇu or earth (just as the king is, but in a different way). Giving them gifts is similar to giving gifts to Viṣṇu. The act of giving gifts to the Brāhmanas is said to earn merit (*dharmapunya*) to the donor, just as worshipping gods, visiting sacred places or observing vows (*vrata*) earns merit for the performer of these activities. At least among the Newars, giving gifts (*dāna*) is part of other religious activities which earn merit for the person who gives gifts or performs religious activities. Giving gifts to the funeral priest or the Kusle or performing propitiatory rituals to evil spirits or malevolent deities do not have the same positive connotations of earning merit as giving gifts to a Brāhman or worshipping benevolent gods. By concentrating on the absorption of sins Parry overlooks the more positive aspect of giving gifts to the Brāhman.

Parry also sometimes assumes that the proximate and the ultimate recipients of gifts are the same person. This may be true in some cases where the donor gives gifts to the Brāhmanas for his own benefit. But there are other occasions where, as Mauss pointed out, gifts are given on the condition that they are "used on behalf of, or transmitted, to a third party, the remote partner..." (Mauss 1970:22). In the case of gifts after death, the ritual specialists are only proximate recipients.²⁶ The ultimate recipient of these gifts (the third party) is the dead person, either as ghost (*preta*) or ancestor (*pitr*). Parry (1980, 1985) is aware of this fact as can be seen from his description of the gifts given to the ritual specialists. However, he overlooks some significant differences between the funeral priest and the Brāhman as proximate recipient of gifts.

Gifts are given to the funeral priest (Bhā) and the Kusle after they have been offered to the ghost (*preta*) of the deceased. They receive, as it were, the left-overs of food which has been consumed by the *preta* here on earth. The Kusle also receives food offerings which have been 'consumed' by the ancestors here on earth. As we have seen, the Kusle receives the share of feast offerings to the ancestors, the next day. The *sayyā dāna* (articles of daily necessities) are given to the funeral priest, the next morning, after, as my informants emphasize, the *preta* makes use of them during the night. It is in this sense that though the funeral priest and the Kusle are the proximate recipients of the gifts, the *preta* is the ultimate recipient.

The Brāhmanas and on some occasions, the (Ghasu) Karmācārya, are the proximate recipients of gifts, which they receive on behalf of the ultimate

recipient, the deceased as an ancestor (*pitr*). The gifts given to these two proximate recipients are simultaneously transmitted to the ancestor. 'Left-overs' may not be given either to the ancestors or the Brāhmins. Giving gifts to the Brāhmins, and to a lesser extent, to the Karmacarya, earns merit for the donor and for the ancestor on whose behalf they are given. The Brāhmins transmit these gifts to the ancestors to be used in the other world. For example, in giving a gift of a cow (*gau dāna*) to the Brāhmin, both the chief mourner, and the ancestor on whose behalf he gives the gifts, benefit in that both earn merit (*dharmapunya*). At the same time, the Brāhmin transmits the cow to the ancestor so that he can cross the dreaded Vaitarni river to reach the land of the dead, Yamaloka. But unlike the Bhā (funeral priest), the Brāhmin is often the ultimate recipient of gifts, such as when the donor gives him gifts for his own benefit (merit) on auspicious rituals.

From the Newar case, it is possible to suggest that the Brāhmin priest (the purohita) and the funeral priest (Bhā) should not be lumped together under the general category of Brāhmin without emphasizing the significant differences between them. As I suggested earlier, the funeral priest and the Brāhmin priest are associated with different aspects of death and other ritual activities. As Parry (1980:93) himself notes, the funeral priest is considered both impure and inauspicious. Although the Brāhmin priest removes the impurity of his patrons and presides over the inauspicious *śraddha* rituals, these are not the main services he provides to his clients. I suggest that it is only the funeral priest and not the Brāhmin priest who is considered to be the paradigmatic example of the remover of sin. The funeral priest absorbs the sins of the dead person when he eats a small portion of his skull on the morning of the eleventh day. A Brāhmin priest would never agree to eat such food which is loaded with the sins of the deceased person.²⁷ If the funeral priests are not available, which is usually the case nowadays, the gifts which they traditionally receive are given not to the Brāhmin but to the Kusle or thrown in the river.

I am not suggesting that the Brāhmin priest never absorbs the sins of his patrons by the act of accepting their gifts. To do so would be going against all available evidence (cf. Gonda 1975; Heesterman 1964; 1985; Parry 1980). But emphasizing only this aspect of gifts and role of the Brāhmin is to distort the nature and function of gifts, and the position of the Brāhmin within the structural order of Hinduism (cf. Das 1977). If we are to follow Parry's suggestion we must consider the king too as primarily an absorber of sins for, according to the Hindu theory of kingship, "In the course of his rule the king not only incurred certain sins but he was also said to absorb from his subjects the same proportions of sins and merit as he collected revenue from their standing crops" (Burghart 1984:105). The king, however,

is not seen primarily as an absorber of sins of his subjects. Similarly a Brāhman priest cannot be seen primarily as an absorber of sins of his patrons.

Conclusion: presentations and counter-presentations

To conclude, I would like to suggest that the gifts which the chief mourners and others give to the dead person either directly as in the *pinda dānas* or indirectly through the ritual specialists are not only presentations but also, perhaps more importantly so, counter-presentations. From a short term perspective, these gifts are means of appeasing the *preta*, and in the case of ancestors, of honouring and worshipping him or her. From a long term perspective, these gifts may be considered as counter-presentations of the gifts of life, food and material things which the dead parents gave their children.

The parents give life to their children; create the body necessary for the soul (*ātmā*) to be reborn; care for them; feed, cloth and house them; and perform the necessary *samskāras* for them. When the parents die, the children, in turn, cremate them; re-create a body for the dead person; incorporate the ghost (*preta*) as an ancestor, provide gifts of food and materials required in the other world as an ancestor; and help the deceased reach his ultimate destination by performing the necessary mortuary rituals and giving gifts. Thus the whole series of gifts and rituals performed when a person dies are delayed counter-presentations by the chief mourner to the deceased father or mother for the gifts of life and other gifts which he received from his parents. In a more general sense, as some scholars (Malamoud 1983; Parry 1985) have pointed out, these gifts are means of paying off the debts owed to the ancestors.

APPENDIX I GIFTS AT DEATH

#	TIME/ OCCASION	PLACE	DONOR	RECIPIENT		ITEM (S)	REMARKS
				PROXIMATE	ULTIMATE		
1	Prior to death	home	dying man	Brāhman	the deceased	cow and gold	the cow helps the deceased cross the Vaitarini river; the cow and the gold, earn merit for the donor
2	Time of death	home	relatives of the dying person	the dying person	the dying person	water	purification of the corpse; water in the next world
3	After death	home	married daughters of the deceased	the deceased	the deceased	cotton	a quilt or shawl in the next world
4	After death	home	chief mourner	the deceased person's <i>preta</i>	the <i>preta</i>	curd, flattened rice	appeasing the <i>preta</i>
5	Before the funeral procession	at the crossroad	old woman of the household	goddess of the crossroad		old clothes; straw mat on which the person died	
6	Funeral procession	en route	married daughters' representatives	spirits	spirits	puffed rice/paddy	appeasing the spirits
7	Funeral procession	crossroad outside the city	Jyāpu on behalf of the chief mourner	the deceased	the deceased	raw bricks	to build a house in the other world
8	Before cremation	<i>ghat</i>	all mourners	the deceased	the deceased	water	water for the next world
9	Before cremation	<i>ghat</i>	chief mourner	cow, dog, the deceased	the deceased; ancestor	curd, flattened rice	<i>śraddha</i> performed
10	Cremation	<i>ghat</i>	chief mourner	Agni	all the gods and Yama	the body of the deceased	cremation as sacrifice
11	After cremation	outside the house of the deceased	old woman	mourners returning from the <i>ghat</i>	evil spirits	<i>ginger/ flattened rice (broken pieces)</i>	appeasing evil spirits
12	For ten days a) daily	<i>ghat</i>	chief mourner and his brothers	dog, crow, <i>preta</i>	<i>preta</i>	<i>pindas</i> (rice balls)	food offering to the <i>preta</i> ; recreating the body of the deceased

	b) daily	home	kin and affines	Kusie	<i>preta</i> of the deceased	cooked food	food 'consumed' by the <i>preta</i> ; given to the Jogi the next morning
	c) daily	home	kin and affines	bereaved household	bereaved household/ <i>preta</i>	cooked and uncooked food	<i>bicā</i> (food offered to express sympathy)
13	Sixth evening (<i>lo-cha</i>)	home	married daughters	Jogi	<i>preta</i> of the deceased	flattened rice, and other food	<i>preta</i> consumes the food
14	Seventh morning (<i>nhe-numa</i>)	home	married daughters	Jogi (Kusie)	<i>preta</i>	seven shares of food	<i>preta</i> consumes the food
15	Seventh evening (<i>Pakhā jā</i>)	home	married daughters, kin and affines	goddess of the crossroad	<i>preta</i>	boiled and flattened rice	<i>preta</i> consumes the food
16	Tenth morning	a) ghāt	chief mourner and brothers	barber	barber	clothes worn by the mourners for the ten days	pollution is over but mourning continues; white here symbolises liminality and inauspiciousness
		b) ghāt	affines	chief mourner and brothers	chief mourners and brothers	white clothes to be worn for the rest of the year	
17	Tenth night (<i>Jāpo khā wanegu</i>)	<i>ghāt</i>	chief mourner	<i>preta</i>	<i>preta</i>	water, milk, boiled rice, flattened rice; needle without eye; six steps ladder	
18	Tenth night/eleventh morning	home	married daughters of the deceased person	a) Bhā \ Kusie	<i>preta</i>	eleven shares of cooked food for each person	

				b) Bhā		<i>kattoo</i> (crushed skull pieces mixed with food)	the Bhā is identified with the <i>preta</i>
				c) Bhā	the <i>preta</i>	<i>sayyā dāna</i> (all items necessary for daily life)	
19	13/ 45th day	home	a) chief mourner	the deceased	the deceased	<i>pinda/ food offerings</i>	<i>sapindakaran</i> a ritual; the deceased is transformed into a named ancestor
			b) chief mourner	Kamāchārya a/ Brāhman	the ancestor	<i>pādukā dāna</i> (wooden sandals, etc.)	to be used in the next world
			c) chief mourner	Brāhman	the ancestor	<i>sayyā dāna</i> ; gift of cow; <i>sidā dāna</i> (uncooked food)	to be used in the next world; the Brāhman is identified with the ancestor (he wears a set of clothes of the deceased)
20	monthly/ annual	a) ghat or home	chief mourner	the ancestor	the ancestor	<i>pinda</i> , water, cooked food	food given to the Kusle the next day
		b) ghat or home	chief mourner	Brāhman/ Kar-macharya	the ancestor	several types of <i>dānas</i>	
21	First anniversary	ghat	affines (WG/WR)	chief mourner and brothers	chief mourner and brothers	set of new clothes (not white)	end of mourning

Notes

This article is from my Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Domestic and Cosmic Rituals among Hindu Newars of Kathmandu" which is being published soon. Field-work was carried out in 1981-83 in Kathmandu city. I would like to thank all who helped me in my field work, writing the thesis and this article, especially my supervisor, Prof. Veena Das, Roshan Darshan and his family, Nirmal M. Tuladhar, David N. Gellner, my informants, and my family. I would also like to thank the Department of Sociology,

University of Delhi, the University Grants Commission, India, and the Spalding Foundation Trust, UK for various grants to support my study.

1. As Stevenson (1971: 136) observes for another Hindu community: "Through all his rites and rejoicing a Hindu has been preparing for death, for,... the thread that strings all the ceremonies together is the imperative desire that the funeral offerings should be perfectly performed." Das has also argued that 'Hindu scriptures enjoins upon the individual the duty of preparation for death and the preservation of the purity of body and spirit'. (1977:121).
2. See Nepali (1965) and Pradhan (1986) for description of earlier life cycle rituals among Hindu Newars of Kathmandu.
3. This is probably why in some communities unmarried men are first symbolically married to a milkweed plant before they are cremated (cf. Carter 1983:130). Newar women who have undergone the *ihī* ('mock-marriage') ceremony are accorded the same status as the males who have undergone their puberty or initiation (*kaitā puja*) ceremony.
4. Two rituals are performed as part of the annual cycle to prolong life beyond the allotted time. The first is Kija puja (brother worship) when the sister pleads with Yamarāja to prolong her brother's life. The second is Mha puja (self or body worship) when the mother pleads with Yamaraja to prolong her husband's and children's lives beyond their allotted time.
5. The expression '*kā wala*' is often used to refer to the bride's husband or his relative coming to collect her to take her back to his house. Both the bride and the deceased go to another home to the husband's house, in one case, and to Yamaloka, in the other.
6. The Hindu ideal is that a person should not die at home but at the ghats of a sacred river (Das 1977; Kaushik 1976; Parry 1981, 1982; Nepali 1965). However there are some indications that the ideal is not so much to die outside the house as to die where one's body is pure at the moment of death. The Newars recreate the river site at home: the place where the dying man is kept is called Brahma-nala and the pouring of the holy water (*jal*) at the feet of the dying person (see later) is equated with immersing the person in the river. Though my informants have not explicitly made such connections, another anthropologist, Nepali (1965:127) has done so. According to Pandey (1976:247-248) a similar practice of immersing the lower half of the dying person is performed in Bengal, but it is a modern development. He states that the normal practice was to die at home near the place where the sacrificial fires are kept.
7. At present very few *vaidyas* attend to dying persons. I have met only one who claimed to have been present at many deaths. He said that he had to purify himself whenever he was present at death. (See Nepali 1965:127 for the role of *vaidyas* at death). At Pasupati (Ārya ghāt) there are some *vaidyas*, called *ghate vaidya* (from *ghat*: cremation ground) who look after the dying but as far as I know, they are not Newars (cf. also Durkin-Longley 1982:159).

8. Kaushik (1976) and Das (1977), for example, write that the *preta* leaves the body when the skull of the half burnt body is cracked. Parry (1981, 1982), on the other hand, writes that it is the vital breath which leaves the body either then or at the moment of death. Moreover, the textual tradition and the popular belief do not agree on this issue.
9. Parry (1982:Fn.11,102) writes that for the majority of his informants *pran* ('vital breath') is synonymous with the *atma* ('soul'). More learned informants differentiate *pran* and *atma*. The rite of *kapal kriya* (breaking of the skull rite) during cremation marks the separation of the soul from the body.
10. Another reason could be that by lighting the pyre, the chief mourner has already offered the body to the gods as sacrifice.
11. I do not know of any such cases which happened within people's memory but the belief is very strong. Regmi (1965:711) cites the case of a documented evidence of a Newar king of Kathmandu, Bhupendramalla, who died in India. When the news reached Kathmandu, his horoscope was burnt and his wives committed sati in the same funeral pyre. According to a popular story, a famous tantric, Jamuna Gubhaju, one day returned home from Tibet only to discover that his son, believing him to be dead, had performed the mortuary rituals. He disappeared in disgust. Greenwold (1978:500) quotes his informant who told him that in such cases the person would be accepted back into society after undergoing the lifecycle rites, and thus being 'reborn'.
12. According to Bloch and Parry (1982) in 'tribal' societies, women handle the dead body and in the Indian (Hindu) context, caste specialist replace women in handling the body. Das (1986) writes that among the Punjabis, women replace castes specialists in handling the dead body.
13. See Das (1986) for an analysis of the functions of men and women, close and distant mourners in the work of mourning and mortuary rituals.
14. See Gutschow and Kolver (1975) on the funeral routes for another town, Bhaktapur. The funeral routes separate one locality from another.
15. See Chapter 9 of my thesis (Pradhan 1986) on the Thaku Jujus who are the chief patrons of the gods/goddess of the cremation grounds.
16. Regarding the parallels between cremation and sacrifice, Das writes, "If we recall the basic elements in the scheme of a sacrifice, outlined by Hubert and Mauss (1964), we find striking similarities with the cremation rituals. Thus the site of cremation is prepared in exactly the same manner as in fire sacrifice, i.e., the prescriptive use of ritually pure wood, the purification of the site, its consecration with holy water, and the establishment of Agni with the use of proper *mantras*... The dead body is prepared in the same manner as the victim of a sacrifice and is attributed with divinity...The successful completion of death rituals ensures that the spirit of the dead man merges with the cosmic forces "(Das 1977:122-123)
17. In animal sacrifice, the sacrificial victim is offered water and food by the sacrificer. Before it is immolated, the victim has to signal its consent by

- shaking its body once. Unless it does so, the victim may not be sacrificed. Similarly, as Das (1977:123) points out, only a person whose intention to sacrifice himself through death is established, is allowed to be cremated.
18. If the fire which is brought from the house of the dead person dies out, it has to be re-lit from the fire of one of the three permanent sacrificial fires (Agni Matha) in Sankhu, Pacali or Patan.
 19. For more detailed description of the effigy making rite, see Nepali (1965:133).
 20. I have heard that formerly the funeral priest cooked the rice and even made the *pindas* but I have not been able to verify this. In Kathmandu, the Bhās (funeral priests) no longer provide their traditional services.
 21. For details of the various *pindas* offered during the whole year, which form three sets of sixteen *pinda* each, see Parry (1985). See also Nicholas's (1981) discussion of the *pinda* offerings. The term *pinda*, as Nicholas points out, means, "food for the departed body, a representation of the departed body, and... the body of the departed itself (Nicholas 1981:7-8). *Pinda* is also used in the sense of body or flesh as in the term *sapinda*, those who share a common bodily substance. *Srāddha* is derived from the term *srāddha* (faith) and may be translated as offerings made to the ancestor with faith.
 22. Some of these rituals are similar to the rituals performed in Banaras as described by Parry (1985:621).
 23. For a discussion on the category *sapinda* and its three main aspects or functions, see Dumont 1983. For the *sapindikarana* rituals, see Inden and Nicholas (1977); Parry (1985:622); Stevenson (1920:185-6).
 24. Actually mourners are polluted when they hear of the death of one of their relatives. If they hear of the death after the ten days are over, they are not polluted. Moreover if a *vrddhi* or mangala (auspicious) *srāddha* is performed before an auspicious ritual, they are not affected by pollution until the concluding day of the rituals. In practice, close mourners often observe pollution and mourning even if they have performed the *mangala śrāddha* (cf. Chapter 2, fn. 4 (Pradhan 1995)).
 25. See Kaushik (1976) for an analysis of the roles of ritual specialists in the different phases of the state of the dead person; she presents a triadic structure.
 26. I have for the moment ignored the roles of the Gwā (cremation specialists), the Josi (astrologers) and the Barber.
 27. The ritual specialists receive separate free (*daksinā*) for their services. There is an important exception to this rule. When the king dies his brain is eaten by a Brāhman. He is seduced into eating the royal brain by being offered huge amounts of gifts and then he is exiled from the country.

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