

DEATH AND KIN  
AMONGST THE NORTHERN MAGAR

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IN MEMORIAM : BERNARD PIGNEDE

Geweckt von dem ewigen Rinnen  
setzen sich Tote zu mir, müde und blind,  
nicht wissend, ob sie ein Leben beginnen  
oder Phantome sind.

Günter Eich : *Abgelegene Gehöfte*, Frankfurt 1948

Thanatology should not be confused with necrophilia. One is a branch of the social sciences, the other is a form of mental disturbance. The antiseptic tone of the term thanatology itself throws a light on the state of the society in which it originated. The word seems to guarantee with its scientific coolness the mastery over a subject which, by its very nature, is an untamable one; it seems to channel our hysterical fears of death into a safe scholarly topic. Moreover, the term indicates that fashion likes to drape itself in neologisms—and "thanatology" is fashionable. And yet, a study of attitudes towards death can be as rewarding as any study in the history of ideas. It is, in fact, one way of studying ideas and their history. That this is so, was recently demonstrated by the French historian Philippe Ariès, when he presented a diachronic view of attitudes concerning death in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Not only did he show that death in the minds of men is not an invariable constant,—in Europe

<sup>1</sup> The fifteen years of work, which Ariès dedicated to the changing attitudes towards death in Europe from the Xth to the XXth centuries resulted in two consecutive books, the former being a concise introduction to the later magnum opus, viz. Philippe Ariès: *Western Attitudes towards Death: From the middle Ages to the Present*, Baltimore 1974 (French edition: *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident-du Moyen Age à nos jours*, Paris 1975 and *L'Homme devant la mort*, Paris 1977.

Among the recent publications, testifying to the new interest in the general anthropological treatment of death the following stand out as exemplary: L.V. Thomas: *Anthropologie de la mort*, Paris 1975, R. Huntington/P. Metcalf: *Celebrations of Death-The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, Cambridge 1979 and the two exhibition catalogues for the Musée de l'Homme in Paris: J. Guiart (ed.): *Les Hommes et la mort. Rituels funéraires a travers le monde, Objets et Mondes*, Paris 1979 and *Rites de la mort*, Paris 1979. A most recent title: M. Bloch/J. Parry (Eds.): *Death and the regeneration of life*, Cambridge 1982 deserve special attention.

a shift had taken place, within a hundred years, from seeing death as a relatively normal event to one that is socially taboo; he also demonstrated that these changes in the attitude towards death could be correlated with other changes in the ideological super-structure. What is the tone of European societies may also hold for others.

The object of the present essay is less to show how two realms of the super-structure change correspondingly in time than to show how they assimilate to a degree of isomorphism. These two realms are the rules of marriage in a society that practices matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and the funerary rituals observed in that society, the Northern Magar of the Dhaulagiri region in West Central Nepal. It will be demonstrated that the actors in the drama of death are essentially the same as those involved in the bonds woven by marriage, and that their functions carry the same meaning in both types of transition. Once the identity of functions in the realms of marriage and death is established, a comparison will be drawn with the functions of the same realms in another Himalayan society, the Gurung.

Critical transitions in life amongst the Magar of the North are conceived of less as singular events than as real passages, extending over a considerable period of time. Just as with marriage, which can be broken up into a series of phases of preliminary negotiations between the parties concerned and movements of the partners between the natal and the allied home, so it is with death. A person may expire at one particular moment; he or she may be physically dead from one second to the next; but socially this is not so. It takes time to become an accepted dead person. It is this span from the moment of biological death to completed social death, a span determined by customary thinking about the relations between the society and its dead, which concerns us here. As we follow this process step by step, we may get a picture of what the specific rites that accompany this passage look like. What I want to underline, moreover, is the significance these actions have for the consolidation and reinforcement of social organisation as a whole : how customary behaviour in the presence of death confirms the rules of the living; in particular, how it confirms the rules of conduct that govern those who are related to each other and were so to the deceased, in a consanguineal or affinal manner.

### **Magar marriage system and kinship terms**

It may be appropriate at this point to preface the ethnographic inventory of death as a social process by a short sketch of the Magar marriage system and its reflection in kinship terminology, since later on, when dealing with the stages of the funerary rituals, we will encounter the same set of actors as those involved in marriage.

The Magar are perhaps the only undisputed cis-Himalayan ethnic group whose traditional form of marriage is matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. That is to say, a man marries his real or classificatory mother's brother's daughter and no one else. This rule is not a prescriptive one in the statistical sense of the word, but it can be observed very frequently, despite the tendency of younger people to disregard the constraints of the system and marry according to their emotional inclinations. Nevertheless, the classical ideal of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and its sociological implications still govern the entire network of Magar relations. In a regime of this order, which produces one of the three possible elementary structures of kin in society,—the other two being generated by bilateral and by patrilateral cross-cousin marriage<sup>2</sup>—at least three distinct kin-groups are necessary. Each of them donates their marriagable girls to one of the other kin-groups always in one and the same direction, and receives their in-marrying spouses always from another. The system of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, therefore, presupposes one kin group that functions as "wife giver" to the kin group of Ego and one that functions as "wife receiver" in relation to the kin-group of Ego. And in this manner an indirect circle of exchange is established, integrating all kin-groups of the society that participate in the rotation of women.

For the concepts of "wife giver" and "wife receiver" the Northern Magar employ Nepali terms, the meanings of which have been enlarged to become real generic terms to serve the specific sociological needs of the Magar. This is a general feature of Magar kingship terminology. Although these people speak a language of their own, a Tibeto-Burman dialect of the Western Bodic branch called Kham, the number of words borrowed from Nepali is indeed high. This massive employment of Nepali loanwords can also be noted in another domain of verbal expression, namely the body of epic chants sung by the magical healers of the Northern Magar. Here, in the domain of kinship terminology, I counted out of a total of 43 non-compound terms 29 as being Nepali or Nepali-based, and only 14 were of Kham origin. Thus, only 30% of the kinship terms stem from the original language. However, practically all of the borrowed words have undergone a broadening of meaning to reflect the preferred system of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, which the other Nepali-speaking ethnic groups do not practice. It is, therefore, not the words themselves that reveal their hidden sociological signification, but the synonymic equations they allow in this or that usage. The kinship terms of the Northern Magar, be they original Kham words or borrowed and enlarged Nepali ones, form a

<sup>2</sup> See amongst others, C. Lévi-Strauss: *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Paris 1967 and M. Oppitz: *Notwendige Beziehungen*-Abriss der strukturalen Anthropologie, Frankfurt 1975, pp. 89ff.

coherent system of appellation that expresses throughout the Magar system of marriage behaviour: the elementary structure of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage.

The generic terms for "wife giver" and "wife receiver" are *māiti* and *bhanja* respectively. In Nepali, the word *māiti* means 'a married woman's parental home'. This meaning is maintained in Magar parlance extended, however, by a second larger one: 'the home of a man's mother's brother and this relative's whole patriline', i.e. the kin-group of the "wife givers". A man's *māiti* is always identical with his mother's, whereas a woman's *māiti* always differs from her own mother's. But a man's *māiti* is also identical with his father's. According to the logic of the system this has to be so, for in a regime of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage with patrilineal descent the son's generation always repeats the marriage direction of the father's generation, and so on downwards. The term *bhanja* (or *bhānij* in Nepali) refers to sister's son. In Magar usage, this meaning is maintained and again extended, covering such meanings as sister's son, daughter's husband, brother's daughter's husband, husband's sister's son, and finally including all those who receive or can receive a girl as wife from the own Ego group. Thus, *bhanja* means the "wife receivers". The girls that are married by these "wife receivers", i.e., all out-marrying females of the Ego-group, are also designated by a generic term. They are called *cili*; *celi* in Nepali means 'unmarried girl, daughter'. Again the Magar meaning is wider, covering the concrete significations of sister, daughter, father's sister, husband's sister (woman speaking, w.s.). *Cili* is thus a parallel term to *bhanji*, the sisters of the *bhanja* or, in the ascending generation, the sisters of father's sisters' husbands, those that marry out of the "wife receivers" kin group, but not into the Ego-group. Both *cili* and *bhanji* are "lost" women for the respective patriline. The own patriline or Ego-group has no specific term by which it would be known in Magar usage. One may talk of *dājyu-bhāi* i.e., brothers, father's brothers' sons, mother's brothers' daughters' husbands, mother's sisters' sons or, if women speaking 'men forbidden to marry' such as father's sisters' daughters' husbands and

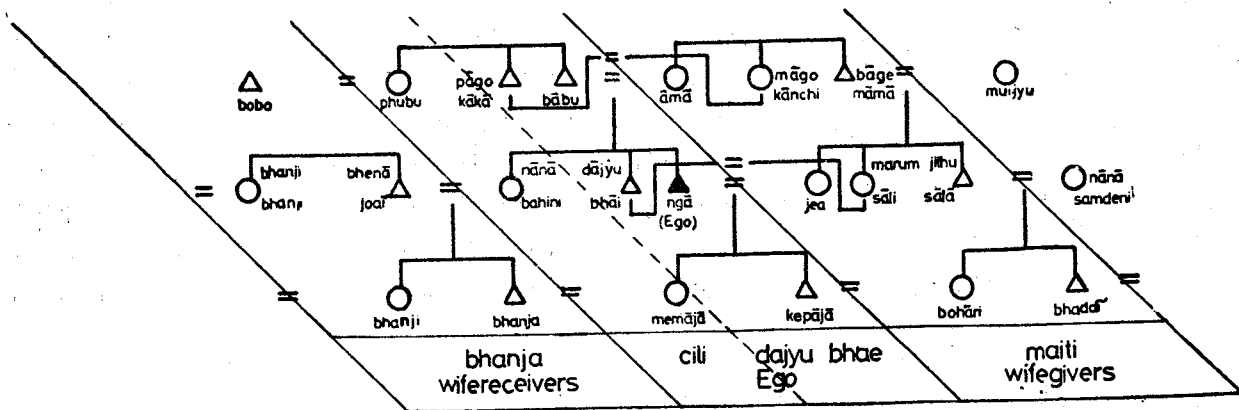


Fig. 1. Diagram of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and related Magar kinship terms

husband's sisters' husbands. In fact, a specific term for the Ego's kin-group is not needed, for the terms *māiti* and *bhanja*, "wife givers" and "wife receivers" are both relational terms: they stand in relation to the Ego-group, which receives women from the one and gives women to the other group, always in the same direction.

In order to provide evidence in support of the proposition that Magar kinship terms (the system of appellation) reflect Magar marriage rules (the system of attitudes), I have assembled the main terms in a list, also to be found in Fig. 1. The list indicates the linguistic provenience of the words and, if derived from Nepali, their respective meaning outside the Magar sociological context. The equations, (=), or extended meanings in Magar parlance, all point in the direction of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage as a system. The meanings set in rectangular brackets indicate marriage taboos.

Generation	Kinship Term	Equations in Magar Usage	Provenience, Nepali meaning
+1	bāge	MeB=WF=WFB (older than Ego's F)	Kham
	māmā	MyB=WF=WFB, MBS (w.s.)	Nepali: MB
	muijyu	WM=WMZ=MBW	N (maijyu): MBW
	māgo	MeZ=FeBW	Kham
	kānchi	MyZ=FyBW	N: youngest female in a series of siblings
	pāgo	FeB=MeZH	Kham
	kākā	FyB=MyZH	N: FyB, MyZH
	phubu	FZ=HFyBW (w.s.) = HM (w.s.)	N: FZ
	bobo	FZH=HF (w.s.) = HFB (w.s.)	Kham
	±0	dājyu	eB=MBeDH [FBeS, MZeS, HeZH, FZeDH (w.s.)]
bhāi		yB=MByDH [FByS, MZyS, HyZH, FZyDH (w.s.)]	N: yB
nānā		eZ=FZeSW [FBeD, MZeD, WeBW, HeBW (w.s.), MBeSW]	Kham
bahini		yZ=FZySW [FByD, MZyD, WBSW, HyBW (w.s.)]	N: yZ
jithu		WeB=MBeS	N (jethān): WeB
sālā		WyB=MByS	N: WyB
mārum		WeZ=eBW=MBeD=FBeSW=MZeSW	Kham
sāli		WyZ=MByD	N: WyZ

Gene- ration	Kinship Term	Equations in Magar Usage	Provenience, Nepali meaning
	bhenā	$eZH = FZeS = FBeDH = [MZeDH, HeB]$	N : eZH
	joaī	$yZH = FZyS = FByDH = MZyDH$	N : DH
—I	bhanjā	$ZS = DH = BDH = HZS$	N : ZS
	bhanji	$[ZD, FZD, SZD, * HZD, FZSZ]$	N : ZD
	dewar <sup>x</sup>	$HyB (w.s.) = FZyS (w.s.)$	N : HyB
	piser <sup>x</sup>	$HeZ (w.s.) = FZeD (w.s.)$	N : HeZ (old Kham : maṣ)
	memājā	$D = ZSW$	Kham

(Abbreviations used : M=mother, F=father, Z=sister, B=brother, W=wife, H=husband, D=daughter, S=son, e=elder, y=younger<sup>x</sup> not in Fig. 1)

All kinship terms used by the Magar that convey only one single meaning, such as F, M, S, have been omitted in this list, for they reveal nothing about the relationship between terminology and marriage system.)

The equations in the above list of kinship terms speak a clear language. The system of appellation is in complete conformity with the preferred system of giving and receiving spouses. The terms point to the praxis, which is matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. Having established this, we can return to the ethnography of death as a social process.<sup>3</sup>

### Dying

Dying amongst the Magar, in cases of natural death, is supervised by a test. When an ill or aged person's final moment has come, a member of the assembled household, preferably a daughter, takes out a silver coin and puts it under the dying relative's tongue. If he is really about to die, he will swallow it; if he is going on to

<sup>3</sup> An article for the Journal of the Nepal Research Centre with the title "Magar marriage system and statistics" is in preparation. Previously, the marriage rules and the kinship terms of the Northern Magar have been dealt with in: A. Molnar: *Flexibility and Option: A study of the dynamics of women's participation among the Kham Magar*, Ph.D.-thesis for the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Univ. Microfilms, Ann Arbor 1980 pp. 15-85, 123-128, 343-344 and in A. Molnar: *The Kham Magar Women of Thabang, the Status of Women in Nepal*, Vol II pt. 2, Manila 1981, pp. 102-146.

A detailed presentation of Magar kinship terms can be found in D. Watters/Hasta Ram Buda: *Kham-English Dictionary*, ms.-copy Kathmandu 1981.

live, he will spit it out. This practice is widespread. One can find it amongst Hindu populations and even amongst tribal groups as far east as Sze Ch'uan and Yunnan, for instance amongst the Na Khi<sup>4</sup>.

The Magar say that in former times—over a hundred years ago—they used to supplement the coin test by yet another death test, in order to corroborate their certainty about this essential life passage, for they feared nothing more than a wrong diagnosis in the matter of death. The second death test consisted in carrying a person's body, as soon as he was considered dead, out of the village to the far bank of the dividing river and depositing the supposed corpse on a stone bench under a tree. There, the body had to remain for one night, before any funerary rituals could be undertaken. Would the body remain unmoved on the test spot, the person would be declared dead. But if it moved away, and I was assured that occasionally this really happened (that a person had only fainted or had temporarily suspended animation), then, after an apology, the person would be brought back home and treated henceforth like a normal living member of the society. The place where this second death test occurred still bears the name *bulnai* or 'restplace of the corpses' (see photo no. 9).

Once death is definitely confirmed, consanguineally related female mourners of the *cili*-class assemble round the dead man's sleeping place to wash his face and make him up for the grand public show the following day. His eyes are closed, his lids are painted green and adorned with rice grains. Round his head, if the deceased is a male, will be tied a new white turban; and his body will be wrapped in an equally white death cloth, white being the Asian colour of mourning par excellence. The silence of the night will be broken by waves of women wailing.

#### Public exposure of the dead

The next morning the dead man is carried on a bamboo stretcher out of the house on to a neighbouring roof by male members of his family. (Magar houses are usually flat-roofed and as villages are clustered on a slope, the roof of one house can serve as an outdoor verandah for the one behind or above. This is a Western Himalayan style of house-and village-architecture, found amongst populations of different ethnic stocks in the middle and northern cis-Himalayan regions, extending eastward up to the Kali Gandaki divide.) On such a roof the dead man is publicly exposed and presented to all villagers as a wealthy man (see photo no. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J.F. Rock: *The Life and Culture of the Na-Khi Tribe of the China-Tibet Borderland*, Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Supplementband 2, Wiesbaden 1963, p. 32 and A. Jackson: *Na-Khi Religion—An Analytical Appraisal of Na-Khi Ritual Texts*, The Hague 1979, p. 128.

The corpse is deposited on a mat, which will later serve as its wrapper, when it is transported to the burial ground. For the present, the deceased is laid out in an east-west direction, his head to the west, since the Magar think a dead person should be able to see the rising sun, which they consider a deity, *surje*. And the course of the sun in a day from east to west is thought of as being also the course of a man through life. Therefore, the same position is chosen at the last repository, the grave. This posture of death with the head pointing west and the feet pointing east is the inversion of the ideal sleeping position with the head pointing east and the feet pointing west. The inversion finds its rationale in the argument that sleep belongs to the realm of life. The practice of depositing the dead in the described manner differs considerably from the customs maintained for the Magar *rammā* or *jhākri*—the magical healers and seers—who are buried in a northward direction because, in accordance with their myth, their place of origin was in the north. Also the final posture of these shamans differs from that of laymen. The latter lie horizontally under the soil. The shamans on the contrary sit upright in a cairn built above the ground, holding a sky-pointed pine-tree in their laps, their tree of life and death, *suwā*, on which their smashed drums and other paraphernalia are hung (see photo no. 2).

The public presentation of the dead as wealthy is achieved by the display of a variety of valuables, placed on the corpse. Large golden ear-shields are hung over his temples; his forehead bears a number of silver coins; three types of necklaces are laid out on the corpse's chest; and money and his favorite knife are placed on his body. It is noteworthy that most of the tokens of wealth are female ornaments. They are lent for the occasion by the dead man's eldest son's wife, i.e., an affinal relative, and are returned at the end back into her personal possession, after a careful purificatory washing. This woman who lends is, in a regime of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, at the same time the dead man's wife's brother's daughter, *buhāri*. She is the ideal female representative of the wife-giving group or *māiti* to the dead (as Ego), and the lending of these female ornaments may be interpreted as a reminder of the specific relations they entertain: when he was young, in the prime of his life, he was given a woman, the most valuable of valuables society can offer, by exactly the same class of relatives that now, at the end of his days, present him with instead of a female, female valuables belonging to and now given by the woman that was given to his own son as wife. The gesture of wife-giving which happens in each generation in the same direction, is thus symbolically repeated. There will be occasion again to verify that in the movements of socially significant exchanges the rules of marriage influence the choice of actors in the drama of death.

Other objects lying on the dead person exposed on the roof are brass plates



containing purificatory plants of juniper and also a copper pot, in which money is collected. This will be redistributed later amongst all actively participating fune-  
 rary guests, *malāmi*, those who are not specifically related to the dead. On the other  
 hand, those who fill this pot with money, by defiling the deceased and depositing  
 their death-gift, on the forehead first, are relatives of the man who died : sons,  
 daughters, sisters' sons mother's brothers' sons and their wives; in other words :  
 "wife givers", "wife producers" and "wife receivers"—all those who are needed to  
 establish matrilateral cross-cousin marriage—the Magar practice—as a system.

Once the dead man has been deposited on the roof of a neighbour, his close  
 relatives squat down around his body and the order in which this is done has again  
 a strict sociological significance. The head or western side of the dead body is  
 reserved for the dead man's sons, the eldest sitting in the middle, flanked by the  
 younger ones on either side. The southern flanks of the body are occupied by the  
 deceased man's daughters; the northern side is occupied by his wife or wives, who  
 sit closest to his head, then his sons' wives and his brothers' sons' wives, in this  
 sequence towards his feet. The southern side of the body, which is considered the  
 right side, is thus occupied by consanguineal females, and the northern side, which  
 is considered as the left side, by females through alliance. Both female flanks dupli-  
 cate the male pattern of seniority. The eldest daughter or the eldest affinal woman,  
 depending on the side, has each of the younger ones of the same class on either side.  
 The eastern or foot side remains empty, (see Fig. 2).

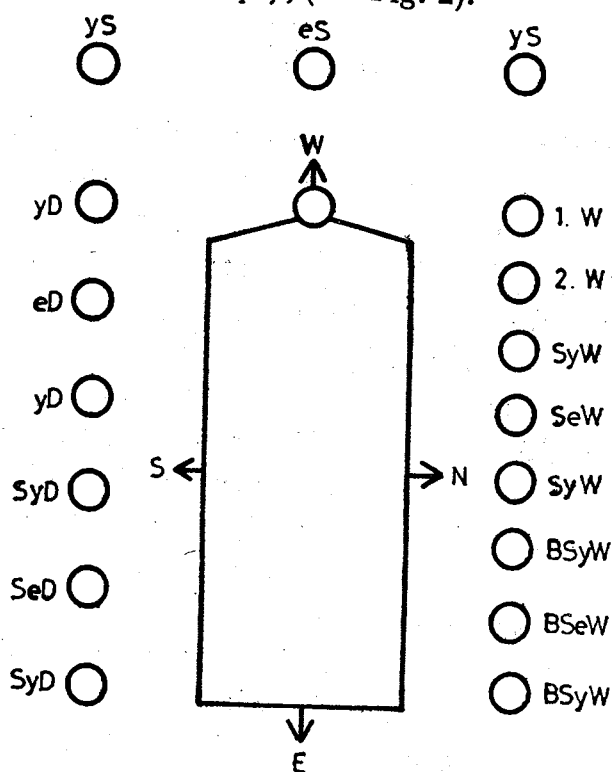


Fig. 2. Sitting order of relatives round the corpse when publicly displayed on a neighbour's roof

During most of the time the dead man is exposed publicly, the daughters and wives of the deceased will chant hymns of grief and mourning, which are partly improvised on a fixed cadence of wailing notes. In these moments of both personal and also formalized, impersonal expressions of grief, the women cover their tear-streaked faces with a cloth, lurching spasmodically forward over the corpse. Their incantations, which channel emotions into form, are moving in a lyrical manner and fit the transcendental mood of the occasion. The inconceivable transition from life into matter is made conceivable in the blending of unspeakable grief into a proto-form of song.

These improvised hymns of grief may run like this: "We will never see each other again, my father. When you were alive, you were our guardian, now you have left us alone. My father, we have lost a member of our family. Today I will open my heart and tell you my sorrows. Our enemies will be happy now. But, perhaps, we will meet again in the next world. Forget the bad things we did do you, and remember the good ones."

Before the corpse is wrapped in the mat on which it had been exposed for public view, a religious officiant, a *jaṛsi* astrologer, recites from a Hindu text called *dharma sankha*, the 'conchshell of religion', an act which is supposed to produce an indulgence: the bad deeds of the dead and those of his relatives will hopefully be forgiven and forgotten by the supranaturals.

### The burial

The procession of the funeral party from the dead man's house to his grave or pyre outside the confines of the village begins with a gunshot, fired from a locally made musket by a relative who belongs to the *bhanja* class, i.e., to that of the sister's son or son-in-law of the dead. These gunshots are repeated five times throughout the funeral. A first shot had previously been fired, when the corpse was carried from inside the house onto the roof. A third shot will be heard when the corpse is carried over the river that divides intra-and extra-village territory. A fourth shot will be fired when the porters of the stretcher who are recruited from the dead man's closest kin, sons in preference, reach the burial ground and a fifth and final one can be heard when the dead person is lowered into the grave. One meaning of this shooting is linked to the idea that the dead have to travel to their final destination; this route is full of obstacles, partly created by the deceased's own terrestrial conduct. If he has led a sinful life, the way is blocked and it is the sister's son's or son-in-law's responsibility to shoot it open. We will meet with the same relative in a similar function later on, as paver of the way to eternal peace. It is an important task and who would be more fit to fulfil it—sons excluded—than the man whose obligation to

the dead is on the highest level, as it was he who received from the deceased the most precious gift a man can offer, namely his own daughter ?

These shootings can also be understood as sounds of transition, *sons de passage*, marking stages of it. And in this respect they may be classed together with the funeral music, played by musicians of the tailor-*damāi* caste. These musicians have a varied and a fixed set of tunes and rhythms, dove-tailing with various moments of such rites of passage. In the funeral, the tunes and rhythms of the *damāi* have two distinct strains—one grave and solemn on the way to the burial ground, the other serene and joyous on the way back.

The procession to the burial ground is led by a file of way-cloth-bearers. These are respected men of the dead man's own and neighbouring villages, related to him or not, each carrying a bamboo stick in his right hand. Each stick is connected to the sticks of the man behind and the man in front by a strip of white cloth, about forty centimeters wide and two to several meters long between two such relay men. One complete set of way-cloth consists of cloth attached to nine sticks. A singular funeral procession may comprise as many as a dozen such way-cloth units, extending the uninterrupted row of way-cloths, *bāto*, into a single file of over one mile's length. One can measure the importance of the deceased by the length of his complete way-cloth. Each of the units of way-cloths is donated by a group of relatives, those who carry it: sons, brothers, brothers' sons, sisters' sons, mother's brothers' sons, mother's brothers' sons' sons. Non-relatives carry way-cloths handed out to them by the deceased man's family. The way cloth is a visible guide-line for the dead to help him find his route to the grave and proceeding from there, to the Other World. En route, way-food, *sāmbal*, consisting of maize, barley, millet, rice and wheat is put on clearly recognizable spots, stones or rocks, at distinct intervals. This service of depositing way-food is preferably done by females, belonging to the class of out-marrying *cili*. All precautions are taken so that the dead should be comfortable during his journey; neither thirsty nor hungry, nor even deprived of his human addictions should he go on his last trip. The corpse of a heavy smoker, for example, is given a cigarette or a *sulpā* pipe is put in his mouth.

The inhumation will take place at a locality chosen by the dead man himself, in his last wish, or by his son. The digging of the grave is always begun by a *kāmi*. This is because the surface of the soil is thought of as being impure, and impurity is the allotted stigma of this caste of blacksmiths. The lower layers of the soil are dug out by members of the pure Magar community. The workers take turns. Another job at the grave in which the whole male Magar population lends a hand is the carrying of stones to the grave in order to cover the corpse, (see photo no 3). It is said that these stones, piled on the grave, are considered as a temporary dwelling

place, *masānghāt* in Nepali and *khadarpo* in Kham, for the dead man's spirit and that, on a practical level, they prevent jackals from ravaging the corpse. If the deceased was a member of a dancing association, *nācāru*, formed in the days of his youth, surviving members of the club will perform special sword dances at the graveyard, in which the number of death-rounds (clockwise direction) outnumber the rounds performed in the direction of life (anticlockwise direction). This symbolism can also be observed at the burial of a shaman. His professional colleagues will dance, in full gear, up to and around his final resting-place and here, too, the death-rounds will outnumber the life-rounds. This relation between death-rounds and life-rounds will be inverted at an event of life, such as the ceremonial birth of a new shaman on a pine tree.

After the dead person has been buried, the long white way-cloths are distributed. The very first part of the cloth-file is given by the sister's sons to the sons of the dead, by wrapping them as turbans around their heads. The main first part of the way-cloth and its end is given to the *damāi*, those who tailored for the dead person in his lifetime and who played his funeral music. This gift recognizes the former tailor-client relationship. The bulk of the way-cloth goes to the *malāmi*, the 'men of the dead', related or unrelated men of honour, the respectable community. The mourners now return to their respective villages. First go the women, who at the graveyard have been sitting at a certain distance from the grave, then the men, both in groups. All of them will wash their hands, legs and faces in the water of the river that separates their village from the dead, in order to purify themselves.

This purification ended, two successive head-shavings are performed, in which the barber and the shaven are recruited from the same three groups of "wife givers", "wife receivers" and "wife producers". On this day, it is the deceased man's sister's sons or "wife receivers", the *bhanja* who have to shave completely the dead man's sons' heads. Thirteen days later, at a small ceremony called *mailā.khyene* or 'throwing away impurities' the same sons are shorn once again. This time the function of barber is carried out by another group of affinal relatives: the dead man's *māiti* shave the sons. These may be the brothers of the dead person's wife or their sons, the brothers of the dead man's sons' wives. In any case they are the "wife givers". After these shavings have been completed, the sons of the dead are invited to their barbers' homes. There, they are presented with new turbans, some pork or mutton and some drink. And, since the barber service is rendered to the Ego-group both from the "wife receivers" and "wife givers" side, the complete structural set of related allies is involved. The death service recalls and evokes the marriage rules.

The shaving itself is a complete one. Even the hair tuft of the deceased man's son is cut away, for it is believed that this tuft represents a man's line to his father, a kind of male umbilical cord of the patriclan and it is the father's 'line' that is now

interrupted by death and, therefore, cut, taken away by the father who died. If the deceased happens to be a woman, the mourning sons shave off their beards or moustaches, the outward signs of a man's physical attraction. During the first period of mourning a man should not look attractive, just as his mother did not, when she was pregnant with him. He is also expected to pull out some hairs of his eyebrows, in redemption of his deceased mother's fate when she bore him : women are said to loose their eyebrows during the time of childbirth. The mourning son, in other words, pays back, at the time of his mother's funeral, a physical debt he owes her : a temporary depersonalisation (by diminishing his attractiveness), which she, too, had to go through, in order to give him his existence. Disregard of the need to carry out such haircuts and shavings are thought of as leading to dangerous situations. Men, disobeying these rules, may become infected with the dead parent's pollutive symptoms and contact with such endangered people may lead to death. Cutting the hair means cutting off the dangerous links to the Beyond, where the deceased now belongs. And with the hair-cuts the first stage on the long march of the physically dead to the status of a socially accepted dead person, is accomplished. He cannot negotiate this stage alone, all have to participate and certain privileged classes of kin have their special duties in this process. And so it goes in the later stages as well.

Before I go on to the next stages, let me note briefly that the Magar practice two forms of corpse disposal; interment of the corpse and cremation on the bank of a river. Interment is more common and seems to be the more traditional form, whereas cremation may be due to Hindu influence. There are certain popular beliefs related to both of these modes which may be briefly mentioned. Cremation is preferred by some, because the smoke of the burning body going straight into the sky provides a visible sign for a wish, namely that the soul of the dead, his *puruś*, goes up to heaven as straight as smoke. Others argue that through cremation the body is completely atomized to ashes and that this instantaneous dematerialization is a horrible thought. A myth, however, seems to favour fast dematerialization of the corpse, stigmatizing the opposite as abominable. In the story of Biselme, an unsuccessful hunter-woman, who, after a series of unintended crimes and bad conduct becomes mad and ends up in the Netherworld, a final, tragic thing happens even after the heroine's death : her body does not putrefy. It remains for twelve years in a half-rotten state. And that is interpreted as the shameful punishment for her criminal life. She had offended the lord of the soil, *bhumi*, and therefore is now not accepted as an indistinct part of the soil. At last the inhabitants of the Netherworld, scandalized, decide to put the never-disintegrating corpse on a pyre and burn it. Snakes go and gather the scarce but necessary firewood, locusts bring flintstones and fire; vultures supply the way-food, *sāmbal*, for the dead heroine's soul. Then she is burnt to ashes and

these are accepted as soil. In fact, from her ashes grow the first grains, barley and wheats.

The choice for one's burial may also be determined by economical considerations. As in the myth, firewood is in reality scarce and valuable in the region of the Northern Magar and a lot of it is needed to burn a person. This waste could be omitted were the dead interred. In any case, the choice is made individually, this being quite the opposite of what is possible for shamans, who have no choice; they are always buried.

### **Journey into the Beyond—Food for the dead and the living— End of mourning**

The next stage in rendering a dead person socially dead happens several months after the burial on a date fixed by the family of the deceased. The event, generally known as *jutho khyene* or 'throwing away impurities' may be subdivided into three major functional phases, which can be characterized as (1) the guidance of the dead person into the Beyond; (2) the feeding of the dead on this journey together with the feeding of the living for the unity of society; and (3) the boisterous finale of the mourning period.

The first and foremost phase of the event is the journey of the deceased to his final abode. This journey is a long and arduous one and the dead person needs support from the living to accomplish it. Thus, on the first night of the three-fold event, a number of qualified singers (in the cases I witnessed it Magar girls and *kāmi* men were involved) gather on the verandah of the deceased person to perform a long antiphonic chant about a mythical trip into the Beyond. It is the lay version of the Somārāni song. The shamanist, second version tells the story of Somarani, daughter of Indra and Bhagwani, and of the beginnings of the world. It relates Somārāni's marriage to the son of Mahādev and Pārvati, rulers over the Blind Country, her descent to earth and the bad experiences she has there; her return to the celestial home; it tells of the creation of the sun and moon, day and night; of a world catastrophe and the recreation of the human race out of the droppings of a bird mixed with the ashes of the burnt Himalayan forests. The lay version of the Somārāni song, on the other hand, as sung for the dead is a guide to the Other World. It is noteworthy that the shamans of the Magar, unlike those of Mongolia and Siberia, never serve as psycho-pomps for the lay population. They do these services only for members of their own guild. They are responsible for life, to defend it against death or to ward off death, but they do not participate professionally in any of the common mortuary rites, notably those of guiding the souls of the dead into the Beyond. This job is entirely reserved for the lay people.

If one follows the route of Somārāni which is said to be also the route of the

dead person, as sung by the lay antiphonic singers, one obtains a picture of its length which differs considerably from the route and its length which alternatively is given as the route of the dead. Normally, the Magar claim that the Beyond begins where their territory ends: at the Jaljala pass in the eastern corner of their world. Here, however, in the Somārāni guide-song, the route takes a different course, even if the general direction is also east. Amongst many others the song mentions the following stopovers on the long way to the final resting place: Taka—Ngaipa (above Taka)—Hukam—Maikot—Purbang (all Magar villages of the north)—Majila—Jangla Bhanjyang (pass to Dolpo)—Tarakot—Ringmo—Charkabhot (all in Dolpo) Muktinath—Mustang—Khagar (Khore La pass in Tibet)—various locations in West Central Tibet and U—Tsang—the Tista river—Bhutan—and finally a holy lake to the north of Bhutan.

The singing of the Somārāni guidesong lasts the whole night and only after it has been finished can the ritual acts of the next day commence. The first two are also concerned, in their own way, with the journey of the deceased into the Beyond. The first of them is an act called *dhan dāne* 'to give wealth'. It shows once more the intricate importance of the relationship between a man and his sister's son. At *dhan dhāne* the deceased's sister's son is given an ox and valuables by the family of the dead. He then drives this ox out of the village and over the dividing river. By doing so, the *bhanja* opens the way to the Other World for the dead, who is said to hang to the oxen's tail. As a reward for this performance the sister's son can keep the ox as a gift, which will, under normal conditions, be sold for cash. In addition, the sister's son is made copious presents such as gold, silver, copper vessels and cloth in the name of the dead. These death-gifts are surprisingly plentiful and they indicate the extent to which the sister's son's death services are appreciated.

The rituals of the second act begin early in the morning as the first rays of the sun touch the village with the decoration and ceremonial feeding of two sheep, donated by members of the dead man's *māiti*, his mother's brothers or their sons, on the same roof as the one where the dead person had initially been displayed in public. These sheep are of the same sex as the sex of the deceased and entertain a very special relationship with him. One of them is called 'companion' or 'guiding sheep' and the other is called 'porter'. Both of them are painted with green, red, purple or blue colours by girls who belong to the *cili* class, i.e., unmarried daughters of the deceased or of his brothers. The 'guide' or 'companion' sheep is further embellished with a flower-necklace made by the *cili* and hung with a chain of bells. The 'porter' sheep in its turn is loaded with a two-sided miniature sack filled with maize, the same type as the Magar use when they go on their long transhumant winter migrations to the warmer south in the month of November. And, in fact, these

two sheep will serve to accompany the dead person's soul on its final journey to the Other World, which lies beyond the borders of the geographical Magar universe, where the Waters of Forgetting flow.

The man who loads this 'porter' sheep is, again, a sororal nephew or future son-in-law. He and the girl or the girls adorning the sheep are potential spouses. This potential couple also holds the plates, filled with *piṇḍa*-rice, mixed with milk, with which the two sheep are fed before they are driven through the village by a pair of *kāmi* of the lowest level, *mowar*. Everybody present on the roof will try to feed these sheep as soon as the density of the crowds gathered around them permits, for the earlier one succeeds in doing so, the more esteemed is the honour paid to the dead, whose soul is thought to be also present before it rides away on the companion sheep. And the great speed with which this ride is accomplished is explained by necessity: the soul of the dead should not be given the opportunity to jump off the animal and continue to molest the living.<sup>5</sup> The act of feeding the accompanying sheep of the dead is called *piṇḍa jyesne* 'feeding with pinda-rice; i.e. food for the ancestor and the act of driving them down is called *jushe jāne* or 'driving the companion sheep'.

Once the copious feeding of the sheep is over and they are out of the village, the animals are led to a small island in the river that divides the territory of the village from the external territory. And there they are beheaded by another man of the sororal nephew class. From this moment on they belong to the *kāmi*, who had worked for the deceased man's family during his lifetime as blacksmiths. They are gutted, cooked and eaten on the spot, an extraordinary banquet for these low-caste people. Meanwhile, two other banquets are in preparation, one for all women of the village, held near the river, the other one for men who are paternally related to the dead on the neighbour's roof in the village, (see photo no. 4)

The women's banquet is preceded by another symbolic feeding of the dead man's soul, which had come to the river on the back of the guiding ram. This feeding is a task for the dead person's daughters, the *cili*. Several leaf-plates containing a selection of the best kinds of food are carried to a hidden spot on the far bank of the river, where, with sighs of mourning and wailing, they are deposited on a rock. There they remain until an insect or a fly, representing the dead man's soul, arrives

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<sup>5</sup> The important relation between the human soul and sheep was already emphasized by Lessing in an article of 1951 entitled: Calling the soul-a Lamaist ritual. He writes: "The Tibetans and other people assume a mysterious relation between the soul and the sheep or lamp", repr. in F. Lessing: *Ritual and Symbol*. Collected Essays on Lamaism and Chinese Symbolism, Taipei 1976, p. 35. In the course of the ceremony to ask back a lost human soul, the Lamaists knead a sheep made of butter which is called *bla lug* or 'soul sheep'.



and settles on the food: The soul has come and accepted the offering. This act bears the name *usa thāne* or 'depositing the first bite of food for the dead'. After it is accomplished, the women get up immediately, leave the place of the offering, which is later plundered by the same *kāmi* who got the sheep, and inaugurate a banquet for all women of the village on the river bank nearby.

From this moment onwards, the general atmosphere changes: gestures and sounds of sorrow cease, the *damāi* change their musical beat from a lament into a joyous one; the women start laughing, eating, drinking and cracking risky jokes. The men on the roof, still rather quiet, have set down on three sides of a square, grouped in a non-hierarchical fashion, according to their villages, and started to consume a meal of maize pulp, meat soup and hot spices. This banquet is paid for by the sons of the deceased and served by the nominal sons-in-law. The consumers are all related to the deceased in the paternal line. The sitting order during one such meal of the male paternal relatives is illustrated in Fig. 3.

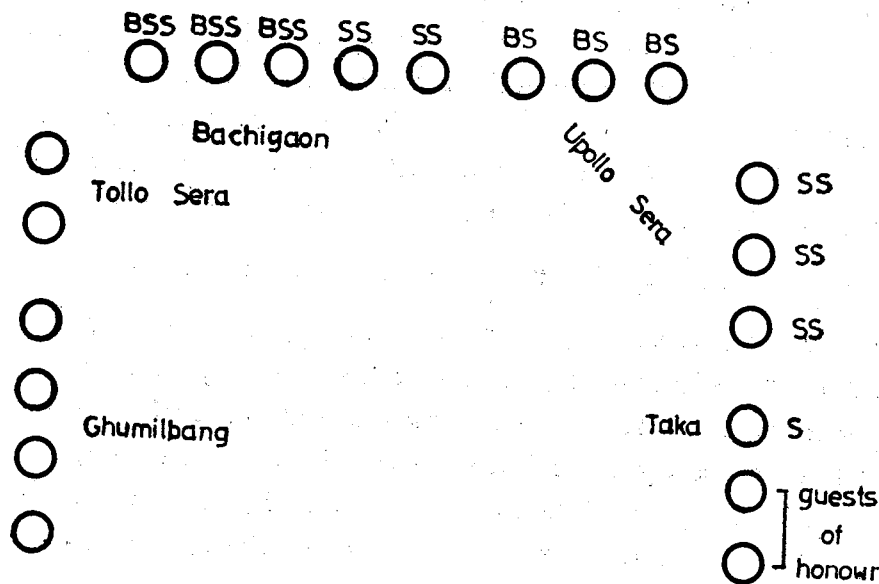


Fig. 3: Sitting order during commemorative banquet held for male members of the patriline

During the afternoon of that same day, another feast is held, a boisterous grand finale for all, relatives, non-relatives, men, women, young and old, Magar and low caste. It begins with a general and generous distribution of all kinds of food and goodies amongst all people present. First, a ram's head is given to the *mukhiya*, then rice, beans, walnuts, bread, chutney, tobacco, milk, yoghurt, honey, maize, flour, wheat and meat are freely distributed by the sons. Some of the untouchables even come with special cloths, pouches and containers to hoard rather than to consume the richly given goods. In some cases, even a buffalo will be killed and its meat

distributed in the same egalitarian manner. *Chokora*-beer and *raksi* spirit, too, are handed out in sufficient quantities. When the public has thus been warmed up, a mock fight between the sexes is begun, the central event of the afternoon. The participants in this rustic game are younger people of both sexes, who are not related to one another in terms of marriage restrictions: they belong to mutually marriageable classes. These fighting games, in the course of which large quantities of beer are wasted by being poured over the participants' bodies, (see photo no 5), have always strong sexual connotations, as is obvious from the wrestling holds as well as from the words exchanged. While throngs of people, clustered on the floor, wet and stinking from the beer, are entangling and disentangling themselves only to form another human knot at another spot on the roof, the assembled audience roars with laughter (photo no 6), shaking off the last traces of grief. And the soul of the deceased which, on its solitary way to the Other World, watches the tangled human bundles from a distance, is thought to participate mentally in the enjoyment of the game. For the game is in the dead man's honour and is intended to entertain him, just as much as it entertains those whom he has left behind and who, because of his final departure, had cut themselves off for a time from the daily joys and passions of their terrestrial existence in order to mourn him. This period is now over and the state of normality is reintroduced by means of a battle between the sexes, which everyone knows all too well as the salt and the apotheosis of the daily round.

#### **Immuring the dead in a memorial stone**

A year or so after the man, whose post mortem fate we have followed so far, has expired, an inscribed stone is erected in his memory at a place, outside the village, which will become a resting-place for those who travel. The stone inscription is engraved in secret by a *jaṛsi*, and it usually contains the name of the dead, that of his father, his own year of death and some religious good wishes, as well as an image of a sun and one of a moon. Instead of these, sometimes a pentagon is scratched into the stone, (see photo no 7). This pentagon or *cakra* represents a sign for the path of astral constellations and, in particular, wards off any magical trickery. The erection of the memorial stone is of major significance for the living, for in it will be immured the soul of the dead, which, although banished on repeated occasions, might still have roamed around and harmed people. Now it is sealed up forever. The dead has become an ancestor.

The person responsible for this important event of immuring the dead in a memorial stone is the nephew or sister's son of the dead, the son-in-law, who always appears on the scene as a functionary in the funerary rites. He is the one who brings the stone, who assists and pays the *jaṛsi* for his spiritual work; he, too, is the one who plants a memorial tree over the site, which, when grown, will give shade to resting

travellers, (see photo no 9). Amongst other relatives present are the *cili*. Over their heads the *jaṅsi* hangs a coloured cloth to conceal them from the sight of the new ancestor, whose presence would be too strong for them to bear with an uncovered face. It is their duty silently to commemorate the dead until he has turned into an ancestor.

The presence of the marriagable girls causes the nephew, who has just accomplished the last funerary service for his maternal uncle, to repeat aloud and publicly his hereditary, legal claim: that he and he alone (or others of his class) have the exclusive right to marry the daughters of the new ancestor; and that the only way to escape this structural promise is to give him an equivalent portion of land instead. In some cases this admonition is uttered in general terms, and the answers of the prescribed "wife givers" will be equally general and evasive. Sometimes, the "wife receivers" will ask for specific dates when to fix the marriage contract and it is then the craft of the answering spokesman of the potential bride's party to satisfy him with a general yes and a specific postponement. The obligation cannot be talked away. It is not an accident that a young man, the moment his deceased maternal uncle has formally been transformed into an ancestor by an act, in which he, the mother's brother's son has been the main actor, will ask for his bride—the dead man's daughter. The final act of transition into socially safe death is the exact moment to close the circle that unites the prescriptions of marriage with the rituals of death...

If by negligence the erection of the memorial stone has been omitted, the deceased is said to turn into a roaming spirit, a *siure-biure*, responsible for poisoning the food of the careless bereaved ones, into an *asān-masān*, responsible for the kidnapping of souls of the living, thus causing them illness and sometimes death, or into a *dāini* (a female roaming spirit of the dead) that can turn people mad and senseless. The memorial stone becomes synonymous with the deceased turned ancestor, *pittr*. As *pittr*, the ancestor and his stone comprise the idea of the lineage or patriline.

### Worship of the ancestor

After the deceased has turned into an ancestor, *pittr*, he will be worshipped at more or less regular intervals of about six months by members of his paternal line with the offering of a cock, grains, yeast and *dhajā* strips of cloth, given at the memorial stone. In the house where he had lived, and probably died, the ancestor also receives a permanent place which is located between the indoor fireplace, *māmuthu*, and the central pillar of the house, *maine-khāba*. At this most sacred spot of the house he will also be worshipped, with a juniper plant, before sunrise on every full moon and new moon date of the month. In case an ancestor or *pittr* should be

angered by a member of his progeny, he will send a *rughā* cold to the offender, and an additional offering of a cock will then be required. This offering is also made at the sacred spot between the fireplace and the main pillar of the interior house. No member of the household may ever pass this spot between *māmuthu* and *maine khāba* in either direction. It is exclusively reserved for the ancestor.

In addition to the ancestors called *pitṛ* or *gel* in the language of the shamans, who represent single patrines on the ancestral level, the Magar worship an ancestral deity, *brāhā*, which is the all-embracing principle of ancestry. *Brāhā* includes the ancestors of all lineages, and is worshipped on two dates during the year, on the full moon of *baisākh*, at *brāhā puja* and on the full moon of *sāun* or *bhadau* months, at *janai purnima* or *rikhi-tarpani*. *Brāhā*'s places of worship vary. They may be real little temples inside or outside the villages, *brāhā thān* or small heaps of stones open to one side, at any location whatever, (see photo no 8).

### Unnatural death

A treatment of death amongst the Magar could not claim to be a satisfactory one without mentioning at least in passing the attitudes taken towards untimely or unnatural death. Strictly speaking, there are two basic forms of this type of death: the death of small children (up to five years), including still-birth, and death by accident, such as falling off a cliff, a house, a wall or a tree, tumbling into a river or being caught by a landslide. On a mythological scale these two basic forms are linked together through the kinship-relation of both their spiritual agents: the malignant ghost or spirit, *jyeā*, who makes small children die—the child—spirit *rā*—is the mythological adoptive son of the spirit that throws people over the cliffs, *serājyeā* or 'spirit of white lime'.

If a child is delivered stillborn to a couple the little body will be buried outside the village by old people, beyond the age of begetting children, men or women, related or non-related to the parents. The fact that the grave-diggers are old is explained by the fear that younger people—through their physical contact with the child's corpse—might be affected and bear dead children as well. This is due to the influence of *rā*, the roaming spirit of dead children. Therefore, one, three or five days after the burial of the stillborn child, a night time ceremony is held by a shaman or a *dhāmi*. It is called *rā dāpaine* or 'expulsion of *rā*'. During this ceremony the parents and other children take their seat under a protective fishing net while the magical healer, after summoning his ancestral and helping spirits, bans the hideous child-spirit from returning to the house. The exorcistic ritual to accomplish this consists of magical mantras spoken and of magical grains, *satabiu*, thrown all over the house. Before releasing the parents of the stillborn baby from the protec-

tive fishing net, the healer beats on it with a bunch of thorny bushes or of nettles, for they sting and therefore keep the childspirit away. After the indoor rituals are over, the shaman and a party of assistants leave the afflicted house by shouting loudly and by each hitting a stick on rocks and on the ground. People from other houses of the village join this charivari by hitting equally with sticks on the outer doors of their houses thus demonstrating to the child-spirit *rā* that he is not welcome anywhere. This village-wide hitting with sticks to expel the roaming child-spirit is called *kāṭā koto*; it is also a second name for the above ceremony. At the crossroad the *jhānkri* healer offers to *rā* the blood of a hen, which is sprinkled on the healer's stick, rammed into the soil. In addition he hammers an iron nail and a splinter of *sāya*-wood into the soil, to fasten the spirit to this spot. Returning home the healer and his party make nine cuts on the road with a knife, to disconnect the realms of the living and those of the child-spirit *rā*.

Should a family have several stillborn babies in succession, a stronger measure is taken against the power of *rā*. Instead of burying the corpse of the baby, its grandparents cut it into three pieces on the bridge, dividing village and the outside world, and throw the pieces into the river so as to "dismember" in this way the evil spirit and his spells. More elaborate ceremonies against *rā* are carried out by the Magar shamans when a healthy baby is born to a household where previously one or several small children had died. As this baby is in the dangerous fangs of *rā*'s jealousy, its life has to beprotected by a banishing rite, called simply *rā* or *thobār*, 'making a banladder against *rā*. This ritual bears striking resemblance to those carried out for an adult injured by accident, fatally or not. This is not surprising, for *rā* and the 'spirit of white lime', *serājyeā*, the malignant agent for accidents are, as mentioned, mythological relatives, son and father, who both cause fates similar to their own. The son tries to harm children, for he himself was neglected harmfully by his lazy mother. The father tries to cause the death of adults, for he himself came to death in an accident, by falling off a tree from which he had tried to save his son who had turned into a wicked bird. I will refrain from a more detailed discussion of this spirit couple, the main accountants for untimely or unnatural death, and the rites and myths associated with them, for this belongs to the subject of shamanism rather than to the topic under consideration, namely death and kin.<sup>6</sup>

Children that die before the age of five i.e., of an unnatural death, are not on

<sup>6</sup> More details on *rā* can be found in J.T. Hitchcock: *Aspects of Bhujel Shamanism*, p. 189 ff. in J.T. Hitchcock/R.L. Jones: *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, New Delhi 1976 and on *rā* and *serājyeā* in my film: *Shamans of the Blind Country*, 1980 as well as in the book, based on this film: *Schamanen in Blinden Land*, Frankfurt 1981, p. 140-173.

this account denied a proper funeral ritual. The ideas related to their passage from life into the Beyond are basically the same as those for more mature deceased individuals, even if their rites are highly condensed in time and abbreviated in content. The burial of such children is done on a small scale, with only the members of the closest kin participating. Being lesser social beings than adults, they need less social and public participation. Even their *bāto* or waycloth, showing the way from the house to the grave, is shorter, much shorter in fact, often not more than one meter long. All consecutive stages for the passage of the child into the Beyond are fused into one single rite, called *ri goptaine* or 'to turn over water'. This takes place three, five or nine days after the proper burial. The ceremony consists of a female procession to a secret place outside the village, where the participating women deposit *usa* food, that is 'the first bite for the dead' and a jar of purificatory water on a rock. As soon as an insect has settled on the food-offering, the soul of the departed child is said to have come and accepted the food-gift. In addition, the jar is now turned over and the purificatory water poured out, by which act the child's soul is said to be purified. After 'turning over the water' the child's soul will find its own way to the eternal abode.

The second category of humans who have died an untimely or unnatural death, those affected by the 'spirit of white lime' receive, provided they are adults, a full death ritual. This indicates that they are treated like other normal beings, even though their death may not be normal. The same attitude applies, moreover, to suicide cases.<sup>7</sup> A person who has taken his or her own life, is considered to have done so in a state of temporary madness, *baūlā*, (N), or *sisiphiphi*, which in Kham means 'whistling nonsense'. The suicide may excite a lot of gossip and curiosity and may even involve a governmental investigation, but in the end it is considered as the suicide's own affair, which does not deprive him of his right to a standard funeral. No protective or exorcistic ritual follows a suicide, as in the cases of unnatural death, where the afflicted have to be freed from the persecutions of the spiritual agents that have caused their deaths. All this indicates that in Magar thought people who have died be they children or adults, suicidal, normal or unnatural cases, in the end all face a similar fate vis-a-vis their passage into eternity. Despite the special circumstances of death entailing special precautions taken for the living, death makes all people equal.

### **The stages of Magar funerary prestations in synopses**

This is, in rough outline, the cycle of death observed amongst the Northern Magar. It is a large one, involving many people and a very fixed set of relatives :

<sup>7</sup> Among the Magar, two methods of suicide are practiced, one by hanging *jhunde* and one by jumping into the river.

sons, daughters, wife's brothers, wife's brother's daughters, mother's brothers' sons and above all sister's sons. In order to see more clearly the patterns underlying this entangled network of prestations, services and obligations that fall due on the various occasions of the death passage, it is advisable to recapitulate the activities necessary at each stage and to spot-light once more those who are responsible for them. One will see that each of these stages, such as the proper death, the public exposure of the dead, the burial, the post funeral shaving, the guiding of the dead into the Beyond, the food distribution at the end of the mourning period, and the memorials for the ancestor, has not only its own themes, but also its own functionaries and directions of prestations. Moreover, once these activities for all the stages have been elucidated, an overall pattern of great simplicity, an *elementary structure of funerary rituals* will emerge.

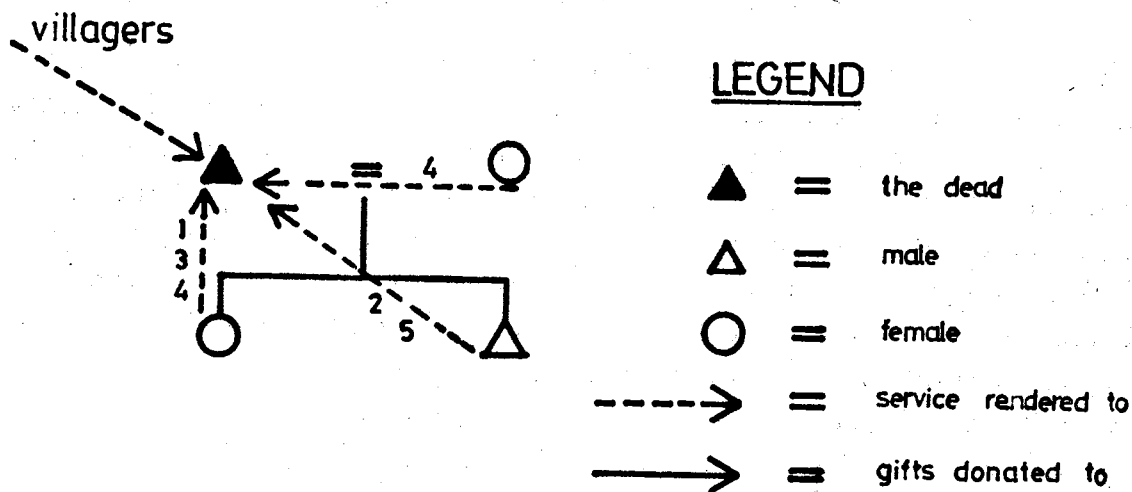


Fig. 4. Services at death

The confirmation of death and the first preparations for the burial inside the deceased person's house, is basically an intra-family event. The cointest (Fig. 4.1) to substantiate a dead person's genuine expiration is done by the daughters, who are also *cili*, later outmarrying girls. The second death test (2), now extinct, could be executed by anyone in the village, but also by members of the closest kin. Washing, re-dressing and embellishing the person confirmed as dead (3) is a task of the daughters of the deceased. Wailing over his demise inside the house (4) is reserved for the dead man's wife and again his daughters. And the transport of the corpse out of the house after the first night of the wake on a stretcher (5) is a job for the dead person's sons.

The events during the public display of the dead person begin with a symbolic donation of female ornaments, laid on the corpse (Fig. 5). They belong

to the dead person's wife's brother's daughter, his own eldest son's wife. This gesture recalls the deceased man's and his own son's reception of their main nuptial gift: a woman from the *māiti*, the "wife givers". Next banknotes and coins are

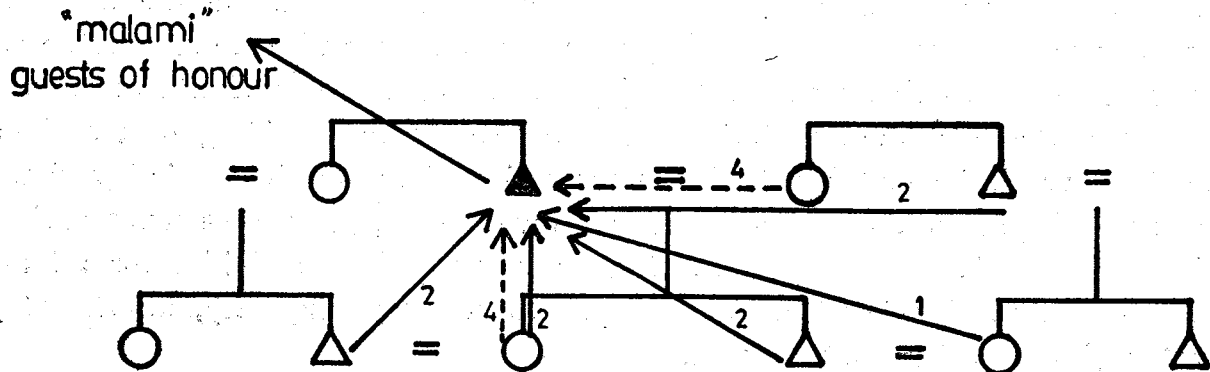


Fig. 5. Gifts and services during public display of the corpse

deposited on the corpse (2) by the brother of the dead person's wife, by his own sons and daughters and by his sister's son, who will marry his daughter. This money (3) goes later to all the funerary guests of honour, the *malāmi*. Two movements of gifts can thus be distinguished at this stage: the former "wife givers" of the dead now give again to the dead; all classes of relatives that are needed for the establishment of the elementary structure of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, the "wife givers", "wife receivers" and Ego or the "wife producers", give to the dead, and these donations, given by all kin classes of marriage, are redistributed amongst all non-relatives of honour. Hymns of grief, finally, (4) are sung over the body of the publicly displayed dead person by his wife and his daughters.

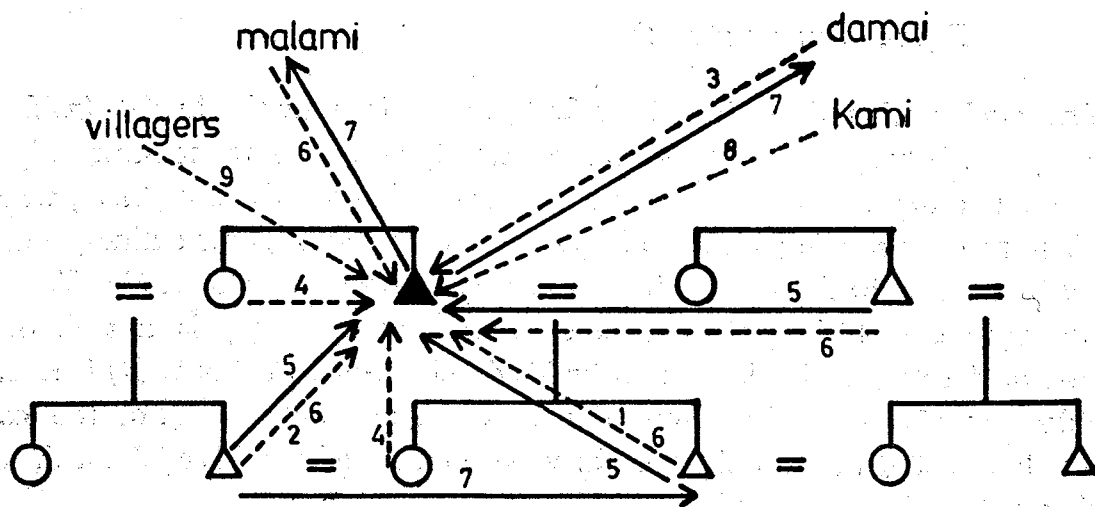


Fig. 6. Gifts and services at the burial

The burial can be divided into three phases: guiding the dead to the grave,



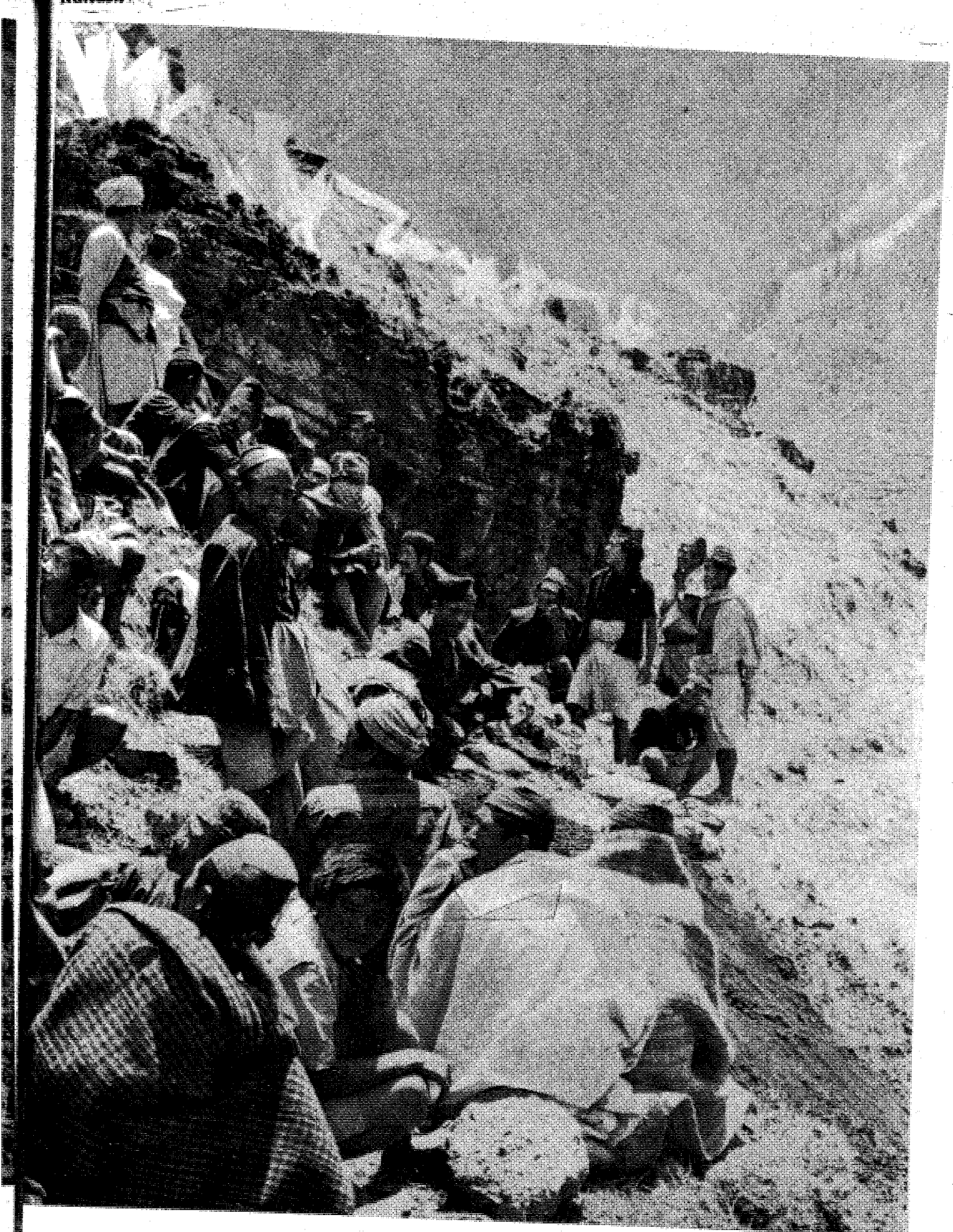


1. Public exposure of the dead : a *jaist* reading from the *dharma sankha*; the wife of the dead man's eldest son, representative of the wife-giving group, arranging women ornaments on the corpse, her gifts to the dead man; next to her a *cili*, an outmarried daughter of the dead

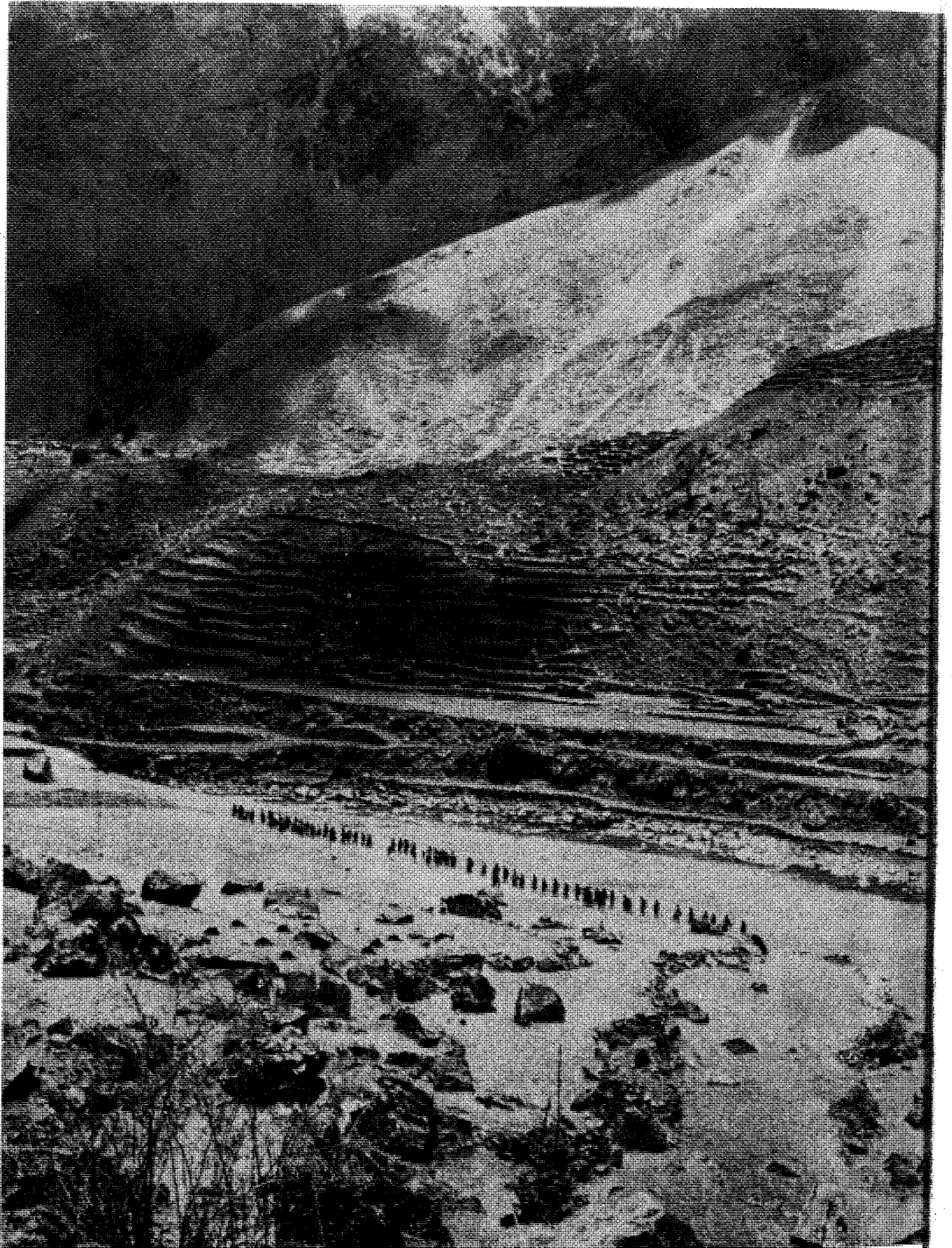


2. The carin of a deceased shaman, *jhānkri* or *ramā*; out of the grave protrudes his tree of life, *suwā*, into which are hung his smashed drum and his former crown of pheasant feathers





3. A male funeral party at an open grave; in the background, the long white file of cloth : the waycloth or *bāto*, guideline for the dead to find his way from the village to the graveyard outside



4. File of women returning from a memorial banquet by the river,  
toward the end of the mourning period

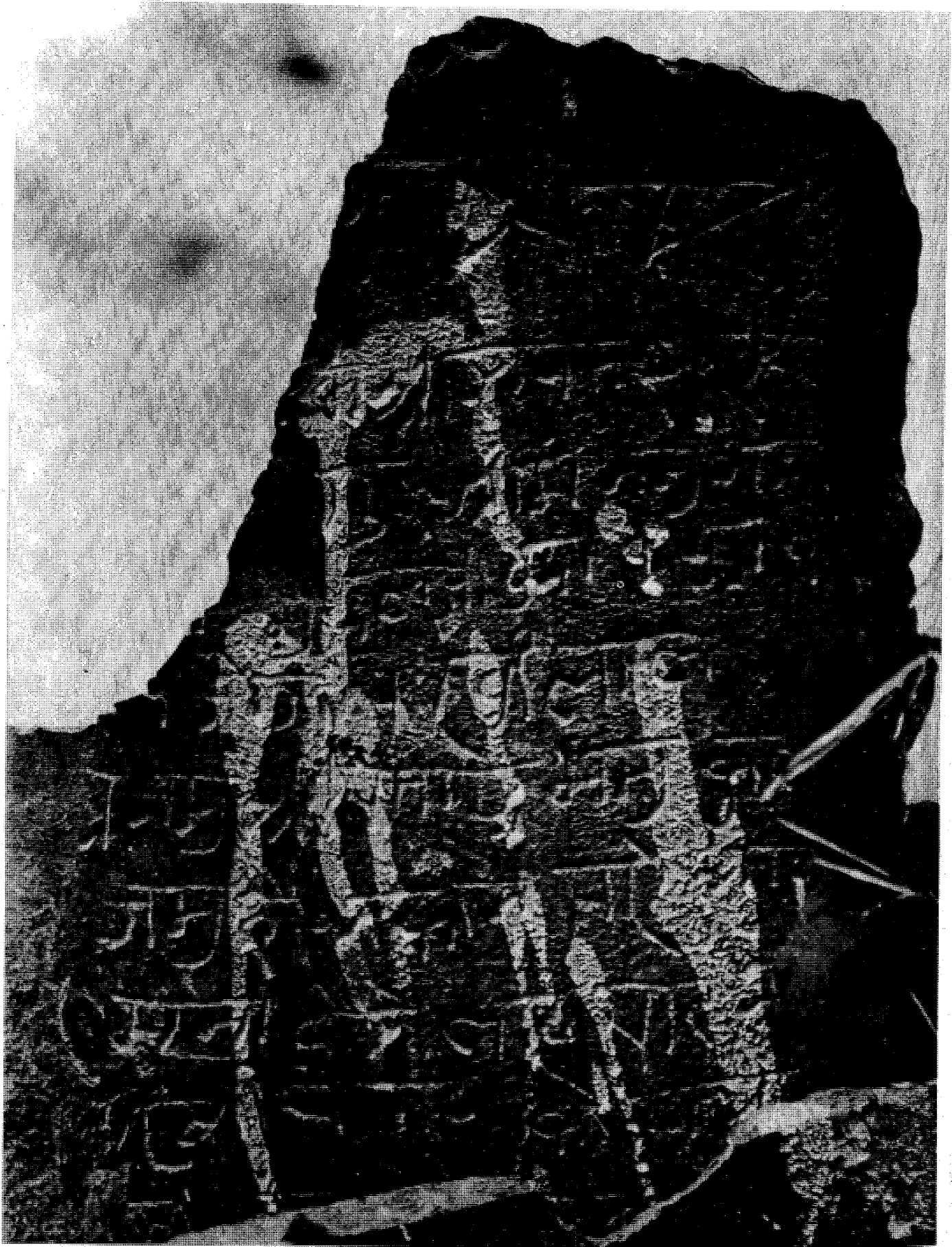




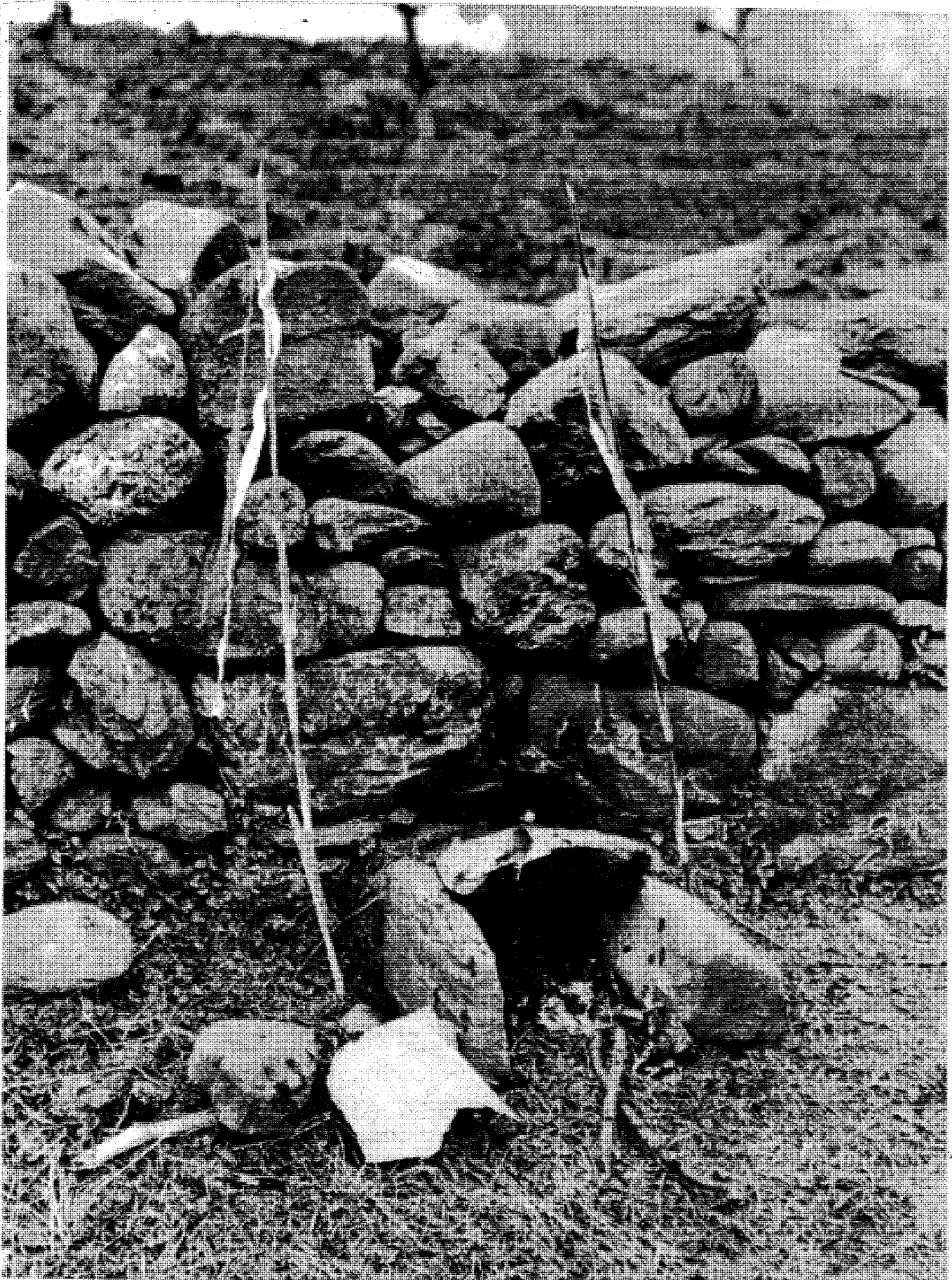
5. The boisterous feast, marking the end of mourning; young people, pouring stale, stinking beer over one another, during the mock-fight of the sexes



6. A laughing crowd enjoying the rustic games during the mock-fight of the sexes



7. A memorial stone, *pittr*, erected for a deceased Magar, turned into an ancestor; the *devanāgarī* inscription contains the names of the dead person and his father, the date of his expiration and some good wishes; on the top a *cakra* or pentagon, warding off magical trickery



8. An offering place for *brāhā*' the ancestral deity; a small heap of stones open to one side representing *brāhā*'s house; next to it, *dhaja*-strips of cloth attached to bamboo sticks, stuck into the soil





9. Memorial tree for an ancestor and resting place for travelling Magar; this one is called *bulnai* or 'restplace of the corpses' where in former times one of the death-tests took place



distribution of the waycloth or *bāto*, and digging the grave. As the corpse of the dead person is carried by his sons (Fig. 6, 1) from the verandah of the neighbour to the grave, various *sounds of passage* are heard : the dead person's future son-in-law, his sister's son, shoots the way open with several gunshots (2), and members of the tailor-caste, *damāi*, intone the funeral music (3). At the same time, the dead person's *cili* put wayfood on conspicuous spots of the route (4). The long chain of waycloths, along which the dead can orientate himself on his way to the grave, are given by members of the three constituent marriage classes (5), the "wife givers", the "wife receivers" and the Ego group, here the sons. Representatives of these three groups of people also carry the waycloth towards the grave, along with other, non-related guests of honour, the *malāmi* (6). After the burial is over, the waycloths are redistributed, given away as turbans (7) : the middle parts to the *malāmi*, the beginning and the end to the *damāi*, and to the sons of the dead those parts carried by the sister's sons at the very head of the procession. The digging of the grave (8) is begun by the *kāmi* and continued by the male community of the village. All men also help to close the grave (9). The major sociological themes of the burial consist in the *cili's* and the *bhanja's* leading role in guiding the dead to his grave, i.e. those who will marry each other and ensure the survival of the "wife receiver's" group. The waycloth donators are once again comprised of all kin-groups participating in the women-exchange and the cloth receivers once more by all guests of honour, plus the tailors. These latter receive this as compensation for their musical services. The *kāmi*, who get nothing during the burial, will be doubly remunerated at a later stage.

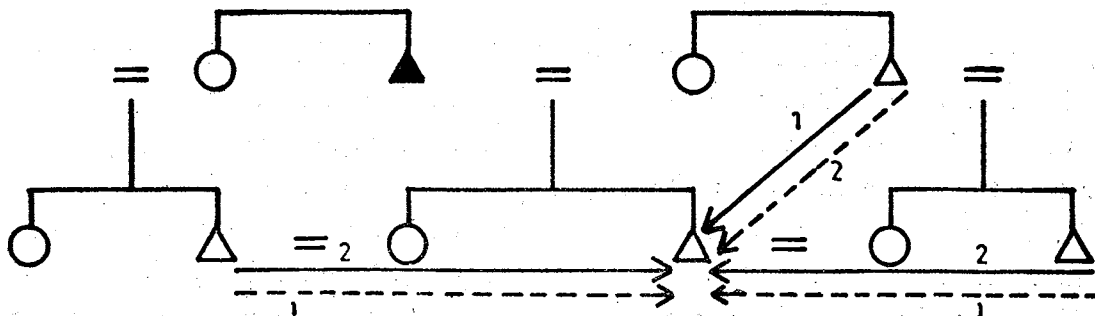


Fig. 7. The shaving of the sons

The next step in the long series of gifts, services and prestations belongs partly to the end of the burial, partly to a small ceremony thirteen days later. The acts are identical : the sons are shaven bald (1) and presented a turban (2). Only the barbers and donors differ. At the end of the burial, it is the sister's sons of the dead who shave their own future brothers-in-law, their proper "wife givers". Later, the same job is done by the brothers of the deceased's wife or their sons, those who are the main

representatives of the "wife givers". The double service of shaving and the double presentation of turbans from both the side of the "wife givers", *māiti*, and of the "wife receivers", *bhanja*, towards the sons of the dead, can be interpreted in the following way: A person who dies is a loss; to those who remain, this loss is a cause of individual grief, whereas to society this loss is a threat. For if he cannot be replaced by another man carrying out the same social functions, (in our case, as producer of outmarrying females and as a producer of males who receive women) the whole system of indirect exchange may break down, society may lose one of the necessary foundation stones on which it stands. That is why the sons of a man who died are honoured: they are the functional replacement of the deceased, and their existence guarantees the continuity of society as a matrimonial system. And the sons of the dead are thanked for that by those who need them, their "wife givers" and their "wife receivers".

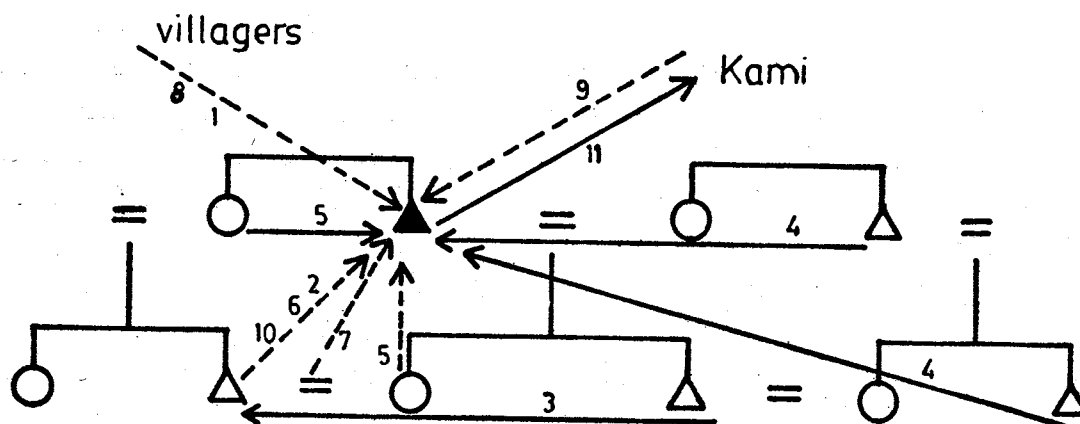


Fig. 8. Guiding the dead into the Beyond

The next stage of the funerary rituals is characterized by a single theme: guiding the dead—not from his house to the grave, as in the burial some months before—but from the vicinity of the village into the Beyond. It is the time of the psychopomps. The first of them are non-related villagers, the singers of the guide-song *Somārāni* (Fig. 8,1). They are followed by the deceased person's sister's sons, the *bhanja* or "wife receivers", who lead the soul of the dead out of the village territory along the tail of an ox (2), donated to them by the sons of the dead (3), together with other valuables such as gold, silver and copper vessels. The next and major psychopompic event is enacted with the aid of two sheep donated for his purpose by the "wife givers" of the dead, his wife's brothers or their sons (4). These sheep, expressly called guide-and porter-sheep, are first embellished for their journey by the *cili* or outmarrying females (5) and then loaded with foodsacks by the *bhanja*, the future husbands of these *cili*, (6). This future couple (or couples) then present together the sheep-food, milk and rice, (7) to the general public, who will feed the guide-and porter-sheep (8). When

they are ready for the transcendental journey, the sheep are driven through the village in great haste by members of the *kāmi* caste (9). The soul of the dead is thought to be mounted on one of them. On an isolating island in the river the sheep, psychopomps of the dead man's soul, are slaughtered by one of the sister's sons or future sons-in-law (10) and consumed by the *kāmi* who have served him (11). The great importance of guiding the dead person's soul into the Beyond is underlined by the fact that it is done several times in succession: first by representatives of the community, then by the sons-in-law, then by the couple *cili-bhanja*, and finally by the blacksmiths. The vehicles for the major transcendental journey, the guide-and-porter-sheep, are made available by the "wife givers", who otherwise remain passive throughout the guided tour into the Beyond.

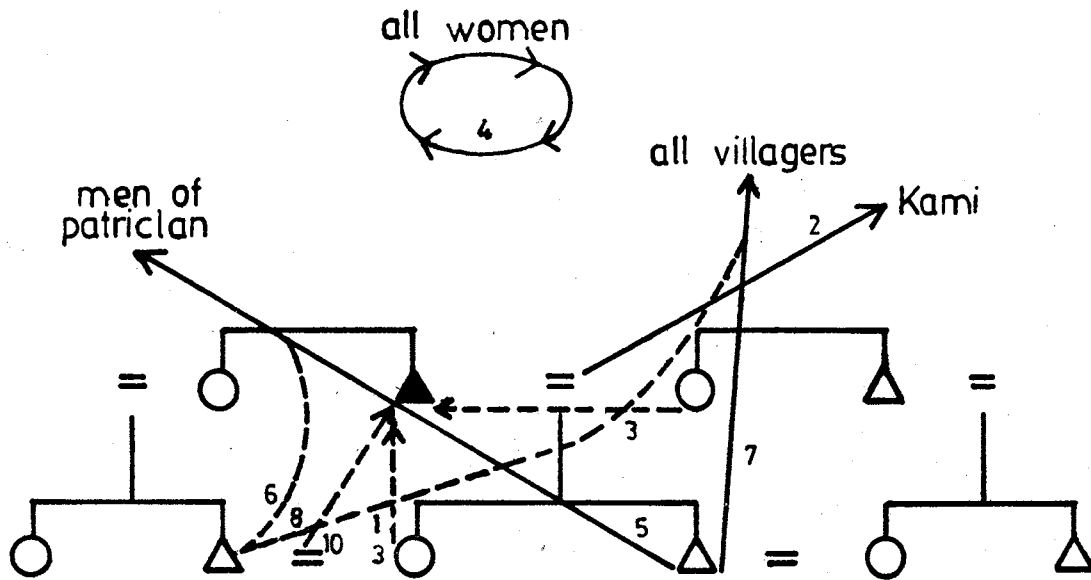


Fig. 9. Food consumption at the end of the mourning period

The next stage is marked by a series of ritual consumptions of food. (The previously mentioned feast of the *kāmi*, who devour the sheep of the dead on the river island, could also be placed here). First, the soul of the dead is fed by his daughters (Fig.9, 1). Once this consolidatory food offering is thought to be accepted by the dead it is cleared away and eaten by those *kāmi* who already received the sheep (2). Until this moment the daughters and wife (or wives) of the deceased have continued to mourn with wailing chants (3). Now, the mood changes and all women of the village share a common, boisterous feast. Every household contributes in bringing food and drink and sharing it with others(4). At the same time, the men hold their own banquet, which however, is restricted to patrilineal relatives of the dead. This food provided for by the dead person's sons (5) is served by his sister's sons (6). In the afternoon of the same day, a grand banquet for all is given (7), concluding this event of general

food consumption; the providers of food are again the sons, and the distributors again are the sister's sons of the dead (8). The mourning period is closed by the game of the sexes, performed by possible spouses, the *cili* and the *bhanja* (10), for the final entertainment of the dead and the living.

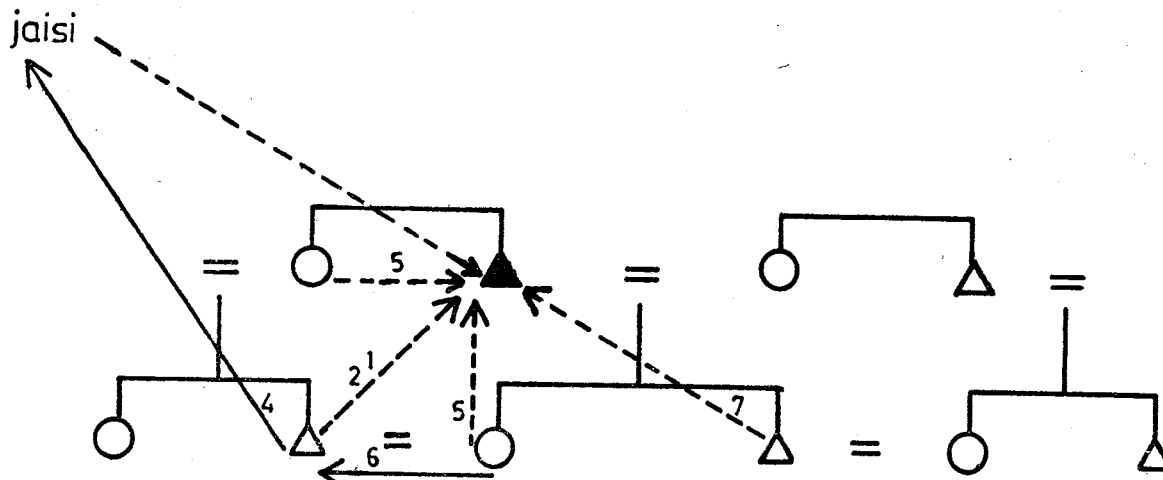


Fig. 10. Memorial for the ancestor

Once the mourning is over and the deceased has been escorted into the Beyond, he or she has to be turned into a proper ancestor. This is done by erecting a memorial stone (Fig.10), (1) and by planting a tree in his memory (2). Both are the jobs of the *bhanja*, the deceased person's future son-in-law. He also pays the astrologer (4) who has consecrated the memorial stone (3). While this is taking place, females of the *cili* class are present (5) who silently commemorate their dead relative, covering their faces under coloured cloths. Their presence reminds everyone of the legitimate claims, pronounced loudly on this occasion by the deceased person's sister's sons that they be given the daughters as wives (6). Thus, the last step of the funerary rituals is also a step in the marriage process. As the sister's sons of the dead turn him into an ancestor, they in turn are turned into his proper sons-in-law, while the *cili* mediate between the two: They are witnesses of the dead, their own paternal relative becoming an ancestor and they will go away from him as wives of the *bhanja*; they bridge the two groups, by reestablishing the ties between the Ego-group of the dead and that of the "wife-receivers". It is noteworthy that in the last two mentioned stages in the funerary rituals the "wife givers" are completely absent. The regular worship of the ancestor, finally, is, as death itself at the beginning, an intimate affair of the patrilineal household (7).

#### An elementary structure of funerary prestations

Having recapitulated in detail the activities associated with a deceased Magar in all stages from physical death to the status of an ancestor, we must now ask if it is possible to draw from this confusing picture of prestations, gifts and services a more

abstracted, integrated mode. This model should, on the one hand, remain truthful to the spirit of the facts and, on the other, give us an insight into an underlying principle that unites the funerary activities into a meaningful whole. This would appear to be possible.

First of all it may be permitted to neglect all non-relatives of the dead person, be they members of the artisan castes such as tailors and blacksmiths, be they non-specified villagers. In a way, what they do and what they get can be summed up by a Magar proverb regarding good neighbourly behaviour: *jiye pāl pāl mare phāl phāl* or 'helping in lifetime and throwing in deathtime'; this means: those who have been on good terms with a deceased during his life are now expected to bring him to his grave, help to ease his passage into the Beyond; and for this service they will be remunerated by those who stand in closer contact to the dead than they,—his paternal kin, his "wife givers" and his "wife receivers". In fact, it is these groups of the society that need to be integrated into the abstracted model of funerary prestations.

The most striking and most constant feature amongst all the movements of prestations is the fact that the members of the *māiti* or "wife givers" of the deceased always give and never receive anything in return. They give the women's ornaments on the body of the dead, they give money on the corpse, they donate portions of the way-cloth, they shave the sons of the deceased and present them with turbans. And they provide the valuable guide-and-porter-sheep for the dead man's journey into the Other World. Except for the barber job, which is a manual service, all prestations of the "wife givers" are actual gifts. They are the noble donors. They rank high, and therefore they can stand outside the lowly business of manual services.

The "wife receivers", on the other hand, real and nominal sister's sons of the dead person, are the main service men in the ritual process of death. They have to shoot the musket for the dead man's passage out of the house and out of the village territory; they have to shave his sons; they have to show the dead his way out of the village with an ox; they have to load the guide-and-porter-sheep; they have to hold the sheep food; they have to kill the guide-and-porter-sheep and give them to the *kāmi*; they have to serve food to the deceased's male relatives and to the community; and they have to erect the memorial stone and to plant the memorial tree. Certainly, they also give on occasions, just like the "wife givers", such as the corpse-money, some of the waycloths, the turban for the dead man's sons, and the money for the astrologer, who consecrates the memorial stone. But these gifts are insignificant measured in real value and compared to those given by the "wife givers" and the members of the dead man's own group. The "wife receivers" are lower; lower than the group of the dead person and lower than their "wife givers", and that is why they do the bulk

of the services. But they are also the big winners, the great receivers: they get an ox from the sons of the deceased together with gold and silver and, above all, they get his daughters as wives.

In turn, the patrilineal relatives of the dead stand in the middle between those who just give, the *māiti*, and those who serve and receive, the *bhanja*. The deceased person's closest kin are naturally involved in serving and giving, for the funerary rites concern one of them after all. The females and, in particular, the *cili* or out-marrying girls, do the most intimate jobs for the dead, those directly concerned with his body: they put a coin in his mouth to find out whether he is really dead or not, they wash, paint, re-dress and embellish the corpse, they throw themselves over it during their dirges, they weep and wail and lament. Then, they take an active role in the departure of the dead into the Beyond. The *cili* lay out the wayfood or *sambal* for him, they embellish his guide-and-porter-sheep, keep the sheep food ready, and feed the soul of the dead on a leafplate outside the village. And they are the silent commemorators when the memorial stone is erected. Some of the services done by the *cili* have their counterpart in those of the *bhanja* or are even identical with them, notably, holding the plates of rice and milk for the departing sheep and paving the way for the dead. At the funerary rituals *cili* and *bhanja*, the potential spouses, occasionally act as if they were already couples.

The funerary activities of the male agnatic relatives, in particular the sons, consist first and foremost in making provisions available. They provide most of the waycloth; they make the bier for the dead, which they also carry; they place money on the corpse; they provide the valuable ox for their future brothers-in-law, and they provide the large quantities of food for the funerary guests, both at the banquet for the male members of the patriline and at the general feast for all villagers. All they get in return in the whole process of the funeral is a turban twice and a shaving, once from a representative of their "wife receivers" and once from a representative of their "wife givers".

In the general process of gift-exchange during the funerals, the agnatic group of the deceased serves, moreover, as an intermediate, a conductor of prestations. Goods, animals and money, provided for the benefit of the deceased at one or the other ritual proceeding, do not stay with him or his surviving closest kin. They are forwarded onwards, passing through. That is the case with the money put on the publicly exposed body of the dead person; it is collected in a pot and later redistributed amongst the honoured funeral guests; that is the case with the waycloths, which are either handed on to the tailors or to the guests of honour, the *malāmi*. And that is the case with the guide-and-porter-sheep, donated by the "wife givers", which, after they have served their purpose in bringing the soul of the dead out of the village, will be consumed by the blacksmiths. Gifts and donations that pass through the

deceased person's own agnatic group are thus only in transit. They have their destination elsewhere: amongst the villagers in general or amongst members of the artisan castes of tailors and of blacksmiths, whereas gifts that really come from them go to the next group of affinal kin, to the "wife receivers", such as the oxen, the gold-, silver- and copper-death-gifts and the daughters.

In leaving aside all prestations coming from and going to people outside the affinal ties, one may reach, in conclusion, the following model of funerary prestations in the full course of Magar death.

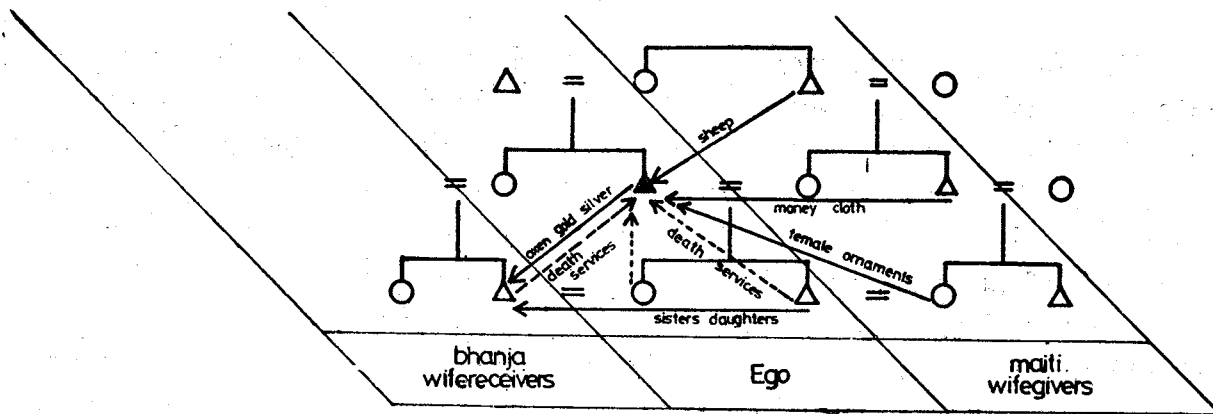


Fig. 11. *Movements of funerary prestations between affinal relatives united by matrilateral cross-cousin marriage*

In its most concise formula, the movement of funerary prestations amongst the Magar that are connected by the ties of a circulative connubium, i.e., matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, can be summarized in the following way: *those who have given give, those who have received receive and serve.*

I am tempted to call this an elementary structure of funerary prestations, one that is correlated with another elementary structure, that of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. In fact, this elementary structure of funerary prestations seems to have borrowed its entire shape from the other. Without the particular marriage rules and their enclosed bonds of relations, the prestations circulating during the death passage would probably take quite a different course. But as it stands the direction in which women are married out is identical with the direction in which the funerary prestations flow. Several questions arise: is the structure of funerary prestations only an emanation of the marriage structure, generated by it to consolidate its empire? Does it or can it exist independantly of the prescriptive marriage rules? Are these structures two entities that may or may not live symbiotically side by side, or are they expressions of one common principle that moulds several domains of society broken up into segments only in the heads of anthropologists? Before one can give a satisfactory answer to these questions more societies, governed by one or the other form of

elementary structure should be studied with the focus of attention on the homologies and differences between marriage rules and funerary rites. One might touch a general law of correspondence: you tell me what marriage system governs a society, and I will tell you what funerary rituals this society will probably have. As a first step in this direction I will end this article by calling to mind some ethnographic data assembled over twenty years ago amongst a society that resembles the Magar in more than one respect: the neighbouring Gurung.

### The Gurung test case

The first statement ever written on a Nepalese hilltribe that goes beyond unidimensional ethnographic accounting and fulfils the requirements of a structural analysis of facts came from the pen of Bernard Pignède. He had studied the Gurung of Mohoriya in the upper Modi river during a nine-month stay in 1958. His monograph, published by Mouton in 1966, was completed at the end of 1959, and in 1961 Pignède died at the age of 29. The most interesting part of his voluminous monograph deals with the connections between kinship and funerary rituals, the subject of this essay. Pignède found out that the flow of funerary prestations as registered amongst the Gurung pointed at a society with matrilateral cross-cousin marriage praxis. The general idea to emerge from his study of Gurung funerary gifts deserves to be quoted, for in its content it anticipates perfectly the formulized findings amongst the Magar: "he who has given a daughter will give, he who has received a daughter will receive and act,"<sup>8</sup> (on the occasion of the funerary rites).

What then were the ethnographic findings to support the general idea shining forth from that elegantly brief formula of such great consequence?

The Gurung, like the Magar, are a society of death. This is to say, in no other domain do they express more thoroughly the ideas they have about their own society, its members and constituent groups than when they deal with death. A study of their death rituals contains in nuce their philosophy of life and the working of their society as a whole.

Among the Gurung the three relevant groups of agnatic and affinal relatives responsible for the performance of the funerary rituals are the *tah* or agnatic representatives of the deceased person's paternal line: the *a-syō*, the paternal relatives of the deceased's wife; and the *moh*, a class of husbands, those of the deceased's sisters, husbands of his daughters, husbands of his father's brothers' daughters. Members of these three groups, which can also be called "wife givers", *a-syō* "wife receivers"

<sup>8</sup> B. Pignède: *Les Gurungs*. Une population himalayenne du Népal, The Hague 1966, p. 276. The quotation in the original: "Celui qui a donné une fille donne, celui qui a reçu une fille reçoit, et agit."



*moh*, and Ego-group, *tah*, divide out amongst themselves the different functions necessary to serve their dead, (see also Figs. 12 and 13)

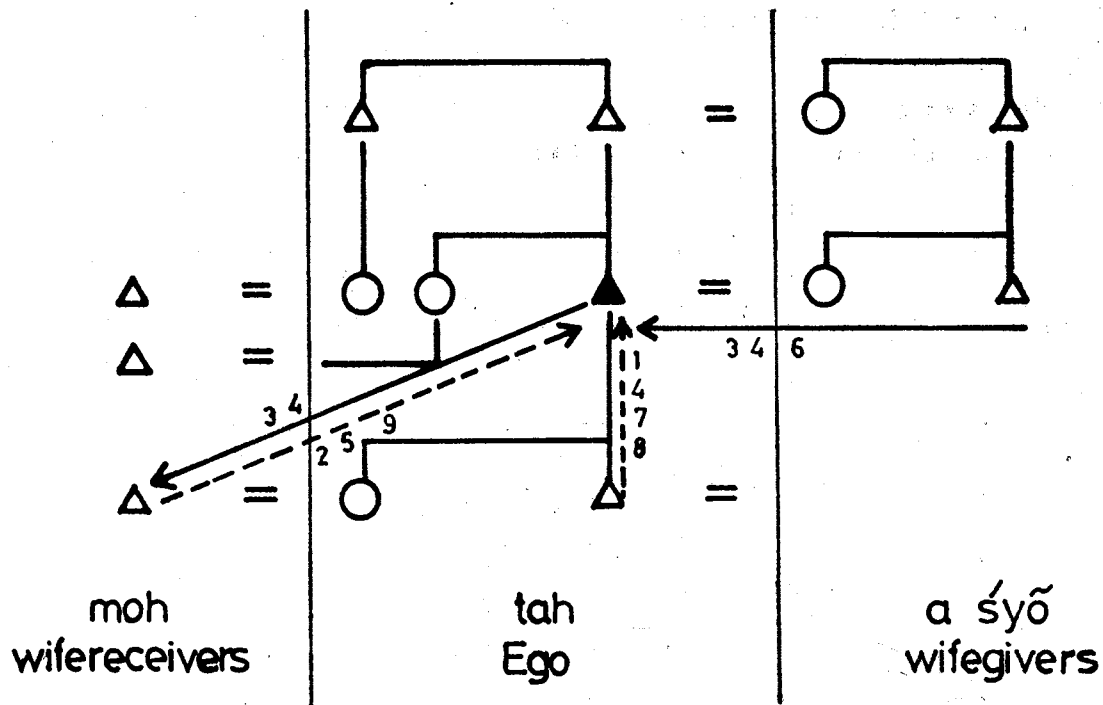


Fig. 12. Prestations at Gurung burial

During the first stage of the mortuary passage, the actual burial, these relatives partition their functions in the following way: when a person has died, a male member of his *tah* makes a death pole with a flag attached to it and erects it outside the house of mourning to publicize the death (1). To the pole are attached some flowers and some clothes, indicating the sex of the deceased. The person entrusted with this job is preferably a *tah*-member who has already lost a parent himself. If no such person is available, a son of the deceased will take this role. The same person later carries the pole to the burial ground along with a piece of white cloth (2), which is part of the cloth into which the dead person, has been wrapped. This piece of cloth will be burnt by the *tah* relative near the mouth of the dead (3) at the funeral site; after burning he puts it down by the bier with a jar of water. The shroud itself is a donation, given by the brother of the deceased person's wife, a member of the wife-giving class (4). The shroud is therefore called *a-syõ tala*, 'drape of wife's brother'. After the burial is over it goes into the possessions of a *moh*- member, or "wife-receiver" the one who has dug the grave (5), (or built the pyre), who has carried the bier (6) and put the corpse into the soil (7). He also washes the tools used at the burial place (8).

Three days after the interment, members of the *tah*-group or closest patrilineal kin of the dead go to the grave to deposit food-stuff there (9). According to Gurung

thought the soul of the dead resides inside its former house for three days, then it begins to wander around. The food-stuff, deposited at the grave, is meant to attract the soul in the right direction, there to where it belongs now, to the grave.

The second main stage and the most elaborate of all Gurung funerary rituals begins ideally 49 days after expiration. It is called *pae* and consists basically in the construction of an image of the dead, *pla*, to guide the deceased to the land of the dead.

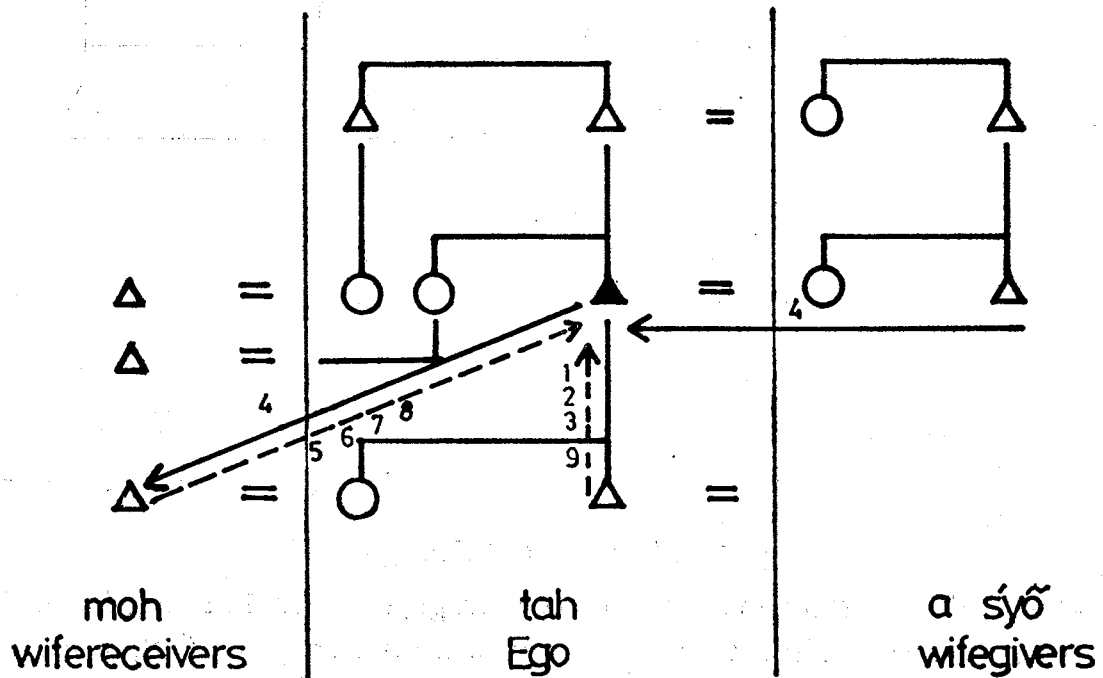


Fig. 13. Prestations at a Gurung *pae*, or journey into the Land of the Dead

The parts are assigned in the following fashion : A member of the agnatic *tah* again makes a death pole Fig. 13 and ticks it into the roof of the house where the ceremony will take place. There a *moh* or "wife receiver" builds a wooden construction (2), the image of the dead called *pla*<sup>9</sup>. This wooden skeleton made of bent wooden planks, braided cloth and leaves is covered with clothes and ornaments indicating the sex of the dead. The *pla* image is then wrapped in another white shroud, called *a-syõ-koi*, which again is donated by the brother of the dead man's wife (3). And again it goes into the hands of the "wife receivers" or *moh* when the image of the dead is destroyed towards the end of the ceremony (5). This act is executed in the bushes outside the village by ritual experts and the *moh*. Beforehand,

<sup>9</sup> The Gurung word *pla* meaning 'wooden image of the dead (soul)' may be related to the Kham Magar word *plā* meaning 'image of a witch to be thrown away', and 'offering to a witch to be thrown away' as well as to the Tibetan word *bla* = soul.

offerings of food, drink and tobacco are deposited around the image of the dead by agnatic and affinal relatives alike (4). They are collected by the *moh*-relatives later on.

A significant sub-ceremony during the *pae* rituals is executed by the religious officiant in order to test the adequacy of the prestations. First, grain fermented with millet is provided by a member of the "wife givers" (6), ingredients needed to model little figures that represent the families of the dead man's wife's brothers and his own mother's brothers, i.e. 'those who give'. These figures are then kicked and the direction in which they fall will indicate, whether or not the deceased has been satisfied by the gifts of the responsible wife-giving families.

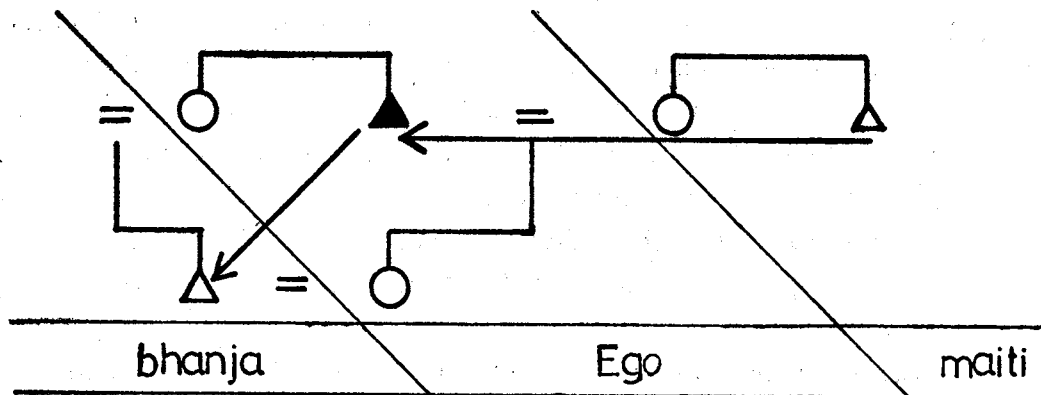
The psychopompic functions amongst the Gurung seem to be delegated to the religious specialists as well as to the members of the dead person's own patriline. For the *tah* are the ones who shoot arrows into the sky to drive away malignant spirits that obstruct the route of the soul on its way to the land of the dead (7). And it is their task as well, to accompany the dead on his route to the Land of the Dead, by singing and dancing in anti-clockwise direction around the image of the dead, *pla* (8). In case an animal sacrifice is needed to appease the dead, the slaughtering is done by a *moh* (9).

These in brief outline, are the main features of the Gurung death ceremonies and the functionaries responsible for them. As can be deduced from the two diagrams, for the burial and for the *pae* of the Gurung, the structure and movements or prestations in both phases are identical. In both situations all the service jobs for the dead are carried out either by members of the patriline of the deceased, *tah* or else by the *moh* or "wife receivers". The *tah* receive nothing for their services at either stage and the *moh* receive in both situations what had previously been donated by the *a-syõ* or "wife givers". "What had been given by the wife's brothers' is received by the husband of the daughter"<sup>10</sup>, as Pignède put it.

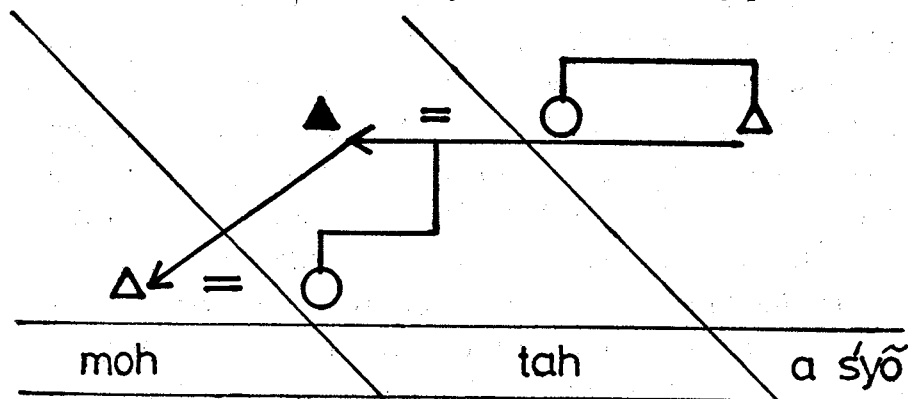
As amongst the Magar, we see that the great exponders are the "wife givers", who actually receive nothing in return in either society. The drapes for the dead, given in the Gurung case by the "wife givers", land in the hands of the "wife II receivers", who do most of the lowly service jobs. As an axis between these two groups stand the patri-group of the dead who, like the "wife receivers", are engaged in many of the services, even though they are less low than those of the *moh* or "wife receivers." As in the Magar case, the model for the Gurung funerary prestations can be described as an asymmetrical oblique one fitting to the system of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage perfectly. It is, in minor modification, the same elementary structure of funerary prestations as that of the Magar. The only difference to be found between

<sup>10</sup> Pignède, op. cit., p. 227: "Ce qui a été donné par le frere de l'épouse est resu par le mari de la fille".

the two elementary structures lies in the fact that in the Gurung case the gifts of the "wife givers", the shrouds, after wrapping the corpse of the dead, who belongs to the intermediary kin-group, move straight on to the "wife receivers". In the Magar case on the other hand, the gifts of the "wife givers", after they have fulfilled their function in the intermediary kin-group of the dead, move out of the circle of relatives. In their stead the intermediary kin-group of the dead procures another set of gifts for their "wife receivers". The directions in both cases, Magar and Gurung, are the same and the services to the dead from the Ego-group and the wife receiving group are also similarly assigned.



*Fig. 14. Magar elementary structure of funerary prestations*



*Fig. 15. Gurung elementary structure of funerary prestations*

After having established an intimate correlation between the marriage rules of the Magar and their funerary prestations, by proving that both domains are governed by identical elementary structures : that of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and by a flow of funerary prestations that repeat the movements of indirect, generalized women-exchange, it could now be shown that another Himalayan society, the neighbouring Gurung, display an identical structure of funerary prestations as the Magar. The logical consequence proceeding from these facts is to deduce that the Gurung also practice the elementary system of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. What do the anthropological eye-witnesses tell us ?

Pignède himself reports that the Gurung of the Mohoriya region generally allow marriages with both cross-cousins : with father's sister's daughter and with mother's brother's daughter. But both statistically and from stated preference, the marriage with the mother's brother's daughter occurs much more frequently. Although not forbidden, as amongst the Magar, the paternal type of cross-cousin marriage is not liked amongst the Gurung of Mohoriya. Even less favoured is the exchange of sisters, the ideal type of bilateral cross-cousin marriage. The marriage system of the Gurung has, so Pignède's conclusion, a strong matrilateral tendency.<sup>11</sup> And in the later part of his book he presents a series of arguments that support this conclusion. We shall return to these below.

After Pignède, who had not been university trained, trained anthropologists came to the Gurung. One of them, D. Messerschmidt, echoed the findings of his French predecessor that there is a "marked preference in Gurung society for matrilateral cross-cousin marriage . . . To a far lesser degree patrilateral cross-cousin marriage . . . is also practised".<sup>12</sup> But Messerschmidt's statements should be read with some reservation on the simple grounds that later on in his book he obviously confuses the elementary structures of kinship. On p. 86 he confounds matrilateral with bilateral cross-cousin marriage, by equating sister-exchange with the matrilateral system, which is not possible, and on p. 87 he presents a diagram (his Fig. 5) of a bilateral cross-cousin marriage system, which he calls one of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Everyone knows that anthropological parlance on this topic has been unambiguously fixed since 1949, the year *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* appeared, so the author cannot get away with the excuse of confused terminology outside his own head.

With the next researcher, A. Macfarlane, we move from the matrilateral favourites to the bilateral and even patrilateral ones. In his book of more than 350 pages dealing with Gurung society, Macfarlane dedicates eight lines to the "kinship structure", half of which summarize Pignède: "The system as he (Pignède) described it is an asymmetrical one, with different terms for kin on the mother's and father's side and a marked preference for marriage with a mother's brother's daughter (matrilateral cross-cousin marriage). There is considerable evidence, however, that both in theory and in practice the system is more symmetrical than he suggests with marriages occurring with father's sister's children just as often and with

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<sup>11</sup> Pignède, op. cit. pp. 227, 228ff.

<sup>12</sup> D. Messerschmidt: *The Gurungs of Nepal, Conflict and Change in a Village Society*, Warminster 1976, p. 56.

a mixture of symmetry and asymmetry in the kinship terminology."<sup>13</sup> End of treatment. As Macfarlane conceals his 'considerable evidence', there is no other alternative but to leave his declarations where he put them : in the air.

We can find more unverified declarations, but also some cases supporting the sought evidence in the essay of Doherty. Unfortunately, this author cannot make up his mind. In the eight pages which he dedicates to the marriage system of the Gurung, he claims them both for the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage as well as for the bilateral one, changing his opinion, expressly or not, not less than four times. He starts out as a vocal advocate of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage : "Father's sister's daughter marriage has priority. The traditional or village rule, stated in the same terms by all my older informants and confirmed by younger people is this : 'Until a man is married, or until he waives his right to her, he will have first call in marriage for his father's sister's daughter. 'As I have said, I encountered this rule continually."<sup>14</sup> With the evidence of a villager's drawing that shows in an isolated case a cross-cousin marriage on the paternal side, Doherty corroborates his conviction with a diagram of a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage regime, borrowed from Fox's kinship textbook. From that same textbook we also learn that a society that practises this rare kin-marriage system is "egalitarian but competitive", and since the Gurung are both egalitarian and competitive, the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage system fits them perfectly. After achieving his goal by pasting labels, the author shifts sides, by presenting two kinship terms and their equations : *au moh* = FZH = MB and *pha nen* : FZ = MBW. This is indeed a double equation that points to sister-exchange or pure bilateral cross-cousin marriage. But the equation is not very strong, for there is a second term for MB, *a-syo*, in the eastern Gurung parlance, from where the terms were taken. In the western area, the beautiful double equation breaks down altogether, for there, so Doherty, one will encounter four different terms: *au moh* for FZH, *pha nen* for FZ, *mum* for MB and *angyi* for MBW, denominations which point into the direction of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage".<sup>15</sup> Besides these two contradictory usages of kinship terminology, one bilateral and one matrilateral, Doherty returns to the third : . . . "a closer examination of the terminology leaves father's sister's daughter marriage as the primary rule to be explained in cultural terms relating to social organisation."<sup>16</sup> But no such

<sup>13</sup> A. Macfarlane: *Resources and population*. A study of the Gurungs of Nepal, Cambridge 1977, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> V. Doherty: *The Organizing Principles of Gurung Kinship*, in: *Kailash*, vol. II, 4, 1974, p. 282.

<sup>15</sup> Doherty, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>16</sup> Doherty, op. cit., p. 286.

examination of the terminology that would favour patrilineal cross-cousin marriage is presented in the pages that follow. Instead, affinal terms such as *moh* or “wife receivers” and *a-syo* or “wife givers” are discussed. Then the author offers us a case from the Parbat District. A couple has two sons and one daughter. One of the brothers is married to his mother’s brother’s daughter ; the other one to his father’s sister’s daughter and the girl finally is married to her mother’s brother’s son. Thus we have one matrilineal and two patrilineal marriages in that one single family (the girl’s marriage being patrilineal, if one regards it from the man’s side). It can be seen from the diagram, however, (see Fig. 16) that, leaving the brother who married his FZD aside, the other two siblings had in reality contracted a bilateral marriage : the second brother had exchanged his sister for another man’s sister who got his.

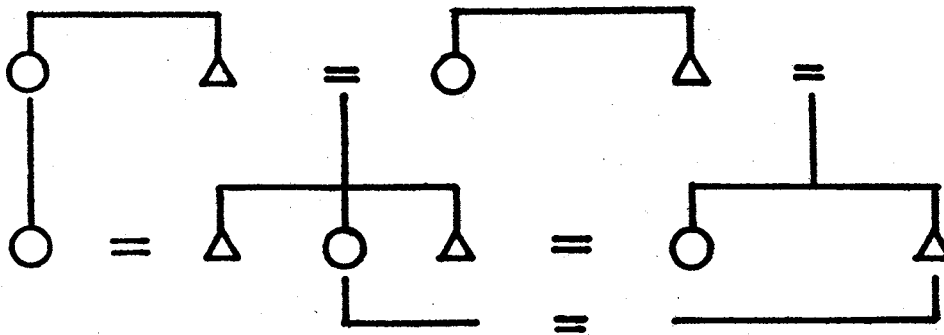


Fig. 16. A Gurung marriage case (sister-exchange)

And the laughing Gurung who related this marriage case to the field worker exclaimed : “Just like a barter system !”<sup>17</sup> He certainly was right : None of the elementary structures of kin-marriage resembles more an ad-hoc barter than the pure form of bilateral cross-cousin marriage or sister exchange. But our author is still troubled. Hardly has he told us this nice case of bilateral cross-cousin marriage, then he has to return to his observation for patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, without giving any further evidence of its existence as a system. His confusion can be explained in the following way : the Gurung he had talked to, mainly exiled people living in the diaspora of Pokhara town, excited his curiosity : there were cases of patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, more than Pignède had conceded. Now, instead of integrating these into the more likely system of optional bilateral cross-cousin marriage, or of freely alternating matrilineal and patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, the author was carried away by the phantom of originality : look, everyone before me was wrong ! I have discovered the new, the real system : patrilineal

<sup>17</sup> Doherty, op. cit., p. 290.

cross-cousin marriage for all Gurung ! And as the data did not help him, he had to slide to and fro with declamatory shouts.

Leaving aside the absurd claim of the Gurung to have a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage system, the case of Doherty and all the other fieldworkers' cases, too, show clearly: the marriage system of the Gurung is not easy to define. All that is left to do is once more to check the kinship terminology for clues, favouring one or the othersystem, and to follow one hint of a Gurung shaman, *puyju*, related by Pignéde, which will lead us back to our main subject: the relations between marriage rules and funerary rites. The Gurung kinship terminology does not tell us much about the leading marriage rules, and what it tells is contradictory. We have already encountered the double equations of *au moh* : MB=FZH and *pha nen* : FZ=MBW, mentioned by Doherty and by him alone, which point towards sister-exchange practice. However, all the other information concerning these +1 - generation relatives points to the contrary: no equations whatsoever, clearly asymmetrical terminology: *au mo* : FZH, *pha ne* : FZ, *mom* : MB, *ā-ni* : MBW; and this matches with matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. On the generation level of Ego, the signs are inverted: all cross-cousins are called by the same names, the terminology turns symmetrical: *nohlo* : FZS=MBS, *nohlō-šyō* : FZD=MBD. They are the 'marriagable ones'; here, the terminology hints at a praxis of bilateral cross-cousin marriage. In other words: to the same extent as the kinship terms of the parental generation refer to a praxis of matrilateral, the terms of the Ego generation refer to a praxis of bilateral cross-cousin marriage. The terms *mom* : MB=(father-in-law)=WF and *ani* : MBW = (mother-in-law) = WM remain, plus their referentiale quivalents *kē* and *šyō-me*. As there are no corresponding equations on the paternal side: *phane* means FZ but not WM and *au mo* means FZH but not WF, the above equations can be listed as indicators for the praxis of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage.

To sum up the results from the kinship terminology as a reflector of the marriage system: Gurung kinship terminology is as ambivalent as is seemingly the praxis. Sometimes it favours bilateral cross-cousin marriage, sometimes it favours matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. But there is an overall tendency to favour more the latter, which brings us back to the statistical evidence brought forth by Pignéde and Messerschmidt: matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is prevalent.

As a last argument in favour of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage we must consider that brief but penetrating remark made to Pignéde by a Gurung *puyju* or shaman, when they were discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the different options for cross-cousin marriage. This religious specialist was a strict opponent of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage and his objection had an almost structuralist touch. He said: "If one marries father's sister's daughter the gifts made



during the funerals create an abnormal situation: what is given by the brother of the deceased's wife, passes afterwards into the hands of his son, who is the son-in-law of the dead."<sup>18</sup> The absurd or abnormal situation this "wise old man" was referring to consisted in the fact that the movements of the funerary gifts applied to a patrilineal (as well as bilateral) regime of cross-cousin marriage would indeed caricature the idea of gift-donation: the funerary prestations in these regimes would be gifts to oneself (more exactly to one's own sons), and thus in all successive generations. The indigenous statement lays bare the pettiness of both structures of direct exchange. In spirit it reminds one of another indigenous saying aimed equally against the praxis of patrilineal cross-cousin marriage. The Batak of Sumatra forbid this form of marriage by saying: "The water cannot run back to its source."<sup>19</sup> As a matter of fact, an elementary structure of funerary prestations amongst the Gurung would take quite a different shape if it were governed by either patrilineal or bilateral cross-cousin marriage, (see Fig. 17).

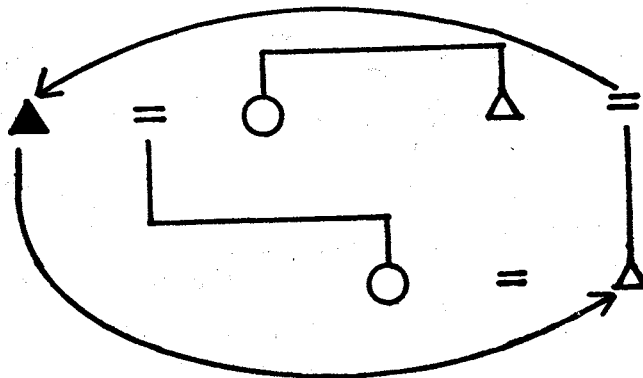


Fig. 17. Elementary structure of funerary prestations in patrilineal and bilateral regimes of cross-cousin marriage

In both the bilateral and the patrilineal cases of cross-cousin marriage, when practiced systematically, the movements of funerary prestations would run in the following fashion (I choose three generations as the minimum to demonstrate the pattern):

18 Pignède, op. cit., p. 231. In the original: "si on épouse la fille de la soeur de son père, les dons faits pendant les funérailles créent une situation anormale: ce qui est donné par le frère de l'épouse du défunt passe ensuite dans les mains de son fils, qui est le gendre du mort".

19 Quoted after C. Lévi-Strauss: *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Paris, 1967, p. 519.

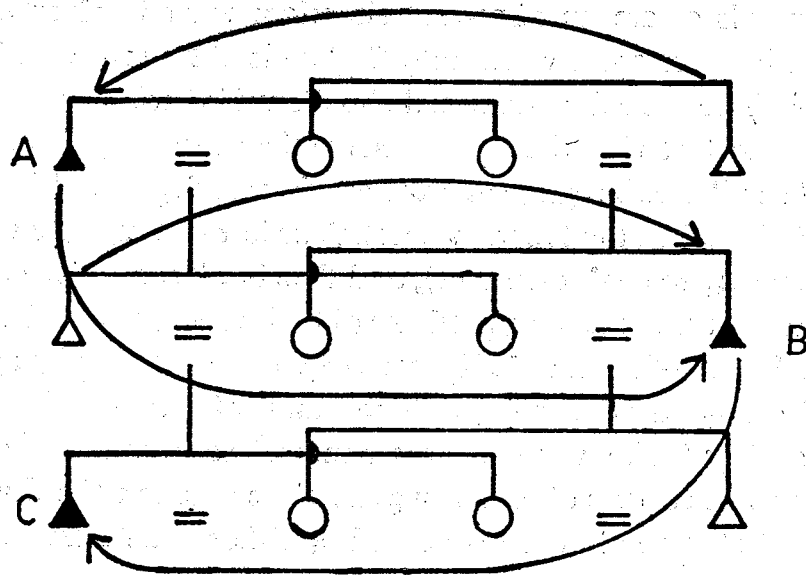


Fig. 18. Movements of funerary prestations in a bilateral structure

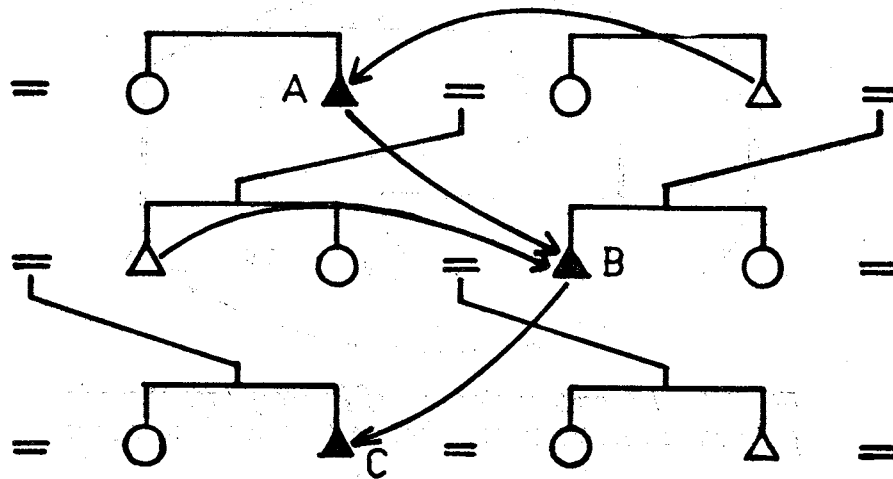


Fig. 19. Movements of funerary prestations in a patrilineal structure

What a man A who died receives from his WB goes on to his DH (who, in the bilateral case, in his SWB, his SZ and his WBS, all at the same time and in the patrilineal case just his WBS), in other words, it goes to the *son of the first giver*. What this man B, when he dies, receives from his WB, (A's own son), goes to his DH (who in the bilateral case is again his SWB, his SZ and his WBS and in the patrilineal case just the WBS), in other words, it goes to the *son of the second giver*, who at the same time is the *first receiver's own grandson*. Towards the own patriline both systems are self-donating.

Both these hypothetical cases run counter to the Gurung concept concerning the kin-groups of "wife givers" and *a-syō*, "wife receivers", *moh*; the concept assimilates

the "wife givers" to the elder generation and to the one more respected and the "wife receivers" to the younger generation and the one lower in status than that of Ego. This is expressed linguistically by the Tibeto-Burman prefix *a-* for relatives of older and higher standing, and by the lack of this prefix for relatives of the same or younger and lower standing.<sup>20</sup> Now, the "wife givers," *a-šyō*, are equipped with this prefix, the "wife receivers," *moh*, are not. Naturally, any wife giver/wife receiver relationship is a dualistic one, even in tripartite societies governed by matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. But the qualities of these dualisms differ. In tripartite societies, the various pairs of "wife givers" and "wife receivers" may be ranked, in societies of patrilineal and bilateral cross-cousin marriage, i.e. of direct exchange, the pair ought to be equal. Why then should the Gurung call the "wife givers" 'higher', by employing the prefix *a-* in *a-šyō* and the "wife receivers" 'lower' by omitting the ranking prefix *a-* in *moh*, if the "wife givers" (or givers of funerary prestations) in one generation, are wife receivers (or receivers of funerary prestations) in the next and this in regard to one and the same patriline which also changes its role of "wife receiver" and "wife giver" in every generation, as is the case in both bilateral and patrilineal cross-cousin marriage systems? The Gurung, who do rank the "wife givers" and "wife receivers" in the said fashion, would thus, if they really practiced one of the two types of direct marriage exchange systematically, constantly invert the ranks they attribute to their own patriline and to the one with which they exchange women. And that would be rather odd. If, on the other hand, they practiced prevalently matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, as they ought to do on logical grounds and as they do on empirical grounds (notwithstanding contrary remarks made by Macfarlane and by Doherty), the ranking of "wife givers" and "wife receivers" poses no problem to the self-assessment of the groups participating in the circle of exchange: one's own group fixes once and for all its position in regard to the two others with which it is matrimonially linked. It is forever 'higher' in respect to the group to which it transfers its marriagable girls and forever 'lower' in respect to the group from which it receives its wives.

### Conclusion

The above essay pursued three objectives : first, to acquaint the reader with some firsthand ethnographic material concerning death and kin amongst the Northern Magar; second, to correlate two sets of information, one about marriage rules

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<sup>20</sup> The wide-range validity of the prefix *a-* meaning seniority, etc. can be pursued in B. Laufer: The prefix *a-* in the Indochinese languages, in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1915, pp. 757-80.

and one about funerary prestations, within the framework of Magar ethnography, showing that both are governed by a single structure; third, to compare these findings with those of another society, studied by others, the neighbouring Gurung, whose funerary prestations evidently display an almost identical pattern with that of the Magar and to deduce from these facts almost identical rules of marriage for the Gurung as well. In doing so it was assumed that the rules of logic may also be applied to the working of society. In the comparison of the two Himalayan hilltribes, a simple equivalence was proposed : that the sociological isomorphism (—) of Magar death prestations and Magar marriage rules is equivalent (=) to the isomorphism of Gurung death prestations and Gurung rules of marriage :

Magar death — Magar marriage = Gurung death—Gurung marriage.

This proposed rule of equivalence was substantiated to the extent that the ethnographic irregularities (concerning the Gurung) permitted. Further studies in other (Himalayan) societies with the perspective on the isomorphisms between death and kin mentioned would lead to a wider scope of comparison.

Amongst the Northern Magar the passage of death from physical expiration to the state of pacified ancestor is a long one with several stages, involving many people, the villagers, representatives of the public, clients and patrons and, above all a very fixed set of relatives : brothers, sons, daughters and wives—one's own patri-line; wife's brothers' daughters, mother's brothers and their sons and daughters—the "wife givers"; and sister's sons and their classificatory equivalents—the "wife receivers" in other words, all those that are needed for a connubium of generalized, indirect exchange of women, for matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, the system practiced by the Magar. All these people involved, each with a defined set of functions, help to ease a dead person's passage from the realm of the living through the realm of errant spirits to the final realm of venerated ancestors. But the dead in return also serve the living, those that remain enclosed in the dungeon of social rules that govern and order their existence, which is often threatened by calamity and chaos. For it is the dead, in their hungry claims for offerings and services, who applaud the rules of the living by seeing these rules—first and foremost those of marriage—reduplicated, applied once more in the process of the passage rites through death.

Lévi-Strauss, true to the spirit of Durkheim and Hertz, the modern founders of a sociology of death, once remarked : "The relations which a society establishes between the living and the dead are nothing but an attempt, on the plane of religious thought, to hide, to embellish or to justify these relations, which exist in reality amongst the living."<sup>21</sup> As for the Magar, I think, except for the last neither of these

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<sup>21</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss: *Tristes Tropiques*, Paris 1955, p. 277. The passage in the original:

qualifications is fully adequate. Their attitudes toward the dead certainly do not try to conceal or to idealize the social relations amongst those who live. They plainly play them over once again and, thereby, sanction and sanctify them.

Written in August 1979 and in June/July 1982 in Kathmandu.

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“La représentation qu’ une société se fait du rapport entre les vivants et les morts se réduit a un effort pour cacher, embellir ou justifier, sur le plan de la pensée religieuse, les relations réelles qui prévalent entre les vivants”.

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