

THE THAKĀLĪS AS BUDDHISTS: A CLOSER LOOK AT THEIR DEATH CEREMONIES¹

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The Thakālīs are an agro-pastoral and trading people whose homeland is the Thāk Kholā valley of Mustang District, Nepal.² Situated in the contact zone between Tibetan culture to the north and Hindu culture to the south, their culture is a mixture of indigenous and exogenous cultural elements. This syncretism is best seen in their religion which is a combination of elements from an indigenous tradition known as *dhom*, Tibetan Buddhism, and Hinduism.³

The oldest tradition is *dhom*, a kind of shamanism related to the pre-Buddhist 'Black Bon' (Tib., *bon nag*) tradition of Tibet and the *jhākri* tradition of Nepal.⁴ The *dhom* like the *jhākri* is a kind of shaman who heals people, especially those attacked by evil superhuman beings.⁵ The *dhom* differs, however, in at least three important ways from the Nepalese *jhākri*. First, the status of *dhom*, in contrast to that of the *jhākri*, is connected to particular patrilineal descent groups;⁶ secondly,

¹ The material for the present article was collected in Nepal in 1972, from 1975 to 1978, and from 1980 to 1981. I am grateful to the Danish Research Council for the Humanities which financed my fieldwork in Nepal. Thanks are due to Krishnalal Thakali and my wife Bina for their assistance in the field, and to G.E. Clarke, N. Fock, E. Haarh, Tarap Tulku Lobsang, M. Oppitz, C.A.E. Ramble, and S. Whyte for valuable suggestions. Special thanks are due to C. Jest who read and commented upon an early draft of the present article. In the present article, Thakālī words were initially written in Devanāgarī script by Thakālī informants and later transcribed according to Turner (1931). Nepali words are transcribed according to Turner (1931), and Tibetan words according to Jäschke (1881).

² See Bista (1967), Fürer-Haimendorf (1975), Iijima (1960), Jest (1966), Messerschmidt (1981) and Vinding (1981) for an introduction to the Thakālīs.

³ One can, however, in Kathmandu find young 'modern' Thakālīs with an atheistic world view.

⁴ See Haarh (1969), Stein (1972) and Tucci (1980) for the pre-Buddhist traditions of Tibet; see Hitchcock and Jones, eds. (1976) for the *jhākri* tradition.

⁵ The ritual specialist of the indigenous tradition among the Tamāng Thakālīs is known as *dhom* while among the Mowātan Thakālīs as well as the Thin, Syāngtan and Cimtan Thakālīs he is known as *āyo lāmā*.

⁶ See Vinding (1981) for the relationship between patrilineal descent and the post of certain ritual specialists.

the *dhom*, unlike the *jhākri*, does not go into trance; and thirdly, one of the most important duties of the *dhom* is to perform the death ceremonies which is not the case with the *jhākri*.⁷

Tibetan Buddhism spread into the Thāk Kholā valley from the eleventh and twelfth centuries and became an important factor in the religion of the local people. Temples and monasteries were established, the Tibetan script was introduced, and locals were initiated as ritual specialists to serve the villagers.⁸

Thāk Kholā, like the rest of the present day Nepal, came under the Shāh rulers by the end of the eighteenth century. These orthodox Hindu rulers looked down upon the yak-eating Thakālīs, as they looked down upon Tibetan speaking people (Nep., *bhotiyā*, *bhote*) whom they considered as impure beef eaters.⁹ In order to change their image in the eyes of the Hindus in general, and the elite in Kathmandu in particular, some Thakālīs abolished a number of elements of their traditional culture which associated them too closely with the Buddhist *Bhotiya*. For example, a number of Thakālīs stopped eating yak meat; not surprisingly, these reforms were most extensive among the migrants living in areas dominated by Hindus.¹⁰

One of the results of these reforms is that Buddhism in general now plays a less important role in the religion of the Thakālīs. As a result several Buddhist temples of Thāk Kholā have been closed down; and as Buddhism declined Hindu elements found their way into the religion of the Thakālīs.¹¹ The introduction of Hindu elements is most widespread amongst the migrants, many of whom use brāhmans for certain ceremonies and celebrate Hindu festivals such as *dasai* and *tihār*.

⁷ See Jest (1966, 1969, 1976) for the *dhom* and his rituals.

⁸ See Tucci (1956), Snellgrove (1961, 1969, 1979) and Jackson (1976, 1978) for the early history of the Mustang District.

⁹ See also Schuler (1979) who analyses the Hindu view of the 'impure beef eating' *bhotiyā*.

¹⁰ According to Fürer-Haimendorf (1966), Iijima (1963), Manzardo and Sharma (1975) and Sharma (1977) these reforms have been very extensive among the Tamāng Thakālīs. Schuler (1979) and Vinding (1979/80) claim, however, that they have been less extensive than previously proposed.

¹¹ Among the temples which have disappeared from Thāksātsai can be mentioned Gāng gomba which was situated below Nākhung, and Boto gomba which was situated a little north of Kobāng. Three temples have disappeared in Thin in Pāc gāū, namely Kheca gomba (also known as ngorpo gomba) a little south of Thin; Paldong gomba (cf. Tib., *dpal ldan dgon pa*) in the middle of Thin and where Bom phobe now have built their new clan house; and Guru gomba next to the famous Kuchapternga (cf. Tib., *sku tshab gter lnga*) temple.

It is difficult to describe the religion of the Thakālis in general terms. First, their religion includes elements from several traditions. Secondly, the Thakālis form a very complex and heterogeneous group: hence in a study of their religion, and especially in a study of the decline of Buddhism and the introduction of Hindu elements, it is necessary to distinguish between a number of subgroups according to criteria such as ethnicity, locality, education, age, and sex. Thirdly, it is necessary to distinguish between the ritual and the cognitive aspects of religion. The tradition which is ritually dominant is not necessarily cognitively dominant too.

C. von Fürer-Haimendorf has written the following concerning the Thakālis:-
“...though they retained some elements of an older tribal religion, Buddhism became the dominant *ideological* force. Temples and monasteries were built in many of the Thakali villages, and considerable numbers of young men and women joined these institutions as monks and nuns. There can be little doubt that even fifty years ago the Thakalis must have presented a picture of a Buddhist society subscribing to most of the values and *beliefs* of Tibetan Buddhism.”

(1967 : 197; italics mine).¹²

My hypothesis is that Tibetan Buddhism was and still is (albeit to a lesser extent), an important feature of the religious ritual of the Thakālis, especially in Pāc gāũ and the northern part of Thāksātsai, but that its cognitive impact always has been, and still is, limited.

I shall try to illustrate this with an example, namely the death ceremonies as they are performed by the Buddhist ritual specialists in Syāng village in Pāc gāũ.¹³ These ceremonies are interesting in many respects. They include several non-Buddhist elements, and to learned monks from the big monasteries of Central Tibet

¹² Fürer-Haimendorf has recently republished a slightly revised edition of *Morals and Merit* under the title *South Asian Societies. A Study of Values and Social Controls*.

The present quotation is also included in this new edition.

¹³ The death ceremonies of the Thakālis vary greatly, especially according to the kind of ritual specialist who performs the main ceremony. The following description is thus only one of several ways in which the ceremonies can be performed. It is important to note that different ritual specialists can take part in the same ceremony. In Syāng, some households invite, beside the *thawa*, an *āyo lāmā* from Thin to participate in the ceremonies of the morning after the *mhāng rāhwa*.

References to the death ceremonies of the Thakālis are found in Iijima (1960), Jest (1976), Kawakita (1974), and Manzardo and Sharma (1975).

References to the death ceremonies of Tibetan speaking groups are many and includes *inter alia* Asboe (1932), Ribbach (1940), Duncan (1964), Wylie (1964-65) and Brauen (1980).

they probably seem rather 'archaic' and 'primitive'. More important, they show that the Thakālis have radically different ideas from orthodox Buddhism concerning the existence of a permanent soul, and life after death. In contrast to orthodox Buddhism the Thakālis believe in the existence of a permanent soul; they do not subscribe to the orthodox Buddhist belief in the endless cycle of rebirths.

Whether or not it is correct to state that fifty years ago the Thakālis presented a picture of a Buddhist society subscribing to most of the values and beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism depends, of course, on how one defines the values and beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism. If one includes the belief in an endless cycle of rebirths, then one must conclude that Fürer-Haimendorf's statement is not correct.

Buddhism in Syang

The Thakālis of Syāng (Tha., *Syāngtan*) claim to be followers of Buddha (Tha., *Sāngge*) and Buddhism is also the most important tradition in the ritual aspects of their religion.¹⁴ Buddhism in Syāng is based on the tradition of married village 'lamas' whom the Thakālis refer to as *ṭhawa* (cf. Tib., *grwa pa*), *chamṭa* (cf. Tib., *mtshams pa*)¹⁵, or more seldom as *khimṭa* (cf. Tib., *khyim pa*). Through the 1970's there have been approximately fifteen *ṭhawa* in Syāng, which is a large number according to Thakāli standard.¹⁶

Most of the *ṭhawa* in Syāng have become *ṭhawa* according to a village rule which prescribes that families with three sons or more should give the second son to the village temple. A *ṭhawa* takes no vow to live in celibacy, and lives an ordinary married life not very different from that of the other villagers.¹⁷ When they are young they learn to recite the Buddhist texts written in Tibetan, and to perform the ceremonies needed by the villagers. Later, their duty includes serving in rotation as keeper of the village temple (Tha., *kunger*, *kungerpā*; cf. Tib., *gnyer pa*) and to perform ceremonies on the behalf of the village, the patrilineal descent groups, and individual households.

¹⁴ The *dhom* tradition also plays a role in the ritual aspect of the religion of the Syāngtan Thakālis, but only a minor one in relation to Buddhism.

¹⁵ *Chamṭa* refers to a person who has stayed in retreat (Tha., *cham*; cf. Tib., *mtshams*) for a shorter or longer period.

¹⁶ An equal number of *ṭhawa* are found in Thin and Mārphā. In Thāksātsai, there are very few *ṭhawa* and not a single monk, but on the other hand a relative large number of nuns.

¹⁷ The *ṭhawa*, however, cannot be elected to any political post according to the traditional political system of the Thakālis. See Vinding (1981) for introductory notes on the traditional political system of the Thakālis.

None of the *ṭhawa* in Syāng are *lama* (cf. Tib., *bla ma*). A *lama* in the Thakālī sense of the word is a *ṭhawa* or a monk who has a seat (Tha., *thi*; cf. Tib., *gzhi*) in the temple.⁸ Therefore, in Syāng the ceremonies in the village temple are done under the leadership of an *ūmce* (cf. Tib., *dbu mdzad*), the chief village *ṭhawa*.

There were no monks and no monastery in Syāng when I first stayed in the village in 1972, but two women from the village were nuns (Tha., *gyomo*; cf. Tib., *jo mo*). One of the nuns is a follower of Kyūpar Lama, the other of the monk (Tha., *gailong*; cf. Tib., *dge slong*) Lopsāng Temba.

Lopsāng Temba, a Mowātan Thakālī of the Hirācan clan, stayed originally at Kyūpar gompa near Ṭukce but left with his followers and went to Nub-ri east of Thāk Kholā. According to informants, there had been a disagreement between Lopsāng Temba and Kyūpar Lama. In the middle of the 1970's Lopsāng Temba settled in Syāng and established a monastery. In 1981 the monastery included four permanent residents, namely Lopsāng Temba, a clan-sister who is a nun, a clan-brother who is a monk, and a young non-Thakālī monk who serves Lopsāng Temba. Three nuns from Syāng, one from Khantī, and two from Bāra gāū are connected with the monastery and stay partly in the monastery and partly in their own households.¹⁹ In addition, three young men from Syāng were staying temporarily in the monastery to be educated as *ṭhawa*; and there were also two young men from Manang staying temporarily to get an education. Lopsāng Temba has the charismatic personality of a leader and, in the eyes of most of the villagers in Syāng, and also of many other Thakālīs, has established himself as the leading Buddhist figure of the Thakālīs.²⁰

In Syāng, apart from the new monastery, there is a village temple in the middle of the village and, next to it, a temple belonging to the Syāngtan phobe clan.²¹ Several of the *ṭhawa* have private chapels (Tha., *che kāng*; cf. Tib., *chos*

¹⁸ A *bla ma* in a Tibetan context is a teacher, a *guru*.

¹⁹ Two women from Syāng have become nuns since 1972. One had problems in her husband's house, left the house and became a nun. The other was engaged and going to marry, but changed her mind and became a nun.

²⁰ We have noted that Buddhism now plays a less important role in the religious life of the Thakālīs, but also that it is difficult to describe the religion of the Thakālīs in general terms. While Buddhism plays a less important role among the Thakālīs in general and the migrants in particular, in the last decades it has played an increasing role in the religion of the Syāngtan Thakālīs. Beside the recent influence of Lopsāng Temba, the visit in the 1950's to Thāk Kholā by Shang Rinpoche (Tha., *syāngba rimpoche*) are important factors in the development of Buddhism in Syāng. See Snellgrove (1961) for the activities of Shang Rinpoche.

²¹ In Tibetan a temple is known as *lha khang*, "god house", while a monastery is known as *dgon pa*, "a solitary place, a monastery". The Thakālī word *gompa* (or *gumā*) refers to monasteries as well as village temples, while the Thakālī word *lha khang* refers to village temples as well as private chapels.

khang) in their own houses. On the northern fringe of the village is the ruin of the old village temple which was abolished after the construction of the new one. A little north of this old temple there is a hermitage. This is at a cave where the *thawa* used to stay in retreat (Tha., *cham*; cf. Tib., *mtshams*), which was usually in connection with their education. I have not seen it used during my stays in Syāng.

The Ceremonies of the Death-day

When a man is known to be dying all his close relatives gather at his bedside to bid their last farewells. Beside the members of the household, the close relatives who should be present are the parents of the man (if they are still alive), his brothers and their wives, his sisters and their husbands, his sons and their wives, and his daughters and their husbands.

The relatives ask the dying man if he has any wishes to make (Tha., *thālu thampa*).²² The dying man tells his relatives what they should remember to do when he is gone, who should have particular goods, and the like.

When the dying man appears to have expired, some men check to see that he has stopped breathing, feel his pulse at the wrists and the neck, and also pull his arms and legs to make sure that he is really dead. When they are certain of that some men go to the roof of the house. These men can be from his *phobe*, that is a group or unit of patrilineally related men; or they can be his *mhā*, that is a man who has received a woman from his *phobe* : hence especially his daughters' husbands and sisters' husbands.²³ On the roof they call out "hoo hoo" three times and ask those who have taken the soul (Tha., *bla*; cf. Tib., *bla*) of the dead man to give it back. They address especially the deceased's ancestors and ancestresses (Tha., *khe mom*), and tell them to give back the soul if it is they who have taken it. Then they leave the roof and go down to the house again.

At the house they get a white piece of cloth and go up on the roof where they whistle three times, wave with the cloth, and call out the name of the deceased. They tell him to return to his house regardless of where he has gone. Then they go down to the house and cover the face of the deceased with the cloth.

Some *mhā* or *phobe* of the deceased go to contact people who need to come to the house. The chief *thawa* of the *phobe* of the deceased (Tha., *cheri*) has to come to

The village temple in Syāng is of the *ngimāpā* (cf. Tib., *rnying ma pa*) sect, while the Syāngtan *phobe* temple is of the *ngorpā* (cf. Tib., *ngor pa*) sect.

²² See Vinding (1979) for the Thakali inheritance system and the custom of *thālu thamba*.

²³ See Vinding (1981) for a description of patrilineal descent groups (Tha., *phobe*) among the Thakālis.

the house.²⁴ It is also important to inform the close wife-givers of the deceased (Tha., *syāng*; cf. Tib., *zhang*), that is his father-in-law or brother-in-law.²⁵ The men who go to inform the *syāng* bring a small wooden container with beer (Tha., *pā paru*) which is given to the *syāng*. The *syāng* offers beer while he addresses the deceased and tells him to go to heaven.

The *syāng* and his wife (Tha., *syāngsa*; cf. Tib., *zhang sha*) then go to the house of the deceased taking with them some beer. The *syāngsa*, usually the WeBW of the deceased, offers some beer to the deceased and places the rest in a cup in the front of him. This offering is important. No other relative is allowed to make any offering to the deceased before it has taken place.

When the *chenī* arrives 108 butter lamps are offered in the name of the deceased. The *chenī* then performs the *phok pumpa* ceremony, during which he pulls out a few hairs from the crown so that the soul of the deceased can leave the body and go straight to heaven under the guidance of the *chenī*.²⁶

Meanwhile, an important discussion takes place between the members of the household of the deceased and his *syāng*, concerning how much the household should or will spend on presents to be given to the other villagers in the name of the deceased. These presents are known as *dhon* and it is believed that they actually are received by the deceased.²⁷ For this reason, and also because the amount given both indicates the economic position of the household and its generosity, the *syāng* will press the members of the household of the deceased to give at least as much as the household can afford.

If the deceased is a married woman, then her brothers tell their brother-in-law that he received their sister while she was young and pretty, that she has worked hard for him and given him sons and daughters. Therefore he should give as much *dhon* as possible to ease her journey to heaven. The husband and his brothers will request his wife's brothers to consider their sister's children. They point out that children need food to eat and clothes to wear, and that it would therefore be more reasonable to spend less on the *dhon*. In this way discussion continues until

²⁴ The chief *thawa* of a *phobe* is known as *chenī*. The Thakālī word *chenī* refers to the personal ritual specialist of a certain client.

²⁵ The *syāng* of a woman includes her male patrilineal relatives, especially her father and her brothers.

²⁶ See also Waddell (1939) and Evans-Wentz (1927) for this ceremony which among the Tibetans is known as 'pho ba.

²⁷ I am uncertain as to whether or not there is a connection between the Thakālī word *dhon* and the Western Tibetan word *gton pa*, to give; G.E. Clarke (personal communication) tells me that the Thakālī word *dhon* may be related to the Sanskrit word *dhān*, which refers to what is received when giving, loosely, merit.

an agreement is reached. In 'the old days' if no agreement could be made, the household of the deceased had to spend as much as requested by the *syāng*. Later this changed, so that now the household of the deceased need only listen to the advice of the *syāng* before they themselves decide how much to spend. If the deceased is a man the *syāng* will, of course, not press their sister too hard; but on the other hand they will make sure that she spends a reasonable amount.

In *Syāng* all those in the village, excluding labourers from elsewhere, are entitled to an equal share of the *dhon*. A newborn baby receives as much as an adult, and the members of the tailor-musician caste (Tha., *ḍulī*; cf. Nep., *damāi*) and the blacksmith caste (Tha., *kemī*; cf. Nep., *kāmi*), regardless of their low social status, receive the same as a *Thakālī*. Usually naked barley (Tha., *karū*) and other grain is given as *dhon*, but money is also occasionally given. The richest households give each entitled person three local measures of grain (Tha., *sin dukyā*), usually rice, naked barley and wheat.²⁸ Most households give two measures of grain, or one measure of grain and fifty paise. The poorer households give one measure of naked barley only.

The above rates held in 1972. In that year the wife of a poor man died. He was heavily in debt and decided that he could not afford to give any *dhon* to the villagers. All the villagers knew about his debt, but most villagers disapproved of his decision anyway. Some told me that possibly the wife would find the way to heaven blocked, and would instead return to the village and create problems.

In 1977 the *Thakālīs* of *Ṭhin*, *Syāng* and *Cimā* (*Cimāng*) decided to ban the giving of *dhon*, and imposed a punishment of 500 rupees on those who broke the rule. The custom is thus dying out, but since 1977 there have been two cases in *Syāng* where rich households have given *dhon* – and payed 500 rupees in fine.²⁹

When the *chenī* has finished the *phok pūmpa* ceremony the deceased is dressed in new clothes and laid on a bed in the main room of the house. If death occurred at night, nothing more is done that same night. But from early the next morning a large number of villagers come to the house to pay their last respects. One of the first to arrive is the chief village *ṭhawa* (Tha., *ūmce*) who has to draw up the death astrology chart (Tha., *sinci korwa*; cf. Tib., *gshin rtsis skor ba*). Through

²⁸ Three local *mānā* (Tha., *sin dukyā*; Nep., *susi mānā*) equals two national *mānā* (Tha., *dhwāng dukyā*; Nep., *mānā*). According to Donner (1972 : 489) one national *mānā* equals 0,545 litres, and one local *mānā* thus equals 0,363 litres. See also note 42.

²⁹ In 1980 an old woman in her seventies distributed grain to the villagers of her village (*Ṭhin*). It is believed that the grain distributed in this way will come back to the old woman when she dies, as it is the case with *dhon*. The distribution took place while the woman was alive and the grain given was, strictly speaking, not *dhon*. Consequently, the woman was not punished.

astrology the *ūmce* relates what has happened to the deceased, how and when the body should be disposed of, which texts need to be recited, and the like.

The members of the family from the *phobe* of the deceased who were the last to use the cremation ground (Tha., *cha*) of the *phobe* go early the same morning to the cremation ground and throw beer and buckwheat flour over the stones. Only now the stones are ready for use again. The close *mhā* of the deceased then go to the cremation ground taking some wood with them. They arrange the stones and the wood so that everything is ready for the cremation.

In the house some men from the *phobe* of the deceased and some of his *mhā* make a bier of wood and sow an expensive cloth around it. The women patrilineally related to the deceased (Tha., *celi*) gather. Some are weeping or comforting weeping relatives, others are busy making tea and food for the many relatives who come to the house. Only the nearest relatives look genuinely sad. Some villagers gather in a corner of the courtyard and discuss the latest news. A few young men take the opportunity to contact their sweethearts and joke with them.

In the main room the *cheni* performs the *senor lawa* ceremony, the main purpose of which is to offer food given by the *phobe* to the deceased.

The grain to be distributed to the villagers is spread out in the courtyard. The *cheni* comes and seats himself next to the grain. He then starts to recite the text *yāngku ehe* (cf. Tib., *gyang khug chos*) while he beats a big drum (Tha., *nga*; cf. Tib., *rnga*).³⁰ Two *mhā* stand next to the grain. One holds a big round copper vessel with a ball of butter, the other has in his right hand a rice spoon, a lentil spoon, and a stick with coloured strings (Tha., *tarhna*; cf. Tib., *mda' dar*) and in his left hand the leg of a goat.³¹ During the recitation he strikes several times over the grain and taking a little grain, he places it in the vessel with the spoon. When the *cheni* has finished the recitation a woman who has married into the *phobe* of the deceased (Tha., *ṭasyū*) comes crying out of the house. In front of the grain she prays with a crying voice, and requests that the deceased leaves the spirit of prosperity (Tha., *yāng*; cf. Tib., *gyang*) behind. She then takes a little grain and goes back into the house. These two rituals are known as *yāng tiwa* (Tha.; to take out the spirit of prosperity) and are done to ensure that the spirit of prosperity does not leave the house.³²

³⁰ *Yang khug* in Western Tibetan refers to "a calling forth of blessing, sacrifices and other ceremonies performed, in order to secure happiness and prosperity." (Jäschke 1881 : 516).

³¹ The *mda' dar* originally was an arrow with coloured strings and a sign of prosperity, power and wealth. (M. Oppitz, personal communication).

³² Some Thakālīs also refer to this ceremony as *phui kimpa* (Tha. to take the *phui*). *Phui kimpa* refers to the situation when a person takes a little, the first, the

Then some *mhā* go to the roof of the house. They call the deceased and tell him that the grain given to the villagers is *dhon* given away in his name. They then call the villagers and ask them to come and receive the *dhon*. The villagers come soon after the announcement. They receive their share and chat with the other villagers they meet. People with many children, especially if from the tailor or blacksmith castes, are sure to hear jokes about the number of their children when the number of members of their household is counted. Later the villagers eat the grain in their home. When they eat the grain they offer a small part of it in the name of the deceased and pray that he receives the grain they eat.

After the distribution of the *dhon* the corpse is placed on the bier inside the main room. The *ūmce* or a *lama* comes to the house to perform the *phok pampa* ceremony. Afterwards, 108 butter lamps are offered in the name of the deceased.

Then *thawa*, monks and nuns from Syāng and often also from the surrounding villages gather in the house for the *ce pampa* ceremony.³³ Some of them, including the *cheni*, sit in the main room while others sit on the roof. During the ceremony the ritual specialists recite a text in a deep monotonous voice accompanied by their small hand-drums (Tha., *damaru*. cf. Tib., *da ma ru*), thigh-bone trumpets (Tha., *kāngling*; cf. Tib., *rkang gling*) and small handbells (Tha., *dilbū*; cf. Tib., *dril bu*). After the recitation the *ūmce* puts on a special dress known as *phāk che*. The hat has several carved figures of which one is a pig (Tha., *phāk*). On the back he has a cloth like the skin of an elephant, over this a cloth like the skin of a man, and in front the skin of a forest leopard.³⁴

The bier is carried out of the main room and into the courtyard. Here the spirit of prosperity is again removed, this time from the corpse itself, so as to make sure that the deceased does not take it with him. On the left hand side of the bier stands a *thawa* who recites the text *yangku che* while another *thawa* strikes cymbals (Tha., *sil nya*; cf. Tib., *sil snyan*) and a third beats a big drum. On the right hand side stands a *mhā* with the leg of a goat, a stick with coloured strings, and a cypress branch in his left hand, and a rice spoon, a lentil spoon, and another cypress branch in his right hand. During the recitation he strikes these things three times over the corpse so as to take the *yāng* from the deceased. When the recitation is over a *ṭasyū*

essence, the *phui* (cf. Tib., *phud*) of whatever he gives away in order to make sure that the spirit of prosperity does not leave with the thing he is giving away. This custom is very common among the Thakālis.

³³ I shall not deal with the payment of *thawa* but can note that the *thawa* who took part in this particular ceremony were each paid two rupees in 1972.

³⁴ Funke (1969, illustration no. 178–180) refers to the 'skin of the elephant' as *Langdjen kolön* (Tib., *glang chen ko rlon*), the 'skin of the man' a *Miphak Jangchi* (Tib., *mi lpags gyang gzhi*), and the skin of the leopard/tiger as *Takpak chendap* (Tib., *stag lpags sham thabs*).

steps next to the bier and strikes three times over the corpse with a small cypress branch. While the spirit of prosperity is taken out, the sons and daughters, as well as other close relatives younger than the deceased, bow down to their knees and touch their forehead to the ground to salute the deceased (Tha., *chyā phulpa*; cf. Tib., *phyag phul ba*).

Then the funeral procession starts. In the front is a tailor-musician beating a drum followed by the *ṭhawa*, monks and nuns playing shawms (Tha., *geling*; cf. Tib., *ryga gling*), small handdrums, and small handbells. After the ritual specialists follows the bier carried by the sons and the close *mhā*, then follow the other close relatives, and finally the distant relatives and other villagers. The procession goes to the plain in the front of the school in the northern outskirts of the village.³⁵ The bier is placed on the ground and a small table is put at the foot. On the table are cups with beer and alcohol and around it the *celi* place large bamboo trays (Tha., *naki*; Nep., *nanglo*) with food offerings (Tha., *cho*; cf. Tib., *mchod*) including various kinds of bread and grain. The close wife-givers cover the bier with a white cloth.

The *ūmce* dressed in his special dress comes to the foot of the bier. He blows once into a thigh-bone trumpet and starts to dance around the bier in a clockwise direction.³⁶ He moves slowly and turns several times around his own axis. The *ūmce* finishes the dance when he again reaches the foot of the bier, and gives a final blow on the trumpet. This dance (Tha., *phasyal syowa*) is done in order to separate the soul from this world so that it can go to heaven.

Some members of the dead man's friendship group (Tha., *rowa*) enter in their oldest and darkest clothes.³⁷ Bare-footed, they walk three times in a clockwise direction around the bier and then disappear. Almost all the villagers will have gathered together by this time. Many of the close relatives will be crying. Most of the close relatives younger than the deceased will make *chyā phulpa*. Distant relatives and other villagers at this time will gather in small groups along the edges of the plain, away from the bier, to chat and joke with one another.

The bier is then carried to the cremation ground by the sons and the close

³⁵ This ground is known as *dhothāng* (cf. Tib., *rdo thang*), "stone plain". In the summer adult male villagers gather here in the evenings to discuss the latest news, and children to play games. Another gathering place is *lyāngba lya* in the middle of the village and used in the summer as well as in the winter.

³⁶ Among the Magars the clockwise direction symbolises death (M. Oppitz, personal communication).

³⁷ The men of Syāng form a number of age groups known as *rowa*. The groups gather in connection with the *phālā* festival in the Thakālī month of *phālā* (that is mid-August to mid-September). Formerly, the *ṭhawa* could not become members of these groups.

mhā.³⁸ A lama walks in the front with a white scarf (Tha., *khātā*; cf. Tib., *kha btags*) tied to the bier in order to lead the way to heaven (Tha., *gyam sāwā*: to lead the way). After the bier follow the *ṭhawa*, monks and the nuns playing musical instruments as well as the close male relatives of the deceased. The female relatives and the rest of the villagers stay behind at the plain.

At the cremation place the relatives clean the stone structure where the corpse is going to be cremated by throwing flour and beer over it. The clothes and the ornaments are taken off the corpse, which then is dressed in old clothes or simply covered with a single piece of cloth. The corpse is placed inside the stone structure in a standing position, or as sitting on a chair (see illustration no. 1). A few hairs are taken from the head and later on the way back to the village they will be placed at a reliquary stone structure (Tha., *mahne*; Tib., *mchod rten*) near the school. Fire is then set to the wood near the knees. In the old days this was done by the closest *mhā*, but now by the eldest son. Some sons have their hair shaven off, are dressed in white clothes and light the fire at the mouth of the corpse.³⁹ Grain and butter are thrown into the fire as an offering (Tha., *jinsā pumṣa*; cf. Tib., *sbyin sreg phul ba*). When the fire has destroyed the body, the ritual specialists and the laymen return to the village.⁴⁰ The relatives of the deceased then gather in his house and are offered food and drinks.

The Ceremonies of the Day after the Cremation

In the morning the *mhā* go to the cremation ground and dismantle the stone structure in which the corpse was cremated. Three stones are placed where the

³⁸ According to informants, the bier was 'in the old days' carried by the *mhā* only.

³⁹ These innovations obviously are due to Hindu influence.

⁴⁰ As noted above, it is the astrologer who finds the best way to dispose of the corpse. The corpse is usually cremated. The Thakālis will only seldom throw the corpse in the river even if the astrologer says that this would be the best way. Instead they sprinkle water on the corpse before it is set alight. Similarly, soil is thrown on the corpse before the cremation if it should have been buried. The body is occasionally cut to pieces and then usually cremated if it should have been cut to pieces and given to the birds. No cremation is allowed from the time the sweet buckwheat (Tha., *gyapre*) starts to blossom and until the harvest is over. This is a period with several restrictions. It is not possible to make any big fire, to dig holes in the ground and to built new houses. The *āyo lāmā* is not allowed to use his drum and uses as a substitute a stick with a bird (Tha., *rho rho*). People who die during this period are usually cut to pieces and thrown into the Kāli *gandakī*. According to informants, some people are also cut to pieces and given to the birds. One informant mentions a case where the corpse was buried and after harvest it was dug out and cremated. Another informant notes that the rich 'in the old days' would keep the corpse in a wooden box with salt and then cremate the corpse after the harvest.

corpse was cremated while the rest—is piled in a heap ready for use the next time. The *mhā* collect the ash and the remains of the bones with a scraper. A few bones are taken back to the village while the rest together with the ash are taken to Omta kyu (Nep., Kāli gaṇḍakī) and thrown into the river.⁴¹

The Thakālīs have a ceremony known as *sowa syāngwa*, which can take place on the day after the cremation or some days later. The *mhā* make an effigy known as *duṇḍā sumba* (see illustration no. 2). Three big local measures of naked barley (Tha., *sin pyāng*), two heaped and one level, are put into a pot together with a bone of the deceased.⁴² The clothes and ornaments of the deceased are placed on a wooden cross stuck into a pot. On the top of the cross is a head made of cloth on which is placed a crown with the five Buddhas (Tha., *rig ngā*; cf. Tib., *rigs lnga*). The *chenī* and a few *ṭhawa* make dough offerings (Tha., *kandū*; Tib., *gtor ma*) and recite texts. Only the close relatives are gathered for this ceremony. They offer 108 butter lamps in the name of the deceased and present food offerings in front of the effigy. The food is later eaten by the *mhā*. It is believed that the food eaten by the *mhā* is received by the deceased, so therefore the *mhā* are served tasty food and asked to eat as much as possible.

Afterwards the *chenī* and the *ṭhawa* perform the ceremony *chachapar jhāngpa*. Bones of the deceased are crushed, mixed with clay and in a mould made into small figures known as *chacha* (cf. Tib., *tsha tsha*). These *chacha* are later placed into the reliquary stone structure of the dead man's clan (Tha., *khimi*), in a reliquary stone structure made especially for the deceased (Tha., *mahne*), or in the village temple.

The Ceremonies of the Third Day after the Cremation

On the second day after the cremation food and drinks are offered to the effigy but otherwise there are no further ceremonies.

In the morning of the third day after the cremation there is a ceremony known as *syāk sum lawa* (Tha. : third day to make). This ceremony is similar to that of the day after the cremation described above. Only the close relatives gather in the house of the deceased. The *mhā* make the *duṇḍā sumba* effigy if the *sowa syāngwa* ceremony has not yet been performed. The *chenī* and a few *ṭhawa* come to

⁴¹ This is said to be done so that the deceased can reach Banares (Nep., Kāshī).

⁴² Two local big measures (Tha., *sin pyāng*; Nep., *susi pāthi*) equals one national big measure (Tha., *dhwāng pyāng*; Nep., *pāthi*). According to Donner (1972 : 489) one national *pāthi* equals 4.36 litres and one local *pāthi* equals thus 2.18 litres. One local *pāthi* equals six local *mānā*, while one national *pāthi* equals eight national *mānā*. See also note 28.

the house to make dough offerings and to recite texts. The relatives offer 108 butter lamps in the name of the deceased and present food offerings in the front of the effigy. The offerings are later eaten by the *mhā*.

Several important ceremonies take place in the evening, which are collectively known as *mhāng rāhwa* (Tha. : to catch the *mhāng*, that is the superhuman being which killed the deceased) after the main event of the night.⁴³ The ceremonies start after dark, when the *cheni* and a few *thawa*, as well as a large number of relatives and villagers, gather in the main room of the house.

The first ceremony of the evening is known as *chyok pumpha*. For this the *cheni* and the *thawa* beat drums, play handbells, and recite the text *koncyo cheti* (cf. Tib., *dkon mchog spyi 'dus*) or the text *dhemcyo*.⁴⁴

Then follows *namsi pāwa* (Tha. : to bring the soul).⁴⁵ The *mhā* and a few *thawa* go to the place where a bone, some hair, or a piece of cloth of the deceased has been hidden.⁴⁶ In Syāng the hiding place is usually a *mahne* at the northern entrance to the village. The *thawa* give the *mhā* a tray with some hull barley (Tha., *cikā*). The *mhā* takes the bone, places it in the tray and covers the tray with 'paper' from the Himalayan birch. The *thawa* play shawms and the party returns to the house, where they receive a formal greeting (Tha., *kyalsāng*). There a crying *celi* of the deceased presents the *mhā* with different drinks, usually beer, alcohol and milk.⁴⁷

⁴³ The *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony is performed three and a half days after death which is the time when the deceased realizes that he is dead: when he looks into the river his face is not in the reflection; when he walks in the sand of the riverbank there are no footprints; and when he returns to his house he sees all the villagers have gathered and his relatives weeping. According to informants, the Thakālis would 'in the old days' cremate the corpse only after three days. No one was allowed to cry the first three days, and the only ceremony performed was to light a butter lamp next to the corpse. It is believed that the ritual specialists could call the deceased to life again, and several cases from 'the old days' are still cited.

⁴⁴ *Koncyo cheti* (cf. Tib., *dkon mchog spyi 'dus*) is the main religious text of the *thawa* of Syāng. The full title of a text I saw in Syāng was *yang zab dkon mchog spyi 'dus kyi bsnyen yig bklag cho. tu bkod pa bla ma'i zhal lung zhes bya ba bzhus so. Koncyo cheti* is a *terma* (cf. Tib., *gter ma*), "hidden treasure" text discovered by *rig 'dzin chen po 'ja' chon snying po*. See also Snellgrove (1957) for *koncyo cheti*.

⁴⁵ Some of my informants note that *namsi* (cf. Tib., *nam shes*: consciousness) is the same as *bla* (Tha.: soul) and refer to *namsi pāwa* as *bla pāwa*.

⁴⁶ I am uncertain as to whether they hide a bone or some hair or both items. A piece of cloth of the deceased is used when it has been impossible to retrieve the corpse, for example if the deceased died in the south during winter, if he drowned, or if he died in war.

⁴⁷ The *kyalsāng* is for the deceased represented by his *mhā*.

The *mhā* places the tray with the bone in the front of the *cheni*. He then goes to the roof together with a *ṭhawa* and a man from the clan of the deceased. There the *mhā* calls the soul of the deceased (Tha., *blā ngoiwa*). He whistles three times, waves with a white cloth and addresses the deceased as following:⁴⁸

“Oh Sonam (the name of the deceased), oh Sonam, oh Sonam,
come, come, come,
please come to your house.
Please come whether you stay in the mountains,
or in the valley,
come, come, come.
Please bring the *mhāng* with you.
If it is a man, then take him by the top of his hair⁴⁹
and bring him with you.
If it is a woman, then take her by the braid
and bring her with you.
If it is a *jho*⁵⁰, then take it by the nose ring
and bring it with you.
If it is a dog, then take it by the chain
and bring it with you.
If it is a yak, then throw a lasso around its neck
and bring it with you.”

The *mhā* then goes to the room and gives the white cloth to the *cheni*. The *cheni* puts the hull barley and the bone from the tray in a mud pot. In the pot he also puts various kinds of grain (naked barley, wheat, and the like) and finally two small bamboo tubes bound together, one of which contains oil and the other dried sesame seeds.

A *celi* of the deceased steps forwards. This *celi* must know how to sing songs to the deceased and if she knows how, one of the daughters of the deceased is preferred for this duty. For the next forty minutes the *celi* puts branches of cypress into the pot while she sings to the deceased in a crying voice. In her song the *celi* tells him that he is now dead, and that therefore all his relatives and villagers have gathered in his house. She explains that they have now made his body: the white cloth around the pot is his clothes, the oil his blood, the sesame seeds his liver, the grain inside the pot his organs (Tha., *luwa cyūngi*: the twelve (of the) body), and

⁴⁸ The Thakālis never whistle in the night as this would invoke demons. This is also a popular belief among the Tibetans (C. Jest, personal communication).

⁴⁹ The tuft of hair on the crown of the head is here referred to as *mu*.

⁵⁰ *Jho* (cf. Tib., *mdzo*) is the hybrid of a yak and a zebu.

the cypress branches cut by his *mhā* at the holy river Marcyāng kyu are his head (Tha., *gowa cusum*: the thirteen (of the) head). Finally, the *celi* tells the deceased that he should go to heaven and not return to the village.

A large number of relatives and villagers attend this part of the night's ceremonies. The distant relatives and the other villagers have come mainly to see how well the *celi* sings and leave soon after the song is over. It is not unusual for the villagers to make comments on the performance of the *celi*. Some Thakāli women are known as very good singers of these songs.

When the distant relatives and the other villagers have left the most important ceremony of the night takes place. This is namely, the *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony, during which the *mhāng* (the cause of death) is caught.⁵¹ The first things done here are to close the door, to cover the holes in the roof from where the smoke comes out, and to cover the pots: this is so that the *mhāng* cannot escape or hide.

Then a trap is made at the door (see illustration no. 3). Some ash is sprinkled on the doorstep, and then some soot over the ash. A line is drawn in the soot and four small dough figures are placed on the line. The four dough figures are a 'butter lamp' (Tha., *angkū*) used for offering beer and here symbolising the power of the *cheni*; a dough figure shaped as a pyramid (Tha., *kandū*) and here symbolising the *cheni* or his *lama*; a dog (Tha., *nakyū*) symbolising the soul of the deceased; and a deer (Tha., *pho*) symbolising the *mhāng*. The four figures can be placed in different positions, but usually the deer is placed closest to the door followed by the dog, the *kandū* and the *angkū*.

In the ceremony which follows, the *cheni* through his power causes the soul to hunt the *mhāng* – "as a dog hunts a deer, as a hawk hunts a bird" – and leads it to the trap where it is caught. The *cheni* and the *thawa* start to recite *koncyo cheti* (or *dhemcyo*). During the recitation they beat the drum, play the cymbals and blow the thigh bone trumpets. The pot with the grain and the cypress branches, known as *mhendo*, is placed in a bamboo basket with naked barley.⁵² If the deceased is a man there should be nine small local measures, eight heaped and one level; if the deceased is a woman there should be seven measures, six heaped and one level. The *mhendo* is placed next to the *mhā* who shakes it several times and cries "ha-ha ha-ha." During the last part of the recitation the *mhendo* is placed in the front of the *cheni* who places a small ladder next to it. In the end he takes the ladder away. The soul has entered the room with the *mhāng* and

⁵¹ The *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony as performed by the Tamāng Thakāli *dhom* has been briefly described by Iijima (1960), Jest (1976), and Kawakita (1974). Ceremonies related to the *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony are found among the Gurungs, see Pignède (1966) and Messerschmidt (1976a, 1976b).

⁵² The literal meaning of *mhendo* is "flower" (cf., Western Tib., *men tog*)

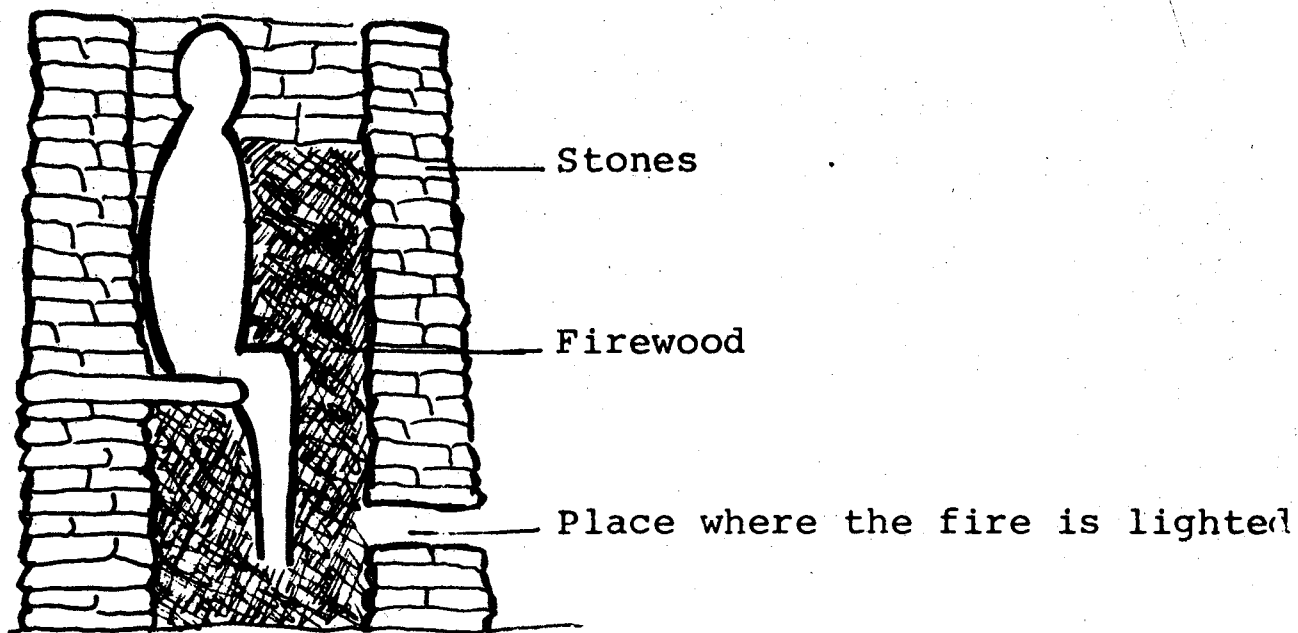


Illustration no. 1a: The stone structure where the corpse is cremated. The corpse is here shown as sitting on a chair.

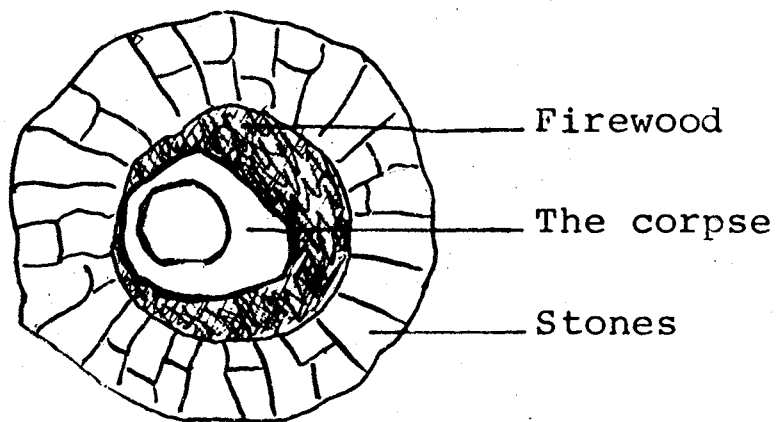


Illustration no. 1b: The stone structure seen from above.

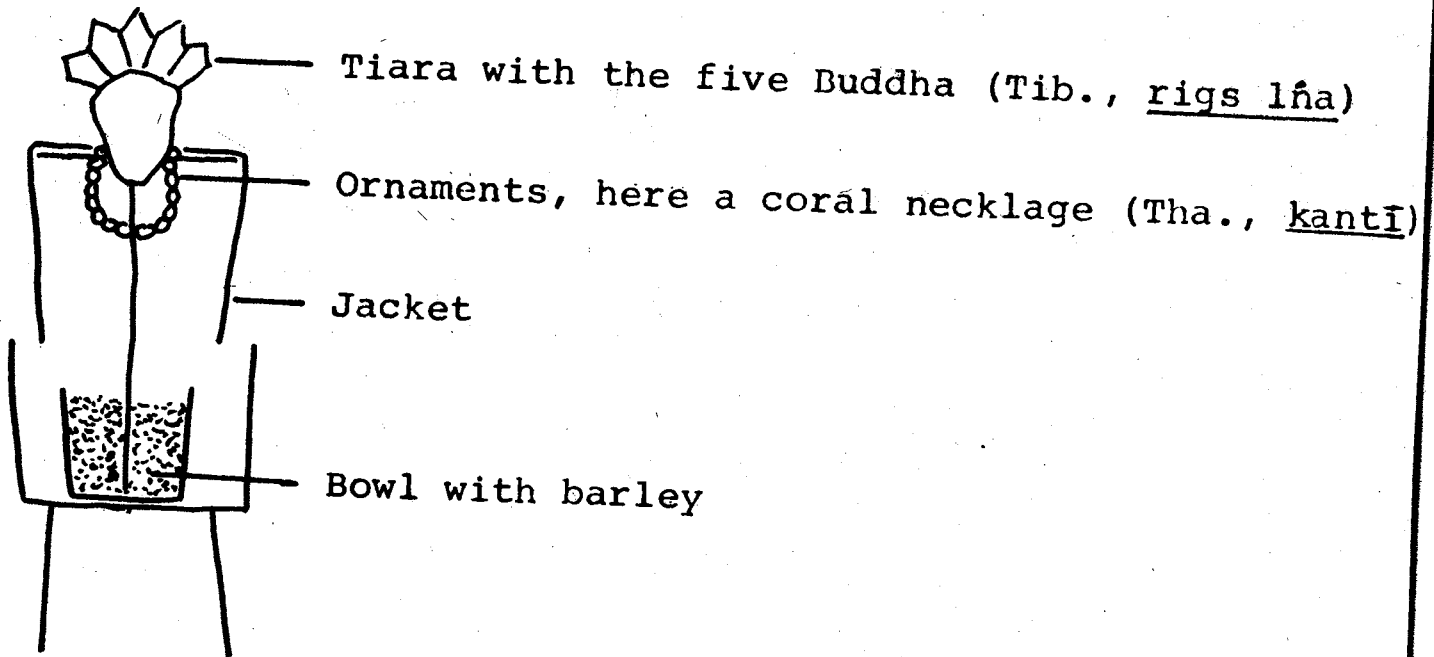
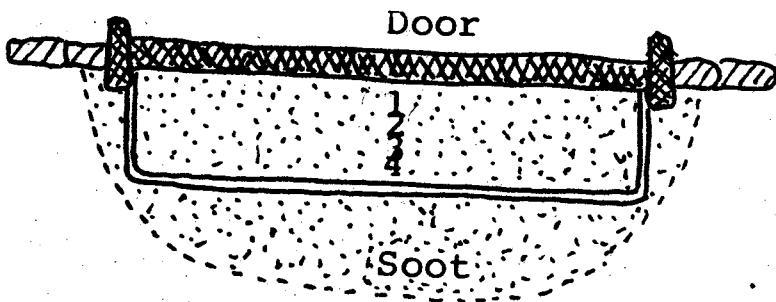


Illustration no. 2



- 1: Deer
- 2: Dog
- 3: Kandü
- 4: 'Butterlamp'

Illustration no. 3

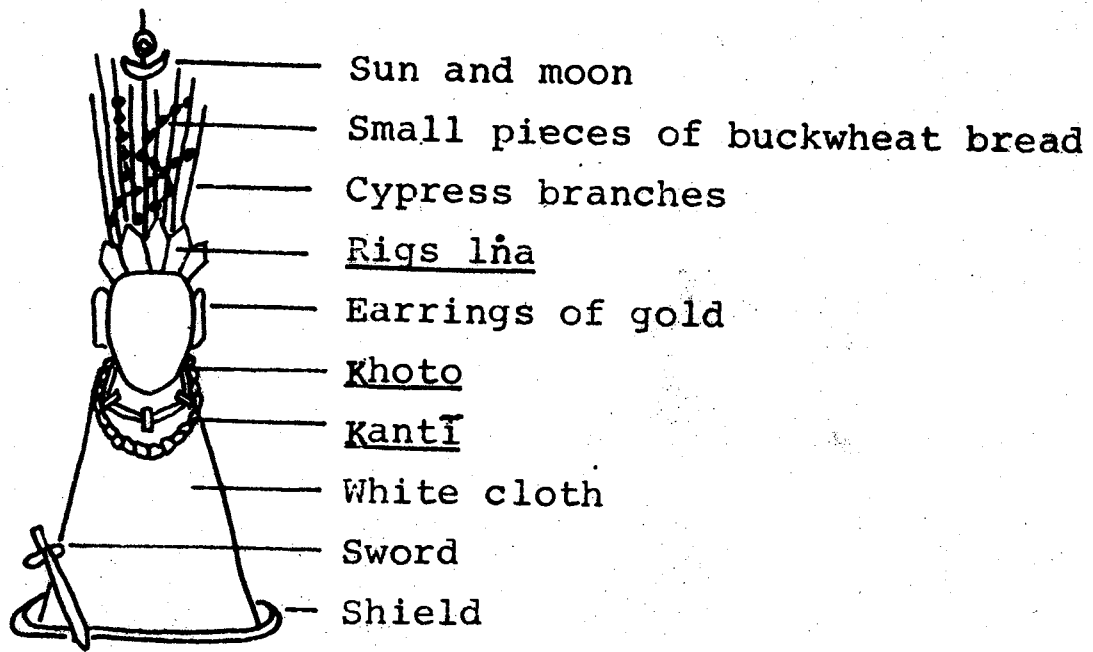
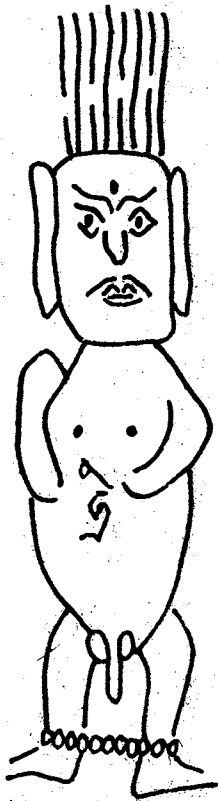


Illustration no. 4



The image of the mhān

Illustration no. 5



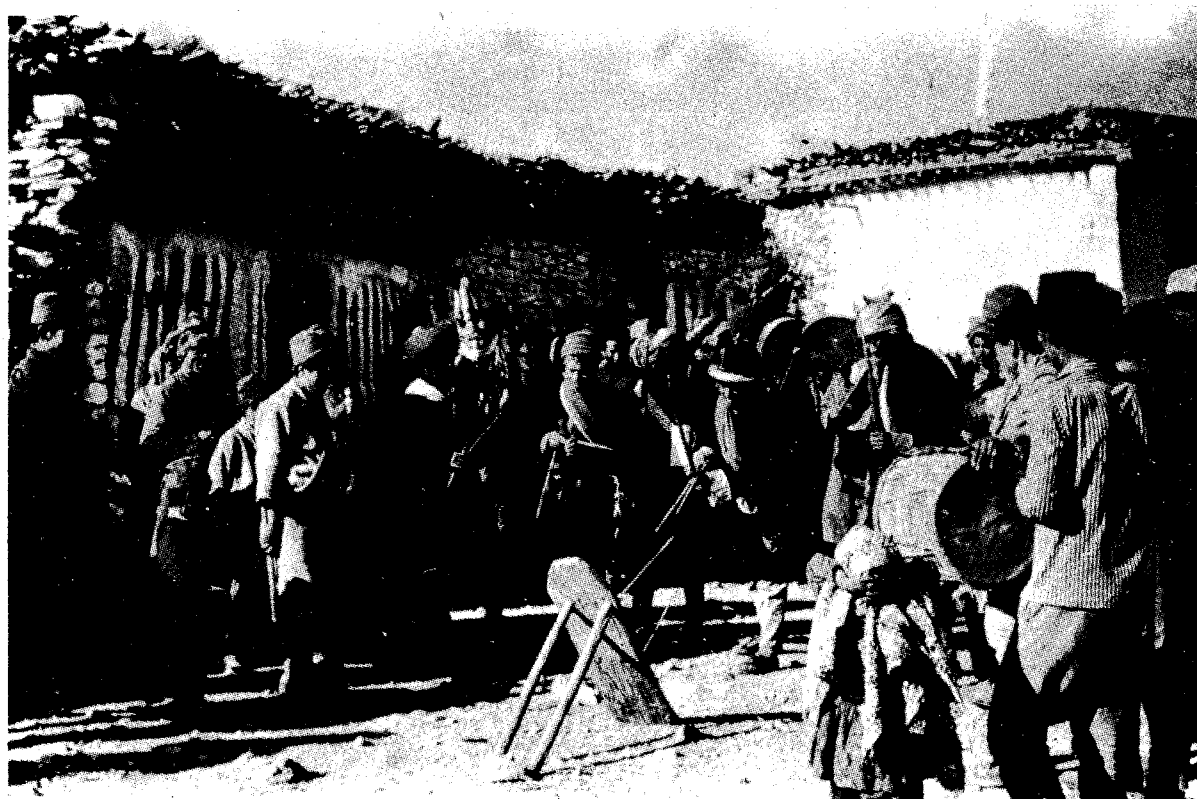
1. The chief village 'lama' in the *phāk che* dress.



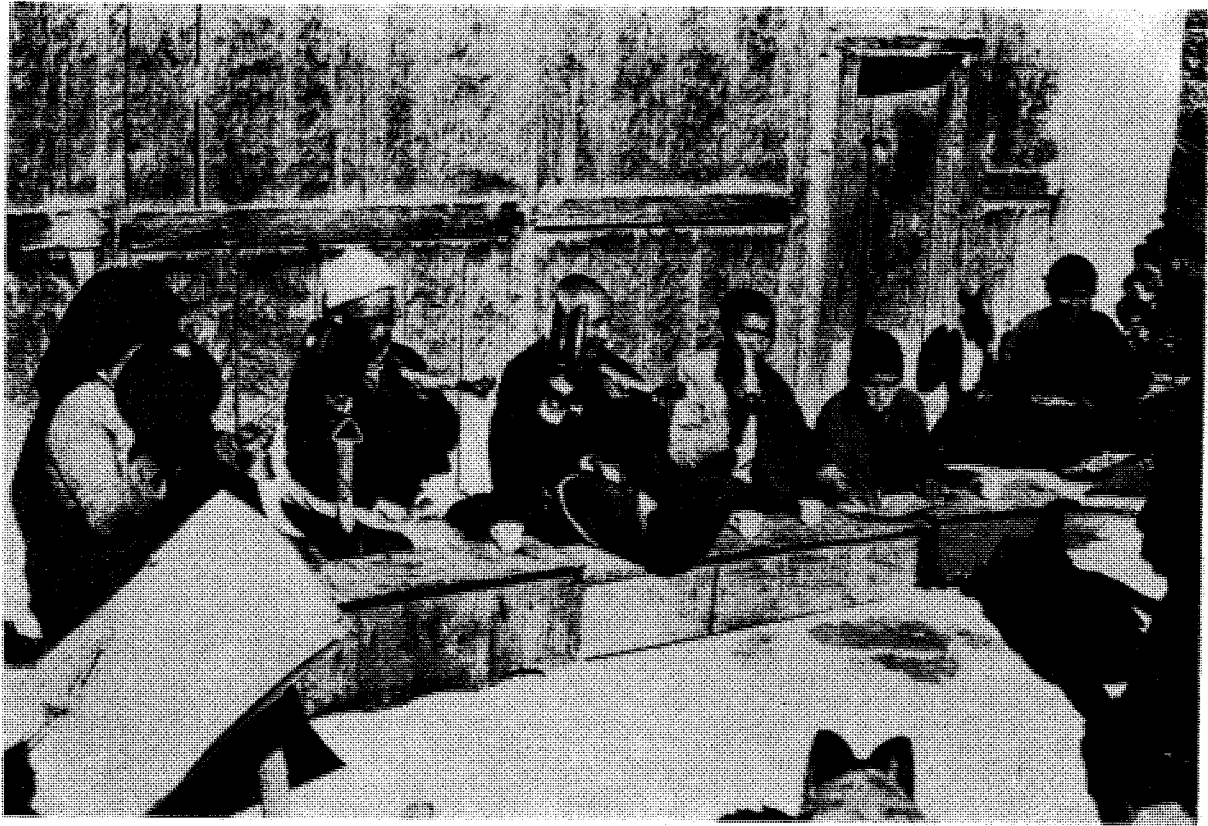
2. The plank with the image of the *mhāng*.



3. A lama walks in the front with a scarf tied to the *mhendo*.



4. The friends of the dead man shoot arrows against the plank with the image of the *mhāng*.



5. Monks, nuns and village 'lamas' with small handdrums and thigh-bone trumpets during the *che pampa* ceremony.



6. Monks, nuns and village 'lamas' on their way to the reliquary stone structure of the deceased's clan.

while the *mhāng* has been caught in the trap, the soul has gone up the ladder and into the *mhendo*.

The *cheni* and the *thawa* continue the recitation for a short while. The *mhā* is then asked to go to the trap and see if there are any prints (Tha., *mai*) in the soot. Usually there are, but if not the *cheni* has to make the ceremony over again.⁵³ There can be many different kinds of prints, and on the basis of the prints it is possible to identify the *mhāng*.⁵⁴ My informants give different interpretations. One informant who has performed this ceremony several times gave the following interpretations: A straight line shows that the *rhi* killed the deceased;⁵⁵ the track of a snake shows that the *lū* killed the deceased;⁵⁶ the footprints of a bird shows that *chakar mikar* killed the deceased;⁵⁷ the prints of a horse shows that the *can* killed the deceased;⁵⁸ a line of small circles or a row of pearls shows that

⁵³ When I saw this ceremony for the first time I was very surprised to see that prints actually appeared on the soot. I thought that someone had made them secretly. Therefore when I witnessed the same ceremony again the next time I kept a close watch on the trap throughout the ceremony. A *mhā* sat next to the trap to see that nobody spat at it or threw cigarettes on it. Again prints appeared, although I had not seen anyone approach the trap. I have later discussed this with several young educated Thakālis. Most of them doubt the explanation that it is the *mhāng* who has left the prints, but like me have no good alternative explanation. Some think the prints are caused by the vibrations from the drums, others they are made by insects. The fact that the prints are often very small and hard to see supports the last explanation.

⁵⁴ Several Tamāng Thakālis from Thāksātsai, including the *dhom* state that the prints are made by the soul of the deceased and indicate the rebirth of the deceased. A print from a bird should thus indicate that the deceased is reborn as a bird.

On the basis of informations provided by a Tamāng Thakāli informant Kawakita notes: "If the prints are those of a snake, it is proof that the soul of the deceased has already ascended to Heaven. If they are those of a bird, however, they prove that the muhan (soul) is still staying on earth. In most cases imprints of snakes are found." (1974:479).

⁵⁵ To die due to the *rhi* means that a man dies at the same age as his own father or own brother.

⁵⁶ The *lū* (cf. Tib., *klu*; Nep., *nāga*) are serpent spirits usually residing near water. The Thakālis worship these spirits daily by offering incense at the place in the house where they have buried a pot with valuable objects. Once every year a ritual specialist (in Thin the duty of the *bon dkar* ritual specialist) makes an offering in the field where his client has buried a similar pot.

⁵⁷ *Chakar mikar* (cf. Tib., *bya kha mi kha*), also known as *mikar chakar*, is the evil gossip of other people.

⁵⁸ The *can* (cf. Tib., *btsan*) is a superhuman being whose residence is a stone structure on the roof and who usually is considered the protector of the house.

the *gomba caca* killed the deceased,⁵⁹ and the prints of a hand shows that a witch (Tha., *sonṭi*; cf. Tib., *gson 'dre*: living demon) killed the deceased.⁶⁰

The *mhā* carefully takes the prints from the soot with a dough figure resembling a man. The dough figure is handed over to the *cheni* who places it in a tray, and then the four dough figures from the trap are placed over the door.

The *mhendo* is given to the *celi* who sit with it and sing to the deceased. The women tell the deceased that he should go to heaven where he will meet his ancestors. Each *celi* asks the deceased to contact her relatives and tell them that she and her family are fine and in good health. The *celi* also request the deceased to carry parcels with him to their relatives in heaven. These parcels contain small pieces of bread, fruit, grain, and the like wrapped up in 'paper' from the birch tree. The parcels are tied to the free end of a long cloth given by the *phobe* and which have been tied around the *mhendo*.⁶¹

The *mhāng* is killed while the women sit with the *mhendo*. Only a single butter lamp lights the room. The *cheni* and the *ṭhawa* recite *koncyo cheti* (or *dhemcyo*). The *cheni* stabs with a small axe, a small hammer, a small arrow and other small weapons into the dough. The wounded *mhāng* is in the end killed with a ritual dagger (Tib., *phur ba*). Afterwards the *cheni* and the *ṭhawa* recite another text and the soul of the *mhāng* is sent to heaven. The *mhāng* could, I was told, have been the soul of an unhappy relative with unsatisfied wishes. During this ceremony the *mhā* stands in the front of the *cheni* and holds the dagger with the head of the dough figure. Afterwards the relatives are given some of the dough to eat.⁶² The

⁵⁹ The *gomba caca* is a superhuman being resembling a dwarf. The house in which he lives becomes rich as he goes around and collects valuables for his house. The house in which he stays, however, starts to smell very badly.

⁶⁰ The Thakālīs fear witches very much. The power of witchcraft is handed over from mother to daughter. The son of a witch does never become an active witch but is still socially discriminated, especially when he has to find a spouse, for the Thakālīs do not want their children to marry the children of a witch, especially her daughters. The families known as being witches are said to have a high degree of endogamous marriages.

⁶¹ Thakālīs who know a person going to a place where they have relatives usually ask the traveller to carry letters and often also small parcels to their relatives. I have often seen travellers loaded with letters and small parcels. On this occasion the Thakālīs are, however, truly considerate. The women send fewer parcels with an old woman than with a young man as the former is not so strong and cannot carry as much as a young man.

⁶² I am uncertain as to why the relatives eat the meat of the *mhāng*. One informant tells that the dough the relatives eat is the good meat while the dough placed in the horn is the bad meat of the *mhāng*. Another informant says that the relatives eat the meat of the *mhāng* because when one eats the meat of an animal killed then the soul of the animal will go to heaven.

rest is placed in the horn of either a cow or a bull, or in the skull of a dog. The horn is wrapped in a rough piece of cloth and bound up with a black and white string in an anticlockwise direction. Finally the relatives stamp on the horn with their feet.

Afterwards the *mhāng* is taken by the *mhā* and a *ṭhawa* to a place outside the village where three roads meet.⁶³ Here the *mhā* digs a hole and drops the horn into it. He fills up the hole and places three stones on the top. Between the stones he places some thorny caragana bushes (Tha., *mhāng pucu*). The stones are covered with hay which is set on fire. Finally, the *mhā* draws nine lines across the road leading to the village, takes some soil, spits on it, throws it in the direction of the hole and tells the *mhāng* not to follow them and to stay away from the village. The *ṭhawa* blows three times in a thigh bone trumpet, the *mhā* spits again, and then they return to the village. The *mhāng* should no longer cause trouble to the villagers as it is buried under soil, thorny bushes and fire, and will have difficulties in coming out. Should it, however, succeed, it will stay in a place where three roads meet and not know which one to take. Should it by chance take the road leading to the village it will find itself cut off by the nine lines.⁶⁴

At the house the *mhā* calls out to announce his return. Some *celī* come and throw ash and dirty water out of the door before the *mhā* and the *ṭhawa* can enter. This is done to hinder the *gomba caca* entering the house together with the *mhā* and the *ṭhawa*. While the *mhā* and *ṭhawa* have been out, the basket with the *mhendo* has been placed on a chair in the main room and trays with food offerings given by the *celi* are placed in the front. It is now around midnight and the tired relatives return home.

The Ceremonies of the Fourth Day After the Cremation

In the morning the close relatives come to the house. The *mhā* wears new clothes. It is believed that it is actually the deceased who wears the clothes of the *mhā*. The *mhā* decorates the *mhendo* so that it looks nice (see illustration no. 4).⁶⁵ The ornaments include a coral necklace (Tha., *kantī*) and a silver necklace (Tha., *khoto*).⁶⁶ The *chenī* comes to the house and recites a short text while the relatives

⁶³ In Pokhara I have seen the entrance to the airport being used!

⁶⁴ It seems like the *mhāng* is first killed and its soul sent to heaven, but later precautions are taken so that the *mhāng* will not return to the village. This indicates that it is impossible to kill a demon so that it disappears forever.

⁶⁵ The decoration of the *mhendo* can also take place immediately after the *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony.

⁶⁶ The Tamāng Thakālis refer to the *khoto* as *khāgālo* and use it in connection with their marriage ceremonies. Some Tamāng Thakālis claim that this ornament

make *chyā phulpa* in the front of the *mhendo*, some a few times only, a few a full 108 times.

Then several *thawa*, monks and nuns as well as a large number of villagers gather in the house. The *thawa*, monks and nuns perform the *ce pumpha* ceremony as they did in the morning of the day of cremation. When the ceremony is over a *thawa* draws an image of the *mhāng* on a wooden plank (see illustration no. 5).⁶⁷ On the chest the syllable *hri* is written in Tibetan letters.⁶⁸ The image of the *mhāng* is known as *māngdū lingka* (cf. Tib., *man 'dus ling ga*).

The friends (Tha., *rowa*) of the deceased come to the house in their best clothes. They go into the room where the *mhendo* is and tell their friend that they have come to kill the *mhāng*. They also request their friend to go to heaven and not return to the village. They then go out in the courtyard where the plank with the image of the *mhāng* has been placed. They are received with *kyalsāng* and are cheerful, as friends always are when they gather together. From a close distance each man shoots three arrows against the *mhāng*. They try to hit his heart, head, or sexual organs, and while they shoot they sing and dance (Tha., *harwa syowa*). In the traditional songs they tell the *mhāng* that he killed their friend, and that is the reason why they are now shooting arrows at his heart. When the shooting has finished in the courtyard, the friends leave the house with a tailor drumming in the front, and just outside the house start to shoot again.

The *mhendo* is taken out in the courtyard, and the *yāng tiwa* ceremony is then performed again, just as it was over the corpse on the day of cremation. The

is found only in their 'caste' in whole Nepal but that the Rājput in India have similar ones, obviously to indicate that the Tamāng Thakālīs are Rājput who fled from India like the high Thakuri families of Nepal. The publication the Tamāng Thakālīs of Kathmandu printed in connection with the *Lha phewa* festival in 1981 was named *khāgālo* after this ornament. The Thin, Syāngtan and Cimtan Thakālīs, however, as described here, use a similar ornament. Presently, the *khoto* is not used during marriage ceremonies but an informant from Thin tells that formerly they too used the *khoto* during marriage ceremonies.

⁶⁷ The wooden plank with the image of the *mhāng* is made only if the deceased had been a member of a *rowa* group, and will thus never be made when women die. It is not presently done among the Mowātan Thakālīs and the Tamāng Thakālīs, but informants from both groups say that they too 'in the old days' had a similar custom.

⁶⁸ *Hri* is a mystical word which refers to the essence of things (Jäschke 1881 : 598), but carries also the meaning "kill!". According to an informant there is on the plank not written *hri*, but *nri*. Tucci (1980) has a drawing of a *ling ga* with the word *nri* written on the chest. According to Tucci, the word *nri* is derived from sanskrit *nr*, "man" (1980 : 185).

mhendo is next given to a *mhā* and taken in a procession to the plain in the front of the school, where the friends will be finishing shooting another round of arrows. The *mhendo* is placed on a chair. A table with cups of beer and alcohol is placed to the front of the chair, and large trays with food offerings are placed next to the chair; the close relatives make *chyā phulpa*, and *ūmce* dances around the chair – exactly as was done on the day of cremation.

Afterwards, the *mhendo* is handed over to a *mhā* who sits on a fine decorated horse. A *lama* walks in front of the horse with a white scarf tied to the *mhendo*. Then, in procession, come the other *mhā*, some close patrilineal male relatives of the deceased, and also some *ṭhawa* and nuns, playing musical instruments.

The procession walks to the reliquary stone structure (Tha., *khimī*) of the *phobe* of the deceased. These *khimī* belong to particular patrilineal descent groups and inside them are kept bones from each dead member of the group. Most of the *khimī* in Syāng are found around the old village temple north of the school. Here the friends shoot their last arrows against the *mhāng*, smash the plank with a big stone and burn it. The *mhā* takes the *mhendo* apart. The cypress branches are placed on the top of the *khimī*. The bone, the contents of the pot inside the *mhendo*, the presents sent by the *celi* with the deceased, and the ladder used during the *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony are all thrown into the *khimī*.⁶⁹ A part of the food offerings is also thrown into the *khimī*, while the rest is eaten by the members of the procession. Then the procession returns to the house of the deceased.

The friends are invited for lunch in the house; as are the members of the *phobe* of the deceased, the *mhā*, and other close relatives. The friends are sometimes given a few rupees. The *ṭhawa*, monks and nuns are given the same amount of grain as was in the basket inside the *mhendo*, while the *mhā* are given a double amount. Formerly, the *mhā* also received the clothes of the deceased—except for a few pieces which were given to the sons. The Thin, Śyāngtan and Cimtan Thakālīs have recently changed this custom and it is now the sons who receive their father's clothes while the *mhā* may be given a few pieces.⁷⁰ Finally, the *mhā* are given about one hundred rupees which they use for a common party. The *celi* are given a similar amount which they too use for a party.

Other Ceremonies

The household of the deceased, on the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, 35th, 42nd, and

⁶⁹ Both the cypress of the *mhendo* and the top of the *khimī* symbolise the head of a man while both the grain in the *mhendo* and the middle part of the *khimī* symbolise the abdomen or body of the man.

⁷⁰ The clothes of a dead woman are, and have always been given to her daughters.

49th day, burns a big butter lamp at the house altar in the name of the deceased. On these days rich households invite *ṭhawa* for book recitation (Tha., *che dowā*).

The household usually burns a butter lamp also on the thirteenth day (Nep., *tera din*). A few households sponsor a book recitation in their house or in the village temple. Furthermore, the *cyāngpar* ceremony is sometimes performed on this day.⁷¹

The *cyāngpar* ceremony, however, usually takes place on the 49th day (Tha., *sipcyū sirgu*) which is the day when according to Tibetan Buddhist belief the consciousness (Tib., *nam shes*) has passed through the forty-nine-day period between death and rebirth (Tib., *bar do*).⁷² In Syāng, the *cyāngpar* ceremony takes place in the village temple. The relatives offer 108 butter lamps in the name of the deceased. The *ūmce* and the *ṭhawa* recite the text *'od dpag med chog* (Tib.) at the end of which the *ūmce* burns a paper with a print of the dead man and his name over a butter lamp. A big piece of cloth bearing a small label with the name of the deceased is usually hung under the roof of the temple in connection with this ceremony. This donation is believed to facilitate the journey of the deceased to heaven.

On the day of the full moon (Tha., *mer*) in the first Thakālī month (Tha., *ālā*) there is in Syāng a collective ceremony called *korsyāng pumba* for all those who have died in the past year. The households of those who have died serve tea, beer and alcohol to the villagers at the gathering place in the middle of the village (Tha., *lyāngbā lyā*)

One year after death a ceremony called *dhuī rihn lawa* is held in the village temple.

Concluding Remarks

Tibetan Buddhism is often associated only with big monasteries and with monks trying to reach supreme realization through meditation and rituals. What I have described here is another aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. The kind of Tibetan Buddhism found in Thāk Kholā could be called the Little Tradition (or Folk Tradition) of Tibetan Buddhism in contrast of the Great Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism found in the religious centers of the Tibetan Culture Area.⁷³

⁷¹ Among the Tamāng Thakālīs the *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony is usually performed on the thirteenth day which is also an important day in the death rituals of the Hindus.

⁷² See also Waddell (1939 : 496) and Snellgrove (1957 : 262ff) for the *cyāngpar* ceremony which Snellgrove refers to as "Guiding the Consciousness after Death".

⁷³ See Redfield (1955) for an introduction to the Little Tradition and the Great Tradition.

There are no big monasteries in Thāk Kholā. The only true monastic community is found in the monastery established recently in Syāng. In Thāk Kholā there are very few monks but a relative large number of nuns and married village 'lamas'. The nuns are found mostly in Thāksātsai, the married village 'lamas' in Pāc gāũ.

The married village 'lamas' are true ritual specialists. Their aim is not to reach supreme realization through meditation and rituals, but to help the villagers survive in a world full of superhuman beings, that is of beings with a power ordinary man do not possess. The superhuman world includes a large variety of different beings, but common for them all is that they can use their superhuman power to harm ordinary men if they want to do so. Seen in the perspective, even the ritual specialists are superhuman beings as they possess superhuman power, and also they can harm ordinary men if they want to do so. The main reason why the Thakālīs spend so much money and time on a large variety of ceremonies is because they hope through the ceremonies to satisfy or pacify the superhuman beings so that sickness and other misfortune do not affect the household, and so that prosperity shall prevail. When a Thakālī sponsors a ceremony, he thinks mainly about what benefits he can gain here and now while his concern for life after death is limited. It is only when he becomes old and feels that life will soon end that he starts to become more concerned about life after death than life here and now.

Seen in this perspective, it is only natural that the texts used and the rituals performed by the village 'lamas' of Thāk Kholā are different from those found in the main religious centers of Tibetan Buddhism. *Koncyo cheti* which is the main religious text of the village 'lamas' of Thāk Kholā is not fully accepted by the orthodox *dge lugs pa* sect. And the *mhāng rāhwa* ceremony which is originally a pre-Buddhist ceremony, is not performed by the monks of the main religious centers of the Tibetan Culture Area.

In the Buddhism presented in the texts and in the teachings of the leading lama, the non-existence of a permanent soul and the cycle of rebirths, are two of the cornerstones of the doctrine. The Thakālīs, except for a few persons like Lopsāng Temba, as indicated in the above description of their death ceremonies, have radically different ideas. Man has a permanent soul (Tha., *bla*; cf. Tib., *bla*), a mind (Tha., *sam*; cf. Tib., *sems*), and a life principle (Tha., *rohk*; cf. Tib., *srog*). Man can lose his *bla*. This causes sickness but not necessarily death. In this case a ritual specialist is asked to call back the soul. According to most informants, it is the *bla* which continues to live after death⁷⁴ The *sam* guides our actions. A man who acts well is known to have a good mind (Tha., *sam sawa*) while a man who acts badly is known to have a bad mind (Tha., *sam āsawa*). *Rohk* is the life principle and

man dies when his *rohk* leaves his body.

The Thakālīs have a number of different ideas about what happens when we die. In Thāk Kholā most informants think that the soul usually goes to heaven (Tha., *sāngge*; cf. Tib., *sangs rgyas*). Their ideas about life in heaven are vague, but they believe it is a place in the upwards direction towards the sky where our dead ancestors and other dead relatives live. When we die we are certain to meet them there.

Not all the souls reach heaven. There are some who find their way to heaven barred. This happens to people with unfilled wishes or to people whose relatives did not perform the death ceremonies in a proper way. The soul of such people can come back to the village and possess people (Tha., *mhāng maiwa*). Through the possessed person the dead man says that the way to heaven was barred and what it is that troubles him. In one recent case the dead man said that his brothers had cheated his daughter by telling her that her father owed them several thousand rupees. In another recent case the dead man complained that his *mhā* had not been given any blanket and that he therefore was freezing. When a person becomes possessed with an unhappy soul, a ritual specialist is asked to perform the necessary ceremonies so that the unhappy soul can leave the village and find its way to heaven. There are, however, a few souls which never reach heaven, but turn into the dreadful *sinṭi* (Tha.; cf. Tib., *shi 'dre*). They are the souls of people who died a violent death (murder, suicide, and the like), or women who have died during childbirth. The *sinṭi* reside near the cremation places and cause the Thakālīs much worry and harm. The reason why the Thakālīs perform such elaborate death ceremonies is not only that they want the best for their dead relatives and want them to reach heaven, but also that they want the dead relatives out of the way so that they will not return to the village and haunt their relatives.

According to some informants, other things can happen to the soul after death. Some informants said that the soul of a good man will go to heaven while the soul of a bad man will go to hell (Tha., *nyelpa*; cf. Tib., *dmyal ba*). It is a place, usually associated with the downwards direction, where it is either burning hot or freezing cold. Other informants said that the soul of a good man will go to heaven while the soul of a bad man will be reborn as an animal. According to both ideas the deeds of a dead man are weighed after his death. For each good deed a white stone is placed in one weighing pan, and for each bad deed a black stone is placed in another. When all the deeds have been counted the stones are weighed and according to the outcome the soul is sent either to heaven or to hell.

⁷⁴ According to some informants, it is the *sam* which continues to live after death and which goes to heaven.

To conclude, the Thakālīs of Thāk Kholā have a number of different ideas about what happens to the soul after death, but in general believe that the souls of most people go to heaven. It is an exception to find a person who believes in the endless cycle of rebirths.⁷⁵

The Buddhism of the Thakālīs is in many ways so different from orthodox Buddhism that some would claim that the Thakālīs are not Buddhists at all. Whether or not they are is, of course, a question of definition. If we choose a strict definition which includes the belief in the endless cycle of rebirths, then the Thakālīs generally speaking cannot be said to be Buddhists. A better approach, however, is to use a broader definition and define a Buddhist as one who regards himself/herself as a follower of the Buddha; one may then proceed to describe and analyse the various forms of Buddhism. If we choose this broader definition, then most Thakālīs of Thāk Kholā are Buddhists.

The Buddhism of the Thakālīs is of a kind which has not received due attention in the literature of Tibetan Buddhism, as it has mainly focused on the Buddhism found in the religious centers of the Tibetan Culture Area and the Buddhism as it is explained by the great teachers. If more attention were paid to the Buddhism of the lay people, one may find that Buddhism in the Himalaya in general has more in common with the Buddhism of the Thakālīs than with the Buddhism of the main religions centres of the Tibetan Culutre Area.

⁷⁵ In Thāk Kholā I have met a few informants who claimed not to believe in heaven, hell, or rebirth. When we are cremated, "we become ash and then everything is finished."

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