

THE FUNCTION AND MEANING OF COMBS IN THE NEWAR CULTURE (NEPAL)¹

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The head is the first part of the human body we focus on to evaluate the character of persons before we interact with them. People consciously try to improve their appearances by combing their hair and decorating the head in beautiful styles, often revealing the strong cultural traditions of the society. In the Newar² society, hair style and head ornaments have significant ritual and social values on which has been no work published yet. Head ornaments show stages in rites of passage, socio-economic status, civil status, and religious affiliation (Manandhar 1992 :111 and photo appendix). In this article I will examine Newar hair dressing and in particular the types of the combs used for different functions, people who make them and what materials they are made up of.

According to tradition and social manner, uncombed and dispersed hair is an inauspicious sign which expresses depression and worry. Most Newars believe that meeting a person with dishevelled hair at first in the morning is inauspicious and will disturb their whole day. Therefore, the Newars comb their hair before starting the day.

Traditionally for daily hair care the Newars used the comb made of bamboo called *kakicā*³. Combs of different types are used for different functions and there is a kind of traditional brush called *thakūcā*⁴ made up of lot of needle shaped bamboo sticks. Newar women use this brush after their bath to arrange their hair before massaging it with mustard oil.



Photo 1. A Newar lady (Manandhar) is using the traditional brush, *thakūcā*, to arrange her hair. ⁵

Then, they use a comb, *kakicā*, for the style of their hair as they like. These combs are made of bamboo tied by cotton cord, style of their fabrications will be different according to their function.

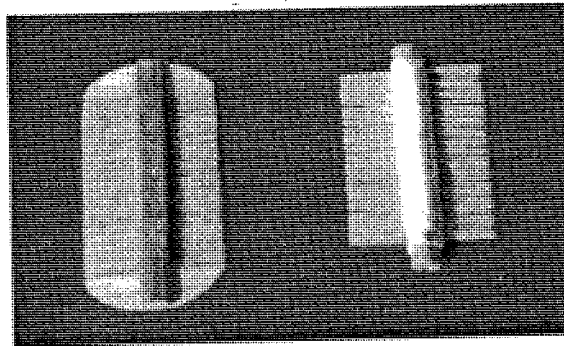


Photo 2. Two combs made of bamboo from left to right : 9 cm. L., 6 cm. b. & 8 cm. L., 5 cm. b.



Photo 3. Some examples of combs and a traditional brush still used in the Newar society.

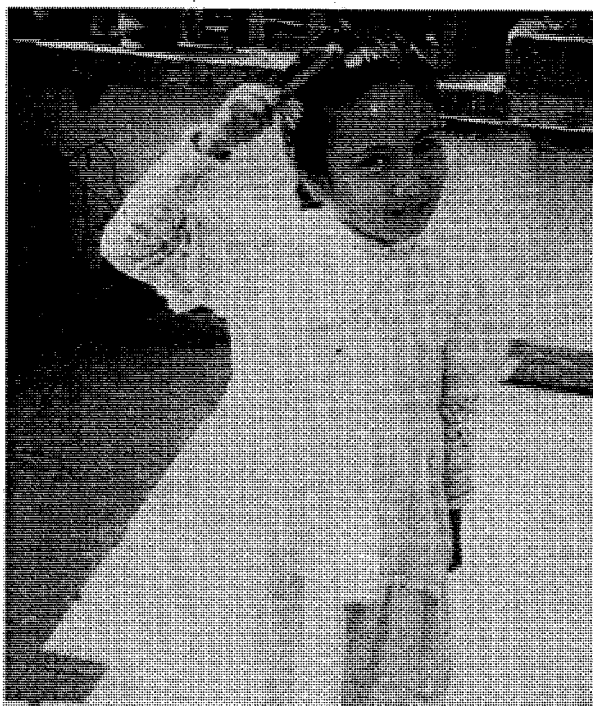


Photo 4. A girl using a comb with handle.

The Newars produce the bamboo comb with a 12 cm. long handle which makes it easier to comb hair.

The normal combs are made with simple teeth on both sides. There are special types of comb with tighter teeth to pick out lice and nits.

A skillful artist can make a comb for two functions; the right side is made with normal shaped teeth attached by one thread and the double banded left side threaded twice to make the teeth tighter and more efficient to pick out lice and nits.

The making of bamboo comb is a time consuming handicraft. Once the comb makers used to be an important part of culture. The bamboo comb makers in the urban area of the Kathmandu valley are rare to be found these days. Nowadays there is little demand of the bamboo comb among the urban people, who use plastic combs, which are cheaper and easily available. They use different chemical products to remove lice and nits, instead. Therefore, bamboo comb makers are not interested to continue their traditional skill in making special bamboo combs for removing lice and nits.

Comb Makers

The Newar comb makers come from different castes. The makers of the bamboo combs and brush are the Poḍe, who are considered as low caste and treated as untouchables. The silver comb makers are the gold-smiths belonging to the high caste Buddhists like the Vajrācārya, the Shākya, and the Tāmṛākār.

Materials for Making the Traditional Comb and Brush

To make the bamboo comb, the Poḍe use three materials : *pā* (thick bamboo) is cut into several small flat sticks. Both ends of sticks are pointed. These sticks are used as the teeth of the comb. A kind of thin bamboo, *nhāyypā kathī*, is attached with these teeth and also extended as the handle of comb. Cotton thread woven across both sides of the comb holds the handle.

To make a traditional brush, the bamboo is cut into sticks ranging from 20 to 30 cm. The top of these sticks are then turned into the shape of a pointed needle. When enough needle shaped sticks are prepared, they are attached together and are bound by a jute thread, *nālukhipah* or metal wire, *tār*.

The goldsmiths make the silver ritual comb, *wahaḥ kakicā*, by using about 100 grams of silver. It is made in their traditional work-shop, *jyāsaḥ*. The silver is liquidified by heating which is called *wahaḥkālegu*. Then, silver is given the shape of a comb. The handles are decorated with dancing peacock, butterfly, flowers or the eight auspicious symbols, *astamāngala*. The most traditional silver combs have the following eight auspicious symbols: an umbrella (*chatra*) a sea shell (*sankha*), two fishes (*yugala matshya*), an endless knot (*shrivatsa*), a water pot (*kalasha*), a lotus (*padma*) and a wheel (*cakra*). Unfortunately, the larger silver combs with these motifs are disappearing and are not being preserved by the Newars. Nowadays the gold-smiths only make the miniature form of silver combs as requested by their clients.

The silver comb comes in a set that consists of a comb itself and a decorated pin (*natūcā* or *natubhatucā*), which is used as a make-up tool as well as a hair decoration object. This set is made in the same process as the silver comb with different cuttings and motifs. Nowadays, the Newars use only miniature comb sets as the symbol of their tradition.

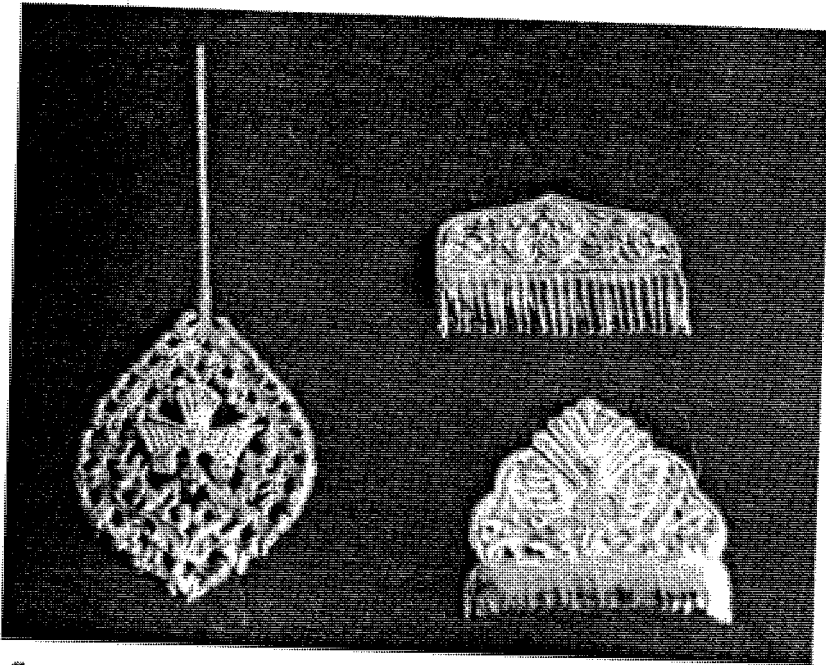


Photo 5. Some examples of the ritual combs *wahaḥkacā* accompanied by a pin : from top to bottom, 8 cm. L., 6 cm. b. and 8 cm. L. 7.5 cm. b. and *natubhatuā*, the pin, 20 cm. L., 8 cm. b. & 23 cm. diameter.

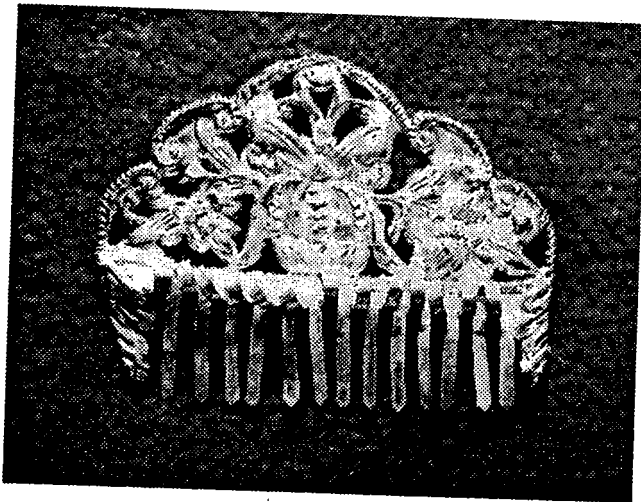


Photo 6. Ritual comb set used by Newars, 20 years ago
6. (a). Ritual comb, *wahaḥkacā*, 12 cm. L., 8 cm. b.



6. (b). Ritual pin, *natubhatucā*, 20 cm. L., 12 cm. b. & 35 cm. diameter.

Combs play an important role during Newar rituals particularly in following life cycle rites and rituals :

Sitting in the Cave, *bārhā taygu* : Interestingly the ceremony has only been described by male anthropologists⁶ based on interviews and none of them remarked on the importance of the comb in the ritual. The *bārhā taygu* life cycle ritual for young Newar girls is held before their first menstruation, between the age of 9 to 13. An astrologer works out an auspicious moment for the entrance ceremony for a girl to go into confinement. If the girl has her first menstruation before observing the ritual, she will be closed immediately in a dark room without these rites called *bārhā cwanegu*⁷. The rite held with or without entrance ceremony takes 12 days. During the first 11 days, the girl has to stay in a room without seeing sunlight and any male person. She has to practice some social rules. She must keep herself well groomed and stay cheerful. She learns to pay attention to family relations and to create harmony among the members, etc.⁸

On the fourth or the sixth day of confinement a ceremony called *koṃcikān sāykegu* is observed. That day, early in the morning, the girl purifies herself using mustard oil cake (*khau*) and bathing. The wife of the oldest male in the family, *thakālinakī*, makes an effigy of cotton called *bārhā khyā* which is placed in a niche, *gwakhānpwā*, or at the ceiling in the confined room. She is given one bowl of home made face washing

powder, *kom*⁹, another one is full of mustard oil, *chikān*¹⁰, a comb, *kakīcā* and other cosmetic objects. She offers all these things with a feast, *bhoy*¹¹ to the effigy then to the girl. From that moment the girl uses face make-up, has to pay constant respect to the effigy. She offers a small quantity of all the objects before she uses traditional cosmetics and the food she eats.

According to Allen (1982), during the ritual, *bārhā*, the girl symbolically flatters the effigy, *bārhā khyā*. As I am a Newar woman I had undertaken the rite and have had a lot of chances to carefully observe the ritual in other occasions. The elderly women would tease the confined girl that if *bārhā khyā* did not come to sleep with you, he did not love you¹².

R. Pradhan (1986) wrote that the *bārhā khyā* is a feminine effigy. I observed it to be a male figure or a couple in a pose with sexual overtone. Therefore, I think that either the ritual itself means the symbolic romance between the girl and *bārhā khyā* or that during these days the girl is receiving lessons in sexual conduct as Allen analysed.

I conclude that during this period of the ritual the girl is prepared for conjugal life. By the way of teasing, she has a lesson of doing make-up to please *bārhā khyā* by respecting and making herself attractive and cultivating cheerfulness. She is preparing for the life with her future husband. During these days the neighbours and friends come to play with the girl. One of their games is acting out dramas. By the means of these plays the girl is made aware of potential family problems and how to handle in-laws. All these experiences prepare her to be a good wife with *bārhā khyā* as her symbolic husband.

The religious book, *swasthani brata kathā*, describes that the goddess Pārvati created a boy Ganeśa, out of the dust of face washing powder, *komkhi*. That means, she gives birth with the *komkhi*. During the ritual *bārhā*, the girl utilises *kom* to wash herself. It signifies that she is ready to give birth and she is considered fertile.

The twelfth day of the confinement is celebrated with a great feast. Early in the morning, the girl takes a bath, the barber, *naunī* or butcher *naī*¹³, woman cuts the toenails and paints her feet with crimson colour, *alah*¹⁴. After she purifies herself with mustard oil-cake, she makes herself up using washing powder, *kom*.

The eldest man's wife, *thakālinaki*, combs the girl's hair by applying mustard oil. In Kathmandu, one hair knot in the middle of the girl's head is made. This knot is called *pwākay sapwa*. that is decorated with a red ribbon and an ornament called, *sapwa tisā*.



Photo 7. A girl with hair combed into a knot and decorated with an ornament ,
sapwa tisā by thakālinakī.

In Bhaktapur, Levy (1992 : 672) observed that the *nakī* (*thakālinakī*), combs the girl's hair and makes one plait instead of a knot. Most of the Newars comb either in the style of one knot or in one plait as a symbol of a married woman. Therefore, the *thakālinakīn* combing the girl's hair in this style has great significance. With this grooming with the ritual comb, the girl is considered a complete adult who can have sexual relations and produce offspring. Thus, the family prepares the girl for marriage.

Nowadays, most of the girls cut their hair very short which makes it difficult to comb in these traditional styles. Even today the tradition of combing the girl's hair by the wife of senior man of the family continues symbolically with the comb and mustard oil.

Once the girl is groomed, dressed and well ornamented, she worships the god¹⁵. At the end of the worship, she receives vermilion, (*sincā*) on the centre front of her head by the wife of the senior in the family. If the girl has already married¹⁶ she receives it from her own husband.



Photo 8. Girl is receiving the vermilion, *sincā*, from the wife of the senior man in the family. (Photo collection of Shrestha family of Banepa)

The ceremony ends that same evening but the girl's groomed hair on that occasion is preserved for four more days.

As observed, the function of the comb has an important place in the ritual life cycle. The comb along with other materials for make-up is offered to the girl. In the case of a married girl¹⁷ these items are brought from her husband's family. I suppose that indicates the girl's status in the family and her link with the family.

List of the ritual toiletries

Name in Newari	Used for	Made of
<i>ajah</i>	black paste, applied around the eyes lids	smoke of borne medicinal herbs mixed with mustard oil
<i>ajahsālā</i>	container of black paste, <i>ajah</i>	silver
<i>chikān</i>	make-up, moisturises the hair	mustard oil
<i>chikān kholā</i>	bowl of oil	silver or bronze
<i>jwālānhāy kān</i>	mirror to see oneself	silver or bronze decorated with flame motif

Name in Newari	Used for	Made of
<i>kakicā</i>	comb to comb hair	bamboo
<i>kom</i>	home made washing powder to wash face and body	mixed flour made of barley, rice and mustard seeds
<i>komkholā</i>	container for washing powder	silver or bronze
<i>sincā</i>	head decoration	vermilion
<i>sinaḥ</i>	forehead decoration	vermilion
<i>sinahmū</i>	container for vermilion	silver or bronze

After observation of the rite, I conclude that the above mentioned objects are directly linked with family relationship. The *bārhā* is a ritual of the girl's admission into her family as a complete adult. With the combing of her hair by the wife of senior in the family and using all objects, she enters the family as a rightful adult member or if married, her hair is ritually combed and groomed by the paternal senior most by applying the comb sent from her husband's family. By the means of the comb, she not only enters both families but ties relations between the two families. Thus, the comb becomes an important object in family relationship.

Marriage and Combs

Traditionally, the parents arrange the marriage of their children. From the initial search for an appropriate candidate till the end of the marriage ceremony many ritual exchanges take place. All these exchanges and negotiations are held only on Thursday, which is considered an auspicious day for conjugal relations¹⁸. After a long negotiation between two families, they fix the dates of the ritual ceremonies. During these marriage ceremonial exchanges, the comb will be given to the bride as a ritual gift on four different occasions.

(a) Among the Manandhar and the Maharjan (Jyāpu), the first gift of a comb is presented by the future groom to his future bride. With the help of a matchmaker, (*lāmi*), both families negotiate for the marriage between their son and daughter and fix the date of the ritual ceremonies. The groom's side sends the first gift to the bride along with the indication of the auspicious time given by the astrologer for marriage. This gift is called *lākhābiyegu*¹⁹. Among the Vajrācārya, Shākya, Tulādhar, Shrestha, Tāmrākār, Chitrakār, etc., send ten betel-nuts,²⁰ a betel-nut box made of silver called *lāmpicā*, and a one rupee coin as the first gift to the future bride (Vajrācārya,

1980:21). This gift is called *gwayabiygu*²¹ which is ritual confirmation of the engagement among the future bridegroom. The Vajrācārya, Shākya, Tulādhār and the few castes of the Shrestha send second gift called *sisāphusā nakah wanegu* (Vajrācārya 1980:22)²². Thus, the ritual process *lākhābiyegu* may happen as the first gift sending process and in some cases it occurs as the second or the third process only. Therefore, this ritual process of gift sending depends on various castes and their tradition.

Anyway, the gift *lākhābiyegu* should comprise of twelve *lākhāmari* sweets, a comb, one box of vermilion and a hair plait decoration *sacikā*, and a piece of cloth for a blouse. Depending on the economic condition of the family the following are also included; a jewellery set, clothes set, a make-up set, fresh and dried fruits, and a varieties of sweets. Among the Manandhar this gift is accompanied by ten betel nuts and a document given by the astrologer indicating the auspicious moment of the wedding.

With the worship to the god, Ganeś, the future bride accepts all these gifts and uses the comb, vermilion and *sacikā*. As soon as she uses these things she is considered a partial member of the groom family.

(b) The girl's parents give her all the necessary objects for a conjugal life as gift. This is called *kosah* and is composed of clothes, a kitchen set, worshipping utensils, a bedroom set, a make-up set including a comb and a hair brush to arrange her hair early in the morning each day.

(c) The next day or the fourth day after the main marriage ceremony, *hōnkegu*, there is a ritual, *sānpyākegu*, held at the groom's house. All the necessary objects for this performance are sent by the bride's natal home, as her ritual gift. This gift contains a set to worship *Ganeś* as well as the newly married couple. This worship is accompanied by ritual snacks called, *sagān*²³, and a set of traditional make-up objects :

Name of the object	Explanation
<i>ajāhsakī</i>	a small silver box to keep a kind of home made herbals black paste, <i>ajāh</i>
<i>ci kān kholā</i>	oil pot made of silver or bronze with full of mustard oil
<i>dumsipā, cusāpā</i>	porcupine thorn
<i>jwālānhāyakān</i>	ritual mirror made of silver and decorated around with flame motif
<i>kakicā</i>	ordinary comb made of bamboo
<i>kalasā</i>	holly water pot made of silver or copper
<i>komkholā</i>	decorative silver bowl filled with traditional face washing powder, <i>kom</i> .

Name of the object	Explanation
<i>kumbaḥkā</i>	a kind of yellow thread prepared by virgin girl.
<i>mhaykhāpā</i>	peacock feather
<i>natubhatuā, natūcā</i>	a needle point tool made of silver its one side is extended in the form of head ornament with the flowers and birds motifs.
<i>sinhaḥmū</i>	a decorative silver container of vermilion with filled with vermilion
<i>s wān</i>	flowers, a pink rose and a white narcissi is compulsory
<i>thakūcā</i>	hair brush made of needle pointed bamboo sticks
<i>wahaḥkaticā</i>	silver comb decorated by the various images

The newly married bride preserves all above mentioned objects as her genuine gift from her natal home. Once using these things during the *sānpyākegu* ritual, they become her personal property. Most Newar women keep these objects for the future ritual ceremonies of their children.



Photo 9. The principle make-up objects of the *sānpyākegu* ritual : In front, from left to right, silver comb, *wahaḥkaticā*, vermilion box, *sinhaḥ battā*, needle pointed tool, *natūcā* or *natubhatuā*; behind, the mirror, *jwālānhyā ykān*, vermilion container, *sinhaḥmū*, home made washing powder container, *koṃ kholā* and oil container, *chikān kholā*.

Utilisation of the combs during the ritual *sānpyākegu*: Early in the morning, the newly married bride purifies herself with a bath. She then takes her seat in front of the sacred fire place, *homa*, where the fire will

witness her husband combing her hair. He then continues to decorate his newly married wife with the above mentioned objects. In this article I concentrate only on comb, brush and head grooming functions.

At first, he applies mustard oil on the bride's head. Symbolically, he combs her hair with the silver comb, (*wahah kakicā*). In fact, he uses the bamboo brush and comb to arrange the hair. He divides her hair into five parts by the help of a decorated pin called *natubhatucā* or *natūcā*²⁴. He makes five knots, *nyāgaḥ sapwah*. These five knots are placed as follows : the principle one on the top middle of the head, one just above the top front of the head, another at the back side just above the neck and the other two are above the left and right ears (Vajrācārya, (N. S. 1103) 1983 : 60). They are considered by the Newars as five Buddha, (*pancabuddha*)²⁵ as well as five essentials elements of the life, (*pancatatwa*)²⁶.

At the end of the hair grooming with the silver comb, (*wahahkakicā*), and the pin, (*natūcā*) is pinned into the knots as head ornaments. Once fixed in place they are bound and circled by yellow thread, *kumbahkā* as shown in Photo 10 (b).



Photo 10 (a). The *sīnpyākegu* ritual, The groom is doing a bride's hair dressing.



10. (b). Doing the hair dressing ceremony and make-up.

According to the Newars of Banepa and Bhaktapur, there is no strict rule to make five knots during this ritual, it may be only one at the top of the head. The important part of the ritē is to comb the hair with a silver comb, oil and give the vermilion to the bride in front of the fire. The silver comb set is an important object; even a poor family offers a miniature form of it²⁷. The other above mentioned objects may be made in less precious metals according to the family's economic capacity.

Both combing and oiling the hair is *lakṣha*, an auspicious act. The placing of vermilion is the sign of happiness, (*saubhāgya*), which is considered auspicious for beginning of conjugal life. At the end of the grooming, he holds the traditional mirror, (*jwālānhāykān*) for her to see herself. Now they are socially allowed to share the conjugal bed. With this ritual the bride and groom promise to have children and to continue the family. Most of the Newars believe that the ritual authorises the newly married man to have control over his wife's sexuality. The Newars do the *sānpyākegu* ritual before they share the conjugal bed as the newly married couple in the process of reproducing offspring. Among the Indian (Hindu), one kind of ritual called *simantā* is done to purify the uterus and to protect the foetus during the first pregnancy of a woman (Pandey 1969 : 64-69). Though the celebration period of the ritual *sānpyākegu* among the Newars and *simantā* in India are different, all processes as well as the goals are similar.

The silver comb has a great significance. According to traditional belief, silver is a metal associated with the moon. Silver has the power to pacify bad influence or danger from the planets. On the other hand silver is considered to be the symbol of moon and is linked with birth (Vajracarya 1983:6). The Newars believe that silver metal has power of moon's constant rebirth. The menstrual period of a woman functions similarly as that of the rebirth cycle of the moon. The ritual *sānpyākegu* concerns the newly married couple's duty to generate the offspring of the family. Therefore, the utilisation of silver comb both purifies and protects the uterus and the foetus.

(d) Four days after the main ceremony of the marriage, *kwāhswawanegu*²⁸ will be held. The bride's natal family members as well as their close relatives, friends and neighbours visit her at her husband's home. Each visitor offers a gift to her. The natal family gifts a make-up set along with a comb, a set of clothes and other things like: jewellery, gold coin, money, sweets and fruits.

Comb and Brush during Funeral Rites

When a person dies, all of his immediate family members as well as relatives observe mourning. Among the family members, the mourning period will last for one year and among the relatives it will last from four to forty-five days. During the mourning period, many kinds of taboos are observed by the family of the deceased's family. One of their first observances is to leave their hair uncombed and not use any head ornaments, hats or make-up. The chief mourners (sons and wife) and immediate family members take off their head ornaments or decoration. Men take off their caps and the women unfasten their node or plait.

None of the family members comb the hair until their first phase of purification is held. The purification date is different from person to person according to the relationship with the deceased. The married daughters of the dead person purify on the fourth day of death. They can then comb the hair without applying oil. The other family members have to wait until the tenth day to comb their hair²⁹. The daughter of the deceased apply oil only after forty-five day, in the *latyā* ceremony. Other married daughters of the family can apply oil on the twelfth day after home purification rite, *gahsū*. During *gahsū*, close relatives can comb their hair and apply oil with the

exception of deceased's wife and sons. A comb, brush and oil are all used in performing the ritual of purification.

The Purification Ritual, *dūbyenkegu* and the Hair Brush: Certain: Buddhists perform purification on the seventh day of the death and almost all other Newars on the tenth day. They wash all their utensils and purify the whole house on that day³⁰. All the family members go to the river side near the cremation ground where the dead body was burned. They perform ritual purification and free themselves from the pollution.

The family priest, the barber and his wife will be present at the river side. The wife of the family barber cuts the toe nails of all the adult family members, *lusithiykegu*.³¹ The barber shaves the head, eyebrows, moustache and beard of the chief mourner, *mitaimha* (son of the dead person), the other sons, and as well all adult men's head of the cognate family of the dead person. This ritual is called *sānkhāyegu* (Toffin, 1971). After the above two actions they all take several purification baths by applying different objects:

At the river side, each of them use a kind of liquid, *āti*³² on their head and wash it with a pot of water mixed with ash and filtered called *khālah*³³

They brush their hair by the traditional brush, *thakūcā*, wash their face with home-made face-washing powder, *kom*, apply mustard oil cake, *khau*, and a pot of river water to purify themselves, rub their head by a kind of fruit, *ambah*, (*emblica officinalis*) and a *hallah* (*myrobolan*) and then plunge into the river.

The last bath will be taken by using a white jasmine, *dāphaswān*. It makes them more or less free from the death pollution, they then offer water to the Sun God.

The family priest sprinkles a substance over the family members a kind of holy mixture, ritually composed of five elements: a product of cow urine, dough, milk, ghee and yoghurt called *pancagabe* (Dubois, 1990 : 152-153). The priest then shows them a ritual mirror made of bronze or silver, called *jwālānhāykān*, and gives the white dresses to the chief mourners (sons and wife), which they wear during one year mourning period.

The priest then gives some rice to all of them to worship the river and the sun.

After completing all these process, the close relatives will be purified from the pollution of death. They are now considered to be free from sadness and depression, *dūbenkegu*.

The Second Step of Purification and Combing the Hair: On the twelfth day of the death³⁴, the home purification ceremony is performed by performing a fire sacrifice, *homa*, at the place where the dead person took his last breath. This ritual is called, *ghahsū*, and all the family members and couples of *phuki* (cognate family members), who play a vital role during the cremation must participate. The *ghahsū* ritual, releases one from restrictions following the death.

At the end of the ritual, the priest gives a frontal mark, *sinah*. He puts a little oil on the head of each male person and symbolically combs their hair. Then he gives a colourful or a black cap to all males except the sons of the deceased. The female members with exception of the wife of the deceased receive oil on their head from the priest's wife, and she symbolically combs their hair. At last, with the exception of the wife and sons of the deceased all of them receive a piece of betel nut and a betel leaf to eat. They are now considered to be free from restrictions on their joy and happiness. They can now resume combing their hair, grooming themselves in their ritual ceremonies.

The sons receive only a white cap and the wife of the deceased does not receive any thing. It symbolises the continuation of mourning.

If the person who dies is the oldest among the family, *thakāli*, these restrictions will continue for forty-five days, when another ritual called *latyā* is held. All the above mentioned objects will be then given to the family members at this ritual instead of the *ghahsū*.

Sayyādāna, (Donation of Bed: During the *ghahsū* ritual, the deceased's family give offerings called *sayyādāna* to their priest. *Sayyādāna* is comprised of all the objects which is necessary during the lifetime of a person, (a furnished room: *kothājwalān*³⁵, a piece of land with some agricultural tools: *bunjwalān*, a kitchen set: *bhutūjwalān*, some items of food and drink: *nasā-twānsājwalān*, worship utensils: *pūjājwalān*, clothes for the priest couple: *wasahjwalān*, a jewellery set: *tisājwalān*, a make-up set: *samājwalān* or *saubhāgyajwalān*). *Saubhāgyajwalān* is accompanied by a comb and a brush.

Among all these things, a piece of gold with motif of a couple symbolising Visnu and his wife is given as a ritual gift. This sketch is a wish for the deceased to have the protection of the god Visnu or to have a conjugal life in heaven. This offering shows that the Newar wish the deceased a harmonious conjugal life in other world. To fulfil the wish, a

comb is given with all the other essential objects. This means the comb accompanies a Newar man not only in his life time but also after his death.

Most of the Hindu Newars perform fire sacrifice called *saptāhā*, once the year long mourning period is over. This worship lasts for seven days. At the end of the fire sacrifice the family will give an offering of a household or a bed-room, *sayyādāna*, to the priest. They offer the divinity a miniature make-up set called *saubhāgyajwalān* as we can see in Photo 11. The Hindu Newars believe that performance helps the dead person find a place in heaven with all the necessary elements of life.



Photo 11. A make-up set, *saubhāgyajwalān*, (comb, plait decoration cord, *sacikā*, mirror, *nhāyakān*, vermilion box, *sinah batā*, front mark, *sinah* some glass bracelets, *curā*, a piece of cloth.)

Combs in Different Ceremonies and Worships

Among the Newars, worship of the living goddess, Kumāri, is very popular. Kumāri is considered as a protector of human beings and destroyer of inhuman beings, *mānava rakṣaka* and *dānava nāsaka*. According to a legend, she killed his own lover who created a lot of trouble to human beings. According to traditional belief, she is the royal protector, mother goddess Tulajā Bhavāni, incarnated in a virgin girl of a Shakya caste³⁶. The Newars worship the mother goddess shrine, *pith*, as Kumāri. One *pitha* has eight, nine or ten mother goddesses among them one must be Kumāri.

Worship of Kumāri plays a great role in ceremonial life cycle rituals among the Newars. From child's first initiation, *macā jānko* through the old age consecration, *burā jānko* ceremony Kumāri is worshipped.



Photo 12. The living goddess Kumāri of Patan (Photo : B. Manandhar)

Not only the Newar but most of the Nepalese people believe that the goddess Kumāri protects and gives blessing. Therefore, the Nepalese people, both Hindus and Buddhists, worship the goddess Kumāri to fulfil their wishes. They worship her particularly for positive results in their work, for protection against blood diseases and bleeding problems.

When someone performs *Kumāri pūjā*, he or she must include a make-up set *saubhāgyajwalān*, in the offerings. This set is composed of a comb, a plait decoration cord, *sachikā*, a mirror attached with vermilion box, *sinah battā*, a frontal mark, *sinah*, some glass bracelets, *curā*, a piece of cloth for a blouse or a set of dress. All these objects are preferred in red colour.



Photo 13. An example of the make-up set, often offered to Kumāri.³⁷

Most of the Hindu Newars observe various fastings and worships like *satyanārāyan pūjā*, and *saptāhā*. The performers have to offer two sets of the make-up objects, *saubhagyajwalān*. One is for divinity in miniature form and the other is the real make-up set with a comb and gifted to the priest couple at the end of the ceremony.

Conclusion

I have already explained that the comb is a symbol of joy and happiness. During several rituals the comb is offered from the seniors to the juniors or to their descendants. It expresses their relationship and wishes their juniors for their happiness and happy lives. By offering a comb, they express their wish to expand their family and continue this traditional protection of their future descendants.

Therefore, I suppose that the Newars wish for a harmonious and happy family life while living in this world and in other world after death. As they believe that all human beings have a soul; only the body dies and the soul continues its existence and takes a new life after death.

The comb, a simple object, can be purchased for a little money. It is a tool of aesthetics; its function is to comb someone's hair, groom it for beauty, happiness and a harmonious appearing personality to the outside world.

In the Newar society a cheerful personality is considered an auspicious sign, *laksana*. During ritual and worship the comb acts as a tool for power and purification. Before birth it gives protection to the foetus by purifying the uterus and after death it removes pollution from those in mourning.

Mostly it brings happiness by removing isolations, depression and loneliness.

The Newars believe in rebirth and have a tradition of preparing the dead person for the other world. They wish the deceased a better life there. It is the great duty of the deceased's descendant (son) to give all the necessary objects including a comb as a gift *sayyādāna* to the family priest. It is supposed that these gift *sayyādāna* will be received by the dead person in the other world for an ideal life.

The comb plays an important role in the culture and ritual functions. It reveals the social meaning and traditional behaviour of the Newars.

Notes

1. This article is a small part of my research report on "The traditional Head-dress and Hair Style among the Newars", (in Nepali), submitted at Centre for Nepal and Asian studies/ Tribhuvan University (CNAS/TU) in 1992. (I would like to thank to C. Boch, Yubin Pujari and Anand Prashad Shresth for giving their time to read this article and for correction of grammar).
2. The Newars are one of the 25 ethnic groups of Nepal. They are 1,041,090 (*Statistical Pocket Book*, 1994 : 22) which represent 5.6% of the total population of the country. Among the Newars, there is social hierarchy, based on caste system according to the distribution of the responsibilities towards the society. Most of the Newars live in Kathmandu valley. They have their own language, art, architecture and culture giving them a unique identity among the other people of Nepal. Religiously, the Newars declare themselves as Hindus or Buddhists. In my opinion they follow the syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism in both philosophy and culture.
3. All the Newari vernaculars are figured in if they are other they are written in italic and bracketed in abbreviation from which language are they taken. For example (nep) for Nepali word or (hin.) for Hindi.
4. There are some ritual function of the brush which will explain on the ritual part of this article.
5. Photos used in this article are mostly photographed by author herself during her field work in 1992, if the photos are borrowed or photographed by some one else than herself their names are mentioned at the legend.

6. Some well known anthropologists considered as the experts on the Newars, G. S. Nepali (1965), M. Allen (1982), G. Toffin (1984), R. Pradhan (1986) and R. Levy (1992)
7. More or less, it is like the *guphā basne* <<stay in the cave>> rite among the Brahman-Chhetris of Nepal. For more details see : Bennett, 1978 : 31-46.
8. For detail information see : Nepali, 1965 : 112-116, Allen, 1982 : 179-210, Toffin, 1984 : 140-141, Lewis, 1984 : 176-178, Pradhan, 1986 : 125-130 and Levy, 1992 : 670-673
9. *kom* is made by a mixture, powder of fried gains of barley, rice and a little portion of mustard.
10. This bowl is called *chikā kholā*
11. The feast contents, beaten rice, two types of vegetable, a type of beans and the potato curry, but the meat and alcohol are strictly prohibited.
12. In the old women's words, *bārhā khyā napān dyan mawalā ? wān māyāyā mawalā?*
13. According to social reforms of Jayasthiti Malla (Budhathoki (ed.), 2039 B. S.) nail cutting service is given, by the barber, Naunī to Shākya, Shrestha, Vajrācārya, Tulādhar, etc. and by the Butcher, *Nai*. to the Manandhar, Maharjan, Ranjitkar, etc.
14. *alah* is a kind of mixture of water and a kind of mineral red colour which is antiseptic.
15. For detail of the worship see, Levy (1992), Nepali (1965), Bennett (1987).
16. Very rare cases in the past when child marriage was prevalent.
17. Some rare cases in the past.
18. Thursday links with the planet Jupiter, which is the source of knowledge and wisdom as well as good luck and prosperity. According to the traditional belief every thing began on Thursday will get success easily. The influence of planet brings long lasting affection among the couple.
19. The first gift sent to the future bride from the groom's house in which a kind of sweet called *lākhāmari*, a paste made by mixing wheat flour and small black beans, *Māy*, flour into a paste, cooking it in butter and then dropping it into a sugar liquid. There will be twelve in numbers and it will be accompanied by the ten betel nuts and other gifts.

20. According to one Vaidya family of Patan, there will be 12 betel nuts and a box of vermilion, from which the girl keeps two betel nuts and accept to put the vermilion on her head.
21. Literary translation: give the betel nut.
22. Literary translation, <<to go to feed the fruits>>, this gift composed by the seasonal fruits but the following fruits are compulsorily presented; bananas, mango, sugarcanes, pea-nuts, radish, guavas, green myrobolan, fruits of the *bayar* tree.
23. *sagān*, is a ritual offering to wish someone good luck who is going to begin something new in his or her life or to congratulate someone who has success or achieved something. There are two types of *sagān*, one is called *goṣṣagān* and another is called *pāṣṣagān*. The *goṣṣagān*, non vegetarian, is comprises with yoghurt, clothes, a boiled egg, a fried fish, alcohol (among certain Newars, along with above said items meat, pan cake, etc., are also added). The *pāṣṣagān*, vegetarian, is comprises with the yoghurt and clothes only.
24. This is a tool used for partition of the hair. Its one side is pointed like needle and another side like as a miniature crown decorated by various motifs likely butterflies, flowers, peacock, etc.
25. The names of the five Buddha, their places and their corresponding elements are respectively as follows: Bairocana-middle-the sky/ Akṣṣvyay-above the front-the water/ Ratnasṁvaba-above the left ear-land/ Amoghaśiddhi-above the right ear-air and Amitāmbha-the back one- the fire.
26. Water, air, land, sky and fire, all together is called *pancatatwa*.
27. Recently one of my friend from Patan told me that the comb is not needed to be made of silver for this ritual. Her own family has a collection of small combs made of other less precious metal than silver. As I have only one information in this matter, I have to do more field work on it to go in depth and I am interested in studying it in detail.
28. Literal meaning of *khwāṣwawanegu*, is to go and see the face (of newly married daughter). Among the Manandhar, it will be held on the same night of the wedding. Nowadays, most of the Newars held this ritual on the convenient day of both families (bride & groom's). Even some families have abandoned this ritual.
29. Among the certain Newar castes, the Vajrācārya, Shākya, Ranjitrkār, etc. practice to purification ritual on seventh day of the death.

30. For more details on purification cleaning process see ; *Manu Smṛiti*, trans. Doniger, 1991 : 111.
31. The butcher plays that role among the certain castes like Manandhar, Ranjitrkār, Benjankār, etc.
32. *āti* is a kind of liquid made of wheat flour and water made by a married daughter of the dead person's family. It will be cooked in a clay pot, not inside the house but under the roof of main entrance, *pikhālakhu*, of the death person's house.
33. *khālaṣ* is a kind of water mixed in ash and then filtered.
34. In certain castes, already mentioned above, this ritual is held on the seventh day of the death.
35. A house if one can afford it.
36. For more details see M. Allen, 1975 & 1984 / S. Manandhar, 1988.
37. In the photo, a small piece of cloth is presented, which is offered to Kumāri shrine. If one is going to worship the living Goddess Kumāri, they offer a piece of cloth minimum 1.5 m. to make a blouse or a set of dress for Kumāri.

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