

WITH HEAD HELD HIGH THE HOUSE, RITUAL AND POLITICS IN EAST NEPAL

. by Philippe Sagant*

Among the Limbus, with the exception of Dasai, the blessing of seeds, the struggle against hail, and the new festivals of the Nepalese calendar, there are very few "village" festivals. On the other hand, there are many important domestic rituals. The house, within the system of representations, seems to carry considerable weight. The notion of "village" is as loose, badly defined and inconsistent -- at least, before administrative Nepalization took place --, as the domestic space, the house, well-anchored at its four corners, is heavy with significance, packed full of symbols. The village is, already, almost the forest. The house, extremely well-ordered, opens wide upon the disorder of the forest.¹

The house: sanctuary of the cultural order, and, beyond it, almost nothing. If we assume that the hypothesis is well-founded, we should be able to verify it. Everyone is aware of the importance of ritual in organizing society. Elsewhere in Nepal, when it takes place within the kingdom, it contributes to legitimizing the power of the king.² But what if it is,

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1. For the organization of space in the Limbu house, see Sagant, 1973.
2. This article owes a great deal to A.W. Macdonald's teaching at the University of Paris X. In his "Introduction au domaine himalayen", he insisted, in 1980, on the relationship between ritual and politics.

above all, domestic? Does it, in that case, confer power to the head of the household? Where does the king stand in ancient Limbu society? And who were those "chiefs" who stood up, in 1774, against the Gurkha conquest?

The purpose of this paper is to try and establish a relation between domestic ritual and political life. Let us begin with the sacrifice of a chicken to the goddess Nahangma. It takes place inside the house. It is carried out in the name of the head of the household, for whom it has an important consequence: it is said, at the end of the ritual, the his "soul has risen", *sām phungmā*, that his "head is held high again"; can such a fantasy have had any real influence in founding the very concrete substance of power?

The Sacrifice to Nahangma

Nahangma is a warrior divinity. *Hāngmā* has, more or less, the meaning of "queen", or, at least of a mighty woman. Besides, the word *hāng* repeatedly recurs during the ritual: *hāng sit lāng*, the central pillar of the house; *tumiā hāng*, the head of the house; *yet hāng*, the eight founding kings, one of whom is the ancestor of the sacrificer. Although it is very rare, it would seem that Nahangma can appear in dreams. She is a very beautiful woman. She is armed: a bow, a sword, a shield, sometimes a helmet. It is said that she sits in a bright and elevated place, East of the Other World, *co lung*, atop a snowy mountain actually existing in the region. Approaching her kingdom, there are springs of great purity, different ones for priests and for laymen, which meet together at one point, *sum lāndomā*. There are also huge stretches of flowers. Each flower stands for a human destiny. It is a life's "vegetal-twin", its double, its external soul its "flower-soul", *phung sām*.

In principle, each household head, *tumiā hāng*, offers up a sacrifice to Nahangma twice a year, once at the beginning of the "rising season" and once at the beginning of the "declining season". In 1966-71, these households were nuclear, or conjugal, ones. They grouped together from four to six persons. The ritual could start around three o'clock in the afternoon and end around midnight. Apart from the people of the house and the neighbours' children, there were few other participants. The cult involved Nahangma, but also the ancestors (Theba Sam, Lumaepa) and the gods of the lineages (Manguenna). Nahangma is also present elsewhere in Limbu country.¹ Her cult seems to be very ancient. But it seems to have given precedence to the cult of Yuma, who has become the greatest of Limbu divinities. To tell the truth, in the myth, Nahangma and Yuma tear one another to pieces when they meet. Perhaps this is not just an accident.

Let us recall the main outlines of the ritual.² The "tribal priest", the *phedāngmā*, directs the feast. Through a shamanistic type of journey he will establish contact between the world of human beings and the world of the gods. But first, at ca. 3 p.m., he erects altars in a terraced field situated a bit lower than the house. He faces the river. He starts by offering left-overs to the spirit of the Monkey: thus he has had his share, let him remain quiet! Then he invokes the Buz-zard and the Wild Cat, sorcerers of the Other World, always in quest of blood, and who run up as soon as a human being starts

1. The data were collected in the North of the country, in the Taplejung District. Nahangma's cult is mentioned elsewhere among the Limbus by Chemjong, 1966, p. 22, 40, 79, and Campbell, 1940, p. 600. Nowadays, it no longer seems to exist in the South, where Caplan, 1970, and Jones, 1976, worked.

2. This ritual, in its relation to the religious calling, was described by Sagant, 1976, p. 76-85. We have summarized some of its most striking features here.

sacrificing a beast anywhere: let them go back where they belong and stay there! Lastly, he offers an egg or a chicken to each of the great masters of the fallow lands: the Spirit of the Forest (Tampungma), the Spirit of the Crests (Toksongba), the Spirit of the Waters (Warokma) etc... so that they also shouldn't come and disturb the feast. All this can happen in broad daylight and last one or two hours. At the end, the altars are destroyed. It is said then that the way to the house is closed, *lām sāk mā*, and its access forbidden.

The sun has disappeared behind the crest, darkness has spread over the valley. Night is here. The priest takes his place on the verandah, near the main door. He offers incense to Yuma. She shouldn't be cross, she shouldn't be jealous. A very beautiful invocation introduces the summons of the master-spirits, *guru*, -- or the auxiliaries -- who will assist the priest on his journey: "To the North, the yak's baby has fallen asleep, the marmot has fallen asleep, etc. In their homes, the Tibetans are sleeping. Now is the time, Masters, to start the sacrifice. It's time for you to get up". The long recitation is repeated from the beginning for each of the cardinal points, then for the place where the shaman is sitting. At the end of the summons, the central pillar of the house has become the centre of the World. The four corners of the house coincide with the four orientals of the Universe. The house, whose entrance has been shut since afternoon, is raised up/*tho*, compared to the space around it.

The priest enters. The ancestors' altar, that of Manguenna, and that of Nahangma are built against the crest-or summit-side wall. Nahangma's altar is the nearest to the main exit, towards the East of the Other World. Among other items, it bears the decorated arms of the head of the house, which are the same as those of Nahangma: the bow, the sword, the shield. Five ritualistic sequences are going to take place within three or four

hours. They alternate between the cult of Nahangma and the cult of Manguenna. The ancestors' cult will take place only afterwards.

The priest first sings of the appearance of the divinity and of the ten kings, the eight warriors and the two priests, founders of the group, in front of Nahangma's altar. He remains constantly seated, cross-legged.

He next takes up his place in front of Manguenna's altar. In the same manner, he sings of the Ten Kings' migrations on the Tibetan plateau. One of them is the head of the house's ancestor. It is for the household chief's benefit that a sacrifice is being offered tonight: his name, his clan name, the name of his hamlet are mentioned; his filiation to one of the Ten Kings is recalled.

Back, in front of Nahangma's altar, the priest starts his journey to the Other World. He carries with him the soul, *mukumāsām*, of the sacrificer, "like a yak carries its load". The long voyage begins at the central pillar. It leads to the Junction of the Three Roads, at the meeting of the Three Springs, *sum lāndomā*, where the fields of flowers stretch out endlessly. The gestures made at this point inside the house must be emphasized: they correspond to the actions undertaken in the kingdom of Nahangma.

- The priest approaches the head of the house, who is standing in front of the altar: he gives him the sword. For an instant, he places the live chicken on the layman's left shoulder, then on his right, on his head and feet, in back and in front.

- Several acts of divination are carried out: the tossing of stones which either split or not; the examination of the flower-soul, *phuhg sām*, symbolising life in the Other World: is it faded, is it withered? Which way does the chicken go when it is

released on the beaten earth of the house in front of the altar? Will it go to the left or to the right, like a priest? Or straight ahead, like a warrior? "There are many people in the *co lung*. You must fight for your place. The chicken picks at people's feet so that they should move aside. If you can't make room for yourself in the *co lung*, you die". Because of the chicken, the layman's soul, *mukumā sām*, lies for a while in the realm of Nahangma. The man still stands before the altar. With the point of his sword, the priest traces a circle around him on the earth. The head of the house then starts to howl, stamping his feet on the ground. He rends the air with his sword. He beats his chest. He jumps up and down, stamps his feet, whirls around several times.

- The chicken is killed with one blow of a club on the spine: there is no blood, except for a few drops from its beak falling on two banana leaves. "Has blood flowed?" cries the anxious family. "It has!" answers the priest. They read the oracles in the creature's appearance.

- Some feathers are pulled out: from the tip of the wings and the tail, from the feet, from the neck of the chicken, and placed upon the altar.

- The chicken is emptied. Again the inspection of the entrails involves divination. The offal are roasted and shared among the assistance, beginning with the head of the house. This is the first communion meal.

After a pause, the priest finishes the ritual of Manguenna.

Another pause and it is the end of the cult of Mahangma and the journey back. All through this long sequence, the priest has held in his hands the turban of the sacrificer. At the end, the head of the house, standing in front of the altar, receives Nahangma's dish in his left hand, the sword in his right. His

head is bound with the turban. The priest slips one of the chicken's feathers between the folds: this is the "pennant", *nisān*, the mark of power. For one moment, he imposes Nahangma's pure water on the layman's head. Once more, wearing the turban, the head of the house stamps his feet, shouts and jumps up and down. It is said then that the soul has entered, *sām liṅgmā*, that its primary force has been restored.

The chicken is cooked. Rice has been ready for a long time. Everyone takes their meal together. This is another communion. As for the gods, they receive the "smoke of the meal", *thok mikhu*, "the smoke of the meat", *sā mikhu*.

At the end of the ritual, it is said that the priest has made the head of the house's "soul to rise", *sām phuṅgmā*. The Nepalese expression *sir uthāunu* is commonly used: the man "holds up his head again".

With Head Held High: a complex religious state

Before looking into how the sacrifice tends to establish the power of the head of the house, let's stop for a brief discussion of some of the themes of the ritual. Two aspects never cease to be impressive. First, the great complexity of the beliefs which surround the notion of living with one's "head held high". Next, the parallels which appear between Limbu ideas and those of many other populations of the Himalayan sphere, and even beyond.

The Head

First, the head held high. When defining, in their language the effects of the sacrifice, the Limbu do not mention the head at all. For them it is the "soul", *sām*, which rises, which is raised, *phuṅgmā*. Of course, when translating, they currently use the Nepalese expression *sir uthāunu*. Word for word, this means

"make to raise" or "raise again". It seems to have its equivalent in ancient Tibet where "the image of sovereignty", as Stein writes,¹ "is the powerful helmet, *dbu rmog btsan*, or the head held high, *dbu phangs mtho*". But is there really community of thought? We think so. For, though the Limbu expression *sām phuhgmā* doesn't explicitly mention it, the importance of the head, throughout the ritual, is constantly reaffirmed. It is on the head of the household's skull that the shaman imposes for an instant the live chicken. It is in the turban brought back from the Other World that resides the "energy", the "soul", the "vital force", *mukumā sām*, restored to its primary force. It is by putting this turban on his head that the head of the house, stamping his feet, expresses this renewal of vitality. Finally, it is on the head that the shaman imposes Nahangma's pure water. At the end of the ritual, it is said that Nahangma sits on the top of the head of the house's skull. The same idea is present in ancient Tibet.² And, what is more, the Nepalese expression *sir uthāunu* can be found among other populations of Nepal, among the Râis, for instance,³ to designate the sequence of a ritual very much like the Limbus'. It contains the same major themes: the sword, the chicken on the head, the couple squatting side by side (who appear in the Limbu cult to Manguenna), the shouts, the way of killing with one blow of the club, the flower under the turban, the head and the house which are "high" because of the sacrifice, etc. Thus, beyond the diversity of languages -Nepalese, Tibetan or Râi-, the conceptions seem to be related. And for the Limbus also, it is a question of walking with one's "head held high".

1. Stein, 1962, p. 171, 186.

2. Stein, 1962, p. 173.

3. Allen, 1976, p. 135, 1974, p. 547.

The Powers Conferred

It could be objected that the Tibetan expression concerns only the king, that it has no relation to a household head. We are confronted here with the critical problem of the nature of powers. It must first be said that in Nahangma's cult, they have a way of conceiving sacrifice which A.W. Macdonald, once again, recently stressed.¹ Neither Hinduism nor Buddhism have left their mark on Limbu sacrifice. And yet, the ideas are related. First, there is the boundary drawn around the sacrificial area. Here, among the Limbus, it encircles the house, whose four corners correspond to the four orientals of the Universe. Elsewhere, in Hindu or Buddhist ritual, they are the frontiers of the realm, or the eight monasteries on the edge of the territory.² Next, a centre is planted to allow the contact between human beings and gods to be established. Here we have the central pillar of the house, an accurate counterpart; where it is a fortified castle, a mountain or a *stūpa*. And then an action takes place which somehow recalls the "creative dismemberment" and its double movement. Here, the sacrifice of the chicken during which feathers are torn out from the tips of its feet, wings, tail and neck. Elsewhere, among the Sherpas, the sharing out of a yak's carcasse,³ or among the Daflas,⁴ the body of the killed man which is used as a standard to evaluate the compensations ending a vendetta; or, yet again, among Buddhists, the "murder" of a she-devil, etc. This creative

1. A.W. Macdonald, 1980.

2. For ancient Tibet, Tucci, 1970, p. 240, also mentions the four corners of the house. For the relations between the space of the sacrifice and the royal power among the Newars, see, for example, Toffin, 1979, and Vergati-Stahl, 1980.

3. A.W. Macdonald, 1980.

4. Fürer-Haimendorf, 1955, p. 163.

dismemberment, in one way or another, regulates society. Here, among the Limbus, it organizes domestic space,¹ imposing the distinction between high and low, blood relations and affines, between receivers and givers of women. Elsewhere, among the S' erpas, it establishes relations between the clans. Among the Daflas, it restores peace and establishes the alliance between two important families; for Buddhists or Hindus it is at the origin of a society stratified into four distinct orders. Finally, and here we are at the heart of the matter, the act of sacrifice -- or creative dismemberment -- founds a power. Here, perhaps, the power of the Limbu head of the house. There, the power of a Hindu or Buddhist king. This "Asian" percentage -- as Paul Mus would have put it in the conduct of the sacrifice is not without implications when trying to define the nature of the powers at the end of the Nahangma ritual. After the Gurkha conquest of 1774, some of the Limbu chiefs were, henceforth, considered kings by the Hindu State of Nepal. They were called *subbā*, which comes from a Nepalese word. By a skillful twist, their authority grew from the four corners of the house to the four orients of their District (*amāli*, nep.). And the Dasai feast became for the *subbā* what Nahangma was for the household heads. But in both cases, the same ambition remained: to go with one's "head held high". In both cases the symbols of authority -- flag or feather -- are called by the same name "pennant" or "standard" (*nisān* nep.). In both cases, the effects of the ritual are the same. Thus, "to lift one's head up" for a Limbu, whether "king" or head of house, is to obtain the same, identical powers.

Nahangma, A Warrior Divinity

It should be noted that Nahangma, the Limbu divinity, seems to be rather closely related to those gods, *dgra lha*, of the

1. Sagant, 1973.

"nameless religion" of the ancient Tibetans.¹ Like them, she is named "by a term which means chief or king". This word, *hāng*, used by the Limbus, cannot fail to remind us of the Naga king of the same name, *hāng*, the Chinese sovereign, *wang*, the Tibetan power, *dbah*. Nahangma sits on the top of a mountain, and, in ancient Tibet, "the sacred mountains are also war gods".² This mountain of -- the Limbus' -- is luminous, recalling the mountain of the first Tibetan king, "dissolving in light".³ Nahangma gives the head of the house access to a parcel of ancestral land. In Tibet, writes R. Stein, "each small land has its own mountain...". They are the gods of the land (*yul-lha*) or the masters of the locality, *gzhi-bdag*, *sa-bdag*. Like Nahangma and Manguenna, "they are intimately connected to the founder of the lineage".⁴ And, as in the Limbu ritual, "their war-like character...and their link with the clan and its ancestor, are expressed...through the feasts which are dedicated to them" In East Nepal, as in ancient Tibet, "the ritual is composed of two elements joined together, a god (mountain, rock, tree) and a goddess (lake, spring, river)". In Libang, as in Dolpo,⁵ the mountain is associated with a lake. The description of the Manguenna ritual would bring other similarities to the fore. The Tibetan conception of a man's gods *pho-lha*, and of a woman's gods, *mo-lha*, is not foreign to this cult. And Tibetan vitality *srog-lha*, presents a certain analogy with the "energy" or the "soul", *mukumā sām*, of the Limbus. To lift one's head up, for the Limbus, is primarily to make sacrifice to gods who are not unrelated to the ancient Tibetan gods of the residence.

1. Stein, 1962, p. 173.

2. Stein, 1962, p. 170.

3. Stein, 1962, p. 169.

4. Stein, 1962, p. 187.

5. Jest, 1975, p. 43.

Gods of the Body and Gods of the Locality

The parallel can be extended further. In ancient Tibet "the microcosm of the inhabited place... and the human body, that other microcosm... are looked upon as belonging to the same model". "Man has within himself no less than five or sometimes six protective gods, 'go-ba'i lha. One of them is precisely the god of the land, *yul-lha*: he resides, as he should, on one top of the head... On the shoulders live the war-god, *dgra-lha*, and the man's god, *pho-lha*".¹ Tucci notes the same, sometimes contradictory, data, in detail, among ancient authors: "the powers feared by the Tibetans... have their seat in all places: in his right shoulder, *dgra-lha*, in his right armpit, *p'o lha*; in his left armpit, *mo-lha*; in the heart, *yan-lha*".² To these Tibetan conceptions correspond those of the Limbus. At the end of the sacrifice, as we have seen, Nahangma lies at the top of the skull. At the end of Manguenna's ritual, it is also said that the god of the man's lineage rests on the right shoulder, the god of the woman's lineage on the left. Some of their ideas about the heart, the armpits, and even the sole of the foot, are not unrelated to Tibetan conceptions. For Limbus and for Tibetans alike, "the souls are hardly different from the gods".³ Between *mukumā sām* and Nahangma, hardly any difference is made. And for the Limbu, to hold one's head up high is to restore the presence of the gods in the human body.

The Sacrificial Blood

The blood of the sacrifice seems to us to be an important

1. Stein, 1962, p. 187.

2. Tucci, 1970, p. 239.

3. Stein, 1962, p. 192.

theme. But the way the chicken is sacrificed to Nahangma, by a blow of a club across its back, raises a problem. For the blood doesn't flow, or just barely. For the outsider looking on, it appears that the Limbus have two main ways of carrying out animal sacrifices. The first one consists in neatly slitting the throat of the beast with a knife. The blood flows on the floor. The second one is a series of different methods: killing with a club, as is the case here; piercing the heart with a spear, or else extracting it. These different methods have a point in common: the blood doesn't run, or very little. V. Elwin has drawn our attention to this type of sacrifice. It can also be found elsewhere, he says, among the Daflas of the former NEFA, who strangle their mithans; and also among the Nagas, the Abors, the Tibetans of Amdo,¹ etc... It is an archaic method. It is described in the Veda. It is said there to be characteristic of the Kiranti ethnic groups. It is also attested among other Nepalese populations.² In Tibet, around 1900, the 'ga-ra butchers slaughtered pigs in the same way as the Limbus, by piercing the heart with a boar-spear.³ As we understand it, killing by piercing the heart is liberating the breath, *sokmā*,

1. Elwin, 1961, p. 10: "The bull killing sacrifice and the killing of the mithun in the Naga Feasts are done almost in the Vedic manner, in each case the animal being killed by a sharp stake of wood which pierced its heart". Also see Srivastava, 1962, p. 34-35, for the Gallongs, Fürer-Haimendorf, 1954, for the Mynions, etc.

2. For example among the Rais: "The really traditional way of killing pigs is to shoot them with bow and arrow, not to behead them with a kukri", Allen, 1972, p. 89. Equally, the Rais sacrifice the chicken in the same way as the Limbus: "The fowl are killed by a blow on the back", Allen, 1976, p. 135. For the relations between blood, heart and breath, see Stein, 1962, p. 191, Tucci, 1970, p. 245. For the method of killing the pig among the Limbus, see Sagant, 1980.

3. D. Mac Donald, 1930, p. 168: "The method of killing is cruel and barbarian. The animal is first tied up, then thrown down, and finally its heart is pierced with a blade". Also see Kawaguchi, 1909, p. 233.

which rises towards the gods. And if the blood doesn't run in this world, it's perhaps because it's being saved for the Other World. Whatever the case may be, blood appears to play a major role in the Nahangma ritual. It is blood which, according to certain informants, allows the flower-soul, *phung sām*, to be refreshed. Its importance is recognized in the ritual: "has the blood run?" asks the family. The rare drops spilled allow them to predict the future. And all the omens, in all the houses where we were present during the ritual, are directed to the same things: wealth, harvests, cattle, money. Nothing else. Here we have yet another example of an idea belonging to the Himalayan sphere, the relation between blood and prosperity. It climaxed with the ancient Nagas' head-hunting.¹ It is present in the sacrifice to Nahangma. To hold one's head up high is to make blood flow in order to ensure the prosperity of the household.

The Flower-soul

The flower-soul, *phung sām*, in Nahangma's sphere, is primarily an individual concept: each human life has its own. Nevertheless, the idea of a collective representation is not absent. The first fields of flowers which the shaman meets during his travels to the Other World, symbolize the lives of children; he next meets those of women, then of men, grouped, it is said, by clans. During the marriage rituals, the priest bases his auguring on the appearance of the two newly-weds' flower-souls. This notion is constantly present in the Tong Sing ceremony. Besides, it is felt powerfully. A teenager becomes very ill when he knows that his father's flower-soul is smothering his own.² Only when his father has died can he regain his health. This representation of the vegetable double is fairly widespread elsewhere in Nepal.

1. For the relation between blood and prosperity, see, among others, Elwin, 1961, p. 11, Fürer-Haimendorf, 1969, p. 95, Bonerjea, 1927, p. 233.

2. Sagant, 1976, p. 64.

Hofer has described it for the Tamangs,¹ though their beliefs seem to be quite different. It's rather the tree-soul, *bla sing*, which, among the Tamangs, seems to correspond to the Limbu flower-soul, *phuing sām*: "every individual is linked with a particular kind of tree which symbolizes, so to speak, his spiritual backbone". Hofer establishes a relation with the Tibetans' tree-soul, *bla shing*. In fact, this notion of a vegetal twin or double is current in Asia. It can be found in Siberia as well as in South-East Asia. "In Tibetan thought", notes A.W. Macdonald, "an individual or a group of men may possess several souls or external lives".² The same is true of the Limbus. For instance, on the grave of a still-born child, a banana tree has been planted; when the tree grows and is ready to bear fruit, it is cut down. The mother is relieved. The still-born child's soul will no longer come to torment her. Another example: the Tokpe Lake can be compared to the lake-soul, *bla-mtsho*, of the ancient Tibetans,³ etc. Stein establishes a relationship between the gods of the place, the gods of the body and the external souls: "the soul, or the life-force", he writes, "resides... both in the body and in an external object... Such an object can be the external soul or the seat of life, *bla-gnas*, of an individual, a group of men or a country". It seems to us that the flower-soul of the ritual to Nahangma is a comparable concept to that Tibetan seat of life, *bla-gnas*, *srog-ngas*. And to raise one's head up, for the Limbus, mainly means restoring the freshness of the flower-soul, at this seat of life.

1. Höfer, 1974, p. 171, 177, 182. For the notion of the vegetal twin or double, elsewhere in Asia, see, for example, Condominas, 1957, p. 150, Moréchand, 1968, p. 113, Lot-Falck, 1974, p. 95.

2. A.W. Macdonald, 1967, p. 57.

3. Stein, 1962, p. 192, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1956, p. 482.

The Vital Force

Restoring the freshness of the flower-soul enables a man to recover the primal energy of his "vital force". I.S. Chemjong, himself a Limbu, has described the relation between the flower-soul, *phung sām*, and the vital force, *mukumā sām*: "an expert priestess sings or recites the whole story of the creation of flower... and compares such inanimate objects to human life in such a way that she particularises the mentality of a certain man to that of the stage of that particular flower... When the priestess refreshes the flower, the man also would regain his energy and become fresh and active again".¹ It would seem that the Tamang ceremony of the quest for the tree-soul, *bla siṅg*, has a similar aim. The effect of the ritual, writes A. Höfer² "is called *che wangur*, from Tibetan *che*, life, *dbañ skur ba*, to confer power". This idea of power is doubly present in the Limbu notion of a "vital force". In everyday life, only the expression *mukumā sām* is used. *sām* means "soul" in general. Chem Jong translates *muk* by "power",³ *mukumā sām* by "the most powerful spirit".⁴ Martine Mazaudon reminds us of the kinship of the word with *mukhyā*, meaning "village chief" in Nepalese. Yet, in the ritual to Nahangma, the expression *mukumā sām* is constantly associated with the expression *hāṅgembā sām*, according to a process of reduplication frequent in religious language.⁵ Concerning the doublet, *hāṅgembā sām*, it is with Tibetan, this time, that a comparison can be drawn, because the Limbu *hāṅg*, as we have seen, parallels the Tibetan *dbañ* (power). This "power-soul", *mukumā sām*,

1. Chemjong, 1966, p. 26.

2. Höfer, 1974, p. 182.

3. Chemjong, 1961, p. 214.

4. Chemjong, 1961, p. 358.

5. The process has been described by Allen, 1978, among the Rais. Among the Limbus, it is identical.

hangembā sām, this "energy", this "vital force" of the Limbus, is thus the one which Nahangma, a warring goddess and hunter, dispenses to every man who can sacrifice to her. Moreover, it is Nahangma herself who is present in every man, to the point, as we have seen, that informants often confuse *mukumā sām* with Nahangma when designating the "vital force" which, at the end of the ritual, sits at the top of the skull of the household-head. The nature of this force, specifically male, is entirely oriented toward hunting and war. Chem Jong has drawn our attention to the relation with hunting.¹ As to war, it is constantly present in field-data. "When the red flag, *nisān*, is out, you strike: *mukum* (manifests itself); when nothing is to be seen, you strike; blood must flow". This "vital force", peculiar to the Limbus, would thus appear somehow linked to the Naga "soul force", as described by Guha: it is present in the body, says he. It gives Vim and Vigour to the individual. In a locality or a community, at any given time, a given quantity of it exists. If this amount decreases, the harvest will be poor, illnesses will appear. In order to be protected from such calamities, "additional soul force has to be procured".² Hence the implications concerning head-hunting, conservation of skulls, etc. *Mukumā sām*, the Limbus' vital force, also seems to be connected with the ancient Tibetans' vital force, *srog*. Stein writes³ that it is primarily linked to blood. Tucci says that

1. Chemjong, 1966, p. 97.

2. Guha, 1953. One may well wonder if, in the ancient N.E.F.A., the whole set of ideas concerning the vital force, following various developments, was not at the origin of very dissimilar facts such as the judgement of the Dead, signs of "wealth", ritual money, war, hunting and sacrificial trophies, feasts of merit, the right to polygomy, etc. See, for example, Needham, 1900, Roy, 1960, p. 141, 147, 156, 157, Shukla, 1959, p. 68, Srivastava, 1962, p. 14, Robinson, 1836.

3. Stein, 1962, p. 191, Tucci, 1970, p. 245.

it is a sort of life impulse, the breathing of a vital soul coinciding with life itself. Further analysis of the concepts compared should be undertaken. We think however, that similar ideas prevailed when the various concepts typical of the Limbus, the Tamangs, the Nagas and the Tibetans were first formulated. And that to raise one's head up for the Limbus, is, in the last analysis, to recover the life force that enables a man, when hunting or making war, to spill the blood which ensures prosperity.

Ritual Purity

As to the notion of ritual purity, it has its importance in the sacrifice to Nahangma. It's at the junction of three pure springs that the shaman settles down, in the Other World, to officiate. The first spring, on his left, belongs to the priests *yā*; the second, on his right, belongs to the *phedāngmā*; the third, in the middle, belongs to the laymen, *tumiā hāng*. From his journey, the priest brings back Nahangma's pure water. He'll place it for a moment on the head of the household chief. To raise one's head up, is to rediscover a vital force closely associated with a state of ritual purity.¹

Thus, when the ritual to Nahangma comes to an end, the household chief's head is "held up high". This is a complex religious state. Essentially, it ensures powers. Its outer sign is the pennant or the banner (*nisān nep.*). Royal or domestic, these powers are of the same nature, a vitality restored in its purity and primal energy, entirely concentrated upon the act of letting blood, whether in hunting or at war, and so ensuring prosperity. This "vital force", *mukumā sām*,

1. Fürer-Haimendorf, 1967, p. 49, has noted that the notions of ritual purity differed from the Hindu conceptions. Höfer, 1979, p. 145, made the same remark concerning the Gurungs and the Sherpas of Nepal; Watters, 1975, p. 126, notes that the criteria of Hindu purity only appeared at a recent date among the Kham Magars.

resides at the top of the head. It is none else than Nahangma herself, the warrior divinity, incarnated in the human body. Shamanist techniques allow one to make the blood of sacrifice flow in the Other World. The head of the house's flower-soul, *phung sām*, then recovers its freshness. This flower-soul, vegetal twin of a human destiny, is a "seat of life", external to man. Restored in its brilliance, this flower-soul enables the "vital force" to recapture the full extent of its power.

"Losing Face": From a Religious State to Patterns of Social Behaviour

To the "head held high" corresponds a state which can be described as being its reverse, something like "losing face" or to "have one head down". In their language the Limbu say, *sām mummā*, "to have one's soul shaken, anxious".¹ They also employ the expression *siriñ mummā*, because this anxiety is located in the head and can be felt physically in the temples, *siriñ*. In Nepali, as among the Limbus the expressions *sir tolinu*, *sir khasnu*, are currently used. The first can be translated as "being prostrated, upset, incapable of action". As for the second, it implies the idea of a fall, a slip, a failure. In both cases, the head, *sir*, is involved. Shame, *saram*, is often associated with it. Be they in Nepali or Limbu, the four expressions, *sām mummā*, *siriñ mummā*, *sir tolinu*, and *sir khasnu*, seem to have a similar meaning. In all four cases, at any rate, there is only one remedy: to find a way "to raise the head up", *sir uthāunu*, *sām phungmā*. If that can't be achieved, there may be danger of death. And even if the person survives, he will find himself in one way or another rejected by society.

1. Chemjong, 1961, p. 217, translates *mummā* by *hallāunu* in Nepali. For *hallāunu*, Turner, 1931, p. 633, gives "to shake, to move, to shift, to trouble, to strike terror into". Limbu informants have frequently insisted on the importance of shame associated with this state.

Losing face can occur in various circumstances: dishonour, impurity, offence, wrong or indignities incurred. Equally, there are ways to "raise one's head" which no longer only consist in sacrificing a chicken to Nahangma. In other words, this state of "head high" until now defined as religious, appears to be closely related to all sorts of social behaviour, to a sort of code of *savoir-vivre*. And these behaviour patterns, although they may very well concern very different domains -- kinship attitudes, political conflicts, norms of alliance -- nevertheless seem to correspond to very precise rules, which are more and more generally accepted, or at least which once were. Some accounts collected in the field will perhaps allow us to understand this close relationship between a religious state and social behaviour.

Mortal Dangers

Toward the sixties, in the little valley where I was working, two chiefs, *subbā*, who were brothers, were locked in political struggle. The first and eldest, had given up local action. He wanted to be free so as to achieve "national" status. The second one, his younger brother, had jumped on the occasion to fill the place left empty. He sat in justice (*amal*) extended his powers, was growing rich. He was accused of over-extending himself with regard to the rights that the Nepalese government still accorded at that time to the Limbu chiefs. People complained that he sometimes held hostages, made use of violence, imposed excessive fines, settled affairs that required capacities superior to his. A coalition of plaintiffs ended up by banding together against him, counselled behind the scenes by the elder brother, aware of the danger. Several complaints, some of which were signed by Sherpas or low-cast people, were lodged against him at the local tribunal, *adālat*. Trials ensued. It was the time when the "prefects", *añcalādhi's*, were

being installed all over the country. The Regional prefect, to penalize the Moubi chief, finally took him to Lungthung, in the next valley, where his head office was installed. He cut him down to size: he sent him to Walungchung to supervise the collection of taxes on Tibetan trade. Unluckily, a very old feud existed in Walung between the chief of the bhotiya line, ('go-ba tib.) and the family of the Limbu chief: no doubt, he was made to pay dearly in consequence. For when he came back to his village he wasn't the same. He was a broken man. "Sir toliyo", people said of him. He had lost his great vitality of yesteryear. A few months later, he was bitten by a snake and died. His death surprised no one. One cannot remain with one's "head down" for a long time with impunity.

Thus, "to lose face" involves, in the long run, danger of death. When came the rising season, Oktoke, a very old but nevertheless very vigorous neighbour, refused, in his house, to sacrifice to Nahangma. Since birth, said he in substance, he had seen all he wanted to see under the sun, and he was tired of living. He aspired to death. In such a case, he explained, there is no better means than to refuse to "raise one's head", *sām phuhgmā*.

A Collective State

"Losing face" is also a state which can collectively affect the relatives of the same lineage in a locality. For example, one story recounts the failure of a marriage by elopement. It happened between 1935 and 1940. A villager tells the story: "This local boy hankered after a girl from the next valley. One of the women of this valley, married in the village, had been given the "price of her trouble". She went for a few days to her father's. When she came back, she had concluded the contract. The much-desired girl was there. She had come accompanied, as "travelling companion". That evening, she was invited to dance.

The aspiring lover danced a long time with her that night. He ended up by declaring his love. "But", he added, "if you don't want to, we won't get married". -- "Why not?", she answers laughingly, "let's get married!" And the boy repeated, "let's get married, yes, let's get married!" Kapoba, (the chief of the lineage), took the situation in hand. A hundred-pound pig was slaughtered, and a goat; rice was prepared. The girl pretended to consent, but in fact she didn't. The sun came up. She played for time. She asked for beautiful clothes, and someone was sent to the bazaar at Dhule, at the entrance of the valley, to buy cloth. She wanted music, and everything was done to get the Damai orchestra together. Time went by. The afternoon drew out. Everything was ready. "I'll get dressed at the spring", she said, and she was given a cake of soap. As soon as she reached the spring, she rushed downstream. She arrived at the river-bank. She crossed the swinging bridge. She started running again once on the other bank. At the village people were waiting. "Wait a bit!" they said, "she'll come back! She's at the spring". Finally Kapoba exploded in anger red as a lobster, the veins of his neck stretched to bursting. Women sent to the river. There was no one. There was only a basket, turned upside down, a copper pot and a cake of soap. All the men started to search for her. They whistled everywhere, they shouted over the terraces. At the bridge there was a fisherman. "A girl dressed like so and so? she crossed over a long time ago! She was running fast, you are not likely to catch up with her! What's your clan?" From the bridge the men fanned out, running down all the paths which lead to the next valley. They searched all night. At dawn, they finally came home one after the other. Kapoba was worried. "Do you have her?" he asked incessantly. No one had her. In the early morning now, they all assembled. The faces were gray. "What should we do?", they asked. "Shall we start looking for her again or shall we get another girl?" *Sir hasiyo! Sir taliyo!*

If all this gets to be known, it's shame on us!" -- "No", answered Kapoba. "The first thing to do is to "raise our head" *sām phuingmā*. And that very day, all the members of Kapoba's lineage sacrificed to Nahangma. "You must understand", continued the narrator, "that when a Pangbo gets married, we avoid spreading the news to the Lungkhimbas, the Penbasongs and the Naidembas. If the girl escapes, it's better not to tell the whole village about it. In fact, "he added in a lower tone, "this kind of thing always gets around. For the other clans it's a great joke! Very painful", he concluded, smiling.

Impurity

"Head low" is also a state which can be brought on by impurity. During the three or four days following a birth, the household lives in a state of quasi-retirement. The neighbours, the female neighbours, mainly by solidarity, nevertheless come to enquire after the health of the mother. They don't come into the house. They ask their questions from the varandah. They are answered through the closed door, shouting from the back of the house. If they did come in, they would risk having their "souls upset" *sām mummā*, "their temples shaken", *sirin mummā*. The same thing is said about a hunter who, before setting out, receives food from a woman who is menstruating. He loses strength. He won't kill anything. His flower-soul, *phuing sām*, withers. This idea of menstrual blood causing flowers to wither is found elsewhere.¹ As for the idea about the warrior or the hunter, it is very widespread.² Bird-droppings falling on the shoulder of a traveller apparently have the same effect. A

1. Gorer, however, 1938, p. 92, seems to doubt it for the Lepchas.

2. Stein, 1962, p. 187, notes that a black turban around the head or the touch of an animal's carcass on the shoulder make the protective gods, who sit in these parts of the body, impotent. Also see Sinha, 1962, p. 95, for the Akas.

short ritual, may, perhaps, "uplift the soul".

Incest's Child

There are people who can never walk with their head held high. Their's is not an enviable fate. During the census preceding my fieldwork, an elderly villager, alone with his daughter in a small house, declared he belonged to the Hebeng clan. It was strange. In the hamlet there was no one else of that clan. "Hebeng?" exclaimed the shaman, later, laughing, "if he's a Hebeng, I'm an American!" No doubt, the villager was a child of incest. It took years before his story could emerge. When incest occurs, all the village is threatened. The wind rises. Hail falls, destroying the crops. The bear turns round in his lair. The tiger roars very near, in the forest. If nothing is done, lightning strikes, the earth gapes open, the ghost of the pig appears. The incestuous couple has to be separated as quickly as possible. Sometimes the man is expelled. Sometimes he flees with the woman. In the past, purification, reintegration in the bosom of the community was possible. A new clan was created. Today, changes no longer allow this. The child of incest drags his misfortune with him. Everywhere he goes and settles, he is a threat. As did Piripa, he changes villages, and says he is a Hebeng. He goes into exile near the Assamese border, even if this means leaving everything behind, going yet deeper into the forest, when the wave of Limbu migrants reaches him. For him, there is no possible respect or prosperity. No way to right a wrong. Piripa's daughter was seventeen. She danced like the others, she got married, or at least she thought she did. But never did her "husband" bring the customary gifts. Normally, the "clan" brothers would stand up and demand reparation for such an offence. No such thing happened for Piripa. Incest's children have no clan brother, because they have no "clan". Incest's children have no land, because they have no ancestors. They are at the mercy of spirits and men. When

genealogies are drawn up during fieldwork, their name is never mentioned. That's because they die young, it is said. And if they live old, it's no better. They cannot prosper, because they cannot sacrifice to Nahangma. To be able to sacrifice to Nahangma one must have a clan, and the child of incest has none.

In the past, did the sacrifice to Nahangma alone erase an outrage? Nothing is less certain. Anyway, there are other means in case of an offence to "lift ones head up". Under Nepalese law, the Limbus could resort to purely judiciary methods.

The Offended Father

A man was returning from the field with his sister. He had been drinking and his father, back home, flared up at him.

- "Is it me you're shouting at?" asked the son.
- "Who else? Have you seen the shape you're in?"
- "You have nothing to say", said the son, "while we toil in the fields, you take it easy here".
- "Shut up. Behave yourself, I am your father. How dare you raise your voice to me? You think perhaps that you have things to teach me?"
- "I might" said the young man, however lowering his voice.

The father rose up, his fist in the air. The son wanted to brush him aside. The father, already old, received a clout on his shoulder and fell awkwardly. The affair grew. One of the most powerful chiefs of the village was sent for.

- "Did you curse him?"¹ he asked the father. "If you did I can do nothing".

1. *Sarāp* in Nepali.

- "I haven't cursed him", the old man answered, "but for sure that I will, if I don't get damages".

Accompanied by three of his men, the chief climbed towards the hamlet. Kapoba was one of the men. "Hitting one's father", he said at the opening of the trial, "is the same thing as hitting the gods". The *subbā* and his men come to the decision that the son should be fined a hundred rupees which he should give to his father. "What do you mean, a hundred rupees?" said the old man. "It's I who make the money here. You want to compensate me with money from my own till?" Some other solution had to be found. The father lived on the first-floor, the son and his wife on the ground-floor. The furniture had been shared between them. It was finally decided that the son would give his father a large copper pot. His wife silently put the pot on the terrace. The son bowed before his father and deposited the pot at his feet, along with a bottle of alcohol. The old man took the pot. He was softened and satisfied.

- "Right", said Kapoba. "But the punishment remains to be settled. How much does it cost to beat one's father?" he asked turning towards the chief.
- "Yes, how much?" the chief repeated, addressing the assistants.

One could have heard a pin drop. Kapoba spoke again, and suggested four hundred rupees. "The family is rich", he said. "Each year they migrate to Sikkim, carrying winter tangerines". For a while there was talk of two hundred rupees.

- "No way", said Kapoba. "The chief would never allow it. A doctor must be paid if medicine is to take effect. The punishment must be severe to prevent it from happening again!"
- "But I am not about to do it again!" said the son. "My father would curse me! He would ruin my hands, my eyes, my mouth! My wife would die! My children would die! My lineage would become extinct!"

He had taken out two hundred rupees. He had to bring out a hundred more. Then the bottle of alcohol was opened and each of the persons present had his share. The way this affair was settled stems from the Nepalese conception of justice. The three hundred rupees claimed by the judge stand for the "penalty", *danda*, (nep.). The bottle of alcohol is called *sabha suddho*, (nep). It ensures "purification"; sharing it indicates that things are back the way they should be. As for the copper pot, it was the contribution allowing the father to "raise his head up again". And in fact, this was called *sir uthāuni*, nep.¹

The Beaten Elder Brother

Another affair illustrates the official side of such a legal settlement. This time it is not a father's shoulder, but an elder brother's head that is at stake. During the ceremony ending the mourning period for their father, two brothers came to blows over a question of inheritance. Outside, the feast was going full blast, but in the house, the younger brother was hurt in the face. He went to the chief of the hamlet and demanded justice. The younger brother was summoned and refused to pay the compensation, *sir uthāuni*, which would allow his elder brother to "raise his head up again". The chief, at the end of his tether, turned to his powerful neighbour, the same man who was mentioned in the former case. Five men were dispatched to catch the offender. He was brought back to the chief. He was questioned. This time the younger brother was afraid. He finally bowed down before his elder brother and deposited twenty rupees and a bottle of alcohol in front of him. This first compensation was called *sir uthāuni*. In addition, the man was heavily fined (800 rupees). Since he had no money, he signed over to the chief an I.O.U. guaranteed by the mortgage of his best rice field.

1. About these contributions, see Sagant, 1978, p. 94.

The overlapping of Limbu and Nepalese facts makes it difficult to sum up. At best, we feel we have only begun to approach the question. "Losing face" results from several different situations: ritual impurity, something connected with "dishonour", a wrong, an insult. It can be individual or collective, religious or social. It contains mortal dangers. Under Nepalese law, a court-trial allows one's head to be raised up again.

To define the "head held low" in religious terms, we only have a few clues. The menstrual flow withers up the hunter's flower-soul, *phung sām*: it becomes impossible for him to exert his vital force, *mukumā sām*. He is thus incapable of killing game. As long as a new clan has not been created, the child of incest cannot sacrifice to Nahangma. Thus, he is forbidden to go with his "head held high", to know prosperity. To hit a father on the shoulder, an elder brother on the head, is like striking at Nahangma and Manguenna who reside in their bodies. The gods are outraged. Man loses their support. In all three cases, even if insufficiently explained, religion is at the root. "Losing face" only exists in reference to its opposite, the "head held high". And this is, above all, a religious state.

At the same time, "losing face" is a social condition. The child of incest who cannot go with "head held high", is also someone excluded from the community. To beat one's father, to show a lack of respect for him, is contrary to traditional kinship attitudes, known and accepted by everyone. Between the social and the religious, the link is indissoluble.

What appears important here is the type of relation which exists between religious beliefs and social behaviour. Under Nepalese law, when a Limbu has been wronged, he appeals to his chief, the *subbā*, to whom have been delegated the royal powers in the name of the Gurkha State. He lodges a complaint. He

awaits restitution in terms of justice. What is the aim of such a step? "To raise one's head". Judiciary action is undertaken in the name of a religious ideal. But what was the institution like in the past, before Gurkha law was established in Nepal? What were the Limbu institutions which ensured reparation in case of an offence? Did the same type of relationship between the religious and the social hold at that time.

Raising One's Head: A Few Political Carry-overs

Inspired by Nepalese institutions, the courts of justice, *amāl*, of the Limbu chiefs, *subbā*, -- mentioned above --, were set up between 1820 and 1827.¹ They were abolished in 1966. However, the Gurkha administration took a long time to really insert itself in the North of the country. And, until recently, the Limbu offered passive resistance to the reforms. Long after the conquest, old practices remain: as far as the Gurkha State is concerned, these are illegal. They reveal a resistance of a political nature. But they belong to Limbu history and can therefore not be ignored. In order to try and understand the oldtime practices, we will summarize the significant tales collected in the field. One of them concerns a case of polygamy, in which the first wife is spurned; another deals with adultery; the last is about how a murder was dealt with.

A Spurned Wife and a Ritual Combat

When a man takes a second wife, -- at least this was the case until the seventies --, the first wife doesn't attend the wedding. At the end of the ceremony however, her friends come to fetch her. "We must carry out our customs", they say, "You must come". She finally gives in, showing nonetheless a lot of reluctance. In front of the small assembly, the younger, newly-

1. See Sagant, 1978.

married woman bows to the older one and lays at her feet a gift of five rupees "in order to raise her head up high", *sir uthāuni*. "There", the elder woman is told, "your head is high, now! You are tall again!" The woman picks up her rupees and leaves. In addition to the younger woman's submission, this also guarantees that she won't be abandoned. If the contract were not fulfilled, the older woman would 'lose face'. And the insult affects the men of her original "house" as well. Her brothers stand up to demand damages.

The following episode took place in the twenties. Mundunghe was one of the 'chiefs' of the village of Tumbangphe. He had married the daughter of a famous man from Longbang, at the mouth of the valley. A few years after his wedding, he went dancing in a nearby valley. He brought back a second wife, much younger than the first. He settled down with her in a separate house. He neglected the older wife: after several violent shows of opposition, she ended up by running away to her father's home in Longbang: "your son-in-law took a second wife... He refuses to share the resources..."

The men from Longbang and the men from Tumbangphe met at the market at the entrance to the valley. The spurned wife's brother, Tekpa, picked a quarrel with Metamba, Mundunghe's main mercenary, *tilinga*, nep. The two men came to blows. People rushed to the rescue on both sides. But it was a put-up job. Some thirty men belonging to Longbang routed about ten men from Tumbangphe.

Mundunghe was informed of the deliberate affront. He linked it to his eldest wife's fate. He summoned his relatives from near and far. A good number of them came, from all over the valley and belonging to different clans.¹ After the meeting of

1. For battles in North-East India, see, for example, Mills, 1922, p.110 among the Lhotas, Dutta, 1959, p.22 among the Tangsas, Hutton, 1921, p.110 among the Angamis, Fürer-Haimendorf, 1962, p.113, among the Apa-Tanis, Srivastava, 1962, p. 93 among the Abors. For Tibet, see Desideri, 1932, p. 317.

a council, *cumlung*, it has decided to challenge the men of Long-bang. A messenger was dispatched. The challenge was accepted: "you, sons-in-law, come one and all... You'll be less cocky at the end of the fight".

The meeting was to take place in the market place. The market was in full swing. In the afternoon, the groups formed and lined-up on two terraces. On each side, there were about a hundred men. Tekpa, the wife's brother, began to speak: "you have defied us... You still have time to run". Metamba, in Mundunghe's name, answered in the same vein. Insults. The two men advanced and fought. It became a free-for-all. A club struck Tekpa on the head. The combat ceased immediately. The participants fled. Metamba came nearer and spoke. Tekpa got up and slashed at his hip with a sword. Metamba avoided the blow, but the soles of his feet were badly cut. The men of Tumbangphe protested.¹ Mundunghe, standing at a distance was informed of this. Metamba was bandaged up with his turban. He was brought back to the village on a stretcher.

A few months later, Metamba's wound had healed. Mundunghe once more challenged his father-in-law. And, once again, their men fought it out in the market square, to the indignation of the Newar shopkeepers who complained to Kathmandu. These line-ups were repeated ten to twelve times over a period of several years. Each time, the battle stopped at the first drop of blood.²

Mundunghe's wife intervened to stop the "war". A chief from another valley, allied to both parties, acted as mediator. A meeting between Mundunghe and his father-in-law was arranged on

1. The combat must cease at the first wound, whence the protest.

2. See Das, 1902, p. 20. In Limbu country, at least in the North, these combats continued up to recently, or their memory persists.

neutral ground. The eldest wife bowed in front of Mundunghe and presented a compensation of five rupees and one bottle of alcohol: Mundunghe promised to share his wealth between the two wives, the eldest and the youngest. Then it was his turn to bow at his father-in-law's feet and he, too, presented five rupees. This contribution was called *samban* in Limbu. Peace had been restored.

A Matter of Adultery

A man who has been abandoned by his wife also loses face. In the past, the Limbus had their own form of divorce, *najong khemjong*. The decision could be one-sided. Thus, a husband couldn't refuse a separation if the wife wanted it. A few stories were contracted by me concerning such situations. The woman is described as taking the golden ring out from her nose, bowing in front of the man, placing the ring at his feet as well as a sum of twenty rupees. This compensation allows the man to "hold his head up high", *sir uthāuni*. It's a friendly solution. Another one also existed. Until 1966, the Gurkha State in Limbu country authorized a wronged husband to get hold of his wife's lover, and to levy the price of adultery, *jāri uthāuni*. In fact, this type of situation led to a razzia, though watered down by a few legal prohibitions.¹ In the past, compensation, *sāmbān*, was the traditional means to "straighten up one's head".

The story took place in the thirties. Mundunghe's third son was fourteen. He was to marry the daughter of a household chief from Panchthar, a three-days' walk away from the valley. The wedding had been arranged by the parents. It consolidated a political alliance. Mundunghe, at this time, was at the zenith of his power. In his home, fifteen to eighteen "slaves", *Yog*, were charged with the material chores; some thirty strong

1. Vansittart, 1915, p. 111, notes that in olden times, the husband would kill the lover. He seems to be referring to an ancient Nepalese law rather than to Limbu custom. See Höfer, 1979, p. 73-80, Adam, 1936, p. 535.

men, *tilinga*, were permanently at his side, and ensured his armed guard.

The woman was twenty-five. She had a lover whom she met at the market, at the entrance of the valley. She ended up by running away with him to his native region, Panchthar.

Mundunghe's son was tending his father's herd. Mundunghe came to meet him in the pasture. They talked man to man in the hut, *goth*. The father joked a little. "What are you going to do about it... Your wife has left. There are two possibilities. Either you don't do anything. Or else we levy the price of adultery". The son took counsel from his friends. He had his father told that he intended to take his revenge for the offence.

Mundunghe summoned all the "men" who were "his" from everywhere in the valley, "rapid and strong". All in all, practically a hundred and fifty people came to him. The expedition was prepared. Mundunghe, contrary to his son, would not take part in it: it was to be led by his brother Metamba, chief of his army.

From the Mewa valley to Panchthar, the journey takes three days. Metamba, on horseback, led an imposing troop. To foreigners who, on the way, asked questions, it was answered that the group was migrating towards Sikkim for the transport of tangerines. The fourth day, Metamba and his fellows hid in the forest, not far from the village where his wife and her lover had taken refuge. Information was obtained about the set-up at the place. The lover was on his guard, fifteen to twenty persons were with him, ready to help.

At nightfall, the house was encircled. They waited until everybody had gone to sleep. The guards in the courtyard were neutralized. They were tied with their own turbans to the long beam of a plough. Metamba entered the house. The main room, on the ground floor, was empty. The couple was on the first

floor. He hadn't had time to pull up the notched ladder. The man was there waiting, sword in hand. If he resisted, this might mean death. Metamba and his men got hold of him.

Early in the morning, the troop set out, now leading twenty captives, among whom the couple. The trip back was marked by several incidents illustrating the mythical content of the narration. The armed troop, defying Nepalese law by having taken hostages, neutralized a police station which attempted to stop them. The arrival back in the Mewa valley was a triumph. In the village, Mundunghe had sacrificed a buffalo. The feast was on.

The lover was shackled to the *theiro*.¹ The wife was kept under guard. The other captives were freed. The wait began. Almost immediately, the prisoner's household had contacted several important men in Nalbu and Khamlung in the Mewa valley. These men were allied both to Mundunghe and to the people of Panchthar. They came to see Mundunghe, and acted as intermediaries. They went over the whole affair from the beginning. The principle of a ransom or compensation, *sāmbām*, was accepted. It was the amount which was the problem. Mundunghe wanted ten thousand rupees. "Don't bother to come back without the right amount", he said. "I will keep the man as a "slave, *yog*".

For six months, the Panchthar household tried to collect the funds. In Tumbangphe, the lover was treated as a "slave". He fetched wood, replanted the grain, fetched water. The woman was treated in the same way. At no time had the negotiations been interrupted. After six months, a meeting between the two parties was held at Mundunghe's, in the presence of the mediators. For three thousand rupees, the hostages were freed. This was the compensation, *sāmbām*.

1. See the photograph of a Dafla prisoner shackled among the Apa-Tanis in Fürer-Haimendorf, 1962, p. 71.

How a Murder was Settled

Here, the facts are more recent. The market was in full swing. The chiefs who control the valley, four or five of them, had gathered at a little distance from the crowd, honouring and complimenting each other mutually. The one from Yungsa -- it is his territory --, was doing the entertaining. At the other end of the market, a fight broke out over a woman. A man from Thangma slashed a gash in the face of someone from Yungsa. Four "clan" brothers rushed to his side, and the man from Thangma was cut down with one blow of a sword. His body was dragged out from the market place. The four murderers left it near the bridge and took to the hills.

The chief of Thangma was the first informed. His first move was to leave the market immediately. Kebong, Mundunche's son, was next informed, and he proposed, before leaving, to take the affair in hand. In the twinkling of an eye, the market place was deserted.

The next day, the chief of Thangma, accompanied by fifteen men, arrived in Tumbangphe.

- "Can you really settle the matter?" he asked Kebong.
- "Give me two days", answered the latter. "Meanwhile, wait for me here with your men".

The evening before, the dead man was buried as a *soghā* (victim of a foul death) on the edge of the river, "deep in the forest". A priest, *yābā*, had come to dance. Nepalese law allows seven days to declare a murder. Since 1820, it's been the Regional Court of Justice, *adālat*, exclusively, which is competent to try such a case.

While Thangma's men settled themselves at Kebong's, the Yungsa chief, the leader of the murderers arrived in a nearby house, surrounded by a dozen men. The head of this house is a

sworn friend, *mit*, whom the man of Yungsa asks to be introduced to Kebong. "Not possible", he was told. "Thangma's men are installed up there". In the evening, though, a secret meeting could take place. "Can you settle the matter?", the Yungsa chief now asked. Kebong didn't answer him directly. "Don't stay here. You have killed a man... I'll let you know very soon what has been decided".

Kebong had dispatched messengers to all the important chiefs of the valley. The next morning, all seven were present, at a Council which took place in Tumbangphe. Several themes were broached. If the matter was to be settled according to Limbu custom, everything had to be finished "within the seven days following the murder". One of the participants was in favour of appealing to Nepalese justice: "This man has killed once, he'll kill again, he is a threat to all of us". All the others were for observing the Limbu traditions. On the side of the murderers, an agreement was reached about the principle of paying a compensation, *sāmbān* and the argument of a possible repetition of the crime was refuted.

Consecutive and parallel meetings were then held between Yungsa and Thangma with Kebong among others, as mediator. The murderers were shackled to the *thehro*. They had received assistance from their households and allied houses. Each of the latter had contributed three hundred rupees. Yungsa declared that he was prepared to give ten thousand rupees in all. Thangma asked for twelve thousand.

The payment of the compensation, *sāmbān*, was made at Tumbangphe. An accident declaration was sent to the Nepalese administration. Police investigation obtained no results.

Are those three examples typical of ancient Limbu institutions, those which existed before the Gurkha conquest? The use of money, the interference of the chiefs, *subbā*, organized by the

Nepalese state, prevent us from thinking so. It is clear, though, that the facts described are illegal according to Gurkha law. They are survivals of Limbu customs. But these survivals have already been subjected to syncretism. Nevertheless, they shed some light on traditional practices.

In the two first examples, the religious concept of the affront is present. The abandoned wife, the betrayed husband, "loss of face". This notion appears outside Nepalese institutions, as it appeared in several tales told before, significant of Limbu tradition: relatives confronted with the failure of an abduction; the father struck on the shoulder; the chief brought into line; incest's child, etc. Under Nepalese law, one engages in legal action in the name of religious beliefs. In the ancient Limbu society, the same ideas led to political action. Today, as in the past, a comparable type of relationship between the religious model and social behaviour exists.

With Head Held High: A Religious Model for Political Action

D. Snellgrove has stressed the difficulty, for a Westerner, of understanding a Tibetan. The reason for this difficulty, as he remarks,¹ is no doubt the great intricacy of religious facts, but, even more so, the simple fact that the Tibetan *believes* in his religion. It's the same with the Limbus. It is impossible to understand their political institutions without entering the field of religious ideas; both are closely linked. And this relationship has consequences. The vital force has only a domestic existence. It expresses itself through political violence. Its symbols are prosperity and power. It explains social mobility. The religious model ensures social order. Everywhere, the reference to the vital force is present.

1. Snellgrove, 1957, p. 123.

The Vital Force and the Power of the Household Chief

The religious concepts concerning the "head held high" establish primarily the power of the Limbu household-chief. There exists no political solidarity, for the Limbus, other than that of the household. In the ancient society, there was no authority superior to that of the head of the house.

The vital force, *mukumā sām*, is, first of all, a religious concept. It appears during the sacrifice to Nahangma. It stems from a complex and coherent set of various beliefs: the gods and the body-souls; the "masters of the place", to use the terminology of Tibetologists; the blood spilled during a ritual; the flower-soul; purity; "the emboxed worlds", where the Universe, the house and the body, for a moment, coincide; shamanist techniques, etc. It's in relation to a specific religious context that the vital force acquires the power to emerge through violence, in war or when hunting. The "head held high" makes reference to these powers. The important thing to understand here is that the vital force can only exist in specific contexts. It is re-vitalized in the space outlined for the sacrifice. It is limited to the area defined by the four corners of the house. The vital force is a religious notion which concerns the household alone.

Of course, defining what such a household was for the ancient Limbus raises a problem. In Nepal, between 1966 and 1971, the dwelling, in general, is the conjugal family's unit of residence. But the vital force, *mukumā sām*, finds expression within three distinct social units. The first is indeed the conjugal household. It is made up of from four to six persons. Each house sacrifices to Nahangma twice a year: this is the ritual which we have analysed in this article. The second household is larger, i.e. the local lineage. In this modern era, its members are scattered in several houses. Every three

years, the chief accomplishes the big Tong Sing ritual.¹ This ceremony, among others, involves the cult of Nahangma. It takes place in the chief's home. But all the members are present. And it's the whole lineage, ultimately, which has the "head held high". Third and last, is the clan segment, larger still, and which, moreover, includes a non-Limbu immigrant clientele. Its unit of residence is the district territory, *amāli*. At its head, the only chief accredited by the Nepalese authorities, is the *subbā*. The clan segment's vital force manifests itself on the occasion of the Dasāñ feast. Here, the sacrifice is not accomplished in Nahangma's name, but in Yuma's and the Devis'. It is carried out each year in each *subbā* household. Putting aside the clan segment, we can try to understand what the ancient Limbu household was like. The clan segment resulted from the establishment of Nepalese institutions and seems not to correspond to any reality of the ancient society. It even seems to be diametrically opposed to it. Thus, only the lineage and the conjugal family remain. In the World of the Dead, *khemā phāngphe*, the remotest ancestors are described as inhabiting one big house. In ancient times, it is possible that the big house was the unit of habitation of the Limbu lineage. In it, each conjugal family is supposed to have enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. Whatever the case, just one remark: whatever its composition may have been in the past, the house is defined by the unity of its vital force.

Due to the "emboxed worlds" concept, the vitality of the house and the vitality of its chief coincide. For the Rais² as well as the Limbus, it is the house, together with its chief, who hold their "head up high" at the end of the ritual. The

1. This Tong Sing ritual seems very comparable to the Rais' as described by Allen, 1976, p. 134-135.

2. Allen, 1976, p. 135.

same goes for "losing face". On the religious level, this state involves the entire household, as we have seen in the tale about the aborted abduction. Or else, if it only concerns the chief, it nevertheless has repercussions on all the inhabitants, as in the case of the children of incest. Or yet again, it may only concern one of its members, but all the house is hit, as in the example of the abandoned wife's brothers. On the other hand, from the moment they reside elsewhere, blood relatives keep their "heads high" even if one of them has "lost face". Religious states involving the vital force do not hit the clan in its entirety, or even the village; the houses only are affected.

From a sociological point of view, it is the same thing. The idea of a widespread political solidarity does not obtain, because the religious expression of the vital force exists only on a domestic level. Adultery, for example, does not affect the clan as a whole, nor the village, but only the house. The wrong, recognized as such by custom, only has a domestic definition. Even today, the more members there are in a house, the stronger it is. But to assure its security, its head has no other support than that of the members of the household. In case of an attack, the house must defend its members and its property by itself. Of course, if a war breaks out, affines, sworn friends and political allies are called to the rescue. Thus, one's living forces are increased. Nevertheless, in case of a razzia or a battle, the two household heads are the first to fight it out; the two households are settling their affairs. There is no political solidarity beyond the house and its allies.

Equally, in conflicts between houses, there is no interference from any superior authority, clan or village. From the beginning to the end of a political action, from the "loss of face" to the compensation which restores peace and harmony, only the household chiefs meet face to face. The men who offer

their services as mediators have neither the power to judge nor the power to punish. They are household chiefs as well. No one, in the ancient Limbu society, can punish criminals, settle a quarrel, judge a wrong. The right to make use of violence in order to "raise up one's head", which belongs to each household chief, is incompatible with the Hindu notion of royal justice as established by the Gurkha State, to the *subbās'* advantage. When the *subbā* appears, he alone, within the district limits, has the right to dispose of an army; for he alone possesses the royal privilege of the pennant and the drum.

How did the *subbā* manage to impose himself on the household heads of his district? Equally, how could the first Tibetan kings come to exist, imbued as they were with the symbolism of the "head held high"? These historical questions bring to light the importance of religion in political matters, and more specifically, the importance of the sacrificial area. When the ritual which concerns the vital force is limited by the four corners of a house, the society is indivisible: there is no room for a royal power, no authority beyond that of the chief of the house. On the other hand, if the sacrifice takes place in a broader setting, it means that, already, in one way or another, within this new territory, the household chiefs no longer dispose of all the might that used to be theirs. Thus, on the political plane, the ancient Limbus, those who lived before the conquest, resemble other Himalayan populations who, up to the Second World War, and even after, had preserved similar practices of razzia, battle and compensation. These are the populations of the old N.E.F.A. and, among them, more especially perhaps, the Nishmis, the Daflas and certain Miri groups. Did they hold the same ideas about the vital force?¹ Indeed, for the Limbus, it is a religious idea, determining

1. Speaking of the Daflas, Fürer-Haimendorf, 1967, uses expressions such as "losing face", p. 59, "restoring prestige", p. 55. The chief of the big house is the "head", p. 55. etc.

the unit of political solidarity, the household, and the only recognized authority, that of the household chief. It is the vital force which founds the entire and indivisible power of each household head, by permitting him to resort to armed violence in case of a wrong. The first visage of vitality is thus primarily domestic.

The Vital Force and Political Violence

Violence is the concrete expression of a religious concept, the vital force, for each household chief. It is that part of *Nanangma*, the war goddess, which each man has within himself, in his right shoulder or on top of his head. It is the stamp of the divine in man, the clearest sign of his humanity. Violence is life. In social life, the forms this violence takes have apparently become institutionalized. There are three ways to obtain the same effect, socially speaking: spilling blood, compensation and enslavement.

In the examples given above of political carry-overs, blood is spilled during a battle, and, naturally, when a murder is committed. It could also have been spilled during a *razzia*, when the lover was captured. On the religious level, this close relationship between the vital force and the power to spill blood probably comes from very ancient conceptions "typical of a warring and hunting society".¹ The capacity to spill blood appears to be the expression of the vital force. It's apparently very highly valued in Limbu culture. As far as I was able to judge, the act always seemed to be accompanied by a very strong emotion.² And this feeling, according to me, is neither an accident nor passively submitted to. On the contrary, it is perhaps thought of as positive and actually

1. Tucci, 1970, p. 239.

2. Let us note, however, to our embarrassment, that Fürer-Haimendorf 1967, p. 113, reckons it is the contrary when talking of the Nagas.

sought after. But, at the same time, this violence, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric, is closely controlled by society. It can only be given free rein on rare and specific occasions, very precisely defined by custom and limited by the institutions, somewhat like (in a different context) the trance.

What indeed is surprising in the Limbus' daily behaviour, is their extraordinary self-control. The blood in the chicken sacrifice to Nahangma, or the pig sacrifice to Yuma, scarcely runs at all. Yet it is accorded great importance. It's the same with political action. The battle ceases at the very first wound. During a razzia, in the first moment of confusion, there is in fact danger of death for the man who resists. But the danger seems lesser for he who allows himself to be captured.¹ And, as soon as a murder has been committed, social groups immediately interfere to offer solutions and break the chain of vendettas. Blood is too precious. As soon as a drop has been spilled, the vendetta is stopped, at least among the Limbus. Be that as it may, it is blood, in the ritual to Nahangma, which enables the household chief to "raise his head up again". And it is that blood, spilled by a house in murder, ritual combat and razzia, which cleanses the offence.

The reparation of a wrong can also be obtained through the payment of a compensation, *sāmbām*. The principle of it is simple. The household which has been wronged assembles its own forces and calls in its allies. It "rises". A razzia is organized. Its aim is to seize the captive who will be taken back to the village. The man is shackled to the *theñro*. And then the wait begins. The hostage's house intervenes straight away. It brings into action mutual allies--matrimonial or political--to offer their services as mediators. Negotiations take place.

1. Furer-Haimendorf, 1967, p. 60, remarked the same thing among the Daflas.

Oaths and ordeals seem to be fairly frequent. Compensation is a complex institution. Compensation is equivalent in value to blood spilled -- at least as far as the outcome is concerned. It leads to the liberation of the captive. It restores peace. Mainly, it founds a new alliance between the two warring houses. Often, it establishes hierarchies. Always, it increases the prestige of the mediators. Finally, it represents, in Limbu politics, what the contribution *sir uthāuni* was to Nepalese justice: it enables one to go with one's "head held high".

When the compensation *sāmbām* is not paid -- and the reasons for a non-payment are very interesting -- the shackled man becomes a slave, *yog*, in the home of his captors. The word is Tibetan.¹ It has a connotation of social stratification. But this idea has no relation to a society hierarchically organized into four orders. This institution survived for a long time in matrimonial alliances. After a marriage, if the "bride price" wasn't paid up, the children of the union became slaves, *yog*, in the mother's home. Attached to the chief of this house, they are dependent on him for shelter, clothing, meals, marriage, etc. They belong to his house; they do menial tasks. This institution differs from Indo-Nepalese slavery, *kāmārā*. It seems to have been prevalent in the past. It went well beyond the limits of matrimonial institutions. All kinds of wrongs gave rise to the search for compensation. Thus, all kinds of circumstances could lead to slavery if the compensation was not paid: adultery, blows and wounds incurred at a bend in the path, epidemics, etc. The slave, *yog*, too, enables one to go with "head held high".

Thus, the vital force, a religious concept, finds expression in the violence of the razzia or battle. But the recourse to violence in political matters is defined by custom. It can

1. *Yog*, in Tibetan *g-yog po*, means "servant".

be given free rein only on specific occasions: the settling of a conflict following a wrong. It is subject to rules: stopping the battle at the first injury, guaranteeing the hostage's security if he doesn't resist, the captive's status, the complex procedure of negotiations, etc. It ceases when one of its goals has been attained: blood spilled, the compensation, the slave. The vital force's second visage in social life is the aptitude for political violence. But a violence which is recognized by law and whose forms have been institutionalized.

The Vital Force and Prosperity

A close connection exists between the "head held high" -- a religious state -- and the most obvious signs of wealth and might. Yet, the society is neither dominated by the strongest nor abandoned to confusion.¹ That is because the violence blessed by the gods can only be productive of wealth, under certain conditions.

The society is indivisible on a political level, but it is not egalitarian. Social mobility is powerful. Some houses prosper, others don't. Prosperous: due to their crops, the importance of their livestock, and also the political weight they carry and their social influence. A household chief's power shows. First of all, he is feared. He will demand large compensations when wronged. Whereas his poorer neighbour asks for two hundred rupees, he obtains eight hundred or a thousand for the same wrong. "His" men can be found in the four corners of the valley and even further away: they will rise at his call. The surest among them are affines. The alliance with the patrilateral cross-cousin implies, over several generations, the renewal of the ties between the two houses, their strengthening. It's the "bridge of gold and silver". The

1. Fürer-Haimendorf's remarks on the Daflas (1967) are at the origin of the idea developed in this paragraph.

powerful man multiplies the number of marriages. He rarely has less than several wives. In the old days, when the country was fairly empty, and land available, it meant labour, real wealth. He who dominated was always at the head of a numerous household. Hence, his plentiful livestock, his abundant crops. The strong man is open-handed. He redistributes his wealth to show his power. The logic of the feasts of merit is just round the corner. He is powerful also through the number of slaves he owns: the young ones tend the herds, the adults are fighting men, his armed guard. How many dominators are there in a valley? Six or seven, perhaps, at the summit of the pyramids of alliances. And all these men of power have a point in common: the fact that their political strength, and even their wealth, depend on their allies. In this society, alliance is primordial. It is the source of all influence. It is the standard for the measure of social mobility. It leads straight to prosperity.

Is the prosperity of the dominator always founded on brute force? No indeed. From violence, to which religion has attached great value, to alliance, the sign of social success, there isn't far to go, but the difference is an important one: the respect of customary rules. Let us try to follow this channel which leads from religion to politics, from violence to prosperity.

Take the example of marriage. An abortive abduction, as we have seen, damages the vital force. One must then sacrifice to Nahangma, to "raise one's head up again". On the contrary, a successful elopement is highly valued. The kidnappers' gestures are the same as those of the head of household's, when sacrificing. They stamp their feet on the ground, beat their chests with their fists, shout, jump, prance around. Their "head is high", then. The violence of the abduction, like all violence, is the expression of vitality. We are on religious territory.

Nevertheless, the vital force of one house always manifests itself to the detriment of the vital force of another. If the ravishers "hold their head high", it's because somewhere else, in the girl's house, they have just "lost face". This violence "blessed by the gods", creates a fissure in social life. It is always at the origin of a conflict. Even in recent times, after so much change, there are love stories which can only be understood in the light of these facts. Two centuries after the conquest, the durable strength of these behaviour patterns is extraordinary. The following story took place in the sixties. A girl ran away with her lover towards Assam. She was caught by her father and his followers. The lover slipped away alone, as if beaten by their number. The young woman gave in and went back home, miserably unhappy. The father put out bunting. This story is a real puzzle for the foreigner! Mainly, what is it that can induce a man to track down his daughter's lover? Couldn't he simply stay at home and wait to be sent the price of the bride? It's a tragedy, in fact. Each person is a prisoner of the logic of his own role. But on other occasions, the lover and the father don't meet face to face. The meeting here represents the ancient Fates, the doing of the gods. One must understand the father's position. The abduction of his daughter, even if she was agreeable to it, makes all the household "lose face". The prosperity of the cows is at stake, and the state of the flower-soul, the strength of the vital force; all are threatened. One risks death by remaining in this state. It's (perhaps) less a question of psychology than of religion. The father's behaviour is founded on the authority of religion. He has no option but to take the plunge in order to raise his head up again. And it is the same for all kinds of other matters. The expression of vitality leads to conflict. Because of religious ideas no one can escape this truth.

Let's consider the social side. After an abduction, two solutions are available. The first consists in acknowledging

the wrong inflicted upon the other household. As soon as the wedding is over, the kidnappers' first care is to prepare a small contribution of meat and alcohol, which a messenger will carry to the young wife's home. This modest present is called *yog thowā*. It's a promise: their duty towards the wronged house will be carried out according to the rules, the offence will be compensated for by the price of the bride. The first meeting between the two houses takes place two weeks after the wedding. It is true that it is an extremely stormy one. The father-in-law is enormously angry and this manifests itself in all sorts of accusations: "wife-thieves!", etc. All through the ceremony, he considers himself an insulted man. He is ready to resort to arms. But he doesn't, because of the little gift received the first day. In fact, a lot of diplomacy is required to make him accept the price of the bride. Yet, in the end, he accepts to share the meat; it's the basis of the alliance between the two houses. Both houses beginning with the son-in-law's, win out in this affair. Thus, conflicts are inevitable, but one had better recognize one's wrongs and observe tradition. For every settled conflict is not only a return to peace, it is also the birth of a new alliance. From violence, through peace and tradition, the way leads to prosperity. And it is the same with political as well as matrimonial situations.

The second solution has an opposite effect. After the abduction, the kidnappers do nothing. No bride price, no contribution *yog thowā*. Pure violence, so to speak, faithless and lawless. In the girl's house, people are worried. The chief delegates "his" men to look into the disappearance. Sometimes it's the father himself who, furious, wanders around the village, looking for his daughter.¹ If the price of the bride is not paid, the violence of the kidnappers ends up by backfiring. First of all, they lose the support of a solid alliance. They

1. Sagant, 1970, p. 90.

also unleash the thunderous rage of a man who has "lost face". The offended house rises to "raise their head up again". It always wins. It obtains increased prosperity. The children of the illegal union will belong to their mother's house, increasing the number of "slaves". They strengthen a political power. There is thus no one to enforce the social laws, but they are not transgressed with impunity. Prosperity is at stake.

Thus, the Limbus do not believe that a man's freedom ends where another's begins. Rather, they think the contrary is true. The vital force of one house always finds expression to the detriment of the vital force of another. One holds one's "head up high" when someone else, nearby, has "lost face". This society which preaches violence, is logical: social life is founded on conflict and he who refuses it risks death. This society is at the same time subtle: it accepts that there be rich and poor. It accepts violence at the root of prosperity. But there is one condition: to become powerful, one must go through with the conflict, put an end to it. And, in order to keep one's books straight, there comes a moment when one must apply the rules and acknowledge the wrong one has inflicted. Only then, can one win an alliance and advance on the road towards wealth. A house can very well show the most virulent vitality, it will never become powerful if it doesn't submit to tradition. No one can constantly flaunt the law. This would unleash formidable coalitions. Thus, it is neither chaos nor the survival of the fittest. Prosperity is the third face of the vital force. On condition that one respects the law. For a Westerner, this society is almost a work of genius: the most unbridled violence has given birth to social order.

Conclusion

"With head held high": this state is connected to the vital force, *mukunā sām*. The notion is at the heart of the old way of

life. It only exists within the four corners of the Limbu house to which it lends its pre-eminence in the old social organization.

The state of the vital force belongs to each house, showing itself very concretely. To carry one's "head high" (how can this be said in Western terms?) means to be at the top of one's form, audacious, full of a happy aggressivity. You become successful in everything. Fearlessly, you throw yourself into political action. When hunting, the game springs up at your feet. In any case, you prosper, you are influential, well supported by your allies, powerful and feared. In your shoulder, on top of your head, you feel the gods' violence ready to break out. At the same time, your neighbour, even a very close blood relative, may have "lost face". He is paralyzed, full of shame, incapable of action. A buzzing at the temples, he seems on the edge of dread, sick of living. He wounds himself when hunting. His crops and livestock fail, he has become a social outcast. He smells of misery and death. His misfortune, however, doesn't affect you. The gods are close to the ancient Limbus. The signs of their favour are immediately tangible. But their presence is limited to the house. The state of the vital force differs from one house to the other.

Inside a household, the vitality has its highs and lows. It changes with time. It's not for nothing that the sacrifice to Nahangma occurs at the end of a three-year cycle, or at the beginning of the rising season and the declining one. Doubtless, the vital force has, by then, been used up. It must be renewed. The body, the house, accord themselves with the rhythm of the seasons, the coming and going of Nature's cycles, the forces of the Universe.

The vitality of a house also varies according to that of another house. It's the thing in life the least fairly shared. The gods, when they force a house to express its own vitality, accept that at the same time this should mean that another

house's vital force be damaged. They introduce an imbalance, a fissure, a conflict in the world of men. In turn, the wronged house throws itself into action, to "raise up its head again". This see-saw game could be never-ending and prevent all social activity. On the contrary, it is its very foundation. The prosperity of one house comes from its capacity to surround itself with allies. It is in your own interest to acknowledge the wrongs your vitality has caused to another. For conflict generates an alliance between two houses, even though they start off by fighting. Every rupture is a promise of prosperity, on condition that you know how to make peace. It is the play of political conflicts between households which ends up by weaving the web of social relations. Of all social mechanisms, alliance is by far the most important. The balance is less precarious than it would appear. In such a society, the powerful are the best integrated, socially. Their wealth depends on stability. They use their influence to ensure the respect of the laws. They are not the most violent. They are, rather, the most cunning, politically. Social order depends on the game of vital forces. And on this chessboard, there is only one kind of piece: the house.

But let us return to our first question. The religious ideal of going with "head held high" founds the political power of each household chief, consisting in the ability to use armed violence when he has "lost face". From the four corners of the house to the four orients of the Universe, there is no village border, no realm-frontier. The house opens wide on the disorder of the forest. It is the basic unit of a society dominated by the political principle. The Limbu chiefs, at the time of the Conquest, were neither petty kings, nor heads of principalities, as in West Nepal. They were household chiefs like the others, but at the pinnacle of their power, at the summit of the structures of alliances. That is because all their life, Nahangma has filled them, more than others, with one exclusive ambition: to go "with head held high".

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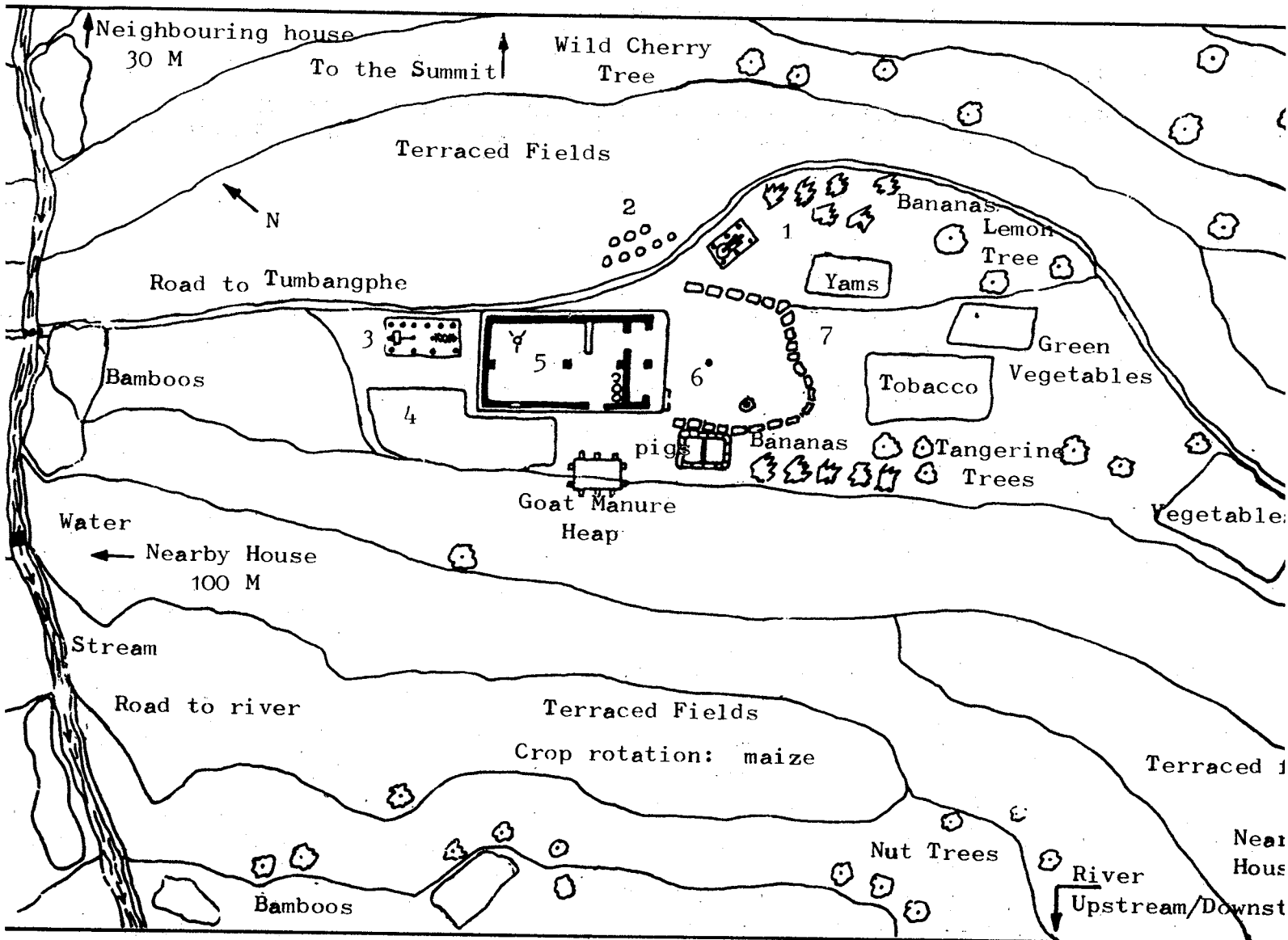
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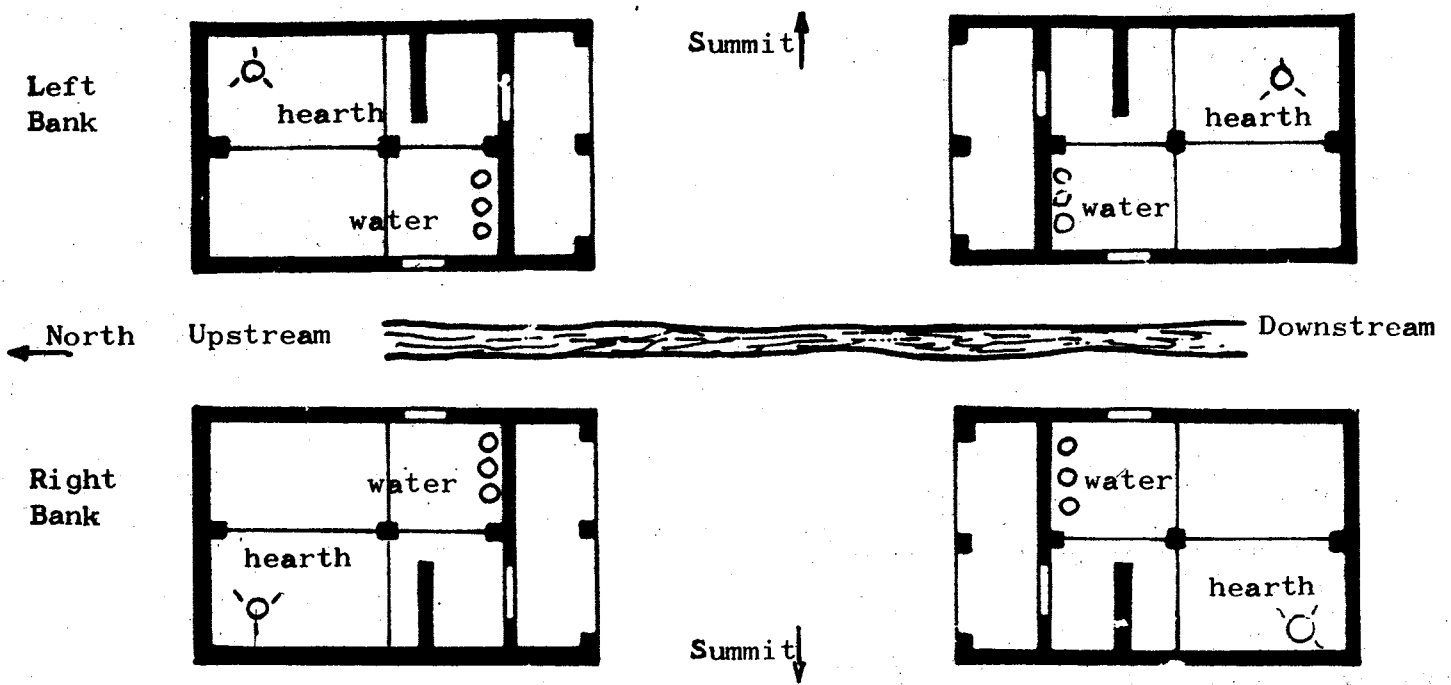
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1. The Limbu House and its Surroundings

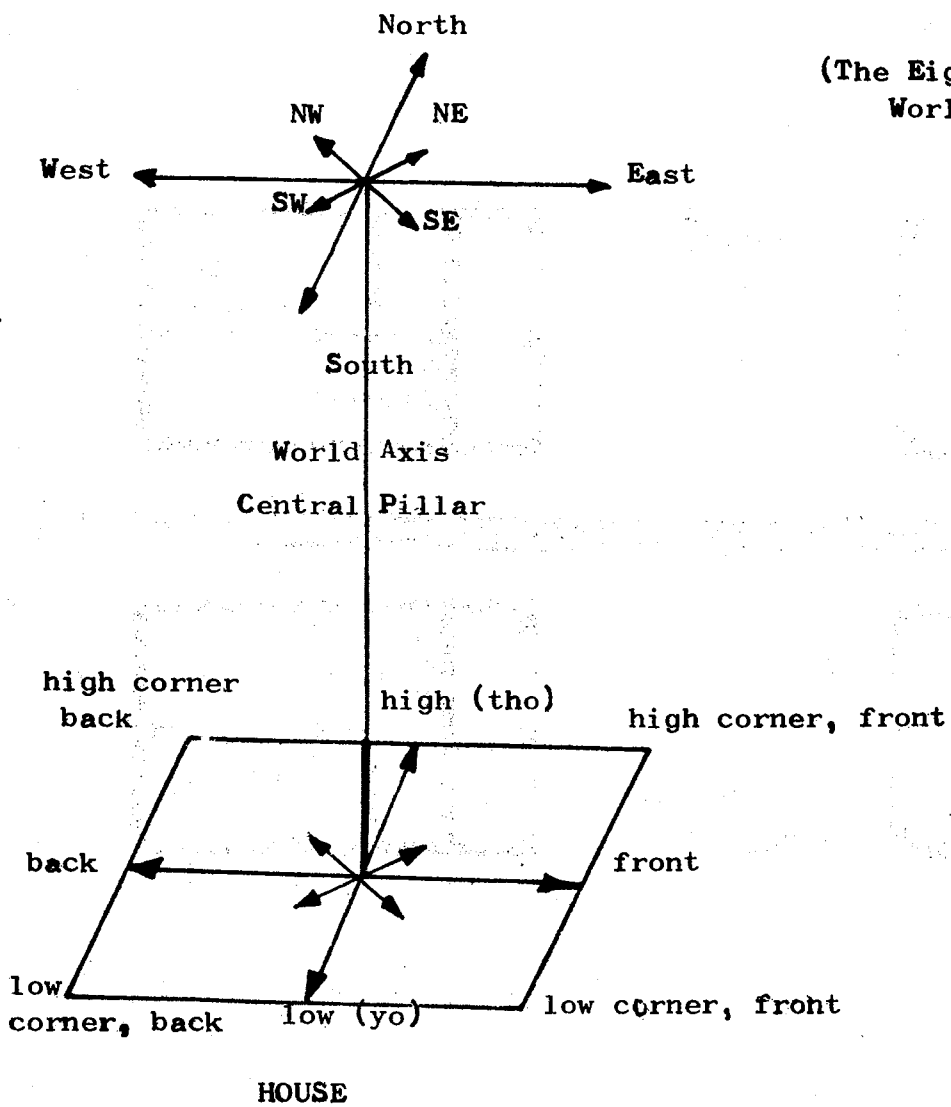
1. Machine to Blanch Grain
2. Flowers, Medicinal Products
3. Bovine Manure Heap
4. Tomatoes, hot peppers, tobacco, marrows
5. Hearth, Central Pillar, Water, Porch Roof
6. Inside Courtyard; Bamboo Mats, Basket (for chickens), Chickens
7. Dry Stone Wall



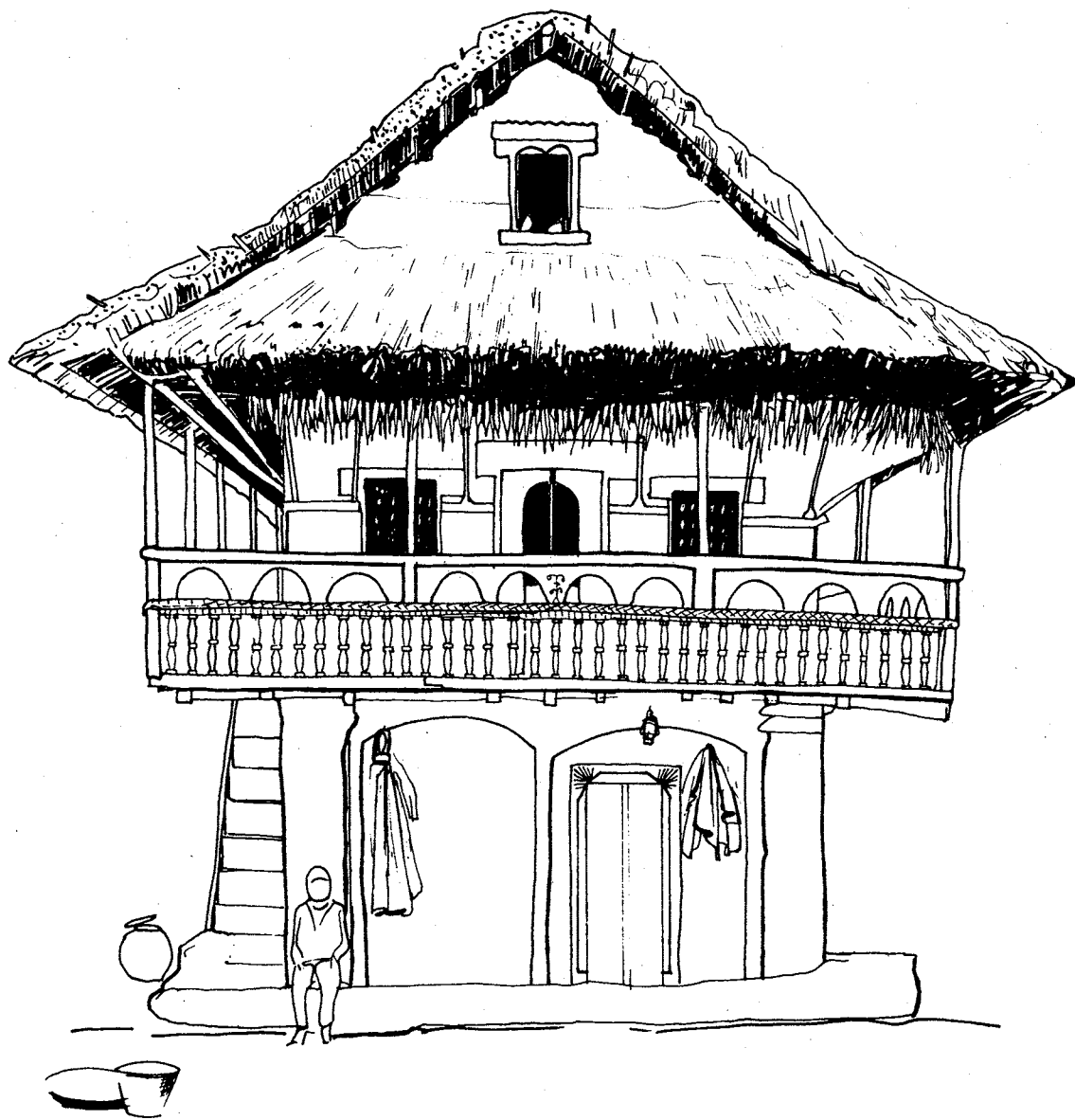
2. Internal Organization of the House

YET LAMDOMA

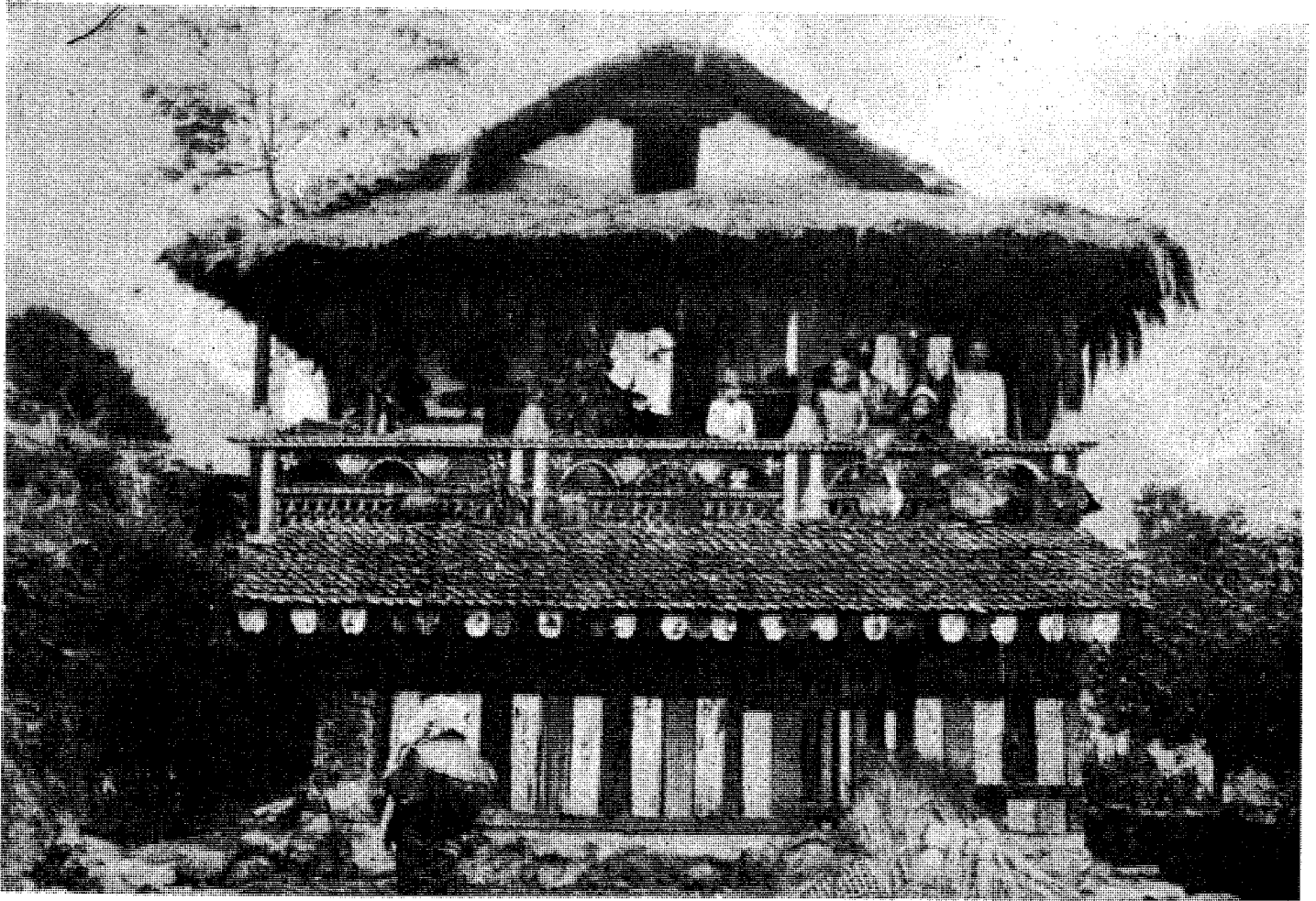
(The Eight Roads of the Other World)



3. The House and the Other World



4. The Limbu House



5. House of the Village Headman