

sex and motherhood among the brahmins and chhetris of east-central nepal

Lynn Bennett

INTRODUCTION

The centrality of motherhood in the lives of Hindu women is well known, but it takes on new force and reality with the intensive study of a particular group of contemporary Nepali women. In this case the women are members of the Brahman and Chetri castes believed to be representative of similar women in small villages in the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding hills. For these women child bearing is the paramount test of their identity and worth as human beings and child rearing the most enjoyable and rewarding of their many tasks.

This report attempts to give some sense of the lives of mothers and their pre-school children in a rural predominately Brahman-Chetri community on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley. Some underlying cultural contradictions are detected in the general positive Hindu attitude towards fertility and childbirth. Traditional ideas about barrenness, fertility, miscarriage and abortion and some beliefs about village sorcery as it affects these things are described. The processes of conception, pregnancy and childbirth as they are understood and experienced in the village are also recorded along with the rituals involving the mother and the early years of a child's life. Brief mention is made of Chetri-Brahman concepts of pre-school child development and the parental role in upbringing. Finally some attempt is made to outline the common childhood diseases and to give a sense of the way they are interpreted and treated in an ordinary village home.

It is hoped that the information collected in this report will be applicable in the on-going development of programs for family planning, health and educational services for the women and children it describes.

This paper is a revised version of an earlier paper entitled: "Pregnancy, Birth and Early Child Rearing: Health and Family Planning Attitudes and Practices in a Brahman-Chetri Community", which I wrote under the direction of Dr. Ferdinand Okada and which was mimeographed as Paper #9 in the Department of Local Development/ UNICEF Research-Cum-Action Project series in October 1974. The data on which that paper was based was collected from July 1972 to September 1974 as part of the field research for my doctoral dissertation for Columbia University. This revised version includes new data collected since that time. During the course of my research I have been affiliated with the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies, and wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude

"A Chetri mother and her child." (Photo by Lynn Bennett)

to its Dean, Dr. Prayag Raj Sharma and to its staff for their generous assistance and encouragement. I would also like to thank Alice Wygant for her help with the photography in this article.

Attitudes towards Fertility

In Hindu religious belief the need for offspring is the only legitimate reason for marriage and sex. While the new bride may have to serve her mother-in-law, please her husband and labor for the family, she also knows her most important work is to have children - preferably male children. Hindu descent is strongly patrilineal. Not only do the lineage name and family lands pass through males, but certain important rituals connected with the continuity of the family and the spritual peace of the forefathers can only be performed by sons.¹

According to the mulki ain² promulgated in 1963 it is unlawful to marry off a girl before she has reached the age of 14. The law in itself is difficult to enforce and might have had much less effect had it not come at a time when more educated brides were becoming preferable in villages within the Kathmandu Valley.³ In the small Brahman-Chetri hamlet where my research was carried out there is no doubt that the marriage age is going up. A survey⁴ in my village revealed that of the twenty-two married women in the under-35 age group the average marriage age was 17 and only two were married before the legal age. Among the twenty-five women age 35 and over, the average marriage age was 13 with thirteen women married before the present legal age.

The reason for the traditional pattern of early marriage has been the preference (stronger among Brahmans than among Chetris) to complete the marriage ceremonies before the bride has reached menarche⁵. Of the fifty-nine women in my survey, thirty-four were married before they had begun menstruation. Of course with the rising marriage age this tradition is becoming less important and most (though by no means all) of these thirty-four women are in the 35-and-over age category. Nepali women however seem to reach menarche relatively late⁶. The average age in my survey is 15.4 which would mean that statistically at least the mulki ain and orthodox tradition of pre-pubesent marriage could both be observed if the parents moved quickly to marry a girl off after her fourteenth birthday!

As soon as a girl has begun menstruation and is married, the women of her husband's house begin watching hopefully for signs of pregnancy. One informant recalled her mother-in-law's impatience when she was eighteen years old and had not become pregnant after four years of marriage: "Whenever I had my period my mother-in-law used to say, 'How many times do you have to burst open? We haven't had any children from you. Since the day you were married you seem to have always been menstruating' She would scold me every month and then at last when I didn't get my period she was happy".

My informants all agreed that having children early was easier because the body is naram and kamilo (:soft and flexible) and can give with the strains of childbirth. A woman past 24 or 25 they said is ciplo (:over-ripe) and likely to tear during delivery and generally will recover less well. For the forty-eight women in my survey who had children the average age for the first child was 18.7. Probably due to the relative sterility which prevails during the first several years after menarche however, there was no significant correlation between later marriage for the under 35 age group and later age for the first child.

In general, Chetri and Brahman women are very positive about having children. It is a source of pride to be pregnant and a source of shame and unease to go too many years after marriage without conceiving. However, two recent brides I interviewed - both of them pregnant - did say in private that they would have rather waited two or three years longer before having children. One admitted being worried about the pain and risk of delivery. The other was in the rather unusual position of having split off from her husband's parents. Without other women in the joint family household, she has no one to help her look after the child while she works in the field and does household chores. Both women also cited the added pressure on their husband's small cash income⁷ from the child's needs for medicine, and eventually, for food, clothing and schooling. Nevertheless, both women said that they wanted children and that their main feeling was of relief and happiness that they were pregnant.

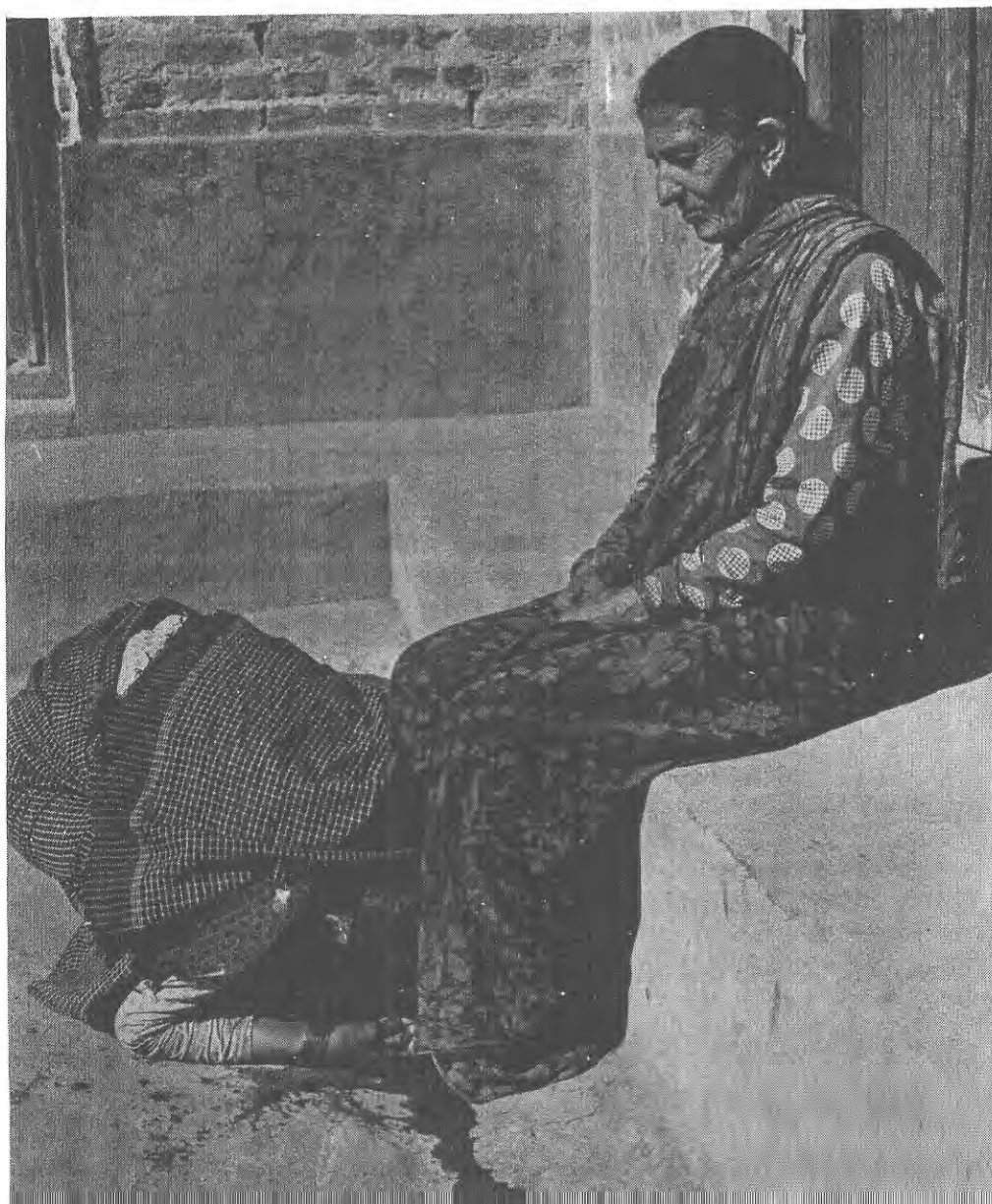
Women are relieved to be pregnant because having children - especially sons - is politically important to a woman in a large joint family. The authority structure in a Hindu family is clearly based on male superiority. Hence whatever respect, consideration or power a woman may gain must be won through skillful diplomacy and alliance. A woman's "career" in the joint family seems to go through three overlapping stages - each stage defined by the "power" she must seek to ally herself with. While her husband is subordinate to his father and mother (her sasura and sasu), she must please them. During this period any open support or affection that her husband may show her is considered disrespectful of the parents. After the sasura and sasu have died and their sons set up separate households⁸, then a woman's power comes more directly through her relationship with her husband. The third stage is when her sons become old enough to marry themselves and bring in daughters-in-law for her to command. If she outlives her husband, she may ultimately have considerable influence through her sons who have become the senior males but owe paramount respect to her.

Obviously a woman who has been unable to have children can never reach the power and security of this third stage. Furthermore, although sometimes a man is good enough to take in his wife's widowed mother, such generosity is rare and may cause other family members

to resent both the wife and her old mother⁹. A daughter is expected to serve her husband's family, not her family of birth; it is the son whose clear and accepted duty it is to honor and support his parents in their old age.

But even in the first stage of her married life, the failure to produce sons can begin to affect a woman's status in the joint family. For the mother and father-in-law are anxious to have a grandson (for the same religious and cultural reasons they wanted a son) and they are likely to be much more lenient with a daughter-in-law who has borne one.

"A daughter-in-law shows her respect for her mother-in-law by drinking that water in which the mother-in-law's feet have been washed (:gora pani khamne) and then touching her feet (dhok dinne). The most powerful position open to most women in Brahman-Chhetri society is that of sasu or mother-in-law." (Photo by Alice Wygant).



The demanding sasu will accept a slackening off of some of the daughter-in-law's traditional service¹⁰ after her first child. Also because marriage is patrilocal the new daughter-in-law is always somewhat of an outsider whose loyalty to the family cannot be entirely trusted¹¹. Once she has had a child who will be supported and loved by her husband's family she is felt to have more of a common cause with them. Slowly greater responsibility and trust can be extended to her.

The principal insecurity for a woman without sons, however, comes in her relationship with her husband. As we have said, he is a powerful potential ally. Covertly in the first stage, more overtly in the second, his favor greatly strengthens her position in the family if she can win it. Yet all the women I have interviewed state flatly that if a woman has after six or seven years, had no children, or if she has produced nothing but daughters, a man has the right - even the duty - to bring in another wife¹². One woman remembered her grandmother's narrow escape:

They say a sauta (: co-wife) had already been picked out for grandmother. Our grandmother had given birth to three daughters and she was pregnant again. (Her husband said), "You have given birth only to daughters. If the child in you turns out to be a daughter then I shall bring a sauta over you"¹³. And because she was afraid that her husband would bring another wife, she prayed to god that she would give birth to a son. She gave birth to my eldest uncle and even when she was an old woman she continued to love him more than the others. She stayed with him when grandfather died and the household split up. "This is the son who got rid of my sauta," she would say. "This is the son who has wiped away my tears. I will not stay with the others."

The elder wife finds herself with a legitimate rival for her husband's affections. The money that would have bought one good sari must now buy two of lesser quality. And in the inevitable factions in the family, there is one more person likely to side against her every time. The fact that recent laws now demand the first wife's permission (: manjuri) for a second marriage sometimes means very little in the village setting. In a case that occurred during my field work, the husband's family simply pressured the first wife until she signed the permission. She tried to put up with the situation stoically as tradition demands, but when her co-wife immediately bore a son she felt she had no more chance of happiness there. She has returned to her parents home and says she does not intend to go back.

Aside from the strong religious motivations and the deep general fear of barren women which will be discussed subsequently, it is clear that for a woman, personal fulfillment within the family - indeed, her very social identity - depends heavily on being a mother. Yet despite this positive attitude about birth and fertility, there is still a strong ambivalence in the Hindu world

view about their ultimate value. The ambivalence is part of a deeper religious and philosophical question: does man achieve spiritual salvation through participation and contribution to the ongoing organic processes of life, or through control and withdrawal from them? Hinduism presents both options as legitimate.¹⁴ One can follow the ancient Vedic tradition, and be a householder, daily honoring the gods, year after year sustaining the ancestors who went before with ritual feasts, and above all, producing offspring who will in turn provide ritual sustenance after one's own death¹⁵. This is the "worldly" path followed by most Hindu villagers. But the villager is always aware that there is another - perhaps more ultimate - path, tangential and yet interwoven with his householder's life. He knows that some men have chosen to become sadhus, giving up caste rank, family and wealth and seeking by control of the bodily senses and emotions to attain release from the very world of organic change and decay in which the villager finds himself immersed. He may say openly that most of the holy men who come begging at his door, naked and smeared with ashes from the burning ghat are charlatans and rascals. But he would not deny that some were genuine and that there were - in this or that temple or holy spot - very powerful saints who had freed themselves from the desires and fears of the flesh.

In other ways too, ascetic values penetrate the villager's "worldly" life. The classical asrama theory is present as an ideal symbolically expressed in the bartaman life cycle ceremony when a high caste boy is given his sacred thread.¹⁶ Moreover fasting and even sexual abstinence are periodically required of the villager in the course of his religious observations. When questioned as to why they fast, my informants never professed any lofty ascetic or spiritual goals. They spoke instead of simple bodily purity which they had to attain to be fit for this or that required worship. However, if we look into these beliefs about purity and pollution which so dominate village religion, we find that on another level of analysis, they do imply the values of ascetic control and withdrawal. For it is those very organic processes - eating, elimination copulation, birth and death - which the ascetic seeks to control and ultimately avoid - that the householder perceives as polluting. Thus, even though the sadhu and the villager have chosen different paths, they share a common value system. Nowhere is this common ambivalence towards sex and birth more clearly expressed than in the villager's understanding of these processes in terms of purity and pollution. Let us turn then to the villagers "symbolic physiology" of conception and birth.

Conception

Explanations as to how conception (:garbha basne) takes place vary from the poetic and religious to the more practical. Often women give several types of explanations in succession. One

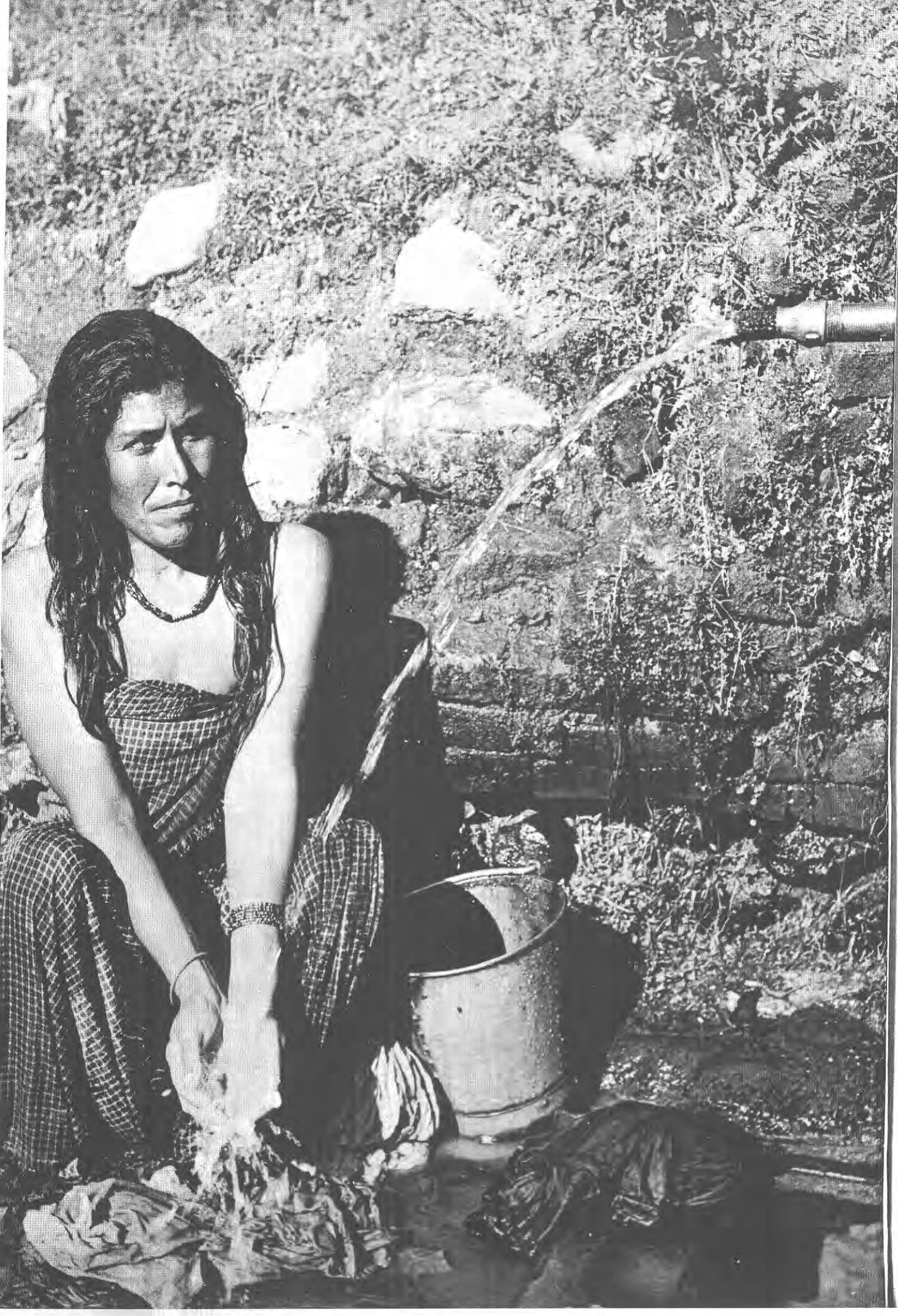
fairly typical description began: "The seed (:bij) is the man's and the woman's blood goes into the seed and forms the baby. A child is found if god gives the seed and that is a matter of karma." A male informant explained that both men and women have seed which is liquid -- though he had never seen female seed. During intercourse the seed mixes in the woman's vagina to form the child whose sex is determined by "whichever partner's seed was stronger."

Though none of my informants expressed the concept of an egg deposited monthly within the woman's womb, there was a strong idea that the woman has a fertile period connected with her menstrual cycle. As one woman explained:

If a man doesn't sleep with his wife on the fourth day (after the beginning of the menstrual period) he gets the pāp (: sin) of a murderer, because at that time there is a child in the womb -- a little blood is still coming. If the wife is at home and her husband is away she has to face toward Sūrya Nārāyan (: sun deity) and offer dhok (: gesture of respect with folded hands) and ask for forgiveness saying that she is helpless as her husband is not there. They say that on the fourth day the ritū dān (ritū: season or period of fertility; dān: religious gift) has to be made.

Some women, though they all knew about ritū dān on the fourth day, said they did not always follow it because often they were still bleeding and they felt either ashamed or disgusted at the idea of intercourse while there was still blood, so they prayed for forgiveness. Even if the orthodox ritū dān is not performed by every couple on the fourth day of every month, it is still a common subject of sexual jokes and teasing. For example, recently a group of women who were planting rice seedlings, teasingly asked an older Chetri man when it was going to rain as the seedlings would soon dry up without more water in the paddy field. He, nodding towards his youngest wife who was in her fourth day, said with a grin that it would rain that night for sure. There was laughter from the women and the young wife flushed and kept on planting rice.

A woman's fertile period includes not only the fourth day which is the husband's religious duty, but also the fifth and the seventh through the fourteenth day after menstruation¹⁷. On the sixth day and after the fifteenth day after menstruation a woman cannot conceive and sleeping with one's husband at that time is only for pleasure. The first three days of menstruation are also infertile and sex during this period is very sinful, though most women thought there were probably some shameless couples who indulged even then.



A woman's fertility, even at these specified times however, is not conceived of as simply the automatic working of human physiology. For, all my informants agree that the number of children a woman will have and even their sex is determined by her own moral history - her karma. Thus, although women know that coitus during the aforementioned fertile periods is necessary for conception, they do not see it as sufficient in itself. A woman's fertility ultimately rests on the spiritual merit that she has accrued in preceeding lives. A large brood of healthy children - providing they are not all girls - is not only proof of, but reward for her past virtue¹⁸. Even the supreme being, Bhagwan, can only give his gifts according to the laws of karma.

To return again to the description of conception given above, perhaps its most significant feature in terms of symbolic physiology is the connection between menstrual blood and the formation of a child. The connection was present for all my informants. Invariably when women were asked about conception and pregnancy their answer would contain the phrase: "Das mahina ko ragat jamera nani pauncha." (After ten months of blood have collected (solidified, thickened) a child is born.) In fact it is a common form of abuse for an irrate mother to call her naughty child "mero rakat ko dallo" (: a ball of my blood). So although there are many versions of how the child is started - i.e. a "seed" given by the father, by both parents, by god or by the laws of karma - everyone is sure that it is from the blood that would have been lost in menstruation that the child grows. To fully understand the symbolic importance of this fact however, it is perhaps necessary to know the meanings which Nepali Hindu culture attaches to menstruation and menstrual blood.

Menstruation

For Nepali Hindus, as for the peoples of many other cultures, menstruation (para sarne) is not only connected with fertility and female sexuality, but it is highly taboo. The more appropriate word in the context of Hindu culture is "polluting" or bitalo. Menstruating women and menstrual blood are two of a host of things (such as left-over food, feces, members of certain lower castes, etc.) contact with which causes a high caste Hindu to fall into a state of ritual impurity. In this state of defilement (called jutho, bitalo or sutak depending on its cause) a Hindu may not eat, approach a well, approach the gods or touch those who are not similarly defiled until he has purified himself.

For three days out of every month then, all Brahman and Chetri women between menarche and menopause become polluted and untouchable.

"A woman bathing on the morning of the 4th day after menstruation. She must wash her body, hair, clothes and bedding before she is choko (:pure) enough to touch an initiated adult male." (Photo by Alice Wygant).

As they themselves explain, "We become like daminis. (:female members of the untouchable tailor-musician caste). We become like dogs." For these three days a woman must not enter the kitchen or touch food or water which others will eat. She may not comb or oil her hair and she sleeps separately in a downstairs room. Above all she may not touch initiated karma caleko high caste males. Some especially strict women avoid touching even children (except those whom they are nursing) and other women. In fact the idiomatic term of menstruation is na chune which means "not touching". Older informants tell me that in the time of their mother-in-laws (i.e. the "old days") menstruating women were hidden from the sun and the sight of all males in a dark room for this period. Food, water and a brass kopara for bodily elimination were brought to them and they could not stir out or even speak to others until the early dawn of the fourth day when they had to bathe and purify themselves before the sun rose. During those three days, each step they took beyond the room brought them the pāp equivalent to having killed a cow. Nowadays such strict seclusion of menstruating women occurs only during a young girl's first three periods, the first and most important being a twelve to twenty-one day seclusion called gupha basne or "sitting in the cave"¹⁹. Nevertheless it is clear that the ritual impurity of menstruation and menstrual blood remains strong. Women themselves while acknowledging it as the source of their much wanted children, connect menstruation with sin. As one informant explained.

"They say that this (menstruation) is a curse given by Bhagwan (:god) to women.... Bhagwan has distributed pāp (:sin) between the Ganga (:Holy river goddess), women and the daurah (:wood, firewood). Just as when wood is set on fire, some phijh (:foam) comes - that foam is sin. They say that when there is foam in the Gangaju then the Gangaju has become na chune. They say that our na chune is also sin and if our sin is not secluded then they say that it becomes a great sin.... Women must have sinned. I don't know. It may be that the sin which has been committed long ago has been distributed to all."

The most important occasion during the year for Brahman and Chetri women is the combined festival of Tij and Rishi Panchami²⁰ which center on purification from sins connected with menstruation. Both the women's own explanations and the symbolism of the bathing rituals on Panchami leave no doubt about the festival's meaning. The most explicit act occurs in the privacy of pre-dawn darkness when every woman must rub rato mato (:red mud) on her genitals three hundred and sixty times and then wash herself clean with water three hundred and sixty times²¹. Other bathing, washing of hair, brushing of teeth (all done three hundred and sixty times each) occurs later in groups by the river. All of this, women say, is to purify them from the possible sin of having touched a man while menstruating.

It seems surprising then, with these strong negative feelings about menstrual blood that there should be this almost equally strong rule enforcing coitus on the fourth day when, as my informant said, "a little blood is still flowing". In a sense, however this apparent paradox is but an expression of the pervasive Hindu ambiguity about sex and fertility mentioned earlier. Menstrual blood representing sexuality is dangerous but (for the householder at least) necessary and potentially good if it can be controlled, for it is the substance from which a child is formed. A woman's menstrual period is when she is most blatantly sexual and thus strict sexual abstinence for the first three days represents control imposed on this potentially unruly and destructive force. Yalman in his analysis of Ceylonese female puberty rites speaks of ritual acts capable of converting the impure and dangerous fertility of a young girl at menarche into a pure fertility which is acceptable and useful to the community²². This same transformation is effected by the aforementioned gupha basne

"A group of women take their ritual baths on Rishi Panchami to purify themselves from the possible sin of having touched a man during their menstruation period." (Photo by Lynn Bennett).



rite which Nepali women undergo at the onset of puberty. And thereafter every month the ritual bathing and washing of hair & clothes on the fourth day repeats this process of purification wherein the force of sexuality is cleansed and channelled²³. As one woman put it: "The blood is the same. But the blood which is impure or spoilt comes out when we are na chune. When the na ramro (:bad) blood has come out then the baby is formed out of the ramro (:good) blood."

Perceived Effects of Menstruation and Intercourse on Female Health.

Carstairs²⁴ has written that one of the prevailing concerns of his male Rajput informants was that they would become physically (and spiritually) weakened if they overindulged their sexual appetites. Following the same reasoning that motivates the celebrate Hindu holy man, Carstairs' Rajastani peasant man believed that loss of semen is accompanied by proportional loss of strength. Not surprisingly, the same view - though accompanied by much less anxiety - is held by Nepali Hindu males. It has not, however, been previously recognised that Hindu women hold a parallel view about their own loss of strength due to the combined effects of menstruation and intercourse. Nepali women accurately observe that a woman who has a heavy flow is likely to have sunken eyes, be generally weaker and perhaps even lose weight. Except for the fact that they have no direct control or responsibility for its loss²⁵, they feel about menstrual blood much the way Hindu men feel about their semen. In fact women repeatedly explained that the reason males are stronger than females is that males do not lose their strength through menstruation every month. Just as Carstairs reported frequent requests from his male informants for medicine to restore strength lost through intercourse, so I have constant requests from women for medicine that will replace what they lose through menstruation. All sorts of "tonics" for this purpose are prepared by gubajyus, vaidyas and others and sold at steep prices.²⁶

Nepali women do not complain greatly of cramps or pain during menstruation. Slight backache or pain in the abdomen often forewarns them that they are about to become impure and may persist for a day or two. Occasionally cramps may be severe and various homemade medicines may be given. One such recipe was reported to me by an older Brahman woman who prepared it for her young daughter-in-law²⁷. The medicine is pleasantly sweet and the sixteen year-old bride reported that it worked well for her.

Occasionally women complain of discharging "black blood" during their periods. This is a sign that a witch (:bokshi) has cast a spell on them and help must be sought from a gubhajyu or jhankri to reverse the curse.

Vaginal discharge, if it is at all noticable, is felt to be even more debilitating than menstruation. Women are greatly ashamed of this parar of seto pani (lit: white water), which they say occurs when the body is internally "heated" either by a fever, over indulgence in heat giving foods (like honey, ghee, meat etc) or too much sex. It is one of their most frequent health complaints and it is associated with weakness, dizziness and loss of weight or "drying up".

Women's ideas about the ill-effects of intercourse are less clearly related to physiology and generally more vague than their anxiety about menstruation and vaginal discharge. Often women informants said that they didn't enjoy sex either, because it made them weak and thin or because they already were weak and thin due to illness, poor diet repeated child-bearing or simply hard work. But they could never explain why or how intercourse had this debilitating effect. Certain patterns in my data however, suggest that women's attitudes towards intercourse correlate with the basically puritan nature of contemporary Hinduism. Usually negative responses came from women past their first youth and already the mother of several children. They would often admit having enjoyed sex when they were a taruni. Taruni has somewhat the same meaning as "teenager" in American culture with the same connotations: physical development, narcissism, frivolousness, energy and an awakening interest in the erotic. Consistent with this is the belief that in the first few months and years after marriage, intercourse makes a woman fat and healthy-looking. Young brides are often teased when they return to their parent's home to visit about how fat they've become and about the probable reason. But this taruni period of enjoyment should end after a woman has borne one or two children, and sex after this begins to be seen as debilitating, also women say they are less attractive to their husbands since childbirth has stretched their vaginas. Women beyond twenty-five or so tend to be extremely reticent about seriously admitting pleasure in sex - even though they may enjoy talking about it and miss no opportunity for a suggestive joke. One informant did go so far as to say that she might enjoy sex "if my husband gave me nutritious food and were healthy and strong again". As far as I can see she is healthy and strong and very attractive too, but she is in her early thirties and even more significant, she is the mother of a young teenage son. A generation ago she would have soon become a mother-in-law. It would have been shameful for her to become pregnant with her own daughter-in-law in the house. Now, of course, women do not assume this prestigious rank until later, but the feeling that it is immature and even wanton to admit enjoyment when one is no longer a taruni remains strong. Once a woman's sexuality has fulfilled its function and she is a mother then its legitimacy decreases. Thus, although the belief of "older" women that intercourse is in a vague way physically harmful to them²⁸ may partially be a reflection of the fact that often their early married life of child bearing and hard work has indeed "worn them out", it may also serve to re-inforce the strong

cultural ideology that sex when not necessary to produce the next generation, is spiritually harmful.

Although most women either did not feel -- or refused to admit -- pleasure in sex, they were frank in admitting the political necessity of maintaining their husbands' affections through sex. As one woman put it: "(My husband) needs a lot. After all, he is a man -- all that matters for men is that they should be able to 'sleep'! If you allow them to 'sleep' with you then they love you. Otherwise they don't".²⁹

Hence instead of gratefully sharing the "burden" of sex with a co-wife, women were usually upset and angry when their husbands went to co-wives³⁰. While informants maintained their own self-

"A new bride (left), still a taruni (:young pubescent woman), and her sister-in-law (right) who has had several children and now calls herself a huri (: old woman) in jesting self-mockery. Note the handkerchief placed over the first vermilion mark which the groom has just placed on the part of the bride's hair. If a witch (:bokshi) saw the mark she could curse the bride to be barren."
(Photo by Lynn Bennett).



images as "respectable" women who passively accepted sex as the wife's duty, there was frequent projection of a sexual voraciousness on to the informant's co-wife to explain the husband's perceived favoritism. One woman went so far to accuse her co-wife of wanting intercourse seven times in one night, and of physically restraining her husband from withdrawing after climax.

It is significant that co-wives (followed by ego's *hu bro wi* (: jethani and devrani)) were the most frequent suspects in witchcraft involving alienation of the husband's affections, sterility, miscarriages, general weakness, and loss of weight. In fact, in several cases women later confided that their earlier complaints about being too weak, thin, and "dried up" to enjoy sex were actually the effects of witchcraft by a female rival in the household.

Clearly women's attitudes about sex and their own fertility are complex, and even ambivalent. They are inevitably bound up with the structure of the joint family within which women must struggle for security and identity -- a subject which is beyond the scope of this paper.³¹ Nevertheless, I would like to relate here one further observation, which seemed to have bearing on women's attitudes towards family planning and contraception. The theme recurred constantly in my discussions with women about the effects of intercourse and childbearing on women's health. The idea was mentioned earlier that all matters concerned with reproduction take a toll on the woman's vitality. If a woman is loved and well looked after, however, her husband, and to a lesser extent, his family and her own family of birth; will replace the strength she loses in childbirth and intercourse. Thus the new mother is given rich foods publicly by the family and the amorous husband and wife feed each other special foods on the sly as a sign of affection or as a romantic prelude to sex. In both cases, women believe that if they get enough nutritious food neither sex nor childbirth harms them.

Still, it came as a surprise to me when I interviewed village women about family planning and found the same concept operating there. One woman was the village mid-wife -- a traditional woman who did not believe in birth control. The other younger woman did believe in it in principle, though she could not openly say so in front of the older woman. But both viewed contraception like everything else connected with reproduction, as debilitating. Both believed that various birth control methods were good for women only if they could get nutritious food along with them.

Here is part of one conversation:

LB: Do you think family planning is beneficial to the women?

- Young Woman: They put in the loop -- when that is put in then the body dries up.
- Midwife: They say that when you put the loop in then there is risk that it will reach the heart and you will die.
- Young Woman: She (pointing to me) has also put it in... But she is healthy. She eats fish, meat, and fruits. Her food is khurakilo (: nutritious). As she hasn't had any children yet, her health is good. But others do not have nutritious food. And they have placed the loop inside them after they have already given birth to children. Once a woman gives birth she becomes weak. You (pointing to me again and laughing) do not have to eat dhiro (: wheat or corn flour mush) like us! What strength do you have when you only eat chillies and salt? Even you would dry up if you put in the loop under such conditions. A person who puts in the loop has to have food which gives strength.
- Midwife: One who has put in the loop does not even have blood in the nails. They become very thin and when you look at them they are so yellow.
- LB: But if you take pills, this medicine which prevents conception, then is that all right?
- Young Woman: That also makes you weak and thin.
- LB: But when I took it, I grew fat.
- Young Woman: If you take nutritious food, then the medicine also benefits you. And if you don't eat (nutritious food) then you grow thin.
- LB: Yes, but if you have many children then the mother also becomes weak and thin.
- Young Woman: When you have many children then you become weak and on top of that if you take (contraception) medicine, then you grow still weaker.
- Midwife: As long as the food is nutritious, the more children you have, the better it is for the body.
- Young Woman: She means it is good to have babies.
- Midwife: All the phohar-maila (: dirt and impurities) in the body is cleaned out. You get nutritious food to eat as a sutkeri (: woman who has recently given birth). The blood keeps changing.

Young Woman: Maiju gives birth to one baby each year. As long as the baby is in the womb, then your baby looks big and fat. And when you give birth to a baby and gets to eat the food of a sutki, then you grow very healthy. And then when you get pregnant again you still remain very healthy. Maiju has given birth to twelve children now and she is as strong as an ox.

Barrenness, Miscarriage and Abortion

There are five categories of inauspicious women in Bahun - Chetri society³² all of them suffer in some way from impaired fertility. They are: 1) Biduwa: the widow whose legitimate fertility ended with the death of her husband - though the colloquial name for widows, i.e. randi (: prostitute), indicates that she is still suspected of illegitimate fertility. 2) Aputri (from Sanskrit: "without son") - a woman who has never conceived. 3) Kagab dhwa or ek bita kouwa (named after a kind of crow (: kaga) which has only one offspring and is considered untouchable) - a woman who has borne only one child and is thereafter infertile. 4) Mrit balak (: dead child) - a woman who has only still births. 5) Srabad garbha - a woman who always miscarries.

Less sanskritic terms for a childless woman are banjo, taro and tari but all these are likely to be uttered directly only in anger or abuse. As we mentioned earlier, such a condition if it persists, is considered karma ko kura - a matter of the woman's own moral history in previous lives. Specifically the sin of inducing an abortion (on one's self or on another), abandoning or causing the death of an infant or a pregnant cow (: garbini gai) in one life inevitably leads to the childless condition in some future life. Such women eventually become the object not only of pity, but also of suspicion and mild ostracism. They are considered inauspicious (: alakshin) and although they are allowed to do puja and participate in other religious activities, they gain no merit because the gods will not accept what they offer. With the exception of older widows, they are excluded from attending at childbirth for fear they will endanger the mother or her child. They are also likely suspects in any witchcraft that is performed. The other negative factors - the fact of their low status in the joint family and the likely addition of a co-wife - have already been discussed.

Fortunately, however, a woman is not clearly labeled aputri until many years have passed and many remedies and prayers have proved ineffective. For witches (: bokshi) are known to exist in every village and a bokshi can make an innocent woman unable to conceive "by closing up the entry to her womb so the seed can't get in." In the hamlet of twenty-one Brahman-Chetri households where I worked, one woman named (in a whisper) four women and surprisingly one man (who was at the same time a jhankri) who were known bokshis, and she felt that there could be others. Not one

of my informants doubted the power of bokshis and all could give examples of witchcraft that had been worked on them and their families. Quite a few said that they had at one time or another been temporarily rendered infertile or caused to miscarry by angry or jealous women who knew the powerful mantras of witchcraft.³³ One becomes particularly vulnerable if a bokshi catches sight of one's menstrual blood, or touches or sees the food one is eating. Brides are also extremely vulnerable if a bokshi sees the red sindur powder which the groom has placed in the parting of her hair on the wedding day (see photo 5). Hence this red line is usually covered with a handkerchief on the day of the wedding. Powerful bokshis can also creep into the house at night in the form of a cat to suck their victims blood. Many women have showed me the bluish bruise-like mark which bokshis leave when they come as cats. Yet another method of casting a spell is putla garne which will be described below.

Fortunately however, there is usually a gubhajyu, jhankri or simply a janne manche³⁴ (:knowing person) somewhere that can break the spell. Much has been written about these practitioners and it is beyond the scope of this report to catalogue their numerous remedies in detail. Instead I will try to give a sense of how these practitioners work by recording one informant's description of a sure she underwent for infertility at the hands of a "lama":

He was black and frightening.... He felt my pulse.... and then he placed his chasma (:spectacles) on the forehead and looked.... He said "Did that person cook syel (:doughnut-like fried bread) and give it to you? And did you eat it in a relishing manner?" And I said yes.... And he said that some evil (:bigarh) had been done at my dhatu-stan. Dhatu stan means the thing from which you urinate. He said that maybe there was something flowing from the dhatu-stan. (This would be the parar or vaginal discharge). He seemed to know all about my illness... so I admitted it was true. He said I felt dizzy, that my waist hurt and that when I became na chune then it hurt we as if I were having labor pains (:nani paune betha). And I said it was true. Then he said he would come on Tuesday which is a very powerful (:karah) day of the week. He brought his son and another janne manche from his village because he was afraid that while he was doing his work another bokshi might kill him. He sent my husband to get oil and chicken eggs that he needed and then at ten o' clock in the night my treatment began....

He did all sorts of things. He had a khukuri and with it he made as if to cut up my body. He cut at my stomach like this, and at my spine-base (daralo) and he bit me. The Lama asked me where my pains were and wherever I told him the pain was he bit and sucked there. He put his mouth there... on the body. He told me to move aside the cloth and there he would suck. "Look, there's the hair coming out!" He would say. He would say that the hair which had been buried as putla (:the hair or piece of cloth belonging to the victim used to cast spells) was coming out. They say that the bokshi takes our putla hair or piece of cloth and buries it. And if they have buried it in a simh (:marsh, bog) then we become bloated (sun-ninu); and if they have buried it in dry earth (mato) then we dry up. And so he said that this was what had been done and he took it (the putla) out. Meanwhile he is sucking away at my blood and he is biting. The Lama keeps telling me to be still and I am scared. I keep wishing that I hadn't gone through with this.... Everyone was sitting and watching (family members and the Lama's assistant). He kept boiling water and pouring it on my daralo. And he had lit a ranko (:fire brand) and it is spurting flame. Then he told me to hold down a chicken egg with my feet.... My husband was scared stiff that he would cut away my toes also. He blew on the khukuri...and then he slashed down and only the egg was cut: Nothing happened to me. There was something black in the egg. "Look - that is what is wrong with you (betha):", he said. All that was over at one o' clock in the night. My husband gave that Lama forty rupees and six pathis of paddy for payment. After this I became na-chune once and then I conceived my little daughter. Otherwise I hadn't had any children for seven years since my son's birth.

This account perhaps gives some idea of the kinds of treatment available from jhankris, gubajyus and other specialists for women seeking children. Often, too, women visit the temples of powerful gods and goddesses and vow to give them sacrifices in return for a son. But all these efforts will prove futile if it is the woman's karma to be childless and not just the work of a bokshi or a temporarily displeased god.

Miscarriage (adhekro, a premature baby, miscarriage or deformed child)³⁵ seems fairly common. Seven (approximately 14%) of the married women in my survey had at least one miscarriage - some had as many as five. Miscarriages are generally thought to

be caused by witchcraft, although one informant said they may also occur if the husband had mojh (:venereal disease) when he slept with his wife.

Abortion or induced miscarriages (: nani pyanknu; nani palnu) are naturally more difficult to get figures on. But they do occur. One village woman who was a regular childbirth attendant knew the grisly recipe for baccha marne ausadi (:medicine to kill the foetus) in which mercury (: paro) scraped from the back of a mirror seemed to be the chief ingredient. Village gossip also attributed one death during my period of research to taking such medicine. The victim was an older and very poor Brahman mother of five who was ashamed to be pregnant because her sons were grown and there were daughters-in-law in the house. Women say they are uneasy about taking any medicines (except tonics or vitamins) and especially injections during pregnancy for fear that it will cause them to abort. Village women also make a strong moral distinction between early and late abortion. As one informant explained: "If you take the medicine (for abortion) during the first one or two months then it's just a lump of blood and there's no harm to you. But if you take the medicine after the baby has life in it (ie. in the 5th or 6th month) then it becomes a great sin."

Pregnancy

There are many synonyms for pregnancy in the Nepali language: dui-jiu ko hunne (:being with two bodies), na sakne jiu ko (:with an "unable" body), bhuri ma bokne (:carrying in the belly) and nani bokne (:carrying a baby). Because of the Nepali system of counting from the month as it begins instead of the completed month, pregnancy is said to last ten months. As soon as a woman is even a few days late for her period - and because of the pollution rules a woman's cycle is necessarily public knowledge - the other women of the house begin to tease and question her. Generally the rest of the village will not find out until the third or fourth month. If not for gossip, outsiders would not know that soon because the loose dhoti and bulky patuka (:waistcloth) which women wear makes physical signs of pregnancy difficult to detect. Many women feel ashamed or embarrassed about their first pregnancy, especially in front of their father-in-law or their husband's older brother (with both of these relatives a woman has a strict respect-avoidance relationship). As one informant said, "We feel ashamed because what we did in the dark with our husbands now puffs out for all to see." But behind the necessary shyness and modesty there is always a strong element of pride.

Women say that after conception they get thinner for a few months before their breasts, vagina and stomach begin to enlarge. This initial loss of weight is due to asani (:nausea) and lack of interest in food which seems similar to the western concept of "morning sickness". Every woman is said to have one particular food which makes her ill during pregnancy. Interestingly it is

usually the cheaper, less popular foods like dhiro (:corn or wheat flour mush) or gundruk (:dried edible leaves) that tend to be avoided by pregnant women. To the limit of their financial ability the family, neighboring friends and members of a pregnant woman's natal family will try to feed her rich, nourishing foods during and after pregnancy. Ghee, meat, liver, milk, fish, eggs, curds and a syrup-filled sweet called jeri are favored - though there are many variations and some will not give meat or eggs for religious reasons. Amilo (:sour, tart) foods such as pickles and achars, and piro (:hot, spicy) foods should not be given even though the pregnant woman may crave them. An informant explained, "They say that the foetus which is made of blood is burned by that which is amilo or piro and becomes restless with pain."

Perhaps because they have seen so many miscarriages at various stages of development. Nepali women seem to have a fairly clear picture of how the foetus is formed. As one old woman described the initial process, "First a seed like that of til (:sesame) falls and then it grows as big as the dhan (:rice). Then it becomes as big as the makai (:corn) and then as the lapsi seed (:Spondias acuminata) and blood congeals and it grows as big as this (showing her fist) by the third month." Sometime between the fifth and sixth month it is thought that the sas or life breath enters the child's body. From that point on, the mother will feel the infant kick and it is considered a human being. Should a miscarriage occur after this stage, a modified religious rite which will be described below (p. 34) is required for the foetus's funeral. If a woman dies while she is pregnant, the foetus is removed from her body and replaced with a mana of uncooked rice. The unborn child and its mother are then buried on opposite sides of a river. It is considered extremely inauspicious for a woman to die while she is pregnant (or while she is menstruating) and both her spirit and the unborn child's are likely to haunt the village.

All informants agree that female children develop faster, are stronger and more difficult to deliver than male children. Sas enters the female at five months and the male only after six months.

Intercourse is suspended after the sixth month because women say it becomes uncomfortable for them. Usually a pregnant woman is allowed to go and spend some time in her maiti (:natal home) where her work is always light and her food the best. But after the seventh month it is felt that a woman should remain in her ghar (:husband's home), for it is not proper for a daughter to give birth in her father's house. If, because of a quarrel with her husband or some member of his family, a woman does give birth in her maiti, she does so outside the main house in a goth (:cowshed). Only her mother and female relatives may attend her or even see her during delivery and for the ten days of birth pollution which follow³⁶.

The whole development and delivery of a child is conceived of as a process of heating the woman's body. Thus if the body becomes greatly over-heated before full term, the child may be lost. For example, one woman explained to me how she miscarried after unwittingly eating a whole mana of honey in her sixth month because she hadn't known it was a heat-producing food. After the eighth month of pregnancy the woman's entire body is heated. "The whole body becomes weary. You don't feel like eating anything and there is a fever within you. From the eighth month there is atma joro (: fever which is not apparent physically, nevertheless still present within) and you are unable to do heavy work." Village women know that labor is always accompanied by a fever, and experienced women can judge the amount of time left before a woman will deliver by feeling how hot her forehead is.

Often during the last two months, though the stomach and breasts get bigger, a woman's face is said to get thinner and her eyes become sunken because the unborn child's appetite is growing and it is eating more and more of its mother's food. At this time special effort will be made to feed her well. She usually continues to do much the same work in the fields and around the house with the exception of carrying heavy loads. Almost all informants describe the onset of labor as interrupting some task - laundry, cooking, etc. - which they stoically finished before informing anyone of their condition. However there are certain ritual prohibitions on the activities of pregnant women. After the fifth month they will not be allowed to do puja or go to a temple. And after the eighth month a woman may not cook dāl bhāt (:lentils and rice) for her elders or touch water which they are to drink.

Labor and Delivery

Sometime before labor (: betha lagnu, betha chalnu) actually begins (a few days or even a few hours) the child drops lower in the womb to the head of the birth canal (dhunginu: from dhunga (:stone), to drop like a stone). At that point the child has turned (pharkayo) to its birth position. When labor begins and a surehni (:midwife) or other experienced woman is called, she will feel the mother's stomach to determine where the child's head is. A normal head first presentation is called a taro baccha. (:upright baby). Feet first presentation is called ulta janmeh ko baccha (:reverse or upside down birth). If such a child is a male he must later be sure to step over his wife at the beginning of each labor, so that his children are not also born feet first. Such deliveries are thought to be more dangerous for both the mother and the child. The most difficult however, is a terso baccha or transverse lay, and for such a delivery villagers say they can do nothing except try to get the mother to a hospital and a doctor.

It is considered extremely important that the mother be kept warm during and after the delivery. Even in the warm summer months, delivery usually takes place near a fire - either an open hearth on

the mud floor of a portable clay bowl full of coals (:makal). Ghee or oil will be heated and rubbed (:seknu) on the mother's back, rectal area and stomach. This massaging is always a downward motion on the stomach and on the back moves from the spine outwards. It is thought not only to ease the pains but to speed the passage of the child. The woman in labor will be dressed in a petticoat and thick cotton dhoti for warmth. Her blouse may be removed occasionally for the massages, but the waist cloth is never removed. It is tied high above the stomach "to prevent the child from going up to the mother's mouth." If she is hungry a woman will be fed foods such as hot milk, ghee and rice, or a kind of heated sugar water (:misri pani) which are considered to be internally warming foods. The laboring woman is expected to run some fever and to perspire, because the whole exertion of labor is conceived of as an internal heating of the body which must be aided by the external fire, warm oil rubs etc.

In the village where my research was conducted there are no longer any surehnis or midwives. Instead, there are two experienced women (janne manche), one or both of whom are usually called. But these women seem to be of very different types. One is an older Brahman woman from a respected family who is called for advice in determining the child's position and the probable time of delivery.³⁷ She may also help with massaging, but she does not involve herself with the polluting task of cleaning up the after birth or washing the mother's blood-stained dhoti. She is not paid, but merely given some of the special foods brought for the mother after birth and fed on the eleventh day naming ceremony. The other woman is from a poorer Chetri family and does perform the tasks of cleaning up which were traditionally performed by the lower caste (but not untouchable) surehni. This woman expects a cholo (blouse) in return for her services as well as food. Neither woman however are qualified to "reach inside" if necessary to aid delivery the way traditional surehnis are said to have done.

Another category of specialists also absent from the village studied is the dhai ama. She is less involved with the technicalities of birth than the surehni though she may aid in the massaging during labor. Her main tasks are washing and oiling the newborn infant and attending to the mother during the sutak confinement by rubbing oil and perhaps washing soiled diapers and clothes. Many women remember female slaves or ghartinis (of clean and often high caste status) who filled the role of dhai ama for all the women in a large joint family. Even though many were slaves, the status of a dhai ama seems to have been higher than that of a surehni. Moreover, surehnis are felt to engage in slightly dubious occult practictices. Women say that once one has called a surehni in (as many would like to do for only the first birth), she has the power to make subsequent deliveries long and difficult if she is not called again. Also many surehnis are said to save the supari (betel nut) on which the umbilical cord of the new-born child

has been cut. They then sell this nut at a high price to a barren woman who places it inside a banana and eats it on the fourth day after her period in the hope of becoming pregnant. A further practice of surehni which one informant remembered from her childhood and found alarming was that of smearing the newborn infant's mouth with some of the blood of childbirth. The surehni had said this would make the child's lips red when it grows up.

Men, children and all women who have not yet given birth to their own children are excluded from the delivery area. The presence of the latter group is said to make the woman's labor longer and more painful. In fact women say that the fewer people who know about it the shorter the labor. Children, however, seem to ignore the ban quite often, because many women remember vividly the birth of their brothers and sisters. Men are not even supposed to hear a woman's cries during labor and the shame of letting them hear seems to be a strong incentive to stoicism on the women's part. However, some women reported that their husbands had helped them with the early stages of labor when they were still reluctant to let anyone else know. Women are discouraged from calling on the name of their mother during labor because it is said that three mothers will then bear the burden of the labor pain—the delivering woman, her mother and mother earth.

The breaking of the waters is called sano sutak and after it labor which becomes more intense is called kanné betha. The women say that the seto pani (:white water) which comes is helpful because a rasilo (:wet) birth is easier than a dry one. During labor and delivery women do not lie prone. They either squat or kneel on all fours. The effort of bearing down (:kannu) to push the child out is described by many women as similar to the motions of defecation. At the time of birth a woman helper gets behind the mother and with her knee or hands presses against the mother's rectum. If this is not done women say the child may come out "where we defecate" and the mother will die.

As soon as the child is born the midwife (or woman in charge) rubs the mother's stomach with oil and ties waist cloth very tight to make the placenta (: sal) come out³⁸. Women believe that when the afterbirth is not expelled, it travels toward the heart causing the mother to swell up and die. There are several methods to aid in the delivery of the placenta: the woman may hang by her arms from a stair railing or low rafter; she may be told to squat on two unglazed bricks over a basin of steaming hot water; or she may be made to swallow some of her own hair rubbed in cow dung. This latter technique, intended to make the woman vomit and thus exert down to expell the placenta, is also used occasionally to make the woman exert during the final stages of a prolonged delivery. Once the afterbirth has been expelled the mother is made to sit down immediately and stretch out her legs "or else the path through

which the baby comes out becomes big and there'll be the risk that the intestine (:andra) and stomach (:bhuri) may come out also."

Women try and face either east or west so the child will be born facing an auspicious direction rather than towards the north or south which are associated with death:

When the child is born most informants agree that it may be seen by the mother. But never can it be shown to the father until a gyotish (:astrologer) has been consulted to determine whether the child has been born under a mulh (:an unlucky astrological sign) dangerous to its father. In such cases the child may simply have to be concealed for a few days from the father, or it may have to be removed from its parent's house altogether and raised by others until the dangerous period has passed. Such unfavorable mulh are rare and some informants admitted that they had not bothered to consult a gyotish before looking at their child. The following account is a case where the mother's death was blamed on the child's mulh by some members of the family. I quote it at length because it gives a sense of the procedures and reactions to a complicated delivery when no doctors or hospitals are available. The speaker is recounting the birth of her brother when she was seven years old:

I was playing about when I saw a huge snake in the kitchen. I shouted and my father came to see if it was true. Then he said that a snake should not be taken out through the door, so he took a stick and flung it out the window into the agan (:courtyard). They say that when a snake enters a house then there will be evil days.

About a week after that snake had entered, they say that mother went down to milk the cow and our buffalo gored her with its horn. Her blouse was ripped from here to here and there were wounds all over her body. She was on her hands and knees like this calling my name. I was afraid when I saw her and went to get father. Father said that she shouldn't have gone to milk the cow - that he would have done it. He scolded mother. Then he caught her by the arms and took her up to the house. She was ill for about a week with fever and there was fear that something might happen to the baby that was inside her. There was some medicine that had been brought from the city and she put that on.

When her labor pains began, father was out in the fields. It was time for harvesting the rice. Mother had got up in the morning and swept the

kitchen, milked the cow and gone to cut grass for the cow. She told me to do puja, so I went to the spring to fetch some clean water for puja. And while I was gone mother began her labor pains with no one there except my ten year-old cousin Leela. Leela came running saying my mother was in labor.

Mother said it was true. She had only cooked rice for us children and she said she wouldn't have time to cook the tarkari as well. She told me to go and call hazur ama (:grandmother). When hazur ama came she said not to mind the tarkari. We children could eat meat left over from Desai.

Then hazur ama held my mother's hand and sat there. Our dhai ama, that ghartini woman whom we had with us, held her from the other side. Mother said she was in great pain. They held her from behind around the waist. When a baby is being born then there's pressure at the rectum because the baby wants to come out.

I was there with my mother. I was peeping around to see what it was they did to mother and to see if the baby was going to be a boy or a girl. Actually the grown-ups tell you to go outside, but we do not listen to them and we go and look and they let us stay.

Then mother had the baby. She gave birth to a bhai (:younger brother). The mother has to keep the baby covered with the phariya (cotton sari). When mother lifted her phariya and looked, she said the baby looked just like Sri Krishna. But she should not have done that. As soon as the baby comes, then a vyotish has to be consulted about whether the baby has come under the mulh of the father or the mother. Only when this has been done can the baby be seen by others. But my mother felt like looking. She was happy because a son had been born. I covered the baby because I knew she was not supposed to look.

Then father went to consult the family priest. He was told that there was nothing to fear and that my father was very fortunate as he now had two sons and a daughter. Our priest said it would be a very happy family.

But when father came back, he was told that the delivery had been very hard on mother. She couldn't

see anything. She said a cloud covered her eyes and she couldn't recognize any of us. Someone who knew about such things came and felt her pulse. She had not eaten anything since the morning, so they cooked a little ghee, milk and misri together and fed it to her. But she threw it all up. And then she began to throw fits.

The dhai ama was asked to take the child and cut the nal (:umbilical cord). It was cut and bhai was separated from mother. But really, you shouldn't cut the cord until the afterbirth (:sal) has come out. And now the afterbirth was in the womb and the baby was outside. The afterbirth must come out quickly. If it remains inside for a long time then it expands and goes to the heart and the woman dies. In those days there were no hospitals. If a hospital had been there, then the doctor would have taken out the afterbirth right away and she would have lived. When the afterbirth did not come for hours they hung a kuto (:mattock) from the umbilical cord...since it is supposed to be something heavy. But even then the afterbirth did not fall out.

Mother was told to eat some rice, but she refused. She was lying down like this and my grannie put a pillow under her to make her more comfortable. And she passed away there.

Our youngest grandfather was there and even though he was not to touch mother as she was in sutak (:birth pollution) he felt her nose. It was very cold and he said she wouldn't live. I fainted then. Grandmother and everyone began to cry and wail because mother was dead. I remember they had to throw her from the third story window out onto the angan because she had died in the house and they could not let her be carried out through the door.

Grandfather said that the baby was to be taken away and given to someone to be brought up. They said it was an ama-tokuwa (lit:one who bites the mother). They said he had eaten up his mother. The baby had been born in the mulh, even though the jyotish hadn't said anything about it. So they said the baby should be taken and given into the house of the lato (:man who is deaf and dumb; cretin).

But grandmother was very fond of sons. She said that if the baby had been a daughter then they could have given her away, but it was a son so he would drink the milk of her eldest daughter-in-law who was still nursing. She argued that mother's time had been up so she died; the baby hadn't eaten her!

So our Thulo Ama (:father's elder brother's wife) kept the baby...and father gave her plenty of buffalo milk, chura and sugar...so she could produce milk for his son. Our Aunt kept the baby for thirteen days and then Phupu (:father's elder sister) came for Tihar. She said that she would take her brother's son and raise it. "I have lost a son and I am a widow. I will take this baby." She had given birth to a son, but it died. She said that this way she would get over the sorrow of her dead son.

So our phupu raised him. Father sent her a goat from the terai, one that gave a lot of milk for the baby. He sent grains, maize and wheat and some money for school fees. But Phupu herself spent a lot. She went to a lot of trouble. She used to cook litho (:a rice flour and ghee paste mixed with water or milk and heated) for him. When the baby cried, he pulled at Phupu's breasts and they say that real milk came from them even though she had not nursed for seven years.

The Sutak Period

Sutak (from the sanscrit sutaka:birth) refers to the specific ritual pollution which attaches to a woman, her husband and (in varying degrees), all her affinal relatives after she has given birth. This period is also called kuna ma (lit: in a corner) or sutkeri hunda though the latter term extends beyond the formal ten days of sutak impurity to the entire period of the mother's recovery. Sutkeri refers of the new mother herself.

Conceptually, sutak pollution for the mother is the same as menstrual pollution, but greater in intensity. As one informant explained, "The residue of menstrual blood that has not come for ten months now comes with the baby, so it is like all those months of na chune compressed into ten days." The sutkeri spends most of this period resting on her mattress of heaped straw (mattresses or quilts of cotton would be permanently polluted by her) in a dark room with as few doors and windows as possible. A small knife is put under her pillow as protection against supernatural beings

which may try to harm her or the child. The infant may not be exposed to sun-light for ritual reasons, but the closed room is also preferred for the mother because she is especially vulnerable to drafts after child-birth. If she is not kept warm at this time she is liable to cramps, and swelling so she will dress warmly and wear slippers around even inside the house.

The sutkeri is untouchable to all, but especially to men during this period. Women of course do touch her when they come to massage her with oil or help her walk if she is weak etc. But such women helpers must wash their body, hair and change to clean clothes before eating or touching a man. The infant itself is not polluted and may be handled and fondled by men and women alike. But it must be placed on the neutralizing earth or gobar floor by the mother and not handed directly.

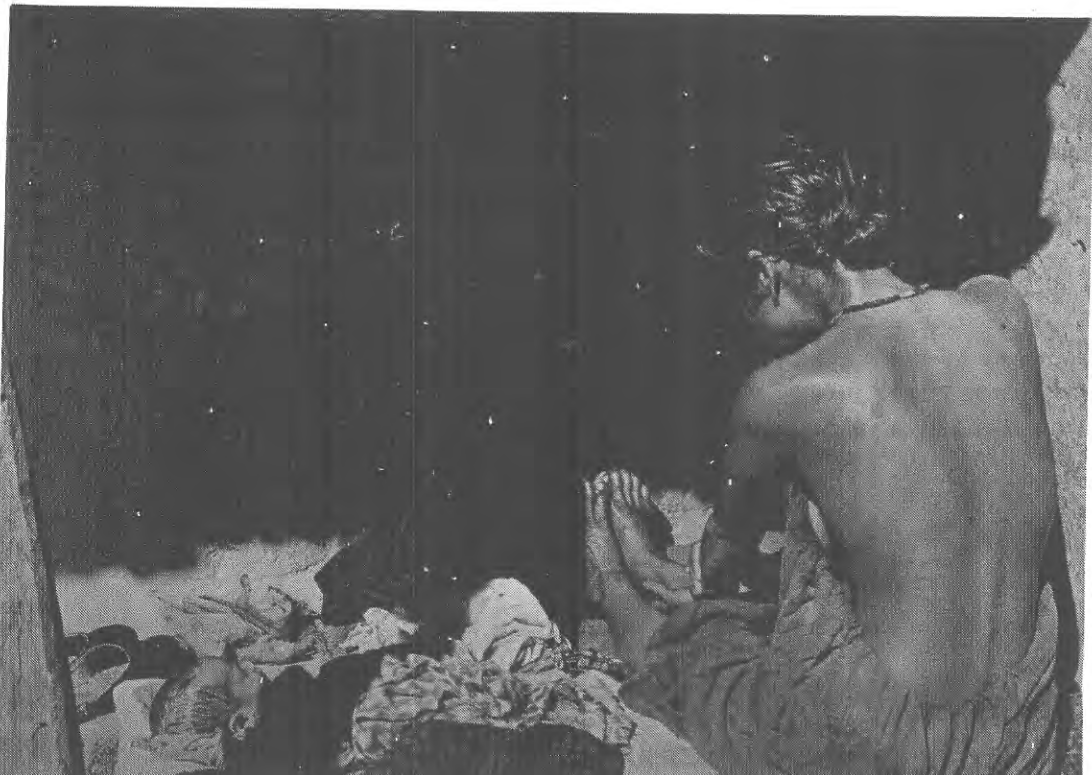
Sutak as it affects the husband and members of his household is very different from that which affects the sutkeri herself. Other household members are not considered polluting to touch and may move freely in the community. There are no restrictions on food as there are during death pollution. They are restricted however from worshipping family or temple gods and from having bartamans or weddings etc. in the family. Sutak lagne and the consequent ban on such celebrations takes effect only after the umbilical cord is cut. Hence sometimes if a big wedding is underway which would be expensive to postpone, the cord is not cut. Instead the afterbirth is put in a brass vessel and covered (to keep away flies and reduce the bad odor) and the cord cut only after the crucial rituals are complete in the wedding. Another case where the cord is not cut is when an illegitimate infant is secretly abandoned. As long as the umbilical cord is intact the infant is considered to be casteless and can assume the caste of whoever takes it in and cuts the cord.

There is some uncertainty about when the umbilical cord (:nal) should be cut. Although it is more orthodox to sever it within an hour or two of birth most women wait at least until the next day and sometimes longer to do so. "It is said in the sastar that we shouldn't keep the nal for five-six days for our convenience like we usually do. It is said that it has to be severed within two hours of birth or it might be jutho." Unless the mother is too ill or weak, she herself will cut the cord because the task is highly polluting and she is already in a state of pollution. The cord will be tied off at the base with kancho dago (:new undyed string) and cut about five or six inches long. Nowadays a razor blade is preferred, but a small knife or even khukuri or sickle may be used. A mohar coin or a supari is placed under the cord as it is cut and within a few days women say it gets black, dries up and falls off. Some keep a piece of the cord sewn into a small amulet (:buti) around a male child's neck as protection. 39

Again, if she is able, the mother herself will take the carefully concealed placenta (:sāl) outside to some corner of the courtyard or kitchen garden or perhaps to the edge of a nearby field and bury it. Like menstrual blood, the placenta, if seen by a bokshi, leaves both the mother and the child vulnerable to witchcraft. It is also a common belief that a child will return to the place where the sāl is buried, so sometimes when a child hangs around the kitchen area too much, he will be teased and asked if he thinks his sāl is buried there. Women believe that the distance the sāl is buried from the house is proportional to the time it will take them to conceive again. So if they want to have more children soon, they will bury it in the courtyard and if they wish to practise "family planning", they will take it to a far-off field. After the sal is buried a leaf plate containing a votive light (:diyo batti) is placed over the spot.

Women are apt to be rather disheveled and not very clean during the sutak period. In fact sutakari justo (:like a sutkeri) is used as a synonym for sloppy, lazy and unkempt. The sutkeri is not supposed to comb her hair or go to the dhara to bathe. Further-

"A sutkeri (:new mother) rubs herself with oil in the morning sun." (Photo by Alice Wygant).



more, because of the belief that the sutkeri is especially vulnerable to chill and damp, even sponge baths with water carried up by others are avoided by many women who feel it risky to be at all wet. Instead, heated oil is applied lavishly to head and body. A fire or pot of coals is usually kept going for warmth. Some women throw juwano (:medical herb; Ligusticum ajowan), sop (:aniseed) and methi (:fenugreek) seeds into the fire and stand over the fire allowing the smoke to ease soreness in the vagina and "keep the womb from falling out" (:pukaune na niskine; ang na niskine). A more common method of the same juwano, sop and methi seeds in an oil soaked cloth which is heated over the fire and then placed in the vagina itself.

Although the sutkeri is generally unkempt, her breasts are washed with warm water soon after delivery because this practice is said to start the milk flowing. Some women say that they begin to nurse immediately. But many say that milk came for them only on the third day - when it is traditionally supposed to come. Rich food and juwano ko jhol (:soup made from a medicinal herb, Ligusticum najowan) are said to be effective in making milk come. Another recipe for the same purpose is to mix ghee and dried ginger in hot water; then molasses is added and the whole mixture is brought to a boil and given hot to the mother to drink. Many women said no meat or blood of any kind should be taken for the first three days after the birth or the woman's bleeding will increase. But then, in contrast, one woman recommended taking rakti (:blood obtained from a goat after its head has been cut-off and the blood allowed to congeal) to make bleeding stop.

In the meantime until the milk has come, the hungry infant may be fed ghee, either hot or congealed with sugar, misri pani, cow milk (buffalo milk is thought to induce diarrhea because it is too rich) and litho (:rice flour and ghee paste mixed with hot water or milk). Since the preparation and storage of this initial food is rather casual, this interval before breast milk comes may be a dangerous one for the new born infant. Once the child begins to nurse he usually is given no supplementary foods (except medicines or, among those able to afford it, a nutrient supplement) until the fifth or sixth month when his system has developed some measure of immunity.

Unlike its mother, the new born infant can be, and is bathed, usually in warm water soon after birth. During the first ten days, and if possible until the six month pasne ceremony, a child should be oiled daily. During sutak the child should be given no stitched clothes to wear. It is covered instead with pieces of old saris while the damai (member of tailor caste) sits outside sewing up small bhotos (:sleeveless shirts with strings to tie at the shoulders) and at least one cap with a tiny cape down to the back to keep drafts off the child's neck. These clothes will be put on after the naming ceremony on the eleventh day. It is thought to be

bad luck to make clothes from new cloth until a child has had his pasne, so household members and neighbors are expected to contribute cast-off clothing for the infant's diapers (:talo) and his tiny mattress and pillow.

On the evening of the sixth day after birth (:Chaitom), a pen, book and a lamp are placed in the room where the baby sleeps. The lamp is kept burning all night for it is believed that on this night Bhabhi, the goddess of fate, comes and writes the child's fortune on its forehead and the goddess must have light and implements so she will write out a long future for the child. Nepalis always gesture toward their forehead when they speak of their personal fate or destiny and are fond of the saying. "Bhadhi le likeko, kasle metnu sakincha?" (Who can erase what Bhabhi has written?).

Nuharan: Naming & Purification Ceremony.

Finally on the morning of the eleventh day the sutkeri can go and bathe, wash her hair, clothes and bedding at the spring to prepare herself for the nuharan ceremony when her baby will be named and she and the household will be purified. The straw on which she has slept is burnt. It would be sinful to allow a cow to eat such straw or others to accidentally touch it - and the blood stains on it would allow a bokshi to attack.

The child's father - or if the father is absent, a classificatory father - must be present on this day to claim the child and give it his thar and gotra. He must also bathe on the morning of the ceremony and put on a new sacred thread. In cases where the child is illegitimate, the failure to produce a father for the nuharan condemns both the child and the mother to be henceforth untouchable. If the child's true parentage is unknown, no chance can be taken and the worst is assumed.

The family priest comes and inside the house on the ground floor he prepares a rekhi (:auspicious astrological design made with rice flour) on an area which has been freshly spread with gobar (:cow dung) by one of the women. He sets leaf dishes of uncooked rice (some of which was beneath the lamp on Chaitom) and brass pots full of water, etc. down on the design to represent the gods that are being called to bless the child. Then, piling firewood in a neat pyre in the center, he begins to do a hom (:vedic worship of fire) ceremony chanting sanskrit and making offerings into the fire. He is assisted by the child's father who has drunk gaut (:cow urine with purifying powers) and done a godan (gift to a Brahman of one mohar and five paisa representing a cow and a calf) to purify himself. At one point in the hom ceremony the priest asks the exact time of the birth and then consults his patro (:astrological almanac) for the child's religious name.⁴⁰

The father then tells the priest his thar and gotra and gives him tika. Then the Brahman writes the child's name with yellow kesari (:saffron) paste on a pipal leaf which is placed on the child's head, and the Brahman whispers the child's name into its ear three times. The Brahman then holds the child over the hom fire and bounces it in the air three times. This is said to make the child brave - but also serves to purify it through association with the fire. Now the child may be taken outside and given its first view of the sun. The child's mother or grandmother covers the child with a shawl and carries it outside placing its feet on the ground and then uncovering it to the sunlight. Black gajal will be put around the child's eyes and if it is a girl her ears may be pierced.

Next the Brahman gives tika to the baby, the father and other members of the family. He then mixes panch amrita (:a mixture of ghee, curds, cow urine, dung and honey with great purifying powers) which is first offered to the family gods to purify them and then given to each family member to drink. Some is sprinkled around the circumference of the house and on the family. The family members, thus purified, come to the Brahman to have the protective yellow rakya bandan strings tied to their wrists. The child's father must then give tika and dakshina (:small gift of money to a ritually honored person) to the daughters of the house. Unless they feel it is unlucky because they have lost so many children or cannot afford the jyotish's fee, the family will have the child's cina (:horoscope) written out on that day.

There is a slight variation in the purification rites which are done for the sutkeri woman during the nuharan. If the family is large and there are enough other women to do the cooking and carrying of water, then the new mother may be left in a state of mild pollution similar to that on the fourth day of menstruation. She is touchable and may comb her hair and move about freely, but still may not cook or touch water which others will drink. If the woman is to be given this extra "vacation" then she merely bathes, drinks gaut and is sprinkled with panch amrita at the nuharan. After another eleven days, on the twenty-second day after delivery, she becomes fully purified by bathing again and doing a simple godan puja to a Brahman and receiving tika from him. This is considered more orthodox and prestigious, but in families short on female labor, the godan is done on the eleventh day and the new mother is able to cook and carry water thenceforth.

Even in the case of a miscarriage or a still-born child the sutak period must still be observed. If the foetus is lost before the fifth or sixth month when the sas enters then the woman must remain apart for seven days as if it were only a lightly longer menstrual period. On the eighth day after her bath she must do godan to a Brahman and then she is choko (:pure) again. If the child is lost after the fifth month or still-born, then the woman must observe the full ten days. On the eleventh day when the

nuharan would have taken place a Brahman is called to do a hom ceremony and give gaut to the woman and her family and sprinkle it around the house. In such a case the family will be observing both birth and death pollution simultaneously for the child. The latter observances will be described below.

The initial month after childbirth must be spent in the husband's house. At least once during that period the new mother must be given sutkeri ko ausadi (:medicine for the sutkeri). A long list of herbs and expensive⁴¹ spices are fried in ghee; the milk is added and the mixture is allowed to boil slowly for several hours. Some of the oil that comes to the top is drunk by the sutkeri and the rest is rubbed into her body. A large share of the remaining sweet mixture is given to her and the rest divided up among the family. This medicine is to bind or close up the mother's body after childbirth (jeu badhne lai). The sutkeri will be fed rice three times a day instead of the usual twice and she will be given as much meat (goat or fish) as can be afforded. Pan (betel wrapped in leaves) will be given to "clean out the blood" and a special rich sweet called gund pac.

If she and the infant are strong enough to travel after the first month, they go to stay at least one month and often several in the woman's maiti. This is viewed by women as one of the great rewards of childbirth. In the maiti, sutkeri ko ausadi is given again along with other rich foods cooked in as much ghee as the family can muster. The sutkeri spends many hours gam thapne or "soaking up the sun", covered with oil and often stripped bare to the waist. For now that she has borne at least one child, there is no shame in exposing her breasts. The infant is also placed in the sun because it is believed that it needs to be dried and warmed after its many months in the watery womb. Small collapsible tripods are made from sticks and hung with clothes to give the baby's face shade or else a doko is turned on its side and covered with cloth and the baby placed inside. Sometimes of course the doko has just been used to carry manure to the fields and may be far from clean. Also flies flock over the infant's oil-covered body and are largely ignored by adults.

When a woman who has had her first child returns to her ghar her father must send a full set of new bedding for the mother and child. Also, once his daughter has produced a child, the father can take rice at her ghar, whereas before if he were orthodox he would be reluctant to even accept a glass of water in her marital village.

Pasne: First Rice

Just as female infants were said to move in the fifth month of pregnancy rather than the sixth, so girl babies are ready for their pasne or first rice feeding ceremony in the fifth month, one month earlier than boys. This is said to be because girls develop faster,

but may also be due to the fact that females are usually connected with odd numbers and males with even in Hindu symbology. The pasne ceremony is simple. A brahman or jyotish is asked to consult his patro and name an auspicious day and hour for the child to be fed his first rice. Sometimes the family cooks khir (: a rich rice pudding) which is offered to the god in a public temple and then fed to the child and its relatives. Often however, khir or an ordinary rice meal is cooked and given at home. The child, dressed in new yellow clothes, is fed his first rice, usually on a one mohar coin by the senior male member of his father's household and than all the others "whom the child must respect" (: manne manche) must feed him in order of rank. Then, when the child's paternal relatives have finished, his mama (:mother's brother) and any other maternal relatives who have been called also feed him. Everyone who feeds the child must give it a gift of either money or new clothes and then they are feasted in return by the child's parents.

Women say that around the time of pasne, but sometimes several months later, the child's first teeth appear. After the first teeth have come, if a child dies he will be cremated with the uninitiated (karma na caleko) intermediate status rites of any unmarried girl or any boy who has not yet had his bartaman. The child's mother and father will observe five days of death pollution (rather than thirteen days as for a karma caleko adult) and the rest of the paternal relatives will observe only three days.

For a foetus, after the sas has entered or an infant before the coming of the baby teeth, there is a special simplified funeral rite. No distinction seems to be made between a premature still-born child and a child who has lived several months. Such infants are not cremated but buried. A hole is dug and a dish of milk is placed in the bottom and buried with the child or foetus. Then, five days afterwards milk is again brought and placed over the grave and a set of new clothes is made and given as dān to a brahman child of the same sex as the deceased. During the five days the child's mother and father eat only once a day avoiding salt or oil and may not do puja. Other paternal relatives eat only one meal on the first day and after bathing the next day are again choko.

Campbell⁴² notes that honored saints and smallpox victims who are said to be possessed by the goddess Sitala are also, like infants, buried rather than cremated. He suggests that all three of these categories are in some way "outside" the community for whom normal Hindu ritual applies. Both the achieved yogi and the smallpox victim have for different reasons transcended the normal human state. They no longer need the symbolic final purification of the body which the fire brings. Infants also do not need this purification because they have not yet fully entered the community. It is believed significant that Nepali Brahman-Chetri society chooses the appearance of the teeth, which conceptually if not always physi-

cally, occurs simultaneously with the feeding of the first rice, as the entry point. For rice itself is the central currency of the Hindu system of accounting purity and pollution. As soon as the child eats bhat (:cooked rice) he becomes vulnerable to and the source of food pollution (:jutho) and begins to need the ritual mechanisms of purification which society provides.

Initially the link which nursing establishes between mother and child seems to protect the child from pollution. Mother's milk is of course a choko or pure food and informants often explained that infant defecation and urine does not pollute as much as that of adults because the infant's only food is its mother's milk. Women often explained that mothers give milk because "God would not create a child without providing his food". This expresses the sense of biological dependence between the mother and her nursing infant which causes them to be perceived as an organic and hence ritual unit. We recall that a menstruating woman does not pollute the nursing child. But with the eating of his first rice, the nursing link begins to weaken and the child begins to be perceived as a separate ritual entity. The connection between the cessation of nursing and the achievement of full ritual being is further strengthened by the chewar or hair cutting ceremony. The chewar is part of the bartaman ceremony where as we said, the male child becomes a full status adult member of his caste community. For the chewar the boy must sit in his mother's lap while his hair is cut, but facing away from her where he cannot nurse as he did as a child.

Chetri-Brahman Concepts of Child Development

From family observations and casual discussions with informants it would seem that village Brahmans and Chetris have a very relaxed attitude about child development and especially about their role in it as adults and parents. Infants and young pre-school children are classified according to their level of physical and mental development into several often overlapping categories and it is believed that all normal children will pass at their own speed through these stages.

The first level, thangne ko baccha or kakhe ko baccha, is said to last usually five or six months. This is literally the "diaper" or "lap" baby. The kakhe baccha moves around very little (and is therefore easier to watch and content to stay in a basket crib suspended from the porch) but should eventually be able to smile, recognise close family members and grab objects. Then comes the bameh sarne or crawling stage which overlaps with the tuku tuku hirne or toddler stage. The tuku tuku hirne or early walking may begin anywhere from ten months to two years. During the toddler stage boli phutiyo and then tote boli or imitative sounds and baby talk, begins. Hurrinu or kudhne are used to describe a child who can walk with some assurance, and finally somewhere between the

age of five and six the child should achieve the prasasta bolne stage where it can converse freely and be understood.⁴³

This time-table is obviously very flexible and little concern is expressed if a child is months, sometimes even years, late in reaching a given stage. There is little competition between parents comparing the achievements of their offspring. Growing up is seen as a natural almost organic process which goes at its own pace more or less regardless of what the child's parents do. This attitude begins with the child's early achievements in motor control and often continues throughout his experience with formal education.

This is not to say the Brahman-Chetri parents take no interest in their developing offspring. It is true that young fathers in a joint household tend to be detached from the child in public situations out of respect for their own father who as head of the household is still the categorical "father" of the child⁴⁴. But grandfather, grandmother, mother et al will spend hours playing "give and take"⁴⁵ and later teaching the child to namaste etc. The child's early attempts at walking and tote boli (especially if it innocently repeats abusive or obscene language) bring warm response from the family. In fact tiny Brahman-Chetri girls probably reach the peak of their dancing careers when they can barely walk and have not yet learned to feel the laj or shame proper to the female sex. However this interaction with the child is seen less as a conscious effort to teach and develop the child than as a pleasureable family pastime. In fact, after the child achieves a certain level of skill in speaking and moving, he may find to his frustration that since he is no longer so amusing, less attention is paid to him.

Parents are held responsible for the child's development in certain areas. Cleanliness and eating habits - both of which are heavily loaded with ritual significance in Hindu culture - are two such areas which will be discussed subsequently. A third rather vague category, is bāni or habits, which includes eating and cleanliness but goes beyond to moral qualities such as honesty, chastity for girls respectfulness to elders and religious reverence. These are believed to be affected by parents and home environment. For children are believed to learn largely through imitation (:nakal garnu) of those around them. Often if a child steals adults will remark that it is because someone at home steals. Hence the available models are felt to effect the child's behavior - but the influence of adults in the home for good or for bad tends to be perceived as largely passive.

Direct discipline and confrontation especially when younger children misbehave seems to be avoided - though of course it does occur. This avoidance is especially apparent with the frequently witnessed temper tantrums thrown by young children when their wishes are not gratified. When adults cannot or will not meet a

child's demands (usually for food or spending money), they tend to ignore them. And when the child's nagging escalates to screaming, weeping and even pounding fists, the adult will either continue to ignore it or else tease and laugh at the child's display. The tendency is not to take the child seriously and get angry, but to remain detached and wait for the child's temper to subside.

Physical punishment is of course, given, but it is sporadic in the families I have observed and usually given only to children over nine or ten years old. Instead, threats are frequent. They begin, in fact, as one of the games played with small babies where the adult raises his hand to strike but follows through with only a gentle strike saying in a baby voice, "Pai garchu" (:I'll hit you). As the child gets older, he slowly learns that the raised hand sometimes means business - but not very often. Along with this, the decision to discipline certain types of behavior frequently appeared to be inconsistent. For example, in one family I have observed for two years, both parents were always quite casual if their son stole small sums of money or food from the locked cabinet (the lock of which he'd learned to pick) or from the pockets of his father's (or the visiting anthropologist's) clothes. They might scold him or grumble that he'd left none of the sweets or coins for his little sister, but they never confronted him with the idea of theft - even though both adults hold personal honesty in high esteem. Then one day recently when a rupee was found missing from the knot in my sari and the boy admitted taking it, he received a beating and an angry lecture from his father. The father had decided that the boy was no longer a child (he is twelve) and that if he continued to take things like that stealing would become a habit.

Eating Habits and Personal Hygiene

After the pasne ceremony, the child's diet of mother's milk begins to be supplemented with rice, cow's or diluted buffalo's milk and any vegetable tarkari which the family is eating. Even though adults eat in strict order or rank, children are always fed first. Up to the age of three or four, children are fed by their mother or some other adult women. If he is old enough to sit properly, the child is given his own pirka (:wooden plank seat) and usually eats every meal in the same place on the mud and gobar plastered floor by the cooking fire. Small children are fed in their mother's lap. The mother first kneads the food with her hands reducing any large pieces of vegetable to bite size and then blows on it to cool it. In families where economics permit variety, the child is

"A woman relaxing in her maiti (:parent's home) with her three month old baby." (Photo by Alice Wygant).



asked what it prefers - usually the choice is between rice with milk or with tarkari and dal. Usually the child is coaxed to take some of both, but never forced to eat what he doesn't want. Often, the head of the household may sit down to eat while the child is still being fed and, as a gesture of affection, he may give some of the tarkari from his plate to the child. Such food taken from the plate of another after they have begun to eat is considered jutho or polluted and would not be eaten by other adults (except a man's wife, as a sign of her respect for him), but the rules of food pollution are very lenient for young children. They can take food freely from almost anyone, but especially someone in the ritually superior position of the father. Until their adult teeth come in, they may even take food from an untouchable with no harm to their caste status - though this is not encouraged by parents. Several women interviewed remember with special pleasure sneaking to a damai or sarki (both untouchable castes) house to be given sweet foods. Even after adult teeth have come in, a relative leniency prevails until a boy's bartaman initiation or a girl's marriage. Some very strict and proper Chetri and Brahman women remember eating buffalo meat and even drinking a little rakshi at the houses of Newari friends when they were young. They are also allowed to take the ritually relevant foods (dāl and bhāt) from the people of castes lower than themselves as long as they are not untouchable (:pani na chalne). Once marriage or bartaman takes place however, these foods may be taken only from people of equal or higher caste.

Parents know that it is difficult for infants and children to go with only two full meals a day as adults do. So rice and some tarkari from each meal is set aside in a dish usually covered and weighted down with a brick so that cats or rats won't disturb it. In the morning rice called basi tasi from the previous meal is heated with some milk or left-over dal and fed to children under four years. If the family can afford it, hot milk or milky sweet tea perhaps with a handful of chiura (pounded rice) or four or five glucose biscuits or even store-bought bread thrown in will be given instead. Some rice from the mid-morning meal is also saved in the same way for the afternoon snack or kaja. Roasted soybeans, dal and popped corn are also given to children at that time.

Nevertheless children whine and tease for food constantly throughout the day and before each meal. This is permitted, parents say, up until the child is eight or nine (though I have observed it in children twelve and thirteen years old) and what is more, it is very often rewarded. Likewise, children who go to school tease their parents for money to spend on sweets or tea - especially those who go to school early before the morning rice meal. I have observed many scenes of children sulking and refusing to go to school at all until they had "extorted" a few paisa from their already hard-pressed parents.

Older children (above five years) are often asked to taste the tarkari or achar that the women are making and report if it is too hot or has enough salt, etc., because the cook cannot taste it herself without polluting it. Whenever the family has tea or some special food, a generous portion is given to children. And whenever a family member goes to town or a relative (especially a returning daughter or daughter-in-law) comes to visit, they are expected to bring some biscuits, fruits, or sweets to the children of the household. Such treats are called pāpā and no child under the age of eight is too shy to beg for them. I have not observed the denial of such foods used as a punishment -- though it is often used as a threat. Only in cases where sweet rich foods are thought to aggravate a child's illness will they be denied. Throughout Brahman-Chettri culture, the feeding of rich special foods is a cipher for affection and concern,⁴⁶ and this is especially true for children. A fat child -- like a plump woman -- is not only considered healthy and attractive, but beloved.

From the moment they are given their first rice, children begin to be taught the complex pollution concepts which surround the act of eating in Brahmin-Chettri homes. Infants' hands and faces are washed whenever they have eaten dāl bhāt -- though not always when they have eaten chokho foods even if they are just as messy. As soon as they can walk, toddlers are taught to go directly to have their hands washed by an adult after eating and not to touch anything or anyone with their jutho hands on the way. Reactions are strong when a child makes a mistake and praise lavish when he learns to clean himself, so that by the time they are four most children are deeply ingrained with proper ritual food pollution behavior. Non-ritual types of impurity, however, are hardly noticed. If food falls on the floor in the house or even on the ground outside, children pick it up and continue eating and are encouraged to do so by their parents. Children are also allowed to eat the bits of cut fruits or sweet breads that are left as offerings for the gods at indoor and outdoor shrines. Flies are also tolerated or swept away ineffectually when they cluster on a sweet which the child is eating. Children also eat unripe fruits and berries and over-ripe fruits which have fallen to the ground. Parents show little sympathy when the child complains of a stomach ache after gorging on such fruits, but no specific attempt is made to stop them.

Traditionally, children should not be bathed on Sundays and Wednesdays and never after dark in the evenings because to do so might attract bad spirits (pichas and bhuts) and ill-fortune to the child. If the child is ill or the day too cold the bath will be postponed - or if there is time, water will be heated. Soap is still somewhat a luxury, but is more and more common. Scrubbing is done with the firm strokes of adult hands. After bathing, the child is dried off and placed in the sun and rubbed with oil. A little oil is poured in each ear (the child may become deaf or have ear

aches if this is not done) and later after the hair is dry, it too is oiled. Women believe that hair which is not regularly oiled will not be lustrous and black, but wispy and reddish-brown like the foreigners who don't oil their hair. Lice are removed by hand and the process is sort of a game which mother and child enjoy. Heavy infestation or a rash may result in shaving the child's head entirely. Little girl's hair is usually kept short in the belief that it will later grown in thicker if this is done.

Some mothers also put black gajal around their infant's eyes every day believing that this will make the child's eyes bigger when he grows up. Children are always made up for visits to town or relatives. Even twelve year old boys dab on some of their mother's face cream and perhaps some powder (both believed to make the complexion lighter) - though boys do stop short of lipstick and gajal eye liner. Children brush their teeth the same way adults do - though less regularly - with a finger and some ash from the fireplace.

Toilet training, like eating habits, is important in terms of ritual purity, yet it seems to be viewed much more casually. Rags (:talo) are placed underneath infants as diapers and often, if they are soiled only with urine, they are not washed, but simply placed in the sun to dry. This practice may partially account for the frequent rashes on infants. As the child becomes mobile he is allowed to crawl around without pants or in the cold weather with pants that open up the back. This makes cleaning up easier. Training begins casually around the crawling stage with taking the child outside or to a kopara in the mornings and after meals and naps and encouraging him with "ssiss" sounds and praise. Most women seem to tolerate accidents and even expect them at least until the child is two or more. By then, he is expected to be able to make his need known in baby language⁴⁷, so that an adult or older child can take him outside or to a cemented drain or kopara upstairs. Eventually he will learn to go outside by himself during the day, but will have to call for someone to wash him off until he is four or five. If a young child is left unclean after defecation, it is taken as proof of the family's - especially the mother's - slovenly habits. Children use the kitchen garden, the pathways near the house and even the courtyard for defecation and are not expected to go out to the fields like adults. Even in rare families where an outhouse is available, children are not particularly encouraged to use it - so the attempt at preventing fecal borne diseases is greatly vitiated. My informants were all unaware of the fact that illness, such as the ever-present worms, were spread through feces.

Village Concepts of Child Illness and Home Treatment

The concepts which Brahman-Chetri villagers hold about child health are but part of a larger matrix of theories about illness

and curing, and not surprisingly they cannot be fully understood apart from them. These complex multi-layered concepts are described and analysed in Linda Stone's article "Concepts of Illness and Curing in a Central Nepal Village". In this paper I have attempted to give only some indication of how the more common childhood ailments are dealt with in the home by non-specialists.

From my observations, there seem to be roughly two overlapping categories in the village concepts of health which we might for discussion purposes call the "natural" and the "supernatural".⁴⁸ Natural refers here to ailments due to biological failure and usually amenable to cure through western or ayurvedic medicine or local village "common sense". Supernatural refers to the effects of sorcery, and attacks by evil spirits⁴⁹ and even by gods (:devtas) Such illnesses like that recorded on page 19 of this report, must be dealt with through the medicines and rituals of dhamis, jhankris and gubhajyus or through domestic and community worship of the devta or spirit in question. These categories however, are by no means mutually exclusive. An illness can be diagnosed as the result of both natural and supernatural causes at the same time. This often happens when much respected western medicine does not produce an immediate cure or even any cure at all. Villagers say then that a bokshi has cast a spell on the patient which prevents the western medicine from working (:ausadi rokyo), a jhankri or gubhajyu must be consulted who will perform the rituals and advise on the sacrifices etc necessary to counteract the bokshi's spell and allow the western medicine to do its work. In short, since the systems involved in the maintenance of health overlap each other, it is not surprising that the forms of treatment should also.

"Common sense" was mentioned above, along with western and ayurvedic medicine for dealing with illnesses in the natural realm. It refers here specifically to the traditional, non-specialist villager's home treatment of such sickness. The following are some of the common sense treatments which women informants said they follow for the usual illnesses of infants and children. Many of them center on food and theories of internal heating and cooling properties of various foods. For example, it is a common thing for boiled water which a doctor or health worker might recommend giving to a sick child to be equated with hot water. Villagers are apt to think that the temperature of the water, rather than the fact that the amoebic impurities have been killed, is the significant factor.

If a child is ciso or chilled from lying or sitting on damp ground, he should be rubbed with warm oil near a fire and given a heated brick wrapped in cloth to sleep with at night.

Joro or fever is treated by giving the child only rice and milk or possibly rahar or mung dāl - but never kalo or black dāl.

Eggs must not be given and amilo, (:sour) piro (:hot, spicey) and guilo (:sweet) foods are also avoided, as they all have heating properties. Nothing was mentioned about the necessity of feeding liquids, but on questioning, informants said a little hot water or milk could be given. The child should also be kept warm with clothes and quilts in a draft free room. Fever of course, is often combined with other symptoms, so it is a very unclear category. But in a survey⁵⁰ I conducted in my village, the third most common remembered cause of death for children was fever. If typhoid (three victims) is included, it accounts for ten deaths.

For ruga-khoki or cold and cough, once again amilo and piro foods are avoided. But gulio foods, if they are hot and cooked like tea are beneficial. Na pakeko gulio or uncooked sweet foods (such as hard candies) are not good. Kalo dāl (:black lentils) is excellent for colds just as it is bad for fevers - because of its heating properties. The child should be dressed warmly with his neck and stomach wrapped. Children are taught to clean the mucus from their noses with their fingers, but they and their mothers who often do it for them, are very casual about where they wipe their hands of the germ-filled mucus. The idea that coughing spreads the disease and thus should be covered seems largely unknown. Lahare khoki or whooping cough is in the category of such diseases as T.B. (:chayarog), tetanus (:dhanuse tankar), typhoid, diptheria (:bija gothir) pneumonia and asthma (:dam ko betha) for which there seem to be no home remedies.

Constipation or disa na hunne is believed to occur because the child's internal system is too hot. Hence, cooling foods like parsi (:pumpkin), amala (:a green berry) and any rasilo (:wet, juicy) fruits are given. Cool water, glucose and misri water are also good. Pisab rokyo or inability to urinate is treated by placing an onion on the child's navel and feeding glucose water to the child.

Diarrhea or cherne is treated by restricting water and milk in the belief that if the liquid intake is reduced, the child's stools will be less liquid. Fortunately, some say they will give hot milkless tea, because diarrhea means the child's internal system is too cool. A popular remedy for simple diarrhea or upset stomach in the village is agni kumari which can be bought from ayurvedic compounders. Agni is the vedic fire god and appropriately this sweet halva-like medicine is thought to warm the stomach and thus ease the diarrhea. Not surprisingly children love to take it. Fruit is also restricted. Many informants mentioned that teething (dānt phutinu) is often accompanied by diarrhea. More serious diarrhea or dysentery is called añ and if accompanied by blood in the stools is called añ rakat. For this jira pani (: a drink made from ground cummin seeds) or a tarkari or soup of dried karkalo (: the edible stalk and leaf of the plant Arum colocasia) is given. When severe diarrhea is also accompanied by vomiting, it is called either chadne cherne or jara banta. It may be symptomatic of

cholera or amoebic dysentary etc. The only home treatment for these symptoms seems to be to give dhai (:curds) and moi (:buttermilk). In my survey, a total of eleven children died from diarrhea in some form (au rakat, jara banta, cherne) or dehydration (:sukuwa betha) which is often associated with diarrhea.

Worms (jugas: general parasitic worms; dadra: ring worm) are extremely common and are usually treated with medicine bought from town or from a local compounder. The only home remedy known was mixing ash with water and drinking the water after the ash had settled. But this is no longer used where modern medicines can be had.

For gau-khatira which refers to any rash, pimple, sore or infected cut, one should refrain from giving the child bhatmas (:soy bean), mas ko dal (:yellow lentils) meat and any piro or amilo foods unless one wished to make the pus (:pip) come so that it can be more easily removed.

In discussing the next three diseases - measles, chickenpox and smallpox - we must go beyond our category of "natural illnesses". For, even though villagers say the rashes of these sicknesses may look just like ordinary khatira, they are caused by a goddess (devta ayo or devta lagyo). Hence the treatment must include not only common sense but religious observances.

Smallpox, the most deadly - but also now the least common - is called either bifer or simply Sitala after the goddess who brings the disease. In India Sitala is worshiped in many different ways - often by a whole village at once. The Brahmans and Chetris in my village said that they did puja individually when someone in the family was sick, they would either take the child - or if it was too sick, take something of the child's - and make offerings at the Sitala shrine at Pashupati which should include a live pigeon. They also do puja at home using an unbaked brick and making unree separate piles of offerings on it. The sores which should erupt in five or six days should not be broken by anyone, but should be rubbed with a paste made of Indian peanuts and sandalwood.

Sitala also causes dadura (:measles) and teula (:chickenpox) and the cure for both requires domestic worship at the onset of the disease, similar to that for smallpox. For dadura the most important common sense part of the cure is to not give any oily (:cillo) foods or rub the child with oil. As soon as the spots are detected, the child is placed in a dark room and covered with quilts. Four or five days later, the sores should erupt and the child covered at this time and a special mixture of bakhara ko dudh (:goat's milk), dak (:raisins) and boiyar ko gera ko bitra pati (:the inside of a berry also called gudi) must be given to the child so that all the sores "come out". A "wonder" drug (because it works in opposing ways) for these illnesses is gadh, a kind of lentil which is soaked

in water and then fed to the child. It is said not only to bring down the fever, but also to "heat up" the inside of the child's body to bring out the sores. It is believed that if all the sores don't come out at this time, the child may die. The restrictions on oil continues for one month and then a paste of barley flour (:kodo ko pito) is made and rubbed all over the body. When that is removed, the body is rubbed with sheep ghee (:bheri ko ghui) which is believed to remove the scars and finally with oil.

For teula, there is also a restriction on oil rubbed on the body and food cooked in oil. The child's mother must also refrain from oily foods (even if the child is no longer nursing) out of respect for the goddess who does not like oil. The same goat milk, raisin and berry mixture or a paste made from nim wood is made and rubbed on the sores.

Besides the "common sense" treatments listed above, most ordinary, non-specialist (certainly non-bokshi!) women know home treatments - a little curative domestic magic or jhar phukne - for the many illnesses.

Almost any woman for example, can cure a headache or other mild ailment for a child or another household member by waving a batti (:lighted lamp used for puja) three times above the affected person's head, blowing on some sesame seeds and throwing them out the door or window and taking the batti outside to the cross roads. Women also know that in the community feasts, where one must eat in the presence of many suspected bokshis, one can protect oneself by touching one's plate unobtrusively with one's foot while sitting down to eat. Food that has been touched by one's own foot is no longer a medium for transmitting the bokshi's spells. Likewise, all women know - though not all are bold enough to carry out - a method of making oneself invulnerable to the spells of any particular bokshi. If one can somehow manage to feed the suspect person even a miniscule particle of one's own feces disguised in some food, that person's most powerful mantras become henceforth nyasta (:ineffective) towards one.

Another common treatment that is done at home by family members is for a vague disorder called runche which can affect children if they touch a pregnant woman or a woman who has just given birth. The foetus (after the sas has entered) or the newborn baby causes children of the opposite sex to cry and act naughty and disobedient if they touch its mother. The cure can be done only on Tuesdays and Sundays early before the crows have cried in the morning. A mixture of ground grasses (armalijhar and dubo), cow urine and cow's milk and water is prepared. Without taking off the clothes he has slept in, the child is placed under a carrying basket (:doko) and the child's mother pours the mixture over the basket. The baby's urine is placed on its lips three times while the mother says, "Tewar, tewar Aitabar; Nani ko runchi

sat daun par. Runi Rouni ja; Hansi kelni a. (Tewar, Tewar Sunday, Let baby's crying go seven villages away. Crying, fussing, go; Laughing, playing come.) Then the baby's dirty wet clothes are removed and washed without wringing. A leaf plate containing sesame seed oil along with incense and a lighted wick, is placed between the child's legs as he sits in the doorway of the house and then removed and taken with the wick burning to a crossroads.

FOOTNOTES

1/ Only males who have been initiated (karma caleko) with the sacred thread can perform sacrifice for the kul devta - the god who if pleased protects and brings good fortune to the family unit. Also it is the son's responsibility to perform austerities (kirya basne) at his father's death and the commemorative sradha ceremony thereafter on the lunar anniversary of the death. This responsibility carries over two generations and becomes should-read:

2/ Mulki Ain (Nepali version) p. 211, Himalaya Pustak Bandar, Kathmandu, 1972 (Nepali year 2029).

3/ In more remote areas such as Nuwakot district this "fashion" had not yet affected the Brahman-Chetri community and the large majority of marriages occur before the girl has reached the legal age. Linda Stone, personal communication.

4/ A marriage and fertility survey was conducted for all the Brahman-Chetri women past menarche, who were presently members of the local patrilineal kin groups of the village. Specifically, this group of fifty-nine women includes unmarried daughters who are still members of their father's thar and gotra and married women who have become members of their husband's thar and gotra. Married daughters who have become members of their husband's thar and gotra in other villages are not included.

5/ This is consistent with the high emphasis Hinduism places on the purity of its women. Such a practice was felt to insure a virgin bride. For further discussion see Yalman's excellent article "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar" Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 193, 1963.

6/ The average age of menarche-which is relatively late in most developing countries - has a clear correlation with nutrition level: The higher the nutrition level, the earlier is the average age of menarche.

7/ Most Brahman and Chetri farmers - especially young men still living in a joint family with their fathers - try to get a jagir or job with the government, military, schools etc. They are gone most of the time, leaving farm management to a father or brother and farm work to the wives, but the job provides a much needed source of cash income.

8/ Splitting the joint family (bine basne; chutaune) does not occur only on the death of the father. The ideal is for the brothers to continue to live together under the leadership of the eldest. The reality is often a split even before the father's death.

9/ There is one such case in my village, but the woman's mother who is now seventy-five brought several thousand rupees with her to buy land for her son-in-law. Otherwise, she says, she would have been ashamed to come and live in her son-in-law's house and she would have become a religious mendicant (jogini) living through begging and government religious donations. This is a fate universally dreaded by all my informants and despite its religious aspect, it seems to be only the resort of the desperate. See the report by Okada and Rana, "The Child Beggars of Kathmandu" (Research-cum-Action Project, Paper No. 2, Kathmandu, 1973) for some statistical data on the numbers of such women.

10/ The good daughter-in-law is expected to rub oil on the sasu's feet and massage her legs at bed time, wash the sasu's clothes and bedding, and before each rice meal, drink the water in which the sasu's feet have been ceremonially washed as a sign of humility and respect.

11/ Young daughters-in-law are practically never given the keys to the store room while daughters of the same age and much younger will be entrusted with them.

12/ Often, in fact, men used to bring in second and third wives even after the first wife had borne a son. But such weddings, though legitimate, were done without parental consent and financial aid or broad social approval because they were obviously for the man's pleasure and not for duty.

13/ The phrase used when a girl is brought in to be second or third wife is: Sauta māti bihā garnu. Literally it means to "marry over (or on top of) a co-wife" and it belies the fact that, although the new wife should give ritual deference to the elder wife, she often has more power in the household because she usually has the husband's affections.

14/ For further discussion of this Hindu dicotomy see: a) Dumont, Louis: "World Renunciation in Indian Religion" in Contributions to Indian Sociology, No. IV. b) Campbell, J. Gabriel:

Saints and Householders: a Study of Hindu Ritual and Myth among the Kangra Rajputs, Bibliotheca Himalayica in Press.

15/ See footnote 1, page 2.

16/ The aśrama theory requires that the individual go through four life stages: celibate student, householder and finally two successively more severe stages of withdrawal from family into religious concerns. Before a high caste boy can marry or assume full caste status (karma caleko), he must go through the bartaman ceremony in which he temporarily becomes a brahmacharya or ascetic student of the first aśrama. The boy must have his head shaved, don the yellow robes of mendicancy and symbolically beg like a wandering ascetic from his relatives. Then only does his maternal uncle call him back to eventual marriage and fatherhood - the duties of the second householder stage. Some few villagers who can afford to in their old age do delegate most of the family responsibilities to their sons and turn more to religious concerns. But this is less a conscious fulfillment of the third aśrama than a general attitude that religion is the appropriate concern of the elderly. As mentioned previously, the fourth aśrama of wandering mendicancy is never sought voluntarily by villagers.

17/ Some women said that a child conceived on the fourth day will be a trouble-maker, while the child conceived on the fourteenth day will be laksin (:auspicious, bringing good luck). This would also seem to indicate a certain ambivalence about intercourse on the 4th day after menstruation.

18/ Men seem to be much less the subject of this kind of accounting. Although the idea of male infertility is not unknown, the "spiritual responsibility" for lack of children tends to rest more heavily with women. For example, when I presented to one informant a hypothetical case of one man who had married four wives and had not been able to have any children, she agreed that it was because the man was infertile, but added immediately that it was those women's unlucky karma to have married such a man.

19/ For fuller description & discussion, see my "Maiti-ghar: An Examination of the Dual Role of Women in Northern Hindu Kinship From the Perspective of the Chetris and Brahmans of Nepal" in The Interface of the Himalayas, James Fisher, ed., The Hague: Mouton, in press.

20/ For another description of Tij and Rishi Panchami see K.B. Bista's article, "Tij ou la Fete du Femmes", p.7 in Objets et Mondes, Vol 9, 1969.

21/ In the more remote hill areas, all ritual bathing, including the purification of the genitals, is done by the river in large groups.

22/ Yalman, op.cit. p. 32.

23/ It is said that the face of the first person a woman sees after completing her fourth day bath determines what a child conceived on that day will look like. One exceptionally light-skinned, brown-haired child in the village is said to have been conceived after his rather dark-skinned mother had seen a foreign "hippie" after bathing.

24/ Carstairs, M.G., The Twice Born. London: Indian University Press, 1967.

25/ The responsibility is a vague one being the result of some forgotten sin in past lives as the earlier informant explained (p.14).

26/ Many women showed great interest in depo pavera birth control injections when told that it would stop their periods. But they were also worried that the "old, spoilt blood" would collect and cause illness.

27/ Ghee, honey, black mustard seeds, yogurt, an herb called aledo, and the juice from inside a cactus stem.

28/ Sex is also believed to harm children if they are sleeping nearby when their parents have intercourse. Women said that an illness called moc ko betha caused by the hawa (:wind or breeze) created during intercourse affects children if they are near the couple.

29/ I found that while women perceived men as wanting and enjoying sex and themselves as weakened by it, men said the exact opposite. Though the sample of men I could discuss the subject with was, admittedly, very small; they responded that intercourse was good for women and debilitating for men!

30/ Women seemed to feel it was legitimate, however, for their husbands to sleep with their co-wives when they themselves were having their periods.

31/ I have pursued this subject more thoroughly in my dissertation.

32/ I am grateful to Linda Stone for drawing my attention to the last three classifications.

33/ Infertility and miscarriage are, of course, only two of the many illnesses and misfortunes ascribed to witchcraft, and males and children are just as vulnerable as women though perhaps less frequent victims. The cause of almost any illness or at least its failure to be cured, can be ascribed to witchcraft.

For fuller discussion of witchcraft in the village setting see Linda Stone's article "Concepts of Illness and Curing in a Central Nepal Village."

34/ There are some methods of counter-acting the bokshi's work which even non-specialist can do. See page 44. below for a description of some common protective practices.

35/ Tunu is the verb "to miscarry" and is used commonly for animals and for humans - but for humans tueko or tuera palyo implies more responsibility for the miscarriage.

36/ This is consistent with the strict shielding of a woman's sexuality (starting with the gupha basne puberty rite) from her male consanguineal kin. For fuller discussions see my article "Maiti ghar" op.cit.

37/ Others including older Brahman men may also be called in to judge the length of labor.

38/ This practice may be partially responsible for the high incidence of procidencia uteri (prolapsed uterus) among village women in Nepal. Dr. Prasana Gautam, personal communication.

39/ My village survey showed that of the 53 child (under 15) deaths, naite pakeko or infected navel accounted for two of the remembered causes.

40/ The nuharan name is usually kept relatively secret and used only for religious purposes like marriage. A bolaune naum or calling name is given by the family when the child is a little older and has some personality.

41/ Batisa ko dhulo (:a mixture of thirty-two ingredients bought ready made); juwano (:ligusticum ajowan); methi (:fenugreek); sop or suf (aniseed); caku (molasses); misri (:crystalized sugar); nariyol or naravan gol (:coconut); cokhra (:dried dates); kaju (:cashew nuts); luang (:cloves); alaichi (:black cardamun); sukumil (:small green cardomum); dalcini (:cinnamon); pesta (:almonds).

42/ Campbell, J. Gabriel, op. cit.

43/ The only case I have encountered of concern over slow development on the part of parents was with a six year old girl who - mostly out of shyness - hardly spoke at all. A specialist was consulted and his rather traumatic treatment was to lock the child in a room alone and not let her out until she spoke!

44/ In such cases, the child will grow up calling its grandfather ba (:father) and its biological father thulo dai (big elder brother) until it is five or six years old.

45/ This seems to be one of the first games adults play with infants. The adult asks the child for some object saying "Give" and holds his hands out for it. The child is praised when he relinquishes the object and saying "Take", the adult returns the object to the child and the exchange is begun again.

46/ Hence young husbands in a joint family sneak sweets to their wives and the theme of many festivals centers on the feeding of various kinship categories. For example, wives are fed by husbands on Tij; fathers by children on Kusi Ausi; Mothers by children on Matha Tirtha; brothers by sisters on Tihar; the ancestors by their progeny on Sraddha; and by extension, the gods are fed by their devotees whenever they are worshipped.

47/ Shu shu garnu: urinate; achi garnu: defecate.

48/ "Natural" and "supernatural" as used here correspond with the categories "physical" and "metaphysical" used by Linda Stone in her "Concepts of Illness and Curing in a Central Nepal Village" see elsewhere in this volume - ed.

49/ i.e. bhuts pichas et the "ghosts" of individuals who either died a violent death when it was not their "time" or whose funeral observances were not carried out properly. Pichas come back and draw attention to their needs by attacking the living.

50/ Out of 120 children borne to the 48 married women in the survey, 53 died before age 15. The greatest single category were the 15 infants who were either stillborn or who had died so soon after birth that the cause of death could not be determined or was not clearly remembered.

Treatment of a headache by application of a mantra while healer's hand grasps temple of patient. (Photo by the author)

