

**CONSULTATIONS WITH HIMALAYAN GODS:  
A STUDY OF ORACULAR RELIGION AND  
ALTERNATIVE VALUES IN HINDU JUMLA**

**J. Gabriel Campbell**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Faculty of Philosophy**

**Columbia University  
1978**

ABSTRACT

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The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand Jumla religion within the context of Jumla culture. As Jumla religion can be distinguished into two separate

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traditions, which have been labeled "Jumla Brahminism" and "Jumla Shamanism", this dissertation explores the roles and meanings of these two traditions and their relationship to each other. This exploration proceeds

through a descriptive and comparative analysis of the two traditions themselves, with particular emphasis on the consultations that take place between the Jumla people and their oracular gods, as well as

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In addition, considerable attention has been devoted to Jumla social organization, but not because it provides the cultural context of Jumla religion, but because the roles and meanings of Jumla Brahminism and Jumla Shamanism are as

such "social" as they are "religious", and cannot be understood apart from Jumla society. Jumla social organization is discussed in terms of the simultaneous presence of "dharmic"

and "non-dharmic" models as a means for understanding the mixture of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy found in Jumla society.

## ABSTRACT

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The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand Jumla religion within the context of Jumla culture. As Jumla religion can be distinguished into two separate traditions, which have been labeled "Jumla Brahmanism" and "oracular religion", the bulk of this study is devoted to exploring the roles and meaning of these two traditions and their relationship to each other. This exploration proceeds through a descriptive translation of the traditions themselves, with particular emphasis on the consultations that take place between the Jumla people and their oracular gods, as well as through a comparative analysis in light of models developed by scholars for elsewhere in South Asia.

In addition, considerable attention has been devoted to Jumla social organization, not only because it provides the cultural context of Jumla religion, but because the roles and meaning of Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion are as much "social" as they are "religious" and cannot be understood apart from Jumla society. Jumla social organization is discussed in terms of the simultaneous presence of "dharmic" and "non-dharmic" models as a means for understanding the mixture of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy found in Jumla society.

Finally, the relationship between Jumla Brahmanism and the dharmic model of society on the one hand, and oracular religion and the non-dharmic models of society on the other hand, is examined in terms of an ideal model based on the contrast between the valley orthodox Hindus (Jyulyāl) and the upland unorthodox population (Pābai). This model of Jumla culture as a whole is then related to models developed by other scholars--both as a means to understand Jumla culture better and as a means to suggest improvements on these comparative models.

The central argument of the dissertation is that Jumla religion and society is animated by two different sets of principles and values which are partially complementary and partially antithetical to each other. On the one side there are the Brahmanical ideals, such as hierarchy, purity, and merit, which underlie the dharmic modes of Jumla social organization and Jumla Brahmanism; and on the other side are the ideals of egalitarianism, love, and practicality which underlie the non-dharmic modes of Jumla society as well as oracular religion. While the former constitutes the dominant model to which the latter is (somewhat rebelliously) subordinated, the latter is highly institutionalized in Jumla culture and is as important as the former. Among the implications of this argument are that: (1) religion and society (i.e. culture) can contain opposing sets of principles and values which are both considered valid, and that (2) Hindu cultures, despite their dominant emphasis on what

has been called dharmic values, may acknowledge the validity of opposing values more than has been generally acknowledged.

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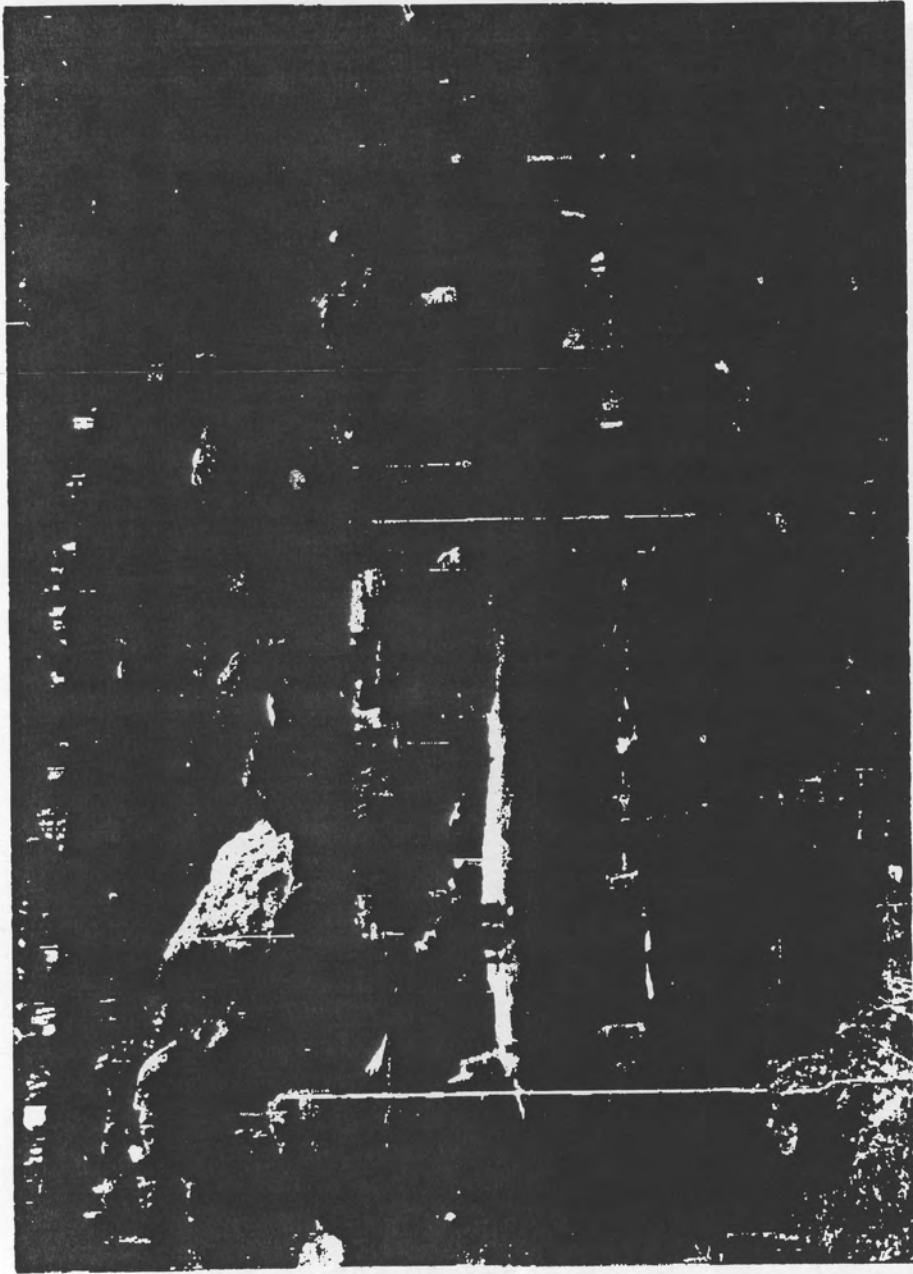


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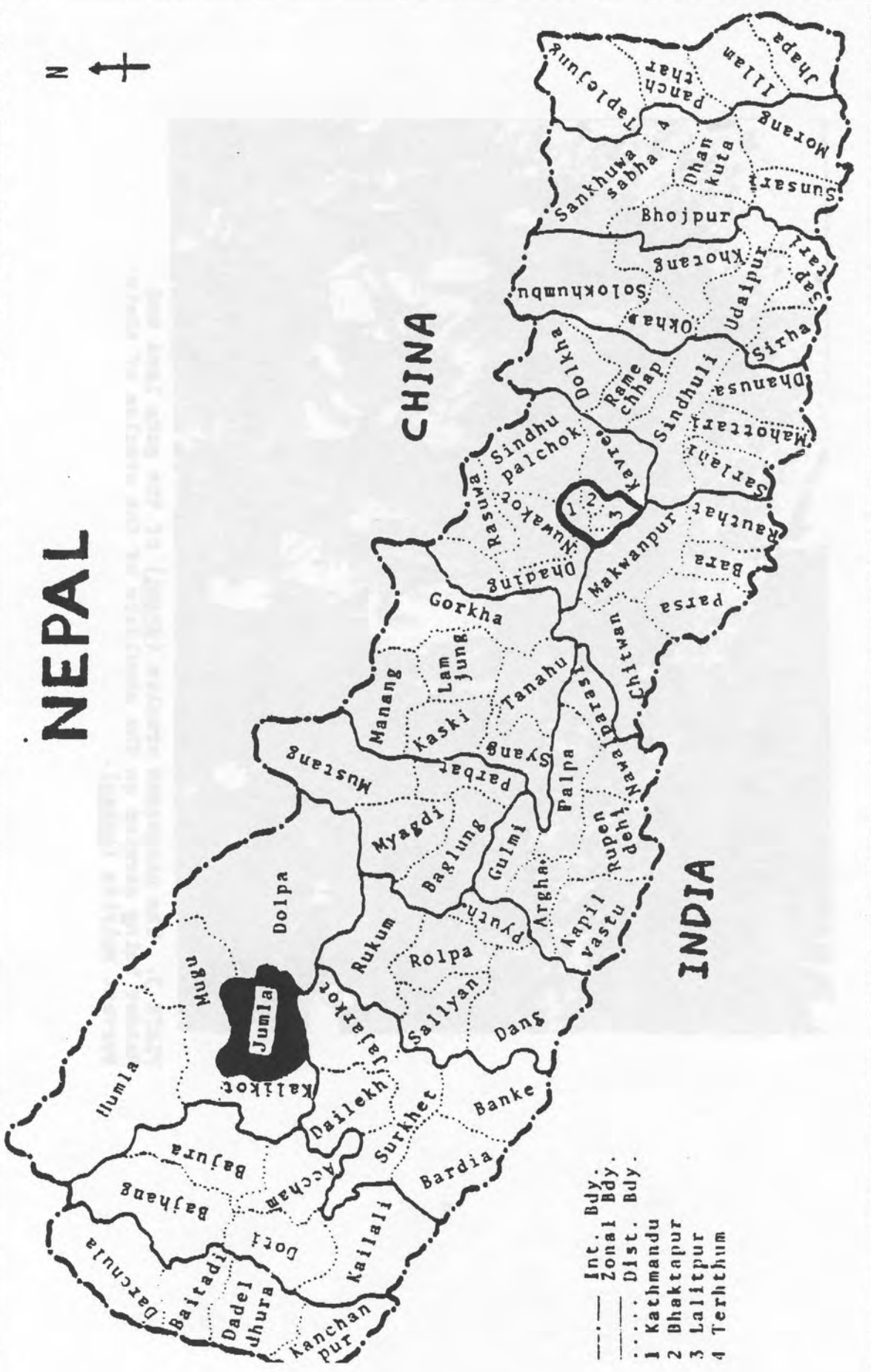
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materially one of the poorest people in the world, they are culturally one of its richest. I am honored to have shared this poverty and riches with them.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Study

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand Jewish religion within the context of Jewish culture. As Jewish religion can be distinguished into two separate traditions, which I have labeled "Jewish Brahmanism" and "secular religion," the bulk of this study is devoted to exploring the roles and meanings of these two traditions and their relationship to each other. In addition, considerable attention has been devoted to Jewish social organization, not only because it provides the cultural context of Jewish religion, but because the roles and meanings of Jewish Brahmanism and secular religion are as much "social" as they are "religious" and cannot be understood apart from Jewish society. In this sense, this study could also be reformulated as an attempt to understand Jewish culture as a whole with emphasis on its religious aspects.

The principal means used to accomplish this primary purpose of understanding Jewish culture are selective description and translation. While I have attempted to understand and present the people of Jewish culture on their own terms and present the people of Jewish culture on their own terms, the description in culture wherever feasible and appropriate, the description in

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Study

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand Jumla religion within the context of Jumla culture. As Jumla religion can be distinguished into two separate traditions, which I have labeled "Jumla Brahmanism" and "oracular religion," the bulk of this study is devoted to exploring the roles and meaning of these two traditions and their relationship to each other. In addition, considerable attention has been devoted to Jumla social organization, not only because it provides the cultural context of Jumla religion, but because the roles and meaning of Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion are as much "social" as they are "religious" and cannot be understood apart from Jumla society. In this sense, this study could also be reformulated as an attempt to understand Jumla culture as a whole with emphasis on its religious aspects.

The principal means used to accomplish this primary purpose of understanding Jumla culture are selective description and translation. While I have attempted to understand and present the people of Jumla's own understanding of their culture wherever feasible and appropriate, the description is

necessarily from my point of view as an observer and outsider. It thus constitutes a selective translation of what I observed and recorded into my language and concepts. To the extent that these concepts were moulded by my own culture, training, and experience, these descriptions constantly refer to the world outside Jumla indirectly. In a more direct sense, I have brought in references to the works of other scholars who have written about Jumla, Nepal or South Asian regions whenever it appears that their data or concepts will facilitate the translation process so as to increase the understanding of Jumla culture. Throughout most of the study the primary concern, however, has been to understand Jumla culture itself rather than its relationship to the rest of South Asia.

This approach is based on the assumption that the process of understanding another culture is primarily one of descriptive translation. In my view, this assumption presupposes a meaningful ordering of the data which is being described. As the term "translation" indicates, this process should involve a representation of indigenous ordering systems (what Geertz calls "structures of signification")<sup>1</sup> within the conceptual language of the observer. Similar to good translations of literature, it should be faithful to the language of the original and intelligible in the language of translation (which in this case includes the body

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<sup>1</sup>Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures. (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973): 9.

of relevant scholarly knowledge). This dual requirement necessarily involves the translator in an analytic enterprise in which he must not only attempt to discover and explore a culture's own meaning systems or models, but must cast them within the framework of the translator's conceptual models.

This latter concern with non-indigenous conceptual models and their "fit" with Jumla culture constitutes the secondary purpose of this dissertation. In other words, my secondary purpose is to further our understanding of cross-cultural models for understanding cultures, with emphasis on their religious aspects. My attempt to accomplish this purpose is primarily contained in the concluding chapter. As my principal concern with Jumla culture is with regard to the roles, meaning and inter-relationships of Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion, this last chapter is mostly devoted to evaluating models developed by various scholars for understanding the co-existence of two religious and social traditions of this kind particularly within the South Asian context.

This dissertation thus seeks to be a contribution both to our understanding of another culture (the ethnography of religion) and to our means for understanding another culture. While both purposes are intrinsically valuable according to the canons of the academic endeavor, they are further validated in this case by the uniqueness

of Jumla culture and the fact that the study of this region is just commencing.<sup>1</sup> That Jumla has a recorded history of nearly a millenium, that it was the seat of a

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<sup>1</sup>The first study of the Jumla region was Tucci's monograph on some historical inscriptions (Preliminary Report on Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal (Rome: Istituto Italiana per Il Medio ed Estreme Oriente, 1956). This was followed by the historical compendiums in Nepali by Naraharinath Yogi, a traditional scholar from western Nepal (Itihasaparakasa (Kathmandu: Mrigestheli, 2012-2013). More recently, the Royal Nepal Academy has published five volumes in Nepali on the people, history, language, geography and literature of the region (Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Jan Jivan: Diyar Gauka Thakuriharu, Karnali Lok Sanskriti (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2028); Satya Man Joshi, Itihas, Karnali Lok Sanskriti (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2028). In addition a number of articles have been published in Nepali in various journals including four issues of a journal edited by a Jumli scholar (Ratnakar Devkota, Jumla ko Samajik Ruparekha (Kathmandu: Matribhumi Press, 2027), who has also published some other works on Jumla (Ibid., Jumleli Sabd (Kathmandu: Matribhumi Press, 2027). Another Jumli scholar, Bhim Prasad Shrestha has also edited an anthology with articles in Nepali (Bhim Prasad Shrestha, Karnali Anchalbata Prakast (Bennu, 2, 2027). In western languages, Marc Gaborieau has written an article in French on the oracular god Masta (Marc Gaborieau, "Note Preliminaire sur le Dieu Masta," Objets et Mondes, 9:1, 1969, 19-50) which has been recently translated into English ("Preliminary Report on the God Masta", In Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas, ed., John Hitchcock and Rex Jones (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976). Prayag Raj Sharma has published a monograph on the region (Prayag Raj Sharma, Preliminary Study of the Art and Architecture of the Karnali Basin, West Nepal (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1972) as well as on the deities of the area ("The Divinities of the Karnali Basin in Western Nepal." In Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal, ed. C. von Furer-Haimendorf (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1974). Barr, Bishop has a report mimeographed in Nepal and is preparing a dissertation on the geography and economy of the region (Barry Bishop, "A Cultural-Ecological Analysis of Karnali Zone in the Western Nepal Himalaya with emphasis on the Movements of People, Animals and Goods, Seasonality, and Recent Change." Kathmandu, not dated. (mimeographed)

kingdom as big as present day Nepal for four hundred years, and that it is the highest altitude and most interior area of the Himalayas to be extensively populated by Indo-Aryan speaking Hindu castes which have institutionalized oracular religion along-side their version of Hindu Brahmanism, are among the features of its uniqueness which will be discussed in the course of this work. These features make it particularly interesting from the ethnographic point of view, and provide a new basis for re-appraising some of the models which have been developed for cross-cultural understanding of religion and society.

#### Methodological Perspective

As presented above, the methodological viewpoint taken by this study was described as descriptive translation. In the terminology of the traditional approaches to the study of religion, this viewpoint could be recast as a phenomenologically informed anthropology of religion. Since this phrase can connote many different ideas to different scholars, this section is devoted to a brief exposition on the phenomenological and anthropological approaches to the study of religion in order to clarify the methodological perspective used by this study.

Despite the prominence of the phenomenological approach to studying contemporary non-Western religion, there has been considerable controversy over what phenomenology really entails. When it has been applied to a specific



body of data rather than when it is discussed abstractly, it has tended to be mostly thematic and morphological. That is, phenomenologists of religion<sup>1</sup> have tended to collect together a large variety of religious phenomena and classify them according to structural similarities and common themes with a view to exposing their "intrinsic meaning."<sup>2</sup> Two of the principal assumptions of this method are: 1) the existence of intrinsic religious meaning, and 2) the mutual intelligibility of this meaning. While the latter assumption is, with varying degrees of qualifications, accepted by most approaches to the study of religion, the former is perhaps the primary bone of contention separating the phenomenologists from the anthropologists.

In examining the work of Mircea Eliade, a self-styled "historian of religion" who utilizes what is commonly regarded as the phenomenological method, the pivotal nature of this assumption regarding religious meaning is revealed. He writes: "I do not deny the usefulness of approaching the religious phenomenon from various different angles; but it must be looked at first of all in itself, in

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<sup>1</sup>Gerardus Van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, (New York: World Publishing Co., 1968); Idem., Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964); Idem., Rites and Symbols of Initiation (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1958); Joseph Campbell, The Masks of the Gods: Creative Mythology (New York: Viking Press, 1968); and many others.

<sup>2</sup>Mircea Eliade, Comparative Religion.

that which belongs to it alone and can be explained in no other terms."<sup>1</sup> Disregarding his sop to other disciplines, he notes that "it is the historian of religion who will make the greatest number of valid statements on a religious phenomenon as a religious phenomenon."<sup>2</sup> Religious meaning is, in his view, an autonomous spiritual meaning which takes precedence over all other kinds of meaning: "In the last analysis, we have to do with mythologies and religious conceptions that, if they are not always independent of material usages and practices, are nevertheless autonomous as spiritual structures."<sup>3</sup>

The validity of this assumption rests on the validity of spiritual meaning as an ontological reality. Since it denies any significant recourse to human meaning systems as revealed by any other discipline which studies human thought and behavior it is not only unfalsifiable but unrelateable. Its claim for the autonomy of religious meaning, based on a notion of homo religiosus places it in an epistemological sphere which cannot admit psychological, sociological, or ecological explanations as having more than secondary validity. In as much as it deals with ontological meaning it is, in spite of Eliade's disclaimer,<sup>4</sup> a metaphysical approach which transcends all cultural

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., page 13.

<sup>2</sup>Idem., Shamanism: 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., page 356.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., page 15.

boundaries. The ultimate validity of the meaning it finds is a function of the validity of its metaphysics.<sup>1</sup>

Such a view is anathema to most anthropologists. Intrinsic religious meaning which is both unverifiable and unrelateable by definition falls outside the scope of the social scientific inquiry. In addition it implicitly contradicts the holistic assumptions regarding the nature of human experience which underlies most anthropological studies of man: the assumption that all kinds of human meaning are to some extent, and perhaps in different ways, related to each other. The existence of purely spiritual meaning cannot be disproved; however, explanations of the same phenomena can, and for most anthropologists, must also be understood in relation to the wider human culture of which they are a part. As I.M. Lewis states in the beginning of his study of ecstatic religion, the sociologist (or anthropologist) of religion starts from "the fact that mystical experience, like any other experience, is grounded in and must relate to the social environment in which it is achieved. It thus inevitably bears the stamp of the culture and society in which it arises."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For a self-disclosure of Eliade's metaphysics, cf: Comparative Religion: 29, 453; Idem., Shamanism: 17, 19; see also: J. Gabriel Campbell, "Spirit Possession in Nepal," Contributions to Nepalese Studies, 3:2, pages 119-127, 1976; Idem., "Approaches to the Study of Shamanism," Wiener Volkerliche Mittelungen, Vol. 1975-1976.

<sup>2</sup>I.M. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism, (Penguin Books, 1971): 16.

If there is widespread unanimity regarding the social-cultural matrix of religious meaning, however, there is little consensus among anthropologists regarding its nature. While it is not possible even to begin to explore the dimensions of this problem, let me illustrate two common approaches that have been taken in order to clarify the position which this study presupposes.

Melford Spiro in his study of Burmese supernaturalism and Buddhism exemplifies the approach to religion which gives explanatory priority to psychological facets of human nature. He writes,

It is my personal assumption, which I wish to make explicit from the very start, that the regularity which underlies the manifest (cross-cultural) diversity in cultural forms rests on a common psychological "human nature," and the wide range of diverse forms constitutes a set of structural variations for the satisfaction of a narrow range of common psychological needs.

And a little later, "For it is in their meaning for social actors with which we are concerned, . . . it is in these ends (their manifest and latent functions) rather than in their formal properties, that this meaning will be discovered."<sup>2</sup> For Spiro, as for other scholars following Freud's footsteps,<sup>3</sup> religious meaning is, when shorn of cultural

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<sup>1</sup>Melford E. Spiro, Burmese Supernaturalism, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967): 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., page 7.

<sup>3</sup>G. Morris Carstairs, The Twice-Born (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967). Carstairs' study of the twice-born in Rajesthan is an example from India.

and historical diversities, a function of psychological needs.

But perhaps the majority of anthropologists of religion, while acknowledging psychology in passing, have followed Durkheim in placing their emphasis on the social nature of religious meaning. As Douglas writes, "Durkheim's famous saying 'Society is God,' spelt out means that in every culture where there is an image of society it is endowed with sacredness, or conversely that the idea of God can only be constituted from the idea of society."<sup>1</sup> In this approach, the determining model for all religious expression is social organization. Social relations are pre-eminent, religious meaning is seen as the "appendage of other social institutions."<sup>2</sup> For the many social scientists that espouse this viewpoint, the study of religious meaning is the study of social meaning:

Instead of marvelling at the way in which Hebrew philosophers respected the dualism of Zoroaster and demonology of Canaan, recommending them for maintaining their monotheist ideas intact, we should rather marvel at the way their legislators organized their social relations. Because this is the level of creativity which lays the groundwork for distinctive world views. The choices people make about how they deal with one another are the real material, which concerns the student of comparative religion. [ my emphasis ]

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1970): 161.

<sup>2</sup>Idem., Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo, (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1966): 91.

<sup>3</sup>Idem., Natural Symbols: 122.

The common factor in these illustrations of anthropological approaches to the study of religion is their view of religion as a function of social or psychological facets of human behavior. Ultimately, religious meaning is just an expression of psychological or social meaning, whether through compensation, projection, or some other kind of spin-off of these explanatory priorities. Like Eliade's phenomenology this approach rests on an implicit metaphysics--only this time the physics stem from placing a social scientific discipline in the meta-spheres which for Eliade is occupied by autonomous spiritual meaning. In each case, the real nature of religious meaning is reduced to a single kind of meaning--the one autonomous from the rest of human culture and the other reduced to one aspect which is considered epistemologically prior.

To my mind the phenomenological and social anthropological approaches illustrated in the previous section both espouse a metaphysical dogmatism which is, at least at this stage of the disciplines, unjustified. For if anthropologists have convincingly shown that the meaning of religious phenomena contains significant social and cultural referents, the real message of the phenomenologists is (or ought to be) that the meaning of human thought and behavior can only be reduced to a function of one explanatory system at the cost of sweeping assumptions regarding the nature of culture and human behavior.

This study has attempted selectively to merge the phenomenological and anthropological stances. With

phenomenology, I believe that the purpose of the enterprise is to look for "that which is experienced," the meaning of the phenomena to the people involved, and to describe it with the restraint imposed by the epoche, the qualification placed upon the observer's intentionality so that the meaning perceived is never of an ontological nature, but only heuristic. In other words, the purpose is to find "structures of signification" which may be communicated through models, but which must not be understood as more than models. Unless one leans on theological principles, the nature of religious meaning, like all cultural meaning, seems too complicated to warrant either the kind of ontological claims made by Eliade or the functional ones made by some anthropologists. This self-conscious intellectual humility is, I think, the principal lesson of the phenomenological method.

However, this humility should not preclude increasingly intelligible renderings or translations of the nature of cultural meaning. For if the anthropological approach has revealed patterns of interrelationship between different aspects of culture, and has found significance in the interrelationship of what people say and what they actually do,<sup>1</sup> it becomes the phenomenologist of religion's responsibility to take these into account. As this study will attempt to demonstrate, not to do so would be to eliminate

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Murphy, The Dialectics of Social Life: Alarms and Excursions in Anthropological Theory (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1971).

much of what makes culture, including religion, intelligible.

The concept which for me binds these two approaches together is a theory of consonance, one which has actually been developed by both phenomenologists and anthropologists of comparative religion. Towards the end of Eliade's exhaustive study of shamanism, he notes, "Our final impression is always that a shamanic schema can be experienced on different though homologizable planes; and this is a phenomenon that extends far beyond the sphere of shamanism and can be observed in respect to any religious symbolism or idea."<sup>1</sup> However, Eliade, perhaps for the methodological reasons noted above, never developed this idea beyond alluding to it in passing. For a full exploration of its ramifications, we must return to the Durkheimian notion of religion replicating society and its extension in the work of Mary Douglas.<sup>2</sup>

Deprived of its functionalism, the Durkheimian thesis states that there is a consonance between social organization, that the homologies Eliade finds within religion are also homologous to social structure. For Douglas, this consonance is an outgrowth of man's need for order: "Just as the experience of cognitive dissonance is disturbing, so the experience of consonance in layer after layer of experience and context is satisfying."<sup>3</sup> In other words, order is not something

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<sup>1</sup>Eliade, Shamanism: 457.

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, "Shamanism".

<sup>3</sup>Douglas, Natural Symbols: 70



which occurs only within the domains of human culture demarcated by academic disciplines, but between them as well.

In my view, the nature of this consonance is such that no one facet of human behavior can be assumed accountable for generating all the rest. If psychological needs influence social structure, social structure also influences the psychological formation of the individual; if social organization influences religious organization, religious ideas also influence the structuring of social relationships, and on around the roster of theoretical possibilities. While particular functional relationships may be fairly convincingly traced, the reduction of one aspect of culture to a set of particular determinants--whether they be psychobiological needs or the so-called binary structure of the brain--is a step justified by faith alone.

However, the use of the words "consonance" and "homologous" can be misleading. As noted above, meaning cannot be reduced to any one model represented in different levels. Rather, consonance refers to the representation of meaning on different levels which can be heuristically understood through models--and often more than one model for the same phenomenon. The reduplicated structures of signification for which we are searching within religion as well as in religion's relation to other aspects of culture are not necessarily unambiguously defined or free of contradictions. In fact, the meaning often lies in the contradictions

themselves, in the simultaneous presence of different and opposing ideational and behavioural models.

This understanding of consonances in culture--where the consonances are sought through an anthropology tempered by phenomenology--is used to provide an underlying organizational theme to this study. The models of Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion are described and translated within the framework of homologous models in other aspects of Jumla culture. It is these groups of somewhat consonant models which are then related to schemas for understanding similar kinds of models discussed by other scholars in the concluding chapter. However, as a phenomenologically informed anthropology, this approach has led me to refrain from attempting to reduce any set of models to another.

### Field Research

In his discussion of the anthropological enterprise, Murphy writes that: "The yield of the agonizing process of ethnography is always incomplete; we skim off the top and come away, if we have done our jobs properly, with a sense of loss and unfulfillment."<sup>1</sup> This characterization was certainly borne out by my own experience. The criteria of rigorous methodological self-awareness which governs discussions of methodology gives way to haphazard practical behaviour in the field. The intent of observing all ceremonies repeatedly, of checking all interpretations with a

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<sup>1</sup>Murphy, The Dialectics of Social Life: 11

large number of different kinds of people, of recording everything of significance that is said or done is constantly being compromised by a myriad of problems--not the least of which is the physical and emotional well-being of the investigator. Regardless of the enterprise's inherent incompleteness, limitations on what the investigator can and does do would render any study incomplete. This study is no exception to that rule.

Following three months of advanced Nepali language training, during which time I lived in a Brahman and Chetri village on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley (where much of my wife's field work was subsequently conducted), I went on my first field trip to Jumla in the early fall of 1972. Although Jumla is located three weeks walk from the nearest roadhead in the remote northwestern region of Nepal, the presence of a STOL (Short-Take-Off-and-Landing) airfield with weekly flights during eight months of the year, allowed one day transportation into the area. In consultation with local officials, I selected the village of Sunār Gaon, Jāirmi-Tātopāni Panchayat which is eight miles down the Tila river from Jumla bazaar (Khalahgā) for the initial period of fieldwork.

Sunār Gaon (known also as Dāngi Bāḍā) was selected for a variety of reasons. Composed primarily of high caste Chetris with some occupational-untouchable castes, it also had a village of Brahmans nearby. Within Sunār Gaon and twenty minutes walk away in Bābiro are two of the most important religious shrines and centers for oracles in the

whole region. In addition, there was both a room with a window (a rarity in Jumla), which my wife and I could live in, and a natural hot springs (tātopāni) which could be used for bathing even when the temperature was sub-zero. The village was poor and did not have a food surplus, but since we had known that the 1972 harvest was very poor in the West we had brought all our food from Kathmandu anyway. Eventually sources of milk and occasional eggs were located, although it was never possible to buy any vegetables except potatoes.

Since the people were friendly, if often busy, field research proceeded according to the normal muddled pattern alluded to above. Called "participant-observation" by anthropologists (I suspect because it is impossible to observe without participating) it involved alternating between periods of intense activity (during rituals, festivals, or just when everyone filed into my room in the evening) and intense inactivity (when everyone was off in the fields working). In addition to a census, observation and listening, indirected and semi-directed interviews were used. Whenever possible information that seemed important was checked with as many other people as possible. Inevitably, however, most information was obtained from a small group of articulate and interested informants. A cassette tape recorder and cameras were used both for documentation and to provide entertainment and gifts (pictures) for the villagers. A constant demand for medical attention also

forced me into the role of dispenser and paramedic, although all serious cases were encouraged to go to the hospital in Jumla headquarters. Although the local dialect of Nepali (jumli bhāsā) is quite different from Kathmandu Nepali, most men knew sufficient Kathmandu Nepali or Hindi to allow me to conduct my fieldwork without an interpreter until I became acquainted with the local language.

After the completion of this initial fieldwork in mid-winter, I returned to Jumla three additional times for approximately a month each time. The first of these trips, during the spring of 1973, was scheduled around the Baisāk full-moon festivals when oracle activity around the shrines of Sunār Gaon and Bābiro is most intense.

Towards the end of this trip, I made arrangements with a Brahman ex-school teacher, Sri Tunga Nath Upadhaya (from Sinje Kholā, two days to the north), to serve as a research assistant. In addition to being a knowledgeable and articulate source of information on Jumla culture, Tunga Nath was particularly valuable in helping me obtain and transcribe the many hours of taped consultation sessions with oracles upon which much of the study is based. In addition to the special language problems which these sessions posed (a rapidly spoken "divine language" is used), the necessity for obtaining tapes of consultation sessions which were not influenced by my presence, made Tunga Nath's assistance indispensable.

The remaining two trips to Jumla were made during the fall of 1973 and the fall of 1974, both scheduled around the Kārtik full-moon festivals as well as the harvest. Although some time was spent in Sunār Gaon, I conducted most of the research during this period in the environs of Lurku and Hād Sinje in the Sinje Kholā. Supplementing this field research, I continued to gather "exegetical" material from Tunga Nath, the Jumla based scholar Bhim Prasad Shrestha, and other Jumla people while they were in Kathmandu. I was greatly assisted in the translation process by Tunga Nath and Prithivi Raj (Bobby) Chettri of Kathmandu.

#### Key Concepts in Jumla Culture

While most of the specific concepts contained in Jumla culture have been discussed in the chapters devoted to their relevant subject area, there are certain key ideas regarding the Hindu worldview and the nature of cultural traditions which underlie much of Jumla culture and thus should be preliminarily translated at the outset. Each of these ideas can be understood as Jumla models of social action, as the conceptual framework through which the people of Jumla (Jumlis) understand their own culture.

The most important of these key concepts is the notion of dharmā (in Jumla, often pronounced dharam and used in the compound form of karma-dharam) found throughout Hindu South Asia. Translated in Sanskrit and Nepali dictionaries

as "religion," "duty," "religious duty," "law," "virtue," "piety," etc.<sup>1</sup>; dharma can be best understood as a prescriptive model of thought and behaviour. It is the "immutable model of society and the truth"<sup>2</sup> which prescribes the ideal course of action for each individual in society. It thus includes "righteousness, religious ordinances, rules of conduct, and duties of an individual peculiar to his stage and station in life"<sup>3</sup>. That is, dharma as an immutable model contains different prescriptions according to an individual's group membership, age and status.

The primary criterion for variation in the prescriptive model of dharma according to groups is caste or jāti<sup>4</sup>. Each caste has a dharmically determined prescriptive model of behaviour which in certain spheres of activity

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<sup>1</sup>Vaman Apte, The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1968): 268; Monier Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, n.d.): 510; N.M. and P.M. Pradhan, Student's Pocket Dictionary: Nepali-Nepali-English (Kalimpong: Bhagyalaxmi Prakashan, 1971): 896; R.L. Turner, A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965): 325.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System, trans. Williard R. Sainsbury (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970): 196.

<sup>3</sup>S.C. Dube, Indian Village (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1967): 236.

<sup>4</sup>Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: 196. The problem of jāti and varnā, so clearly distinguished by Dumont and Mandelbaum and their relation to dharma will be discussed later.

is different from that of other castes. This dharma, sometimes referred to as jāti-dharma, specifies the kind of ritual actions which are permitted or enjoined for different castes. For example, it is the Brahman's dharma to undergo the rites for donning the sacred thread and to eschew liquor, while it is the untouchable caste's dharma to serve the higher castes.

Jāti-dharma is sometimes also referred to as kulā (family, lineage) dharma. However, in its primary sense kulā dharma is understood as referring to that aspect of the dharma which prescribes family behaviour. This includes not only all the life-cycle rites but an ideal model for kinship relations, such as the duty of sons to obey fathers. Although there will be occasional variations between families of the same caste, kulā dharma is usually the same for all members of one caste.

A third category of dharma which is in some sense pre-eminent to the other two (mukhya dharma) can be referred to as devtā dharma, the dharma of the gods. It is this aspect of dharma which most closely translates the Western notion of "religion" and includes prescriptions for the worship of gods, acts of merit such as pilgrimages, etc. Although there are some differences in devtā dharma according to caste (i.e. an untouchable should not defile a high caste temple) this dharma is generally applicable for everyone. In fact, although from one point of view the gods are



the source of dharmā, it is clear from the texts and stories which recount their activities that they are also subject to this dharmā. In this sense, devtā dharmā takes on the impersonal sense of Truth, and can be seen as an injunction to virtuous and pious behaviour.

These three categories of jāti dharmā, kulā dharmā and devtā dharmā should not be considered as either precise or exclusive subdivisions. However, these are categories which are used in Jumla, and which can be usefully employed to point to various domains of the concept of dharmā.

The fact that Jumla people often refer to the concept of dharmā as a whole in the compound form of dharmā-karmā, indicates the close relation of this latter notion of karmā. Although in its broadest sense karmā refers to any "action", "work" or "deed,"<sup>1</sup> its meaning in this context is "dharmically" significant social action. That is, it refers only to those actions which are seen to have significance in relation to the prescriptive model of dharmā as it applies to one's jāti and kulā.

This "relation of significance" can take either a positive or negative form. When positive, an action is understood to have conformed to the prescriptions of dharmā and results in the accumulation (kamāune) of merit or purne

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<sup>1</sup>Turner, Dictionary of Nepali; 78; Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary; 258.

(punya in Sanskrit)<sup>1</sup>. Conversely, action which is understood to violate or contradict the dharma results in the accumulation of demerit or sin (pāp). As all social action relevant to dharma is made up of these two kinds of karma, an individual's total karma represents an accounting (hisāb) of all his "dharmically" significant actions. It is therefore karma which, according to the universal but not necessarily fully endorsed Hindu belief in rebirth, is exclusively responsible for the conditions of an individual's destiny in each life. Actions which are "dharmically significant" are the only actions which have ultimate significance. The concept of dharma-karma therefore encompasses all that is ultimately significant in life, and it is in this sense that it can be more meaningfully translated as "religion."

Karma as the conditions of rebirth is for the Jumla people almost synonymous with the notion of bhāgge, usually translated as fate or destiny<sup>2</sup>. Bhāgge or karma is understood to have been pre-determined before birth. Although the agent for this predetermination is sometimes thought of as the impersonal workings of the cosmos or Bhagwān (God), it is frequently personified as Bhābi in everyday usage.

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<sup>1</sup>That "punya karma" (meritorious action) represents the manifestation of dharma in action, is attested by the fact that N.M. and P.M. Pradhan give this as their first definition of dharma in their Pocket Dictionary : 214.

<sup>2</sup>According to Monier-Williams: "fate, destiny, resulting from merit and demerit in former existences" Sanskrit-English Dictionary: 752.

The extent to which bhāgge is considered to have predetermined an individual's life is not consistently and unambiguously delineated. For example, the following two Jumla songs (gīt) seem to present two contradictory views:

1. The hawk has crossed the forest of pine  
And it cannot be met  
The karma which has been written out by Bhābi  
Even if you try, cannot be erased.
2. When Bhābi is writing out the bhāgge  
Then if she does not write out the karma<sup>1</sup>  
Those persons have to face hardships and sorrows  
Who are not industrious.

On the one hand bhāgge is seen as immutable; on the other industriousness is commended as a means of averting a deficient bhāgge. The ambiguity reflected in this concept, and its consequent ambiguous relationship to dharma, is of prime importance and will be pursued throughout this study.

To summarize the above, dharma can be understood as the moral authority through which relevant action (karma) is prescribed and measured. The accumulation of this action is, in turn, the criterion for an individual's destiny (bhāgge) in each succeeding rebirth. It was also noted, however, that dharma as a model of approved social action varies according to caste, family and life-cycle stage. In addition, it should be stated that the specifics of dharmic prescriptions vary according to region and individual inclination. That

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<sup>1</sup>In this line karma is used in the sense of "good karma."

That is, dharma as an abstract concept is immutable and universal, but as a purveyor of specific norms and laws which govern karmic action it becomes changeable and differentiated. While certain particular prescriptions may be considered valid for all of Hindu South Asia, others may be restricted to Northern India and Nepal, the Central Himalayas, Northwestern Nepal, etc. The specific dharmic prescriptions for social action applicable to the people of Jumla are contained in the traditions and customs of the area.

#### Riti-Thiti and Cāl-Calan

Encompassing those activities which are prescribed by dharma, but with a wider range of applicability to Jumla social activity, is the notion of thiti. Thiti refers to the proper order or arrangement which should underlie all social action. While it is used indiscriminately for all accepted patterns of social action, it carries with it both dharmic and non-dharmic connotations of morally correct behaviour. That is, while some activities are seen to accord with the model of dharma and therefore need no other justification, other social activities which are not directly related to dharma still contain a moral legitimization through their reflection of order through cooperation. An example of this latter instance of thiti which is often cited is everyone cutting rice together in a systematic cooperative basis. Conversely, the lack of order (bithiti) is illustrated by the unorganized haphazard harvesting of rice.

The traditions and customs which embody the Jumla people's notion of thiti, and thus also the specific forms of dharma, are referred to as riti-thiti (also riti-sthiti or locally as tek-thiti) and cāl-calan. Although these two concepts of social action overlap and are often used interchangeably, some different shades of meaning can be discerned. Riti-thiti refers particularly to those traditions handed down by the ancestors which either through reference to dharma or to the value of thiti have a compelling moral legitimization. Riti-thiti is composed of only significant customs that require cooperative action and are seen as beneficial to society. Those which are not derived from dharma are often envisioned as having their origin in a group decision of the elders in the distant past. As such, the customs which are referred to as riti-thiti are not easily changed. Two examples of riti-thiti are: 1) the organization of an annual religious fair held at a certain shrine, and 2) the unwritten laws regarding access to firewood and pasture land in an area which lies between two villages.

Although riti-thiti is often indiscriminately referred to as cāl-calan, the latter concept is usually used to refer to more trivial customs and social conventions. Although cāl-calan also has in its widest sense a customary arrangement or thiti, it may be, depending on the perspective of the individual, moral, immoral or amoral. That is, cāl-calan is a less restricted word for custom which includes

almost all conventional conduct or behaviour including individual habits or bāni. Example of cāl-calan which are not riti-thiti are: 1) the custom of smoking a clay pipe, and 2) the custom of singing parties. An example of a cāl-calan associated with a riti-thiti would be the custom of riding horses to a religious festival.

While the English language categories of "religion," "social organization," etc. have been retained in this study as the the language of the translation, this introduction to Jumla's own cultural conceptions reveals that even if this study was not methodologically committed to understanding religion in its cultural context, it would be forced to do so in the interests of accurate translation.

## CHAPTER 2

## JUMLA: THE SETTING

Location and Terrain

The region of Jumla is located in the remote north-western corner of the Nepal Himalayas. Previously used to refer to the whole upper Karnali area, and still loosely used in this sense, the name "Jumla" now designates the southeastern most district of the Karnali Zone. In addition, it is the cartographical name of the small bazaar town which, as the only bazaar in the zone, serves both as the capital of Jumla District and the Karnali Zone.<sup>1</sup> However, for the purposes of this study, Jumla is identified as a cultural region which includes Jumla District as well as parts of the surrounding districts of Kalikot and Mugu in the Karnali Zone,<sup>2</sup> Jajarkot and Dailekh in the Bheri Zone, and Accham and Bajura in the Seti Zone. Since the boundaries of this region are not well defined or clearly known beyond some of

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<sup>1</sup>Within Jumla District, the bazaar is usually called Khalangā.

<sup>2</sup>In 1976, the district boundaries were again redrawn to amalgamate the district of Tibrikot into Jumla in the East and create the new district of Kalikot out of Jumla District in the West. As all statistics in this study are based on the pre-1976 boundaries, Jumla District will be used to refer to this previous arrangement.

the characteristics described below, this concept remains geographically inexact. Thus, while most statements in this study are applicable to this whole region, they derive from research conducted primarily in the Sija and Tila Karnali valleys and may in certain cases be relevant only to this restricted area.

Jumla is an entirely mountainous region with no flat land except for narrow strips alongside the beds of the various tributaries of the Karnali river which drain the region. Although the Humla Karnali in the southwestern corner of Jumla District (now Kalikot District) descends as low as 3,500 feet, the valley floor throughout most of the region is between 6,000 and 9,000 feet and averages 8,000 feet in the Tila and Sija tributaries. The ridges or lekh between these valleys range from 12,000 to 19,000 feet and on the periphery of the Jumla region are several higher mountain massifs over 20,000 feet. Even though many of the mountains are steep and precipitous, Bishop notes that the landforms of the Karnali Zone are "relatively less rugged and the country more open" than in the central and eastern Nepal Himalaya.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barry C. Bishop, "A Cultural-Ecological Analysis of Karnali Zone in the Western Nepal Himalaya, with Emphasis on the movements of People, Animals and Goods, Seasonality, and Recent Change." Not dated: 3 (Mimeographed)



### Climate

The climate throughout most of the populated region is temperate, although the southwest corner is sub-tropical and the ridges and northern regions are alpine or arctic. Bishop identifies the seasonal variations as a "characteristic three-season pattern: 1) a cold-dry period from October through March, 2) a warm-dry period from April through June, and 3) a cool-wet period from July through September, the monsoon season."<sup>1</sup> Annual rainfall varies from 25-50 inches, with approximately 30 inches in the Tila-Sija area, of which 80 percent occurs during the monsoons.<sup>2</sup> Precipitation during the winter months falls in the form of snow, and winter temperatures are below freezing most of the time when the sun is not shining.<sup>3</sup> Even summer temperatures are not very high, usually ranging between 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit.

The following folk song from Jumla expands on this theme of the cold in its description of the monthly cycle

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., page 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., page 5; Sthir Jangbahadur Singh, Bhaugolik Drstikon, Karnali Lok Samskriti, (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2028): 12.

<sup>3</sup>Singh reports that during 1969-1970 there were forty-nine days in Jumla when the temperature dropped below freezing. Singh, Bhaugolik Drstikon: 12.

in Jumla<sup>1</sup>:

The cold of Baisākh (April-May) has entered a hole  
 The cold of Jeth (May-June) is in a handful of seeds  
 The cold of Ashār (June-July) has reached Doti [a district to the West]  
 The cold of Sāun (July-August) returns with the mist  
 The cold of Bhadau (August-September) is put in the plants  
 The cold of Asoj (September-October) is in the got [basement cowshed]  
 The cold of Kārtik (October-November) is in the threshing ground and fields  
 The cold of Mañsir (November-December) rasps your throat  
 The cold of Pus (December-January) Hai! Hai! [i.e. oh my! oh my!]  
 The cold of Māgh (January-February) eats at the teeth  
 The cold of Phāgun (February-March) should be respected  
 The cold of Cait (March-April), cut off your ears [i.e. no one can say it is cold in Cait]

According to the 1971 Census, the population of Jumla District, which has an area of 988 square miles, is 122,753.<sup>2</sup> This yields a density of 124 persons per square mile which is just over half of the Nepal average of 213. However, this figure, like the adjoining one for Humla where the density is only 16 per square mile, is deceptive. If the population density is calculated according to cultivated land, the density becomes 5,780 persons per square mile as compared to 3,547 in neighbouring Dailekh, 2,110 in Humla, and only 1,511

<sup>1</sup>Although this song was collected by Terence Bech and translated by myself, the same song was also collected by Pradip Rimal in Sahitya Sangit Kala published by the Royal Nepal Academy (page 17) and by Singh in Bhaugolik Drstikon, page 47.

<sup>2</sup>Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Pocket Book, 1974.

for all of Nepal.<sup>1</sup> It can thus be seen that while the population density is relatively low, especially in the northern parts of the region, much of the land is made up of lekh and the density according to cultivated land is exceedingly high.

In striking contrast to all other high altitude populations in Nepal where areas above 6,000 feet are inhabited exclusively by Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic groups such as the Magars or Gurungs or by Tibetan-dialect speaking "Bhotiyas" such as the Sherpas or Manangbas, the population of Jumla region is overwhelmingly made up of Nepali-dialect speaking Hindu castes (sometimes referred to as parbatiyas or paharī). The predominance of Hindus in the Karnali Zone is demonstrated by the fact that the Census records only 26 Buddhists in Jumla District (0.02%) and even for the more northern Districts of Humla, Mugu and Tibrikot only 12% of the population or 7,690 persons are registered as Buddhist. However, these latter figures are probably misleading, as they do not reflect recent social changes and ambiguous self-identification in the northern parts of the Zone on the

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<sup>1</sup>Figures calculated from Economic Data Papers-- Nepal, Economic Planning Section, Program Office, USAID/Nepal, 1972 (mimeographed). Bishop made the same kind of calculation, but it is not clear what basis he used to arrive at a figure of 350 per square mile. (Bishop, "Karnali Zone"); 7.

edge of the Jumla cultural region.<sup>1</sup>

The Nepali-dialect speaking Hindu population that make up the Jumla cultural region with which this study is concerned is divided into three general categories by the Jumla people, or Jumlis. The Jyulyāl are high caste Brahmans (Bahuns), Thakuris, Chetris, and Jogis (Gosain-Giris) who wear the sacred thread (janai hāleko, tāgādhāri) and live along the river bottoms and on alluvial fans of tributary drainage where they have jyulā or irrigated rice lands (also called khet land). The Pābai are those people who live on the mountain slopes (pākho) usually from 500 to 4,000 feet above the river, do not have any significant jyulā land, and are variously referred to as Chetri, matwāli (liquor-drinking) Chetri,<sup>2</sup> Budha, Budha-Chetri, or Vaisya.<sup>3</sup> The unusual status of this mixed group and its relationship to the Jyulyāl will be discussed extensively later.

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<sup>1</sup>Nancy Levine, "Social Change in Class and Clan Organization among a Tibetan Speaking Population in Humla," paper presented in a Tribhuvan University Research Seminar, Kathmandu, 27 May 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Prayag Raj Sharma, "The Matwali Chhetris of Western Nepal", Himalayan Review, 4(1971): 43-60; Singh, Bhaugolik Dr̥stikon, 193.

<sup>3</sup>Ratnakar Devkota, Jumleli Sabd, (Kathmandu: Matri-bhumi Press, 2027): 53.

The third general category of people distinguished in Jumla are the Dums or Kamsel.<sup>1</sup> These are the untouchable (achut, chui) occupational castes such as the Sunars (gold-smiths), Kāmis (metal-workers), and Damais (musician-tailors). Although Dums possess little jyulā land, they reside both in the river valleys with the Jyulyāl and in higher areas alongside the Pābai. Since their status as Dum takes precedence over all other characteristics, the fact that they could be distinguished as Jyulyāl or Pābai according to area of residence is rarely considered.<sup>2</sup>

The Tibetan-speaking population in the northern parts of Humla and Mugu are generally referred to as Bhotiyas, or, more specifically, as Humlis or Mugals. Since there are Nepali-speaking Pabai and Jyulyāl living interspersed with Bhotiyas in the northern part of the zone,<sup>3</sup> a demarcation of the

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<sup>1</sup>Berremman and Atkinson note that untouchables in Garhwal and Kumaon to the West of Jumla are called doms.

<sup>2</sup>A recent Small Area Development Program (SADP) study by New ERA, Kathmandu recorded the following caste breakdown for the villages in the central Tila Nadi area: Chetri (both Pabai and Jyulyal)--54.19%, Brahman--17.07%, Sarki--13.8%, Kami--7.15%, Damai--3.8%, others--4.71%. Draft report.

<sup>3</sup>C. von Furer-Haimendorf, Himalayan Traders: Life in Highland Nepal, (London: John Murray, 1975); Levine, "Class and Clan".

northern boundary of Jumla region would show some overlap.<sup>1</sup>

To the east, the boundary of Jumla region is more clearly determined by several high lekh which separate the Jumla Hindus from the Kham Magars and other ethnic groups living in Dhaulagiri Zone.<sup>2</sup>

The same clarity is not found to the southeast, south, and west of Jumla. Although there are much fewer Pabai in these areas, the population is predominately parbatiyā with the same Jyulyāl and Dum caste groups. Jumlis feel a close cultural affinity to these people but nevertheless distinguish themselves from them. The Hindus living to the south and southeast whose villages are at lower altitudes (generally below 6,000 feet) are referred to as people who live in the aul, the warm lowlands in which winter crops can be grown and fodder grows all year long. As this distinction does not always apply in the west, the boundary is much more indefinite and the cultural change more gradual. Thus people from that area are often just referred to according to their district of residence or under the general rubric of Dotiāl (from the district of Doti).

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<sup>1</sup>Haimendorf also notes the presence of some Byansis, a Nepali-speaking "bhotia" population that presumably migrated from the West. Himalayan Traders .

<sup>2</sup>See James Fisher, "Homo Hierarchicus Nepalensis, a Cultural Sub-Species" (Paper no. 0659, Chicago: Ninth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, 1973.)

History: Khasādesa

Despite Jumla's extremely remote location the first known historical documents from this area verify that it was the seat of the powerful Malla Kingdom which ruled over almost all of Western Nepal and a significant portion of Tibet for an estimated 250 years from the beginning of the 12th century A.D. to at least 1358 A.D. The capital of this kingdom was located in Sījā (Ya tse in Tibetan) on the Lāmāthada spur overlooking the present villages of Had Sījā and Lurku in the Sījā Karnali where some of the research for this study was conducted.

The earliest inscription discovered from the Malla kingdom is a copper plate found in Baleswar, Kumaon issued by the king Krachalla in A.D. 1223 recording a recent conquest in that area.<sup>1</sup> However, the most useful documents for understanding the Malla Kingdom's history are a lengthy inscription found in Dullu (approximately a week's walk to the south of Sījā) which was issued by Prithivimalla in 1357 A.D. giving a complete geneology of the Malla kings, and the corroborating Tibetan chronicles of Guge and Purang, analyzed

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<sup>1</sup>Atkinson, North-Western Provinces Gazateer, 9: 516-528; Satya Man Joshi, Itihas: Karnali Lok Samskrti, (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2028); Prayag Raj Sharma, Preliminary Study of the Art and Architecture of the Karnali Basin, West Nepal, (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1972): 17; Giuseppe Tucci, Preliminary Report on Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal, (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1956): 66.

by Tucci.<sup>1</sup> These documents together with other inscriptions issued both by the Malla and neighboring kings have been thoroughly examined by Tucci,<sup>2</sup> Sharma,<sup>3</sup> Naraharinath,<sup>4</sup> Vajracharya,<sup>5</sup> Joshi,<sup>6</sup> and others.

Although the documents are too scant to provide detailed information certain tentative conclusions have emerged from these scholars' work regarding the nature of the Malla Kingdom.

According to a 1270 A.D. inscription in Bodhgaya installed by Sahanpala, a treasurer of Dasratha the brother of the king Asokacalla, Asokacalla is described as the great king of the Sapadalaksa mountains.<sup>7</sup> According to Sharma these mountains described the land from Chamba to western

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., page 46-66; Sharma, Art and Architecture; Joshi, Itihās: 25.

<sup>2</sup>Tucci, Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal.

<sup>3</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture.

<sup>4</sup>Yogi Naraharinath, Itihāsaprakāsa, (Kathmandu: Mrgastheli, 2012-2013).

<sup>5</sup>Dhanavajra Vajracharya, Karnali Pradeśko Aitihāsik Ruparekh, in Karnali Pradeś: Ek Vito Adyayan, ed. Bhim Prasad Shrestha (Kathmandu: Samajik Adyayan Samudaya, 2028): 11-62.

<sup>6</sup>Joshi, Itihās.

<sup>7</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture: 18



Nepal in medieval days.<sup>1</sup> In fact it is doubtful whether the kingdom extended as far West as Chamba. However, there is evidence that the western boundaries included at least parts of Kumaon.<sup>2</sup> In the East, there is recent evidence reported by Sharma<sup>3</sup> that the Malla Kingdom controlled villages in Gorkha District, over two hundred miles from Sijā and less than seventy-five from Kathmandu. Various Malla kings starting from the end of the 13th century actually visited and raided the Kathmandu Valley, but apparently were never able to subdue it. In the north, it is fairly clear from the Tibetan chronicles that the kingdom included the regions of Guge and Purang throughout its history from Nagaraja to Prithivimalla.<sup>4</sup> In the South, no clear boundary has been identified. However, it is known that Dullu also served as a capitol for the kingdom and that several kings visited Lumbini and installed inscriptions there. Most probably, the border coincided fairly closely to the edge of the Terai, near the present Nepal-India border.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vajracharya glosses it as "savalakh", the swalik hills. (Karnali Prades): 20.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture, page 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., page 34.

<sup>4</sup>Tucci, Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal.

<sup>5</sup>S. B. Gewali states that the southern limit was the village of Malawara in the Karnali terai. Nepal in Perspective, page 49.

The other name for the Malla Kingdom revealed by the Bodhgaya inscription is exceedingly important for understanding the ethnic and religious history of the Jumla region despite the fact that it raises several controversial and unsolved issues. The relevant portion of the inscription reads "khāsadesarājādhirājāsrimādasokācāllā" which would translate as "the great king of Khasadesa [the country of the Khasa] / Srimat Asokacalla."<sup>1</sup>

Although the identity of the Khasas is not well known, there exists enough textual and ethnolinguistic data to indicate that they played an important part in Himalayan history. Grierson, whose work on this subject has not been adequately followed up, collected a number of references to the Khāsās (also referred to as Khāsā, Khāsā, and Khāsirā) in the Purānas and Mānābhārata.<sup>2</sup> From these he concludes that they were a "warlike tribe" of Central Asian origin who spoke an Aryan language closely allied to Sanskrit. He also infers from the dates of the references that they entered from the North-West where Kashgar of Chitral was named after them and reached Western Nepal during the 3rd to 5th Centuries A.D.<sup>3</sup> By the 12th century, he concluded that "they

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<sup>1</sup>Vajracharya, Karnali Prades: 20; Sharma, Art and Architecture: 43.

<sup>2</sup>George A. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, part 4, 9, 1916): 1-16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

certainly occupied in considerable force the hills to the south, south-west and south-east of Kashmir."<sup>1</sup> The Brihat Samhita mentions them along with the Himalayan tribes of the Kiratas (Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes presently inhabiting Eastern Nepal) and the Chinas which may refer to Western Tibet.<sup>2</sup> Sharma notes that Manu referred to them as degraded Ksatriyas<sup>3</sup> and Grierson writes that they were looked upon as Ksatriyas which had "become Mlechchas, or barbarians, owing to their non-observance of the rules for eating and drinking observed by the Sanskrit-ic peoples of India."<sup>4</sup>

The term Khas or Khasiyā is also in widespread contemporary use to describe the Nepali language and many of the Himalayan inhabitants. Both Grierson and Hamilton referred to Western Nepali as khaskurā or  khasbhāsa,<sup>5</sup> a nomenclature which is still found in the hills of Nepal. Berreman notes that the Rajputs of Garhwal refer to themselves as Khasiya<sup>6</sup> and Atkinson documented the use of the term in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pages 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>P.R. Sharma, Art and Architecture, pages 14, 38.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.      <sup>4</sup>Grierson, Linguistic Survey, pages 6-7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., and Francis B. Hamilton, An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the Territories Annexed to this Dominion by the House of Gorkha, (New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1971).

<sup>6</sup>Berreman, Hindus of the Himalayas, page 14.

Kumaon<sup>1</sup> to refer to both Rajputs and Brahmans. In Jumla, the term is well known and is used opprobriously to refer to the Chetri, if Brahmans are speaking; and to the Pabais if the Jyulyāl are speaking. Elsewhere in Western Nepal the Chetris are also called Khas, although they usually consider the term insulting.<sup>2</sup>

Given this mutually supporting, although fragmentary, evidence, it can be fairly confidently asserted that the most important part of the population of the Malla Kingdom which called itself Khasādes̄h was these same Khas which appear to have penetrated much of the Himalayan range. If, in fact, the present day Pābais and other Chetri groups are the direct descendents of these Khas as is asserted by Sharma,<sup>3</sup> Bhim Prasad Shrestha,<sup>4</sup> and Joshi,<sup>5</sup> then it should be possible to make some speculations regarding Khas culture and religion

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<sup>1</sup>Atkinson, North-Western Provinces Gazateer, page 430.

<sup>2</sup>Dor Bahadur Bista, People of Nepal, 2nd ed. (Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1972): 2; Khem Bahadur Bista, Le Culte du Kuldevta au Nepal en particulier chez certains Ksatri de la Vallee de Kathmandu, (Paris: CNRS, 1972): 13-16; Prayag Raj Sharma, "Art and Architecture" in Nepal in Perspective, eds. Pasupati S. J. B. Rana and Kamal P. Malla, (Kathmandu: CEDA, 1973). Aside from whatever historical reasons there may be for considering the term Khas as an insult, it is clear that its phonetic similarity to the Nepali verb khasne ("to fall") has led many Chetris to believe that this is its etymology.

<sup>3</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture, pages 14-15.

<sup>4</sup>Bhim Prasad Shrestha, "Karnali Anchalbata Prakasit", Sennu. 2:2027, pages 76-78.

<sup>5</sup>Joshi, Itihas, pages 4-15.

on the basis of present customs,<sup>1</sup> However, for the moment, it is sufficient to note that on the basis of available historical evidence all that can be concluded regarding the Khas of Jumla is that they were an Indo-Aryan people who spoke the first recorded form of the Nepali language<sup>2</sup> and were regarded by Plains Hindus as having an ambiguous caste status which in some respects related them to kshatriyas and in others to mlecchas (barbarians).

The evidence on the religious orientation of the Malla Kingdom also defies unambiguous categorization, but does shed more light on the ethnic origins of other parts of the population. The Malla Kings were relatively active in constructing a number of temples and stupas, many of which are still standing today although untended and unused by the present Jumlis. Many of these structures and the icons they contain have been catalogued by Sharma,<sup>3</sup> revealing that they were dedicated both to mainstream Hindu deities such as Śiva, Pārvati, Durgā, Gaṇeś and Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa, Lakṣmi-Nārāyaṇ) as well as to Buddhist figures such as Gautama Buddha and Padmupani Avalokitesvara. This dual patronage of both Hinduism and Buddhism is also found in the invocations contained

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Khem Bahadur Bista who writes, "Peut-être les Maṭwali, Ksatri sont-ils les seuls exemples de Khas Rajpoutes qui n'alent pas été influencés par l'hindouisme orthodoxe des plaines." (Kuldevta: page 20)

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture, page 34.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.,

in inscriptions which typically call on the sun, the moon, Brahma, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara (Śiva), Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.<sup>1</sup> In the immediate area of the site of the Sijā Lāmāthada palace, clay tablets containing impressions of chaityas reminiscent of Tibetan chortens were examined by Sharma<sup>2</sup> and Joshi<sup>3</sup> and can still be found today in caves set in the nearby cliffs. It is also thought that the Bhagwati Temple which stands on Lāmāthada had its origin in Malla times. In addition, several of the Mallas made pilgrimages to Lumbini (the Buddha's birthplace) and Bodhgaya (the site of his enlightenment).

It is clear from the above that the Malla kings respected both Hinduism and Buddhism simultaneously. According to Tucci, Buddhism was the original religion of the Mallas and was gradually superseded by Hinduism.<sup>4</sup> While there is

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<sup>1</sup>Tucci, Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal, pages 113, 127; Vajracharya, "Karnali Prades," page 60.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture.

<sup>3</sup>Joshi, Itihas, figures 16, 17.

<sup>4</sup>This position taken by Tucci is an outgrowth of his controversial views regarding the origin of the Khas Mallas. He asserts that they first entered the Tibetan Provinces of Gugge and Purang (maybe from Ladakh), became "Tibetanized" and then extended their kingdom southward to Sija and Dullu. (Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal: page 129). Sharma challenges this position which he considers to be viewed too much "from the Tibetan angle". (Art and Architecture, pages 40-41). He suggests that it is more plausible to assume the Mallas would "have reached Purang and Gugge only gradually from the south consolidating themselves politically." (Ibid.) Joshi suggests a kind of compromise position in which the

evidence which suggests that Buddhism was more dominant in the earlier part of the reign, Vajracharya notes that even king Krachalla who affirmed that he was a follower of Buddha performed a pujā to Śiva upon his conquest of Kartipura.<sup>1</sup> However, it is true that Buddhism gradually disappeared except in the northern regions during the reigns of the Baisi kings which followed the Malla Kingdom and that its greatest strength was during the 12th and 13th centuries.

The evidence of double patronage of both Hinduism and Buddhism in addition to the linguistic data suggests that the Mallas utilized both Brahman priests and Tibetan lamas. As the religious representatives of the peoples occupying the southern and northern parts of the kingdom respectively, their presence in Śijā is probably illustrative of the other ethnic groups which made up the Malla kingdom. Although little documentary evidence is available, it is assumed that Tibetan speaking populations inhabited at least the northern

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Mallas went from Kumaon first into Gugge and Purang and then descended to Jumla. (Itihas: page 18). Regardless of which direction the Mallas actually came from, the main conclusion that can be drawn from all these viewpoints is that Gugge and Purang were integral parts of the kingdom from an early date and the Khas were therefore in close contact with Tibetan culture throughout their reign. As Haimendorf notes, "it would seem that an overlapping and dove-tailing of Tibetan and Nepali ethnic elements has been a characteristic feature of the Jumla area at various periods in History." (Himalayan Traders: 225.)

<sup>1</sup>Vajracharya, "Karnali Prades", page 60.

regions prior to the establishment of Khasādesā.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, it is more reasonable to suppose that in light of the documented migration of high and low caste Hindus into Nepal from India (particularly from places like Rajasthan) and into Eastern Nepal from Western Nepal during this period that these groups filtered into the Jumla region more gradually and at least partly as a result of the establishment of the Malla kingdom. Despite present claims to purity of descent from Indian Rajputs as put forward by several Chetri and Thakuri castes, it would appear that there was considerable intermarriage and integration with the local Khas. Certainly, many of the Chetris, Brahmans and Thakuris now living in more eastern parts of Nepal trace their origin to the Jumla region, and there are inscriptions which identify various family surnames (thar) such as Thapa, Karki, Adhikari, Canda and Khadagana which are now spread all over Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Yogi Naraharinath and Joshi have speculated that the other 'original' inhabitants of this region prior to the advent of the Khas were the Rautes, the Kusundas and the Ban Manche. (Itihasaparakasa 2:1, pages 9-11; Itihas.) While the existence of the ban manche (jungle people) seems as difficult to establish as the yeti (abominable snowman) to whom they would appear physically related, Rhienshard has traced down remnants of the almost extinct Kusunda who spoke a language completely unrelated to other language families and has done ethnographic work with the hunting and gathering tribes of Raute in the area south and west of Jumla. (Rhienshard, Kailash 2, 4). He feels that it is quite possible that this group, which speaks a Tibeto-Burman language, may have included the Jumla region in its migratory routes in earlier years. (Personal communication).

<sup>2</sup>Vajracharya, "Karnali Prades", page 54.



Unless it is assumed that the oracular religion with which this study is particularly concerned was a later development--an assumption which would appear contradictory to its widespread prominence in contemporary Jumla culture as well as its association with the Pābais--the presence of these Hindu migrants and Buddhist lamas should probably be taken as a partial explanation for the complete lack of any reference to oracles (dhāmi) or the dieties which they serve. That is, it would seem reasonable to speculate that the Malla kings utilized the Brahman pandits and Tibetan lamas to attain and present a religious orthodoxy which may not have accurately reflected the Khas religious practices current among most of the population.

Regardless of the truth of these speculations, it is clear that the Malla kingdom of Khasādesā exerted a profound influence on the present culture of the Jumla region, as well as the rest of Nepal. In establishing a powerful kingdom headquartered in the remote Himalayan valley of Sījā, the Mallas integrated certain features of Khas culture such as the Nepali language with Brahmanical Hinduism and set the stage for the eventual Khas-Brahman-Chetri domination of the country. In Jumla, they left behind a legacy of Indo-Aryan speaking peoples settled extensively in high altitude areas elsewhere inhabited by Tibeto-Burman speaking populations. In addition they brought into the region features of orthodox Hinduism and Buddhism which have most certainly affected contemporary Jumla culture.

History: The Post-Malla Era

Following the disintegration of the Malla kingdom sometime soon after 1358 A.D. into a number of small principalities termed the Baisi, or "Twenty-two," the Jumla kings still retained a nominal suzerainty.<sup>1</sup> Although the geneologies of this period list many names of the Thakuri Kalyāls and Rāskotis who ascended various thrones, only two are worth mentioning in this context. These are the king Medinivarma who ruled at Sīja between 1393 and 1404 A.D. and Bali-rāja (1398-1404) who shifted his capitol to Suvarnagrāma which is the present day Sunārgaon, the principal site along with Sīja for this study's research. The present inhabitants of Sunārgaon are aware that their village was once the seat of a small kingdom, and still point out the fields which once housed the palace and tūdikhel (parade grounds). This kingdom they refer to as Thakur Rāj (the rule of the Thakuris) in distinction to the earlier Malla kingdom which they call Bhutan (Tibetan) Rāj.<sup>2</sup>

The scant and confusing records available for the Baisi period shed little light on the ethnohistorical and religious picture presented by the Mallas. Although some architecturally significant structures were still constructed

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture, page 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., and Joshi, Itihās, page 81.

up to 1582 A.D.<sup>1</sup> which were both Hindu and Buddhist, and although it appears that some Thakuris and Brahmans may have migrated to the area, the lack of specific data makes further conclusions difficult. However, it should be noted that Joshi has utilized present legends and songs to reconstruct some interesting local traditions regarding various kings and their actions.<sup>2</sup> Utilizing this method, it can be speculated that the several presently existing non-oracular Hindu temples such as Candanāth, Bhairabnāth, Kankāsundari Devi, and Tripurāsundari Devi which trace their history back to this time are indicative of the gradual Hinduization of the area which must have taken place.<sup>3</sup>

This process of Hinduization was most probably accentuated following the takeover of Jumla and other Baisi states by the armies of Prithivinarayan Shah after a two-year war from 1787 to 1789.<sup>4</sup> However, as pointed out by Stiller, the Shah dynasty laid considerable stress on respecting and adhering to local customs, so that it can be assumed that any changes which occurred were more voluntary than politically enforced. Nevertheless, it is clear that this period must

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, Art and Architecture, page 21.

<sup>2</sup>Joshi, Itihās, pages 91-108.

<sup>3</sup>Ludvig Stiller, The Rise of the House of Gorkha: A Study in the Unification of Nepal 1768-1816, (New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1973, Bibliotheca Himalayica, series 1, 15): 261-265; Joshi, Itihās: 100-102; HMG, Ministry of Communications, Information Department, Mecidekhi Māhākālī, (Kathmandu 4, 2031):454.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

have witnessed the disappearance of active Buddhism within the Jumla region as well as the incorporation of more Khas groups within the tāgādhari or sacred-thread-wearing castes.

#### The Present Administration

Following a brief period of party politics in the 1950s, the present system of panchayat government was introduced by King Mahendra in 1962. This system specifies that each village panchayat area be divided into wards (often coinciding with old village units) which elect representatives to the village council (panchayat) on the basis of universal adult suffrage. This council is headed by a pradhān pancha and elects representatives to the District Panchayat which in turn elects representatives to the Zonal Council from which the National Rastriya Panchayat members are elected.

The village panchayat has responsibility for coordinating local development and maintenance projects as well as settling minor disputes. As these two functions give the panchayat jurisdiction over the management of some financial resources (generated both by the village and the Nepalese Government) as well as minor civil and criminal cases, panchayat elections are often hotly contested. However, in all but officially recorded activities, the actual decisions are usually made by an ad hoc group of elders which usually includes the most important panchayat members in addition to several non-elected members (such as the hereditary government tax collector or mukhiyā, if not elected to the panchayat). As will be seen later, this dispute settling function of the pancha-

yat forms an important part of the context in which the oracles operate.<sup>1</sup>

Among the non-elected officials who have responsibility and jurisdiction over the Jumla people, the most important are the Zonal Commissioner (Anchaladhish) and the Chief District Officers. Along with the rest of the Zonal administration, including the Zonal Court, the Zonal Hospital, etc. the Zonal Commissioner's office as well as the Jumla Chief District Officer's office are located in Jumla bazaar. This serves as the focal point for any governmental development activity, higher panchayat politics, and health and educational services. For the purposes of this study, however, the most important aspects of this administrative center are the presence of the civil courts and the only medical facilities able to offer any degree of modern medical care.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For discussion of the panchayat system and dispute management, see A. Patricia Caplan, Priests and Cobblers: A Study of Social Change in a Hindu Village in Western Nepal, (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1972); Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Jan Jivani Diyar Gaoko Thakuriharu, Karnali Lok Samskriti, (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2028).

<sup>2</sup>For an analysis of the health facilities in Karnali Zone, see Prasanna Gautam, Preliminary Health Survey of the Karnali Zone, (Kathmandu: UNICEF/HMG, 1974). As Gautam documents and my own observations confirmed, health conditions in Jumla are appalling. Child mortality is near 70% and an even larger per cent of the population suffers from goitre and chronic gastrointestinal diseases.

Despite continuing efforts by the Government, the effects of development projects on the majority of Jumlis' lives has been minimal except in the area of education.<sup>1</sup> A number of Primary and Middle Schools and two High Schools are now distributed throughout Jumla District. This has resulted, at least in the Jyulyāl areas, in a literacy rate of 6.2% (11.2% of males; 0.9% of females) which although lower than the all Nepal rate of 13.9% is a considerable improvement over twenty years ago.<sup>2</sup> In addition to increasing literacy, the institution of the school and the presence of government paid teachers is the most tangible evidence of government concern.

#### Village Habitation

The village settlement and housing patterns of the Jumlis is in striking contrast to all other Parbatiyās (caste-Hindus) in Nepal. Except for a few richer families who often live in a large house seperated from the rest of the village, most Jumlis live in homes which share a common

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<sup>1</sup>The remains of two recent projects that were unsuccessful can be seen in most villages: unused and caved-in latrines and cooperative grain storage houses. The reason for their lack of use is not difficult to find--in each case the new institution attempted to replace a beneficial old one without its value being understood. As the government is planning to direct considerable resources into the Jumla area through various new programs, it is expected that the pace of development there will accelerate considerably.

<sup>2</sup>HMG, Ministry of Communications, Information Department, Mecidekhi Mahākāli, (4, 2031): 488-490.

roof and courtyard with other families and form a relatively compact nucleated settlement. These long, rectangular common houses are called bādo or pagri<sup>1</sup> and are divided into sections each containing a front door for each separate family unit (ghar or dhvāng). In addition to referring to a collection of dhvāng under one roof, the term bādo (or bādā) is used to identify a group of adjacent bādo or pagri of the same caste usually presumed to be of the same extended lineage. For example, in the map of Dāngibādā hamlet, a part of Sunārgaon village of Jārami-Tātopani Panchayat, there are a total of thirty-three dhvāng distributed in seven different bādā. Not shown on the map are the two other settlements --one of Dums and one rich Thakuri family--which are about a half mile away but are also considered part of the larger unit of Sunārgaon.<sup>2</sup>

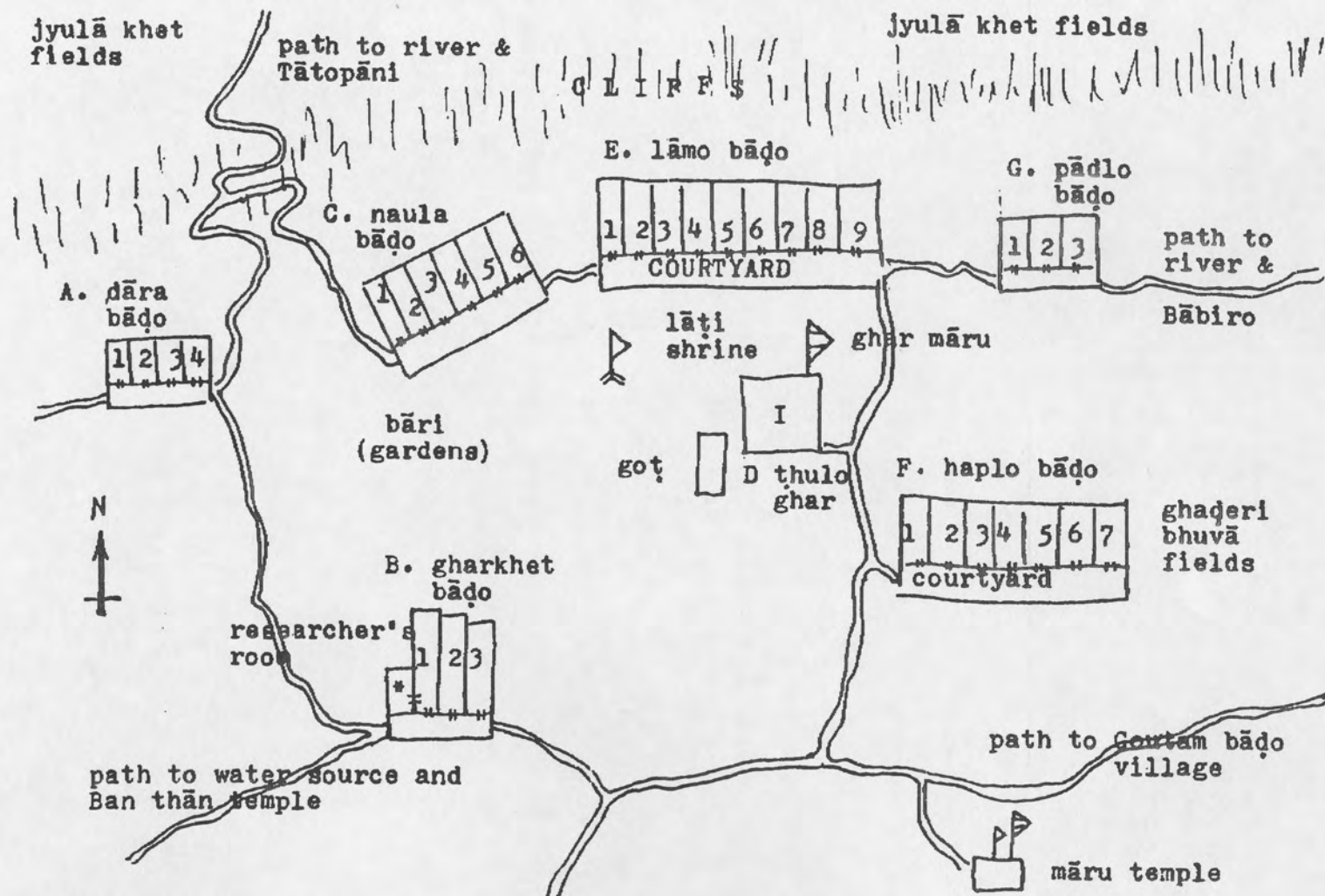
The type of houses in which Jumlis live, while similar to some other Bhotia populations, is unique among Parbat-iyās. Constructed with wooden beams and stone with mud mortar, their most obvious difference from other Parbatiyā's houses is their pounded earth flat roof. This roof (thāro) is utilized to dry, store, and prepare grains and vegetables as well as a vantage point from which to carry on conversations

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<sup>1</sup>The term pagri, also reported by Bihari Shrestha for Sija, is not in common use in the Tila. (Bihari Shrestha, Jan Jivani.)

<sup>2</sup>For a description of the layout of another village, see Ibid., pages 5-10 and the first appending diagram "Diyār Gauko naksa ra bādā vibhājan."

Figure 1: Dāngībādo (Sunārgaon)





and arguments<sup>1</sup> with other bādo inhabitants. Since all houses are oriented to the south whenever possible to derive the most benefit from the sun's warmth, houses built on southern facing slopes usually have their roofs attached to the ground on the north, allowing them to construct various upper stories for additional storage. The roof and any additional stories are connected by ladders made of notched logs.

In all except for the richer houses, the main floor of a dhvāng consists of three or four rooms usually aligned in a straight line in which one room serves as the passage for the next. The outer room contains various wooden and earthen storage vessels used for storage of grain and implements as well as copper water pots and may have an adjacent bedroom where outsiders are entertained or accommodated for the night. The next room usually contains the cooking fire (culā, kaol, agenā in Nepali), which is placed near the middle of the room in a slightly sunken area above which pots are suspended on a metal tripod. At night or during meal-times, this room is the central meeting place for kinsmen or visiting high caste guests. Family members usually sleep in this room at night due to its warmth, and unlike other parbat-iyā will remove their clothes before sleeping. Alternately, some members may sleep in one of the next rooms which are also used for clothes storage. Aside from the door in the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., page 8.

front, the only other openings are usually a small smoke hole above the kitchen and a small window in the back room. This means that even during the day most of the house is completely dark unless the cooking fire is going, necessitating the use of pine-pitch faggots in order to see. Needless to say, these faggots along with the lack of a chimney for the cooking fire results in a very smoke-filled house and is partially responsible for the black coating Jumlis develop on their faces and hands.

Below the main floor of any house are basement animal rooms called goth. In addition to providing a place where cows, buffalos, horses and goats can be kept these goth serve as the site for important social and religious occasions. The inner or jagge goth<sup>1</sup> is utilized for conducting the major Brahmanical ceremonies of the life-cycle such as the bratā-bandha and marriage.<sup>2</sup> In addition, these inner goth are the site for the semi-secret singing parties which will be described later.

Separate from the main building, but usually located close to the courtyard there is usually a small wooden shed about three feet high and four feet square. This shed, called pire or chui khulo is used both for drying chillies and

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<sup>1</sup>Bihari Shrestha records the name as jagi (Ibid., first appending diagram).

<sup>2</sup>Other parbatiyā, in contrast, conduct these ceremonies in the courtyard.

as a place for menstruating women to stay during the five days in which they must sleep outside the house.

### The Economy

One who comes today is gone  
tomorrow--  
The will of God (Iṣwar)

One satisfied by wealth is  
a thief  
And his heart (man) a sinner  
(pāpi).

--Jumla song

The Jumla economy is based primarily on agriculture. But as indicated by the extremely high ratio of population to cultivated land cited earlier, agriculture alone cannot provide Jumlis with even sufficient food for subsistence. As a consequence, the Jumla people must substantially augment their agricultural output through the exploitation of other resources. These include: 1) animal husbandry, 2) forest resources, and 3) home industry, trading, portage and migrant labor.<sup>1</sup>

The necessity of integrating all these components of the economic system into the seasonal requirements of the climate and labor time available results in a complicated

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<sup>1</sup>For an analysis of Jumla economy, see Bishop's Preliminary Report: "Karnali Zone." Bishop's complete analysis will be available in his forthcoming dissertation in the Geography Dept., University of Chicago. For other fairly extensive treatments of Jumla Economy in Nepali, see: Singh's Bhaugolik Drstikon and Bihari Shrestha's Jan Jivani. In addition, see Regional Development Study (Nepal), CEDA, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu 1973-75 and New ERA, Kathmandu: "Jumla Small Area Development."

work schedule. As Bishop notes: "It is only by his generally frequent movements that the peasant can supply the needs of his family and bring his standard of living to a subsistence level."<sup>1</sup> In addition to this movement, it is clear from living in Jumla villages, that even by Nepal's high standards, Jumlis of all ages and both sexes have to work exceedingly long hard hours almost everyday of the year in order to keep their subsistence economy functioning. It is not unusual for a Jumla woman to commence her daily work at 4 a.m. and, with only a few small breaks during the day, work solidly until 8 p.m.

#### Agriculture

According to a recent survey, agriculture accounts for the primary source of income for 94% of the population of Jumla District.<sup>2</sup> The principle crops grown are rice, barley, wheat, maize, potatoes, soyabeans and buckwheat. In smaller quantities, millet, amaranth, chillies, tobacco, pulses, mustard, turnips, pumpkins, marijuana and a few other coarse grains, vegetables, and spices are also grown. Both summer and winter cropping patterns are used, allowing for some inter-cropping and crop rotation particularly on irrigated fields.

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<sup>1</sup>Bishop, "Karnali Zone," page 11.

<sup>2</sup>CEDA, Regional Development Study, table 7.3.

Although probably not the major crop in the region,<sup>1</sup> paddy (rice) is socially and ritually the most important crop. Strictly speaking, it would be correct to say that rice is the only "real food;" that is, the only food (along with the dāl [lentils] which is eaten with it) that has social and ritual relevance. Thus, the planting, transplanting, harvesting, cooking, and eating of rice is, unlike any other crop, highly ritualized in many ceremonies and restrictions. In addition, its importance has led Jumlis to grow paddy up to 9,000 feet, the highest recorded in the world.<sup>2</sup>

This special status makes rice-growing land the primary measure of agricultural wealth and the basis of the social distinction between the Jyulyāls and the Pābais. Jyulā or khet, as rice growing fields, are distinguished from all other agricultural land, which is referred to as bhuvā and described as bāri or "garden" land. Bhuvā land is further sub-divided into two main categories of ghaderi ("of the house") and lekhāli ("of the ridges"). Although secondary to the jyulā, the former of these is also regulated according to the laws of land ownership. Thus when a Jumli is asked how much land he owns, he will first answer the question on the basis of his jyulā holdings, but when pushed to specify all kinds of land, he will also mention his ghaderi bhuvā.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., page 175.

<sup>2</sup>Bishop, "Karnali Zone," page 13.

In addition to this method of land subdivision which is followed by Shrestha<sup>1</sup> and Singh,<sup>2</sup> Sunārgaon Jumlis report the following classification: 1) khet--irrigated paddy land, 2) svara--non-irrigated village fields, i.e. ghaderi, 3) bāri--home garden, and 4) bhuvā--high lekh land, i.e. lekhāli. Functionally, these two classification systems are the same.

In contrast, lekhāli bhuvā land, which is often two to five hours walk up from the village is not governed by permanent laws of ownership. Any villager may request his village to make use of vacant lekhāli bhuvā land, and if granted, the land will be considered his as long as he continues to utilize it. In this way poorer families who have insufficient jyulā and ghaderi bhuvā, will often have a relatively higher percentage of lekhāli bhuvā. However, the low productivity of the land, the limited number of crops which can be grown, and the long distances which must traversed in order to tend to the land make it impossible for families to make up their food deficit through this strategy.

The size of the average family's landholdings in these various categories is extremely small. According to data collected at Sunārgaon and Bihari Shrestha's data from Diyārgaon in Sinja,<sup>3</sup> the average household has approximately

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<sup>1</sup>Bihari Shrestha, Jan Jivan, pages 27-29.

<sup>2</sup>Singh, Bhaugolik Drstikon, page 85.

<sup>3</sup>Bihari Shrestha, Jan Jivan.

one-half acre (6-10 muri) of jyulā and less than that of bhuvā.<sup>1</sup> For poor Jyulyāls, Dums, and Pabais, the ratio of jyulā to bhuvā is in reverse proportion, but even lower such that many of these families will have only one-eighth to one-fourth acre of jyulā and less than half-acre of bhuvā.<sup>2</sup> On the other end, rich, large joint families will sometimes have 5 to 20 acres of jyulā in addition to several acres of bhuvā.

The bulk of agricultural labor commences in April and does not abate until November. Plowing is done with wooden plows drawn by oxen, and fertilizing by a mixing of manure and pine needles. Irrigation is by means of small canals and channels which divert water from the river as well as tributary mountain streams. Threshing is accomplished by cattle hooves, and wheat, barley and corn are milled by small watermills (ghatta) while all rice must be milled by a sunken stone mortar and six-foot wooden pestle in individual courtyards. The small, dispersed fields as well as the exceedingly steep (up to 40°) angle on which some fields are constructed further contributes to the time-consuming nature of agricultural labor during this period.

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<sup>1</sup>Bishop also mentions an approximate figure in the same range. "Karnali Zone," page 13.

<sup>2</sup>Soorya Lal Amatya mentions a figure of 0.2-0.4 hectares for the Pabais of Chaudabis Dara, "An Economic-Geographical Sketch of Chaudabis Dara of Tibrikot District," (Kathmandu: Himalayan Review, 4, 1971): 38, and New ERA reported an average land holding of .17 hectares, ("Jumla Small Area Development).

## Livestock

The most important livestock raised in Jumla are cattle. Every household attempts to keep at least one cow, and the average number of cows per household is probably three to four.<sup>1</sup> In addition, most Jyulyāl households will also have one to two oxen, and at lower altitudes, if they can afford it, one female buffalo. In the higher northern areas, yaks, naks (female yaks), and various crossbreeds with cows are also raised.

The primary value of these cattle is as an agricultural input. The manure is used extensively for fertilizer as well as for ritually cleaning the kitchen area and plastering the walls after being mixed with mud. The oxen are used for plowing and threshing. Despite the small milk yield (around a quarter quart in winter and only one quart in summer per cow), dairy products are also highly valued. In addition to milk, curds and ghyu (clarified butter) are used and the latter is sometimes sold.

Other livestock raised to provide food sources include goats and sheep, chicken, and the chukor pheasant (cyā-khurā). Since eggs and chicken may not be consumed by high caste Hindus, their distribution is limited to Dums and some Pabai households. Small herds of goats and sheep are, however,

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<sup>1</sup>CEDA, Regional Development Study, page 193, reports a figure of 3.2 based on a limited sample, and Amatya cites an average figure of five per family, "Chaudabis Dara," page 41.



kept by about a third of the households in order to supply the bāde or sār (uncastrated goat and sheep also called boko and pāthā) required for sacrifice and the khassi (castrated goats and sheep) required to provide meat for festivals and special occasions. The cyākhurā, as a tamed wild pheasant, is kept by a few rich families since it is an acceptable meat for anyone.

Animals raised for trading purposes include sheep, horses, yaks, and yak-cattle crossbreeds. Large herds of sheep and goats are kept particularly by Pābais and Thakuris and other Jyulyāls involved in large scale trading. These herds are used not only to produce wool and for sale to others requiring khassis or sacrificial goats, but even more importantly as pack animals who are able to carry grain and salt along trails unnegotiable by larger animals or too low an altitude for yaks. However, yaks and crossbreeds are utilized for these same purposes within much of the Karnali Zone.

Horses, in contrast, are not usually used for pack animals but are raised primarily for sale in various areas two and three weeks walk to the south and west (i.e. Dang, Rajpura, and Joljibi). While only a few families actually raise horses, many households engage in horse trading by buying them either from other Jumlis or Mugals and Humlis and then reselling them during the winter. Horse trading is thus the focus of considerable interest and perhaps one of the most favorite topics of conversation. In this context it may be interesting to record the verses (āssi dinu) recited by a

middleman (pañca) to seal a horse-selling transaction:

le bhaiyā, de bhaiyā  
yo ghoroko mol subhāūsar pār lagos  
yo bhagwānko pujāmā lāgos  
ellāi line lāi bhālo  
ra dine lāi bhālo  
yo ghorāko mol (the agreed price)

which roughly translates as:

take brother, give brother  
 may the price of the horse be attached to an auspicious  
 occasion  
 may this (horse) be attached to the worship of god  
 may the taker of this thrive  
 may the giver of this thrive  
 this horse's price is (the agreed price)

During this recitation, the pañca presents a flower given to him by the seller (along with a rupee he keeps) to the buyer. This event seals the bargain.

#### Natural Resources

Much of the land in Jumla is non-arable forests, grasslands, and alpine meadows. This area provides resources which are indispensable to agriculture, animal husbandry, and food preparation, light and warmth as well as products which can be utilized in trade. In this sense, it is an essential component of the economic eco-system.

The primary floral resources consumed by Jumlis themselves are: firewood for cooking and warmth; wood for house furniture and implement construction; pine needles for mixing with manure; faggots containing pinepitch for torches; leaves and grass for fodder; and a small variety of wild fruits and vegetables used for food, cooking oil, dye, and curing tobacco. In addition a number of wild herbs are collected to be

sold as medicine and incense. Wild marijuana is harvested for a variety of products: cooking oil from its seeds, rope from its bark, fuel from the stem, and ganjā and attar ("grass" and hashish, called caras in the rest of Nepal) from its leaves and flowers. The latter is used both for occasional home consumption (particularly when cold or up in the lekh) and for trade and sale in the Terai.

Wild fauna found in the forest do not form an essential component to the economy. Nevertheless, mountain goats, pheasants, and wild boar are hunted by a few for food, and the banned musk deer (kasturi) is keenly hunted for the musk which brings a very high price in the Terai and India. In some areas, the Jumlis' crops and livestock must be defended from bears, monkeys, porcupines, boars and leopards.

The availability of extensive meadowland, both above and below the treeline at approximately 13,000 feet, is crucial to the raising of livestock. Grazing land within two to four hours walk of the village is used primarily for livestock such as cattle and household goats and sheep during the summer monsoon months. High alpine lekh which may be up to three days walk away are utilized for grazing larger herds of sheep, horses, and yaks during these same months. For both of these kinds of grazing, small sheds will be built on the meadows near a water source where various family and village members deputed to look after the herds will live. This necessity for herders during the busy summer months further exacerbates the labor shortage faced by most families and is the

principal reason that smaller families are unable to maintain shepherding in addition to agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Another natural resource which should be mentioned in this category is fish. The various tributaries of the Karnali as well as Rara Lake have a number of fish which are harvested mostly in the fall. Although there is no caste specializing in fishing in Jumla, and all castes can fish, it is most common for the Dums to engage in this activity. The fish that are caught are both eaten at home and sold to other villagers in the area.

The right for using these natural resources are determined primarily by village residence. That is, each village has established a kind of limited sovereignty over the forests, meadows, and water resources in its area and restricts the gathering and use of its resources to its members. This system or riti-thiti has grown out of the rekh-rekhi system used by the Baisi kingdoms in which rights over certain products in specific areas (i.e. the wood from the forest, all hunting in a particular area) were awarded to certain individuals and sometimes whole villages for services rendered. As such, the distribution of forests and meadow land varies considerably from village to village and is

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of this problem among the Gurungs of Lamjung, cf. Donald Messerschmidt, "Gurung Shepherds of Lamjung Himal" Objects et Mondes, (14, Hiver 1974): 307-316, and his excellent article "Ecological Change and Adaptation among the Gurungs of the Nepal Himalaya," ed. Stephen E. Brush, Human Ecology, "Cultural Adaptations to Mountain Ecosystems" (in press).

frequently the source of bitter inter-village disputes.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the community held village lands, are the high lekh meadows which are considered to belong to the traditional villages in that area. Although outsiders are welcome to pass through and use the grazing facilities temporarily, they are not permitted to establish their herds there for a whole summer.

#### Trading, Porterage, Migrant Labor, and Home Industry<sup>2</sup>

Despite the extensive exploitation of land resources through agriculture, grazing, and the collection of natural resources, most Jumlis can only maintain their subsistence standards through trade and labor, particularly in the winter months. These activities require that a majority of the able-bodied men spend long periods away from home, and villages during the period from November through March are mainly occupied by women, children and older men.

Trade patterns between Jumla and the North (Tibet, Mugu, Humla) and the South (middle hills, Terai and India) are exceedingly complex and cannot be described in detail

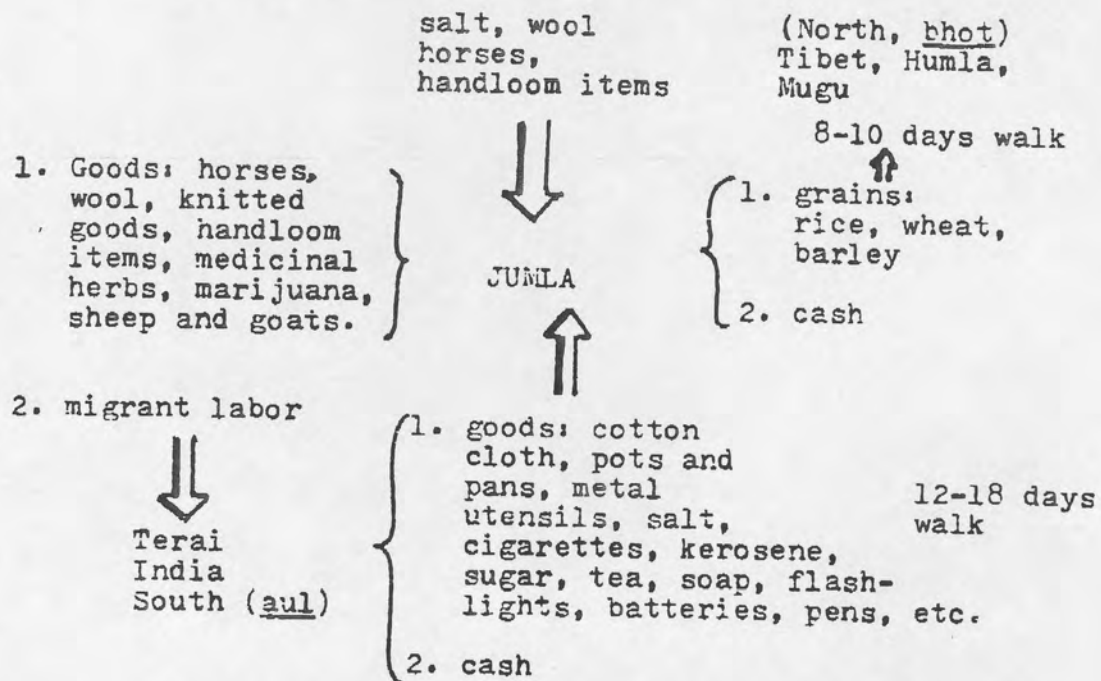
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<sup>1</sup>According to recent government legislation, these communally held lands are now the exclusive property of HMG. However, it is doubtful whether this will radically alter village rights.

<sup>2</sup>Since employment as a government servant or service in the military only affects a very small percentage of the population, this source of income has not been discussed. However, it should be noted that with increased education, more and more Jumlis aspire to these positions.

here.<sup>1</sup> Since, however, trade is an important part of the organization of the Jumla culture, the following simplified diagram illustrates the movement of goods and labor:

Figure 2: JUMLA TRADE PATTERNS



As can be seen, livestock and natural resources products, together with home industry items such as handloom woolen blankets, goat and yak hair rugs, and knitted goods are taken to the South (aul) for either barter or sale. Following the journey South, except for those men with large herds or other trading resources, most of the men hire themselves out as migrant labor (i.e. coolies, night watchmen, wood cutters, farm workers, etc.) thereby obtaining sufficient

<sup>1</sup>See Bishop, "Karnali Zone"; Bihari Shrestha, Jan Jivan; Singh, Bhangolik Drstikon; C von Furer Haimendorf, Himalayan Traders.

food for their sojourn as well as cash surpluses to buy the items they will take back to Jumla. These items consist primarily of the few necessities unavailable in Jumla such as cotton cloth and metal utensils.<sup>1</sup> The small percentage of other items imported such as kerosene, sugar, matches, ornaments, flashlights, cigarettes, etc. represent "luxury" goods in the sense that they are either technological innovations over home-made goods (i.e. matches instead of flint and steel, kerosene and flashlights instead of pine faggots, cigarettes instead of home-grown tobacco smoked in clay sulpa or pipes, etc.), or items that most people do without most of the year anyway (i.e. sugar, tea, etc.). The high cost of these imported goods in Jumla (averaging two to three times the cost in the Terai), also allows returning laborers to profit from portorage on the return journey by selling part of the goods he has purchased to households who have not gone South or to shops in Jumla bazaar which cater to government officers and surrounding villages.

Trade to the North, which is handled primarily by Bhotiyas and Thakuris from Humla but also by enterprising Jumlis, has been complicated by recent bureacratization in

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<sup>1</sup>According to the CEDA Survey, cotton cloth and clothes alone accounts for 70% of the items imported. Their figure for the average total value of imported goods per household is Rupees 766.23 (@ US \$ 60) which they calculate as about half of the total average household budget. (Regional Development Survey, page 165).

Tibet as well as importation of Indian salt.<sup>1</sup> This trade occurs primarily in the summer and the spring and fall when households from the North come through with their caravans. Except for the purchase of horses, it is based on a barter system in which grain is exchanged for Tibetan salt. Although Jumla is a grain deficit area, "one must keep in mind that there are not only entire areas that produce an agricultural surplus, but that there are generally some households which produce a surplus within a deficit agricultural area as well."<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon, plus the fact that salt is a necessity for which Jumlis are willing to make up the deficit by working during the winter, allows the salt for grain trading system to function. The profit within this system arises from the fact that salt is traded for unhusked rice (dhān) at a 1:1 basis in Jumla, at a 1:3-1:5 basis in Taklakot, Tibet and at a 2:1 basis in the aul (lower hills and Terai). Thus traders with transport animals are able to trade grain for salt in Tibet, and salt for grain in Jumla or further South, and in effect receive payment for their transportation costs while simultaneously looking after their herds.

Labor and Financial Arrangements:  
Riti-thiti and Cal-calan

The wide variety of activities performed and considerable movement required to make this economic system function

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<sup>1</sup>C. von Furer-Haimendorf, Himalayan Traders.

<sup>2</sup>Bishop, "Karnali Zone".



results in a fairly complicated work-schedule. Figure 3 illustrates the various activities involved in an annual work cycle. This work schedule is punctuated by a number of annual festivals. Although most of these are at least partially concerned with the economic work cycle, some are even directly determined by this schedule. For example, there are two "festivals" associated with rice cultivation:

1) copāi--an elaborate ritual of rice-transplanting which takes place in jeth on the day one receives water for one's fields, and 2) bhui pujā, "earth-worship"--a joint village feast cooked outside, celebrating the harvest and threshing of rice. A similar feast, only confined to women, takes place at the end of baisākh (May), to celebrate the completion of the task of cutting and collecting firewood and pine needles, and is appropriately called ban coro (forest-leaving). Whenever activities are occurring in more than one location at the same time, i.e. planting in jyulā, harvesting in bhuvā, and grazing in lekh, Jumla families without sufficient members to allocate a division of labor or sufficient land to hire laborers, must carefully schedule their time and spend many hours walking between different locations.

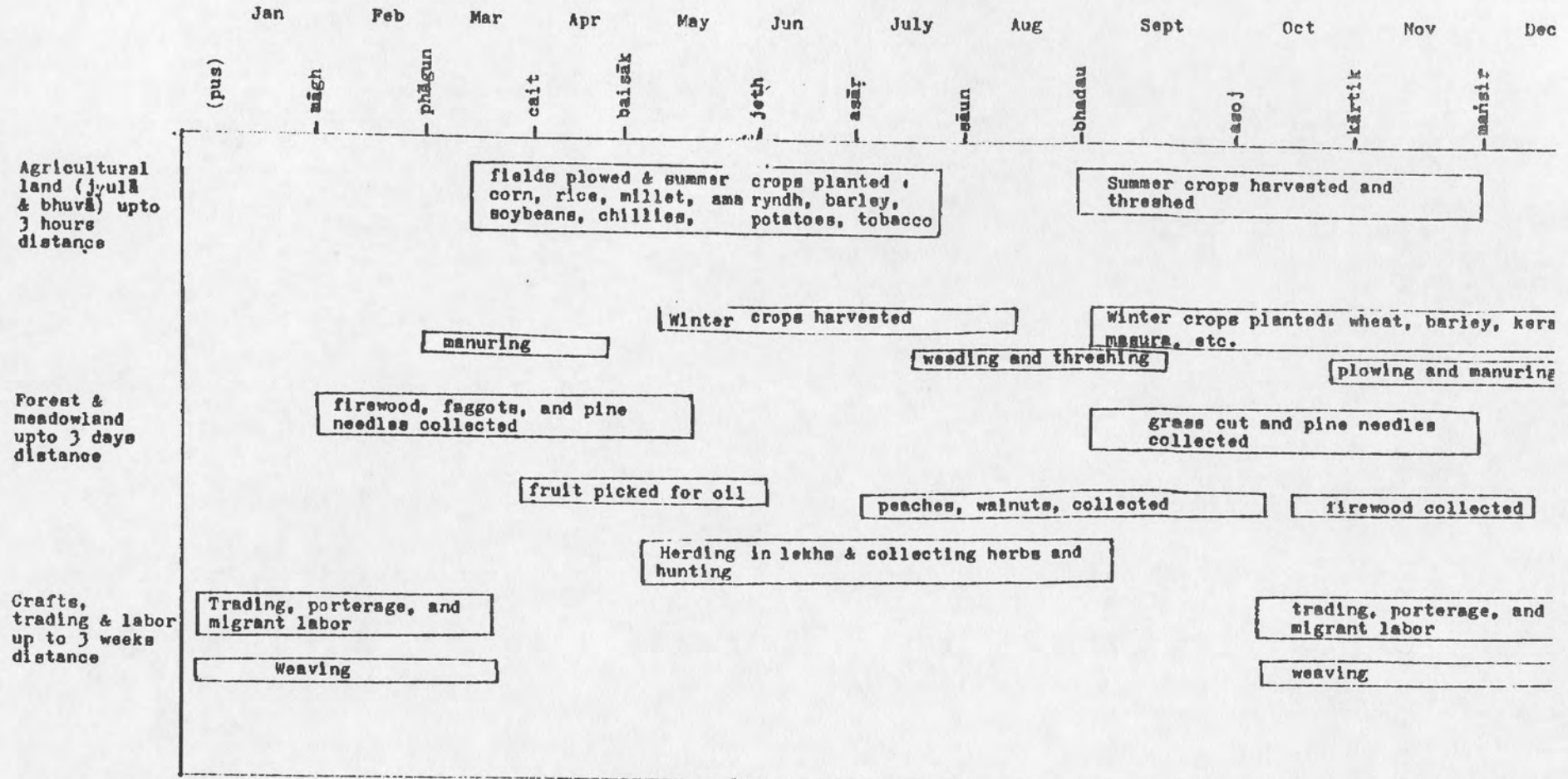
The diagram does not include the daily household work which is primarily the responsibility of the women and children. Without modern amenities, this is arduous and time-consuming. Every day, water must be carried in copper vessels carried in cane baskets on the back with a headstrap from the spring or stream which serves as the village water

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FIGURE 3 : ANNUAL WORK SCHEDULE



source--an activity which can take from half an hour to four hours a day. The rice to be eaten that day must be husked in the courtyards by hand, and women are often engaged in this activity for one to two hours a day even though rice is eaten at the most only once a day. Other food preparation is also time-consuming: cooking oil must be extracted from a variety of seeds and fruits through pounding and squeezing on boards (two hours of work usually yields only about 4 oz. of oil); soyabeans must be ground in order to shorten the cooking time; and flour must be cleaned of stones and dirt before being made into unleaven breads (roti). Cooking takes place in the dark over a small fire, and all dishes and cooking vessels are scrubbed with mud and pine needles following the meal. In addition, animals must be watered and fed, the kitchen plastered, firewood and faggots cut, and clothes and implements mended and repaired. The little free time that is left is devoted to talking and smoking.<sup>1</sup>

Division of labor by sex applies not only to household work, but to many of the economic activities which support life in Jumla. Figure 4 charts this division of labor including both the annual and daily cycles of work. Joint families with more than one brother/son and with more than one daughter-in-law are able to further allocate a division of labor to achieve greater efficiency.

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, "Matwali Chhetris": 47-48 for calendar of annual activities among the Pabai of Caudhabis Dara.

Figure 4 : Division of Labor by Sex

	women	both	men
Field Work	carrying manure to fields, rice transplanting, threshing by beating drying grains	hoeing, weeding, harvesting, threshing with cows	plowing, sowing grains, organizing & managing stacking hay
Household Work	rice pounding, making edible oil, carrying water, food preparation, cooking in home, cleaning dishes, looking after children	watering & grazing, animals, chopping firewood, mending clothes	making tobacco, repairing implements, weaving, spinning & cleaning wool, building houses & irrigation channels, money management
Forest & Meadow Work	collecting pine needles, cutting and collecting firewood cutting and collecting fodder		grazing livestock on meadows, collecting herbs, hunting, fishing
Trading & Migrant Labor			done by men only

In addition to a division of labor within households there is a division of labor by caste which is partly based on ritual restrictions and responsibilities, and partly on the need for additional labor. Among the former, which will be discussed more extensively on the section on caste, are the traditional conventions (riti-thiti) which do not allow Brahmans and Thakuris to plow and the notions that certain occupations such as leatherwork, sewing, and metalworking are polluting and may only be conducted by Dums. In fact, most high castes will engage in a certain amount of all these occupations, but continue to use untouchables for major jobs since they have an economic exchange relationship with them which corresponds with the ideology of caste and since Dums also have greater expertise in these tasks.

This traditional contractual relationship between high caste (cokho) families and low caste (Dum) families is referred to as the lāgi-lagityā system in Jumla and corresponds to the various jajmani systems described for Northern India<sup>1</sup> as well as for other Brahman-Chetri areas in Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David G. Mandelbaum, Society in India, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970, 1 and 2): 161-181; William H. Wiser, The Hindu Jajmani System (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1936); Gerald Barreman, Hindus of the Himalayas, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963): 57-61; J. Gabriel Campbell, Saints and Householders: A Study of Hindu Ritual and Myth among the Kangra Rajputs, (Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1976): 22; Oscar Lewis, Village Life in Northern India: Studies in a Delhi Village, (New York: Random House, 1958): 55-87.

<sup>2</sup>Caplan, Priests and Cobblers: 31-45; Khem Bahadur Bista, Kuldevta: 37-41; Lynn Bennett, personal communication.

The primary characteristic of this system is the exchange on the one hand, of goods and services (including labor) for food and gifts between Dum occupational families (the lagityā) and pure (cokho) land owning families (the lagi--in address: bista); and, on the other hand, the exchange of priestly services for food and gifts between Brahman purohit (priest) families and the same land-owning families (in this context called jajmān). This latter jajmān-purohit relationship, along with the ritual aspects of the lagi-lagityā relationship will be discussed in a later section.

The principal lagityā caste groups in Jumla are the Kamis (metalworkers), Sarkis (cobblers), and Damais (tailor-musicians). Some areas also have other Dum castes such as the Sunars (goldsmiths), Lohars (metalworkers), Tamrakars (copperworkers) and Badi (musician-prostitutes).

Although the Kamis and Sarkis do specialize in their traditional occupations (jāti-dharma) to some degree, the primary service they provide to their lagi is the same: carpentry, plowing, and harvesting. In return for these services, the lagi provide a certain amount of the harvests in which they have assisted as well as a non-rice meal (roti) on the days they have worked and various occasional gifts of clothes. The amount received is dependent on the size of the lagi's landholdings and the amount of services rendered. Usually it amounts to several āgālo (arm-loads) of the harvest, but may be even less in the case of poor families. However, some lagityā who work as the plowers (hāli) and

conduct almost all of the agricultural work for wealthy Brahmans or Thakuris are placed in a special status<sup>1</sup> whereby they receive considerably more grain and clothes and are sometimes given their own plots of land to grow their own crops.

The Damais on the other hand, are much more exclusively limited to their traditional occupations of tailors and musicians, and payments for their services are more integrated into the ritual occasions in which they mostly function. Although many do receive a small portion of the harvest, they are most often rewarded by meals and gifts (including some cash) set in the contexts of marriages, and other special occasions. In this sense their role is similar to that of the barber (nāi) in India.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to an exchange of goods for services, the fact that the lagi-lagityā system is based on a long-standing hereditary relationship between the households concerned, which cannot be changed at the lagi's will without severely violating the accepted values, gives it added dimensions of mutual responsibility. Since the abolition of slavery in 1925, many former slaves (called gharti) retain an hereditary relationship with their former masters that in

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<sup>1</sup>Called badahāli in Sinje Khola (Shrestha, Jan-Jivan, pages 56-57) and hāli-riti in the Dailekh region (Caplan, Priests and Cobblers, page 32), but not named in Tila Khola.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis, Village Life, pages 58-59, 66-67.



many ways resembles the lagi-lagityā system. For example, in Sinja Kholā, descendents of former slaves still plow the land for their master's descendents in return for a portion of the harvest. Thus, lagityā can take grain on credit, and lagi often expresses a responsibility to look after their lagityā families during special occasions such as marriages or calamities like famine or fire. In return, lagityā will perform special jobs for their lagi and tend to support them in factional politics and disputes.<sup>1</sup>

Another long-term labor relationship, which may become hereditarily transmitted in time, is land tenancy. However, this relationship may be contracted with families from any caste, including one's own. Depending on the distance of the landholding from the owner's home and the degree of mutual trust, this system takes two forms. The most commonly used for nearby lands is the adhiyā, in which land is loaned to a tenant in return for half the harvest. The alternative system, called kuth, is utilized for distant land where it is not possible to supervise the harvest and make sure that the landlord is receiving his full half. Under this system, the land is loaned on the basis of a fixed rent the amount

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Lewis (Village Life), Caplan (Priests and Cobblers), Epstein (Economic Development and Social Change in South India, New York: Manchester University Press, 1962), and Mandelbaum (Society in India). There has been considerable discussion of the "exploitive" and "mutually supportive" nature of the jajmani system. While a few examples of the former were seen in Jumla, many examples of the latter were also in evidence.

being approximately three-eighths of a normal harvest.<sup>1</sup>

During times when intensive labor is required such as rice planting and harvesting, two other systems of labor contracting are used: majuri and parmā.<sup>2</sup> Majuri (derived from majdur--laborer) is a system of hiring laborers of any caste needing the work on a daily basis. Laborers hired on a yearly basis change from majdur to nokar (servants). Many houses will have untouchable children, cretins (lāto), poor relatives or widows for full-time servants. Their primary responsibility is usually to take care of the animals, cut and bring firewood, clean pots and pans, etc. Usually they are not paid regular wages, but receive their daily food plus occasional gifts of clothes and sometimes a little cash. The usual form of payment is in food and grains. The laborer will be fed both a morning and evening meal and will be given approximately four pounds (mānā) of unhusked grain per day. Although not obligatory, landowners will most often use the same laborers each year, and laborers are reluctant to be absent during this time for fear that they will lose their position in the following year.

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<sup>1</sup>The rent is calculated at the rate of 10 pāthi per muri, utilizing 6 mānā-muri, whereas the normal harvest for one muri of land is one muri of grain calculated on the basis of 20x8 mānā-muri. One acre = 24 muri, but see Shrestha (Jan-Jivan, page 29) one muri = @ 160 lbs. .

<sup>2</sup>Shrestha, Jan-Jivan, pages 41-44.

In contrast, parmā is a cooperative labor exchange system. Utilized particularly in rice-planting, parmā involves the coordination of rice-planting schedules so that women from one household can work for another during their planting in return for their labor in their own planting. Since not all families have an equal number of women or amount of rice-land the exchanges that it is possible to arrange in this fashion must usually be supplemented with the majuri system.

Two other labor cooperative systems are used in the village: nāorā or narālo and kāmti. The former refers to the village herdsmen who have responsibility for grazing the village animals in nearby meadows from April to October; and the latter is the name used for the man responsible for the distribution of irrigation water to the fields. Each of these roles are filled on a rotating basis, so that each household will have the opportunity to appoint one of its male members if desired. In return for this service to the whole village, the narālo and the kāmti receive a portion of the harvest (often four pāthi or forty-eight pounds of grain) from each participating household.

In addition to these formalized traditional systems (riti-thiti), a variety of informal cooperative economic arrangements (cāl-calan) are found in Jumla villages. At times of misfortune, the construction of a new house, marriages, etc. members of a village will assist each other either on an ad hoc basis or through ritualized means (such as feeding of the marriage party through distributing a few members to each household in the village). Similarly, informal credit

facilities, either for the loan of grain (called paico), or sometimes even cash (called joko), are available to villagers with special temporary needs. Although this system can and has been abused by unscrupulous money-lenders, it functions sufficiently well within the traditional relationships to keep villagers from readily adopting cooperative programs sponsored by the government.

Projects which require inter-village and inter-panchayat cooperation are often arranged through the government administrative system, but may also be the result of local initiative. Examples of the former are the construction of a school, panchayat building, latrines, etc. Irrigation ditches and ponds, bridges and roads may be done either through the government or privately, but most often are a combination of the two. That is, a certain amount of labor, money and land is contributed by each member of the village and, if approved, this sum is matched by the government.

Finally, there are also cooperative economic relationships between the Jyulyāls and Pābais and between traders from distant villages. In return for rice, the use of oxen for plowing, and manure for any jyulā fields the Pābai may own in the Jyulyāl villages, the Pābai exchange labor during harvesting, honey, wool and goats. By and large these exchange relationships are not formalized, but consist of close ties between groups of Pābai and Jyulyāls who live in relative proximity (i.e. 2-4 hours walk) and call each other ista (friend). As in the lagi-lagityā system, Pābais and Jyulyāls will often

use a credit system to obtain the goods they require ahead of the normal schedule. This credit system is also used with traders who come from the North and by Jumli traders on their return trips either North or South.<sup>1</sup>

To summarize, it can be seen that Jumlis utilize a variety of traditional contractual and cooperative arrangements (riti-thiti) in order to maintain an economic system characterized by diverse activities designed to exploit many different kinds of resources in different locations. But even with these complex arrangements and long hours of labor, most Jumlis are barely able to meet their subsistence requirements and during years of famine such as that experienced in 1972, many Jumlis are barely able to survive.

It is therefore not surprising that Jumlis often speak of Jumla as a land of suffering (dukhā) where there is not enough land, the winters are too cold, everyone turns black from the smoke, and where people work hard and still must go away during the winter in order to buy clothes. But they do not want to leave. If they can somehow manage to get the food and clothes they need for the year, then they tell the story of the Jumli who worked for the King for many years in Kathmandu. When the King asked this Jumli whether Jumla or Kathmandu was better, the Jumli replied that he preferred Jumla. The incredulous King asked why he thought Jumla was better, the Jumli replied that beside his home in

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<sup>1</sup>C. von Furer-Haimendorf, Himalayan Traders.

Junla there was a large boulder that he did not have at his fancy house in Kathmandu. He missed the boulder.

## CHAPTER 3

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

CasteVarna: the Dharmic Model

The varna system of caste organization propounded by Sanskritic texts since the Brahmanas<sup>1</sup> is generally utilized by Jumlis, as it is by most of Hindu South Asia,<sup>2</sup> to explain and justify their own caste system. That is, it is understood as the dhārmic model which underlies their own particular caste organization (riti-thiti), giving it ultimate moral legitimization. This legitimization is maintained despite the fact that the varna model is inadequate for describing the perceived caste organization without considerable modification and amplification.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System, trans. Williard R. Sainsbury, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970): 67.

<sup>2</sup>David G. Mandelbaum, Society in India, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1 and 2, 1970): 22.

<sup>3</sup>This situation is true for most of the rest of Hindu South Asia as well. cf. Ibid., pages 22-27; Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, pages 66-75.

In brief, the varna model divides society into four hierarchically arranged separate divisions (varnas, "colors" or "estates",<sup>1</sup> which have their mythological origin in different anatomical parts of purusa, the primeval man of the Rg Veda and represent a division of labor. At the top of the hierarchy are the Brahmins, who issued from the mouth, and have the responsibility of being the literate priests of the rest of society. The Kṣatriyas, who issued from the arms, are next below the Brahmins and are enjoined to be the rulers and warriors of society. In the third division are the Vaiśyas, or merchants, who emerged from the thighs; and in the fourth, the Sudras, who emerged from the feet and are destined to be society's servants. The untouchables are not included within this model as they are not considered part of society.

As Leach and Mandelbaum have noted,<sup>2</sup> this model can be analyzed as reflecting a series of four binary divisions. These binary divisions, illustrated in figure 5, can, in turn, be seen to be based on particular manifestations of what Dumont has called the "fundamental opposition of the pure and the impure":

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<sup>1</sup>Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: 67.

<sup>2</sup>Edmund Leach, "Caste, Class and Slavery: the Taxonomic Problem," in Caste and Race: Comparative Approaches, eds. A. de Revek and J. Knight, (London: J and A. Churchill, 1967): 10-11; Mandelbaum, Society in India : 25.



Figure 5 : The Varna Model (Sanskritic)

Origins                  Varnas                          Binary Divisions                          Hierarchy

mouth	Brahmans		Religious	Twice Born	Inside Society	pure
arms	Kṣatriyas	Warriors & Rulers	Secular			
		Merchants				
thighs	Vaisyas					
feet	Sudras		Ordinary			
	Untouchables				Outside Society	impure



This opposition underlies hierarchy, which is the superiority of the pure to the impure, underlies separation because the pure and the impure must be kept separate, and underlies the division of labor because pure and impure occupations must likewise be kept separate. The whole is founded on the necessary and hierarchical co-existence of the two opposites.<sup>1</sup>

That is, each binary operation can be seen as a means of further refining the distinction between pure and impure as it applies to different domains of Hindu society.

The justification for this view that the varna system is based on the fundamental opposition of purity and pollution is too lengthy to be represented here. However, it should be noted that Dumont's extensive treatment of the subject in Homo Hierarchicus is directly supported by Douglas,<sup>2</sup> Bennett<sup>3</sup> and my own work in the Kangra region of the Indian Himalayas.<sup>4</sup> In essence, the argument rests on the hypothesis that the human body is a symbol for society<sup>5</sup> as illustrated by the origin myth of the varna, and that "impurity corresponds to the organic aspect of man."<sup>6</sup> These notions will be

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<sup>1</sup>Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: 43.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas, Purity and Danger and Natural Symbols.

<sup>3</sup>Lynn Bennett, "Mother's Milk and Mother's Blood: A Study of the Social and Symbolic Roles of Brahman-Chetri Women in Central Nepal," Ph.D. dissertation submitted to Columbia University, 1977.

<sup>4</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders.

<sup>5</sup>Douglas, Natural Symbols: 93-112.

<sup>6</sup>Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: 50

further explicated and documented in the following analysis of Jumla social organization.

Varna: The Jumla Model

While the foregoing Sanskritic model of varna is known by Jumlis and used as a means dharmically to justify their own caste (jāt) system, their own general model for caste organization is a kind of modified version of the varna system. Although it would be, strictly speaking, incorrect to label this second level model as another varna system since knowledgeable Jumlis would not necessarily refer to it under this rubric,<sup>1</sup> it is clear that it is in fact a modification of the Sanskritic model to suit Jumla social reality, in addition to much of the rest of Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 6 shows the basic outline of this model as well as the binary divisions by which it can be organized.<sup>3</sup> The Bahuns (Brahmans) in the first row correspond to the Brahman varna, and the Chetris are likewise identical to the Ksatriya varna.<sup>4</sup> The Matwalis are considered equivalent to

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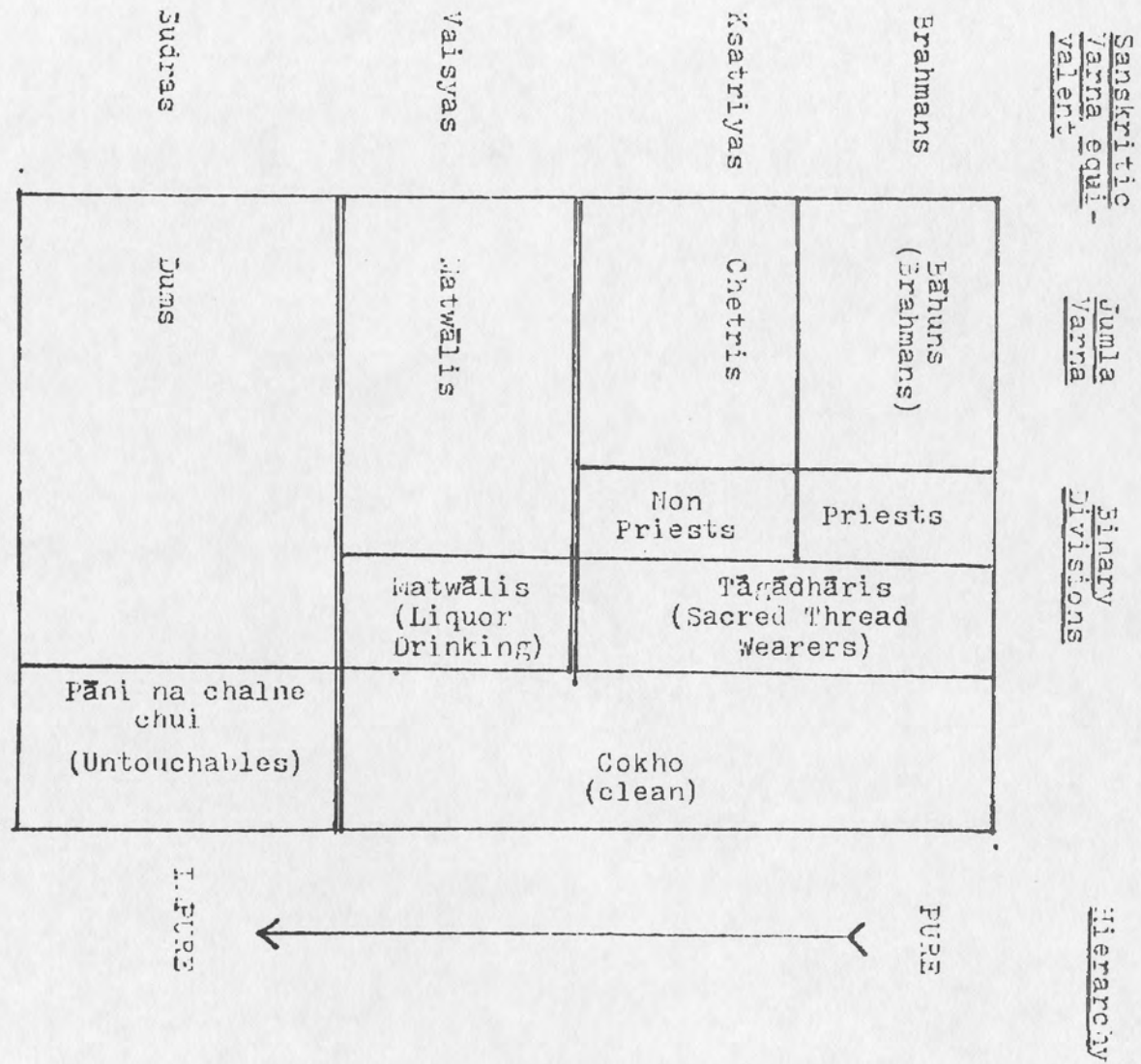
<sup>1</sup>However, for a slightly different version of this varna model, see Ratnakar Devkota's Jumlaiko Samajik Ruparekha, (Kathmandu: Matribhumi Press, 2027): 15. Devkota is a prolific young Jumli scholar.

<sup>2</sup>This usage of "Jumla Varna Model" is similar to Mandelbaum's category of "Jati-cluster", Society in India: 19.

<sup>3</sup>For a similar kind of diagram see Khem Bista, Kuldevta, 1971, page 30.

<sup>4</sup>The Nepali words Bahun and Chetri, also spelled Ksetri, are in fact directly derived from the corresponding Sanskrit varnas.

Figure 6 : Jumla Yarna Model



Vaisyas, but their definition has changed such that they are not usually considered a twice-born (dvi-jā) caste. In the most radical transformation, the untouchable Dums are made into Sudras, and therefore members of society, although they retain their untouchable status.

The binary dichotomies into which this model can be analyzed illustrates the same concern with separating degrees of impurity from purity. At the bottom of the hierarchy, the Dums, which as a group are considered to eat beef and buffalo and generally be involved in polluting occupations such as leather working, are separated from the rest of society through being considered untouchable (na chune, chui) as well as ineligible to give drinking water (pāni na calne). That is, their touch is considered impure enough to pollute both the body and water of the clean (cokho) castes requiring them to purify themselves with water. The Matwalis who as a group are associated with the drinking of liquor (mat), are then further distinguished from the purer castes who are eligible to don the sacred thread (janeo) and become twice-born "thread-bearers" (tāgādhāri). Finally, the tāgādhāri themselves are separated into those pure enough to perform priestly duties, the Bahuns or Brahmans, and those who are not, the Chetris.

#### Jāt: The Working Model

While the Jumla varna model translates the Sanskritic ideal into more accurate and useful terms, it remains a simplified and generalized model that may serve as an image of

society, but is inadequate both as a description and as a basis for functioning in Jumla society. There is, therefore, what could be called a "working model" of castes, or jāt,<sup>1</sup> which is the primary basis for Jumlis' interaction in this sphere. While not an overt model expressed by Jumlis, all the features of the model described here are consciously known and can be elicited through interviews and observations. In essence, it represents an amplified and complicated version of the Jumla varna model.

The most important difference between the jāt model and the varna model, is the separation of castes considered equivalent to various varna divisions into endogamous jāt. These jāt are the principal groupings upon which Jumla society is organized--the primary basis for social and ritual interaction outside of kin relationships. As such, the jāt model further differs from its Sanskritic varna counterpart by virtue of its historicity. That is, in contrast to pan-Hindu South Asian model of varna, Jumla jāt are a direct outgrowth of ethnic composition and political events of the Jumla region from the Malla period onwards. These historical factors, in addition to the complications caused by irregular marriages, have resulted in problems of status definition. These problems are reflected in the jāt model as areas of ambiguity and lack of consensus, and illustrate the fact that

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<sup>1</sup>The term jāt is ambiguous in Jumla usage. In addition to its primary sense of "caste," it is also used to refer to extended lineages or thar as well as varna. In this study it will be used in its primary sense.

the jāt system is, in contrast to the varna model, subject to continuing change.<sup>1</sup>

Although endogamy has been noted as one of the defining characteristics of jāt, each jāt has associated with it various other traditional features of primarily ritual status significance. These ritual features, through their reference to riti-thiti and the dharmic model of varna are what has been referred to as jāti-dharma. Even though some of these features are ambiguous, and at times implicitly contradicted by customary actions (cāl-calan), the strength they derive through being considered jāti-dharma makes them an integral part of the jāt model which serves as a basis for social interaction. Thus, in the following brief description of each jāt group, these traditional characteristics are also included although it is not possible clearly to distinguish them from other descriptive features of the jāts.

#### Upadhaya Brahmans

In the unchallenged highest position in the jāt hierarchy are the Upadhaya Brahmans (Bahuns). Also referred to as "upāddhe" and "barma" or "bāman," the Upadhaya Brahmans are the only caste which is allowed to serve as priests (pu-rohit or puret) to the clean castes, although many have left off this occupation if financially solvent through other

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<sup>1</sup>For a thorough review of the literature on India demonstrating the continual mobility of caste groups in various areas as well as the many factors involved in defining and achieving status, see Mandelbaum, Society in India, p. 425-520.

means such as land and trading. They are the most literate caste since they have maintained a tradition of tutoring in order to learn the skills of a priest as well as sending their sons to schools as part of their self-identification as learned men (pareko mānche). This literate tradition is also maintained through ritual restrictions which forbid them to plow their own fields, although Brahman women do the same kinds of field labor as women from other castes. While not vegetarians, their food restrictions are the most strict: they may only eat the meat of goats (and sheep), wild deer, and pheasant (cyākhurā),<sup>1</sup> cannot eat eggs or drink any liquor, and cannot accept boiled rice (phāt) from the hands of anyone except members of their own caste in good standing. Furthermore, and this is in striking contrast to all other castes, they must be exclusively the issue of kanyādān (virgin-gift) marriage contracted by two families of unimpeachable Upadhaya Brahman standing. That is, they cannot be the offspring of a woman's second marriage, regardless of whether the first marriage ended through an informal divorce or death of the husband.

Although Upadhaya Brahmans probably number less than five percent of the population, some of the wealthiest landowners are of this caste, and one of the two National Panchayat representatives is currently an Upadhaya. However, the wealth and power of a few Upadhaya families is also deceptive.

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<sup>1</sup>They may also eat fish, but this is not considered a "meat".



Many of them have very little land from which they receive less harvest than other farmers since they must employ plowers and have to live off their fairly meager earnings as family priests. It is perhaps this latter situation which has led to the disparaging stereotype of Upadhaya Brahmins as greedy (lobi) and to the use of the term "kāthā" meaning "dog" as their "caste-abuse-word" (jāt ko gāli). Despite the general currency of this term, however, Upadhaya Brahmins are also universally respected and their values emulated by the other caste groups.

#### Jaisi Brahmins

The other jāt of Brahmins, called Jaisi, are derived from Upadhaya Brahmins but nonetheless function as an independent caste with a separate status of their own. Jaisi's are originally the offspring of Upadhaya Brahmin fathers and non-kanyādān or impure Brahmin mothers. That is, whenever an Upadhaya Brahmin "marries" a widow or woman who has been previously married, the offspring become Jaisis. Since this is a permanent status,<sup>1</sup> the Jaisi caste is maintained primarily through endogamy in which Jaisi males marry Jaisi females, but may receive new additions to their number whenever the original combination re-occurs. Since the Jaisis are considered impure, some castes dispute their claim to being

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<sup>1</sup>Linda Stone reports in a personal communication of one exception to this rule from her area of research in Central Nepal, where after seven generations of daughters marrying only Upadhayas, the Upadhaya status is regained. This is not accepted in Jumla.

members of the Brahman varna, and they cannot serve as family priests. Since many of them are literate, and without large landholdings, they sometimes become astrologers (jyotīs) instead and are thus often referred to as josi (a Jumli form of the word jyotīs). Their diet is restricted to the same items as the Upadhayas, with the exception that in addition rice and dāl boiled by their own caste members, they accept boiled rice from Upadhayas. Their "caste-abuse-word" is kadkālā, meaning "fallen". Despite their close association with, and derivation from, Upadhaya Brahmans, their caste status and position on the hierarchy is ambiguous and no other tāgādhāri (sacred-thread-wearing) caste will accept cooked rice from their hands.<sup>1</sup> Although statistics on their percentage of the total population are not available, it seems probable from the composition of Brahman villages in which they live that they may outnumber the number of Upadhaya Brahmans--a testimony to the number of irregular marriages that have occurred in the Brahman caste group.

#### Thakuris

The Thakuris who are widely spread over the whole Jumla area including the far northern areas of Humla, are considered to be Ksatriyas par excellence. Their claims to

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<sup>1</sup>This position is inconsistent with the fact that tāgādhāris will accept cooked rice from the offspring of women married more than once in their own caste, leading to a supposition (supported by Manu) that higher standards are maintained for Brahmans and their violations of purity are more severe than among Ksatriyas.

to be descendents of the Baisi rulers who originally immigrated as Rajputs from India are accepted as valid in Jumla and appear to be at least partially supported by historical evidence.<sup>1</sup> This concensus regarding the Thakuris origins, has allowed them to assume their position in the caste hierarchy under the Brahmans but above the Chetris unchallenged, such that, in contrast to other parts of Nepal, Chetris do not hesitate to eat their boiled rice.<sup>2</sup> In consonance with their position, Thakuris observe the ritual restrictions regarding meat and liquor incumbent upon tāgādhāri (twice-born) and some of them refrain from plowing, although they are not always as strict as the Brahmans and are allowed to eat wild boar.

The Thakuris special status as past rulers, however, has led to several unorthodox practices that are part of their caste-tradition (jāti-dharma). As will be discussed later, the Thakuris have a preference for matrilineal cross-cousin marriage<sup>3</sup> that is generally considered to be incestuous for

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<sup>1</sup>C. von Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction among the High Hindu Castes of Nepal," *Eastern Anthropologist*, 1971, 24: 11-12. In this article, Haimendorf devotes considerable attention to castes in Jumla, and presents several case histories of the Thakuri historical traditions.

<sup>2</sup>In Central Nepal, Chetris will not accept boiled rice from Thakuris. Personal communication from Linda Stone.

<sup>3</sup>cf. Shrestha, Jan Jivan, page 24. As Shrestha did his research among Thakuris in Sinje Khola, his work is an invaluable source of information on this caste.

other tāgadhāri castes, although my census data reveals that this does occur in a disguised form among Chetris. The other unorthodox feature of the Thakuri's jāti-dharma is their role as the beheaders of buffalo during Dasai festivals at Devi temples. Although as high caste Hindus, they do not eat buffalo, as Thakuri warriors it is their responsibility to wield the swords and khukuri that decapitate the sacrificial animals. This role of warrior is also seen in their propensity for hunting, and perhaps serves as a partial explanation for their "caste-abuse-word" which is kusundā--meaning uncivilized jungle dwellers like the Kusunda tribe.

Considered part of the Thakuri caste, but temporarily of slightly different status, are the Hamals. Hamals are the offspring of Brahman (either Upadhaya or Jaisi) men and Thakuri women and the offspring of Thakuri men and Chetri women. Although the latter kind of Hamal is considered to have slightly less status than the former, and even the former may be considered inferior by some Thakuris, these groups are allowed to intermarry with pure Thakuris and will often regain full status after three generations, particularly if they are a wealthy family. However, there are sufficient numbers of Hamals in Jumla so that they will often intermarry among themselves, forming, in effect, a separate jat. A rare third source of the Hamal group occurs when a Thakuri marries a woman from the tagadhari Sanyasi caste. Shrestha states that this kind of Hamal-Thakuri is called hitān,<sup>1</sup> although

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<sup>1</sup>Shrestha, Jan Jivan : page 21.

Haimendorf uses this word to mean a Thakuri who plows with his own hands.<sup>1</sup>

### Sanyāsi

The Sanyāsi caste mentioned in the above example is an instance of a caste not readily reconciliable with either varna model and which thus occupies a permanently ambiguous position within the jāt system. As indicated by their name, Sanyāsis, or as they are also called, Jogis (yogi) are descendants from ascetics who married and adopted the householder life. Sanyāsi and Yogi both literally mean "ascetic" or "religious hermit". The fact that this caste is also referred to as gosālī and giri may indicate their origin from the Khānphāṭā sect.<sup>2</sup> This situation in which the ascetic is, on the one hand, considered a person outside of the caste system who may accept food from anyone and may have originally been a person from any caste, and, on the other hand, considered a highly religious person who may also dispense food to anyone; presents a contradiction in terms which has made it impossible for this caste to be unambiguously integrated into caste society. Thus, while the Sanyāsis wear the sacred thread and do not drink liquor and are thereby accepted as a twice-born caste, the ambivalence of their origin means

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<sup>1</sup>C. von Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction", page 15.

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders, and G. W. Briggs, Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).

that they occupy a position entirely of their own in which they will not accept boiled rice from anyone except Upadhayas, and in which no other twice-born caste will accept boiled rice from their hands. In part, this undefined status can be maintained indefinitely as a result of their relatively small population, as there are only a few Sanyasi villages scattered in each Jumla valley.

### Chetris

The Chetri caste is numerically predominant in Jumla, and despite Haimendorf's claim for the Thakuris,<sup>1</sup> appears to be in many respects the dominant caste of the area. Although Chetris identify themselves with the Ksatriya ideal of rulers and warriors, there is little in their jāti-dharma which would appear to be directly related to this "traditional occupation" beyond a slight propensity for hunting and the occasional youth who joins the army or police forces. This leads some Brahmans to challenge the validity of their claim to be Ksatriya. However, they are, particularly in comparison to Chetris in other parts of Nepal, exceedingly strict on maintaining the purity of their ritual status as twice-born. While there is no restriction regarding plowing, Chetris eschew all liquor, will not eat eggs, and eat only those meats (goat, sheep, wild deer, boar and pheasant) that the Thakuris eat. While this ideal is voiced in the rest of

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<sup>1</sup>C. von Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction", pages 16-17.

Nepal, Chetris in other areas rarely sustain it to the degree observed in Jumla.<sup>1</sup> For example, it is known throughout Nepal that high castes should remove their stitched clothes and bathe before each meal, but in most of Nepal the strict observance of this ritual obligation is considered to be only a part of the Brahman jāti-dharma. In Jumla, while Chetris will shorten the requirement for bathing at times to include merely washing hands and feet, they will frequently take off their clothes and eat with just a loin cloth on despite occasional freezing temperatures. Similarly, their restrictions regarding menstruating women are stricter than those for Chetris in other parts of Nepal.

In contrast to Jumla Chetris' relative orthodoxy with regard to diet and menstruation, considerable unorthodoxy is exhibited in their behaviour regarding sexual relations and second marriages for their women. This contradiction to the normal caste standards of tāgadhari is very important to understanding Jumla culture and the oracle's role within it, and will thus be discussed extensively in the section on kinship.

Similar to the Hamals among the Thakuris, the Chetris also have associated with them various caste groups descended from mixed marriages. The most respectable of these are the Khatris who are offspring of Brahman fathers and Chetri

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<sup>1</sup>Personal observations and discussions with other anthropologists.

mothers. These jharrā, or "pure", Khatris are accorded the same status as ordinary Chetris and intermarry without any difficulties. Offspring of a Chetri man who marries a Thakuri wife also fall into this category. However, the children of Chetri fathers and Matwāli mothers are considered to lose their jharrā status and become "thimbu" Khatris.<sup>1</sup> The permanence of this lower status depends not on what kind of Matwāli woman was involved (i.e. Pābai Chetri, Newar, Humli, Bhotia, etc.) but on the relative wealth and status of the man's family and their consequent ability to marry their daughters back to jharrā Chetris.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, a wealthy respected Chetri who marries a Pābai woman of relatively good standing may be able to have his offspring considered jharrā, particularly if the son does not accept boiled rice from the mother; whereas, on the other hand, an ordinary Chetri marrying a Bhotia of obscure origins may be considered to have lost his status as a Chetri and have his offspring assimilated permanently into the Matwāli category if he does not restrict his ritually relevant relations with her.

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<sup>1</sup>Although the term "thimbu" is more commonly used in Central Nepal than in Jumla, some Jumlis are aware of it and the concept is the same. cf. Bennett, "Roles of Women"; Bista, Kuldevta: 47-50.

<sup>2</sup>For an exhaustive discussion of this problem, see G. von Furer-Haimendorf, "Unity and Diversity in the Chetri Caste of Nepal" in Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon, ed. C. von Furer-Haimendorf (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1966).



### Matwālis

As these instances of the status of children from mixed marriages involving Matwālis demonstrate, the category of Matwāli encompasses a number of different groups of varying status and ethnic origin. In addition to the Pābai Matwāli Chetri groups, all other non-Dum ethnic groups are considered both cokho (clean) and matwāli (liquor-drinking) and thus grouped under this varna heading. These latter include the handful of Newars living in Jumla Bazaar as well as the Humlis and Mugals in the northern parts of the region. Other ethnic groups who pass through the area such as Bhotiyas (Tibetans), Magars, and Sherpas (with trekking parties) are also classed as Matwāli.

### Matwāli Chetris

The most numerous and problematic group is the Pābai Matwāli Chetris. Although preliminary research on these people has been conducted by Furer-Haimendorf,<sup>1</sup> Sharma,<sup>2</sup> Bista,<sup>3</sup> Shrestha,<sup>4</sup> and myself, it is clear that much more in-depth research is required before the wide diversity of data can be assembled into a coherent understanding. While statements on this group must thus remain tentative, it is possible to indicate the range of diversity that has come to light as well

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<sup>1</sup>Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction".

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, "The Matwali Chetris".

<sup>3</sup>Bista, People of Nepal.

<sup>4</sup>Bhim Prasad Shrestha, "Karnali Ancalbata Prakast".

as point to the ongoing changes of status which may be partially responsible for this wide variation.

Many Matwāli Chetris, particularly in areas such as the Chaudabis Dara just north of Jumla Bazaar where they are the exclusive residents conform to the image held of them by higher castes. These Pābai drink liquor, raise and eat chicken, have little need for Brahman priests for their life-cycle rites, and do not claim or seek twice-born status.<sup>1</sup> The continuation of this self-conscious disregard for the dictates of Chetri jāti-dharma, has led both Sharma and Haimendorf to speculate that the Matwāli Chetris are a "distinct socio-ethnic group such as we encounter in Central and Eastern Nepal."<sup>2</sup> Having posited separate ethnic identity, Sharma and Shrestha point to the historical evidence regarding the Khasa and indicate the likelihood of this group being direct Khasa descendants.<sup>3</sup>

If the tribal ethnic identity that these scholars have tentatively assigned to the Matwālis is indeed the

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<sup>1</sup>Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction", p. 20-21; Sharma, "Matwali Chhettris", p. 45-46, 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 45; Haimendorf likewise compares them to an "ethnic group of a tribal nature", although he does admit that the Matwalis do not appear to have more mongoloid physical features than other groups. Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction", p. 20-21.

<sup>3</sup>Sharma, "Matwali Chhettris": 46, 58; Shrestha, "Karnali Ancalbata Prakast" : 68-78.

Khasas, as the evidence would suggest, then it would appear misleading to class this jāt, as they do, in the same category as groups of Magars, Gurungs, and Tamangs. From historical evidence reviewed earlier,<sup>1</sup> it is clear that the Khasas were an Indo-Aryan group whose language was Nepali and who lived in close proximity with high caste Hindu culture from at least the twelfth century. Thus, while it is likely that the Khasas had a separate ethnic identity, it seems probable that there were many cultural affinities with the immigrant Hindu population that, given the many years of integration during the Malla and Baisi periods, would make it difficult to categorize present day Matwālis as a tribal group in the same sense as Tibeto-Burman speaking groups.

The theory that there has been considerable mutual assimilation between the Matwāli Chetris and the twice-born castes, some of whom were probably immigrants from India, receives support from the status of "ambiguous" Matwālis in Jumla today. For some Pābais who are classed as Matwāli abstain from liquor and chicken and have even made arrangements with Brahman priests to conduct the ceremony in which the sacred thread is donned. Haimendorf reports that the tāgādhāri castes have no objection to this phenomenon, since, "the pure Chetris merely continued to treat all such matwāli Chetris as inferior and refused to enter into commensual or connubial

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<sup>1</sup>Chapter 2.

relation."<sup>1</sup> This view needs qualification, since I encountered many pure Chetris who strenuously objected to the Matwalis taking on the sacred thread. Haimendorf reports that in the village of Bumra in the upper Sinje Khola, half of the inhabitants now wear the sacred thread while the other half do not.<sup>2</sup> There is also historical evidence indicating that even before the Rana times certain villages were given the right to become twice-born.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the existence of Chetri clan (thār) names among all the Matwali also supports the theory that Matwalis have assimilated themselves into the Chetri jāt from an early period.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, if it is assumed that it has been the immigrants who have been assimilated, this evidence of mobility between the Matwālis and the twice-born tāgādhāri suggests that there is no significant difference between the ethnic composition of the Chetris and the Matwālis and that it is only through historical circumstances and uneven cultural change that some Chetris achieved higher status than others.

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<sup>1</sup>C. von Furer-Haimendorf, Morals and Merit: A Study of Values and Social Controls in South Asian Societies, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 174.

<sup>2</sup>Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction" : 20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., page 71.

<sup>4</sup>Levine, "Class and Clan". This process of adopting clan names is still occurring among some of the Byansi and Shotia groups in the northern part of the region, although Tibetan clan names have also been retained.

It is evident from the above discussion that although a clear distinction exists between the Pābai and Jyulyāl on a geographical basis as well as in the realm of jāt stereotypes there are some Matwāli Chetri groups whose status is ambiguous. That is, there are some groups which share some elements of the tāgādhari Chetri jāti-dharma as well as some of the more truly matwāli groups as typified by the residents of Chaudabis Dara.

#### Gharti

Below the Matwāli Chetri and of unambiguously matwāli status are the Ghartis. This caste of former slaves were originally drawn from different clean castes, but are now considered to be of the same status. Living primarily in the jyulā close to their masters prior to 1925, members of this jāt do not have much land and are often dependent on wealthy patrons who employ them for farm work. Except for their consumption of liquor and domestic pig and their lack of sacred thread, their jati dharma conforms to that of the Chetris.

#### Byansis and Bhotias

The area of ambiguity between Jyulyāl Chetris and Pābai Chetris discussed above is also found to a lesser extent between Pābai Chetris and some of the other non-Gharti Matwāli jāt such as the Byansis and Bhotias. While little

is presently known about the Byansis<sup>1</sup> it appears that they are a Bhotiya group which like the Thakalis further East have attempted to completely change their identities to Chetris. While some Humlis and Mugals have made some steps in moving in this direction (such as the adoption of Chetri clan names when talking Nepali), they have, by and large, maintained their Tibetan language and culture. Since this includes both personal and ritual uses of liquor, their caste-abuse-word (which is frequently used) is jār (beer, the feminine form is jāreni). In terms of ritual status, they are considered to rank lower than the Matwali Chetris.

#### Newars

The few families of Newars in Jumla are located entirely in Jumla Khalanga Bazaar. Although their number is small, they occupy the most important business positions and have considerable political influence. They have retained some Newari customs, but no longer speak Newari and have become completely integrated into the community. Although they are accorded considerable respect due to their wealth and influence, ritually they rank as a Matwali caste and are sometimes referred to by their caste-abuse-name of "kode" (from kodo meaning "barley", also "stupid", "moron") because of their custom of making distilled liquor (raksi) from this grain.

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<sup>1</sup>See Furer-Haimendorf, Himalayan Traders; and A. Manzardo, D.R. Dahal, and Navin Rai, "The Byanshi: Note on a Trading Group in Far Western Nepal", Contributions to Nepalese Studies. 3:2, September 1976, pages 171-222.

## Dums

From the perspective of the cokho jāt all Dums are untouchables and pāni na calne (water is not accepted) and therefore of the same status vis-a-vis themselves. However, even the high castes recognise that the Dums distinguish status between themselves and of course, have different relationships with the various Dum jāt on the basis of their traditional occupations, particularly with those families who are their lagityās.<sup>1</sup>

## Kamis

The Kamis, or metalworkers, are the largest caste of Dums and are generally considered to rank the highest. This caste contains a number of "sub-castes" of families who specialize in certain kinds of metal. The Sunars are the goldsmiths and are often attributed a status higher than other Kamis. Other sub-castes include the Tamatto (copper workers); the Lohars (ironsmiths); and Tirva (general vessel makers). In addition to these main sub-castes, there are a number of highly specialized jāt which consists of a few families. For example, the kulāla jāt in Sinje have the responsibility of carrying the bride and groom in marriages as well as being the "servant" for the Bhagwati Temple--for which service they receive the meat of the sacrificial buffalos. Although each of these latter groups will sometimes claim a higher status, they usually will accept each other's boiled rice and generally

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Chapter 2.

intermarry.

#### Sarkis

The Sarkis, or cobblers, are usually conceded to rank lower than the Kamis. Although my data on these groups is too scanty to make any definite statements, it appears that the Sarkis and Kamis will usually accept each other's boiled rice unless involved in local disputes regarding their mutual status. On the other hand, they usually do not intermarry and can be considered separate jāt on the basis of endogamy rules.

#### Damais

The Damais, or tailor-musicians, occupy a distinctly lower position than either the Kamis or Sarkis. Neither of these latter castes will accept boiled rice from their hands or give them their daughters in marriage. However, by virtue of their participation in high caste marriage ceremonies, some members of this caste have become ritual specialists and often serve as the priests for other Dums since no Brahman can be called.<sup>1</sup> This role lends a certain ambivalence to the Damai's position on the lower end of the hierarchy.

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<sup>1</sup>The nature of these ritual functions and the type of priestly role performed will be discussed later.



## Bādi

Although the Damais are the lowest caste in permanent residence in Jumla, the Bādi or Gaine,<sup>1</sup> an itinerant caste specializing in dancing, singing, fishing and prostitution, are considered "untouchable" even to the untouchables. However, given their activities as prostitutes, this restriction must be violated fairly often.

## Biṭālus

There is another untouchable group which is not strictly speaking a caste. This is the biṭālu, the result of marriages between high caste men and Dum women. Despite the extreme opprobrium which is attached to this event, it does occasionally occur and biṭālu families can be found in Jumla today.

Except for the biṭālus, all of the Dum caste share a jāti-dharma which can best be defined as the absence of many of the restrictions which make up higher caste jāti-dharmas. They raise and eat chicken and male buffalos and will eat female buffalos and cattle that have died a natural death. They also drink liquor and are not required to wash more than their hands before a meal. Although many do observe pollution associated with menstruation, birth and death, the restrictions are less exacting and not strictly observed. However, they

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<sup>1</sup>The Gaine caste of Central Nepal does not actually extend as far West as Jumla. (Jest: personal communication). It must therefore be assumed that the caste Jumlis refer to as Gaine must actually be the Badis. The Rising Nepal, October 12, 1975, reported that there were ten Badi families in Jumla.

are very careful to avoid inflicting pollution on the clean castes and except in the case of high caste children, will refrain from any bodily contact.<sup>1</sup>

Caste Ranking: Purity and Pollution

In the preceding discussion of the Jumla jāt system, individual jāt have been distinguished on a variety of criteria: occupation, ethnic origin, historical events, social mobility, and irregular marriages; as well as by the dietary and ritual restrictions which they observe. In several instances (the Jaisis, the Sanyāsis, and the Matwālis) it was indicated that all of these criteria were not always consistent, such that the individual caste status could not be unambiguously defined. Yet some castes such as the Upadhayas, Thakuris, and Chetris were clearly ranked and their acceptance of their status signalled by their willingness to accept boiled rice from the caste above them.

This confusion of criteria is clarified by understanding that although many kinds of considerations can influence the rank of a caste, it is only the ritual aspects of those considerations which are significant. As Mandelbaum notes,

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<sup>1</sup>Since Dums' physical appearance is identical to many of the higher castes, one way that a stranger can ascertain their status aside from either asking them or seeing them in their occupational setting is to observe how they sit some distance way and accept items given to them such as cigarettes by cupping their hands so that the item may be dropped rather than passed.

"ritual standards are used as a reference frame for the social order."<sup>1</sup> These ritual standards are the degrees of purity and pollution which are attached to different kinds of behaviour. While some of these, such as cow-eating, have an absolute value, others such as buffalo beheading must be balanced against other caste standards in assessing the caste rank. Thus, various ritual criteria must be weighed, and where there is flexibility there is also room for manipulation on the basis of wealth and influence, as well as the opportunity to attempt to change one's status by assuming purer standards.

As indicated in the preceding description of the jāt, among the ritually relevant considerations which are weighed in determining caste ranking are the consumption of meat and liquor, and occupation. In the category of meat, it was seen that not all meats are ritually significant. Fish and wild game are neutral meats and are, therefore, like goats (and sheep) which are the purest meat, acceptable to all. Although a few rare individuals have opted for even higher purity by becoming vegetarians, this practice is not widespread in Jumla except in the case of widows in mourning and high castes maintain their purity even though they do eat some meats.<sup>2</sup> The ritually relevant impure meats are ranked

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<sup>1</sup>Mandelbaum, Society in India: 206.

<sup>2</sup>Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: 146-151, 141: "Brahmans probably eat meat where competition from vegetarians did not make itself felt. . . ."

in hierarchical order, and the consumption or non-consumption of them is thus one of the criteria for caste ranking. Wild boar is eaten by all except the Brahmans; chickens are eaten by Matwālis and Dums, but not tāgādhāris; buffalos and domestic pigs are eaten by some Bhotia Matwālis and Dums, but not by Matwāli Chetris and tāgādhāris; and cows are eaten only by Dums.<sup>1</sup>

The category of liquor is not sub-divided, and it was seen how the impurity associated with its consumption is the basis for distinguishing the whole class of tāgādhāris from the Matwālis. In contrast, other intoxicants such as marijuana or opium (which is rare) are considered neutral in respect to purity and can be consumed by all.<sup>2</sup>

Some occupations are, like meat, hierarchically ranked according to the ritual impurity they impart. Plowing, making yokes, and carrying the harvest are forbidden to Brahmans and avoided by Thakuris although permissible for all other castes. Castrating animals is slightly more polluting and is forbidden to Brahmans and Thakuris and avoided as much as possible by Chetris. The occupational speciality of the Dums, including metal-smithy, leather working, sewing new clothes, and making implements are even more polluting as

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<sup>1</sup>Although some Bhotias eat cows in secret (lukera), high caste Hindus attempt to ignore this fact as they would have to classify them as Dums.

<sup>2</sup>In fact, it appears that Brahmans are often heavier users of marijuana and hashish than other groups.

full-time occupations and are thus, in theory, restricted to the untouchable castes. However, as occasional activities they lose their ritual significance and are done by every caste when the need arises.

Although a general sort of caste ranking can be generated from the avoidance or non-avoidance of these ritually relevant items of consumption and occupational activities, this ranking can be deceptive. For, as has been described, certain caste groups can claim higher status than is generally accepted by increasing their degree of avoidance in imitation of higher castes (e.g. Matwālis giving up liquor). While some of these attempts at upward social mobility have been successful, the jāt system is highly resistant to change and a purer life-style does not usually result in increased caste status.

A more effective criteria for determining accepted caste ranking involves the analysis of boiled-rice acceptance patterns.<sup>1</sup> Food in general, like meat is particular, is divided into three different categories of "pollutability". The most impervious to pollution can be referred to as phal-phul. Literally meaning "fruit", this category includes, in addition to unpeeled fruits, raw vegetables, grains and flour. Given the lack of pollutability, phal-phul can be accepted from

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<sup>1</sup>This analysis derives from the transactional analysis developed by McKim Marriott in his article, "Interactional and Attributional Theories of Caste Ranking", Man in India, 39:2, (1959).

any jāt and Brahmans may even accept it from Dums. The next category of food, which can be called cokho or pure,<sup>1</sup> theoretically includes only those foods made pure through frying in ghyū (clarified butter), but in practice includes all fried and boiled foods except boiled rice and dāl. As implied by the name, cokho foods can be accepted by any jāt from any cokho jāt. That is, high castes can accept cokho food from any caste except the Dums. The most vulnerable category of food is, as indicated before, boiled rice or bhāt.<sup>2</sup> This category includes the lentils or soybeans that are served with it (dal), and due to its extreme vulnerability to pollution from castes below one's own, can only be accepted from pure members of one's own caste as well as from castes whom one acknowledges to be ritually superior.

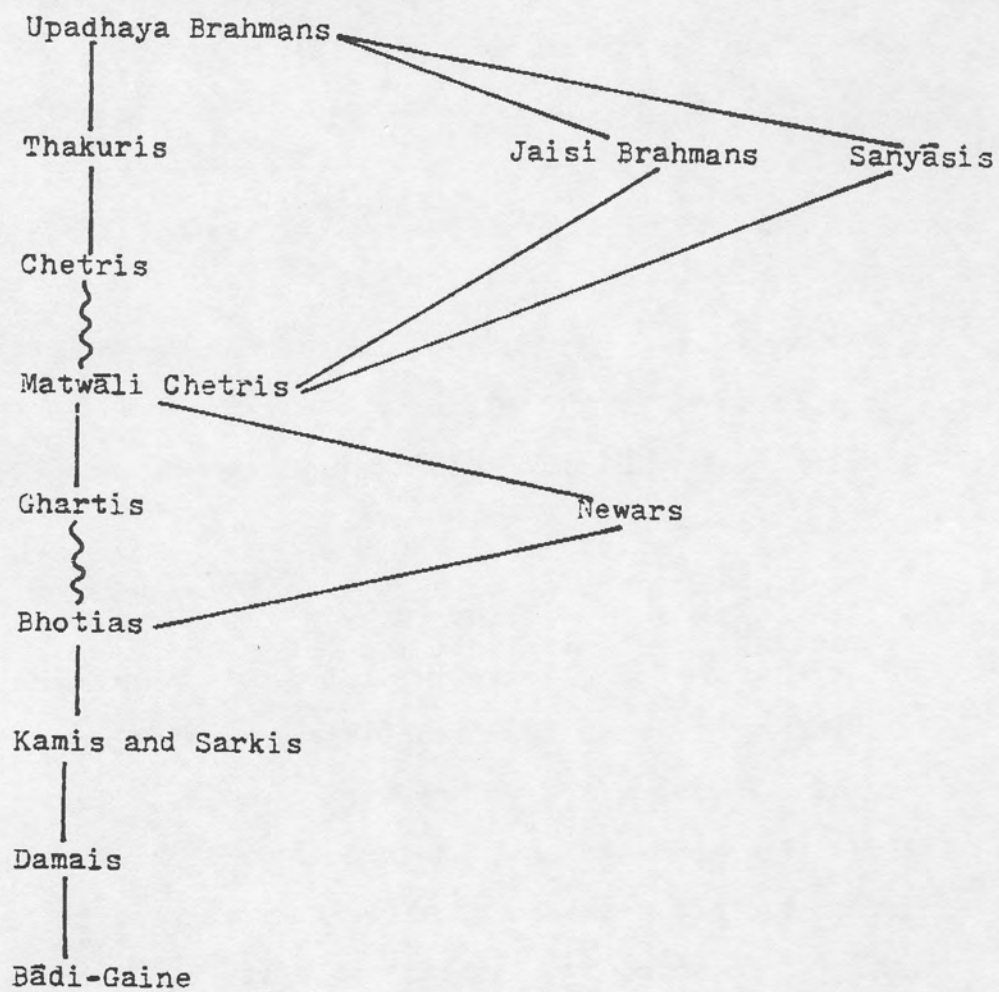
It is this last characteristic of boiled rice which makes it a good indicator of accepted caste ranking. For by determining which caste will accept boiled rice from the caste above them, accepted caste ranking is explicit. By the same principle, castes which do not accept each other's boiled rice are either a result of attempted upward mobility or ambiguous ranking. Figure 7 demonstrates this method of ranking Jumla castes. Connecting lines indicate those castes

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<sup>1</sup>This is called pakka in North India, Marriott, *Ibid.*; Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: 142; Mandelbaum, Society in India: 199.

<sup>2</sup>Referred to as kacca food in North India, *Ibid.*

Figure 7 : Caste Ranking on the Basis of  
Acceptance of Boiled Rice



who will accept boiled rice from the caste above, but not the caste below; and wavy lines indicate lack of clear separation.

As can be seen, this jāti ranking model does not fit neatly with the Sanskritic varna ideal, and only roughly corresponds to the Jumla varna model. However, these varna systems still serve as the ideal representation of the caste system, the source of its dharmic legitimacy, and, the caste system, despite its many areas of ambiguity, still bases itself on the same underlying notion of purity and pollution. It thus conforms in principle to the various caste systems in Northern India and Gould's comments on Bengal are equally appropriate for Jumla:

The higher the varna of a jāti [jāti] the nearer it is to identity with the sacred (non-involvement with biological process), the lower it is the more it is identified with the profane (involvement with biological process).<sup>1</sup>

While the Dums engage in all activities including skinning dead cows, Brahmans are even restricted from plowing their fields. Brahmans strictly confine and ritualize their consumption of food and liquor, while Dums may accept almost anything from anybody. The castes in-between display various different compromises between these two extremes of non-involvement with biological processes and total involvement. As Douglas has noted, this social system based on purity and pollution maintains the Sanskritic analogy between the body

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Gould, "Priest and Contrapriest: A Structural Analysis of Jajmani Relationships in the Hindu Plains and Nilgiri Hills", Contributions to Indian Sociology: New Series: 10, (1967): 35.



and society.

The whole (caste) system represents a body in which by the division of labor the head does the thinking and praying and the most despised parts carry away waste matter. Each sub-caste community in a local region is conscious of its relative standing in the scale of purity. Seen from ego's position the system of caste purity is structured upwards. Those above him are more pure. All the positions below him, be they ever so intricately distinguished in relation to one another, are to him polluting. Thus for any ego within the system the threatening non-structure against which barriers must be erected lie below. The sad wit of pollution as it comments on bodily functions symbolizes descent in the caste structure by contact with faeces, blood and corpses.<sup>1</sup>

#### Kinship: Kul Dharma

##### Pure Continuity and Virgin Marriage: the Patrilineal Ideal

High caste Jumlis share with other high caste Nepali and North Indian Hindus an ideal image of their kinship system which is based on the notion of a pure patriline which links "the individual to his ancestors (pitṛ) and the ancient sages of the distant past as well as to his own hopes of heaven and future rebirth through the ritual efforts of his descendants."<sup>2</sup> Within this ideal scheme, the continuity of the patriline must remain unbroken and its purity unsullied. In thus simultaneously enshrining the ideal of complete ritual purity and continuous regeneration, it faces an internal con-

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas, Purity and Danger: 123.

<sup>2</sup>Lynn Bennett, "Maiti-Ghar: An Examination of the Dual Role of Women in Northern Hindu Kinship from the Perspective of the Brahmans and Chetris of Nepal," in Interface of the Himalayas, ed. James Fisher, (The Hague: Mouton and Co., in press).

tradition within the parameters of Hindu thought--for the ideal of complete ritual purity demands ascetic celibacy, while continuity through progeny demands the introduction of women and sexuality into the patriline. This contradiction is of central importance in understanding Hindu social and religious life, although all of its ramifications and expressions cannot be examined here.<sup>1</sup>

The Sanskritic kinship unit which is used to express the pure continuity of the patrilineal ideal is the gotrā. The gotrā is understood as an exogamous group which traces its descent from one of the seven sages: Jamadagni, Gautama, Bharadvaja, Atri, Visvamitra, Kashyap and Vasistha.<sup>2</sup> The putative common descent is the rationale for the exogamy rule, for all members of the same gotrā (sagotri) are considered in some sense to be brothers and sisters. The purity of this descent group stems from the understanding that the common progenitor (sometimes modified to common guru) is a sage

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<sup>1</sup>For an extensive treatment of this problem see, Ibid., Idem., "Sex and Motherhood among the Brahmans and Chetris of East-Central Nepal", Contributions to Nepalese Studies, Special Issue, Anthropology, Health and Development, (June 1976)3: 1-52; Idem., "Roles of Women"; Campbell, Saints and Householders.

<sup>2</sup>Irawati Kavre, Kinship Organization in India (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, Second Revised Edition, 1965): 59.

(ṛṣi).<sup>1</sup> Thus, on a mythological level, the gotrā attempts to approximate the patrilineal ideal of unbroken descent through pure (celibate) holy men that I have elsewhere argued is the primary resolution attempted by the Nath myths of Northern India.<sup>2</sup>

This ideal mythological character of the gotrā has been insufficiently stressed by anthropologists who have attempted to integrate the gotrā within other systems of kin reckoning found in Nepal such as the thar. Since the gotrā of individuals and groups other than one's own immediate patriline is usually not known (in Jumla, like elsewhere in Nepal, a man does not usually know either his wife's or mother's gotrā) and since gotrā affiliation cross-cuts thar and is usually not ascertained in arranging marriages until the time of the ceremony itself, anthropologists have often considered it a non-functional unit and therefore "without

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<sup>1</sup>There are various other Sanskritic elaborations of this theme in gotrā organization such as the cross-cutting pravārā which refers to families which originally used the same priest. These concepts reinforce the argument presented here, but are not sufficiently important to Jumlis to warrant discussion. cf. *Ibid.*,: 59-65; Lynn Bennett, "The wives of the Rishis: An Analysis of the Tij-Rishi Panchami Women's Festival" (*Kailash*, no. 2, 1976, 2):185-207; and P. N. Prabhu, Hindu Social Organization (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1954): 155-157.

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders.

significance."<sup>1</sup> However, all Hindus understand the gotrā as the primary exogamous unit and examples of marriage arrangements that have been cancelled between persons of the same gotrā as well as examples of persons who would have been considered unmarriageable but eventually allowed to marry on the basis of different gotrā can be found in Jumla as well as elsewhere. This partially functional aspect of gotrā can be understood when the gotrā is seen as a different kind of kinship unit. In contrast to the other "working models" of kinship organization, gotrā is a dharmic ideal, a reference model similar to the varna, which, because it expressed the patrilineal image derived from Sanskritic Hinduism, can be invoked with complete authority at any time, but because it contradicts the working system is more often ignored except in the contexts of Brahmanical rites or an abstract discussion of Hindu kinship. As a different order of kinship unit, its main function is to express the patrilineal ideal of pure continuity through the succession of gurus, but like other ideal formulations it can be used as a model for social action when desired.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karve, *Kinship Organization in India*, page 115; Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*: 138; John Hitchcock, *The Magars of Banyan Hill*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966): 45; Victor Doherty, "The Organizing Principles of Brahmin-Chetri Kinship," *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 1:2 (June 1974): 58-59.

<sup>2</sup>T. N. Madan, "Is the Brahmanic Gotra a Grouping of Kin?", *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 18: 59-77, 1962; Bennett, "Tij-Rishi Panchami".

Since, as noted above, that aspect of the patrilineal ideal which would prefer succession through a line of celibate males is resolvable only on the mythological level, the Sanskrit model has also had to include the incorporation of women into the patriline. This necessity is, as Bennett has noted, dangerous both to the purity and security of the patriline and thus must be accomplished with the greatest degree of purity and control possible.<sup>1</sup> Kanyādān or "the gift of a virgin" is the form of marriage which accomplishes these criteria and is thus prescribed by scriptural sources. This type of ideal marriage, called biyāh (vivāh) in Jumla is the basis for the actual patrilineal kinship organization model which is utilized in Jumla, reflecting both the ideal of pure patrilineality and the ambiguous role of women.

#### Jumla Patrilineal Kin Groupings

The largest kin unit within tāgādhāri Jumla jāt is the thar. Found also in the rest of Nepal, the thar has been variously defined as a clan<sup>2</sup> and a sib. However it fits neither of these standard definitions very precisely.<sup>3</sup> A more revealing definition is that presented by Doherty who

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Maiti Ghar."

<sup>2</sup>Furer-Haimendorf, "Chetri Caste": 28.

<sup>3</sup>See Bista, Kuldevta: 50-52 for a discussion of this issue.

calls it a "named patrilineage cluster."<sup>1</sup> Somewhat analogously to an Anglo-Saxon surname, a thar refers to a group of patrilineages which consider that they must have had a common ancestor and are all called by the same name. Except where gotrā affiliations are invoked to supercede thar, the assumption of common ancestry makes the thar the working exogamous unit and all members of the same thar express a sense of vague kinship to each other.

Thars are found among all Jumla tāgādhāri jāt (Brahmans, Jaisis, Thakuris, Chetris, and Sanyāsis) as well as among Matwāli Chetris. Some Bhotia groups are now taking on thar names, but these are really translations of Tibetan clan names which are differently organized.<sup>2</sup> Dums do not have thars and when asked their thar will give their jāt or village. Although not a complete list, the following list compiled from my own notes and the list given by Ratnakar Devkota in Jumlako Samajik Ruparekha<sup>3</sup> are most of the thar found in Jumla.<sup>4</sup>

List of thar:

Brahmans (& Jaisi) : Ācārja, Regmi, Nyaopāne, Debkotā, Caolāgāni, Timalsinā, Pyākuryāl, Gautam, Pāḍe, Dhitāl, Pandiṭ, Dabādi, Katibaḍā

<sup>1</sup>Doherty, "Brahman-Chetri Kinship" : 27.

<sup>2</sup>Levine, "Class and Clan".

<sup>3</sup>Devkota, Jumlako Samajik Ruparekha.

<sup>4</sup>Compare with the list compiled by Khem Bista in Kathmandu, page 53.

- Thakuri : Sāhi, Kalyāl, Malla, Hamāl, Khana, Bām, Chānd
- Chetri : Kaṭāet, Dāngi, Rāvōl, Kārki, Darāla, Rāvat, Buḍā,  
(pure & Bista, Rokāiyā, Kaṭka, Bohoḍā, Bhandāri, Basnet,  
Matwāli) Thāpā, Adhikāri, Dhāni, Thāmi, Mahātarā, Budh-  
thāyā, Bogori, Sejuvāl Kāorā, Sāh, Mahat, Kāserā,  
Bhākri, Baniyā, Bhāmā
- Sanyāsi : Puri, Giri, Bhārati, Yogi, Nāth

Since offsprings of intermarriages retain the thar and gotrā of their fathers, Jaisis, Hamals, and Khattris will have Brahman and Thakuri thars even though they become members of a different caste.

Thar also contain various sub-units or branches called bāsā in Jumla (baṃsā in Kathmandu Nepali). These branches (lit. hāngā) or "lines"<sup>1</sup> are frequently named on the basis of residence and refer to a sub-group of a thar which assumes they have a common ancestor that is more immediate and at less geneological depth than the thar progenitor. In Jumla, where village hamlets are often composed entirely of single thar the bāsā is often used to refer to one village, or if a tradition of immigration from another village is maintained, a couple of villages. Given the wide distribution of thar all over Nepal, the bāsā thus becomes a more meaningful unit of patrilineal descent than the gotrā.

The bāsā is made up of a number of hakdār or aṅsiyār which can be described as the maximal lineage. The hakdār, which appears to be the same as the kul utilized in

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<sup>1</sup>Bista, Kuldevta : 30-31.

far Eastern Nepal, is composed of members descending from a known ancestor (although the actual name may be forgotten) theoretically up to a depth of seven generations, but often somewhat less and sometimes more depending on mobility or the fame of the ancestor and the family's commitment to genealogies (many Brahman families maintain written baṅgābāli or genealogies, while few Chetris do). The hakdār as the known patrilineal grouping, places all its members into hierarchical and discrete kin relationships with each other.<sup>1</sup> All members of the hakdār are therefore required to observe the full thirteen-day death pollution which accrues to the patriline upon the death of one of its members, although this rule is not strictly observed when residence is distant. In contrast to the thar and bāgā, then, the hakdār constitutes the traceable patrilineage and functions as the actual limits of patrilineal reckoning. All hakdārs see themselves as directly related by blood to each other.

The hakdār is further subdivided into the sāk which may be defined as the minimal lineage. Although the sāk may be composed of one extended family it is most often made up of a number of families that are related to each other by not

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<sup>1</sup>Doherty, "Brahmin-Chetri Kinship."



more than three generations. Although occasionally used interchangeably with hakdār, Jumlis will thus often define sāk as tin pust hakdār (three generations hakdār). In many situations, the sāk is the most important patrilineal grouping. In addition to mandatory birth and death pollution, the sāk retains certain rights of inheritance such that should any of its members die childless, the property reverts back to the sāk members.<sup>1</sup> In return, the sāk is required to furnish a member who will perform the death rites for a sonless member who dies (kriyā basne). In this sense, the sāk is considered an extended family despite the fact that most sāk are split up into a number of households.

An even smaller patrilineal unit that is somewhat ambiguously defined is the sākke (real). Although sometimes used interchangeably with the sāk if the sāk is small and relations very closely maintained, sākke is often used to refer to a more restricted group descended from the grandfather and possibly, but not necessarily, living in the same household. Thus, following the relatively recent break-up of a joint family, all members will be considered as sākke although the sāk will probably be larger. In addition, a sāk or hakdār relation who lives with the family will become sākke even if their relationship is seven generations removed.

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<sup>1</sup>If the sāk itself dies out, the hakdār takes this role.

The core family unit, called ekkal ghar (one house), parivār (family), or dhavang (house) are all those members who share a common living quarters and hearth (culā). This may be either a joint or nuclear family, although census data reveals that only in a few cases do brothers continue to live together after the death of their father. This unit is the primary social and economic grouping. Despite the ritual and social importance of the various extended patrilineal units, the individual family has ultimate responsibility for maintaining its livelihood and so long as one of its members is alive it retains ownership of land and property separately.

In the following figure, these patrilineal units are illustrated as they are found in the Chetri village of Dangibada. The letters and numbers refer to the map of Dangibada given earlier, the letter indicating separate bādā and the numbers separate dhavang or households. The order of birth is reflected horizontally, with the left side indicating seniority within each generation. As can be seen, Hakdār I is to a depth of four generations from the eldest living male, whereas the sāk are three. Sāk Z contains two joint families, including D 1 which is the largest in the village, in which the brothers have stayed together after the father's death. Also illustrated in Sāk Z is the case of two male descendants three generations removed living together in the same household to form a sākke (C3). Although sāk tend to be grouped in the same bādā, it is evident from the diagram that one sāk will often be spread over more than one which, as in the case



of B2, B3, and D1, is the result of joint families splitting and some brothers setting up new households by building new bādā.

### Affinal Relatives

All potential or actual affinal relations are called kutum or kutumba. That is, the kutum encompasses all families who are potential wife-givers or wife-takers according to the dictates of jāti-dharma. Theoretically, this would mean that the kutum includes all members of the same jāt of any thar except one's own and all members of a single thar would have the same kutum. In fact, since most marriages are arranged with the same group of villages, the kutum usually refers to this more limited group in which previous marriages have taken place and affinal relations already established.

Although some castes such as the Thakuris will establish kutum relations at a relatively great geographical distance,<sup>1</sup> most castes conform to the pattern in which the surrounding villages form the kutum. This pattern is illustrated by the Dangis of Dangibada who contracted 65% of their marriages with villages less than two hours walk distant, and only 10% in villages more than five hours walk away-- although several brides were brought from two, five and even fifteen days walk distance.

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<sup>1</sup>Purer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction".

The distinction between potential and actual affines is made by the term nātādār (also nātedār). Although nātādār literally means all those who have a connection (nātā) and thus includes the patriline, it is conventionally used only to designate affinal relations such as all those people related through FaMo, FaSi, Si, Wi, etc. Conceptually, it implies all those relatives related through marriage rather than through blood except for women who through marriage to the patriline itself have become members of that patriline.

Specific categories of nātādār are distinguished according to whether they are wife-givers or wife-takers. Among the wife-givers, distinctions are made on a generational basis. Wife-givers from the previous generations, such as one's mother's or paternal grandmother's natal families are called māuli or māwāli. Relations contracted through one's own generation such as through one's wife or brother's wife are called saurā or sasurāli; and relations through marriage to the descending generation are called sandhi. Among the wife-takers, such generally applicable terms are not found, although all may be classed as juwāi patti (the son-in-law's side).

#### The Dual Role of Women in Familial Relations

As demonstrated by Bennett,<sup>1</sup> the key to understanding

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Maiti-Ghar", Idem., "Sex and Motherhood"; Idem., "Tij-Rishi Panchami".

the organization of Hindu kinship is the dual role played by its women. In this respect, Jumla does not differ from other areas. In order to maintain any one patriline, women must be brought in from another patriline. Although these women are through marriage considered to be incorporated into the thar and gotrā of their husband, they still retain certain membership rights in their natal family and have the right to frequently return for ritual occasions. This membership in two patriline, one by blood and the other by marriage, results in an ambiguous role whereby women are defined differently in their husband's house (ghar) and their natal home (māitā) and have two entirely different sets of familial relations which in many respects are opposed to each other.<sup>1</sup> These opposing relationships illustrate what Doherty has called the principles of "status" (mānnu parne) and "love" (pyāro hunu),<sup>2</sup> and Bennett the "patrifocal" and "filiafocal" models respectively.<sup>3</sup>

#### Ghar Relations: Hierarchy and Respect<sup>4</sup>

Familial relationships are based on the hierarchical ordering of each member of the family on the basis of gener-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Doherty, "Brahmin-Chetri Kinship" : 33

<sup>3</sup>Bennett, "Roles of Women".

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., this section corresponds to the model of kinship relations which Bennett has identified as "patrifocal."

ation, relative age, and sex.<sup>1</sup> That is, all members of one generation take precedence over descending generations; but within a generation, the hierarchical status of each member is a function of his relative age and sex. As noted above, women are further distinguished on the basis of whether born into the family or married into it.

The hierarchical ordering of all kin relations is, as noted by Doherty for Western Central Nepal, reflected in the kinship terminology.<sup>2</sup> The order of siblings' births is calculated separately for males and females and is specified by attaching the Nepali terms jethā, māilā, sāilā, etc. to kānchā (the youngest).<sup>3</sup> Not only do these terms determine relationships between siblings but apply to ascending generations as well. However, between any two individuals of the same generation the major distinction is between the elder and the younger, as is reflected in the more common usage of terms such as thulo (large, big)--sāno (small); jethā (elder)--kānchā (younger); dāju (elder brother)--bhāi (younger bro-

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<sup>1</sup>This characteristic hierarchy in Brahman-Chetri kinship is so important that it has led Doherty to emphasize it as one of his four "organizing principles." His other principles are "lineality" (discussed here in terms of the patri-line), and "individualism." It is difficult to understand what Doherty means by this last principle which is not conceptually of the same order as the others. "Brahmin-Chetri Kinship."

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., page 28.

<sup>3</sup>The terms antare and jantare are not used.

ther); didi (elder sister)--bahini (younger sister).<sup>1</sup> Since generation takes precedence over relative age, a FaWi or FaBr who might actually be younger than ego is still considered in a hierarchically superior position.

Figure 9 adapted from Doherty sets out the basic Jumla kinship terminology. Although there are some variations by caste, i.e. the Thakuris call their mother jia instead of āmā, these terms are basically the same for all Jumla castes and similar, though not identical, to other Nepali Brahman-Chetri groups. This terminology system reveals in more detail some of the hierarchical relationships by groups of kin, particularly as related through marriage which will be briefly discussed below.<sup>2</sup> In the figure, the terms for elder relations are listed first, and for younger, second when this distinction is applicable.

Among male members of the patriline, relationships are based primarily on notions of respect (mānru parne) and on property ownership rights. Thus a son is always expected to respect and obey his father, father's brothers, and elder brothers. Symbolically this respect is demonstrated by the greetings which are exchanged. The respect-giving-person lifts his palm towards his forehead and bows slightly while saying "jaideo" (lit. praise God). The person receiving the

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<sup>1</sup>Feminine forms are thuli, sāni, jethi, kānchi.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Doherty, "Brahmin-Chetri Kinship" for a detailed analysis of the terminology.



FIGURE 9 : JUMLA KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY - 1

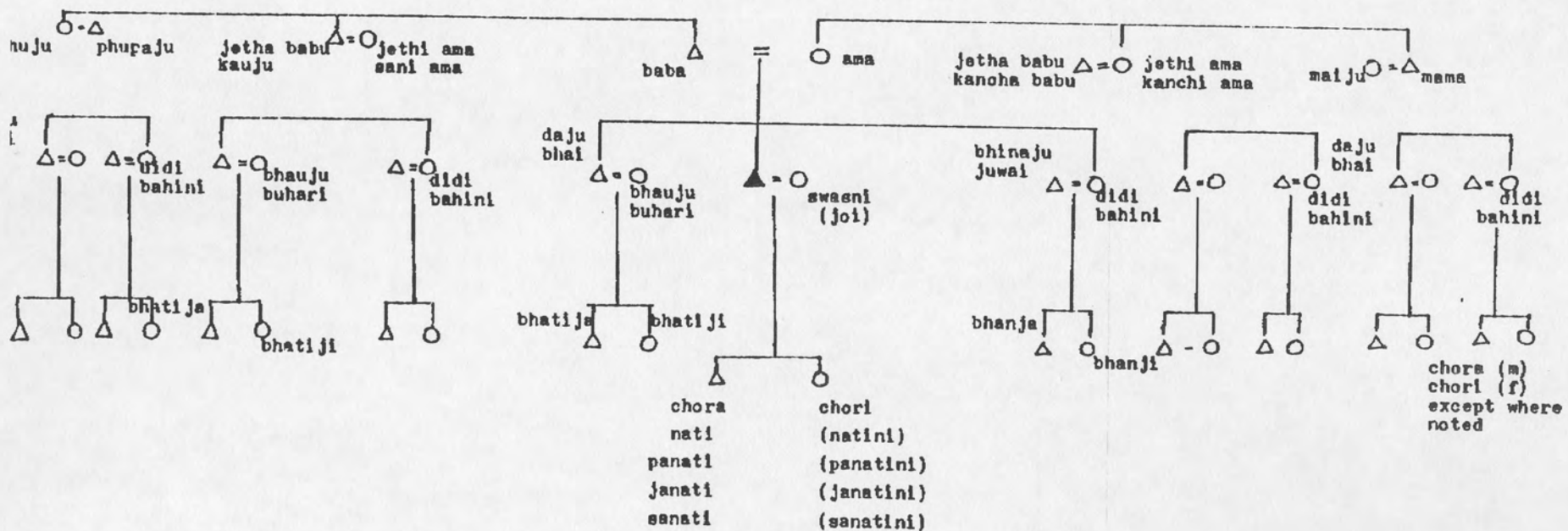
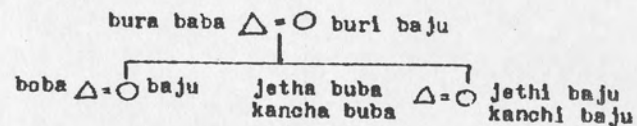
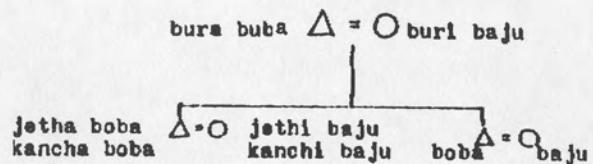
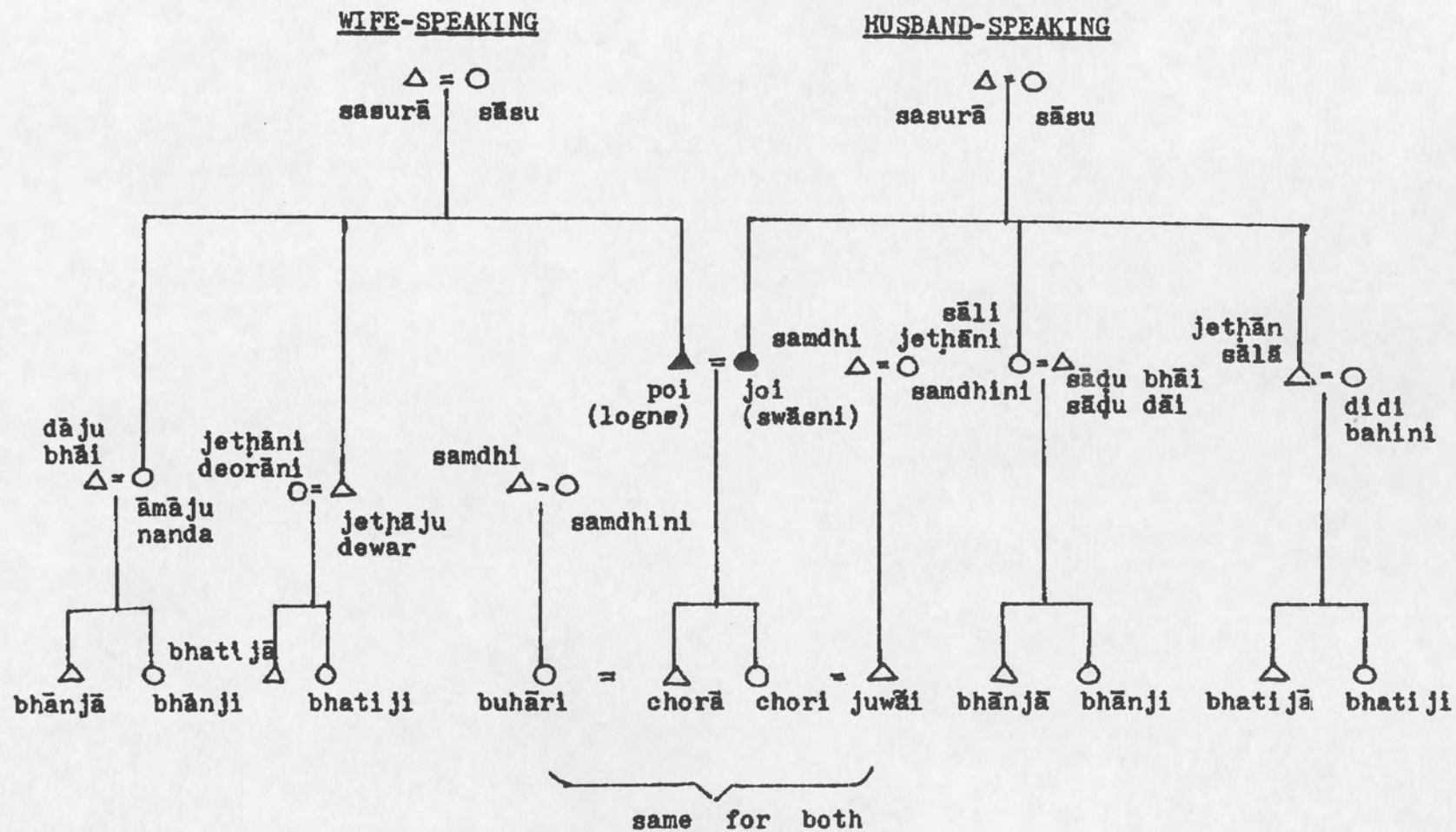


FIGURE 10: JUMLA KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY - 2



respect then responds with "jaihos" (lit. let there be praise). Although this is a traditional greeting, it is to some extent being replaced by the folded hands "namaste" common in the rest of Nepal in which it is the responsibility of the less senior person to give the greeting first.

The respect relationship between males in the patriline is simultaneously strongest and most vulnerable to being broken down within individual households. Since the household unit is economically independent and the source of all food and property for its members as well as the locus of the strongest emotional ties, it is here that the drama of family relationships is most intensely played out.<sup>1</sup> Aside from tensions arising from conflicting loyalties to parents and wife which is briefly discussed later, most conflicts with the prescribed respect relationships among males arises over the inheritance rights and the division of property. As long as the household stays together, all authority over the family property is vested in the household head (muli) who is the eldest living male in sound mental health. However, all sons are aware that they are to receive an equal share of the property at the time when the household is divided and occasionally demand this share prior to the muli's death in order to accommodate tensions arising from other sources. Competition between brothers is frequently in evidence, again resulting in a conflict with the respect relationships which the patriline

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Sex and Motherhood."

demands.<sup>1</sup> Despite the conflicts which occur, however, the male members of a household, though hierarchically ordered through respect relationships, usually have close emotional ties and a greater degree of mutual trust than is possible even with non-household sāk members.

In many respects, the mother-son relationship is identical to the father-son model of respect. Sons are expected to give "jaideo" to their mothers (and other women who fit this classificatory position such as the grandmother and Fr Br Wi), and mothers return the greeting with the female counterpart called atu in which the woman cups her hand under her chest and bows slightly. However, the relationship with the mother is usually closer than with the father who tends to be a more distant figure.

The most subservient and respect giving position in the household is the daughter-in-law/wife. Often thought of as a servant, the daughter-in-law/wife is "expected to be attentive, subservient and pleasing"<sup>2</sup> to her husband and all members of the patriline senior to him. She is expected to do all of the demeaning labor such as washing the pots and pans and carrying manure to the fields, to rise earlier than everyone else, and to retire later. Although theoretically

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Shrestha, Jan Jivan : 78-88, for an excellent case history of politics in Jumla which stems around the conflict of two brothers.

<sup>2</sup>Bennett, "Maiti-Ghar" : 13.

incorporated into her husband's patriline at marriage as demonstrated by the fact that it is the patriline that is required to conduct the death rites and observe full death pollution, Bennett has shown that she does not in fact achieve this status until she has borne sons and established political alliances.<sup>1</sup>

Although the daughter-in-law/wife must show respect to all patriline relatives senior to her husband, the nature of the relationship varies with each member. With the father-in-law and husband's elder brothers she has a respect-avoidance relationship. The relationship is demonstrated by her atu which must be done from a distance so there is no bodily contact. If contact does occur by accident, particularly with the husband's elder brother, then a brief ceremony must be conducted across the portal in which the wife pays the elder brother for her mistake. Although veiling does not take place and Jumla women always have the head covered with a folded blanket anyway, purdah in the sense of remaining almost invisible does take place.<sup>2</sup>

The wife's relationship with the husband should publicly conform to the respect-avoidance described above. However, the rule regarding contact does not apply, and the wife should greet her husband by touching his feet (dhok garne).

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Idem., "Sex and Motherhood".

<sup>2</sup>Idem., "Maiti-Ghar" : 17.

In fact this form of greeting is rare and many Jumlis state that the wife should not give any greeting to her husband. In private, it is a wife's duty to respect and obey her husband and her future status in the household is largely dependent on the closeness of the relationship she builds with him.<sup>1</sup> In Jumla, as will be seen, there is also an alternate model of husband-wife relationships; however the ideal respect relationship here described is still considered the norm.

A daughter-in-law's closest contact is almost always with her mother-in-law and husband's elder brothers' wives. The most subservient greeting, either referred to as a "special atu" or dhog garne is reserved for the mother-in-law and husband's elder sisters and involves touching the feet of the person respected. The husband's elder brothers' wives receive a normal atu equivalent to that given to her elder sisters. The mother-in-law as the female head of the household (called ghar-dhandā after her responsibility for cooking the household meals) is directly responsible for overseeing the daughter-in-law's activities. This, in addition to a variety of other problems, often leads to a great deal of tension between the daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law, or if the female household head is one of the elder brother's wives, between the latter and the daughter-in-law. This tension often places the husband in a position of conflicting loyalties (mother and father versus wife) and is often the reason a joint family

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pages 13-14.

splits despite the prescription that a son's loyalties should be first to his parents and the patriline.<sup>1</sup>

As noted by Bennett, "the one exception in the daughter-in-law's relations with affinal men is her relation with her husband's younger brother."<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the daughter-in-law's relationship with her husband's elder brothers, this relationship is characterized by affection and joking. Nominally the younger brother is considered hierarchically inferior as is demonstrated by his obligation to give jaideo to his brother's wife, however his stronger position within the patriline nullifies this inferiority such that the two can interact on an "equal" basis. The joking affectional relationship often contains sexual undertones and although vehemently denied by Brahmans and Chetris as a violation of "bone-relation" (hār nātā), levirate does seem to be practised among the Pabais and Dums and even infrequently among the Chetris. The following proverb known throughout Jumla records this practice:

Always flower, O Datte tree  
Never (be) naked,

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<sup>1</sup>One elderly informant distinguished the quality of sons on this basis. A suputra (good son) loves his parents more while a kuputra (bad son) has greater loyalty to his wife.

<sup>2</sup>Bennett, "Maiti-Ghar" : 18.

When the elder dies then move to the younger  
Never (be) empty.<sup>1</sup>

The hierarchically ordered respect relations which characterized all ghar relations except the daughter-in-law's relationship with the husband's younger brother described above and identified by Bennett as "patrifocal" is exemplified in the festival of Dasai celebrated throughout Nepal and in India under the name of Dashera. On the tenth day of this festival (dasami) all sāk relations must exchange ritual greetings in the form of ṭikā (vermilion placed on the forehead). However, in contrast to the rest of Nepal where the elder members of the patriline give ṭikā to the younger members, in Jumla the younger patriline members give ṭikā upwards through the hierarchy following the pattern of other greetings. Despite the reversal of ṭikā-giving direction in Jumla, the central conception of an hierarchically ordered patriline is still expressed and reinforced through this festival. For instead of equating the Dasāi ṭikā (in Jumla called pithā lāune) with the ṭikā of blessing given out by the King or the priests of various gods as is done elsewhere in Nepal, Jumlis view this ṭikā as a means of showing respect and reaffirming authority.

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<sup>1</sup>phula phula datteliyo / nāngi nabhayā / jethi mari  
kānchi sari / khāli nabhayā.



Māiti Relations:  
Affection and Reversal<sup>1</sup>

To even a greater extent than is found in the rest of Nepal a Jumli woman's tightly structured and hierarchically subservient position in her husband's house is reversed in her natal home (māitā). In her māitā, she is treated with respect, given considerable freedom of movement, and relieved of the demeaning jobs of carrying manure and wood and washing dishes. It is therefore not surprising that women express a strong preference for their māitā, as shown in the following song:

With seven pairs of bulls, dear one [sāhi]  
And with a Bigadha of wood we have plowed the field  
One just talks about the husband's house  
But the māitā is far better.

To the extent that the daughter/sister is a member of her natal patriline her status is hierarchically ordained by her generation and age vis-a-vis the male members and she must respect those elder than herself. However, this general notion of respect is tempered and at times reversed by stronger ideals of affection and ritual respect in which the daughter/sister is considered to have a higher status than the male members. Thus the relationship between fathers and brothers towards their daughters and sisters respectively is characterized by affection and a kind of protective respect which is completely different from the respect relations found else-

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<sup>1</sup>This section corresponds to the model of kinship relations identified by Bennett as "filiafocal" in "Roles of Women."

where in the patriline.

Like other areas of Brahman-Chetri society in Nepal, the protectiveness a woman receives from her māitā includes the right to a share of her natal patriline's food. Jumlis consider that it is part of the māiti's dharma to feed and clothe its daughters/sisters whenever they return from their husband's house. This obligation extends to extended or permanent residence in the māitā, and though socially somewhat disapproved, a woman may usually leave her husband's house if she finds it intolerable and return to live in her māitā with the assurance that she will be cared for until her death.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike other Brahman-Chetri areas, however, the māiti's protectiveness does not extend to a woman's sexual activities. As will be discussed later, women who return to their māitā are free to attend singing parties (chotti basne, chotti khelne) in which sexual liaisons are accepted as the norm. Although the woman's natal patriline do not participate in the same singing parties and are supposedly unaware of their occurrence, they in fact give their tacit approval.

As discussed by Bennett and Haimendorf, the ritual respect shown to daughters/sisters stems from a notion of their sacrality. While the husband's house bases its relationship with affinal women on their sexual and polluting

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<sup>1</sup>As shown by the following song, this possibility is eliminated if there are no fathers or brothers to take care of a woman in her māitā: Go sister and pluck some greens / there is no greens in the garden // I am not happy in my ghar / And I do not have a brother in my māiti.

aspect, the māitā relates to its women on the basis of their purity as daughters and sisters.<sup>1</sup> This respect for the sac-  
rality of women in their māitā is illustrated in the festival  
of Tihār (referred to as jemā dutiyā in Jumla) when brothers  
are fed and protected by the ṭikā given by their sisters; and  
in the kanyādān ceremony discussed later in which the patri-  
line individually washes the feet of the bride they are giv-  
ing away.

Kanyādān: the Merit-  
orious Gift of a Bride

The above described kinship system, which largely  
conforms to the pattern of high caste kinship throughout Ne-  
pal and much of Northern India, is perpetuated through the  
Sanskritic form of marriage called kanyādān (virgin-daughter  
gift). Although many of the rituals associated with a kanyā-  
dān marriage are, as will be seen, particular to Jumla, the  
basic format of this kind of marriage are not unique to Jumla.

Literally speaking, kanyādān is the only legitimate  
"marriage" (biyāh, vivāh). Thus, kanyādān marriages are cal-  
led byāite to distinguish them from all other kinds of mar-  
riages which are collectively called lyāite (taken) and for  
which the term biyāh cannot be used. The distinguishing fea-  
ture of kanyādān as "true marriage" is that the bride is given  
as a meritorious gift (dān) from one patriline to another. In

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Maiti-Ghar;" Furer-Haimendorf, "Chetri  
Caste".

order to be meritorious, the gift must be pure and the receiver of a higher status than the giver.<sup>1</sup> Thus the bride should be a virgin (kanyā) and the wife-receiving lineage is temporarily elevated above the wife-givers.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, although a man can be married more than once, a woman can only have one kanyādān.<sup>3</sup>

This necessity for purity is often reflected in the practise of arranged child-marriages which account for approximately 60-80 percent of the kanyādān marriages in Jumla. This custom (riti-thiti) insures the purity of the bride as well as allowing the parents to make a satisfactory alliance. In exchange for a pure bride, the wife-givers receive merit (punya) which increases their stock of good karma as well as enhancing their earthly prestige. Romantic love or the mutual affection of bride and groom is irrelevant within this system except in the cases, discussed below where the kanyādān is arranged at the request of the bride and groom.

The elevation of the status of the wife-receivers above the wife-givers results in a special relationship between these kin-groups. Whereas, according to age the son-in-law

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<sup>1</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders.

<sup>2</sup>In other areas this requirement is often institutionalized in hypergamy. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>This notion is expressed in the following proverb: sixteen sihār (the jewelery of marriage) belong to the husband / one sihār belongs to the wife.

should respect the father-in-law and greet him first as his inferior, the elevation of his status through being the recipient of the kanyādān demands the reverse. Thus, when greeting each other, the son-in-law attempts to greet his father-in-law first in a special kind of jaideo called pāilā in which both hands are joined towards the other's feet, the father-in-law attempts to bow to the feet of the son-in-law (dhok garne) usually resulting in a mutual bow in which each restrains the others hands from touching his feet. The son-in-law is accorded high respect in his father-in-law's home to such an extent that among some Brahmans and Dums he is utilized as the family priest (purohit).

From the perspective of the bride's brothers, their sister's husband, though treated with respect, becomes either an elder or younger brother (dāju or bhāi) depending on whether their sister is older or younger than they are. However, in relation to both their sister's and their wife's sister's children (called bhānjā or bhānji) they have a special relationship of obligation and respect such that they are required to bow (dhok garne) to them and act as their protectors and mentors. This unique māmā (maternal uncle)-bhānjā relationship, which is with different emphasis, found throughout Northern Hindu society<sup>1</sup> is in many ways similar to the relationship between father and daughter and is elucidated in the

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Maiti-Ghar"; Idem., "Roles of Women"; Campbell, Saints and Householders; Mandelbaum, Society in India.

description of the life-cycle ceremonies.

### Pollution and Sin

The kinship system describes above, which is based on the kanyādān system of marriage as a means of resolving the conflict between the ambiguous role of women and the patri-lineal ideal, can from one perspective thus be seen, together with the jāt caste system, as an organization of society which attempts to avoid pollution and sin (pāp). Or, stated positively, it is a systematic way of maximizing purity and merit according to the overall model of dharma, although as has been noted, this is by no means the only considerations which have affected its organization.

The avoidance of pollution has been noted in the un-touchability of Dums, the restrictions concerning food, death pollution, and the menstruation of women. Although these kinds of pollution (as well as others not yet discussed) cannot be examined in detail here, it is possible to divide the different kinds of pollution into some general categories. These categories used by Jumlis, do not form a consistent model as in other areas such as the Havik Brahmans described by Harper for South India.<sup>1</sup>

Chui (from chune--to touch) refers to all pollution that can be obtained through touching another person who is

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<sup>1</sup>Edward B. Harper, "Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion" in Religion in South Asia, ed. Edward B. Harper (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964).

polluted such as a Dum or a menstruating woman. By extension it is also used to refer to persons in the polluted state and menstruation is frequently referred to as chui--although it is here classified as sutkeri pollution. Sutkeri is divided into two kinds: thulo (big) sutkeri or birth, and sānu (small) sutkeri or menstruation. Although both of these kinds of sutkeri primarily affect women, they are also polluting to a lesser degree to the men of the household and, for certain situations such as marriages, to the whole sāk. Jutho refers to all non-sutkeri pollution including pollution which comes from death, eating, defecating, and the pollution arising from touching a chui person.

The degree of pollution differs according to kind and relationship. The mildest forms of pollution such as those associated with eating, defecating and to a lesser extent sexual intercourse, are highly temporary, lasting only until a brief washing with water restores the status ante quo, which may be described as the normal state. Severer forms of pollution progressively make the individual: 1) unable to do worship, 2) unable to give water or cook, and 3) untouchable, a state which is the Dums permanent lot. In menstruation and child-birth, a woman starts with the severest restrictions and then progresses through each of the stages according to a set schedule until she again achieves her normal state. In Jumla this schedule is stricter and more prolonged than in other Brahman-Chetri areas of Nepal. Thus menstruation in Tila Nadi Khola involves three days of complete untouchability during

which the woman cannot enter the house, followed by four days<sup>1</sup> in which she can enter the house but cannot cook, followed by an additional day through which she cannot attend a pujā (worship). For childbirth, the respective figures are ten days untouchability, thirty days (including the first ten) of no cooking, and fifty days of no worship. During this pollution of their women, the household men are only restricted from doing worship during the days of untouchability--following which they return to their normal state.

When sufficient time has elapsed to move from a state of severer pollution to a milder form, the ritual transition is accomplished primarily by washing with water. Thus, a menstruating woman will wash after the third day, the seventh day, and the eighth day. Following the seventh day, however, the purificatory efficacy of water is supplemented by drinking cow's urine, a practice also followed after the other kind of sutkeri. The accidental or necessary touching of a Dum, though, only requires that water be briefly sprinkled over the hand or the body. In the case of childbirth or death, the final purification is also accomplished by a religious ceremony conducted by the family priest.<sup>2</sup>

In order to move from the normal state to a state of greater purity, bathing in water is combined with various measures of austerity such as fasting and sexual continence.

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<sup>1</sup>In some areas this is reduced to two days.

<sup>2</sup>cf. the next chapter.



Thus a temple priest (pujāri) about to perform a large pujā or a bride's father about to give away his daughter in kanyā-dān will be required to eat one meal the previous day and nothing on the day of the event itself as well as to abstain from sexual intercourse and to bathe thoroughly.

Any violation of the above restrictions attending purity and pollution constitutes sin (pāp), although the degree of pāp incurred is relative to the gravity of the offense. A high caste Jumli forgetting to purify himself after touching a Dum constitutes only a minor infringement and one which is unavoidable on trips to the Terai or India, although Jumlis are more religious about its observance than in many other areas of Nepal. In contrast, a menstruating woman or untouchable who intentionally conceals her/his polluting state and touches or prepares the food for a tāgādhāri male incurs great pāp, the magnitude of which is likely to affect the kind of re-birth obtained in the next life.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, the austerities and bathing associated with attaining a high degree of purity results in the accumulation of merit.

In addition to the violations of the rules governing purity and pollution, pāp is obtained from violating the caste and kinship rules governing marriage. Aside from inter-

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<sup>1</sup>Drs. Lila and Prasanna Gautam, who were the medical officers for Jumla Hospital reported that the fear of violating sutkeri is so strong that several women have died because they could not be touched to be brought to the hospital, or once in the hospital will not be touched by their male relations. Personal communication.

caste marriages which result in only minor pāp (unless one partner to the marriage is a Dum and the other a cokho), this form of pāp is primarily centered around the notion of incest. The ambiguity which infuses these rules on the affinal side is further evidence of the central conflict between the patrilineal ideal and the necessary role of women.

Incest within the patriline is easily determined on the basis of thar, although the existence of two or more gotrā within the thar allows individuals to overcome the thar restrictions if they find that they are of different gotrā. Assuming that the gotra are also the same, any intercourse between members of the same thar is thus considered incestuous. However, occasional liaisons and even rare biyān marriages take place resulting in some pāp--though for this to occur within the hakdār would result in māhā-pāp (greatest sin). If discovered, this latter kind of incest results in complete social ostracism in addition to accumulation of bad karma.

Among affines, as noted, the boundaries of incest and the resultant marriage regulations are ambiguous. Jumli Chetris and Brahmans while affirming the practice among Thakuris and Matwālis (who usually deny it), often state that they oppose any form of cross-cousin marriage. They state that there must be at least seven generations distance in order to repeat or reciprocate a marriage between two patriline, or five generations distance if the mother's or sister's descendents are traced through the daughters who in each generation marry

into another patriline.<sup>1</sup> In fact, although I did not find a case, Jumli Chetris would cite rare instances of Mo Bro Da marriage, and my census revealed cases of Fa Mo Bro So Da and Fa Fa Si So Da marriage, which would be theoretically incestuous. When questioned regarding these cases of one generation removed cross-cousin marriage, most Chetris admitted that they did not really feel that this was pāp, although they expressed a preference for at least three generations depth. However, when asked to list the various kinds of incestuous pāp, Jumlis always listed incest with Mo Bro Da or Br Da immediately after one's sister in severity and it is clear that despite the ambiguity that surrounds cross-cousin marriage the sacred relationships of māmā-bhānjā and father-daughter make cross-generational intercourse within these relationships a very serious sin.

The importance of family relations and incest is exemplified by the following case of rape which occurred in Sinja Khola during a saptami (seventh day) festival at Bhagwati Temple during Dasai. The girl, who was a daughter-in-law in a nearby village, was raped in the evening by a boy from another village when she went into the bushes to relieve herself. When the girl's cries were heard, others at the festival ran down and proceeded to beat the boy, although not too seriously. The father-in-law of the vic-

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<sup>1</sup>For similar but different rules, see Doherty, "Brahman-Chetri Kinship" : 35-36.

tim then went to the Pradhan Panch and village elders and demanded justice, either in the form of a large fine (the figure of Rs, 3,000 was mentioned) or by sending him to jail for the mandatory sentence of six years. Following two nights of arbitration and discussion, a third option was finally accepted. This punishment required the boy's family to pay the sum of Rs. 120 to the girl's father-in-law, but more significantly, to suck the girl's breast in public. This act was acceptable to the girl's father-in-law in lieu of the other punishments because it required the boy to acknowledge the girl as his mother for the rest of his life and thereby suffer the humiliation of having committed symbolic incest.

From the above description of purity and pollution and sin and merit, it can be seen that Jumla society's organizing rules reflect the attempt to avoid pollution and sin and maximize purity and merit. The dhārmic ideal for which this model of society strives is the complete elimination of all pollution and sin, which--since most pollution and sin arises from the bodily processes--would involve complete celibacy, fasting, etc. as is idealized by the gotrā system of succession through saints. However, as noted earlier, this ideal is untenable since it conflicts with the necessities for continuing life such as food and sex. Thus, these organic necessities are carefully contained and regulated in order to minimize the necessary pollution and confine it to the extent possible to particular individuals, either permanently through caste and

its rules of commensuality and endogamy, or temporarily through rules governing such organic facets as the daily pollution of eating or the monthly pollution of women. Since women are subject to the greatest pollution through their involvement with childbirth (and its potentiality in the form of menstruation) much of society's organization is concerned with their roles and their transfers from one patriline to another. As the incest rules for affinal relatives demonstrate, kinship is reckoned bilaterally to some extent, although the confusion surrounding cross-cousin marriage shows that the inclusion of affines conflicts with the ideal of a unilineal patriline descent system and the latter justifies infractions of the former.

Non-Dhārmic Social Models: Cāl-Calan

Let the water be flowing in  
the mill  
Let the miller be absent

Either I should not have any  
manhood  
Or you should not have a  
husband

Jumla Love Song<sup>1</sup>

The organization of Jumla society by caste and kinship as described in the previous two sections were labeled jāti-dharma and kul-dharma respectively in order to indicate their partial derivation and overt correspondence

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<sup>1</sup>padaloudo pāni hoi jā / ghatalo koi nā ho // ki mati bhardā nā ho / ki dāi ko poi nā ho.

to the orthodox Brahmanical reference model of dharma. For, although it was noted that there are many other considerations both historical and ecological which appeared to be taken into account in the actual organization of these Jumla caste and kinship models, Jumlis derive its legitimization from its adherence to the principles of dharma and its presumed Sanskritic authority. As the analysis of the varna system, the patrilineal ideal, and the principles of purity and pollution and merit and sin attempted to show, principles of dharma do in fact inform the organization of these social models and place them within the framework of the Hindu eschatology of karma, rebirth, and indirectly, moksa. The relevance of these models for understanding much of Jumla social action was demonstrated in the arenas of inter-caste, inter-familial (i.e. marriage), and intra-familial relationships and its relative vitality as means of ordering social action vis-a-vis other high caste areas of Nepal was shown in the orthodox strictness with which certain restrictions regarding pollution are upheld.

However, as was partially indicated by the number of castes descendents from mixed marriages and the brief reference to singing parties, many of the prescriptions of these dhārmic models for social action are regularly violated. In fact, Jumla social life exhibits a far greater degree of unorthodoxy or violations of the dharmic social order than other areas of high caste Hindu culture in Nepal. This unique combination of orthodoxy and unortho-

doxy was first noted by Haimendorf in the following comment regarding female remarriage:

While conforming to the various dietary and pollution rules as strictly as any other high caste Hindus, they have adopted a tolerant attitude vis-a-vis the inconsistency of wives no less than of husbands, and the percentage of women married a second or even third time is high.<sup>1</sup>

While second and even third "marriages" for women are found among other Brahman-Chetri groups in Nepal, perhaps to a greater extent than is usually recognized, the incidence of such marriages is still relatively low enough to be partially dismissed as exceptions to the norm. In Jumla, my data supports Haimendorf's contention that, in contrast, the percentage is high. For according to my own rather limited sample, confirmed by observation in other villages, approximately 30% of all marriageable women have been married at least twice.<sup>2</sup> Given the fact that this sample included women of all ages presently living in one village, it can safely be assumed that by the time of their death the number of women who will have been married at least twice will definitely be higher--perhaps near 40-50%. Such a high percentage can no longer be called an "exception," indicating that the accepted dharmic models for

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<sup>1</sup>Furer-Haimendorf, "Status and Interaction" :171.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Sharma's observation regarding the Matwali Chetris of Chaudabis Khola in which he notes that "a fairly large percentage of marriage in this valley is done by jāri (elopement); Sharma, "Matwali Chetris" : 53.

social action in Jumla are in themselves insufficient to explain Jumla society.

Co-existing with the dharmic models, therefore, are a separate set of non-dharmic models of social action or cāl-calān. These models are, whenever possible, partially integrated into the dharmic models, and, in fact, clear-cut distinctions cannot always be made between the two. However, in general, these models express values which are either antithetical or neutral with respect to the dharmic social order. In that sense, though expressed and acknowledged in certain contexts, they take on a more covert and less structured character--for they do not have the standard dharmā as their reference and source of legitimization.

The values expressed by these non-dharmic models of social action can be preliminarily summarized as love, equality, and pragmatism. While acknowledging the legitimate authority of the dharmically ordained social order and seeking to minimize violations of this order, these values stress the supremacy of emotions and practical (ecological) concerns over this order. Thus the models which embody these values are not always systematically organized, although many of them are institutionalized in various different contexts. However, their non-dharmic orientation gives them an "anti-structural" character similar to Turner's



anti-structural notion of "communitas"<sup>1</sup> which he describes as having "an existential quality (which) involves the whole man in his relation to other whole men" as opposed to structure which "has cognitive quality" and "is essentially a set of classifications, a model for thinking about culture and nature and ordering one's public life."<sup>2</sup> These values of love, equality, and pragmatism give a recognizable, if lesser legitimacy to the Jumla cāl-calān which violate the prescriptions of jāti and kul dharma. Among the most important of these that will be discussed here are all forms of lyāite "marriages", inter-caste friendships, matri-local marriage, and adoption.

Aside from the direct expression of these values in these cāl-calān, a direct expression of them is found in the Jumla songs called git.<sup>3</sup> Git songs, as a violation of the dharmic order, cannot be sung in front of relatives with whom one has a strong respect relationship. Thus they are sung by women only if they are in their māitā or in the forest with their friends, and by men mostly with friends of their own generation whenever they are off by themselves.

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<sup>1</sup>Victor W. Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., page 127. The value of Turner's model for understanding these values is explored in the concluding chapter.

<sup>3</sup>Other categories of songs in Jumla have separate names such as the dharmic māngal.

However, the context par excellence for git is the singing party--and the singing party, more than any other social institution, is the embodiment of the values expressed by the non-dharmic models for social action.

### The Singing Party

The singing party, referred to as chotti basne (sitting with the girls) or chotti khelne (playing with the girls), is usually arranged between a group of male friends (thetā or thito: boys) from one village and a group of female friends (theti or thiti: girls) at their natal village.<sup>1</sup> Both the boys and the girls may be either married or unmarried and their ages are usually between 14 and 35 although younger brothers and sisters occasionally talk their elders into letting them come along. However, under no circumstances may any of the boys be related to the girls to a close enough degree that intercourse between them would be considered incestuous. That is they cannot be of one hār (bone or blood), although as has been seen the applicability of this term to affinal relatives is ambiguously defined. However, the frequency with which this restriction is stressed by Jumlis indicates that despite other

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<sup>1</sup>Compare with the Gurungs rodighar and the Bhotiya-Byansis' rambang as described by Ellen Andors, "The Rodighar and its Role in Gurung Society," Contributions to Nepalese Studies, 1:2, June 1974; and C.A. Sherring, Western Tibet and the British Borderland (London: Arnold, 1916).

violations of the dharmic social order, the great sin (māhāpāp) of incest must be avoided.

Singing parties take place from about ten in the evening until dawn. Although they may take place throughout the year, they are especially prevalent during festivals when women have returned to their māitā. During the warmer summer months, they are arranged for some shed or clearing in the forest (ban); during the colder months of the year they take place in one of the inner animal sheds (got) beneath a house in the girls' village. Arrangements for the event are usually made by the boys either through a contrived "chance" meeting at a festival, wedding, or on the path, or through using the mediation of a younger brother of the girls.

Once arrangements have been made, the boys assemble at their village after their evening meal and proceed as a group (usually 2-10 members) to the assignation. Given the expense of flashlights, this usually involves fifteen minutes to one hour's walk in the dark. If the party is taking place in a cattle-shed, the boys will attempt to sneak into the girl's village (a feat which the barking dogs rarely allow) and either meet with the girls in the cattle-shed or quietly call them to assemble. This attempt at stealth (which made me very nervous during the initial parties I attended) is indicative of the awareness that this form of activity violates the dharmic social order. However, as Jumlis explained, the stealth was only a pre-

tense which was designed to avoid the shame/embarrassment (lāj) the girls' would feel if their fathers were aware of their participation. In fact, as most Jumlis admitted, their fathers usually did know of their participation and while overtly condemning it, tacitly gave their approval.

The singing party itself consists of a whole night of git singing, cutkilā singing,<sup>1</sup> joking, teasing, necking, and frequently, sexual liasons. In striking contrast to hierarchical mode of all kin relations, particularly that of husband and wife, relations between the sexes in the singing party is one of equality and mutual consideration. Although the girls may pretend to be shy at first (particularly with outsiders present) they soon overcome their shyness and remove the folded blankets (gomche) from their heads. Cigarettes and clay pipes (sulpā) are shared equally, with the boys frequently offering them to the girls first. The treatment of girls with consideration by the boys also extends to their oft-repeated obligation to stay until dawn--since they state that the girls are their responsibility during this period.

Along with the removal of restrictions on inter-sex behaviour, inhibitions regarding the expressing of emotions such as love and sorrow are also considerably lessened. These emotions are expressed both through song--where they

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<sup>1</sup>Cutkilā is another form of question and answer song which are somewhat more public than the git.

are the most frequent motifs--and through intimate conversation. An example of the latter occurred during one party I attended in which a young woman whose husband had been jailed for dealing in stolen images tearfully related the sorrows of her position in the ghar without her husband, and was comforted by the others present. Examples of the former are given below and throughout this section, however, since there are literally hundreds of git and since they are often extemporaneously composed, it is impossible to give even a representative sample.

In addition to expressing sorrow, many of the git songs concern sexual love and the problems of loved ones wishing to live together despite other marital ties and economic necessities. These love affairs frequently emerge out of singing parties. However, sexual relations do not usually occur during the first meeting at a party except with a few girls who are known to be "promiscuous". In general, sex usually takes place only after several, or even, many meetings, during which love (māyā) has developed. Jumlis state that once this has occurred, as indicated by the acceptance of physical contact, the invitation to have intercourse is usually given by the girl by rolling her eyes to one side. Then, depending on the number of people present (privacy within the cattle-shed is obtained through complete lack of light) they may go off to another cattle-shed. These sexual liasons occur with either married or unmarried women, and informants say that virginity is rare

above the age of fifteen or sixteen regardless of whether the girl has been married or not.

The following are some examples of love songs arising out of the liasons occuring in the singing parties and often sung within them:

Up above Black Ridge  
There is the wandering hawk  
You, O beloved have pretty limbs  
And today is the day to hold them

I have come to you, my lord  
Placing a pen in my ear  
The flower-garden is yours beloved  
Whichever flower you choose, pluck it

Meat is made tastier by spices  
Dried radish by butter  
Come and taste the nectar  
With the excuse of smoking tobacco

If you have betel nuts with you then leave some  
for me  
If you have none then give yourself to me  
Drink the sweat of love  
And give me a share of your youth<sup>1</sup>

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1 kālā lekh māthi pudā  
tyo rinnā bājai ho  
sun sāiko rupavati  
sumānu ājai ho

āira gayā hajurko pāti  
kān kalam koci  
phul bāri terai ho saiyā  
jo phul lāuchai roji

māsu mitho masālāle  
cānā mitho ghyule  
āi jānu khāi jānu rasal  
kakkadā kā nyule

cha bhanyā supāri di jāu  
nāi bhanyā dāi di jāu  
māyako pasinā bhijāu  
jovanko bhās dijāu

The Heavens, black with clouds  
 The heart, black with pain  
 Either do what my heart asks  
 Or kill me with the axe

I am the cowherd for my cows  
 I will make the damla for them  
 You say "Death take us both"  
 (but) We can live as yogis

The outsider has come looking for shelter  
 Will he find a shed?  
 I am married to one without manhood  
 If you are a true man, take me away

Together (with you) in the dream  
 When awakening there was no one  
 One who suffers owns nothing  
 But keeps earning heartaches

Some say an "airship" has come  
 Some say an "eagle-vehicle" (cilgādi)  
 In spite of weeding with the mattock and digging  
 with the hoe  
 I have to live in debt<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> sarga kālo bādālule  
man kālo dardaile  
kita mero manko gardhyāo  
kita kāṭa kardaile

mero gāiko mai guwālā  
mai bātulā dāmlo  
dubai laijā kalāle bhanchau  
jogi bhai khāula

pardesi bās khojdai āyo  
pāine hoki thāti  
namardāko sidur paryo  
laijā mardā āti

biujhyāta koi pani chainan  
sainā samācāko  
dukhiko ghar barai chaina  
janjāl kamāyeko

koi bhandā huājāc āyo  
koi bhandā cilgādi  
kuto gori bāuso  
khāni khānuchā rṅgari

Since dawn my brother has been hungry  
 I will fry the barley and millet  
 If you say to open the tie of my blouse--  
 If you say to tear it off, I will tear it off<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the repercussions of the sexual activity arising out of the singing party on the incidence of second and third marriages to be discussed below, it should be noted that this also leads to a fairly high percentage of pre-and extra-marital pregnancies. In the case of the women who are married and intend to stay with their husbands, these pregnancies are usually passed off as their husband's. In situations where this is impossible (i.e. the husband has gone from the home or the wife has lived for a long time in her māitā) divorce and re-marriage are the only options. In the case of unmarried girls, the parents usually attempt to arrange a "shotgun marriage", failing which they demand monetary compensation.

The attitude of Jumli men towards the participation of married women in these singing parties is ambivalent--showing the co-existence of the dharmic value of fidelity and the singing party value of romantic love. On the one

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<sup>1</sup>chakyalvā bobrā bhāi  
jau bhatta bhutulā  
khol bhūryā colikā tunā  
cud bhunyā cudulā

This song refers to a male lover who has stayed too long after dawn wishing to continue love-making while the woman must return to cook for her brother. She therefore insults him by turning his request for her to undress into a request for him to suck her breast i.e. to become her son.



hand Jumli men are pleased when they can attend the parties with other men's wives; while on the other hand they often state that they have forbidden their own wives to attend when they return to their māitā. The contradiction inherent in this "double standard" is apparent to many--however they continue to hope that their own wives will be faithful. As one Jumli stated, "the singing parties mean you can still have fun (enjoyment) after marriage".

Lyāite Marriages: Love Marriages, Elopement and Widow Re-marriages

The high incidence of plural marriages for women primarily take the form of jāri (elopement after a first marriage has already taken place, literally "adultery") and rāri (widow re-marriage, literally "widow"). These forms of marriage are termed lyāite and by the strict definition of biyāh are not considered "marriages" in the theoretical sense--although by any functional definition they can be considered as marriages. As has been noted these non-kanyā-dān marriages violate the dharmic precepts of female fidelity whereby a woman can only be married once and must remain devoted to her husband even after his death. However, they still seek to minimize these violations while placing priority on the values of love, equality and pragmatism celebrated in the Jumla love songs.

In fact, similar to recent developments in urban centers in South Asia, Jumla even has one form of byāite (first) marriage that expresses these values despite the

fact that it has been so integrated into the orthodox dharmic model that it still qualifies as a biyāh. This form of marriage, which has Sanskritic precedents in the Gandharva or Svayamvara (self-choice) form of marriage,<sup>1</sup> is referred to as "manko biyāh" (love marriage) or "manjusri biyāh" (choice marriage). This kind of love marriage takes place when an unmarried boy and girl decide to get married usually after many singing parties together and either convince their parents to perform a kanyādān since the sexual fact of their "marriage" is already publicly established and a traditional kanyādān with another husband would not be possible. Another variation of this form of marriage occurs when, after secret prior planning, a Brahman priest is called to the boy's house and a brief ceremony takes place on the night that the bride is brought to his house. Should the parents still want a kanyādān performed, this can still take place afterwards.

Although Jumlis stated that roughly 25-35% of first marriages of "self-choice" based on love take this form, an estimation corroborated by my census data, many of these do not culminate in a kanyādān ceremony and are of doubtful legitimacy from the point of view of the orthodox model. In some cases a kanyādān marriage is not performed because

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<sup>1</sup>R. Pandey, Hindu Samskaras, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969): 162-163; the svayamvara ceremony has recently been reintroduced into Chetri ceremonies in Kathmandu, Lynn Bennett, personal communication.

the families are financially unable to perform even a minimal kanyādān (called sānu biyāh). In these latter instances, Jumlis often state that the elopement is carried out with the secret knowledge and encouragement of the parents in order to avoid loss of face resulting from their inability to finance a proper marriage. In other cases, kanyādān cannot be performed because, even though no marriage for the girl has yet taken place, she has been promised and often formally engaged to another person. In either of these cases, and particularly the latter, the arranged fiancé is considered to have legitimate dharmic rights to the girl making the elopement a form of jāri that requires monetary reimbursement to be given to the fiancé. In addition, the girl's family that had made the arrangement is publicly embarrassed and regardless of their true feelings, are obliged to show a certain amount of disapproval over their daughter's actions.

The more common form of jāri marriage which accounts for approximately 80% of plural marriages for women occurs when the woman elopes with another man (poile jānu) while her previous husband is still living. This form of de facto divorce and remarriage is regulated by a number of conventions (cāl-calān) according to the situation. These conventions are primarily concerned with the amount of compensation (jāri tirne, literally "adultery fees") which must be paid to the previous husband but also includes obtaining the blessing of the gods, as will be described.

in a later chapter. The compensation paid is viewed as reimbursement for marriage expenses rather than as punishment or compensation for the loss of a wife.

A woman may obtain a "legitimate" or free divorce from a biyāh marriage if: 1) her husband becomes crippled or deformed, and 2) if over a period of years her husband either through extended absence or extreme poverty is not able to provide enough subsistence food for her survival (the name for such a husband is napunsak). However, in all other cases, including her husband's bringing in co-wives (gautā), a woman can only elope with another man on the condition that her new husband pays jāri compensation.

The amount of compensation depends both on the cost of the original marriage and the relative wealth of the two husbands involved. In addition, it depends on whether the woman is leaving her first, second, third or fourth husband. A woman's first elopement following a kanyādān biyāh marriage demands the greatest compensation, and may run anywhere from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 5,000 with an average between Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3,000 (equivalent to the cost of a good horse or milch buffalo). The compensation paid to a woman's second husband by her third husband will always be exactly half of the original sum paid to her first husband. If a woman again elopes to a fourth husband, she is considered "promiscuous" and the third husband will be fortunate if he receives half the sum he paid from the fourth husband. Thereafter if a woman should continue to elope with new

husbands, no compensation can be demanded or expected.

All male children and weaned female children are considered to be the property of the father, although unweaned male children will go with the mother until old enough to live with the father. However, the father may renounce any children he does not want, which, given the value of male children, usually results in the sons staying with the father and the daughters going with the mother even though they still retain their father's thar. The mother has rights over all clothing and jewelry given to her by her parents, but if she takes any jewelry given to her by her husband's family this amount must be added to the computation of the jāri compensation. This computation is usually a long and dispute-filled process requiring the mediation of others, and when an amount is finalized a document is drawn up upon which both parties affix their thumbprints.

Jumlis explain the high incidence of jāri elopement as a means for women to leave household situations which are intolerable because of the lack of love in favor of a household where she loves and is loved by her husband. As has been noted, a woman given in kanyādān assumes the most subservient role in the household, and if she is not loved by her husband or cared for by her mother-in-law, often finds herself in an intolerable situation which by comparison to her life in her māitā she finds unbearable. While her husband by arranged child marriage may not dislike her,

there is a good chance that once he has matured he will fall in love with another woman in a singing party or through some other circumstances, often leading him to bring in another co-wife who becomes his favorite. This accentuates the first wife's predicament, and even if she has not fallen in love with another man earlier, often leads to intensified efforts to find another suitable husband while she is at her māitā. If she then elopes with a new husband, whose wife by kanyādān has not already left him, the cycle may well continue with her husband's previous wife seeking another husband. However, it should not be assumed that wives elope merely when their original marital situation is not to their liking, although this is certainly the most common; for as the incidence of third marriages (approximately 5-10%) testify, wives or husbands may again fall in love with another person which can result in another elopement.

Since the jāri wife is based on a marriage of love, her relationship in her husband's household are necessarily somewhat different from that of a wife by arranged marriage. While she is still expected to respect her parents-in-law and observe the same ritual greetings as well as do the most despised jobs of carrying manure and washing dishes, her relationship with her husband gives her the political leverage to be more independent and less subservient. In addition, some of the relationship of equality established in the singing party carries over into the relationship with her

husband, and jāri wives do not usually hesitate to smoke or talk in front of their husbands. However, as the following song illustrates, the most important difference between a love marriage and one in which there is no love, is the presence of love itself:

The loved one who is dear to the heart  
 Even his kicks can be borne  
 The one not loved, a widow's son [<sup>1</sup>insulting term]  
 Even sitting in his lap is painful<sup>1</sup>

Love is also considered to be a major factor in widow remarriage (rāri, literally "widow") which is about one-third as frequent as jāri marriage; however Jumlis usually place more emphasis on the practical reasons for this kind of marriage. The principle reasons a Jumli gives for "remarrying" a widow is in order to fulfill the need for male offspring and in order to have a woman's labor. For, as Jumlis frequently say, "We would die without our women. Not only do they produce the sons we need to complete our lives and do our death ceremonies, but they do the most important work without which we could not support ourselves." Thus Jumli men whose wives have died, eloped, or are barren, and who have insufficient resources to attract and finance another biyāh marriage, or pay for a jāri, frequently look for widows whom they might marry. From the point of view of widows, unless they have sons who will care for them and

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<sup>1</sup>mankā piyāro daiko / lātta hone sai ā  
amā nakarnā kāle / koli hāle āi ā

make sure they obtain their share of the inheritance, they often lose their status within their husband's homes and often prefer to find a new husband who will care for them and with whom they can raise a family. However, each situation is unique and many cases of widow remarriage will depart from this generalized situation.

Since the death of the husband cancels the husband's expenditure in the marriage ceremony, no compensation is paid to the original husband's family upon remarriage of his widow. Likewise, should she elope once more, her second husband cannot claim any compensation unless she took with her some of his personal property. However, should a widow elope from her second husband, she is in danger of the people using the term rāri for her in its second and pejorative sense of "whore". Needless to say, the unorthodox nature of widow remarriage means that no religious ceremony is performed by a priest when widows are brought into the home.

In contrast to other Brahman-Chetri areas in Nepal where jāri and rāri marriages are considered aberrations and the resultant offspring of a lower status with curtailed inheritance rights, the relative legitimacy of these lyāite marriages is demonstrated not only by its prevalence but by the fact that offspring from these marriages are considered to have the same status as those from biyāh marriages. This equality of offspring is reflected not only in Jumlis' comments, but in the inheritance rules which give equal shares



to each of the sons of a byāite and lyāite marriage as long as the father is the same.

Despite this incontrovertible evidence of the legitimacy of lyāite marriages and the strength of the non-dharmic models of social action which sanction them, Jumlis are aware of conflict between these forms of marriage and the orthodox dharma. This awareness manifests itself in the ambivalent attitudes Jumlis' express in various contexts as well as in their attempts to integrate these unorthodox cāl-calan within the dharmic model. Thus, while lyāite marriages are accepted as legitimate and ultimately practiced by over 50% of the population, a certain amount of social disapproval is still attached to these marriages according to the merits and mitigating circumstances of each case. For example, Jumlis stated that if one biyāh wife is childless, unfaithful, ugly, or poor worker, most people would not strongly disapprove bringing in a second wife, particularly if she is a strong worker or a striking beauty. Similarly, if a woman is being badly treated by her husband and his family, or if her husband has gone to the Terai or India for two to three years, her elopement will be considered sympathetically. However, if a co-wife is brought in, Jumlis frequently expressed the dharmic obligation of the husband to continue to treat his first wife well, including continuing sexual relations. However, despite good intentions, the new wife usually becomes the favorite and continued sexual relations with both over many

years is rare.

For the potential elopers, the conflict between the dharmic values of marriage to one husband for life and the desire to find a better household situation, and for non-widows, a better husband, is often an agonizing conflict between being abused and committing a sin versus personal happiness. These conflicts are expressed in the following songs:

Above the rafters of the cattle-shed  
A snake (like) a pipe-stem (sits) coiled  
(How can I) not drink the Benares water (i.e. elope  
with the man she loves)  
But if I drink it, it is a sin (pāp)<sup>1</sup>

No son and no daughter  
Who is there to give in marriage?  
If I elope, everyone will abuse me  
If not, what is there to do?<sup>2</sup>

As the decision over whether or not to elope also requires (in the case of jāri) that the husband be financially compensated and since most women also do not wish to break their close relations with their natal home (māitā), these factors, as illustrated in the following song, are also part of the conflict felt by the potential eloper:

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<sup>1</sup> gotkā bharainā māthi  
nali jeurā sāp  
nakhāuta kāsikā jāl  
khāiā luta pāp

<sup>2</sup> chorā chaina chori chaina  
ma ke ko bhyā garu  
poilā jā desko gāli  
najāta ke garu

The rice grains given to the gods  
 Can you eat them?  
 Satisfying my māiti and my husband  
 Can you take me?<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes the difficulties involved, the social disapproval that will be incurred, and the sin that will be committed, dissuades the woman from eloping--leaving her wishing that her father had arranged her marriage with her lover:

Saun (the month of Srawan) has come, Saun full-  
 moon is here  
 The new clothes have been sewn  
 If my father had known  
 He would have given me to you<sup>2</sup>

However, at other times the blame for having married to the wrong husband is placed on a person's karma:

Had you, my loved one, been in my karma  
 It would have been written in our horoscopes  
 Go away, you are another's<sup>3</sup>  
 Why do you come before me?<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, as the following song illustrates, the ambivalence inherent in this conflict between two value systems, also allows karma to be used to justify elopement:

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<sup>1</sup>deutāko diyeko dānā  
bhoknā bhokaulā kyā  
māiti sujāi poiī bujāi  
lina sakaulā kyā

<sup>2</sup>sāun āyo , sāun puni āyo  
thālā sidiyāle  
merā bābā jāhne bhyā  
tā kā didiyāle

<sup>3</sup>rāi sugā karmaudā bhayā  
cinā lobidā hau  
pundā jāu paraemā lāo  
kina dekhi dā hau

(I) cannot put off  
 (That which is) required by karma  
 If I have to elope<sup>1</sup>  
 Why should I delay?<sup>1</sup>

The strength of the values supporting elopement in the face of dharmic conflicts was also demonstrated by a conversation I was present for during which the customs of India and the Terai were discussed. When the strictness surrounding the rule against widow marriage was mentioned, all the men laughed and several commented that the men there must be very stupid if they do not make use of a young widow's capacity for still bearing children.

Adoption and Matri-  
 local Marriage

The high incidence of child mortality, cretinism, and sterility in Jumla contributes to a situation in which many households find themselves without mentally and physically sound male offspring. Since both the patrilineal ideal, the life-cycle ceremonies, and the often expressed emotional necessity for a son require a male offspring for their fulfillment, the practice of adoption and matrilocal marriage found to a limited extent in other parts of Brahman-Chetri Nepal are prevalent in Jumla. Like lyāite marriages, the relatively high incidence of this cāl-calan in

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<sup>1</sup>tharera tharine haina  
karmako khōjā  
poilā jā nā jānai parne  
din gujāri khōjā

Jumla (according to my census, matrilocal marriages accounted for 16% of all marriages in the village of Dangibada) has given it an institutionalized character absent in other areas of Nepal.

Adoption, called dharam putra (son by dharma) or sampatti khāne, usually takes place within the sāk and is thus an extension of the patrilineal dharmic ideal. That is, a household without a son, will adopt an extra son of one of their relations by officially declaring their action to the rest of the village. This son will move in with his new household and will be treated the same as a natural son, with the same rights to inheritance and the same obligations to his adopted parents.

Some cases of adoption, however, do not take place within the patriline and must be incorporated through an ambiguous fictitious process. In these cases, the adopted son may either be an abandoned child whose parentage is completely unknown or considered to be of the same caste, or, more often, will be the son of an affinal relative. When the original thar of the son is known, his patrilineal identity becomes, like that of a woman's, ambiguous. On the one hand, his thar is considered to have changed to that of his adopted parents, and his sons will be of this adopted thar. On the other hand, however, he is also identified as another thar and will observe the full period of mourning for his real parents if they are known. Individually, as illustrated by a close neighbor in Dangibada,

he will sometimes refer to himself by one thar name, and sometimes by the other. For purposes of marriage, both thar are excluded as possible kutum.

A similar ambiguity arises in the case of matrilineal marriages. These marriages are arranged when a household has only daughters living or when the sons are unable to be married or have children. A household locates a marriageable man who either because of the poverty of his family's land holding or because there are too many brothers with which the land must be divided is willing to leave his family's home and suffer the slight loss of status associated with becoming a resident son-in-law (ghar juāi or dholāji-juāi). Following a biyāh marriage, the husband moves into his wife's household and is conditionally accepted as a son. That is, his sons will assume the thar of their mother<sup>1</sup> and he will have the obligation to perform the death rites for his parents-in-law. A resident son-in-law's share of the inheritance, however, is considered to be in the name of his wife. As long as he continues to care for her and her family, this land will be his to use. But if he wishes to bring in another wife without adequate reasons (such as the infertility or death of his present wife) he loses his right to residence and to a share of the property. A son-in-law

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<sup>1</sup>This identification of a resident son-in-law's children with their mother's thar is in striking contrast to the rest of Nepal and shows the extent to which these alternative values have been integrated in Jumla culture.

who maintains his residency is considered to have adopted his in-law's thar and will be called by that name; however since thar endogamy is not usually permissible he is also considered to retain his original thar and, if he leaves, will revert back to the latter.

Although these brief descriptions describe the general situation in which a poor son-in-law is brought in for a variety of dharmic, emotional, and practical reasons, many more complex reasons also occur. For example, one of the richest men in Dangibada who lives in the largest joint family (D1) with three brothers (one of whom died during the course of the fieldwork) maintains two wives in two villages. In his own household in Dangibada he has his byāite wife by arranged marriage. In another village over the ridge from Dangibada he is considered the resident son-in-law to a jāri wife whom he fell in love with at her māitā and whose brothers died subsequent to her first marriage. To complicate the matter further, he works in a government office four hours walk in another direction and is rumored to keep another unofficial wife at the room he rents near the office. This man, therefore, maintains three residences and is in constant circulation between them. His sons from his byāite wife will inherit their share of his land in Dangibada, and his sons from his jāri wife will take on the thar of their mother and inherit the land in her village. If he ever acknowledges the third marriage, her sons will also have a right to his Dangibada lands, although pressures

from his brothers will probably keep this from occurring. Although he maintains that his own thar is Dangi, his sons by his jāri wife will also perform his śrāddha (death rites) and from one point of view he can be considered a part of the jāri wife's thar. Although such an arrangement is accepted by his Jumla relations and neighbors, they also recognize that it represents a travesty of their orthodox kinship system.

Inter-Caste Love and  
Fictitious Ritual  
Kinship

In the previous discussion of singing parties and lyāite marriages, the role of caste was only mentioned briefly in order not to obscure the non-dharmic models of social action they represent. While it is true that most singing parties and most lyāite marriage do take place within the same caste, as was illustrated by the number of jāt descendent from mixed marriages, a sufficiently high incidence of inter-caste marriage takes place to consider it an accepted feature of Jumla society.

The reasons given for inter-caste marriages are almost exclusively love. In this sense, it is merely an extension of the values of lyāite marriages which place the love of two individuals higher than the orthodox dharmic rules of society. This value is expressed in the following song:



The sun is setting from the far side  
 The shadows are in the trees  
 Sleep does not search for a mattress  
 Love does not search for jāt<sup>1</sup>

(In other words: if one is tired and sleepy then one does not search for a bed but sleeps anywhere, if in love, one does not look into the caste of the other.) However, although love does overcome the concept of purity and pollution as it applies to caste endogamy, it does not overcome it as it applies to inter-caste food restrictions and other members of the same caste will not accept boiled rice from a lower caste wife. Furthermore, as was shown, the offspring of mixed marriages where the wife is of lower caste are of a lower status for at least two to three generations. But, as in other lyāite marriages, the offspring do receive their full share of the inheritance.

In addition to inter-caste heterosexual love, there are many examples of these non-dharmic values in the area of friendship between men and women with their own sex. Many Dum lagityās who spend considerable time at their lagi's village working side-by-side with their high caste patrons become respected good friends whose company is highly valued. In the case of non-Dum castes, such as Jyulyals and Pabais or Bhotias these friendships (īṣṭa sambandh) are often

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<sup>1</sup>bel buri pariudā āyā  
rukḥ paryo chāyā  
nid khojdaina ochyānayā  
jāt khojdaina māyā

formalized through rituals of fictitious kinship.<sup>1</sup>

These formalized friendships, described in detail by Bihari Shrestha<sup>2</sup> range from dharmā īṣṭā, the recognized friendship between a Pabai and a Jyulyal, through saṅgī mit, a ritualized friendship marked by the exchange of clothes and tikā, through sāini mit, in which pujā is performed during the exchange of clothes, tikā and gifts sometimes including cattle and horses. Although these rituals are sometimes performed by unrelated members of the same caste, they are more often used fictitiously to incorporate a member of a different caste into each other's kinship system. That is, the dharmic model of kinship which is by definition exclusive to each caste, is extended across caste boundaries to serve as a model in which to incorporate inter-caste love.

The strength of this system of ritual friendships is demonstrated by the fact that mit are obliged to observe full death pollution for each other and to relate to their ritual brother or sister in the same way as a real brother or sister. This ritual "siblinghood" extends to the festivals of Dasai and Tihar when the mit is expected to come to the

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<sup>1</sup>Formally ritualized friendships also occur with high castes and untouchables if after birth an astrologer determines that an evil influence by one of the planets can only be neutralized by such a relationship. This incorporation of inter-caste relationships within the orthodox system is discussed by Bihari Shrestha, Jan-Jivan, pages 70-72,

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pages 68-77.

house and receive or give tikā according to his mit's position in the household hierarchy. In addition, ritual friends have mutual obligations to assist each other in times of need which are taken very seriously and usually honored for life. In this connection, Shrestha records the following saying:

There are seven relationships (generations) among the sāk, and there are fourteen among the mit.<sup>1</sup>

That is, the mit relationship is double the strength of the patrilineal one--a feeling which leads many men to seek mit relationships with business partners for whom they feel a deep affection. For as the Jumla song says:

On the far side of the high meadow (pātan)  
The sheep are baa-ing  
If hearts and mind meet  
What can caste do?<sup>2</sup>

Jumla Society: A Mixture of Dharmic  
and non-Dharmic Models

As this chapter's discussion has attempted to describe, Jumla society operates according to two sets of models for social action: those that have been termed the orthodox dharmic models of caste and kinship and those that have loosely been grouped together under the rubric of non-dharmic models of social action. Each set of models embodies a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., page 73.

<sup>2</sup>pātankā pallo patti / bhedile bhyā garyo  
hitta milyo citta milyo / jātle ke garyo

different set of values which, as has been noted, are sometimes in conflict with each other. Thus, for example, while the dharmic models stressed the importance of avoiding pollution and sin and maximizing purity and merit in order to ensure a better rebirth and ultimate salvation, the non-dharmic models emphasized the importance of love and equality and the pragmatic needs for violating the dharmic precepts in order to fulfill emotional and subsistence requirements for life.

Although, as I have attempted to demonstrate, these models can be understood as having a phenomenological reality, the rigid division of them into two categories is, of course, merely a heuristic means of more clearly delineating Jumla social reality by grouping together indigenous categories of social action into abstractions that are based, as much as possible, on the logic of these Jumla models. As was repeatedly shown, non-dharmic models and their values were integrated to the extent possible into the greater authority of the dharmic models. Thus, instead of viewing these as non-dharmic models, it would have been possible to incorporate them into the dharmic models by considering them as deviations or exceptions to the norm. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate by both the high incidence of the exceptions and by the formalized legitimacy with which they have been institutionalized (in inheritance rules, for example) these exceptions can be better understood and explained by their adherence to a separate set of models

which lie at the practical and emotional outskirts of the dharmic models, and can be understood as forming in a loose sort of way a gestalt of their own.

Jumla society then, is a combination of these two sets of models. While Jumlis attempt in various spheres of social action to maintain the standards of dharmic society, and are in fact exceedingly strict with regard to the observance of some of its precepts such as avoidance of caste, food or menstrual pollution, the circumstance of their ecological situation and their counter-values of love and equality often result in social acts which are "non-dharmic" and which conform to a set of conventions (cāl-calān) which in part violate the riti-thiti of the dharmic order. This situation is illustrated by the fact that the great majority of women's first marriages are arranged by kanyādān. Theoretically these byāite marriages should last until death. However, by the end of their lives, at least half of the women, and if biyāh love marriages are counted, over half of the women end up in lyāite marriages based on love and practical necessities in which their relationships with their husbands include a greater degree of equality than the orthodox model requires. Since even many arranged marriages do end in loving relationships, or at least in relationships which are economically and politically secure through the production of sons, it can be seen that in some respects the value of love which is irrelevant to the dharmic model has triumphed over the structured order espoused by the

latter. From the opposite perspective, however, the non-dharmic models can be viewed as conventional means for structuring and controlling ad hoc situations not encompassed by the dharmic model, and to the extent that their institutionalization results on the partial integration of these non-dharmic values into the dharmic order, it is the latter that has taken precedence over the former.

This mixture of these various different models in Jumla social action is most clearly illustrated by particular case histories. The following example is a description of one such case history--Bado B in Dangibada.

Hari Mal Dangi was the youngest brother of E7 and E6's fathers and lived with his brothers in E bādo. After his first wife by a biyāh marriage produced two sons (B3 and B2) and died, he brought her sister in as a second wife by paying jāri to her original husband. Following Hari Mal Dangi's death without having had any living offspring from his second wife, this second wife went in rāri marriage to Nare Dangi of Bado A. Nare Dangi's first biyāh wife had died after giving birth to three daughters and one son who had all died as children. With his second rāri wife, Nare Dangi managed to have only one daughter, and thus had only four daughters and no sons.

Nare Dangi therefore married three of his daughters to men in nearby villages and brought in a residential son-in-law (B1) from the village of Babiro across the river. B1 comes from a very poor family--so poor in fact that his only

two brothers also married into Dangibada as residential sons-in-law, one with his mother-in-law's previous husband's brother's daughter (E7), and one with an only daughter in F Bado (F3). B1 then had two sons and two daughters with Nare Dangi's daughter. However, all of these children died, followed by the death of their mother. Since, by this time, Nare Dangi and his second wife had also died, B1 married a widow from Tatopani near his natal home of Babiro whose original home was in Sarmi over the ridge. Since B1 had inherited Nare Dangi's land following his first wife's death, he remained in Bado A until two more children by his second wife had also died. The oracle then declared Bado A inauspicious for him, and six years ago B1 helped to build and then moved to Bado B with two more children still living. In these six years he had an additional two children, one of whom died.

B2 and B3, the other present residents of B Bado, used to live jointly in E Bado even after the death of their father Hari Mal Dangi (the husband of B2 and B3's mother as well as of her sister, B1's original mother-in-law). B3, the elder brother, married only once, in a biyāh marriage with a woman from Babiro, the natal village of B1. However, he had only two sons that lived and no daughters. Of these two sons, one was blind in one eye from birth and by the age of eight had lost most of his sight in the other eye due to a cataract, and the other was a lāto (cretin) who had

difficulty in speaking and was uncoordinated in his movements.<sup>1</sup> Although there was no possibility of marrying his blind son, B3 did manage to arrange a child marriage for his lāto son. However, it became apparent that neither of these sons could have children or adequately take care of the property, so B3 brought in his wife's brother's son from Babiro as an adopted son. He then arranged a biyāh marriage for his adopted son with a girl from Ranka down the river. With his biyāh wife, the adopted son had four children, two boys and two girls, but all of them died. He therefore paid jāri for a woman he had fallen in love with whose māiti was in Kurari and whose ghar had been Tampti, a Pabai village up the valley beyond Sarmi. This jāri wife brought her only issue with her, a daughter of five years. At about this time, B3 decided, also on the dhāmi's advice to move with his brother of the joint household to a new house they built with B1 in B Bado. B3's adopted son, subsequently stopped sleeping with his first wife, and had one daughter (who had died) with his jāri wife as well as one son, who was still alive.

In the meantime, B3's younger brother had been married in a biyāh marriage to a woman from Sarmi, the same village as B1's second rāri wife. After five years of childless marriage during which his biyāh wife became increasingly blind (although she was not blind at marriage)

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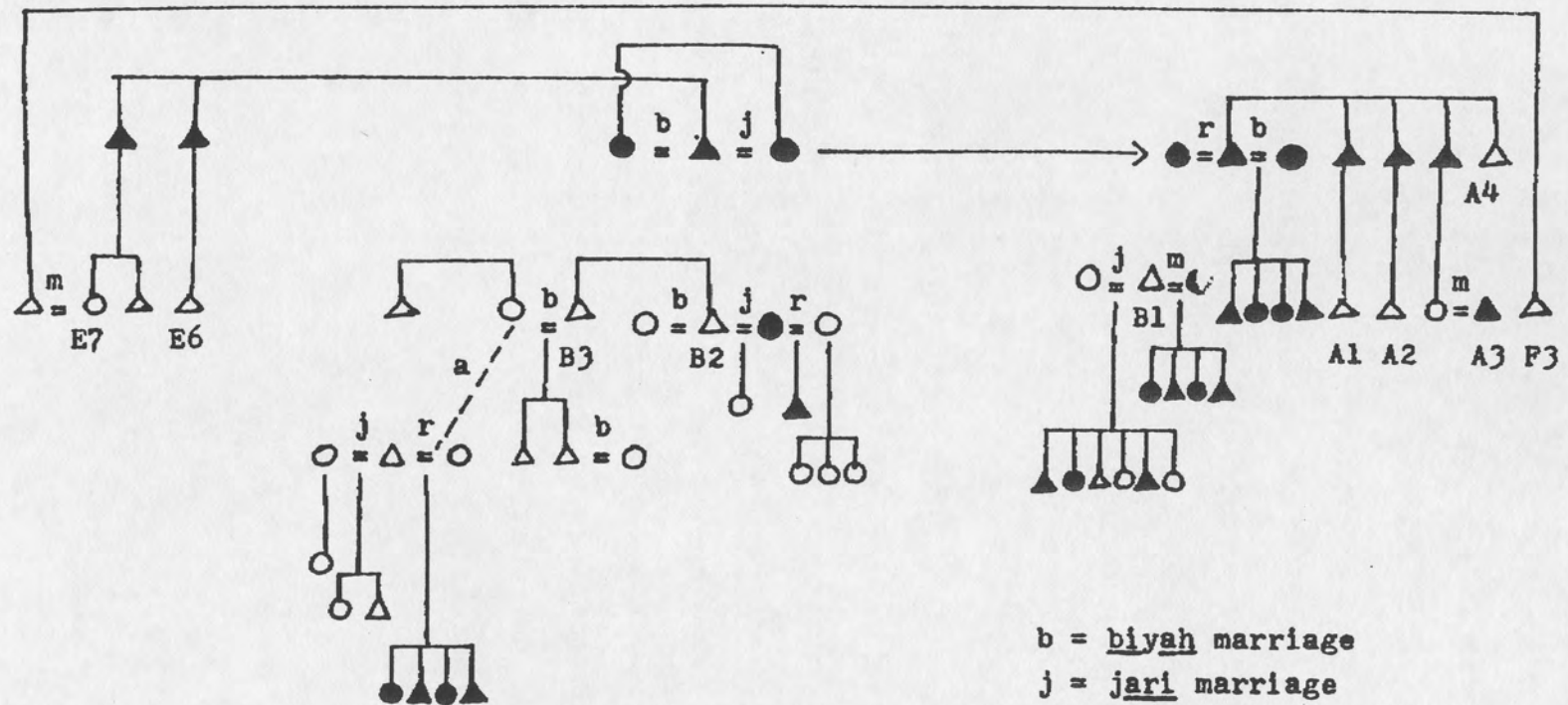
<sup>1</sup>B3's wife has severe goitre.



B2 brought in a second jāri wife whose māitā was across the river in Tatopani. This jāri wife died at childbirth, although her child survived as a lāti who was deaf. B2 then brought in a rāri wife who had delivered one daughter in her first husband's village near Rara lake, and two more daughters in her second husband by jāri in Tatopani village across the river before her second husband died and she eloped with B3. She brought two of these daughters with her, and during the course of fieldwork, the first daughter also deserted her second husband and returned to live with her mother. B3 had one son by this rāri wife, but he died. The presence of two (and later three) daughters in B2's household which were not his own children but who were given more food than the lāti daughter of his blind original biyāh wife became a source of conflict with B3, and about four years ago B2 and B3 split up their joint family and separated into two households.

This complex life history, illustrating the mixture of both dharmic and non-dharmic models for social action is shown in diagramatic form in Figure no. 11.

FIGURE 11 : E BADO CASE HISTORY



b = biyah marriage  
 j = jari marriage  
 r = rari marriage  
 m = matrilocal marriage  
 - - - a = adoption

## CHAPTER 4

BRAHMANISM: THE HOUSEHOLDER'S  
RELIGION OF HIDDEN GODSThe Brahmanical ModelConceptual Foundations

The concept of "Brahmanism" as used in this study cannot be exactly defined. It refers to that aspect of Jumla dharma (devtā dharma) which revolves around the Brahman puret (purohit: priest), his written texts and the gods that are the subject of these texts. In its underlying conceptions, its view of the nature of life and the universe, its acceptance of classical Hindu texts and myths, and its basic modes of worship, Brahmanism in Jumla is fundamentally the same as in most of Hindu South Asia. In fact, it is this core of shared "dharma"--that which makes Jumla religion "Hinduism"--which is here understood as the "Brahmanical model." Jumla Brahmanism derives from this model in the sense that it is based on it, and constantly refers back to it. However, like other "Brahmanisms" elsewhere, it has its own particular traditions (riti-thiti) which are sometimes unique, but are often found in slightly modified form in surrounding geographical areas.

While it is, of course, far beyond the scope of this work to present in detail the nature of the Brahmanical model--in effect the nature of classical Brahmanical Hinduism--it is important to describe briefly its fundamental tenets and orientation as understood in Jumla. Much of this task has already been accomplished in the preceding chapters, for what is here understood as the Brahmanical model is based on the same dharmic concepts that were previously elaborated in connection with models of social organization and concepts of social action. Devtā dharma is merely another aspect of kul dharma and jāti dharma. As noted in the Introduction,

dharma can be understood as the moral authority through which relevant action (karma) is prescribed and measured. The accumulation of this action is, in turn, the criterion for an individual's destiny (bhāgge) in each succeeding rebirth.

Dharma is the prescriptive model of truth and society. Karma is social action which is dharmically significant, either positively or negatively. When action is dharmically positive, or meritorious, it results in the accumulation of good karma or punya; when negative, or sinful, it results in the accumulation of bad karma, or pāp. This good and bad karma attaches itself to an individual's soul (purus) or through the identification of an individual with his patriline, to

an individual's forefathers, and determines the conditions of the soul's rebirth.<sup>1</sup>

The world in which karma, birth and death take place is referred to as sansār, or more colloquially, as yo lok ("this world"). Sansar is the realm of sin and merit and of pollution and purity. Dharmic prescriptions of social action and social organization can only be fulfilled by maintaining appropriate purity and conducting oneself meritoriously, but the physical constraints and conflicting values of this world make dharmic living a difficult task. This difficulty is largely explained by the classical Hindu cosmological notion of the yugas or "ages". Sansār is presently in the midst of the kali yug, the last degenerate age during which "truth and virtue is nowhere to be seen."

The immediate purpose of living dharmically in this world is to achieve a good rebirth; however, the ultimate purpose of life as defined by dharma is to achieve freedom from rebirth (mokṣa). While classical Hindu philosophers and Jumlis would both agree to this definition of salvation, their conceptions of the nature of this salvation differ. In contrast to classical ideas of mokṣa which have tended to

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<sup>1</sup>In the words of a dhāmi taped in Jumla, this concept means that "the poor and the wealthy have what they have because of their bhāgyas (destinies). Happenings depend upon the karma that you have brought with you at the time of birth. And there are some things which the children and grandchildren receive as rewards of the actions of their fathers and grandfathers."

stress its undefinable character, its transcendence of phenomenal, describable reality, Jumlis consider mokṣa to mean living in heaven (swarga) with the gods (Indralok-- the world of Indra). In fact, the term mokṣa (locally pronounced mocchā) is invariably used with the verb "to be" (hunnu) and most frequently in the phrase "mocchā hoṣ" which is understood the same as "swarga jāoṣ" ("may he go to heaven").

While most Jumlis agree that ultimate salvation is rebirth in heaven where they will live in bliss in the company of the gods, they are more concerned with the nature of their next rebirth. For although Jumlis sometimes cite the figure of 84 rebirths per individual soul, they most generally express the idea that there will be an indefinitely large number of rebirths before they will finally reside in heaven. They therefore view a good rebirth and the respect of society as the primary rewards for living a dharmic life.

Jumlis' notion of a good rebirth usually include the following characteristics: wealth, health, status (high caste), and a large harmonious joint family with sufficient sons. Implicit in this list is the notion that one will be reborn a human and a male. It is from such families that a person who has lived according to the dharmā has the best chance of being reborn in heaven; for such a fortunate rebirth is itself the fruit of having accrued good karma in previous lives.

According to the same logic, the lack of the characteristics of a good rebirth, such as poverty, ill-health, sonlessness, etc., can be indicative of sinful deeds (pāp) in prior existences. The fruit of this sin must be endured and the suffering accepted until it has become exhausted and a better rebirth can take place. The nature of the suffering is often directly related to the nature of previous sin. Thus, for example, a wandering ascetic (jogi), who is clearly distinguished from a saint or a guru, is understood as a person who is fated to live by begging because he lived by stealing or forcefully taking property in a previous existence.

As these conceptions of rebirth and mokṣa indicate, and as the example of the jogi confirms, Jumla Brahmanism is completely oriented to the householder (grhastha) dharma. The various yogic dharmas of renunciation and transcendence of the conditions of sansār (including celibacy and withdrawal from social and economic life) which are an integral part of Hinduism, are only found in Jumla Brahmanism to the extent that they are symbolically encapsulated in the dharmic models upon which much of Jumla culture is based. That is, the classical notions of renunciation and transcendence with their concomitant ideas of mokṣa are only a part of Jumla dharma in as much as they are incorporated into the householder's dharma--as viable options for individual lives,

the yogic options of renunciation and transcendence (including classical tantra) do not exist for Jumlis.

The complete orientation of Jumla Brahmanism towards the householder's dharma is also indicated by the fact that its primary concern is with life-cycle rituals, the saṃskaras (usually referred to by Jumlis as sanskrtis). Although a number of the rituals performed in these life-cycle ceremonies can be classified as local riti-thiti, most of the principal rituals are directly derived from Brahmanical models of Hindu South Asia. The texts recited by the Brahman purets and the accompanying ritual actions for these Brahmanical Samakaras are printed in Sanskrit with Nepali glosses in Varanasi by Brahman pandits and are based on the Sanskrit Paddhatis which are, in turn, based on earlier works in the Grhyasutras and, in a few instances, even the Vedas and Aranyakas.<sup>1</sup> These Brahmanical saṃskāras thus closely resemble those found in the rest of Nepal, which uses the same texts, as well as the rest of Hindu South Asia, which uses the same textual sources.

The Brahmanical ideal which serves as the dharmic model for these saṃskāras is the āśramas. The āśramas are conceived as four life-stages through which every high caste Hindu should pass in the course of a normal life: brahma-cārya (celibate student), gṛhasthya (householder),

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<sup>1</sup>R. Pandey, Hindu Samskaras, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969); Nilakshi Sengupta, Evolution of Hindu Marriage, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965).



vanaprasthā (forest dweller), and sanyāsa (wandering ascetic). However, the sāṃskāras as life-cycle rituals for householders, do not recognize the last two stages by way of any ritual, and incorporate the first only as an intermediary stage to householdership. The values of renunciation and transcendence (i.e. "yogic dharma") are, nevertheless, symbolically expressed in some of the sāṃskāras and to a certain extent the āsrāmas can be viewed, like the varṇa system, as an ideal model for the samskaras.<sup>1</sup>

The classical Brahmanic sāṃskāras, to some extent based on the ideal model of the āsrāmas, include a large number of rituals starting with conception and continuing after death.<sup>2</sup> In Jumla, like elsewhere in rural Hindu South Asia,<sup>3</sup> many of these classical rituals are either abbreviated or ignored. As evidenced by the sāṃskāras they actually practice, they are principally concerned with the life-transitions of birth, initiation, marriage, and death.

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<sup>1</sup>cf. J. Gabriel Campbell, Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas, review article, Contributions to Nepalese Studies, no. 2, (September 1976) 3: 119-127.

<sup>2</sup>While authors differ to the number, R.B. Pandey, who has devoted a whole book to the subject, lists sāṃskāras for sixteen different life-states. R.B. Pandey, Hindu Samskaras, (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>J. Gabriel Campbell, Saints and Householders.

The primary concern of Jumla Brahmanism with these life-cycle transitions essential to a householder's life, is that they be accomplished properly according to the dharma. The saṁskāras are the means for accomplishing this purpose; they are the dharma through which dharma is fulfilled. In the same way that dharma sets the criteria for correct social organization (jāti dharma and kul dharma) and the basis for interaction between individuals, it also encompasses the different life stages of each individual and provides a model for correct transition between them. The householder's dharma is to perform these rituals so that the individual soul can proceed normally through the dharmaically ordained cycle of rebirth to death to rebirth. Their performance not only allows the individual the opportunity of living according to the dharma and thereby securing a good rebirth but gives merit to the patron of the performance. Conversely, the nonperformance of the saṁskāras not only endangers the orderly transition of an individual soul and his opportunities for better rebirth, but brings sin (pāp) upon the performer and thereby affects his karma.

#### The Hidden Gods

The preceding brief summary of some of the conceptions underlying Jumla Brahmanism demonstrates that many of the central ideas are logically interrelated. This logic of dharma and karma as it relates to the householder's life in sansār is, however, merely part of the conceptual

underpinnings of the vast and complicated symbolic universe presented in Hindu texts from the Vedas to the present. The principal foci of these symbolic worlds are the gods of classical Brahmanism whose relationship to each other and to dharmā, karma, and sansār is simultaneously logical and contradictory depending on the perspective taken.

In Jumla, these gods are often referred to as the gupta devtā (hidden gods) to distinguish them from the local oracular gods who speak through dhāmi. The hidden gods include all those whose names appear in the sanskrit texts recited by the puret, that is, all the principal deities of Hinduism. Of these, the major gods of Hinduism and their incarnations are well known throughout Jumla. Thus, Ganeś, Śiva, Viṣṇu and his incarnations, Lakṣmi, Durgā and her incarnations, and various gods associated with these deities are familiar to most Jumlis while infrequently represented gods such as the Nau Graha (nine planets), Agni, Indra, etc. are usually only known by name.

In contrast to most areas in Hindu South Asia where the popular sanskritic gods are usually represented in images and temples, there are very few temples to these gods in Jumla. Neither Viṣṇu in any of his forms, Lakṣmi, Śiva, nor Ganeś have any temples dedicated to them in the Jumla region except for those built during Malla and Baisi eras, that are now abandoned. In fact, the only sanskritic gods to whom functioning temples are found in Jumla are

Tripureswari Devi and Kanaksundari Devi who are considered incarnations of Pārvati-Durgā. In addition to these there are small shrines erected to other forms of the Devi and the Candan Nath and Bhairav Nath temples in Khalanga Jumla, which although not mentioned in the Sanskrit literature are associated with Śiva and numbered among the hidden gods by Jumlis.

The role of these hidden gods in Jumla Brahmanism is, as noted above, extremely complex. On the one hand, it can be seen from the mythology which details their origins and exploits that they are subject to certain aspects of the dharma. On the other hand, they are also seen as the instruments and recipients of dharma. By in large, it is this latter view which prevails in Jumla Brahmanism. The gods, whether understood as individual beings or as the manifestations of the supreme godhead, Bhagwan, are viewed as the agents of dharma, the means by which dharmic ritual and karma are made effective. They must thus be worshipped to provide ritual efficacy and merit, to obtain the fruits of a dharmic life. They are simultaneously the source of dharma, the instrumentality of dharma, and the purpose of dharma.

This multi-faceted relationship between the gods and dharma is expressed in a variety of ways in the gods' mythology such that the gods can also be viewed as an expression of dharma and the mythology analyzed as symbolic attempts to resolve key dharmic issues. While it is beyond the scope

of this work to present such analyses, it is noteworthy that such mythological analysis that has been conducted regarding these gods from an anthropological perspective has revealed a concern with many of the same ideas and themes that were found to underlie dharmic models of Jumla social organization. Thus, for example, O'Flaherty has traced the intricacies with which the themes of eroticism and asceticism are played out in Śiva mythology,<sup>1</sup> Bennett has explored these same themes in the mythology of the Devi within the context of ideas regarding purity and pollution and related them to kinship organization, ritual, and the role of women among central Nepal's Brahman and Chetris<sup>2</sup> and in a previous study, I have analyzed the local gods of Kangra in terms of the ways in which they express ideas of purity and pollution, sterility and fertility, the patrilineal ideal and the role of the householder, etc.<sup>3</sup> From these studies, as well as others<sup>4</sup> not here cited, it is clear that the dharma expressed in the gods' mythologies is the same as the dharma

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<sup>1</sup>Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva, (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>Lynn Bennett, Roles of Women; Idem., "Tij-Rishi Panchami."

<sup>3</sup>J. Gabriel Campbell, Saints and Householders.

<sup>4</sup>Milton Singer, ed. Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes, (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966).

embodied in social organization and ritual, and that much of the gods' "meaning" can be found in their expression and resolution of these dharmic concerns.

This "expressive" and representation aspect of the gods' role in Jumla Brahmanism is, despite the lack of organized temple worship, an important feature of Jumla dharma. Although Jumlis are usually acquainted with only the most popular myths concerning the hidden gods, their literal belief in them is strong. The gods legitimize the dharma by their existence, play out the dharma in their own lives, and serve as both the agents for karma and to a limited extent, as the intercessors between individuals and their own karma.

However, as the connotations of the term "hidden gods" and the lack of temples suggest, these gods are considered somewhat remote from life in this world (yo lok). As residents of the other world (par lok) who are closely associated with the inexorable workings of karma as the agents of destiny (bhāgge), they are not directly involved in everyday affairs. While they legitimize dharma, participate in its fulfillment through the performance of the samskāras, and provide a means for attaining merit and a better rebirth, they rarely interfere in the affairs of this world beyond determining an individual's destiny at birth. Their incarnations in this world are always of the distant past before the advent of the present stage of the Kali Yuga. In the present, their activities are predictable and

unchanging in as much as they are confined to formalized ritual occasions. As such, their role is ultimately important, but practically limited.

### The Brahman Priest

In addition to their non-incarnating silent nature, a contributing factor to Jumlis' perception of the hidden gods as remote is the fact that specialized priests are required for communication with them. These specialized priests are the Upadhaya Brahman purets (purohits) around whom, as was previously stated, Jumla Brahmanism revolves and derives its name. According to the accepted Brahmanical model, it is only these priests who, through their high caste birth, strict standards of orthodox purity, and knowledge of the esoteric means of communication (Sanskrit language and ritual) are able to correctly invoke the gods and thus provide the means for the fulfillment of the high caste householder's dharma. The Brahman priests are the necessary mediators between the gods and mankind, without which the dharma cannot be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to being mediators between gods and men, the Brahman priest's knowledge of Sanskrit texts and rituals makes him the official source of knowledge about the dharma.

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Harold A. Gould, "Priest and Contrapriest: A Structural Analysis of Jajmani Relationships in the Hindu Plains and Nilgiri Hills," Contributions to Indian Sociology: New Series, no. 10, (1967); J. Gabriel Campbell, Saints and Householders.

His roles as priest thus include performance of all rituals based on Sanskritic texts and involving the hidden gods as well as both formal and informal roles of dharmic education.

The kinds of rituals the Brahman priests perform can be divided into two categories: the saṃskāras and optional pujās. The term pujā signifies almost any act of worship, and the saṃskāras are in fact composed of a number of individual pujas. However, the pujas performed for the saṃskāras are predetermined according to the life-stage of the individual involved and ideally, all of them should be performed for each high caste individual. In contrast to the saṃskāras, what has been here called the optional pujas are arranged on an ad hoc basis and are not obligatory for any individual.

The optional pujas include the katah, the rudri, the saptā, and the nava, which are found in the rest of Nepal as well as most of Hindu South Asia. These pujās are arranged at the request of an individual who wishes to please the gods, obtain dharmic merit for the next life, and seek dharmic edification. Often there will also be a specific reason for sponsoring one of these pujas that has to do with the fulfillment of a vow made earlier, a death anniversary, as a response to particular misfortunes, or at the direction of an astrologer (jyotis) or oracle (dhāmi). The pujās themselves vary in length and expense. The katah is the least expensive and most common, averaging Rs. 50 and 18 lbs.



of grain, and requiring only one Brahman priest for one day; while the saptā requires seven priests for seven days and the nava requires nine priests for nine days with expenses in the range of Rs. 700 and 80 lbs. of grain and more infrequent occurrence. Within the last ten years there have been one saptā performed in both Dangibada and Lurku-Sinje, while there are usually four or five katahs per year.

Although the elaborateness of the pujās thus differ, their nature is essentially the same. They can be conducted at almost any place, including the cattleshed, house, roof, courtyard, field, or local shrine, where the priest has room to set up the ritual diagrams, pictures of gods, and images that are required. According to the wish of the sponsor (patron) the pujā will generally be directed towards a particular "hidden god", usually Māhādev (Śiva), Devi (Pārvati), or Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu), although other gods such as Ganeś, the Nau Graha, Agni, etc. will be invoked during the course of the pujā. The pujā itself consists of more or less elaborate homs (a standard ritual sequence through which the gods are invoked through the sacred fire or agni) followed by worship of the particular god and readings and expostulations of relevant texts such as the Swasthāni concerning Śiva and Devi,<sup>1</sup> and extracts from the Rāmāyanā and Māhābhārata for Rām and Kṛṣṇa. Pure (cokho) cooked foods such as roṭi

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<sup>1</sup>Lynn Bennett, "Roles of Women."

(fried bread), wheat halvā, khir (rice boiled in milk and sugar); and fruits are offered to the concerned god and at the end of the ritual distributed as prasād (blessed food) to the patron, his family, and all onlookers. Throughout the whole pujā, the Brahman priest or priests officiate with the assistance of the patron (jajmān), who is responsible for feeding and paying the priest as well as providing all supplies.

### The Temple Priest

While all Brahman puret can perform the sāṃskāras and optional pujās for their hereditary patrons (jajmān) only a few priests are involved in the specialized roles of temple priest (pujāri) for the "hidden gods" temples in Jumla. This role of temple priest is transmitted hereditarily, like the family priest (kul puret). The primary responsibility of the temple priest is to perform daily morning and evening pujās, look after the maintenance of the temple, and officiate during festivals associated with the temple. In return for this service, he usually receives the largest share of the temple's annual wealth which is generated from its land and forest holdings (guthi) as well as from individual offerings. The remaining shares are distributed to various hereditary assistants such as the hereditary sweeper, wood-gatherer, etc., and used for maintenance of the temple.

The festival of Bhagwati Than in Haḍ Sinje which which occurs on the ninth (nawami) and tenth day (dasami) of the festival of Dasai (in India called Dashera), illustrates the role of the pujāri and the hidden gods as it is set within the context of a popular festival. The Bhagwati Temple (Thān) is situated on the Lamathada hill at the confluence of two tributaries of the Sinje Karnali overlooking the fertile valley of Haḍ Sinje and Lurku. Close by the temple on the top of the hill is the remains of the Malla palace/fort which used to be the capital of the Malla Kingdom. The temple itself is constructed of stone, mud, and wood and contains several brass and stone images. The role of temple priest is actually shared by two different pujāris (both of whose families have hereditary claims on the role) by alternating months of service. For the Bhagwati festival, these two pujāris officiate on alternate years and are assisted by various hereditary or rotating functionaries who have specific responsibilities in the arrangement of the festival.

On the days preceeding the festival, the pujari and his helpers clean and prepare the temple. This process is culminated in a special hom puja performed for the Devi by the pujāri, usually on the ninth day. During this time, the people living in nearby villages have been celebrating Dasāi and preparing to participate in the Bhagwati festival. Married daughters and sisters have returned to their natal homes (māitā), castrated goats and sheep (khasi) have been killed for meat, and the barley seeds planted inside the

house on the first day (jamarā) have been growing into small shoots for offering to the Devi. Everyone unpacks their best and most colorful clothes as well as their jewelry for wearing to the festival. Men with horses prepare them for the informal horse competition which takes place during the festival.

The main feature of the festival is the animal sacrifices and offerings to the Devi. This first takes place on the night of the ninth, but most impressively on the tenth day. These animal sacrifices should ideally include the pañcbali: an uncastrated male goat (boko), a male buffalo calf (rāgo), a pigeon (parewā), a fish (in substitute for a duck), and a pumpkin (in substitute for a sheep). In fact, very few devotees offer all five, and depending on their wealth or prior vows, give either a buffalo, a goat, or grains and vegetables. The goats are sacrificed inside the temple grounds, while the buffalo due to its relative impurity, is sacrificed outside while tied to a special stake set aside for that purpose. The justification given for the inclusion of the buffalo, which it will be recalled, cannot be eaten by high castes, is the mythological encounter of the Devi with the buffalo demon Mahiṣāsur (locally called maikāsur). The buffalo sacrifices are symbolic of the Devi's triumph over this demon; while the sacrifice of goats are considered only as blood offerings to which the Devi is partial.

The tenth day commences with the Dasāi festival of tikā giving in which, as was noted in Chapter 3, each member of the family exchanges tikā according to their hierarchical position. In addition to the tikā, the jamarā (barley shoots) are distributed to each family member. Following the exchange of tikās, a special meal is eaten and everyone proceeds to the Bhagwati Than in their finery. Those with horses put on their best saddle blankets and ostentatiously gallop (when possible) up to the temple grounds where they gather to examine each others horses at one end of the hill. Everyone goes to do worship at the temple, where the pujāri is in charge of receiving offerings of grain and fruit and distributing blessed food and tikās (prasād). During this initial time the pujāri also sacrifices goats within the temple by first determining whether they are acceptable to the Devi through sprinkling water on them until they shiver or tremble (if they do not tremble after several attempts they are deemed unacceptable) and then cutting their throats so that the blood spurts out on the images. After taking the head and one leg the carcass is then returned to the sacrificer for his own use as food.

Following these initial offerings during which there is considerable joking, gossiping, and general milling around, everyone adjourns to the area set aside for buffalo sacrifices. The only caste allowed to perform these sacrifices, under the direction of the pujāri and a specially appointed "master of ceremonies" (mālik) is the Thakuris because of their special

ksatriya (martial) status. A number of Thakuris vie for this privilege, and a considerable number of arguments and mock-serious disputes take place over the privilege of beheading the buffalos. Since it is important that, in contrast to the goats, the buffalos be beheaded with a single stroke in order for the sacrifice to be auspicious, it is incumbent on the sacrificer (jajmān) to choose a good beheader. Once the choice has been made, the pujāri again sprinkles water on the animal to determine whether it is acceptable. Following this determination, the buffalo is tied to the stake and held while the chosen Thakuri attempts to behead it with one stroke of his khukuri or sword.<sup>1</sup> The carcass is then taken away by the Dums, who because of their untouchable status are allowed to eat the meat. Included among the sacrifices made are two buffalos donated each year by the King (Sarkār). However, most of them are given as the result of vows taken by devotees in previous years. After the sacrifices, the people disperse, and the pujāri's job is finished except for a brief evening pujā.

#### The Astrologer

In contrast to the family priest or the temple priest, the astrologer (jyotis) does not perform pujās (unless he is

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<sup>1</sup>Usually he is successful in this attempt, but with particularly large buffalos it often takes many strokes during which the buffalo may get loose and have to be chased down the hill--much to the entertainment of the spectators and the shame of the beheader.

an Upadhaya Brahman who combines astrology with being a priest). Since most astrologers are from the Jaisi Brahman caste, they lack the pure status required for pujās to the hidden gods, although their descent from Brahman families has usually meant that they have retained the reading skills of their priestly forefathers. These reading skills plus the specialized knowledge of astrology has been maintained within particular Jaisi lineages, yielding a semi-hereditary group of astrologers whose client families are passed on from father to son as with the family priests.

The astrologer's primary function can be best understood as that of a diviner. Jumli astrology is predicted on the notion that the grahas (thought of as the constellations of stars and planets) of an individual's birth partially determine the course of his future life. To a certain extent, these constellations are seen as agents of karma and are thus numbered among the "hidden gods." However, in some respects the constellations are both more specific than karma and more variable. They can predict individual habits and events as well as temporarily change for the worse (graha bigrincha) causing the normal course of life to go awry. The astrologer's function is to divine the meaning contained in these constellations, and when remedial action is called for, to spell out the possible means of averting bad events and influences. This divination is accomplished by consulting texts published yearly in India

and Nepal which give the yearly movement of the relevant constellations.

During the normal course of events, the astrologer's primary role is his relation to the samskāras. In the ceremonies following birth, he is responsible for making the horoscope of the child in which certain aspects of its life will be predicted and by which its official name will be determined. If he is also a family priest, he will also perform the graha puḷā to pacify the grahas. Following the completion of the horoscope, he will also suggest any remedial measures that should be taken to avert evil influences such as forming ritual friendship (mit) with an untouchable or performing an optional puḷā.

This initial horoscope is then later used by the astrologer to determine the auspicious times for other life-cycle ceremonies such as hair cutting, initiation, and marriage. In addition, he will, if consulted, compare the horoscopes of prospective brides and grooms to determine their suitability for marriage. The need for the samskāras to be astrologically auspicious and for an individual's life-cycle to be in accord with his constellations thus ensures that the astrologer has a role in the samskāras throughout an individual's life.

Aside from the samskāras, however, the astrologer may also be consulted at times of misfortune or before important activities such as house-building, leaving for a trading journey, etc. To the extent to which Jumlis make use of



these ad hoc consultations depends on a variety of factors including the caste and education of the individuals as well as the directions that may have been received from an oracle. Since this ad hoc consultative role, as well as some of the astrologer's roles in the samskāras partially overlaps with that of the dhāmi, it will be discussed in a later chapter (Chapter 6). The important point to note here is that despite the remoteness of the hidden gods and the inevitability of karma, the astrologer does provide a means of mediation which can partially bridge the gap. Though hidden, the gods are still seen to have a limited role in specific human events which can be partially predicted and perhaps slightly manipulated.

#### The Untouchable Priest Untouchable Brahmanism

The foregoing discussion of Jumla Brahmanism and its religious specialists has been concerned exclusively with the clean (cokho) castes. The Dums' status as untouchables precludes a Brahman priest from officiating at their rituals and excludes them from the premises of the temples of the hidden gods. They are thus unable to make use of the services of the Brahman priest, the pujāri, or the astrologer, and cannot worship in the temples.

The exclusion of the Dums from Brahmanical rites and Brahmanical mediation with the gods is in some respects tantamount to excluding them from the dharma--for from the high caste point of view they are not eligible to participate in

sanskritic dharmā until they are reborn as clean castes. Jumla Brahmanism revolves around the Brahman priests, and the Dums lack of access to these priests means that they are unable to participate in this dharmā as it is defined by Jumla Brahmanism for the clean castes.

The dharmic role that is prescribed by Jumla Brahmanism to the Dums is one of service to the high caste including ritual service for high caste samskāras and other pujas. As noted in Chapter 3, the Dums have dharmic obligations to provide specialized services in these various ritual contexts. These include providing music for samskāras, temple pujas, and, sometimes, optional pujās; sewing ceremonial clothes, making ritual implements, etc. Both clean castes and untouchables agree that these kinds of services constitute dharmic obligations whose fulfillment in combination with living a moral life (a life according to dharmic morality) will yield a better karma in the next life.

However, while clean castes would confine the untouchable's dharmā to these supportive services and moral living, the untouchables have also developed a "sanskritic dharmā" for themselves. These untouchable or Dum "samskāras" can be seen as direct imitations of many of those practiced by the clean castes. That is, the Brahmanical samskāras are clearly the model on which the Dum rituals are based. Although in one respect imitations, however, they are in other respects far more original than the Brahmanical model upon

which they are based as they are not prescribed or maintained by any written texts.

These Dum samskāras are often referred to as "Kāmi Ved" (the Vedas of the Kāmis). They consist of oral texts in Jumli Nepali which are recited during the performance of life-cycle rituals. Much of the content of the "texts" consists of descriptions of the rituals which are condensed versions of the Brahmanical samskāras. However, their format differs considerably from that of the Brahmanical texts in that it often uses a question and answer form regarding the ritual items and actions. In this respect, the term ved seems a singularly apt title--for to a perhaps greater extent than the Brahmanical texts, except in the matter of language, they appear to resemble the original Vedas in style and, perhaps, function. Since these Kāmi veds often crystalize and translate the Brahmanical samskāras meaning to even high caste Jumlis, examples will be used later during the description of the Brahmanical samskāras.

The priests who perform these Dum rituals are particular Kamis and Damais who have taken an interest in the occupation and learned the rituals and oral texts from their fathers and other knowledgeable Dums. They do not belong to any special subcaste or gain ritual status from their occupation. However, they are sometimes referred to as purets (priests) and are called upon for life-cycle events such as marriages. Since they receive very little remuneration for

their services, they also retain their other occupations, which often consist of being a musician for high caste patrons' samskāras.

### The Dharmic Life-Cycle

#### The Working Model

As noted earlier, the life-cycle rituals practiced in Jumla are, like those elsewhere in Nepal and India, an abbreviated version of the classical samskāras in which many of the rituals found in the latter are either not practised or are condensed into other rituals. More important, however, is the fact that they include, also as elsewhere in Hindu South Asia, a number of rituals which do not require the services of the Brahman priest. These rituals, while not strictly speaking Brahmanical, form an integral part of Jumla Brahmanism as it is understood and practised in Jumla. That is, the Jumla householder's dharma as it is expressed in the life-cycle rites contains rituals not specifically concerned with the hidden gods which require mediation by Brahman priests, but still considered as an important part of Jumla Brahmanism. This combination of rituals can be understood, in contrast to the Brahmanical model, as the working model of Jumla Brahmanism.

While the ultimate aim of the working model of Jumla samskāras remains salvation in the form of a better rebirth and eventual ascent to heaven, most of its rituals express a concern with more immediate issues involved in the dharmic

life-cycle. Salvation is only alluded to indirectly, for its attainment depends not on any single act but in the fulfillment of the requirements of the dharmā and the accumulation of good karma. Thus the rituals involving Brahman priests place greatest emphasis on concerns such as the purity of the participants, the invocation and pacification of the gods, and the symbolic transition of an individual and his family from one life-stage to the next in the presence of the gods. Rituals not performed by a priest have a far wider range of concern that includes kinship and caste relationships, economic transactions and relationships, fertility and health, food, etc. While not all of these concerns are of direct dharmic importance, many of them indirectly deal with relationships which are in part based on dharmic models. That is, they are riti-thiti which by virtue of their firm establishment in Jumla culture and their ultimate reference to the authority of the dharmā are seen to carry dharmic significance.

Depending on the analytic perspective taken, the working model of the sanskāras can thus be seen as an expression of the dharmā as it is embodied in various facets of Jumla culture or as the expression of some aspects of Jumla culture in dharmic contexts. Either mode of comprehension allows us to examine the rituals for the dharmic

meaning they express and the values they contain.<sup>1</sup> As the central emphasis of Jumla Brahmanism, they are the best source for discovering its meaning. However, in as much as many of the samskaric rituals and especially those based on common Sanskrit texts are essentially the same as those found elsewhere in Hindu Nepal and North India,<sup>2</sup> and in as much as the rituals are long and complex, it is not necessary or appropriate to examine them in too much detail here. Instead, the working model will be briefly described and analyzed in order to bring out the dominant concerns, the differences found in Jumla, and the meaning as understood in Jumli terms.

### The Māngals

In addition to the "Kāmi ved" discussed previously, there is another source of non-Brahman indigenous commentary on the Jumla samskāras which is invaluable for revealing the meaning of the rituals to Jumlis as translated into their

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<sup>1</sup>The presupposition upon which this approach is based is that ritual, despite whatever other functions it may have, is "pre-eminently a form of communication" Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols: 20, which expresses a culture's organizing principles. (Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols.)

<sup>2</sup>For detailed description and analysis of these rituals as found elsewhere and in the classical texts, see: Campbell, Saints and Householders; Pandey, Hindu Samskaras; Bennett, "Roles of Women"; and J. M. Planalp, "Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1956 (UM 16,262).

own language. These are the māngals ("hymns" or "auspicious songs"--derived from māngal: auspicious) which are sung by knowledgeable women called maṅglyāris during many of the samskaric rituals, although they are mostly sung for the marriage rituals. The māngals are composed of verses called sanjay (auspicious lamp, Sanjay Devi) and are sung in a long drawn out fashion structurally similar to certain Tibetan songs.<sup>1</sup> While this form of singing makes them difficult to understand (and impossible for any non-Jumli) the fact that they are sung in the local dialect renders them considerably more intelligible than the Sanskrit recited by the Brahman priests which is only understood by other Upādahaya Brahman priests.

The māngal's principal subject matter are the ritual events which occur in the samskāras. The songs describe these events, including some of the priests' actions, attribute speech to some of the principal actors, and praise the gods. In a certain sense, they are a record of what is taking place, for they are sung during the rituals and often simultaneously to the priest's recitations. However, their content has been predetermined by oral tradition and does not include much improvization.

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<sup>1</sup>Terence Eech: personal communication. For an analysis of māngal poetics, see Rimal, Sahitya: 2-6.

Although most of the māngals concern life-cycle events, there are also special māngals for the gods and other ritual events. The māngals praising the gods include not only a few of the "hidden gods," but also the "incarnating gods" which will be discussed later. Some of the ritual events which are celebrated through māngals are: rice planting, festivals such as the spring festival of Basant Pancami, building a new house, and leaving for a pilgrimage. Examples of māngals similar to these will be cited in the following discussion of the life-cycle ceremonies.<sup>1</sup>

### Birth

Jumlis' ideas regarding the process of conception is basically the same as is found elsewhere in Hindu South Asia. The woman is considered the vessel in which the seed (bij) from the man's semen (phusi) is deposited and nurtured. Conception can only take place if the time is right. While ultimately this timing can only be determined by Bhagwan (God), certain kinds of indications such as a woman's discharge of "water" (pāni) are known to disclose infertile periods. While there is no question that the direct cause of pregnancy is intercourse at the right time, all Jumlis agree that unless it is ordained by Bhagwan, conception will never take place.

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<sup>1</sup>For excerpts from māngals sung on other occasions, see Rimal, Sahitya.



According to Jumli (and South Asian) methods of counting, birth takes place after ten months of pregnancy. Although women work during the whole of this period, they are supposed to be given lighter loads. In one māngal sung after birth, this period of fertile pregnancy is likened to the fertility of nature:

How many leaves are there in the pālaṅgi sāg (spinach) of the high ridge (lekh)?  
 The pālaṅgi sāg of the lekh has one leaf.  
 Our buhāri (daughter-in-law) has become one month.  
 How many leaves are there in the pālaṅgi sāg of the lekh?  
 The pālaṅgi sāg of the lekh has two leaves.  
 Our buhāri has become two months. . . . etc., to ten  
 ten leaves and ten months.

For the birth itself, the mother secludes herself in the cattle-shed beneath the house (goth). Among richer families or for a first child, an experienced relative acts as the midwife (sureni) and assists the mother. However, it is considered the mother's responsibility to cut the cord herself and collect the placenta for later burial with the birth clothes. These considerations point up the primary concern at birth with the problem of pollution. Because birth is extremely polluting, the mother should give birth outside the house and others are reluctant to assist in the process since they will also become polluted and unable to continue a normal life until purified by time and later rituals.

Following birth, the mid-wife or other female relatives who have attended from a distance inform the family

which notes the time according to the sun or through approximation.<sup>1</sup> If the child is a son, a gun (if one is available) will be fired repeatedly in the air. The Damai musicians will also be summoned and they will play the rhythms associated with birth throughout the next day or days, depending on whether it is a first son, and on the wealth of the family. Celebrations for a female are more subdued, and frequently no musicians are called.

This differential treatment of the birth of a male and female child is prevalent throughout all the birth ceremonies. Although more wealthy and orthodox families will conduct most of the same rituals for a girl as a boy, many families omit most of them for a female child. This unequal treatment is partially a function of the patrilineal system described in Chapter 3 in which a son is considered more desirable than a daughter since he is able to maintain the family lineage and perform death rites for his patrilineal ancestors, while a daughter must be raised to be given away. The following excerpts from a māṅgal sung after birth illustrates the happiness which attends the birth of a son as well as the transition to rebirth which has occurred:

(The mother-in-law says:) Before this my daughter-in-law had been feeling sad and depressed.  
But today my daughter-in-law is extremely happy.  
The baby had come from the womb.  
From the world of the gods (Indra Lok) into this mortal world (mṛtyu lok).

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<sup>1</sup>Shrestha, Jan Jivan.

The five auspicious items (sagun) and the five foods (jiunār) have been kept in case they are needed after the birth.

The Kingdom of Ayudhaya has been kept for the baby.

Come child, come to the mortal world.

We have kept for you a throne of gold.

Come child, come, we have kept and saved it just for you.

We have saved a knife of gold to cut the umbilical cord (nābi).

Go and get the dubo and the dubaro (auspicious grasses, --sagun).

Our child needs it.

From this day, my daughter-in-law, I have given you all I own, all my wealth and property.

(The daughter-in-law says:) Your grandson is born so put the tikā on me.

You have to give me some sagun.

What things will I get from different people?

I need those things.

Your family has been born.

(Mother-in-law:) In the past my daughter-in-law was worried and unhappy.

But now that a son is born she is happy.

There is joy in the whole village, and happiness in our family.

(The husband's married sisters say:) The drums of celebration are being played in my natal home (māiti ghar).

Listen, O listen, sisters and brothers, may be my nephew (bhatijā) has been born.

The first ritual to be performed after birth is the ṣaṣṭhī puḷā (sometimes, khāṣṭhī puḷā) on the sixth day.

This ritual is primarily concerned with introducing the child into the world he will inhabit. The house is cleaned by a fresh plastering of cow-dung and mud (the mother must plaster her cattle-shed herself due to her state of greater pollution or sutkeri) and relations are assembled. The child's female relations of a separate thar, particularly his FSi, his FFW, and his MBW, bring gifts of sagun

(auspiciousness) which should include clothes (the bhoto, "shirt"), sīdur powder for tikā, and various fried cokho foods (laddu, arsā, phini). The clothes which must include some from the maternal uncle (māmā) are put on the child and it is brought up to the house with a kalas (a sanctified pot of water representing Ganeś and the other gods which is used throughout the samskāras). All Jumlis note that this is an extremely dangerous time for the child since Bhābi is just in the process of writing out its destiny and there are ghosts and demons (bhut, pret, rāksas) as well as jealous witches (boksi) lurking in the vicinity. To guard against this danger the Damais play music, the kalas is kept close to the child, and a khukuri knife and gun may also be brandished.<sup>1</sup>

In the house, the Brahman family priest lights a lamp (batti) and performs a hom (homa) ceremony to the gods in general and the Devi (Ṣaṣṭi Devi) in particular. The purpose of this pujā is to call for the gods blessings and

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<sup>1</sup>Among the Dums, who do not of course have a Brahman officiating, but who do conduct the other rituals, there is a special ceremony to protect the child against the danger of this time. Two images of bees are made, one black one representing death (kāl--"time") and the other white one representing the child. The black one is burned while the white one is kept safe, and the following māngal is sung: "The black bee and the white bee have gone around and returned. Brothers cover up the black bee with the left hand. Brothers cover up the white bee with the right hand. With the left hand squeeze the black bee; with the right hand cover the white bee. etc."

protection of the child. This puja is performed during the night and lasts until the morning.

During this same night, called chāiti rāt (sixth night), all of the relatives (both fictive and real) celebrate by dancing and singing khels and cutkilās (literally, khelne means "to play") while the maṅglyāris sing māngals.<sup>1</sup> These songs, which include those already cited, celebrate the birth of the child, devoting particular attention to the kinship obligations created by the birth as well as the conflicts arising out of a changed family structure. Central among these are the relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and brother and sister.

As noted in Chapter 3, the daughter-in-law's position in her husband's family improves if she has produced a son. While the mother-in-law is pleased when a grandson is born (as was shown in the previous māngal quoted), she has also lost some of her status and control over her daughter-in-law, typically resulting in some conflict between these two women of the family. This conflict and the competition for the son's loyalty can be seen in the following māngal:

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<sup>1</sup>In the Sinje Kholā, a puppet (putalā) representing the son is made on this evening and is used in the songs and dances. The puppet is made to dance while refrains such as the following are sung: "wear your new clothes and dress yourself up and dance, my child (bālā)."

SoW: (son's wife--daughter-in-law): O my mother-in-law, give me my baby.

HM: (husband's mother--mother-in-law): Do you think I am the keeper of your baby?

SoW: I had thought that you would look after the baby for your daughter-in-law and so I left him with you.

HM: Did your baby have anything to eat? Did your baby have clothes to wear and blankets?

SoW: I had left milk and cooked rice for my baby to eat. And there were beautiful clothes for him to wear. Give me my baby, my mother-in-law, give me my baby.

HM: Listen, daughter-in-law, your baby has gone to the cattle-shed.

SoW: Give me my baby, my mother-in-law, give me my baby.

HM: Do you think I am the one to look after your baby? etc. . . .

One aspect of the brother-sister relationship which is revealed in the sasthi puja ritual, is the mutual obligations they have to each other's children, which are shown by the giving of sagun. The reaffirmation of the relationship even after the sisters have become a member of another patriline shows both the sister's residual membership in her natal patriline and the special relationship of mutual affection and protection which should continue to exist between siblings of different sex. While I do not have a man-gal which deals with this relationship, there is a story which is told about the occasion of the birth of a son which illustrates the dharmic importance of honoring this kinship relation.

This story, which is too long to present here in any detail, describes what happens to two different sisters after the birth of their brother's son. One sister has been married into a wealthy family, while the other is extremely

poor. When the wealthy sister returns for the sixth night, she is treated with respect because of the expensive gifts she brings. Since the poor sister could not afford to bring gifts she is told to sit outside with the servants. However, the son dies and is then resurrected by the poor sister through a remedy involving hot oil that was taught to her by two spirits who had met on the way to her brother's house. The poor sister is then given many gifts and becomes very wealthy. In fact, she is so wealthy that she had never returned to her brother's house and when her nephew comes to call her for his wedding she says that she is too busy to come. The nephew then curses her to have a co-wife and she returns to her original poverty.

The central moral of this story is that the kin relationship of brother and sister should be respected and honored independent of wealth and worldly respect. When the brother's family initially failed to honor their sister, they were met with disaster that only the sister could avert. Likewise, when that sister became so proud of her wealth that she no longer maintained her ties with her brother and his son, her wealth and happiness were taken away.

Similarly to this story, the final ritual of the saṣṭhi puḷā can be seen as an affirmation of proper kinship relationships as they should exist. A goat (khasi) is slaughtered and all those who have danced, sung, and done puja are given a feast (bhatyār) on the morning of the seventh day.

On the ninth day after birth, the second major birth ritual called the nvāran or nuāran takes place. This ritual, referred to in Sanskrit literature as namakaranā and locally as graha puḷjā, is primarily concerned with securing the child's position in the world, both in relationship to his family and in relation to the heavens (the gods and the constellations). The astrologer draws up the child's horoscope (janampatri or locally, cinā lagaunu), and on the basis of this horoscope the family priest performs a hom puḷjā to the grahas and assigns the child his name. The name includes reference both to the constellations under which the child was born and the gotrā and thar of the father. Thus the child is established in his patriline and caste and presented to the gods.

The following māngal illustrates this process as well as expressing the hope that the child's horoscope will reveal that he will be wealthy:

Write, write O astrologer, write properly.  
 What is the destiny of the baby who is born?  
 What awaits him?  
 This baby of ours will make walls of gold.  
 This baby of ours will make doors of silver.  
 This baby of ours will make improvements.  
 He will fill the stables with horses and  
 eaves with hawks.  
 This baby of ours will cover the roof of the  
 house with copper. etc. . . .

The nuāran ritual marks the end of the birth pollution (sutkeri) for the child's household and the end of the mother's confinement in the cattle-shed. On the tenth day, all the household members including the mother bathe,



and the mother is given some cow-urine to drink. However, since the mother's pollution was far greater than the other household members she is still not allowed to cook food for another twenty days. Families that can afford it, celebrate this occasion by sacrificing an uncastrated goat to the Bhawani ("incarnating") devtā shrine and slaughter a castrated goat to provide meat for a village feast. Other mān-gals are sung, including ones which name all the child's relatives by relation and wish them long life.

The ritual which completes the child's introduction into the world is the annaprasana (often called annapastni-- in Kathmandu it is called pāsne). The principal purpose of this ceremony, which is held between five and eight months after birth (on an even month for boys and an odd month for girls), is to feed the child its first solid food and show him the world (deś' dulāunu). As in the saṣṭhi puja and the nuāran, the priest performs a hom, the relatives come bringing sagun, and a feast is held. The child is fed some of different kind of foods and shown the world outside by its relatives of the same sex, starting with the eldest and working down to the youngest. Following the ceremony, as elsewhere in Nepal and Northern India, implements representing various occupations (i.e. a pen, a sword, a plowshare) are placed before the male child to determine his future occupation on the basis of which one he picks up.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders.

Examining these birth rituals as a whole, it can be seen that the primary dharmic purpose which they accomplish is to insure the proper transition of the child from Indra Lok of the other world (par lok) to this mṛtya lok. This transition involves: insuring the fertility of the mother, avoiding and purifying birth pollution, aligning the child with his constellations and establishing his horoscope, invoking the gods' blessings and protection for the child, establishing the child within his patriline and introducing him to his kin, and introducing the child to the world and to the food that will be his sustenance. In addition to these ritual activities oriented around the child's transition, we have seen how the celebrations and songs which are built around them are occasions for re-establishing the values of correct kinship and caste relationships and exploring the reordering of kinship obligations and status as the result of the birth of a son--including the tensions inherent in the system. Of considerable importance in this regard, is the exchange of sagun gifts for food (feasts) which occurs in the three pujās performed by the priests: the ṣaṣṭhi puajā, the nuāran, and the annaprasana.

### Initiation

The ritual which initiates males into full membership in society as it is defined by dharma is the bartaman (from the sanskrit vratābandha, technically referred to as the upanayanā). This ritual, in which the sacred thread

(janeo, janai) is donned, is permissible only for the highest castes. Theoretically, then, only the Brahmans, the Thakuris, and the Chetris are allowed to undergo this ritual transition. However, as was discussed in Chapter 3, the ambiguous status of the Sanyāsis and the Pābais has resulted in most of the former and many of the latter also taking on the sacred thread.

The bartaman is symbolically seen as a second birth through which an individual becomes a member of the twice-born (dvi-jā) castes. Prior to this ceremony, a boy is permitted considerable leniency with regards to caste purity. As long as he does not show disrespect to his elder generation or violate the purity of the house and village, he is permitted to descretely violalate high caste restrictions such as touching Dums, accepting boiled rice from lower cokho castes, eating slightly impure meats (i.e. chicken or even pork), and drinking liquor. That is, prior to the bartaman, he is not considered a full member of his caste and thus not subject to all its dharmic restrictions. It is only after his bartaman that a man is considered karma caleko (karma "moving") in which his actions are dharmically significant.

For a variety of reasons which may include the desire to postpone the restrictions accompanying karma caleko as well as to avoid double expenditures, most high caste Jumlis perform the bartaman as a part of the marriage ceremonies

during which the groom is prepared for marriage.<sup>1</sup> However many Brahmans and some Thakuris and Chetris do perform the ritual at a separate time which may be years before marriage in accordance with the classical prescriptions. This, in addition to the fact that even those Jumlis who include the bartaman in marriage conceive of it as a ritual which can be performed separately, allows us to examine it as an initiation rite structurally differentiated from marriage, and temporally prior to it.

The ritual commences, at a date and time (lagan) determined by the astrologer, with the preparation of the flour that will be required. This is usually referred to as pitho kutne (pounding the flour), although Shrestha also gives the name of sarva sama.<sup>2</sup> The next auspicious day determined by the astrologer is called lugā chekne (clothes measuring) in which the necessary clothes and ritual items are collected and prepared by the family members and their servants and lagityā. The forays into the forest to collect ritual items are always accompanied with a kalas to which puja has been performed. This day of lugā chekne thus commences with the kalas puja.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. This is also true for North India.

<sup>2</sup>Shrestha, Jan Jivan.

The kalas puja, in which the metal pot (kalas) is offered dahi (curds), gobar (cow-dung), kuś (a sacred grass), til (sesame seeds), achetā (aksatā, rice grains), janeo (sacred thread), sidur (vermilion), white, yellow and green matṭi (earth), is usually performed by the Brahman family priest. It is considered a dedication to Ganeś, and is thus used at the beginning of any auspicious ritual, including the birth ceremonies and those performed at marriage. The following "Kāmi Ved" describes the origin of the kalas pot in language which indicates that it is viewed as symbolically representing a human body:<sup>1</sup>

From which place did copper and other metals originate?

Where are these metals found now?

These metals originated from black mountains and hills. They were made in the homes of the Sunwar and the Kami. And it (kalas) stayed for a few days in the home of a storekeeper (sāhu).

What was the weight or the proportion of the body, the feet, the waist, the neck, the spout and the cover of the copper kalas?

Two parts of the copper are separated and kept aside.

One part of the copper from the mines is melted into the cover.

Two parts are needed for the neck, three parts for the waist, five parts for the feet, ten parts for the body.

The māngal sung during the flour making on the previous day utilizes a similar format to this Kami Ved:

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<sup>1</sup>Compare with the Varna Purus, Chapter 3.

Of what is the pestle made?  
Of what is the mortar made?

The pestle is of khayar wood (acacia catechu).  
The mortar is of stone.

O Grandmother, put into that mortar the pāthi  
(a volume measure) of motiyā (literally pearls,  
here meaning rice).

Today during the auspicious lagan of the boy .  
(bālāk).

Today, for this auspicious lagan we have to  
pound the flour for the laddu (a sweet).

For the first lagan we have to pound the dhiro  
(flour paste).

Today our grandmother is preparing the sagan  
for the lagan.

The first pounding is made by our grandmother.  
And then it is our husband's elder sister.  
And then it is our mother's.  
Pound it out, pound it out, Mother, pound out  
the flour for the lagan.  
We are about to need it, it is needed for the  
lagan.

On an auspicious day following these ceremonial  
preparations, the bartaman itself is held in a cattle-shed  
beneath the house. The first ceremony to be performed is  
the shaving of the boy's head, called curā karma. This  
ritual, in which the boy is likened to the Gopicandra in-  
carnation of Visnu, is described by the following māngal  
sung at that time:

Give us the knife of gold--give it to us Father.  
Shave his head properly.  
See that the hair does not fall on the ground.  
Keep all the hair in the plate of gold.  
Pick up the hair, Sisters and Aunts, pick up the  
hair and keep it in the plate of gold.  
Keep the top knot (jori) intact and knot it  
carefully.  
Tie a turban on your head, Gopicandra.  
Tie a waistband around your waist, Gopicandra.  
Put the pants on your legs, Gopicandra (etc. for  
all clothes).

May you be plentiful like the dubo grass;  
 Full like the pāthi;  
 Blossom like the flowers.  
 May you bend down like the bamboo. (i.e. be  
 humble)  
ākāś sira, pātāl jarā (may your head be in  
 the skies and your roots in the underworld).

When the hair is cut, as described in the māngal, the boy's consanguinal female relatives take it down to the river (gangā) and throw it in. The primary purpose of this ritual is to purify the boy (through shaving his hair), and thus elevate his status for undergoing his "second birth." The hair is carefully collected and disposed of so that it cannot be used by evil spirits or witches to cause him harm.<sup>1</sup>

Following the curā karma, the Brahman priest commences his pujā with a hom to purify the grahas and invite the gods to attend the yagya (literally, "sacrifice," here meaning agni puja). The boy-initiate participates in this pujā and is further purified through various ritual actions and mantras.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile the Damais play their drums (damāh) in the next room, and the maṅglyāri sing the māngals.

A number of the māngals sung at this time concern the lighting of the lamp (batti, diyo) which is one of the Brahman's first ritual actions. Parts of these māngals

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Campbell, Spirit Possession: 119-127; William Crooke, The Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal (reprint) 1896).

<sup>2</sup>For details of a similar ceremony, see Campbell, Saints and Householders.

detail the ingredients of the lamp (i.e. metals, wicks, and oils) in much the same fashion as the Kami Ved regarding the Kalas and the māngal on the flour pounding. Other parts invite the gods to attend the ritual, such that the māngals on the lighting of the lamp duplicate the priest's activities by means of the hom. For example,

Let the lamp burn throughout the night.  
 We now invite the 33 koti dev devtā (330 million gods, a figure which symbolically represents all of the gods) to this jagge (hom ritual).  
 You may sleep at all other times, but now you must come to our jagge.  
 We request Mahādev Mahārudra (Śiva) to forego his sleep tonight and attend this jagge.  
 We invite all the gods to attend our yāgya tonight. etc. . . .

Significantly, these māngals include in their invocations the incarnating gods that are discussed later which are not in the sanskrit texts recited by the Brahmins.

After these initial pujās are completed, the boy receives a mantra (usually the gāyatri) from the priest, and to the accompaniment of additional mantras,<sup>1</sup> dons the sacred thread (janeu). This signifies his transformation into a brahmacāria (celibate student) with full caste status. The Brahman priest becomes his guru who by way of the mantra symbolically imparts the esoteric knowledge to those who have been twice-born.

This ritual is immediately followed by the ceremony called jogi chorne (to let go as a jogi). In this ceremony,

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Ibid., Pandey, Hindu Samskaras.



which is also found in the rest of Nepal and Northern India, the boy symbolically becomes a wandering ascetic (jogi, san-yāsi). After taking off his previous clothes (a dhoti), he dons a loincloth and animal skin and turns around two times while his assembled family shouts "bartaman bhayo" (the bartaman has taken place). This turning in place, which Jumliś explained as representing the jogi's travels in the world, is repeated twice more. These symbolic journeys continue in combination with a symbolic marriage to Agni, the fire (also representing Surya, the sun) by way of circling the hom fire three times while the priest reads mantras. During each circumambulation (pherā), the jogi begs alms from each of his relatives. His parents and his maternal uncle (māmā) each give significant quantities (10-20 lbs.) of achetā (polished rice, the term achetā is only used for rice given for dharmic reasons) on each round while other relations give lesser amounts. When these rounds are completed, his guru, the priest, exhorts him to live a dharmic life, to visit all the holy sites of the gods and goddesses, to read the scriptures (śastrā), and to listen to the advice of his gurus and the sages. He then takes a small packet of rice and a book wrapped in a red cloth and goes outside to do his studying and visit the world symbolically.

The ceremony in which the groom returns to the house, called ghar paiso (house entering), completes the bartaman by reintegrating the boy into the householder's society. Upon entering the doorway, where two vessels full of water

have been placed, he gives tikā to the door, and then receives tikā from each of his family members, starting with the Brahman priest and then the eldest on down. His father gives him a gift, usually consisting of several mohars (half-rupee coins) but sometimes including a cow or a field,<sup>1</sup> which is called ritaune. The boy is accepted back into his family as an initiated member and the bartaman is completed.

The bartaman accomplishes a symbolic second birth by means of the central jogi chorne ritual in which the son separates himself from his family and his society and becomes a casteless, celibate, student of the dharma. Paradoxically, in the manner of other rites of passage,<sup>2</sup> it is this symbolic separation from the householder's society which allows him to be "reborn" in it a full caste member prepared for marriage.<sup>3</sup> For by becoming a jogi and receiving a guru, the initiate symbolically embraces the dharma of renunciation and learning as they are represented in the three non-householder āśramas (brahmacāria, vanaprasthā, sanyāsi). Through symbolically fulfilling his dharmic option of renunciation, he is spiritually qualified to enter the householder's

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<sup>1</sup>Shrestha, Jan Jivan.

<sup>2</sup>Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, (New York: Free Press, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders.

dharma. By becoming casteless, he can now take on his caste; by becoming celibate, he can now marry; by taking leave from his family with their blessing, he can now assume his kinship obligations and is eligible to perform death ceremonies; and by living on alms, he can now live by means of his own wealth and work.

Throughout this transition, it is the gods who by their presence and blessings, legitimize the transformation. They are the agents of dharma, the means by which the initiate's karma becomes activated (caleko). By virtue of his entry into their presence through his purification, the initiate becomes symbolically akin to them (as was shown in the māngals) for the duration of the ritual. Upon becoming twice-born, his relationship has not only changed vis-a-vis society, but also in relationship to the gods. He is now dharmically responsible for his actions, and obligated to worship the gods.<sup>1</sup> This entails an obligation to maintain purity throughout his life.

While marriage is universally acknowledged to be the ritual initiation into a karma caleko life for women that somewhat corresponds to the bartaman for men, there is a "puberty rite" for girls which does entail similar obligations to maintain greater purity. This "ritual", which in

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<sup>1</sup>This obligation includes the duty to perform a daily morning pujā to the sun in which the mantra received during the bartaman must be recited.

contrast to Central Nepal does not involve a priest, is a girl's first menstruation, called chui. At the onset of the first blood, the girl is secluded in a cattle-shed beneath the house where no male is permitted to see her. After four days in the cattle-shed (in some areas after three days),<sup>1</sup> she surreptitiously goes with her sisters to the stream to bathe. This bathing is repeated until the seventh day, when she is given cow urine (gaūt) to drink and welcomed back into the house with sagun of flowers and achetā by her sisters.

From the time of this first menstruation, a girl is obliged to maintain the purity of all males by secluding herself during all subsequent menstruations and refraining from touching a male or cooking until she has been sufficiently purified. This is considered to be a part of her dharma and thus to the extent that she gains pap by violating this restriction, her karma can be said to be "caleko".

### Marriage

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are a number of different forms of marriage in Jumla which can be roughly categorized as byāite and lyāite. According to Jumla Brahmanism, only the kanyādān form of byāite marriage strictly conforms to the dharma, and the other forms of marriage are deviations based on non-dharmic models of social action which have to

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<sup>1</sup>Shrestha, Jan Jivan.

varying extents been integrated into the dharmic model. Thus many of the rituals of the non-kanyādān marriages can be seen as condensed and abbreviated versions of those performed for kanyādān. Conversely, the presence of strong non-dharmic models for marriage has led to their partial integration into the kanyādān rituals. The following examination of marriage in Jumla will, therefore, concentrate on the kanyādān form of marriage primarily to reveal its dharmic values, but also to show to what extent the "working model" of Jumla Brahmanism has been embedded in a culture which also has strong non-dharmic models.

The rituals of the kanyādān marriage in Jumla are, as elsewhere in Hindu South Asia, by far the most elaborated of the samskāras. The number of individual rituals considerably exceeds all the rest of the life-cycle rites as a whole, and the expenses involved is correspondingly greater. This heavy emphasis on marriage, in its proper dharmic form of kanyādān, reflects the importance of this event both as a life-cycle transition of dharmic significance and as the transference of a girl from one patriline to another with all the kinship and economic ramifications entailed by this "transaction." While a detailed analysis of all these ramifications is beyond the scope of this study, the following presentation of the various stages of the kanyādān rituals will trace these two themes in the context of the models they invoke.

## Engagement

In a proper kanyādān marriage, engagements are arranged by parents--often at a very early age. The initial steps in arranging an engagement are informal. The father of a son talks with his nātedār and other kutumb about appropriate families who have daughters and indirectly locates possible families. These families and their daughters are then scrutinized to make sure that they have sufficient land and that their caste status is appropriate. As this is most easily accomplished by trustworthy relations living near to the possible family or having relatives in the village, possible families tend to come from a set of nearby villages with which there has been intermarriage in the past.<sup>1</sup>

If a possible family meets the initial criteria and their daughter appears to have no serious physical or mental defects, the son's father makes use of a "go-between" (variously called: kurā-garo mānthā, saidāre, laḡi, mājhi lāgne) who is usually known by both families. This go-between informally talks with the daughter's parents, ascertaining more information regarding their situation and reactions as well as providing them with information regarding the possible groom. Among most Brahmans and some orthodox Chetris and Thakuris, horoscopes of the prospective couple are also compared to determine their compatibility. However, more

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Chapter 3.

important in determining a successful engagement are the individual inquiries made by the respective parents regarding the other's family and child.

Following an informal agreement, the official engagement takes place. This ritual is usually referred to as the māgne dahi (the asking curds).<sup>1</sup> In this ritual, performed without a priest, the son's father accompanied by the go-between and another patrilineal relation called the bhala ādmi (reputable man), go to the prospective fiance's house laden with ritual gifts called māgne sarjām (curds, fried breads, soybeans, vermilion, sacred-thread, string, coins, etc.). These gifts are then given to the girl's father. If he accepts them, he indicates acceptance of the engagement and the two prospective fathers-in-law exchange tikā of curd and rice, as well as other gifts while the maṅglyāris celebrate the occasion in māngals.

From the time of this ceremony, their daughter and son are committed to marriage to each other and the fathers address each other by the kinship terms reserved for SōWF and DHF respectively. Among orthodox Brahmans, this commitment is equivalent to a preliminary marriage and the death of a girl's fiance renders her a widow who, if she remarries, becomes a Jaisi. Among less orthodox castes this commitment is still sufficiently serious that if it is broken by the

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<sup>1</sup>Shrestha, Jan Jivan.

girl marrying another man, half of the normal divorce fees (jāri) must be paid by her husband to her fiance (called kāco jāri--raw adultery). A boy who marries another is still honor bound to marry his fiance as well.<sup>1</sup> The engagement can thus be considered the first ritual of marriage by which the new kinship relationships have been initially, but firmly, established.

#### Preparation Rituals

Marriage entails a number of preparations which are treated as rituals in Jumla and are seen as an integral part of the marriage ceremony. With some important differences, these rituals follow the same pattern in both the bride's and groom's house, and take place at the same pre-determined times.

The determination of the correct auspicious times (lagan) for these preparations is one of the few situations where the orthodox Brahmanical model comes into potential conflict with the role of the oracle and his incarnating gods described in the next three chapters. Once the approximate date of marriage is mutually agreed between the groom's and the bride's family, the groom's family is responsible for obtaining the lagan for all of the marriage rituals. More

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<sup>1</sup>Both of these consequences of a broken engagement can be seen as partial reasons for the tradition of child marriage--as well as setting the stage for future love-marriages.



orthodox Jumlis (generally Jyulyāls) consult the astrologer for these times, while less orthodox Jumlis (generally Pa-bais) consult with the oracles. Occasionally, both are consulted serially, and resultant discrepancies worked out on a compromise basis. In any case, once the lagans are determined and informally communicated to the bride's family, almost all Jumlis go to the oracles to obtain the god's blessings on the ceremony. Once this has been obtained, the lagans are formally sent to the bride's house with sagun gifts of soybeans and tumeric wrapped in a cloth in a ceremony called lagan ko kāgat patāune (sending the lagan paper).

On the days specified by the lagan, the various preparations are carried out. These include: the kalas puja (as for the bartaman), lugā or orne chekne (the sewing of clothes<sup>1</sup>--a name which is also used to refer to all the preparations), pitho kutne (pounding the flour), dubo khojne (finding the dubo grass), sallā ko dhup lyāune (bringing the pine incense) sīnār banāune (buying and preparing the decorations and jewelry), dāijo lyaune (bringing the dowry),

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<sup>1</sup>Both the bride and groom's families prepare the following clothes: for the bride--white pacheurā (shawl), red colo (blouse), pātke gāghro (printed shirt), socks and shoes; for the groom--white anga (shirt and blouse), white phetā (turban), red and white jalari (headpiece), red and white ancala (sashes), and white bhoti (trousers). In addition the following jewelry must be procured for the bride: golā (silver bracelets), curā (red bangles), kampani mālā (necklace made from East India Company rupee coins), mughā (plastic necklace), kampani chāp (silver rings), gold earrings and a gold bulāk (nose ring).

jagge banāune (preparing the place for the hom ceremony), and ani hālne (preparing the ani or arni food that will be sent to the bride's house from the groom's). Each of the ceremonial preparations is accompanied by lagi Damais playing music (sanai and drums) and maṅglyāris singing māngals. In addition, at auspicious moments, tikās are distributed to gathered kin (including married daughters who have returned home and village dāju-bhāi) and periodical ritual payments are made to the Dum lagis who are sewing clothes, playing music, or making vessels and implements.

The māngals sung on these occasions, similar to those sung for the bartaman, describe the events taking place and detail the ingredients required, the instruments used, and the particular clothes which must be made for both the bride and groom by each family. As illustrated by the following mangal sung at the bride's house, their primary purpose is to celebrate the auspiciousness of the marriage.

Come together, come together, O grandparents.  
Come together all our māiti (wife's house).  
Today we shall be giving the kanyādān for  
our child.

Today our grandfather will make the kanyādān.

Today our father will make the kanyādān.

Today we the māiti will make the kanyādān.

All the clothes that is needed has been  
brought.

The Damai-darji (tailor) has come to our  
father's courtyard.

The music (bājā) is being played. . . .

Let all say before they depart that the lagan  
was auspicious.

On the day before the groom's departure to the bride's house, the ritual preparations are completed. The final act

among this group of rituals is the dispatch of baskets (chāpri) full of sweets (lārdū and arsā) from the groom's house to the bride's in the care of the bhala-ādmī.<sup>1</sup> These sweets are the gifts sent by the ghar (groom's house) to the māitā (bride's house) in order to ensure a warm welcome and an auspicious wedding. Each of the 8-9 baskets sent contain a carefully calculated number of sweets designated for particular households in the māitā's. The first basket is filled with sweets set aside for the māiti's gods. This is followed by a large number of sweets in a basket for the bride's family. Other families in the māitā receive smaller numbers of sweets depending on the closeness of the patrilineal relationship to the bride, and thus the closeness of the affinal relationships they will be establishing with the groom's family. This ritual thus prepares for the new kinship relationships which will be established through the forthcoming marriage.

#### Purification Rites

During the night before the actual marriage,<sup>2</sup> both the groom (byāulo) and the bride (byāuli) are ritually

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<sup>1</sup>Pabai bhala ādmis carry these baskets themselves in a doko (large basket carried on the back). However, high caste Jyulyals must hire a Pabai to do this job since they consider it demeaning to carry the doko themselves--although in non-ritual occasions they frequently do carry dokos.

<sup>2</sup>In the groom's case this may be two nights before if it takes more than one day's walk to reach the māitā.

purified through Brahmanical ceremonies (yagyas). In the case of the groom, this purification is usually in the form of the bartaman, the initiation ritual already described. For groom's that are already twice-born and for brides, this ritual purification takes the form of a similar ceremony that lacks the rituals of becoming a jogi or donning the sacred thread. After the bride or groom is bathed and dressed in pure clothes, they participate in a hom ceremony conducted by the family priest in the cattle-shed beneath the house. The details of the ritual are basically the same as in other hom ceremonies and take place to the accompaniment of māngals and music provided by the Damais. Their purpose is to purify the bride and groom through the agency of the gods and the Brahman priest so that the life transition of marriage can take place. At the completion of the ritual, the wedding clothes are donned, and their bodies are decorated (sinār lāune) with jewelry and colored tikās and lines. The bride and groom have been symbolically separated from their previous states.

#### The Marriage Party's Departure and Arrival

Following the purification ceremonies performed by the Brahman priest, there are a series of rituals whose primary concerns are with various facets of social relationships. These commence on the day the marriage party is to leave for the bride's house and continue until the actual marriage rituals take place.

The first of these primarily "social rituals" is the ritāune hālne. In the ritāune hālne, the groom's patrilineal relatives and village "brothers" exchange blessings in the form of yellow achetā (rice) tikās with the groom and give him a gift of some money. The amount of money given is a function of the closeness of the kin relationship and the wealth of the giver. As implied by the meaning of the verb ritāunnu (to make as nice as possible)<sup>1</sup> this ritual is understood as a means of conferring the patriline's blessings on the groom as well as assisting with his marriage and fulfilling their kinship obligations by giving him some money.

After the ritāune hālne but before the marriage party's departure is the first of the wedding feasts, called bhater (from bhāt, cooked rice). The food and firewood for this feast (referred to as the jāne or going bhater) is supplied by the groom's house but much of the labor is cooperatively supplied by relatives in the village. All relatives present and all members of the village as well as those persons of different castes who have lagi or ṭāta relationships with the groom's family are fed. The meal itself consists of goat's meat, rice and soybean "curry". The rice for the tāgādhāri males must be cooked by a Brahman hired for the purpose, while the rice for the women is cooked by themselves, and any cokho caste male may cook the rice for the Dums and

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<sup>1</sup>Turner, Dictionary of Nepali, page 537.

the meat for the whole group. Participants in the feast, which is usually held on a field near the groom's house, bring their own brass plates (thāl) and cup and sit in a large circle around the cooking area in groups characterized by the same sex and caste status. Following the meal, everyone washes their own plates so that no one is required to touch their polluted utensils.

Normally this jāne bhater is the only feast the grooms' family has to provide until the marriage party returns with the bride. However, if the journey to the bride's house takes more than one day or involves crossing a major ridge (lekh), an additional feast referred to as a bhāt bakri (rice-goat) or lekh kātne bakri (ridge-crossing-goat) must be provided. When possible, this is arranged through relatives who live along the way. If these relatives are in the wife-giving category, then they do not have to be repaid for their expenses in providing the meal. But if they are wife-receivers, then any expenses incurred must be repaid in full. Regardless of whether they are wife-givers or wife-receivers, all members of the marriage who eat from them enter into a special relationship in which they must refer to their hosts as "bhātbakri" in the future.

The composition of the marriage party (janti) which leaves the groom's house after the jāne bhater varies according to the wealth of the families involved and to some extent according to whether they are traditional Pābai or Jyulyāl. According to ideal Jyulyāl standards, there should be a large

marriage party (thulo or big janti), which includes the groom, forty or more male relatives and village brothers, the bhala ādmi, the palanquin bearers, and six to ten Damai musicians. However, since many Jumla families cannot afford the expense of feeding this many people, particularly if the journey is long, the marriage party will frequently be small (called a sānu janti) containing just the groom, two or three close male relatives (one of whom will be the bhala ādmi), and several Damai musicians. Among a few Pābai families, the groom is not included in the marriage party--however I have neither the data or space to discuss this variation here.

Prior to the marriage party's departure the groom must take leave from his mother by symbolically sucking her breast and receive her blessings in the form of ṭikā. During this farewell, the following māngal is sung:

Look O my mother-in-law, you give leave to the  
marriage party soon.  
They may have to halt in the middle of the  
journey.  
On the way there are dense and dark jungles.

This māngal then goes on to extol the virtues of the bride's house and to compare the bride to Sitā and the groom to Mahādeo (Śiva):

How far away and in which strange place does the  
house, the palace of our bride lie?  
The palace must lie in the East, and there is a  
house in that direction which has trimmings of  
gold.  
That must be the house of our great queen Sitā.

What is Sitā like?

Sitā is an ideal woman; she is full of beauty and virtues.

Sitā's complexion is like that of gold; her face shines with the sparkle of diamonds.

Our marriage party must take Mahadeo and bring Sitā back.

As another part of the departure rituals, the palanquin (doli) which will be used to bring back the bride is decorated. Since most villagers are unable to obtain an actual palanquin for this purpose, a symbolic palanquin is constructed out of a log with a blanket attached to it. However, even this symbolic palanquin is decorated with colored tikās and flowers, and, as illustrated from the following excerpt from the Kāmi Ved, is considered to be inhabited by the gods.

May Mahādeo and Indra inhabit this palanquin.  
 May Basundhārā of the earth and all the other devis and devtas that inhabit the earth also come to this palanquin.  
 May Kālikā Mahākālī Devi also come and reside in this palanquin.

Following the decoration of the palanquin and the groom's leave-taking from his mother, the marriage party proceeds to the bride's house in procession. At the front of this procession are the Damai musicians dressed in special long white skirts and saffron sashes who frequently stop in front of houses to dance and play music in return for small gifts. Next in line is the palanquin, which is significantly placed before the groom on the outward journey and behind him on the return--signifying the bride's status before and after marriage. The groom follows riding a horse with a



relative holding an umbrella over his head to signify his pure ritual status akin to that of the gods. The groom is followed by the remainder of the marriage party, the more wealthy of whom may ride horses.

Upon the marriage party's arrival at the bride's house, two different rituals of welcoming take place. On the one hand, the groom is formally and respectfully welcomed by a respected elder from the bride's family through the mediumship of their Brahman priest in a ritual called baruni puja (barun is derived from varunā, the god of water). With the accompaniment of Sanskrit mantras and Jumli māngals the baruni puja consists of a brief puja to the bride's kalas, a Ganeś puja, and an exchange of ṭikās between the groom and the bride's representative, in which the bride's representative demonstrates the ritual superiority of the son-in-law (wife-receivers) by touching his feet (dhok garne).

Simultaneously to this very respectful Brahmanical ritual, the young women and girls from the bride's village disrespectfully throw pans of water over the members of the marriage party. This practice, called pāni khunaune, is accompanied with a considerable joking behaviour and horseplay. It is rationalized by the more conservative as a means of purifying the marriage party after their journey in which they may have had contact with untouchable Dums; however, others explained it as flirtation between newly established kuṭumb. In as much as it exhibits the values of romantic love and egalitarianism between the wife-givers and the

wife-receivers, it can be seen as an example of the inclusion of non-dharmic values into the marriage rituals.

Immediately following the baruni puja and the pāni khunaune, the groom is led into a cattle-shed next to where the marriage will be performed, and the bride's family prepares their wedding feast (called the māiti-bhater). During this preparation period the Damai musicians from the marriage party hold a musical and dance competition (Damai khel) with the musicians from the bride's village. At this time, it is considered the bride's musicians' right to win, while on the day of departure, the groom's musicians should win. The wedding feast follows the same pattern as that which occurred earlier at the groom's except that the marriage party must be served before the rest of the village can eat their share.

#### Marriage Rites

The rituals which are considered to constitute the actual marriage rites take place within the cattle-shed beneath the bride's house.<sup>1</sup> The first of these is the invocation jagge or hom for which the groom and bride's fathers are present, but the bride is absent. This puja commences with the preparation of the hom diagram and the starting of the sacred fire, and continues with a kalas puja and an invocation to all the gods. Its format is basically the same

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<sup>1</sup>Elsewhere in Nepal, these rites are conducted under a pavilion constructed in the courtyard. Jumlis explain that it is too cold in Jumla to allow for outside ceremonies.

as other homs performed for the bartaman and other saṁs-kāras both in Jumla and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> During the puja, māngals describing the formation of the jagge and the invocation of the gods are sung by the mānglyāris.<sup>2</sup>

Following the completion of this initial puja, the bride is brought into the room by her sisters and ritually weeping, is seated to the left of the priest but to the right of the groom. This seating arrangement signifies that the bride is at this point ritually superior to the groom (although inferior to the priest). This elevated status stems from her status as a spiritual gift (dān). Once she has been ritually given in the kanyādān and the major marriage rites have been completed, then her status is reversed and she is seated to the groom's left--a position she must occupy for the rest of her life. This shift in seating positions thus ritually illustrates the transition in a woman's life between her positions in her natal and husband's homes.

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<sup>1</sup>Aside from the fact that these pujās take place in a cattle-shed, Jumla pujās are somewhat different from those performed elsewhere by virtue of their informal style. For example, the priests are not concerned whether or not leather shoes are removed in the vicinity of the hom, and the sacred fire is frequently disturbed by people reaching for coals to light their pipes. Also, in one hom I witnessed, the priest left off his duties half-way through upon being informed that his food was prepared. He then finished the ceremony an hour and a half later after he had eaten.

<sup>2</sup>These māngals are very similar to the Kāmi Ved which are used by the Dums for their parallel ceremony.

After initial purification rites performed by the priest for the bride and the groom, the "feet washing" (gorā dhune) ceremony takes place. Starting with the bride's father or grandfather and her maternal uncle, each of the bride's male relatives wash both the bride's and groom's right foot and symbolically drink the water. They then touch their forehead to their feet (dhok garne) and give a small gift (dakṣiṇā), while the priest recites mantras and the maṅglyāris sing. The bride's female relatives, starting with the father's sister and mother, follow the same procedure, but only for the bride and without the priest reciting mantras. However, for the bride's closer female relatives, the feet washing takes much more time than for her male relatives as each one weeps with the bride.

This feet washing ceremony is considered the first part of the kanyādān which in Jumla, in contrast to other areas of Nepal, is spread throughout the marriage rites.<sup>1</sup> It ritually demonstrates the high status accorded to the daughter and son-in-law by the bride's family. This status differential vis-a-vis the son-in-law allows the kanyādān to be considered a dharmic act which provides merit to the bride's patriline. The bride is a pure gift given to a person of pure status, and thus, analogously to the gift of a cow to a Brahman, provides merit to the giver.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Roles of Women".

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders.

Following the feet washing, there are several rites which demonstrate the bride's high status and her entry into society as a woman with caste status (karma caleko). In the first of these, the priest provides the bride with a sacred mantra, similar to that provided to the man in his bartaman, by whispering it to her under cover of her shawl. Next, the groom does a brief puja to the bride's head, an act which will only be performed by the bride in the future.<sup>1</sup> The bride and groom then do several acts of pujā together, including eating curds, honey and ghi (madhuparkha) and exchanging blessings in the form of a barley-rice (jau-achetā) tikā for the groom and some sīdur powder sprinkled on her head for the bride. This marks the completion of the worship of the bride, and following a brief pujā, the bride's clothes brought by the groom are handed over for the bride to don.

After an hour's break, the marriage is continued through a number of ceremonies primarily intended to establish the bride's new relationship to the groom. This is first accomplished by officially changing the name of the

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<sup>1</sup>According to Bennett, this act of worshipping the bride once during the marriage ceremony is meant to insure that the bride will forever worship her husband in the future. In this connection, it is interesting to note that in Jumla the groom worships the head whereas in the rest of high caste Nepal, the groom should worship the bride's feet. It can be speculated that this difference is correlated with the more flexible position of women in Jumla society in which, unlike elsewhere, the women do not drink water from their husband's feet every day.

bride's gotrā to that of her husband in a ceremony in which the bride's hand is placed in the groom's. At this time the Brahman also furnishes her with a new name derived from her husband's. This is followed by a ceremony in which the bride's shawl (pacneurā) is tied to the groom and they rotate around each other clockwise for three times to the accompaniment of shouts of "biyāh bhayo" (the marriage has happened).

Next occurs a rite called lāhā which is intended to insure the fruitfulness of the bride through the mediation of her brother. The groom stands over the bride and with the tips of his fingers makes a horizontal hoop above the bride's lap. The bride's brother then drops unhusked rice through this hoop into a plate on the bride's lap three times. Following each receipt of rice in this fashion, the bride offers it to the hom fire. Jumlis state that the first drop of rice represents wealth (dhan), the second represents fruit in the form of children (phul), and the third represents harvest (anāj).<sup>1</sup> They further state that these "fruits" are a part of the gift which the brother is giving to the groom in the form of his sister.

The lāhā ceremony is performed yet a fourth time after the bāuri riṅgne, or fire circling ceremony has taken place. In this rite, which is found over all of Northern

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<sup>1</sup>While it is beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to examine this ritual in the light of data I analyzed in Kangra which suggests that the bride's brothers are essential to their sister's fertility.

South Asia, the bride followed by the groom, who holds on to her shawl, circumambulates the hom fire clockwise four times also to the accompaniment of more shouts of "biyāh bhayo". On the fourth round, the bride's father's sister (phupu) stops the couple and demands payment from the groom in a ceremony called phupu car. This demand is made because it is considered that the phupu has special claims on the bride which must be satisfied before she will allow the groom to take her away.<sup>1</sup> In response to this demand, the groom will normally pay several rupees and the last circumambulation is finished, following which the bride sits on the groom's left. However, since Jumlis recognize that for the bride's family to accept money from the groom violates his superior status in relation to themselves, the bride's father will sometimes make the payment on behalf of the groom.

During the circumambulation of the fire, the following māngals are sung while the priest continues to recite his texts:

The bride has gone round once in order to remember the grandparents.

The bride has gone round a second time in order to remember her parents.

The bride has gone round a third time in order to remember her uncles and aunts.

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<sup>1</sup>This special claim is traced to a story retold in the māngals sung at this time in which after the birth of a son the father's sister was the only relative who showed genuine joy and accepted the invitation to come to the sasthi puja.

The bride has gone round a fourth time in order to remember her brother and sister-in-law. The bride has gone round a fifth time in order to remember her divine lord (pati deo: husband). From today the bride has become one with the groom.

I have gone round the sacrifice (jagge, yagya) one time and the witnesses are the five musicians, the five maṅglyāris, and the five gods. I have gone round the second time and the witnesses are the sun and the moon, the heavens and hell (pātāl), the night and the day. I have gone round the fourth time and the four cardinal points (disā) are witnesses. I have gone round the fifth time and the five kalas are witnesses.

Following the lāhā and bāuri riṅne occurs another part of the kanyādān ceremony which elsewhere in Nepal takes place earlier at the end of the feet washing.<sup>1</sup> In this ceremony the bride's father or grandfather takes the bride's hand and with appropriate mantras from the priest places her hand together with a rupee into the groom's hands. This signals the giving of the bride to the groom, although a number of rites have already taken place which assume that this gift has already been made.<sup>2</sup>

The next rite, called samdhele joryo (joining of the samdhis, the parents of the bride and groom), serves the purpose of establishing the affinal kinship ties consequent on

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, Roles of Women.

<sup>2</sup>It is possible that this rite was inadvertently forgotten in the ceremonies I witnessed. In the rather flexible style of Jumla rituals, a certain amount of inadvertent variation does take place.



a marriage. Representatives of the groom's and the bride's family hold a string between them which represents the connection which has been established. They then stage a mock tug-o-war in which the groom's party is supposed to win, demonstrating their superiority.<sup>1</sup>

The joining of the affines is followed by the last of the kanyādān rites in which the marriage is blessed and the bride and groom are enjoined to treat each other properly. In one ceremony I witnessed, this was accomplished by the priest saying the following in Nepali:

Let this gift (dān) be good (rānro);  
 Let Pārvati [the bride] and Śiva [the groom]  
 receive fruits (phal).  
 Let them receive fruits like those received by  
 the King;  
 Let all consider this kanyādān as good;  
 Let the wife faithfully serve her husband;  
 Let the husband treat his wife well;  
 If wealth and children were not received in  
 previous births,  
 May they receive them in this.

In a discussion with Jumlis about this occasion, the following words were imputed to the participants:

Groom: Among women there are those who are deceitful, those who are witches, and those who are ugly. I shall not accept a wife like that. My wife must be from a respectable family, and live within her respect (izzat). No matter what happens she must have a bright and cheerful face. I may prosper, or I may suffer, but she will have to remain devoted to me under all circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup>In one case I witnessed, the bride's grandfather kept pulling the string away from the groom's representative much to the amusement of the onlookers. However, in the end, he was forced to give way and allow the groom's side to win.

Bride: When you have said this then know that I might also have to face happy days and days of sorrow. Then if you forsake me and marry another wife then what shall become of me? If one's husband is the kind who becomes enamoured with another's wife, and if he is dark-skinned and white-haired, then it is useless to accept him as a husband. I do not need a husband like that. I need a man who is full of virtue (gunwān) rather than one who is handsome (rupamān). He should always speak the truth and remain devoted. He should be a noble and great man.

Bride's Father: No matter what happens my daughter is leaving her country and home, she is leaving her mother and father who gave birth to her and cared for her and raised her. She has left all this and taken shelter with you. When she has done all this then do with her what you will. This maiden is now yours. Whatever condition you keep her in, the prestige (mān) and insult (apamān) will reflect only upon you.

As the kanyādān is now deemed to have been completed, the groom establishes his new relationship with his wife by putting sīdur (red powder) in the part of his bride's head. This powder which is only worn by non-widowed, married women (saubhāgya) is an indication of the bride's transition from unmarried to married and her special relationship (involving sexuality and fertility) with her new husband. In the words of the māngal sung at this time, "the sīdur of this day makes you (the bride) the responsibility of your husband."

As if to postpone this final transference of the bride to her new husband, the sīdur ceremony is followed by a joking ritual in which the bride and groom are made to hit each other and to eat each other's polluted food (jutho). During this ceremony in which there is considerable laughter, the assembled relatives urge the bride to hit the groom hard since this will be the first and last time that she is allowed to strike him and that he will eat her polluted food.

This ritual is referred to either as hāne (to strike) or as jutho khāne (to eat polluted food).

The marriage rites are then brought to a close with a final puja conducted by the priest in which all the gods are invoked and bidden farewell. The maṅglyāri follow suit with a song expressing the same intent:

The pañc kalas and the pañc Brahmans have stayed here as befits them (maryādā ma--with respect).

The five maṅglyāris have stayed here as befits them.

The musicians have stayed here as befits them.

The Masta gods have stayed here as befits them.

The Nau Durga goddesses have stayed here as befits them.

The tetis koti gods have stayed here as befits them.

The ista and the kutumb and dāju-bhāi have stayed here as befits them.

The kalas which has been decorated; the rice; the money; the cloth kept at the jagge; twelve brothers Masta, Nine Sisters Durga; thirty-three million gods, and the maṅglyāri;

Leave this world of men and go to heaven (swarga lok).

Wash the kalas and keep it with due respect.

Treat the maṅglyāris with honor and let them depart to their homes and stay there as befits them.

#### The Marriage Party's Return

Prior to the marriage party's return to the groom's house with the bride, another wedding feast takes place in the bride's village. In contrast to other areas in Nepal and Northern India, the bride's family does not bear the cost of this meal. Instead, except for the groom and his father who are fed at the bride's house, the marriage party is divided equally among all the households of the same caste

in the village where they are fed.<sup>1</sup>

After transportation has been arranged for the bride's dowry (daijo, consisting of clothes, bedding, and various vessels and kitchen utensils) and the bride has exchanged tikās with her natal relatives, the marriage party leaves and the same joking and water-throwing which accompanied its arrival. Since most palanquins are only symbolic, the bride must be carried on the backs of members of the marriage party. The bride's female relatives weep with the bride and attempt to restrain her departure. The Damais play music, and the maṅglyāris describe the departure:

Come out and look my brothers and grandfathers,  
The marriage party is about to leave.  
Our child will wet her shawl;  
The black eye-shadow (kājal) she wears in her  
eyes will become wet and flow away.  
Come my grandfather, your child is leaving.

Upon reaching the groom's house, there are a number of short rituals whose primary purpose is to introduce the bride to her new household. In the first of these, variously referred to as ghar paiso (entering the house), dhoko pujne (worshipping the door), or dailā niurāune, the bride followed by the groom, places three tikās of curds and rice on the top of the door. They then pass through the door, which is flanked with large copper water vessels, and step

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<sup>1</sup>While all appropriate households are supposed to participate in this cooperative venture, in fact the frequent existence of bitter family feuds often means that a few households are not included.

over a plate in which five oil lamps are burning, placing their feet on a special cloth in which nine heaps of rice (representing the naugraha) have been placed.

This auspicious entering of the house is followed by the meeting of the bride and her mother-in-law (sāsu-buhāri bhet). This meeting is staged in the form of a competition in which the bride and mother-in-law each search for a rupee that has been hidden in a bowl of rice placed in a container. However as in the similar ceremony in which the marriage party staged a "tug-o-war" with the bride's family (samdhelo joryo), the correct outcome is predetermined. In this "competition," it is considered auspicious for the bride to find the rupee and the mother-in-law is not expected to search effectively. The bride's "winning" indicates that she is intelligent and hard-working and will be a good addition to the family.

Next follows a ceremony in which the bride is literally and symbolically joined to her new mother-in-law. The groom takes each of their braids and tying them together, pours oil over the knot, indicating that he is bringing a wife to join his mother and that his ideal dharmic role is to create a close bond between them. When the oil has been poured, it is the bride's responsibility to untie the knot, perhaps indicating that if the bride/mother-in-law bond is broken that it is the bride's responsibility.

After the bride and groom have placed their hand-prints on the inside wall of the house to make it auspicious,

there follows the official meeting ceremony between the bride and her new affinal kin. In this ceremony, called mukh dekhaune (showing the face), the bride exchanges tika with her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, father-in-law, etc. and receives gifts of rupees from those who are older than the groom. For elder women, the bride must respond to this gift by placing rice (acheta) on their feet and bowing her head until she touches their feet (dhok). This establishes her hierarchical relationship within her husband's family. The acceptance of the bride into her husband's house is completed in the final wedding feast, in which she eats from her mother-in-law's hands.<sup>1</sup>

After several days in the groom's house, as long as it is a Wednesday or a Friday, the bride is sent back to her natal home (maita) for several weeks, or months depending on her age, with her brother who accompanied her to her husband's house. One of the groom's relations is then sent to fetch her back for her second entry into her husband's house. Following this second journey, variously called hatauti, durbini, or stauri pheraune, the marriage is considered complete and the bride will only return to her natal home on ritual

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<sup>1</sup>If it is a big marriage, the whole village will again be fed at this time. In small marriages, only the few persons who accompanied the groom will be fed.

occasions when other women also return.<sup>1</sup>

Although the marriage has been completed, there remains one ceremony concerned with fertility in which the bride and groom play a principal role. This ceremony, called chopāi, takes place on the first rice transplanting (dhān ropne) after the marriage. For the chopāi, a "doll" (putlā) is constructed in the form of a wooden cross from which red and white cloth has been strung, and placed in the middle of the largest rice field. On the day in the month of Jeth which has been specified by the village for commencing the transplanting of rice, the bride, followed by the groom are carried by the plowers and circumambulated around the doll three times in a counter-clockwise direction. They then return to their home by way of the major shrines and do a brief pujā to the gods in which they vow faithfulness to each other. While Jumlis give no clear meaning for the doll, they do associate this ritual with both the fertility of the couple and the field.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Women's Game

In addition to the rituals described above which are directly concerned with the life-cycle transition of marriage

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<sup>1</sup>If, however, she is a child bride, she will continue to spend much of her time in her parent's home until she has passed puberty.

<sup>2</sup>The counter-clockwise circumambulation, which is considered the inauspicious direction, is difficult to explain and requires further research.

there is an indirectly associated "ritual" which takes place at the groom's house on the night of the marriage rites occurring at the bride's village. This celebration, which occurs in different forms over most of Northern India and Nepal,<sup>1</sup> is called "the women's game or play" (āimāi ko khel). The women of the village whose male kin have gone in the marriage party (although in a small marriage most have in fact not gone) gather together around outside the fire and spend the night in dancing, singing, and joking. The joking takes a very specific form whose main intent seems to be to mock male sexuality. One woman is selected as the lāto (deaf-mute, cretin) and dresses up in tattered men's clothes with bells representing testicles and a broomstick representing a penis. This woman spends the night chasing other women around and much to the hilarity of all the women and girls present, imitates a male's role in sexual intercourse. The playing ends in the morning when the women exchange greetings and the woman who has played the lāto is given some rice by the other women.

### Death

Death rituals vary considerably according to the type of death and the caste and means of the family of the deceased. Like birth, death is an "organic" life-cycle transition and thus must deal with the pollution which

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Roles of Women."



accompanies it. However, unlike birth, initiation, or marriage, death marks an inauspicious transition, and the samskāra rituals associated with it thus lack the māngals which are an integral part of all the auspicious samskāras.

The primary distinction between types of death is that between a "timely death" (kāl ma mareko) and an "untimely death" (akāl ma mareko). The former are those which are perceived as "natural" deaths, deaths which occur in middle or old age as a result of sickness or non-violent causes. The latter include all "unnatural" or premature deaths, such as those resulting from accidents, sudden illness, violence (including suicide), or childbirth and are exceedingly inauspicious.

As in the other samskāras, the primary purpose of the death rituals is to ensure an orderly and dharmic transition from one life-cycle stage to the next. In the case of timely deaths, this transition is from the society of the living to either heaven (swarga) or rebirth, and the purpose of the rituals is to ensure that this transition is accomplished without the deceased's soul either being lost in-between worlds as a spirit (bhūt, picās) or going to hell (narka, pātāl). The inauspiciousness of untimely deaths make this proper dharmic transition problematic and uncertain as the danger of the soul remaining in this world as a spirit which haunts the living is very high. Thus, while most untimely deaths are ritually treated as timely deaths in the hopes that the soul can still make the appropriate transition,

some types of death in this category result in different ritual treatment.

Death rituals for timely deaths as well as those untimely deaths which are treated in the same fashion, center around the cremation of the body, the feeding and assistance to the soul on its journey to heaven (or rebirth), the mourning and purification of the deceased's surviving kin, and the subsequent commemorations of the death and the feeding of the ancestor. The primary purpose of the cremation and the rituals leading up to it are to purify the body of the deceased so that the soul (purus) can escape its organic and polluting confinement. The severance of the deceased's kinship ties are incorporated into this process. The soul is then symbolically fed and provided assistance for his journey to heaven through the mediation of a Brahman. This not only helps to accomplish the soul's transition but provides the opportunity for the surviving family to gain merit which will effect their own future life.

In contrast to this standard samskaric format, children who die before they have lost their milk-teeth<sup>1</sup> are buried in the earth or weighed down by rocks in the river

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<sup>1</sup>Although some Jumlis specify that the loss of milk teeth determines whether or not a child is buried or cremated, in fact there is great variation depending on the wealth and whims of the family. Thus some (particularly Pĕbais) bury all uninitiated children, particularly if they are pre-pubesent.

without any subsequent ceremonies except the observance of a brief one to three day pollution period. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the burial of children is comparable to the burial of saints (which though not done in Jumla through the lack of saints, is nevertheless known) since both children and saints are not members of caste society such that the soul does not require cremation in order to be released from the pollutions of the body. Adults who die untimely deaths as a result of plague or epilepsy are also buried in Jumla, but in this case other death rituals are performed and the reason for burial is to isolate the particular disease which might otherwise spread to the survivors.

Although death as a result of sickness in old age is considered timely, many Jumlis still attempt to avert this death by means of a ritual called kāl sāro (changing the time) which can be considered as the first of the death rituals. In this ritual, the dying person's family attempts to transfer the time of death to various items including some black lintels, a piece of black cloth (dhajā), some rice, and a black chicken. These substitute items are waved over the dying person's face and then taken to a crossroads where the chicken is killed and then left there with the other items. However, since the purpose of this act is to induce death (personified in the form of Yamaraj) to shift

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<sup>1</sup>Campbell, Saints and Householders.

to another person at the crossroads, some Jumlis consider it to be immoral (against dharma) and therefore do not practice it. Further, other Jumlis argue that since death is determined by an unchangeable karma, it is futile to attempt to change what fate (Bhābi) has written.

While kāl sāro is thus not always performed, many Jumlis do attempt to gain last minute merit for the dying person by assisting him to do godān, the gift of a cow to a Brahman. This may be accomplished either symbolically by giving some money to a cow, which is passed on to a Brahman, or literally, by giving a cow to a Brahman. Additionally, some wealthy and orthodox Jumlis try to arrange a last minute optional pujā such as a kathā or saptā.

The first of the purification rituals takes place at or soon after the time of death and is called hirin hālnu. In this ritual the deceased's son or other close relative places a coin (preferably gold, or a silver coin which has been taken on a pilgrimage) in the mouth of the deceased. The coin serves to purify the mouth which is the source of much pollution and thus vulnerable to evil spirits (bhut) as well as to show the concern of the relations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This double meaning can be related to the definitions of "hirin". Turner (Dictionary of Nepali, p. 639) glosses hirin as "a strong desire" and hirin hālnu as "to feel a strong desire." However, it seems likely to me that "hirin" in this context may be derived from "hiranya" meaning gold, which is known for its purifying qualities.

Following the hirin hālnu, the body is bathed and dressed according to its status. A man whose wife is living will be dressed in his good clothes and have a ṭikā placed on his forehead by his widow. The widow's bangles and marriage necklace (pote) are taken off by the deceased's younger brother and also placed on the body. If a wife dies while her husband lives, then she retains these marks of marriage and fresh sīdur is placed on the part of her hair. If a young boy or girl who are past puberty but still uninitiated die, then they are dressed in marriage clothes to attempt to change their status from "untimely" to "timely".

During this period immediately following the death, the deceased's male patrilineal kin (including the sāk and village dāju-bhāi) younger than the deceased, must shave their heads, don white clothes, and fast. Chief among these is the person who will have the principal responsibility for performing the funeral rites for the deceased. This person, referred to as kiryā putra (funeral son) or kiryā pati (funeral lord), should be the eldest son of the deceased. However, if the eldest son is not available or there are no sons, then various other relations including brothers, nephews, etc. must perform this crucial role. The shaving of the head, wearing of white clothes, and fasting are marks of respect for the dead which indicate their kinship relationship. Women relations of the deceased also fast, but instead of shaving their heads, loosen and uncover their hair.

Once the body is prepared and the entrance room has been plastered in the opposite direction to its usual pattern (usually the plastering is done from the doorway in), the corpse is taken out of the house (often by the back way if possible) and placed on the bier. The bier is constructed out of one or two pieces of bamboo depending on the sex and status of the deceased, or may in the case of wealthy families, be made in the form of an "armchair" called caupāl. Some families offer the first food to the deceased at the doorway in the form of piṇḍ, a ball of barley flour, although this is more common among the Jyulyals than the Pabai.

The bier is then carried to the site of the cremation by funeral party (malāmi or katāru) which is made up of patrilineal and village male kin while the women mourn. The cremation is located at particular village/family sites on the banks of a river. There a pyre is built from wood collected by the funeral party. The kiryā putra places a lighted lamp in the deceased's mouth and five piṇḍ of symbolic food on his chest. The pyre is then lit and the body cremated. Following the cremation of the body, all traces of the pyre are washed into the river, the site itself is purified by oil, and the funeral party bathes before returning home.

Although the funeral party can now resume eating, there are various restrictions imposed on their diet, clothes and behaviour--the extent of which depends on the closeness of

of their relationship to the deceased. Non-sāk patrilineal kin need only observe the restrictions of eating no salt for three to five days, following which they bathe and are no longer considered polluted. Sāk kin, particularly those who are direct descendents of the deceased, should observe this restriction of no salt in addition to no milk products, and no meat for thirteen days. During this period, they also should not wear their regular clothes, but be dressed in a dhōti or single piece of cloth that is preferably white with their cap turned inside out. On the thirteenth day, they are purified through bathing and the consumption of the products of the cow--the most important of which is cow's urine (gaūt) administered by a Brahman priest.

Considerably more extended and comprehensive restrictions apply to males and their wives upon the death of their father or mother (in the absence of male children, these restrictions are applicable to the kiryā putra). For men these include abstention from eating meat, onions, garlic, soybeans, masur lentils, and barley (kodo) for twelve months in the case of a father's death and six months for a mother's death. In addition they should not ride a horse, use an umbrella, wear a hat or any leather article, or directly participate in a pujā for a twelve month period. The death of a mother also entails abstention from milk for twelve months. Daughters-in-law are expected to observe the restrictions of not wearing a nose-ring (pulāki) and avoiding the same foods

as their husbands for the same period of time. They should also only wear a single blouse turned inside out and refuse to accept red or yellow tikās. Widows should observe the same restrictions for one year after the death of their husbands, and avoid remarrying within this time.

During the thirteen days in which the close patrilineal kin of the deceased observe the restrictions incumbent upon them after death, the number of death rituals performed varies according to the wealth and inclination of the deceased's immediate family (dhvang). More conservative and wealthy Jyulyals often engage their family priest on the day following the cremation to read the Puranas and conduct the ceremony referred to as sameru or kiriyā for ten days. However, the more common course is for the sameru or kiriyā to be performed on the tenth day after death, followed by a purification ceremony on the thirteenth day.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of retaining the priest's services for more than a day is to increase the merit of both the deceased and his family.

Regardless of whether the priest is immediately called in, almost all Jumlis feed pind to the deceased's soul for either ten or thirteen days. This pind consists of one round ball of rice cooked in milk (pind in its restricted meaning) as well as one long "sausage-shaped" pind referred

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<sup>1</sup>These days may be altered if so determined by the astrologer.



to as jāri for each day that has elapsed since death. Thus, on the first day one of each are offered; on the second day two of each, etc. These pind are offered next to the river where the cremation took place and are then buried in the sand or earth.

The kiriyā or sameru which is performed on the tenth day, or from the first day until the tenth day consists of a pujā performed by the family priest on behalf of the kiryā putra. For this pujā, a "sameru" is constructed to represent the sacred mountain of Mt. Meru. It consists of a pit approximately three feet across in the middle of which there is a heap of earth representing the mountain (parcat). During the course of the pujā the last of the immediate pind are offered to the top of this "mountain." Jumlis construe the purpose of this ritual both as a means by which to reconstitute and feed the otherworldly "body" of the deceased and to assist the soul to reach heaven. While the pind provides the food to form and feed the body, the symbolic mountain provides easier access to the other world.

Another ceremony performed at the time of the kiriyā involves the construction of a puppet (putlo, also pronounced putla) which represents Deo Dutt Brahman, a symbolic Brahman who accepts gifts on behalf of the deceased.<sup>1</sup> This puppet

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<sup>1</sup>By first offering the gifts to the putlo, the Brahman priests who eventually receive them remove some of the opprobrium attached to this position. See further, Bennett, "Roles of Women." It should also be noted that some Jumlis consider the putlo to represent the deceased.

is clothed and then symbolically fed a little of all kinds of food except for those which are restricted during the mourning period by all of the deceased's male and female relatives. This feeding is often accompanied by the priest reading from the Puranas, a service which may be commissioned to last the whole night. The kiryā putra is expected to remain in vigil for the full night at the site near a temple or the river where the kiryā has been held. This is often the occasion for telling of lengthy stories (chārat) regarding the dharma and various folk heroes (paikelo). On the eleventh day, the sameru and the puppet are thrown into the river.

On the thirteenth day, following purification through bathing and drinking cow's urine, the kiryā putra performs gāi tarpan or godān (the gift of the cow). In this ritual, a cow is decorated by tikā and red and white strips of cloth and then given to the family priest. Jumlis understand the value of this ritual as twofold. On the one hand, the gift of a cow to a Brahman in this world is considered equivalent to providing a cow for the deceased to cross the river into the next world; while on the other hand it increases the merit of the family involved and thus favorably improves both the deceased's and the survivor's karma.

As this ceremony marks the end of the polluted mourning period for all except the kiryā putra, restrictions regarding the abstention from salt and meat are now lifted.

Families with sufficient resources celebrate this event by providing a feast to the village for which a goat is cut and rice and meat served.

However, even after the thirteenth day ceremony, death rituals on behalf of the deceased continue in increasingly diminished and remote form for as long as the lineage is perpetuated. During the first year after death, pīṇḍ is offered once in a month after a night of fasting and a morning of shaving the hair and bathing. In addition, some people fast, bathe and shave one other time each month, although pīṇḍ is not offered. This process culminates in the barakhi ceremony which is performed on the first anniversary after death. In this ceremony, as in the monthly pīṇḍ ceremonies, the family priest performs a hom on behalf of the deceased and pīṇḍ is offered. Following the barakhi, sons and their wives can resume their regular clothes and the special restrictions placed on them are withdrawn.

Subsequent to the barakhi, annual pīṇḍ ceremonies called śrāddha are performed by the kiryā putra and his family priest for the rest of his lifetime. If the deceased was a particularly well-remembered person, this tradition may even be kept up by the kiryā putra's son, and perhaps even grandson. However, the more typical pattern is for the individual annual śrāddha to be discontinued upon the death of the kiryā putrā, and for the pīṇḍ offerings to the deceased to be amalgamated in the annual ceremony of sora śrāddha

in which all of the ancestors are offered pinḍ collectively during the two weeks before the festival of Dasāi. Thus, a particular ancestor is theoretically offered pinḍ for as long as the descendent lineage is maintained.

The fact that departed souls require a continuous line of male offspring to provide them with regular śrāddha in which they are offered pinḍ (food) and worship (pujā) illustrates the householder dharma's dominant concern with the perpetuation of the patriline. Chronologically, śrāddha is the last of the saṁskāra life-cycle rites, and in one sense, it is also its ultimate telos. From birth onwards, the saṁskāra are a means of dharmically ushering an individual through life so that he may be finally cremated within the ideal circumstances whereby his soul is cared for after death by both the gods and his descendents.

#### Brahmanism and the Householder's Life-Cycle

While the goal of the saṁskāra is ultimately to provide the means for an individual soul to reach heaven with a better karma which will, in turn, insure a better rebirth, the foregoing discussions of the rituals which make up the saṁskāra clearly indicates that most of them are only indirectly dealing with the particular transitions involved between life-stages as they are defined by the whole context of Jumla society. Thus some of the rituals can be understood as dealing almost exclusively with changing and enduring kinship relationships; some focus on economic transactions

involved; some are concerned with caste relationships; and even those rituals directed by priests as a means of invoking and receiving the blessings of the gods often contain ritual actions whose specific concerns are related to these other aspects of Jumla social life.

The extent to which sanskritic rituals performed by Brahman priests incorporate social relationships demonstrates the extent to which the Hindu model of dharma informs Jumla social organization and integrates it within the larger fabric of Jumla Hinduism. The working model of Jumla Brahmanism is based on this common denominator of **a dharmically ordained** system of life. Without a specifically Hindu social system, or at least one which can be perceived as such, the saṁskāra and the householder dharma they represent would lose much of their meaning. The dharma is as much "social" as it is "religious"--Jumla saṁskāra are "socio-religious" transition rites, and their viability depends as much on a social system which is understood as being organized according to the dharma as it does on the mediation of the Brahman priests and the presence of the "hidden" gods.

Thus, many of the saṁskāra reflect concern with the same principles that were found to underly the dharmic models of social organization. Throughout the saṁskāra there are always rituals whose principal purpose is to contain pollution associated with organic processes such as birth, menstruation, sexual relations, and death, and increase purity.

Purity is the only means to ritual transition between life-stages, it is the basis of dharmic action. This principle is most clearly illustrated in the marriage and death saṁskāra. In the former, the bride and groom are purified through various ceremonies in order that their sexual relations will violate the ideal of dharmic purity (and celibacy) to the least extent possible. In the latter, the body is purified through cremation by fire so that the soul can leave for heaven unfettered by organic worldly pollution. The same tension between the necessity for the organic and the ideal of spiritual purity which animates the kinship system is reflected in the saṁskāra's unceasing attempts to purify necessary pollution.

Likewise, the saṁskāra are concerned with maximizing merit (punya) and minimizing sin (pāp). Not only do they reinforce the hierarchical organization of society and the kinship system and the dharmically proper modes of relationship between individuals and groups, but they provide the means for gaining merit through the mediation of Brahman priests. The proper performance of the saṁskāra as well as the proper living of the life-stages they introduce is the primary purpose of the householder's dharma. By following this path, the householder controls pollution, minimizes sin, builds up merit and is pure enough to reap rewards of heaven or a better rebirth. By virtue of the mediation provided by the Brahman priests and astrologers, he is able to

harmonize dharmically significant events in his life with the cosmos and improve his own karma through pleasing the gods.

The integration of eschatological and social concerns within the householder's dharma through the utilization of common principles and reliance upon a common dharmic source (the Brahmanical tradition), allows the Jumli to maintain a proper relationship to the "other world" while dealing with life-cycle transitions in this world. Thus, while Jumlis point to salvation in the other world as the primary purpose of their dharma, most of them are content to allow this purpose to "take care of itself" through the performance of the correct rituals, and devote most of their attention to the social and economic aspects of the rituals performed. This attitude is reinforced by the "hidden" and remote nature of information regarding the other world. While Jumlis implicitly base their ritual actions on an acceptance of this other world as interpreted by the scriptures and the Brahmins, they often temper it with a certain amount of explicit agnosticism such that the answer to the question "what happens to the soul after death?" is as often met with the answer "who knows?" as with traditional accounts divulged by the priests. However, this explicit agnosticism regarding the soul's fate after life rarely extends to scepticism regarding the hidden gods existence and almost never influences the Jumli's perception of life in terms of purity and pollution, and merit and sin. The principles of dharma are firmly accepted, even if their other-worldly operations are vague and remote.

Jumlis' predominant concern with the social and economic aspects of Jumla Brahmanism emphasizes its sociological importance as a means of dealing with the cultural (i.e. social, psychological, political, economic) aspects of the major life-cycle transitions of birth, maturation, marriage, and death. As briefly discussed in the preceding description of the ritual cycle, these concerns are handled by a variety of means. New kinship relationships are ritually inaugurated, inherent conflicts are ritually expressed and resolved, patrilineal principles are emphasized, and affinal relationships are ritually integrated. Gifts of food, clothes, and jewelry are exchanged in ritual settings, and caste services are ritually reimbursed. Psychological stress is ritually chanelized, political alliances are forged between new kutumb as well as defined within patrilineal settings. In other words, the rituals serve diverse functions in diverse fashions and can be understood as a principle means by which Jumla social life is defined and maintained.

However, the Brahmanical context within which these rituals are performed sets important limits to the range of social phenomena with which these rituals can concern themselves. the sequence of social actions of each ritual is predetermined by sanskritic tradition (riti-thiti). Although some recurrent "abnormal" situations such as "untimely" deaths have been fully incorporated into the sanskāra,



the saṃskāra are primarily designed to deal with a "normal" life-cycle as it is defined by dharmic models of the cosmos and social organization. The manipulation and expression of social relationships found in the saṃskāra rituals is based on a generalized conception of social relationships as they are set out by the dharmic working model. While certain provisions are made to accommodate common irregularities such as the substitution of kin in similar relationships to those that are ritually required (i.e. the substitution of a nephew for the son in the kiryā putra role), as a whole the rituals are unable to accommodate significant deviations from the norm.

In as much as Jumla social organization is characterized by the strong presence of non-dharmic models of social action, the limitation on the saṃskāras' ability to ritually accommodate certain important social situations and conflicts assumes greater importance than it does in many other high caste Hindu areas in Nepal and India. The situations arising out of these non-dharmic models for social action, as well as social problems, conflicts, and irregularities stemming from the dharmic models for social action but not dealt with in the saṃskāra are part of the province of the incarnating gods (avatār devtā) and their oracles (dhāmi). Their role in Jumla culture, particularly in relation to the models for Jumla social organization and Jumla Brahmanism, is the subject of the next three chapters.

## CHAPTER 5

ORACULAR RELIGIONThe Incarnating GodsThe Family of Gods

Oracular religion, or those aspects of Jumla culture associated with dhāmis (oracles), is based on "incarnating gods" (avatār line devtā). These gods are those which use the medium of a dhāmi's body in order to act and speak in this world. The verb used to describe this characteristic (avatār linu) is the same as that used to describe the incarnations of the Brahmanical gods; however, Jumlis consider the incarnations of the Brahmanical gods to have occurred only in the distant past, and without the use of medium bodies, such that they are presently "hidden" (gupta), while the incarnating gods reveal themselves in the present.

The pantheon of incarnating gods can be separated into categories according to criteria of origin, nature, and power (śakti). Each of these categories of gods form "kin groups" with specific kin relationships to each other. The nature of this putative kinship system, as well as its assigned kin relation to the Brahmanical gods is an important clue to the values held by oracular religion and its relationship to Jumla Brahmanism. Thus the description of

the pantheon of incarnating gods given below has been organized according to these kin relations. However, it should be kept in mind, that this categorization is, in specific instances and specific localities, misleading: there are points of considerable ambiguity and flexibility within the pantheon which must be appreciated in order to understand the gods' meaning and their role in Jumla culture.

The primary source of information about the gods' individual life histories and relationships to each other is the pareli recited by the oracles when they are possessed by the gods. These parelis are the gods' "autobiographies". Recited during certain ceremonial occasions described later,<sup>1</sup> these pareli present the gods' life-histories as told by the gods themselves through the mediumship of their oracles.<sup>2</sup> As all of the more important

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<sup>1</sup>Since it is, from a phenomenological point of view, the gods themselves that speak through their dhāmis, this study frequently attributes the words of the dhāmis while in a trance directly to the gods as separate beings.

<sup>2</sup>These parelis appear to be similar to what Hitchcock calls the "shaman's song" among the Magar, Pignede, in describing the Puco Priest among the Gurung mentions a recitation (pe) which also seems similar. John Hitchcock, "A Shaman's Song and Some Implications for Himalayan Research." In Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal, ed. G. von Furer-Haimendorf, (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, Ltd. 1974): 294; Bernard Pignede, Les Gurungs: une Population Himalayenne du Nepal, (Paris, Mouton and Co. 1966).

gods have more than one oracle in different villages, and as the occasion for reciting pareli differ, each god's pareli varies according to the time allotted to its recitation. However, as in unwritten myths, the major incidents and relationships expressed by a particular god's pareli seem to be maintained in the different oracles' versions. This study has utilized the taped transcriptions of eight different gods' parelis collected by myself and my Jumla associate, Sri Tunga Nath Upadhaya, in addition to a short pareli recorded by Rimal and one taken down by the hand of Devkota.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the parelis themselves, this study has relied on knowledgeable Jumlis' accounts of the gods' life-histories and natures. These accounts represent "paraphrased parelis" in the sense that they derive from a common knowledge regarding the gods which is a result of constant exposure to the actual recitation of parelis as well as informal discussions regarding the gods in other

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<sup>1</sup>It would be interesting to compare the different versions of individual god's parelis as recited by different oracles and by individual oracles on different occasions. Such a study was beyond the scope of my research as it would have required the assistance of a number of individuals over a number of years, each supplied with a tape recorder and recompensed for the tedious task of transcribing. In fact, two researchers, Mr. Dor Bahadur Bista and M. Marc Gaborieau, have taped the pareli of Lama devtā in Lekpor village, in addition to myself. However, so far these other versions have not to my knowledge, been transcribed and translated. Rimal, Sahitya; Devkota, Jumlake Samajik Ruparekha.

forums. In general, they differ from the parelis themselves, primarily by being cast in the third person rather than the first, and secondarily by the lack of immediacy and emotion expressed in their telling. During the course of fieldwork approximately twelve life-histories of the gods were collected in this fashion in addition to numerous individual anecdotes and isolated facts. I have also relied on the summary of seven such life-histories given by Gaborieau,<sup>1</sup> as well as the other articles that have been written on the incarnating gods of Jumla.<sup>2</sup>

The Brothers: Bāra Bhāi Mastā

The Mastā are the most well-known gods of Jumla. First noted by Snellgrove and Tucci, these gods have been almost exclusively discussed by the scholars writing on Jumla deities, although Sharma and Gaborieau have noted that Masta are by no means the only important gods in

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<sup>1</sup>Marc Gaborieau, "Note Preliminaire sur le Dieu Masta" Objects et Mondes, 1969, 9(1): 19-50. (translated into English and reprinted as "Preliminary Report on the god Masta" in Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas, eds. John T. Hitchcock and Rex L. Jones, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976).

<sup>2</sup>P.R. Sharma, "The Divinities of the Karnali Basin in Western Nepal," in Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal, ed. C von Furer-Haimendorf, (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, Ltd. 1974); Shrestha, Jan Jivan; Narbahadur Hamal, "Dharmik Parvako Ek Anga: Masto," Bennu, ed. Ratnakar Devkota, no. 1, (2026): 61-65; Devkota, Jumlako Samajik Ruparekha.

Jumla.<sup>1</sup> Although disproportionate attention has been devoted to the Maṣṭā at the expense of the other important categories of incarnating gods in the Jumla pantheon, the Maṣṭā are in many respects the central figures of this pantheon, such that all the other incarnating gods are referred to as "maṣṭā paṭṭi" (towards the Maṣṭā, or, on the Maṣṭā side).

Collectively the Maṣṭā gods are always spoken of as the bāra bhāi (twelve brothers). The significance of this appellation lies not so much in the number as in the fraternal relationship attributed to the Maṣṭā. As Gaborieau has noted, "twelve" is a "nombre idéal plutôt que réel,"<sup>2</sup> a model for, rather than a description of, reality. There is no consensus regarding which gods are the twelve Maṣṭā brothers, and most Jumlis are unable to list more than five or six. However, a compilation of all the lists collected by different scholars and myself results in thirty-three different Maṣṭā names, fourteen of which are given by more than one source. Some of the names on this list have been called non-Maṣṭā by some scholars, but, as

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.; Sharma, "Divinities"; David Snellgrove, Himalayan Pilgrimage, (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1961); Tucci, Two Scientific Expeditions; Shrestha, Jan Jivan; Hamal, "Masto"; Devkota, Jumlako Samajik Ruparekha; Naraharinath, Itihasaprakasa.

<sup>2</sup>Gaborieau, "Dieu Mastā" : 23.

I will attempt to demonstrate later, such distinctions are spurious.

Given below is a list of all the Maṣṭā gods compiled by various scholars and myself, together with the location of the principal shrines where known. After each Maṣṭā's name a letter has been placed to indicate which persons have included this Maṣṭā on their lists. The key to these letters is as follows: G = Gaborieau; P = P.R. Sharma; D = Devkota; H = Hamal; S = E.K. Shrestha; and C = myself.<sup>1</sup> In some cases alternate spellings have been given:

<u>Maṣṭā</u>	<u>Location of Principal Shrine</u>
1. Buḍu (GSDPC)	Buḍu, Sījādarā, Jumlā
2. Thārpā (GSDPC)	Thārpā, Bomdarā, Mugu
3. Kāvā, Kāh, Kau, Kā (DSPC)	Kāvā, Khatyād, Mugu
4. Bābīro (GSDPC)	Bābīro, Tātopāni, Pañc-soyadarā, Jumlā
5. Ukhāḍi (PDC)	Ukhāḍi, Asidarā, Jumlā
6. Sunārgāon (DC)	Sunārgāon, Tātopāni, Jumlā
7. Dādār (DSC), Dāre Khatyād (G), Dāryā (P)	Dādār, Bajhāng
8. Kālosilṭo, Kālāsīlā (GDC)	Bināyak, Kunnā darā, Acchām
9. Bātpāl (GC)	Dādār, Bajhāng
10. Bijuli, Bijulidāḍo (PDC)	Bijulidāḍo, Jājarkoṭ
11. Guro is in some respects an anomolous god, a separate section (C; as non-Maṣṭā: P)	Bih, Bijulidāḍo, Sorudarā, Humlā
12. Khāpar (PGC)	Srinagar (Galbadarā), Gumdarā (Palantā) Zapatā Panchayat
13. Dudhesīlā, Dudhāsīlṭo, (SPGC)	Dailekh
14. Ksatripāl (GC)	Dhādar
15. Liudi (S)	Khatyād
16. Kamal (S) Kamale (C)	Khatyār, Serijam
17. Sim (SC)	

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<u>Maṣṭā</u>	<u>Location of Principal Shrine</u>
18. Ramāl (S) (C)	
19. Dhāsāpāni (S)	Palantā Khin Panchayat
20. Kurmi (SP)	Kālikoṭṭdarā
21. Lākhuro (C)	Dādār, Bajhāng (bhārja)
22. Dhaulāpurā (C)	Bājurā (Sījā)
23. Mege (C) (Kanārā, Kāmi Musto)	Juku, Palantadarā (Kāli-koṭ)
24. Liguni (C)	
25. Niguniko (C)	
26. Dāne (C)	
27. Lātā Silṭo (C)	Dādār, Bajhāng
28. Bāckoṭh (C)	
29. Kadārā (C)	
30. Bāntapāl (P)	Pāuni Sījādarā (Dādār)
31. Lvāchāri (P) Lāvāsor (C)	Telphi, Chaudabisdarā
32. Bānjhkoṭ (P)	Bānjhkoṭ, Palantadarā
33. Baḍḍākoṭi (P) Ghorāmauke	Chautho

An analysis of the gods given in this list reveals that the names of the Maṣṭā derive from two sources. The first and most common source of the Maṣṭā's name is the name of the village in which its principal shrine is located (i.e. Buḍu, Dādār, Bābiro, etc.). In almost every case where this relation is known not to hold, the name has a semantic meaning descriptive of the god. Thus, in the latter case, "kālosilā" refers to "black rock" a term used to mean "blood-accepting;"<sup>1</sup> "dudhesilā" refers to "milk rock" meaning "milk-accepting;" "bātpāl" translates as "guardian of the shares;" "ksatripāl" translates as "guardian of land" and "guru" is generally assumed to derive from "guru." These descriptive terms will take on more meaning as the god's nature is further described in the next section.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., page 41.



The differentiation of the Maṣṭā gods on the basis of the location of their main shrines as well as descriptive epithets suggests on the one hand that Maṣṭā is one god whose "incarnations" in different villages and different forms are ideally referred to as twelve brothers.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it seems to indicate that Maṣṭā is a collection of a number of village gods whose origins and natures have converged over the years. While it is probably impossible to resolve a historical question of this sort, it is important to note that there are a number of common features of the Maṣṭā gods which support at least the partial identity of the various separate incarnations. These common features are found not only in the similarity with which the shrines are organized and the regular worship performed, but in the origin stories and life-histories recounted by each brother in his pareli.

According to these life-histories, the Maṣṭā are sons of Indra, who is specified as the king of heaven. Upon the order of Indra, the Maṣṭā took incarnations in this world (mṛtyalok) in the village of Dādār in Bajhāng District (west of the present Jumla District).<sup>2</sup> From

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<sup>1</sup>This explanation seems to be preferred by Gaborieau. (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup>Some accounts also mention Garhwal as the place of original incarnation in this world. When this discrepancy is pointed out to Jumlis, they often state that while the Maṣṭā did spend some time together in Garhwal, they first revealed themselves in Dādār.

Dadar, the Maṣṭā brothers wandered from the northern part of Jumla region (Humla, Mugu) to the southern (Dailekh, Surkhet) both singly and together and performed many deeds for the benefit of mankind. During the course of these wanderings, there was an informal division of the territory such that different brothers became associated with and responsible for different areas within the Jumla region.

While the Maṣṭā derive their origin from Indra, the Vedic Hindu deity, they also closely associate themselves with the Tibetan cultural tradition presently prevalent in the northern regions of Jumla and previously also associated with the Malla kingdoms. At the beginnings of their wanderings, the Maṣṭā acted as Bhotiyas. This is illustrated in Bābiro Maṣṭā's pareli:

All us brothers and sisters [see below] used to wear the clothes that are worn by the Bhotias. We put on lupkā [Tibetan dress, bakhu] and we ate their food, thukpā [a Tibetan soup]. We lived just as the Bhoties did, and we travelled to each of the villages and places that the Bhoties went to.

The phrase "eating thukpā, wearing lupkā" (thukpā khāne, lupkā lāune) is frequently used also by Jumlis when describing the nature of the Maṣṭās at the present time. Kālo Siltā Maṣṭā carries this identification one step further in his pareli. After reaching Mugu gāon (in Mugu district), he recites,

And then I saw a very beautiful Tibetan woman (jāreni) and I desired her, So I teased that woman and I played with her. After I had stayed there for a few days and passed my time in love then I came to (another place).

This association with the Tibetan tradition is further emphasized in the "divine language" (devtā bhāsā) which the family of incarnating gods uses to communicate with each other. This "language" uses phonetic combinations which sound like Tibetan (i.e. "lā mriduk, khārpā mriduk, lākcha mridu, dho mridu") and is identified by Jumlis as a language similar to that spoken by the Bhotes.

In the course of their wanderings, the Maṣṭā brothers leave the northern areas and begin to identify themselves more with the Hindu gods and populations of the central and southern areas of Jumla region, including both the Pābais and the Jyulyāls. This identification takes the forms of: a) meeting and worshipping the "hidden" gods which have shrines in Jumla, b) meeting and assisting Jumlis of different castes, including Pābais, Brahmans, and Dums, c) purifying themselves through performing various rites, d) performing acts of dharma, and e) appearing in the guise of a jogi. For example, Bābiro Maṣṭā recites,

Then I went to the temple of Guru Chandan Kātha [in Jumla bazaar] and there I offered incense and puja. After accepting cow's urine and dung (gaut-gobar), I became pure, and I performed dharma.

and, later:

At that time I met a son of a Brahman, We made the Brahman's dharma and my dharma one, and then I performed puja and bathed in milk and made myself pure (suddha).

An additional quotation from Bābiro's pareli shows the

association with Pābais:

I gave much riches and wealth to one called Jaibal, who was the son of a Pābai. When he became rich then his family also increased.

It is evident from the examples given above that while the Maṣṭā brothers have attempted to establish their origin and legitimacy in terms of Jumla Brahmanism, they also retain a strong association with the Bhote traditions. It is tempting to speculate on a historical explanation for the presence of this Tibetan association among the Jumla incarnating gods. Such an explanation would be supported by: a) the co-existence of Hinduism and Buddhism during the Malla era, b) the co-existence of Bhotes and Hindu caste groups during both the Malla and post-Malla eras, c) the possible migration route of the Khas through Garhwal, Gugge, and Purang, and d) the association of the time of Maṣṭā incarnation with the Baisi Raja's era (an association which will be discussed later). Whatever the validity of such an explanation, however, it is still necessary to understand the meaning of this Tibetan association within the present context of Jumla Brahmanism and Jumla culture.

Parts of this meaning is revealed by the internal kinship relations of the Maṣṭā brothers. As the sons of Indra, and as the brothers of the "family of incarnating gods," the Maṣṭā stand as the patrilineal focal point of the pantheon's putative kinship system. They are the reference point (the "ego") for the system, and would appear

to represent the patrilineal aspects of kinship. However, in contrast to the principle of patrilineal status ranking which insists upon a definite hierarchy between individuals on the basis of generation and seniority of birth, most of the Maṣṭā brothers are not clearly ranked as elder or younger.<sup>1</sup> Two exceptions to this rule are the positions of eldest (jethā) and youngest (kānchā) which are generally assigned to Buru Maṣṭā and Daḍār Maṣṭā respectively. However, in these cases, Hindu patrilineal reckoning of status within a generation has been reversed in favor of the normal Bhote system of reckoning. Daḍār, the youngest Maṣṭā, is universally considered the king (rājā) of the rest of the Maṣṭās, similar to Bhote families in which it is the youngest son who inherits the throne. In deference to the Hindu system, however, Buru, the eldest, is considered the wisest--the one whose advice must be followed. In addition, on a between-generational basis, the patrilineal subjugation of sons to father has been maintained as an analogy for the relationship of the incarnating gods to the hidden gods of Jumla Brahmanism.

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<sup>1</sup>Gaborieau refers to one of the legends he collected as stating that territory was divided between the Maṣṭā on the basis of seniority. However, all Maṣṭā address each other as "bhāi" (younger brother or undifferentiated "brother"), never distinguishing between themselves on the basis of seniority as human brothers would do. ("Dieu Masta": 23).

The reversal of the status of the eldest and youngest Mastā together with the lack of hierarchical differentiation between the other brothers suggests that Mastā represent a de-emphasizing of the hierarchical respect relationships which characterized male kin relations within the patriline (i.e. patrifocal relationships). This possible reversal of the dominant values of kul dharma has important implications for understanding the meaning and role of oracular religion in Jumla culture which will be explored in the succeeding sections on other members of the Jumla divine pantheon.

The Sisters: Nau Durgā Bhawāni

Closely associated with the twelve Mastā brothers are their "nine sisters," the Nau Durgā Bhawāni. As the following list elicited from Jumli informants by various scholars demonstrates, the number "nine" is, like the number "twelve," more ideal than real.

<u>Bhawāni</u>	<u>Source</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Main Shrine Location</u>
1. Bhawāni	SGPC	(many locations given)
2. Malikā	SGPC	Jumlā; Dharāl, Rakāldarā;
3. Kālikā	SPC	Litākoṭ, Malikā Lekh,
4. Kanakasundari	SPGC	Jumlā-Pājurā, Hāḍṣijā,
5. Tripurāsundari	SPGC	Sījādarā, Jumlā-Chauda-
6. Pugelni	SHC	bhisdarā, Jumlā-Tibrikoṭ,
7. Jalpā	GPC	Rakāldarā; Khatyār Lekh,
8. Anesamālini	SC	Ukhāḍi, Chaudabhisdarā
9. Thagālni	S	

<sup>1</sup>As for the Mastā list, S = Shrestha, G = Gaborieau, P = P.R. Sharma, H = Hamal, and C = Campcell.

<u>Bhawāni</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Main Shrine Location</u>
10. Himālini	S	
11. Māhākālī	G	
12. Sārdā	G	
13. Deurāli	G	
14. Vindhyaśāsini	G	
15. Mahiṣāmārdini	G	
16. Siddhidātā	G	
17. Ambikā	P	
18. Candikā	P	
19. Jālandhāri	P	
20. Seti	P	

As contained in this list, most of the sisters' names are Puranic epithets of the Brahmanical "hidden" goddess Durgā. This identification of these goddesses with Durgā is made by all Jumlis and is the source of the classical number "nine."<sup>1</sup> It is also the source of the names numbered 8-20, with the exception of some local geographical names such as "Seti." That is, after Jumlis have listed the first five or six sisters whose shrines they know, they complete their list by recalling classical epithets of Durgā they have learned through Puranic accounts, regardless of whether there are any shrines dedicated to them in Jumla.

However, the identification of all these sisters with Durgā is ambiguous. While the identity is maintained in abstract discussions, questioning regarding particular life histories and roles yields two somewhat separate categories of goddesses. On the one hand are those goddesses

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<sup>1</sup> Many Puranic accounts mention nine Durgā forms.

mentioned in the previous chapter which function as "hidden" gods located in the Jumla region. These include Kanakasundari, Tripurāsundari, and other goddesses on the list whose possible temple location I was unable to ascertain. These "hidden goddesses," sometimes distinguished by being called "Bhagwati," are usually housed in large stone temples and are represented by a physical image (murti). While they are referred to as "sister" by the Maṣṭā dhāmis, they are never incarnated in dhāmis themselves. Thus, lacking parelis, their life-histories are usually cast in terms of Puranic stories.

In contrast, others of the sisters are barely distinguished from their Maṣṭā brothers.<sup>1</sup> As will be described later, their shrines, patterns of worship, and lack of an image, are identical to the Maṣṭā. These goddesses are part of the closer family of "oracular gods" who manifest themselves to the world through their dhāmi.<sup>2</sup> Collectively they are usually referred to as "Bhawāni" after the name of

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma traces the historical association of Bhawani and Maṣṭā to a document of Saka 1547 (A.D. 1468) which refers to "Bhuvani Mastho." Sharma, "Divinities": 249.

<sup>2</sup>Although Sharma (Ibid.) notes Bhawani is associated with Maṣṭā in contrast to the Brahman pujari-officiated temples of Kanakasundari, Tripurāsundari, etc., he states that even Bhawāni is not represented by an oracle (p.251). On this point he is mistaken. In the two panchayats of Had Sijā and Lurku there are seven dhāmi for Bhuvāni and Kālīkā.



the goddess-sisters in the area.<sup>1</sup> In addition to Bhawāni, the most common sisters are Kālikā and Malikā among the avatāra goddesses.

Unfortunately, as I was unable to tape any parelis of the Bhawanis, my information on their origins and deeds is all at "second-hand" and somewhat incomplete. In stories told about them and in reference to them in other deity's parelis, their appearance in the Jumla region and subsequent activities closely parallel those of the Mastā. First manifesting themselves in Dādār, they wandered around the region sometimes together with their Maṣṭā brothers and sometimes on their own.<sup>2</sup> While they speak the same divine language as their brothers, I was unable to find any other associations with Bhote culture. Thus, as their identification on some levels with Durgā suggests, they are more strictly "Hindu" than their brothers. But, like their brothers, they are not hierarchically ordered according to seniority of birth and address each other as "bahini" (younger sister) transforming this term into a form of address between equals.

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<sup>1</sup>Bhawāni is, of course, also used as an epithet of Durgā.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma mentions a legend, which I was unable to confirm, in which the reasons for the Maṣṭā incarnation was given as necessary in order to protect the virtue of their sisters from demons (rāksas). Sharma, "Divinities."

The Maternal Uncles: Māhdev

Closely identified with the brothers Maṣṭā and sisters Bhawāni are a group of deities considered to be their maternal uncles (māmās). The most prominent and widespread of these are as follows:

<u>Māmā</u>	<u>Source</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Main Shrine Location</u>
1. Māhdev, Māhādev Māhādeo	PC	Many locations
2. Māhārudra	PC	Padmārā, Chaudābhis
3. Kuldev, Kuldeo	C	Many locations
4. Māhābhāni, Māhābhyā, Māhābhāi-bhānjā	PGHC	Mabu, (Jumla/Dailek)

Two of these names are common epithets of Śiva (Māhādev, Māhārudra), the third translates as "family or lineage deity" (Kuldev); and the fourth could possibly be rendered as great brother (Māhābhāi).

Beyond statements that these incarnating gods were, like Maṣṭā and Bhawāni, of divine rather than human origin (bhuiphuṭṭā, earth-arising), Jumlis I queried were unable to give accounts of the origins of these categories of gods. In the Kuldev pareli I collected, no origin story is recited. Instead the pareli commences with wanderings in the mountains and plains:

Hu! Hu! Hu! I plucked the various kinds of flowers and put them in my hair. I plucked them from the twenty-two different plains (maidān) and from the twenty-two different mountains (parbat) and from alpine

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<sup>1</sup>As for the **other** list, P = P.R. Sharma; G = Gaborisau; H = Hamal; C = Campbell.

meadows (pātan) and from the green forest meadows (caur).

The pareli then continues in a parallel fashion to those of the Maṣṭā. It includes references to association with Bhote culture:

When I looked at myself and saw the bakhu (Tibetan dress) of purut (?) which was upon my back, then how well it suited me,

to association with Pābai Chetris:

And then I was incarnated in a person of the Matwāli Chetri caste (jāti) who was afflicted with a disease, and to being a jogi:

That old man said (to me): You are staying here like a jogi and eating nothing.

While I was unable to obtain a pareli for Māhdev, Jumlis informed me that they also conformed to this same pattern. In this sense, Māhdev's position is similar to Bhawāni. For, like Bhawāni, Māhdev is associated with his Brahmanical namesake (Śiva), while his life-history and pattern of worship confirms to the Maṣṭā pattern. This ambivalent status is reflected in Jumlis' understanding of Māhdev. While some assert that he is indeed an aspect or form of Śiva, others categorically deny that there could be any relation between the Brahmanical hidden god, who as a vegetarian is worshipped in the forms of Bhairav Nath and Chandan Nath in Jumla bazaar,<sup>1</sup> and the incarnating non-vegetarian god who is considered to be Maṣṭā's maternal

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<sup>1</sup>cf. previous chapter. He is also worshipped in small shrines in some villages (i.e. Hādsīje).

uncle. This confusion is an acknowledgement that although the name is the same, conflicting sets of values and patterns of worship characterize the Brahmanical and incarnating deities.

The identification of this category of incarnating deities as maternal uncles signifies a special kind of affinal relationship with the Maṣṭā brothers and Bhawani sisters. As pointed out in the chapter on kinship, maternal uncles are considered to have a close, almost spiritual, relationship with their nephews and nieces (bhānjā, bhānji), which contrasts sharply with the distance/respect relationship which should be observed by members of a younger generation with their consanguineal elders. As members of an ascending generation, the maternal uncles have a superior status which demands the respect of their nephews and nieces; but as non-patrilineal mother's brothers, this respect is reciprocated and tempered by affection. By calling Māhdev his maternal uncle, Maṣṭa is establishing a relationship of unequal respect that is, more than any other relation between unequals, characterized by mutual loyalty and affection.

#### The Nephews and Daughters: Picās Devtā

All of the incarnating deities described above are considered to be of divine origin. In contrast, this category of gods is composed of the spirits of deceased humans, called picās devtā. All of the deities in this category

are the spirits of humans who have died an untimely (akāl) death. However, not all those who have died an untimely death become picās devtā. While many spirits of such persons do not manifest themselves in any way after death, the majority of those that do, either through their actions or by way of a human medium, confine themselves to their lineage. These spirits, called maiya, are discussed below; the picās devtā are those maiya who have shown sufficient power (śakti) to become gods (devtā) for persons outside their own natal lineage.

Since all maiya are thus potential picās devtā, constructing a list of gods in this category is even more problematic than for the incarnating gods of divine origin. Furthermore, many of the deities in this category are confined to a single village. The following list, then, merely mentions some of those picās devtā who are well-known in the Jumla region.<sup>1</sup>

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location of Principal Shrine</u>
Jaganāth	Koṭkholā (Kālikoṭ), Bārabisdarā
Īṣṭa and Īṣṭāni	Cilkhāyā, Bārabisdarā
Hyākar (Hiyā Lāṭā)	Simpatī, Sijeri Dharā
Deuti	Nuwākoṭ, Pānsayadarā ( <u>māiti</u> ), Lurku, Sījādarā ( <u>ghar</u> )
Satyawati and Som Rājā	Jubithā, Rakāldarā

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, "Divinities" lists some other deities in this category on page 255.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location of Principal Shrine</u>
Lāmā <sup>1</sup>	Lekhpur (Lekhpara), Sijadara
Gomae Lāṭo	Gautambada, Pansayadara

The names contained in this list represent either the name of the deceased person (i.e. Jaganāth, Hiyā, Satyawati and Som Rājā) or descriptive epithets (i.e. Īṣṭa and Īṣṭāni: male and female genders of "friend," Deuti: "goddess," Lāṭā or Lāṭo: "deaf and dumb," Lāmā: "Buddhist monk," etc.).

The parelis and life-histories of these gods reveal that for most of them the untimely death by means of which they became deities was not the result of an accident or illness. Rather, most of these gods died by deliberate violent means: either in the form of suicide (Jaganāth, Deuti, Satyawati, Gotāme Lāṭo), or as a result of murder (Īṣṭa and Īṣṭāni, Hyākar, Som Rājā). These violent deaths are always the result of unjust treatment of the victim. Having died a wrongfully violent death, the victim's spirit then returns to avenge itself upon the evil-doers. In this process of vengeance and the subsequent pacification that is necessary, the spirit incarnates itself in human mediums and thus joins the family of incarnating gods.

The spirits of deceased human victims that have been established as gods are addressed by the kaṣṭā as

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<sup>1</sup>As a special case, Lama is discussed in a later section.

either bhānjā (sororial nephew), bhānji (sororial niece), or chori (daughter). That is, if the deity is a male, Maṣṭā is considered to be his maternal uncle (māmā); and if it is a female, Maṣṭā may either be considered her maternal uncle or father. It is apparent that for male deities and some female deities, this relationship re-duplicates that found between Māhdev and Maṣṭā, with Maṣṭā now assuming the superior position of maternal uncle. As one's maternal uncle's maternal uncle is also addressed as māmā, the relationship between Māhdev and the picās devtā follows the same pattern.

The alternative kinship relationship of father-daughter which is assigned to some female picās devtā and the Maṣṭā brothers appears anomalous to the pattern of family relationships within the incarnating gods. However, as was noted in the chapter on kinship, this relationship is, like the maternal uncle-nephew relationship, characterized by respect/affection. Significantly, while the father-daughter relationship is considered an alternative to the maternal uncle-nephew, the father-son relationship is not.

The somewhat inferior position of the picās devtā vis-a-vis their maternal uncles/fathers is attributed by Jumliś to their human as opposed to divine origin. They sometimes note that gods of human origin have only "half-power" (ādhā śakti), while those of divine origin have

"full-power" (purā śakti). This seemingly definite distinction based on origin becomes blurred, however, wherever particular picās devtā establish a reputation as powerful or "big" gods (thulo devtā). Thus some Jumlis state that some of the picās devtā should be addressed as maternal uncle rather than as nephew; and some claim that some of the Maṣṭā were originally of human origin. It therefore seems likely that over time some gods have moved from one category of kinship relation to another and that there is a certain amount of flexibility in the system.

Even as Maṣṭā is the focal point of the incarnating gods' putative kinship system, Maṣṭā also seems to represent the model that deities from other categories "imitate" in the process of change.<sup>1</sup> For example, the pareli of the anomalous god Lāmā, closely follows the pattern of the Maṣṭā and makes no reference to his human death--implying that he also had a divine origin. However, examples can even be found among the less established local picās devtā. Thus, the Gotāme Lāṭo who was born a Brahman girl commences her pareli with an incongruous reference to wearing Tibetan clothes:

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<sup>1</sup>This process can be seen as analogous to "Sanskritization" as originally set out by M.M. Srinivas with regards to caste. Within this analogy, Maṣṭā is equivalent to the "dominant caste" within a region that other castes seek to emulate. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1966).



I had been the cowherd of the kailu gāi (a cow dedicated to a particular incarnating god); I had lived in the shed of the cow like a cowherd, I had worn a bakhu (Tibetan dress) of wool, a cap of wool, a shawl of wool. I had worn white clothes. I am the Lato of Gotamwada. (emphasis added)

This reference to a Brahman girl wearing Tibetan dress can only be understood as an attempt to imitate the Mastā and establish a greater degree of familiarity with them.

Given the indirect association of Mastā with Bhotes and Pābais, it is also important to note that many of the deities in the picās devtā category were originally of the Brahman caste.<sup>1</sup> This fact is yet additional evidence of the integration of oracular religion with Jumla Brahmanism, suggesting that the greater purity of the Brahmans provides them with the śakti (power) which enables them to more easily become deified.

#### The Lineage Spirits: Maiyu

The spirits of deceased lineage members who have died an untimely death are not strictly speaking part of the family of incarnating gods. However, they are briefly described here because they are the pool from which the picās devtā are drawn.

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<sup>1</sup>Noticing this correspondence, Sharma considered the category of deified spirits to be composed exclusively of deceased Brahman men and women ("Divinities" :245). However, in addition to Lāmā, the gods Iṣṭa and Iṣṭāni were Bhotes from Humla, and I was told that spirits of members of other castes could also become picās devtā.

The spirits in this category are called maiyu, although elsewhere in Nepal they are known as bāyu (wind, spirit). Not all persons who have died as a result of accident or violence become maiyu. maiyu are those members of this class of spirits which were unable to be integrated into the next world during the death rites and which have chosen to haunt their living descendants. This "haunting" either takes the form of troubling some descendent through causing misfortunes such as illness or crop failure or through possessing a descendent in order to make its presence and desires known. In the former case, the action of the maiyu is usually determined through consultation with a dhāmi; whereas in the latter which occurs more rarely, the maiyu speaks for himself through an occasional medium.

Once the active presence of a lineage spirit has been determined, a small empty niche inside the household to which the spirit has manifested itself is set aside as a shrine. All members of the immediate lineage (sāk) contribute to the spirit's monthly feeding and worship (mānnu khāne), but only one person is actually responsible for the worship which is performed on the day before the full moon. This man, referred to as the mānnu khāne māntā (māntā = mānche), must be an initiated (karma caleko) male member of the patriline. At the time of worship he offers incense (dhup), a lighted lamp (batti), a piece of cloth

(dhajā), rice mixed with curds (dahi-cāmal), and yellow unleaven bread (besār roti) to the spirit. Once the food has been blessed through offering, thus becoming prasād, it is distributed to patrilineal members, including daughters-in-law but excluding married sisters and daughters.

According to Jumlis, the purpose of this monthly worship is to please the deceased ancestor and thus deter him from causing harm. Since victims of untimely deaths are unhappy with their fate and frequently express their resentment by troubling their descendents, it is necessary to pacify them through food and worship. Those spirits who because of the circumstances of their death and inherent power are particularly vengeful to persons outside their own lineage require pacification by a larger segment of the population frequently go on to become picās devtā with their own oracles and separate shrines. As maiyyu can manifest themselves either immediately after their death or many years hence, the family of incarnating gods receives constant additions from this direction. The reverse process also occurs, however. The worship of maiyyu from previous generations is often discontinued when a more recent maiyyu manifests itself within the lineage; and some picās devtā who no longer have dhāmi are also gradually forgotten.

The Servants: Bāhāns

Closely associated with almost all of the incarnating gods are their "servant gods." These gods are referred to as bāhāns, which Jumlis derive from the sanskritic vahanā or vehicle.<sup>1</sup> These bāhāns are thus considered to be analogous to the divine animals which serve as the vehicles of the hidden gods. Although the bāhāns are associated with horses, however, they are not considered to have animal forms or origin. Instead, the bāhāns are composed of ghosts (bhut) and demons (rākṣas, dait or daitya) whose inherent malevolence has been transformed into submission through the superior power (śakti) of the incarnating gods. Although some of these ghosts are considered to have had human origin, their specific identity is usually considered to have been forgotten.

Almost all of the important incarnating gods have at least one bāhān associated with them, and some of the best known deities have up to five or six. Among the forty-seven bāhāns collected by Sharma<sup>2</sup> and the forty-four

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<sup>1</sup>While this etymology makes linguistic sense, it is interesting to note the similarity of this term to the Kham Magar (Tibeto-Burman language family) word for "the shaman's helping spirit." Watters gives this term as bahrang in the area to immediate-East of the Jumla region. David Watters, "Siberian Shamanistic Traditions among the Kham Magar of Nepal," in Contributions to Nepalese Studies, no. 1, (February 1975) 2: 14.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, "Divinities."

collected by myself, only a few names are duplicated. This indicates that, by in large, each god has his own individual bāhān and that the presence of a bāhān is usually confined to only one location. This surmise is further demonstrated by the fact that most of the bāhān's names are derived from the location of their shrine (usually in a ravine formed by a tributary stream, a kholā) or the name of their "master" deity. Some examples of the former are: Naulikholā, Dhulikholā, Kholākhāni; and of the latter are: Duru ko Bāhān, Thārpā Bānān, Phutāsili, etc. Some of these bāhāns have their own life-histories; while the origins of others is considered to have been obscured by time.

As their descriptions as "servants" (nokar) indicates, the bāhāns are members of the incarnating family of gods by virtue of their subservient attachment rather than by putative kinship. As their originally demonic nature has been permanently tamed, however, their eternal loyalty to their masters has been assured. Thus the bānān are considered members of this family in the same sense that a loyal servant or slave is a member of a human family.

Despite their lower status and dependent relationship, the bāhāns also have both their own shrines and their own dhāmi. A few of these dhāmis also recite parelis which recount their past deeds and wanderings in the same format as that used by the Maṣṭā. The bāhāns are thus an

integral part of oracular religion and, as will be seen, serve specialized roles that are both complementary and parallel to the Maṣṭā family.

The Mavericks: Guru and Lāmā

Among the deities that have been described above, two stand out as particularly anomalous. While to greater or lesser extents each of the members of the incarnating family of gods does not exactly fit the pattern set out for each category, Guru, who was listed under the Maṣṭā, and Lāmā, who was listed under the picās devtā, are recognized by Jumlis as mavericks within the family.

The discrepancies between Guru and the rest of the Maṣṭā are found both in stories of **his origin and in his relationship to his Maṣṭā "brothers."** Guru, who is usually considered to be one deity, is sometimes divided into two partially separate deities called Guru (or Gurār) and Bijai. Knowledgeable Jumlis state that Bijai took his first avatār (incarnation) by bursting open the head of a snake (nāg) whose name was Kāli Nāg while Guru took his avatār through a fish. Although this story is well-known, the distinction between Guru and Bijai is not maintained in the pareli version collected. In this pareli, Guru (Guru-Bijai) takes his avatār through the snake only:

I had come after an avatār. There was a snake (nāg) named Kāli Nāg. I burst his head and that snake died.

The pareli then goes on to explain the reason that he chose

the head rather than some other part of the snake's anatomy:

I would have come out of the ears of the Kāli Nāg, but the men of this land would have named me Kān-phātā / ear-splitting, the name given to the Kān-phātā Yogis<sup>1</sup> who may be related to the Gosain castes in Jumla --so I couldn't come in that manner. I could have taken my avatār out of the mouth of the snake but then they would have said that I was something thrown up by the snake and that I was vomit. There were other places in the body of the snake out of which I could have emerged in my avatār--like there was the tail of the snake. But if I had come out from there they would have said that I was the shit of the snake and I would have lost my śakti (power) and kirti (fame, glory). Therefore I couldn't emerge from there either. I had to take my avatār as a bāyu (wind, spirit) from such a place from which my power and glory could be seen.

Having demonstrated his power and glory (śakti and kirti) as well as purity by emerging from the snake's head, Guru's pareli continues to recount his adventures and his encounters with the Maṣṭā.

Although not mentioned in the pareli collected, the universally known incident concerning Guru's relationship with the Maṣṭā concerns the distribution of food between the Maṣṭā brothers. In this incident, Guru is described as the youngest of the Maṣṭā brothers. While travelling through the region, Guru happened to lag behind one day and was late in arriving at the place where the other Masta had stopped to eat. Upon arrival he could find no food left and asked his brother, Lākhurā, where his share was.

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<sup>1</sup>See G. W. Briggs. Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis.

Lākhurā replied that since he was late there was no food left and that Guru should therefore eat the earth (māto) if he felt hungry. This so angered Guru that he threw a boulder at his brother and broke his tongue. In retaliation for this act, his brothers banished him from their society and forbade him to associate with them in the future.

The pareli records a similar story, although there are some important differences. As recited by the dhāmi, Guru, while wandering, came across some tents of a Bhote. He requested the Bhote for some food, but was refused and forcibly trapped between the Bhote's sheep loads. Hearing of his plight, Kālo Silṭā maṣṭā, here described as the eldest brother, brought a stick weighing 6400 pounds (eighty man) and destroyed the Bhote's tents. Having been thus rescued, Kālo Silṭā and Guru travelled on until it was time to eat. Guru prepared a goat and chicken, but saved the goat for himself and fed the chicken to Kālo Silṭā by claiming that it was a kālij pheasant fitting for the eldest brother. After feeding him the chicken, Guru informed his brother that he could no longer touch him since he had become an untouchable by eating impure food. Kālo Silṭā then became very angry and said, "You have been kept squashed up inside the tent of a Bhote. I have saved you from a place like that. But in return you have committed such a sin (pāp) against me." Hearing this, Guru took Kālo Silṭā's stick and broke his leg, following which he



was ostracized by his Maṣṭā brothers.<sup>1</sup>

As these two incidents demonstrate, Guru is unacceptable to his Maṣṭā brothers because he violated the solidarity of the patriline by violently injuring an elder brother. Perhaps surprisingly, it is in the pareli version recited by one of Guru's oracles where Guru's actions are least justified and thus most reprehensible. For after being rescued he ungratefully and sinfully forces his elder brother to lose caste purity by feeding him chicken in the guise of pheasant. In the other incident, which should be understood in the light of the constantly recurring patrilineal problem of land/food distribution, Guru was denied his proper share, but nevertheless overreacted by violently injuring his brother. This incident has given Guru the reputation of being quick-tempered, and even more importantly, through his having to eat earth, has given him a special authority over land.

These incidents thus reveal that Guru represents values opposed to the patrilineal ideals of solidarity, respect for elders, and maintenance of purity. However, his representation of these values takes an extreme form which cannot be tolerated by the "family". Guru is thus mythically ostracized from the community of Maṣṭā. This mythic ostracism is used to justify a social ostracism of

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<sup>1</sup>This incident is given as the reason that the oracles of Kālo Silṭā bend their leg when they are incarnated by the god.

Guru's oracles such that they are not allowed to participate in group ceremonies involving other gods' oracles.

Guru's origin from the head of a snake; rather than descent from Indra, can be seen, in part, as an explanation for his anti-social behavior. Even as the snake and fish are anomalous animals<sup>1</sup> Guru is an anomalous member of the incarnating family of gods. Thus, it is unclear whether Guru should even be considered to be a *Maṣṭā*, and Jumlis are ambivalent in their identification of him. To the extent that Guru is not a *Maṣṭā* in the normal sense, his behavior becomes more pardonable; but to the extent that he is considered a brother he represents a form of rebellion against the patrilineal ideals.

While Guru is an anomalous *Maṣṭā*, *Lāmā* is an anomalous *picās devtā*. As was noted earlier, he makes no reference to his human death in his *pareli*, but rather patterns the recitation of his life-history after the *Maṣṭā*. In fact, beyond the statement that he was originally a Tibetan *Lāmā*, Jumlis are unable to recount any specific origin of him. The *pareli* itself commences with statements of *Lāmā*'s journeys and accomplishments:

Hu! Hu! Hu! For twelve years I have been to different places and to the mountains, I have made tall temples. I have always walked in the truth. I have spoken in strength (*śakti*). I have performed many wonderful deeds in the places that I have been to.

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<sup>1</sup>See Campbell, Saints and Householders.

The implications of these statements is that Lāmā is presently understood as a Buddhist monk who became a deity through his saintliness and power rather than through an untimely death as the result of violence. Thus, although still a picās devtā in the strict sense of having a human origin, he more closely conforms to deities of divine origin in other regards.

Similarly to Guru, Lāmā's relationship with the Maṣṭā is one of conflict and asserted superiority. In the beginning of the pareli, Lāmā recites that after he met the twelve brothers and nine sisters, "I pulled the twelve brothers bhānjā (uterine nephews) after me--I showed my powers to be more than theirs." Later he mentions that he met the orphan Thārpā in the hills and after showing him his power (śakti) made him into a uterine nephew who called him by the title of maternal uncle. Forcing the Maṣṭā to become his nephews is a theme which is repeated later with regards to Buḍu Maṣṭā:

At the time there was a pātro (astrological reference book) which was to be consulted for the time and the day and the date. That book was stolen by Buḍu Maṣṭā--my despicable nephew. After he stole it, I beat him thoroughly and showed him my power. He became frightened and said that from that day he would call me his maternal uncle.

By claiming the status of maternal uncle vis-a-vis the Maṣṭā, Lāmā is simultaneously stressing those aspects of his origin which separate him from the picās devtā and claiming superiority over the Maṣṭā.

While we have seen how the *maṣṭā* partially identify with the Tibetan tradition, Lāmā's claims of superiority rests primarily on his strong identification as a Buddhist Tibetan. This can be seen from his frequent reference to Buddhist learning and meditation. For example, at one point Lāmā recites:

Then I went making the hills and mountains of Tibet (Bhot) a mass of confusion and reached a place called Byaniko Tar. After overcoming the difficulties of that place, I performed learning (*gyān*) and meditation (*dhyān*) in that place also. For about twelve years I read thousands of books (scriptures) and I meditated.

At another point he recites that he filled twenty-two books with his own knowledge, and constructed many Buddhist temples (*gombā*). Furthermore, Lāmā describes himself as continuing to wear Bhote dress and eat Bhote food, including the alcoholic drinks which are anathema to high caste Hindus. This willingness to contravene the ideals of caste purity is accompanied by a very vocal anti-caste attitude which he expressed in his *pareli* through such statements as: "There is no difference between castes. I eat that which is cooked by anybody."

If Lāmā derives his strength from his Buddhist identification, he nevertheless shows respect for Hindu deities and has ultimately been absorbed within the Hindu tradition. For example, Lāmā, like the other *maṣṭā*, recalls his visits to the shrines of hidden gods such as Kanakasundari where he has offered homage and received the deity's blessings. This demonstration of respect for Hindu

and sisters to their uncles, fathers, and brothers respectively. Each of these sets of kin relations, which Bennett has termed "filiafocal," are opposed to the strictly patrilineal relations subsisting between members of a patri-line excluding sisters or daughters, which Bennett has called "patrifocal."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, within the family of incarnating gods, the nature of the kin relations which would within human society be determined by patrilineal relationships of discrete hierarchical ordering and respect relations have been altered so that they no longer conform to this model. Thus, the Maṣṭā brothers and Bhavani sisters do not distinguish between themselves on the basis of age and address each other only by the term "younger brother" (bhāi) or "younger sister" (bahini). Even the two main exceptions to this rule, the youngest brother Ḍaḍār and the eldest brother Suru, are addressed as "bhāi;" and as was mentioned earlier, it is the youngest brother rather than the eldest which is considered to be the king (rājā).

The pattern which emerges, therefore, is one which is distinctly anti-patrilineal. In place of the values of strict hierarchical ordering and respect relations characterized by the distant respect which are the hallmarks of the "patrifocal" model of kinship, there is a clear stress

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<sup>1</sup>Bennett, "Roles of Women."

on egalitarian, affectionate relationships traced matrilineally between kinship categories, corresponding to the values of the "filiafocal" model.

Significantly, the situation in which the patrilineal "patrifocal" model is used is between the family of incarnating gods and the Brahmanical pantheon of hidden gods. The Maṣṭā brothers who are the focal point of the family lay considerable emphasis on the fact that they are the sons of Indra. Likewise, although they do not necessarily claim kin relations with the hidden gods, each of the other category of gods recites in their pareṇis that they show a distant respect to them that is parallel to the kind of respect shown by persons to their patrilineal superiors. They thus acknowledge the superiority of the dominant patrilineal values while they are themselves organized according to a matrilineal "filiafocal" model for kin relations. The hidden gods of Jumla Brahmanism are thus identified with patrilineal hierarchy and respect while the family of incarnating gods identify themselves with matrilineal affection and equality.

From this perspective, the hidden gods and incarnating gods together form a kinship "system" which reduplicates human kinship. This reduplication is not in the form of specific relations, but a reduplication of the different principles and values which make up human kinship and are typified by the relationship of father to son, brother to sister, maternal uncle to uterine nephew,

etc. Even as human kinship contains both the patrifocal and filiafocal model for relationship, each set of gods is seen to emphasize a different one of these two models.

Tibetans, Hindus and Pābais

When questioned regarding the anti-patrilineal, partly anti-caste, and Tibetan characteristics of the family of incarnating gods, thoughtful Jumlis tend to give a historical explanation. This explanation recounts how most of the gods came from the North (as recited in the parelis), and how most of these gods were originally worshipped by the Pābais before Jyulyāls Hindus migrated in from India. Since many of the gods came from the North, they had "naturally" adopted many Tibetan Buddhist customs, and as they were originally worshipped by the Pābais who only became strongly under the influence of Brahmanical values during the last four or five hundred years, the gods have retained many of the customs of an earlier period.

Although, as was discussed in Chapter 2, there is insufficient data to clearly evaluate this explanation historically, it does seem to fit the facts that are known about the history of Jumla. It will be recalled that the Pābais are likely to be the historical descendents of the Khas people who migrated into the Jumla region from the north-west bringing with them an Indo-Aryan language but lacking many Brahmanical customs and values. While the

incarnating gods are not mentioned in the inscriptions of the Malla kingdom, the admixture of Hinduism and Buddhism that is invoked in the historical records could suggest that the royal families consciously patronized these prestigious religions at the same time as the majority of the Pābai population worshipped the incarnating gods.

Regardless of the history of these gods' entry and popularity in the Jumla region, however, it is clear that their present identity and meaning to all segments of the population, including the high caste Jyulyāls, includes elements of what Jumlis describe as "Tibetan Buddhist" (Shote bāuda dharam) and Pābai. While the incarnating gods are incorporated within the overall context of Jumla Brahmanism for most of the region, part of their meaning within this context stems from their partial Tibetan and Pābai identity. This identity, which manifests itself not only in the geography of the gods' wanderings but also in incidents of anti-caste purity behavior reinforces the values of egalitarianism and anti-patrilinealism which were revealed in the gods' kinship system. While they may be viewed as historical vestiges of Pābai values and the earlier strength of Buddhism in the area, it would appear erroneous to understand their present meaning as "merely" historical. For, even if these gods were originally associated with the Pābais, their present complete incorporating into the cultural life of both Jyulyāls and Pābai



Hindus demand that the values represented by these "Tibetan elements" be understood as a significant part of the gods' present meaning to Jumlis.

The Gods' Achievements: The Path of Life

While the previous section's investigation of the incarnating gods' system of kin relations and origins introduced some of these gods' meaning to Jumlis, an examination of the gods' activities as revealed in the parelis and life-histories reveals a much fuller picture of the gods' "self-proclaimed" identity. As such an examination must necessarily generalize into similar categories the kinds of achievements and experiences expressed in individual god's parelis and life-histories, it runs the risk of merging all the gods' separate identities into one. However, the high degree of consistency between each pareli and life-history and the close similarity of form suggests that the meaning of these same kinds of actions performed by each god is identical enough to take this risk. Thus, the following account while taking note of some exceptions, especially the difference between the gods of divine origin and those of human origin, tends to treat all of the gods as partial replicas of each other.

Exploring the Territory

As noted earlier, the parelis are, of all except the picās devtā, "autobiographical" accounts of the gods' wanderings once they have manifested themselves on this

earth. The incidents which take place during the course of these wandering journeys make up the "plot" of the story; but it is the geographical movement throughout the region which not only provides the "setting," but helps to establish the god's roles. For, in a certain sense, the incarnating gods are territorial gods closely associated with the geographical domain they have traversed.

Starting in the northern limits of the region in the present Districts of Humla and Mugu, most of the gods spend considerable time in the areas immediately surrounding the village of the oracle reciting the pareli before travelling south to the Districts of Dailekh and Surkhet and finally returning to the location of their main shrines.

Significantly, it is only when the gods are at the northern and southern limits of their journey that they mention village or district names. In the area of their greatest activity and specificity, the gods confine themselves to chronicling stops at high ridges (lekh), mountain meadows (caur), forests (ban), rivers and streams (kholā), and the shrines of the hidden gods to whom they homage. That is, the gods associate themselves primarily with the untamed remote parts of the country and stress their affinity with the "wild" areas.

Making Paths; Providing  
Water; Building Bridges

Although the gods state their liking for wild areas, most of them report how they used their power (śakti) to make them physically habitable for humans. This is accomplished primarily by making paths through impassable areas, creating sources of water, and providing bridges to cross rivers. Most of the gods repeat these deeds in different locations through their parelis, such that this taming of the land emerges as a major theme. The following excerpts are examples.

Kuldeo: There were rocks which made it difficult to walk to and from that place. I split those rocks and boulders which were like mountains and I made a path. There was a boulder in the middle of the road of a place called Daura or Karandara which made it difficult to walk. I split that boulder and made a resting place (cauthārā).

Bābirc: There was no water in a place called Shulbhule in the Chucirko Lekh. I used my knee to bore a hole in the earth and take out water from there. I took a bath in this water, and even drank it.

Lāmā: In those days there was no route on which those travelling from the Madēs (India) to Bhot (Tibet) could travel. There were small square stones with sharp edges and points which made it difficult to walk over them. I am the one who made the route walkable. I planted trees and plants in a place like that and made it pleasant. I split that place (Culi Gaura) and made a path so that even the sheep and goats could go to and fro.

In the example taken from Bābirc's pareli, the god continues immediately after the excerpted quotation with the statement: "I showed my powers by bringing out that water." Throughout all of the parelis the gods' frequently refer to their acts as demonstrations of their power (śakti)

and glory (kirti). However, as the quotation from Lāmā explicitly states, these acts are also intended to benefit humanity. By demonstrating their ability to make paths and create water sources, the gods demonstrate their power to make human life easier and more fruitful. Insofar as these acts primarily occur in the forests, meadows, and high ridges where Jumlis spend summers in herding and where they must journey in trade ventures, the gods also establish their ability to assist in these economic ventures crucial to Jumla life.

#### Subduing Demonic Forces

Interspersed between accounts of the gods' alteration of the land for the benefit of both the gods and men are many accounts of the gods' triumphant encounters with evil demons (rākṣas, daiṭyas), ghosts (bhūts), and witches (daṅkinis, boksis, and kaptinis). The sheer number of these encounters recounted in all the parelis and life-histories suggests that the divine identity is closely tied to this role of subduing supernatural evil. As in the incidents relating to making paths and creating water sources, these encounters demonstrate the gods' power to make the world more inhabitable for mankind.

Following are various examples from the parelis:

Lābiro: After that we (the brothers maṣṭā) came to a river called Datya and we stayed there. There was a terrifying demon at that place. That demon began to fight with us. His other teeth were small but there were some which were very long and sharp. He used

these teeth to dig up the roads and block them. He created terror in all places. When we saw that he was doing this, then we cursed him. And then the fights started. We fought with him for seven nights and seven days and then again for four nights and four days. After this everyone praised me when I hit the demon on the head and defeated him. I was able to push that demon about and when I hit him once on the head it was like being hit seven times! When I had beaten him up then he was unable to bear it any longer. He said, "From this day I shall not do anything. You will have to forgive me for what I did in the past." We agreed to forgive him. We made him swear that he would never trouble anyone anymore. He asked for forgiveness and licked our soles with his tongue. And then we let him go.

(2) I spent a night in that place called Phate Garh. There I found that a ghost from a place called Rahni Lehna was causing trouble to all the travellers and the people. And he made it so miserable for the people that they could not live there. When that ghost saw me then he came towards me to fight. When I had kicked him a few times I put him in bonds and made him my prisoner. When I had done this then he was scared and asked for my forgiveness and said that he would accept me as his Guru. He said that he would carry out my commands and he offered obeisance at my feet. When he had promised, then I made him lick my feet. When he had said that he would leave that place and would live on white clay (kamero) then I let him go.

Kālā Siltā: After I had met the goddess Sati Mai, I met a demon of Phatka. I fought with him and defeated him. Then I buried him in hell (pātāl) and made him swear that he would never trouble anyone. I made him lick the sole of my feet and then only I let him go.

Lāmā: When I had come down a little from that place then I suddenly met a ghost from Ghora Maula. He was sitting right there on the road. I made him prisoner inside a huge boulder and kept him there. I had a horse (ghorā) and that had been tied at the sacrificial post (maulā) and that is why the name of that place has been Ghora Maula. A god (devtā) had been kept there by many demons and ghosts of that place in a cage which they had made. I gave a kick to that cage and freed the god and I wrecked the house and the cage of that ghost, and I frightened that ghost and destroyed him. I showed my power (śakti) and glory (kirti) at that time. I chased that demon up to the ridge (lekh) and down into the streams (kholā). And when he finally accepted me as his maternal uncle (māmā) I let him go.

As these examples indicate, the gods' triumph does not result in the death or eternal banishment of the demonic forces, but in their subjugation to the will of the gods. This subjugation is symbolically achieved by the demons' obeisance to the gods through licking the soles of their feet, calling them Guru, or becoming their fictive uterine nephews. After being subjugated, many of these demonic beings thus go on to become the Bahans, the gods' servant spirits, which were described earlier. In this way, the gods' transform sources of evil and misfortune into agents of good works.

#### Removing Human Exploitation

In addition to subduing sources of supernatural oppression, the non-picās-devtā gods' recount many instances in which they have removed cases of human oppression and exploitation. Most of these cases involve kings of the Baisi (post-Malla) era whose pride is too great, who fail to respect the incarnating gods, and/or whose rule is unjust and evil. While specific kings are not usually named, the parelis frequently refer to the lineages of the Bārākoṭs in Bajhang, the Kalyāls of the Jumla region, and Jalandari's reign in Sinje. Significantly, the parelis do not refer either to the Mallas prior to this era or to any recent rulers.

The importance of this divine role in controlling evil and excessive human rulers is particularly emphasized with regard to the Maṣṭā brothers. According to many Jumlis, it was the exorbitant pride and unjust rule of the Bārākoṭ kings which first motivated the Maṣṭā to reveal themselves in Daḍār. In a long story embellished with many details, Jumlis report how the Maṣṭās, in response to the Bārākoṭ's tyranny, took various incarnations within the Bārākoṭ kingdom. Through these incarnations the gods created considerable mischief and displayed their power and strength. One such display involved sacrificing a goat through severing its head by using only the dhāmi's (oracle's) teeth. These acts so angered the kings that they set up a public test in which the goat's neck had been covered by an iron collar weighing 12 dhāni (60 lbs.). However, by turning into a tiger, the Maṣṭā was able to bite through the collar and demonstrate his strength. Finally, the kings were thoroughly frightened and punished through natural calamities (earth-quakes, lightning striking their palace), illness, and impurity (marriages with untouchables). In this fashion the Maṣṭā re-established a just rule, and some claim that Daḍār, the youngest brother, himself ruled for a time after this divine triumph.

Other encounters between the incarnating gods and evil kings are recorded in the parelis. For example, Bā-biro recounts how the kings provoked divine rebuke because

they felt threatened by the gods' righteousness:

Seeing the powers of the Twelve Brothers and Nine Sisters, and how we stood for what was true and just, the Kalyal kings tried to suppress us and gave us much trouble. Also the Thakur king of a place called Bua Banki gave us much trouble. They did not allow us to stay on the ridges nor on the banks of the rivers. So we cursed them. We cursed them that they would be destroyed, and then we went away.

Kuldeo recites how he had to cause the destruction of the Bārākoṭs through curses because they destroyed mankind's work:

There was the Bārākoṭ king who destroyed all that man had built and done. And so I was not liked by the Bārākoṭs; and I also did not like and favor the Bārākoṭs. I cursed the Bārākoṭs. I cursed them so that nothing which they did would be successful. They could not succeed in raising the cows and bulls or even their bees. They would not have any friends or kin or daughters or brothers-in-law or wealth of any kind.

Among the encounters with kings recorded in Lāmā's pareli, is a well-known story regarding Lāmā's great powers and the king's demands for proof. The story commences at the king's court:

At the court I burst out laughing for no reason and the king and nobles of that kingdom asked me why I was laughing for no reason. And they pressed me to say why I had laughed and what there was that I found funny. I said that there were two dancers who were dancing before the kings of all the seven kingdoms in a stadium in Kumaon (a district of India which borders Nepal). While they had been dancing their saris had become undone and they were very embarrassed and that was why I was laughing. But the king did not believe what I told them. So they took down the day and the date and the time when the sari had fallen and then they sent a messenger to find out if this had really been so. And then that king felt that he should keep me locked up till **the news** came and so I was shut up.

While the two messengers were crossing the bridge at Jhul Ghat (over the Mahakali river), they fell into the river. So I went there and took them out and threw



them on the banks. And then they continued walking. After I did this, at the court of the king, I squeezed my sleeves till the water ran out. I told them that the messengers had fallen into the river and I had thrown them on the banks, causing my sleeve to become wet. When I said this they were still more amazed. And they asked why only one sleeve had got wet and I said I could extend my arm also. I told them that I could do whatever I wanted to--if I wished to do good then it would be good and if I wished to do evil then that would be evil.

After chastising Lāmā for this further outrage the court again noted the time. When the messengers returned, they confirmed all that Lāmā had said. Following this confirmation,

All those who were at the court honored me and set me free. Those messengers said that I was their mother and father. They said that their children had nearly become orphans and their wives widows but for my mercy. But the king said, "You son of a Dhote, you have said that you can do what is good and what is evil. Now that you have shown what is good, I wish to see what is evil too."

Lāmā attempted to dissuade the king from this course, but after he insisted Lāmā "caused twenty-two earth-quakes and caused that kingdom to tremble." When the king continued to insist on seeing more, Lāmā caused his palace to fall down and his kingdom to be destroyed. He then ruled in the king's place for twelve years to restore order.

While Lāmā asserts that the reason for his destruction of this king was his disbelief in Lāmā's powers and his greed to see evil as well as good, in other incidents he relates, the reason is the king's oppression of people. For example:

A widow from the village called Odi came to me. She had loosened her hair and she came weeping and crying

to me and said that the king of that place had caused her to suffer greatly. She was not wearing a blouse even. She asked for my help and she held me and began to cry. I told her that the evil person who was causing her to suffer would be thrown into the skies and be buried under the earth by me and that I would destroy that person's kingdom. So I stopped his reign and destroyed his kingdom. I was able to fill that widow's house with wealth and food and I gave her grandsons. Thus did I satisfy her.

Later he summarizes his activities against all forms of oppression by saying, "From Tibet to Patankot Khola I destroyed the ghosts and the demons and all the kings who were tyrants."

As this statement of Lāmā indicates, the incarnating gods identify themselves as champions of mankind who save men from the tyranny of evil kings and evil spirits. However, the examples also show that they demand respect and obeisance of all men. Their power is great, and those who either refuse to recognize it or defy it bring retribution upon themselves.

#### Avening Injustice

As we noted earlier, the picās devtā are the spirits of deceased human beings who, as the result of unjust treatment, died by violent means. Thus, in some ways even more than the non-picās devtā, their identity is related to the retribution of injustice. For it is the unjust violence of their death which must be avenged and their own purity and innocence which gives them the power to become gods after death. Righteous revenge is their raison d'être.

The kinds of injustices perpetrated on the picās devtā when they were human beings, while sometimes in a more extreme form, are the same kinds of injustice that Jumlis perceive within their own society today. For example, in two of the cases collected, the violent death was a result of disputes over water rights in which the victim was deprived of his rightful share. In the case of Som Rājā, his brothers murdered him after withholding his water allocation. Similarly, in the case of Jaganāth, a poor Brahman whose dispute over water rights with a powerful neighbor was unjustly decided against him by the local king, Jaganāth committed suicide.

Other examples of injustice are also situations in which the victim is deprived of what is rightfully theirs. Som Rājā's wife, Satyawati was forced to commit suicide through sati (imolation on her husband's funeral pyre) because her brothers-in-law wanted to take over the land left to her by her husband. In another instance of land theft, an evil king killed Hyānkar (Hiyā Lāṭo) and his lineage mates in an attempt to usurp their land. As a final example, Īṣṭa and Īṣṭāni, who were Humla bhotes visiting their Pāpai mit (ritual brother) in Chaudabis Dara, were murdered by their mit so that he could steal the large amount of gold they had brought with them for trade.

Each of these cases of injustice are perceived by Jumlis as stemming from the sin of greed (lob). In each instance, it is greed which causes the persons involved to

violate the proper relationship which exists with the victims (such as the relationship of kinship) and deprive the victim of his rights and property. It is this greed which is avenged by the victim after his death through destroying the family and wealth of the persons committing the crime. Thus, like the other incarnating gods, the picās devtā are identified as agents for rectifying injustice.

#### Power, Glory and Truth

Throughout their parelis, the gods keep repeating in different forms the following statement: "In this way I showed my power (śakti), glory (kirti) and truth (satya)."  
 In many respects, each of these words are synonomous. Although it is possible to have evil power of the kind displayed by demons and ghosts, that is considered a limited kind of power. A real command of power is necessarily possessed only by those beings who live in the truth (satya). Such power always reflects to the glory (kirti) of the god. "Possession" of the truth is the source of power and glory-- in the parelis the gods proclaim their possession of the truth in part by demonstrating their power and glory.

While the nature of this truth is not explicitly defined by the gods, it is partially revealed by the gods' activities and achievements as recounted in the parelis and life-histories. As we have seen, these achievements revolve around the gods' ability to make the Jumla region a better place for humans to live. The gods' demonstrate how they

are able to "tame" the region physically (by making paths and creating water), supernaturally (by subduing evil spirits), and socially (by causing retribution to fall on those who wrongfully violate other persons's rights). That is, they demonstrate the ability to create and uphold the proper arrangement or order (thiti) of life. This proper order is the truth which they possess; their ability to maintain it is based on the power which this truth provides; and their demonstration of this power provides them with glory and respect.

But as we have seen, this truthful order displays moral values which in some important ways differ from the dharmic model of Jumla Brahmanism and the hidden gods. While the incarnating gods consider themselves the "sons" of the hidden gods and thus subservient to them and their values, they lay emphasis on a different set of values which are to some extent in conflict with those of their "fathers". Thus this alternate set of values stresses egalitarian and matrilineal relationships instead of the hierarchical and patrilineal relationships dominant in Jumla Brahmanism. Along with its egalitarian values, it focuses on justice and the removal of tyranny and oppression caused by either supernatural or human sources rather than the accumulation of merit and the performance of rituals intended to pave the way to a better rebirth. That is, it is concerned with the quality of life on this world

(yo lok) rather than in the next world (par lok). Thus, it is less interested in violations of ritual purity, in the avoidance of involvement in the pollution of organic life, than in the sins of excess pride and greed which lead to suffering in this life. Part Tibetan, part Fābai, part Hindu, the incarnating gods proclaim themselves the champions of the people's daily lives.

## CHAPTER 6

## ORACLES AND ORACULAR WORSHIP

Dhāmi: The Oracles

In a recent article entitled "Shamanism and Spirit Possession: The Definition Problem," Reinhard has given the following definition of a "shaman":

A shaman is a person who at his will can enter into a trance (in which he either has his soul undertake a journey to the spirit world or he becomes possessed by a spirit) in order to make contact with the spirit world on behalf of the members of his community.<sup>1</sup>

According to this definition, which is considerably broader than many<sup>2</sup>, the Jumli dhāmi can be defined as a "shaman."

However, even as Reinhard's definition distinguished between two kinds of shamanic trances, the latter type of which fits the dhāmi, it is necessary to differentiate the kind of "shamanism" represented by the Jumli dhāmi and those usually found elsewhere in Nepal. While a similar

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<sup>1</sup>Johan Reinhard, "Shamanism and Spirit Possession: The Definition Problem," in John F. Hitchcock and Rex L. Jones, eds. Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976): 16.

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, Spirit Possession.

kind of dhāmi has been described by Winkler<sup>1</sup> for the area to the west of Jumla, most authors who have discussed shamanism in Nepal<sup>2</sup> describe different kinds of shamans which usually share certain features in common that are not found among the Jumli dhāmi.

The principal difference between the Jumli dhāmi and the kinds of shamans found in much of the rest of Nepal (which will here be referred to collectively by the Nepali term jhākri), is that the dhāmi are not considered to possess power (śakti) of their own. That is, while the jhākri possess esoteric skills and knowledge (such as mantras and the ability to journey to the spirit world) learned from various gurus (including both human and divine), the dhāmi has neither gurus nor is he considered to have special abilities. The power (śakti) displayed by the dhāmi is the power of the god which possesses him--the dhāmi himself is merely the form, the avatār, used by the god.

Another important respect in which the dhāmi differs from most of the jhākri of Nepal is in his relationship to his god's shrine. Although jhākri usually have

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Winkler, "Spirit Possession in Far Western Nepal," in Hitchcock and Jones, Spirit Possession: 244-262.

<sup>2</sup>See the anthology collected by Hitchcock and Jones (Spirit Possession) for articles by John Hitchcock, Rex Jones, Shirley Jones, Phillipe Sagant, Alain Fournier, Nicholas Allen, Robert Paul, Wolf Michl, Donald Messerschmidt, Johan Reinhard, Corneille Jest, A.E. Macdonald, and Walter Winkler as well as articles collected in Anthropology, Health, and Development (Special Issue, Contributions to Nepalese Studies, 3, June 1976).



"tutelary spirits" who may be located in specific shrines, they are rarely part of the regular pattern of worship at that shrine and usually practise their "trade" at the houses of their clients/patients. In contrast, the dhāmi are closely associated with the shrines of their gods and are an integral part of the worship ceremonies at their shrines. This institutionalization of the dhāmi within the worship of the incarnating gods, together with aspects of his role which will be discussed later, suggests that the dhāmi is as much "priest" as "shaman." For this reason, the term "oracle" has been used rather than the more misleading "shaman".<sup>1</sup>

As the gods' oracles, the dhāmis are the primary means of communication between incarnating gods and men. While there are legends recounting occasional direct encounters between gods and men, and it is believed that the gods can appear to men in their dreams, it is the oracles which transform gods from hidden to visible and from silent to conversing. It is through the medium of the oracles that the gods are able to recount their parelis and consult with their people. The oracle is the mediator between gods and men which allows the gods to assume human form and talk to men in their own language.

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<sup>1</sup>The term "medium" would appear equally appropriate, however I think that the priestly aspects of the Jumli dhāmi are better conveyed by the term "oracle."

### Certification

The institutional character of oracular religion in Jumla is reflected in the process of certification which all officially recognized oracles must undergo. It is only through certification (chāp bido lāune) that a dhāmi can be recognized as the genuine oracle of a god with all the attendant rights and obligations of this position. Prior to certification, a person may become possessed, presumably by the god he claims, and even fulfill some of the roles of an oracle such that he is called dhāmi, but he cannot be installed on the gaddi (seat, throne) reserved for the oracle in each incarnating god's shrine.

The division of dhāmi into certified and uncertified is based on the premise that at any given shrine there can usually be only one certified oracle (mul dhāmi) who is the official mouthpiece of the god. That is, each shrine of a particular god will usually have only one official oracle attached to it. However, since most of the incarnating gods in Jumla have both a principal shrine (mul thān) and branch shrines (nāhgā thān) there will be many oracles of the same god located at each separate shrine. As there are often other dhāmi of the same god in the specific area of one shrine, these remain uncertified until such time as they may succeed the mul dhāmi upon his death or another branch shrine is established. These uncertified dhāmi are thus usually younger men (rarely women) who are likely

to succeed the mul dhāmi or are only temporarily subject to possession.<sup>1</sup>

Within the community of oracles, it is the mul dhāmi of the mul thān (principal shrine) of a particular god who is primarily responsible for certifying oracles for branch shrines. That is to say, it is the god as he is incarnated in his principal oracle at his principal shrine who has the authority to certify that he has genuinely incarnated himself also in the branch shrine's dhāmi. This certification is awarded to the branch dhāmi who has come to the main shrine by the chāp (stamp of approval) and bido (tikā--blessing on the forehead). The chāp is symbolically given by placing one of the god's brass bells on the oracle's head, and the bido by placing rice on the forehead in the traditional form of blessing.

In order to obtain this chāp-bido certification from the principal shrine's oracle, the candidate must prove both to his community and to the established oracles that he is indeed been chosen by the god as his oracle. This proof consists of displaying miraculous power (śakti dekhāune) and meeting certain criteria of authenticity. The miraculous power that must be shown by each dhāmi as a test of authenticity is called bhit. Each god, and sometimes, each shrine, has its own tradition of the kind of

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<sup>1</sup>cf. later section on succession.

bhit which must be displayed by the dhāmi. The following are examples of bhit for the principal shrine of various gods:

<u>god</u>	<u>bhit</u> (miraculous test)
Buḍu Mastā	While in trance the <u>dhāmi</u> must be able to correctly choose the bell, out of many displayed, which has a small bell hidden under it.
Thārpā Mastā	Without having had any training, the <u>dhāmi</u> must be able to recite portions of the Vedas.
Ḍaḍār Mastā	Shut in a closed room, the <u>dhāmi</u> must be able to sever the head of a goat with his bare teeth.
Bāṭpāl Mastā	The <u>dhāmi</u> must be able to bend an iron rod which is two fingers thick.
Guru	The <u>dhāmi</u> must be able to leap across two boulders and cross a rope bridge without using his hands.
Sunārgaon	By rubbing rice together, the <u>dhāmi</u> must be able to produce tumeric.

While Jumlis state that it is the display of these kinds of bhit which constitute the proof that is required of certification, and are able to recall instances in which they have witnessed these bhit, an analysis of dhāmis' life-histories (as related by others) and of a taped transcript in which a dhāmi was seeking certification show that the process is often more ambiguous and drawn out. That is, it appears that many dhāmi do not display bhit which are unambiguously accepted as proof of their genuine possession by the god. In these circumstances, the village community and

other oracles use a number of criteria over a period of several years in order to determine the validity of the dhāmi's accession to office.

The additional criteria which are used to prove the authenticity of a dhāmi's selection by a god may include: demonstrations of power to foresee events, validity of predictions, knowledge of divine events and the god's pareli, ability to live according to the requirements of an oracle's life, evidence that the god has "blessed" the dhāmi's life and is looking after his health and prosperity, etc.<sup>1</sup> As these criteria are open to differing interpretations, it not infrequently happens that some people of a dhāmi's community may be convinced of his authenticity while others are still skeptical. However, unless it is convincingly demonstrated that a dhāmi is a fraud who uses tricks to produce bhit, or unless the dhāmi flagrantly flouts the requirements of being an oracle, the skeptics usually do not create large controversies and the dhāmi is eventually accepted as authentic by the majority of the people.

#### Selection/Succession

Most of the persons who are chosen by the incarnating gods to become certified as oracles are "pre-selected"

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<sup>1</sup>Winkler, "Spirit Possession in Far Western Nepal": 248-249.

on the basis of heredity. That is, most oracles are succeeded by members of their immediate lineage (sāk), frequently their own sons, but sometimes nephews, brothers, or grandsons. This pattern of succession is not considered obligatory, but "normal". To Jumlis, it seems very reasonable that the gods should continue to incarnate themselves in the descendants of their previous oracles, particularly if these oracles have served them well.

Alternate patterns of succession usually arise when it appears unlikely that any member of the deceased oracle's lineage will become an oracle. This kind of situation often occurs after many years have elapsed since the death of a certified oracle and no members of the deceased's lineage has shown signs of becoming a dhāmi by going into trance or demonstrating uncommon devotion to the god. In these cases the shrine either remains without an oracle, or someone else from the community (usually from the same thar) who has acted as an uncertified dhāmi for the god becomes a candidate for certification. Occasionally, there will be more than one dhāmi who seeks certification (including members of the deceased oracle's lineage) in which case considerable emphasis is placed on which dhāmi displays the most convincing bhit and thereby receives chāp-bido.

Regardless of whether succession has occurred within the immediate lineage of the previous oracle, almost all oracles claim that they did not seek the position, but

had it thrust upon them by the god. However, it would appear that this claim reflects more what oracles wish to have members of their community believe about them than what the community actually thinks. This is revealed by the descriptions of various oracles given by their neighbors and relatives who usually stress how the oracles showed predisposition at an early age towards becoming a dhāmi and serving the god, sometimes to the point of "campaigning" for the position of oracle. Nonetheless, the claim of being chosen by the god demonstrates the extent to which the institution of oracular succession is considered to be entirely the function of the god's will rather than the individual involved.

#### Requirements

All oracles are required to behave in a fashion that is pleasing to their god and appropriate to the role of being a vessel for the god's incarnation in their person. This means that on the one hand, the oracles must maintain an exacting standard of purity so the god is not defiled, and, on the other hand, that the oracles remain humble and scrupulously honest so that the faith invested in the gods by the community is not abused.

While the high standards of purity required of an oracle are to some extent dependent on his caste status, all oracles must live according to stricter criteria of purity than others within their caste. Thus, most oracles

will only eat rice prepared by members of their own family and Brahmans of unquestionable purity and some will only eat rice cooked by themselves. Many oracles avoid impure foods which are eaten by members of their own caste such as millet, meat, and soybeans and are particularly scrupulous about avoiding liquor even if they are members of a matwāli or liquor-drinking caste. Five days prior to any major occasion on which they will become possessed and must serve at the god's shrine they eat only one meal a day of the most pure foods and on the final day they must fast prior to the worship.

In addition to avoiding pollution attached to impure foods the oracles are enjoined by their position to purify themselves of other sources of pollution to a far greater extent than other Jumlis. Thus, even though he avoids participating in the death ceremonies of all persons, including his mother and father, he should not participate in the worship of his god for a full year after the death of lineage members. If there is any birth in the village, regardless of whether it is a member of his lineage, he should not participate in worship for ten days following the birth. Similarly, if his wife is menstruating, he cannot worship or incarnate the god during the first four days even though his wife remains outside his house during this period. Since travelling on trade journeys and doing agricultural work are also considered sources of pollution, the oracle should not make any journeys



except for pilgrimages and should avoid work in the fields. However, this last injunction is only obeyed by those oracles who are able to support themselves through their positions, and some poorer oracles do make trade journeys and even work as porters or laborers.

Violations of these high standards of purity are considered to anger the gods, causing the oracle to lose the god's blessings. Minor infractions may only be punished by illness or minor misfortunes until the oracle asks for forgiveness. Major deviations from the norms of purity, however, can result in serious calamities to the oracle's household and even the refusal of the god to incarnate in the oracle in the future.

Physically the oracle's special requirements to remain pure so that he can serve as a medium for his god is indicated by the growth of his tuft of hair called the lattā. The continuous growth of the lattā, upon which silver rings offered to the shrine are attached, are indicative of an oracle's faithfulness to his god and the requirements placed upon him. Among elder and more famous oracles, this lattā will often be four to seven feet long with 25-100 silver rings on it. Gaborieau<sup>1</sup> voices the suspicion that some of these long lattās may be false, but goes on to state, "mais il va de soi qu'aux yeux des fidèles ce sont

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<sup>1</sup>Gaborieau, "Dieu Masta": 31.

de vrais cheveux." It is always hidden under a turban or hat except when the oracle is possessed by the god.

The requirements that an oracle remain humble and honest indicate Jumli's awareness of the possibilities for fraud and corruption inherent in the position of oracle. Jumlis realize that it is not difficult for the oracle to blur the distinction between the god who speaks through him and himself and thereby attribute the respect shown to the god as a respect shown to the oracle. If, through greed or pride the oracles only pretends to incarnate the god and manipulates the consultations to his own ends (thereby opening himself to the possibility of bribery) he ceases to be a genuine oracle even though this may not be evident to the people. Thus, it is incumbent on the oracle to be scrupulously honest at all times and maintain humility so that he will not be tempted to become avaricious or proud.

As in the cases where oracles violate the standards of purity which they should maintain, pride, greed, or dishonesty will bring down the wrath of the god on the oracle. However, since it may take time for the god to act or since he may have decided to punish the oracle through his progeny, it is also the communities' responsibility to assure, as much as is possible, that the oracle remain honest and humble. This is accomplished primarily through indirect social pressure rather than open confrontation.

Although the requirements for honesty and humility can be seen to be consistent with the values expressed by

the gods in their parelis, the stress laid on purity would appear to contradict the somewhat anti-purity stance expressed by some of the gods such as Lāmā. To some extent, this contradiction is less glaring than it may seem. Even as the incarnating gods accept the hidden gods of Brahmanism as their "fathers" they also accept the Brahmanical frame-work for life in which the necessity to maintain purity is a cornerstone. Thus, while some of them express values contrary to the idea of maintaining purity, they do it within a context of the overall truth of this frame-work. However, to the extent that there is a real contradiction between the values expressed by the gods' requirements for their oracles, it can be seen to rest somewhat on a double standard. While the gods, as part Tibetan Buddhist who possess considerable power, can themselves violate the rules of purity and pollution, their oracles, who are subject to the laws of dharma and karma as they have been expressed in human social organization, do not have this liberty. Thus, the oracle of Lama drinks liquor while he is possessed by the god and attempts to make other oracles do likewise, but is very careful never to drink liquor on his own when he is not possessed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>While it is dangerous to make historical or sociological speculations, an additional possible explanation for this contradiction should be noted. This explanation would attribute the stress on the purity of the oracle to efforts by oracles to raise their status vis-a-vis Brahman priests by adopting some of their standards at the same time that the identity of the gods as against purity and pollution rules is maintained.

Status and Distribution

Theoretically, an oracle's social status is dependent on the same factors of caste, kinship, wealth, personality, etc. that determine the standing of other members of his community. As merely a medium for the god, the oracle is supposed to be treated in the same manner as other men. The respect shown to him while he is possessed by the god is considered to be respect shown to the god--the oracle as a person is not considered deserving of any special respect.

In fact, some oracles do receive more respect than their position in society might otherwise dictate. The degree to which higher social status is accorded to the oracles appears to depend not only on the status of the god he incarnates, but on the degree to which he meets and keeps the requirements of being an oracle and the reputation he has established for being powerful, knowledgeable, and effective. As might be expected, the stricter the regimen of purity followed by the oracle, the more the oracle is respected and his reputation enhanced. Similarly, the greater the oracle's reputation for accurate prediction and the greater power he demonstrates in consultations and displaying ohit, the more respect is accorded to him and his status raised.

This slight contradiction between how Jumli's say oracles should be treated and how they actually treat some of them indicates that a sharp separation between the oracle

and the god he incarnates is not always maintained. Without disbelieving in the gods or their incarnations, Jumlis are aware that to some extent the oracle may be able to influence his god's decisions and views, that information supplied to the person of the oracle is more readily accessible to his god than that supplied to other persons. In addition, an oracle who is able to incarnate his god powerfully through his person is considered to be a person who is deserving of this honor by virtue of his purity, honesty, and devotion. Thus, Jumlis accord respect to powerful oracles both because they are in a powerful position in relationship to their own lives when they are in trance and because they are deserving of respect by virtue of their personal behavior.

Perhaps more significant than the fact that some oracles are accorded a higher social status than their fellows is the observation that many oracles do not appear to be treated any differently than other persons of the same social status when not in trance. While it is possible that Jumlis are somewhat more reserved with oracles, I was unable to detect major differences in behavior towards them. It thus appears that until an oracle has made a strong reputation or is automatically in a powerful position by virtue of the reputation of the god he incarnates, he is generally accorded the same status he would have had if he were not an oracle.

The lack of special interest shown to most oracles is particularly noteworthy in that it runs counter to prevailing sociological theories regarding the motivation for possession. While a variety of explanations abound<sup>1</sup> most of these theories understand possession as an "oblique aggressive strategy"<sup>2</sup> which "works to help the interests of the weak and downtrodden who have otherwise few effective means to press their claims for attention and respect."<sup>3</sup> Within this view, possession is utilized by the "oppressed" and "peripheral" members of society in order to gain respect for themselves.<sup>4</sup> If, as we have seen, very few oracles do receive any special respect by virtue of their position, this explanation as a motivation for a person to become an oracle is called into question.

The distribution of oracles by caste, and within a caste, by wealth and social status, further calls into question the validity of these explanations of possession. In the village panchayats of Lurku and Had Sije there are

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<sup>1</sup>I.M. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism, (Penguin Books, 1971); Rex L. Jones, "Spirit Possession and Society in Nepal," Hitchcock and Rex Jones, Spirit Possession; Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis, Ecstatic Religion: 32

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.; Campbell, "Spirit Possession."

<sup>4</sup>Lewis, Ecstatic Religion; Douglas, Natural Symbols.

a total of ninety-two oracles of which thirty-four are tāgādhāri (twice-born) Jyulyal, forty-three are Pabai, and thirteen are Dums (untouchables). This distribution of oracles by caste roughly parallels the distribution of the population by caste within these two areas. That is to say, the oracles are roughly proportionally distributed according to the three main caste groups in Jumla.

In addition to this proportionate distribution according to caste groups, oracles are found within each caste represented in the population sample. This is shown in the following breakdown of the oracles by individual caste:

<u>Caste</u>	<u>Number of Oracles</u>	<u>approx. number<sup>1</sup> of households</u>
Pābai (Matwāli Chetri)	43	350
Chetri ( <u>tāgādhāri</u> )	23	150
Brahman ( <u>upādhayā</u> )	5	120
Sārkis	4	40
Jaisi Brahman	3	45
Thakuri	3	50
Sunār	3	35
Damai	3	30
Kāmi	3	60

From this table it can be seen that most of the oracles are clustered towards the middle of the caste hierarchy. While there are five Brahman oracles, this is proportionately less than their total population. But while this fact could be explained by the "oppression theory" mentioned above, it

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<sup>1</sup>Average population per household = 3.4.

ceases to be a meaningful explanation when it is seen that the untouchable castes are also proportionately less represented.

Lacking detailed data on the wealth of individuals who are oracles and those that are not, my evidence on distribution of oracles within a caste according to wealth is based only on my own observations and generalized statements made by Jumlis. However, it is my impression that the pattern of distribution of oracles by wealth roughly parallels that of distribution by caste. That is, the distribution of oracles according to wealth (including land and animal possession) is approximately proportionate to the distribution of the population in this respect. While there were not many instances of oracles from relatively very wealthy families, there were some. The majority of the oracles were from relatively poor families, but as most Jumlis are relatively poor this does not emerge as an important criterion. However, it should be noted that despite the actual distribution, Jumlis did sometimes express the opinion that it was appropriate for a god to incarnate himself in a poor person.

I was similarly unsuccessful in attempts to isolate other common social denominators (such as order of birth, etc.) between oracles. While many oracles seemed to have lost at least one parent fairly early in life, others still had both parents living. It is possible that detailed case



histories of a large number of oracles would reveal similar kinds of childhood traumas and configurations of hardship and suffering, but lacking this data I am unable to generalize in this regard.

Regardless of whether such biographical data would reveal common childhood experiences, it should be recalled that since the institution of the oracle at each shrine tends to be hereditary, there is little scope for placing much emphasis on an explanation of its role which is entirely concerned with the self-selection of individuals according to various sociological or psychological factors. This fact, combined with the lack of evidence of oracles sharing an "oppressed" or "peripheral" social status, suggests that the theories advanced by Lewis and Douglas have a limited value in understanding the motivation of oracles in Jumla culture. Of more importance to understanding the role of Jumla oracles is the fact that they are distributed throughout the whole of Jumla society, indicating that the values they represent are a shared feature of Jumla culture.

#### Case Histories

The generalized picture of Jumla oracles presented above is best illustrated by case histories of some individual oracles. The following cases briefly sketch the background, certification, and performance of three oracles.

Rishi Upadhaya, a Brahman, is 33 years old and an oracle of the picās devtā called Deuti who committed suicide

as a result of false accusations against her behavior following her husband's death. His grandfather, who died seven years before his birth had also been the Deuti's oracle, but his father was not an oracle. Rishi states that during his childhood they were a poor family. Rishi's father died when he was five, leaving only his mother to take care of him.

Between the ages of seven and ten, Rishi showed various predelections of becoming an oracle. When playing with friends, he would make miniature shrines of the gods and perform worship to them. Like other children, he often imitated the movements of oracles when they are in the trance-dance called paturne. Even prior to having his initiation ceremony (bratābandh) he showed extreme sensitivity to matters of pollution. For example, if he was fed left-over rice, he would become ill and vomit; if his mother touched him during her menstruation period, he would get a headache or toothache until he underwent a purificatory bath and drank cow's urine.

When he was eleven, Rishi started to do the trance-dance (paturne) in earnest during the full-moon ceremonies (paith) when other oracles were also in trance. His actions while in trance were those of an oracle who is incarnating a female deity. At this time he says that he prayed to Deuti to either take her avatār properly through him or leave him alone. However, the other oracles mostly ignored

him, and it was not until he was thirteen and fully initiated by bratābandh, that the other oracles began considering whether he had been chosen by Deuti to become her next oracle.

It was during the first full moon ceremony after his initiation that, as Rishi recalls, the spectators demanded that the other oracles determine whether Rishi was a genuine oracle or not. The other oracles are then remembered as saying to Rishi, "Since you have begun to do the paturne (trance-dance) tell us what is the work of Deuti, tell us about your shrine, and show us the bhit and śakti you should have. Then only can we give you our bido (certification)." Rishi then related the Deuti's pareli and told the other oracles about her work. On this basis, the other oracles bestowed their bido and allowed him to mix in their company. They also told him that after two years they would give him the official chap (certification) if he continued to demonstrate that he was a genuine oracle in the intervening two years. He was also admonished to live a life of even stricter purity and to eschew all pollution.

Following two years, during which it was reported that his house prospered, Rishi was given the official certification (chāp) that allowed him to sit on the goddess's "seat" (gaddi) and accept offerings. He is generally well respected by his community and maintains a life of strict purity. Although not wealthy, he is moderately well

off except for the fact that he has no children even though he married about twelve years ago. When asked how he felt about being possessed by the goddess, he replied:

I do feel that the paturne (trance-dance) is something bad (naramro), but what can I do? When the drum music is played or when someone comes before me with some problem or sorrow then I begin to shake and shiver involuntarily. I feel like controlling myself and sitting quietly, but suddenly I am dancing and speaking without even trying. And when I finish doing the paturne then I feel sort of strange. And I feel frightened that when a god has possessed me then if I were to look with contempt upon that god then perhaps it would be a dos (fault/mistake) of mine. So I am obliged to do all things. If I sit quietly without doing the paturne then I feel depressed. My body rises of its own accord, When I have finished the paturne then I feel calm and my body feels fresh.

The story of Urgen Buda, the oracle of the god Lama, is, like the god he incarnates, more unorthodox. As in the case of Rishi, Urgen lost his father at an early age; but unlike Rishi, there is no knowledge of other oracles within the family history. As the eldest son in a poor Pābai household, Urgen was sent by his mother to be a cow-herder in a wealthy Thakuri household in a nearby Jyulyāl village in order to earn some money and his keep. During his employment as a cow-herder, there was a theft in the Thakuri's house in which clothes, utensils, and some money was stolen. After no other thief could be located, the Thakuri family decided that Urgen was the culprit and tried to extract a confession from him by beating him. Since Urgen continued to plead his innocence, they finally let him go but forcibly took some articles from his mother's home in lieu of the stolen articles.

As the Thakuri family was rich and powerful, Urogen was unable to rally any social support for righting the injustice which had been done to him. Thus Urogen turned to the god Lāmā, whose oracle was an old man, and pleaded with him for justice. After several months of pleading, Lāmā's oracle told him to throw consecrated rice (achetā) around the various corners of the Thakuri's house. Through this means Urogen was told that he would receive revenge. Urogen protested that he could not return to the house of the Thakuri without being beaten, but the oracle assured him that the god would provide him with the opportunity to get inside the house unscathed. Urogen then went to the Thakuri's house and found that everyone except an old man had gone to a feast. The old man, who was blind, then asked Urogen to go inside the house to get embers for his pipe and Urogen praised the god for giving him the opportunity to scatter the rice grains.

Within a year of scattering the rice grains, "strange and troubling" things began to happen in the Thakuri's house. One brother was drowned in the river and the house was full of disputes so that the remaining brothers separated into their own households, sometimes by taking untouchable wives. These happenings confirmed Urogen's faith in Lāmā and he became devoted to the god, assisting in the worship ceremonies and singing his praises.

Following the death of the old oracle, Urogen began to do the paturne and after several years was acknowledged

by the other oracles as the genuine successor. In addition to being able to recite the pareli and demonstrate his knowledge of the god's habits, this acknowledgement was largely based on one incident in which Urgan, during trance, had given the boon of a son with a mark on his head to a childless couple. When a son fitting this description was born ten months later, the community agreed that he was indeed the oracle of Lāmā.

During the succeeding years, Urgan has greatly enlarged his reputation as an oracle. However, there are many who take offense at what they consider to be his conceited and condescending manner and accuse him of instances of fraud and pretense in order to increase his own wealth and fame. By in large, it is the poorer Pābai families which trust him and the richer Jyulyāl families who have become skeptical.

Ram Lal Jaisi is an oracle of the Mastā god Lāṭā Silṭā. He is from a respected and moderately wealthy family of Jaisi Brahmans. Before him, his father and grandfather were also the oracles for Lāṭā Silṭā Mastā and were the hereditary village headmen (mukhiyā). His father is remembered as a particularly respected oracle whose relatively infrequent pronouncements while in trance always came true.

Ram Lal did not start to do the trance-dance until after his father's death, while he was a teenager. Since his elder brother had died, Ram Lal had to perform the death

ceremonies for his father. Prior to his performance of these ceremonies, he was considered lax in his observance of the rules of purity which were incumbent upon him by virtue of his initiation into the "twice-born." However, the villagers were impressed by his rigorous adherence to strict standards of purity during and following his performance of the death rites.

In addition to carefully observing purity rules, Ram Lal devoted considerable time to the performance of optional religious ceremonies for Lāṭo Siltā in which he paid for the services of Brahman priests. It was therefore not considered at all surprising when Ram Lal began to do the paturne, and after several years other oracles and members of his community beseeched him to go to the principal shrine of Lāṭā Siltā in Ḍadhār in order to receive certification.

Once Ram Lal had agreed to go to Ḍadhār, the community collected all the offerings and provisions which would be required and a group of about ten kinsmen and villagers accompanied him on the journey. They were warmly welcomed in Ḍadhār, but as it happened neither Ram Lal or any of the other candidates that had come received certification on the full-moon day on which it is usually given. At this, all the members of his group entreated the oracles to give their certification to Ram Lal, and eventually this was given.

Upon his return, Ram Lal assumed the seat of Lāṭā Siltā and became an officially recognized oracle. In contrast to his father, however, some accuse him of using every possible opportunity to go into trance in order to satisfy his pride and increase his wealth. In addition, it is said that although he observes most rules of purity which are required, he frequently seeks extra-marital affairs. However, most of the community accepts him as a genuine oracle even though they find some fault with some of his behavior.

#### Patterns of Worship and Consultation

##### Shrines

Shrines (thān, sthān) for most of the incarnating gods except the bāhāns are usually found in or near to village settlements. Important gods usually have more than one shrine, each serving different functions and located relatively near to each other. Shrines to incarnating gods are found in or around all Jumla settlements that contain more than a few houses, with most villages having three to six shrines dedicated to different gods. For example, with the village panchayats of Lurku and Had Sinje, in which there are approximately twenty settlement areas, there are nineteen Māhdev shrines, forty-one Maṣṭā shrines, eleven Bhawāni shrines, twelve picās devtā shrines, and around fifty bāhān shrines. The ratio of shrines to population as determined by the sample of



Lurku and Had Sinje Panchayats is approximately one shrine to fifty persons.

All shrines except those devoted to bāhāns and those located within Jumla houses are architecturally distinguished on the basis of their sloping wooden roofs.<sup>1</sup> As this type of roof construction is considered a prerogative of the gods, it is forbidden to use it for any other structure. The shrine walls, in cases where the roof does not extend to the ground on both sides, are constructed of either wood or stone with mud mortar. They are usually plastered with white or red mud and in some areas (such as Jarmi-Tatopani) are the only buildings the gods will allow to be so plastered. Most shrines are also architecturally distinguished on the basis of their sculptured wooden columns supporting a veranda and on the basis of a red and white flag (nejā, ālim) flying from a pole in the roof or courtyard.

Those gods that have three separate shrines for the same god will often have one located within a house in the village (called either: pujā garne thān or ghar thān), one located on the outskirts of the settlement area (called ghar māru or just māru), and one located some distance away (usually from 100 yards to one mile) in the forest called

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<sup>1</sup>See Gaborieau, "Dieu Masta": 28.

ban thān or thulo thān or ban māru).<sup>1</sup> The latter two shrines are constructed according to the description given above while the shrine located within the house merely consists of a room in which the daily worship is given to the god. Other gods will have either two of the above type shrines (in which case one is sometimes called the ghar thān and the other the ban thān), or just one shrine (in which case it is always a separate structure as described above). Thus, all incarnating gods have at least one separate "temple" devoted to it except the bāhān which are often represented just by stones, tridents, banners of red and white cloth (dhaJā), and sculptured figures called murti.<sup>2</sup> The distribution of shrines in Jarmi-Tatopani is shown in Figure 12. . .

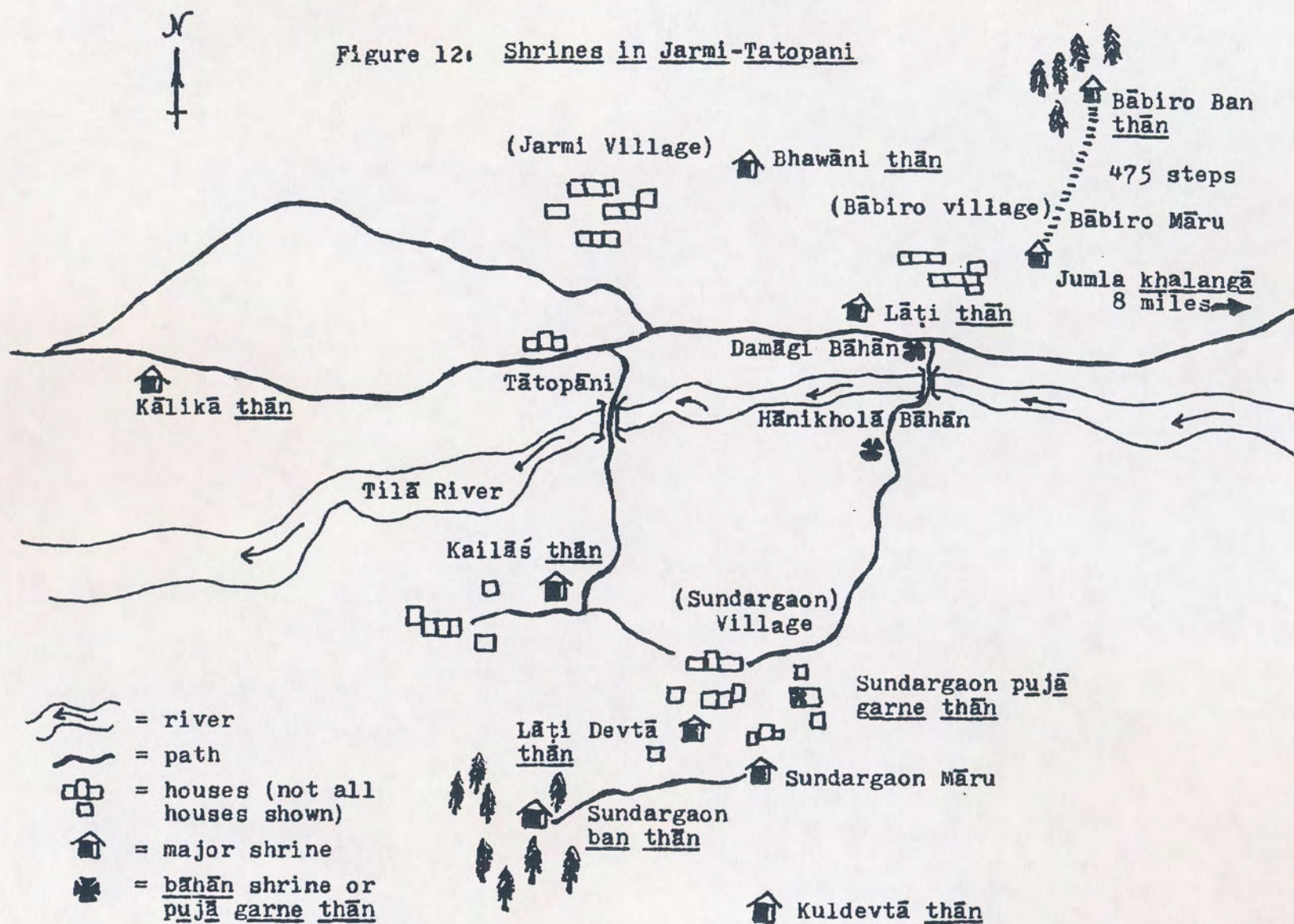
The layouts for all the constructed shrines follow the same patterns although they may differ in details. As depicted in Figure 13 they usually have one inner room (gabubir, gabhbir) containing a place for the sacred fire

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<sup>1</sup>As major shrines usually own land in their name which cannot be used for agriculture, these shrines are surrounded by their own forests. These forests are usually made up of pine trees, but also contain the rare Himalayan Cedar (deodār; diyār).

<sup>2</sup>The term murti (image, idol) is misleading, as noted by Gaborieau and misunderstood by Snellgrove ("Dieu Masta": 29; Himalayan Pilgrimage : 28). These carved wooden figures depicting men, sometimes with guns, are not images of the gods but votive gifts given by the Dums.

Figure 12: Shrines in Jarmi-Tatopani



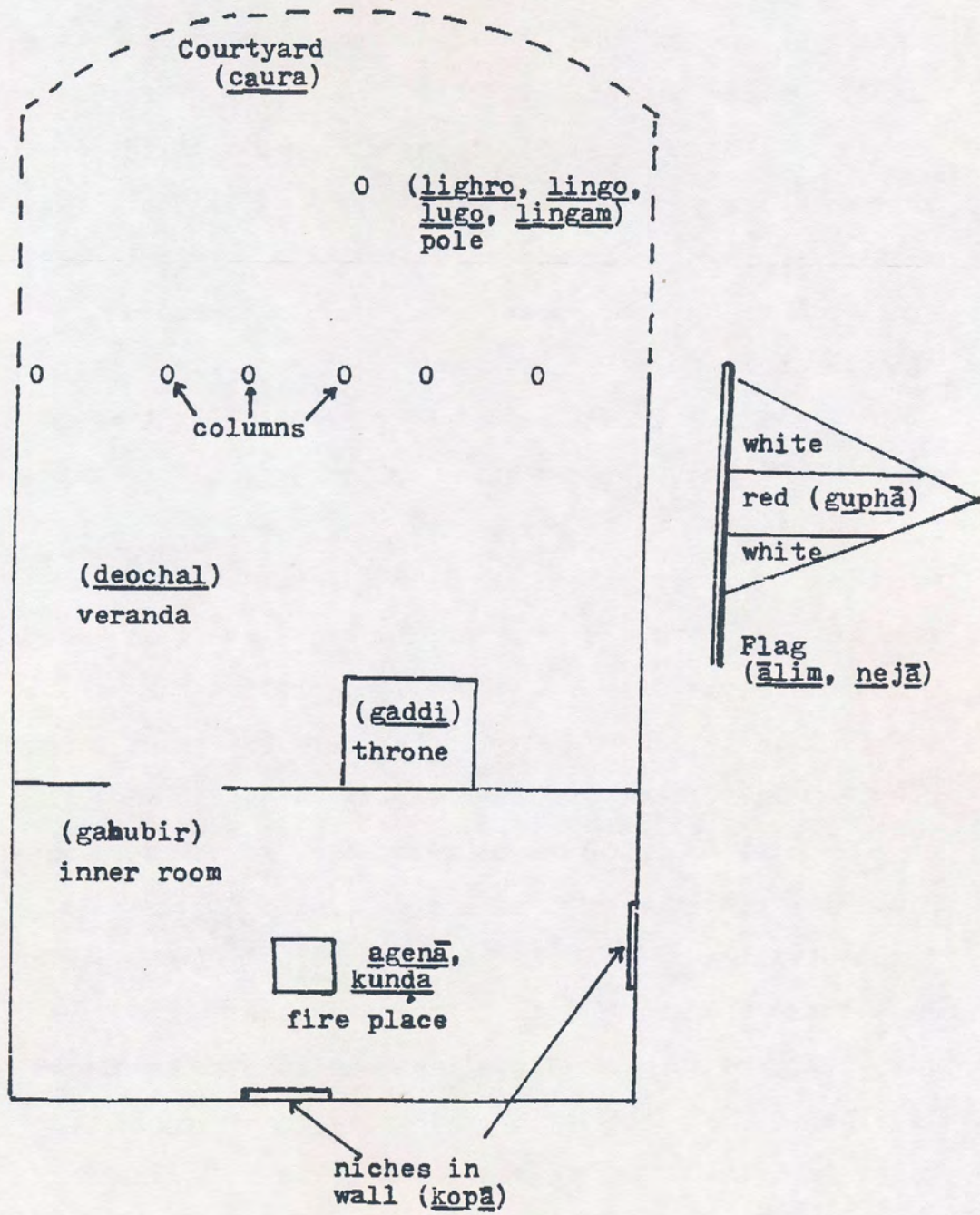
(hom) to be built (called agenā or kunda) and empty niches in the wall for the god to be worshipped. Outside this room, but usually under the same roof is a veranda open on one or three sides (sometimes called the deochal). Often within this room, but sometimes outside in a special small structure, is the raised platform which is the god's "seat" or "throne" (gaddi) on which the consulting oracles sit. Outside the veranda is a courtyard where the "trance-dance" (paturne) takes place (usually called cauro). In the middle of this courtyard there is usually a long (up to fifty feet) pine pole (lingo, lingco, lugo, lingam)<sup>1</sup> with some of the branches left uncut on the top (called jhuprā). In addition, there is usually a flag (nejā, ālim) in the shape of a triangle with two bands of white cloth enclosing a strip of red.

A number of articles that have been given to the god by devotees (pāli) are distributed around and inside the shrine. These include: brass bells of all shapes and sizes (ghantā), strips of red and white cloth about a yard long and several inches wide (dhajā), animal skins and rugs (thāri) for use on the gaddi, wooden statues depicting people and animals (murti), brass and other metal images, conch shells, animal horns, and such items as purchased paintings of the Brahmanic gods.

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<sup>1</sup>This pole is replaced every other year on Sravan purne (full-moon) and reconsecrated on alternate years.

Figure 13 : Typical Shrine Layout



### Priests

In addition to an oracle, each shrine (or set of shrines to one god) has attached to it one or more hereditary priests (pujāri, dāngri). These priests may be of any caste, but are usually of the same caste as the oracle as they are a part of the same community. In fact, for smaller shrines, it is not uncommon for the priest and oracle to be the same person--these cases depend on the oracular succession following strict hereditary lines.

The role of the priest or priests is similar to that of the temple priest (also called pujāri) of Jumla Brahmanism. It is his responsibility to perform daily worship to the god, clean and maintain the shrine, prepare and perform the worship on the occasions when the god incarnates himself in his oracle, and present the worshipper's offerings to the god. In the more important shrines where there are more than one priest, these various roles are allocated to different priests, each of which is distinguished by title, rights, and obligations. The most common division of roles is between the pujāri who performs the worship and the dāngri who prepares the shrine for worship, performs the sacrifices, and assists the oracle at the time of the consultations. For major ceremonies, the pujāri is assisted in his task by calling in a Brahman priest who is the only one authorized to perform a Sanskrit hom for the blessings of the "hidden gods." Some shrines also have additional functionaries, including an "interpreter"

(khāvā) for the oracle, a distributor of the sacrificial remains (kathāyat),<sup>1</sup> and others whose job it is to collect firewood, plaster, mud, etc. Each shrine will also have an hereditary group of Damai musicians who are responsible for playing their drums on the appointed days.

Together with the oracles, these priests are considered "to belong" to the shrine. Thus, although the obligation is not as rigid as for the oracles, they are required to observe strict standards of purity, particularly before performing worship (pujā). Conversely, when they are polluted through their wife's menstruation, childbirth, or death, the shrine also becomes polluted and no ceremonies can take place until the pollution period is over and the priests purified. The most serious pollution occurs when a pujāri, dāngri or dhāmi of a shrine dies, as this causes all worship at that shrine to be suspended from six months to one year. The shrine of Jumla incarnating gods is thus an establishment which includes not only a physical structure but a small group of priest(s), and oracle(s) which are part of its institutional structure.

Paith: The Full Moon Festivals

Jumla gods incarnate themselves in two distinctive manners depending on the setting and purpose. The manner which has been referred to as the "trance-dance" (paturne)

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<sup>1</sup>Gaborieau, "Dieu Maṣta": 34.

takes place exclusively during the full-moon (purne, purni-  
mā) festivals dedicated to the god, called paith. The  
other manner of incarnation, which has been called "consult-  
ation" (dhamelo basālne, herāi) is often included in the  
full-moon festival but more frequently takes place on the  
days following this festival and can be arranged for other  
auspicious times of the year. Both of these forms of in-  
carnation usually take place at the god's shrine, although  
if a god has a separate forest shrine (ban thān) this is  
used only during the full moon festivals. The only excep-  
tions to this rule are when oracles are sometimes consulted  
when they are away from their shrine in an abbreviated con-  
sultation called patak bholāi or jotthā herne.

Each god is normally worshipped through a paith on  
four full-moons in the year unless the shrine has become  
temporarily polluted. Usually these are the astrological-  
ly most auspicious full-moons of the months of Baisākh  
(April-May), Sāun or Srāvan (July-August), Kārtik (October-  
November), and Māgh (January-February). However, other  
auspicious full-moons are occasionally used (usually when  
a festival had to be postponed because of pollution asso-  
ciated with the pujāri or dhāmi) and Gaborieau reports that  
some shrines such as Thārpā substitute the full moon of Jeth  
(May-June) for Kārtik.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gaborieau, "Dieu Masta": 50.



While it is considered each god's festival or paith takes place on these full-moon days, in fact the obligation upon neighboring oracles to attend each other's festivals and the desire to avoid overlapping festivals within one community has resulted in a cluster of festivals on the days immediately preceeding and following the full-moon in each community. Thus, it is usually the most important Masṭā god whose festival is actually celebrated on the full-moon while the festivals for other gods are held on preceeding days. The actual schedule for each set of gods depends on the individual communities, but it is common for the festivals to last five to six days in order to accomodate different sets of gods each night. For example, the following schedule is followed in the Jarmi-Tatopani area around Sundargaon:

two days before full-moon (tetradasī): Evening worship (pujā) for various Bhawāni followed by trance-dances (paturne) takes place.

one day before full-moon (caturdasī): In the early afternoon there is worship of some of the picās devtā with trance-dances at the shrines that have oracles. In the later afternoon, there is a second worship with trance-dances at the Bhawāni shrines as well as worship and trance-dances for the remaining picās devtā. In the evening there are processions to the two main Masṭā shrines followed by worship and trance-dances into the night.

day of the full-moon (purnimā): In the early afternoon there is worship and trance-dances at the Kuldevtā and other "maternal uncle" shrines as well as a hom worship of the Maṣṭās by Brahman priests. In the last afternoon there is another pujā and paturne at the Maṣṭā shrines during which the main offerings are given. Later in the evening the bāhān of the various gods are worshipped.

day after the full-moon: In the morning every family that has a maiya (ancestral spirit) that must be appeased performs worship in their house (mānu khāne). In the afternoon, consultation sessions (dhamelo basālne, herāi) are held in the māru shrine and worship with trance-dances are held at small shrines not worshipped earlier.

following days: The consultation sessions at the more prominent shrines continue on the following days for as long as there are persons waiting to consult with the gods.

As this schedule indicates, the more important shrines have at least two days and evenings devoted to their worship while the smaller shrines are worshipped only once. While the pattern of worship is similar at all shrines (except for the bāhān), the ceremonies surrounding important shrines, especially mul thāns of principal shrines, are considerably more elaborate and are attended by larger groups sometimes numbering in the hundreds. These more elaborate festivals usually follow the same basic sequence although individual shrines retain unique variations based

on their own traditions. The following description of the sequence of events in these festivals is based primarily on the festivals which take place for the Maṣṭā gods of Sunargaon in Jarmi-Tatopani.

During the week prior to the festival, a number of preparations are made by the shrine's priests and oracles and by the community. Women in the village clean the shrine under the direction of the pujāri or dāngri while men bring loads of firewood. The dhāmi and the pujāri purify themselves through morning baths, abstinence from sex, and by eating only one meal a day. Individual families collect the offerings which they will be giving to the gods during the festival. Persons from distant villages who plan to attend the festival set out from home. As Sunargaon is the principal shrine of a major Maṣṭā, some people come to the festival from up to a week's walk away, either because they have been directed to consult the god by another oracle and have some special request or obligation or because they wish to make the pilgrimage to the principal shrine of their family's god (kulyānyā devtā).

On the morning of the first ceremony (that is, one day before the full moon), the god's forest shrine is freshly plastered with cow dung (gobar) by the women. From the early afternoon onwards, people start to gather around the forest shrine (ban thān) and some of the thitā-thiti (boys and girls) organize cutkilā dances. At the god's village

When the procession arrives at the forest shrine, the various ritual articles are deposited inside the inner room by the oracle and priests. While the Damai musicians (who number 15-20) arrange themselves in a semi-circle around the far side of the courtyard and continue to drum, the priests begin to perform their pujā to the god. This pujā is either performed by the pujāri and dhāmi alone or with the assistance of a Brahman priest (purohit) who performs a standard hom ceremony in which the names Bārā Bhāi Maṣṭā and Nau Durgā Bhawāni are also mentioned. Regardless of the presence of a purohit, a hom fire is lit in the kun-  
da before the niche representing Maṣṭā in which the offered images are put, and various small oil lamps are also lit for the god. During this time, members of the village and other devotees of the god who have come to the festival give their non-sacrificial offerings to one of the priests in the veranda. These offerings usually consist of: one pint (mānā) of oil, one pint of husked rice, two to four quarts of wheat or barley, and one to two quarts of milk or curds. A certain portion of these offerings is then immediately cooked into khir (a dish of rice cooked in milk) which is given to the god by the priest as a food offering. If a Brahman priest is also conducting the worship, he then ties a wrist-thread (raksā-bandhan) on the oracle and other priests.

Normally, the main oracle of the shrine (mul dhāmi) is the first to start the "trance-dancing" (paturne). Often with a loud trilling cry he is suddenly possessed by the god and dances into the courtyard in a trance state. Not infrequently, though, there are other oracles from neighboring shrines or even uncertified dhāmi of the same god who have already become possessed and commenced the trance-dance on the courtyard. While the intensity of activity and degree of bodily control is constantly fluctuating, the trance-dance usually consists of hopping with both feet at the same time in alternating directions while the body is in a crouching position. Both arms are swung out straight or one arm is raised with the index finger pointing to the sky while the other arm is swung. Dhāmi often careen into each other or link arms behind each other's backs and start a kind of synchronized swaying and hopping while the Damai musicians literally cause the earth to vibrate through their redoubled efforts on their kettledrums. Oracles of female deities cover their heads with shawls to indicate their sex.

As soon as the trance-dance starts, it is the responsibility of the shrine's principal oracle to greet each of the other dhāmi and the Damai musicians. The nature of this greeting differs according to whether they are "kin" oracles (i.e. of the core family of incarnating gods), bānān oracles, or Damai musicians. The method used by the god/oracle for greeting his kinsfolk is to take some husked rice

(achetā) mixed with milk from a tray he brings out of the shrine and place it on the other oracle's forehead (often with considerable force). This tikā is then reciprocated by the other oracle and it is considered that the gods have "met" (bhetne) each other. This meeting is sometimes accompanied by brief "conversations" between the gods in their divine language (devtā bhāsā). The same achetā is used by the oracle to give a tika to each of the Damai musicians, regardless of the caste of the god's oracle. However, in this case, the greeting is acknowledged by a folded-hands namaste or a one hand atu. In the case of the bāhān oracles, the other oracles "feed" the bāhān by shoving the achetā into his mouth and then anointing his head with red powder (abir). The feeding of the bāhān is considered the equivalent of a master feeding his servant and the red abir is considered to signify the bāhān's desire for blood.

As the trance-dance continues, oracles from among the audience, which is crowded around on all sides (including on the shrine's roof and on tree branches) also become possessed by their gods. As oracles are not permitted to wear pants, hats, or shoes while in trance, friends standing next to an oracle who has just become possessed attempt to restrain him until his shoes, pants, and hat or turban is removed. The newly possessed oracle then enters the courtyard area, is greeted by the other possessed oracles, and greets the Damai musicians by going inside the shrine and bringing out a cup of achetā for the use as tikās.

Many gods, however, often appear reluctant to possess their oracles so that the oracles that are already possessed spend considerable effort in coaxing these gods into incarnating themselves. This coaxing is accomplished by:

a) showing the oracle (who is in the audience) the achetā being held and throwing this achetā at the oracle; b) sticking his tongue in and out and pointing to the sky, the oracle, and the courtyard ground; and c) smiling and pointing to the music to indicate the "good time" (ramailo garne) being enjoyed by the gods who have already possessed their oracles. The musicians also assist this cause by playing the particular beat that is associated with the unpossessed oracle's god, as each god and shrine has its own established rhythm. These coaxing efforts are usually successful eventually, although sometimes they are continued by various oracles for over a couple of hours before the oracle in the audience is finally possessed.

During the course of the trance-dance it is the responsibility of the bāhān oracles to demonstrate their role as vehicles (vahanā) for their masters. This is accomplished by lifting their masters onto one shoulder while continuing to do the trance-dance. In addition, the bāhān oracles demonstrate their aggressive fearlessness by jumping into the courtyard fire and dancing on the coals until they are pushed off by the other oracles. As it is considered that the bāhāns often take animal forms, some of them show their

"animal nature" by pushing down a wooden pillar which has been loosely placed in a hole for this purpose.

While the trance-dance continues, the audience continues to give its offerings to the pujāri or dāngri at the shrine veranda. Occasional oracles will also approach members of the audience for brief "consultations" in which they give their blessings or express their opinion regarding some new event or long-standing case. An example of the former is the presence of a foreign observer such as myself. Oracles would frequently approach me regarding: a) the reason for my presence, b) to inquire about (and often to forbid the use of) cameras and tape recorders, and c) to bless me with children and success. As I was initially unsure of the correct responses to be given, friends and neighbors from the village usually answered on my behalf explaining why I had come to Jumla and the festival and arguing with the gods regarding their perception of the dangers of cameras and tape recorders.<sup>1</sup> In addition to holding these brief "consultations," the oracles distributed their blessings to the audience either by giving them a tikā of achetā on the forehead or by throwing the achetā over their heads. Upon occasion, the oracles would also pass out flower garlands they had received as well as vegetables such as cucumbers

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<sup>1</sup>Many of the oracles as person already knew me and the functions of cameras and tape recorders, however, in this case it was the oracles as gods who were enquiring.



or pumpkins. As with the Damai musicians, these blessings are acknowledged by either folding one's hands in a namaste or holding the right hand palm upward.

In some piaths, these brief blessing and consultative encounters are followed by an actual consultative session (dhamelo basālne) in which the oracle ascends the god's "seat" (gaddi). However, as these are more frequently held separately, they will be described in the next section.

While some oracles discontinue the trance-dance early and return to their place in the audience, many oracles continue the dance until the final ceremony. This ceremony consists of circumambulating the shrine clockwise three times. On the last round, a brief pujā is offered to the liero (lingam) pole in the courtyard by anointing it with achetā. Following this rite, the oracles cease being possessed by the god and either go into the shrine or return to the audience.

By this point, some of the offerings that have been presented by the devotees (pāli) have been cooked and offered to the god. Portions of these cooked offerings are then distributed to the audience by the shrine's priests and oracles in the form of prasād (blessed food), in the same way that prasād is distributed in the temples of the "hidden gods" of the Brahmanical tradition.

When the prasād has been distributed and the worship of the god in the shrine completed, there is a reverse procession back to the god's village shrine that is composed

of the same elements as the previous procession to the forest shrine. This procession marks the completion of this part of the festival, which usually occurs around midnight.

It is part of the god's dharma that any pilgrims or visitors who have come to the festival from villages which are more than several hours walk away should be provided room and board in the shrine's community. Once those visitors who have kin relations or previous acquaintance have been boarded, the remainder are informally distributed equally among all the houses in the village for their evening meal and a place to sleep. As this kind of hospitality between strangers is otherwise rare in Jumla, this dharmic obligation is considered to be an important part of the festival.

The worship and trance-dance which occurs the following afternoon on the full moon day itself is a repeat of the activities described above, except that it is considered the more important day and that it may include animal sacrifices as well as special gifts. The former of these exceptions does not change the sequence or basic structure of the activities, but it does mean that there is usually a larger audience and a greater number of oracles participating in the trance-dance. In part, the presence of more oracles is due to the fact that some oracles were required to do their own worship at their own shrines the previous evening and thus were unable to attend.

If there was no hom ceremony performed the previous day by a Brahman purohit, this ceremony must be performed on the full-moon day at any major shrine of a clean (cokho) caste community. In this ceremony, the pujāri performs the same devtā puajā as is used for bartamans or marriages. In exceptional circumstances, a shrine's priest, oracle, or devotee will sponsor a longer optional ceremony such as the rudri or saptā.

The presence or absence of blood sacrifices depends on two factors. On the one hand, the incarnating gods are somewhat ambiguously divided into "blood-eating" (ragat bhog) and "milk-eating" (dudh bhog). Some of the picās devtā who are spirits of deceased Brahmans are always "milk-eating," meaning that they never accept blood sacrifices. However, among the majority of the gods, their acceptance or non-acceptance of blood varies from shrine to shrine with little over-all consistency. While some authors<sup>1</sup> suggest that it is only the exceptional Mastā that accepts blood and that the sacrifices offered at their shrines are actually given to Bhawāni, my information supports the opposing view that most Mastā accept blood and it is only the exceptional Masta or Bhawāni (often those with the name "dudhe") that do not accept blood sacrifices. Certainly among the principal shrines of these gods, most of them are "blood-eating".

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, "Divinities": 96; Gaborieau, "Dieu Masta": 40.

Among those gods that do accept blood sacrifices, however, the times in which these offerings may be given are restricted. The full-moon ceremonies of the months of Māgh and Sāun are called vegetarian because no animal sacrifices may be given during these months. The non-vegetarian months in which blood sacrifices may be given are usually confined to Kārtik and Baisākh. Thus, the following description of the offering of blood sacrifices applies only to "blood-eating" gods during the full-moon festivals of either Kārtik or Baisākh.

For the major deities which have two days devoted to their paiths, the animals are brought for sacrifice usually on the second day either before or during the trance-dance. All gods except the bāhāns will accept only uncastrated male kids or lambs (boko or pāthā). These kids or lambs are brought to the veranda of the shrine and given to the dhāmi. The animal is then sprinkled with water until it shivers thereby indicating that it is acceptable to the god.<sup>1</sup> Once it has been determined to be an acceptable sacrifice, it is taken into the inner room where its throat is cut from below (retne) and the blood is either spurted onto the niche or mixed with some of the achetā (husked rice) that

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<sup>1</sup>Although I have never witnessed a case where the animal was not eventually deemed to have "shivered", Jumlis state that occasionally an animal is found unacceptable through this method.

is offered to the god and then given as tikās for the people.<sup>1</sup>

Persons who offer a goat kid or a sheep lamb to one of the family of incarnating gods are also required to offer a chicken (kukhurā) or chick (callā) to the god's bāhān whereas normally an egg is sufficient. This chicken is given to the bāhān's oracle or priest following the trance-dance and is sacrificed at the bāhān's shrine later in the evening. The servant status of the bāhān together with the fact that its oracles and priests are usually members of the untouchable castes dictate that they are always offered only chicken whereas the higher status family members will accept only the pure meat of goat and sheep.

The offering of a kid or lamb and a chicken must also be accompanied with red and white strips of cloth (dhajā) and the regular offering of rice, oil or clarified butter, and barley. Special offerings called pañc dandā or pañc ratna may also be given in which bells, rugs, images of metal (gold, silver, copper, or iron), money, and silver bands for the oracle's lattā accompany the animal sacrifice.

All offerings given to the god during the full-moon festivals are called sik. The regular offerings of food-stuffs given by the shrine's devotees (pāli) are the most

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<sup>1</sup>As was noted earlier the Dhadār and Dāre Mastā oracles are considered to cut the neck of the goat with their teeth rather than with a knife.

common kind of sik and are also referred to as jas (fame, glory) because they are given as a seasonal offering without any particular cause. Whenever special offerings such as animals, metals, etc. are given, however, it is the accepting oracle's responsibility to ask the offerer what kind of sik his offering represents. The three possible categories in which the offerer's response must fall indicate to the oracle what the purpose of the offering is. These categories are: doeri, kar, and jos. Doeri offerings are unsolicited and given with the intent of requesting the god to perform a special act on behalf of the offerer. In contrast, kar (tax requirement) refers to offerings that the offerer is obligated to give either because of some prior command (by an oracle) or prior promise or obligation. Jos (enthusiasm) offerings are, like doeri, unsolicited, but instead of asking for a future favour they are given because the offerer is grateful to the god for some good fortune which has already happened.

The rights to these various kinds of offerings given during the full-moon festivals are carefully determined by individual traditions at each shrine. In some shrines all offerings except meat left over after prasād has been distributed and the Damai musicians and Brahman purohit paid their shares for their contributions, belong to the oracle and priests of that shrine. In these cases, the meat is carefully divided equally among each household in the village containing the shrine while all other offerings are

divided among the oracles and priests. In other shrines, all offerings except those specifically for the decoration of the shrine or the oracle (such as metal images, bells, lattā-rings, etc.) are divided among the village households with an equal share to each household (dhvāng) but perhaps slightly larger shares for the oracles and priests. Only in the case of jog animal sacrifice does the offerer retain any of his offering if he is from outside the village and this consists only of a front leg from the kid or lamb.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the distribution system used, it is only at the largest and most popular shrines that it is possible for oracles and priests to sustain themselves on the offerings received through full-moon festivals and consultations. For most priests and oracles these offerings represent only a small supplement to their income which rarely exceeds the wages they would have received if they had devoted the same amount of time to other kinds of activities such as field labor.

While the above description of a full-moon festival is based primarily on those which take place at major shrines such as the Maṣṭā shrines of Sunārgaon and Bābiro, the festivals which take place at minor shrines differ only by

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<sup>1</sup>This tradition of village distribution instead of returning the bulk of the sacrificial animal to the offerer differs from most other areas in Nepal where the priests retain the head and neck but return the carcass to the offerer.

being smaller and more abbreviated. Thus, while the same elements of worship, offerings, trance-dance, and distribution of prasad and offerings take place at smaller shrines they may be confined to one afternoon or evening and involve a total of only two or three Damai musicians, two or three oracles, and an audience of fifteen to twenty. Structurally, these festivals are the same as the larger ones at bigger shrines although their small size often reduces the sense of drama and excitement which accompanies the latter.

#### Dhamelo Basālne: Consultation Sessions

In some respects, the pattern of worship in consultation sessions called dhamelo basālne (to cause the sitting of an oracle) or herāi (a seeing) is similar to that found in the full-moon festivals and described above. In fact, as was noted, the consultation session can be a feature of the festival itself, although it is more common for it to occur on succeeding days in the case of important gods. However, the content and purpose of the consultation sessions are entirely separate from the full-moon festivals and many of the features of the latter are not necessary for a consultation to take place. As the content of these consultations and their significance for understanding oracular religion is the subject of the next chapter, merely the form of the sessions will be described here.



A consultation session can occur on any astrologically auspicious day as long as there is no pollution attached to the shrine and there are a sufficient number of people requesting the session. These conditions are most frequently met immediately following the full moon when people have come to "meet" (bhetne) the god and participate in the festival.

When there are more than three to five people wishing to consult the god or animals have been brought for sacrifice, the consultation session is usually arranged to take place in the god's māru shrine on the edge of the village. When fewer persons are involved or only minor matters are to be considered, it is more common for the session to be held in the pujā garne thān inside the village, as long as a gaddi (throne) has been constructed within the room. On rare occasions, the consultation will take place outside of any shrine when an oracle is met on the path and consents to do a short consultation called pathak bolāi (occasional speaking).

As for the full moon festival, the shrine must be freshly cleaned and plastered prior to the session. An hour or so before the session is due to start there is an informal procession usually without any Damai musicians<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gaborieau describes one dhamelo basālne at Tharpa where Damai musicians do accompany the procession. However, they never drum during the session itself unless it is a full-moon festival ("Dieu Masta": 36).

(if the session is being held in the māru) to the shrine where the pujāri performs a brief pujā by burning incense and a butter lamp and lights a fire in the inner room. The dāngri (or pujāri for shrines without a dāngri) also prepares the gaddi by spreading over it the various rugs and skins which have been donated to the shrine. The consultants arrive at the shrine and give part of their offerings of achetā (husked rice), dhajā (red and white cloth). Most of the offerings are retained for giving during the session itself, and if some have brought animals for sacrifice, these are left to the end.

As there are no musicians playing kettledrums, the possession of the oracle which signals the start of the session itself usually occurs quite unexpectedly. The oracle and priests, having finished their worship to the god, are usually sitting around the gaddi in the veranda, or room in which the gaddi is contained, smoking and chatting when the oracle will suddenly start to shake and jump up on the gaddi. The oracle then sits with his legs crossed on the gaddi, removes his turban--releasing his laṭṭā hair tuft, and places several necklaces of rudrāchi beads around his neck. At this point (or sometimes before he dons the beads) the oracle may or may not recite his pareli depending on his inclination and the wishes of the consultants.

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<sup>1</sup>These rudrāchi beads are the same as those used by sadhus throughout Nepal and India.

If the pareli is recited, it is done so in a special chanting fashion while the oracle rings brass bells in each hand.

Following the pareli, or if there is no pareli, the oracle gives a tikā of achetā to his priests and members of the audience and starts the consultation. This is done by either making some general comments or by addressing a particular consultant, who comes forward, makes obeisance to the oracle and gives his offerings. Theoretically each consultant is dealt with individually, however, in practise other consultants often address the oracle at any time and talk among themselves so that more than one case sometimes goes on at the same time. Depending on the number of consultants and the complexity of their cases, the consultation session can last anywhere from about half an hour to six or seven hours, with an average of two to three hours per session.

For important cases, it is not unusual to have a guest oracle from a nearby shrine join the shrine's own oracle by becoming possessed at the request of the consultants. In these cases the host oracle will give a tikā for the guest oracle (or oracles) and may place some of his rudrāchi beads on him and make a place for him to sit next to him on the gaddi or the floor. While both oracles generally concentrate on one case at a time, I have observed sessions in which each has become involved with different consultants simultaneously.

The form of communication used by the god to communicate to the consultants through his oracle is distinguished from normal speech both in style of talking and in vocabulary. Most oracles speak in a high, falsetto voice. Their statements are usually broken up into short phrases punctuated by rapid noisy breaths during which they repeat a characteristic syllable such as "hu: hu!" or "sun: sun!" (listen: listen!). The differences in vocabulary are limited to a small number of key nouns, and appear to differ somewhat by area--as the list I collected in Tatopani differed in half the words from that collected by Chudamani Bandhu in Sinje.<sup>1</sup> Given below is a list of this special divine vocabulary as collected by myself and Bandhu.

Word in English	Kathmandu Nepali	Jumli Nepali	Tatopani Oracles	Sinje Oracles
man	<u>mānche</u>	<u>mānthā</u>	<u>naratokyā</u>	<u>naratokyā</u>
cattle	<u>gāi-goru</u>	<u>lachimi</u>	<u>gou</u>	<u>dhauldār</u>
horses	<u>ghorā-ghori</u>	<u>ghorā-ghori</u>	<u>bhāipuki</u>	<u>thuryā</u>
buffalo (f)	<u>bhāisi</u>	<u>bhāisi</u>	<u>lāmisinge</u>	<u>lāmāsingyā</u>
bell	<u>ghantā</u>	<u>ghanta</u>	<u>ghanta</u>	<u>thinkā</u>
rice (for offering)	<u>achetā</u>	<u>achetā</u>	<u>nāoti</u>	<u>viyā, gerā</u>
field	<u>khet</u>	<u>khet</u>	<u>mātto</u>	<u>ātti</u>
Damai	<u>damai</u>	<u>dholi</u>	<u>dhiungā</u>	<u>dhiunyā, tokyā</u>

<sup>1</sup>Chudamani Bandhu, Bhasa, Karnali Lok Samskr̥ti, (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2028).

<u>Word in English</u>	<u>Kathmandu Nepali</u>	<u>Jumli Nepali</u>	<u>Tatopani Oracles</u>	<u>Sinje Oracles</u>
son	<u>choro</u>	<u>choro</u>	<u>putra</u>	<u>celo, pīrchu</u>
daughter	<u>chori</u>	<u>chori</u>	<u>kanya</u>	<u>celi</u>
kettledrum	<u>damāha</u>	<u>dumā</u>	<u>camachālā</u>	<u>camachālā</u>
cloth (for offering)	<u>dhajā</u>	<u>dhajā</u>	<u>thorān</u>	<u>dāso</u>
flag	<u>dhvajā</u>	<u>ālam</u>	<u>nejā</u>	<u>nejā</u>
wife	<u>swāsni</u>	<u>swāini</u>	<u>siudi</u>	<u>siudi</u>
kid (goat)	<u>boko</u>	<u>pātho</u>	<u>chālo</u>	n.a.
oracle	<u>dhāmi</u>	<u>dhāmi</u>	<u>agojyā</u>	n.a.
sheep	<u>bhero</u>	<u>bherā</u>	<u>sunākori</u>	n.a.
dog	<u>kukur</u>	<u>kukār</u>	<u>lotiāhiuri</u>	n.a.

As illustrated by this list, the divine vocabulary of the oracles is made up of terms derived from Sanskrit (i.e. naratokyā, putra, kanya, cela, celi), terms which are descriptive of the object (i.e. lāmisīnge = long horns, māṭṭo = earth, chālo = leather), terms which sound similar (i.e. gou, tinkā), as well as others whose derivation is not immediately apparent. The fact that most of the words' meanings are easily derived and that the list of special vocabulary is very small means that all Jumlis understand the oracles' language without difficulty. In fact, some individuals will use this specialized vocabulary themselves while talking with the god.

Regardless of whether this vocabulary is used, all consultants must use respectful terms of address to the

oracle. These terms are usually names of Viṣṇu, Śiva, or Bhagwān borrowed from the Brahmanical tradition but can also include secular terms of address. Following are the terms I have heard used either singly or in combination with another term: Gosāī, Nārāyan, Parmeswār, Māhdev, Mālik, Sāhib, Bhagwān, Māhārāj, and Īswar.

When the consultation session is over, the oracle becomes "depossessioned" by taking off his beads, rewrapping his turban and stepping off the gaddi. If consultants have brought kids or lambs for sacrifice, these are given to the dāhgrī who takes them into the inner room to cut their throats and offer the blood to the niche representing the god. The procession then proceeds back to the village as soon as the articles for worship have been stored and packed. Depending on the shrine's traditions, offerings are then distributed among the oracle, the priests, and the villagers.

#### Gods and Men

In some important respects, the pattern of worship in oracular religion is structurally similar to that found in Jumla Brahmanism and worship of gods elsewhere in Nepal and India. As in Jumla Brahmanism, the gods are given offerings of food through the medium of specialized priests and "made happy" (khusi banāune) through worship involving cleansing their shrine, lighting lamps and incense, and giving them gifts in return for the gods' blessings. Also as in Jumla Brahmanism, some are blood-accepting while others

are vegetarian and sacrifices for those who accept them are given in much the same way.

While worship in oracular religion and Jumla Brahmanism can be understood as a similar "system" of exchange of offerings for blessings, the nature of the blessings received from the two sets of gods is different. The worship of the "hidden" gods, as was seen, is primarily oriented towards receiving blessings in the form of benefits in the "other world" (par lok) of after life and rebirth. In contrast, the "this world" (yo lok) orientation of the oracular gods means that Jumlis perceive the blessings they will receive in return for their offerings in concrete terms of bettering their present existence. Since the "goods and services" that should be received within this system of exchange with the oracular gods are thus more tangible and measureable, oracular worship can be understood in the framework of a contract between gods and men.

The on-going terms of the contract provide that men should give regular "normal" offerings in return for regular "normal" services given by the incarnating gods. The normal offerings (described above as being composed of rice, oil, barley, etc.) are regular in the sense that they should be offered to one's own family and community gods at the scheduled full-moon festivals. This schedule of offerings is to some extent keyed to annual harvest and trading cycles. Thus, important harvests like rice and barley must be offered to the gods in these festivals

before they can be consumed in the home, and successful trading ventures must be acknowledged in the form of offerings upon the traders' return. The nature of the regular normal services provided by the gods will be clarified later as they are best revealed in the declarations made by the gods in the consultation sessions. In essence, however, they constitute assistance and protection so that the proper course of life can continue without undue suffering. The worship which takes place in the full-moon festivals constitute a ritual occasion in which the terms of this contract can be renewed and fulfilled.

Within this analogy of a contract, the worship which takes place in the consultation sessions represents the negotiation and fulfillment of individual special "sub-contracts". In these sessions, special offerings are demanded, negotiated, and given in return for special service from the gods. They are extraordinary contracts in the sense that they are prompted by problems and events which demonstrate that the terms of the on-going regular contract are not sufficient to secure the solutions required. The nature of these special contracts and their causes, negotiation, and solutions as well as their underlying premises and values is the subject of the next chapter and will thus be discussed in detail there.

If the full-moon ceremonies are an occasion for renewing and fulfilling the "contract" between gods and men, it is also an occasion for social celebration for both gods



and men. Men and women put on their best clothes, meet relatives and friends, dance, participate in singing parties, provide hospitality to pilgrims and guests, and, above all, watch and meet the gods while they are incarnating in human form. The gods on their part, use their human mediums as an opportunity to meet each other by bestowing tikās and to meet their priests, musicians, and people who have "invited" (nimtā dine) them by giving offerings and playing their tunes on the kettledrums. But beyond meeting, the full-moon festivals are considered as a time for the gods to play and amuse themselves by dancing in their own fashion. The gods' amusement is also a source of amusement for the men--for even though the men have come to honor and glorify their gods, most of them find the strange movements and actions of the gods to be comic and there is a great deal of laughter when the gods accidentally fall down or bump into each other.

The fact that the gods meet each other by giving tikās and enjoy themselves by dancing reveals that the gods are perceived to behave in manners similar to that of human society. However, as was discovered for the gods' kinship relations, human forms of social relationships are used to stress values somewhat counter to the dominant Brahmanical model. For when the gods give tikā to their untouchable musicians or when bāhān oracles from untouchable castes carry their high caste masters on their shoulders, they are violating the standards of purity established for human

relationships. Furthermore, the comic nature of their dancing is a violation of the standards of dignity which respected persons of high ritual status should maintain.

The explanations given by the Jumlis for their gods deviant behavior is that although they behave like humans in many respects, the fact that they are gods who are only inhabiting their oracle's bodies as spirits means that the pollution that would normally be received by touching an untouchable does not apply to them. According to a variation of the same logic, the oracles are also not polluted since it is the gods, not them, who are having physical contact with the untouchables. At the same time, however, Jumlis state that untouchable oracles, even though they are in the state of being possessed by their god, are not allowed inside the shrine of a high caste community's shrine as it would be polluted by the oracle's presence. In addition, I witnessed one incident in which a Damai bāhān oracle grabbed a chicken intended for a Sarki bāhān and bit off its head in order to drink the blood. This act provoked an hour long argument and fight because the Sarkis who should have received the chicken claimed that it had now been permanently polluted.

The presence of two conflicting notions regarding the pollutability of the god and his oracle reveal both the existence of contradictory ideas regarding the status of the oracle's body and identity while being possessed by a god and the convergence of different attitudes towards the

whole system of purity and pollution that is found in oracular religion and Jumla Brahmanism. As noted earlier, Jumlis accept that it is the god himself who is acting through his physical medium, but simultaneously recognize that the medium himself still retains some of his human social identity. In other words, while the possession of an oracle by an outside agency who has slightly different standards of behavior excuses some violation of the rules of human interaction, the identity of the oracle as a member of human society has not been so completely effaced that all rules can be suspended. The gods' incarnation in human bodies is not only temporary, but it is subject to some of the limitations set out by the Brahmanical model for the purity of high caste human bodies.

That limitations are imposed on the gods by human social organization also reveals another feature of the relationship between gods and men in oracular religion. This feature, which will be explored further in the next chapter, is the relative lack of distance between the oracular divine and the human. As will be seen, men can not only laugh at the antics of their gods, but can argue with them, question their power, disagree with their statements, and negotiate for compromise settlements in the consultation sessions. While the gods are honored and worshipped as beings which have power to influence their lives for good or ill, their power is finite and their status is not infinitely far above men.

## CHAPTER 7

## CONSULTATIONS WITH THE GODS

The Gods as Problem Solvers

"The one who writes your fate is Bhābi, but the one who looks after you is me"--Bābiro Maṣṭā

Approximately 75% of the consultation interviews I have collected and transcribed are concerned primarily with specific problems which had been taken to the gods for solutions.<sup>1</sup> The remaining 25% are concerned with less specific issues regarding life which can be broadly grouped under the title of "general and individual anxieties." Although a number of these latter anxieties and the "solutions" to them given by the gods find expression in the consultations regarding specific problems, this section will be principally concerned with the consultations on specific problems, leaving the general anxieties and the god's role in human life to the next section.

Reasons for Consultations

The specific reasons which prompt Jumlis to consult their gods in dhamelo basālne sessions can be divided into

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<sup>1</sup>Altogether 80 reasonably complete consultation interviews plus other fragments were collected on tape, some resulting in only two to three pages of transcription and some as long as thirty to forty pages. These interviews were collected, transcribed, and translated with the help of Tunga Nath Upadhaya and Prithivi Raj (Bobby) Chettri.

two categories according to the dimension of time. On the one hand are problems which have already manifested themselves in the past and are continuing into the present, and on the other hand are planned future enterprises for which the god's blessings must be sought if a potential problem is to be avoided. This latter category, consists of such enterprises as house building, trade journeys, hunting trips, pilgrimages, and new occupations. As the oracles deal with this category of "future problems" in much the way as "general and individual anxieties," it will be more extensively discussed in Section B of this chapter.

In the former category of present problems stemming from the past, there is a wide variety of environmental, economic, health, and social problems which are the subject of consultations with the gods. Each of these problems, however, can be viewed as a disturbance in the natural or social orders of life. That is, whenever the proper order or arrangement of life (thiti) is perceived to have gone sufficiently awry, it can become a reason for consulting the gods.

The disturbances in the "natural" order which become reasons for consultation are primarily in the spheres of physical environment, livestock, human health, and reproduction. Drastic disturbances in the physical environment, such as drought, severe hail, fire, or crop diseases are often a reason for group consultations with the gods as they effect the economic livelihood of the community as a

whole. In contrast, problems regarding livestock, which includes milkless cows, death of cattle or sheep, etc., and human health and reproduction, which includes illness, barrenness, death of children, etc., are primarily reasons for individual or family consultations. An exception to this pattern is epidemics which affect whole communities and may thus become a subject for a group consultation.

Disturbances of the social order which become reasons for consultations are primarily concerned with disputes and immoral or improper behaviour. Disputes usually involve whole factions, caste groups, or villagers. Immoral or improper behaviour includes a variety of acts and situations including theft, rape, exploitation of the weak or poor, mistreatment of a kinsman, etc. In essence, all disturbances of the social order are failures to maintain the proper dharmic relationships between individuals and groups.

With the exception of consultations prior to leaving for a trading journey, none of the above listed new enterprises or disturbances in the order of life (thiti) necessarily require the individuals involved to consult with the gods. In fact, for each kind of problem, there are alternative means of dealing with it, and as the government extends its services and institutions into the region these alternative "solutions" will increase. For disturbances in the "natural" order, individuals have the choice of: a) passively accepting it with no remedial

action, b) appealing to the "hidden" gods, or c) applying various home remedies, and in the case of health, utilizing the limited medical and veterinary facilities available in the region. For disturbances in the social order, there are a variety of informal dispute solving mechanisms (such as a council of respected village elders or the mediation of a mutually respected man) as well as the formal institutions of the Pancayat and the government courts. In the case of new enterprises, the individual has the choice of obtaining no divine blessings beforehand or of consulting with the Brahmanical tradition's astrologer (jyotis). Figure 14 presents these alternatives to consulting the gods together with the reasons which can lead to consulting the gods.

Figure 14

	Reasons for Consultations	Alternatives to Consultations
present and past	<u>Natural Order Disturbed</u> --drought, hail, fire and crop disease	--no action
	--livestock diseases & death of livestock --human illness, epidemic barrenness, death of children	--appealing to Brahma- nic gods --utilizing increasing- ly available govern- ment services: hos- pital, veterinary clinic, health wor- kers, etc.
present and past	<u>Social Order Disturbed</u> --disputes: in family, in village, between factions and castes	--informal mechanisms: mediation of respect- ed person(s)
	--immoral or improper behaviour: theft, rape exploitation, etc.	--formal govt. institu- tions: pancayat, police, courts, etc.

Reasons for Consultations	Alternatives to Consultations
<p><u>New Enterprises</u></p> <p>--house building</p> <p>future --journeys for trade , labor, pilgrimage</p> <p>--hunting, herding</p> <p>--marriages</p>	<p>--no action</p> <p>--utilizing astrologer of the Brahmanic tra- dition.</p>

Given the existence of alternative strategies, the question becomes: for what reasons and under what conditions do Jumlis decide that these problems are one which they should take to the gods for solution? While the answer to this question is by no means clear-cut, particularly since many Jumlis use alternative strategies either prior to or in addition to consultations with the gods, the following generalizations made by Jumlis themselves and mostly confirmed by my own observations provide some over-simplified indications. In general, then, Jumlis tend to take their problems to the gods under the following conditions:

a) When the individuals involved are poor, illiterate, and/or living in remote areas. People in this category which includes more Pābais and Dums than higher caste Jyulyāls, not only have difficulty utilizing more formal and expensive means of problem-solving (such as the courts), but place greater reliance on the traditional methods of dhamelo basāine.



- b) When there are unknown factors in the case. Such unknown factors include those which cannot be determined easily (such as land boundaries or ownership in the previous generations, the identity of thieves, etc.) or those which require prediction of the future (such as the success of a trading venture).
- c) When there is reason to suspect that the case is related to some supernatural agency such as the incarnating gods, spirits of the deceased (maiyu), ghosts (bhut), or witches (boksi, dañkini, kaptini).
- d) When there is reason to suspect that the case is related to a "crime" against the dharmic order which does not fall under civil jurisdiction, or which, because of the close kinship ties with the offender, the consultant prefers to avoid civil jurisprudence.
- e) When alternative strategies have been unsuccessful in bringing about an acceptable solution to the problem.

In other words, individuals consult the gods about their problems either because it is the kind of problem which is only resolvable by gods or because they feel that it is to their advantage to do so. Since the gods have a reputation for being scrupulously honest and just, it is to one's advantage to consult the gods only when one has been unjustly treated and is confident that right is on one's side. Thus Jumlis feel that it is usually only when one wants to take unjust advantage in a given situation that a person will utilize formal alternatives to consulting gods

(such as the courts). This attitude as well as others which surround the decision of whether or not to take a specific problem to the gods will be clarified in later sections where the gods' solutions to problems are addressed.

Establishing the Reason:  
The First Stage of Con-  
sultation Sessions

The first stage of individual consultations consists of establishing which problem the consultant has come to discuss. That is, prior to seeking explanations and solutions, it is first of all necessary for the oracle (god) to discover why the consultant has come to him.

Often, this first stage in the consultation process is very brief as the consultant immediately informs the oracle of his problem, or the oracle is already aware of the problem and indicates his knowledge while addressing the consultant. This kind of straight-forward establishing of the reason for a consultation is illustrated by the following example of a Pābai woman consulting the oracle of Bābiro Maṣṭā:

Woman: I would also like to have some of my troubles looked into, Māhārāj. I have had this opportunity this day and I am extremely happy.

Dhāmi: Well, woman, I do not see anyone in your house who is so ill that he has to lie on the bed all the time. So why is it that you have had to come to me? Speak.

Woman: There is nothing else except about my cows. I have not been able to drink my cow's milk or

take its curds. Tell me<sup>1</sup> whether there will be any calves born or not.

However, it is more frequently the case that consultants challenge the oracle to tell them why they have come. This challenge is considered a kind of test of the god's powers and the oracle's authenticity. By successfully divining the consultant's problem through his supernatural knowledge, the oracle proves that he is capable of resolving it. Theoretically, if the oracle fails to pass the test, he should be considered incapable of dealing with the problem. In fact, however, the case is still presented to the oracle even in those instances when the oracle is incorrect in his divination. Perhaps related to the fact that according to my data, the oracles are as frequently wrong as they are right when they venture their opinion specifically without having received preliminary "clues" from the discussion, many oracles attempt to avoid this test by: a) continuing to try to elicit the information from the consultant, or b) stating that their powers are insufficient to determine which particular problem is the reason for the consultant's visit. Alternately, oracles will prolong this initial first stage of the consultation process by making general statements until they discover the reason indirectly (either through clues furnished by the consultant or by comments made by others in the

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<sup>1</sup>Since the cow has not calved, it does not give milk.

audience, including the dāṅgri) or refer to it by a broad category of problems which the consultant considers satisfactory.

The following excerpt from a consultation with the oracle of Ḍaḍār Maṣṭā is an example of an instance in which the oracle meets the challenge of divining the reason to the consultant's satisfaction. The case concerns a dispute between two families which originated during the previous generation's time when a member of one family stole some goods from the other family. As the consultant (a Brahman woman descendent from one of the families) lives in the same village as the oracle, it is likely that the oracle as a person would be aware of the circumstances.

Dhāmi: Listen, oh woman. Everything is all right in your house. I do not see anything that is wrong.

Woman: Whatever there is about me, you, Nārāyan, should see it. If you can see then you are Nārāyan. If you cannot see it, then you are still Narayan for me.<sup>1</sup>

Dhāmi: What is it that troubles (you)? Is it something which you are only imagining and so you cannot say it?

Woman: What is there for me to say? Since you are all-knowing there is nothing for me to say to add to your knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup>It is interesting to note that despite the fact that she is testing the oracle she affirms her faith in him even if he should be wrong. Instances like this where the consultant leaves room for the oracle to be unsuccessful are frequently found in the consultation sessions.

Dhāmi: This is something about the land and woman.<sup>1</sup>  
A maximum of three generations and minimum of two generations have passed. Is this true or not?

Woman: I do not know anything. I do not know how many generations it has lasted and what the trouble is. May be it is something--some disease--which has come out of its own.

Dhāmi: When you do know all about it why do you pretend to be ignorant?

Woman: This is like saying "if you are going to become my husband I shall run away with you." If it is something which I knew about then what is the point in consulting you, a god (devtā)?

Dhāmi: If I am to<sub>2</sub> speak then listen: The cause is the invocation<sup>2</sup> of a woman who sings māṅgal (hymns). Two to three generations have passed. It is something which has to do with what was said by a woman and with some stealing. If it is the truth, say so and if it is false, then say so.

Woman: It is true. That was the big anxiety of mine.

The next excerpt from a consultation is an example of an instance in which the oracle's initial diagnosis of the consultant's problem is incorrect. However, the oracle subsequently demonstrates considerable flexibility by immediately reversing his position. This excerpt also demonstrates the dialectical process of indirect verbal fencing which often occurs between consultant and oracle. The case under discussion concerns the present whereabouts of the consultant's servant who ran away with a thousand rupees

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<sup>1</sup>The general term for land and women is māu-māṭi. As will be discussed later, many problems in Jumla resolve themselves into māu-māṭi.

<sup>2</sup>pukārā. The role of such invocations will be discussed later.

belonging to the consultant which was supposed to be delivered to a friend in return for a horse. The dhāmi is an oracle of the god Kuldeo:

Dhāmi: Now what is there that can be done? When a pirālu /root of arum lily/ is planted in the morning then by evening two leaves will have sprouted. Similarly, that which has happened in the morning will found to have changed into something else by the evening. Listen, there must be thousands of feelings and anxieties in your mind this day. But I shall never be able to recount them all. Now what is there that I can do? Today you have all gathered here with the hope that this insignificant god might be able to do something where all else has failed. And then, another thing, children, it might be that you have come here hoping that I shall be able to fulfill the desires that you have in your mind. And finally, it might be that you have come to test me and to see for yourselves whether I am a true god (devtā) or not and to understand my secrets.

Man: Nārāyan, why should I want to understand your character and your secrets? I have come here of my own decision. I have come here because I wanted to . . . .

Dhāmi: If you have not come here to find out about me then I do not see anyone ill in your nouse who is lying on the bed and I do not see anything which you have lost. I do not see anything else that is wrong. Have you come here because of your heart's yearnings and desires? May be you have come here to know what is going to happen because the future worries you.

Man: How is it that I have lost nothing, Nārāyan? I have lost something.

Dhāmi: But I do not feel that you have come here without reason. You must be troubled (and) that is why you have come here. Is this not so?

Man: True, Gosāin. I do not know whether to hang myself or to drown myself. That is why I have come to you. Otherwise why should I have come here?

Dhāmi: You have lost something--this is true. And today you are suffering and you are filled with anxiety.

Man: This is true, Gosāīn. Nārāyan.

Dhāmi: Is this true or not? If it is then say so--and if it is false then say so.

Man: If I were not suffering then why should I say so, Nārāyan? How could I come here with a falsehood?

Dhāmi: Listen, child. I see that it has not been many days since you lost this thing. It has been only a few days.

Man: It has not been many days since I lost that thing, Nārāyan.

Dhāmi: If I am to speak the truth then I will say this--the thing which you have lost is a moveable and useable thing. Is this true or not? If it is true then say so. If it is false say so. Listen to me and speak the truth. The thing which you have lost must be of two or three colors. Is this true or not?

Man: True, Parmeswar, true. It is of two colors and two kinds. When it has been used in one place then it can be got again in another place.

Dhāmi: Listen, it must be about a week since you lost that thing.

Man: Nārāyan, it has been about two weeks since I lost it. Why should I hesitate to say this?

Dhāmi: But it has been only one week since you have been brooding over your loss and have been having doubts.

At this point in the consultation, there was a number of people speaking to each other at the same time which could not be distinguished enough to transcribe. However, it is evident that members of the audience who knew the case talked with the consultant and each other and the facts regarding the servant's theft were completely revealed.

One final example serves to illustrate how the reason for a consultation can be established both through information provided by a third party and through the oracles use of generalized statements regarding the nature of the reason. In addition, this excerpt reveals aspects of the relationship between gods and men which will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter. The case which has been brought to Ḍaḍār Maṣṭā's oracle, concerns a house which must be rebuilt, a forthcoming marriage, and frequent cattle deaths:

Dhāmi: Listen, child, why have you come today? Is it because you wanted to see something ramailo /good and enjoyable/ or is it because you only want some shade from the hot sun? I do not see anyone who is ill or sick and who is lying on the bed--but what is that feeling in your heart /man/ that has brought you to me? What is it that makes you so anxious?

Man: Well, Nārāyan, you are the one who should see it all, Parmeswar.

Another Man: This one's house has fallen down. He feels that if he were to know an auspicious day to repair it then may be it would be beneficial.

Dhāmi: Do you want me to tell you about the cause of the anxiety that you feel or is it something else that you want to know?

Man: It is something like that which I want to ask, Parmeswar.

Dhāmi: Is it because you are not sure whether your plans will succeed or not that you are worried?

Man: Well--I have come to trouble you, Nārāyan, because I do not know the answer and I want you to tell me.

Dhāmi: O son of man, no matter what the work is or how big it is; plan and execute it and I will see to it that you succeed. That is all the assurance that a deity can give you.



Man: Well, that is the way it is, Nārāyan. Only when we plan to do something will that succeed. Otherwise how can we succeed? The god will also help us getting on the easy path from the difficult one. Now, I have to build my house. The deity will not go and bring all the stones and wood that I require. He will not go himself to bring the windows and doors for me. But what the deity should do is to see that we get good wood and that no one is hurt and if we are walking upon the wrong path then he should lead us to the right path.

Dhāmi: Listen, child. I see that there is some fault (dos) about a woman (māu) or land (mātti). This concerns your house and it is quite an old cause. What is this?

Man: Yes. I have come here because of some difficulty about the land.

Dhāmi: The tendency of your questions lead to women and land.

Man: Yes, yes. That is exactly what is in my mind. That is what has brought me here, Gosāin. I have come to ask about a woman and about land.

From these examples it can be seen that the oracle is tested by a question and answer dialogue in which information is revealed and the problem defined through indirect references and through identifying general categories. Further, it can be seen that the testing is less a true examination of the oracles than the form or style of dialogue used to identify the problem during the first stage of the consultation process.

#### The Etiology of Problems

Once the nature of the problem that is the reason for a consultation has been established, the next stage in the consultation process is usually concerned with the cause of the problem. All problems, except those grouped

under the category of "new enterprises", have one or more causes which must be discovered in order for them to be resolved. As each of these kinds of problems can be understood as perceived disturbances in the proper natural and social order of life, the purpose of this second stage in the consultation process is to establish the causes of these disturbances.

All causes of problems can be divided into four categories. Each of these categories of causes has its own forms of agency, its own rationale, and its own sphere of activity. These four categories can be identified as: a) destiny (bhāgya), b) guilt or fault (dos), c) malevolent beings, and d) mundane physical forces.

The category identified as destiny (bhāgya) is closely associated with the sphere of the hidden gods of Jumla Brahmanism. It refers to the cosmic workings of the laws of karma and the effects of astrological forces (graha). Thus, it is predetermined both by actions in previous lives and by the moment of birth. As the moment of birth is itself a function of a person's karma accumulated in previous lives the problems caused by "destiny" can be understood as punishment for previous violations of the dharmic code. The agents of destiny are Bhābi, the personification of the laws of karma (bhāgya) and the planets (graha). Both of these agents may also be referred to by using one of the names for the supreme God (Brahma, Bhaḡwān, Parmeswar,

Ishwar, etc.) or one of the major Brahmanical incarnations (Viṣṇu, Māhādev, etc.).

Destiny is able to effect all aspects of an individual's life. Thus, it is potentially the cause for disturbances perceived to be in the natural order or in the social order. It can be the reason children or cattle die, the reason thefts occur, the reason a family has disputes, the reason a person becomes blind, etc. That is, there is no way for humans to determine on an a priori basis whether a problem is ultimately caused by destiny or by some other cause.

The causes which fall into the category of dos (guilt or fault) also have their origin in human actions. However, these causes can be traced back to "faults" or "mistakes" (dos) made by individuals or their families (including their ancestors) in this life. These faults represent violations of the dharmic code for behaviour which should regulate the behaviour of individual's towards each other and towards gods. Also included within this category are "mistakes" which may have been inadvertantly made with regard to the dharmic order, but for which the individual is still considered responsible. Taken as a whole, the category of dos is most frequently identified in consultations as the source of problems brought to the gods.

The agents of dos which has occurred as a result of violations of the proper relationship between people and gods are the oracular gods, either acting directly or

through the instrumentality of their servant bāhān. That is, when an individual has angered a god, the god responds by punishing him. The kinds of violations which can make a god angry include: failure to worship the god in regular full moon ceremonies, severe violations of the standards of purity (such as women who purposely hide their menstruation and pollute men, high caste men who have sexual relations with untouchables), or even relatively minor infractions of rules set out by various gods for their own communities (such as the rule in Tatopani that only the god's shrine shall be whitewashed). Depending on their severity, these violations can result in divine punishments in any facet of an individual's life. In other words, the punishments can take the form of any kind of problem experienced in an individual's life, including illness, fire, barrenness, family disputes, poverty, etc.

The agents of problems which are caused by violations of the dharmic order which should exist between individuals or groups can thus be either the oracular gods or other humans, or even a sequence of other humans and oracular gods. That is, if there is some dispute, theft, exploitive behaviour, etc., it may be because the god is punishing the person because of some previous violation of the type described above or it may be due just to the improper or immoral behaviour of another person. If the cause of the immediate suffering or problem is the behavior of another person (such as a landlord or husband), and

alternative strategies that have been employed have failed, then the injured person can appeal to the god to redress the situation by punishing the offending person. If the god heeds this appeal, then the offender (the person who originally violated the dharmic code of correct behaviour) can be the recipient of divine punishment in which the god (or his bāhān) is the agent.

The fact that victims of improper behaviour (the cause of whose "problem" is other people) can appeal to the gods to have punishment levied on their victimizer(s) is crucial to understanding the gods' roles as problem-solvers in Jumla culture. This kind of appeal is usually referred to as a pukārā (call, invocation, complaint, report) or a bigār (harm, deterioration, damage--from the verb bigārnu, to spoil, to damage).<sup>1</sup> These appeals may be made to the god in private, but are frequently made to the oracle in consultation sessions where other individuals are also present. In the case of women who believe that they have been maltreated in their husband's house (ghar), it is most likely that the appeal will be made to the family or community god of their natal home (māitā). The appeals are

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<sup>1</sup>Winkler notes a similar kind of appeal called ghāt in far-western Nepal which he defines as "a special oath made to a god or spirit so that it will render justice and trouble the guilty individual." Walter F. Winkler, "Spirit Possession in Far Western Nepal." In Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas eds. John Hitchcock and Rex Jones, (New Delhi: Vikas, 1976): 253.

oaths<sup>1</sup> in the sense that the person who appeals to the god promises that he will give a special offering or do a special service for the god if the god renders him justice. This kind of offering, called doeri, was described in the previous chapter.

Jumlis understand that the gods agree to accept appeals to punish individuals not only because of the offerings promised to them in return but because, as was shown in their pareli life histories, they are champions of the oppressed and exploited. The gods are angered by all kinds of violations of proper moral behaviour and will thus mete out punishments not only on their own behalf but on behalf of individuals who have brought their problems to them. As this understanding of divine motivation suggests, gods will only carry out appeals if they are justified and the individual requesting the punishment is truly the victim of improper behaviour. Unjustified appeals will be made to rebound on the individual making them, as the gods purpose in accepting appeals is to perform true justice.

As when the gods act on their own behalf, the kind of punishment they chose may take the form of any disturbance in the natural and social order as it effects the guilty party. However, sometimes individual appeals made to them specify the kind of punishment desired and sometimes

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

the gods are perceived as using that particular form of punishment to render justice. There is one important respect in which the gods' forms of punishment differ from those which may be awarded by secular institutions such as the courts which are alternatives to consultations. For in contrast to human justice which can be administered relatively quickly, the divine justice of the oracular gods may take up to twelve years to take effect. That is, while the oracular gods always follow through on their promises, they may take up to twelve years to do so. Shrestha<sup>1</sup> records a proverb which expresses this aspect of divine justice: bārā barsā dhuni, bārā barsā khuni (for twelve years preoccupied, for twelve years a blood-taker).

In contrast to the gods who only cause problems for people who are guilty of wrongful actions, malevolent beings usually attack innocent individuals. These "malevolent beings" include ghosts, demons, and witches who have not yet been pacified. Ghosts and demons who have become pacified usually become maiya (see Chapter 5) or bāhān for the gods. This category of "causes" is thus composed of beings--both nonhuman and human--that have the capacity to harm individuals through supernatural powers.

The ranks of ghosts (bhut, pret) and demons (rākṣas, daitya) include both named and unnamed beings. Among the former the ghosts are attached to particular lineages while

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<sup>1</sup>Bihari Shrestha, Jan Jivan, p. 98.

the demons are associated with certain specific locations. The unnamed ghosts and demons can be found anywhere but are most likely encountered either around cremation grounds or in uninhabited areas such as the forest. While ghosts of particular lineages usually only trouble their own descendants and kins (as was described in Chapter 5), unspecified ghosts and demons attack randomly selected people.

The reason why demons and unnamed ghosts attack people can be because of envy, sexual desire, or actions which they interpret to be provocations; but it is most often because of their capriciously malevolent nature. Possible provocations include infringing on their "residence" at night or whistling outside after dark. An example of a situation in which a ghost or demon is motivated by desire is when an attractive woman falls asleep in the forest while cutting grass<sup>1</sup>. However, the situations which are most likely to attract the evil intentions of ghosts and demons are states of non-ordinary purity such as pollution following birth or death or the heightened purity attained by the bride and groom during marriage.

Given the randomness and capriciousness of attacks by these malevolent beings, individuals and families must take protective measures to reduce their vulnerability. These measures include carrying iron utensils, khukuri,

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<sup>1</sup>In Tātopāni, the stillbirth of an abnormal child was attributed to a ghost's having had intercourse with the woman in the forest in just this kind of situation.



knives, guns, fishnets, and sacred books as well as obtaining sacred formulas (jantar) from Brahman priests. During the periods of increased vulnerability mentioned above, a number of rituals (see Chapter 5) are performed to scare the ghosts and demons away. However, since none of these measures are completely foolproof, and since the range of problems which attacks by ghosts and demons can cause overlap with other problems, such attacks are potentially the cause of problems brought to the gods in consultation sessions.

The behaviour of witches is similar to that of ghosts and demons, but is considered less capricious. While witches may attack people for no reason except their naturally evil nature, most witches are motivated by envy of another's good fortune. As envy is most likely to arise between members of the same family or community, witches usually only trouble people that they know well.<sup>1</sup>

Although the terms used are often interchangeable, Jumlis state that there are three kinds of witches: boksi, dañkini, and kaptini. While definitions vary between different informants most agree that the dañkini is invariably a female and the most evil of the three. Boksi are less evil than dañkini, but more evil than kaptini who are almost

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<sup>1</sup>In the voluminous anthropological literature dealing with witch accusations it has been fairly conclusively shown that accusations reflect social tensions. As will be shown later, oracles seem to be well aware of this principle when they are engaged in identifying witches.

always females. To greater or lesser degrees all three kinds of witches have learned the esoteric knowledge (kapat) which enables them to cause troubles for other humans. Like witches elsewhere, they use the "evil eye" (dekh parnu, ākḥā lāgnu, boksrinu), articles belonging to their victims, or food as a means of performing their evil deeds. Although precautions are taken against them, there is no way to completely avoid their powers.

The last category of causes has been identified as the "mundane physical". This category refers to problems which arise out of "natural" events which have no supernatural or human influence operating upon them. These include illness caused by eating poisonous plants, dirty food or water, accidents such as a man or horse falling off the path, fires caused by lightening, sickness caused by exposure to an ill person, etc. Since there is always the danger that these events occurred because of destiny, dos, or malevolent beings, it is often necessary to consult with the gods regarding their origin and cure. However, it is recognized that many problems in life arise "by chance" as a natural sequence to eating the wrong thing or not watching one's footing carefully enough. These kinds of causes have been classified as the "mundane physical" because they do not require divine explanations in consultation sessions, although the gods often give cures and blessings whose purpose is to alleviate the problem.

This four-fold classification of the causes of problems, while encompassing the roster of theoretically possibilities, does not take into account the potentiality for multiple causation. Any given problem can have more than one cause, both in the sense of antecedent causes and in the sense of multiple causes. For example, a person may be ill because he ate a spoiled food (mundane physical cause) that became spoiled because of a spell put on it by a witch (malevolent being cause) who was angry because she was maltreated by the victim (dos cause). In addition, the person's actions in a previous life may have been such that it was his karma (destiny) that he should become ill. In such an instance, the first cause is destiny, the second is dos, and the third is malevolent being, and the fourth is mundane physical. Alternately, the person could have become ill because his father never carried through with a promise he had made to a god and because his wife had made an invocation (pukāra) against him because he took a second wife and expelled her from the house--a situation in which two kinds of dos operate at the same time.

In cases where there is a plurality of causes in the antecedent sense, it is possible to rank the four categories of causes identified here hierarchically. At the top of the hierarchy is the cause of destiny. Destiny may always be the ultimate cause of problems which are also perceived to have more immediate causes, and though it is theoretically determined by antidharmic actions, (dos) in previous

lives, its relatively immutable and irrevocable nature gives it the status of a "prime mover". At the other end of the hierarchy is the mundane physical. While it is often the immediate cause for problems which may have been ultimately caused by destiny, dos or malevolent beings, it is incapable of being a prior cause to any of these other three categories. In the middle of this hierarchy are dos and malevolent beings. Each may be a prior cause for the other and/or the prior cause for mundane physical, but, within the context of the consultations, can only be caused by destiny.

While destiny can thus be the ultimate cause for any problem despite whatever other intermediate causes there may be, it is not necessarily so. In fact, it is precisely because all forms of dos, malevolent beings, and the mundane physical can be the ultimate cause of problems that the oracular gods can play an important role in human life. For while karma is not subject to change in one's present life (although the influence of the planets can be changed somewhat), all other causes have the potential of being manipulated or eliminated so that problems can be resolved. It is thus the oracle's job to discover if one or more of these malleable causes is to blame and then to attempt to resolve it.

Discovering the Causes: The  
Second Stage of Consultations

As with the first stage of the consultation process in which the nature of the problem is identified, the process of discovering the cause of the problem proceeds through a dialogue between the oracle and the consultant. Although the deity is less frequently tested by the consultant at this stage, a similar sort of verbal fencing nevertheless takes place in order for both parties to elicit the information they require. In instances where the case is clear-cut or well-known to the oracle, this process may be very short. In other instances where the case is very complicated and new facts and attitudes are continually surfacing, the process may be very lengthy while different potential causes are investigated and the relevant factors sorted out. In addition, some cases, though complicated and unfamiliar, may be dealt with in a preemptory fashion without ever isolating and identifying the probable causes for the problem.

As the only way to identify either destiny or the mundane physical as the sole cause of a problem is through the process of eliminating other options, most consultations that seriously address the question of causation are concerned with the possibilities of dos or the malevolent beings, with greater emphasis being placed on the former. The emphasis on dos, whether through the agency of the gods or fellow humans, also reflects the fact that the overwhelming majority of cases are usually attributed to causes

within this category, and that these causes are directly related to human actions vis-a-vis the dharmic code of behaviour.

The primary method utilized by the oracles to discover possible dos consists of various verbal games. These include one game in which the oracle solicits information through making statements which must be confirmed by the consultant with either a "yes" or a "no" answer, as well as direct questioning and various psychological techniques in which the oracle attempts to uncover emotionally charged events and relationships. From their side, consultants participate in these "games" in a variety of manners, extending from complete cooperation at providing all information readily, to testing the oracle or even attempting to manipulate the "facts" through indirectly denying any wrongful acts they may have committed.

In addition to these verbal methods of discovering the causes of problems, considerable reliance is placed in a rice-divination method. This method, sometimes called achetā herne (to look at sanctified unhusked rice) or dānā herne (to look at grains), usually involves either the oracle or the consultant placing two or more piles of rice on the oracle's gaddi. The consultant is then told to assign each pile to a possible option in his mind and the oracle identifies which pile is the correct option. Alternatively, the oracle will throw some rice on his hand, and by examining whether the number of grains is even or odd,

divine which of several choices is correct. If the former method is used, it is usually presumed that the oracle is aware of which option has been assigned to each pile, however, in some instances in which the consultant does not reveal his code, the oracle must proceed with further verbal exploration to discover which option has been selected. This method may be used more than once in a single consultation when several choices are progressively required.

As the use of the rice divination method suggests, the gods' powers to "see" or "know" all of the causes underlying a problem are recognized to be limited. Particularly if some other god is responsible for the consultant's troubles, it is understood that the particular oracle being consulted may not be able to fully unravel the etiology of the problem. Thus, consultants sometimes take their problems to additional oracles if they are unsatisfied with the results obtained from prior consultations with their family god (kulānya devtā).

These processes of discovering the causes of problems in consultations can best be understood through examining some examples of actual cases. The following case serves as an illustration of how the rice-divination method is combined with "verbal games" to discover the identity of the thief. The consultant is a woman who loaned her silver coin necklace to her step-daughter for a festival. The step-daughter had reported that the necklace was stolen from her when she had taken it off in order to wash in the

river. The oracle in this case is the medium for the god Māhādeo. As the second stage of the consultation is mixed in with the first stage of determining the problem, the case is given in its entirety:

Woman: Can I get your blessings (dui dānā) also, Gosāin?

Dhāmi: I don't see that there is anything of yours which is spoilt or broken. But there seems to be a question of "woman-land" (māu-māti).

Woman: It is not something to do with the "woman-land".

Dhāmi: But doesn't your question deal with some woman? It seems that you are trying to lie to the god. Tell me, is your question something to do with a woman or not?

Woman: It is true, Nārāyan. I am finally satisfied.

Dhāmi: It is something to do with a woman. The thing has to be of two kinds (barnā). You want to ask about that thing and it is a question about a woman also.

Woman: True! True! Nārāyan!

Dhāmi: Isn't that thing of two kinds? It is something which can be moved only when someone moves it--isn't this so? It has to be something which is white and bright. It is something which cannot move on its own, white, bright, something which you have seen with your own eyes, something which you have kept with you, and it is something which has simply disappeared. Is this true or not? You are one who lies to the god and says that it isn't about a woman when it is about a woman. [The dhāmi slaps her on the cheek].

Woman: It is all true, Nārāyan. I am satisfied. I have to say that it is the truth!

Another: That is alright, Nārāyan. Please do not hit her. What you say is the truth.

Dhāmi: You are one who goes around saying that which is not the truth. Today you want to know whether this has happened through your own



fault (dos) or because of bad planets (daśā graha, destiny), or something else. Isn't this all that you want to know? Or is there something else that you want to know about? You seem not to care about the god and say that what the god says is not right! Otherwise, tell me what else there is that you want.

Woman: /weeping/ Nārāyan: Is it a woman or a man? who is the person who has taken the necklace?

Dhāmi: There has been a lot of discussion between the man and the woman. Your thing isn't very old. It is something which has been lost recently.

Woman: True Nārāyan. It was recently. And it was something which is used very readily.<sup>1</sup> Has it been taken by one person or are there a number of them involved? What is it, Nārāyan?

Dhāmi: I have already spoken. It is something which dazzles the eye. There has to be two kinds of whiteness and brightness in it. But, shall I say two or three? They are together in it.

Woman: Now that one won't give it to me. That one has taken it forever.<sup>2</sup>

Dhāmi: If, for some reason, you are not given it then I shall cause that person's stomach to pain and boils to appear on the body. But if that person comes and gives it to you on the quiet then the matter shall rest. But if that person doesn't give it to you, then take some earth from the top of my gādi. Then I shall bring each and everyone of them to hand. But you have asked whether it is a woman or or a man. So take a handful of rice and place it in one heap representing the woman and then take another handful and place it in another heap representing the man. Then I shall tell you. I would have caught that person myself.

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<sup>1</sup>Although the woman has already identified the missing object as a necklace, it is interesting to note that the oracle continues to act as though he is still identifying it.

<sup>2</sup>This statement provides the clue that the consultant has a specific suspicion regarding the identity of the thief.

Woman: True, Nārāyan. Is it a male or a female?

Dhāmi: Place two handfuls /of rice/ in two heaps asking whether it is male or a female. And then we will decide.

Woman: As for females, is it my daughter or some other woman? And as for males, is he someone from a lower caste or a higher caste? Or is he someone from my own caste with whom I am familiar?<sup>1</sup> Thus you have to distinguish it for me Nārāyan.

Dhāmi: /When the two heaps of rice have been placed on the gaddi/ It says that the one who took it is a woman. Right? Tell me the truth.

Woman: Since you have seen that a woman has taken it, tell me whether it is still with that woman or has it passed into the hands of a man?

Dhāmi: If you want to know whether it is your daughter or another man you must again place two handfuls of rice for each of them.

Woman: True, Nārāyan. When you are able to tell between the two heaps which heap is for the woman and which for the daughter then will I truly believe you.

Dhāmi: I cannot see that a woman has taken it. But I do see that your daughter has taken it. When I think over the matter seriously then I find that it was your daughter who took it.

Woman: True, Nārāyan! I also suspected my daughter.

The next case is an example of a consultation in which the dos of the consultant's parents is identified as the reason why the consultant's family is suffering and his children dying. However, unlike the case cited above, the identification of the cause is somewhat tentative, and the

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<sup>1</sup>Note that the woman had specifically mentioned her daughter as a suspect.

case is not examined in detail. Thus it is not made entirely clear whether an invocation had been against the wife and a god was the agent for their misfortune or whether there was some additional cause. It is this type of consultation which is often repeated with the same or another oracle as the troubles afflicting the family continue. The case also clearly illustrates the way in which destiny and dos are considered as alternative causes for the problem. The oracle is the principal dhāmi of the Sundargaon Maṣṭā:

Dhāmi: You, boy with two minds. Why have you come here? Have you come here because you have been burned by the heat of the sun, or have you come here because you thirst for water? Speak!

Husband: What to do Parmeswar? Evil days are upon me and so I have come to consult you. Is it because our own days and planets are under evil influences (destiny) or is it because some deity or the other is annoyed with us?

Dhāmi: Is your wife suffering or not? Had not your mother-in-law said that they would give your wife to somebody and had they taken that person's curds or not?<sup>1</sup>

Husband: I don't know whether they had given their word to some person or not. May be it is because of that reason that my children have died. Will I be the next to die? That is why I have come to /you/ Parmeswar to know whether there is any way out. Three of my children have died--what can I do?

Dhāmi: Listen. This time also there is a son in your wife's womb. When that son is born then I shall take something as a gift of gratitude.

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<sup>1</sup>Taking a person's curd refers to the completion of the engagement ceremony described in Chapter 4.

Your last son is also a year and a half now. This is true or not? When that child had been ill because of the illness of the head and the stomach I was the one who had said that I would not let him die and I had cured him. This is true or not?

Husband: No, Parmeswar. Our children should not have to bear the punishment of our /the parents'/ faults and mistakes (dos). And if my children die and you take away my family then how do you gain by that?

Dhāmi: Listen. The father of your wife had said to another man that he would give her to that man and the father had even accepted the auspicious curds (dahi-sagun). Is this true or not?

Husband: May be he had said that he had a daughter and had eaten the curds from some shepherd or the other.

Dhāmi: Listen, that curd was not one eaten in jest.

Husband: What could we know, Parmeswar? May be those who have eaten the curd know from whom they took it and for what purpose.

Dhāmi: The people from your wife's family know about this. How could your wife or I know whose curd was eaten.

Husband: My wife used to say no matter whose curd her parents had eaten, she would not marry with one whom she did not like.

Dhāmi: Listen. I see that her mother's brother had said that he would arrange to have his niece married to a certain man and had shown some greed and taken something from that man.

Husband: If they had taken something then they will repay that Parmeswar. What can we know about that?

Dhāmi: Girl, your parents are no longer alive. Is this true?

Wife: What can I do Parmeswar. My father and mother are also dead. Now I do not know whether the fault is theirs, my husband's or whether it is my own karma. My body suffers and my children also do not survive.

At this point in the consultation, the oracle ceased discussing the cause and began to give his blessings as a cure. In addition to its method of dealing with the possible cause, this case is noteworthy as an instance in which the Brahmanical values of engagement come into conflict with the values of romantic love and the self-determination of husbands by women.

The following case presents an even briefer example of cause being determined without any of the details of the case being established. In many respects, it is typical of the many brief consultations that take place. The consultant is a Brahman woman and the oracle is Bābiro

Mastā:

Dāgri: There is a Brahmani here who has come to consult you, Parmeswar. You must advise her.

Dhāmi: What to see--she has not reached the stage where she is confined to the bed and is about to die. Why has she come here?

Women: How could I be all right, Parmeswar? I am always suffering.

Dhāmi: What to do? Shall I say that the cause lies in your own evil times or shall I say that some person is responsible? Actually, I shall tell you what I see. But I see that there is some fault on a woman's side. What is this?

Woman: Who is responsible, Parmeswar? Is it our own deity or is it someone else--you must tell me. (Some rice is put in two small heaps and the dhāmi touches one of them).

Dhāmi: Well, is this the one or not?

Woman: It may be, Parmeswar. I also had my doubts about this one.

Dhāmi: Right. That deity is the one who is responsible to some extent. Offer proper worship (pujā) to that one. Take these few grains of mine and you will be protected. Now go.

This next case illustrates the process of making an invocation (pukārā) to the god to punish persons who acted against the dharmic code. The consultant is a widow who used to have plenty of wealth and four daughters, but no sons. She brought in two resident son-in-laws to whom she made over her property on the condition that they looked after her and her daughters. However, one of the son-in-laws, named Asa, sold some the land and built a new house in which he installed another wife, and the other, a man from a village called Ghorega, also left his wife and went off, leaving the widow with only part of her property left and no one to look after them. In this consultation, the widow is appealing to the oracle of Dhaḍār Maṣṭā:

Widow: I have a plea also, Nārāyan. The one from Ghoregā has left us as if we were dead and gone. It seems as if we have never offered devotion to you. What are we to do? My daughter says that she was kicked out before she could enjoy the fruits of her own labour. And the second, Asa, to whom I had given my land, property, and daughter has also slapped me in the face and gone away. O Mālik, do whatever you want to do but grant us deliverance.

Dhāmi: Here, take these few grains of husked rice and put it into your mouth. As for taking care of your tears and sorrows, I am there to help, O woman.

Widow: O Mālik, these rascals have made my daughters give birth to a child each and now they have created all these problems for me. I have no one else to turn to. I am only meditating upon you, Narayan. They have coaxed me and have made me do things according to their wishes.

Now this is my condition, Nārāyan. I shall serve you and devote myself to you--I have been doing this--only when you will have made insane those who have wronged me and have destroyed all that they have, will I be satisfied, Nārāyan, Bhagwān.

Dhāmi: All this is because of your own faults. When you had to do anything then you did not remember the god. And now when you are in trouble what is there that the god can do?

Widow: What to do, Nārāyan? At that time also I had said that if he was going to leave my daughter then I would not give her to him. But I gave all to him because he said at that time that he would look after all of us and do everything for us.

Dhāmi: I see that those who were devoted to me have no respect for their fellow human beings. What is this? Listen, I am one who is a father to the widow and the orphans. I am the sworn enemy of the wealthy oppressors. He has treated you with contempt--but you are not the only one --he feels that I, too, am insignificant.

Widow: You are the one who knows all, Nārāyan. What can we say?

Dhāmi: Listen. I am still here for you. There is nothing to be worried about. Now it my share to make insane those who are drunk with conceit. When I have accomplished this then know me for a god. And if I am unable to do this then you can spit upon me.

Widow: There is nothing else. The woman's natal home's god (māiti devtā, her own god) has been worshipped. If there is nothing that you can do then I do not see how anyone else could do anything. There will be no justice.

Dhāmi: Take these four grains of mine and scatter them into the four directions. There is nothing to worry about.

Although there is no connection between them, the following case can almost be read as a sequel to the one presented above. A man who had left his first wife for another woman had been suffering various troubles which

led him to consult with the oracle. During that consultation, it was discovered that the cause of his suffering was an invocation (pukārā) made by his first wife. As a result of this discovery, the man paid his jāri (adultery/divorce) fee to his first wife so that she would remove the invocation. However, the man was still suffering from the same problem, and so consulted the Sundargaon Mastā's dhāmi:

Dhāmi: O man from Suni village, why have you come? I do not see you suffering from any disease or ailment. Why have you come here?

Man: Parmeswar, what can I do? There was no fault of my father or grandfather. There is a small matter for which I have come to you, Parmeswar. I have already paid five hundred (rupees) where I had to pay a thousand as jāri. Those who took the jāri had said at that time that they would pacify the deity (to whom the invocation had been made). But they have not done so till now and that is why I have come to you.

Dāqri: You, man from Suni village, also behave like you are washing your face four times. There was something which you had to return (to your first wife) and you have not done so.

Man: True, there are a few clothes which I have to return. I shall bring them during the next full-moon. No matter what it takes you have to pacify the deity.

Dhāmi: Listen, bring all the things that you had promised to give. See that nothing is left out. Whatever happens, she (your wife) is my daughter also. I shall not destroy her. Now go.

This consultation was followed by another with the oracle of Sunārgaon Mastā which will serve as a final example of this stage of the consultation process. In this case, the cause of the consultant's sickness is identified as a witch (boksi). As in other instances where a witch is identified as the cause of troubles, the witch's identity



is usually hinted at without actually being named.

Dāgri: Parmeswar, a girl from Sāni village whose name is Cukki has come to consult you. You must advise her.

Dhāmi: Listen girl, there are no troubles and problems that you are facing to make you feel as if you are crossing the river during Srāvan (July-August, in the midst of the monsoons when the rivers are swollen) or crossing the high ridge during Māgh (January-February, when the ridges are covered with snow). I do not see any problem or sorrow in particular. What have you come for? Have you come because of a mere whim? Tell me what it is.

Girl: What to do Parmeswar? I have come for my own body. I don't know what has happened--sometimes I feel all right and sometimes I don't feel well. Sometimes I can see with my eyes and sometimes I can't. That is why I have come to you.

Dhāmi: True. You have come here for the sake of a "two-legged" (dopaiyā). I know. Listen, there is a woman friend of yours who has cast evil upon you and that is why you feel like this. But don't worry. Take these few grains of mine and go. I shall cure you.

Girl: Who is that witch, Parmeswar. You have to fix her in any way possible.

Dhāmi: Listen, that woman is a relative of yours. But I shall not speak the name now. But I shall make her suffer for what she has done. I am already here--the one who will save you from death. I shall do what there is to be done for you. Do not worry. Now go.

Solutions and Resolutions: The Final Stage of Consultations

If the problems brought to consultation sessions are understood as disturbances of the proper order of life caused by destiny, dos, malevolent beings, or the mundane physical, then the resolutions of these problems can be viewed as an attempt to restore the proper order of life

by removing the cause for the disorder. Within this perspective, the kinds of resolutions attempted are directly related to the causes diagnosed or divined for the problem. Although there is some overlapping of means and an underlying consistency of principles, the various categories of causes have separate kinds of possible resolutions. Necessarily, however, most of the possible resolutions are concerned with problems caused by dos since this is the category most frequently identified in consultations as the cause.

The exception to this conceptual schema is the cause labeled "destiny". For while destiny can be broken down into fate determined by the laws of karma as well as fate determined by the planets, with the latter kind of fate subject to a limited amount of manipulation by either the gods or astrologers, the basically immutable nature of destiny means that the problems it has caused cannot be resolved by the gods. The identification of a problem as one that is caused by destiny is tantamount to identifying it as insolvable. Since it is potentially the first cause underlying all other causes, it serves as the oracles' "escape clause", or, as it was expressed to me by a Jumli: "When the gods don't know what to blame, they say it is your destiny". Destiny thus serves as an explanation for problems which cannot be solved by the oracular gods. The only "resolution" which can be offered by the oracle is the god's blessings for the future.

The following case presents an example of such a "resolution" in which the oracle is unable to remove the consultant's problem. The case also illustrates the kind of problems which can occur when an individual forsakes too many of his dharmic obligations for the sake of romantic love. The dhāmi in this case is the oracle of Dhadar Masta and the consultant is a distantly related friend who was staying at his house. The consultant's problems started when he quarreled with his second wife (the first having left him) and his elder brother and moved into a relative's house in the village. In that house he seduced the house-owner's wife and eventually she gave birth to a son although she had been childless after many years of marriage. The consultant claimed ownership of the son, and in the dispute that followed the mother acknowledged that he was the father rather than her husband. The husband then expelled the consultant and his own wife and demanded jāri payment. As the consultant had lost his lands to his brother he was unable to make payments but agreed to give his niece to him instead. However, he was unable to persuade his niece to marry the cuckolded husband so the husband appealed to the god to punish the consultant. Subsequently, his own brother, who had accepted him back with his new son, again expelled him from the house, his second wife appealed to the god to punish him, and he was forced to live on alms and casual labor with his third wife.

Dhāmi: Listen, O son of the ācāryas, what am I to do to-day? If I look down then I see the river swollen with the rains of Srāvan (July-August). If I look up then there is the month of Māgh (January-February) and the snow packs in everything. There is no path that I can see. There is nothing that can be done. Now tell me what is there that I can do?

Man: You should know. What can I tell you? I am living in your house and I will say nothing. The dhāmi knows all that there is<sup>1</sup> to know--all about my troubles and my sorrows.

Dhāmi: Listen, children, what is there that I can do this day? If one is to create a snowstorm on one side and a hailstorm on the other, then the family that is yours and that gives you all these sorrows is the one that is at fault. For me they are like the flowers of the same garden. I consider all to be equal. If one of them is hurt or troubled and sad then I feel it and my heart tears for them. There is no other who is affected by their sorrow as I am affected.

Man: Well, Parmeswar, what am I to do? If you see anything that is wrong with me then you have to tell me. If you see any joy and happiness in store for me then tell me about it. I shall spend my days in the same manner as other unfortunates. I shall bear the sufferings that I have to bear, Nārāyan. Now, I am one who is unhappy and starving. There is nothing that I can say or do. What shall I do, Nārāyan?

Dhāmi: Now what is there that can be done? Listen, O children, what can I do? If I am to hit out then I will hurt myself, if I try to tie someone up then I myself will be tied. What can be done? I am the god who can turn water into food and the wind into clothes. From this day I shall see that your old and tattered bag is filled with alms. If I am to tell the truth then I do not see you starving or naked till this day. But there is no way in which you can get land and property. Listen, child, though you may be going through troubled times at present you will receive happiness and

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<sup>1</sup>Note that the consultant assumes that anything known by the dhāmi is also known by the god.

peace afterwards. Why are you becoming disappointed?

Man: (with a heavy sigh) Things will never turn out the way I want them to. I think that on the day the world comes to an end and everything is turned upside down then only will my wishes be fulfilled. And I will become happy. Otherwise my life is like that of a frog which is inside a pond. What can you do Nārāyan? A god who wishes to show his power (shakti) and tells me that he will do this and that will find that nothing works. Your powers will only be insulted if you try them on me! When will the time for my happiness and peace come--if ever? Now I am forty-two years old. And still I have no peace of mind or happiness. Now when will I ever get happiness? Each year the sorrows and troubles increase for me. I see that my destiny is that of a troubled and sad person.

Dhāmi: O child. I see that the planet which is troubling you is the rāstriya graha--A rāstriya graha like the kind which troubles nations during times of war. It is quite difficult to remove your troubles and sorrows. Are these troubles there because it is written in your destiny? Or do they trouble you because of some other family member of yours? This I cannot say. But the troubles which you are facing are the ones which belong to your share (bhāgga, destiny). Here, take these few grains of rice and put them under your pillow before you go to sleep. If, in the early morning you dream of some sign of a god then be sure that I shall again give you peace and happiness. What is the use of speaking a lot? That is all the advice that I can give you.

Man: Māhārāj. Gosāin.

Although problems caused by mundane physical forces are not considered insolvable unless destiny is the ultimate cause at work, the kind of cures usually prescribed by the oracles are similar to the kind of blessings given by the dhāmi in the case cited above. These blessings consist of sanctified grains of rice, usually called dui

dānā (two grains) or cār dānā (four grains) accompanied with a statement of hope. As in the above case, the consultant is often instructed to place the grains under his pillow to determine if his dreams will indicate what will take place in the future.<sup>1</sup> Only rarely is this kind of "blessing-cure" supplemented with any advice regarding herbal home remedies or the kind of blowing and recitation of mantras used by jhākris and dhāmis in the rest of Nepal.<sup>2</sup> However, problems that have traditional causes (such as witches) do require special offerings or actions to neutralize or pacify these additional forces.

As with problems caused solely by destiny, the number of problems diagnosed as being caused exclusively

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<sup>1</sup>While there is some room for individual interpretation of dreams, most dreams are only considered meaningful if they conform to a standard list. This list includes in the following dream-subjects, each of which has a pre-determined interpretation:

- a) receive money in dream = will receive something in life
- b) one person beats another = the beater is the cause of trouble
- c) a snake crawls onto your body = a good omen
- d) a snake is killed = a bad omen
- e) a jogi visits you = a god is blessing you
- f) a jogi beats you = a god is angry with you
- g) a dhāmi visits you = a good omen, his god is pleased
- h) a dhāmi beats you = his god is angry
- i) you kill a bird = someone in your house will die
- j) a bird sits on your clothes = you will receive a baby
- k) a cucumber is given to you = you will receive a baby
- l) a cucumber is cut = a baby will die
- m) a quarrel in your family = a bad omen

As can be seen from this partial list, the god appears to people in dreams usually as a jogi (sādhu) or as his dhāmi. In addition some gods appear as Tibetan shepherds.

<sup>2</sup>Hitchcock and Jones, Spirit Possession.

by the mundane physical tend to be few. The following case is one such instance. It involves a woman who was ill following a miscarriage consulting the principle oracle of Buṛu Maṣṭā. During the miscarriage, illness, and consultation, the woman's husband was away on a pilgrimage to the principal shrine of Dhaḍār Maṣṭā to request that their future children survive:

Dhāmi: Do not talk about other things. Here, take these grains of my rice and see if they are an even number. Then--if what I say is not fulfilled--you can sprinkle ashes in my shrine and I shall not complain. If the grains are an even number then know that the god has spoken to you. But if they are an odd number then a god does not speak--you shall know. I shall show you an even number in your dreams and then whatever you wish for will be fulfilled. Here, take these dui-dānā and eat them.

Woman: I shall not eat them. Until I am satisfied I shall not eat your grains or anything else.

Dhāmi: I shall protect you against it, whether it is some local disease or whether it is the work of some ghost or demon. But why don't you eat my dui dānā? Which god am I? Are these grains of rice which I give nectar (amrit) or are they poison (bik)?

Woman: Nārāyan, my home is not a happy one. Is the cause something done by someone or is it that my own fate is like this?

Dhāmi: Why blame the place uselessly? This is something caused by a contagious disease. Do you think that once you ask the dhāmi he will always give you something upon which you can put the blame? You have to ask about those things which have actually happened. When you set fire to green grass then the grass doesn't catch fire. How can I say anything which is false? I do not see that the place has any defects. Nor do I see any other defects. Listen, you are worried about your illness and the foreigner (pardesi, i.e. her husband) who has gone to the Dhaḍār. Take my dui dānā and when you go to sleep in the evening, then

scatter them to the East, the West, the North and the South. And then see whether your wishes are fulfilled. When you wake up in the morning then see if you can find some rice under your pillow. If you do, then know that you have truly met the god. And if you ever have headaches or if you stub your toe then you can blame me.

Woman: Only when I am cured, Nārāyan, will we know whether my wishes have been fulfilled or not.

In cases where malevolent beings have been determined to be the cause of problems, the oracles use a variety of means to resolve the problem and render justice to the victim. As is found elsewhere in South Asia, the techniques used to remove the evil influence of ghosts and demons include reward, punishment, and fright. In cases where the ghost or demon is understood to have possessed its victim rather than attacking him from outside, these techniques as are directed towards the victim's body which the ghost or demon has possessed. The victim's possessing spirit is coaxed to leave the victim, then, by offering it future gifts (reward), threatening severe punishment, and by attempting to frighten it. The means of frightening evil spirits often involve the use of fire and metal implements as well as the oracles demonstration of the superior power of the gods.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, when a problem has been traced to the evil actions of a witch, the oracle will often attempt to

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<sup>1</sup>Techniques of these kinds are found throughout South Asia. From a psychotherapeutic perspective, it has been acknowledged that these kinds of healing can be very effective: See Campbell, "Approaches to the study of shamanism".



frighten the witch into ceasing to trouble its victim. In contrast, however, offerings are rarely promised to the witch herself, but rather to various dieties who have the power to protect the victim against further attacks. As in the case of human offenders, the gods will also agree to fulfill invocations from the victims requesting punishment of the witch for her evil actions. In addition, the problem is often partially resolved by indirectly identifying the witch so that the victim can take steps to avoid situations in which she will be able to cast her spells.

The following case is an example of the means used by oracles to rid a woman of troubles caused by a witch. The case involves an old Brahman woman who has become deaf and has a boil on her goitre, and her son who is still childless at the age of thirty. The woman's sister acts as the spokesman for the woman and her son with the oracle of Kadārā Maṣṭā. As it was established in a previous consultation that the cause of the problem is a witch, this consultation was especially arranged to contain the witch's activities. For this purpose a large fire had been lit in the māru shrine and a metal spoon heated in the fire. When the spoon had become redhot, the oracle placed some grains of rice on it and pressed them down with the palm of his hand. He then lifted his hand and showed the red imprints that the grains had left on his palm, saying:

Dhāmi: Look, this is what was in the belly of this old woman. Heat the spoon red-hot once again. When Bhai Raja ("brother-king", Dhaḍār Maṣṭā) gives me permission then I can advise you all. When

I have to say or do something then that is done only after I have received my orders from Raja. Listen, this day you may decide that I am lying or that I am telling the truth. It would have been better if this one<sup>1</sup> had been able to move all the hands and feet.

Woman's Sister: Someone has made this one into a deaf mute (lāṭi). This consultation (dhamelo) is specially meant for this one. The matter with her is that she doesn't hear a single thing! Whatever food she is given she eats. And where you send her she will go. She has become just like an animal. If you were to take away the clothes that she is wearing she won't even ask why you are doing so. She has become totally deaf.

Dhāmi: Make the fire more bright. Heat the spoon now.

Another: Nārāyan, no one can tell what the feelings are in the mind--they are numerous. We are not capable of removing the ills in the mind. If you do it then she will be cured--otherwise not.

Woman's Sister: We have no one else, Nārāyan. If you protect us then we are protected and if you discard us then we are discarded. Last year this sister had a boil on her throat and it had grown very large. A woman had come and had remarked about her boil and had touched it with her finger. After three days the boil got worse and she had to bear a lot of pain.

Dhāmi: (Having placed rice grains against the spoon with his palm again, he then places it on the goitre of the old woman while mumbling some spells.) Listen, Brahman, this is how she has been suffering. (He shows the marks on his palm).

Woman's Sister: Look. See how the evil has been working in your stomach. It has made you absolutely useless. Nārāyan, make that widow (witch) blind within three days or within three hours. Or make her insane. Then only we will be satisfied. Today we call the dhāmi and remove the evil but she will only place it on us again. If only you could mark her properly.

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<sup>1</sup>"this one" refers to the old woman.

Dhāmi: Listen. Today you must offer a sacrifice of a fowl to Nilādā Gagana Bāhān and then we will settle our accounts later when you see that I have done my share. Here, my cār dānā (four grains).

Woman's Son: Gosāin. You are the one who must protect us.

Dhāmi: Just offer that sacrifice of that fowl. And within three days and three hours I will make her blind and lame. I shall cause her to be bed ridden. When this has been done by me then you can be sure that the god has given you cār dānā. Listen, if I am to cure her properly then I have to heat seven spoons. Although the spoon has to be heated seven times, that which is done by the other gods for many times is the same as that which is done by this god for a few times. The sound of a big bell from some other place is the same as the sound of a small bell from this place.

Woman's son: Whatever you do, that which is done by other gods is very different in effect from that which is done by one's own god.

Dhāmi: There is no one else who can do anything in this place and in this village. I am the only one who can do anything. When you stub your toe or when you hit your head against a branch then it is the god who gets the blame. Sacrifice a chicken to Nila Daha Bahan and then it will be my duty to see that your family and your animals prosper and that all your hands and feet move and become useful. I am the god who always takes regular offerings (jas) and I shall take it from you too. Here--my cār dānā.

Woman's Sister: Will my nephew be a jogi (celibate saint, childless) throughout his life or will he have some children?

Dhāmi: (after saying some spells over his head) Place my cār dānā in his mouth and make him eat it. Then take dui dānā and after touching his head with it throw the grains into a confluence of two streams. When I have removed the evil which makes you look like a corpse in the night and when you begin to look human again then you call me again.

Woman's Son: When you have showed some hope to me I shall pass my days with that hope.

As illustrated by this case, it is important to note how the oracle couches the specific techniques of curing within a larger framework of providing peace, happiness, and protection for his consultants. These assurances and blessings are indicators of the kind of relationship which exists between the gods and their devotees (pāli) which will be explored in greater depth in the next section. At this point, however, it is necessary to understand how these assurances and blessings reinforce the kinds of specific resolutions used by the oracles to solve consultant's problems.

The methods used by the oracles to resolve problems which have been traced to dos of various kinds include those already discussed for other types of causes as well as more elaborate means of restoring order such as levying fines, reallocating material resources, pacifying gods and their bāhān, granting forgiveness, and arranging reconciliations between persons. Each of these methods may be used singly or in combination with other methods depending on the nature of the causes underlying the problem. In addition, the various solutions may be used sequentially over more than one consultation or even within one consultation as the continuing discussion of the problem reveals new information and attitudes regarding the problem, its causes, and the persons involved. Thus, while standard methods of resolving problems are used by the oracles,

each resolution represents an ad hoc application of these methods according to the characteristics of the particular case.

Fines levied by the oracles serve both to punish the offender and pacify the victims (which may be either gods or men) through reimbursing them for their material losses and suffering. Even when the victims of dos are men the gods demand offerings for themselves both because they consider an offense against their devotees to be an offense against themselves and because they must receive payment for their services in rendering justice. In this latter sense, their role is closely analogous to that of a civil court which requires that the offender pay court fees. Depending on the gravity of the offense, the ability of the offender to pay, and the extent to which the gods played a role in bringing the offender to justice, the amount of the fines and offerings are determined by the oracles in negotiation with the offender. Once these fines and offerings have been either given or the offender has promised to give them (called bhākal) the offender is forgiven, the proper order of life is restored, and the case considered closed as long as the offender follows through on his commitments.

The following case illustrates the often lengthy process of determining the extent and nature of the fines and offerings levied against an offender. The case involves a man from the village of Phurgre (referred to as

Phurgre) and his half-brother in the village of Lekhpor (called Lekhpori). Lekhpori was the son of his mother's first marriage. When his father died leaving his mother a widow, she remarried a man from Phurgre village and had a second son (Phurgre) while her first son stayed in his father's village and inherited his land. After the woman's second husband died, she decided to return to live with her first son, while her second son stayed on in Phurgre and inherited his father's property there. The twice-widowed woman then died while living with her first son Lekhpori, and he conducted the death ceremonies for her without receiving any assistance or offer to conduct them from her second son. Since she was officially still a member of her second husband's thar and gotrā by virtue of her marriage, the second son should have performed the death ceremonies and the first son appealed to his god Kuldeo for whom he was the dāgri, to punish him. Within a year the second son became ill and consulted his own god who reportedly informed him, "Because your mother died in Lekhpor the god from that village is troubling you and so you have to go to Lekhpor and offer a cow and accept punishment. Only when you have done this and have offered up cloth (dhajā) and other things will you be cured." Following these instructions, Phurgre came to Lekhpor to consult with the oracle of Kuldeo. As the consultation took place during a full moon ceremony, the oracles of the gods Lāmā and a female picās devtā were also in trance and

participated in the consultation along with the officiating priest (pujāri) of the Bhagwati (Tripurāsundari) Temple and others.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: Where is that Phurgre: Only when he has given the pañc dandā and pañc marimānā offerings, and only when his case has been decided will I look into the matters and troubles of the other devotees. Only when that Phurgre comes here in humility and offers a cow, a goat, the cloth, some grain, and a hat for the god and sits at my shrine will I forgive him. I have to forgive him. I have to forgive him because of his virtues. What to do, the mistake (dos) committed on one side will cause punishment on the other side. It is like the person who has put his feet into two boats. First, because that old woman had a first husband and there was a son from that husband that old woman had to come here and die. If she hadn't had a son then there was no reason for her to come here and stay. What do you say, Devi?<sup>2</sup>

Devi Dhāmi: This that has happened is something like this: there are two trees known as the Sālu and Mālu. But they are the kind that cannot be grown on their own--the Sālu has to support the Mālu and the Mālu has to support the Salu. And so, because of the complications for which the Phurgre was not responsible and because of what he had to suffer, I do not feel that we should punish him.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: What is the use of levying a huge fine on him and blaming him to a great extent? But he has already the cow, sheep, cloth and the grain to offer... My devotee (Lekhpori) was not the kind who wouldn't keep his own mother in his house and would turn her away. But now you have to offer a cow and other things as your fine. If my devotee has said that since his mother had left him and gone to another man, he would not perform her death ceremonies then you wouldn't have to bear this punishment. But he did conduct his mother's death ceremonies

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<sup>1</sup>The oracle of Lāmā is given wool Tibetan hats which he and other oracles wear at Lekhpar when in trance.

<sup>2</sup>Devi here refers to the female picās devtā.

and so you, Phurgre, have to bear the punishment. Since my devotee declared that although his mother had married another, she was still his mother and that he would perform the death ceremonies--you have to bear a greater punishment, Phurgre. O my devotees, I feel that the son should never have performed the death ceremonies because his mother had already been married to another. This (marriage) broke the bond between them of mother and son. There was no difference between this son and the other son. But this one (Phurgre) should have observed the death ceremonies.

Spectator: True, Nārāyan, what you say is correct. This son and the other son are the same. But this one shouldn't have said that since the other had performed the death ceremonies there was nothing for him to worry about.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: Listen, the son who was born of that woman's first husband and the son who was born of her second husband, the result of what happens will be made known to these two brothers. If this one had performed the death ceremonies because it was his dharma and if he had not invoked me, his god, and had kept quiet about it then you could have been forgiven if you had only offered a bunch of flowers to me. But since he has already invoked his god against you, I have to do what there is that I can do. That is why you have to make the pañc dandā offerings. Have you brought it or not?

Phurgre: I have brought all that you need, Māhārāj. (He then places the offerings before the dhāmi.)

Dhāmi: No matter how guilty (dosī) you are and no matter how many crimes you have committed, if you have a bell then tie it around the cow's neck, if not then you may tie dhajā around her neck, and I shall forgive you because of your virtues (gun). You do not have to become sad at heart because you have had to give a lot to me. I shall see that you benefit from something else. You have to tie the dhajā around the neck of the cow. If the cow has been brought for some other thing then we would have to let it go just like when you let loose the cow that has been offered to Buru Masta. But as this has been brought for this matter, the cow has to be taken by the one in whose house the woman had died.



Spectator: Yes, yes. Whatever Nārāyan has said that is just. The one who performed the death ceremonies is the one who should receive the cow.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: Because that death had happened in the house of a dāgri and because she was the mother of a dāgri, the dhāmi and others of the village have no rights or claims over it.

Spectator: This decision is a very just one. Because the cow goes into the cattleshed of he whose mother died in his house. This decision is good.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: From this day I am pleased. From now you shall prosper. From one person you shall have twenty-one descendents. And whatever you do that will prosper.

Phurgre: What you have said is good, Nārāyan. We are happy.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: Now that you are happy you can do whatever pleases you. Because you had come prepared to accept your fate there is no fault (dos) held against you. Because the matter was one that dealt with death, I was obliged to decide upon it.

Phurgre: I have brought the cow and also a red hat for the Lama god. Since I have brought the clarified butter, rice, money, shawl and other things, you have to accept all these also.

Lāmā Dhāmi: My servant (i.e. bāhān) is the one who will wear that hat which will cause you to be forgiven of a hundred faults. But there is no need for you to give the fowl to my bāhān. There is nothing that you have to give. This hat is sufficient. He is one who tries to be very stylish and so this will do for him.

Devi Dhāmi: Listen, Maternal Uncle. That is worn by the officiating priest (pujāri) of the Bhagwati Devi temple. That will suit a priest when he is about to perform worship.

Priest: It is enough for me, Māhārāj. When I am performing worship then I feel cold and I shall wear it then.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: If the hat is for Bhagwati Devi then you need something for Māhādeo. And you need something for the other bāhān also. For whom have

you brought that shawl? What shall you give the others?

Phurgre: I couldn't get more cloth, Māhārāj.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: If you say that you haven't brought any more cloth then you have to keep fifteen rupees here.

Spectator: Once the god has spoken there is nothing else to be done. You have to give it.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: Here, the hat is for Bhagwati Devi.

Priest: Jai hovas (praise be)! This will come in handy when I perform worship.

Spectator: For Bhagwati you have to wear a red tikā, and now the hat is also red. They match very well.

Devi Dhāmi: Maternal Uncle, you need a kid for Māhādeo. You have to have a goat kid. Maternal Uncle, you have given your nephew the leftovers from what you have eaten. Now the nephew wants you to give him a kid.

Phurgre: As for a goat kid, I don't have any. But will it do if I give some money instead of a kid?

Kuldeo Dhāmi: Money won't do, you have to give a kid.

Phurgre: I guess I shall have to bring a kid another time then. Otherwise, it is wiser not to keep matters pending for who knows what will happen. What do you say to my giving the money instead right now?

Kuldeo Dhāmi: If you give money then the dhāmi and the priest will use it up. But if there is a kid then all the brothers of the village will share and eat it. And so I say, why do you want the dhāmi and the pujāri only to have it all?

Devi Dhāmi: The Lāmā devtā needs an overcoat. The coat must be of a red color. That is if you want to win that legal case.<sup>1</sup> If not then what I have I am happy with it.

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<sup>1</sup>This reference to a legal case is obscure.

Phurgre: Once Nārāyan has spoken then there is nothing more to say. But you have to tell me whether I should bring it during Srawan full moon or during this full moon.

Another Dhāmi:<sup>1</sup> The time has come when you shall fall into the ditch that you yourself have dug for another. There is nothing more to say--you have to give the Lāmā devtā a red overcoat and to Māhādeo a kid on this coming full moon.

Phurgre: These old men and women, who knows where they had gathered and had been waiting. Now I have to spend at a thousand. What to do? My father had taken this old woman and had thus dug a ditch and now, we, the sons, have fallen into it. Now we have decided that we shall not spare anything. When are we to come again?

Kuldeo Dhāmi: If you have a lot of money then place five hundred even. Otherwise you have to give a coat to Lāmā devtā, a goat kid to Māhādeo, two roosters to their bāhān and you have to bring all these by Magh full-moon.

Spectator: If you come during Māgh full moon then that will be just right. Then you can make an offering of the coat and the kid and you will fulfill your tasks. It will be just right on the night before the full moon.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: Come during Māgh full moon. Bring a coat for the Lāmā devtā, a kid for Māhādeo, rice and lintels mixed and four rupees for Lauri Sime Bāhān. The same for Chāmi Khole Bāhān and two roosters for the others. As for the offerings that you have brought now, I shall keep all. Here, take these cār dānā of mine. I shall see that you have enough grain and wealth.

Phurgre: Nārāyan, do what you will.

Kuldeo Dhāmi: It has been necessary that you give these offerings so that you may win your cause. A death had occurred here and so you may have to bring other offerings, otherwise there is no way for you.

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<sup>1</sup>I am unclear as to the identity of this oracle.

In the case presented above, it can be seen that justice is accomplished and the rightful order restored by the oracles through the following steps: a) Lekhpori invokes his god against Phurgre, b) Phurgre suffers misfortunes, c) Phurgre consults his god and discovers the cause of the misfortunes, d) Phurgre consults with Lekhpori's god and requests forgiveness, e) Phurgre is absolved of his dos by fining him a cow which is given to Lekhpori in compensation and other offerings which are given to the gods and the priest of Bhagwati Temple and with the promise that additional offerings will be given at the next full moon ceremony. This basic formula of punishing the offender until he is ready to acknowledge the fault (dos) and seek forgiveness through reimbursing the victims and accepting penance is repeatedly used by the oracles in cases which concern dos. The following case illustrates another application of this method in a situation in which the offender's dos was inadvertent and there was no direct human or divine victim per se. The case involves a Fābai woman consulting Dhaḍār Mastā who accidentally was guilty of violating the dharmic code in that a bull she had tied up in the cattle shed strangled itself on the rope during the night. Since that time her other cattle had been dying and she was continuing to become deaf. The case is also important to the understanding of oracular religion in that it contains some clear statements of the oracle regarding

the gods' values of egalitarianism and support for the oppressed:

Woman: I would also like to have some of my troubles looked into, Maharaj. I have had this opportunity this day and I am extremely happy.

Dhāmi: Well, woman. I do not see anyone in your house who is so ill that he must lie on the bed at all times. So why is it that you have had to come to me? Speak.

Woman: There is nothing else except about my cows. I have not been able to drink my cow's milk nor its curds. Tell me whether there will be any cows born or not.

Dhāmi: Listen, you woman. You should be able to take milk and curds next year.

Woman: Will all the cows give birth or not? What is going to happen?

Dhāmi: Listen, you are asking a dhāmi. But if you were to go to an astrologer and ask him then he would have to say that the other planets of yours are okay but you should give some alms and make some donations. This you would have to do. This is what he would surely say. But you have consulted the god and he says that everything is alright except there is something wrong with your land, property, family or something like that. This is what I have to say, this is our duty. If I am to speak the truth then you will abuse the god. If I do not say anything then you will say that I did not give you any advice. If you want to know what is deep inside then remember that if you set fire to green grass then it does not catch fire. Similarly you will say that the dhāmi has said something which is of no use. But if you insist on knowing then I tell you that I see something which is gravely wrong. Listen, I see that the fault is yours and you are the one who committed the wrong. Speak, is this the truth or not?

Woman: I haven't the slightest idea, Nārāyan. If you see it then you should say so. There is nothing to be hidden and concealed, Nārāyan.

Dhāmi: Listen, I am a god which sees into all the three worlds (lok). To see what is wrong with you is a very simple matter. Let us not engage an idle talk, you are guilty of cow-slaughter (gauhatyā). That is the cause of your misfortunes. Speak, is this the truth or not?

Woman: I have not hit and killed one nor have I pushed one off a cliff and killed it. There is nothing I have done. There is one thing--one evening I had tied the cows and bulls as usual in the cattleshed. I came home. Then the next morning I saw that one of the bulls was still tied, but it had been strangled. That bull had died. Apart from that I have not sinned by killing a fly even, Nārāyan. You say what it is all about.

Dhāmi: Listen, woman. You might be thinking that if you are accused this day of cow-slaughter then the people might think ill of you. This is not what I have said. If you consider it then you will see that the bull's death is your responsibility. O girl, do you take out the cows to graze or do you wish someone to take you out to graze? What is the use of talking a lot this day? In order to cleanse yourself of the sin of being unable to care for cattle you have to go on a pilgrimage to a place called Gaṇḍ Nuhāuni. There you have to tie a rope used for tying the cows around your neck and stay up for a night in that place. Even if you happen to fall asleep you must not take off the rope from around your neck. The next morning you have to take off the rope and then plead that your guilt for having killed the bull might be removed and that you may have enough cattle in your cattleshed from that day onward. When you have said this and cut the rope from around your neck you must bathe and then feed a Brahman, your daughter and your son-in-law. And you must give them some gifts (dakṣinā). Only when you have done this will your sin (pāp) be destroyed and your cows will not die untimely deaths. This is a custom which has been followed from time immemorial by all. You have been guilty of cow-slaughter and I have told you about it. Now you must do as I have told you. But you must go there on a Saturday to perform that act of contrition. This has happened to many persons and they have done the same thing. You must also atone for

the killing.

Woman: Māhāraj, Parmeswar. I shall do what you have told me and I shall follow your advice. How could I refuse and act as if I were more important than you, Nārāyan?

Dhāmi: O woman, at the most you have three cows in your house and at the least there has to be two. Speak, is this the truth or not?

Woman: True, Mālik Sāhib. I do have two, if only they would survive then it would be sufficient for me, Parmeswar.

Dhāmi: Here, take these few grains of rice from me. Mix it with the fodder for your cows and give it to them. Take the remainder and scatter them around the head and tail of your cows. Everything will be fine. There is nothing to worry about.

Woman: I shall do that for the cow, Nārāyan. But, I have gone deaf. It has been happening for a long time. What has happened? You have to look into that matter, Nārāyan.

Dhāmi: Because your god is here you are told that you should take some mustard oil, a shoot of the Datelo tree root, and put it into your ear and you will be cured. This is what the gods say. But it is not what I say to you. I am not to cure things like that. There is a saying, "dig the whole mountain to kill a mouse"--I am not a doctor who has been appointed by the King. But, I am unable to do things and yet these people of the government acknowledge me--why is this? If you are unable to give me your devotion then you will not benefit. But as you are one who gives me her devotion and respect this is a minor problem for me. The one who is fortunate and who passes through good times finds the gods to be favorable also. But for the unfortunate there is no way. There is a proverb, "During good days the god is on your head; during bad days the god is in Kathmandu" (su din devtā kapālma, ku din devtā Nepālma.). When you are in trouble then the gods who should be helping you are far away. Is this the truth or not? Have not your gods gone to Kathmandu, O sons of men?

Audience: True! True! The fortunate will get everything everywhere, but the unfortunate get nothing anywhere.

Dhāmi: Although that is the way things stand I am the father and the mother of the orphan and the widow. I am the enemy of the blood-eating rich. What is the use of my saying a lot. Take these few grains of rice. Wipe them off your ear and scatter them into the four directions. Then take a few grains and eat them. Then only will there be any reckoning between us. If the disease persists or if it is cured, or if there is some trouble then I am one who will be responsible.

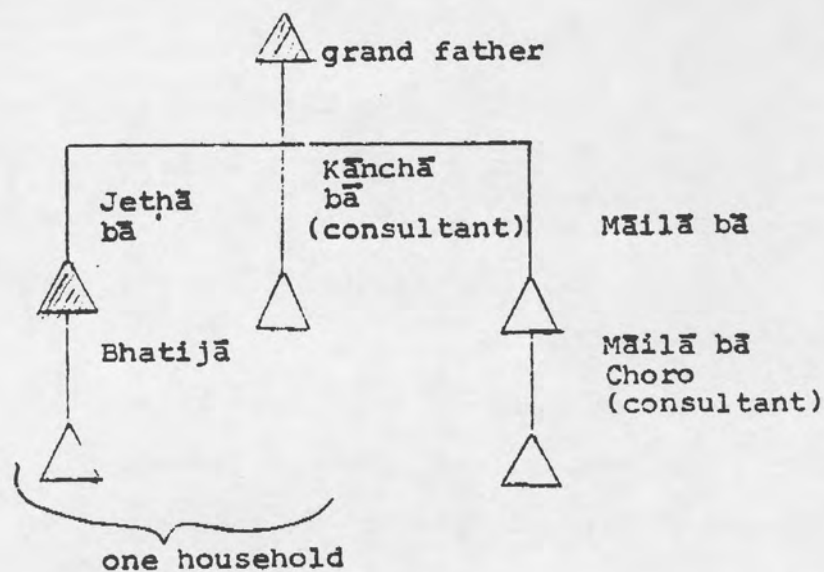
In this case, the penance assigned by the oracle is a symbolic reenactment of the crime with the offender taking the position of the victim. In addition, by having to spend a whole night with a rope around her neck, the woman is both humbling herself and performing an act of austerity (tapasyā). The prescribed punishment including the gifts to a Brahman, daughter, and son-in-law, is designed to pacify the hidden gods of the Brahmanical order within whose code cow-slaughter is a sin even if inadvertent. The oracle's role can thus be understood to embrace the restoration of the dharmic order within its own terms as well as within the framework of oracular religion. That is, the oracles not only attempt to solve problems which are beyond the scope of fate and the laws of karma, but they give advice on how to keep sinful actions in this life from creating a bad destiny in the next.

In cases involving disputes and conflicts between persons, one of the oracles' most important methods for achieving a resolution is to affect a reconciliation. In these instances, the god not only demands that the consultants seek divine forgiveness but that they seek forgiveness



from each other. In order to accomplish this kind of reconciliation the oracle must not only bring the disputants together at his shrine but must uncover the reasons for the dispute. The former precondition can take place either through the disputants themselves deciding to consult the oracle together or through the lengthy process of one party invoking the god against the other until the other has suffered so much that he desires to remove the invocation by reconciling the case. The latter takes place both through the process of divining the cause, as was described earlier, and through the process of negotiating a settlement.

The process of achieving a reconciliation is illustrated by the following case regarding land distribution. While I was unable to obtain as much background information regarding the disputants as I had hoped, the basic outline of the case is clear. The following diagram depicts the relationships between the principal persons involved.



When the grandfather and father of the present consultants died, he divided his land into three shares for each of three sons. When the eldest son (Jethā Bā) died, he left only one young son (Bhatijo) who was then taken into the household of the youngest son (Kānchā Bā). As Kanchā Bā did not have any sons of his own, he began to look upon this nephew as his own son and decided that both his share and his deceased elder brother's share (which included the family house) would be inherited by this nephew (Bhātijā). This meant that when the middle son (Māilo Bā) died and the household was divided, that the middle son's son (Māilobā Choro) inherited only one third of the land and none of the house. Since the descendants of the grandfather were now divided into two households with one household having two-thirds of the inheritance even though there was only one member of the third generation living in that house. Māilobā Choro felt that the division was unjust and that he should receive more of the inheritance. Kanca Bā disputed Māilo Bā Choro's claim and the fight continued until Kanca Bā felt he was being punished by the gods and agreed to a consultation in order to arrange a reconciliation.

The consultation for this case was held with their family god, Sundargaon Mastā. As the session was very long and the first part consisted of a general discussion of whether Kanca Bā owed more regular offerings to the god, the first part of the case has been omitted.

Kanca Ba: What there is to be decided between you and me can be decided later. Now what is going to happen between this one (Māilo Bā Choro) and myself? Is what is happening because of our own fate or is there some decision that you can give?

Dhāmi: This is the decision: only when you are facing trouble do you come to me and say, "This is our problem, Nārāyan you will have to help us." But when you have been helped and stop caring for the god then he will trouble you. In the beginning there was only one. Then he had children and there are many. Then they began to quarrel and say that one had got something while the others hadn't. So three shares were made. Then those three shares had to be divided further into three more shares and so on, till there were little pieces left only. Isn't this true? Speak.

Kanca Ba: That is what happened, Nārāyan.

Dhāmi: You have already eaten up half the share in the past and this one also received his share and has been enjoying himself. And that is why he finds it difficult to leave everything. He feels as if there is wound at his waist and he has to limp at the same time.

Kanca Ba: Well we must not leave that wound to fester but we have to cut it out.

Dhāmi: If you want to get rid of that wound then you can try to throw it away. If you want to burst it open then also you can try. It is up to you what you wish to do.

Kanca Ba: Why should we keep it with us Nārāyan? A wound has to be burst and cleaned out.

Dhāmi: You will burst it and clean it now--but what will you do later when you find out that that person's life is in danger? You have not had to face such problems and so you laugh and the other weeps. But someday you will have to weep while that person laughs.

Kanca Ba: It is possible that this thing is true. When one dies then what is there that one can get? If you laugh at one today then he will also laugh at you some day.

Dhāmi: When they separated and divided the inheritance then there must have been some quarrel.

Kanca Ba: Whose inheritance was it? Did this quarrel begin because of some wife, or land? Is the root of this trouble some woman or some piece of land? What is the cause, Parmeswar?

Dhāmi: I see that this problem began because of a woman.

Kanca Ba: What was the reason for this quarrel? What was the thing for which they quarrelled?

Dhāmi: Actually I cannot say that the quarrel was because of a woman. I see that it was because of some ornament. When the quarrel because of the woman had begun then another reason, that of land, was also added to this. It seems that there was injustice because of the woman and the land. The trouble for the husband started because of the land and for the wife because of some ornament.<sup>1</sup>

Kanca Ba: Do you see that I have usurped it or that this one (Māilo Bā Choro) has usurped it?

Dhāmi: I do not think that I should tell you everything because the demon of Dhupi caur might object. But I feel that some of it has gone to this one. I see that the family in the house and cows in the cattleshed are troubled and ill.

Kanca Ba: Whatever mistake there was it seems that it was done by that one's grandfather. He is the one who was unjust. But, what must we do now so that both of us will benefit?

Dhāmi: It has been two generations now, hasn't it?

Kanca Ba: It has been two generations, Nārāyan Parmeswar.

Dhāmi: All the land and property that has not been divided till now should be shared equally by you. But there are others who might say that

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<sup>1</sup>The paragraph illustrates the oracle's flexibility in identifying "woman-land" (māu-mātti) as the cause of a problem.

all of it should belong to him who has worked on that land and who has taken care of it. And this is the reason that his family and kin have found that they cannot get anything from anywhere.

Māilo Bā Choro: Actually our Kanca Ba (Uncle) is the eldest and most responsible.

Dhāmi: This one (Kanca Ba) says that everything belongs to their house and that they will take all the wealth. But then (Māilo Bā Choro) say that everything has to be divided up. That is why I feel that there has been the invocation (pukārā).

Māilo Bā Choro: Kanca Ba used to say that he should be the one to get all the land and property, and that we should share the other property among us. This is what Kanca Ba used to say. But others say that there are just the two of us and that it should be shared equally.

Another: Now the true facts are being spoken!

Dhāmi: What will you do now? There is a proverb: bhāt dāl khādā, vardā dhunu malāi lāhdā (after eating rice and dal, the dishes are given to me to wash). If I ask you to forsake your share then you will think that this is the end of the world for you. And you will feel like you have been exiled. Moreover you might tell others that you had been possessing everything up till now and then you had to give up half of what was yours.

Kanca Ba: Who is the one to blame the most, Farmeswar?

Dhāmi: I shall tell you what I see. When I have done justice then you will know. Even Bābā Indra has given me the right to do justice. He has told me to perform true justice and not a false justice. This one's father had gone to seek justice with a king while the other had come to us, we, who are like demons, seeking for justice. Do you still say that you will stick to the paths you have chosen?

Kanca Ba: We have never thought ourselves to be greater than the gods. Because we shall walk upon whatever path the god shows to us. If we are told to pass through a small hole then we are ready to do so, and if we are told to pass

through a large one then also we agree. We have no answer against death or commands. Just as there is no cure against death, so we cannot say no to that which is commanded by kings. When you are at death's door then no medicine can cure you. This is what is happening to us now, Parmeswar.

Dhāmi: Whether the hole is small or big, you have to pass through it. There is no other way.

Māilo Bā Choro: Your father had nothing but one sheep in the beginning. From that he managed to become quite wealthy. He was even able to ride in planes. In those days he had managed to get a share which consisted of land and property. Isn't this true? There has been some conflict over that and they have begun to say that they did not receive their rightful share. This is the cause. Speak if this is true or not?

Māilo Bā Choro: They took what had been their share. But there must be a sharing of the land that was acquired later.

Dhāmi: Tell me whether this is true or not. Will each and every member of the family get an equal share or not? Speak.

Māilo Bā Choro: The rest of us brothers and cousins (dāju-bhāi) say that if it will be good to give the share then it must be given. But we do not know what the ones who are to give the share think.

Kanca Bā: What has happened, Parmeswar, is this--it becomes cold only on the side upon which the wind blows. All those who did these things in the past are dead and gone. Now there is an orphan son of one brother (Bhatijā) and there is me, the old Kanca Bā. Both of us have become the same. What we feel is like we are lost in a dark and huge forest. We are in the dark. We are ready to bear whatever fine or punishment that you, Parmeswar, levy upon us. Let this problem go to the same place that those who have created have gone to after their death. I am ready to leave everything behind.

Māilo Bā Choro: If you yourself say such things with your own mouth then what else is there to say?

Dhāmi: If you are pleased then I am pleased also.  
But if you are not pleased then neither am I.

Kanca Bā: My mother is dead and gone and so is my  
father. We have only this son (Bhatijā). If  
something were to happen to this son then now  
could I ever be happy again?

Dhāmi: If your father had wanted to get hold of us  
then he could have done so. This has happen-  
ed too. It was your father who sprinkled mud  
on the shoulders of Sunḍuski (Bābiro Maṣṭā).  
So, if he isn't the one to be punished then  
who is?

Kanca Bā: That is something that did happen.

Dhāmi: If you say that you are pleased then I am  
pleased too. And if you are not pleased then  
neither am I. If you wish to lament then I  
shall see that you have no scarcity of salt  
and oil.

Māilo Bā Choro: What happened was this: an invocation  
(pukārā) had been made to the god but no  
decision had been made on that matter. So if  
you wish to take account of all that happened  
from the beginning till now then everything  
will be settled when you pay back.

Dhāmi: In the past I had given that to you so that  
you could earn a living. Now that same thing  
is being shared and divided. So will you  
divide it up and share it out or not?

Kanca Bā: I have already finished it all. It is just  
like saying that the wind follows the god.  
The one who was supposed to get nothing has got  
it all, the one who was supposed to give has  
given all--now what more is there that he can  
take? There is no wealth in the house nor is  
there any fat or flesh upon the body. We  
have reached a stage where we have neither  
grass to eat nor water to drink.

Dhāmi: That house also has utensils and pots and  
pans and all these are in your keeping.  
Speak if this is true or not?

Kanca Bā: What can I say about what is there and how  
much of it is there?

Dhāmi: If that is so then that is all the wealth there is. Nothing will be given. If you say that you haven't anything and if the god doesn't give anything then he will never feel well and never be happy. Until it can be proven that you did take them there is nothing that can be done.

Kanca Bā: Well, then. You prepare the harvest and I will eat it. If I say this then it will be settled. Otherwise even if it has been taken or not one has to say that is has been taken.

Dhāmi: Speak the truth and say that you forgive out of dharma and without any evil thoughts.

Kanca Bā: What do you want me to say? Only when you have been able to take something or when you are given something will you be satisfied. What is the use of behaving like cows who have eaten salt or like horses who roll and tumble all over the place? All I ask for is this son. If this son were to live then everything would be fine with me. Now it seems that I'll have to say that I took it all although I have had to leave everything. Well then, he gave my share and I took it. I forgive him.

Dhāmi: Hey! I am also one who weeps when his devotees weep and laughs when his devotees laugh.

Another: This is what happens if you are unable to speak out when things are happening.

Kanca Bā: One thing happened during the father's time and another thing happened in my elder brother's time, and something else happened during my time. Now there is just this son and me, his father.

Another: What better things can happen than when the father leaves something and the son is able to enjoy it? Because when there is any harm then he is the one who has to suffer. And if there is proper compromise and forgiveness then that will be the best. This will give satisfaction too.

Dhāmi: If it is for your satisfaction then I say that I am extremely happy and pleased.



Kanca Ba: He has to be given something and then he has to settle down and only when he says that he is pleased then only will we be free.

Dhāmi: Will the number ten piece of land do? Give the number nine and number one to him. Share equally.

Another: True, Narayan. Be happy from the bottom of your heart. Let there be no dissatisfaction over any matter. If he is ready to leave everything for his Bhatijā who is like his son then it will be the best thing that has happened in the family.

Another: What the god is saying is this: may the person be small or big, number ten or number one, all that matters is that they should be pleased.

Dhāmi: Will you give to all of them--from number ten to number one? What will you do?

Kanca Ba: There is nothing to say about this matter because when I have said that I will give everything then there is nothing more that he can say. He has to leave everything.

Dhāmi: What I am trying to say is this: if you do not give even one share out of ten shares then it will seem as if the god, the Fañ-cas (elders), and the other interested parties have not made a just decision.

Kanca Ba: Whatever has to be given must be given. Whether it has to be filled in pāthis (large containers) and given or whether it has to be divided up on a nail. At least each one who is receiving has to be satisfied. How is the problem to be solved? But it must be solved.

Dhāmi: Lā mridukh, khuroā mridukh, lāchā mriduk. (words spoken in the divine language of the gods).

Kanca Ba: Now you will have to tell us how much the share should be Gosain. Then everyone will be satisfied.

Māilo Bā Choro: I have spared whatever I have been told to spare. It is absolutely clear to

all who are here. But after all this I do want my share of what is left. If this is done then all will see what happens. When the uncle and the nephew compromise then only will this be all right. I wouldn't have asked for anything from them. But what to do? I have to ask for that which I need. We must be able to say that the god has done justice.

Dhāmi: Now when the god has spoken you are bound to give land that will yield a muri. But the land will have to be given--which land you wish to give is your decision.

Kanca Bā: Well, they can take it. Then can take the muri land which is nearest. That I will give. But all this trouble and invocations, who was responsible for it? A woman or a man?

Dhāmi: At first there was some quarrel and conflict because of land. But the god was invoked by a woman. It was about some land. Now you have to say that you have received all the land and ornaments and other things that you were supposed to have got in the first place. You have to say that you are satisfied with all that has happened about the land. Both of you have to say that you are happy with what you have given and received and that there is nothing more to be said.

Kanca Bā: The first invocation is definitely from you. That much is clear.

Another: You have to say that you have given all that was to be given and that you are no longer responsible for anything else. And you will have to say that you have accepted a muri worth of land.

Dhāmi: Now if you again claim that some other land is yours or your father's then I shall definitely give you trouble. You will have to swear that you will make no more claims against him--ever.

Kanca Bā: I have given freely the one muri land which he has asked for. May I be free of all troubles from this day. You, Nārāyan, have to look upon me and be as clear as water and white as milk with me.

Dhāmi: Whatever your father had said is now erased from this day. All the blame that has been

put upon you and all the grudge that has been held against you will be erased from this day. Take my grains.

Māilo Bā Choro: From this day may his cattleshed be filled with calves and may his door never shut upon an empty house. I pour this water and give this flower as witness that whatever my father or mother had against him may all be forgiven. May our relationship be as clear as water and as white as milk from this day. When he is hungry may he have food and when he is tired may he have sleep. When he walks may he never stumble and may his cap never be snatched off by boughs and creepers. May he have the strength to digest even rocks, Nārāyan, Parmeswar.

Dhāmi: Everything is settled. But now you have to give some token of devotion to the god. From one because he has won and from the other as a fine.

Kanca Bā: Why shouldn't we give some token of devotion? Until that is given we cannot become pure (sud-da). When this is done then we shall give and take the land. When we have pleased the god then we shall take grains from him. We shall both eat those grains saying that no harm should come to us and that we both should have the same happiness. May both of us have enough of wealth and children.

As is demonstrated by this case, the reconciliation of the individuals involved is the resolution. By bringing individuals into harmony again, the proper order (thiti) of life is restored. As is also shown in this case, this process is considered to be analogous to the healing of a wound. In addition, it is viewed as dispelling darkness with light, and above all, a process through which individuals regain purity (sudha). Conflict and the disturbance of the proper order of life are equivalent to pollution. It is the oracle's role in problem solving to remove this

pollution through uncovering and dealing with the cause so that people can regain the harmonious purity which is the proper order of life. As the Kāṛāgaon Māhādeo said in one consultation, "The innermost thoughts have to be brought out and all the roots have to be washed and cleaned". The role of the true god, in the words of the Bāṭpāl Maṣṭā, is "to wash away the dirt that lies in the hearts and minds of the devotees". In this sense, the Jumli oracle's role is very similar to that of the Ndembu counterpart as described by Turner:

It seems that the Ndembu 'doctor' sees his task less as curing an individual patient than as remedying the ills of a corporate group. The sickness of a patient is mainly a sign that "something is rotten" in the corporate body. The patient will not get better until all the tensions and aggressions in the group's inter-relations have been brought to light and exposed to ritual treatment.<sup>1</sup>

The oracle's "cure" is the reconciliation of exposed conflicts and the reestablishment of harmonious order.

#### The Gods as Guardians

In the previous section concerning consultations regarding specific problems which had already occurred, it was noted that the principal means of resolving the problem was to discover and eliminate or pacify its cause. However, throughout the discussion of the process of achieving this resolution and in the examples cited, it was clear that

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<sup>1</sup>Turner, in Kiev, Magic, Faith and Healing, (New York: The Free Press, 1964).

these specific resolutions were set within a wider context of divine reassurance, blessings and comforts. This more general means of problem solving, combined with specific predictions, constitutes the kind of resolution given by the oracles for consultations concerned with future enterprises or general anxieties regarding the future. As these consultations frequently include general discussions of the mutual obligations and roles of the gods and their devotees, they provide a framework from which it is possible to understand the overall relationships between oracular gods and men in Jumla culture.

#### Future Enterprises and General Anxieties

Specific future enterprises such as trade journeys, house-building, etc. are particularized instances of anxiety regarding one's future fortune in life. In the sense that they request the god's approval of a specific planned course of action they are different from more general anxieties, but in that they request the god's blessings for the future, they are treated in much the same way as cases of "general anxiety" by the consulted oracle. These general anxieties include worries regarding the future of one's health, family, economic well-being, emotional contentment, and spiritual happiness. In short, these cases consist of requests for future well-being.

Since future well-being, including the success of specific future enterprises, can be a function of an

individual's karma and astrological forces, which are the domain of the Brahman priest and astrologer this category of problem can also be taken to these specialists rather than to the oracles. As general anxieties are not the kinds of problems which oblige an individual to consult anyone, it is primarily with regard to obtaining auspicious starting times (sāyat) and predictions of success or failure with regard to specific future enterprises that the overlapping roles of the oracles and astrologer become an issue. In fact, Jumlis tend to perceive a potential conflict between these different specialists only within this arena.

As with the overlapping roles of the court system and the oracles with regards to rendering justice, Jumlis relate the decision to consult an oracle rather than an astrologer to caste status, education, and wealth. In their view, which was confirmed by my own observations, it tends to be the middle and lower castes who have less education and often less wealth who consult the oracle rather than the astrologer. In addition, it is clear that those people such as the Pabais who live at a distance from Brahman priests tend to consult the oracles in their own villages rather than make long journeys.

Although these generalizations describe a general trend within Jumla society, the fact that many people, including high caste Brahmans, consult both astrologers and oracles confirms that these roles are partially

complementary even though they largely overlap. That is, while some people feel that approval from either one is sufficient, many others believe it is necessary to consult both in order to take heed both of the astrological forces at work and the other forces which fall into an oracular gods' domain. While the advice and prognostications given by both sometimes conflict, and while oracles sometimes perceive astrologers to be a threat, most often it is possible to reconcile the two sets of advice. In part, this reconciliation takes place easily because both the oracles and the astrologers are familiar with each other's methods and tend to ascertain any previous advice given by the other while making their own.

The following excerpt from a consultation with Bābiro Maṣṭā regarding the auspicious date for starting a horse trading journey is presented as an exception to the pattern of harmonious complementary relations between oracles and astrologers. In this case, the oracle demonstrates an almost open hostility towards the fact that the consultant had conferred with an astrologer after he had given the auspicious date for departure to the consultant. In addition, he makes a claim to being able to influence destiny, a claim which contradicts his own previous statements as well as the shared understanding shown by other gods and Jumli people as a whole. However, it does illustrate the potential conflict that exists between these two roles.

Dhāmi: O devotee (pāli), did you not find that the day which I had given and the day mentioned by the astrologer to be one and the same? What have you to say? If it is true, say so, and if it is not then also speak.

Man: There is no doubt about it Nārāyan, they are the same.

Dhāmi: Was not the breath (life) about to depart from half the body?

Man: Yes, Nārāyan, it is true.

Dhāmi: Then listen all. No one else has been troubled by as many planets (graha) as you have been troubled by. But I have pulled you through although it was your destiny.

Man: This is also true, Nārāyan, Gosāin.

Dhāmi: Although your soul (ātma) was unable to carry on and although your interest was lost, did I not give you the date (sāyat)? In spite of the planets? But now you have also begun to doubt me a little. You went to the astrologer (jyotis) thinking that a diety is after all mere wind and breeze. But tell me, what I had told you and what the astrologer said was the one and same or not?

Man: It was the same.

Since most consultations regarding the obtaining of an auspicious date for departure do not refer to the astrologer, the following excerpts are presented to exemplify the typical pattern of blessings, and in this case, warnings that are given. The case concerns a man leaving with a group for a pilgrimage in which he also hopes to conduct some business. The consulting oracles are Lakhura Mastā and Deuti.

Man: Nārāyan, tell me whether I should make my sāyat for departure tomorrow?



Lākhurā Dhāmi: It is possible to make tomorrow your sāyat. But be sure that the route you take passes by my shrine. Take that route only.

Man: We shall take whichever path you show us Nārāyan. I shall pass by your temple, Nārāyan. Why should I take any other route?

Lākhurā Dhāmi: Listen. I shall give you your sāyat at my shrine today. But after that there will be some minor problems and difficulties. But there is nothing for you to worry about. I am there for you. Actually there is going to be a lot of trouble. But before that happens I shall be there to help you. You shall be doing something which you shouldn't do and you will miss the road. But as long as you are one and undivided nothing will be permitted to happen to you. There will be two persons who are not very friendly who will be travelling with you. They will do things which are wrong although you do things which are right. You have to be careful.

Man: I don't know anything. It might be that there are some who wish to go with us without our finding out about it. The two persons whom you say will be unfriendly, are they from my village or some other village, Nārāyan?

At this point in the consultation the Deuti oracle also was possessed, following which there was a brief discussion of why she was delayed in joining her maternal uncle, Lākhurā Maṣṭā. The Deuti Dhāmi then addressed the consultant and the case continued as follows:

Deuti Dhāmi: Listen. This day you have done all that there is to be done for me. But you live in one place and do business in another place. What I mean is that I see you are from one village and you are friendly with a person from another village. But I see that because of some bad behaviour there will be some slight trouble. When this happens you will know whether I have spoken the truth or not.

Man: Whatever joys or sorrows we receive are all your doings. We are incapable of bearing all the sorrows and so we worship you, Nārāyan.

Lākhurā Dhāmi: There is nothing that will cause difficulties for you. Whatever there is to be done we shall do it. All you have to do is set out. We are there to lead you and also to look after you. We are there to handle things even if there are any robberies or such. If you find yourself in any difficulties then you should not be afraid. We are there for you. We are with you.

Deuti Dhāmi: As far as I can see the day that you have chosen is one which will fulfill all your wishes and desires. Then when you find that you have profited at the ridges or near some river then know that you have met the god this day. If you do not profit then I am useless.

As in this instance, many blessings and assurances are accompanied by a guarantee in which the oracle invites the consultant to treat the god with disrespect if his predictions should not come true. The Maṣṭā Bāṭpāl provides an extensive example of this guarantee in one of his consultations: "After the cure if you do not come then you are cursed; if I am unable to cure then I am cursed. If you find that there is no progress and that your troubles remain as they are then you can set fire to my shrine and scatter ashes all over it. I shall eat the ashes that you scatter." Although Jumlis can recall no occasion in which individuals have cursed the gods in this fashion, these kinds of guarantees clearly serve to reinforce the credibility of the prediction and the reassurance it provides for the consultant.

The Guardianship of the Gods  
and the Divine Contract

Underlying the oracular gods' roles as problem-solvers, forecasters, and dispensers of divine blessings, is

their role as guardians of their people. It is this guardianship, the power and meaning of which the gods proclaim in their parelis, which both allows and requires the gods to solve their people's problems and look after their future wellbeing. The gods' roles as guardians provides the rationale for their consultative activities and the context within which their meaning within Jumla culture can be understood.

The guardianship of the gods is often expressed in the consultation sessions (particularly those concerned with general anxieties about the future) in terms of a number of analogous relationships. These relationships include those of: a king to his subjects, a parent to his child, a gardener to his plants, a judge to his accused, a master to his servants, a shepherd to his sheep, and a guide to his followers. In each analogy, the god is the superior figure who has obligations to use his power responsibly for the benefit of the inferior living organisms within his care. Drawing on relationships in many spheres of life from the political to the agricultural, each analogy emphasizes the dependency of the Jumla people on their gods for taking care of them. As the oracle of Babiro Masta once said to his consultants "the one who looks after you is me."

These responsibilities of guardianship are understood as the gods' dharma. Just as each caste group has its own dharmic obligations to uphold, the oracular gods

are dharmically required to serve their people through their functions as guardians. This understanding is illustrated in the following statement made by Bāṭpāl Maṣṭā to the oracle of Deuti at the time of giving her the cap of certification: "You must not leave your dharma....Will you be able to give me your dharma and promise that you shall fulfill your obligations and please the devotees of your village? Swear that you shall stick to your dharma and that there will be no changes." It is also illustrated in a statement made by a shrine's dāñqri priest to his oracle during a consultation: "The one who commits the mistake is the one who receives the punishment. Narayan, people do make mistakes, but you have to forgive them and make them better. It is the dharma of the gods to punish and to make one's life better."

However, the dharmic obligations of the gods to be their people's guardians is not unilateral. As the analogies used to describe their relationship imply, and as was discussed with regard to the full-moon festivals, the relationships between gods and men take the form of a contract. The gods are only required to uphold their dharmic obligations if their people uphold their own. As Lama once said in a consultation session, "The day you stop serving the god the god will also leave you. .... You are my servants. You are indebted to me." The gods' guardianship of their people is contingent on the fulfillment of the contractual terms. The relationship between

gods and men is based on a set of mutual obligations which require the people to serve the god if they wish to have the god serve them. As the following description of this relationship by Karagaon Mahadeo states, this relationship implies a certain dependence of the gods on their people:

The turnips from the garden should not be all plucked up and eaten. If they are saved and kept then they will come to use. There must be equal love and affection between the god and his devotees (pāli). If there are devotees then it is the best for the god, and when there is a god then he is the protection for his devotees and thus it is best for the devotees too. If the devotees consider the god to be important and powerful, then the devotees are also important. We gods have become important because our devotees have made us important. When the devotees do something wrong, then they make offerings of money or other things, or they might send us special offerings (jas), which is an income for the gods. You devotees worship us and offer us your pujā with the perspiration of your bodies and your own hard work. You devotees are the ones who have made us gods important. It is not our dharma to treat our devotees badly and pluck them like the turnips and make them poor and miserable. We have to mete out justice and be responsible for the praises and curses of our devotees.

The set of mutual obligations which constitute the terms of the contract between the gods and men are best understood in terms of the analogies used to describe this relationship. For example the regular offerings of the harvest and food made to the gods is not only an act of feeding the gods but can be understood as taxes which are rightfully due to a king by his subjects. One consultant described these offerings in a similar sense:

If some high official of the king comes then each house contributes towards the expense and all the things that are required for that official. But if there are some who are obstinate then if they are whipped everything is done very fast. But the god does not whip us. It is the duty (dharma) of the

devotees (pāli) to perform the worship by gathering whatever flowers and fruits are available and by collecting with devotion the amount each village is supposed to give. And the god also has to be one who has power (shakti) and glory (kirti). There is a proverb that if the Ṭina seed is hard then you will get oil from it. If the god has power then there will be devotion (bhakti) towards that god.

Another consultant also utilized a political analogy to describe the gift of offerings to the god in more succinct terms: "The one who gives me something to eat is the one who is the king. The one who is able to satisfy me will receive my offerings."

Even as a king has obligations to provide for his subjects, the gods are obliged to provide for their devotees. As the following statement by a person who has just received blessings for a trade journey states, the devotees are neither under any obligation nor financially able to serve the gods unless the gods assist them:

What more does one want after trading the horses? If I am able to get a few clothes for my wife and daughter and pay the taxes of the government then I am satisfied. And I shall bring cloth and offerings for Narayan also. But if there is no profit and I find it difficult to pay back the moneylender and if I have to sell the muri worth of land then how can I pay my taxes and bring clothes, and how can I offer anything to the god?

Although the specific terms of the contract are subject to financial constraints as noted above and vary according to the attitudes of different individuals, a rough outline can be discerned. As was noted with regard to the full-moon ceremonies, the basic on-going contract between the gods and their people provides that the gods look after their present existence in return for regular

harvest and food offerings. More specifically, as was revealed in the consultation sessions, this basic contract calls for the gods to protect the lives, health, land, animals and property of their people in return for both regular offerings and the maintenance of dharmic obligations with regard to inter-personal relationships and codes of dharmic purity. That is, the gods will look after maintaining the proper order of life as it applies to an individual family as long as that family maintains its obligations to behave dharmically and continues to acknowledge the god's services through regular offerings. The terms of this basic contract are on-going and as long as either party fulfills its obligations the other party is required to fulfill theirs. As this contract calls only for regular calendrical offerings its terms can be fulfilled in the full-moon ceremonies without any attendance at consultation sessions.

It is in the consultation sessions that the wider role of the gods as guardians is revealed and that the terms of various "sub-contracts" are established. In each of these sub-contracts, the consultant is always required to give special offerings, the nature of which is determined by circumstances and through direct negotiations. However, in addition to these special offerings, the consultant is also required to meet certain standards of behaviour and to display certain attitudes towards the god and his fellow man in return for the special services offered by

the gods. The terms of these sub-contracts, in addition to the basic contract are listed in Figure 15.

As guardians of their people, the gods' primary obligation is to maintain the proper natural and social order of life (thiti) particularly by re-establishing it when it has become disturbed. In return, the principle human obligation is also to maintain the proper (dharmic) social order and worship the gods in return for their protection and assistance. When humans fail to maintain this order or outside forces intervene, then they must be assisted or coerced by the gods into repenting their wrong actions or fighting off the outside forces so that the proper order can again be established. The contract between gods and men can thus be seen as a partnership whose goal is the maintenance of the proper dharmic order of life and the elimination of injustice and suffering which is not pre-ordained by karma.

Within this formulation, the oracular gods can be understood as playing a supporting role to that of the hidden gods and Jumla Brahmanism. As the sons of Indra whose domain is the problems of this world, the gods assist their people in maintaining the proper dharmic order which is the basis of salvation in the other world of the hidden gods. The gods provide the means for their people to overcome the problems in this world so that their people will continue to be in a position to fulfill the dharmic obligations which salvation in Jumla Brahmanism demands. By



Figure 15 : CONTRACTS BETWEEN ORACULAR GODS  
AND THEIR PEOPLE

Divine Obligations

Human Obligations

A. Basic Contract:

--To protect the lives,  
health, and wealth of  
their people

--To give regular of-  
ferings to the gods  
and to maintain prop-  
er dharmic behaviour

B. Sub-Contracts:

--To divine the true causes  
of problems

--To speak the truth  
with the gods, plus  
special offerings

--To reconcile conflicts

--To be willing to for-  
give each other, plus  
special offerings

--To punish wrong-doers

--To invoke the god,  
plus special offer-  
ings

--To forgive wrong acts  
(dos)

--To be penitent, plus  
special offerings

--To grant requests and  
fulfill predictions

--To fulfill vows,  
give devotion to the  
god, plus special  
offerings

--To provide guidance and  
comfort

--To give special  
devotion to the gods

serving the oracular gods, Jumlis not only resolve outstanding problems and reduce their suffering, but they indirectly work towards a better rebirth and salvation in heaven.

Alternative Values: The Gods as Saviours

While the understanding of the gods' role as guardian of their people presented above is the principal basis for most Jumlis' interaction with the oracular gods, there is an important sense in which the gods' relationship with some devotees exceeds this formulation and thereby adds another dimension to our understanding of the meaning of oracular religion in Jumla culture. This special relationship places the gods in the roles of a kind of saviours. In that it is an extension of the role of guardian as expressed by the metaphors of shepherd, parent, etc., it is applicable to all of the gods' worshippers and not easily distinguishable from the gods' normal roles. However, to the degree that it is, like the other "services" of the gods, contingent upon a mutual contract, its importance and value is far greater for those who contract for it by requesting it and by offering greater devotion. As in some interpretations of the Christian tradition, the gods become saviours only for those who believe in them and offer them their devotion. These persons include those who come to the gods for general consultations and solace as well as those persons, called thāne, who dedicate their lives to serving a god.

Since the gods' role as saviours is inherent in their role as guardian, this facet of the gods' meaning to Jumlis has been frequently encountered throughout the description of the parelis and consultation sessions. However, in that these consultation sessions have been primarily concerned with problem-solving, it has played a somewhat disguised and secondary role in the interactions between gods and men. In most of these sessions, the gods' role as saviours has appeared most clearly at those times when the gods administers their blessings, proclaims their own values and teachings, and request their consultants to trust their fate to them.

Nevertheless, there are occasions in which the gods express this aspect of their roles more explicitly. For example, Mahadeo once said in a consultation, "I am a god who shows the path to those who are lost. It is my duty (dharma) to give salvation to all." In this instance, the word translated as salvation is "uddhār", a word which Turner glosses as "deliverance, salvation, discharge; - debt, loan" from the verb "uddharnu", "to deliver, save, ransom, exempt."<sup>1</sup> As used by Māhādeo, it is not a direct substitute for the mokṣa of Jumla Brahmanism and does not directly refer to salvation in the next life. However, it does appear that it refers to a kind of salvation in this life as well as an implicit salvation in the next world.

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<sup>1</sup>Turner, Dictionary of Nepali, p. 49.

The kind of salvation in this life that is offered by the gods is often expressed metaphorically through the analogies of guardianship mentioned earlier and is closely related to the alternative set of values espoused by the gods in their parelis. For example, Lāmā has said, "I am like your shepherd during the day and your child during the night"; and Kuldeo once said, "I am the father and the mother of the orphan and the widow." However, the most pervasive metaphor understands the gods as guides who show their people the "path". For example, Kuldeo once said, "I am here to show you the way and the path during night and day" and Kālā Silṭā Maṣṭā said, "It is our duty (dharma) to shed light upon the path for those who wish to travel on it and to make a smooth path over the rough tracks for those who seek the path". This same notion of the god as a guide through life was expressed by a consultant to Bābiro Sundargaon:

For me any god will do. This one is mine and that one is also mine. I am like one who is trying to climb a tree but cannot find any branches as handholds or any notches for footholds. Nor is there anyone who will keep watch in front of me or behind me. Whatever you say, Parmeswar, I am your devotee--I am the one who is living in your hope and trust.

The path of salvation provided by the gods is, in keeping with their own values, particularly open to the oppressed and powerless. As Lāmā once stated, "I am like one who has been tied to one corner of the clothes that are worn by those who are widows and orphans. I am the tears of the widow and the orphan. I am the resting place of

those who are poor and troubled." By extension, the gods promise to destroy those who are haughty and oppress others. Kuldeo stated, "I am the enemy of the blood-drinking land-owners" and Lāmā once stated, "If someone has been trying to act high and mighty then I shall destroy them like pouring hot water over snow."

Above all, the gods as saviours ask that their devotees cease to worry about the vicissitudes of everyday existence and trust in them to provide for them. They teach that their devotees should maintain harmonious and helpful relationships with each other and live life with a simple contentment. The following quotations from Kuldeo and Lāmā express this view:

Kuldeo: This is the truth (satya) of the god: even when you have nothing I shall clothe you with the wind and feed you with water and protect you. This much I assure you.

Lāmā: Know that I look after everyone. So why shouldn't I protect my own devotees? From the Lama Bannu up to the Gare Māto, and even in all the world and all my kingdoms, do not commit injustice; do not kill yourself before your time; do not deceive each other; do not take advantage of another by lying and cheating. All should be happy and live together in harmony and listen to each other's wisdom and advice. Whatever there is to be done do it with each other's help and advice. This is the advice and wisdom of the god.

Lāmā: The day that you think you will have trouble will pass with ease. Listen, even if you stub your toe then you can blame the god and curse him. But I say that you will travel as smoothly as a swan and that your days will be bright and continuous like a garland of flowers. Do not worry for anything. If you are hungry, then eat; if you feel sleepy then go to bed. Stay happy and contented. Take care of those

who are unhappy, unfortunate and sick. You shall definitely receive your reward for that sometime.

The instruction "to sleep when you are sleepy and eat when you are hungry" and the assurance that "I will clothe you with wind and feed you with the water" are often given by many of the gods to their people in consultation sessions, although the exact words used vary. In a sense, these statements represent the essence of the gods' teachings and the kind of salvation they offer. As guardians of their people, the gods promise to protect them and make smooth the path they must follow. If their people accept this assurance and give devotion and trust to the gods and behave harmoniously with their fellowman, then they will receive the "salvation" of a contented and happy life. That is, not only will they receive the protection and blessings that they have contracted for, but they will find a spiritual and emotional happiness through serving the gods. As expressed by the following consultant, the gods can then become the center of a person's existence:

Whatever you have told me has been fulfilled, Parmeswar. I have enough. But you have to fulfill my wishes afterwards too. It is the god, it is you, who makes one unhappy from happy and happy from unhappy.<sup>1</sup> I have managed to live in a jungle like this by worshipping the god. If the god does not look after me then who is

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<sup>1</sup>The words "happy" and "unhappy" do not fully convey the wealth of meaning in the original "sukhi" and "dukhi". Sukha is more than just "happiness", it also implies a certain spiritual contentment just as its opposite, dukha, can refer to suffering, pain, and spiritual discontentment.

there who will? You are all I have, my friend, my parents, my everything, Nārāyan.

While this special relationship with the god as a kind of saviour is available to anyone who gives devotion to the god, as mentioned earlier, some people formally embrace this relationship through becoming thāne. At many major shrines and even a few minor and branch shrines, there will be these thāne who have formally dedicated their lives to the service of a particular god. This service includes being present at all full-moon ceremonies during which the thāne should participate in the worship of the god through such acts as helping to clean and plaster the shrine, collect firewood, and offering gifts as well as constantly showing devotion to the god. In return, the god becomes the thāne's saviour and the thāne is eligible to receive a certain percentage of the offerings given to the god. In some cases where the thāne is destitute and has no personal resources, the devotees of the god undertake to provide board, room, and clothes for the thāne, and the thāne becomes completely dependent on the god and his followers for the remainder of his life. Some thāne will even become auxiliary oracles for the god and even hold consultation sessions, although they are not certified to sit on the gaddi.

The reasons for a person becoming a thāne parallel the reasons that certain humans become pisāc devta after their death. Among all the case histories of thāne that I collected (approximately ten) the thāne always reported

some incident in which they were severely victimized by other people as the impetus for becoming a thāne. Following the victimizing incident, the thāne went to their god and invoked him against the persons who had treated them wrongly. Sometimes at this time and sometimes many years later, the thāne decided that his devotion to the god was such that they wished to officially become their thāne. This was accomplished through acts of great devotion (bhakti) and asceticism (tyāg) followed by the confirmation of the god during a full-moon ceremony. These acts usually consisted of staying awake for several nights at the shrine of the god while fasting, singing hymns (mānqal) of praise, and perhaps sitting on a bed of thorns. Some thāne even rub ashes over themselves and wear only loin-cloths or the equivalent of a saffron skirt.

Once the relationship of thāne has been established, it can only be broken through the formal permission of the god. While some thāne do request to resume a normal relationship particularly after their invocation (pukārā) to the god has righted the wrongs which prompted them to become thāne, many decide to remain thāne for the rest of their lives.

The parallel between the role of a thāne in relationship to oracular religion and that of jogi or sādhū in relationship to Brahmanical Hinduism is frequently noted by Jumlis. Like the jogi, the thāne often forsakes his home and his normal life to dedicate himself to the devo-



devotion of the gods. Also like the jogi, the thāne performs acts of asceticism and may smear himself with ashes. However, unlike the jogi (as perceived by Jumlis) the thāne does not dedicate himself to the hidden gods of Brahmanism for the sake of his salvation in the next life, but to the oracular gods for the sake of justice and salvation in this life. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which both thāne and other Jumlis believe that this special relationship with the oracular gods is, like that of the jogis' to the hidden gods, conducive to a better rebirth and hence a greater chance of ultimate salvation.

It is this perception, never directly articulated, that the oracular gods form an alternative path to salvation in the next world in addition to protecting life in this world and looking after a person's destiny, which, when taken together with the other alternative values to Jumla Brahmanism presented by the oracular gods, suggests that oracular religion as a whole is in some senses an alternative to Jumla Brahmanism. While the primary role of oracular religion is to support Jumla Brahmanism by maintaining the proper dharmic order of life, it simultaneously stresses certain alternative values which challenge aspects of the dominant Brahmanical model and provide an alternative path for the oppressed and victimized in Jumla society.

The gods not only proclaim their power to be the champions of the oppressed and powerless in their parelis,

but demonstrate that power in the consultation sessions. At the same time that the oracular gods bow to the authority of karma, declare their filial loyalty to the Brahmanical gods, and strictly enforce the maintenance of ritual purity among their priests, oracles, and general devotees, they express their own kinship system in terms of the filiafocal model of matrilineal descent, and proclaim the equality of men. While using their powers of punishment and reconciliation to insure that the code of dharmic relations is maintained, they proclaim their enmity against powerful males who have become haughty and their partiality to widows and orphans. At the same time that they require Brahmanical hom ceremonies to be performed for them in their shrines and they straighten out complications which obstruct the proper performances of the samskāra life-cycle rites, they instruct their people to live simply and amuse themselves with wild uncontrolled dances on the full-moons. Where Jumla Brahmanism concerns itself mostly with the unseen and distant other world and dictates that heterosexual relationships should be governed by strict rules of purity (such as no widow remarriage), oracular religion concerns itself with the everyday problems of this world and has the flexibility to deal with situations arising out unorthodox behaviour which may be motivated by such emotions as romantic love. While the Brahmanical gods only speak prearranged texts which are intelligible only through the mediation of Brahman priests, and are only symbolically present in

rituals; the oracular gods hold direct conversations with all of their people and for short periods of time are physically present with their people.

The vitality and appeal of oracular religion as an alternative to Jumla-Brahmanism stems from these contrasting roles and values. As a separate religion it proclaims its ability and readiness to help all people, but particularly those who are oppressed or powerless, to cope with the problems of life and substitute contented happiness for suffering and misery. In addition, it indirectly, and sometimes, inconsistently, supports the validity of the values of equalitarianism against the values of the hierarchical Brahmanical model; it champions the values of a matrilineally derived filiafocal model for inter-personal relationships against the patrilineal, patrifocal model which is dominant in Jumla Brahmanism; and it stresses the values of worldly pragmatism and love instead of those of purity and other worldliness.

But as these contrasting roles and values also demonstrate, oracular religion also defines itself within the overall universe of Jumla Brahmanism as complementary to it. The oracular gods acknowledge their inferiority to the hidden gods and legitimize their own role through establishing their descent from them within the patrilineal terms of Jumla Brahmanism. They punish offenders of the dharmic code; uphold its values at the same time that they also present alternative values; and join their people in

in worshipping the hidden gods. While offering a modified kind of salvation of their own, they strive to help their people find salvation within the terms of Jumla Brahmanism. They confine their activities to this world and, on the whole, declare their lack of authority and power over karma and the events of the next world which are controlled by the hidden gods.

Oracular religion simultaneously serves, complements, and challenges Jumla Brahmanism. While guiding, protecting, and, at times, coercing Jumlis along the dharmic path to salvation in the terms of Jumla Brahmanism, it also redefines that path, and, for those who want it, offers an alternative. While upholding the dharmic values of Jumla Brahmanism, oracular religion simultaneously proclaims the values of egalitarianism, love, and pragmatism and declares itself the path of salvation for the oppressed and powerless.

## CHAPTER 8

## CONCLUSIONS

Comparative Models for Understanding Jumla Religion

The existence of oracular religion and Jumla Brahmanism as two distinct but related religious systems in the Jumla region parallels the dual nature of religion found by many scholars for the South Asian region.<sup>1</sup> A brief examination of the schemas developed by these scholars and their applicability to the situation found in Jumla can clarify the value of these models as comparative tools as well as providing a greater understanding of Jumla religion.

At the outset, it is necessary to distinguish between the kind of duality that exists between Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion and the kind that has been implied in the well known division of South Asian religion into Great and Little Traditions. The Great-Little Tradition dichotomy originally developed by Redfield and Marriott,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See particularly the anthologies: Religion in South Asia, ed. Edwards R. Harper, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); Dialectic in Practical Religion, ed. E.R. Leach, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); as well as the work of Spiro on Burmese religion.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Redfield, "The Social Organization of Tradition", Far Eastern Quarterly (1955) 15: 13-22; McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization" in Village India, ed. McKim Marriott, American Anthropological Association, (1955) 57: 171-222.

has been understood both as the literate religious tradition versus the non-literate vernacular traditions and as "all-India Hinduism" versus local Hinduism respectively.<sup>1</sup> As Berreman rightly points out the latter definition in terms of geography is unacceptable since "the non-literate tradition includes many elements which are as widespread geographically as elements of the literate tradition."<sup>2</sup> Eliminating the geographic dimension of this dichotomy, then, the Great-Little Tradition distinction can be understood as the literate "chiefly Sanskritic" tradition<sup>3</sup> versus the non-literate popular tradition or as Ames reformulates it for Buddhist Sri Lankans, the religion of the "religiously sophisticated virtuosos" versus the religion of the "masses."<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that this understanding of the Great-Little Tradition dichotomy when applied to Jumla religion should properly refer to the relationship between the "working model" of Jumla Brahmanism and the Sanskritic "ideal

<sup>1</sup>Gerald Berreman, Hindus of the Himalayas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963): 138.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.: See also: J. Gabriel Campbell, Saints and Householders: 22; and Mandelbaum's statement that "local deities are also worshipped, though in different forms and under different names, throughout the subcontinent" in "Introduction: Process and Structure in South Asian Religion" in Religion in South Asia, ed. E.B. Harper, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964): 10.

<sup>3</sup>M.N. Srinivas, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

<sup>4</sup>Michael Ames, "Magical-animism and Buddhism: A Structural Analysis of the Sinhalese Religious System" in Religion in South Asia (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964): 41.

model" rather than to the relationship between Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion. While Berreman, among others, finds this dichotomy "useful" for understanding village Hinduism,<sup>1</sup> I have tried to show in this study as well as argued extensively elsewhere that "The different levels and aspects of Hindu religion (in this case, Jumla Brahmanism) are part of a single religious system, and that the Great and Little Traditions are in very real senses only different manifestations of One Tradition and merely express the same structure on different levels."<sup>2</sup>

It is my view that this understanding of the Great-Little Tradition dichotomy as different forms of expression of a single tradition of Brahmanical Hinduism (or in some areas, Buddhism) conceptually clears the way to a better understanding of the equally important dichotomy between traditions such as Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion.<sup>3</sup> This latter kind of dichotomy has often been expressed, as I have expressed it here, in terms of categories specific to the culture being described. Thus, for example, Spiro

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<sup>1</sup>Gerald Berreman, Hindus of the Himalayas, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>J. Gabriel Campbell, Saints and Householders: 154.

<sup>3</sup>An alternative method of dealing with this problem would be to apply the Great-Little Tradition distinction to this latter dichotomy (as has been done by Mandelbaum, "South Asian Religion": 10.) However, since most authors still equate the Great Tradition only with the ideal model of Hinduism (or Buddhism) this usually involves confusing the "working model" with traditions such as oracular religion.

talks about Buddhism and the "nat cultus" in Burma<sup>1</sup> and Ames distinguishes between Buddhism and "magical-animism" among the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> In Hindu areas of South Asia the distinction is more often made in terms of the Brahmanical and the shamanic tradition, or between Hinduism and shamanism,<sup>3</sup> when it is not found under the categories of Great and Little Traditions.

One of the primary distinctions made by these authors between these two kinds of traditions is, similar to the Jumla distinction between the other world (parlok) orientation of Jumla Brahmanism and the this world (yo lok) orientation of oracular religion, between the transecendent and worldly orientations of the two traditions. Thus Spiro describes Buddhism primarily as a salvation religion concerned with the other world (lokutturā) and the nat cultus as a system concerned with this world (lokikā).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Ames distinguishes between the transcendental release

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<sup>1</sup>Melford E. Spiro, Burmese Supernaturalism, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>Michael Ames, "Magical-animism and Buddhism"

<sup>3</sup>Religion in South Asia, ed. E.B. Harper (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); Gerald Berreman, Hindus of the Himalayas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Jack M. Planalp, Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village, (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1955).

<sup>4</sup>Melford E. Spiro, Burmese Supernaturalism, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967): 12. In a later work Spiro refines his understanding of Buddhism into two systems which are soteriological and one which is apotropaic. Idem., Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).



(lokottarā sampatā) of Buddhism and the worldly relief (laukikā sampatā) of Sinhalese "magical-animism".<sup>1</sup> Ames further distinguishes the former as "religion" in opposition to the latter which he calls a "profane science" (vidyāva) because only the former is soteriological.<sup>2</sup> Berreman makes the same kind of distinction in relation to the traditions of the Brahman priests and shamans. In his words, the Brahman priests:

deal with maintenance of the system in ways prescribed in the great tradition of Hinduism. It is they who help other people achieve a favorable after-life and rebirth. Their primary responsibility is the long-range welfare of their clients. They perform the annual ceremonies and life-cycle rites as well as many special ceremonies. In addition they perform worship to village gods and they practice astrology and some forms of divination based on written prescriptions of Hinduism.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast,

(the) non-Brahmanical religious functionaries deal with the exigencies of daily life relative to the supernatural. Their primary responsibility is the immediate and worldly welfare of their clients. The shaman diagnoses difficulties through the use of his personal deity. The pujari performs worship to propitiate household deities and plays drums to let the spirits dance. These two functionaries enable people to find the cause and cure of supernaturally caused troubles.<sup>4</sup>

Utilizing this primary distinction between the other-worldly and this-worldly orientations of these two kinds of traditions, Mandelbaum has labeled the former as

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Ames, "Magical-animism and Buddhism".

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Gerald Berreman, "Brahmins and Shamans in Pahari Religion" in Religion in South Asia, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

the "transcendental complex" and the latter as the "pragmatic complex" and constructed a comparative typology.<sup>1</sup> According to his "preliminary sorting out", the transcendental complex is "ultimate, supernal, derived from Sanskrit texts" while the pragmatic complex is "proximate, local, validated by vernacular tales".<sup>2</sup> Noting that "there is always some overlap in certain particulars in any one locality", Mandelbaum then presents a comparative model for these two complexes as shown below:<sup>3</sup>

	<u>Transcendental Complex</u>	<u>Fragmatic Complex</u>
<u>Religious Functions</u>	long term welfare system maintenance ultimate goals	personal or local exigencies individual welfare proximate means
<u>Forms</u>	universal gods Sanskritic texts cyclical rites preponderant	local deities vernacular folklore cyclical rites; <u>ad hoc</u> rites important
	priests as ritual technicians	shamans who become possessed (also caretaker ritualists)
<u>Practitioners</u>	office hereditary in jati high caste-rank clients in jajmani or other stable arrangement prestige adheres to calling and jati exemplars of ritual purity	achieved role usually lower caste-rank clients not in bound relationship individual prestige demonstrators of supernatural presence

<sup>1</sup>David Mandelbaum, "South Asian Religion": 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Comparing this typology with the Jumla Brahmanism/oracular religion traditions discussed in this study, it is clear that there is a considerable degree of fit. Within the transcendental complex (which I would prefer to label "sociological"), it is clear that the characteristics of its functions, forms, and practitioners which he describes for Brahmanical Hinduism and Buddhism elsewhere apply equally to Jumla Brahmanism as it has been described in this study. Within the pragmatic complex (which I would prefer to call "ameliorative"), the characteristics Mandelbaum ascribes to its religious functions and forms is similarly equally applicable to Jumla oracular religion.

However, with regard to the practitioners of oracular religion, it is evident that several of the characteristics described by Mandelbaum do not strictly fit the situation in Jumla. Thus, while Mandelbaum opposes the achieved role of the pragmatic complex practitioner with the hereditary priest in the transcendental complex, we have seen in Jumla how the oracular religion priests (pujāri and dāngri) are strictly hereditary and how oracular succession tends to follow hereditary lines. In addition, the oracle in Jumla does not so much achieve his role through training with a teacher as he is picked for it and required to perform without any formal training. Also, we have noted how the Jumla oracle can be of a high caste rank and how the majority of them are from the middle castes rather than almost entirely from lower caste-ranks as described by Mandelbaum. Finally,

while Jumla clients are not in a bound relationship to the extent that they are with their Brahman priests, it was noted how there is a strong god-devotee (devtā-pāli) relationship in which the god is frequently a permanently identified "family deity" (kulyānyā devtā). *This relationship could thus not be described as "clients not in bound relationship" as is found in Mandelbaum's typology.*

These differences between the characteristics of the oracular religion practitioners in Jumla and those found in Mandelbaum's generalized typology can be attributed in part to the institutionalized character of Jumla oracular religion in comparison with the kinds of shamanism found in much of the rest of Nepal and South Asia, as well as to the purely mediating role played by Jumla oracles.<sup>1</sup> Whereas most shamanic figures elsewhere are not associated with a particular shrine and must develop their own powers for controlling the supernatural through apprenticeship with other shamans, Jumla oracles are inextricably related to the shrine of their god and serve merely as the gods' physical mediums. Although these differences do not, therefore, invalidate Mandelbaum's model for most of the South Asian region, they do suggest that it should be treated somewhat cautiously with the greatest emphasis being placed on transcendental versus pragmatic (alternatively,

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<sup>1</sup>See the discussion of these differences in Chapter 6.

soteriological versus amelioritive or other worldly versus this-worldly) orientations of the two complexes.

Turning to the relationship between these two complexes, it is apparent that most authors describe the relationship as complimentary although sometimes overlapping. Thus, Mandelbaum notes that "very widely in India, priests and shamans have different but complementary characteristics. Although the roles of these religious specialists may partially overlap in any particular case, each functionary has a total role pattern which is quite distinct from that of the other."<sup>1</sup> As a specific instance of this in Sri Lanka, Ames writes that "although the two realms of Buddhism and magical-animism are completely separate and distinct in Sinhalese theory, they are complementary in function. This is why Sinhalese fuse them in practice."<sup>2</sup> This view of the transcendental complex as "compatible and even complementary"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Mandelbaum, "South Asian Religion" 8.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Ames, "Magical-animism and Buddhism: 39.

<sup>3</sup>Gerald Berreman, "Brahmans and Shamans" 64.

is supported by Spiro,<sup>1</sup> Harper,<sup>2</sup> Fuchs,<sup>3</sup> and Pignede,<sup>4</sup> among others.

The basis for this widespread notion of complementarity is that these complexes "constitute two distinguishable systems"<sup>5</sup> whose respective other-worldly and this-worldly goals are ultimately antithetical. However, since the activities of the practitioners in each system infrequently overlap and the systems occupy different domains of concern, each is usually understood as complementary to the other. That is, despite the contradictions implicit between the two systems, most of the peoples of South Asia understand the systems in terms of complementarity; they are able to operate within both systems simultaneously without being overly disturbed by the inherent contradictions.<sup>6</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>Melford Spiro, Burmese Supernaturalism, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>Edward Harper, "Spirit Possession and Social Structure" in Ratnam ed., Anthropology on the March, (Madras, Journal of Anthropology. (Vol. 13, 1957): 270.

<sup>3</sup>Stechen Fuchs, "Magic Healing Techniques among the Balahis in Central India" in Ari Kiev ed., Magic Faith and Healing, (New York: The Free Press, 1964).

<sup>4</sup>Bernard Pignede, Gurungs.

<sup>5</sup>Melford Spiro, Burmese Supernaturalism, page 269.

<sup>6</sup>Although Gorer was concerned with slightly different kinds of religious systems among the Lepchas of Sikkim, he makes a similar point when he writes that the Lepchas "practise simultaneously, and without any feeling of theoretical discomfort, two (or possibly three) mutually contradictory religions". Geoffrey Gorer, Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim, (New York: Basic Books, 1967): 181.

obtaining of auspicious timings) as well as areas in which they contradict each other. However, and this is a point which is perhaps not sufficiently clarified by other authors dealing with these two kinds of complexes, the transcendental complex of Jumla Brahmanism always remains the dominant defining framework for the pragmatic complex of oracular religion. While the pragmatic complex may be defined against and around the transcendental complex, it remains subordinate to it and is ultimately defined within its terms of reference. In this sense, it is not so much a question of two antithetical yet intersecting systems, as one dominant system within which is contained a partially antithetical system.

As the foregoing discussion of the understanding of transcendental and pragmatic complexes shown by scholars for various parts of South Asia and their applicability to Jumla has revealed, it is evident that Jumla religion can be understood within the terms of this comparative model. In addition, the application of this model to Jumla has allowed us to suggest some modifications and cautions which help us to clarify the understanding of the nature and usefulness of the model for understanding features of South Asian religion. For it is clear that this division of South Asian religion into transcendental and pragmatic complexes is both pervasive enough and consistent enough to be considered one of the most important features of the religious culture of the region.

However, in terms of the holistic understanding of religion in Jumla culture which this study has been seeking, it is equally evident that this sort of model is only partially satisfactory. Not only does it fail to deal with the underlying values which have been found in Jumla oracular religion, but it fails to provide a framework in which social and other cultural dimensions of Jumla religion can be integrated and understood. To better understand Jumla culture as a whole, then, it is necessary to reformulate the relationship between Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion in another framework than the transcendental complex versus the pragmatic complex.

The Dharma/Non-dharma and Pābai/  
Jyulyāl Models of Jumla Culture

In this study's presentation of Jumla society (Chapter 3), three kinds of models for understanding the organization of Jumla caste and kinship were discussed. These included the ideal dharmic models such as varna and gotrā, the working dharmic model of caste and kinship, and the alternative models which were referred to as "non-dharmic". The first two dharmic models refer to what we have here defined as the distinction between the Great and Little Traditions. The non-dharmic models were contrasted with these different aspects of the dharmic model as alternatives which sometimes opposed the dharmic model although they were defined within it's framework and are subordinate to it.



It is clear that this relationship between the non-dharmic models of Jumla social organization and the dharmic ones parallels the relationship described between the oracular religion and Jumla Brahmanism. More significant, however, is the fact that these two sets of models parallel each other in terms of their value-content and the principles upon which they are organized. The dharmic values of hierarchy, purity, and understanding of behavior in terms of merit, sin, and the workings of karma as they relate to the next world and life after death were found to underlie both dharmic social organization and Jumla Brahmanism. Likewise, the values of equality, love, justice, and pragmatism were found to be expressed both in the non-dharmic models for social action and in oracular religion.

This congruence of relationship and values found between the two sets of models in Jumla society and religion has important implications for our understanding of Jumla culture. On the one hand, from the point of view of Western categories of understanding, this congruence confirms--at least for Jumla culture--the value of the theory of consonance between society and religion that was discussed in the introduction. On the other hand, from the point of view of Jumla culture, it confirms the lack of separation of the "social" from the "religious" and the explanatory priority of indigenous categories of understanding such as "dharma" as models for cultural organization.

Reuniting the artificially separated categories of Jumla religion and society, we are able to perceive Jumla culture in terms of a more inclusive model. On the one side, the dharmic models of Jumla social organization and Jumla Brahmanism are combined as aspects of the larger model of Jumla dharma. This model consists of those aspects of Jumla culture which are informed by, and ultimately refer to, the principles of Hindu dharma as they are understood and modified in Jumla culture. The articulators of this model are high caste Jyuyals, particularly the Brahmans, and their mediators are the Brahman priests and astrologers. The model includes both the Great Tradition of Hinduism (as the ideal) and the Little Tradition (as the working model of the Great Tradition). While the model is not always consistent with itself--due both to inherent contradictions and local variations and compromises--and the boundaries sometimes fuzzy, it is perceived by both Jumlis and myself as forming a clearly recognizable whole.

On the other side, then, is oracular religion and what has been loosely called the non-dharmic models of social action. While the world of oracular religion has been sufficiently institutionalized and articulated to form a recognizable whole, the non-dharmic models for social action are not usually seen as a separate "complex" or "system", nor is there a Jumli category which is used to combine them with oracular religion which is parallel to the dharmic model. Rather, this non-dharmic model can be seen as a loose collection of alternative models which share many of the same

values which are defined partially around and partially against the dharmic model, but ultimately subordinate of it. It is this position of subordination which may in part explain its lack of articulation as a single model antithetical to the dharmic one. For while Jumlis acknowledge the existence of these alternative values, the explanatory and moral priority of the dharmā has precluded their being expressed as an alternative system except in the case of oracular religion where its relationship of subordination has been more extensively worked out. The mediators for this collection of models are the oracles and oracular priests --they mediate not only between the particular gods and Jumlis but through the consultation sessions between the non-dharmic model and the dharmic norms. If this non-dharmic model is to be assigned its articulators, such as the Brahmins were assigned to the dharmic model, it is clear from the perspective of both Jumlis and myself that they should be the Pābais.

This identification of the dharmic model with the Brahmins and the non-dharmic model with Pābais suggests that Jumla culture could also be understood along the lines suggested by Leach's study of highland Burma,<sup>1</sup> in an even more inclusive model of "ideal types" centered around the dichotomy between Pābais and Jyulyāls. This model,

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<sup>1</sup>E. R. Leach, Political Systems of Highland Burma: A study of Kachin Social Structure, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

similarly to Leach's description of Kachin political culture in terms of "two polar types--gumlao 'democracy' on the one hand, Shan 'Autocracy' on the other,"<sup>1</sup> depicts Jumla culture in terms of the two polar "ideal models"<sup>2</sup> of Pābai and Brahman Jyulyāl. Also similar to Leach's description of actual Kachin culture, which he describes as "organized according to a system described in this book as gumsa, which is, in effect, a kind of compromise between gumlao and Shan ideals,"<sup>3</sup> actual Pābai culture is organized according to a compromise between what is here described as ideal Pābai culture and Brahman Jyulyāl culture. However, the ideal Pābai cultural model used here, while artificial, is nevertheless the way in which Jumlis abstractly see Pābai culture themselves. That is, this Pābai-Jyulyāl model, while a theoretical construct of polar ideals, is nonetheless indirectly articulated by Jumlis themselves and has been accepted as valid by those Jumlis to whom I presented it.

As was discussed in regard to the history and economy of the Jumla region presented in Chapter 2, Jumla society is divided into the valley Jyulyāl and upland Pābai. While the Jyulyāl are made up of many castes including untouchable Dums, it is typified by the high caste Brahmans, Chetris, and Thakuris who trace their descent to immigrants

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. page 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. page 204.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. page 9

from India. In contrast, the Pābais, despite the actual variations in status and behavior, are typified as non-tāgādhāri (non-sacred-thread-wearing) liquor-drinking (mat-wāli) people who are considered to be the descendents of the Knas who migrated through the Himalayas from the Northwest. While the economy of both is mixed, the Jyulyāl are associated primarily with rice-growing while the Pābai are considered shepherds and upland (non-rice-growing) farmers. While the religious history of the Jumla region is insufficiently documented to be very clear, it will be recalled that there is evidence to suggest that it was the Jyulyāl who brought in the dharmic models of Hinduism and the Khas-Pābai who originally were the exclusive practitioners of oracular religion.

These associations and historical identifications of the Jyulyāl and Pābai suggest that there is a basis in fact for considering Jumla culture in terms of a mixture of Pabai and Jyulyāl culture. Likewise, oracular religion and the non-dharmic models of society become part of one larger model called Pābai culture. Where Jyulyāl culture is centered around Brahman priests, sedentary agriculture, and the tenets of the Hindu dharma; Pābai culture is centered around the oracles, shepherding, and the values of egalitarianism and love. Where Jyulyāl culture is ideally oriented to the next world through fulfilling the householder's dharma, Pābai culture ideally focuses on the pragmatic problems of this world with a view towards a simple,

contented life. Put in terms of different dimensions of culture, Figure 16 presents a simplified summary of this model.

This abstraction of the characteristics and values of Pābai culture and Jyulyāl culture allows us to understand actual Jumla culture in terms of an intermixture of the two. The nature of this intermixture is such that while Jyulyāl culture is the dominant model, Pābai culture retains its identity as a separate, though subordinate, model. That is, both models can be seen to exist simultaneously with the Jyulyāl model dominant and the Pābai model subordinate to it rather than both models coalescing to form a new construct.

This intermixture or mutual absorption of the Pābai and Jyulyāl models in Jumla culture is found to different degrees among the Jyulyāl and Pābai populations. Whereas the Jyulyāls fully participate in oracular religion, engage in singing parties and accept with some qualifications the underlying Pābai values of love and egalitarianism, they place considerably greater emphasis on the dharmic principles and values which have been defined as Jyulyāl culture. Similarly, while the Pābais accept the tenets of Jyulyāl culture as their dominant orientation, the emphasis they place on Jyulyāl values is correspondingly less, although historical evidence of Pābais recently seeking to gain higher caste status suggests that they are increasingly moving towards the Jyulyāl model. Regardless of the historical

FIGURE 16

PĀBAI-JYULYĀI MODEL OF JUMLA CULTURE

	<u>Pābai</u> (Ideal Type)	<u>Jyulyāi</u> (Ideal Type)
<u>Descendents of:</u>	Khas	Immigrant Indians (high caste)
<u>Economy:</u>	Shepherding	Agriculture
<u>Social Organization:</u>	Egalitarian (no ranking by caste)	Hierarchical (caste ranking)
<u>Kinship:</u>	Filiafocal	Patrifocal
<u>Interpersonal Relations:</u>	Stress value of love	Stress ritual purity and discipline
<u>Gods:</u>	Oracular gods	Hidden Brahmanical gods
<u>Mediators:</u>	Oracles	Brahman priests
<u>Morality in terms of:</u>	Mistake/forgiveness, and compensation	Sin/merit
<u>Orientation:</u>	Fragmatic (this world)	Soteriological (next world)

validity of the model, however, present day Jyulyāl can be considered part Pābai and present day Pābai can be considered part Jyulyāl, or, alternatively, as Jyulyāl who are greater part Pābai. Jumla culture is Jyulyāl culture that contains within it the alternative values and characteristics of Pābai culture.

The usefulness of this model for understanding Jumla culture is that it allows us to integrate historical, economic, and social aspects of Jumla culture into our understanding of Jumla religion. Jumla religion is part of Jumla culture and as this model has attempted to demonstrate, can be more meaningfully understood within this larger context.

In addition, this dual model allows us to understand the simultaneous presence of opposing values and principles in Jumla culture. Jumlis act on the basis of multiple models for behavior--their culture provides choices of accepted norms although those norms associated with the dharmic values of Jyulyāl culture are often more acceptable than their opposite. That is, Jumla culture is not one large self-consistent whole. Even as the filiafocal model of kinship is contained within, but subordinated to, the patrifocal model, oracular religion is contained within but subordinate to Jumla Brahmanism. While the different characteristics and values of the Pābai and Jyulyāl models occupy mostly different domains and are associated with different segments of the population, thus making them somewhat complementary to each other they are sufficiently polar



opposites of each other that they must be seen as antithetical models which coexist within Jumla culture and make more intelligible the actions of the Jumli people.

Marginality, Rebellion, Communitas: Explanations  
For the Dual Nature of Jumla Religion and Culture

While a qualified kind of historical explanation was implied in the previous discussion of Jumla culture in terms of an ideal Fābai-Jyulyāl model, the mere juxtaposition of the cultural traditions of the Fābai-Jyulyāl (even, if they did conform to the ideal model) is an unsatisfactory way to account for the mutual absorption and continuing coexistence of these traditions in Jumla culture. As noted in the Introduction, this study takes the methodological position that there can be no single explanation of religion, regardless of whether it is historical or psychological or based on some other body of theory that reduces culture to certain propositions or functions. Nevertheless, it does seem valuable to examine the situation in Jumla in light of several cross-cultural explanatory theories which deal with problems similar to those found in Jumla in order to obtain partial explanations and deepen our understanding of Jumla culture.

One theory which partially accords with the situation found in Jumla is that put forward by Mary Douglas in her book Natural Symbols.<sup>1</sup> Starting from the proposition

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols.

that "religion is not a compensation, but a fair representation of the social reality people experience,"<sup>1</sup> Douglas argues that religious expression is more or less "controlled" according to how tightly society is structured.<sup>2</sup> Thus Douglas states that "as trance is a form of dissociation, it will be more approved and welcomed the weaker the structuring of society."<sup>3</sup> Conversely, if the society is highly structured, Douglas expects trance to be found only among "peripheral classes" since "this is how the fringes of society express their marginality".<sup>4</sup> According to this theory, trance in highly structured societies is only found in the form of isolated evil spirits possessing marginal persons; and a positive widespread cult of trance is only found in the most loosely organized societies. In between these poles is shamanism, where trance is permitted but tightly controlled and spirit mediumship (such as in Jumla) where trance is slightly controlled but welcomed as a power to be utilized.

This theory accords with the situation in Jumla to the extent that oracles and oracular religion is associated with the Pābai model of a more loosely structured egalitarian society rather than with the very highly structured

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. page 80

<sup>2</sup>For an analysis of Douglas' assumptions see: J. Gabriel Campbell, "Shamanism".

<sup>3</sup>Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols, page 74.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. page 83.

Jyulyāl model. In this sense, oracular religion can be viewed as an expression of the social organization contained in the Pābai model and this theory can serve as a partial explanation of why the majority of oracles are Pabais. To some degree Pābais are marginal to Jyulyāl culture and it is possible to see oracular religion as an expression of their marginality.

However, this theory fails to explain why high caste Jyulyāls, including some wealthy and powerful Brahmins become oracles or why oracular religion is such an important part of the Jyulyāl population's culture. That is, this theory fails to provide any explanation of why both models exist in Jumla culture simultaneously. While this study has found support for the underlying idea of consonance upon which Douglas' theory is based, the dual organization of Jumla culture tends to refute her theory that the one-dimensional criteria of loosely structured versus highly structured social organization is sufficient to predict the presence or absence of different kinds of trance.

If, on the other hand, Douglas' theory is enlarged to take into account the possibility of a highly structured society whose culture also contains an alternative model of a more loosely structured society, it would be possible to apply her theory more usefully. According to this expanded theory, then, oracular religion would be an expression of the alternative Pābai model, Jumla Brahmanism an

expression of the Jyulyāl model, and the subervience of the Pābai model to the Jyulyāl would be an expression of the subordinated position of these forms of social interaction to the highly structured Jyulyāl form of society.

However, even this expanded theory fails to provide us with much insight into the problem of explaining the coexistence of these two models in Jumla culture. Another theory which can help us approach this problem, which was briefly discussed in Chapter 6, is that propounded by Lewis in his cross-cultural study of spirit possession and shamanism.<sup>1</sup>

As noted earlier, Lewis' idea that spirit possession is a form of rebellion against oppression--when applied to the problem of who becomes oracles in Jumla--was found somewhat unsatisfactory since oracles are distributed throughout the population. Turning from the application of Lewis' thesis to the identification of shamans or oracles to his understanding of the raison d'etre for cults of ecstatic religion, however, provides us with a provocative view which seems to have some relevance to the Jumla situation.

In cases where possession has become institutionalized as either a "peripheral cult" or a "central religion", Lewis' basic proposition that "possession is essentially a

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<sup>1</sup>I.M. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion.

philosophy of power,"<sup>1</sup> "a retort to oppression and repression,"<sup>2</sup> is applied to the movement as a whole. These movements are thus understood as rebellious responses to oppressive outside pressures. In the case of peripheral cults, Lewis states that "these pressures arise from the oppression to which subordinate members of the community are subject. The self-assertion which possession represents here is directed against the entrenched establishment."<sup>3</sup> When the cult becomes the major religion, and it's members the establishment itself, Lewis defines the oppressors as that which controls even the establishment:

In central ecstatic religions, the constraints are external to the society as a whole, they are felt by everyone....In central religions, establishment shamans incarnate as their equals the powers which control the cosmos. Here the protest which possession embodies is directed at the gods, the external pressures which provoke ecstasy are challenged and even rebutted, and shamanism asserts that ultimately man is master of his fate.<sup>4</sup>

For Lewis, then, possession and possession religions are always rebellious protests against any form of hierarchical subordination. Man's nature is basically egalitarian and thus no form of submission or distance can be tolerated either between men or between men and the gods:

What the shamanistic seance thus protests is the dual omnipotence of God and man. It celebrates a confident and egalitarian view of man's relations with the divine, and perpetuates that original accord between God and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. page 204

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. page 35

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. page 177

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

man which those who have lost the ecstatic mystery can only nostalgically recall in myths of creation, or desperately seek in doctrines of personal salvation.<sup>1</sup>

The direct application of this theory to Jumla religion is made problematic by the dual nature of Jumla religion and its consequent lack of exact fit with Lewis' categories. Oracular religion in Jumla is a "peripheral cult" in the sense that it is subordinate to Jumla Brahmanism, but it is a peripheral cult which has been fully accepted by the "establishment" Jyulyāls. If we are to understand Jumla oracular religion strictly in terms of Lewis' category of peripheral cult in which it would be seen as a Pābai and Dum protest against the high caste Jyulyāls and Jumla Brahmanism, then we are immediately faced with the problem, noted earlier, of why high caste Jyulyāls themselves practice oracular religion. If, on the other hand, Jumla oracular religion is defined as a "central religion" to avoid this contradiction, we are immediately faced with the indisputable fact that the dominant central religion is Jumla Brahmanism--and Lewis does not make allowances for there to be two central religions.

By modifying Lewis' theory to encompass the possibility of a possession religion which coexists in a subordinate position with a non-possession central religion throughout all segments of a culture's population, however, his theory can be fruitfully applied to Jumla religion and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. page 205.

culture. On the level of the ideal Pābai-Jyulyāl model, it can be seen that there is considerable support for the idea that Pabai culture and oracular religion represent a celebration of the egalitarian ideal and a rebellion against oppression. It will be recalled how the oracular gods through their oracles constantly reiterate their championship of the cause of the oppressed in society. In addition, it was noted how oracular religion functions to obtain justice for the disinherited in society; how it proclaims the equality of men before the gods (although not with the gods as Lewis maintains). That is, there is a meaningful sense in which oracular religion is a religion of the oppressed and Pābai culture an embodiment of the egalitarian values posited by Lewis.

There is also a sense in which the oracular religion of Pābai culture is directed against Jyulyāl culture. The emphasis on filiafocal kinship, egalitarianism, love, pragmatism, and the somewhat muted anti-ritual-purity statements and parelis do represent a kind of challenging protest to the principles and values of Jyulyāl culture. However, and this is perhaps the most important point at which Lewis' theory must be modified, it is a protest made by high caste Jyulyāl as well as Pābais and Dums, although perhaps to a somewhat lesser extent. Jyulyāls accept the Pābai cultural values as valid though subordinate alternatives just as the Pābais accept the Jyulyāl values as having greater moral authority. Pabais are not directly protesting themselves

and the gods; both are reaffirming the validity of an alternative value system and protesting oppressive exploitive behavior in overly greedy individuals and inherently evil ghosts and demons. Pābais and Jyulyāls champion the norm of egalitarianism even as they simultaneously champion the dharmic norms of inherent hierarchy--which, for whatever historical, psychological or sociological reasons, they have placed in the superior position.

On the basis of the Jumla situation, man's nature cannot be assumed to be egalitarian any more than it can be assumed to be hierarchical. However, it is clear from the Jumla data that it is possible for men to recognize the validity of both simultaneously and to express both through different forms of religious expression. In this sense, oracular religion can be seen as a "protest cult" in which everyone engages themselves to different degrees while simultaneously accepting the greater validity of the system--although not the individuals and evil beings--which is being protested.

But as this last qualification suggests, the major protest is not against Jumla Brahmanism per se, but against suffering and injustice--which may be indirectly abetted by Jumla Brahmanism but is not sanctioned by it. This brings us back to the partially complementary nature of oracular religion and the transcendental versus pragmatic complex model. Oracular religion's main concern, in addition to espousing an alternative set of valid values, is



to relieve misfortune, tame the environment, and generally provide an easier path for Jumlis to follow. To accomplish this purpose it punishes those who violate the proper code of behavior (i.e. provides a means for the oppressed to protest) and performs other services, but throughout, its main concern is to relieve suffering in this world--by in large leaving Jumla Brahmanism to take care of the problems and suffering associated with the other world and future lives. From this perspective, Jumla Brahmanism and oracular religion are similar to the contrast described by Ames for Buddhism and the "profane sciences" (magical-animism and others):

At one level Buddhism and the profane 'sciences' (bhuta vidyāva, aryurvediyā) are complementary: Buddhism is concerned with the law of karmāva /karma/ and the sciences with other natural laws. At another level, they appear to contradict one another because both Buddhism and the sciences aim to remove suffering and misfortune. But the paradox is resolved at yet a third level, for although both appear to be providing different means to the same end, the end also differs. Each offers a different kind of release or panacea for a different kind of misfortune. Vidyāva, at least the portion that I designate bhuta vidyāva or magical-animism, attempts to provide consolation or "worldly relief" (laukikā sampatā) from what we in the West could call temporary misfortunes or 'neurotic anxieties'....Buddhism, on the other hand, offers a final or transcendental release (lokottarā sampatā) from evil itself, from what some theologians now call 'existential anxieties'.<sup>1</sup>

While this study has demonstrated (and the application of Lewis' thesis has confirmed) that oracular religion deals with far more than 'neurotic anxieties', the thrust of Ames' description is still valid for Jumla religion.

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Ames, "Magical-animism and Buddhism": 39.

The understanding of Jumla religion and culture in terms of the simultaneous presence of two models which express antithetical values, both held to be valid, yet both functioning together through a divergence of primary concerns and the subordination of one to the other, can be further deepened through brief reference to Turner's work on "structure and anti-structure."<sup>1</sup>

While Turner was mainly concerned to isolate and describe examples of what he calls "structure" and "communitas" (anti-structure) in ritual sequences and millenarian movements, his understanding of these two notions has bearing on the dual organization of Jumla culture. Turner writes that in rituals which contain liminal transition phases,<sup>2</sup>

It is as though there are here two major 'models' for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less'. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period (and, he later argues, in millenarian movements) is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pages 94-130. This concept was originally developed by Arnold van Gennep in The Rites of Passage, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960).

<sup>3</sup>Victor Turner, The Ritual Process, page 96.

For Turner, these "two major models for human interrelatedness" form an essential dialectic for every society:

What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of *communitas* outside or against 'the law'. Exaggeration of *communitas*, in certain religious or political movements of the leveling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, overbureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of his study, Turner adds "one final comment":

Society (*societas*) seems to be a process rather than a thing--a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and *communitas*. There would seem to be--if one can use such a controversial term--a human 'need' to participate in both modalities. Persons starved of one in their functional day-to-day activities seek it in ritual liminality. The structurally inferior aspire to symbolic structural superiority in ritual; the structurally superior aspire to symbolic *communitas* and undergo penance to achieve it.<sup>2</sup>

There are many respects in which Turner's model of structure and *communitas* corresponds with this study's "Jyulyāl culture" and "Pābai culture" (including with regard to some specific values such as love, matrilineal kinship, etc. which have not been specified in this very brief presentation of Turner's thesis). This correspondence suggests that if Turner's thesis is broadly correct (an assumption supported by this study) the coexistence of similar models in other South Asian cultures is not an anomaly to be explained but a feature to be expected. To the extent that there may be a "human need to participate in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. page 129.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. page 203.

both modalities" of structure and anti-structure, the presence in Jumla culture of both models requires little further explanation.

However, here again, Jumla culture demands a slight modification on the theory. Turner's description of the presence of both models is primarily in terms of "successive phases" where either in ritual or in millenarian movements the structural phase tends to alternate with the anti-structural phase. The fact that both of these models are simultaneously present in Jumla culture, and so far as can be determined, have been simultaneously present for at least several hundred years, suggests that both modalities can be simultaneously enshrined in a culture to a greater extent than sometimes implied by Turner. While this may only be possible where the anti-structural model is ultimately subordinated (one might even say "coopted") to the structural model, as Pābai culture is subordinated to Jyulyāl, the existence of this possibility suggests that the theory can be broadened to increase its applicability and our understanding of culture.

While a slight modification of Turner's theory may thus be in order, his understanding of society as a dialectic process and this study's understanding of Jumla religion in terms of the dual Pābai-Jyulyāl model suggest a caution: culture cannot be treated as static. As Leach notes, "In practical field work situations the anthropologist must always treat the material of observation as if

it were part of an overall equilibrium, otherwise description becomes almost impossible."<sup>1</sup> This study has had to treat Jumla culture in this fashion for this reason. But as Leach goes on to request, "the fictional nature of this equilibrium should be frankly recognized."<sup>2</sup> While historical conjectures were made which could partly account for the present configuration of Pābai-Jyulyāl Jumla culture, it is sure that these configurations were and are continuing to change, and will continue to change in the future.

In fact, this change, and the disequilibrium in Jumla culture, while not dealt with in this study, is recognized and feared by some in Jumla. In one perhaps prophetic statement, Kālo Silṭo Maṣṭā said, "Since the planes have begun to fly in the sky, the gods have begun to hide themselves and disappear into the earth". Perhaps fearing this possibility, one consultant pleaded with Deuti for her to stay:

You must not forsake the power that is yours. Because the rivers have been flowing from ages past. The fire still burns and heats and the sun still gives light and heat. That which should grow on the earth still grows. The Kali Yug (present degenerate age) has not been able to do away with things like these. Similarly the power and glory of the gods are still present. All that the Kali Yug has done is to cause harm to man and nothing else has changed. What is there the Kali Yug can do against the gods? When it is time to snow then the snow falls and when it is time to rain then the rain falls. The summer and winter are separated. Each and everyone remains in the place allotted to him. Do whatever there is that you ought to do.

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<sup>1</sup>E. R. Leach, Kachin Social Structure, page 285.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

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