

# THE GUTHI ORGANISATIONS OF DHULIKHEL SHRESTHAS

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## 1. *Introduction*

The small bazaar town of Dhulikhel lies 30km east of Kathmandu along the Arniko Highway which connects the capital with the Chinese border. The old town, which comprises Wards 3-9 of Dhulikhel Village Panchayat, is almost exclusively Newar and is dominated by the caste of Shrestha who account for 91% of the population. Dhulikhel Shresthas effectively form a separate sub-caste since they virtually only marry among themselves and restrict membership of their most important organisations to people who have been born locally. The most important institutions in this respect, those which define a person's caste status, are the *guthis*. Before describing the Dhulikhel Shrestha associations however, it is necessary to make an important distinction.

The word *guthi* has two main referents in Nepali<sup>1</sup> which are quite different though both are connected with the performance of religious duties and this has led to some confusion. Briefly, these are:

(1) a system of institutional landownership 'under which lands

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1. Generally the Nepali term *guthi* is more widely employed than its Newari equivalent *gu*, though they are interchangeable.

are endowed for religious and charitable purposes' (Regmi, 1976, 68);

(2) 'an organisation based on caste or kinship, or, occasionally, on geographical propinquity, which ensures the continued observances of social and religious customs and ceremonies of the community' (ibid., 48).

*Guthi* land tenure is found throughout Nepal and special provisions apply to it in the state legislation with regard to fiscal regulations and rules governing its management and alienation. *Guthi* as a type of social organisation is unique to the Newars among Nepal's ethnic group. Different *guthi* associations regulate different aspects of social and/or religious behaviour and in every Newar community there is an extensive network of such associations:<sup>2</sup>

For the Newars the *guthi* system is a fundamental element of social structure, of the same order as lineage or caste. By ensuring the organisation of festivals, feasts, funerals, religious ceremonies and the worship of gods, this system regulates all of social and religious life (Toffin, 1975, 207).

Some writers have suggested that the two types of *guthi* are complementary. Hosken, for example, writes of the Newars: 'All of the religious festivals and the large family celebrations are supported by the respective *guthi* associations through the *guthi* system of land endowment' (Hosken, 1974, 220). Similarly, Greenwold has written that

Often a monastery will possess an endowment of land or money to provide crops and/or cash to support the *vihara*'s

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2. Quotations from Toffin and Stahl are my translations from the original French.

activities, including the numerous feasts... The endowment of land or money is also known as *guthi*, so that this term refers to both any organisation or association that is responsible for the observance of religious or charitable duties and for the form of ownership under which such corporations hold property in trust (Greenwold, 1974,133).

In fact, this is not the case. By and large the state is only concerned in the operation of some of the minor Newar *guthis*, for temples and festivals, and has no brief whatsoever in the organisation of the two major *guthi* associations which regulate Newar communities. Both of these associations may hold land but it is not necessarily registered with the local *Guthi Samsthan* (corporation) which regulates all lands held under *guthi* tenure for taxation purposes.

In Dhulikhel I was told that land owned by the main *guthi* associations was registered with the *nāpi* (land tax) office just as individually owned lands are. It was pointed out that these were private (*niji*) and not State (*rāj*) *guthis*, and that therefore the *Guthi Samsthān* had nothing to do with them. In any case, many of the Newar *guthis* have converted their landholdings into cash which is now placed in bank accounts. Where these associations hold land, it is usually only enough to provide grain to be distilled into alcohol for the annual *guthi* feast. The *guthis* are not landowning corporations as such and the obligations on *guthi* members described below do not appear to me to derive from considerations of property. Nevertheless, it should be admitted that land has probably been more important in the past. A combination of confiscation of lands after the conquest of the Valley in 1969, and, more recently, of land reform which has given tenants greater control over the land they work, has made land and its produce much less significant in the operation of the various *guthis*.

The contingent connection between the two meanings of *guthi* is best described by Mahesh Regmi:

The origin and growth of the Guthi system as it exists today in Nepal may be traced to the social and religious customs of the Newar community of Kathmandu Valley. For non-Newari communities, Guthi is simply a system used to finance religious and charitable institutions. For the Newars, on the other hand, the system is an organic part of their social and cultural life... The term Guthi, in this sense, is primarily used to denote a social institution which determines the rights and obligations of a Newar vis-a-vis his community. It is obvious that such an institution has no relationship with the land tenure system... the organisation is not based on ownership of property as such (M.C. Regmi, 1968, 2-3; see also Regmi, 1976, 48).

Regmi's legalistic and state-centric perspective means that he does not examine the Newar institution in any further detail. His primary concern is with the period following on the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by the king of Gorkha. The subsequent unification of Nepal and the consolidation of the power of the Gorkhali state was achieved in large measure, he argues, through the judicious application of a variety of land taxation practices one of which was *guthi*. Land being the key to wealth and power, it was primarily through land tenure policy that the modern Nepalese state was forged.

The term *guthi* derives from the Sanskrit *gosthi* meaning 'an assembly, meeting, society, association, family connection, partnership' (Monier-Williams, 1970, 367). In Nepal, according to Regmi, its meaning was more specific though it still referred to an organisation of people and not to a type of land tenure. The second meaning was a Gorkhali invention:

In both India and Nepal, the term *Gosthi* or *Guthi* was originally used to denote an association of persons responsible for the management of religious and philanthropic land endowments. The use of the terms to denote the lands endowed, rather than the body formed to supervise the functions to be discharged with the income, probably started only after the Gorkhali conquests. It was also after the conquests that religious and charitable land endowments in most parts of the country came to be known as *Guthi* (M.C. Regmi, 1976, 47).

Presumably there were social institutions in other parts of Nepal for overseeing the maintenance of temples but this is not my concern here. Rather I want to draw a distinction between endowments for religious purposes which subsequently became known as *guthi* throughout the country, and an institution peculiar to Newars, also called *guthi*, but which has nothing to do with land tenure.

For individuals the primary reason for registering land as *guthi* under the Gorkhali land tenure system was to acquire religious merit. Such endowments, once made, could not be revoked and thus also had the effect of legally preventing a man's heirs from alienating land (M.C. Regmi, 1968, 11). By integrating *guthi* endowments into the taxation system, the state ensured that they were not simply lost. On the contrary, the state guaranteed its prosperity twice over: spiritually by appearing to be a religious benefactor, an image which suited well the idea of a Hindu kingdom; and materially from taxes which accrued to it from such lands. There is now a national *Guthi Samsthān* (association) which is responsible for the management of these lands and for overseeing the utilisation of their product. Grain from these fields, or their cash equivalent, is used to finance the upkeep of temples and roadside shelters and to provide for religious festivals. This would include the payment of ritual

specialists and the provision of *pujā* materials.

Bearing in mind the distinction between the two meanings of *guthi*, let me now turn to the Newar institutions. The following summary of the essential features of *guthis* is a fair representation of the way in which the average Newar perceives these associations, even if he is not usually so articulate:

The Newar society is notable for its numerous *Guthi* institutions which grant membership to the individual household groups. These Guthis divide the Newars horizontally in a number of groups for achieving different objectives. Of these, the caste-Guthis and the Fukee (lineage) Guthis are most effective as regards group control. The Dewali (lineage deity) *Guthi*, the main *Fukee Guthi*, is the real means of upholding the norms of the society. This feature speaks for the well-knit functioning of the patrilineal solidarity within the framework of caste.

The entire network of social relations in the Newar community is kept strong through the feasts and festivals under the auspices of the various *guthis*. These feasts and festivals are numerous. They are not so much religious as social. It is through the participation in these feasts that a Newar individual enjoys the protection of the society. Solidarity is sought to be maintained through the feasts and festivals on four different levels -- family, patrilineal grouping, caste and community (Nepali, 1976, 420).

While Nepali makes mistakes on certain points of fact (for most castes there is no such thing as a caste *guthi*), and while he exaggerates the degree of solidarity generated by *guthis* alone, his central premise is, I believe, correct. We are dealing here with cohesion and social control.

A fundamental preliminary point to note is that *guthi* membership is constrained by residence. The main *guthis* are organised around lineages which, among Newars, are 'based not only on patrilineal descent, but also on a traditional link with a specific place of residence and worship' (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956, 36). There are three main types of *guthi* and I will examine each one in turn as they are operated by the Shresthas of Dhulikhel. All of the associations are distinct: the membership of one *guthi* is never exactly the same as another which has a different purpose. In brief, the names and functions of the *guthis* are as follows:

- (1) *deo pujā guthi*: coextensive with the patrilineage, all the members of which come together once annually to worship the lineage deity, *digu dyo*;
- (2) *śi guthi*: generally groups together a number of neighbouring lineages in order to ensure that cremations are properly carried out;
- (3) temple or festival *guthi*: takes the name of the deity to whom the temple or festival is dedicated. These are often voluntary associations which one joins to acquire religious merit.

Membership of associations (2) and (3) is open only to heads of household and, in Dhulikhel at least, admission to all *guthis* is strictly limited to members of the local sub-caste. All households *must* belong to both a *deo pujā guthi* and a *śi guthi*. Not to belong implies excommunication from the lineage and sub-caste. *It is these associations which pre-eminently provide the residential element of Newar social organisation and which ensure that identity is not simply a matter of affiliation to lineage and caste. Lineage and caste are themselves defined in terms of a ritual attachment to a locality.*

2. *Deo Pujā Guthi*

The *deo puja guthi* takes its name from an annual ritual of central importance to all Newars -- *digu dyo puja* -- which is usually abbreviated to *deo puja*. While essentially the same ritual is practised by non-Newar Hindus in the Kathmandu Valley<sup>3</sup> and elsewhere in Nepal, for Newars participation in it is perhaps the most important means of regularly re-establishing social identity. Simultaneously it connotes territorial origin, ethnic identity, and membership of a particular lineage and local caste group (the effective sub-caste).

Not entirely inappropriately, this ritual has been called a kind of ancestor worship (Nepali, 1965, 194ff). More accurately, it is the worship of a god or gods, whose identity is more often unknown than known, who somehow symbolize the ancestors. Those who worship in common always belong to an agnatic kin group with a common ancestor and in Dhulikhel always to a single named patrilineage. It is not so much the ancestors who are worshipped (as in *srāddha*) as a deity which represents the idea of ancestors. It is the deity which the ancestors themselves worshipped, and this produces the ambiguous way in which the idea is sometimes expressed: 'It is the god of our patrilineal ancestors'.

In popular Newar theologising such fine distinctions can seem rather academic. My persistent attempts to find out who *exactly* was being worshipped (i.e. the name of the god) were usually circumvented. The truth is that they just did not know and, as I hope to show, in sociological terms the theological identity of the gods in question is irrelevant. Nevertheless, I will also point out that when they do identify these gods the results are interesting, though unfortunately also confusing.

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3. See especially Bista (1972).



The Newars call these gods *digu dyo*. Josi defines *digu* simply as 'worship and feast' (Josi, V.S. 2022, 129), a curiously incomplete definition. Newars themselves usually identify *digu dyo* with the Nepali term *kul devata*, glossed by Turner as 'Family god, a loan-word from the Sanskrit *kula devatā*' (Turner, 1980, 101). According to K.B. Bista (1972, 6), who has made a thorough study of the cult to *kul devatā* among Chetris in the Kathmandu Valley, the elaboration of which seems to owe much to contact with Newars since the late 18th century,

The term *Kuldevatā* means 'the god or gods worshipped by the lineage' or 'the gods whom the ancestors used to worship'... The principle aim of worshipping *Kuldevatā* is to avoid diseases and epidemics, acquire wealth and achieve success... *Kuldevatā* is not represented by any iconographic image or symbol. When a celebration or sacrifice is performed in honour of *Kuldevatā* the offerings are offered to the stone or different iconographic representations of different divinities of Hindu or Buddhist pantheons or divinities of unknown or unclassified origin. The divinities whatever their origin when worshipped in the name of *Kuldevatā*, are generally represented by simple stones (K.B. Bista, 1972, 6).

The word *kul* on its own has an extensive denotation: 'Tribe, clan, family; pedigree, race' (Turner, 1980, 101). But while the word *kul* may have a semantically wide application, to the people who may collectively worship the same *kul devatā* it is not open to interpretation. The exact degree of genealogical depth varies from group to group but co-participants can always be sure that they are descended from a common patrilineal ancestor. 'The founder of the lineage is a human being whose identity and name can be varified' (Stahl, 1979, 119).

There is some confusion about whether the *deo puja* group

should be described as a *guthi*. Stahl says the term *guthi* in the context of *deo puja* applies properly to an *association* of lineages:

Several lineages from the same caste may come together to celebrate the annual festival: this association is called *digu puja guthi*... if an association (*guthi*) is constituted, the members will be able to pay a priest and spend less on the ceremonies which are very expensive (Stahl, 1979, 122).

In Dhulikhel lineages always celebrate *deo puja* separately and never employ a priest. On different occasions I have been told that for the *deo puja* group the word *guthi* is *not* used, that it *is* used, and that though it is not used, the group is *like* a *guthi*. However, I will continue to use the word *guthi* since the *deo puja* group shares certain characteristics with the other *guthi* associations, notably the rotation of responsibilities among heads of household and the holding of an annual worship and feast.

One of the defining characteristics of a Newar lineage is that its members have the same *digu dyo* which they worship annually.<sup>4</sup> In some of the higher castes in Kathmandu and Patan this worship no longer necessarily takes place collectively. Individual households of the same lineage may go to worship their *digu dyo* on different days within a prescribed period. My understanding is that this is a recent development unevenly affecting different castes and is largely a result of disparities of wealth arising from modernisation. However, this is something which must await further investigation. In Dhulikhel, collective lineage worship is compulsory. Not to

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4. See Stahl (1979, 119) for the defining characteristics of a Newar lineage.

perform *deo puja* with the other adult male<sup>5</sup> members of the lineage is to proclaim that they are no longer lineage brothers: *dājukijā*. As I shall illustrate, the first step when a lineage splits is the separate performance of *deo puja*.

Let me then turn to the actual performance of *deo puja* since it is the solitary occasion in the year when the lineage members get together *qua* lineage members in the guise of the *deo puja guthi*. Though it happens only once, its importance should not be underestimated. The lineage is, after all, the basic exogamous unit in Newar society and this is the occasion to demonstrate its solidarity in a very practical way. I observed most of the proceedings of three different lineages in Dhulikhel in two separate years and witnessed parts of the proceedings of other groups. With the exception of the biggest lineage, who take an extra day for the feast and perform the ceremony only once every three years, all the other lineages behave in the same way.

Theoretically Newars may hold *deo puja* on any Thursday or Sunday between the third of *Baisākh* (in April), which is the day following the celebrations for the Nepali New Year, and the sixth day of the bright fortnight in *Jeth* (May-June). In practice it seems to be possible to use any day between these dates. The final date coincides with the festival of *Sithinakha*: when wells were traditionally cleaned in Kathmandu. The logic in having a final day is that festivals should not impede the rice planting which commences when the monsoon rains arrive in June.

Stahl states that 'One can be sure that those who celebrate it on the actual day of *Sithinakha* have been in some way or

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5. Women and children are not excluded but their attendance is not compulsory as it is, minimally, for the male household head or, in his absence, another household adult male as his representative.

other, excluded from their lineage of origin' (Stahl, 1979, 121). I have asked many Newars about this and no-one has ever been able to confirm it. I was rather hoping they might since *all* of Dhulikhel's lineages perform *deo puja* on *Siṭhinakha*., the last permitted day. They simply say that their tradition has always been to celebrate on this day. There is however fragmented evidence to suggest that the status of Dhulikhel Shresthas, which is rather ambiguous, may result from their expulsion from lineages elsewhere. There are certain circumstances wherein a lineage may not undertake *deo puja* in any particular year. These mostly relate to the observance of birth and death pollution when all worship is prohibited. With respect to *deo puja*, it cannot be performed collectively by the lineage for:

- (a) 1 year if the seniormost male (*nāyo*) in the lineage dies,
- (b) 6 months if the seniormost female (*naki*) dies,
- (c) 13 days if any other adult lineage member dies,
- (d) 12 days if a child is born into the lineage; the two biggest lineages in Dhulikhel observe only four days in this case,
- (e) 4 days if a child in the lineage dies,
- (f) 4 days if a married daughter or sister dies,
- (g) as long as a girl is undergoing the 12-day puberty ritual of *bārha tayegu*.

Menstruating women are forbidden from doing this worship as they are from any other but they may partake of the feast. An ux-orilocally resident husband (Nep. *ghar juwai*). would also be barred but there is no such case in Dhulikhel.

When the lineage is barred collectively from doing *puja* in any one year, individual households, who are less closely affected, may still go to worship *digu dyo* on their own initiative. Households in the Makāju lineage, which performs *deo puja* collectively only once every three years, do so individually for

the other two years. This other worship is called *kṣema puṣā* (*kṣema*: forgiveness) in atonement for its not being carried on properly *en bloc*. The same lineage also waived the one-year ban when their *nāyo* died precisely thirteen days before the *puṣā* of 1981. This was not done without much discussion and it earned the disapproval of some of the elders of other lineages. They went ahead because they felt that since they performed the ceremony only once every three years, it should not be postponed for yet another year.

The reason the biggest lineage only hold their *puṣā* once in three years is one of organisation and finance. Until recently they also performed it annually. Unlike other lineages they invite those among their married sisters who are not taking part in the *deo puṣā* of their husband's lineage. (In any one year there will always be a number of lineages barred by pollution rules from performing this particular ritual though outside of the dead person's household, other lineage members may perform other *puṣās* after the 10-day pollution period.) The *puṣā* of the Makāju lineage can involve 600-700 people and requires considerable organisation. The lineage held *deo puṣā* in 1981 and 1984 and on both occasions I was allowed to participate in parts of it and pointedly excluded from others. I was repeatedly told that non-lineage members are not allowed to attend the proceedings and I saw some youths being physically ejected from the site where the gods are kept. I cannot explain why the Mākaju married sisters are allowed to participate since they are no longer members of their natal lineage. I was told that because it was held only once every three years and was a special occasion, they liked to be able to invite their *mhyāymacā* (New. 'married sisters and daughters').

The sites are open, uncultivated fields on the edge of the settlement. A few years ago one Mākaju man had asked to be allowed to grow millet on their site (in Dhulikhel they are

always dry fields) during the two years when *deo puja* was not performed. He offered to pay a rent which would help defray the costs of the triennial feast. At first the other lineage members agreed but later, after a dream in which the *naki*<sup>2</sup> (seniormost lineage female) saw that this would incur the wrath of the gods, the practice was discontinued. These fields are registered with the government *nāpi* (land measurement) office as being dedicated to the worship of *digu dyo*.

The gods are nearly always a simple line of crude stones.<sup>6</sup> No-one ever seems to be quite sure of their number which I have had variously estimated at between seven and twelve. It is not always easy to tell which stones are gods and which stones are merely stones! When I asked what would happen if one of the stones were taken away, this evoked great hilarity. Apparently children do sometimes move them since the fields are completely open at other times of the year for people to come and go as they please. If one is lost, another is put in its place. These idols appear to have no inherent value. Conversely, idols kept in temples, often made of precious metals, are highly valued and many have been stolen. When not being worshipped, they are usually kept under lock and key, one of the unpleasant side-effects of the Western interest in such exotic items.

It is not only in *deo puja* that crude stone gods are worshipped; they are found in a great many places and it is usually the location which is primarily significant:

The basis of this stone worship is not so much the stone itself, but the spot where the stone has been erected. They are to be found on corners and crossings of streets, near thresholds or at the entrance of palaces or temples

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6. Some are embellished with engravings of gods, but rarely in Dhulikhel. Particularly good examples of elaborate stone *digu dyo* can be found in Balaju near Kathmandu.

or on the outskirts of towns or cities. These places are considered to be dangerous because of the presence of demoniacal powers and are therefore marked by particular types of stones. The demons have to be pacified and worshipped by presenting offerings near these stones in order to prevent them from doing harm to the people. In particular, when someone has fallen ill or in the case of death, the presence is felt and offerings are to be made (Van Kooij, 1978, 7).

The *digu dyo* shrine, a homage to ancestral deities, is intimately tied to departed spirits. According to Stahl (1979, 120), these shrines should always be near both the *ghāt* and the *piṭh*-seats of the eight mother goddesses (*aṣṭa mātṛkā*). They must be 'hors-les-murs', outside the protective circle of gods at the cardinal points of each settlement who keep evil forces at bay.<sup>7</sup>

In Dhulikhel few of the *digu dyo* shrines can be said to be near the *ghāt* but all are close to one of the deities which could be construed as Dhulikhel's *aṣṭa mātṛkā*. And all are firmly outside the town in open fields. The modern expansion of towns and villages often means that these old symbolic boundaries no longer exist in a physical sense but at certain times of the year the enactment of ritual enables one to locate fairly precisely the boundaries of the old settlement.

The day before *deo puṣā*, rites of purification take place. The house will be cleaned and every floor re-washed (New. *bā tibe*) with a mixture of clay and cow dung. Women bathe and have their nails pared by the Barber's wife. These preparations are common to all major rituals. That evening a cursory check is made of the site to see that all the stones are actually there. This is carried out by some of the senior men of the lineage including the *nāyo* and the organiser of the event for that year (*pālamha*).

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7. See Toffin (1981, 61) for a description of the *aṣṭa mātṛkā*.

The responsibilities of the *pālamha* are rotated annually among the heads of household of the lineage. The word actually means 'the person whose turn it is' and it is applied to other *guthis* also. While the post involves some extra financial contribution, the main duties are to oversee the operation of the worship and feast, including the invitation of participants and the collection of dues. Having checked that the stones are there, he and the other elders will clean up the site and the *nāyo* informs the gods that they will be worshipped the following morning. Families then eat their last meal of boiled rice until the ceremonies are complete.

On the morning of *Sithinakha*: Dhulikhel is a hive of activity. Women and girls, many in their best clothes, weave through the town carrying trays of offerings to all the main deities. As with every Newar *pujā*, Ganeś is worshipped before any other deity. As a rule married women and older unmarried girls do not accompany the later procession to the *digu puja* site but there is no specific prohibition. It has been suggested by Stahl that married women are not actually incorporated into their husband's lineage until the time of the first *deo puja* after their marriage. For the first year of marriage, she says, a woman 'remains part of her parents' lineage' and so does not worship at her husband's *digu dyo*. However his lineage will make some offerings in her name. This is not the case in Dhulikhel. There the critical time of entry into the husband's lineage is either the marriage itself or, in the case of a very formal wedding, the betrothal four days before the main marriage ceremony when a presentation of betel nuts by the groom's parents to the bride's parents seals the engagement.

The change in a woman's status is marked by the number of days death pollution is observed when she dies. An unmarried woman is mourned by all her lineage members for ten days but by her natal lineage for only four days. The period of pollution



is not any way dependent on the performance of *deo puja*. Nevertheless, the biggest Dhulikhel lineage -- Mākaju -- does have a special ritual whereby newly married women are absorbed into the lineage and this takes place on the evening of *Sithinakha*: every three years when they hold *deo puja*. As far as I know however, Mākaju women who have not yet performed the ritual are in no way handicapped, either ritually or socially. It is simply an additional way of confirming their new identity with their husband's lineage. In other lineages, newly married women, in the traditional gesture of respect (New. *bhāge yāye*), bow down to all the senior members of their husband's lineage, both male and female, immediately after the main worship.<sup>8</sup>

The *puja* begins with a procession from the house of the *pālamha* led by the *nāyo*. Ideally it contains the heads of all the households in the lineage but a son or younger brother from the same household (New. *bhutu*, lit. 'hearth') may represent someone who is away on business or who is too ill to attend. It is a grave insult for a head of household who is fit and at home not to attend the ceremony. Potential sanctions against a defaulter include not observing death pollution for a member of his household. Effectively this would imply excommunication from the lineage and I know of no case of expulsion for this reason. Informants were quite clear that the sanction would be invoked. Those who have moved away and do not return for *deo puja* are regarded as being no longer in the lineage. Dhulikhel residents *always* honour this commitment.

Often the processions are preceded by a small band of Kusle (the Tailor caste) musicians but this seems to be a matter of preference and not *de rigueur*. However, I was told that in one case where a lineage had fragmented into three separate lineages, only the descendants of the most senior could legitimately employ the

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8. See also Nepali (1965, 394).

Kusle. The case of the split will be discussed below. While I did not follow the Kusle on either occasion, I am confident they could not have succeeded in attending every group since there are only two Kusle households and over fifty Shrestha lineages. Because of this shortage, the Mākaju lineage employed Damai musicians from a neighbouring hamlet. The Damai are not Newars but they fill the same occupational role -- tailor/musician -- and have the same unclean status among Parvate castes as the Kusle do among Newars. The attendance of musicians is to add pomp to the occasion rather than a strict ritual requirement. Kusle are under obligation to provide music at certain other rituals.

The Kusle go as far as the entry to the site and then move on to their next engagement. Their presence near the gods would be regarded as defiling since they are considered untouchable -- a status which though legally abolished is still very much in force. The other participants file through to the space where the gods are kept, many of them carrying offerings. They are led by the *nāyo* who carries a special brass vessel called a *kota* which is *said* to represent the unity of the *digu dyo puḷā* group. This is a very interesting material manifestation of solidarity and its importance will be illustrated in the discussion of the split lineages below. I have been told that the *kota* is the symbol of every *guṭhi*. One person applied the aphorism, '*kota madu, guṭhi madu*' -- if there's no *kota*, there's no *guṭhi*. However, this is not strictly true since there are voluntary *guṭhis* in Dhulikhel with no *kota*.

The representatives of each household carry a little brass basket containing offerings of flowers, *sinha* (vermillion powder), rice, bread, duck eggs, incense, fruit and vegetables. Having arrived at the stone gods, all the offerings are placed before them. These also include one raw egg and one small clay saucer with uncooked rice and a five paisa coin per household. The

whole display appears very colourful and lavish. A pure black goat is purchased on behalf of the group by the *pālamha*. A contribution of between five and ten rupees per person is levied by him on the heads of household. An equal contribution is made for all family members down to newborn babes and in return all will take an equal share of the feast.

The *nāyo* then proceeds with the offerings. Each egg is broken open and a little of the white poured over the carnivorous gods. The second year it was pointed out to me that two of their gods were vegetarian. One of them was identified as Nārāyaṇ but no-one was too confident. In this ceremony there were quite clearly eight stones which the same man then hypothesized represented the *aṣṭa mātrkā* -- the eight mother goddesses. This is less than plausible for a number of reasons, not least of which is that Nārāyaṇ is a male god. There is however a different connection between the *aṣṭa mātrkā* and *digu dyo* taken up by Stahl (1979, 125) but it is not particularly relevant here.

The main offering is the sacrifice of the goat. Water is sprinkled over it by the *nāyo* until it shakes itself dry -- a sign that it has become acceptable to the gods. It is then seized and the head held back so that when the neck is cut open blood will spurt over the gods. The head is completely severed and placed before the stones along with pieces taken from the goat's neck and tail. The head and tail are later divided into seven pieces (*śī*) which are shared amongst the seven seniormost males of the lineage.<sup>9</sup> The rest of the body is skinned and

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9. G.S. Nepali gives the figure as eight but includes a portion for the priest who is absent in Dhulikhel. Toffin (1976) shows clearly how this sharing out of the pieces of the goat's head reflects the hierarchy of seniority. The same principle, where different castes are awarded different parts of a goat after a festival to Durga, is described in Toffin (1978). In the former of these articles, the author draws an interesting and convincing parallel with the mythological origin of the *varna* system. In the same way as the *varnas* emerge from the different parts of the body of Puruṣa, so the Newar 'feast of the head' periodically re-establishes the power of the elders.

guttled with a final offering in the form of the intestine which is garlanded around the central idol. Everyone present is given a *tika* by the *nāyo* and together they then bow in respect to the gods and shower them with uncooked rice. All of these elements are familiar parts of Newar ritual.

A small 'pre-feast' (called *samay*) is then eaten. What is left of the eggs is fried and eaten with beaten rice and flattened bread provided by the *pālamha*. A little distilled liquor (*ailā*) may also be drunk. What happens next will depend in part on whether another group is worshipping at the same site. This is common in Dhulikhel and, as far as I know, elsewhere. In one case, eight different lineages all have the same *digu dyo*. In spite of the fact that this is in some sense an ancestral deity, I was assured that none of these lineages was, or ever had been, patrilineally related to any other. However, they, and they alone, also make up one of Dhulikhel's *śī guṭhis* and all are from the same part of town.

In at least two other cases, however, lineages which once celebrated *deo puḷā* in common now worship in separate groups but at the same site and within a few minutes of each other. The splits were the result of a caste dispute in 1955 which, by all accounts, virtually divided Dhulikhel in two. Two neighbouring lineages at the western edge of the town did in fact separate, in one case into two lineages, in the other into three. The dispute is discussed after the description of the *puḷā*.

On the second occasion I watched *deo puḷā*, I joined one of the lineages which had split. When we arrived at the site, another group were already engaged in worship. These people were from the nearby village of Chaukot and are said to be emigrants from Dhulikhel. They have no agnatic relations in Dhulikhel but they are called Shrestha and freely intermarry with the Shresthas of Dhulikhel (given the restrictions of kinship proximity). The 'indigenous' Shresthas of Chaukot

believe these emigrés and all Dhulikhel Shresthas to have lower status than them and will not marry them. When these Chaukot people had finished their worship, they removed their offerings to one side. The *nāyo* of the group I was with then washed down the stones and commenced his own *pujā*. A short while later, the next group (of erstwhile relatives) turned up and patiently waited until they could begin.

This indicates clearly that the gods are invoked into the stones by each group and explains the casualness with which the stones are treated at other times.<sup>10</sup> Banter, rather than animosity, was the order of the day. While everyone remembers the dispute, it is widely felt to be a matter of the past. My questions on the subject were often evaded with the reply: 'Caste is abolished now'. A third group, which was also to have done *deo puja* at the same site, did not because its *nāyo* had died during the preceding year. There is no rule about which group may worship first. It is simply a question of who arrives first. At the site I attended however, only one of the split lineages carried a *kota*, the brass vessel symbolizing unity. This was the group who are descended from the seniormost ancestor at the time of the split.

Once the *pujā* and *samay* are finished, preparations for the main feast begin. This may be held at the same site but where a number of groups are competing for space, it is more usual to have it somewhere near the house of the *pālamha*. If the place is not sufficiently private, a cloth screen will be erected to exclude outsiders. As a rule, only lineage members and, in the case of the Mākaju lineage, married sisters, may partake of the feast. My presence caused considerable embarrassment and not a little tension in the first year I was there. I had been invited to the feast by the *pālamha* himself and it was to be held in the open square in front of his house. I watched the preparations discreetly from an upstairs window but later moved

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10. See also Macdonald & Stahl (1978, 88).

outside to take some photographs. Some of the older men objected to my presence and I was quickly removed to a neighbouring house where I was given my share of the feast.

Newars are an amazingly generous and hospitable people though their generosity always has something of a potlatch spirit -- 'look how much we can afford to give!' This material hospitality does not have a social counterpart. An outsider is always an outsider and the barriers of exclusion are many. As throughout the Hindu world, eating provides one of the main forums for acceptance or non-acceptance. Daily food, i.e. boiled rice, is usually eaten only by household members and certainly only members of the local subcaste. I was never invited to eat rice in a Dhulikhel kitchen -- not once in eighteen months. On the few occasions I did eat rice in others' homes, it was always in a downstairs room and my hosts were far from comfortable. What seems to be important is the simple fact of commensality and not, as is reported from other areas, the question of who is giving or receiving boiled rice.

By contrast, I was often invited to eat feasts because the food is less capable of being polluted (boiled rice is not eaten) and because they are much more public affairs. My exclusion from the *digu puja* feast -- i.e. not to be allowed to eat *with* them -- was in marked contrast to all the other feasts I attended with the exception of the *śī guṭhi* feast where I was not allowed to eat at all. It was not a case of my polluting their food. It was simply that I did not belong to the lineage and to eat with them on this occasion would have demonstrated that I did.

This was illustrated again later when I was recounting the story of my exclusion to another member of the lineage who had not been present at the time; (there are so many people, the feast is held in shifts). When I said first that I had just eaten their feast, he laughed and said, 'Oh, now you're a real

Newar'. He suggested I adopt the name Shrestha. Another man present, from a different lineage, thought the name Mākaju more appropriate since I had, after all, eaten their feast and attended their *pujā*. My Mākaju friend and his brother both looked very uncomfortable and, without giving a reason, suggested this was not a good idea. Instead they offered three alternative Dhulikhel lineage names -- families whose house I was or had been living in. This playing around with names afforded sufficient humour to dissipate what was clearly for them a tense situation.

By the second year I was more conscious of intruding and did not attempt to get invited to any of the various *deo puja* feasts. But I did go to watch the ritual and to take some photographs. The lineage whose *pujā* I watched first did not seem at all happy to have me even there and their tetchy old *nāyo* insisted I pay Rs 20/= for the privilege of taking photographs. I bargained a little and offered to pay the money on condition that I be given a share of the feast. My offer was hastily refused and I was allowed to photograph without fee.

The question of who *digu dyo* is always brought forth contradictory replies in Dhulikhel. Most equated it with the Nepali *kul devatā* (lineage deity). This produced a problem however because certain other gods were also sometimes referred to by them as their *kul devatā*. In this case, the Nepali term was always used and no reverse equation with *digu dyo* was made. For example, most of the Mākaju lineage claimed the goddess Harisiddhi as their *kul devata*. One of the town's main temples is erected to her in the central square and four lineages, including Mākaju, are obliged to do worship there on all important ritual occasions. A conversation might run something like this:

Q. Does *digu dyo* have any other name ?

A. Not a name like Bhairav or Ganes but he is sometimes referred to as our *kul devatā*.

Q. Who is Harisiddhi ?

A. Harisiddhi is the *kul devatā* of the Mākaju lineage (and of three other lineages).

Q. So Harisiddhi is *digu dyo*?

A. No.

The paradox has a solution because Harisiddhi is not in fact their *kul devatā* though there is a very good reason for making the mistake. In order to see it, I had to look at accounts of the Newar pantheon outside of Dhulikhel though another Dhulikhel informant gave the lie when he said that Harisiddhi was not a *kul devatā* but simply a god which Mākajus and others has specially *chosen* to worship. It is very common for Newars to adopt a particular god and for worship to be perpetuated by succeeding generations. The term *iṣṭa devatā*, glossed by Locke (1980, 468) as 'A chosen tutelary deity or favourite god' is in common parlance in Kathmandu. It is not widely used in Dhulikhel. If Harisiddhi and other gods really belong to the class of *iṣṭa devatā* (as I believe they do), how did they come to be identified with lineage gods ? I should make it clear that both the *kul devatā* and the *iṣṭa devatā* have the same social referent -- the lineage. Though a number of lineages worship Harisiddhi, they do so separately. The goddess does not in any concrete sense provide a focus for bringing the lineages together.

Some of the confusion can be cleared up by reference to Stahl's account of *digu dyo*. Stahl has argued convincingly for Bhaktapur that the open *digu dyo* shrines outside the town are complemented by secret idols inside, at least for the high castes:

The high castes (Brahmins, Chathariya, Pāc̣thariya) do not only have the Digu-dyo sanctuaries outside the town for their lineage divinities; they also have temples 'within the city walls' called Āgama-che (Stahl, 1979, 122).



She points out that like *digu dyo*, *āgā dyo* (the god of the *āgā chē*) is not a proper name but the name of a category, and continues:

The temple 'within the walls' may be situated in a separate building or in a house belonging to a lineage member... Whichever is the case, the deity is hidden and the cult is secret and reserved to initiates (ibid.).

According to Toffin (1978, 5), *āgā* 'derives from the Sanskrit *āgama* "secret, hidden"'. Among Newars the exclusion of outsiders is a very common theme, not only in ritual but in everyday social intercourse. Secrecy and the right of access to certain tantric rituals, knowledge and deities are more common among the high Newar castes. It is particularly marked at the level of the household where each joint family constitutes a strictly separate financial unit and decisions about the use of resources are jealously guarded from outsiders.

Although I could be the unwitting victim of such secrecy, I am confident that no *āgā chē* or *āgā dyo* exist in Dhulikhel. I found only one, very well educated informant, with an academic interest in Newar culture, who was aware of the term *āgā*. This may reveal something about the claim of Dhulikhel Shresthas to high-caste status if Stahl's contention that the *āgā chē* is a high-caste phenomenon is universally true for Newars. The absence of an *āgā dyo* in Dhulikhel means that the following equivalence has no meaning there:

It is important to make it clear that it is the same divinity in the *Āgama chē* as in the outside sanctuary -- *digu dyo*. During the annual ceremony for *digu dyo* the priest begins by invoking the name of the deity who is in the *Āgama chē* (stahl, 1979, 124).

The absence of an *āgā dyo* and its substitution by an *iṣṭa devatā* adopted by long-forgotten ancestors is not then a huge step,

particularly in a caste which is renowned for seeking the trappings of high-caste status. While I cannot *prove* that this is what happened with some of Dhulikhel's lineages, I know of no other explanation for the existence of two gods, both identified with *kul devatā* but not with each other. It seems to me to be a particularly good example of status-aspiring plagiarism but, as is frequent in such cases, the aspirers do not fully understand the rules of the game.

There are however precedents where an *iṣṭa devatā* and *kul devatā* are identical. Perhaps the most noteworthy Newar example is Maneśvari who filled both roles for the Malla kings. Another well-known case where a *kul devatā* is known to have been adopted (as must have happened with several of Dhulikhel's clans) concerns the Chetri clan of Thāpa. When they migrated into the Kathmandu Valley they adopted Khadga Yogini in Sankhu as their *kul devatā*. It is apparently quite common for an immigrating clan to come to share the same *digu dyo* as others already settled in the community. (I am grateful to Thakur Lal Manandhar for this information).

A footnote to the status of these chosen gods is that they are primarily worshipped by people living in the neighbouring locality. In Dhulikhel four of them are regarded as the major deities of the four old quarters or *toḷs*. The principle of residence, so important to Newar social units, not only sets one community apart from another, but also divides the community from within.

### 3. *Śī Guthi*

The Shresthas of Dhulikhel are divided into 51 named exogamous lineages. In fact it is a little more complicated than this because four lineages have recently split and recognise certain ties of agnatic kinship (they do not yet inter-marry) but not others (they no longer observe death pollution for each other). The split is discussed in detail later. These Shrestha lineages are divided into ten different *śī guthi* associations comprising as few as three and as many as ten lineages. The breakdown of lineages by *śī guthi* is given below. Generally all the households of a lineage will belong

to the same *śī guthi* but there is no absolute rule about this and in fact the four split lineages each have households in two different *śī guthi*. Again this is a direct result of the dispute described later.

Table No. 1: Number of households in each Shrestha lineage grouped according to *śī guthi* membership

<u>Guthi No. 1</u>		<u>Guthi No. 5</u>	
Lineage name	No. of h/hs	Lineage name	No. of h/hs
Byāju	53	Barai	1
Dhana Man Singh	1	Gholi	8
Paṭṭaju	1	Kālu	8
Saiju	1	Lākhe (Taksāri)	7
		Nhasi (Lando,	
		Phatta, Twana)	15
		Pukse	1
		Gajya	3
<u>Guthi No. 2</u>		<u>Guthi No. 6</u>	
Bujyaju	2	Biju	7
Byanā Byā	3	Deoju	16
Cilaju	1	Mākaju	60
Dhōju	2	Tusuju	9
Ganeju	7		
Ghinaṅgju	8		
Ta:khāchē	18		
<u>Guthi No. 3</u>		<u>Guthis Nos. 7 &amp; 8</u>	
Lineage name	No. of h/hs	Cocchē	45
Bakhata	1	Khoju	27
Bukhāju (Khasiju)	2	Wēju	25
Cukeju	12	Nyākhwā	2
Kāṅgoju	5		
Kōju	30	<u>Guthi No. 9</u>	
Maisaju	5	Karmacārya	3
Māneju	2	Sōju	6
Pākaju	3	Yogal	55
		Kāṅgo	1
		Phasanpu	1
<u>Guthi No. 4</u>		<u>Guthi No. 10</u>	
Dyenaju	7	Barun	12
Hiphāju	4	Bhālu	2
Patyāṅg	3	Dhālachē	20
Puwā	1	Nasing	12
		Pañca	1

Total no. of h/holds: 519.

There are a number of restrictions on who may join a *śī guthi*. I have been told in Kathmandu that members may be drawn from different castes but personally know of no case where this is so. In Dhulikhel there is a specific prohibition on intercaste membership. There people say that any Shrestha could potentially join provided that he could prove his caste status and provided he was a resident of the town for at least ten years (some people say twenty). Again, I know of no case in living memory where an outsider has been granted membership of a *śī guthi*. I was always prevented from seeing written records.

Normally membership passes from father to son. Only the household head may be a member of any *guthi*. Other household members are automatically granted the services of the *guthi*. If brothers separate, all except the eldest must apply for new membership in the *śī guthi* and there is a small entrance fee of Rs 10-20. Unless there is some exceptional reason, for example, breaking of caste rules, they will always be admitted. If one household chooses to leave one *guthi* and join another, this is permitted but it is very unusual and only happens where there are deep personal disputes. There is a strong financial disincentive to do so since membership of another *guthi* can cost up to Rs 200/=.

As a rule co-*guthiyārs* (*guthi* members) live in very close proximity to each other. Co-lineage members always live in neighbouring houses where possible since partition is normally effected by dividing a house or building an extension. The *śī guthi* groups together neighbouring lineages for reasons of expediency. Its main function is to dispose of dead bodies and this should always be done quickly. It is important therefore that *guthiyārs* can be informed immediately since they are under obligation to attend the funeral procession and cremation of all household members of a co-*guthiyār*. The obligation is sanctioned in the first place by fines for non-attendance and

ultimately, if the absence is repeated, by expulsion from the association. If expelled, a household can rely on no-one to take away their dead. There is no Shrestha family in this position in Dhulikhel and, as far as I know, only two Dhulikhel households are not members of a *śī guthi*. The case is exceptional and involves two brothers who belong to the Cipā (dyer) caste. They migrated in some years ago from Dharan; one brother is mad and both are extremely poor. I was told that if one of them died, friends and neighbours would help but that there would be no obligation to do so.

If a *guthiyār* cannot come himself, any other adult male from the household may represent him. Adulthood is marked by a caste initiation ceremony which may take place any time between early childhood and late adolescence. If, unavoidably, no-one can come, (for example, because they are away on business), a small fine of 50 paisa will be levied. This is even the case where a household has no adult male, and one all-female household has been paying fines for years. If a *guthiyār* is in the town but chooses not to go to the funeral procession, the fine jumps to between Rs 5 and Rs 25. The rate is not fixed because those who do go will discuss among themselves the gravity of the offence and the ability of the offender to pay.

As with Hindus everywhere, death in Dhulikhel is marked by an abundance of ritual. Given that *śī guthi* membership is compulsory, it is curious just how little *guthiyārs* are affected by the death of one of the members of their association and how minimal their role is. Once a death is announced, one *guthiyār* will inform the others that they must come immediately to the dead person's house. This responsibility is rotated annually among the *guthiyārs* and there are some other concurrent duties which are described below. The *guthiyārs* first gather in an upstairs room of the deceased person's house and, having offered condolences to the household relatives, briefly discuss the nature of the death and when

exactly they will carry the corpse away. This is usually done as soon as the bier has been constructed and the necessary materials -- straw and wood -- have been despatched to the *ghāt*.

The *pālamha* (he whose turn it is) will also bring certain items from his house where they have been stored for the year of his stewardship. These include an orange shroud (*devāṅg*), a brass vessel known as a *kota* which symbolises the *guthi*, and one small clay saucer (*salincā*) for each *guthiyār*. These are all the common property of the *guthi*. It has other property too, notably an idol which in Dhulikhel invariably seems to represent Bhairavnāth -- a particularly fierce incarnation of Śiva. There are also various pieces of equipment which are used to cook the annual *guthi* feast.

When the time comes to move off, the procession is led by Kasai (Butcher caste) musicians playing percussion instruments only. The main group is composed of *guthiyārs*, other lineage members, daughters' and sisters' husbands, friends and neighbours of the same caste. Only male adults may go to the *ghāt*. Other castes permit or require married daughters to join the procession but Dhulikhel Shresthas forbid it though their married daughters do play an important role when a death occurs in their natal household.

The body is carried feet first by any four men in the procession (excluding of course the Butchers). The *nāyo* (lineage head) will carry the *kota*, another *guthiyār* some wheat straw which is lit at the ritual boundary marking the exit of the town. Yet another carries a *puja* tray and makes offerings both to the dead man's soul and at every crossroads. Crossroads are places where evil spirits are thought particularly to lurk. One further *guthiyār* carries three clay bricks which are dropped once outside the town. And each member of the association brings the clay saucer which signifies his membership.

Once at the *ghāṭ* all the processionists pay their final respects to the corpse in a ceremony known as *la: twankegu* (giving water to drink) where they each pour water and ever-green grass (*gutha*) on the mouth of the deceased. The last to do this will be the chief mourner -- the eldest son for the father, the youngest for the mother. Before the body is set alight, a second, white shroud, provided by the deceased person's household is brought up and the orange shroud is taken off and thrown to a member of a very low untouchable caste waiting at a distance. The *guthi* shroud is retained and used again.

At this stage many mourners begin to return home. All of the *guthiyārs* however must remain until the body is completely burnt. If they have pressing business they may ask permission from the *nāyo* to leave early but as a rule they are expected to stay. A register of all the members' names is taken to the *ghāṭ* and a roll call taken. Note is made of those who are absent and agreement is reached on the fine they will pay at the time of the annual feast. Once the corpse is fully burnt, the ashes are put in the river and the *guthiyārs* return to the house of the deceased. There the son's wife pours water over the hands of all male lineage members and *guthiyārs* present and they wipe their eyes with it. Having eaten a small 'snack' of beaten rice and ginger (*sisā pālu*), they can then go home.

From the moment death is announced all lineage members observe ten days' death pollution. During this period, certain foods, including salt and meat, may not be eaten and gods may not be worshipped. At the end of the ten day period all male lineage members are supposed to shave their heads. *Guthiyārs* who are not lineage members do not observe any pollution nor shave their heads after ten days. Once the task of burning the dead is finished, their work is over. They play no part in the elaborate post-funerary ritual and need not even be invited to the feast held by the deceased person's household, nor to the

purification ceremony (*che binkegu*) immediately after the feast, which occurs thirteen days after the death. Neither do they play any part in the annual festival of *gāi jātra* where households which have had a death in the preceding year lead a small chariot representing a cow, or a cow itself, through the streets.

The next and only obligation of members of the *śi guṭhi* is to attend the annual feast. Some of the Dhulikhel associations meet once or twice more a year to sort out their records but, for the sake of simplicity, I will consider only the feast where all *śi guṭhi* conduct the major portion of their affairs. The first business is to collect the annual fees, most of which are used for the feast itself. The remainder goes into a fund for utensils and any other items such as shrouds, *pujā* materials and so on. Money may also on occasion be used for granting small loans at low interest to *guṭhiyārs*. *Guṭhi* funds are never used to pay for funeral expenses which must be borne by the household. In cases of extreme poverty the *guṭhiyārs* may voluntarily contribute but this would be very unusual, and it would be done on an individual rather than a corporate basis.

The *guṭhi* as a unit employs no ritual specialists. Priests and musicians alike are paid by the dead person's household. The day before the feast a group of *guṭhiyārs* sit together with the register of names and collect both the annual fees and any outstanding fines. Accounts are meticulously recorded and the rule is simple: one's share in the feast cannot be taken until the money is paid. Different associations demand different amounts. The highest I heard was 3 *pāthi* of paddy or Rs 20 in lieu plus Rs 40 cash (1 *pāthi* =  $2\frac{1}{4}$  litres approx.). Some found this very difficult to pay and one man was exempted though he was made to feel very guilty for being so poor. Another *śi guṭhi* relies mainly on voluntary contributions and works on the principle that each gives according to his ability.



The *pālamha* must provide certain items such as wood for fuel, oil, salt and other spices. All other expenses are collectively met and, if there is any shortfall, a second collection is taken up. Total expenses can be as high as Rs 5,000 but can be partly offset if the *guthi* owns land which produces millet or rice for making liquor. At the feast the *pālamha* may be aided by another male household member (*wāla*) who is not himself a *guthiyār*. He will also be entitled to a share providing his work is done properly.

*Guthi* feasts are the business only of those who are members and others are physically excluded by erecting screens or by holding the event in a private place. In my first year in Dhulikhel I was not permitted to watch the proceedings. By chance the second year one of the feasts was held in my back garden because the *pālamha* for that *śī* *guthi* was my landlord. He lived all year in a border town to the south doing business and looking after fields which he owned there. He himself did not come back for the *guthi* feast and I never met him. Instead he sent his wife to do the organisation for him. The other *guthi* members seemed perfectly happy with this arrangement in spite of the fact that women are never *guthiyārs*. I will deal with the problem of absent *guthiyārs* later.

The feast is held over two (sometimes three) days. On the first day dues are collected; on the second day various gods are worshipped, the *guthi* god is transferred to the house of the following year's *pālamha*, and finally the feast is eaten. There is no fixed day for the event but it always takes place in the month of Mangsir (Nov.-Dec.). Because of my exclusion the previous year, I ascertained in advance that I would be welcome (in my own house where I was usually alone). I was told that while some of the older men might disapprove, I could watch all the proceedings, take photographs, ask questions and generally make a nuisance of myself. I would not be allowed to actually

partake of the feast since in any case it was only going to be a formality and the food itself was to be taken home to be shared with each *guthiyār's* household.

On the first evening the *digu dyo* site was cleaned as I have described earlier. Early the second morning the first *pujā* took place -- to the main idol of Ganes for that *tol* (quarter). Two buffalo were taken to the shrine and slaughtered in quick succession. After each one a small group of men (by no means all the *guthiyārs*) took *prasād* (blessed offering) from Ganes. As the second *pujā* began I was invited to join in. This, they said, would make me a *guthiyār*. I hastily agreed and they pointed out that a membership fee would be required. I spoke with the *guthi's* elders and, after some hard bargaining, we moved from 100 dollars to Rs 100. It was only as I too was taking *prasād* that I realised that I had unwittingly committed myself to joining another *guthi* and that the two sacrifices had been two completely separate events.

My mistake arose because each of these two *guthis* is composed of split factions of the same lineages. I knew of the split but not of the precise alignment. Having made the commitment, my new *guthi* associates refused to hear my protestations that my landlord's family would be less than happy. I was paraded down to my own house like a prize catch where I sat bemused while they argued over which group I was in. Finally I was dragged off by my co-*guthiyārs* to do another *pujā* to an idol of Bhairav outside the town.

This *pujā* was relatively unimportant though a chicken was sacrificed and cooked and eaten immediately afterwards. In all we were six or seven people and the other *guthi* members told me they had come of their own volition. As I came back home a small procession from the other *guthi* was transferring the *guthi* god to the house of the following year's *pālamha*. The idol was kept covered since only *guthiyārs* may see it.

Those that I spoke to however said they were too afraid to look at it and, even when worshipping, kept it covered with a cloth. It is thought that if a non-*guthiyār* steps in front of the procession he will die. Later a share of the feast is set aside for the god.

For me things went from bad to worse. I returned to my house and watched the proceedings in my back garden from an upstairs room where I hoped, temporarily, to be left in peace. Not long after, I heard the familiar sound of death music. I went to the front window to watch the spectacle and lo-and-behold there were my fellow *guthiyārs*. Not only had I joined the wrong *guthi*, on my very first day I had failed in my only obligation to it! (In my defence however it was the responsibility of the *pālamha* to inform me of the death and request my attendance at the funeral procession). This death severely disrupted the *guthi's* feast since it was heavily dominated by one lineage and all were immediately barred from taking meat -- the main feast food. In spite of the fact that some of them had invited me to the feast, when I turned up an excuse was made for delaying it and I was 'advised' to go and have boiled rice. Since boiled rice and feast food are never eaten at the same time, this was more or less an instruction not to eat the feast.

In the end then I wasn't invited to produce the clay saucer (*salicā*), the handful of uncooked rice and a 5 paisa coin which they had earlier asked me to bring and they stayed in my pocket. These items symbolize the entry of a new *guthiyār*. Neither did I bow down to the elders which would have indicated my respect for them and formally sealed my membership. Till I left however they insisted I had broken the deal, not them, and that they were prepared to admit me. A few days later two of the *guthi's* oldest men challenged me in the street and asked for the Rs 100. I agreed on condition that the register was brought and my name was inscribed with the others. We settled

for a later date but the register was never again produced. This enabled them to abuse me for failing to pay up and me to abuse them for having me on. This was only occasionally amusing.

The point of this anecdote is not to illustrate my relations with Dhulikhel Newars which, incidentally, were usually rather better, though always on their terms. It is rather to show the tolerance given to outsiders when they attempt to infiltrate the system. In a parallel case another anthropologist, who was studying Newar music in Kathmandu, was assured that his name had been added to the register of a *guthi* of the Manandhar (Buddhist) caste which was dedicated to the performance of religious music. When he attempted to pay his fine for non-attendance his money was very firmly refused. Unsurprisingly, his name was not on the register. Anthropologists, of course, are special cases. But it was precisely because we lay outside the ordinary boundaries of social interaction that the shutters were not pulled down earlier as they would have been on any Nepali. It was amusing to have a foreigner around provided he didn't get too close. Even other Dhulikhel Shresthas would neither have attempted, nor been allowed, to attend *guthi* functions other than their own.

In the end I was able to watch the feast being held behind my house. It was easily the most lavish I had ever seen. In front of each *guthiyār* was a straw tray normally used for winnowing. These were covered with food and after each member had eaten a little of each preparation, their wives came to ferry the trays back to the houses where they were shared out with other members of the kitchen and with married daughters who had been invited. Huge quantities of meat had been prepared and each household was also allocated a pot of *khulā* -- a kind of jellied buffalo meat. As with other *guthis* the eight seniormost members were also given *śī* -- the parts of the goat's head which are distributed according to seniority. This

seems to be another example of the pervasive ideology of respect for elders which seen particularly clearly in the authority structure of the joint household, and which is mirrored by the kinship terminology.

In both ideology and practice the question of whether households can be expelled from a *śī guthi* is ambivalent. I know of no case where a household has been *actively* expelled but there are cases where membership has been allowed to lapse because of the continued absence of *guthiyārs*. These are always cases where the entire household has settled elsewhere and has effectively severed its connections with Dhulikhel. This does not happen frequently. In March 1982 I was invited to three weddings involving two girls and one boy from the same household. Some years previously the entire family had moved to Sikkim but they maintain a house in Dhulikhel and sporadically visit it. All three marriages were with Shrestha families based in Dhulikhel. The household continues to be represented in a *śī guthi* and pays fines if no-one is available to represent it at a death.

In another case however, where five brothers partitioned after the death of their father, only three have become members of the *guthi*. The other two live in bazaar towns in east Nepal but come to Dhulikhel for festivals and rituals such as *kijā puja* (younger brother worship). I was told that for each year these two abstained from joining the *guthi* they would be liable to pay a fine of Rs 100 but that there was no question but that they would be allowed to join. In other cases, where families have emigrated and lapsed in their obligations, I was told that they would be regarded as expelled but that if they decide to return they would be re-admitted to the *guthi* on payment of the appropriate fee.

When a Dhulikhel trader dies while outside, the *guthiyārs* have no duties to perform. I was told that friends and neighbours in that bazaar would cremate the body. When the news

reaches Dhulikhel co-lineage members begin the period of death pollution. Dhulikhel traders almost always do business in bazaars where they know other Dhulikhel Shresthas to be. They are quick to exploit new business opportunities but reluctant to do so in isolation from those they know. These business communities are, however, almost purely economic concerns. In those that I visited the Dhulikhel traders said that they had virtually no social links in the bazaar, even with other Shresthas from Dhulikhel. All festivals and life-cycle rituals are celebrated at home with the rest of the joint household and not in the bazaars where, usually, only two or three males are present.

The extent to which a *śī guṭhi* can be considered an economic organisation is, in Dhulikhel at least, minimal and this is true also of the other *guṭhis*. I mentioned earlier that one of their functions is to provide loans but I was told that this is not a frequent occurrence and that, in any case, the amounts of money involved are relatively small -- up to Rs 1,500. This might be enough to solve a temporary crisis for a poor *guṭhiyār* but it is insignificant in comparison with the daily turnover of the average Dhulikhel shopkeeper. It is quite possible for one member to be almost destitute and for his fellow *guṭhiyārs* to be completely oblivious to the fact, at least in so far as they absolve themselves of any responsibility. For other Newar castes this picture needs to be qualified but first I wish to consider the caste dispute which split two of Dhulikhel's lineages and brought about a new alignment of the *śī guṭhi* groups.

The story of the split, which occurred in 1955, is a complicated one, full of ambiguities which I never fully resolved in spite of repeated questioning on the issue. People were willing enough to tell me the general principles involved and to say which families were now members of which group. But they denied that the bone of contention was still of relevance even though the divisions are regularly re-enacted at the time

of *deo puja* and each time someone dies. I was unable to get information on every quarrel which led to a division but I learned enough to be able to give the general idea both of the reasons for separation and the consequences of it.

The two lineages which split were originally called Cocche and Khoju (see diagrams below). The latter divided into two groups both of which retain the lineage name Khoju. The former divided into three groups respectively called Weju, Cocche and Cocche again.<sup>11</sup> The two Cocche groups are distinguished by the local epithets *wāre* and *pāre* ('over here' and 'over there') which locate them on either side of a main street. These are the divisions for *deo puja* and thus the lines of lineage affiliation. The *sī guthis* have a slightly different membership pattern as I will try to show in recounting the history of the split. I will also spell out the consequences of it for marriage prohibitions and death pollution.

The quarrel, I was repeatedly told, was a matter of *jāt-bhāt* -- caste and food. *Bhāt* (Nep.) specifically means boiled rice, the food which is most strictly governed by pollution rules. As a rule it is only eaten with household members in the kitchen which is located on the top floor of the house in order to make it inaccessible to strangers. Other relatives, provided they are of the same caste, may also eat in the same kitchen. In theory anyone sharing the same caste status will eat rice together but the principle is applied only to those whose status one is sure of. Even though Dhulikhel Shresthas all share the same status today, there is no practice of 'going out to dinner' except perhaps for married daughters who frequently visit and stay with their natal families.

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11. A fourth lineage, Kāṅgo, has one household in a separate *sī guthi*. I did not realise this until after I had finished my fieldwork in Dhulikhel and was compiling lists of *sī guthi* membership later from scattered notes. I am not currently in a position to say whether this has any particular significance.





lineages. I have recorded fourteen cases where this took place.

At some stage however Lāl Kāji moved to Sikkim and my informant for this part of the genealogy failed to state that he married again there. From other sources I know that his new wife had no connection with Dhulikhel and was regarded as belonging to a caste lower than Shrestha (Darjeeling Pradhān). She and Lāl Kāji had a son called Jaga Nāth who became a doctor and at some stage moved back to Dhulikhel. Lāl Kāji had three sons two of whom married in Sikkim and the other died before marriage. I was unable to identify their mother since none of them ever came back to Dhulikhel. They married in Sikkim to 'Shresthas from over there' -- a non-compromising way of saying 'we don't know who they married'. As long as they stayed in Sikkim no-one really cared.

Jaga Nāth unfortunately returned to Dhulikhel and somehow or other managed to marry a girl in the neighbouring town of Banepa. She belonged to one of the emigre Dhulikhel Shrestha families there. These families marry freely in Dhulikhel but are not accepted as legitimate marriage partners by native Banepa Shresthas. I was unable to discover how exactly the marriage was arranged. Jaga Nāth was killed some years ago in a plane crash. His marriage however resulted in an acrimonious debate which all of Dhulikhel seems to have been involved in.

The first interesting thing is that the second marriage of Jaga Nāth's father, Lāl Kāji, was not itself a cause of contention. It was only when Jaga Nāth, the issue of a low-caste mother, attempted to marry into Dhulikhel's closed circle of acceptable marriage partners that objections were raised. His status as a doctor however swayed some into accepting his claim and in time this group became the majority in the town. The objection was strongest in two lineages, Khoju and Cocchē. Sizeable numbers in each lineage argued that not only should

the Banepa Shresthas be outcasted but so should their supporters. This too is noteworthy because there seems to have been no question of expelling Jaga Nath from his own lineage -- Mākaju.

The early isolationist policy of the Khoju and Cocche lineages would have been untenable for long and it seems to have been abandoned shortly afterwards. At the time however one Khoju man had betrothed his daughter to a member of another Dhulikhel lineage who supported the doctor. While he was against marriage with these 'low-caste' people in general, he felt unable, as a matter of honour, to break the engagement. As a way of compromise he suggested to his fellow lineage members that, once married, he would never again allow his daughter back in his house nor accept cooked food from her.

Rather uncharitably the offer was refused. The marriage went ahead and the girl's father and family were 'out-casted' -- i.e. expelled from the lineage. A short time later this man's brother also married into one of the 'low-caste' Dhulikhel lineages. His household too were 'degraded'. The English words 'outcaste' and 'degrade' were used by the informant who first told me the story in detail. He is the son of the first Khoju who was outcasted. When I asked him to explain these words he said that his family and his uncle's were forbidden from performing *deo puḷā* with other Khojus and that when someone in their households died other Khojus refused to observe ten days' pollution.

The details of what happened next are unclear. Over the years arguments in the Khoju lineage festered and bit by bit other households re-aligned with the original out-casted families. The picture today is that all but one of them do *deo puḷā* together. This one household however holds the brass *kota* which should be brought out for the annual worship since it symbolises the unity of the group. Now it is never brought out so that even twenty-five years later the separation has

not been publicly formalised. The carrying of the *kota* by one group would be a very public demonstration of the split and it was said to me that no-one wanted to admit in the open that the separation was final. Nevertheless, neither group observes death pollution for the other so this is demonstration enough. On the other hand there have been no marriages between the two groups because the split is very recent and they can easily trace common patrilineal ancestors.

Curiously the alignment for *sī guthi* membership is different and reflects the divisions of 1955 rather than those caused by subsequent disputes. The reason for this, as far as I can gather, is that other lineages were involved and they were not prepared to continually adapt to the internal ructions of the Khojus. Meanwhile the Cocche clan had split into three lineages as a result of the same dispute. Why three always remained somewhat obscure to me though it has something to do with the founding member of the Weju lineage -- *we* (New.) means 'mad'. The Wejus divided again into 'high' and 'low' groups for the purposes of *sī guthi* membership but they worship *digu dyo* together and regard themselves as a separate lineage. While the Cocche groups have not yet intermarried, there has been at least one 'love' marriage between Cocche and Weju though it should have been forbidden on the grounds of kinship proximity. None of the lineages derived from the original Cocche clan observes death pollution for the others.

These internal divisions, which have led to the establishment of new lineages, have had no effect on relations with other Dhulikhel lineages. When I asked if 'high' Cocche would marry 'low' Khoju, I was told: 'Now we do not believe in that concept'. Caste had been abolished by law and while people might criticise irregular marriages, they could no longer, for example, bar someone from attending *deo pujā*. In fact this is not actually the law which remains ambiguous: caste is abolished but traditional practices should be respected. Among Newars *deo pujā*

and participation in the *sī guthi* are examples of such practices which regularly reinforce the boundaries of lineage and thereby of caste.

Fürer-Haimendorf believed that fission in the *deo puḷā guthi* was a normal developmental sequence 'occurring once in every generation at the time when young men separate from their fathers' households, and as independent householders gain the right to full membership in the guthi' (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956, 29). It is true that the separation of a household requires that the head of each new unit independently 'join' the *deo puḷā guthi* and the *sī guthi*. But this is more or less automatic unless there is some good reason that someone should be barred -- for example, for an infringement of caste rules. But the 'natural' or other fission of households does not necessarily produce a split in either of the two main *guthis*. Ideally the *deo puḷā guthi* should never split since its purpose is to regroup agnates. The *sī guthi* might divide, I was told, if its size became unmanageable (particularly for organising feasts), but in a settlement the size of Dhulikhel there is no good reason why this should happen very frequently.

Toffin's description of the *guthis* of Pyangaon reinforces the idea that periodic fission is inevitable though I find his discussion somewhat puzzling. In Pyangaon there are five *sana guthi* (basically the same as *si guthi* and three *digu dyo guthi* and membership in these corresponds to but is *not* identical with the lineage divisions of the village. Thus from each of the five clans a core of agnates forms the base of each *sana guthi*. To this core is added other villagers who cannot trace any agnatic links. The *digu dyo guthis* are formed in the same way. One association groups two clans who claim a common ancestor, another a second pair who also claim a common origin; the third corresponds to the remaining clan. Membership of each *digu dyo guthi* is then formed by a core of agnates from each of these three groups augmented by non-kin linked individuals.

While this arrangement is perfectly acceptable for a funeral association, I find it bizarre that those who are not agnatic kin should worship the same *digu dyo*. Toffin simply explains this non-correspondence of clan and *guthi* membership by the stronger claims of village cohesion: 'If tensions explode one day and jeopardise the unity of the entire village, the heads of the clans can authorise any villager to change association' (Toffin, 1977, 44).

#### 4. Other Guthis<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the *śī guthi* and the *deo puja guthi*, there are a number of other associations in Dhulikhel which are called *guthi* (Nep.) or *gu* (New.). All of these are dedicated to the worship of a particular god or goddess and may organise and finance an annual festival to the deity and/or pay for the upkeep of a temple or shrine. Some are private (*niji*); others are financed by the state Guthi Samsthān. Membership in some is purely voluntary; in others it has an ascriptive component but the degree of obligation to perform duties is markedly less than in the case of the *si guthi* and *deo puja guthi*. I will give two examples.

The smallest, and newest, *guthi* in Dhulikhel is called the *kanya puja guthi*. It was founded in V. S. 2001 (1945 A.D.) by the grandfather of the present chief *guthiyār*. By 'chief' I do not wish to imply any hierarchy, simply that the main obligations have rested with one family. Other *guthi* members are seen as helpers. The *guthi* was begun by the grandfather of Sri Lāl Makāju -- the present chief *guthiyār* -- in order to do *puja* to young virgin girls who had not yet gone through the Newar mock marriage ceremony of *i yāyegu* (*ihi*). The girls are seen as an incarnation (*rup*) of divine female power (*śakti*) which is usually

12. For other examples of the diverse functions which *guthis* can perform, see *inter alia* Locke (1980, 56 ff, *passim*) and Moaven (1974, 177).

locally identified with the goddess Bhagvati, herself an incarnation of Durga. *Kanya puja* takes place on *Kārtik suddha navami* -- the ninth day of the bright fortnight of the Nepali month of *Kārtik*. The intention in founding this worship was to acquire good (New. *bālagu*) *dharma*. A rice field was set aside to pay the expenses with the proviso that the family would meet any short-fall.

The *guthi* is private and has no connection with the *Guthi Samsthān*. Today it is comprised of all the heads of household of the Makaju lineage (60) and seven others drawn from five different lineages. Apart from Śri Lāl, these other *guthiyārs* have no specific obligation to help out though generally they will provide flowers, money, and various assorted sweet foods to the assembled girls. Anyone who wishes to acquire religious merit may do the same and scores of people avail of the opportunity. The main reason that *guthiyārs* are drawn from other lineages is in case Śri Lāl and other Makajus are prevented from doing *puja* while in a state of pollution.

In theory any young girl can attend the ceremony, including untouchables though they tend to sit separately. Non-Newar girls from the surrounding villages also come and an estimated 1,400 girls, sitting in an unbroken line which stretched through the town, turned up in 1981. A preliminary *puja* to Ganeś was performed by Śri Lāl (incidentally one of the richest men in the town) and the Mākaju *nāyo* (seniormost lineage male). Then each girl was garlanded in turn and presented with offerings by anyone who wished to acquire religious merit. According to Sri Lal, this *guthi* has no *nayo*, no feast, no other meetings, and no *kota* (the brass vessel which usually symbolises a *guthi*). Only men may be members but there is no sanction if a *guthiyār* chooses to leave since the act of acquiring *dharma* is a personal and voluntary one.

My second example is the *Bhagvati guthi* (Nep.) or *bhaga gu* (New.). This is a state (*rāj*) *guthi*, and every year the *Guthi*

Sansthān office in Dhulikhel provides money for a festival at the end of Dasai -- the most important Nepali festival, dedicated to Durga -- after the rice harvest.<sup>13</sup> The money, previously administered by a *jimmawal* (village chief) is nowadays given to the *pradhān panc* -- the village head under the new Panchayat system. He in turn appoints a contractor (*thekadār*) to oversee the festival. The money comes from selling the produce of land registered in the name of the *Bhagvati guthi*. The *guthi* itself is an association of 24 heads of household drawn from nine different lineages. This number (24) is unchangeable and, on the death of a member, he is succeeded by his son. If there is no son, another household may apply for membership.

My understanding is that originally 24 households formed a voluntary association dedicated to Bhagvati, built a temple to her, and endowed lands to pay for the maintenance of the temple, daily worship by a Karmacārya temple priest, twice daily music from the Kusle caste, and an annual festival. At some stage, these responsibilities were assumed by the Guthi Samsthān. I was unable to find out exactly when. This is a fairly common practice however for which there is a double rationale. The most commonly heard reason is that *guthis* have allowed temples to deteriorate and worship to lapse. The state therefore intervenes to guarantee both the material and spiritual welfare of the deity. In assuming *guthi* lands however the state also accrues an extra source of income and, provided that the minimal obligations to the deity are met, it may keep any additional income.

The festival then, which involves carrying a chariot, containing the idol of Bhagvati, round the town, is not the responsibility of the *guthiyārs* but of the *pradhān panc*. He, or his *thekadār*, arranges for the payment and feasting of the

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13. For worship of Durga among Newars, see especially Toffin (1981).

members of the Jugī (Kusle) and Nāy (Kasai) castes who act as musicians and chariot bearers. Until twenty years ago it is said that the *thekadār* feasted one person from every Dhulikhel household. Today there is barely enough money to feed the Jugī and Nāy. The *gūṭhiyār*s are supposed to play music at the end of the festival but anyone, male or female, adult or child, may represent the *gūṭhiyār*'s household. Otherwise the *gūṭhi* meets only once a year in Mangśir (December) to collectively worship Bhagvati and, at their own expense, to have a feast. There is no sanction against non-attendance.

Altogether there are about eighty associations in Dhulikhel which have the title *gūṭhi*, though more than half are accounted for by the lineage-based *deo puṣā gūṭhi*. Only in the *śī gūṭhi* and *deo puṣā gūṭhi* is membership in any sense felt to be mandatory. Those *gūṭhis* which are dedicated to a particular deity or festival have the effect of bringing together lineages from different areas of the town and providing a formal, if festive, arena for collective participation among people whose only other connection is marriage. (The fact that all of the Shrestha lineages of Dhulikhel regard themselves as status equals does not of course mean that there will actually be marriage alliances between every two lineages at any one time.)

Both *Kanya puṣā* and the *Bhagvati gūṭhi* festival also provide occasions where all the town's castes can come together and demonstrate the unity of the town vis-a-vis outsiders. *Kanya puṣā* is unique in allowing outside, non-Newar castes an active role in a festival and this is undoubtedly because it is a recent innovation in Dhulikhel's calendar. Further, it was from the outset conceived as a way of earning religious merit for its patrons who could be anyone, rather than as a way of defining a social group whose survival and purity depend on the continuing practice of its rituals by a restricted number of members.



The various local rituals and festivals contribute to defining a sense of community and it is important to point out that within Dhulikhel rituals which are performed separately may yet reinforce this collective sentiment rather than weaken it. Thus each lineage, by definition, performs *deo puja* individually. But the fact that each does so on the same day (*Sithinakha*;) and that this is visible to members of other lineages in the settlement, produces a sense of collective participation in a ritual which distinguishes them from others who are not seen performing it. The same can be said for the *sī guthi* feasts all of which take place in December and stress an equality of status among participating lineages.

Visibility is all important: it is known that Newars elsewhere practise the same rituals in more or less the same way and this does invoke a sense of common 'Newariness'. But it is relatively weak in comparison with the affinity felt for those whom one can actually see performing the same rituals as oneself and with whom one periodically joins in the execution of other rituals.

5. *Guthi membership: economic interest or ritual obligation?*

Finally let me turn to the question of *guthis* as economic associations. Before commencing my fieldwork I was convinced that the obligatory nature of *guthi* membership had to be the result of a financial dependence on them. In a rather muddled discussion, for example, D.R. Regmi (1965, I, 707) had written that the *guthi* was 'an institution which tended to keep social groups and their individual members safe from process of integration by providing adequate economic sanctions against the same'. In Dhulikhel, as I have shown, this is clearly not so. Among artisans and agriculturalists however the role of the *guthi* as a credit bank appears to be more important. On the basis of a study of the Citrakār painter caste, Toffin has offered a general theory of the working of the Newar *guthi* system. However

it depends heavily on the nature of the Citrakār *dēsālā guṭhi* an association which has, as one of its main aims, the function of regulating competition among caste members for work. While such 'corporatist' organisations may be common among service castes, they do not appear to be nearly so significant among Jyāpus or Shresthas who together form the bulk of the Newar population.

According to Toffin:

The *guṭhis* are, above all, financial societies which own goods, manage a budget, make loans and investments... the majority of *guṭhis* also have lands which were previously cultivated by Jyāpu tenants and which tend nowadays to be worked by wage labourers... Sometimes the high caste Newar *guṭhis* have considerable lands and immovable property as well as objects of art (painting, sculptures of gods) of very great value. These, nevertheless, are the exceptions; most of the Newar *guṭhis* in the Kathmandu Valley are small associations with just enough money to organise their annual feast (Toffin, 1975, 208).

In spite of this customary poverty, however, Toffin insists that the *guṭhis* provide 'even today an unquestionable financial security for all their members... they may even, in certain cases, play the role of credit bank (ibid., 209). It is difficult to reconcile this latter view with the picture of *guṭhis* having just enough to provide for the annual feast, a position which would seem to be the most common among Newars.

Consider, for example, the degree to which the *guṭhis* of the farmers of Pyangaon can be seen as financial organisations. Annual contributions from each *guṭhiyar*:

Cover the annual expenses of the *guṭhi*: offerings to gods, purchase of wood for the funeral pyres, food served on

the occasion of the group's feasts etc. Equally, these remittances may be used to help a *guthiyār* in need following a death in his family. Moreover, *guthi* funds are supplemented by revenue from lands. Each *guthi* has three or four ropani of land, the product of which accrues to the organisation (Toffin, 1977, 45).

Unfortunately no figures are given for the financial contributions of *guthi* members so it is impossible to gauge how economically dependent Pyangaon's inhabitants are on the cooperative resources of these associations. The impression however is that they are not so dependent to any great extent. The amount of land involved, for example, is minimal given that individual households customarily cultivate more than ten *ropanis* of land (ibid., 184). Ishii's (1978) description of 'Satepa' -- a Newar village in the west of the Kathmandu Valley -- leads one to the same general conclusions.

To the best of my knowledge, in general where a Dhulikhel *guthi* has bank deposits they are relatively small allowing only, through their interest, for a contribution to the annual feast, or a small, temporary loan to a member of the association in difficulty. It seems implausible then that membership should be obligatory or even desirable for financial reasons. But in both Dhulikhel and Pyangaon membership is mandatory: 'Everyone living in the village is obliged to be a member of these two *guthis*; to be excluded from them is to be excluded from one's caste and community' (ibid., 43).

Earlier, Fürer-Haimendorf had described *guthis* formed specifically for the purposes of economic cooperation and the sanctions which make such groups effective.

A *guthi* formed for the sake of economic cooperation is known as *manka guthi*. The *guthiar* of a *manka guthi* are committed not only to help with the field work of other members,

but also to render them effective economic assistance in times of emergency... Discipline within a voluntary *guthi* is maintained by a system of fines to be paid into *guthi*-funds (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956, 33).

Try as I might, I was never able to confirm that such organisations existed, though both Toffin and Ishii demonstrate that an *informal* system of cooperation does exist among the farming caste.<sup>14</sup>

Other writers have suggested that Newar *guthis* bear some resemblance to mutual aid societies found among urban Tibetans and among some of the Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples of Nepal. If true, this might lend weight to certain arguments about the ethnic origins of Newars. (There are competing theories that they come from Tibet and India.) Comparisons with the Tibetan associations however bring only superficial similarities to light. V.S. Doherty (1978), for example, has written that the *kidus* described by Miller for modern, urban Tibetans -- mainly in Darjeeling but also in Sikkim and south and east Tibet -- bring to mind the Newar *guthi*. Reference to Miller belies the comparison:

The kidu is designed to function as a source of aid and comfort during the life crises or major prolonged illnesses of its members. In these circumstances the *kidu* contributes as a unit towards the expenses incurred by its members (Miller, 1956, 160).

As with the Newar *guthi* there is a rotation of duties for events such as the annual religious feast, and there are punishments by fines for those who do not comply. But both the criterion of membership and the incidence of these groups are quite different. With the *kidu*, 'There are no actual restrictions

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14. See Ishii (1980) and Toffin (1977).

in membership' (ibid., 162) and the usual factor for someone wishing to join will be his prior acquaintance with friends already in the organisation. The only basic requirement 'seems to be that members be Lamaists and share in some Tibet-wide cultural patterns' (ibid., 163). Secondly, the Tibetan *kidu* is restricted to areas of concentrated population and then to 'urban, secular, lower and middle-class groups' (p. 165). It is not found among monks. By contrast, Newar ritual specialists, both Hindu and Buddhist, have their own *guthis* and the organisations are found throughout the Newar caste hierarchy and in even the smallest settlements.

Any comparison with rotating credit associations (*dhikur*) in the Himalayas is even less justified. In an article by Messerschmidt, the author refers the reader to various accounts of mutual aid systems some of which 'are strikingly similar to the Dhikur in form and structure'. Included among these references is G. S. Nepali's description of *guthi* organisations (Messerschmidt, 1978, 141n). A *dhikur* is a rotating credit association 'formed among friends and acquaintances who have similar financial needs and interests' (ibid., 141). The basic aim is for all the members to subscribe a fixed amount at pre-established intervals. The pool is then awarded in turn to each individual member, sometimes on the basis of need, sometimes by lot. There are many variants of this arrangement but the essential features which distinguish them from *guthis* are:

- (a) financial means is the dominant criterion of membership,
- (b) there is no restriction on the use of funds,
- (c) they are also formed by women and even children.

Among Newars social identity is a particularly coercive mechanism for regulating individuals' roles but it must be *continually* and *repeatedly* reaffirmed through active participation in ritual. If it is not, one risks losing one's social status,

in whatever the relevant context is, and there is a lot to lose. This applies even to the closest bonds of kinship. The man who settles in another bazaar and who does not return to honour his obligations to the *śī guṭhi* and the *deo puṣā guṭhi* is, in a very real sense, forgotten. Not even his brother will be obliged to observe pollution in the event of his death.

This is not mere ideology. The sheer number of ritual events throughout the year is a constant reminder of who one is and what one therefore has to do. The number of days spent in ritual activity by the average Bhaktapur Newar has been calculated at over sixty and Dhulikhel is not far behind. To opt out of any of these obligations would immediately provoke some kind of sanction, because it would be a slur not just on that individual but on the group of which he is a representative.

What might seem at first sight a minor default soon becomes the object of gossip and defamation. A household which incurs this faces the potential risk of being shunned by previously willing marriage partners. The ultimate sanction is excommunication from caste and lineage. That such drastic measures are not often taken does not indicate that sanctions cannot readily be invoked. Sanctions are few because Newars choose, if that is the correct word, to honour their obligations.

*Deo puṣā* is the major occasion for demonstrating the solidarity of the lineage overtly. If a household is not represented, other members of the lineage will neither attend the funerals of that house nor observe death pollution. As we have seen, this would be to effectively deny any relationship whatsoever since the number of days pollution is observed is directly correlated with the proximity of relation.

Seen as an isolated event, albeit annual, it may not seem as if *deo puṣā* could regulate to any great degree the social

behaviour of Newars. The fact that it does is because it is not felt to be separable from the complex weave of other institutions, rules and obligations. Less an event, *deo puja* is part of a continual process of re-establishing the status quo. The lineage is the focus of rules of kinship and marriage which are in turn the fundamental expression of caste. For Newars caste affiliation tends not to transcend the immediate locality except in some nebulous way. Often only the members of a caste in any one settlement will see themselves as true status equals, and will neither eat with nor marry outsiders claiming the same status. Membership in the *deo puja guthi* and *si guthi*, because they are residential units and not just based on kinship, is the acid test of caste pedigree. Those who have no lineage deity are, in a way, excluded from their society; they cannot marry in their own locality (no-one will agree to marry them for fear of transgressing the incest prohibition), they are considered as outcastes ('hors-statut'), (Stahl, 1979, 127).

Without membership of the *guthis*, one has no lineage and therefore no caste status. In Newar terms this amounts to losing any meaningful identity.

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