

THARUS OF DANG: RITES DE PASSAGE & FESTIVALS

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Introduction

In many societies there exist certain methods for purifying or sanctifying individuals and shaping the way of life of the people. Through them a person is supposed to proceed towards a better and more auspicious way of life both in this as well as the other world. These are the life-cycle ceremonies or the rites de passage.

Contact between Tharus and any other culture, apart from that of the Hindus, has been limited. Sandwiched as they were between the Hindus of the hills and the plains, they were almost closed off from any other cultural contact or influence. Therefore most of the Tharu life-cycle ceremonies have been influenced by Hindu beliefs.

Child Birth

No ritual takes place during the pregnancy of a woman, though a pregnant woman is expected not to go towards the cremation site or a burial site or to step out alone on dark nights.

A woman delivers her baby in her bedroom, if she is inside her house at that time. Sometimes babies are born in the fields, streets, or courtyards, when the pregnant woman happens to be there in the course of household-work. A pregnant woman can be seen doing her household work quite normally until the last hour before delivery. Individuals, other than the *sorinnyā*

(traditional midwife) or those who have to care for the mother and the child, must not touch or enter into contact with a new-born baby and the mother. Those who have to have such contact, must take a bath after the contact. The explanation given for this prohibition is that the newly born baby and the mother are polluted and unclean.

After the birth of a baby, attention is paid to whether the placenta (*purin*) has come out or not. If not, several methods are applied to make it come out. Such practices are: giving the mother some water fortified with *jhārpuk* (incantation) to drink, giving her an amulet (*jantar*) to put on her neck, showing her a mail or express train ticket, etc. When the placenta has come out, the *sorinnyā* or any other experienced woman, ties the umbilical cord and cuts it with a knife. Then she puts the placenta in the form of an anti-clockwise spiral-shape over a *tepri* (dish-like construction made of *Soria robusta* leaves) and takes it to the extreme south western corner of the *ghāri* section of the house, where a pit has just been dug by a male member of the family. The *sorinnyā* keeps the placenta inside the pit and buries it. Stones and heavy logs are put over it to prevent it from being dug up and eaten by carnivorous pets. After that, the *sorinnyā* bathes the baby with some paste of mustard oil-cake and then the baby is given to the mother to nurse.

Fire is lit in the room, where the delivery took place and the mother and the new born child are to be confined until the performance of *ghatwā karainā*. The fire is made to warm the mother and child during their confinement. This fireplace must not be touched by others than those concerned with the case. The *sorinnyā* heats some mustard oil over the fire and rubs it over the body of mother and child. Most portions of the mother's body are exposed to the fire to keep them warm. The *sorinnyā* washes the dirty clothes and sheets of the

mother and the child too. After completing her job she takes a bath and returns back home. From next day on, the *sorinnyā* goes to see the mother and child twice a day up to the *ghatwā karainā* ceremony. Each day after work, she takes a bath to purify herself from the pollution consequent on contact with the newly born baby and the mother.

When the umbilical cord over the baby's navel dries and drops away (generally after four or five days) *ghatwā karainā* (=introducing to the water source) ceremony is done to purify the mother and the child from their pollution. On this day the straw, mat, fire-wood, charcoal and ashes 'contaminated by pollution' are thrown away and the room is plastered with dung. The new mother goes to a water-source and takes a bath. There she makes a little cow-dung hillock on the ground and puts some vermilion spots on it. Her baby too is bathed. Then some *swan pāni*¹ is sprinkled over the mother and child for purification.

After the *ghatwā karainā* ceremony, the mother is freed from her confinement. From now on she participates in household-works as usual. For a few weeks she does not do heavy work.

Mur Bhwāj or the First Hair Cutting

Mur bhwāj is a first hair cutting ceremony. Hindus call it *kshaur* or *mundan*. Among high-caste Hindus this ceremony should be performed for every male child. But, among Tharus, this ceremony is performed only for that male child whose birth is considered as a great event, bringing pleasure and happiness to the family. For example the birth of a first son, or the survival of a boy immediately after several instances of infantile mortality. Rich Tharus, however, perform this ceremony for all of their male children.

1. Water ritually purified by contact with a piece of gold.

Mur bhūāj is performed during the fourth or fifth year of the boy, on any Monday or Wednesday of Fagun (February-March). In this ceremony first of all some holy liquor is offered to all liquor-accepting household deities. Then a maternal uncle or maternal uncle's cousin shaves or clips a bit of the boy's hair. If the man is an expert, he can shave off the hair completely, otherwise this is left to an expert.

A little prior to this performance, respected guests, especially members of the sisters' families, father's sisters' families, and the Mahaton of the village, are invited. A great feast is arranged in their honour. A pig, goat or a sheep is slaughtered for the feast in which plenty of home made beer (*jār*) and meat is served frequently.

Naming

Traditionally Tharus do not perform any name-giving ceremony. Nor is there any time of the year or age fixed for that: the name can be given at any time from the 5th day after birth until the age of 18 months.

Any person, a member of the family, a neighbour, a respected man of the village, a hermit, a pilgrim or a junior official of the census department on his census collecting tour, may help the family in selecting a name for their child. The name selected is used by all the family members and is later established as the real name of the person.

Traditionally the names are derived from the following sources:

- a) Day of the week or the month of birth.
- b) Site of baby's birth.
- c) Name of the place where the father was going or the occupation in which he was engaged on the day the baby was born.

- d) Rituals for protecting the child against infantile death.
- e) Events or festivals which occurred on or near the date of the child's birth.
- f) Physiognomy or attitude of the child.

The above-mentioned sources of names, however, are not all inclusive. Tharus coming from the elite group or those who are in contact with either the elite group or members of the traditional Hindu castes have abandoned such names. Rather they prefer to use common Hindu names like Janaki, Sitaram, Sivalal, Narayan, Bala, Dhana, Moti etc.

Tharus usually do not like to be addressed by their proper names. Calling the elderly or respected persons by their proper names is considered as an insult to them, and thus most rude and impolite behaviour. For their day-to-day use, Tharus have calling names which are derived either from their position in the sibling hierarchy of the family for instance *Barka* (=eldest), *Majhla* (=second), *Sajhla* (=third) etc. Moreover each household of a village is given a nick-name. This could derive either from the name of the previous village from where the senior household members came, or from the name of the place from where the wife of the household chief came. Sometimes the physical location of the household within the village determines its nick-name (for instance: *Bhitrahan* =a house which is set further back from the street than others in the row).

Marriage

Marriage is an obligation. According to Tharu concepts, happiness is consequent on having a lot of children and seeing these children married. Tharus aspire to see their houses full of children and grand-children. Such desires are quite natural for people living in a difficult climate and unsafe

surroundings and in circumstances which result in a large number of infantile deaths. So the parents try to arrange an early marriage for their children. Tharus prefer to get their children married at an early age (during their early teens). But occasionally this is not possible owing to the system of 'marriage by exchange'. Among Tharus there are two possible ways of obtaining a girl in marriage. One must either give a girl in exchange for another, or pay the bride price. Suppose A wants to marry a girl B. Either A will give his sister X to B's family in exchange for B, or he will pay the bride price. If both of the families concerned prefer exchange of girls rather than the bride-price, the girl X will be married to a man Y from B's family. Y can be either B's brother, nephew (brother's son) or a paternal uncle. If A has no sister to give in exchange, another girl from A's-joint family, (for example: A's brother's daughter or A's father's sister) will be given to B's family to be married to Y. The condition of 'Marriage by Exchange' makes it occasionally difficult to organise the early marriage. For, if a brother of a girl is too young, and there is much age difference between them, the girl might have to wait a little longer for marriage till his brother becomes old enough for 'exchange marriage'. Furthermore in such exchange a quite young boy may be married to an adult girl or vice versa. An adult daughter may be kept waiting until her young brother approaches the minimum marriage age of about 10 or 12 years.

The system of 'marriage by exchange' helps people in many ways. First, the exchange system is considered practical in Tharu society where barter was previously more prevalent and is still prevalent today. To exchange is the traditional system. It is more convenient for a family to arrange for a girl to be given in exchange for one of their own male members rather than to pay the bride-price. Tharus prefer to deal in objects rather than in cash. A Tharu will wait

for a couple of years to get a girl back in exchange for his son or brother rather than be given cash (as a bride-price for his recently married out daughter or sister). Again 'Exchange' saves the trouble of fixing the price. It also links the two families both ways. In Sukhrwar village a Tharu girl Laihya, aged 8 or 9, was married in 1974 in exchange for her elder brother's wife, already married in 1971. Of eight men married in the village in the year 1974, seven were married by exchange. The reason for the eighth man, Balbahadur, not doing so was that the early people in his family were influenced by Hindu norms and ideals and did not like the exchange or the 'sale' of a sister or daughter. Balbahadur's sister had already been given in marriage a few years previously without bride-price. Nevertheless on the occasion of Balbahadur's marriage his perspective in-laws who did not share the Hinduized view of marriage, demanded the bride-price for the hand of their daughter.

There is one more elaborate form of exchange-marriage, called *tinkhut* (=three fold). Three parties or households are concerned in this form of marriage rather than the usual two. In this system, A gives big daughter to B's son. B gives his daughter to C's son and C who has no daughter to give in exchange, gives cash as bride-price to A. Some couples in Sukhrwar were married in this way.

A man without a sister, niece (brother's daughter) or father's sister, to give in exchange, and who has not the money for the bride-price, has to wait quite a long time till he earns sufficient to pay the bride-price. Otherwise he must accept a woman who has degraded herself socially by marrying several times and thus is available at a nominal bride-price or for no bride price at all.

For marriage all Tharus groups, like Dangaura, Rana, Kochila etc. are endogamous. Within each group the clans are

exogamous Within Dangaura group any clan can have matrimonial relations with any of the other clans from any sub-group.

Thus there are several forms of marriage prevalent among Tharus. Polygyny, though not common, is socially recognized. But polyandry is neither recognized nor practised. Polygyny is practised generally in cases like the barrenness of the wife or if several deaths occur in child birth, and, occasionally, if the wife does not produce a male issue. Sometimes a man dissatisfied with his first wife or having a serious love affair with another woman marries or abducts a girl or woman as his second wife.

In Sukhrwar village, Mohanlal Mahton's father Kantu had two wives. The first wife had no son. So he married a second wife from whom Mohanlal and others were born. There are a few more instances like this in the village. Among the Tharu youths Gobardhan (28 years old) son of Jagatram (Chhayaram's household) and Sukhlal, son of Bishnulal, have two wives. The first wives of these youths went through traditional marriage ceremonies with the requisite rituals, while the second wives were abducted without ceremony. Neither of these second wives had been married earlier.

Divorce, though not frequent among high caste Hindus, is socially recognized and frequent among Tharus. But the bride-price (*jhaga*) of a woman goes on decreasing in proportion to the number of husbands she has had. After three or four changes of husband no bride-price can be claimed, according to customary tradition. Generally the divorce takes place in cases where:

- a) the couple were married forcibly by the parents.
- b) the husband was too young to satisfy his wife.
- c) ill-treatment of the wife by the husband or the co-wife.

- d) physical disability or long illness of one or other party.
- e) *migration*: The wife does not like to loose contact with her parents or brothers. So if her parents move far away, she encourages her husband to follow them in their migration. If the husband does not like her advice, she leaves him, divorces and goes to her parents. Otherwise the husband, like Sitaram in Chhayaram's family, has to move with the in-laws, thus abandoning his own joint-family and also his share of property in it.

Mostly it is women who divorce their husbands as they enjoy a more dominant position and can find another husband quite easily. A husband like Sitaram (mentioned above) sometimes has to sacrifice his own pleasure to comply with his wife's decision.

In the making of a marriage, the first approach is always made by the boy's side to the girl's side. As most marriages are fixed by exchange, generally both parties play an equal role in the marriage negotiations.

A. *Proper Forms of Marriage*

Two types of the regular form of marriage are most common. These are:

- (i) *Choti bhwāj* (=minor wedding).
- (ii) *Barka bhwāj* (=major wedding).
- (i) *Chhoti Bhwāj*

This is a very ordinary and simple marriage, practised by very poor families. In it, the household and village deities of both sides are offered some liquor or other preparation like *chapātis* prepared in ghee or oil. Certain selected guests like the Mahaton, cousins in both lines and the affines of the groom's married brothers and sisters, are invited for a feast.

(ii) *Barka Bhwāj*

Barka bhwāj is a fully fledged regular marriage. It needs a great amount of food grain, liquor and money. So, such a marriage is generally not held in a drought-affected or low-productivity year.

Relatives, Mahaton, the *barins* (for a *ghargurawa* household) or the *ghargurawas* (for a *barin* household) work as intermediaries to bring the two parties together for betrothal. Both of the contracting parties investigate certain matters like:

- a) Whether the economic status of both families is sound.
- b) Whether the spouses are in good health, work hard and possibly have a good appearance and are of suitable age.
- c) Whether the other party's moral reputation is good.

Ordinarily Tharus do not want to go far from their village to establish matrimonial alliances. For marriage, a household gives first preference to a girl from the same village and probably the same family with whom they have had matrimonial relations in the past. If there is no such girl, they again look for other possible partners in the village with whom fresh marriage relationships can be established. If still no possible spouse is found, they then try to find one in the neighbouring villages. Here too, efforts are made to renew relationships within those families with whom matrimonial relations had been established in the past. By this stage, they generally succeed in locating a marriageable candidate. Once a girl for marriage or a family suitable for exchange-marriage is found, no further delay occurs.

Those few Tharu families who rank above ordinary economic status face some difficulty in finding a suitable match of the

same status. There are only a few such families in Dang. In Deokhuri, there are a few more but most of them are descendants of the same family or clan and thus cannot be married. Due to the scarcity of the same rank or same status-owning families, sometimes families in Dang or Deokhuri valley have to go either to the next valley or to Banke, Bardia or Kailali districts. Shyamesh Chaudhari of Baibang village of Dang married the daughter of Chhimanand Mahaton (an ex-minister) from Kailali. Likewise a sister of Phattasing Tharu, the District Panchayat president of Nepalganj, was married to Khem Chaudhari, a nephew of Parashunarayan Chaudhari (also an ex-minister) of Deokhuri valley. Furthermore Puran Chaudhari, a brother of Parashunarayan, married Chakbir Mahaton's daughter from Dundra village of Dang valley. Later, Puran also married a highly-educated Tharu girl from Bara district as his second wife.

As far as the age of marriage is concerned, there is no fixed rule. The marriage-age depends upon several circumstances. Generally, if there is a sufficient amount of food-grain or money, and there is no other problem, marriage takes place somewhere between the age of 12 to 25. Due to the system of exchange of girls for marriage to avoid bride-price, there sometimes exists a difference of 15 or 20 years' between the ages of bride and bridegroom. In rare instances, if the girl to be given in exchange is too young (5 or 6 years old) for her would-be husband, she may be reserved for exchange in a marriage to be held in future. The case of Laihya (the grant-daughter of Talsa) could be mentioned here. She was reserved for exchange after her aunt's marriage that took place in 1971. She was to be married after a simple ceremony at Janakpur (the husband's house) in 1974.

Five years ago, in a neighbouring village, Sewar, a young Tharu boy, Durga, aged 14, had married a divorced woman

28 years old. As Durga had no sisters or unmarried female cousins to give in exchange, and his father had not sufficient money to give as a bride-price, he got married with a woman who had divorced three earlier husbands and was pregnant from her last husband. She was bought with Rs 50 in cash and one Muri of paddy. For some time all concerned with this union were happy. The pregnant woman delivered the baby. There was no reaction to this birth from the new husband's family, who took it normally. Unfortunately the baby died of malnutrition as the mother had no milk in her breast; and the mother eventually left her fourth husband. Durga cannot now claim any money in compensation, as a woman going to a fifth husband is considered as a prostitute and not a marriageable woman.

The current bride-price is Rs 1,000 in addition to 50 *pāthis* of rice, one *dhārmi* of salt, one *dhārmi* of mustard-oil and 22 yards of *bahrwār* (coarse textile), for a beautiful, unmarried girl. A woman who has divorced once costs less. For such a woman, the next husband has to pay around Rs 800 only to the ex-husband as compensation. For a woman divorced a second and third time the sum is Rs 400 and Rs 200 respectively either in cash or in crops of the same value.

In a *Barka bhwāj* ceremony the following rituals take place during the auspicious months of Māgh, Phāgun, Chait and Baisākh.

- (a) *Doobdan Ghalna* (=putting on the *doob* strands etc.). This is the first of the series of several rituals in a regular, full-fledged marriage ceremony. This performance is held just after the preparatory negotiations. In *Doobdan Ghalna* it is declared officially that an agreement has been come to in view of a marriage or marriages. The declaration is made in front of witnesses including the Mahatons of both sides and a few other Tharu nobles.

On the day fixed for this performance, the house-chief or the father of the bride taking along with him one more man² (the Mahaton, if the bride and her family belong to another village) goes to the house of the bridegroom. After serving liquor and country-beer to them, the house-chief of the bridegroom's family leads them to the house of the Mahaton of that village. The local Mahaton asks them the cause for their coming. Thus the conversation begins. When answered, he asks the bride's household chiefs, "*apan chai/bahinnya delyā* (=Do you give your daughter/sister in marriage)?" The chief of the bride's household agrees. Now the same Mahaton asks the chief of the bride-groom's household "*kyakarmā lelyā* (=for whom did you accept)?" The bride-groom's family chief answers whether he accepted it for his son (1st, 2nd, 3rd etc.). The same questions are asked three, four or seven times to both heads of household concerned who answer the same way each time. Now the questioner -- the Mahaton bride-groom's side -- asks another question "*bāt ghumaibyā kā* (=will you change your decision afterwards)?"

The bride's father answers: "*nai ghumain*" (=no, never). The Mahaton asks, "*bacha khaibo ki nahi* (=will you take an oath or not)?"

Both household-chiefs concerned answer unanimously "*khaim* (=certainly)". Then the Mahaton chants one of the following verses:

"Uppar jaibo ta gwārā pakaram = If you go upwards, I will hold you
by your legs

Tara jaibo ta cutti pakram = If you go downwards, I will hold

2. For every visit or communication concerning a marriage, the visitors or messengers must be sent in pairs (two men) since a couple of males are a good women for marriage.

hold you by the *cutti*³

Athen panca bhalādmī sāci bāti = Here the *pancha* and notables are the witnesses

Kālkatā anetra lagaibyā ta = Incidentally, if you get your daughter or sister married else-where

Ek betyāk doo betyā lem" = I shall take two daughters for one

Or

Upar badri tara dharti = Above are the clouds, below the earth

Pāc panca sākhi = Five *pancha* witnesses

Paun pāni sākhi = Air and water witnesses

Jyākar chāi jāi = He whose daughter elopes with another man

Ek betik lauwa damād karāi = Or who makes a new son-in-law

Ta ek betyāk doo betyā dee = He will have to refund two daughters for one.

After the recital of the verse the same Mahaton beats the ground with his right hand three or five times and asks:

Dharti hili pathar doli = Earth will tremble; rocks will move

Yi bacan āj se nai tari, nā?" = But this promise will not change from today, is it not so?

Again the Mahaton asks three times:

"Ab se lauwa lauwa istamitra hoilo na?" = From now on you, from both sides, have become relatives, is it not so?

3. *Cutti* is the little tuft of hair left on the crown by Hindus.

The household chiefs also answer unanimously "yes, we became relatives".

Finally, a mixture of rice and curd and also some strands of fresh *doob* grass are brought there. A person (anyone from the village, whose parents are alive) puts this as a *tikā* first on the forehead of the bride's side household head and then puts some of the *doob* strands on the bride's father's head or stuffs them under his cap with the *doob* tops visible outside. Next, a similar *tikā* and *doob* is given to the bride-groom's household-head and later to the rest of those present.

After this, everyone is offered some liquor or country-beer by the organizing Mahaton's family. Afterwards, everybody goes back to his home.

(b) *Thokauni*

The same day, or any other auspicious day, all the members present at the *doobdan* ceremony, go to the house of the bride-groom. A few relatives as well as one man, (generally the household-head) from every house in the bride-groom's village are also invited. Preparations go ahead for a huge feast. One of the male villagers or a male relative, generally a son-in-law or brother-in-law (sister's husband) is put in charge of the cooking. A pig is killed for the feast. One leg of pork is put aside for sending to the bride's family. Several jars of *jār* and also some liquor are prepared and huge amounts of fish, several varieties of pork, green leaf vegetable dishes are cooked.

After the cooking is done, the kitchen-supervisor (also called *bhitorryā* or *burrhyā*) brings the items for the feast, one by one from the kitchen. The first service of every item is offered to the bride's father or to the household-chief in

the bride's family, the next to the bridegroom's father or the household-chief and then to the rest of those present.

All these items are eaten only after the *jhāgā* (bride-price) settlement and the *khut negainā* ceremonies (to be discussed below) are completed. Though the actual *jhāgā* (bride-price) was already settled earlier, to give it official recognition and verification, it is settled again at this point in front of the Mahaton. *Jhāgā* settlement is also performed as a formality even though the marriage has been fixed by 'exchange marriage'.

(c) *Khut Negainā*

For *khut negainā* a lady from the bride-groom's family comes out with a bowl containing a fast red colour solution. She puts a spot of that colour on a garment worn by the bride's father, generally a loin-cloth or a *cadri*. Next she colours the bride-groom's father's loin-cloth/ *cadri* on the same way and finally those of all present. Then a person from the bride-groom's side declares, "*hardi besārak rang chutas as hamār istamitra na tuta*" (=As the colour of turmeric does not fade, so may our relatives not break).

Now the bride-groom is brought to the *barari* to be introduced. He first of all greets the chief person from the bride's family and then all others. The greeting, called *syāwā lagnā*, is done by raising one's right-hand immediately after touching the right palm of the greeted person with the tips of one's right-hand fingers. Next, the bride-groom brings a *hookah* ready for smoking.⁴ He offers the *hookah* to one of the senior and elderly men present; it is shared by all, one after another.

4. A *hookah* is an oriental tobacco pipe with a long tube by means of which the smoke is drawn through water which is kept in its bottom.

Now the chief figures from the host's family ask the bride's father or the household-head from the bride's family to begin eating, and the latter start to drink and eat. Next the bride-groom's father or his substitute and finally the others start consuming the drink and food. The menu of the meal is as follows:

- a) liquor,
- b) *pakkwa* (roast meat),
- c) *sagun* (green leaf vegetable, an auspicious symbol),
- d) fish,
- e) pork (choice pieces),
- f) other pices of pork (stomach and intestines),
- g) other vegetables,
- h) rice (for those who want it).

When the chief representative of the bride's side starts eating, the *bhitorryā* selects the roast meat and the better pieces of other meat and makes a package (*teprā*) of them. The package, and one leg (*phendwā*) of the pork, which was already put aside, are sent to the bride's family.

After the heavy meal, all the men return to their homes. Due to tradition the bride's father, or the chief of the bride's party, must not stay there that night in the groom's family. Two men from the groom's house go to deliver the package, the pork and *sagun* (raw and green vegetables) to the bride's house.

- (d) *Pacās pāthi cāur phaknā* (Delivery of fifty pathis of rice)

One or two days before the main marriage-day, fifty *pathis* of rice, one *dharni* of salt, one *dharni* of mustard-oil and twenty-two yards of *bahrwār* (a kind of white cloth) are sent to the bride's family from the bridegroom's side.

(e) *Karai pinā* (drinking from the *karai*)⁵

This must be done only on a Monday. Sometimes *karai pinā* is omitted or done earlier. On this day the bridegroom takes a bath and goes to the deity-room of his house. The bridegroom puts five or seven pairs (the number requested by the bride's mother) of intact *golrās* (the common name for *karai*) full of good home-made liquor in a row, in front of the deities enshrined there. The *golrās* are covered with sal (*Shoria robusta*) leaves, and bound with string. The spout in addition to the mouth of each *golrā*, is also closed in the same manner. These *golrās* are considered auspicious. So only those persons who do not have a 'broken house' (*ghar bigral*) i.e. those who are not widows, widowers, divorced or re-married are allowed to have any contact with these auspicious *golrās*. One or two women from the family decorate these *golrās* by making hand-marks of rice-flour paste on these vessels and inserting flowers between the strings at their tops. A man whose parents are alive, accompanied by another man, carries these *golrās* which, because they have been decorated in the above manner, are now called *karai*. He also carries a bundle of leaves and two more *golrās* of liquor called *aghauna mahtaua* which must be given to the *mahaton* in the bride's village.

The two *golrās* of liquor are first delivered to the house of the *mahaton* of the bride's deities by the *mahaton* himself or by a male member of his family. The liquor in another *golrā* is either consumed by all present, or stored inside the *mahaton's* house. The empty *golrās* are collected by the "porter" (the man bringing the *golrās* of liquor). Now the *mahaton* also joins the two men from the groom's house, leads them to the bride's house and introduces them to the bride's family.

5. A small spouted earthen vessel used for keeping liquor.

At the bride's house, all the *golrās* are taken inside except for one pair. Those which are taken inside are then distributed to the assigned persons in the following manner: One pair is for the bride, one pair for the bride's father and one pair for the bride's mother. If the bride's mother has demanded seven pairs of *golrās*, the liquor in the remaining *golrās* is generally distributed to the *gardhurryas*, who consume it on the spot.

Now, special sitting arrangements are made in the *bahari* section of the house. Two mats are stretched over the floor, parallel to each other with some space for passage in between. The men coming from the groom's house are seated in the following order on one of the mats. First the groom's father or his substitute who came with the "porter", next the "porter" who had carried the liquor vessels and the *mahaton* from the groom's village. On the next mat are seated men from the bride's house. Each man on the bride's side sits facing his counterpart of similar status from the groom's side. Small leaf cups have been stitched together with the leaves brought from the groom's house. Three small pebbles or clay pieces are placed on the ground in front of each individual seated on the mat, forming a stand for the leaf cups, in which the liquor is to be served. The leaf cups are first placed before the bride's father and then given in a counter clockwise direction by one of the men from the groom's side to others who are seated on the mat. Then the same man serves liquor in the leaf cups starting with the bride's father again in counter clockwise direction. Great attention is paid while pouring the liquor. If a single drop falls on the ground when it is being poured into the leaf cups, a fine of five rupees or one more *golrā* of liquor must be paid to the bride's side. This liquor, or the amount thus collected in fines, will be shared equally by the *surahwa* and *panehri* (male volunteers who bring water and fire-wood) from the bride's side.

Now the person serving liquor enters the inner room where the bride lies sobbing on her bed, covered by a quilt or blanket. The bride's mother and the bride's childhood friends sit by her side as her attendants. There too, leaf-cups are laid on the pebbles. The companions of the bride darken the room by covering all the windows or peep-holes so as not to let men from the groom's side see the bride and also to facilitate the collecting of fines from the liquor-server: in the dark it is more difficult to pour liquor in those leaf cups. Here too, the first person served is the bride's mother.

Once the liquor is served, fish, vegetables and a huge amount of home-made beer is brought from the kitchen of that house. This time no preference is given to any person for the first service. All men eat and drink heavily. The Mahaton too, from the bride's side if he can afford it, takes all these (representatives from the bride's and groom's side) to his own house for some more food and drink. All the men coming from the bridegroom's house must sleep at the bride's house that night. The bride's sisters and companions meanwhile play tricks. They put logs and brick-bats below the guests' beds to give them trouble and thus make fun of them. However the guests finally go to sleep, too drunk to feel any discomfort. When they sober up and awake, they feel troubled but by custom they are bound not to remove the things from their beds. Next day, after the morning meal, the bride's family gives them a good farewell. Meanwhile the appropriate day for the main marriage ceremony is discussed.

(f) *Bhwāj*: *The main marriage ceremony*

The main marriage ceremony lasts for three or four days. Usually the months of Fāgun (February-March) and Chait (March-April) are preferred for in these months there is no farming work to be done. However marriages can be held in Māgh

(January-February) and Baisākh (April-May) too.

The actors participating in the marriage ceremony besides the bride and the bridegroom are the following:

Bridegroom's Side

1. *Bhojuwa* In the groom's party he is the most respected and the most important person apart from the bridegroom. Usually this role is filled by the *ghardhurryā* or sometimes by the father of the bridegroom on condition that his wife be alive and participating as *bhojinnyā* in the marriage.

2. *Bhojinnyā* She is the wife of *bhojuwā* and the most respected lady in the groom's party. Dressed in ceremonial garments, she is always busy in the ceremonies associated with the groom and the two *nenhariyās*. During any procession, she leads the group formed by the bridegroom, the *bhojuwā*, the two *nenhariyās* and others, holding one oil-lamp in her right hand and a *lotā* of water in the left.

3. *Nenhariyās* They are two unmarried girls who may or may not belong to the family of the groom and whose parents must be still alive. They are also dressed in ceremonial robes and are closely connected with the groom and the *bhojinnyā* during most parts of the ceremony. The one who walks in the front during a procession is called *aghilki nenhariya* and the other, who walks behind her, is called *pachilki nenhariyā*. During processions both of them carry a *delwā* (basket) containing the dress and ornaments for the bride and other things for the marriage.

4. *Surahwās* They are the men volunteers of the village who are responsible for the supply of fire-wood and occasionally also for water needed for the marriage.

5. *Panheris* They are a group of girl volunteers of the village supplying water needed during a marriage.

Bride's Side

1. *Nakondi* They are a group of several girls who are the colleagues and friends of the bride. They accompany the bride during her first trip and stay at the bridegroom's house with her.

2. *Cauthyār* They are the men coming to the bridegroom's house from the bride's side (not necessarily from the bride's family) along with the bride. They carry her in the *doli* and also help to carry a few other items during her first trip to her husband's house.

Panheri, *surahwā* and *bhitorryā* come from both the bride and the groom's sides.

The main marriage ceremony is called *bhwāj* and starts on a Tuesday evening of the bright fortnight in any of the auspicious months which are Māgh (January-February), Fāgun (February-March) Chait (March-April) and Baisākh (April-May). It lasts for four days. On the evening of the first day, friends, nobles and relatives are invited. The musicians (*damāi*) are summoned to play their instruments. The performance starts with the splitting of black gram (*Dolichos pilosus*) in a grinder. This is done jointly by three individuals, the *bhojinnyā* and the two *nenhariyās*. Some rice-flour is also ground. After that some vermilion is applied to and a little liquor is poured over the grinder. Meanwhile an auspicious song concerning the *diuli darnā* (splitting of the black gram) is sung by a group of men.

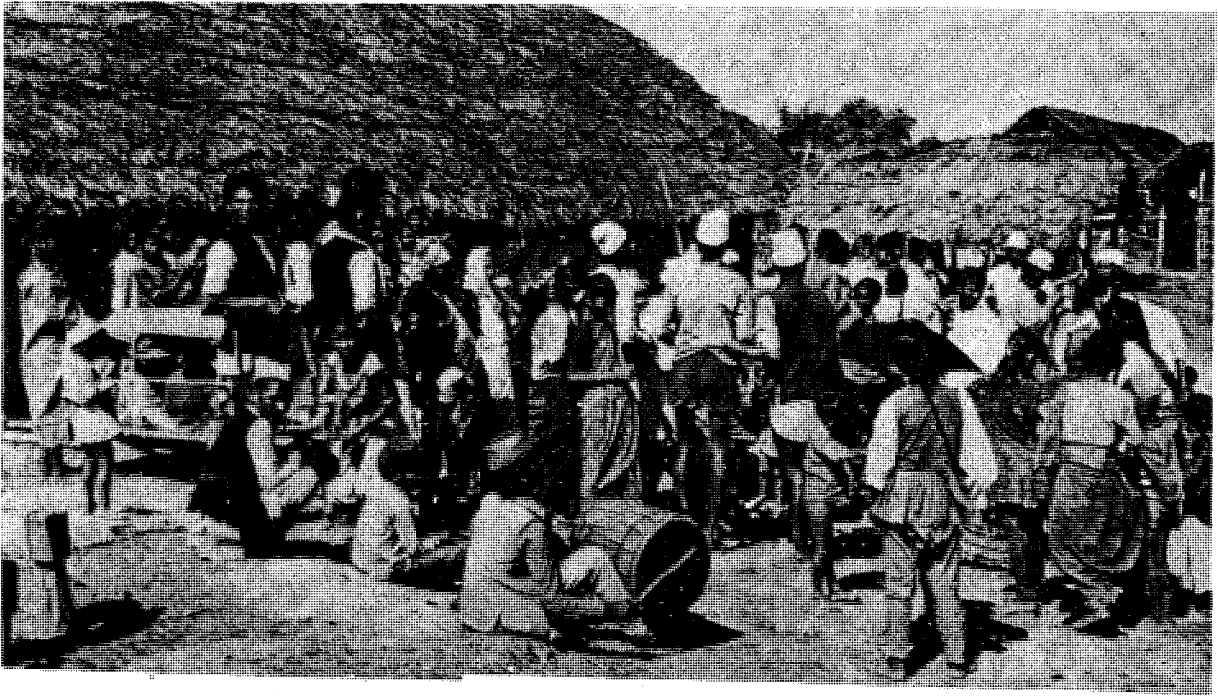
The following morning a small procession goes to a river or a stream. It is led by musicians, the *bhojinnyā* who is



1. Splitting of diuli (black gram) for the Marriage Ceremony



2. A guruwa Purifying the Musgard Oil for Cooking the Holy Dishes of cuni and barrya



3. Musicians Playing During Marriage Ceremony

4. The Groom, Assisted by a guruwa, begs for Blessings from the Deities before going to the Bride's House



carrying an oil-lamp in her right hand, and the two *nenhariyās*, who are carrying baskets, as well as a few other women and children. Some families like that of Somalya in Sukhrwar do not call musicians as they maintain that in the past this had proved a bad omen. The *diuli* (the split black gram) which had been already soaked in the water for one night is dehusked in the water by rubbing it with the hands and rinsing away the husks. The three women (the *bhojinnyā* and the two *nenhariyās*) and a few other women take a bath. After that the procession returns. At about 9 or 10 A.M. the *gharguruwā* (only in the case of *barin* families) or any other *guruwā* from the same *gharguruwā* family, makes preparations for cooking the sacred *barrya* (salty cakes made out of *diuli*) and *cuni* (a dish prepared from rice flour). Some men make a new fire, which is produced by rubbing a dry chilli stalk over a dry piece of *gainyāri* wood. This 'holy' fire must not be blown on by mouth, as this is considered polluting. Two unused horse-shoe shaped earthen hearths, similar to those in ordinary use, are set in a corner of the *bahari* section. One clean metal vessel is put on each hearth. One each of the hearths and the cooking vessels is kept to make a pair, as things in pairs are considered auspicious for a marriage. The *gharguruwā* (or in his absence a *guruwā*) who is acting as cook purifies the mustard-oil to be used for deep frying the *cuni* and *barrya* by stirring it with a tiny brush made of *kush* and *doob* grass as he chants certain *mantra*. Then he pours the oil into one of the vessels (to be used for deep-frying the cakes), heats the oil and fries the *barryās* and *cunis* in it.

Meanwhile one more *guruwā* worships the deities in the deity-room. This worship, called *bhojaha gurai*, is done to please the deities and to request them to pacify all evil spirits on this happy occasion.

In the afternoon at about 4 p.m., the groom starts to get ready. He takes a bath and prepares to make offerings to the deities. The *guravā* or an elderly man explains to him the method which he must follow. First of all, he takes some cow-milk diluted with water, pours it into a leaf-cup, offers it to Bagar, whose shrine is in a corner of the cattle-shed section of the house. Meanwhile the *bhojinnyā* prepares a mixture of mustard oil-cake and water, in which most of the deities (enshrined in the deity-room) are dipped and then rinsed. The deities which must not be dipped (like Maiya whose body is made of unbaked clay and Gurubaba, made of a piece of leather) because they may get damaged, are bathed symbolically with a few drops of the mixture first, and water next. The bridegroom lights a lamp, applies some vermilion to the deities, offers *cuni*, *barrya*, and liquor and asks for protection against the bad spirits and other evils. The worship and offerings take place in the following order: 1) To the deities inside the deity-room, 2) To the deity of the *bahari* section and 3) To the deities of the courtyard.

After completing the worship and offerings to the household and courtyard deities, the groom then takes another bath to prepare for worship and offerings to the village-level deities, at their shrine.

At about six p.m. the groom takes a meal and gets his hair trimmed or shaved. Inside the deity-room, the *guravā* dresses the groom in a white turban, white gown and white shoes. White, contrary to Hindu belief, is supposed by the Tharus to be an auspicious colour. Again the groom offers liquor to all household and courtyard deities. Then he takes a spear in his right hand (which at other times is kept in a corner, near the deities and other ritual objects in the deity-room). Then he joins the *bhojinnyā* who is carrying an oil lamp in her right-hand, the *nenhariyās* who are carrying

5. Men Carrying Palanquins for the Groom and Respected Guests



6. Men Carrying a doli (Palanquin for Bride)



7. Interior of a doli



8. Dhikris (Steamed Cakes)



baskets, and the *bhojuwa*. He is also accompanied by a few other persons who are carrying the *sonkarai*,⁶ the *sagunaha macchi*⁷ and bed-rolls to be used by the persons going in the procession, and a few other items to be carried to the bride's house. A farewell feast is arranged for them in the courtyard. After which, the bridegroom, the *bhojuwā*, the *bhojinnya*, the *nenhariyās* and a few respected guests ride in the *dwalās*,⁸ while others walk on foot. Men and women are carried in separate *dwalās*. The *dwalā* for the bridegroom must have a cover of white cloth, while other *dwalās* can be covered by a cloth of any colour.

The procession starts, with the musicians walking ahead playing their instruments. Some *guruwās* and a few Tharu singers sing *māgar* (Sanskrit *mangal* =auspicious) songs concerning the context, while a few gun-shots are fired.

When the procession arrives at the outskirts of the bride's village, several girls from the village gather and mock the bridegroom and his party with insulting expressions like: 'Oh baby what have you come for? Oh beloved infant of your mother' etc. All the people in the procession keep quiet and proceed to the bride's house. Before the *dwalās* are lowered, liquor has to be poured into the mouths of the *dwalā* bearers. Now mats are stretched by the men from the bride's side in the courtyard where the groom, after fixing his spear in the ground, in front of him, sits down. The *bhojuwā*, *bhojinnyā* and the *nenhariyās* sit close to the groom, on the same mat if it is big enough.

6. A *golrā* sealed with *sāl* leaves and decorated like the *golrās* in *karai pinā* ceremony.

7. Small fish strung on a thread and kept as an auspicious symbol.

8. Tharu version of palanquins; they are beds carried by four men.

Other people in the procession also settle down on other mats. One of the women in the bride's family washes the feet of the five respected participants (the bridegroom, the *bhojuwā*, the *bhojinnyā* and the two *nenhariyās*). Immediately a light meal (*parchakki*) is served to them on the spot, after which the groom goes to the bride's deity-room where he fixes his spear in the ground in the corner where such spears are usually kept. Meanwhile outside the deity-room all people in the procession are again served with liquor, home-made beer and a light feast.

After that, the groom goes for a rest. Before the supper, a flock of village girls comes there to 'welcome' the groom's party and entertain them with songs and verses that contain abuse and insults to the groom's party. Some of the verses carry complaints such as: "Though we are giving you a queen-like belle, you have brought liquor like water (i.e. tasteless). The dress you brought for our friend (the bride) seems as if it was stitched by a blind tailor. Its designs resemble the markings made by a group of small crabs walking over mud." Sometimes the girls may make fun of the chief figures in the groom's party saying, "The shameless Mr/Mrs/Miss (the name of the person) sits like a buffalo (or a dog)" etc. The girls also make jokes about their physical features. Finally a heavy dinner is arranged by the bride's family in honour of the groom's party. After the dinner some of the latter group and the children go to sleep, while most of the men pass the whole night listening to the *māgar* songs sung by men in the party.

Early next morning around four a.m. the groom takes a bath (the others do not have to bathe) and the groom's party enjoys an early morning meal (*bhinsariā bhāt*) and liquor. After putting on their formal dress, the groom and his group go to the courtyard for *ghām tapauni* (=sun warming) ceremony. They

sit on mats. Some fire in a hearth is put in front of them. A man holds an open umbrella over the groom, not for shade but as a *chatra*, the symbol of mighty Hindu emperors and gods. *Māgar* songs concerning *gham tapauni* are sung by some of the members of the party.

Meanwhile a little ceremony called *dāij darnā* (=dropping the dowry) is celebrated. A metal or bronze dish is brought from the bride's house. First of all, the head of the bride's family drops one rupee into it, and is followed by the *bhojuwa*. Next the other members and the guests from both sides also drop some money into that dish. This money and the dish are called *dāij* (=dowry) and become the private property of the couple, not to be shared by other members of the joint-family.

Next one of the *panheri* from the bride's party breaks open with a single blow the mouth of a big jar called *barāhā*.⁹ The *panheri* takes out some of the contents and puts it directly in the mouths of the nobles in the groom's party. Sometimes, the *panheri* mixes some chilly-powder or tobacco secretly in it to make fun of them.

Next a little fun is organized to trouble the bridegroom. According to the tradition, the groom has to offer a packet of *makhur*¹⁰ as a gift to the *panheris* of the bride's party. He has to give this in a special manner and not hand it to them directly. First, he has to carry it suspended on his shoulder from a very thin and flexible stick. To balance it, he must carry a packet of cow-dung of the same weight on the other end of the stick. Now, carrying those packets, in this manner he

9. This big jar contains the solid fermented substance which when diluted with water, becomes the home-made beer.

10. Tobacco mixed with liquid brown sugar or molasses and used in a *hookah* for smoking.

has to touch or catch hold of a *paneheri* and then offer to her that packet of *makhur* to be shared by all the *panheris*. But while trying to catch one of the running girls, the packages hung on both ends of the stick, move up and down making it difficult for the groom to run. Finally when the groom is totally exhausted he begs pity from the girls, who then agree to accept the *makhur* from his hand.

Lunch for the groom's party on this day is arranged at the house of the Mahaton from the bride's village. The groom must pay a token price for this meal. In Sukhrwar, this price was three rupees in March 1973. In the afternoon, the bride's party gives a farewell feast (*bidahyā bhāt*) to the groom's party; this is eaten in the courtyard.

Now the marriage procession returns home in *dwālā* or on foot along with the musicians without taking the bride as would be the case in a Hindu marriage. The bride is brought in a *doli* in the evening. In the groom's village first of all the procession circumambulates all the village-level shrines, always keeping them on the right side.

Once the marriage procession returns to the village, the Mahaton and the relatives give a reception, including *jār* and vegetables, to all persons in the returning procession. When the procession returns to the groom's house, all others may enter the groom's house except the groom himself who has to stay outside and sit on a mat, near his road-side door, fixing his spear there in the ground. He looks like a door-attendant or like a yogi in his meditation. Some of the grooms who at this point get bored change their marriage-costume and go to their friends and relatives in ordinary dress until the bride is brought.

In the evening, when the stars shine, the bride is brought in a *doli* carried by men, either from the bride's family or

other families. Some *nakondis* (female companions of the bride) two to ten in number, come on foot, along with the *doli*. One other person carries the clothes of the bride (given by her parents) and her bed-roll. One more person carries a *lotā* full of *sājal pāni*.¹¹ The bride in the *doli* is dressed in the garments already given by the groom. The bearers of the *doli*, as before, only put it down after some liquor is poured into their mouths.

Before introducing the bride inside the house *parchanā*¹² is performed. In *parchanā*, first the *bhojinnyā* comes out of the house with an oil-lamp in one hand and a fresh broom made of *siru* grass. She touches the *doli* with the broom, leads the bride from her *doli* and places her beside the groom. Next she takes some cotton seeds in both her hands, moves them around the heads of the bride and bridegroom and finally drops the seeds on to some fire brought there on a piece of earthen ware. This is done three times. After this, the *bhojinnyā* turns over the fire-pot. Then putting their right feet over the fire-pot, first the groom and then the bride, enter the house and go to the deity-room.

Inside the deity-room the bride, standing upright, pours on the ground, in front of the deities, about one *manā* of rice that she had brought from her parents. Both the bride and the groom sit down facing the deities. Again the *bhojinnyā* performs the same act with cotton seeds which she had executed before the couple entered the house. But this time, no fire is used. The cotton seeds are just left on the ground. Next, catching hold of the bride's right hand, the *bhojinnyā* makes

11. *Sājal pāni* is water fortified by Mantras and magic; it is supposed to be drunk by the bride on the way if she is thirsty though it is rarely drunk by her.

12. Not to be confused with the *parchana* applied in a ritual offering.

the bride apply mustard-oil (an act of showing honour and care) to her groom's legs. After that the *bhojinnyā*, on behalf of the groom, adorns her with *natthyā* (a big nose ring, made of gold), *mundri* (a finger-ring) etc, and also dresses her with a new *jhotbannā* (hair-tying string or ribbon). Finally the groom and the bride go to greet each person present inside the house. A dinner arranged by the groom's family is attended by all of the persons (including the guests) inside the house. In the night, as on the previous day, a dance is organised by the Tharu youths of the village.

Next day, in the early morning at about four a.m, an early morning feast (with meat) is given in honour of the *nakondis*. A little ceremony called *ghatwā karainā*¹³ is performed, when the *panheri* of the village gather and ask the bride (who is dressed in *lahanga*, *satki* and *ghurghut*) to carry out in a basket and throw away the ashes left over from cooking *cuni* and *barryā*. Next the bride is asked to take out some cow-dung from the cattle-shed section of the house and also to sweep a portion of it. After this has been done, the bride is taken to the water-source for fetching water with a little jar poised on an ornamented *berra* on her head. There she washes herself and fetches water in the jar for the house. All these acts symbolise the future household routine of the bride.

The same day, *biswas piainā* is performed. For it, mats are stretched side by side in two rows with some space in-between on the *bahari* section. One row of mats is occupied by individuals from the groom's side facing the *cauthyārs* (the men who came with the bride) who are seated on the next row. Meanwhile two *bhitorryās* bring out *barkā maduā*.¹⁴ Also two

13. To introduce to the water-source; a symbol of household work.

14. Literally means grand liquor; it is a big earthen jar containing water and covered by a folded blanket which is tied by a strip of cloth hanging it on a rod.

small jars (*golrā*) containing a little liquor diluted in water are brought. The contents of these two small jars are to be poured on the ground. The big jar (*barkā maduā*) is kept there just for show and not for any use. Now the bride, accompanied by another woman, arrives. Each of the two women takes one jar of liquor in her right hand. The other woman (keeping on the right side of the bride) touches the bride's right arm with her left hand. Now both of them move towards their left, pouring some drops of diluted liquor on the ground before the row of the *cauthyārs* and then in front of the row of the groom and a few others present there by his side. After this both of the women greet all members of both rows who are sitting with their hands stretched out, palms facing upwards. The two women touch the finger tips of the people to be greeted moving their hands to their foreheads after each greeting. Next all the persons sitting there are served with rice. The bride, accompanied by the same woman, serves a few drops of fish-soup in a spoon from a bowl held by the other woman. This soup is prepared with the fish previously supplied by the village *gardhurryās* and left over after some have been strung in two strings, called *sagunāhā macchī*, carried in the marriage procession. Next the bride serves the soup¹⁵ made from the pork. Now the *nakondi*, the *surahwā* and the *panheri* (the last two belonging to the groom's party) are called to join the feast. The dish containing the left-overs of the groom's meal is passed to the bride for *duthā khawainā* (Nep.-*jutho khwāune*)¹⁶ and she eats from it her part of feast.

15. This soup is one of the items in the menu that had been prepared for the farewell feast given to the bride (and also her party), who will leave for her parents' house a few hours later.

16. This refers to the Hindu concept that the food once touched by one's lips becomes ritually polluted (*jutho*) and cannot be touched by any one of equal or higher status. Thus by eating food, which the groom has ritually defiled, the bride accepts her lower status *vis-a-vis* her husband.

After the farewell feast in honour of the bride and her party, the bride circumambulates the house which is oriented North-South. She leaves the house by the West-side door (while facing south) and re-enters it by the opposite side door. She goes to the deity-room where the groom wears his ceremonial garment and drinks liquor from a bowl, some of which, left over by him, is taken by his bride. Again the new couple greets all senior people or people of equal status present inside the house. Finally, the *bhojinnyā* with a lamp in the right hand and a *lotā* with water in the left, comes out from the West-side door. She is followed by the two *nenhariyās* the first of whom carries the empty basket (*delwā*); next comes the groom in his formal dress with the spear in his right hand, then the *bhojuwā* and lastly the bride; the bearers are waiting outside for the bride to carry her. The bearers, after installing the bride in the *doli*, carry her to the road-side courtyard. Thus the *nakondis* and the men who had came with the bride, accompany the bride back to their homes. The groom, and others in his party, after watching the departure for a while, re-enter the house silently.

Two or three weeks later, *pathlari annā* is done to bring back the bride from her parents. A person from the groom's party, accompanied by the Mahaton, goes to the bride's house. Next evening they return along with a person carrying two little baskets full of *dhikri* (steamed rice-cakes) sent from the bride's family. A little portion of the cakes, already kept separate for the purpose, has to be distributed among the boys on the way who ask for them. A little later, the bride accompanied by ten or twelve girl companions called *pathlari* (=those coming to send with) arrives there on foot. All these girls are served with beer and other preparations. The young men of the village, specially those who had volunteered as *surahwas*, help in serving them with these preparations. After that, the young men offer them cigarettes (from the

bridegroom's expenses) and greet them. Some of these youths play mischievous jokes immediately after greeting each girl. For example, one of them may shake a packet full of mixed powder of chillies and *timur*¹⁷ under the girls' noses causing them to sneeze and cough. Another may shake a packet of tobacco-dust or a third one may annoy them by shaking a dry and hollow bottle gourd containing some pebbles or other pieces so as to make a rattling noise. The feast lasts up to mid-might with eating, drinking and chatting.

Next day, the *pathlaris* return to their home leaving the bride in her husband's house. After passing five nights (*pac rat*) in her husband's house the bride is sent back (*lauli phirtā pathainā*) to her natal house with the men called *lelharas* who came from there. Some cakes (*dhikri*) are sent to the bride's family along with them.

In the month of Saun (July-August), the bride, now called *lauli* (=the new lady) returns to her husband with a gift of fine pieces of basketry like *dhakli*, *panchopni*, *dhakyā*, *gondri*, *delwā* along with cakes and other things for the family. In the month of Mangsir (November-December) the bride goes to her parents for a holiday (*dhil*) of about a month, and later returns with gifts including a stick decorated with hanging motifs and having the figure of a bird or animal carved on its top. Another stick with a curved top, one pipe, a few toys, one *hegri* (small stick with a forked top) and one highly artistic *berrā*. All these materials are embroidered with coloured threads. The gift items have to be distributed among some of the different age-group persons in the family i.e, the pipe will be given to one of the elderly or senior men like house-chief; the *berrā* to the mother-in-law of the bride, or to

17. A kind of hot spice; xanthoxylum.

18. Persons coming to take or receive.

another woman in the family; and the rest of the things to the children.

Marriage among the Tharus is formalised by a series of back and forth visits and feasting between affines. There is no clear end to the marriage ceremonies. Rather the ritual exchanges of hospitality simply become less frequent and less elaborate. During the final stages of the marriage rituals other villagers outside the family may be unaware of the minor rites and obligatory visits which are still going on between the bride's and groom's families.

B. *Other Forms of Marriage*

Apart from the proper forms of marriage, as described above, there are a few other forms for arranging matrimonial relations like re-marriage, levirate, the *bhwar paithna* and *urhari* which will be discussed below.

Re-marriage is practised both by men and women after either the death or the divorce from the earlier spouse. So unlike the case of high-caste Hindus, widow remarriage is common among the Tharus. Usually a widower or a divorced man marries a widow or a divorced woman. This is what happened in the case of Biharilal, a widower of Sukhrwar who married a divorced woman Gongi. But sometimes even an unmarried single girl may marry a man who has already been married; a bachelor may marry a woman who is divorced or a widow. But there is an age limit for remarriage. Widows or widowers who are considered very old (around fifty or more) do not remarry. Second marriage for a man may be performed by *barkā bhwāj* if it is the first marriage of his bride, or if the man himself is quite young and has no children. Otherwise, the marriage is carried out without any pomp and show or any ritual performance. In such cases the compensation is paid, or the promise of its full payment is kept, with a premium of some money paid in

advance, according to the demand of the previous husband's family. After that, at an auspicious time in the evening, the bride is fetched to her husband in a simple *doli* (of any colour but not red and bright) without having any floral or colourful designs on it. A simple feast is given to the household-heads of the village and a few relatives of the neighbourhood. The household deities are offered some liquor. Chotka Chaudhari, the younger brother of the Mahaton of Sewar, whose wife had eloped with another man has now married a divorced wife from Aspari village in the simple form just mentioned above.

Tharus also practice levirate. In such cases a man marries his elder brother's widow in a very simple ceremony or even without any ceremony. Bandhu of Sukhrwar village, an old man of around sixty-five, is now living with his elder brother's widow and her children by the elder brother. Thus Bandhu's wife is his ex-sister-in-law (deceased elder brother's wife) whom he has taken as wife. Furthermore he had earlier taken another sister-in-law (the widow of another elder brother), but she expired a few months after taking up with Bandhu. Villagers, except the very old ones, are today ignorant of the fact that Bandhu's wife is the widow of one of his elder brothers. Likewise the children think of Bandhu as their own father.

Another form of widow remarriage among Tharus is called *bhuwar paithna* in which the senior members (males and females) of the household choose a new man as husband for their widow daughter-in-law. This man is thus 'adopted' as their own son. In *bhuwar paithna* remarriage the family of the deceased rather than the widow herself takes the initiative, although she is always consulted. Such adoption or remarriage, whatever one may call it, helps to compensate for the loss of the dead person, especially in a family short of man-power. Such a

man becomes the new husband of the widow, enjoying the same social status as well as the same affinal and consanguineal relationship with others, as enjoyed by the first husband. The children born from such a union become bonafide members of the family and the new-born sons get or can claim an equal share of the property, after the partition of the joint-family, if their father behaves and works honestly for the benefit of that joint-family like other men of the family.

In Sukhrwar village, a Tharu named Kamal was adopted as a husband for Kauki, the widowed daughter-in-law of Chotkanwa. Kamal, though born and brought up in Kailali District, had come to Dang valley a few years ago, working from time to time as a junior level technician, in two or three rice mills of Dang. While he was working in the mill at Sukhrwar village, he had met the Chotkanwa family. But though Kamal stayed there for about one year, he could not stay longer, as his health was not sound and he did not like the farm jobs which he had to do. After one year's stay in that family, Kamal left the village for a few weeks. After that he did not return. Chotkanwa's family wondered whether he had died or become seriously ill, as his health was already unsound. But most probably he did not like to join the new family, as he did not like to do the farm-jobs like other members.

There is one other marriage custom called *urhari* (abduction). It happens in a circumstance when the parents of two lovers either do not agree to the marriage or if, for other reasons, the marriage is delayed. The boy with the consent of his beloved abducts the girl to some distance away in one of his relative's or cousin's houses for a few days. Later on, the parents or the guardians of the two lovers meet to regularize this union. Any problem, like the shortage of bride-price or the absence of a girl for exchange, are solved by giving facilities to the boy's side for paying the sum in

easy premiums or by arranging for a girl to be given back in exchange a few years later.

Regarding the marital customs of the Tharus, it seems that though they are assimilating some Hindu features in their usual way of life, yet the rites and ceremonies concerning marriage are rarely influenced by outside customs. But one cannot predict whether the situation will remain the same in the future. A few educated and rich Tharus, who are developing a taste for a Sanskritized way of life have started to introduce alien patterns such as the abolition of the bride-price or of the exchange of girls or women for marriage, though not the rites or ceremonies themselves. Sagunlal Chaudhari of Sukhrwar, did not accept any bride-price or girl in exchange for his married sister, though later on he had to pay the bride-price for his younger brother Balbahadur's wife, as the parents of the bride were not ready to forego the price. Campaigns for social reforms are very necessary to uplift an under-developed community, but the programmes for such reform must not simply impose the norms and values of the dominant Hindu culture.

Death

As death is universal, all human beings must come to terms with the fact of death. Tharus believe in rebirth; but their ideas concerning the other world are quite vague. Most of the Tharus believe that there is a shadowy world where people go after death. They also believe that people are rewarded or punished in that world on the basis of their deeds in this world.

According to their beliefs there is a continuing wheel of reincarnation. However, for some individuals, the wheel may come to a final stop when the dead is reborn in the form

of a rock as will be described below. Tharus classify death into two sorts:

- (a) Natural death (*kālgati munā*) and
- (b) Unnatural or Accidental death (*akālgati munā*).

Unnatural death is thought to happen when a person dies of an epidemic disease, in a natural disaster or in an accident, such as falling from a tree, drowning, burning in a fire or being killed by wild animals etc. Persons dying an unnatural death, as well as the unmarried, are not given full funeral rites after their death. Such persons are always buried, whereas others may be or may not be buried. In Sukhrwar, the Sukhrorya Gurwa clan always cremates its members who die a natural death and bury the others. Other clans generally bury their dead but occasionally they cremate them, if the person had expressed this wish during his life time. Due to the scarcity of fire wood too, generally the poorer Tharus prefer to bury their dead.

The funeral rites are performed for two reasons: 1) for the purification of the living who are thought to be polluted by the death of their relative and 2) to better the other-world existence of the dead. According to their beliefs those who do not have proper funeral rites, may return to haunt the surviving family members.

The funeral rites among Tharus do not manifest much variety and the description of these rites, which follows, is applicable to both sexes unless otherwise specified.

Unlike the Hindus, the Tharus let a person take his last breath inside the house. But once the person is dead, they do not keep him there any longer. If a person dies before

4 or 5 p.m. and there is sufficient time to bury or cremate him or her, they take the dead body out the same day; if he dies later, they do so the next morning, as it is not convenient to perform the funeral rites in the dark.

When a person dies, messengers are sent abroad at once to inform men of the lineage. Elders and adults from each house of the village assemble at the dead person's house and help to perform the funeral ceremonies, as well as console the family.

The dead body is brought to the *bahari* section of the house and kept flat on its back on a mat, in a north-south direction, the head towards the north.¹⁹ The dead body is at first covered with the *cadri* and again wrapped in a new white cloth (*kaffan*). Except for precious and brand new clothes all the belongings of the dead person are tied in a bundle

Meanwhile a few persons (generally the women of the family) help in collecting one or two handfulls of every sort of foodgrain and little bits of most of the edible vegetables. Any cereal or vegetable lacking in the house can be collected from the standing crops in the fields. The grains thus collected are called *satbihi* (=seeds of seven sorts).²⁰ Some small toy-like earthen vessels are also brought there to be taken to the funeral site. One of these vessels contains mustard oil (which is the common cooking oil) and the other contains ghee.

19. Keeping one's head towards north while sleeping or lying down is inauspicious for a living man as it is the posture of a dead person.

20. *Satbihi* is supposed to contain seven sorts of cereals. But in fact it contains the grains of all varieties of rice available as well as potatoes, taro, onions, garlic, a few green-bean pods, little bits of several varieties of green and dried (not common to that season) vegetables, tobacco leaves (if the dead person used tobacco), some salt; turmeric powder and a few chillies.

The rest of the vessels, which are empty, are used in the *culha* (=kitchen) ceremony to be performed during the funeral rites.

A few elderly men from the village help in making a *macān* (stretcher to carry the dead). A *macān* is a ladder-like frame made of pieces of bamboo. It is made of seven or nine (always an odd number) cross-pieces attached to two long side-pieces.

If the dead person was a married man, his widow breaks her lac-bangles, takes off her anklets and all of her ear ornaments and bead-necklaces and lays them all (apart from the precious ones) on the dead body. One male lineage member dresses the dead man's head with a white turban, starting from the left side (reverse to the usual manner). No turban is given to a dead female.

Hiran Khawaina Ceremony

By now male representatives from all lineage families have assembled. In case of the lineage-households, in the village, the women also assemble there. Households of the same clan or sub-clan living in the village whose lineal relationship with the dead person's family is not sure, are also expected to send one male representative to the dead person's house. Now the *hiran khawainā* ceremony is celebrated. *Hiran* is a mixture of rice with some water, turmeric powder and a nominal quantity of gold-dust obtained by scraping the *natthya*²¹ of the widow (if the deceased was a married man) or of the deceased herself. First of all the chief mourner (*kirryā baithuiyā*)²² puts a little of the mixture in the mouth of the

21. Big nose-ring.

22. The *kirryā baithuiyā* or chief mourner is usually the eldest son of the deceased, though other sons may also take this role. In the absence of direct descendants, the sons of male collaterals may also serve as *kirryā baithuiyā*.

dead person. Next he dips his right hand in a *lotā* of water and lets water drop in the dead person's mouth. After he has completed this ritual, all other male members do the same in order of their closeness to the deceased: members of the joint-family, first; members of the same lineage, second; and finally members of the clan. Even the small boys of the joint-family of the deceased are also helped by their fathers to do this. After that the chief mourner once again feeds *hiran* to the dead person on behalf of those male members of the joint-family who could not attend. Now comes the turn of the women, starting with the widow (if the deceased was a male), then affinal women of the joint-family²³ and followed by the affinal women of the same lineage living in the village. Finally the first woman offers *hiran* once again on behalf of the affinal women who could not attend.

Ujri Darnā Ceremony

After the *hiran khawainā*, the *ujri darnā* ceremony is performed. *Ujri* means the cup-shape formed by joining the two hands; and *darnā* means to drop or to pour. For this ritual the performer has to take about one handful of rice in his cupped hands from a basket and drop it over the dead body three times. As in *hiran khawainā*, the first to inaugurate the rite is the chief mourner, followed by the members of the joint-family, then the lineage-men and again the chief mourner on behalf of the absentee men. Later, the women do as before.

Now, before taking out the dead body from the house, some of his very personal belongings like the *batua* (purse) containing the *sulpha* (a terracotta pipe for smoking) some tobacco, the

23. Daughters or sisters of the joint-family whether married or unmarried are not considered as bonafide members of a family. Thus they are not allowed to participate in a ritual concerned with their natal family.

chewing tobacco-set, the set of tooth-pick and ear-cleaner (Nep.- *kankarno*), also the medicines and *achetā*, kept when the owner was ill prior to his death, and his stick etc. are put by the side of his head. His shoes or slippers too are put near his feet. Now the broken beads, bangles, the anklets and other ornaments are put on the other side of his head. After levelling the rice, an oil-lamp with its wick towards the dead person's head is kept lit. But no such lamp is lit if the person left no male child. After that all the male lineage members jointly leave the mat carrying the dead body and take it out head-first and put it over the *macān*. The voices of the weeping persons become louder as the dead body is taken out.

Funeral Procession

A great crowd gathers in the house and courtyard of the dead person, composed of participants in the funeral and spectators. Only the males take part in the funeral procession. Only male lineage members carry the dead and participate in the subsequent rites though if necessary a few elderly men from other lineages in the village may also join the procession to supervise and guide the others. Some carry the items needed for burying or cremating the deceased while others walk empty-handed. The following articles are carried: a spade, an axe, a burning piece of dried cowdung (to make a fire), a little dried Sabai grass (to make ropes if necessary) and few bundles of straw and thatch taken from the roof of the dead person's house. These straw and thatch bundles are used in making fire for the cremation and also for the *culhā* or hearth of the deceased. One of the men carries the *satbihi* and other associated items in two worn-out baskets hung from a *bausā*.²⁴

24. A tool used in making pit-holes on the ground.

The dead body is taken to the burial or the cremation site which is always situated to the south of the village, generally towards the south-west on barren land (in case of burials) or a river bed (in case of cremation) at a half to two kilometers distant.

Henceforth, as these are two different methods for the disposal of the dead body a) Burial and b) Cremation, each of these will be described separately.

(a) *Burial*

A grave is dug in a North-South direction. There is no fixed rule or tradition concerning the size of the grave. But it must contain sufficient space and depth to accommodate the dead body. So, its area is roughly 2 X 7 feet and its depth about 1 foot.

Before placing the dead body in the grave a bed of old and worn-out sheets or blankets is prepared inside the grave. On it, the corpse is kept with its head always towards North. A male body is deposited with its back upwards and the face downwards. For a female body, the position should be the contrary.²⁵ A *cadri* or a shawl or maybe an old blanket, preferably one which the dead person had used frequently during his/her life time, is kept to cover the dead. Three handfuls of *satbihi* uncooked items of food, are put near the mouth of the dead. Next, some thread, cotton, a few drops of mustard oil as well as the clothes of the dead are also put inside the grave. It is thought that the deceased will need them in the next world.

Now, the chief mourner throws a little earth (*mati denā*) with his hands into the grave and others do likewise

25. See Bennett, Lynn, 1977, p. 174 (foot-note).



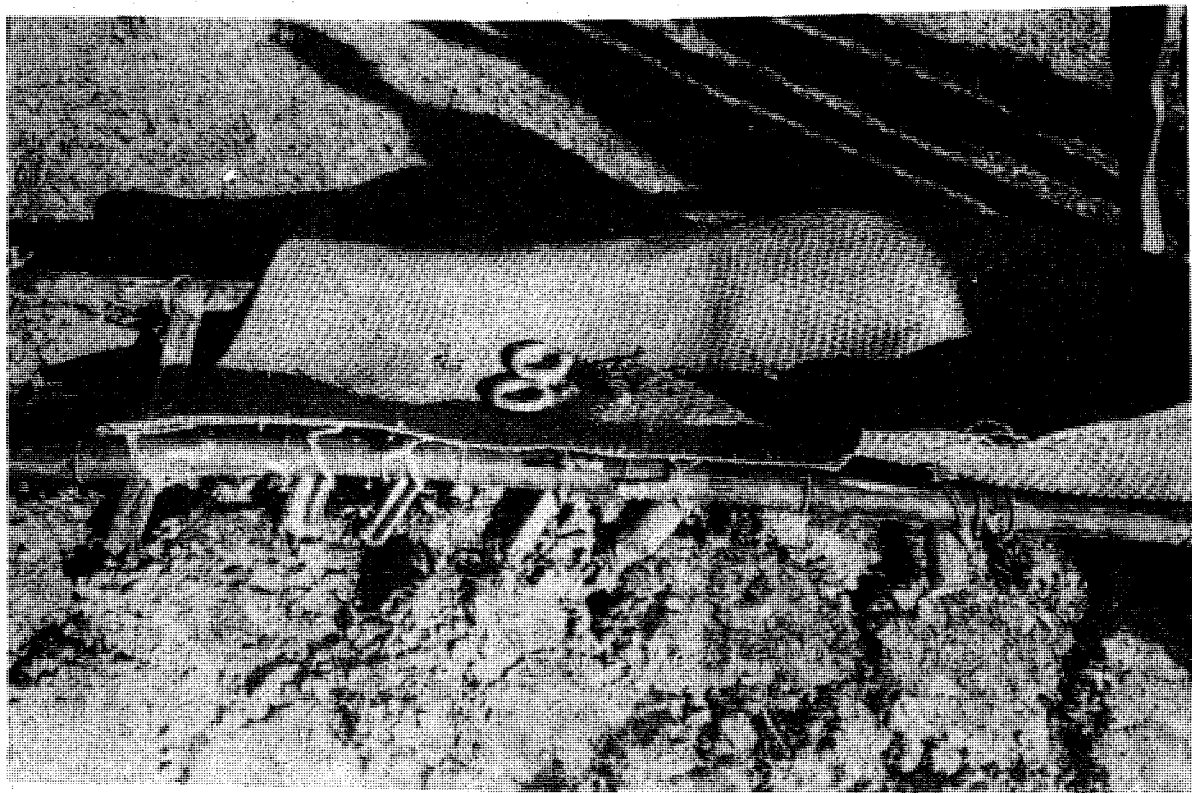
9. Lowering a Corpse into the Grave



10. Corpse inside the Grave



11. Covering the Grave with Earth



12. Stretcher with Man and Ornaments (of the Deceased) Placed over the Grave

The grave is filled up with clay, raising its height about a cubit over the ground. Finally big clay clods of square or rectangular shape, already dug out from the vicinity are fitted over the raised grave. This time too, the first person to place a clod is the chief mourner. A few coins are thrown over the grave, which might be useful to the dead person in the next world as he has to pay a fare to the boat-man while crossing the 'big river'²⁶ (*ladyā tarkanā*) in his journey to the other world.

Either a *macān* (stretcher) or a *khatiā* (bedstead) may be used to carry the corpse to the burial ground where it is inverted and left over the grave. Usually a man will be carried in his bedstead if he was using one at the time of death. A woman, on the other hand, if she dies before her husband, will be carried on a stretcher since Tharus believe that the bedstead should be left for her husband's use, even though he may no longer wish to sleep in it. But, in the case of a man dying before his wife, he is carried in the bedstead regardless of the needs of his wife. This signifies that the needs of men are more likely to be cared for than those of women. This shows that the Tharus do not accord equal status to females and males.

Once the corpse is buried, the mat used to carry it, the personal belongings such as ornaments,²⁷ the

26. Tharus believe that they have to cross over a big river while going to the other world from this earth. This shows some influence of Hindu belief according to which all persons have to cross the river Baitarni while going to heaven. But a Hindu crosses this river by catching hold of the tail of the cow which he/she had donated while Tharus cross on a boat.

27. If the deceased was a man whose wife is still alive, her costume jewellery will be removed and placed on her husband's grave. In the same way when a woman dies her own costume jewellery is also placed over her grave. Expensive jewellery of real gold or silver is kept by the family.

sickle, the wooden slippers as well as the wooden handles of all the instruments used in the preparation of the burial and also the baskets used in bringing assorted cereals (*satbihi*) and vegetables to be buried with the dead are piled over the grave. But before these things are left at the grave each is destroyed so that they, like the deceased have "taken their last breath". Finally symbolic measurements of the grave and the handles of the instruments used to dig it are made with a straw or stick which are later broken and thrown over the grave.

(B) *Cremation*

For the cremation, the male cousins in the male line and the clansmen from the village and also from neighbouring villages bring with them to the cremation site one log or a piece of firewood. Cremation is always carried out in a river or a stream bed. Two male-line cousins (men), scrape the earth around the place chosen for cremation but the first digging or scraping is done by the chief mourner. A mound of sand and pebbles is formed in the shallow water in a north-south direction. The mound should be sufficiently large and of an appropriate height above the water-level to accomodate the pyre to be made for cremating the dead.

While the cremation-mound is being constructed, some of those who came with the procession, split one of the logs into small sticks which are later used in the pyre to help the logs burn easily. Next, out of the bundles of thatching grass, which had been carried to the cremation site, a long and thin coil (about ten to fifteen feet long) is made. About two thirds of the logs brought there are put on the mound in north-south direction.

Before putting the dead body onto the pyre, he/she is undressed carefully without exposing his/her private parts, which are left covered by the *kaffan*. His loin-string too, is cut off. The medicines, the amulet, the bangles or any other personal belonging like slippers, the tooth-pick set, are thrown away in the river. Finally the dead body is lifted up jointly by all lineage-men and clansmen present there. Before putting the body onto the pyre, they make five anti-clockwise circumambulations; those who are behind, and thus cannot touch or hold the dead, hold on to those in front. The dead body is then put face down and with the head to the north over the pyre, parallel to the logs. The chief mourner now puts one log over the dead body, and next the others cover the dead body with the remaining logs. The clothes of the dead person and also some straw are now inserted inside the hollow spaces between the logs. The rice, collected during *ujri darma* and the assorted cereals, except for one handful left for the dead person's cooking (*muâl manaik bhansa*) are also put on the pyre. Some mustard seeds (about three or four kg.) are also poured over the pyre, not for any ritual reason, but just to make the fire burn easily.

Now, in order to light the pyre, all the cousins and clansmen present together catch hold in their hands of the long thatch coil and line up to the right and left side of the bundle. The chief mourner stands at the one end of the row. In this order they make five circumambulations of the pyre. Now, the chief mourner lights the top end of the thatch coil and puts the burning part over the pyre. Others, pluck out the remaining parts of the coil and put these pieces over the pyre. Next, led by the chief mourner again, each puts one small bundle of thin pieces of firewood over the burning pyre. Some

ghee, carried from home, is also poured on it. The dead body is now left to burn. Meanwhile all persons in the procession take a bath and wash all the instruments used during cremation (the spade, the *bausa*, the axe and the sickle). After the bath, they purify their clothes, doing this themselves or helped by others. Some drops of *swan pani* (=water kept in touch with gold) are used to purify the clothes that were worn during the funeral procession and the performances and thus are polluted. Everyone then returns home. After four or five hours, when they suppose that the body has been burned, a few people return back to the cremation site. Before touching the mound, a man from the dead man's family throws a stone or lump of earth over the ashes. Others throw water over the ashes from the stream or river just below, with their hands. When the ashes have cooled down, they pick out a few small bones or bone fragments and they break or grind the rest of the unburnt bone-fragments into very small pieces with the help of stones and disperse them. After that, they destroy the pyre-mound that had been raised over the river-bed for the cremation. Again they take a bath, wash the spade, purify their clothes with *swān pāni*, and return home.

Henceforth, as the post-funeral performances for both cremation or burial, are similar, the following description of the later rituals applies to both.

About ten to fifteen feet away from the burial or cremation site, a hearth is constructed using either three clay blocks from the grave-site or three stones from the mound raised above the river-bed for cremation. Over this hearth, a little pot, containing assorted cereals, spices, vegetables, vegetable oil, and ghee is put by the chief mourner. The chief mourner again inserts some burning thatch, that had been

lit from the fire burning over the pyre inside the hearth made of three pebbles or clay lumps. In case of burial, such a hearth is lit from the fire already carried for this purpose from the dead person's house.

After disposing of the dead and having a bath and purification with *swān pāni*, all persons participating in the funeral procession return to their homes. On the way, before entering the village, one of the men, with a spade in his hands, steps forward and digs a mark (*thāp marnā*) exactly on the foot-way, a little ahead of him. This mark is a symbolic form of a ditch dug to check the entrance of the dead person's spirit into the village. All returning men who went with the procession gather there and all of them jointly address the spirit of the dead thus 'Hello Mr/Mrs/.... we shall perform *uddhar*²⁸ for you on a day. We shall give you a feast on the same day. Don't be worried till that time.' After that, everyone crosses over the mark and returns to their home.

The same day in the afternoon, one man and one woman from each Tharu household of the village gather at the dead person's house. Each male brings one little jar (*golrā*) of home-made rice-beer with him while each female brings a little basket (*dhakli*) containing some rice, pulse salt and chillies. The beer is consumed on the spot by the men. The things bought by the women are collected for preparing the *dharam bhāt*²⁹ feast. Meanwhile, the men stitch leaf plates and the women cook rice and pulse for the feast. When the meal is ready, it is served first to the chief mourner and then to the other males. Then the chief mourner does *dharam bhāt kaharnā*. He takes the first morsel of rice in his right hand, dips it into the pulse-curry and then puts it on the

28. Salvation, restoration, a ceremony.

29. Ritual rice, ritual meal.

floor by the side of his plate. Next he pours some water over the rice with the same hand. All others participating in the feast do the same and then enjoy the feast.

On the night following the death of the person, a little test is carried out to ascertain the form of animal which the dead person will be in the next world. This is called *janā dharnā*. It takes place in an isolated corner of the house. Some flour is spread on the ground. Above it an oil lamp is put; next that portion of the ground is enclosed with a mat to stop any animal from entering it. At mid-night elderly persons carefully take away the mat and look to detect and identify the footprint of the animal thought to intimate the form which he will take in his next birth. Such an animal may be a cat, dog, cow, goat, sheep, horse, buffalo, tiger, pig, bird, tortoise or a snake. If there is no trace of any such foot-print, it means that the person will not be re-incarnated (*jalām orainā*) in an animal but in a stone.

The same day, preparations go on for the mourning of the dead. The mourning is called *kirrya baithnā*. The chief mourner, in the case of the death of a man, should preferably be his eldest son whereas, for a woman, it is her youngest son. The chief mourner should always be a male. If no son is present to mourn the death, or, if he is unfit or unable to perform the rites, any other person, preferably a nephew (male line cousin), is asked to take this responsibility. Mourning lasts for a few days until the *uddhār* ceremony is performed. Only the joint-family of the dead is affected. Cousins, already separated from the family, don't have to mourn or practice any taboo. Members of the joint-family of the dead, except for the chief mourner, have only to observe the taboo on mustard-oil. Neither should they eat it nor should they apply it to their heads or bodies.

For *kirryā baithnā*, a corner or a portion of the *bahari* or the *ghāri* section of the house is enclosed with a mat or net, so that other individuals or animals may not enter. The chief mourner has to stay within that boundary except if he has to go out to relieve himself or to take his daily bath in the morning. Whenever he leaves the ritual enclosure, he must put *pawā* on his feet and take a *khurai* (a small spear) in his hand. During the mourning period he must not wear a cap. He should use only woollen blankets on his bed. If he uses covers of other textiles, these should be thrown away on the day of *uddhār*. He must fetch his own water and cook his food for himself within the boundary. He should not use salt and vegetable oil in his food. Therefore a mourner takes, as his diet, plain rice with milk. Other persons must not touch or contact him.

In some instances a man or a woman may enter that space to make preparations for cooking, except for putting the cooking utensils on the fire, which the chief-mourner must do himself. Such a person must have a bath immediately after coming out of that place. The chief mourner has to close the passage or entrance of his dwelling place well, when leaving it for a while, so that in his absence no human being, animal or fowl can enter and contaminate it.

Every evening, after the cattle return home, the chief mourner goes a little to the south of the village along the same path by which the corpse was carried. There, on the foot-path, he plasters a little space with cow-dung and, over it, he lights a leaf-cup oil-lamp. This oil-lamp should be lit with the help of the thatch pulled out of the roof of either the house, the cattleshed, or the pig-shed of the dead. Then the mourner pours a little water out of a leaf-cup on the ground near the lamp. Next, he stabs the foot-way horizontal-wise with a knife (carried by him from the house)

and addresses the spirit of the dead "Please, Don't come today".

The *uddhār* (=salvation or restoration) rites of mourning mark the end of the period of pollution and taboos brought on by death. Thursday is supposed to be an auspicious day for *uddhār*. On the day of *uddhār* the mat or the net, put to fence off the space for the chief mourner, is lifted out. All the male members (except the very small babies) of the dead person's family and also one or two members each from the male cousin's line gather at that house. A few other men from the village also join them. The women of the dead person's family gather in the courtyard of the house and begin to weep, bidding farewell to the men before they go to a water-source for shaving their heads. The chief-mourner, if he is the dead person's own son, has to shave his head completely including the *cutti* (the little tuft of hair left on the crown by Hindus) beard and moustaches. But in case of any other person substituting for him as chief mourner, the shaving of only the beard, moustaches and a little hair around his ears will suffice if he does not like to shave off all his hair. Next, all the male-line cousins, who go with the chief-mourner, get at least one or two locks of their hair clipped. Then all of them take a bath and, after purifying themselves with *swān pāni*, they return home.

Meanwhile all the women and girls of the dead person's joint-family also take bath. They wash their hair with mustard oil-cake. The very young children are bathed by their mothers in the courtyard.

The *gardhurryās* from each house of the village gather and help to take all the kitchen utensils and smoking pipes out of the house and wash them well. The cooking vessels, which are not generally washed, are well washed at this time. The

black layer (*Lyāwā*) accumulated on the outside of the vessels must be removed as well. Some women help in polishing the floor of the whole house, except the cattle-shed section. One or two other women help in bathing (dipping in oil-cake mixture and then rinsing with water) all the religious figurines and other associated objects enshrined in the deity-room.

Next the men, after shaving and bathing, make preparations for cooking *barryā*. Fire is brought in the *bahari* section from the kitchen. A fresh hearth is put over the fire. Four or six persons are engaged in cooking *barryā*. *Barryā* is prepared from rice-flour. Rice-flour is mixed with a little water and then small balls are made of it which are fried in mustard-oil. This mustard-oil must be the home-made oil offered by the families in the extended patrilineal of the deceased.

Now, two men make preparations for a shamanistic performance to evoke and contact the new ancestor as well as the old ancestors. One of these is a *guruwā* from a *gharguruwā* family and the other a *kesauka* from any clan or sub-group (of Dangaura Tharus). The deity and the ancestors, when called one after another by the *guruwā* are thought to come onto the body of the *kesaukā* during the latter's state of trance. The *gharguruwā* and *kesaukā* sit down on a mat facing west in the *bahari* section. The *kesaukā* (person on whom the spirits will mount) takes off his cap. One small jar of liquor and one mug (*lotā*) of plain-water (both covered with leaves) are also brought there along with some *achetā* (dehusked rice used for religio-shamanistic purposes). An oil-lamp is lit on the ground in front of them. Now the *guruwā* begins to chant Mantras and throw *achetā* over the *kesaukā*, to call the deity or ancestor, by making the *kesaukā* come into trance. Finally the *kesaukā* goes into trance. This is done three times successively. The first trance is for Maiya deity, the second for

the old ancestors and the last one in honour of the new ancestor. When the *kesaukā* starts to go into trance for the new ancestor, he enters the deity-room in a state of possession. Then the *gardhurryā* of the house picks up the Saura deity and moves it (anticlockwise) around the body of the *kesaukā*. Then the latter's quick breathing, associated with spirit possession, diminishes. He returns to the original seat. As the new ancestor has possessed the *kesaukā*, the *guruwā* and the *kesaukā* (on behalf of the dead person, who has now become a new ancestor) begin a conversation. The conversation runs like this:

Guruwā = "New ancestor, please, did you come?"

Kesaukā = "Yes, I came."

Guruwā = "Please, did you occupy your abode in the deity room?"

Kesaukā = "Yes, I did."

Now the offerings (*minhi* = snacks) are made. First of all a little liquor is poured into a leaf-cup, which is then poured onto the ground. Meanwhile, the women of the house get the food cooked for offering. The menu consists necessarily of the green leaves of *pawai*,³⁰ green beans, whole grains of black gram, fish and pork. All these items are cooked in the deity-room. Some men of the family stitch three dishes and six cups out of leaves. Of these, one dish and two cups must be stitched by the left hand although the help of the right hand also may be taken in holding the leaves, while stitching. The rest of the cups and dishes are stitched in the usual way, with the right hand, while holding the leaves with the left. Now, a woman from the family

30. A creeper plant with small soft and smooth leaves which bears very small round and juicy fruits of purple colour coming in bunches.

plasters the floor below the eastern wall of the deity-room with cow-dung. The widow of the deceased (if the dead person was a male) or another lady puts all the items of the menu in the leaf dishes, paying attention that the left-hand-stitched dish is filled or served by her left hand. Every thing put or served in such a dish or cup must also be served with left hand.

Then, the chief-mourner comes and puts the left-hand-stitched dish, to the right of him, near the end of the plastered space. The rest of the dishes are now kept to the left side of the left-hand-stitched dish. The chief mourner puts the leaf cups also on the plastered ground. The left-hand-stitched cups are put in front of the left-hand-stitched dish. After that the chief mourner puts water in each of the leaf-bowls or cups, in front of each dish. In the other cups, liquor is served.

Now one or two strands of *siru* grass are put over each dish by the chief-mourner to be used as tooth-picks by the guests, who are the deities and the ancestors to whom these dishes have been served. After that, all members of the family (except the sisters and daughters) and all patrilineal cousins form up in a row behind the chief mourner. All of them stand one behind the other and touch the person in front. This is done just to make it easier for the participation of others in the offerings. Whoever touches or contacts the chief-mourner directly or indirectly also gets credit for the offerings.

Now, the chief mourner, who is the front line performer, applies a spot (*tikā*) or vermilion at three separate points on the cow-dung plastered space. Then he moves the left-hand-stitched dish and the cups and places them over the left-most spot of vermilion with his left hand. Next he puts the other two spots, and finally performs *parchanā* by dipping the fingers

of the closed hands inside a *lotā* and then sprinkling the water drops with his fingers near each leaf-dish.

After that, the row of persons is dismissed and all those previously standing in the row are supplied with a leaf-cup. The chief mourner then distributes a few drops of liquor as *parsad* (an offering to or from the deity) to them. This is the liquor which has been left in the liquor jar after offering it to the deity and ancestors. The chief-mourner then drinks a few drops of liquor from his leaf-cup. Then the others also follow suit.

Now the chief-mourner pulls out one of the right-hand stitched dishes and its two cups and eats or drinks the contents within the deity-room. Male children and others, housewives or clansmen can, if they wish, take the contents of another right-hand-stitched dish and cups. Next some home-made beer, and other items of food (not necessarily associated with the ritual) are also brought. But only leaf-cups or leaf-dishes are allowed. All those men or women must not leave the deity-room or the next-door room (in which they are eating, due to shortage of space in the deity-room). Neither should they throw away elsewhere any particle of food nor the leaf-plate itself. All the food left-over on the floor as well as the left-over leaf-cups and leaf-plates are swept together and collected into a basket along with the left-hand-stitched dishes and cups and their contents. The contents of the basket are put aside for a special disposal called *pittar puhainā* (=to wash away for the ancestors). For this a lady of the house dresses carefully with ornaments and fine make-up. Then she takes up the basket and carries it southwards to any river or stream and empties it of its contents. It is thought that the deceased person, who has now become an ancestor, will come to collect his share of food and be happy to see the family representative dressed in fine garments and make-up.

The same day, there is also a small ceremony called *tel lenā* or *tyal lenā* (to take or to begin with oil). This is one of several small rituals which compose the *uddhar*. This little ceremony puts an end to the period of taboos on certain items of food like oil and lentils or on certain forms of behaviour like greetings (*syāwā lagnā*), imposed during the period of mourning. A man belonging to one of the clans traditionally known as *tel dihwā* (offerer of oil), is invited either from the village itself or from any other village. A new cap is also already brought at the mourning family's expenses. Now the *tel dihwā* puts the new cap on the chief mourner's head. As it is not easy to arrange for new caps for all the others (men from the lineage and the clans-men), he (the *tel dihwā*) turns upside down the caps worn by each man or boy present. The others (the men and boys) then bring their caps to the original position by turning them right-side up once more. Now some home-made mustard oil is brought there in a bronze bowl from inside. The others present are also given oil which they apply to their heads in the same way. Then they greet each other and also the *tel dihwā* to confirm the renewal of greetings after the taboo imposed on his practice during the mourning-period.

The same day, a little charity donation takes place. The gifts are bronze utensils such as cooking vessels, dishes, bowls or *lota*. The donation must be made, in the eastern side courtyard of the house, to the *tel dihwā* and to the *bhainās* the donation is made to the descendants of the *bhainā*.

Among certain clans, like the Sukhrorya Gurrwa of Sukhrwar, there is the custom of collecting a few bones from the pyre, after the body is burnt. This is done by one or two male members of the family or the clan. They carry these pieces with them to Deokhuri valley, where they are disposed of at the junction of the Mungraitha stream with the Rapti

river. From there, after a bath and purification by *swān pāri*, they bring one *lotā* of holy water with them to the dead man's house. This water like *gangājal* (holy water from the river Ganges) among Hindus, is then diluted with one jar of local drinking water and then poured on the hands of each and every person present there. They then drink it. On that day, all men and women from the extended patriline who reside in the village, and one or two male representatives from families of the extended patriline who do not live in the village, as well as all *gardhurryās* and their wives from the village, assemble there, bringing a little gift with them. Male patrilineal relatives from the village bring only one small jar of home-made beer and their wives bring a single small basket of rice, pulse (preferably black gram), salt and oil. Patrilineal relatives from other villages are expected to bring two baskets of the same items. It is said that previously, when there was plenty of grain, two full baskets of rice were actually brought, but now the tradition is maintained by bringing a small amount of rice in two baskets. Village males other than the clansmen or patrilineal cousins bring only a little rice (about 1/2 or 1/3 kilogramme) and one or two crystals of salt knotted in a fold of their *cadri*. The grains thus collected are sold by the dead person's house. Out of the proceeds a vessel is bought, which is kept in memory of the dead person.

Finally, all persons present participate in a feast in honour of the dead, organized by the dead person's family and called *kaharna* (lit: to take out as a share or offering to a ghost or deity). First, there is one sitting for the males. All of them sit in a rough crescent in the *bahari*, near the entrance door to the corridor. Beginning with the chief mourner, each person is served with a cooked meal containing pork, *cuni* and *barryā* in a leaf-dish, and some liquor in a leaf-cup. The chief mourner then takes out a few pieces of pork,

cuni, and *barrayā* and drops them on the floor by the side of his leaf plate. This is called the *kaharnā* of pork and *cuni*. Next he pours some liquor over the pieces on the floor and then begins to eat. All others participating in the feast do likewise. Next, the other men, helping to serve the meal, bring some more items of food such as mutton and home-made beer and serve it to the others. Once all have finished eating and have washed their hands and mouths, a next sitting starts for the *kaharnā* of rice, lentile-soup and fish. This time, the chief-mourner is served first with a leaf-dish containing rice, lentile pulse, fish and pork-intestines. The chief-mourner then, as before, takes out small portions of all things and drops them on the ground. This time, as there is no liquor, he just sprinkles some water from his hand and starts eating. The others follow suit.

When the males have finished eating, the first sitting starts for the females. This time, if the dead person was a male, his widow leads the others in *kaharnā*. Otherwise, all is similar. There are two *kaharnā* sittings for females also. The first one for the *cuni*, *barrayā* pork and liquor, and the second one for rice, pulse, fish and other things.

In the evening, all from the village and the neighbouring villages go back to their homes after drinking *jar*. The members of the dead person's family, according to the tradition, must not limit themselves to the meal, served during the *kaharnā*. They should eat or drink something more, like rice or *jār* in the evening.

Tharu Festivals

Like many other peoples, Tharus have feasts and festivals which take place at intervals during the season when they are

not occupied in the fields. The most important of the festivals are: (a) Maghi, (b) Dasya, (c) Atwari, (d) Astimki and (e) Dhureri or the Hori.

(a) *Maghi*

The festival of Maghi is little different from other Tharu festivals. It is somewhat like a new-year's day festival. Yet there is no religious myth or legend associated with this day.

For Tharus, it is a time of eating, drinking and celebration, and of doing no work at all. Even personal servants and agricultural employees of Tharu origin get holidays, during this festival. All the annual agreements between landowners and tenants or masters and servants end on this day and must be renewed during or after the festival, if both sides wish to do so. In the course of the year neither party is supposed to break an agreement made during the Maghi festival.

The main day of Maghi festival falls on the first day of Magh (in the second or third week of January) according to the Hindu solar calendar. The festival may last three or four more days -- until there is no more *jār* to drink or pork to eat, and serious work must begin again.

A little before the festival, in the month of Pus, some *jār* is specially prepared from Andhi rice. At the same time some common *jār* is also prepared. The day before the main day of festival, families go to catch fish for the festival. The same day, some rice (about two to ten kilograms, depending upon the size of the family) is soaked in water and pounded in the *dheki*. From this pounded rice-flour *dhikri* cakes are made and steamed, for the next day.

On the main day of the festival all households, except the very poor or very small, kill one pig. Those who cannot

afford a pig or who do not need the meat of a whole pig buy at least some pork from those who have surplus.

In the early morning of the main day, all people take a bath in a river or a well. Some go to pilgrimage sites in the vicinity. Couples who have no children or whose children are dead, go on pilgrimage to the Laraina. There after taking a holy bath, they ask for the boon of children from the deities Barāhā, Nārāyana and Basudeo (also a name of Lord Vishnu).³¹ From Chayaram's household Bhagiram and his wife went on such a pilgrimage in company with other people, who had gone only for pleasure to see the fair. On their way back to the village, a team of amateur Tharu dancers and musicians went out to greet them as an honour to the returning pilgrims. Moreover, when they arrived at the house, the wife or one of Bhagiram's elder brothers washed Bhagiram's feet as a gesture of respect. Since Bhagiram was the youngest of the married brothers and since the wives of elder brothers are not supposed to touch the feet of a younger brother's wife, no one washed the feet of Bhagiram's wife. The pilgrim couple gave the *tikā* to other people in the house and greeted them. The sisters and nieces of Bhagiram were also offered some money along with *tikā* by the pilgrim couple. After that, some women of the village, generally from the families of paternal cousins, came with food and drinks called *parchakki* (feast) for the pilgrim couple. Feeding a pilgrim is considered a deed of charity and it also transfers some of the merit of the pilgrimage to the furnisher of such *parchakki*.

In every house, when all people come back from their bath, all the males of the house go to the deity-room. One, two or three pots (depending upon the number of generations of living males in that family) are kept there, in which men

31. See also A.W. Macdonald, "Note Sur Deux Fetes chag les Tharus de Deng", *Objects et Mondes* 9:1, (Printemps 1969) p.88.

of each generation (i.e. the grandfather's generation, the sons' generation and the grandsons' generation) drop (*kaharnā*) some cereals and salt in a separate pot, to be donated to the sister/sisters of the men of each generation. Each donator has to drop five *ujri*³² full of rice, five single hand-fulls of whole grain black grams and the same amount of salt in the allotted pot for his generation. The materials thus collected are delivered within a few days to the sister/sisters (to be divided equally if there is more than one sister).

After this, all persons in the family eat and then go from one house to another (usually to the house of relatives and friends) to drink more *jār* and eat more pork, pickles and vegetables. Meanwhile long talks and discussions go on as long as the food and drink lasts. The discussions on such occasions generally concern the food especially the *jār*. Comparisons are made between the taste of food and drinks served during the festival by the various houses which have been visited. Therefore everyone competes to serve better *jār* than the others. These feasts last usually for about a week.

During the mid-day of the main day of the festival, all the household heads (*gardhurryās*) gather at the Mahaton's house carrying one *golra* full of *jar*, which they drink there. Next day, they gather again at the same place, with the same amount of *jār*. This *jār* is consumed during a *kheḷ*, in which the Mahaton asks each individual *gardhurryā* about his problems: whether he is moving or migrating to a new place, whether he has any intention of building a new house or renovating an old one, or whether some one in his house, is going to get married. These questions are asked to let the Mahaton know

32. Cup-shape formed by the two hands.

what sort of community help will be needed at what time by the *gardhurryā* concerned so that he can prepare or fix a rough schedule for such events.

During the festival, or as soon as possible afterwards, each tenant or farm labourer goes to his master to receive a *tikā*, as a sign of respect or acceptance of his mastership.³³ A new tenant or new labourer for the coming year also goes to his new land-owner or master to receive a *tikā*, as a formal sign of the acceptance of his mastership.

During the Maghi week there are several male and female groups of amateur Tharu dancers in special colourful and charming dresses. They sing, dance and beg for money from one house to another.

(b) *Dasya*

The word 'Dasya' is derived from the Nepalese word 'Dasai' which is the Nepalese name for the Vijaya Dashami festival of the Hindus. But very little seems to have been borrowed by the Tharus from the Hindu tradition of Dasai except the day.

Preparations start early for Dasya. During Sorah Shradha³⁴ Tharus boil some whole-grain maize. After boiling it with *sanjai*³⁵ they dry it in the shade and keep it for Dasya. This maize is now called *kuri*. *Kuri* is supposed to be a purifier of liquor, which, when mixed in the fermented grain

33. A *tikā* in most cases, is applied by a senior to a junior. It means that the junior accepts the supremacy or the mastership of the giver of the *tikā*.

34. Sorah Shradha are the sixteen days of the year set aside by the Hindus for performing ancestor worship.

35. *Sanjai* is the fermenting agent prepared out of the tiny red shoots and buds of the *sāl* (*Shoria robusta*) tree mixed with charcoal powder, in the month of May.

for liquor before distillation, makes the liquor holy and fit for offering to the deities. *Kuri* maize for a house is supposed to be boiled and prepared only by the male members or by the affinal women of the family.

During the last few days of Sorah Shraddha, *dār* is cooked in two or more containers. *Dār* is a preparation of cereals which when fermented becomes a basic substance for distilling liquor. It can be prepared from any cereal like rice, maize, barley or wheat. After boiling a cereal for *dār* it is cooled until luke-warm and then preserved in three separate jars in layers which alternate with thin layers of *kuri*. The *dār* cooked in these separate containers must be, likewise, preserved in separate jars, to be distilled into liquor for three different purposes. Thus the, *dār* preserved in one of the jars is called *chakiā* and is offered to the deities. *Dār* preserved in a second jar is known as *pitarwan* and the liquor distilled from it is offered to the ancestors. The content in the third jar is used in distilling ordinary type of liquor, to be consumed by men. All three jars are shut tight and left to ferment for eight or ten days until Naudurga (the nine days of Vijaya Dashami) when liquor is distilled from their contents.

Liquor is first distilled out of *chākiā dār*. That obtained in the first shift of distillation of *chakiā* is stored for offering to Maiya goddess; liquor obtained in the second shift from the *chakiā dār* is stored for offering to the *gharguruwā*'s household deities. It is delivered to his house by a *barin* when he goes to him to bring *dhoop* and *bān* on the fifth day of Naudurga or Dasya. When a *gharguruwā* household produces this type of liquor, it is offered to their own household-deities. Liquor obtained from further distillation from *chakiā* is used for domestic consumption. Once the whole *chakiā dār* has been distilled, the distilling vessels and instruments are washed

thoroughly before the *pitarwan dār* from the second jar is distilled. The liquor produced in the first shift of distillation out of *pitarwan dār* is stored for offering to the ancestral deities (on the ninth day of Dasya in most cases). Liquor obtained in the second shift of distillation out of *pitarwan dār* is stored for offering to *guruwās*, who drink it during their group-seance in the house of a more experienced *guruwā* on the first day of Dasya.

The first day (*pratipadā* - Sans.) of Dasya is marked by sowing maize-seedlings in a basket which is kept in a dark place to let the seedlings become yellow in colour. These yellow shoots are used as *jiurā* (*jamarā* - Nep.). Maize seeds for *jiurā* must be sowed in the morning by either a male or a female member of the family before he or she eats.

On the fifth day (*pancami* - Sans.) of Dasya, the TERRA and DAHIT clans of Gharguruwa sub-group Tharus perform their *shraddhā* or *pittar denā* (offerings to the ancestors) while other clans perform this on the ninth day (the final day for Tharus). On the same day one man from every household of a Barin sub-group clan goes to his *gharguruwa* to deliver to him the holy liquor along with a gift consisting of maize-cobs and seasonal vegetables. In return he receives *dhoop bān* from his *gharguruwā*, which will be used in the household rituals for the coming year until the next Dasya.

On the seventh day (*saptami* - Sans.), preparations are made for cooking *dhikri* cakes. The *painas* - *topī* (a set of hollow-bottomed baskets used for steaming *dhikri* cakes) and a few more baskets and mats are washed well and dried. Rice is soaked in water over night. Then, early next morning, (the eighth day) the pre-soaked rice is pounded in the *dheki*. One of the women of the family, who will be cooking these cakes, has bathed herself the day before. On this day she fasts until all the *dhikri* cakes are cooked and offered to the deities in a ritual.

The *gardhurryā*, of the house, who will perform this ritual, also fasts. During their fast they are allowed to take as much liquor as they like but no food or water.

The different varieties of *dhikris* steamed for the occasion consist of *paawā* (=sandle), *bwajhā* (=bundle), *dyagā* (=stick or rod) shapes and in some cases *lāgu bāsu* (=snake) shapes also. Except for their shape, all *dhikri* have the same quality and taste. In addition to these, some ghee-chapatis are also prepared.

At dusk, the *gardhurryā* of the house goes for a bath and brings one *lotā* of fresh water. Then he goes to the deity-room taking some *jiurā* (the yellow maize-shoots, mentioned above), a few *bebri* (basil) stalks, some vermilion and one tiny jar of holy liquor obtained from *chakiā dār*, to be used in the ritual.

The ritual or worship starts with the application of vermilion spots to all the deities and religious objects concerned. Then some ghee-chapatis along with *jiurā* and *bebri* are offered by households who enshrine him, to Succa deity who does not accept liquor or blood. Water is also sprinkled on the Succa deity in *parchanā* manner. Next, offerings are made to the Maiya group of deities (Maiya, Khekhri, Saura and the others kept inside the *jholi*) with *dhikri*, *jiurā* and *bebri* stalks together in a leaf plate. After that, a few drops of water are sprinkled on the plate and then the liquor is poured over it. Next some *dhoop* is put over a fire and finally, *parchanā* is done.

By and by, the deities on other altars in the room and also those in the *bahari*, *ghari* and the courtyard are also worshipped in the same manner.

The same evening the worshipper (the *gardhurryā*) of the house, makes an animal-like shape from a *kwārā* (Benincasa hispida) fruit (Nepali: *kubhinda*) by inserting some wooden

sticks in it as legs, tail, mouth and ears. Then it is left standing on its 'feet' in front of Maiya's altar. A *lotā* containing fresh water and covered on its top with *sal* leaves, is put below this animal-like figure.³⁶ Over the *sal* leaves, is placed a leaf-cup containing several assorted cereals (*sal bihi*) with a lit oil-lamp on the top. The lamp is kept burning throughout the night.

At dawn on the ninth day, which is the main and final day of Dasya festival for Tharus, the worshipper cuts the animal-like image into two pieces. The front piece is offered over the altar of Maiya, along with liquor. The back piece, which is slightly bigger than the front, is taken to the kitchen to be included in the meal being prepared for offering to the ancestors (*pittar*).

The same day, one of the affinal women of the family prepares a special meal for the *pittar*. Rice and five other items are cooked for the offering. Recipes of *kohri* (preparation of whole grains of black gram) and two varieties of *sāg* (green leaf vegetables) of mustard and *pawai*, pods of green beans, and fish constitute the five items to be offered. Once the menu is prepared, the worshipper starts the offerings to the ancestors. First he takes a bath and brings some fresh water in a *lotā* and some strands of *siru* grass. Meanwhile, the part of the floor in the deity-room below the eastern wall is plastered with cow-dung. Five *ghurrās* (circular drawings made with rice-flour) are prepared in a row (north-south) on the plastered space. The worshipper now sits facing east, towards the plastered area, with four of the *ghurrā* designs on his right and one on his left. The woman who has been preparing the food then brings five leaf-plates containing

36. According to some informants, this animal-like image is supposed to be a sheep.

all five special items in the menu along with rice, one after another. However, she serves the food in the first dish with her left hand, while the other dishes are carried in and served with her right hand. The worshipper too, using his left hand, puts the first dish (served with the left hand) over the northern-most *ghurrā* on his left side. The rest of the dishes are put over the other rice-flour designs in the usual manner with the right hand. Then the worshipper applies vermilion *tikā* and offers the fresh (holy) water, two types of liquor (one of which is diluted with water and the other undiluted), some milk, *jiurā*, *bebri* stalks and a few *siru* strands on each dish including the first dish. He must be careful that the first dish is always offered with the left-hand and the remaining dishes with the right. Finally *parchanā* is done.

After the offering, the worshipper removes the dish served with the left hand and gives the remaining dishes to male children of the family or of the partrilineal cousins, if they happen to be there at that time. Food in these dishes cannot be eaten by others or taken out-doors. Those who eat this food must eat it inside the room and must wash their hands and mouth well before leaving. The food in the remaining dish that was served with the left-hand is washed away in a river or stream. A woman, usually the wife of the *gardhurryā* goes to wash (*assainā*) these things. The woman going to do this must wear beautiful make-up and a charming dress.

After the offerings to the ancestors, the worshipper starts to sacrifice to the different deities and spirits. First, a cock is sacrificed to Maiya. To do this the cock is held in the left-hand and then some holy (fresh) water and rice are sprinkled over the head of the cock. If the cock shakes its head when water and rice are sprinkled over it, this is supposed to be the sign that the *pujā* (meaning sacrifice in Tharu sense) is agreeable to the deity to whom the sacrifice is being offered. The head of the cock is then out

off and put on the altar of Maiya. Next, another cock is sacrificed at the altar of the terracotta horse, which in the case of a *gharguruwa* sub-group is enshrined in a miniature hut in the eastern courtyard. One cock is sacrificed to Raksa, in the courtyard, not by decapitating but by just knocking it to death. One more cock is sacrificed to the goddess Patnahi Bhawani also in the courtyard. After a sacrifice to a deity, the deity must be offered holy liquor.

In the afternoon of the final day, there is a *tikā* giving ceremony in the house of Mahaton. *Gardhurryās*, or others who represent them, go to the Mahaton to get *tikā*, carrying *jiura*, *bebri*, and ordinary liquor. The Mahaton or any male or female person (preferably an elderly one from his family) puts *tikā* on the forehead of the *gardhurryā* or the person representing him. This *tikā* is made of a thick paste, prepared by pounding pre-soaked rice and is white in colour.

In the evenings during the whole of Dasya, a group dance is performed in every Tharu village. Young men and women, mostly the bachelors and single girls, participate in it. The girls form two semi-circular lines, each facing the other and in the middle of these two rows, there are males playing the drums. There is more singing than dancing. The girls dressed in fine, special dresses, move slowly towards their right, in a circle, while singing songs and playing *majira* with their hands. The girls in each row sing alternate lines of the song while the drummers each time move and face towards the row of singing girls; they do not move in a circle like the girls.

This dance is called *dasya nac*. The songs in most cases contain themes from the Hindu epic *Krishna Caritra* (=life history of lord Krishna). Such dances, performed during Dasya, take place from Astimki onwards and end one or two weeks after Dasya.

It is interesting to compare the Dasya, the Tharu festival, with the Dasai festival as it is performed by Nepalese Hindus. The main difference lies in the theme and ideology itself. For the Tharu, Dasya is mainly an occasion for offerings to the ancestors like *shrāddha* is among Hindus. For Hindus on the other hand, Dasai is a festival which commemorates Ram's success over Ravana and Durga's victory over the demons. Among Hindus, there are traditional athletic games, dramas etc, on this occasion while there is no such tradition among Tharus.

The Hindus of Nepal use barley-shoots as *jamarā*, while Tharus use maize-shoots. Hindus use whole grains of rice mixed with red colour for *tikā*, while the Tharus use only the plain white-paste made of pounded rice. Among Hindus, the *tikā* is applied by every senior person (in age, relation or social hierarchy) to every junior one, linked by a social or economic tie. Among Tharus, it is applied by the Mahaton or his substitute to the *gardhurryās* or their representatives in the local area only. Again among Tharus, *tikā* is applied on the ninth, which is their main and final day of this festival. But among Hindus, *tikā* is given on the tenth day.

Yet there are certain traditions common to both. For example, both of them prepare *jamarā* (Hindu) or *jiurā* (Tharu) though of different cereals. Both of the groups cut or sacrifice *Benincasa hispida* fruit (Nep. - *kubhindo*; Tharu-*kwārā*) to offer to their goddess who, among Tharus, is Maiya,³⁷ and among Hindus Durga or Bhawani. These few resemblances, help us to sketch out the cultural interaction of Tharus with the Hindus.

37. Also occasionally called Bhawani.

(c) *Atwāri or the Barkā Atwāri*

This festival is so named because it is performed on a *atwār* (=Sunday). This particular Sunday also known as Barka Atwari (=the great Sunday) falls on the first Sunday of the bright fortnight of Bhadau (August-September). It is a fasting festival observed by males only. Except for the very young, the very old or very sick persons, or those to whom this fast has proved unauspicious, all Tharu men take part.

The mid-night before Atwāri, those who are going to fast the next day, take a heavy meal (*dar*) consisting of rice, fish and rice-beer, etc. Next day, when men fast, they are allowed to take only liquor, not water or food. Men do their usual farm work until mid-day when they take a bath and change their clothes. A portion of the *bahari* section of the house is plastered with cow dung. A holy fire is made there, by rubbing a dry stick of the red pepper plant against a dry piece of *gainyāri* wood. After that, one of men who is fasting puts a big pan with oil over a new hearth, where the holy fire has been tended. This oil is used to cook the Atwari cakes, which will be offered to the fire-god and then eaten by the fasters. Flour for cooking the cakes has already been prepared for the occasion by pounding the rice which has been pre-soaked in water. One of the older men who is fasting takes small bits of this flour in his hands, presses them flat and puts them in boiling oil for deep frying. If those who are fasting are quite young and do not know how to cook these cakes, their mothers after they have bathed and changed clothes, can cook these cakes for them. When the cakes have been cooked, milk, cured, fruit and a little cow-butter are brought in. A senior person among those fasting then takes out one cake in a separate leaf. He tears a small piece out of this cake, rolls it in butter and offers it to the holy fire in which the cakes had been cooked. Next, he sprinkles holy water over the fire

three or five times in the *parehanā* manner. The other men fasting do likewise one after another. After that, the cakes, milk products, fruit are divided equally among all fasting men in different dishes. Then each fasting man is supplied with one empty dish in which he sorts out some pieces of every item of food from his share. This sorted food called *agrāsan* will be delivered or given to his sisters the next day. The rest of the things in the share are eaten on the spot by the men. This food is the only meal they are allowed to take on that day but they are free to take liquor as often as they like. The holy fire is kept burning till next morning, when the men use it to cook 'holy' rice as *pharāhār*³⁸ which is eaten with butter.

(d) *Astimki*

The word *astimki* is a derived form of the Sanskrit word meaning 'the eighth day'. *Astami* is also a short form of *janmasti* or *krishnastami*, which is the day of lord Krishna's birth and falls on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra or Bhadau (August-September) month. Among Tharus it is a women's festival in which mostly girls and young women participate. Except for very young girls and weak women, all fast for the whole day without taking even water or liquor. The very young girls and weak women may take some fruit or milk products but not any cereal. The baby girls of two or three years who cannot stay without eating rice, are given rice with milk or curd to eat, but without salt.

On the same day, in the house of the Mahaton, *Astimki* murals are drawn and painted over the surface of the big earthen grain container (*dehri*) standing at the northern limit

38. Derived from Sanskrit *phalāhār* literally meaning a diet of fruit; auspicious food.

of the *bahari* section of the house. An expert man, from any Tharu family, draws and paints the murals. But he should also bathe and fast to participate in this act.

At about six or seven p.m., a crowd of fasting girls and women gather at the Mahaton's house, near the mural, for worship. Every girl or woman comes with a lighted oil lamp, placed above some rice on a plate, along with two fruits (*astimki rahanā phar*). These fruits may be any variety of citrus fruit, cucumber, guava, banana, or a betel-nut. Once a girl selects a particular fruit as her *astimki rahanā phar*, she has to continue to offer it. She must never eat this fruit. Therefore girls select fruits which they do not like much or which are not easily available.

In the worship, the girls lay the things they have carried with them in a heap over a plastered space, below the murals. First rice is placed on the bottom; then oil lamps over it and then the fruits around these lamps. Meanwhile a lot of flowers of different sorts which must include the *ghunyāsar* (*Mirabilis galapa*) are brought in and placed around the lamps by the worshipping girls. Next the girls or women put *tikā* marks of vermilion powder on each male or female deity's image with the exception of the Barmurrwa (a twelve-headed demon), depicted in the mural. Finally the girls sprinkle water over the mural in *parchanā* manner.

After worshipping the mural, the girls and women go to a bedroom (*konti*) plastered with cow-dung. In it some fruits or dairy products to be eaten by the fasting women and girls, are kept: a little butter, some holy water in a *lotā*, and fire is also brought there. All fasting women and girls sit around these things. Then all the edible things have to be cut into pieces before being distributed equally; each fasting girl or woman is then given a dish of such edible things as her share. One of the girls then puts some butter over the fire

(*agiyāri karmā*) and then immediately all women and girls tear off a small piece of each sort of food in their dish, roll it in butter and throw it in the same fire.

Next the fasters, take apart some pieces of edible items from their plate as *agrāsan* and keep these for their brothers or the sons of their elder sisters. These foods are given to the brothers only on the next day. If the brothers, or sisters' sons live at a distance, the girl or the woman has to go herself to deliver the food.

After breaking their fast with *pharāhār* the girls again gather at the Mahaton's house where they sing verses about Kanha's (lord Krishna) birth. They pass the whole night in singing the verses and songs. Such songs are sung up to Dasya and in post-Dasya weeks except that later on these verses are sung in elaborate group dances (*dasya nae*) in which the males also participate as drummers.

The rice and the fruits thus collected in the Mahaton's house as a rule become the property of the mural artist and his family. Generally such an artist comes from the Mahaton's family. But in practice, if the artist happens to be from another family, he is rewarded with a piece of cloth or a cap and the rice is kept by the Mahaton's family.

For the preparation of the surface for the *astimki* murals, three or four days earlier a frame or border, which is slightly raised above the surface, is made of ant-hill clay mixed with husk. Next, the surface is plastered with a mixture of cow-dung and clay. When it dries, the surface is again polished by rubbing green leaves of cucumber and beans to make it smooth. One day before the performance, the artist paints the surface in white, either with lime or rice-powder paint. On the main day, the artist draws and paints the pictures. In former days, only ochre and black colours obtained from

minerals were used. Later on green colour, obtained from bean leaves, was also introduced. Nowadays chemical colours are brought from the market and other colours like yellow, pink, blue are also used.

The figures drawn on the *astimki* murals include the sun and the moon, two rows of warriors,³⁹ porters carrying a bride and bridegroom in a *doli*, a male in-law (*samdhi*; father of the bride or bride-groom), Kānhā playing his flute in a tree, milk-maids in a boat (a scene from *Krishna Caritra*) and large-scale figures of fish, or other animals like monkeys. Sometimes floral designs are also drawn in addition.

(e) *Dhureri or Hori*

According to Hindus, Hori or Phagu falls on the full moon of Phagun (March-April). But Tharus are not very strict concerning the day or date for this festival. They perform it more or less on the same day, depending upon the weather or the leisure of the villagers.

The night before the Holi festival, the kitchen-fire in each house is put out. Next morning, some boys of the village go to a near-by forest or rivershore to bring some branches of *dhairo* (*woodfordia floribunda*) tree and a small trunk of *semar* tree (*Bombax Malabaricum*). Some of them take drums with them while others take cow-bells. When returning, with those branches and the tree trunk, they play their drums and jingle the cow-bells at their waist and occasionally sing certain couplets, the theme of which generally contains teasing and jokes about girls. Before entering the village, the boys make three circumambulations (anti-clock-wise) of the village and then plant the *semar* trunk in a hole dug

39. Interpreted as the Pandavas, the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, by some Tharu informants.

out at a short distance from the *deuthannwā* (the village-level deities' shrine; also called *bhayār thān*), or near a crossing of foot-paths. The *dhāiro* branches are also planted in a circle around the *semar*.

Meanwhile, *gardhurryās* gather near the *deuthannwā*, where they make fresh and holy fire by rubbing two dry pieces of *gainyāri*⁴⁰ and red pepper wood against each other. The fire thus produced must not be blown on with the mouth, until the ceremony ends. This fire is taken to a shade and put inside a new hearth, to be used for cooking a ceremonial dish. Some of the *gardhurryās* cook *roti*, while others assist. A few women from Mahaton's family also help them in cooking, if necessary. A huge amount of *roti* (chapatis deep-fried in oil or ghee) are prepared, so that one full dish can be available for each house to share. The materials needed for cooking the *roti* are supplied by the Mahaton's house or, if he is unable to afford that, he can collect them from the villagers.

In the evening after sunset, the Mahaton takes a bath, brings fresh water in a *lotā* and goes to the *deuthannwā*. A few *gardhurryās* go behind him carrying cow's milk, holy liquor and some of the *rotis* (already cooked in the holy fire) to be offered to the village-level deities by the Mahaton. The Mahaton plasters the space below the wooden images in the *deuthannwā* where he first puts a bigger lamp in the middle and then several leaf-lamps (all lit by holy fire) beside it. He applies spots of vermilion powder over the wooden figures, winds cotton thread three or five times around the body of the statues, then offers milk and the diluted and undiluted liquor. Finally one leaf plate full of *roti* is offered to each figure of a deity in the *deuthannwā* group, followed immediately by *parchana*.

After the offerings to the deities, the Mahaton goes to the *semar* site, makes three circumambulations round it and puts three or five twists of cotton-thread round it. He then applies vermilion powder over it, offers liquor and finally rolls a straw loosely around the tree. Next, a few *rotis* are hung over the branches and finally the tree is lit from holy fire.⁴¹ Some boys throw lumps of clay over the tree to make the cakes fall, before they get burnt, so they can eat them. The *gardhurryās* or others from each house come there with some bits of dry cow-dung stuck on sticks. These are lit from the same fire, and taken home to start the fire in their kitchen. The Mahaton gives each of them a share of *roti* for their house.

41. See *Objets et Mondes*, 9:1, p. 78 for a photograph of this activity.