

MARRIAGE AND THE CONSTITUTION OF HIERARCHY AND GENDER IN BAHUN-CHETRI HOUSEHOLDS

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Introduction

I begin with a mild 'deconstruction' of the title of Collier's book, *Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies* (1988)¹. I assume that the 'unsaid' of the term 'classless' describes societies in which social relations are characterised by equality, whether normatively or praxically defined. Further, the term classless immediately suggests a marxist perspective which locates the origin of equality in the mode of production. As a result, the title proposes it is marriage that introduces inequality into societies which are, in terms of economic infrastructure, fundamentally egalitarian. In this paper I take up one implication of this deconstruction--that marriage transforms equality into inequality--but do so with respect to Brahmin-Chetri society in Nepal, a society that is fundamentally hierarchical.

Perhaps it is not surprising that an ethnographer of South Asia would pick up on this implication since it recalls a point made consistently by Dumont (1980) but which Collier does not appear to recognise. Whether one is dealing with a society which professes hierarchical or equalitarian values, both hierarchy and equality are inextricable in social life--they are two sides of the same coin. In this respect, instead of conceiving of hierarchy and equality as discrete dimensions of social life, I treat them as a configuration of co-implication (see Munn 1973). This configurational conception of hierarchy-equality is significant for ethnographic analysis because to refer to one is to entail the existence of the other and to describe the character of one entails identifying its relations with the other. Thus in analysing social inequality or hierarchy² the task is not merely, as Collier suggests, to explain how inequality is socially organised (Collier 1988:197). Such an approach assumes that somehow equality is more 'natural' and therefore does not need to be socially organised to exist. Instead the approach adopted here

necessitates explaining how both hierarchy and equality are mutually constituted in social practice and specifying the configurational relations between them. Thus in analysing marriage in Bahun-Chetri society I do so not just to explain how it is a condition for the existence of hierarchy and/or equality in social relations, but to show how it mediates and thereby engenders a particular relationship between them.

The understanding of marriage in the constitution of hierarchy and equality in Brahmin-Chetri society is derived from ethnographic studies among Chetri households of Kholagaun Hamlet in Banaspati Village. Banaspati is located near the southern edge of the Kathmandu Valley in an area populated largely by Hindus with close historical and cultural affinity to the North Indian pattern of marriage and hierarchy. In this area of the Valley the rural settlement pattern is non-nucleated with relatively small clusters of houses scattered amongst agricultural land. These clusters of houses are locally recognised social and residential units (*gaun*) which I call 'hamlets'. Banaspati consists of twelve hamlets, each of which is locally acknowledged to be inhabited by a particular social group distinguished by jat, ethnic and/or descent group affiliation. Although hamlets consist of households of several such groups, most are dominated by one or two of them. This gives each hamlet a particular social identity. For example, one hamlet is composed entirely of Tamang households; another, curiously, is dominated by Brahmin households and by Untouchable Leatherworker (*Sarki*) households. Kholagaun, the focus of this paper, is one of the larger hamlets consisting of sixty-seven households of which fifty-seven are members of a single Chetri agnatic lineage.

Chetri social life is organised by hierarchical practices and they rank themselves just below Brahmin in the local jat hierarchy. Chetri marriage illustrates the inextricability of hierarchy and equality in social life and the way in which it is central in socially constituting the configurational relations between them. On the one hand, Chetri marriage is formally isogamous and centrifugal in the sense that in arranging marriages for their children, Kholagaun Chetris searched outside Banaspati for spouses belonging to Chetri lineages and clans of equal status to their own. After marriage, the wife is expected to reside with her husband in his natal household. On the other hand, Chetri marriage is 'hypergamous'³ in the sense that the wife-receiving household becomes superior to the wife-giving household. Here marriage seems to transform relations of status equality into hierarchy. Paradoxically, however, such marriages are also the pre-condition for constituting the equality among Chetri lineages and clans that allows marriages to be isogamous.

As a result of these complexities of marriage, Chetris have an extensive

network of affinal links with other Chetri households, lineages and clan throughout the Kathmandu Valley and this forms the limits of what I later call the Chetri regional caste. It is within this Chetri regional caste that I explore how marriage implicates gender relations and how these in turn mediate and constitutes a particular configurational relation between hierarchy and equality. I begin with the Chetri household because marriage and its cultural implications for gender and hierarchy are ontologically domestic phenomena.

Marriage and the Domestic Ontology

The Brahmin-Chetri household (*pariwar*) is an institution embedded in Hindu dharma. Without recognising the centrality of dharma, the Brahmin-Chetri household would appear much like domestic groups in many other societies: an ensemble of social relations and shared activities concerning kinship (marriage, descent, affinity), access to productive resources (usually agricultural land), co-residence, and ritual. However, dharma identifies the essence of the *pariwar* and thus defines it holistically. This is important for it is in relation to the essence of the household that those social relations and shared activities constituting it take on the particular character that defines them as Brahmin-Chetri domestic practices.

As Chetris understand it, dharma consists of the specific duties to be performed by each distinct category of people. In Hindu society, there are two cross-cutting systems of categories of homogeneous people--the division of society into *varna* (castes) and the division of the individual's lifetime in society into four *ashrama* (stages of life)--and each *varna* and *ashrama* is endowed with a distinct code of moral conduct. One of these stages of life is that of the Householder⁴ (*Grihastha ashrama*) whose dharma provides the basis for a holistic apperception of the Chetri household.

Brahmin-Chetri ethnosociology recognises four stages through which males may pass during their lives in society--the Celibate Student (*Brahmacharya Ashrama*), the Householder (*Grihastha Ashrama*), the Forest Dweller (*Vanaprastha Ashrama*), and the Wandering Ascetic (*Sannyasa Ashrama*). These four, however, divide into two more fundamental social personae which Dumont (1960:37f) recognises as the distinction between the Renouncer and the Householder, between detachment from the world and attachment to the world, or between asceticism and passion. The Renouncer and the Householder are personifications ('symbolic types' [see Gratoff 19??]) of the two contrasting forms of energy or heat--*tapas* and *kama*--underlying all action in the world. *Tapas* is the energy or heat generated through ascetic practice, epitomised by chastity, and the consequent detachment from the world; *kama* is the energy or heat of human

passion, epitomised by sexual desire, and the consequent attachment to the world.

As portrayed in classical Hindu literature (see Heesterman 1982) the Householder's dharma includes three principle duties: begetting offspring; discharging his responsibilities as a member of the community, typified by feeding ascetics (Brahmacharya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa); and performing sacrifice. The first is a direct manifestation of the sexual desire central to the concept of kama. The moral fulfilment of this desire by the Householder necessarily entails an attachment to a woman which must be legitimated by marriage. The second is epitomised by feeding those members of the community whose dharma prohibits them from forming attachments to worldly things. The duty to feed the ascetics entails a moral relation to land and the establishment of legitimated economic and political relations consequent to subsistence production on that land. This is the basis for rights of ownership in and subsistence from land being for Nepalis some of the most important diacritical markers of household membership. The third duty is an activity which brings the Householder into contact with the gods whose primary characteristic in relation to humans is greater purity. Accordingly, the performance of sacrificial rites minimally requires the Householder to be in a state of purity achieved by ascetic practices and a fire as the symbol and vehicle of sacrifice.

In terms of dharma, the Householder is the archetypal 'man-in-the-world' largely motivated by kama. He lives in a household which is an institution composed of hierarchical structures, practices and persons characterised by passion and attachment to the world that are consequent to and enable the fulfilment of his dharma. Thus the concept of Grihastha dharma has a double significance: it concerns the duties of the Householder as one category of person in the human world, and it also expresses the distinctive holistic character of the institution in which the Householder exists, in which he realises his nature through the performance of his dharma, and which is the objectification of the performance of his dharma.

Marriage is a central relationship of the Brahmin-Chettri pariwar precisely because it is what must be established for the Householder to engage in moral action that satisfies his sexual passion and fulfils his duty. The Chettri pariwar is holistically oriented by men, and women become a part of it through marriage as a means for those men to fulfil their dharma. Here is the basis of the encompassment characteristic of the hierarchical relation between husband and wife, between affines more generally and perhaps between man and woman in Nepali society. Dharma defines the nature of the whole household and it is through domestic practices that men directly uphold dharma. Men are associated with the goal of moral action in the world--to

sustain the cosmos; women are the means and accordingly they are subordinated to their husbands. As the personification of dharma in the household, the husband is worthy of respect (*mannu parne*) from his wife and those to whom she gives birth. The sons borne of such desire are the man reborn (see Kondos 1989) and form the patrilineal *santan*, the two to four generation line of agnates that is the core of the Chetri household. The sons are the substantialisation of his intrinsic constitution and thus form a kind of collective being in the household marked by the concept of *santan*. The men of the *santan* are co-parceners in the land whose product sustains the members of the household and enable men to fulfil their duty to the ascetics. Accordingly, the household appears as a patrilineal core with women attached to it by marriage who enable the men to morally satisfy their passion and to realise their dharma. This is the basic hierarchical division within the household. The daughters borne of the marital relation are given away to other men of other households. One householder, therefore, provides the means, in the person of his daughter, for another to fulfil his dharma. This as we shall see later underlies the idea of marriage as the meritorious 'gift of the virgin'. As a result of giving such a gift, there is established between the households affinal relations with a specific hierarchical character.

Marriage and Descent

While I have highlighted marriage as an ontological and practical condition for the establishment of the Brahmin-Chetri household, it should also have been evident that agnatic descent is functionally and conceptually inseparable from marriage in the constitution of the household and therefore of hierarchy and gender relations. Marriage incorporates Brahmin-Chetri conceptions of human reproduction, particularly the maternal and paternal contributions to the child, which they used to explain the explicit agnatic genealogical reasoning that is the other main dimension of household social relations. During sexual intercourse, substances from the father and the mother combine to form the body of the child. Using an agricultural metaphor, Chetris described conception as the father's seed (semen) being planted in the mother's field (womb). In the womb, the mother nourishes the seed so that it develops into a human body. The paternal white seed becomes the bones and other 'hard' parts such as nails; the mother through her nourishment of the child in the womb contributes the 'soft' parts of the body, principally flesh and blood. This indigenous biology is embedded in the common saying, 'a child's bones come from the father and the blood and flesh from the mother' (see also Kondos 1989, Ostor and Fruzzetti 1982). Further, Chetris said that the hard parts of the body are enduring as evidenced by the fact that after cremation, the bones remain while the flesh is consumed. As a result,

continuity through generations inheres in the enduring parts of the body--the bones--which are the contribution of the genitor. Thus it is through men and their contribution to the substance of the child in conception that there is the possibility for continuity of the person over generations.

The realisation of generational continuity in time through marriage, sexual intercourse with a woman, and the birth of children are the bases of the almost exclusive emphasis on the patriline for descent reckoning. Because it is the male substance which endures, a corollary interest of every Chetri householder is that sons are conceived in the passion of sexuality. Sons ensure the father's continuity and 'conditional immortality' (Bennett 1983:37) in two ways. First, according to the conception beliefs, the son's body shares enduring substance with his father's. It is for this reason that Chetris said the father is reborn in the son and in his son's son, and so on into the future through an unbroken line of men who, in sharing a common substance, can be seen as a patrilineage. Second, it is son's duty to perform the mortuary rites which transform the deceased parent from a disembodied ghost (*bhut-pret*) into an embodied ancestor (*pitri*) and which maintain the ancestor until it is eventually reborn (see Gray 1987)⁵. This is another instance in which the father is reborn and another way in which he achieves conditional immortality, this time through the ritual practices of the son which create an unbroken line of ancestors through the father, his father's father, and so on backward in time.

Chetris distinguished various levels of agnatic inclusion and continuity in terms of the generational depth of the apical individual and the territorial domain in which he and his descendants are located. *Bangksha* is loosely equivalent to the anthropological concept of 'clan'; members of each Chetri *bangksha* posit a common ancestor and tend to live within a region such as the Kathmandu Valley. *Khalak* loosely corresponds to the anthropological concept of 'lineage'; *khalak* members can trace their descent--the Chetris of Kholagaun have a written genealogy--from a common ancestor and are associated with a particular village or hamlet surrounded by their individually owned agricultural land. *Santan* refers to a 'domestic descent group' which usually consist of the eldest male as household head and his sons, and in a joint household his son's sons, all of whom share rights of access to the agricultural land that forms the domestic estate.

Brahmin-Chetri marriage cannot be understood apart from these descent groups because it is not merely a relation between a man and a woman. Rather marriage establishes particular relations between each of these agnatic descent groups. What is interesting is that the hierarchical nature of the relation varies depending upon which descent group is being considered. Chetris asserted that marriages are arranged between people who are of

equivalent hierarchical status. However, as a result of marriage, this egalitarian relations is transformed into a hierarchical one in which the wife-giving santan becomes inferior to the wife-taking santan and khalak. Yet simultaneously, this same marriage generates relations of hierarchical equality between other Chetri khalaks and bangkshas which allows them to make the arrange isogamous marriages.

Before explaining how Brahmin-Chetri marriage has both egalitarian and hierarchical consequences, two issues concerning the relation between marriage and the hierarchy-equality configuration need to be explored. The first is the particular nature of hierarchy in Nepal; and since through marriage women establishes relations between agnatic descent groups, the second concerns Brahmin-Chetri conceptions of women and gender relations. I deal with these two issues in turn in the following sections.

Two Paradigms of Hierarchy

From Dumont's perspective it seems sociologically correct to say that a modality of all Brahmin-Chetri domestic relations is hierarchy. However, to do so fictionalises the ethnographic situation in at least two important ways. First, it suggests that Brahmin-Chetri social relations are mutually congruent but this is belied by their diversity and potential incoherence. I take up this point later with respect Brahmin-Chetri conceptions of women and domestic gender relations. Second, hierarchy appears as an abstract, objective and monolithic phenomenon which it is not for the Chetris of Nepal. Instead, Chetris explicitly recognise two forms or paradigms of hierarchical relations. Each paradigm consists of a model of interactions between two types of beings whose ascribed characteristics place them in a hierarchical relationship. Each paradigm also specifies the kind of interactions -- including exchanges of gesture and things -- their meaning and logic which define one being as superior and deserving of those actions that constitute him/her as such and reciprocally constitute the inferior as such.

Puja-Prasad

One hierarchical paradigm concerns relations between humans and divine beings differentiated and ranked in terms of purity (*shudha, jharra*). When Chetris talked about purity in general terms, they referred to it as a socio-religious state which requires continuous efforts by people to offset the polluting effects that mere physical existence has upon them. Dumont (1980) echos this understanding in his recognition that purity is a relative state which expresses the Hindu value on the separation of organic life from social life. Accordingly, a state of purity is achieved by tapas, that is by ascetic actions of abstinence from and/or non-involvement in organic and natural

processes as well as passion (*kama*) and consequent attachments of life in the world. Through *tapas* a being produces not only a state of purity but also a form of spiritual energy and knowledge which enables the being to exert some control over those phenomena abstained from in achieving purity. *Tapas* and the purity and spiritual energy generated by it define the attributes of divinity. The greater the level of abstinence and/or non-involvement in the passions of social life, the greater the purity, the greater the spiritual energy and control over those phenomena abstained from, and thus the greater divinity and higher rank than those beings achieving less *tapas*.

Deities epitomise divine beings. They exist in a realm separate from the human world and this is a vivid iconic representation of their non-involvement in the world and consequent greater purity and spiritual energy than humans. Accordingly, deities have the power to affect the lives of villagers, their passions and the organic and natural processes in which they are intimately involved. This is the basis of the central relation of the *puja-prasad* paradigm of hierarchy: the right of deities to be worshipped (*puja*) and their powers to grant boons in the form of blessings (*prasad*) to humans, that is, to control the phenomena of the world from which they detached for the benefit of humans. The *puja-prasad* paradigm entails the reciprocity of worship and blessing and incorporates notions of divinity, adoration and humility.

The specific ritual practices of the *puja-prasad* relation vary in complexity and grandeur from the simple act of 'Namaskar' performed while the worshipper mentally expresses devotion and adoration of the divine to large scale rites orchestrated by one or more Brahmin priests involving the most elaborate *solah-so-upachar* (service of sixteen) which consists of decorating the divine with coloured powders (*tika*) and offerings cleansing water, pure foods, flowers, cloths, precious metals and *dhog* or *namaskar*. However elaborate, all these ritual practices are understood by Chetris to consist of two principle rites. In *puja* humans worship the divine through the offering of *tika*, pure foods and flowers; in *prasad* the worshipper receives the reciprocal blessing of the divine in the form of a *tika* on the forehead, consuming some of the pure food and wearing some of the flowers that were offered to the divine.

Deities are not the only divine beings deserving of worship. Humans may achieve limited states of divinity, purity, spiritual energy, knowledge and control through *tapas*. For Chetris there are two types of humans who are considered divine. The first is Brahmins. Their divinity and greater purity derive from their birth into the Brahmin *jat* and from the greater detachment from the passion of the world achieved through the ascetic practices that characterise their life style: vegetarianism, performance of ritual (which itself

involves ascetic practices in order to be in a pure enough state to approach the more divine gods), and knowledge of the sacred universe obtained through study of the texts and through the performance of rituals.

The second types of divine human is especially relevant to the household and role of marriage in the constitution of hierarchy in gender relations. Chelibeti -- a man's sister (*didi, bahini*), and the sisters of his father and sons -- are explicitly likened to gods. Chetris say, 'Chelibeti are equivalent to deotas and therefore are deserving of worship'. While the divinity of chelibeti is still based upon the purity consequent on tapas, it has a different derivation than that of the Brahmin. Chelibeti's divinity and greater purity relative to their brothers is not directly inherent in the bodily substance of their birth in the first instance as it is for Brahmins. As members of the same Chetri jat, chelibeti have the same bodily substance as their brothers. While like Brahmins the divinity of sisters is founded on ascetic practice, it is also domestically circumscribed. In the household they share with brothers, sisters and divine chelibeti because they abstain from the passions of sexuality. Yet this is precisely the context in which brothers as Householders and their wives fulfil their dharma and their desires and consequently establish attachments to the world through passion. The important point I wish to emphasise here is that in the context of the Brahmin-Chetri household and in relation to its core domestic descent group (*santan*), marriage distinguishes between two distinct forms of Chetri womanhood -- divine sisters and, as we shall see, ambiguous wives -- and two forms of hierarchical practices. As in the relations with Brahmins, Chetris conceive of relations with chelibeti in the same terms as relations between themselves and divinity. In those context in which sisters are divine, interactions are organised by the puja-prasad hierarchical paradigm.

Mannu Parne

The other hierarchical paradigm is *mannu parne* (literally 'having respect'). It is the model which Silwals allude to when describing the nature of social relations between people who consider themselves to be of equal purity. Jat or caste is precisely that segmentary level of society in which people's bodily substance is deemed to have the same level of purity. Since a person's bodily substance is derived from his/her father and mother and since marriage necessarily entails sexual intercourse in which the father's and mother's substances combine to form the child, marriage is the most important practice constituting and socially recognising the partners, their household, lineages and clans as equally pure and ultimately the Chetri jat as a distinct social domain. Chetris in Kholagaun insisted that proper marriages could only take place between people of equal status. Thus in arranging marriages they

carefully scrutinise the purity of self and other. Such scrutiny focuses not only on those practices of daily life which affect the continuing purity of the person (i.e. diet and occupation) but also on the past marriages contracted by the household and close agnates of potential spouses. In this sense, the Chetri jat consists of all those household, lineages and clans with whom marriages have been contracted in the past or may be contracted in the future. That is, a jat consists of one's kin or potential kin. As a result, the mannu parne paradigm of hierarchical practices operates between actual and potential kin who for the purposes of normal daily interactions are not differentiated in terms of divinity and/or purity. Since all household members are conceived of as kin, it is the mannu parne paradigm which Kholagaun Chetris themselves used in interpreting the nature and structure of domestic social relations and their hierarchical character.

In mannu parne relations, kin are differentiated and ranked in terms of age, generation and/or gender: authority and respect inhere in superordination and obedience and deference in subordination. Among those household members who are lineal or collateral agnates, age and generation are the primary criteria of status: 'elders' are superior to, have authority over, and are deserving of respect from 'youths'. Within the same generation it is relative age which defines 'elder' and 'youth'; older siblings, regardless of gender have superior status over younger siblings. Between generations it is generation which defines 'elder' and 'youth'; lineal and collateral agnates in the ascending generation, regardless of gender, have superior status and the concomitant authority and respect. Among those household members related by marriage, gender is the primary criterion of status: husband is superior to wife. Gender, however, does not define status relations between the wife of a santan member and other in the household. In marriage, there is a joining, a merging, of a woman with her husband. Consequently, she assumes his mannu parne status relations and appropriate conduct with other members of the household. Thus, regardless of her relative age, she is 'elder' to all her husband's younger siblings and their spouses and 'youth' to all her husband's older siblings and their spouses as well as to her husband's lineal and collateral agnates of the ascending generation and their spouses.

It is in terms of these two paradigms of hierarchy that we must understand Brahmin-Chetri conceptions of women and domestic gender relations for these form the basis of explaining how marriage engenders the configurational relations between hierarchy and equality.

Domestic Kinship, Marriage and Hierarchy

On the model of Levi-Strauss' 'unit of kinship' (1963:43), the following analysis is based upon the resolution of domestic kinship into a set of dyadic

relations. I focus only on the two dyads that concern gender relations between men of the santan and their wives and sisters.

Husband-wife

This relation is one of the two main axes of the household. Gender as culturally constructed determines mannu parne status. It is not maleness *per se* that establishes the husband's superordination nor femaleness *per se* that accounts for the wife's subordination. Ontologically, it is men as husbands who personify Grihastha dharma, the goal of moral action in the world and thus encompassment, domestic holism and superordination while women as wives are the means by which men fulfil dharma and thus personify the encompassed part and subordination. It is the association of husband with Grihastha dharma that partially renders understandable the common saying, 'a wife should treat her husband like a god'. This is not an empirical statement about the divine character of husbands; it is a metaphor which refers to the closer association of men with the holism of the sacred cosmos. Socially, an homologous whole-part relation holds between men and women in the domestic group: the household and its continuity over time is defined by and is one of the most important interests of the core santan; it is the fertility of wives of santan members that is the means of producing it.

For Chetri men and women, marriage is the most significant event in their lives since it marks the transition to being Householders. Their lives culminate during this ashrama--no one from Kholagaun is remembered to have taken up the Vanaprastha or Sannyasa ashrama. It is in the state of married householders (culturally this is redundant) that the most valued goals (i.e. raising children, living in a joint-family household, ensuring one's conditional immortality) may be achieved and at the end of which, having achieved these goals, people may die with contentment.

The wedding ceremony, therefore, is for Chetris the most important of the Hindu life-crisis rituals (*samskara*). It is a long and elaborate affair lasting at least two days and combining solemn Hindu pujas with more playful rites in which the bride and groom create firsthand the practical knowledge that enables them to act appropriately as husband and wife. It is the first occasion in which they actually do towards the person who will be the spouse the bodily movements, actions and spatial relations that are the typical expressions and invoke in consciousness the typical meanings, dispositions and emotions of being husband and wife. While observing wedding ceremonies with me Kholagaun Chetris spontaneously identified several of these rites which of them portrayed the most characteristic aspects of the relationship between husband and wife. All of them concerned hierarchy and together provide a relatively comprehensive cultural account of their

knowledge and understanding of the hierarchical relations specific to husband and wife.

The early stages of the wedding rituals are dominated by the more solemn Hindu pujas which sacralise the couple and culminate in the rite which transforms them into husband and wife, *kanya dan*-- the gift of the virgin. Kholagaun Chetris' exegesis of *kanya dan* combined in a quite specific way *mannu parne* respect with *puja-prasad* and its themes of purity and pollution. The word 'dan' means a non-reciprocated gift given to the pure and divine-like Brahmin priest during worship. Like offerings of rice and pure foods made to the gods in *puja*, *dan* gifts also consisted of edible products whose integrity and wholeness had not been destroyed by human action. Virgins (*kanya*) have a similar quality of integrity and wholeness and thus are also considered pure and appropriate as *dan* gifts. In calling this rite *kanya dan*, then, offering a pure virgin in marriage is explicitly homologous to a *dan* given to a divine being who in this context is the groom. In effect, the rite associates the concept of divinity with that of the respect due to the husband. It is at this point that the equality which characterised the status relations between the bride's and the groom's agnates is transformed into a hierarchical relations. *Kanya dan* renders the wife-giving family inferior to the wife-takers. These experiences are confirmed in a rite of *gore dhune* which immediately follows *kanya dan*. In *gore dhune* conceptions of purity and impurity again are used to give a particular inflection to the nature of the bride's *mannu parne* inferiority. In *gore dhune* members of the wife's household and lineage wash the feet of the couple the most impure part of their bodies-- allowing the water thus made impure to fall from their feet into a vessel. The bride's agnates then sip the impure water thereby rendering themselves inferior to the groom's agnates with whom the bride is now joined.

After this, the mood and character of the rites become lighter but they continue on this theme of expressing the nature of *mannu parne* relations between husband and wife in terms of purity. After *gore dhune*, the bride sits on the inauspicious and inferior left side of the groom, at various times she does the most respectful form of *dhog* by touching her forehead to the groom's feet, and she eats food made impure by being previously eaten by the groom (*jutho khaune*). These latter two rites (*gore dhune* as well) are forms of what Harper (1964) calls 'respect pollution'. In coining this phrase, Harper implicitly saw such rites as juxtaposing the *mannu parne* attitude of respect with the quality of purity and pollution central to *puja-prasad* and indicating that both forms of hierarchy inform these practices as well as the relation between husband and wife.

In these rites, the expressions of the wife's subordination derive their force

from her appropriating her husband's bodily impurity. In dhog, the bride brings the most pure part of her own upper body -- the head - into contact with the most impure lower part of her husband's body -- his feet. Jutho khaune is based upon the impurity (*jutho*) transferred through contact with bodily secretions. In the act of eating, a person's hand becomes polluted by touching saliva in the mouth and consequently the food on the plate becomes polluted. Accordingly, by eating the food polluted by her husband, the wife voluntarily polluted her body and make herself less pure than her husband.

In these rites acts which in everyday life render people relatively pure and impure are used to create experiences of *mannu parne* superordination and subordination between husband and wife. The significance of this is that purity - pollution is a metonym of the other hierarchical mode-puja-prasad- and consequently of relations between humans and the divine in which the criterion of superordination is purity. As a result the stark respectful *mannu parne* hierarchical mode is experienced in terms of the ideas and beings Chetris associate with purity and pollution.

As we have seen previously, purity is epitomise by deities and divine beings who are regarded as beneficent and capable of granting boons to humans; and this is another dimension of the trope that a wife should treat her husband 'like a god'. Further, the other side of the trope is impurity which constitutes a danger to the pure and is personified in witches (*boksi*) and the malevolent disembodied spirits of the dead (*bhui, pret, pichas*). In a woman's conjugal household, the *mannu parne* and *puja-prasad*, the literal and figurative dimensions of her wifely status, together structure the experience of her subordination that conflates inferiority, pollution and malevolence. The wedding rites render her subordinate to her husband who is metaphorically divine. Further, she enters his household as an outsider whose loyalty is suspect and this twists the logic: it is undeniable that her husband is literally an insider and metaphorically divine and that she is literally an outsider, and this is sufficient cultural evidence that her metaphorical impurity could become literal and she could turn into a malevolent witch. For Kholagaun Chetris, the motivation for a wife to effect this transformation from the figurative to the literal is contained in their ideas about other malevolent beings.

In village beliefs only women can be evil and malign witches; and for the household members who reason from the perspective of the core *santan*, it is only in-marrying women-the subordinate outsiders-who are considered to be potential witches. A woman is thought to learn witchcraft from her mother (herself an outsider in relation to the core *santan* of her conjugal household) and her first victim is her husband himself or her son/the husband re-born.⁶

A wife position in her husband's household and the potential motivations

attributed to her are analogous to the impurity and malevolence of disembodied spirits of the dead (bhut, pret, pichas). Bhut, pret and pichas are the spirits of people who died prematurely and unnaturally either through accident, witchcraft or suicide (see Gray 1987). As a result of their unnatural death, mourning rituals are either not effective or not performed. For those who die naturally, mourning rites (*kriya* and *shraddha*) performed by close kin of the deceased purify the pollution of caused by death, re-embodiment the spirit and transform him or her into an ancestor who lives in the realm of the ancestors and receives annual offerings of food as remembrance. Bhut, pret and pichas are disembodied spirits who remain in the polluting state of death because they cannot become ancestors. They are spiteful, angry and bitter beings destined to roam the human world at dawn and dusk--iconic symbols of their interstitial or outsider character--neither in it nor in the realm of the ancestors and who consequently threaten the human world with sickness and misfortune that are the manifestations of their pollution and the power deriving from it to disrupt normal social relations. They are continually seeking the offerings of food through which humans remember and honour their ancestors. Thus when they attack people and make them ill, part of the cure is to appease them with food offerings.

Persons in jats inferior to Chetri combine the same characteristics: inferiority, outsidership, danger, pollution and the resulting power to disrupt normal social relations. The point to make here is that wives in relation to their conjugal household, disembodied spirits of the dead in relation to the human social world and inferior jats in relation to Chetris are potentially and analogously threatening. In each case, their outsidership and subordination accounts for their motivation to malign actions and pollution accounts for their power to effect them.

However, unlike disembodied ghosts and persons of lower jat, the domestic domain is ambivalent for the wife because she is not just potentially a witch; she is also the only member of her husband's household with the beneficent power that enables him to fulfil his dharma.⁷ I briefly illustrate this ambivalence of Chetri wives in the practices of husbands and wives addressing each other.

In Chetri households, members do not address each other by personal names. When referring to one's spouse in informal conversations with other villagers, Chetris use the term *jan*: and when formally introducing one's spouse to someone from outside the village, Silwals use the terms *sriman* (husband) and *srimati* (wife). However, when addressing one another, a husband and wife avoid using personal names as well as these Nepali kinship terms for spouse, husband and wife. When addressing his wife, a Chetri has two alternatives. One is to use the name of the village in which his wife was

born with a feminine suffix. For example, one Kholagaun Chetri's wife was born in the village of Chobar; around the house he calls to her or addresses her as 'Chobari'. In using this form of address, the husband is emphasising that the woman is by birth an outsider to the village, to the household and to its core *santan*. This is significant because one aspect of domestic kinship is that an outsider must be allowed to enter the group in order to perpetuate.

The other alternative form of address is the use of the teknonym 'mother of (son's name)'. In discussing the topic of their wife's name, Silwal men said that they felt ashamed to call their wives by their personal names; many claimed that they did not even remember it! Soon after birth, chetris are given two types of names. One name is given to the child on the eleventh day after birth as the primary task of a rite call *nuaran*. For this rite, the household priest constructs an astrological chart based upon the position of the planets at the time of birth of the child. This chart foretells the fate of the child and indicates which letter of the alphabet is to be the first letter of the child's name. On this basis and after performing a Hom sacrifice, the priest bestows a formal personal name on the child which is appropriate to its fate as determined by the position of the planets at the time of birth. This name is referred to as the child's *nuaran nam* and is normally used only for official purposes and for official documents. Most Chetris also have what is known as a 'calling name' (*bolau nam*) which is given to them by the father and mother a few weeks after birth. The delay allows the parents to select a name that reflects a characteristics of the child. The calling name for boys may refer to some attribute of the child's martial nature as a Chetri- *Mahabir* (Hero), *Khadga* (Sword), *Yuddha* (Fighting); for girls it may reflect some feminine attribute - *Gita* (song), *Gayatri* (a verse from the Rig Veda recited in morning and evening devotions), *Nani* (young female child), *Punywati* (Virtue); and for children of both genders it may reflect the emotional relation between parent and child- *Prem* (Love), *Pranai* (Beloved).

Naming in Nepal is never mere nominalism. Names reflect the person's constitution either derived from the astrological position of the planets at the time of birth, from the *jat* of the child or from the nature of the intimate relation between the child and parents. Both the formal name and the calling name are given the child in his or her natal household, are based on events and relations occurring there, and are thus intimately associated with the identity of the person as a member of the natal household. In claiming to forget his wife's name a Chetri man is 'forgetting' his wife's birth in another household, her strong emotional relations with members of that household, her origin as a outsider and her consequent malevolent potential to cause disruption and sickness; in using a teknonym which describes her as the mother of his son he emphasises her beneficent power to enable him to

fulfilling his dharma and the resulting strong links to her conjugal household both as wife and mother of the core santan.

Together the two alternative modes which Chetri men use in addressing their wives are practices in which is embedded their doubleness. They are outsiders whose loyalty to their husband's household and santan is suspect because they continue to maintain important social relations with their natal households, especially with their brothers. In giving birth to sons they are also essential for the fulfilment of the husband's dharma and the realisation of his socially constituted interests: i.e. the ideal joint family, the continuity of his santan, lineage and clan, and the insurance of his (as well as her own) conditional immortality. Moreover, a Chetri woman only fulfils herself as woman in marriage and motherhood- that is, roles which are defined in relation to her husband, his santan, and dharma.

To briefly summarize, the husband-wife relation constitutes hierarchy as a complex appropriation of both puja-prasad and mannu parne. Belonging to the household by virtue of his birth, the experience of the husband's superiority and respect is tinged with encompassment, purity and divinity: gaining admission to the household through marriage, the outsider wife is experienced as an inferior and potentially dangerous being as likely to perpetuate the household through the birth of sons as to destroy it through witchcraft.

Brother-sister

In some respects this relation is the most complex of all in the household. It consists of an ensemble of practices and experiences which resonate with major themes from all the other core relations of the household. Moreover, it is the social relationship which Kholagaun Chetris described as the most relaxed, open and emotionally as well as materially supportive. While brothers and sister described their relationship in terms of both hierarchical paradigms, they did so without the negative valences of other household relations: there is not the restraint as between father and son, the danger as between husband and wife, or the conflict as between brothers. Instead it combines hierarchical benevolence, cooperation as well as purity and divinity.

As siblings, birth order is the criterion of mannu parne status, elder sibling having authority over and deserving of respect from younger sibling. Further as was the case with the husband-wife relations, cross-gender character of this relation introduces into the mannu parne status relations purity and the concomitant puja-prasad practices but in a reverse form. Far from being the polluting and potentially dangerous outsider, a sister is a pure, divine and benevolent insider.

The puja-prasad paradigm is the source not just of metaphors of mannu parne hierarchy in cross-gender relations, purity and impurity, benevolence and malevolence are synecdoches for men to understand the nature of the women and their relations to them. The wife and sister respectively typify the negative and positive forms of supernatural power, both of which are entailed in the puja-prasad paradigm.⁸ While wives are potentially malevolent boksi, sisters are chelibeti - humans with a divine quality and hence deserving of worship.⁹ In this sense they are more than mannu parne kin, they are *pujya* - worshipable - thus linking in consciousness a positive valence of the worship (puja-prasad) mode with the respect (mannu parne) mode of hierarchy. Unlike the husband - wife relation, where the negative dimensions of the puja - prasad paradigm (impurity and danger) are subjected to the control of the mannu parne paradigm, in the brother-sister relation the divinity and benevolence of the sister suffuses the hierarchical experience.

There is an important feature of this analysis of Brahmin - Chetri women and gender relations that remains ethnographically inchoate. So far women's place in the domestic scheme of things and thus the hierarchical character of gender relations has mainly been discussed as warranted in Grihastha dharma - they are means to Brahmin - Chetri men realising their sacred duty and social projects. Yet, as both wives and sisters they have been portrayed as powerful beings, malevolent and benevolent. By linking the puja-prasad paradigm to the mannu parne in domestic gender relations, I have also implied that the source of women's power lies beyond the social world. It is necessary to address this issue before attempting to bring together all the threads of the paper in analysing how marriage and gender relations constitute the configurational relations of hierarchy-equality in the Chetri jat.

Dassain: The Encompassment of Shakti

Gender relations and hierarchy in domestic social relations are the subject of the culmination of the annual festival of *Dassain*. In presenting an analysis of a central rite of the festival, I recall some of Valeri's comments on the nature of ritual. Valeri (1985) writes that in the performance of ritual artificial situations are created so that the 'typical' or 'model' experiences that constitute the enabling conditions of social life can be generated in the consciousness of the participants¹⁰. Further, in actually performing ritual the participants reproduce...

Society by reproducing dispositions that are at the same time bodily, emotional, and mental. To obtain this effect, the subject must be stimulated not simply to decode messages from other peoples' gestures, words, emotions and so forth, but also to learn how to reproduce them. He must therefore acquire the "practical" (in

Bourdieu's [1980] sense) knowledge that makes it possible for him to act, feel, speak, and think in the prescribed way ... Moreover, the "understanding" that ritual creates is an understanding of the premises of the cultural system. But these are fundamentally implicit and unformulated: the only clear knowledge that exists about them is that they can be "felt" -- and felt to have an effect on action and mental dispositions -- in certain experiential situations. These are precisely the situation created by ritual. These ritual situations, in turn, regularize and emphasize certain elements of diffuse, everyday experience that are associated with the "practical" or "inchoate" apperceptions of the presuppositions of the cultural system as reflected upon by the acting subject (Valeri 1985:344).

Dassain, celebrated in the month of Aswin (September-October), is the most joyous, auspicious and important festival in Nepal. The explicit theme of Dassain is the victory of goods over evil. The agent of this cosmic victory is the Goddess and her power, shakti. In the analysis of domestic kinship presented thus far the focus has been on the nature of social relations and practices as these occur in everyday life. Given the domestic ontology and its transformation into the socially constituted projects in which men attempt to realise the dharma of the Householder, women have been portrayed as subsumed and encompassed by men, as the means for men to fulfil their dharma. This, however, is only one aspect of the constitution of woman in Nepal; the importance of the Goddess is another and Dassain is a celebration of it.

Almost everyone in Nepal can recount the mythical events and characters that Dassain commemorates. In doing so Nepalis bracket them off from the human world by locating in a different era (yuga) and in a different realm from the one humans inhabit. More particularly, in performing the rites of Dassain, Chetris create a situation in which, by sacrilising a woman as the goddess, she is temporarily disengaged from domestic social relations with men--the very relations in which she fulfils herself as a social being. Dassain portrays the female and her power in her own right and presents the implications of woman in this state for reflection by participants, both male and female.

In explaining the meaning and significance of Dassain to me, Chetris recounted two stories (*katha*) which are celebrated in the rites and activities of the festival. One story concerns Lord Rama's victory over the evil King Ravana of Lanka who had kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita. During her captivity Sita remained faithful, not yielding to the sexual advances of Ravana. Lord Rama's victory over Ravana was assured through the worship of Durga and her reciprocal blessing for the success of his battle. The other story is about Durga as the defender of the gods and the slayer of demons. Here Durga slays the buffalo-demon, Mahisasura, who could not be killed by man or beast

because each drop of his blood spilled during a fight turned into another equally fierce demon. Durga in her fierce form was able to kill the demon by drinking his blood before it touched the ground. There is an important ending to this story. After using her powers in defeating Mahisasura and drinking his blood, Durga becomes intoxicated, takes on the form of another avatar of the Goddess, the terrible and bloodthirsty Kali, and goes on a rampage of destruction and death. Durga/Kali is stopped only because the god Shiva lies on the ground in her path. When Durga/Kali treads upon him and beholds his face, she is quietened.

These mythical exploits of Sita, Durga, and Kali depict some of the characteristics of the powers of the cosmic female principle, *shakti*, personified in the Goddess, *Devi*. They manifest the attributes of woman qua woman, and in relation to them Chetri men construct typifications of the women in their social world. Chetris' understanding of the source and nature of *shakti* was revealed in how they used the appellation 'Devi' in naming female beings. 'Devi' occurs at three levels: it names the personification of the general female principle, *shakti*; it also is the name for one of her avatars, the Mother Goddess, representative of fertility and the potential for reproduction; and upon marriage a Chetri woman's middle name is changed from Kumari (virgin) to Devi. In its use as the name of the Mother Goddess, Devi sacralises female procreative powers; in its use as the middle name for married woman, Devi marks the legitimate social context or its fulfilment and what for Chetri men and women is the dharma and ultimate aim of a woman's life in society--to marry and in that state use her procreative power to bear and raise children for her husband. A woman fulfils her social being and legitimately actualises her *shakti* through marriage and motherhood.

The avatars of Devi, Sita, Durga and Kali, are the 'heroines' of the stories celebrated in Dassain. They are commentaries on the janus-faced character of *shakti*. Sita is the image of the virtuous and devoted wife who remains faithful to her husband throughout her captivity. Her faithfulness typifies the controlled and therefore legitimate use of *shakti* through its encompassment by her husband resulting in the benevolent and creative potentials of her procreative power being the means for her husband's to realise his dharma.

The Durga/Kali image of the second story portrays the destructive and terrifying consequences of uncontrolled *shakti*, that is, female procreative power independent of male social encompassment. Recall the ending of this story: Kali's uncontrolled rampage is quietened when she treads on Shiva. There are two facets of this event which need comment. First, Kali's rampage is quietened by Shiva's presence. When Chetris talked about Shiva, they associated him with Parvati, his wife, who is another avatar of Devi. In this respect, Shiva is their image of Householder and 'husband' par excellence,

and it is in relation to him that the uncontrolled, destructive and illegitimate use of her powers are quietened. Second, in telling the story, Chetris pointed out that Kali's sudden calming stems from her horror at treading on Shiva, the husband. Here again the theme pollution signals that the relation between husband and wife is suffused with the supernatural power of women, shakti. By treading on Shiva, Kali is polluting him because not only is Shiva in the spatially inferior position below her, but she is also touching him with the most polluting part of her body, her feet. This is the source of her horror for she is reversing the normal relation between husband and wife. It is a reversal because Kali's inverts the respect pollution gesture that takes place between the bride and groom during the marriage rites in which the bride does *khuttā dhog*: she touches the most pure part of her body--her head--to the most impure part of her husband's body-- his feet. This rite is an iconic representation of one of the central dimensions of the husband-wife relation: it involves her physically experiencing her subordinate status in terms of pollution; and she does so 'voluntarily'. Together these are the metaphors by which the wife accepts her encompassment by her husband. It is in this state that her shakti has a benevolent character. Kali's actions are the inverse: being intoxicated by the blood of the demon, her actions are involuntary and destructive rather than creative; she pollutes the archetypal husband; and in her horror she allows her powers to be re-encompassed by him.

The narrative structure of the story is as follows: it begins with shakti as Durga unencompassed by implicitly male gods and being used properly for the good of the world in defeating the demon; but this victory also unleashes its destructive potential until it is again encompassed by man in the form of husband. The processual structure of the festival while paralleling the narrative structure of the story expands upon its commentary.

While Dassain's themes are cosmic, the celebration of the rites expressive of them firmly locates their significance in the domestic world. The festival begins with female power independent of male control but ends with its re-encompassment by men. Dassain lasts two weeks, ending on the full moon day of the month. On the first day, known as *ghatastapana* (*ghata*= water vessel, *stapana*= to establish), every household in Kholagaun sets aside a corner of the house where the water vessel is to be placed. The household priest performs a puja inviting Durga to reside in the ghata for the duration of the festival. When Durga enters the vessel, it becomes the *goddess*. In this puja, the ghata is covered with cow dung and placed on a two-foot square of soil. Barley seeds are planted both in the soil and in the cow dung covering the ghata. The Brahmin priest returns to the house each morning for the next nine days to worship Durga on behalf of the *pariwar*. By the tenth day, the barley seeds have grown into six-inch stalk called *Jamara*.

By opening the celebrations with ghatastapana in which on behalf of the household the priest worships Durga, Dassain portrays theme of shakti in a state disengaged from men and herself encompassing the household and its male santan. The ghata is not only Durga who in the myth uses her shakti to reinstate the normal social order destroyed by the demons but is also potentially the bloodthirsty and uncontrolled Kali. So it is shakti in its controlled and beneficial form as well as its potential for death and destruction in its uncontrolled form that stands alone in the middle of soil planted with barley seeds. The ritual icon for Durga used in Dassain privileges the procreative aspect of shakti. The placement on and decoration of the ghata with cow dung and the Jamara which grows in it recall the agricultural metaphor for conception--male jamara seeds (semen) are planted on female field (womb).

The tenth day of Dassain is 'Tika Day' and is the culmination of the festival. On this day and over the following three days, every member of the household receives Durga's blessing ('Durga Prasad') and honours those kins deserving of respect. After completing the puja to Durga, the Brahmin priest acts as mediator between the Goddess and humans by distributing the signs of her blessing (prasad) to the members of the household. The distribution takes place in a strict mannu parne hierarchical sequence beginning with the most senior member of the household and ending with the most junior.

The Durga Prasad interactions involved the exchange of three items: it began with the Brahmin placing a tika consisting red and yellow powders and a mixture of red-coloured rice and curds on forehead of the male household head; then strips of red and white cloth are tied around his right wrist (bandhan); and finally a small bunch of jamara is placed on his head then secured behind his right ear. During these actions the Brahmin chants a blessing for the welfare of the pariwar. Once complete, the male household head reciprocated by placing a tika on the Brahmin's forehead, offering a gift of money (dakshina) and performing khutta dhog by touching his forehead to the Brahmin's feet.

Following this, the Brahmin distributes the Durga Prasad (tika, bandhan and jamara) in a series of dyadic interactions with each of the other members of the household in descending order of their mannu parne seniority. However, with them the reciprocal offering is attenuated; it includes only khutta dhog. The tika of worship and dakshina are not performed because they are offered to the Brahmin only once on behalf of the whole pariwar by the household head. Thus the wife of the household head is next because she is junior to him; but since he is senior to all other members of the household she is also senior to them because her status is merged with her husband's in relation to them. Here we see one indication of the re-encompassment of

women in Durga prasad. In a festival that celebrates the power of woman in the form of the Goddess, its culmination is a rite in which the shakti that a wife possesses as woman is limited and controlled by men. Such encompassment is achieved in society and isolated for reflection in Durga Prasad through the wife's mannu parne practices in relation to all other members of the household; in these her mannu parne status is derived from her husband's and not from any attribute she may possess independent of him. Following the wife, the Durga Prasad interaction took place between the Brahmin priest and the children by age. This finished the Brahmin's participation in the Durga Prasad; but the distribution of the blessing continued now with members of the household forming dyads among themselves and acting as givers and receivers of the prasad. These intra-household Durga Prasad dyadic interactions involved each individual squatting in front of each member who was junior in descending order to him/her and offering tika, jamara and a verbal blessing and receiving in return respectful gesture, usually dhog. The sequence and roles adopted by members of the household in the Durga prasad interaction proceeded according each member's mannu parne status. Thus in the first round, the household head places a tika on his wife's forehead, whispered a verbal blessing and gave her a bunch of jamara; in return she performed khutta dhog. He then replicated this interaction with every other member in descending order of mannu parne status in relation to him. In the next round, his wife as the second most senior person in the household did the Durga Prasad rite with every member junior to her in descending order of mannu parne status. In the third round, the next most senior person bestowed Durga prasad on those junior members. These rounds continued until everyone except the most junior member had bestowed Durga Prasad on his/her mannu parne juniors.

One aspect of the performance of the Durga Prasad rite relates back to the paradigms of hierarchy presented earlier. For Chetris, the act of bestowing a blessing, whether as a mediator between the divine and the human recipient or merely as a human expressing responsibility for the welfare of the human recipient, signifies status superiority; performing a reciprocal a gesture of respect acknowledges the latter's subordination. However, when these practices are appropriated into a festival celebrating shakti, the Goddess Devi and her avatars (Sita, Durga and Kali) and into a rite involving interactions between kinsmen who are members of a household, the meaning of these interactions for Chetri's conception of women and the experiences of gender relations with them is more specific. Kali, the uncontrolled, bloodthirsty, terrifying, merciless and destructive avatar of Devi is transformed into Sita, whose sexual power of procreation is encompassed by man in service of his dharma. The Sita image is typified by the mannu parne interactions between

husband and wife. In this sense, the *mannu parne* enshrines formality, restraint, encompassment and duty in domestic relations. Sita is the faithful, submissive, devoted and fertile wife whose sexual desire is channelled for the perpetuation of the husband and his conditional immortality realised in his *santan*. Uncontrolled sexual passion is considered by Chetris, but especially by the mother-in-law, to be an improper use of a woman's power which diverts a man's devotion away from his parents and brothers leading to conflicts within the domestic group. Here is one source of Chetri's construction of the in-marrying woman as a potential witch (*boksi*). Chetris recognise that a wife has the procreative *shakti* that is defied in the Goddess and which they worshipped in the sister. It is thus *shakti* that is the source of female divinity and basis for the *puja-prasad* paradigm of hierarchy being culturally relevant to woman's identity. But as the *Dassain* stories show, this power is ambiguous. A wife can be like the faithful Sita using her *shakti* in the form of procreative power for the benefit of her husband and his household; but she is potentially the inverse--suspected of using her *shakti* in the form of sexuality in an evil way not to fulfil her husband's *dharma* and perpetuate his *santan* by bearing sons but to destroy the household. This she may achieve in two ways; either her *shakti* becomes excessive and uncontrolled sexual passion which drains her husband of his semen and his vigour so that he wastes away, or she becomes a witch who uses her *shakti* in the form of curses placed upon her husband or son.

In this respect, *Durga Puja* describes a way to avert female malevolence. The *shakti* of wife can be controlled through scrupulous adherence to *mannu parne* practices which incorporate asceticism: in interactions with husband, she must act with restraint, lack of emotion and sexual attachment. *Kali* objectifies the dangerous but unseen potential of an in-marrying woman's uncontrolled use of procreative power; and just as *Kali's* rampage was subdued through her horror at contravening hierarchical practices, so too can the unseen and dangerous potential of an in-marrying woman's sexual passion be subdued by controlling her visible and public conduct with other members of the household and channelling her procreative power into the birth of sons. This is perhaps another level at which *Dassain* celebrates the victory of good over evil.¹¹

While gender has little affect on the details of the *Durga Prasad* interaction between most members of a household, when they are performed between men and their sisters or daughters, there were significant changes indicative of the particular nature of *chelibeti* women. *Durga Prasad* interaction with them begin in the same manner as with other *mannu parne* kin: when they are interacting as *mannu parne* juniors, they received the *tika* signifying *Durga's* blessing and their *mannu parne* subordination from their father and brother.

However, instead of receiving the reciprocal dhog gesture, men each offered chelibeti dakshina and dhog--the same offering made to a divine Brahmin in ritual contexts.

The point to emphasise here is that in Dassain Durga Prasad rite Chetri men pattern their interactions in accordance with their typifications of the two forms of shakti and females who live in their households. In the performance of Durga Prasad, they clearly distinguished between their chelibeti and their wives, worshipping the shakti of the former and attempting to encompass the procreative power of the latter through the public imposition of the ethos of the mannu parne. The attenuation of the mannu parne aspects of the Durga Prasad with chelibeti is just one aspect of the devoted and indulgent approach taken by men toward their sisters and daughters. In her natal household after marrying, a woman remains a chelibeti and her husband takes on her divine character. In her conjugal household, she assumes the mannu parne status of her husband in his household. When she visits her father's and/or brother's household she is free from household chores; she and her husband are offered the finest and purest food cooked in clarified butter (ghee) by her brothers' wives. In her conjugal household, the same woman is excluded from this exalted state and is expected to strictly adhere to mannu parne forms of interactions; formal, obedient, restrained, unaffected by emotional attachments.

The in-marrying woman is an outsider who is both committed and confined to her conjugal household: committed because it is as a wife and mother that she realises herself as woman in Nepali society by enabling her husband to realise his dharma and to ensure her husband's as well as her own conditional immortality: confined because she must strictly adhere to the tight and unemotional control of mannu parne relations that offsets what is seen as her natural tendency to be too attached to the world. Such attachment is expressed in the stereotype of women as insatiable. The divinity of her procreative shakti as chelibeti in her natal household become the evil potential of sexuality in her conjugal household.

The analysis of the complexities of Durga prasad and domestic kinship reveals a more general point about marriage and its implications for the relations between hierarchy and equality in Brahmin-Chetri social life. In those relations involving men (i.e. father-son and brother-brother) the mannu parne mode alone orients the experience of hierarchy, albeit with the various shadings of restraint and benevolence in the father-son relation and of equality, cooperation and conflict in the brother-brother relation. However, it is in the cross-gender relations that the supernatural-oriented puja-prasad mode becomes significant in the experience of hierarchy. A further complexity is that there is a gender specificity to that experience. For men there are two

types of women in their households. Wife and sister typify two forms of supernatural intervention in human affairs: pollution/danger/malovenence and purity/divinity/benevolence. The supernatural beings associated with each form of intervention--ghosts and demons on the one hand and deities on the other--personify the types of action associated with inferior and superior positions in a hierarchical structure. Further, a husband's *mannu parne* authority is threatened by pollution and the malign power of demons; conversely a brother's *mannu parne* relation with his sister (whether younger or older) is overshadowed by her divinity and her being deserving of worship.

For women there are two types of households--conjugal and natal--in which they may claim membership. In each there is a different experience of the relation between the *mannu parne* and *puja-prasad* modes of hierarchy. In the former as a wife she experiences the overbearing and confining authority of her husband and her mother-in-law who attempt to control her potential danger through scrupulous adherence to *mannu parne* interactions. In her natal household, the structures of *mannu parne* are greatly relaxed and she enjoys the adoration and trust of her brother and his wife.

The significance of this gender specificity in the experience of hierarchy in cross-gender household relations is threefold. First, from both male and female perspectives there is an ambivalence in the general concept of femaleness and its relation to hierarchy, though the ambivalence has a different character for men and women: men experience inferiority and superiority as occurring with distinct and separate female persons of different nature; women experience inferiority and superiority as dimensions of an existential being in different households such that their ambiguity is contextual. Second, as an ambivalent being woman has the character of mediator. This is one dimension of Brahmin-Chetri marriage that is emphasised in this paper. Third, the household contains the structural atom for understanding wider-scale social units: an agnatic descent group linked to other descent groups through women of positive or negative supernatural valence. Accordingly the way relations between hierarchy and equality in such wider-scale social units organised by agnatic descent groups greater depth (i.e. *khalak* and *bangksha*) may be partially explained in terms of the form of female mediation linking the household or other social groups whose core is an agnatic descent group on the model of the *santan*. I conclude the paper by briefly illustrating how marriage mediates and constitutes the particular relation between hierarchy and equality that characterises the Chetri jat in the Kathmandu Valley.

Conclusion: The Chetri Regional Caste

By 'Chetri regional caste' I refer to the local conception that Chetris living

in the Kathmandu Valley form a distinguishable section of the Chetri caste which extends throughout Nepal. The basis for distinguishing a regional caste within the Kathmandu Valley is that it forms the usual territorial limit of marriage. Thus one pre-condition for the distinctive identity of a social group is a set of kin conceived to be associated with a territory. This provides only a partial description of the regional caste as understood by Chetris themselves. It may also be described using social concepts at three levels of kinship. The regional caste may be analysed as set of clans among whom marriage is prescribed; as a set of localized lineages (i.e. like the Kholagaun Chetri lineage) linked by actual and potential marriage; or as a set of households linked by marriage and by potential or exogamously proscribed marriage. Whatever the level, there is a basic structure: a set of agnatic descent groups--clan, localized lineage, household santan--linked by marriage or potential marriage. These various levels of agnatic descent group are extensions on time and space of the household father-son dyad. The clan is distinguished from localized lineage and household by its lack of formal association with a specific territory: localized lineages and households of each Chetri clan are spread throughout the Kathmandu Valley and beyond. Despite this difference, the common image for the affinal connection between agnatic descent groups recalls Levi-Strauss' unit of kinship: the linked dyads husband-wife/sister-brother.

The issue raised by this conception of the regional caste is that marriage constitutes different relations of hierarchy-equality among the agnatic descent groups at each level. At the clan level, all are considered of equal status enabling marriage among all the clans to be isogamous and to constitute the *jat* as a distinct segment of Nepal society. However, at the household level, there is a hierarchical relation between the superior wife-taking santan and the inferior wife-giving santan. At all levels marriage binds the descent groups into a recognized unit but the status implications of marriage vary. These ethnographic facts highlight marriage as the crucial relation for the nature of the Chetri regional caste.

Experientially, marriage is first and foremost a problem for the household. Generally it is the senior man and his wife who expend a great amount of time and effort finding a suitable spouse for the unmarried men and women in their household. At this level marriage involves the linked dyads of husband-wife/sister-brother and focuses attention not on relations within the household but between households.¹² In the search for a spouse, they consider households of all Chetri clans--except those prohibited by rules of exogamy, i.e., father's, father's mother's, mother's father's and mother's mother's *gotras*¹³--to be of equivalent purity and status and thus potential affines. As we have seen previously both the husband-wife and brother-sister dyads

incorporate a notion of hierarchy based on purity and the puja-prasad paradigm. Thus as a result of marriage, the relations between the households involved take on the hierarchical character of the dyad linking them: the wife's natal household (wife-giving) is considered inferior by the husband's household, and the sister's conjugal household (chelibeti-taking) becomes pure, divine and superior in relation to her brother's household. Here the equality in terms of purity between households identified by clan as potential affines is transformed by marriage into hierarchy between households identified as households of actual affines.

These hierarchical consequences of marriage affect the local lineages in the same manner as lineage brothers become impure through a birth or death. This means that marriage between local lineages may be repeated only if it hierarchically replicates previously remembered or extant marriages. If a Kholagaun Chetri sister marries into a local lineage in another village, that lineage would become superior in status. Consequently a Chetri could not marry a woman from that lineage--at least until the original marriage is 'forgotten', because it would confound the hierarchical relation already established by the previous marriage. The Kholagaun Chetri must look beyond such affinal local lineages for a spouse. Analytically he or she may marry into a different localized lineage of the same clan as an existing affinal lineage. However, Chetris do not think about it in these terms. Once the reference moves beyond existing affinal lineages, the potential marriage universe is conceived of as a set of households identified primarily in terms of their clan affiliation. At this level of thought, marriage may occur in 'both directions'; and this exchange is both the cause and effect of the nullification of any hierarchical implications of marriage for Chetri clans. Here hierarchy between households and localized lineages identified as actual affines is transformed by marriage into equality among clans identified as potential affines.

One reason why this particular moment of hierarchy-equality transformation occurs is that unlike a household or localized lineage, a clan does not establish productive relations to a specific and identifiable territory. Thus there is not the easily recognizable corporate group to take on the hierarchical consequences of marriage. Being spread throughout the valley, there is no way for each household of the clan to keep up with the marriages of all the other members and to calculate the hierarchical implications for the clan as a whole. Since the concept of woman generated in household social relations incorporates purity-pollution, the linkage of clans by both wives and sisters effects the status equality among all of them. Socially, marriage between households centrifugally forms circulating connubium linking santan, lineage and clan agnatic descent groups and realizing the

transformations between hierarchy and equality. Experientially marriage constitutes in consciousness the hermeneutic relation between hierarchy and equality.

Notes

1. This paper was first presented at the American Anthropological Association Meetings in Washington, D.C., 1989. It was a part of a session on Marriage in the Himalayas organized by Nancy Levine and Tom Fricke. The theme of the session derived from Collier's then recently published book, *Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies*. The Participants were asked to structure their papers in response to some issues raised by Collier. It is for this reason that I refer to her work in indentifying the problem addressed in this paper.
2. Dumont clearly distinguishes between 'inequality' which exist in societies where equality is the encompassing value and 'hierarchy' which exists in society in which it is the encompassing value.
3. See Gray 1980 for a critique of the appropriateness of this concept when used to indicate a marriage rule. It is more accurately a description of the result of marriage not a pre-condition of marriage.
4. When the term 'Householder' is capitalised, it refers to him as an ontological being characterised by dharma, that is, by unmediated and non-intentional action; when the term is non-capitalised (i.e. 'householder') it refers to the 'man-in-the-world's who engages in practice in order to realise socially constituted and meaningful projects in society.
5. The son also performs these mortuary rites for his mother who also becomes an embodied ancestor (pitri) and thus ensures her conditional immortality but not as part of a patriline. All genealogies I have seen are agnatic and include only men.
6. For a full account of the wife as a dangerous witch see Gray (1982) and Bennett (1983).
7. We will see shortly that this ambivalence of woman reflects a basic contradiction of a wife's place in domestic relations and functions.
8. The explicit core referent of the puja-prasad paradigm is as a mode of interacting with deities. But more generally it provides a mode of interacting with supernaturals of all kinds. Thus exorcists and other types of specialists dealing with malign spirits also use basic puja-prasad practices for interacting with demons and ghosts.

9. The brother-sister relation is the epitome of the underlying structure which is the relation between the men of the household's agnatic santan and women born to them. For example, a daughter is a chelibeti of her father and a father's sister is a chelibeti of her brother's son. Thus a man's chelibeti includes the following; sister, daughter, father's sister, son's son's daughter, and father's father's sister, and the relationship is extended to the husbands of these women and in some circumstances to their households.
10. Like Leach, ritual is phenomenon out of normal time and space; and like Geertz, Paul and Kapferer, ritual is a context in which the basic assumptions and ideas of social life are detached from their normal embeddedness and consequences in social life and held up for reflection.
11. As we shall see in the next section, it is women who have previously been in the same position but who have proved their loyalty to the household through the beneficent use of their procreative power who are seen as primarily responsible for ensuring that this malevolent potential of female shakti is not used against the household. It is a mother-in-law's duty to ensure her son's 'wives' scrupulous adherence to mannu parne practices.
12. In this sense marriage is one of the primary centrifugal social processes carrying the implications of household relations to inter-household relations.
13. Strictly speaking rules of exogamy apply to gotras. Among the Chetris there is a complex relation between gotra affiliation, clan and localized lineage. All members of the Chetri clan are also members of the Bharaduj gotra. However in other Chetri clans, there may be two or three gotras, and some gotras include lineages from different clans.

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