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A NUNNERY IN NEPAL

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf

London

The study of Buddhist institutions among the Tibeto-Burman speaking populations of Nepal has been the concern of both Tibetologists and anthropologists, and the past two decades saw the publication of a number of works dealing with specific aspects of the practice of Buddhism in various parts of the kingdom¹. In my book *The Sherpas of Nepal* I discussed in some detail the constitution of the Nyingmapa monastery of Tengboche, but had little to say about the complementary community of nuns living at Devuche at no great distance from Tengboche². Other authors too paid more attention to the life-style and the practices of monks and lamas than to that of nuns, even though in some Buddhist societies, such as for instance among the Thakalis of Thak Khola³, nuns now greatly outnumber the dwindling number of monks. Yet nuns are an important element of Buddhist communities, and if we ignore them we forego the possibility of gaining an insight into the women's role in Buddhist religious life. When in August 1974 I decided to undertake a study of a community of nuns in Eastern Nepal, I was following a lead which had come my way twenty-one years earlier. At that time I had encountered two nuns from Bigu while camping in the Tamang village of Risingo through which I passed on my way to Khumbu. The nuns were collecting funds for the enlargement of their *gompa*, and my small donation was rewarded by some information on that nunnery lying some five days' walk to the north of Risingo and close to the Tibetan border. I was intrigued by the statement that in Bigu *gompa* Sherpa and Tamang nuns lived side by side, for I had been under

¹ David Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford 1957.

Himalayan Pilgrimage, Oxford 1961.

Four Lamas of Dolpo, Vol. I, Oxford 1967.

Friedrich Funke, *Religioses Leben der Sherpa*. Khumbu Himal Vol. 9.

Innsbruck-München, 1969.

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Sherpas of Nepal. Buddhist Highlanders*, London 1964.

L.G. Jerstad, *Mani-Rimdu: Theatrical Festivals of the Sherpas of Nepal*. Seattle 1969.

² Op.cit. pp. 134, 138, 139.

³ Cf. "Caste concepts and status distinctions in Buddhist communities in Western Nepal", in C. von Fürer-Haimendorf (editor), *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon*. London & Bombay, 1966.

the impression that these two ethnic groups, though both professing Buddhism, seldom joined in the creation of religious communities. Concentration on the study of various other populations prevented me then and in the subsequent years from visiting Bigu, but when in the summer of 1974 my wife and I found ourselves in Kathmandu with some weeks to spare we decided to devote the time to a micro-study of a nunnery of which we had heard for so many years. Unlike the most other centres of lamaistic monastic life, Bigu is now relatively easily accessible. Three hours' drive along the motor-road linking Kathmandu with Lhasa brings one to the small market town of Barabise, and from there Bigu can be reached on foot in three days' walk involving the crossing of the Tinsang La, a pass of some 11,000 feet altitude, but offering otherwise no natural obstacles.

The valley east of the Tinsang La in which Bigu is situated contains a mixed population of Sherpas, Tamangs, Thamis, Magars and a few families of Chetris, the latter being relatively recent settlers. Administratively the village of Bigu belongs to the Dolakha district, but economically the inhabitants are linked with Barabise and since the establishment of motor-traffic even with Kathmandu, rather than with the district headquarter at Charikot.

The *gompa* which on the map and in the parlance of the people of the more distant villages is described simply as Bigu *gompa*, is locally known as Tashi *gompa* and its full name is Tashi-chime-ga-tsel bikung (Pleasure garden of deathless good fortune). It lies at an altitude of 8,250 feet on a south-facing slope surrounded by cultivated fields, pastures and some scattered houses of Sherpas. The Sharpa village and an older and much smaller village temple, situated on a lower ledge, existed long before the establishment of Tashi *gompa*, and we shall see presently that some prominent Sherpas of the village were instrumental in the construction of the *gompa* and the foundation of a convent under the leadership of a Bhutanese lama.

THE HISTORY OF TASHI GOMPA

Tashi *gompa*, like many monastic institutions in Nepal, is a relatively recent foundation. The circumstances of its establishment are hence well known to people still alive, and while I was unable to obtain any documentary evidence, I gathered much information from villagers and nuns personally involved in the construction of the *gompa*.

The story goes that some forty years ago, in the year of the great earthquake of 1934 remembered throughout Nepal, a Drukpa lama from Bhutan passed through Bigu in the course of a pilgrimage. This lama, whose name was Ngawang Paldzen, is now referred to as the Tulku (or Autari in Nepali) because after his death he was reborn and in his new incarnation continues to head the four *gompa* which he founded in his earlier life. Ngawang Paldzen was known as Geshe Sherap

Dorje, but neither his original name nor the latter name is normally used by either villagers or nuns.

Nim Pasang, the *misar* (headman) of Bigu, and father of the present *misar* Tsiring Ngundu was often travelling in Tibet, and there he had been to numerous monasteries and convents. Greatly impressed by their role as centres of religious artistic activities, he conceived the idea of promoting in his own village the foundation of a *gompa* similar to those of Tibet. Once, when he stayed with one of his sons who was a lama living in a house near the site of the present *gompa*, he had an auspicious dream in which he saw gods and temples. This gave him the idea that the place was a suitable site for a *gompa*. Some time previously he had met a Drukpa lama whose charismatic personality had aroused his admiration. The lama had meanwhile gone to Bagan in Yelmu, but the *misar* Nim Pasang and his lama son set out to find him there and ultimately invited him to preside over the foundation. The lama accepted the invitation and promised to raise some of the funds required for the construction of a *gompa*. As the Drukpa lama Ngawang Paldzen had already founded two *gompa* for monks, namely those of Bagan and Tsum, Nim Pasang requested him to establish a *gompa* for nuns, where women anxious to lead a religious life, and widows or deserted wives in need of a place of refuge, could find shelter and inspiration.

Nim Pasang provided a suitable site and as much land as would annually yield 3 *muri* (i.e. circa 202.5 kg.) of wheat. He also contributed substantial funds and persuaded the villagers to give unpaid labour for the construction of the *gompa*.

Yet the resources of the village of Bigu in men and skills were insufficient for building a *gompa* such as the Drukpa lama and his patron envisaged. Hence they recruited helpers and craftsmen drawn from Lapche, a village north of Lama-bagar close to the Tibetan border. Ngawang Paldzen had stayed there for some time before coming to Bigu, and it must have been his influence which caused men from that relatively distant village to co-operate in the construction of a *gompa* at Bigu. The news of the proposed foundation of a *gompa* had also attracted a large number of monks and nuns, and they all helped in the collection of building materials. The first year was spent with the gathering of timber which was obtained from the forest on the hill-slopes surrounding Bigu. When the construction began there arose the need for skilled carpenters and later of painters capable of painting the frescoes in the interior of the *gompa*. The carpenters, who produced the carved doors and door-frames came mainly from Tibet, but painters were called from Bhutan as well as from the Solu region of Nepal, and from Khasa, a nearby Tibetan market-place often visited by the people of Bigu. The greater part of the painting work was done by two Bhutanese artists, the younger of whom later settled in Bigu, where he still lives with his Sherpa wife, who was a nun in Tashi *gompa* but gave up the religious life to marry the Bhutanese painter.

The older nuns, who witnessed those early stages in the *gompa's* history, tell of the hardships they then suffered. There were as yet no quarters to house them. Ngawang Paldzen and some of the nuns were given shelter in the houses of villagers, but did not stay in any house for more than a few days at a time. Other nuns lived in temporary sheds roofed with mats such as herdsmen use in their camps at high pastures. Monks and nuns laboured side by side with the villagers, carrying stones and dragging heavy beams to the building site.

At first many laymen too gave their labour freely without expecting payment. But skilled craftsmen had to be paid, and when it came to the construction of the roof of the *gompa*, the headman Nim Pasang and the Drukpa lama ran out of funds. Determined that the project should not come to a standstill, Nim Pasang sold a large portion of his land and his entire herd of yak and cross-breeds (*dzo*). The Drukpa lama also helped in the raising of funds by touring the surrounding villages and asking for contributions.

Thus the construction of the main building could be completed and the Bhutanese painters paid wages for decorating the interior and the porch of the *gompa* with frescoes. The *gompa* is a rectangular building to which access is gained by a flight of stone-steps. This leads into an open porch, 32 feet long and 11 feet deep, which can be protected against rain by heavy yak-hair curtains. The three walls of the porch are decorated with frescoes including pictures of the "guardians of the four quarters" and a wheel of life. A heavy, richly carved double door, usually kept locked, leads into the great hall (*duang*), the roof of which rests on two rows of stout wooden pillars, painted in several colours. The arrangement of the seats for the nuns along the two rows of pillars is conventional. At the far end of the left row of seats, there is a raised carved and painted throne for the founder of the *gompa* and his reincarnation, which in the Tulku's absence remains vacant. Opposite this throne is a lower, but also raised seat for the Guru Lama.

The centre piece of the altar is a statue of Pawa Cheresi. To the right of this there is a small wooden case containing a sculpture of Srungma Chundin, and three alcoves are filled with statues of Opame, Tsepame, and Chitin Drolma, while a statue of Milarepa is free standing.

On an altar to the left of the main altar there are statues of Temba Rimpoche, Guru Rimpoche and Pawa Cheresi, each standing in a carved alcove of its own. There is also a closed *Srungma* shrine, and a shrine containing the books of Bum. Tashi *gompa* is not rich in ritual scriptures and possesses neither the Kangyur nor the Tengyur.

There are extensive frescoes of good quality on the wall to both sides of the entrance door, but the side walls are devoid of frescoes and painted in a reddish brown. Compared to the decoration of some of the monastery halls of Khumbu and Solu, the frescoes are modest in extent and quality, but the general impression of the *duang* is dignified and pleasing, and thanks to the effort of the present sacris-

tan (*konier*) the hall and its furnishings are still kept in excellent order.

At the time of the foundation of the *gompa* only a small house was built for the Drukpa lama. The quarters of the nuns and a double-storeyed house used as a store and cook-house were constructed in later years, and the paving of the courtyard was also done more recently. Indeed the extension of the paved area surrounding the *gompa* is still continuing, and in August 1974 I watched some young nuns fetching stone slabs suitable for paving and laying them.

At the time when the Drukpa lama stayed at Tashi *gompa* there were about 60 nuns and several monks in residence. After his death some five years after the completion of the main building those nuns who had come from Yelmu, Lapche and Lapthang returned to the places of their origin, and in subsequent years the number of permanently resident nuns steadied at a figure of about 35.

Originally the *gompa* had a roof of wooden planks but when this began to leak, it was decided to replace it by a roof of tin sheets which ultimately were to be painted red. Again funds were collected in the villages of an area extending as far south as Risingo, and when sufficient funds had been gathered tin sheets were purchased in Kathmandu. The transport of these heavy sheets was undertaken by the nuns themselves. At that time the motorable road to Barabise was not yet in existence, and the nuns carried the sheets the entire way from Kathmandu to Bigu, each nun carrying three sheets at a time, and making two or three journeys. The older nuns tell about the arduous work they had to do during the early of development of the *gompa*. They point out that nuns had then little leisure to read books and meditate, but had to carry heavy loads and give a hand to the workmen constructing the various buildings.

*

Three years after the arrival of Ngawang Paldzen and the foundation of Tashi *gompa*, he was joined by three youths who were the sons of his elder brother referred to by the people of Bigu simply as a "Drukpa Lama", his personal name having been forgotten. All the three youths were *thawa*, and their names were Kusho Tendzen, Kusho Pema and Kusho Tsetsu. Ngawang Paldzen did not take on the day-to-day direction of the new *gompa*, but installed a lama from Kyirong as head of the community. It would seem that he intended to put his nephew Kusho Pema in charge of Tashi *gompa*, just as later he appointed Kusho Tendzen as head of Mu *gompa* at Tsum and Kusho Tsetsu as head of the monastery at Bagan. But at that time Kusho Pema was still too young for such a post and hence the lama from Kyirong was invited to take charge of Tashi *gompa*. The latter left after a few years and Ngawang Paldzen, who had retained the overall control over the four *gompa* he had founded, selected one of the numerous Drukpa lamas who had come with him from Bhutan to be the new head of Tashi *gompa*. He must have been an old man for he is remembered as Drukpa Meme—*meme* being

the word for grandfather. Through he stayed for eleven years, he was not popular with the nuns and the villagers. He was addicted to drinking liquor and used to beat the nuns if they talked during rites in the *gompa*. By that time Kusho Pema had taken over the management of the accounts and business affairs of the *gompa*, and held a position of considerable influence and power. But he had no vocation for a celibate life, and got involved with a nun, who bore him three children. According to monastic rules he had to leave the *gompa* precincts and moved to a nearby house where he lived with his family. He still had a say in the management of the *gompa* and he participated in the performance of the major rituals. He died in early middle age and one of his two daughters is now a nun in Tashi *gompa*, while his son became a lama and joined the establishment of the Dalai Lama in India. Kusho Pema's elder brother Kusho Tendzen also had an affair with a nun, and their daughter is now a nun at the *gompa*. Subsequently he went to Tsum and is said to hold a high position in Mu *gompa*. Kusho Tsetso, the youngest and most gifted of the three brothers, retains close contact with Tashi *gompa*. He lives at present at Maharajgunj in Kathmandu, and is co-ordinating the practical affairs of the four *gompa* founded by Ngawang Paldzen until such a time when the latter's reincarnation, the young Tulku, will be experienced enough to take over their management.

Ngawang Paldzen spent his last two years at Phuma, a hermitage in the mountains above Deodunga. He had one attendant with him, and when in 1941 he died his corpse was carried to Tashi *gompa* and cremated nearby. In his memory a large *chorten* was built in the courtyard. Some six years after his death a boy born to Tibetan parents in Tarkartasso near the village of Shak, in the Dzongka district of Tibet which is not far from Kiyrong, evinced signs of being a reincarnation, and spoke of a *gompa* in Nepal where he had lived in his previous life. The news reached the lamas in Tsum and ultimately Kusho Tsetso. The child was exposed to the usual tests of having to identify some of the possessions of the late lama, and unhesitatingly picked out the correct objects rejecting all others with which they had been mixed up. Kusho Tsetso provided the young Tulku, who is known as Tshutul Rimpoche, with a horse and good clothes, and when he was eleven years old, he visited Tashi *gompa*. Later he stayed at Bagan *gompa* and studied under Geshe Rimpoche. In 1974 he was invited to Bhutan, and spent there a number of months. It is expected that ultimately he will take over the position now held by Kusho Tsetso.

For the past 18 years the direction of Tashi *gompa* has been in the hands of the present Guru Lama. He was born in Kham and for some years he was a monk at Sera monastery in Tibet. Then he came on a pilgrimage to Nepal, and there he heard of Ngawang Paldzen. As he was looking for a spiritual guide he sought him out at Tashi *gompa*, and then went to live at no great distance at

Changdze Mendok, a hermitage above the village of Bulugpa. When some years later the Drukpa lama in charge of Tashi *gompa* received an invitation from a monastery in Bhutan and, much to the relief of the nuns, decided to leave Tashi *gompa*, the villagers of Bigu suggested that the lama from Sera might be offered the headship of Tashi *gompa*. They had been impressed by his piety and seriousness of purpose, and approaching him with gifts of ceremonial scarves (*kata*) invited him to take charge of the *gompa*.

The fact that the Guru Lama had been trained in the Gelugpa monastery of Sera was apparently no obstacle in the way of his appointment to the headship of a Kargyupa *gompa*. He has neither difficulties nor conscientious objections to conduct the ceremonies according to the Kargyupa ritual traditional in Tashi *gompa*. When he took over the position of abbot, Kusho Pema was still alive, and continued to look after the accounts and the business side of the *gompa* administration.

THE ECONOMIC BASE

Tashi *gompa* is not well endowed, and most of the nuns depend for their maintenance largely on their own resources. The land donated by the headman of Bigu provides the nuns with kitchen gardens and small orchards, a few plots on which they grow maize, and pasture for a few cows. In addition the *gompa* owns land which was donated by a wealthy Thakuri, i.e. the member of a high Hindu caste, who held the rank of captain in the Nepalese army. The Thakuri's wife was childless and he hoped to be blessed with a son by dispensing such charity. Though his efforts were in vain, he remained in close touch with the nuns, and when his wife died, the inmates of the *gompa* performed a memorial rite (*gyewa*) which was attended by the deceased woman's relatives. The land donated is in the villages of Latu, Budipara and Marsekarka, all of which are in the Sunkosi valley some two days' journey from Bigu. In Latu and in Marsekarka the *gompa* owns also small houses in which the nuns can stay when they come to collect their share of the crops. In Budipara they have only rice-fields, and these they let out on rent. Among their tenants there are Brahmans, Tamangs and Thamis, and the tenancy is of a type known as *kot*, according to which the quantity of produce to be delivered as the owner's share is fixed, however good or bad the harvest may have been. If in a bad year the tenant is unable to deliver the agreed amount of paddy, the deficiency has to be made up in the next year.

In Latu and Marsekarka mainly maize and wheat are grown, and in these villages the land is hired out on the understanding that whatever the yield may be the owners receive half of the crops harvested. When the maize has ripened

two or three nuns supervise the division and strip the grain from the cobs. One of them then goes to Tashi *gompa* and calls other nuns to fetch the maize.

The grain produced on the land owned by the *gompa* is divided between the Guru Lama and those nuns who fully participate in the activities of the *gompa* and are known as *thiba*. The Guru Lama gets two shares, and 23 nuns are given one share each. There are 7 nuns, who although living within the *gompa* precincts, do not hold any of the posts connected with the *gompa* ritual, and do not participate in the common work of the community. Such nuns, described as *surba*, do not receive shares of the *gompa* income in grain. If a *surba* wishes to join or rejoin the active body of nuns she must entertain the other nuns at a tea-ceremony (*mang-se*) and promise to accept the work discipline of the *gompa*. The Guru Lama will then give her a ceremonial scarf (*kata*) and admit her to the community of active nuns (*thiba*).

The grain yield of *gompa* lands lasts the nuns only about two months a year according to the nature of the harvest. For the rest of the year they depend for their subsistence on the contributions of their families and the charitable offerings of devotees.

The basic yearly needs of a nun are approximately as follows :

4-6 *muri* of grain, one *muri* being the equivalent of 67.5 Kg; 10-15 *dharni* of clarified butter, one *dharni* equalling 2 1/2 Kg; 3 *pathi* of potatoes, one *pathi* equalling 3 1/2 Kg; 3-4 bricks of Tibetan tea, each worth about Rs. 20, and Rs. 100 worth of clothes.

Each of the 23 *thiba* nuns gets normally one *muri* of grain from the *gompa* land at Latu. In 1974 the net income of unhusked rice from the Latu fields was 18 *muri*. Until some years ago the tenants gave the *gompa* 30 *muri* of rice, but since the tax payable to the government has increased, the share due to the *gompa* has diminished. The yields of maize and millet (*Eleusine coracana*) are 8 *muri* and 4-5 *muri* respectively.

Another source of *gompa*-income are the donations of devotees who come to Tashi *gompa* to commission ceremonies for specific purposes or to consult the Guru Lama in regard to personal problems. When doing so they usually bring gifts of grain, butter or money, and the maintenance of the *gompa* ritual depends to a large extent on such donations. Laymen make such donations either in order to acquire religious merit or to benefit deceased kinsmen. If the Guru Lama is not in residence, the senior nun (*umse*) notes the requests of devotees arriving at the *gompa* and receives their donations. On his return the Guru Lama says prayers for the intended purposes or performs the required rites. In some cases commissioned rites may also be performed in the Guru Lama's absence. Small donations are usually pooled and used to hold a ritual benefiting several

devotees.

A system of loans given to villagers from *gompa*-funds is an important means of securing regular support for the ritual performances in the *gompa*. The *gompa* has built up a fund derived from cash gifts by devotees, and from this fund the Guru Lama gives loans of up to Rs. 1,000 to trustworthy villagers. In lieu of interest they provide the wherewithall for the performance of certain seasonal rites. A borrower who takes a loan of Rs. 200 may have to contribute 10 *pathi* rice, 3 *dharni* butter, and 6 *pathi* wheat for a specific rite. The value of these commodities is much greater than the commercial interest would be, and borrowing from a *gompa* is not only a convenient way of obtaining cash at short notice but has also the purpose of gaining merit by the sponsorship of ritual performances.

The capital at the disposal of the *gompa* for such purposes is divided into a number of funds described as *guthi* in Nepali and *ten-ma* in Sherpa. There is a fund known as Niungne *guthi* which in 1974 stood at Rs. 4,000; in that year ten people had taken loans for Rs. 400 each and were to provide the materials required for the celebration of the Niungne rite.⁴ Another fund known as Bum *guthi* stood at Rs. 2100. Three persons had taken loans of Rs. 100 each, and a fourth man had taken the remaining Rs. 1,800. The purpose of this *guthi* is to finance the performance of a *tsho* known as Dukpa tsetsu (which is centred on the recitation of the volumes of Bum, one of the canonical books). Another fund known as Diksha *guthi* stood in 1974 at Rs. 1,200. Some 25 people had taken small sums from that fund, and before the performance of the Diksha rite, the debtors arrange among themselves what contribution to the performance each of them would make.

There is a separate fund, the yield of which is used to provide butter for the four lamps burning continuously in the main *gompa*, the *mani*-building, housing the great prayer wheel, and the Guru Lama's house. The Rs. 800 of that *guthi* were distributed to equal parts among eight cattle owners, each of whom provided annually one quarter of a *dharni* of butter, i.e. 5/8 Kg.

Whenever a devotee visiting the *gompa* makes a donation either in cash or kind the Guru Lama enquires for what specific purpose it is to be used, and the donor may specify that it is to be utilized for the performance of a *tsho*, a *diksha* rite or a *niungne*.

The system of loans given to laymen who undertake the responsibility of

⁴ Cf. *The Sherpas of Nepal*, pp. 180-185, for a detailed description of the Niungne rite.

providing the materials required for ritual performances is not confined to Tashi *gompa*, but the village *gompa* of Bigu has two similar *guthi*, the funds of which are lent out to members of the village-community. These persons make the arrangements for the celebrations of the Narak rite (which corresponds to the Dumje of the Khumbu Sherpas) and provides butter to be used as fuel of lamps burning at certain *gompa* rites. These funds of the village *gompa* were set up a long time ago by two wealthy men, and later increased by further donations.

Casual contributions to Tashi *gompa* are offered for a variety of reasons. People approach the Guru Lama or individual nuns with the request to say prayers for the cure of sick kinsmen or for other intentions of a personal nature. Thus during my stay in Tashi *gompa* a young Sherpa brought a small pot of butter for the burning of lamps. The *gompa* hall was specially opened and the young man prostrated himself in the aisle and then bowed to all the statues and the seats of the founder and the Guru Lama. He and two companions then filled some of the lamps with the butter he had brought. He explained that some 20 years ago his father had lent Rs. 250 to a Sherpa of Lapthang, a village in Tibet, but that after his father's death the debtor had disclaimed any knowledge of the loan. The offering to the *gompa* was done for the benefit of his mother with the express intention that *in her next life* she should get repayment of the loan. Even Hindus sometimes give offerings to the *gompa* for the purpose of redressing a grievance. Those who have been wronged by someone in this life believe that by giving a donation to the *gompa* they may be able to obtain satisfaction in the next world where the roles will be reversed and their adversary will be in their power.

Occasionally the *gompa* also receives donations from persons who do not link any special request with their gift. Thus during my presence a Sherpa of Laduk village presented to the *gompa* a whole tin of butter, containing eight *dharni* (i.e. 20 Kg.), without commissioning any specific rite. He had lost some money in gambling and his father had reproached him, and pointed out that as he lived near the *gompa*, instead of gambling it would profit him more if he gave an offering to the *gompa* and thereby acquired merit and gained some benefit for his next life.

Besides the income from their land and the charitable donations of devotees the *gompa* community receives a small annual government grant. Many religious institutions in Nepal enjoy such support, and in the days of the Rana regime it was fixed at Rs. 300. Even though it has been raised to Rs. 550 its real value is being eroded by inflation. At one time this grant was distributed among the nuns, but it seems that nowadays it is being used for the upkeep of the *gompa* or other purposes decided upon by the Guru Lama.

Until some years ago the *gompa* owned a herd of some 13 *dzomu* (female

yak-cow cross-breeds). They were kept mainly for the sake of the butter which was needed for burning in the lamps of the *gompa*, but as such animals have to be kept on the high pastures the nuns could not look after them permanently. Hence paid herdsmen had to be entrusted with the *dzomu*, and owing to their negligence several animals died. As the arrangement was altogether unsatisfactory and the herdsmen were dilatory in the delivery of butter, the Guru Lama decided to sell the *dzomu*. Nowadays the *gompa* only owns a few cows. Two of these are looked after and milked by the nuns, but some others have been given into the care of a Thami neighbour, who gives the *gompa* part of the manure and half of the number of calves born, but keeps the milk for himself.

The *gompa's* sources of income are clearly not sufficient to maintain the Guru Lama and the nuns resident at Tashi *gompa* for more than part of the year. While the Guru Lama has no personal income other than the gifts of devotees, most of the nuns are largely maintained by their natal families, or own some land which they can let out on rent. Among Sherpas and Tamangs a family whose daughter has entered a nunnery is expected to contribute substantially to her maintenance. If a nun's parental home is within one or two days' walking distance, she visits her parents frequently and is furnished with provisions and usually also with clothes. If her parental home is far from Tashi *gompa* she may visit it only once a year, and in that case her family will contribute to her upkeep in cash rather than in foodstuff. When her parents grow old or die, her brothers or other close relatives are supposed to take over the responsibility of continuing a nun's support. However, there are cases of nuns who have no more living kinsmen able or willing to contribute to their maintenance. Such nuns, who are usually old, have to resort to begging for alms in the villages within reasonably easy reach of Tashi *gompa*.

Nuns have moreover the opportunity of adding occasionally to their income by rendering ritual services to laymen. Such services include the performance of *kurim*, i.e. the reading of appropriate sacred scriptures, in the house of a sick person for the purpose of effecting a cure. Similarly *kurim* may be performed for the benefit of a man setting out on a long or supposedly dangerous journey. In all such cases the nun or nuns reciting the books are fed on the day or days of the performance and in addition given a small honorarium.

While fully established nuns, capable of performing rituals, have such subsidiary sources of income, for the first two or three years a newly recruited nun is neither entitled to support from *gompa* funds nor is she likely to be asked to perform ritual services. During this initial period such a nun has to rely entirely on parental contributions or the income from such land as she may have inherited.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOMPA-COMMUNITY

Buddhist monastic communities are basically egalitarian but this does not mean that they are unstructured. Though all monks in a monastery and all nuns in a nunnery have equal chances of attaining positions of responsibility there is a long and arduous way from the status of novice to that of the major *gompa* officials. In *The Sherpas of Nepal* (pp. 145-149) I have outlined the organization of Tengboché, a monastery in Khumbu, and familiarity with the structure of that community made it easy to understand the structure of the small community of nuns in Tashi *gompa*. So far the leading position in that community has always been occupied by a lama selected and appointed by the founder of the *gompa*, and as this pattern is now firmly established it is unlikely that one of the nuns could rise to the substantive headship of the *gompa*. In this respect Tashi *gompa* differs from nunneries such as Devuché in Khumbu where there is no resident lama, and the nuns elect from time to time a headnun, known as *loben* (literally: 'teacher') from among their own numbers.

In Tashi *gompa* there is at present no *loben*, and the Guru Lama, though spiritual head of the community, is never described as *loben*, but as *kempu*. Until six years ago there was a nun who held the position of *loben*, but was nevertheless subject to the authority of the Guru Lama. Her name was Tsiring Yangdzum and she was a native of Tsum in Western Nepal. She started her religious career in Tsum *gompa*, and at one time came to Tashi *gompa* in the company of the Tulku, but then returned to Tsum. However, Kusho Tsetso as over-all controller of the four linked *gompa*, realized how learned and potentially useful she was and persuaded her to join Tashi *gompa* where she was entrusted with the special task of teaching the nuns. She lived there for a long time and acquired a high reputation and great popularity. When the Guru Lama asked the nuns whether he should appoint a *loben*, the majority supported Tsiring Yangdzum, and welcomed her promotion. The story goes that in the course of the years she performed one thousand *niungne* rites, but this is obviously a vast exaggeration. When Tsiring Yangdzum died the other nuns performed in her memory seven *melam* rites spaced out over seven weeks.

Ever since the death of Tsiring Yangdzum, there has been no *loben* in Tashi *gompa*, and the senior-most position among the nuns is held by the *umse*. The main function of the *umse* is to lead the chanting and recitations of the nuns at *gompa* services. To discharge this function she must possess a good knowledge of the scriptures used in the liturgy and should also have a good voice and diction. In the absence of the Guru Lama the *umse* presides over all ritual performances, and decides matters regarding the performance of *gompa* ritual. She is also res-

possible for teaching the younger nuns the meaning of ritual texts, for while the Guru Lama occasionally expounds to the nuns problems of doctrine, he does no routine teaching. Apart from the prestige inherent in the position of *umse* the incumbent has few concrete advances. The only traditional privilege of the *umse* is the right to have her meal of rice served on a brass plate when she and other nuns sit together during a retreat (*tsam*); the other nuns get their rice served in a cloth on such an occasion.

Unlike most other *gompa* offices, that of *umse* is not filled according to the principle of seniority. However, the manner of selection seems to vary from time to time. Normally the *umse* is chosen by the nuns in an informal meeting where each nun is free to express her preference and there is no resort to written ballot papers. But when Hishi Droma (House 26), who was *umse* for seven years from 1967 till 1973, was appointed there were three candidates of about equal seniority and accomplishments, namely Hishi Droma, Dorje Droma (House 7) and Sange Gyelmu (House 25). As there was no consensus among the nuns, the Tulku, who had come to Tashi *gompa* for the occasion, arranged for each of the three names to be written on a piece of paper. He then made each slip into a ball and placed the three paper balls on a dish which he half covered with a scarf (*kata*). Raising the dish, he prayed to the gods and then moved it in such a way that one paper ball after the other fell out. The nun whose name was on the paper-ball emerging first was to be *umse*. Hishi Droma's name came first, and I was told that the two other candidates wept from disappointment.

After the expiry of Hishi Droma's seven year period of office, neither Sange Gyelmu nor Dorje Droma wanted to become *umse*, and the latter canvassed the name of Sherpa Omu (House 3), who is relatively junior but extremely gifted and popular. The Tulku who had come to Tashi *gompa* consulted all the nuns, and they unanimously recommended the appointment of Sherpa Omu as *umse*. But the Tulku was not convinced of the wisdom of appointing so junior a nun and proposed that two *umse* should be chosen and the senior one take over the position first. He argued that as Hishi Droma had often been ill of late, and could conduct the *gompa* services only with difficulty, it was advisable to have two *umse* so that the junior one could deputize for the senior one in times of need. As Dorje Droma and Sherpa Omu were the favourite candidates he decided that Dorje Droma should be appointed *umse*, and Sherpa Omu be regarded as *umse*-elect, succeed Dorje Droma after seven years and meanwhile act as *umse* in the event of Dorje Droma's absence.

Next in rank to the *umse* is a *gompa* official known as *kutum* or *gerku*. This post is held only for one year and is usually filled according to seniority. The *kutum* is responsible for discipline and has authority to punish nuns for breaches

of the *gompa* rules. For a minor offence a nun may be suspended, i.e. excluded from *gompa*-services and communal activities for a limited time. To be re-admitted she must prostrate herself 108 times, offer *mang-se* (i.e. the ceremonial serving of tea in the *gompa*) to all nuns, and present the Guru Lama with a scarf (*kata*). Causing dissension among the nuns by telling tales is an example of such a minor offence. For serious offences, such as theft, a nun may be expelled permanently. If a nun is caught in a love-affair with a man the *kutum* will force her to wear a torn cap and circumambulate the *mani* and *gompa* three times. The torn cap is called *tsapani* and is donned in such a way as to hide the face like a mask. After having been shamed publicly in this way the guilty nun may be fined as much as Rs. 1,000 and will be expelled from the *gompa*. She may run away without paying, but unpaid fines are sometimes recovered even after two or three years. Most fines are not as high as Rs. 1,000, but many ex-nuns who have married and live in the vicinity of Bigu have paid a fine to the *gompa*. The *kutum* has also the responsibility of ringing every morning a bell and in this capacity she is known as *tilbu*.

The third *gompa* official in the order of seniority is the *niermu*, whose position is equivalent to that of *nierwa* in communities of monks. But whereas the *nierwa* of a monastery such as Tengboche deals not only with domestic affairs but manages also the trading activities of the *gompa*, the *niermu* of a convent deals mainly with the management of the household, the farm-work and the maintenance of buildings. Her daily duties include the supervision of the kitchen and the pouring out of tea at *gompa*-services. After having been *niermu* the incumbent automatically advances to the position of *kutum*. Normally a *niermu* services only for one year, but at the time when the *gompa* was still under construction and continuity was desirable there were exceptions. Thus Tsangdzum Sangmu (House 19) served for 17 years as *niermu* and supervised many of the building operations.

The *niermu* has an assistant known as *nieryok* who serves in this capacity for one year.

There is no one *gompa*-official solely responsible for the supervision of the communal grain stores. *Niermu* as well as *umse* and *kutum* must be present when grain is to be taken out from the store and transferred to the kitchen for current consumption.

Another post held in rotation is that of *chorpen*. There is a *chorpen* in every *gompa*, whether part of a monastery or belonging to a village. The incumbent is responsible for the organization of ritual performances during which the person acting as *chorpen* has certain priestly functions.

The remaining ranks through which all nuns have to proceed to the higher

offices are named according to the instrument a nun plays at *gompa*-rituals. Thus the players of oboes (*geling*) are called *gelingba*, the players of conch-shells, *tungba*, and the players of telescopic horns, *sangdungba*.

A position of some importance which stands outside the rank-order of nuns is that of the *konier*, the sacristan responsible for keeping *gompa*-hall and altars clean and in good order. The *konier* is appointed for an unspecified number of years and as the work is burdensome and without specific rewards there is little competition for this position. The present *konier*, Tuchi Droma (House 11), has been working in this capacity for 12 years, and has repeatedly expressed the wish to being replaced. The *konier* keeps the keys to the *gompa*-hall, opens it in the early morning and replaces all the water in the many bowls on the altar. This necessitates several trips to the spring. There the *konier* fills a large narrow-necked brass or copper pot with water and then carries it on her back to the *gompa*. Altogether 56 bowls standing on the altar have to be filled every morning and emptied in the evening. 28 of them are large and take a very considerable amount of water. Behind this daily filling and emptying of bowls lies the idea that the water offered at the altar symbolizes all the various offerings which according to Buddhist belief are the dues of the deities worshipped in the *gompa*. For the post of *konier* the nuns usually choose a woman of no great intellectual ability, but strong and dependable, and above willing to take on what is undoubtedly the most onerous task in the maintenance of the *gompa* as a tidy and dignified place of worship.

The integration of a girl or older woman into the community of nuns is a fairly lengthy process. Except for nuns who have taken vows in other *gompas* and come to Tashi *gompa* with recognized credentials, every candidate has to go through a period of training and testing before she can attain the status of a fully privileged nun .

Anyone seeking acceptance as a novice has to approach the Guru Lama. Usually she offers him a ceremonial scarf and perhaps a token gift of money. The candidate and any of her relatives accompanying her also visit the *gompa*, bows to the images and place a small offering on the altar or bring butter to be burnt in the lamps.

The next step is the cutting of the candidate's hair as a symbol of the renouncement of secular life. The hair cutting and shaving of the head must be done by a lama, and in Tashi *gompa* it is normally done by the Guru Lama. The hair is thrown away or burnt and may not be used for any purpose.

For a period of about one year the novice is considered a probationer, and during this period she can withdraw without attracting any opprobrium or be-

coming liable to a fine such as nuns have to pay who leave in order to marry.

Candidates are taught reading and writing in Tibetan. They also have to learn certain basic religious texts which they are supposed to know by heart before they can attain the status of *gyengi* ("living by virtue"). There is no fixed period for the preparation leading to this step in a nun's career. The admission to *gyengi* status is a simple ceremony. The Guru Lama recites some sacred formulae and the candidate undertakes to abide by the rules of the *gompa*.

The next step is the taking of the *rabdzung* vow which signifies total commitment to the religious life. (Cf. *The Sherpas of Nepal*, pp. 143-145). To be allowed to take this vow a nun should normally have an adequate knowledge of the scriptures recited in liturgical performances. It seems, however, that in Tashi *gompa* exceptions are sometimes made in the case of dedicated older women who became nuns in middle age and though unable to master the reading of scriptures are allowed to take the *rabdzung* vow. Such a waiving of rules seems to have occurred in the case of Chiangchup Droma (House 1). The requirement of adequate scriptural knowledge can be waived also in relation to very young girls who entered the *gompa* as children and are living with an older nun responsible for their upbringing. Tashitsiring (House 5), for instance, who after her mother's death came to Tashi-*gompa* to live with her father's sister, was allowed to take the *rabdzung* vow at the age of 10, when she had been for 3 years at the *gompa*. Several lamas of the rank of *gelung* are required to administer the *rabdzung* vow, and there is the possibility of repeating the vow if a lama of particularly high status becomes available to preside over the ceremony.

The rank of *gelung* is attained by many monks of learning, but such advancement is denied to nuns. There is a tradition that in the early times of Buddhism women too could become *gelung*, but in the present age women are not ordained as *gelung* however learned and devout they may be.

Several nuns of Tashi *gompa* mentioned that they were hoping for a reincarnation as men, because as monks they could attain more responsible and prestigious positions than as nuns, and more specifically could become *gelung*.

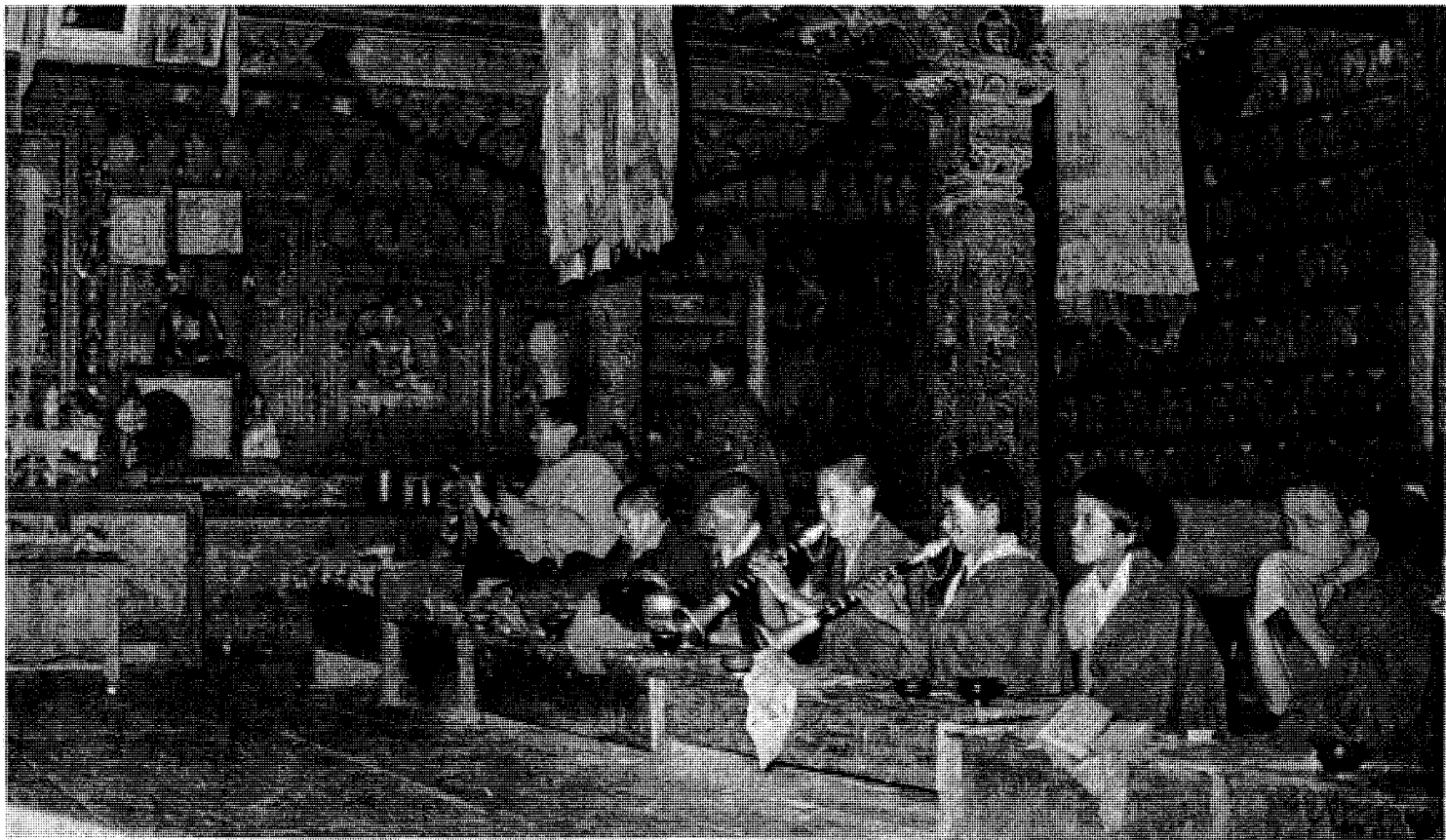
The advancement of a nun from probationary novice to *gyengi*, and from *gyengi* to the stage marked by the taking of the *rabdzung* vow, is not subject to a rigid time-table. Some nuns take the *rabdzung* vow early in their career while others take many years to acquire the necessary qualifications. There is no definite correlation between the position of *surba* and *thiba* on the one hand and the attainment of scholarly and spiritual status signified by the admission to the *rabdzung* vow. Nuns such as Sange Chirgin (House 20) have not yet taken the *rabdzung* vow but enjoy the status of *thiba*, whereas some of the *surba* living outside the *gompa* precincts have taken the *rabdzung* vow.



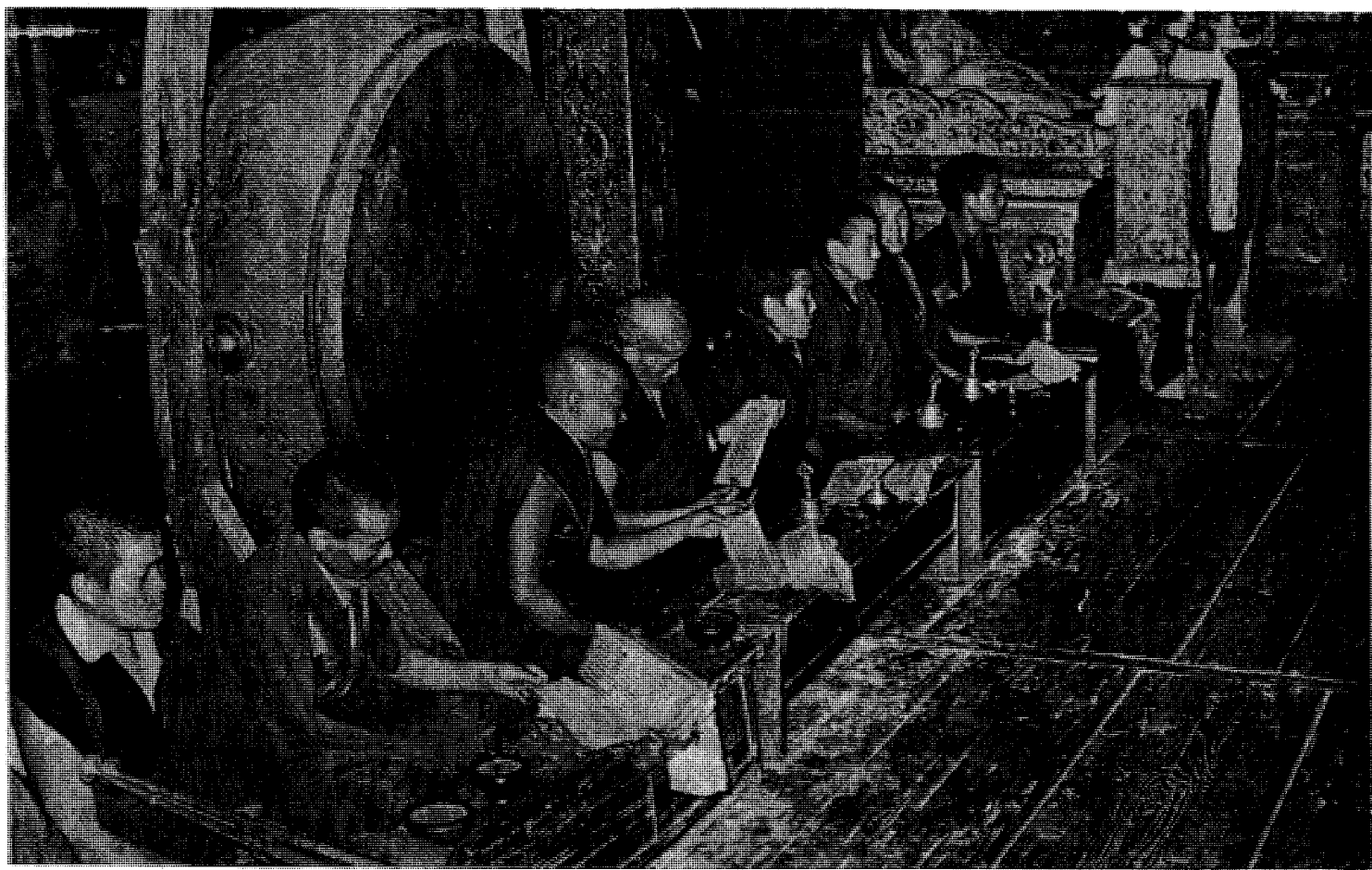
1. Tashi *gompa* with the house of the Guru Lama in the right foreground



2. Part of the line of nun's quarters facing the vegetable garden.



3. The Guru Lama and nuns during a *tsho* rite in the main hall (*duang*)



4. Nuns reciting scriptures during a *tsho* rite in the *duang*.

The composition of the community of nuns living at Tashi *gompa* is fluid. As nuns die or leave the *gompa* because they lack vocation or get involved in a love affair, which will usually lead to marriage, others apply for admission, and if acceptable, join the *gompa* in the first instance as novices and ultimately as fully privileged nuns. The motivation and circumstances of the individual nuns vary widely, and rather than attempting any generalizations I propose to give brief case-histories of all the nuns who were resident at the time of my stay in Tashi *gompa*. Most of them were very willing to talk, but a few proved somewhat reticent, and this accounts for the uneven character of the following notes. The information is arranged according to the situation of the nuns' small houses which stand in two lines, enclosing a fruit and vegetable garden. While most of the nuns have individual households, a few share their house with a close friend or kinswoman.

Houses 1-13 stand in a line, broken only by the covered entrance which leads from the *gompa* courtyard to the nuns' quadrangle. They are built wall to wall with the doors facing the garden, in which the nuns have small individual plots. Houses 14-27 form an unbroken line at the lower end of the vegetable garden, and their doors and small verandas face the garden and the upper line of houses.

Each house consists of a single room in which the occupant or occupants sleep, cook, study and receive guests.

House 1. is inhabited by Chiangchup Droma, known also as Karma Dzolpa, the name she adopted at the time of taking the *rabdzung* vow, a Sherpa of Salaka clan from Dolongsa. Age 40 years. She shares her small quarter with her daughter Teshi Chuti (alias Chiamu Karma Chopal Droma), age 20 years.

Chiangchup Droma was married in Dolongsa, and some 6-7 years her after husband's death she entered Tashi *gompa* as *surba* (lay-nun). Her avowed purpose of becoming a nun was the gaining of merit. She cannot read the liturgical texts, but her daughter has learnt to read. Neither mother nor daughter have the status of *thiba*, but when the Tulku next comes to Tashi *gompa*, they both intend to become *thiba*, i.e. fully committed nuns.

Mother and daughter get all the supplies required for their maintenance from Dolongsa. Chiangchup Droma's husband had no brothers, and when he died his land passed to her and she has let it out, receiving as rent a share of the maize, wheat and millet grown on it. Her share of the crop is carried to Tashi *gompa* partly by her and her daughter, and partly by hired porters.

One of her brother's daughters is also a nun at Tashi *gompa* and lives in House 15.

House 2. Tashi Droma, a Sherpa of Salaka clan, age 51, came from Changku, and is the father's brother's daughter of Tashi Droma (House 11). She was married and was pregnant when her husband died. Ten years later, when she was 35 years old, she came to Tashi *gompa*, and brought her daughter, then 10 years old, with her. The daughter did not become a novice and died in the year of her arrival at Tashi *gompa*.

House 3. Sherpa Omu, also known as Hishi Omu, age 31, is the daughter of a Drukpa father and a Sherpa mother. Her father was Kusho Tendzen, one of the three nephews of the founder of Tashi *gompa*, and now lives at Tsum. He did not marry her mother and left her when Sherpa Omu was six months old. Her mother subsequently married a Sherpa of Choitang, a village near Bigu, but he too left her and is supposed to live in India.

Sherpa Omu entered Tashi *gompa* at the age of 18, and has since acquired a good knowledge of Tibetan scriptures and *gompa* ritual. Her mother's mother's sister was also a nun, and is believed to have been reborn as a man and to be now a monk at Bagan.

Sherpa Omu who had a hard childhood, and met her own father only once when she was 18, became a nun by her own volition. She receives material support from her mother, who is a daughter of the younger brother of the *misar* (headman) of Bigu village.

Thanks to her experience in ritual performances and outstanding personality she was put forward as candidate for the position of *umse*, and as the result of a compromise was chosen as *umse*-elect and deputy of the present *umse*.

House 4. Tserap Sangmu, age 32, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Lhonsa near Dunge. At the age of 18 she came to Tashi *gompa*, where her father's sister Sange Gyelmu (House 25) was a nun. Once when Sange Gyelmu visited her natal village, she followed her to Tashi *gompa*, and decided to become a nun. By that time her parents had died and she was living in the house of her father's younger brother. She twice took the *rabdzung* vow; once it was administered by a lama of Sun *gompa* and the second time by the Tulku of Tashi *gompa*.

Ever since she became a nun her mother's brothers, who live in Dunge, have supported her. Once a year she goes to Dunge, and is given money and *ghi*.

- House 5.** Ngawang Chutin, age 61, one of the two seniormost nuns of Tashi *gompa*, is a Tamang from Choitang village in the Charikot area. She came to Tashi *gompa* at the age of about 30, and before that time she had spent many years as a maid in the royal palace of Kathmandu. Her brother was a friend of the present Guru Lama, and from him she heard of Tashi *gompa*, which was then in the process of construction. She became interested and requested the king's permission to leave the royal service and to become a nun. Her request was granted and after spending two months in her home village she came to Tashi *gompa*. There she learnt to read but never mastered the art of writing. In 1973 she went on pilgrimage to Badogarai and there met the Dalai Lama.

Ngawang Chutin shares her house with her brother's daughter Tashi Tsiring, aged 17, whom she had brought to Tashi *gompa* at the age of seven after the death of the child's mother. Tashi Tsiring took the *rabdzung* vow at the age of 10. Ngawang Chutin's two brothers live in Choitang, and they send her cash, grain and butter. She has two sisters, one in Choitang and one living in Calcutta.

- House 6.** Urken Droma, age 36, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Jiri village, came to Tashi *gompa* at the age of 20. She had no relatives among the nuns but came with a friend on her own initiative. Her friend abandoned the idea of becoming a nun, even before she had cut her hair, but Urken Droma stayed on, and after two years took the *rabdzung* vow, administered by a lama of Sun *gompa*. Six years ago a reincarnated lama of Thimphu in Bhutan administered the *rabdzung* vow once more. She has a mother, an elder brother, and an elder as well as a younger sister. Once a year she visits her family in Jiri, and her brother gives her money as well as *ghi*. She never asks for lama from other people, and does not even beg food when travelling. Her sister's husband, who owns some 20 yak cattle cross breeds, rents a high pasture near Bigu and she sometimes goes to see him there.

Urken Droma has held the *gompa* positions of both *chorpen* and *niermu*.

House 7. Dorje Droma, age 40, is a Sherpa of Salaka clan, Her parents lived in the Maising settlement of Bigu, and both died within 15 days when she was 13 years old, her sister 9, and her brother 5. Earlier her parents had lived in Darjeeling, where her father worked in a bakery, and where both she and her sister were born. They had returned to Maising five years before their death, and had farmed the land they owned there. After their death Dorje Droma, let out their land and stayed on in their house with a Thami servant, living on the income from her land. She never married and at the age of 18 she entered Tashi *gompa* and became a nun. Her younger brother now lives in Bhutan and her younger sister is married in Garlate near Choitang.

She holds the *gompa*-post of *umse* and is expected to remain in this position for 7 days. Dorje Droma has landed property of her own, and lets her house and fields on share to Thamis.

House 8. Sangesomu, age 63, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Thibutang near Chautara. She has been at Tashi *gompa* ever since its foundation. Before that she was married, and had four children, two of whom died. Her husband went to India and died there. Leaving her small son, then 5 years old, with her parents'-in-law, she came to Tashi *gompa* taking her daughter with her. Both she and her daughter became nuns. Sangesomu applied herself to the study of Tibetan scriptures, and rising rapidly in the rankorder of nuns, ultimately became *umse*, a position she held for the usual seven year period. But her daughter, who is now 40 years old, left the nunnery and went to India, where she disappeared without trace.

Sangesomu had some land, but it was registered in her husband's name, and when she became a nun she gave it to her parents-in-law to preserve it for her son. When that son also went to India and her parents-in-law died, kinsmen of her late husband took over the land. Since then she has no income of her own, and depends entirely on alms. Every two days she goes to one of the houses of Bigu to beg, and sometimes she also goes to neighbouring villages, such as Bulung, Arampur and Dolongsa to collect food. When she is on one of those extended begging tours, she stays away for 4 to 6 days. She used to go also to Barabise to exchange grain for salt, which no doubt had come from Tibet. Previously she also visited *gompa* in Tibet, such as for instance Sun *gompa*.

Though Sangesomu is materially less well off than many of the younger nuns who receive regular support from their families,

she enjoys a respected position in the monastic community, is often to be found in the general kitchen drinking tea and eating with the nuns who look after the bodily needs of the Guru Lama. It is obvious that the other nuns would not allow her to suffer any hardship even if the frailty of old age should prevent her from going on her begging rounds.

House 9. Sange Droma, age 25, is a Tamang from Temal village near Balauti. She came to Tashi *gompa* 8 years ago, when she was 17 years old and unmarried. In her home village there is a small *gompa* and she had already become a nun when in the company of some older nuns from Temal she first visited Tashi *gompa*. Her companions occasionally came there and stayed from one or two months with friends in their quarters. Some time after that first visit Sange Droma came alone to Tashi *gompa* and asked to be admitted as a regular nun.

Her parents are still alive and she has one elder brother and four elder sisters, none of whom is a nun. The decision to come to Tashi *gompa* was her own, but she had the consent of her parents who continue to support her. At least once a year she visits her home and stays for some time with her family.

House 10. Lobsang Droma, age 36, is a Sherpa of Kambadze clan from Bigu, and a younger sister of the mother of Sherpa Omu (House 3). Her father, who died when she was an infant, was Kusho Lama, the younger brother of the *misar* Nim Pasang. She never married and entered the *gompa* at the age of about 20. Her mother died some four years ago, but she has there elder brothers, who support her, and two sisters.

House 11. Tuchi Droma, age 52, is a Sherpa of Salaka clan from Changku (near Ulag) some 3 days' walk from Bigu. For the past 12 years she has held the post of *konier* (sacristan). Before she became a nun she was married and she has one daughter. But when her husband died she became a nun, and 21 years ago she took the *rabdzung* vow at Tashi *gompa* through the person of its founder. All those nuns who took the *rabdzung* vow at that ceremony repeated it some 7 years later when the Tulku came to Tashi *gompa*. The ostensible reason for this repetition was the fact that on their own admittance they had eaten pork and onions and drunk *rakshi* when being entertained on their travels.

- House 12.** Chembal Chindu (alias Tsiring Llamu), age 20, is the illegitimate daughter of Kusho Pema, a Drukpa Lama from Bhutan, and a Sherpa woman of Salaka clan of Bigu. Kusho Pema was a brother's son of Ngawang Paldzen, the founder of Tashi *gompa*; Chembal Chindu's mother, Nim Droma, who is still alive, was a nun, but had to leave the *gompa* because of her association with Kusho Pema. She later married a Sherpa and now lives with a younger daughter in a house of her own not far from the *gompa*. Chembal Chindu entered the nunnery when she was 9 years old, and at first stayed with her mother's elder sister who was a nun. The latter died some years ago. Chembal Chindu now receives grain and clothes, but no money, from her mother. Her elder brother is in the service of the Dalai Lama, and said to be currently in Malaya.
- House 13.** Genden Droma, age 22, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Sailung, and the elder sister of Lobsang Chundu, one of the two monks acting as attendants to the Guru Lama. Genden Droma entered Tashi *gompa* 5 years ago together with Tamjen Droma (H. 24), and has already taken the *rabdzung* vow. Her parents are alive and supporting her, and she has also 3 younger brothers, and one younger sister.
- House 14.** Urken Palmu, age 29, a Sherpa of Kambadzen clan, from Dolongsa, shares the house with Pem Droma, age 16, of Chiawa clan, also from Dolongsa. Urken Palmu came to Tashi *gompa* 10 years ago. She was friendly with Sangesomu (House 8) and had been there on visits before becoming a nun. Her parents are alive and support her. As Dolongsa is near she goes there about once a month and fetches supplies from her home. She has one younger brother, two elder sisters, both of whom are married in Dolongsa, and one younger sister, Pem Droma, who is not yet a fully privileged nun, but has the status of *surba*. Her mother died when she was about 6 years old, and her father suggested to her to become a nun at Tashi *gompa*, where she has a kinswoman, Chiangchup Droma (House 1), who stands to her in the relationship of father's sister. She has one elder and one younger sister, but her only brother died. She visits her father about once a month and gets from him grain and clothes.
- House 15.** Sange Chensum, age 22, a Sherpa of Gardz clan from the Jagat settlement of Bigu, entered the *gompa* one year ago of her own free will

to acquire merit; there is no kinswoman of her among the nuns. She is still a *gyengi* (novice) and is being taught by Sherap Omu (H. 3) whom she regards as her guru. Her father died but her mother, four elder sisters, all married, and two elder brothers, support her. Sometimes she goes to help her family with the work on their fields. When the Tulku next visits Tashi *gompa* she will take the *rabdzung* vow.

House 16. Karsang Droma, age 35, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Dunge (east of Jiri), came about 16 years ago. She was never married and came by herself and had no friends or kinswomen among the nuns. At that time her mother was still alive, but she has neither brother nor sister. Her father went to India after she was born, and was never heard of again. Till her death her mother stayed with her own brothers. Karsang Droma's only relatives are her father's brother's sons, and she sometimes stays with them at their *goth* (herdsmen's settlement) at Rali, but they do not support her and apart from her share in the *gompa* income, she depends on alms and fees for ritual services.

House 17. Chembal Sangmu, age 22, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Choitang (near Bigu), holds the important *gompa* post of *chorpen*. She was sent to Tashi *gompa* by her father 14 years ago, to join her mother's sister who was a nun there and whose quarters she shared until her death 3 years ago. At the age of 13 Chembal Sangmu took the *rabdzung* vow. Her parents are still alive, and she has two younger sisters, and one elder and one younger brother. From her parents she gets all necessary supplies of food and occasionally also cash. Her home is only one hour's walk from Tashi *gompa* and she often goes there.

Chembal Sangmu now shares her quarters with a novice, Tensing Droma, a Sherpa girl, 20 years old, from Dolongsa, who came only recently and is still *surba*. She has no kinswomen among the nuns, but was acquainted with several of the nuns whose home-village is also Dolongsa. Tensing Droma's parents are alive and support her; she also has one elder and one younger sister as well as a younger brother.

House 18. Pema, age 32, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Dunge. She was married and came to Tashi *gompa* 1 1/2 years ago after her hus-

band's death. She had two children, but both of them had died too. As she joined the *gompa* only recently she has not yet taken the *rabdzung* vow and has still the status of *surba*. She has no relatives among the nuns of the *gompa*, and arrived accompanied by her elder brother. Her parents are still alive, and support her, and she has one elder and 4 younger brothers as well as 4 younger sisters.

House 19. Tsangdzum Sangmu, age 55, a Sherpa of Salaka clan from Jiri, is one of the oldest residents. She came 40 years ago, and remembers the time when the Guru Lama's house was being built. She has never been married, and after first coming to Tashi *gompa* and having her hair shaved off, she returned for some time to Jiri and lived there as a nun. Even after finally settling in Tashi *gompa* she remained for several years *surba* and was given the status of *thiba* on the same day as Sange Gyelmu (House 25) and Hishi Droma (House 26). Her seniority in the *gompa* counts only from that day. For 17 years she held the position of *niermu* (manager) and for some years she was *kutum*.

She receives support from her relatives. She has many brothers' daughters who are very wealthy.

House 20. Sange Chiring, age 26, a Sherpa of Kambadzen clan from Kartele Dulugpa (near Bigu). Her father is a village-lama and her brother is a monk staying at present in Thimpu (Bhutan) with the Tulku, i.e. the reincarnation, of the founder of Tashi *gompa*. Sange Chiring was never married and has been in Tashi *gompa* for the past four years. Although she has not yet taken the *rabdzung* vow she has the status of *thiba*. Her parents are alive and support her; she has an elder and a younger sister.

House 21. Da Droma, age 32, a Sherpa of Gardza clan from Chongku (near Ladu), holds the position of *niermu*, and as such manages the kitchen and general household affairs of the *gompa*. She is the elder brother's daughter of Tuchi Droma (House 11) and is also related to Tashi Droma (House 2). She was never married and came at the age of 19. Her two cousins were already at Tashi *gompa*; they had come there 4 years earlier, and when she saw them becoming nuns and being happy at the *gompa*, she joined them of her own free will. Her parents are still alive, and she visits them at least once a year; they supply her with grain and also give her some money.

- House 22.** Kerab Droma (alias Tames Dzangmu), age 23, is a Tamang from Sailung. She came to Tashi *gompa* 5 years ago. The Guru Lama and Kusho Tsetso had visited her village and had accepted her as a nun, cutting off her hair then and there, and bringing her with them to Tashi *gompa*. Her father's sister, Samden Droma (House 23) came at the same time. Kerab Droma has already taken the *rabdzung* vow. She has three brothers, who support her, and one elder and three younger sisters.
- House 23.** Samden Droma, (alias Damje Omu), age 42, is a Tamang from Dorumba is the Sailung area, and related to Kerab Droma (House 22). Eight years ago she came to Tashi *gompa* of her own accord. She has been married and had one son. Her husband died and when subsequently her son, aged 8, also died, she sold all her property and brought the money with her. She has neither parents, nor brothers or sisters. But her father's younger brother and her father's sister support her, and she visits them once a year. As her home-village is 5 days' journey from Tashi *gompa*, her relatives give her money rather than grain. Only after coming to Tashi *gompa* did she learn to read, and when she had progressed sufficiently she took the *rabdzung* vow.
- House 24.** Tamjen Droma, age 30, is a Tamang from the Sailung area. She was never married and six years ago she came to Tashi *gompa* with the Guru Lama, who has visited Sailung. Three years later she took the *rabdzung* vow. Her mother is alive and she has an elder brother who supports her. Once a year she visits her home and stays there for one month. Her brother gives her grain and hires porters to help him carry the grain to Tashi *gompa*.
- House 25.** Sange Gyelmu, age 38, is a Sherpa of Gardza clan, from Lungsamba (near Jiri). When she was about 16 she and two of her sisters came to Tashi *gompa*. While her sisters, who had no desire to become nuns, returned home, she decided to stay and seek admission to the *gompa* community. In this decision she was not influenced by her parents, who are alive and give her material support. She has one brother and six sisters, all of whom are married. Once a year she visits her home, and returns with gifts of grain, butter and cash.

House 26. Hishi Droma, aged 49, a Sherpa of Lama Sherwa clan from Tarkeyang in Yelmu, had become a nun before she had even heard of Tashi *gompa*. When she was a young girl, Lama Ngawang Palzend, who became the founder of Tashi *gompa*, came to Gerung above Tarkeyang. She went to visit the place and was so impressed by his personality that she became a nun without even telling her parents. Later she went back to her village and her parents provided her with clothes and provisions. Then she went on pilgrimage to several *gompa* in Tibet. On her return Lama Ngawang Paldzen advised her not to continue going on pilgrimage but to join the nuns at Tashi *gompa*. By the time she did so she was about 25 years old, and there were only about 12 nuns at Tashi *gompa*, all much older than Hishi Droma. She had learnt some reading and writing in Yelmu, and she continued her studies at Tashi *gompa*. Finally she went to take the *rabdzung* vow at Bagan; it was administered by Kusho Tsetso and eight *gelung*. For seven years she held the position of *umse*, and whenever the Guru Lama went on tour she was the effective head of the *gompa*. She held this post until 1973. Her family always supported her and when she recently had a serious illness her sister sent her money via Lama Kusho Tsetso. She has one brother and 3 younger sisters, and her mother, aged 79, is still alive.

House 27. Sange Chegi (alias Bakti Ama), age 20, is the only Thami in the nun-nury, and is the daughter of a local *jankri* (shaman). As a young girl Sange Chegi was ill for a long time, and her father thought that her illness might be caused by his work as a shaman which involved the sacrificing of animals. He approached the Guru Lama, vowed to follow Buddhist teaching, went to meditate in a hermitage, and sent his daughter to the *gompa* to become a nun. The Guru Lama accepted her and when the reincarnate lama came to Bigu he ceremoniously cut her hair. Sange Chegi's health improved, but even now she is not strong. Her father relapsed into his practice as a shaman, but the girl continues to live as a nun in Tashi *gompa*. The quarters in which she lives has been empty ever since the death of the previous occupant 3 years ago. Sange Chegi often visits her parents' house, which is close to the *gompa*, and gets from them all necessary supplies.

The data contained in the above house-list demonstrate clearly that the great majority of nuns entered Tashi *gompa* as young unmarried girls. While 23 of the nuns have never been married only 6 nuns are widows who came to Tashi *gompa* after their husbands' death. The numbers of those who have or had relatives among the nuns are equally balanced; 14 of the nuns have kinswomen among the members of the community, and 15 came to Tashi *gompa* without finding a relative among the nuns. The latter category, however, contains nuns who have co-villagers among the other inmates of Tashi *gompa*. The information obtained in the course of the compilation of the house-list also shows that with the exception of five nuns who came as children or adolescents to stay with older kinswomen, all the nuns entered the *gompa* on their own initiative, or at least of their own free will.

It is difficult to determine what causes a young Sherpa or Tamang girl to leave her own village and renounce all prospects of marriage and motherhood and accept the many restrictions of a nun's life. One of the basic motivations for such a decision is undoubtedly the conviction deeply ingrained in Buddhist ideology that the attainment of religious merit is a path to future good fortune through favourable reincarnations as well as to peace and contentment in this life. There is moreover the undoubted fact that in Sherpa and perhaps to a lesser degree Tamang society the status of those associated with a major *gompa* is still surrounded with prestige and a certain glamour. This stems at least partly from the impressive splendour and artistic sophistication of *gompa* services, which form the main focal points for cultural creativeness. One can well imagine that the more sensitive among young people of both sexes are attracted to the participation in rituals, the performance of which arouses the awe and admiration of laymen used to the simplicity of daily life in their small mountain villages. Though nuns as well as monks live under a discipline which imposes stringent sanctions on lapses from the chosen path of celibacy, most Buddhist clerics are neither puritanical nor unduly sanctimonious. Inmates of a monastery or nunnery are not cut off from the life and normal pleasures of lay-society. Nuns are free to accept hospitality in village houses and may pay extended visits to their families. They are allowed to attend weddings and other domestic celebrations, and though the drinking of alcoholic beverages by monks and nuns is frowned upon in practice many nuns partake of beer and occasionally even distilled liquor in modest quantities.

Watching nuns at their domestic tasks and communal activities such as work on the fields one cannot help being impressed by their amiability and good humour. Particularly among groups of young nuns there is always laughter and hilarity, and one feels that the girls really enjoy life in the *gompa*-community and do not pine for the even freer life in their home-villages.

Some of the more articulate nuns voiced the opinion that it was better to become a nun than to marry. "If one marries," said an old nun who had been married and was widowed, "one is happy at first, but later many troubles arise, and one is likely to become unhappy;—in the long run nuns have a better life than married women. The worst a nun can do is to leave the *gompa* and get married. Such a breach of one's vows inevitably results in a painful fate in one's next reincarnation." The latter view is by no means generally held, and married women, who had been nuns, believe that they can gain merit by good works and are clearly not in fear of a bad incarnation.

Sherap Omu (House 3), one of the most intelligent younger nuns suggested that those nuns who came from a difficult family background and had experienced hardship as children appreciated the peaceful life in a *gompa* whereas young nuns who had happy memories of home often craved for family life and were more likely to leave the *gompa* in order to get married. Sherap Omu nevertheless thought that it was preferable to be a nun rather than a wife: "As a married woman, one has to worry about one's husband, one's children and one's parents, and whether they had all enough food. As a nun one may have to care for one's old mother but when she dies one is quite free". Her hope is to be reincarnated as a god or at least as a human, preferably as a man. "As a woman one is always inferior", she argued, "however much one learns one is never given as much respect as a lama. Even corrupt lamas are still treated with some respect; a man can lead a sinful life, and yet later become a lama and be considered superior to any woman".

Despite the rule that nuns leaving the *gompa* have to pay a fine, no great obstacles are placed in the way of those wanting to get married. However, Sangesomu (House 8), who has been at Tashi *gompa* ever since its foundation remembered only three cases of nuns being expelled because of love-affairs and all three married the man with whom they had associated. In addition to paying fines into the *gompa* funds they had to offer tea to all the nuns, burn butterlamps, and bow 108 times to the nuns "because they had left the *dharma*." One of these ex-nuns is the wife of the Bhutanese painter Teshi Ongdi who lives in a house close to the *gompa*, and she told me that in her case the fine for leaving the *gompa* was only Rs 70. She is on excellent terms with the nuns and is not made to feel guilty about her defection.

This attitude towards nuns who return to secular life coincides entirely with the treatment of ex-nuns and ex-monks in the Sherpa society of Khumbu. (cf. *The Sherpas of Nepal*, p. 278.)

GOMPA AND VILLAGE COMMUNITY

Most monastic communities of Nepal have close links with the lay-folk of nearby villages and Tashi *gompa* is no exception. Without the initiative and efforts of the village-headman Nim Pasang, the father of the present *misar* Tsiring Ngundu, Tashi *gompa* would never have come into existence, and its inmates enjoy up to this day the moral and material support of the villagers of Bigu.

The settlements comprised within the administrative unit of Bigu are spread over the slopes and ledges of a wide valley, and within each settlement the individual homesteads are also widely scattered, interspersed by fields and pastures. The total number of households within Bigu panchayat is 337, but among these only Sherpa households are directly concerned with the affairs of the *gompa*, though Magars, Thamis and Chetris may make occasional donations and certainly consider the Guru Lama and the nuns with respect and affection. The settlements topographically closest to Tashi *gompa* have the following composition in terms of households :

<i>Tashigaon:</i>	13 Sherpa (clans : Gonba, Khambachen, Salaka and Gardza)
	3 Thami
<i>Jagat:</i>	2 Sherpa (Gardza)
	3 Magar
<i>Sisarkhani:</i>	2 Sherpa (Khambachen)
<i>Maising:</i>	4 Sherpa (Khambachen, Gonba, Salaka)
<i>Donko:</i>	3 Sherpa (Salaka, Khambachen)
<i>Pankharma:</i>	6 Sherpa (Salaka)
	1 Drukpa
	2 Thami
<i>Tsemkharka:</i>	4 Sherpa (Salaka, Gardza)
<i>Jimthang:</i>	15 Sherpa (Salaka, Khambachen, Chaba)
<i>Babung:</i>	1 Sherpa (Salaka)
	1 Thami
<i>Darkha:</i>	1 Sherpa (Gardza)
	1 Kami
<i>Kaptang:</i>	2 Sherpa (Gardza)
<i>Chutapdara:</i>	5 Sherpa (Salaka)
<i>Chuidak:</i>	3 Sherpa (Khambachen)
<i>Usthali:</i>	3 Sherpa (Salaka, Khambachen, Gonba)

In the settlements on the lower slopes, and hence at a greater distance from Tashi *gompa*, Thamis, Magars and Chetris predominate, although there too a few

isolated Sherpa households are found.

Long before Tashi *gompa* was founded Bigu had already a village *gompa*, situated several hundred feet further down in the settlement of Jagat. This *gompa*, which is surrounded by a profusion of ancient *chorten* and *mani*-walls, retains its function as the focal point of village rites, and its care is in the hands of a set of *gompa* officials entirely distinct from the personnel of Tashi *gompa*.

The village *gompa* is a small, rectangular building painted white like all the dwelling houses. The widespread custom of painting religious buildings pink does not extend to this area. The decorations in the interior are simple but comprise some quite competent frescoes painted by the Drukpa painter, living in Pankharma settlement, who assisted also in the painting of Tashi *gompa*. As the village *gompa* is Nyingmapa a statue of Guru Rimpoche occupies the central place on the altar. The statues are primitive but well maintained.

A Sherpa living in a nearby house serves as *konier* (sacristan) and two lamas, married men who otherwise lead the life of ordinary householders, preside at the seasonal rites. The most important of these rites, known as Narak, resembles in many ways the Dumje festival of the Khumbu Sherpas. The arrangements for this rite are made by five villagers, referred to as *jintak* who correspond to the *lawa* of Khumbu.⁵ But unlike the *lawa* of the Khumbu villages they are not appointed in strict rotation from among all the householders. The *jintak* are villagers who have volunteered to provide the food and materials for the celebration, and to pay the fees of the ministering lamas. There are moreover two *guthi*, funds donated to the *gompa*, and these are used for the giving of loans to villagers, who in return contribute provisions for the *gompa* celebrations. Unlike the Dumje, which is held during the monsoon, the Narak is celebrated in the autumn at about the same time as the Hindu Dassain festival, and according to one of the lamas in conscious opposition to the Dassain ritual of other ethnic groups which involves the sacrifice of goats and sheep objectionable to the Buddhist Sherpas. The nuns of Tashi *gompa* are not in the habit of attending the whole of the Narak rites, but on the last days of the festival the organisers usually ask the nuns to play oboes (*geling*) because there are not sufficient lamas in the village to provide the full complement of musical instruments required for the ritual.

Apart from the two married lamas associated with the village *gompa*, there are two other lamas living at Bigu. One of them is Gelung Lobsang, a young celibate local Sherpa, who built himself a small house above Tashi *gompa* but spends much of his time at the Kargyupa monastery of Chulungkharka in Solu. There a Tibetan reincarnated lama has established a monastery with some 30 monks and 15 nuns, and Gelung Lobsang considers him as his guru.

⁵. Cf. *The Sherpas of Nepal*, pp. 185-188.

The second lama not attached to Tashi *gompa* is Mingma Lama, a Sherpa of Gazrdza clan, who also built a small house in Tashigaon. He was married and had two sons. After his wife's death he divided his property, giving one third to each of his sons, and keeping one third to maintain himself. However, the latter share is being managed by his younger son, who gives the produce to his father. Thus Mingma Lama, can devote himself mainly to religious practices.

It thus seems that the religious life of the Sherpa community of Bigu is by no means concentrated exclusively in Tashi *gompa*, but that there is room for the continuance of ritual performances based on the village *gompa* and for religious practitioners unattached to the nunnery.

This is not the place for an ethnographic account of the Sherpas of the Bigu area, but a brief description of the economy supporting the religious activities of the community is necessary for an understanding of the total situation.

The Sherpas are basically hill-farmers, who divide their energies between agriculture and animal husbandry. Wheat, barley, millet, and potatoes are their main crops, and the climate of Bigu permits the cultivation of winter as well as monsoon crops. Yak and *dzomu* (cross-breeds between yak and cow), favoured for the sake of their ample milk-yield, are kept for most of the year on pastures of varying altitude. On the lower pastures the herdsmen live in temporary shelters of wooden posts and mats. But at higher altitudes they have houses built of stone and roofed with wooden planks like the Khumbu Sherpas. The number of yak and cross-breeds owned by the Sherpas of the Bigu was about 250 in 1974. The high price of *ghi* (clarified butter) and the improvement of communications thanks to the construction of the motor-road leading from Kathmandu to Barabise has increased the profitability of dairy-herds, and cattle owners derive most of their cash income from the sale of *ghi*. The change of the political situation in Tibet, on the other hand, has created difficulties for the movements of herds across the borders. Before the Chinese occupation of Tibet there was an open border between Nepal and the neighbouring districts of Tibet, and the Bigu Sherpas freely used pastures on the Tibetan side of the border. Even today they are still able to use some pastures inside Tibet, but these are limited and the Sherpas have to pay grazing fees to an office in the Chinese border town of Khasa.

The Sherpas' trade with Tibet has been severely restricted by the Chinese authorities, though some border trade continues. Before the Chinese intervention in 1959 the headmen of Bigu and other wealthy Sherpas traded widely in Tibet, travelling as far as Kuti, Tingri and Shigatse, and travelling via Tibet to Gangtok. In those days some of the Sherpas concentrated mainly on trade and dairy-farming, while others devoted themselves mainly to agriculture. Nowadays the nature of

the trade has changed, because the Sherpas of Nepal may go only as far as the Chinese trading post close to the border. While in the old days the Tibetans were mainly in need of grain, and bought also Nepalese handmade paper, dyes, sugar and hides, the Chinese controlling the trade are mainly interested in obtaining fruit, vegetables, fowls as well as some rice and wheat. Oranges, which the Sherpas obtain from the Nepalese population of the lower regions, are now an important item of trade, and for 100 oranges the Chinese pay 4 *pathi* (4 gallon) salt. A strong porter can carry as many as 1,000 oranges, and as the men going to trade in Tibet cannot carry all the salt back, they exchange some for shoes, matches and cigarettes which are available in the border villages. The Chinese seldom pay in cash, but for the commodities they want for their own consumption they pay relatively high prices in salt. Thus one chicken is bartered for 6 *pathi* salt, and good prices are paid for pumpkins and other vegetables.

Some of the nuns of Tashi *gompa* still go to trade in Tibet. Recently four of the younger nuns went to Khasa to trade with the Chinese. Each carried 2 *pathi* of maize and exchanged it for twice the volume of salt. They told me that the Chinese officials encouraged them to come again and said that they had no objection to nuns entering China for the purpose of trade. Buddhist monks from Nepal also go for trade to Khasa.

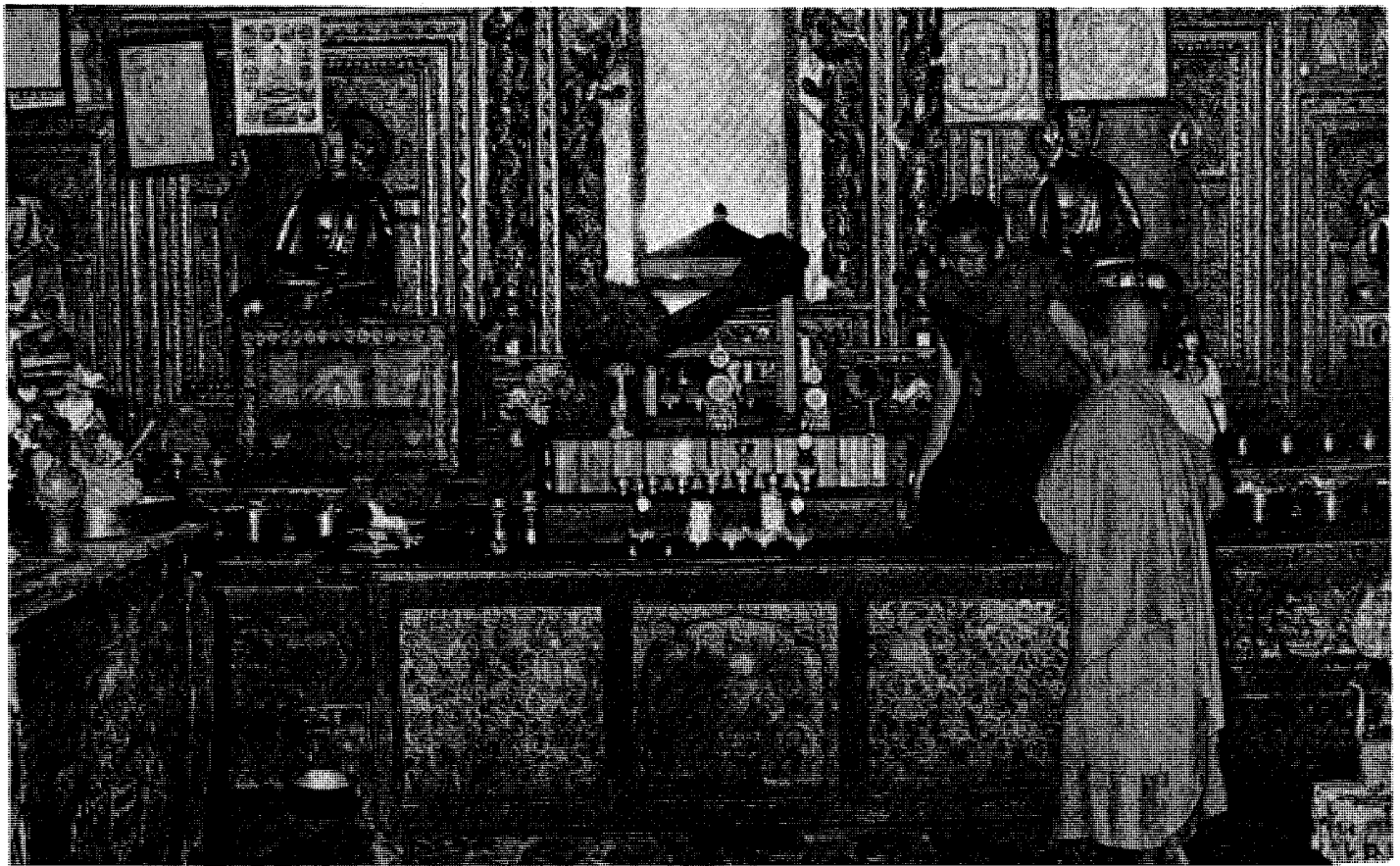
Though conservative and traditional, particularly in the pursuance of their religious practices, the people of Bigu are by no means inward-looking. Lamas and nuns go on distant journeys, mainly to visit centres of pilgrimage but also for trade, and laymen travel widely in search of work and commercial opportunities. One of the wealthiest Sherpas of Bigu, who now keeps a shop in his house in Maising hamlet, started life as a monk in Bagan, but after nine years of monastic life, joined one of the Gurkha regiments of the British army. Subsequently he went to Darjeeling where he ran a vegetable business. This commercial interlude was followed by a period of service in the Indian police, and after this he worked as a contractor in the Punjab.

Finally, however, he returned to Bigu and bought land with his savings. Of his five sons only one is with him in Bigu, while the others are in the Punjab, in Dehra Dun, in Kathmandu and in Chiapu. While this may be an extreme case, many of the Sherpa laymen and also many of the nuns have travelled in India, Sikkim or Bhutan. Yet, these experiences do not seem to make them restless, and the nuns, at least, seem to be very contented with their peaceful life at Tashi *gompa*. The large proportion of young nuns would seem to indicate that despite the awareness of the outside world there is as yet no trend away from monastic ideals such as has become apparent in the case of Tengboche and other monastic centres of Khumbu and Solu.





7. The Guru Lama with a group of nuns on the steps of Tashi gompa.



8. The main altar in the *duang* of Tashi gompa.

Only the future will show whether Tashi *gompa* can survive as a centre of religious devotion and culture, but for the time being it certainly offers the opportunity of observing the functioning of a small Buddhist community unshaken in the faith which inspired countless generations of Tibetans and Sherpas, and is now gaining rather than losing ground among the Tamangs of a region extending as far as Risingo and Sailung. Indeed there are indications that the influence of Kusho Tsetu, and the dedicated nuns of Tashi *gompa* has been instrumental in the establishment of a new monastic centre at Sailung right in the heart of the Tamang country. There used to be an old *gompa* inside Dorumba village, and some years ago a Tamang donated a site on a nearby hill in the name of Kusho Tsetu, who provided the inspiration and initiative for the plan of establishing a larger *gompa*. The local Tamangs of the Sailung area collected funds for the construction of the new *gompa*, and some people gave as much as Rs. 200-300 or substantial quantities of rice to feed the construction workers. In 1972 Sange Gyelmu of Tashi *gompa* went to Sailung, but at that time the *gompa* was not yet completed. Sange Gyelmu and Genden Droma stayed for a year at Sailung, and other nuns of Tashi *gompa* went there for some months at a time to help with the establishment of the new *gompa*. Now the images have been transferred from the old to the new *gompa* it is essential that at the very least one nun is permanently there to care for the images and also the small garden which has been laid out. There was the intention that the *gompa* should ultimately be staffed by monks, but as it takes time to collect sufficient monks for the establishment of a new monastery, nuns from Tashi *gompa* have taken it on themselves to look after the new religious centre. If successful it might come to play among the Tamangs a role similar to that of Tashi *gompa* in the Bigu area.

As far as one can judge from fragmentary documents and local traditions Buddhism has experienced various periods of expansion as well as of contraction all along the southern fringe of the Tibetan culture sphere. In regions such as the upper Arun valley or some parts of the Gurung country it would seem to have has a short-lived efflorescence and has now taken a downgrade course, whereas in Khumbu and Solu several new monasteries were established within the past half century. Tashi *gompa* provides an example of the recent foundation of a new religious centre, and the history, structure and operation of the small community of nuns therefore seemed worth recording.

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VIEWS FROM THE MONASTERY KITCHEN*

Fieldwork with Tibetan Monks and Nuns

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Kathmandu

It is morning again. From the *lha-khai*, across the courtyard the chanting has already begun. The Himalayan air is cold and until the sun rises it is best to remain inside; in the monastery kitchen, the best seat is near the huge black ovens. I settle myself on my thick woolen mat close to the desk of Chagdzo, the manager. It is from that desk and by means of those ovens combined together within the blackened kitchen of the monastery that the affairs of his Buddhist community are administered and supported. It is from the vantage point of the kitchen with its constant provision of butter tea, the comradery of the monks and the industry of the nuns that I have settled myself to research the day to day expression of Tibetan Buddhism.

Like all the men and women in the community Chagdzo is clad in purple: an ankle length skirt of wool wrapped tightly with a woolen belt, and on top he wears a knitted red sweater over his orange sleeveless blouse. In order to remain free for the vigorous domestic matters that keep him in constant motion throughout the day Chagdzo discards his monastic cape here. The other nuns and monks working with him are also too active to encumber themselves with the layers of formal robes. My comrades of the kitchen contrast with the motionless row of lotus-seated monks and nuns whose chanting is heard from across the courtyard. The elegantly adorned shrine, the *lha-khai*, pulses with the rhythm of their sutra-chanting, and its painted walls are alive with benevolent as well as wrathful manifestations of hundreds of Tibetan deities all alight from the scores of butter lamps flickering around the hall.

The kitchen rather dark by comparison, but after my eyes become accustomed to the smoke and the murmuring style of speech, it is clear that the constant movement of people here, the continual directives emanating from here and the endless swarm of chores in progress together make this a more instructional situation in which to study the practice of living Buddhism. Sitting in the kitchen and

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watching, it becomes apparent that Chagdzo is the key figure in the affairs of the entire monastery, and it is from his desk that much of the activities are orchestrated. What is proceeding in the shrine is, so to speak, the finished product: the delivery to the gods. The scholarship and art of the ritual liturgy have emerged only after there has been a process of education, of production and of coordination between kitchen and altar, between layman and cleric having been negotiated by Chagdzo and his cadre of monks and nuns. This system had become a traditional procedure, but it is also practical for Chagdzo to conduct his operations from the kitchen, and that is where you usually find him. Half of the low-ceilinged blackened room is lined with platforms covered with woolen Tibetan mats, the other half house the huge oven and storage shelves. At the sides are piled firewood and pots, and there is an enormous caldron storing fresh cold water. Just barely visible by the firelight thrown against the wall is an emblem scratched in white above the caldron: a drawing of the tashi dargya, the eight auspicious symbols. Above that are written the Tibetan letters ལྷ་མཚན་ an invocation to the water god. The vessel itself is filled from a rubber hose, newly imported, which extends to the ceiling and across to the door. Outside, it disappears over the monastery roof as it makes its way to the auspicious water spring discovered not far from the compound. There are no chairs or tables, leaving the centre of the room relatively free for the constant traffic. The main entrance into the courtyard is at one end—at the other side, opposite the main door is another entrance leading into the less frequented chamber, the storeroom where all the monastic supplies—from bolts of cloth to sacks of tsampa flour—are kept under lock and key. Three small cupboards are set in the corners of the sitting-platforms between the mats, providing a kind of elbow desk for Chagdzo, myself and anyone else sitting along here. At one end, just beyond my own platform seat is a small iron stove like the potbellied variety we use in our own winter cottages. This provides a separate facility where an old cook—servant of the lama prepares meals for him, for his aged mother, for Chagdzo and for me. All others are served out of those enormous brass caldrons on the main stove where two buxom nuns constantly lift and stir. Since there are no chimneys or open windows, over the years the mud walls have become blackened, but each New Year when decorations are made, those dusty walls are brightened by graphic and naturalistic designs.

These are white marks, made by dabbings of the thumb which has first been dampened and set with flour. White dots are pressed on a line so as to make a fretted border all the way around the room 3 feet above our platforms. Above that border the walls are embellished with images, dotted outlines of birds, fish, flowers and ribbons. Months later now, traces of these white designs against the black wall of the kitchen convey the sense of cherishment and care, even if they

are unlike the elegant, colourful more serious venerabilia we find reverberating from the walls of the assembly hall.

The nuns and monks in the kitchen function as extensions of the lama and Chagdzo; each is occupied with his own job but all work together with pride and a sense of service to the lama. Theirs too is religious work, as important as that of their fellow *chös-pa* who chant sutras in the *lha-khari*. The kitchen team constitutes a kind of select group chosen to do particular activities, and thereby enjoys a degree of freedom from the chanting routine. At the same time they acquire a closer and more intimate access to the lama, the abbot whom they serve. The kitchen is the link between the lama and the rest of the community. Secluded in his chamber or enthroned at the front of the shrine, the lama sends instructions directly to the kitchen where Chagdzo sees they are carried out. One young monk in the kitchen is the *chös-pön*, as serious and quiet boy who as master of the votive offerings is required to spend a great deal of time here decorating the offerings, cleaning, polishing and refilling the butter lamps, and preparing other ritual objects. Two blackened, shy nuns and another youth serve tea and help prepare meals. They are untiring and cheerful, busily shifting vessels of food, polishing and scouring pots, pumping gallon after gallon of Tibetan tea. Much energy is spent churning the liquid with butter and salt in long wooden tubes to emulsify the generous quantities of butter. While the old servant who cooks for the lama prepares item after item of the most delicate of Tibetan cuisine, another old monk remains seated in apparent oblivion wrapped in his shawl, stooped over a text. Motionless for most of the day, he mutters through the syllables as he puzzles some grammatical issue the lama has called him here to resolve. The sunny mountainside does not appeal to the scholar and he prefers the conviviality and hot tea at his disposal in the kitchen. Straining at his texts in the near darkness, he mumbles his monotone without end. But he frequently interrupts himself to join our conversations or to toy with my camera and tape recorder. He periodically fingers through my field-notebook poised with red pencil in search of spelling mistakes among the Tibetan words he can recognize scattered through the pages. If unable to find a spelling error my inspector offers to elaborate on certain lexicographical issues, adding synonyms and derivatives into my text. However, when I invite him to become my grammar teacher, he declines saying he has only to finish this text for the lama and will return to the village to live with his son. But he examines my notebook again and teases me at the letters— རྩམས་ — cause, appearing alone among a page of English words. That such an abstract concept could appear in isolation is for him a source of hilarity and he chuckles and slaps his thigh intermittently throughout the day.

Quietly, although purposefully, individual monks and nuns enter the kitchen from the courtyard approaching Chagdzo with deference as they extend for his inspection pieces of their work, assignments he delegated in the morning. One woman has been doing calligraphy, copying a text borrowed from another lama's library, and Chagdzo knows by examining the consistency of the ink and the spacing of the letters whether it is good copywork. Another nun who has spent the week pounding paper in order to give it a smoother finish also appears here twice a day, and returns to a room off the main courtyard to continue her pounding. The monastery has a tailor, not a full monk although with shaven head, who comes here for a week or two at a time to stitch ceremonial garments, canopies, and hats. Others who catch Chagdzo in mid-stride asking for his inspection and advice are nuns engaged in printing prayer-flags, polishing butter-lamps, and preparing inks and dyes. Although relaxed and familiar, each bends in deference waiting for Chagdzo's instructions. If there are any doubts he takes it to the lama who oversees everything. There is constant movement and conversation, yet all proceeds with neither-noise nor flurry; each task and each person is given due attention.

Still, Chagdzo always has an eye on his watch—an alarm clock sits on a shelf at his elbow. It has been set for mid-day to remind him of the visit he must make to the huts above the temple where repairs are needed. There are only two other items besides these clocks that constitute Chagdzo's office equipment: a lidless cash box made from a discarded cookie tin, and a somewhat more efficient, looking account book, a black diary bound in western style. In this, throughout the day, Chagdzo jots lists of numbers and names with an ancient red fountain pen he had been given in the 1940's by an Everest explorer who passed through his former monastery in Tibet. As for the cash box it is not so much a receptacle as it is a target for the bits of currency Chagdzo tosses its way. Although chief treasurer of the monastery, Chagdzo appears impatient when dealing directly with cash, and simply drops bills anywhere around his cushion. Despite this apparent unconcern Chagdzo is attentive to the smallest detail and is sharply aware of all the financial transactions of the community. If he allows himself to rest for a moment, he sets his eyes on a thought. Preoccupied, he unconsciously twitches his fingers around the edge of his chin, occasionally lifting his pinched thumb and forefinger to inspect a thread of hair that has been captured. This random plucking is the Tibetan method of shaving.

Chagdzo's ear is particularly alert for two sounds, both of which move him from his place with startling alacrity. One is the signal from the buzzer, set in the

ceiling below the lama's chamber by which the lama summons his chief servant and administrator. As soon as he hears it, Chagdzo is off his mat and has disappeared up the narrow stairway into the silent room above where none but the most intimate servants are permitted. The other sound that enjoins Chagdzo's attention pulsates across the courtyard penetrating the very walls of the kitchen. This is the deep drone of the monks's chanting combined with the booming of the long brass horns and conch shells. They come from the main hall of the shrine where behind the four guardians painted on the outside foyer, over a hundred monks and nuns are assembled in ritual offering. From the clashing gongs and cymbals mixed with seemingly unintelligible rumblings of the sutrachanting, Chagdzo identifies the progress of the ritual and sees that in the kitchen the appropriate offerings are prepared. Whatever his preoccupation he does not miss a signal. His kitchen staff, the cooks and the young *chös-pön*, and the other attendant whose duty it is to serve tea and prepare materials for the lama are all equally alert, not a second behind Chagdzo. They are ready with their brimming kettles, trays, ladles to move between the kitchen and the shrine back and forth with precision and confidence, each man and woman handling his role with equal dignity.

The *chös-pön*, a young monk of no more than twenty called Losang, acts as apprentice to Chagdzo and regularly consults him. He proceeds nevertheless with his duties as if fully trained. He enters the kitchen from the assembly hall and unobtrusively approaches Chagdzo's desk holding in one hand a sparkling silver chalice, this time filled with white curd. From the edge of the bowl with his other hand the young monk lifts a slender silver spoon filled with the glistening liquid to which Chagdzo offers his own palm. The curd is poured into it and without formality or hesitation Chagdzo draws his cupped hand towards his mouth and licks away the curd. As he does so the boy has moved on towards my mat inviting me to partake of the offering. I repeat Chagdzo's gesture while Losang proceeds to each of the others in the kitchen.

Those assembled in the shrine have already partaken of this portion of the offering and have moved on to the offering of sweetwater which likewise will be circulated to the kitchen staff. Just as are the chanting assembly we too are members of the community. When *tsog* is offered each individual in the community must receive a portion; not even the dog is overlooked and the cooks will see that some scraps remain to throw to the birds. Predictably, moments after the curd and sweetwater have been distributed, the main plate of *tsog* arrives, one for each of us and again I am given mine after Chagdzo. This offering plate consists of a cooked rice packed into the shape of a cone, about a pound in weight and coated

with a red food dye. Called *torma*, this rice is the basic element in the offering but the other items usually accompany it: a sweet (manufactured) cookie, a fried donut-like Tibetan biscuit, some popped corn, glazed candy (again, manufactured), and a chip of dried meat, brown and crisp with age but nevertheless delicious. While most members of the community are either in the kitchen or the assembly hall there are a few, the aged and frail or those involved in special meditative exercises who remain in their private huts scattered around the hill above the main temple compound. Equal members of the community, they are also entitled to share the *tsog*, and either a cook or one of their kinsmen in the assembly sees that a portion is delivered to their huts. A religious gathering, whether it is a monthly assembly or a permanent community, is for its members a community in which everyone is regarded with equal respect and accommodation; while each person retains his individuality and may enjoy his particular possessions and offices, there is a strong sense of sharing with and contributing to the work of the lama and to his selfless service of religion. This is symbolized in the *tsog*, the plate of offerings, which means literally: the group.

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I remember my own privileged visit to a small monastic centre lying remote and withdrawn where, following the tradition of extensive meditation set by its recluse leader, all the monks and nuns remain for months at a time in their own huts meditating. There is no assembly in a communal shrine. On the auspicious occasion coinciding with my visit to this impoverished but nevertheless intense community, one of its members, a monk of fifty-five received a very special initiation from the lama. He had just completed the rigorous but prestigious meditative exercise requiring him to remain secluded and mute for three years, three months and three days. Apart from the lama, the *chagdzo* and two others who had been invited to assist in the preparations, all the other monks and nuns remained in retreat, each in his own hut or cave set individually into the mountainside. As part of his initiation, after the solemn and climactic offering of the mandala, the lama bestowed new powers and a new name on the monk. Following that ceremony the monk distributed the *tsog*. The kitchen, hardly more than a shed, had come to life for two days as *torma* and sweets were prepared. A niece of the man, a nun about 22 years of age, had been to the distant bazaar for provisions for this special ceremony. The initiation itself was modest, attended by only the honoured monk's kinsmen and those few of us visiting the lama. At the end of the ceremony, the initiate, assisted by his niece and me, carried laden trays of *tsog*, out to the sequestered men and women.

Sometimes, as we approached the fenced-in courtyard of a cave, all we saw

was a bare arm reaching out to accept a share of the offering after which it withdrew and the robed figure retreated into the darkness of the private dwelling. Meditation is usually carried out in seclusion and total silence so that not even words of congratulations or thanks are exchanged. At one dwelling hardly discernable from the surrounding rocks and foliage, there was no response to our tap on the wooden barrier. We slid the tray under the gate hoping the monk would awaken and fetch it before the birds came for their share. We visited more than thirty huts here. Since each was secluded and some distance from the next, we had walked over several acres of mountainside before we had finished.

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So here in this monastery kitchen the ovens are always hot and fresh tea is always being brewed. Food offering and distribution is a central activity in these religious communities and it is not difficult to understand why the kitchen is a focal point. As such it is the ideal meeting place. This is where visiting kinsmen, officers of the monastery, novices, businessmen and travellers congregate. Although one side of the kitchen is taken up with the ovens, the piles of wood and scattered pots and caldrons, the area nearest the entrance leading out to the courtyard and shrine is relatively uncluttered. Matted platforms are set against the wall available for the arrival and comfort of a guest.

The openness and readiness to accommodate anyone in the kitchen applies to visitors and members of the community, and extends most certainly to the anthropologist. Although there are rarely more than three at any given time, outside visitors to the monastery are frequent. Today, Tensin, has arrived. He enters the gate of the temple courtyard, by passing the shrine although it is apparent there is a religious service in progress. The chanting continues from behind the doors. On the steps are scores of pairs of empty shoes left scattered around by the praying monks and nuns. Tensin proceeds into the kitchen to announce himself. He has walked for several hours; as is customary the *gonpa* is some distance above the last village. He has bundles of baggage he is eager to unload. Although his is not a familiar face, this man is not a total stranger. Someone has undoubtedly recognized him and sent word to his daughter, a nun here, that he has arrived. Any others of his kinsmen living here will be informed in the same quiet and unobtrusive way. There is no buzz of gossip, no excited call, and no flurry of questions to break the pattern of routine and movement in the community. This response to the visitor is another part of that ability of the monastery to accommodate the needs of whomever enters its orbit.

The man's welcome inside the kitchen is also quiet, and there is apparent neither delight nor disturbance of any sort occasioned by his arrival. Knowing a

message will be conveyed to his daughter, he silently accepts the hospitality of the kitchen, climbs onto a mat near the door and again, without a comment or appearing to notice, allows a bowl of hot buttery tea to be poured for him. Eventually there is an enquiry about his village and about his companion, for people do not usually travel any distance alone in these mountains, not even a sturdy trader. The cook-nun returns now and invites him to lift the bowl. Tensin drinks, talks, and the bowl is refilled several times before his daughter appears. She has been with the others in the *lha-khañ*, participating in the recitation which today is the invocation to the chief patron of this community, the Lord Padmasambhava. She has been excused for a few hours now that her kinsman has arrived. She shows none of the excitement she feels but waits attentively for instructions from the Chagdzo as to what assistance she might provide. Only later will she have an opportunity to hear the eagerly awaited news from her family and village friends, and to open the gifts of food and cloth her father has brought. Meanwhile she slips out as quietly as she entered, taking his bags to her but beyond the main compound where she begins brewing a cup of tea at her corner hearth. Later she will prepare a bed for her father who Chagdzo has suggested will share the tiny dwelling during his stay here.

One of the reasons Tensin has come at this time is to request a divination from the lama on the forthcoming betrothal of his son at home; he may also consult the lama about the progress of his daughter and whether or not it is advisable for the girl's grandmother, widowed last year, to come and live with her in the monastery. Last year at the time of his father's death, Tensin came here to make the lama the *ngö-rten* offering and request the special funerary recitation that every lama must bestow on his devotee. The abbot of this monastery, as the *Tsebai Lama* of both Tensin and of the father is obliged to perform such life-crisis rites even though he does not see the corpse or visit the home of the deceased man. Now, since a year has passed it is time for the son of that dead man to sponsor a memorial rite.

Arrangements for this will be made, upon advice of the lama, during the few days Tensin is here. Whether a visitor's purpose in coming here is personal or religious, he has first to consult Chagdzo, who then makes the appropriate arrangements: his accommodation, and audience with the lama, accounts for services performed and materials needed. Laymen come with specific requests and generally do not spend much time in the *lha-khañ* where from dawn to dark every day the monks and nuns are assembled, chanting and making offerings on behalf of such visitors. There is a recognized code of reciprocation between the monks, trained and skilled in communicating with the superior forces, and the more susceptible

he come for the relief and assistance the rituals can effect, happy to pay for these services, and in turn the monks and nuns fulfilling the traditional role of the Sangha oriented towards serving their patrons, are obliged to respond. There is therefore no reason for a layman to interfere with the ritual or to participate by joining the monks and nuns. He gains more merit by allowing them to work for him as well as continuing their own spiritual studies. It is only at the climactic point in the ceremony when the *tsog* is offered that he enters the shrine; even then he remains for no more than an hour. Contrary to his relaxed demeanor in kitchen, he appears awestruck and subdued, prostrating three times before entering the shrine. The lama may or may not be presiding, but the man makes the symbolic layman whose worldly preoccupations inflict him with pain and distress. And so presentation of a white *karthag* to the throne and drapes additional scarves at the base of the icons of patron deities glistening in their benign and gracious opulence. Here the awe of the visitor is in contrast to the occupied and relaxed attitude of the assembled monks and nuns who, not appearing to notice Tensin's arrival and departure, proceed with their work.

After sitting for a while in deference to those gods who have been summoned and assembled for his *tsog*, the visitor makes a quiet exit. The rest of the day, if it is sunny, he wanders about the courtyard muttering mantras, or sits against a warm wall away from the wind fingering his prayer beads. Rising, he circumambulates the shrine that continues to pulse with the chanting. Most of the time however Tensin remains with us in the kitchen; if he does not volunteer his help, he will be invited to assist in a minor domestic chore which still permits him to engage in our conversations. Although he was almost as stranger on his first day, within a short time Tensin becomes part of the trust and conviviality that pervade this community. It is easy for me to ask Tensin some of the many questions on my mind; he responds freely to those about his family and village, but hesitates to be explicit about his religious beliefs evading those of my questions relating to the subject. It is not because he cannot articulate his views; rather he prefers to express his religious attitude by emphasizing his devotion to his lama. A devotee, lay or cleric, if he is serious about religious matters has a *Tsebai Lama*, a guru to whom he owes obeisance who in turn becomes his teacher and advisor. What the lama imparts to his devotee is between the two of them, and the latter, if he is not specifically initiated to pass on the doctrine to others has no right to instruct or to explain religion, not even to a well-meaning anthropologist. But *dharma* or *choga* are in any case too abstract, not the subject of conversation among those in either kitchen or monastery. What they will talk about is their own lama. A devotee will eagerly engage in a long tribute to his lama: the story of the lama's discovery and boyhood, the miracles he performed, with whom he studied, the

events he prophesied, the centres he consecrated, the reliquaries he constructed or those he visited, for lamas also go on pilgrimages; we will be provided with figures of the lama's financial assets, his richest and most prestigious sponsors, the size of the crowds attending his lectures, the number of novices he initiates each year, and numerous minute details of the patriarch's personal idiosyncracies. This recounting, like the writing of a biography of a saint or master, is a highly regarded act of piety as well as a sign of one's religious learning. Extolling the virtues of one's lama is for the Tibetan Buddhist an appropriate way of expressing his beliefs: his lama is for him the embodiment of his Buddhist ideals, the model of selflessness, of compassion, of knowledge applied towards relieving the suffering of all sentient beings. The devotee recognizes in his lama, a man who having experienced hardships has gone on to surpass both the difficulties and the desires from which they arise. Simply to recognize these qualities in one's teacher is to show an acceptance of the Buddhist ideals and a loyalty to them.

Not only laymen but also monks and nuns avoid my specific questions about religious matters, referring me each time directly to the lama, their own teacher. Having failed to obtain any instructive hints from the visitor Tensin or his daughter, a demure and intelligent nun already familiar with much of the liturgy, I decided to turn to the ancient mumbling monk, sitting near me in the kitchen, stooped over his texts. Since he had volunteered to mark my spelling, it seemed probable he might respond equally enthusiastically to my doctrinal queries. But he suggested simply that I should improve my English calligraphy which he clearly was less carefully exercised than my Tibetan script.

I look again at Chagdzo, my most accommodating host who seemed to take a degree of responsibility in facilitating my work. He granted the nuns and monks permission to leave their work in order that I might interview each individually: he allowed my long talks in the lama's chamber to continue uninterrupted, and he confided in me some of the details of his own difficult youth, but not once did Chagdzo undertake to instruct me in anything but technical matters. He informed me of budget management, of the scheduling of rituals, what ingredients must be added in which type of offerings, of the various offices and training procedures at the monastery as well as details of its economy. He often anticipated what might be of interest to me. For example, when sitting in the kitchen together, if Chagdzo, alerted by a particular pulse of the gongs and bells to the arrival of a colorful part in the ceremony in progress across the courtyard he prompts me to move into the *lha-khan*. Remaining at his desk he sees that my tea bowl and a cushion are transferred to my seat among the row of nuns. Chagdzo only appears in the shrine during those periods of the day that the lama is enthroned there leading the ritual, and at

those times you will usually find me there as well. Here again Chagdzo takes it upon himself to alert me by subtle eye signals from his own position beside the throne as to where I should position myself for photographing, recording and notating the highlights of the ceremony.

Chagdzo, as the highest office next to the lama, could be interpreted as a secular rank: the administrative arm of the religious leader representing a division of authority between religious and secular. This is not the case however; the office of Chagdzo can be reached only by way of many years of training and study in the academic, artistic and administrative skills and their underlying religious principles and culture. Chagdzo is forty-eight now, but he joined a monastery at the age of ten first taking instruction from his maternal uncle with whom he lived. Over the last thirty-eight years he has trained by working in every office and at every monastic art: as *umseh*, cymbalist and master of the ritual; *chös-pön*, master of the offerings; *khon ner*, the temple keeper; *ge kyo*, chief disciplinarian; he trained on each of the ritual instruments: gyeling horn, durm, conch shell and trumpets. He has learned the arts of cooking, calligraphy, printing, accounting, grammar, painting and ceremonial design as well as the preparation of tablets, amulets and other curatives and purifying agents to be dispensed by the lama.

These skills combined with the understanding of *dharma* and liturgy enable Chagdzo to assist and advise a devotee coming to see the lama. First, before Tensin is to have his audience with the lama, he has to prepare his symbolic offering in the kitchen where, borrowing a tray from the cook, he proceeds to prepare his gifts. Grain is heaped to a peak, laced with a few cellophane-wrapped candies, dates or raisins brought from a distant market, and then crowned with some bills of currency that have been rolled and set firmly into the pile of grain. Chagdzo assists the slightly nervous devotee with the arrangement of the plate for it must look beautiful as well as correct and opulent. To finish it off he provides Tensin with a newly washed white *karthag* which he then drapes over the tray. After every thing is set, Tensin is poured another cup of tea while Chagdzo checks with the lama. He returns shortly, having announced the visitor and instructs Tensin to proceed with his tray up the separate guest's stairway to the chamber. The private conference between the man and his teacher may last but a moment, but some are longer. Invariably Chagdzo is summoned either to serve tea to the lama and his guest or to be consulted on schedules and stores.

After his final audience Tensin has returned to the kitchen, not entranced by a charisma of a living Buddha, but rather mindful of each syllable of advice he had been given. He sips his tea while initiating arrangements with Chagdzo after

the lama's diagnoses. Again combining his technical, administrative and liturgical knowledge Chagdzo is able to implement the necessary proceedings. In this case the lama has divined that Tensin observe his father's memorial by planting a prayer flag in the fields above the temple here. It is agreed that the white muslin for the flag may be purchased from the monastery store and then stamped with the assistance of two nuns familiar with the block-printing process. Tensin will also have the *Dom-bum* read for his father, but that is to be arranged by local monks when he returns to his village. Meanwhile Chagdzo pushes ahead with preparations for the prayer flag offerings, instructing Tensin to fetch an ax from the corner and cut-down a tree 25 feet high for the pole of the flag. One of the nuns, a kinswoman of the deceased father is to prepare the cloth and is thus freed from a day of chanting. The cloth to be used is fifteen inches wide and eighteen feet long; it is washed and dried and then dampened again just before printing. Another nun prepares the ink, a glue-based liquid made from charcoal powder collected off the bottom of cooking vessels. Water is gradually added to the powder in a long tedious process of mixing and stirring in a stone mortar borrowed from the calligraphy room. All this together with the printing is supervised by Chagdzo. A corner of the platform in the kitchen is cleared away to become the printing table, and when the ink is ready we can begin. The block, engraved with a mirror image of the prayer to be set, is brought from the library and the cloth is dampened and stretched. While one helper swabs the face of the block, two nuns pull a lengthwise section of the cloth taut above the block. They rest it down squarely and then press the cloth with the palms of their hands to ensure it takes up a strong image. The prayer block is not changed. The printing is repeated again and again, moving the narrow strip of muslin down of foot or so at a time, so in the end we have what appears to be one long continuous image of lines of syllables. Chagdzo oversees the entire exercise which with the care it receives is not complete until the late afternoon. The block is washed thoroughly and reshelved with countless others in a dark corner of the library, and the printed sheet is strung to dry in the courtyard. On the third day before Tensin departs for his village, at the auspicious time designated by the lama the pole is prepared for raising. The prayer cloth is tacked to the pole along its entire edge so that the flag flutters all the way down the eighteen feet of its length. Then a colourful canopy of blue, white, yellow and red bands sewn together by the monastery tailor is pinned into the top of the pole, and with cheers to the gods it is raised in one thrust by all available hands from the kitchen. Even Chagdzo accompanies us to above the temple where the launching takes place. *Kyi kyi lha-sol-wa, lha-sol-awa.*

Perhaps I could have made a paper copy of that prayer and set about to translate it; or, I might have climbed further up the mountain to one of those lofty

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Himalayan huts to meditate and eat nettles; I could possible have set out over the hills in search of a hermit yogini to initiate me; but instead I rejoined Chagdzo and the cooks and the young monks below in the kitchen preparing more tea.

* * *

LIMBU WOMEN, DIVORCE, AND THE DOMESTIC CYCLE

Shirley Kurz Jones and Rex Jones

New York

I INTRODUCTION ¹

In this essay we examine the problem of Limbu marital stability from a woman's perspective. We maintain that the decision making powers of a Limbu woman in marriage are powers which she holds by virtue of her status as a socially productive adult. The analysis further suggests that the economic role of women is extremely important in marriage. A woman's position in Limbu society is not limited to her status as a domestic or childbearer. She brings cash into the household and actively participates in agricultural production. Her productivity and the recognition of this productivity by others are key variables in her ability to accomplish her desires.

Anthropologists have long recognized that females play an important role in marital stability. Theoretical explanations of marital stability and divorce have suggested that variables such as bride price, the degree of integration of the woman into her husband's kin group, divided loyalties of the wife, or the economic role of women play a part in the maintenance or dissolution of a marriage.² Many of

¹ Field research was conducted jointly by the authors in 1967-1969 in the area of Tehrathum Bazar, Eastern Nepal. A grant by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Research Foundation of the State University of New York, Stony Brook, in the fall of 1975 made possible a return visit by Rex Jones. The latter research project attempted to test the central thesis of this paper through accumulated survey data.

² Some of the earlier researchers correlated marital stability with variations in the payment of high brideprice (Brown 1932). This correlation was rejected by Evans-Pritchard (1934) who considered it naive to explain the maintenance of marriage as due to economic motives. Following Evans/Pritchard, Max Gluckman (1950) suggested that both the divorce rate and the amount of exchange at marriage were rooted in the social structure. Gluckman hypothesized that divorce correlated with the variable of descent; that is, low divorce rate, while societies with less marked "father right", e. g. patilineal, would have a low divorce rate, while societies with less marked "father right" e. g. bilineal and matrilineal, would have a high divorce rate. Fallers (1957) and Lewis (1962) attempted to modify and refine the Gluckman hypothesis, while still explaining marital stability in terms of descent. Fallers suggested that patrilineal corporate groups tend to disrupt marriage by dividing the loyalties of the spouses. He hypothesized that in patrilineal societies divorce correlates with the degree to which the woman is absorbed into her husband's lineage. Lewis, on the other

these suggestions, however, look upon women merely as objects manipulated by the male world around them. We attempt here to look at Limbu women's roles subjectively, e. g., that Limbu women are active strategists who can make and execute decisions about their own lives.³ Marital stability is viewed in terms of the decisions which individuals must make in order to undertake, maintain, or dissolve a marriage relationship.

In societies such as the Limbu, where marriage functions as a system of alliances to unite families (Jones 1973:278-279), anthropologists have frequently viewed women as pawns in the political games men play and marriage as a tool on the political battlefield. In Limbu society contracting marriages largely rests on the decisions made by men with an eye to the formation of alliances widespread over the Limbu area. However, the maintenance and dissolution of a marriage relationship seems vitally effected by the actions of women. Invariably, it is the Limbu

hand, suggested that divorce in patrilineal societies was correlated not with the degree to which the woman is absorbed into her husband's lineage, but with the degree to which her own agnatic kin ties are dissolved by marriage. Leach (1957) criticized the use of descent as a variable in marriage stability. Leach draws a distinction between genetricial rights and jural rights. He argues that in situations where a woman loses rights over her children (genetricial rights) but maintains membership in her own descent group (jural rights), she is presented with a situation of divided loyalties which brings tensions to the marriage. In such situation, the sibling tie remain stronger than the affinal tie, and if tensions are great enough, it may result in divorce or separation. Recently, anthropologists have returned to economic variables in explaining divorce, suggesting that the economic role of the wife plays a part in the maintenance of marriage. Cohen (1961: 1246) suggests that among the Kanuri of Nigeria, economic independence of women facilitates the breakdown in traditional patterns of male authority within the conjugal household and men become dependent upon female services - a primary factor in marital dissatisfaction.

Lloyd (1968:68), notes that among the African Yourba, women have a high measure of economic independence as a result of occupations in crafts and trade. This is cited as a frequent cause of jealousy and envy between Yoruba men and women, and many times leads to marital quarrels, accusations of witchcraft, and divorce or marriage instability. Strathern (1972) notes that in Mount Hagen, New Guinea, the role of women as "luasi-transactors" who facilitate exchange relations between their husband and their brothers puts them in a position to challenge male dominance and sabotage the exchange system by divorcing their husbands. Jones (1973) suggests that marital stability among the Limbu is correlated to the degree of economic independence of women.

³ See Lamphere (1974) for recent attempts to look at domestic group politics in terms of strategies which women employ to achieve their desired ends.

woman who ends a marriage by leaving her husband and running off with another man. We see the ability of Limbu women to take such actions as an indication of the decision-making power of Limbu women within the domestic cycle, despite a decidedly patrilineal bias in Limbu society (Jones and Jones 1976; Chapter 3).

II THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

The Limbu inhabit an area of approximately 4,500 square miles located in the hill region of far eastern Nepal, known locally as Limbuan. Historically, the Limbu were the original inhabitants of Limbuan, but today they live in a plural society as a result of the conquest of the first king of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah, and the subsequent immigration of high-caste Hindus into the area.

The Limbu do not live in nucleated villages, but in homesteads dispersed up and down the steep hillsides. At most, two or three houses may be clustered together in a settlement, often sharing a common courtyard. Although a family's fields are usually in the general vicinity of the house, patterns of sale and mortgage often result in scattered holdings. Permanent bazaar towns are located in seven or eight areas, approximately one to two day's walk apart. These bazaar towns are largely populated by Newars who have migrated from the Kathmandu valley and consist of anywhere from twenty to one hundred small shops at which can be purchased a wide variety of imported goods. Each bazaar town has a weekly market called a *hāt bajār* to which hill men and women bring grain, vegetable produce, animals, cloth, salt, pottery and a variety of other village manufactured products for sale. Small *hāt bajār* are held twice a month in areas located far from a permanent bazaar town (Sagant 1968-69).

The principal domestic animals raised in Limbuan are cattle, waterbuffalo, pigs, goats, and chickens. The milk of both the waterbuffalo and the cow is used for drinking, the production of ghee, and the manufacture of yogurt. Oxen are used for plowing, while the meat of the male buffalo is eaten by most castes. Pigs, goats, and chickens are all raised for food with restrictions on their consumption varying with caste affiliation. The Limbu eat the meat of most of these animals, although members of certain lineages may refrain from eating one species or another. Cows and water buffalo are more frequently owned by Brahmans and Chetris due to dietary restrictions and greater accumulation of wealth. Pigs, which are ritually important for the Limbu, are the domestic animals most frequently raised by the Limbu.

A sexual division of labor is common to many tasks performed by the Limbu. Women weave cloth, mats, and brew beer. Men make baskets, looms, fishnets, and small stools. The only Limbu craft speciality in the Tehrathum area was a man

who made bamboo stools (*mura*) and was generally known as the *mura*-maker. Women generally cook and process foods, carry water, and cut firewood. Men, however, cook when along on the trail or on ceremonial occasions. Only men hunt and fish, neither of which is very important in today's economy. A division of labor by sex is evident in certain phases of agricultural production. The strictest rule is that only men may plow. Women usually follow behind the plow, broadcasting seeds. Cultivation and harvesting may be done by members of either sex. Children of both sexes also have specific tasks to perform. They herd animals during the agricultural season, watch their younger siblings, and aid their parents in tasks of agricultural production and food processing.

III THE LIMBU WOMAN'S ROLE IN PRODUCTION

For purposes of the analysis of Limbu women's economic roles, the Limbu economy may be grouped into three spheres of economic activity: the state, the Limbu indigenous system, and the market. The state sphere consists of institutions which reflect the penetration of the central government into the affairs of Limbuan. Central to this sphere is a government sanctioned hierarchy regulating inter-caste social relations, land distribution, and taxation. Changes in this hierarchy reflect changes in government policy which have led to the concentration of productive land in the hands of a few elite Limbu and high-caste Hindus (Caplan 1970; Jones 1976). The Limbu indigenous sphere consists of the institutions which regulate the relations of production between Limbus in their own community. Participation in these institutions is based on membership in a Limbu patrilineage, common residence in a local area, or both. The institutions of the market sphere regulate economic exchange between Limbu and non-Limbu. Individual Limbu sell their labor and the products of their labor to members of other ethnic groups in the marketplace, some of which, such as the permanent and weekly bazaars, are located in the hills, while others are located beyond the boundaries of Limbuan.

While Limbu women are generally denied access to the political and economic institutions of the state sphere, they are active producers in the institutions of both the Limbu indigenous sphere and the market sphere. Although the struggle for land over the past two hundred years has resulted in the formation of class-like divisions even among the Limbu community (Jones 1976 a), the institutions which organize subsistence production for most Limbu are basically egalitarian. Female participation in these institutions carries with it the status of social adulthood. Furthermore, women are active producers in the cash economy, both as wage laborers and producers of goods which they sell to shopkeepers or in the marketplace. A short survey of all adult married women in three Limbu villages near the

Tehrathum Bazar revealed that over 98% were either engaged in wage labor, or the production and sale of liquor, beer, and cloth, or both. What follows is a brief summary of the role of the Limbu woman in economic production.

In the Limbu indigenous sphere, participation in economic activities are based on sex, age, membership in kinship groups, and residence in a local area. These activities center around the ownership and control of land under the system of *kipat* tenure.⁴ There are three categories of relatives with which a Limbu may unite in relations of production (Jones: 1972:9): (1) the *bongsoli* (patrilineal kinsmen, or "relatives by the bone"), (2) the *mamoli* (mother's brothers), "relatives by the flesh", and (3) the *kutumba* (affinal relatives). These categories and their subdivisions form the basic units which are utilized to organize both land and labor. The economic significance of each of these units depends upon whether ego is a male or female.

For a man, the primary social category from which he acquires access to land and with whom he will join in productive relations throughout his life are his patrilineal kinsmen. He has some residual rights in the land known as *kipat* of his mother's brother's kinsmen, but may only receive land from and become part of this productive unit if land is plentiful enough for such a grant. For a man, economic relations with this affines are secondary, and involve distribution of goods in marriage exchange payments and the acquisition of a wife, who becomes part of his household's productive unit. Occasionally, he may, however, become a part of the productive unit of this group if his father-in-law has no sons.

For a woman, her patrilineal kinsmen and her affines are of more equal importance, as she is, at various points in her life, an active productive member of both her natal household and of her husband's household. If she remains unmarried, she may receive an inheritance from the lands of her patrilineage and continue as a member of the productive unit of her natal home. If she marries, she herself inherits no land from her natal group, but upon residence in her husband's home, she becomes a member of his productive unit. With the birth of children and the establishment of a separate household, she acquires certain economic decision-

⁴ Under the system of *kipat* tenure, Limbus have exclusive rights to land as a result of membership in an ethnic group, e.g. the Limbu community. These rights are contrasted to freehold tenure known as *raikar*, which are state controlled. The *kipat* tenure system and its implications for the Limbu community have been analyzed by Caplan (1970) and Jones (1976a). The Lands Act of 1964 effectively abolished *kipat*, but as late as the fall of 1975, a complete land survey in Limbuan had not been completed and the tenure system was still very much in existence.

making powers, particularly if her husband is absent in migratory wage labor. On her husband's death she receives a portion of his lands for maintenance of herself and her younger children.

A woman whose husband takes a second wife after she has children has even greater independence in economic decision making. She can demand that her husband give her half of his property and establish her in a separate household. Although she cannot sell the property, she keeps it in trust for her children and has near total control over agricultural production on her share of land, making all decisions as to planting, harvesting and distribution of crops (Caplan: 1970:42). Even after she marries, the patrilineal kinsmen of a Limbu woman provide her with economic security. Upon her marriage, she is often given a part of the bride-price as her personal property, in the form of gold or silver jewelry. Her independence in her husband's household seems to vary with the size of this property. The young married girl may spend considerable time, even years, living and working in her natal household, and as an adult with children, she makes extended visits to her natal home.

Most productive activities carried out by women are done in close cooperation with the other girls and women of the household and localized lineage in which they live. Although each household forms a unit of consumption, most other economic activities are carried out communally. Most Limbu houses are very small, and are mainly used for eating and sleeping. All other activities take place in the courtyards, the fields, the forests, or the bazaar towns near by. Even when the tasks performed by women could be done efficiently by just one person, women usually work together for companionship.

Women are responsible for many of the tasks of agricultural production, processing food, weaving cloth and mats, and supplying the household with food and water. Young girls learn to carry out these tasks by observing their mothers, aunts, older sisters and cousins as they perform these tasks together. We often saw young girls of eleven to thirteen accompanying the other women of the localized lineage to the forest to fetch wood with tiny baskets which they filled with wood for the household.

Certain phases of agricultural production, particularly planting and harvesting, require the cooperation of a labor force large than the household or localized lineage. The Limbus who live within a local area assist each other through a complex network of mutual labor exchange. Members of a household will act as hosts for a labor gang of friends and neighbours that meet to help them plant and harvest. The hosts supply beer and a snack, and a festive air prevails. Each household keeps a strict account of how much labor it owes and is owed. This labor of men and women is regarded as equivalent, and a man might send his daughter to assist

a neighbor whose son came to aid him in his harvest (Caplan 1970:108-9). Households that need more labor than they are able to return pay a daily wage to some of the people who assist them.

There are ample opportunities for Limbu women to participate in the activities of the market sphere, both in and out of Limbuan. While generally only men become migratory wage laborers, either as soldiers or agricultural workers, women work for wages as domestics and local agricultural workers. The bulk of the cash earned by women comes from the sale of goods that a woman produces herself. The goods Limbu women produce for sale include beer, liquor, brewer's yeast, cloth and flattened rice. Yeast, cloth, and flattened rice are sold by the women in the weekly bazars. Home brew and distilled liquor, being illegal, are not sold openly in the market, but are frequently brought to the *hāt bajār* on market day and sold to shopkeepers. More frequently, these products are sold from Limbu houses along the roads leading to the *hāt bajār*. Cash earned from the sale of these products is kept by the individual who produce and sold them. Women use any cash they save to buy gold and silver jewelry which then serves as a kind of personal bank account, the spending of which they control. If a woman is married, she often uses this cash or savings for the purchase of household utensils, food, or other necessities, particularly in times of emergency.

IV DIVORCE AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

In Limbuan both the bride and groom make decisions concerning their marriage. A courtship institution called the *dhān nāch* (Jones 1976b) enables Limbu men to meet marriageable girls from a wide area. Weddings, market days, and other holidays provide occasions when young people can organize these dances with marriageable partners. When a young man and his family have accumulated enough goods to make the initial marriage payments with which the marriage process begins, the prospective groom has considerable latitude in choosing his own bride and it is he, along with a male kinsman, who goes in search of a bride. In the event that he is already married and has no male children, or if otherwise strongly motivated, he can always take a second wife. Although a woman's choice in arranged marriages is limited to the right of refusal, a number of options are available which serve to give the Limbu woman considerable decision-making powers over where she will live and who she will marry: (1) She may remain unmarried and inherit property along with her brothers; (2) in an arranged marriage (*māgi bihā*) she may choose to live in her natal home for periods ranging up to ten or fifteen years; (3) he may elope with a man of her choice, thereby circumventing the wishes of her parents (*chori bihā*); or (4) finally, if dissatisfied with her marriage

altogether, she may choose to leave her husband and run off with another man (*jāri bihā*).

Very few Limbu women take up permanent residence in their husband's household immediately after marriage. Little more than adolescents when they marry, Limbu brides often return to their natal households along with their female relatives and friends who have formed their wedding party. At most, they may stay in their husband's house a few weeks. When they return to their natal home, they resume their role as daughter in the household, rejoining their friends at work and at play until the birth of a child, often three to five years later. During the initial phase of a woman's marriage, the husband makes periodic visits to his wife, occasionally bringing her home with him for a few days or weeks, while he and his family make annual payments of meat, liquor, and cash to the bride's family to cement the marriage contract. Despite the interest both families have in maintaining the marriage, should a woman be dissatisfied with the marriage, the long periods of residence in her natal home enables her to meet other marriageable Limbu men, particularly on the occasions of a *dhān nāch*. She may end the marriage by running away with another man, an acceptable form of Limbu divorce providing compensation is paid.

Fluctuations in periods of marital stability seem to correlate with developmental phases in the domestic cycle of the Limbu family. The domestic cycle of the Limbu has been described as follows (Jones 1972:17):

“within the patrilineal kingroup, there are three sets of living relatives to whom ego must relate with different behavior patterns of familiarity and respect. On the one hand there are the unproductive members of the group—the old men and women who are too old to work and who have little or no decision-making power regarding the land base. Along with this group and the extremely young—the infants and young children who must be watched and cared for by the adults. Secondly, there are those people who do not yet hold the land in trust. There are the unmarried young men and women who work and produce, but who have not set up separate households and do not hold decision-making power. Finally, there are the full-fledged adults, men and women, who are married and who maintain a household and make the important decisions concerning production. In terms of land, production, and decision-making, these three sets of relatives represent the domestic cycle. At any one point in time EGO will be a member of one of these sets of relatives and his relationship to his relatives will be determined by his position in the domestic cycle.”

Chart 1

The Domestic Cycle in Terms of Production
Bongsoli (patrilineal relatives)

Old men and women, infants	————	Dependents
Young unmarried females and males (pre-pubescent)	————	Producers
Adult males and females (post-pubescent)	————	Decision-makers

(From Jones 1972:17)

The young Limbu woman who has just married, remains a producer, not a decision-maker. The years between puberty and the mid-twenties is a period of intense productivity for a young Limbu woman. She is fast becoming a mature worker, able to carry out a full day's agricultural labor, and rapidly learning the other skills necessary to an adult Limbu woman. As yet unburdened by the necessity of caring for a number of young children, she is valued as a producer, especially in households which have been drained of men for migratory wage labor. Marriage in Limbuan links people into households which form the basic units of economic production. Married women must be integrated into the work groups of her husband's household and localized lineage for a marriage to be successful. Cooperation between these groups of women is essential for the subsistence of the household and the local group.

In her natal household, a woman works with other women with whom she has worked since childhood. Long years of cooperation have formed the women of her father's localized lineage into a relatively smooth-running team. In the off agricultural seasons of the year, the woman can direct her own time and may devote considerable time to the production of goods for sale in the market, the profits of which she alone controls. In her husband's house she must become a member of a productive group composed of strangers directed by her mother-in-law, who is often a hard taskmaster.

The Limbu recognize the significance of this aspect of marriage in the marriage ceremony itself. After the all-night ceremony, the bride, still dressed in her wedding finery, arises at dawn to ritually sweep the courtyard and take her place with the

women of the groom's household by joining them in their early-morning task of collecting the day's water from the water fountain. At each wedding we attended, the girls and women would call us out in excitement to watch the bride sweep and carry water.

If this transition into the productive unit of her husband is not successful, the options available are to remove herself from his household, either temporarily, by extended visits to her natal household, or more permanently, by divorce (*jāri*). By the time she has children, her husband is likely to establish an independent household, in which case she becomes a decision-maker, thereby elevating much of the tension between herself and her husband's kinsmen.

Limbu marriage stability fluctuates in relationship to the adjustment of the woman during the evolution of the domestic cycle and ultimately to her degree of economic independence as a producer. As the woman gradually moves from dependence in her parents' domestic unit, her family of orientation, to her husband's domestic unit, her family of procreation, she begins to assume economic independence through the retention of bridewealth and the role of producer in the Limbu agricultural economy and the market economy. This phase of independence, especially prior to the birth of children, is the phase in which Limbu marriages are most vulnerable and subject to dissolution. There is a direct correlation between instability, age, and the economic independence of the woman. *The greater her independence and her dissatisfaction, the greater the likelihood of an unstable marriage or divorce.*

A recent survey conducted in the fall of 1975 of all married women of three Limbu villages near the Tehrathum Bazar further substantiates the above statements. Statistical data were collected on the type of marriage, age at marriage, and divorce. These data were correlated to economic data, especially personal wealth of each married woman. The survey consisted of eighty-six women ranging from 20 to 85 years of age.

Table 1 below indicates the distribution of three types of marriage in the three villages surveyed. Both *māgi bihā* (arranged marriage) and *chori bihā* (marriage by "theft" or "elopement") are first marriages, while *jāri bihā* (adulterous marriage) indicates a previous marriage that ended in divorce or the woman taking a second husband.

TABLE 1

Total marriages of 86 married women of three adjacent Limbu villages according to type of marriage. (1975).

Type Marriage	Number	Percentage of Total Sample
māgi (arranged)	56	65%
jāri (divorced)	18	21%
chori (elopement)	12	14%
Totals:	86	100%

In Table 2, the 86 marriages are again presented in such a way as to show the percentages of first marriages that resulted in divorce. Both *māgi bihā* and *chori bihā* are first marriages. The figures to the right of the table show the percentages of each first marriage that ended in divorce (*jāri bihā*).

TABLE 2

Percentage of first marriages according to type ending in divorce (*jāri*)

Type	1st marriage		2nd marriage		Percentage
	Type	Number	Type	Number	
māgi (arranged)		73	jāri	17	24%
chori (elopement)		13	jāri	1	8%
Totals:		86		18	21%

In Table 2, we are able to see that a greater percentage of divorces (*jāri*) occur in arranged marriages (*māgi*) than in marriages by free choice (*chori*). This indicates a greater stability in marriages of free choice than in those cases where the woman has less say in the choice of a spouse.

In Table 3, we get an indication of age at first marriage according to type. The mean average for all first marriages according to our sample is 17.4 years of age. The average age for arranged marriages that did not end in divorce is 18 years; the average age for marriage by elopement that did not end in divorce is 19.2 years. The average ages at first marriage for those ending in divorce is 15.1 years. This clearly indicates that women who marry young are more likely to be involved in an unstable marriage than those who marry late.

TABLE 3

Ages at first marriage according to type

Sample number	Type marriage	Mean age	Median age	Modal age
56	māgi	18	17	17
18	jāri	15.1	14	14.5
12	chori	19.2	18	17

Table 4 below shows the average age at second marriage (*jāri*), or those women who are divorced and married a second time. Divorce clearly occurs in early twenties as women are entering the phase of decision-makers in the domestic cycle.

TABLE 4

Average age at second marriage (jāri)

Type marriage	Mean age	Median age	Modal age
<i>jāri</i> marriage	22.6	21	21

Table 5 below correlates personal wealth of 86 women with the type of marriage. There are indications that women who enter into a divorce (*jāri*) on the whole possess greater personal wealth than those who do not get divorced.

TABLE 5

Personal wealth index of Limbu women according to type marriage

Number in sample	Type Marriage	Percentage with less than 1000 Rs. personal wealth	With more than 1000 Rs. personal wealth
56	<i>māgi</i>	35.7% (20)	64.3% (36)
18	<i>jāri</i>	22.3% (4)	77.7% (14)
12	<i>chori</i>	50.0% (6)	50.0% (6)

In summary, the data presented in the five tables above indicates that the stability of a Limbu marriage has much to do with the adjustment of the women in the domestic cycle. First, if she has free choice in deciding whom she will marry, the marriage seldom ends in divorce. This is substantiated by the low percentage of free-choice marriages (*chori*) ending in divorce (*jāri*). Furthermore, these choices are usually made later in the woman's life, when she is an active producer in the Limbu economy, around 19 years. Secondly, a marriage arranged early in life, prior to 15 years, has a greater chance of instability and eventual divorce than those arranged after 18 years, when the woman has become a productive member of society. Finally, the means by which Limbu women are able to rid themselves of an unacceptable marriage situation through divorce (*jāri*) is made possible by their accumulation of personal wealth and their role as decision-makers in the domestic cycle.

V CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions lend support to the theory that sociocultural and not biological variables determine the position of women in any society. Specifically, they substantiate the theories of Engels (see Leacock 1972, and Sacks 1974), that sociologically, the status and role of women cross-culturally is best explained by a labor theory of value. Humans evolved in societies based on cooperative labor, and the social value of each person seems to have been related to the degree to which he or she contributed to the production and reproduction of human life. In preclass societies, the value of a person's labor could not be alienated and could not thus accumulate value for another. Under these conditions, the labor performed by

women as well as men is social labor, and it gives to the laborer the status of a social adult. As productive modes developed which allowed for the increasing alienation of labor, the value of one's labor could accumulate to another. In the market economy, labor itself could be bought and sold, and the status of social adulthood was only granted to those individuals who could sell their own labor in the market place. In such societies where only marketable labor is given value, women who only perform unpaid domestic labor are given status of wards instead of social adults. The entire economy of a society may not be integrated by a single mode (Terry 1972, Polanyi 1968). Different economic spheres may, in fact, be integrated by different modes of production, and thus labor may be differentially valued within one society. This is true in Limbuan, where the indigenous economic institutions exist side by side with institutions which have developed as a result of the Hindu conquest and the growth of a market economy.

Limbu women are given the status of social adults because of their participation in both the Limbu indigenous economy and the market economy. It appears that the alternatives which Limbu women have in deciding whom they will marry, where they will live, and whether they will remain married, are decisions which they are able to make because of their control over their own labor in everyday production, rather than factors which are related strictly to the structure of the Limbu "kinship system."

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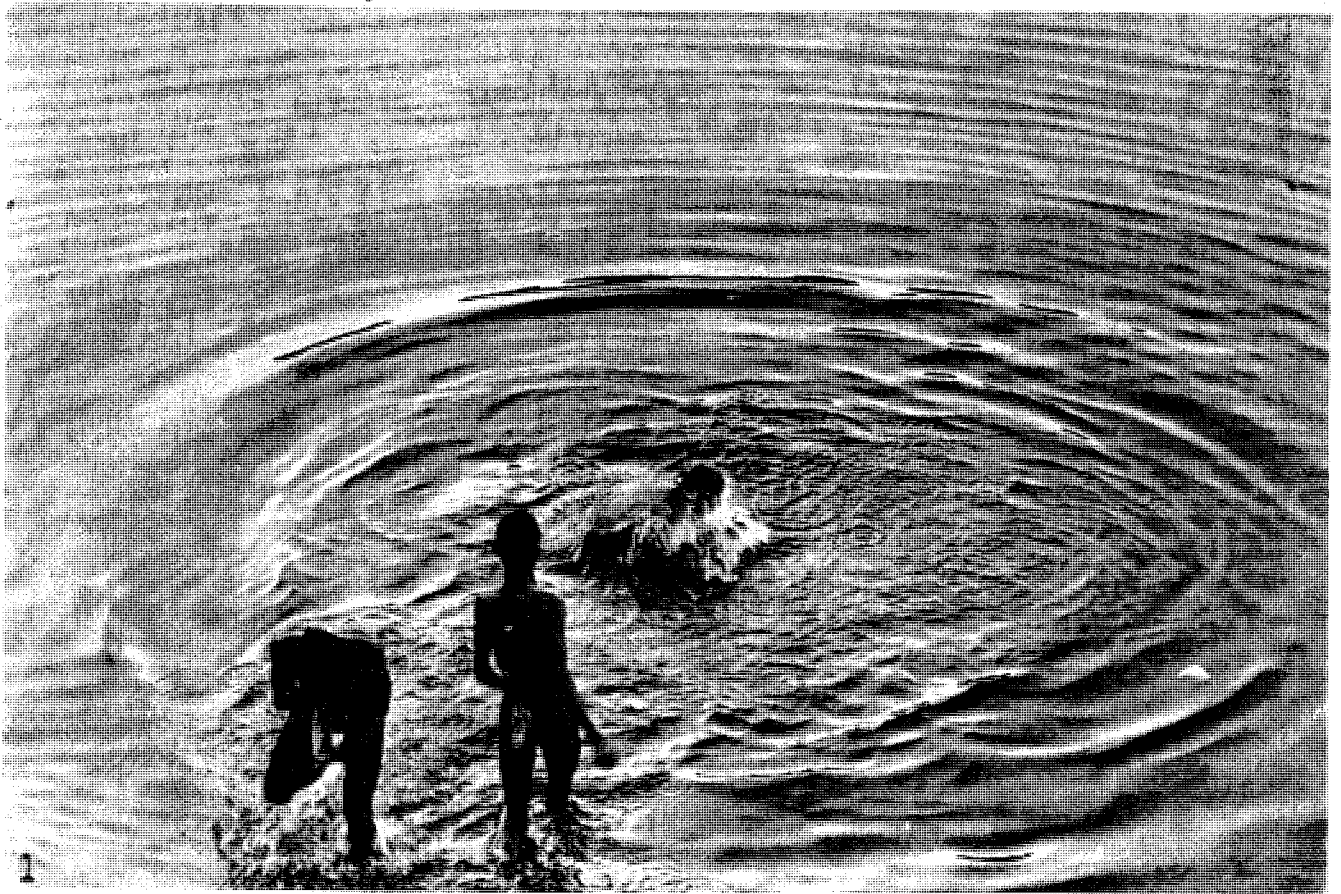
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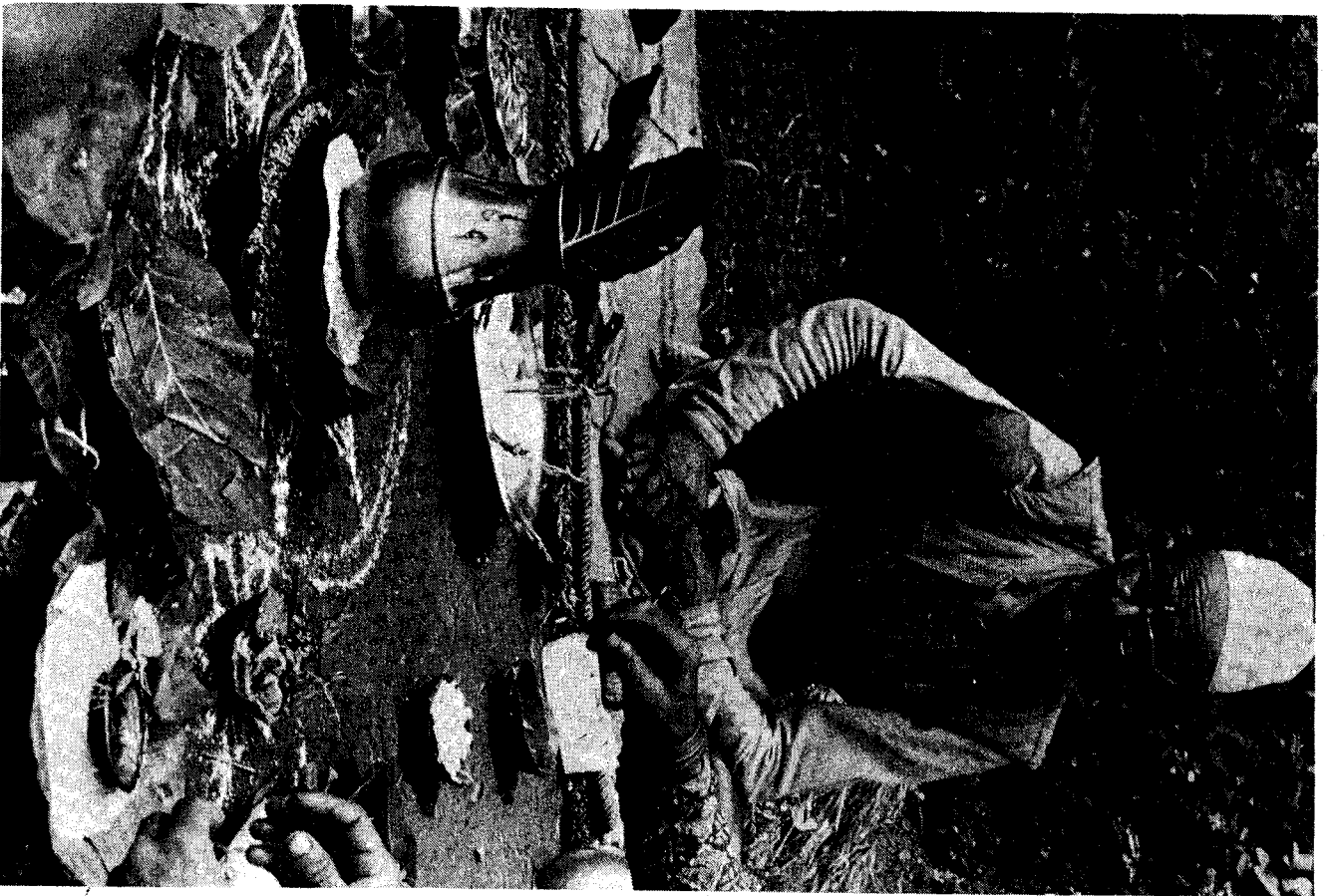


1. Men bathing on Janai Purni before putting on new sacred threads.





3. A Brahman woman prepares to indulge in the *dar Khamme* feast on the eve of Tij.



4. Rishi puja officiating priest with the central *Kalas* and the tray containing *kus* grass figures of the seven Rishi and Arundati.

THE WIVES OF THE RISHIS:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE TIJ—RISHI PANCHAMI WOMEN'S FESTIVAL

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The Tij-Rishi Panchami complex represents a response to the dominant patrilineal ideology which so strongly influences the social structure and the world view of Brahman-Chetri culture in Nepal. As such the rituals of Tij-Rishi Panchami and the myths surrounding those rituals express patrilineal ideology and its ambivalent view of women while at the same time attempting to mediate some of the conflicts and contradictions inherent in this view.

The keystone of Hindu patrilineal ideology is the high value placed on the solidarity of male agnates. This principle is evident in the kinship structure which is based on the patrilocal joint family. Usually a man, his wives, their unmarried daughters, sons, son's wives and the latter's children all live together as single residential and economic unit. Each patrilineal unit must send its daughters out in marriage and bring in daughters-in-law from other patrilineal lines. Thus women serve as the links between lineages, but they never become fully identified—ritually or emotionally—with either their natal or affinal patrilineal lines. They remain to some extent outsiders with regard to the whole patrilineal institution.

The peripheral nature of women's involvement in the institution of the patriline is ritually expressed by their exclusion from the major ceremonies like Devali (worship of the lineage god) and the Dasai Durga Puja, both of which celebrate various aspects of agnate solidarity. It is also highly significant that women may not directly perform the *kirya basne* funeral rites or the annual *sraddha* rituals of feeding of the ancestors.¹ These ceremonies represent the spiritual continuity of the patriline beyond death, and the strong Hindu belief that only a son can assure his parents' immortality in the *pitrilok* (the world of the fathers).

The ambivalence towards women which is evident in patrilineal ideology is increased by their association with sexuality which is itself an unending source of contradiction in the Hindu tradition. Village Hinduism, such as practised by the Brahmans and Chetris of Nepal, represents a perpetual opposition between the loftier ideals of the ascetic (*tyagi dharma*) and the more practical ideals of the householder

¹ A priest informant said that women could theoretically perform these ceremonies in the absence of a qualified male relative *after they were past menopause*, though he could recall only one such instance in his experience.

(*grihasti dharma*.) Village Hindus are of course by and large householders involve in the toils of earning a living and raising a family. Nevertheless, their deep involvement with concepts of purity and pollution betrays a strong underlying respect for the values of asceticism. For the things which are considered polluting are almost all associated in some way with birth, death, copulation, eating or defecation—the organic processes of life and the temptations of the flesh which tie men to the samaric round of death and rebirth. These things which the Hindu householder sees as defiling are the very things which the Hindu ascetic attempts to escape through his austerity (*tapas*) and renunciation (*tyag*.)

Obedience to the rules for maintaining individual and caste purity then, is one of the principle means of integrating the ideals of asceticism (for which sexuality and women are dangerous distractions) into the life of the householder (for whom they are a necessity). This integration is symbolized in the rituals of Janai Purni when Brahman and Chetri men must renew the *janai* (sacred thread), which signifies their ritual purity as members of the “twice born” castes. I have chosen this ceremony out of the many life cycle and calendrical rites in village Hinduism which deal with the ascetic / householder contradiction, because the ritual idiom of Janai Purni closely parallels that of Tij–Rishi Panchami which is the focus of our inquiry. Janai Purni is an all-male festival² which involves purification through fasting, sexual abstinence and rigorous bathing followed by worship of the seven Rishis. These same elements appear in the all-female festival of Tij–Rishi Panchami and I believe that their meaning in either context is amplified by reference to the other.

The *Sapta Rishi*³, or Seven Sages worshiped on both occasions are the mythic embodiment of the ascetic / householder contradiction. At the same time in their role as *gotra* founders, they represent the continuity of the patriline as an

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2. In the village setting Janai Purni involves only men. However, it is also an occasion of pilgrimage to various alpine lakes (such as Bhairav Kund and Gosain Kund) sacred to Siva. Women also participate in these pilgrimages and bath in the sacred lakes.
 3. The original Rishis are traditionally seven. According to one village priest they are: Atre, Kaysap, Biswamitra, Bharadwaj, Gautam, Basista, and Jam adagni. However, their numbers increase in certain contexts. One such situation is the explanation of the origin of *gotra*, each of which is said to be named after its founding Rishi. The number of *gotra* far exceeds seven and includes many names not found on the traditional list given above.

institution and the claim of each individual lineage to purity of descent. The Rishis are ascetic forest dwellers; but they are also householders because they have wives. As O'Flaherty has pointed out, it is the wives of the Rishis with their distracting sexuality, their own unsated sexual demands and eventual unfaithfulness who delude the Rishis and hinder them in their spiritual pursuits. "The virtue of the wife is often the crucial point in the forest dwellers dilemma"⁴— the flaw that upsets the tenuous balance of the householder / ascetic paradox.

Although the Rishis' wives are supposed to be, like their husbands, paragons of virtue and restraint, "the ascetic tradition, based as it is upon a profound misogyny, is quick to challenge the chastity of any woman and is therefore suspicious of the wife of the forest dweller".⁵ O'Flaherty cites many myths⁶ wherein the loss of chastity—even in thought or by accident—on the part of the Sages' wives cause the Sages to lose the power they have gained through their long and arduous austerities. The Brahmans and Chetris of Nepal have their own version of the story. It appears in the *Swastani Vrata Katha*⁷ woven into the story of Shiva's madness after the death of his beloved wife Sati Devi. Most villagers are well acquainted with this short text (approx. 300 pages), which is read a chapter a night in the homes of those who are literate during the holy month of Magh. This then, is the Nepali version of what O'Flaherty calls the "Pine Forest Story", which forms part of the mythic backdrop for the worship of the Rishis on Janai Purni and Tij-Rishi Panchami:

"After Sri Mahadev had brought his mind under control he realized that Sati Devi's body was gone. He felt disconcerted and decided to go north to perform *tapasya*. But by mistake he took the route to the south and arrived at Karnatak (forest). There was a village there called Brahmapur. The Rishis of the village had gone to bathe in the holy river. The wives of the Rishis saw Shiva. One of them pointed at him and said "Look there goes Mahadev ! He is roaming about like a madman because of Sati Devi's death. Our Rishis are weak of body because they eat only once in twenty-four hours. They are incapable

⁴ O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva*, Oxford University Press, London, 1973, p. 81.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 80

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 80–81. and p. 98–106.

⁷ *Swastani Vrata Katha*, Babu Madhavaprasad Sharma, Dudhvinayak, Varansi – 1 Samvat 2022.

of giving us sexual satisfaction, so let us follow Mahadev!”.

So the one hundred wives of the Rishis followed him. But the Rishis who had gone to take their baths at the river came to know of it and they went in search of their wives. After some distance they caught up with them. The Rishis charged Mahadev with enticing their wives away. Mahadev replied that he was not guilty of such a crime. Then the Rishis pointed out the throng of women following him and asked Mahadev who and what they were. Mahadev looked around and was surprised to find, a crowd of women behind him. He was amazed to see the Rishis' wives and he flatly denied having seduced them.

“I dont' known why they have followed me.” he said.

“It must be your penis which is responsible.” replied the Rishis. So they cursed his penis to fall from his body. Because of the Rishis' curse, Mahadev's penis fell down from his body. Out of it another penis of flames (*jyotirling*) appeared, it continued growing until it covered the entire world. At this terrible calamity the entire host of gods led by Brahma, the Rishis, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Daityas went in a group to Vishnu and said, “Oh Baikuntha Nath ! Mahadev's flame *linga* has grown until it covers the entire creation. We have come to inform you !”

Vishnu acted immediately and covered it (the flame *linga*) with his body. At this the *linga* became small again at once. Seeing this, all the gods, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Daityas thanked Vishnu and went back home. Sri Mahadev issued out of the flame, *linga* and addressed the Rishis and cursed them.

“When I was without fault you cursed me.” he said.

So he counter-cursed them for their crime saying, “Let your words not be truthful and thus without force, and let your wives be unfaithful to you”. After delivering this curse he went north and practiced meditation and devout austerities.⁸

Despite this mythic lapse (i.e. the Rishis lost their detachment and became jealous of their wives' sexual attraction towards Shiva), the Rishis in their role as *gotra* founders continue to represent the ideal of male ascetic purity to Hindu

⁸ *Ibid.* Chapter 12, (pages 142–145), (my translation).

villagers in Nepal.⁹ After all it was their wives, not they, who caused the trouble ! Through *gotra* affiliation each lineage traces its symbolic descent from one of the Rishis (though not necessarily one of the traditional seven). As T. N. Madan¹⁰ has pointed out *gotra* does not represent an actual kinship grouping—its only social function being the regulation of marriage. But I think he misses the *conceptual* importance of the fiction of patrilineal descent from the ancestor Rishis in validating the Hindu patrilineal ideology. The ascetic Rishis provide a kind of spiritual pedigree for lineages which by their very nature must be deeply involved with the worldly concerns and distractions of the householder's dharma. Since absolute ascetic purity is impossible for the patriline as an institution, purity of descent becomes its structural equivalent.

Sexuality is legitimate if the proper women are obtained in marriage through the rules of *gotra* exogamy and caste endogamy—and if these affinal women are then carefully guarded from outside men. The agnatal group's concern over female sexuality as a threat to lineage purity is, on a deeper level, a concern for the spiritual purity of its own members.

There is a strong emphasis on asceticism in the *brataman* ceremony which initiates the Hindu male into caste, *gotra* and lineage membership. The young boy must renounce his family and lineage for the celibate religious life of a *brahmacharya*. His head is shaved, he dons the clothes of a mendicant and makes as if is set out into the world as a *yogi*. He even begs rice from his relatives. Then having symbolically fulfilled the ascetic ideal, he can be called back by his family to assume the life of a householder and his eventual duties as a husband and father. Having established his spiritual purity, he is fit to participate in the continuity of the patriline.

The sacred thread (*janai*) which a boy receives during his *brataman* is not only the emblem of high caste rank and full lineage membership. It is also a symbol of spiritual purity and of the initiate's link with his ascetic Rishi "ancestor". Informants explain that the Rishis are actually *in* the *janai* that they wear. The lives

⁹ For fuller discussion of *gotra* and its relation to Nepali *thar*, see; von Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph, "Unity and Diversity in the Chetri Caste of Nepal", pp. 11-67. In *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon*, ed. Furer-Haimendorf, Asia Publishing House, 1966.

¹⁰ Madan, T. N. "Is the Brahmanic Gotra a Grouping of Kin ?" in *South-Western Journal of Anthropology*, p. 59-77., Vol 18, 1962.

of adult Brahman–Chetri males are beset with rules to keep the *janai*—and by extension its wearer—from being defiled. Thus the *janai* is placed over the ear during defecation and changed altogether after a birth or death in the patriline or after contact with a menstruous women or an untouchable. Like purity of descent, these rituals of physical purity are the householder’s equivalent for the absolute purity of ascetics like the Rishis which he cannot attain.

The importance of the Rishis as an ideal of male purity is evident in the Janai Purni rites. The men say they must bathe three hundred and sixty times on Janai Purni “because the Rishis used to bathe every day and we don’t so we make up for it on this day”. The day before the festival all initiated males observe the strict *havasya basne* regimen which includes shaving the head,¹¹ bathing, restricting the diet and avoiding sexual intercourse. Then early on the morning of Janai Purni the high caste men of the village, dressed in clean dhotis, go down to the river carrying their year’s supply of new *janai* and the things they will need to purify themselves and to do *puja* to the Rishis.

After stripping to his loin cloth, each man takes *choko mato* (pure earth) in his left hand, makes three mud balls of it and covers them with his right hand while he recites a *mantra* invoking the mud to destroy his sins. He then takes the first ball of mud and rubs it over the lower half of his body. The second ball is rubbed from the waist up and the third from the head down over other whole body. Then, dipping his whole body in the river, he bathes.

He repeats the process twice rubbing himself with cow dung and then ashes—though since ashes are sacred to Shiva, they may only be rubbed on the purer part of the body above the waist. Then he takes some strands of *dubo* grass and sprinkles himself three times with water from the river. He does the same thing with *datiun* (a wild plant) leaves and finally splashes water on himself three hundred and sixty times with a spring of holy *kus* grass before taking a final plunge in the river.

When all the men have finished bathing and put on clean dhotis, they gather in a large circle for the Rishi puja led by one of the Brahman priests in the village. A copper tray containing all their new sacred threads is placed in the center along with the standard *kalas* (water vessel into which the gods are invoked), *Ganesh* (betel nut in a plate of rice representing the elephant-headed Ganesh, son of Shiva, who must be worshiped at the beginning of any ceremony) and *diyo* (lamp). After

¹¹ Many less orthodox villagers avoid this requirement now.

the *Ganesh*, *diyo* and *kalas* have been worshiped, offerings are made, first to the sacred threads and then to the Rishis. As they offer puja, the priest tells each man to remember his own *gotra* the while the priest recites the following *mantra*: "Let our sacred thread give us *tej* (brilliance associated with ascetic heat) *bal* (strength) and *ayu* (life)".

After the joint worship each man approaches his own family priest, gives him a *janai* and *dakshina* (religious gift to a ritual superior) and puts a new *janai* on himself while reciting the *mantra* given above. Later in the day each family priest will come and tie the protective yellow *raksya bandan* thread on the right wrist for men and the left for women. Thus, through bathing and worship of the Rishis on Janai Purni, high caste men are able to restore the power and purity of the *janai* which their past year's existence as a householder—above all their contact with female sexuality—has dimmed.

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Tij-Rishi Panchami is actually comprised of two separate festivals on the 3rd and 5th day of the bright half of Bhadau (Aug-Sep).¹² But as Bista¹³ noted, Nepalis think of the two as a single event, because they are both for women exclusively and also I believe, because the expressed purposes of both are conceptually related. Informants usually explained their activities throughout the entire festival as motivated by two desires (i.e. to insure the long life of one's husband¹⁴ and to be purified from the possible sin of having touched a man during one's menstruation period)—even though strictly speaking the first goal is related specifically to Tji and the second to Rishi Panchami.

To understand either part of the Tij-Rishi Panchami complex—or the relation between the two—it is first necessary to become acquainted with some of the symbolic meanings attached to menstrual blood in Brahman-Chetri culture. Menstrual

¹² Usually the two are separated by a day in between, but since the dates for the festivals are determined independently by astrological calculation, they sometimes fall back to back—even though *tij* means the third day of the lunar fortnight and *panchami* means the fifth.

¹³ Bista, Khem Bahadur, "Tij ou la fete des femmes", p. 7-18 in *Objets et Monde*, Vol IX, No 1, Spring 1969.

¹⁴ Unmarried girls (past menarche) seek a good husband; widows seek to avoid widowhood in the next life.

blood is a strong source of pollution—particularly to adult initiated males (i.e. those who wear the sacred thread). At menarche girls are sequestered in a completely darkened room, usually in another village. They are hidden entirely from the sun (a symbol of male purity¹⁵) and from all men—especially male consanguineal relatives—for a period of 12 days. This rite called colloquially *gupha basne* (staying in a cave) ends with a series of purificatory rituals after which the girl can look at the face of her father and brothers and return home.

Thereafter a woman becomes polluted “like an untouchable or a dog”, for the first three days of every menses. She may not carry water, cook food, worship the gods and above all she may not touch adult men¹⁶.

The myth of how menstrual blood came to be polluting is in the *Rishi Panchami Vrata Katha* which is read by the priest after the rituals on Rishi Panchami. According to the Nepali myth, Indra, the king of the gods, sought help from Brahma to purify himself from the heinous sin of *Brahman-hatya* (killing a Brahman) which he had committed. Brahma helped Indra by dividing the sin into four parts and throwing them into four different places.

The first fell into the flames of the fire, the second into the river the third on the mountain and the fourth into the *Rajh* (menstrual blood). And that is why these women have to be set aside with great care. They should not touch anything at all, they should set themselves apart, and this is the command of Brahma.....! All the four *varnas* should first and foremost forsake the woman during her menstruation because on the first day she is like a *Chandalini* (an accursed, damned woman), on the second day she is as sinful as *Brahmaghatini* or one who has killed a Brahman. On the third day she is equal to a *Rajhki* or *Dhobini* (untouchable washer woman), and on the fourth day she is purified. During those three days (if there is contact) a most grievous sin is committed. And in order to destroy that sin, to destroy all sin and all kinds of defects, it is

¹⁵ Women explained their reluctance to engage in sex during the daytime (or even after sunrise in the morning) as being out of respect for Surya, the sun god who is strongly associated with purity and asceticism.

¹⁶ Very orthodox women also avoid touching other women or children (except their own nursing infants), but most women touch each other freely during menstruation.

necessary to under take the *barta* (fast, religious vow) of Rishi Panchami¹⁷.

Despite this strongly felt¹⁸ and strictly observed negative import however, menstrual blood also has some positive connotations through its connection with fertility. For according to village beliefs about the physiology of conception, menstrual blood is the material out of which much-desired children are formed in the womb. Village women explain that during pregnancy the blood which doesn't appear in mensus is collecting or solidifying to form the child¹⁹. The ambivalence towards menstrual blood is expressed in the myth given above. For, although it is connected with the grave sin of Brahman murder, the connection is arbitrary. Furthermore, it is significant that the other three things which receive a fourth part of the sin—the fire, the river and the mountain—are all considered sources of purity in the Hindu tradition. The structural message of the myth is that menstrual blood too is basically a good thing, but due to human weakness (Indra's violent crime) it must be regulated.

It is my contention here that menstrual blood is symbolic of affinal women—women in their specifically *sexual* roles as wife and mother. From the point of view of the patrilineal unit affinal women, like menstrual blood, are at once necessary and dangerous. They must be brought in to produce children if the lineage is to continue. At the same time affinal women present a threat both to their own husbands individually and to the agnatal group as a whole.

As the Tiji *bart* shows, women are felt to be somehow responsible for their husband's long life. His death is considered as their *pap* (sin).

¹⁷ *Rishi Panchami Vrata Katha*, Babu Madhavaprasad Sharma, Dudhvinayak Varansi-1, Samvat 2022. (translation by P. R. Cehtri and myself)

¹⁸ Women do feel that they are ritually impure for three days, but they do *not* feel the sense of personal sin (which the text seems to impute to them) any more than would a Nepali male who was undergoing death pollution observances for his father. On the contrary, women cite the myth to explain that they are not individually responsible for menstrual pollution *unless they disobey the restrictions*.

¹⁹ For fuller discussion of beliefs about conception and menstruation, see my "Sex and Motherhood among the Brahmans and Chetris of Central Nepal" in *Anthropology, Health and Development*, a special issue of *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, in press.

Thus women who have been widowed during a given year may participate in the purifying fast at Tij and the bathing on Panchami, as a kind of penitence for their husband's death, but they may not on either occasion participate in the worship of Shiva or the Rishis. Villagers often explain the wife's responsibility in terms of her *karma*: some sin in a previous life causes a woman to become a widow in this one. In myth the connection is often made between the wife's chastity and her husband's life span. For example in the *Swastani Vrata Katha* mentioned earlier, the demon Jalandar loses his life the moment his wife Brinda is seduced by Vishnu disguised as her husband. It is perhaps this idea which finds expression in the colloquial word *randi* which means both widow and prostitute.

Carstairs has pointed out a more direct threat in the sexual demands of the wife which are seen as drain on the husband's life forces²⁰ "Sexual love is considered the keenest pleasure known to the senses. But it is felt to be destructive to a man's physical and spiritual well being. Women are powerful, demanding, seductive—and ultimately destructive²¹". There is more than a faint echo here of the Rishis' wives !

But besides the threat and distraction which individual wives present to their own husbands, there is the very real threat which affinal women represent to the agnate unit as a whole. For the status of a daughter-in-law in the joint family is extremely low and her goals are likely to be counter in many respects to those of the group—aimed at the prosperity of herself, her husband and their children rather than that of the patrilineal unit as a whole. Furthermore, her only influence in the joint family (until she has a grown son) is through her husband. To gain power she must use her sexuality to win him away from his ingrained loyalties to his parents and brothers. Often of course, these lineal ties are already frayed by restlessness with parental control and the strong sense of competition between brothers.²²

²⁰ Had Carstairs been able to interview Rajastani women, he might have found that, like Brahman and Chetri women, *they* also view their husbands' sexual demands on *them* as debilitating. I have found that each sex expresses the view that the other is more sexually active and demanding. This probably reflects the fact that ascetic values including a negative view of sexuality is, not surprisingly, shared equally by both sexes.

²¹ Carstairs, Morris, G., *The Twice Born*, Indian University Press, Bloomington, 1967. p. 156.

²² Doherty, Victor S., "The Organizing Principles of Brahman-Chetri Kinship.", p. 25-41 in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, Vol. 1., No. 2, June 1974.

However, since agnata rivalry is contrary to the dominant patrilineal ideology, affinal women—their devious and contentious nature and above all, their seductive wiles — are usually the focus of blame for the constant household quarrels and for the ultimately inevitable segmentation of the joint family. Although it tends to be exaggerated by the patrilineal bias, this characterization of women as the divisive members of the groups is not entirely inaccurate.

The Tij–Rishi Panchami complex expresses this dangerous and potentially divisive power of women and their sexuality and attempts though myth and ritual to re-integrate that power into the very patrilineal structures of family and kinship which it threatens.

The festival which consists of purificatory fasting (Tij) and ritual bathing (Rishi Panchami) begins paradoxically with extreme indulgence in rich expensive foods which the women eat at the *dar khane* feast on the eve of Tij. The women explain that the purpose of their *dar khane* gorge is to “keep a fire burning in the stomach” during the strict fast on Tij. The men of the family, if they possibly can, must provide whatever foods the women demand for *dar*. And as Bista pointed out,²³ the unreasonable nature of women’s requests and the great trouble and expenses that men must go to satisfy them is a common theme of jokes during Tij.

Young daughters-in-law also expect to be allowed to return to their *maiti* (natal home) to celebrate Tij and have a few days “vacation” from the demands of their *ghar* (husband’s home). A daughter-in-law who is kept in her *ghar* because there is work to be done is very likely to sulk quite openly and to receive the sympathy of her neighbours when she complains.

On the day of Tij itself women re-enact the famous fast of the goddess Parvati who performed austerities to obtain Shiva as a husband. This story is part of the traditional puranic corpus of Shivite mythology and the Nepali version with which village women are most familiar appears in the previously mentioned *Swastani Vrata Katha*.

In the story Parvati (or Uma), the daughter of King Himalaya learns from her girl friends that her father has arranged her marriage to Vishnu. Parvati is distraught because she has always wanted to marry Shiva. (He was her husband

²³ Bista, Khem Bahadur, op. cit. p. 10–11.

in one of her previous incarnations as Sati Devi). On her friends' advice she runs away to a hidden spot by the banks of the river where she makes a sand *linga* and worships Shiva. Pleased with her devotion, Shiva appears and grants her a boon. She asked for Shiva as her husband and her wish is granted.

In some versions of the myth Parvati undergoes extreme austerities. For 3600 years she spends the hot season in the midst of four fires with the sun as the fifth, and the cold season immersed neck deep in an icy mountain stream. She reduces her diet to water, then to dry wind blown leaves and finally to nothing at all. Parvati, who is usually portrayed in Hindu art as a beautiful sensual young woman is sometimes depicted as an emaciated a-sexual hag at the end of her austerities. This extreme *tapas* is one mythic solution to the Hindu conflict between asceticism and fertility. Parvati's body has been so purified that there is nothing left of her sexuality to threaten or contaminate her beloved ascetic Shiva !

Parvati's austerities as they are depicted in the *Swastani Vrata Katha* however, are far less violent and much more within the reach of village women themselves. Parvati's good deeds, her attention to the details of ritual, her distribution of alms and above all her religious devotion (*bhakti*) are stressed along with her asceticism.²⁴

As it is actually enacted by village women at Tij, Parvati's mythic fast undergoes yet another subtle transformation. The romantic and erotic elements of the myth (i.e. the fact that Parvati fasted to win the man she *loved* rather than the man her father choose for her), come into much greater prominence. Of course the under-

²⁴ The whole *Swastani Vrata Katha* is dedicated to extolling the powers of the goddess Swastani and the efficacy of the Swastani *vrata* or *barta-a* religious vow to the goddess with power to grant any desire. Thus Parvati's fast is used by the text as an occasion to demonstrate the power of the vow. Shiva appears to Parvati in response to her worship of the sand *linga*. But instead of directly granting her boon, Shiva directs her to follow Vishnu's advice. Vishnu then tells Parvati to perform the Swastani *vrata* and describes the procedures for it in meticulous detail. Only after performing the vow to Swastani, does the goddess grant her Shiva as a bridegroom. Village women usually perform the arduous Swastani *vrata* at least once during their lives—but as the vow can only be performed during the month of Magh (Jan–Feb) and requires a month of fasting and worship, it is not performed on Tij. Instead village women re-enact the first and more traditional part of Parvati's austerities in which she worships the sand *linga*.

lying theme of purification through asceticism remains. The women observe a strict fast for more than twenty-four hours ²⁵. Most will not even take water and say that to do so is "like drinking your husband's blood". Some even spit out their own *salava* to make the purification more complete.

But the aspect of devotion changes from passive worship of the sand *linga* to virtual seduction of Shiva at his temple. The women do make and worship a sand *linga* when they go to bathe in the river as part of their purification. They also set out offerings and a votive light for Shiva during the night of Tij²⁶. However the main event of the day is when the women, giddy with their fast, dance and sing at a local Shiva temple.

After their bath in the late morning, the women spend hours combing their hair, putting on precious make-up bought in the bazaar and adorning themselves with all their jewelry and best clothes. Red is by far the preferred color and by afternoon the village paths to the temple are overflowing with chattering crowds of women dressed in their blood-red wedding saris carrying trays of offerings for Shiva. After worship the women linger around the temple talking and admiring each other until usually one of the older women begins to clap and sing and urge the younger girls to dance. Some of the young men of the village may loiter on the outskirts of the temple grounds hoping to see the dancing and one or two may be allowed nearer if they are playing the drums. But the throng at the temple is almost all female. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of coy reluctance and genuine embarrassment among the women, because dancing is considered highly suggestive and erotic in Brahman-Chetri culture. Respectable women simply don't dance. ²⁷ But at Tij most women will allow themselves to be coaxed into a few graceful steps before they collapse into giggles and run to hide among their friends. If there is a new bride who has married into the village that year, the other women will not let her rest until she has shown her skill at dancing—a skill which, if displayed on any other occasion, would brand her as shameless prostitute !

The laughing, singing and dancing at Tij then, represents a complete reversal

²⁵ From after the late night *dar khane* until the morning of the day after Tij.

²⁶ Although my informants reported that the offerings were to Siva, Bista reports (page 12) that women in his area made offerings to Krishna on the night of Tij.

²⁷ The one occasion besides Tij when women will dance is at their son's or brother's wedding.

of the Hindu ideal of womanly behavior. By village standards a virtuous woman—the kind of girl one seeks as a bride for one's sons—is shy, quiet and restrained in all her behavior. To say that a girl is *laj manne* (shy, embarrassed) is to praise her highly. On Tij the high spirits, the flirtatiousness, the sexuality which women must ordinarily suppress are released *en mass* at Shiva's temple. However this display of the erotic side of female nature is only permissible because on Tij, it is held in check by the strict purifying fast which the women are undergoing for the welfare of their husbands²⁸. On the morning after Tij women must perform a puja and make offerings to a Brahman priest dedicating the *barta* to their husband (present, future or in the next life) before they can break the fast. The dangers of female sexuality are thus firmly bracketed by the mutually re-enforcing ascetic and patrilineal ideals.

But it is not until the rituals of Rishi Panchami are complete that female sexuality which emerged in the Tij dancing is truly brought under control and integrated into the ideology of the patriline. On Rishi Panchami female sexuality is represented not by throngs of dancing women in red saris, but by the abstract concept of menstrual blood with all its contradictory connotations. As I mentioned earlier, Rishi Panchami is concerned with purifying women from the possible sin of having inadvertently touched a man during menstruation.²⁹

Women explain that Rishi Panchami is “like the fourth day of menstruation” for all women and that only after bathing are they pure enough to touch men. In the morning the women gather in groups of friends to walk down to the river where other women of the village may have already begun bathing. Each woman has prepared the items she will need to purify herself including 360 stems of the *datiun* plant, and 360 *datiun* leaves all tied into neat bundles of twenty each. After removing her sari and drawing her peticoat up over her breasts she squats in the long row of women beside the river and begins her ablutions.

²⁸ However, even this pious, patrilineally acceptable goal can be subverted, because some women told me that if a woman didn't like her husband she should dedicate her fast to finding a new one to run away with (*poi le jannu*). Even though women and even widows who marry a second time lose ritual status and a certain amount of respect in Brahman-Chetri culture, quite a few do so.

²⁹ Women past menopause do not need to bathe on Rishi Panchami although they gain extra merit if they do so.

First she must rub red mud (*rato mato*) on her vagina 360 times to wash away the mud. She keeps track of the numbers with a small pile of stones from which one is removed after every 20 washings. She continues rubbing mud and sprinkling water 360 times each on her feet, knees, hands, elbows, mouth, shoulders (or arm pits) and forehead. The whole process is then repeated with "white" mud. (*seto mato*)³⁰ or *pina* (remains of mustard seeds after they have been crushed for oil) and then cow dung (*gobar*). Next she washes her hair with either mud or *pina*. She cannot use soap for any of her bathing as it is considered *bitulo* or ritually impure. Then she puts a piece of holy *kus* grass around her waist and begins to brush her teeth 360 times by chewing on the bundles of *datiun* stems and spitting them out into the river. After that she dips the bundles of *datiun* leaves into the water and sprinkles them over her head. Then, borrowing a flat basket sieve (*calno*) from her neighbour, she pours water over her head with it several times. Since each tiny stream of water counts as one bath she can quickly insure that she had taken the required 360 baths. Then she takes a quick plunge in the river (held by her friends because the river is swift and she cannot swim). Finally she recites her *mantra* and swallows a sip of purifying *panchamrita* (five purifying substances—milk curd, ghee, cow urine and honey). Then she cuts the *kus* grass from around her waist and her bath is complete.

In some villages the women return to their own households after bathing to do the Rishi Puja there. In others' a group of twenty to thirty neighbour women, all Brahman-Chetri, may meet together at the river and do a joint puja under the direction of a single priest.

The women form a large circle in the middle of which is placed a tray of paddy contributed by each household. On top of this is the central *kalas* which the women will worship together. All the women have brought long pieces of white-tipped *sama* grass which when extended gives them contact with the central *kalas* during the worship. The Brahman also gives each woman a ring of holy *kus* grass to purify the right hand which will make the offerings.

On the edge of the circle before each household group (i.e. co-resident women who share the same *thar* and *gotra*) are baskets full of offerings and the implements for worshipping their own separate *diyo*, *Ganesh* and *kalas*.³¹ The ceremony

³⁰ In Bista's very thorough account of the bathing ritual the more orthodox *sapta mritika* (seven types of pure earth) are mentioned here.

³¹ According to some informants a married daughter in her *maiti* could worship the *diyo Ganesh*, and *kalas* with her mother, but she had to do her own *godan* and her own offerings to the Rishis and Arundhati. Other informants maintained that a married daughter also had to do a separate *kalas* puja.

begins with each group individually performing these standard pujas under the common direction of the priest who tells each woman to remember her own *gotra* as she makes the offerings. This is followed by a *godan* (gift of a cow represented by coins on a leaf plate full of rice) which each woman must offer to the priest in order to purify herself for the subsequent rituals. Then there is joint worship of the central *kalas* which the priest has decorated with red and yellow powders. Holding their long wands of *sama* grass in contact with the *kalas* the women throw flowers, rice, water etc. as the Brahman directs.

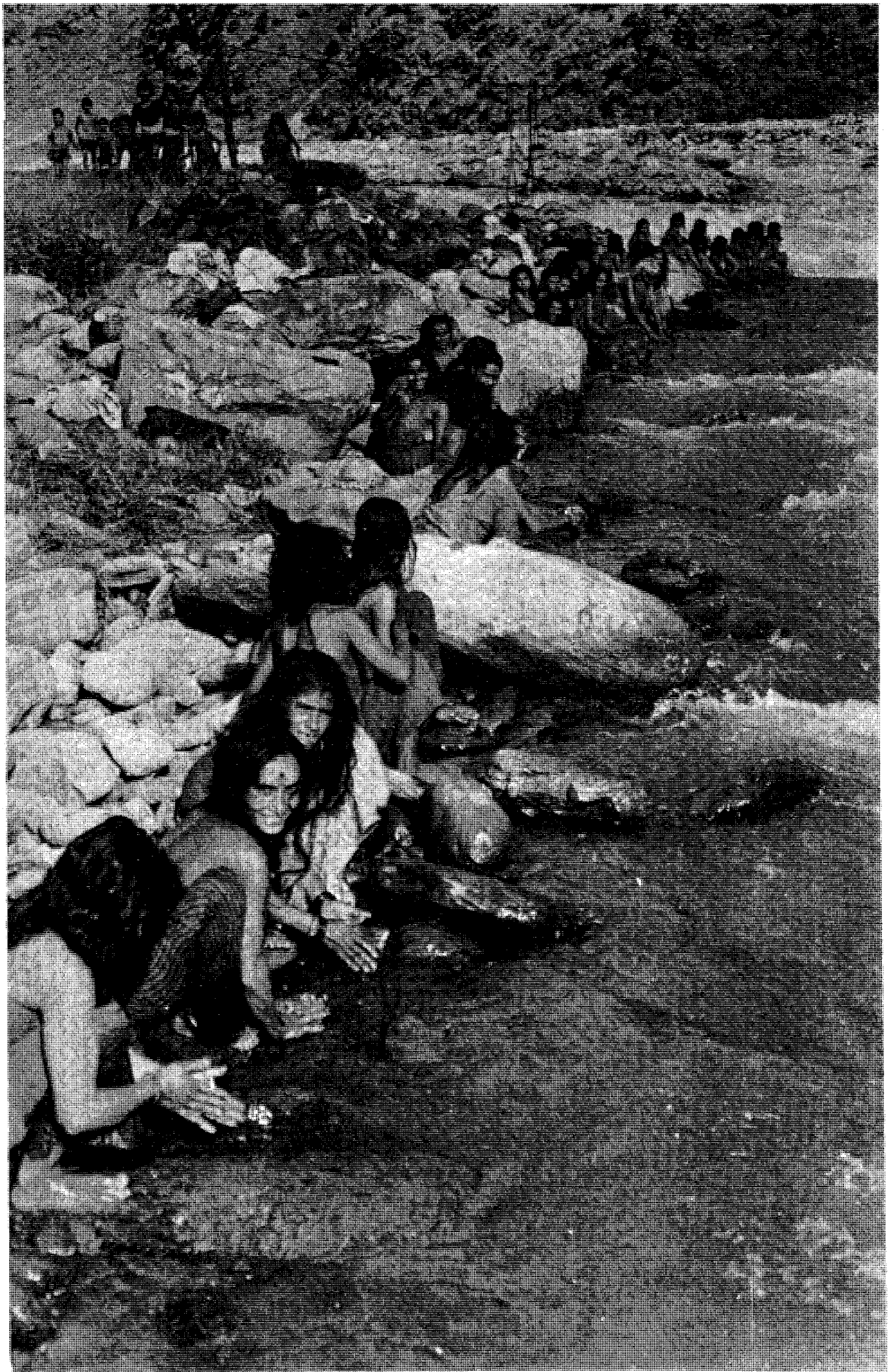
After these preliminaries comes the actual Rishi Puja. The Brahman places a tray on top of the central *kalas*. The tray contains eight *kus* grass figures stuck into eight piles of rice. The seven *kus* figures around the side represent the Rishis and the figure in the middle represents Arundhati – the one among all the wives of the Rishis who remained faithful to her husband even in the face of Shiva's charms.

Arundhati is really the focus of the entire ritual. She is the epitome of the chaste and faithful wife, the *pati brath*, and myths of her virtue abound in the Puranas. Those cited by O'Flaherty bring out two points which help to clarify the Rishi Panchami rituals. First, O'Flaherty suggests that the vulnerability of the other Rishis' wives who do lose their chastity is related to menstruation.³² According to one interpretation of the myth of the birth of Shiva's son Skanda, the Rishi's wives had been bathing in the river at the end of their monthly periods when all but Arundhati went to warm themselves by the fire of Shiva's seed and became impregnated. It is hard to see the Rishis' wives innocent act of warming themselves by the fire as culpable, but symbolically it represents their sexual looseness in contrast to Arundhati's restraint.³³ Village women on Rishi Panchami, who we recall are also ritually considered to be "in their fourth day" like the Rishis' wives, are particularly anxious to associate themselves with Arundhati. She represents control of the erotic side of female nature which surfaces so dangerously during menstruation. As one village woman explained; "Arundhati can take away the *pap* (sin) of having touched a man during menstruation because she was faithful to her husband."

The other myth concerning Arundhati which O'Flaherty discusses re-inforces

³² O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, op. cit. p. 100.

³³ The myth is echoed in the traditional belief that the husband must sleep with his wife on the fourth day after menstruation because women begin their fertile period then and are particularly desirous of sex—though village women themselves usually deny that they are.



5. On Rishi Panchami women cleanse themselves by washing various parts of their bodies with "red" mud, water,

the connection between the wife's chastity and the husband's long life which we have encountered already as a central theme of the Tij-Rishi Panchami complex. Because Arundhati resists his attempts to seduce her, Shiva gives her the boon of immortality and virility for her husband.³⁴ This stands in marked contrast to Shiva's curse on the Rishis to be "without force" and have "unfaithful wives" after their wives had tried to seduce him in the passage quoted earlier from the *Swastani*.

Before worshiping Arundhati, the women make their offerings to the Rishis. The items offered in this elaborate puja include milk, ghee, curds, water, honey, strips of cloth, vermilion, incense and sandelwood powder, betel nuts, and leaf plates full of fried breads and others containing fruits and coins which the priest collects and places in the center. But the most important among the things presented to the Rishis are the sacred thread, banana and leaf plates containing the 'counted things'. Each woman prior to the puja must count out exactly 360 grains each of barley, unbroken rice and sesame and 360 ghee-soaked cotton wicks. When the *janai* and all the 'counted things' except the wicks, have been given to the Rishis, the women then offer their *saubagya saman* to Arundhati.

The *saubagya*³⁵ *saman* are all the accessories of the married woman whose husband is still alive. It consists of the following: a *batta* (small box), *sindur* (vermilion powder for making the red tika mark on the forehead and the line at the part of the hair), *dago* (hair braid) *kaniyo* (comb), *aina* (mirror), *vastra* (strip of cloth representing clothes), *chura* (glass bangles), *pote* (bead necklace) and *gajal* (black eye make-up). These are bought by the husband in a small pre-assembled packet before Tij. But no married woman will ever, if she can possibly help it, be without these signs of her auspicious state—especially the red hair braid, beads, bangles and vermilion mark. These adornments and the privilege of wearing red clothes are at once an enhancement of her beauty and a sign of her virtue. Good women are believed to die before their husbands and have the honor of being cremated in a red shroud (instead of yellow or white) with the *saubagya saman* laid on their chest. Once again the indirect connection is made between the husband's long life and his wife's virtue. The *saubagya saman* then, symbolized female sexuality (since they increase a woman's powers of seduction by making her more attractive) and its control (since she may only wear them while her husband is alive and presumably her chastity is intact). By dedicating these adornments which they wore on Tij to dance seductively before the temple of Shiva, to the chaste wife Arundhati, women are

³⁴ O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, op. cit., p. 102.

³⁵ Turner's *Nepali Dictionary* glosses *saubagya* as "happiness, good fortune, prosperity—the possession of a living husband."

purifying their own sexuality. They are channeling it in the only direction acceptable to Hindu patrilineal ideology—towards their own husbands.

This interpretation is re-inforced by the final part of the ritual. After lighting her 360 ghee wicks, each woman purifies herself by moving her hands from the fire to her face three times. Then the plates of burning wicks are placed outside the circle and the women walk around the central *kalas* eight times – once for each Rishi and once for Arundhati. The women move very slowly for as they explained to me, the whole efficacy of the puja would be lost if they do not keep their knees together as they walk or if any space is left between heel and toe. The meaning of this restrained gait in the context of Arundhati's faithfulness is clear enough. When they have completed the circumambulation, the women are seated in a circle again and they make their final offering to the Rishis – either a banana or a cucumber— while the priest instructs them once again to remember their *gotra*. Each woman must bring this final offering home and give it to her husband.³⁶

The Rishi Puja itself is now complete and the women may return home for their morning meal.³⁷ Usually however, after the puja some women in the village sponsor a priest to recite the *Rishi Panchami Vrata Katha* in their own home and other neighboring women go there to hear it. The central myth of the *Rishi Panchami Vrata Katha* adds an important dimension to our understanding of the

³⁶ Although no explicit association was made to me in this context, women often joked about the phallic nature of these fruits at other times.

³⁷ This meal is cooked and served by husbands and the women eat first, reversing the normal procedure. Because they are considered ritually to be in the same state as if they had just bathed on the fourth day of menstruation, the women returning from their Rishi Panchami observations are pure enough to touch men but not pure enough to cook food or carry water. (This they may do only on the fifth day). The meal of rice, *piralo* (a white potato-like root) and *karkalo* (the dried edible stalk of the *parilo*) must be served on a banana leaf which the women must burry themselves when the meal is finished. The *karkalo* which the men must serve is interesting because it seems to be believed to arouse sexual desires when eaten. Women in the late stages of pregnancy are advised not to eat *karkalo* because “it will make their buttocks itch”—i.e. it will make them want intercourse. Informants themselves however, never mentioned this aspect of *karkalo* in connection with the Rishi Panchami meal.

Tij-Rishi Panchami complex. I have excerpted here the main part of the story from the Nepali text:

There was once a Brahman named Sumitra who had become an expert in all the Vedas and rites and rituals. He was the kind who worked in his fields and cared for his family with love and kindness towards all. He had a very devoted wife, a Brahmani named Jaisri. She was completely devoted to serving her husband and she had sons and daughters and servants. All she worried about was what was happening in the fields.

"The field workers have come," she would say to herself. "It is getting late and food has to be prepared for them and taken. If I don't go then they will cheat us. There's no manure. There are seeds and it is time to sow them. The clods have to be broken. The mustard has to be threshed and there is millet which has yet to be harvested. The wheat has to be sown. The corn has to be weeded. Everyone else has weeded their rice and we haven't". These and many other problems of daily household work used to keep her occupied.

One day she saw that she was having her menstruation period, but she did not care about what utensils she touched and out of contempt, she touched everything.

When she became old, then death claimed her and the Brahmani named Jaisri died. And her husband Sumitra Brahman also died. And when both husband and wife had died thus, the Brahmani who had deliberately touched and defiled things was born again as a bitch. And because of the sin committed by his wife, Sumitra Brahman was also born as a bull. And both of them happened to go and live in the same house which they had owned in their past life. Because of her deliberate defilement during her period of menstruation, both of them had to go and be born of such miserable wombs.

The son of Sumitra was one who served his ancestors. His name was Sumati and he was very religious. Although Sumitra's parents had been conceived in the womb of animals, both of them were fully aware of what they had been in their past life and the reason for their present condition. The Brahmani used to remember her *purwa karma* (deeds of the past life). But what could she do? She used to go from house to house and eat what they threw away. And her

husband Sumitra who had become a bull had to go and plough every day.

Then one day the *eko dhist sradh* (the worship which is performed annually on the day when one's father, mother or husband died) of Sumita's father arrived. And he, who was devoted to the service of his ancestors, was filled with a sense of duty. So Sumati said to his wife Chandrawati,

“You with the beautiful smile, today is my father's *sraddha*. I shall have to feed Brahmans, so prepare a rich feast.”

Hearing the command of her husband, Chandrawati prepared different and various kinds of rich food. But at the time a snake came and dropped its venom into the dish of *khir* (rice pudding). The bitch which had been waiting outside saw the venom being dropped and was afraid that if the Brahmans ate the *khir* than they would surely die. So the bitch went and touched the food. Then Chandrawati hit the bitch with a flaming stick and it ran yelping out. Then Chandrawati again cooked other food and the *sraddha* was performed according to the ritual and the Brahmans were fed.

The bitch sat outside. But Chandrawati, angry because it had touched the food, did not give that bitch the food that was left-over and had been thrown away. So that day the bitch went hungry. Where was it to go ? What was it to do? Where it used to be fed every day there was nothing to eat that day. It spent the whole day thus and then when night fell the bitch who was suffering terribly with hunger went to where the bull, its husband was and said thus:

“Oh Lord, Oh Husband ! Today they did not give me even a mouthful. I was unable to lick even the dirty plates and I am sorely troubled with hunger. Before my son used to give me food everyday. Today they did not even give me the left-overs.....”

And after that the bitch's husband said to her.

“Oh auspicious one ! You have suffered because you touched that *khir*. What am I to do? I am helpless. I can do nothing. I myself go around with a load upon my back – this you have seen. Look, I also went to my son's fields today and ploughed the whole day. While I was ploughing he tied by mouth. Say – what is it that he would give me to eat ? I am also suffering from hunger. It is useless for that son to perform my *sraddha* because today I have to suffer so !”

Hearing his mother and father talk among themselves about their sorrow, Sumati came to know that night that these (animals) were his mother and father. So Sumati took food that was rich and delicious and fed it to them.

And then when Sumati saw this condition of his mother and father he went into the forests. Because he wanted to know the reason for this condition and this sorrow of his parents, he went into the forests. There he saw the seven Rishis, the enlightened ones who always live in the forest. And there Sumitra prostrated himself at the feet of the seven Rishis and, for the good of his parents, he asked them with great deference,

“On Brahma Rishis ! Please deign to answer my question. Oh masters of meditation ! By the fruit of what karma did my mother and father take birth in this state ? Now what should I do so that they will be liberated from that sin?”

When the Rishis heard Sumati's question, they replied,

“Oh Brahman! Out of stupidity your mother was careless during her menstruation period. And because of this act she became a bitch. And because of her defilement your father has also become a bull. And now in order to liberate them from this womb, your wife has to undertake the Rishi Panchami *vrata*. She has to worship the Rishis in the proper manner according to the rites and rituals. Oh Brahman ! You should undertake this *vrata* for seven years. (Here follows the Rishis instructions for penitential fasting and the rituals of Rishi Panchami)... And because of the efficacy of the *vrata* when it is performed all the sins committed when one touches and defiles during the period of menstruation will be cleansed and destroyed. Your mother and father will also be redeemed. There is no doubt about this.”

....Because of the virtues of this *vrata* the mother of Sumati was liberated from the womb of that bitch. Sitting in the best *viman* (flying machine) and wearing ornaments which defied description, she went to heaven. And his father was also liberated from the animal womb at his death. Because of the effects of this *vratha* (his parents) entered heaven.³⁸

³⁸ *Rishi Panchami Vrata Katha*, op. cit., p. 16-60. (translation by P.R. Chetri and myself)

The myth immediately relates the ascetic / householder opposition to that between male and female. Initially the opposition is balanced. The husband who is an expert in ritual also cares for his family and the wife who is concerned about the prosperity of the fields is devoted to her husband. It is when Jaisri's worldly concerns overcome this devotion and she touches her husband's food during her menstruation that the balance is destroyed. It is restored at the end of the myth by the ascetic Rishis who prescribe the strict fasting and the bathing rituals of Rishi Panchami to rid the couple of the effects of Jaisri's sin. The Rishi's instructions to Sumita about what food he may eat during the penence for his parents also carry a distinct anti-householder import. "You should eat only that which grows wild, like green leaves, *sama* grass and the like. Eat only that which you do not have to sow and reap." This is a sharp contrast to Jaisri's initial over-involvement in sowing and reaping which caused all the trouble.

Two other recurring themes of the Tij-Rishi Panchami complex find expression in the myth: the idea that a woman's virtue affects her husband's long life and that women present a threat to patrilineal solidarity. In the myth Jaisri's lack of fastidiousness about menstrual taboos (i.e. her sexual looseness) does not cause her husband's death. They both die in old age. But it does cause him—as well as her—to be born in miserable and very impure re-incarnations. She is reborn as a bitch—a very impure animal who eats the *jutho* or polluted left-overs of others. (We also recall that women during their periods are likened to female dogs.) He is reborn as a bull who must plow the land as the pure Brahman caste is forbidden to do. Instead of enjoying a peaceful and contented existence as *pitri* (ancestor spirits) in heaven, they become animals on the earth. Because of their lowly rebirth the *sraddha* ceremony for them (which represents the spiritual continuity of the patriline) is rendered ineffective. The son's attempts to honor and feed his dead parents are unsuccessful and both the animal-parents go hungry that night. The Rishis appear, not in their role as the irrasible cuckolded husbands of the *Swastani* myth, but as protagonists for patrilineal continuity through ritual purity. By following their instructions, Sumati with his wife's help is able to release his parents and send them to heaven where his *sraddha* ceremonies for them will be effective. Thus the Rishis re-establish patrilineal continuity which has been broken by female sexuality. In this role they provide the link between the men's festival at Janai Purni where the sacred thread is purified and the woman's festival at Tij-Rishi Panchami where the *saubagya saman* (women's equivalent of the sacred thread) is purified.

In the myth Jaisri demonstrates her repentance by reversing her former sin. Instead of polluting others in secret for her own benefit, she publicly pollutes the

khir so that the Brahmans will not be killed by the snake's venom, even though she knows she will go hungry as a result. The fire brand with which she is struck represents the beginning of her purification from her initial sin.

It is Jaisri's daughter-in-law, Chandrawati, who threw the brand, who ultimately plays the main role in destroying her mother-in-law's sin through the Rishi Panchami rituals. Chandrawati in her fastidiousness about pollution stands in contrast to her mother-in-law. She went to the trouble and expense of re-cooking the *khir* after it had been defiled by the dog. If Chandrawati had been careless like Jaisri was during her menstruation period, the Brahmans would have been killed by the poison *khir*. Thus Chandrawati's ritual purity is structurally equivalent to Arundhati's sexual purity. She is opposed to the ritual laxness of Jaisri just as Arundhati is opposed to the sexual looseness of the other Rishi's wives. Both are virtuous women. Like the village women who have just undergone the Tij-Rishi Panchami rituals, they have accepted the restrictions placed on them by the dominant ascetic and patrilineal ideology of Hindusim.

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