

A COMMENT ON 'TWO 12-YEAR FESTIVALS IN THE THAAK KHOLA'

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In the article 'Two 12-Year Festivals in the ThaaK Khola' (*Kailash*, Vol. IX, No. 2-3, page 159-176, published May 1983), Mr. I.V. Somlai briefly describes the *lha phewa* festival, and the festival for *bū amā* which were both celebrated in ThaaK khola in 1981. Noting, that the programme of the *lha phewa* festival has been outlined in a cursory fashion by Jest (1973), and that its history has been detailed by Gauchan and Vinding (1977), Mr. Somlai proposes "to fill a gap by providing a more detailed description of the diurnal events that could serve to both compare activities with previous festivals as well as avail to professionals in this area a useful record." (p. 159).

Unfortunately, Mr. Somlai fails in this attempt. The section on the historical background of the *lha phewa* festival appears to be based on Gauchan and Vinding (1977) and in general is correct; the festival is, however not celebrated in the year of the bird (p. 160), but in the year of the monkey; also, it was not celebrated from 6 to 20 January 1981 (p. 162), but from 8 to 24 January 1981. The main section on the proceedings of the festival is incomplete; it fails to describe some important events which took place during the period covered (see for example the description of the full-moon day below), and it ends with the full-moon day 20 January 1981, although the festival continued for another four days through 24 January

1981. Also, the description is faulty, as illustrated by the following few examples:

- (a) "Day 1. The paandes removed the deity images from their homes...and amidst reserved pomp led a small procession to Chokhopaani...wherein the images are placed for an overnight cleansing in holy water. Accompanying the paandes were eight boys about 10 years of age..." (p. 163).

On the first day of the festival (8 January 1981) the four clan priests (*pāre*, or *pānde*) and a 'virgin' boy (*kumār*) from each of the four clans went to Mharsyāng kyu (Cokhopāni) and spent the night there. Early the next morning they purified themselves and the weapons of the clan-ancestors in the holy river, and over the smoke of burning cypress. (The images of the clan deities were not taken to Mharsyāng kyu).

- (b) "Day 2...Thereafter, the procession climbed a hill directly above Kobang to the Hlakhang of Lha Hyawaa Rhaangjyung, wherein the Bhattacan paande recited from his clan's rhab." (p. 164).

On this occasion, the Bhattacan clan priest did not recite the Bhattacan clan history (*bhurgi rhap*) but (I am informed) *shyāng rhap* which is a text the clan priests recite when they and/or the clan gods leave a location.

- (c) "Day 2..the source of the sacred Laarjung Khola.... Here, the Serchan paande chanted sonorously from his rhab. Later, each of the four paandes took his deity image from an attendant and placed it in a depression near the source." (p. 164).

The four clan priests and other people gathered at a source of Lārjung kholā known as *ḍhong syā kyu* (or *ḍhom syā kyu*) Here the Gaucan, Tulācan and Sercan clan priests recited *syu rhap* which is recited when the clan priests and/or the clan gods arrive at a new location. A helper from each of these three

clans placed the images of their respective gods in some depressions near the source.

- (d) "Days 13 to 14...The residents and remaining visitors now impatiently awaited the Full Moon -- the last day. Day 15. In a final surge of energy, all congregated once more in the field to watch clansmen detach the deities' heads from the bodies. Each paande then led a procession to his respective temple to deposit the images..." (p. 166).

The full-moon day (20 January 1981) was the main day of the festival. In the morning, at a place just below *syolenta yun* (which is a big stone on the north-western outskirts of Lārjung and used by children as a slide), a 'shaman' (*ḍhom*) performed the *ḍhonje lawā* ceremony to call the souls of the four clan gods; as a part of the ceremony, a goat was sacrificed by pulling out its heart.

In the afternoon hundreds of people gathered around a field next to Kyongkor in the southern end of Lārjung to witness a humoristic programme. The first item was a hunting scene. Five Bhaṭṭacan men who had been hunting since the morning entered the field; one was dressed as a hunter, another as a dog-owner, two as dogs, and one as a muskdeer. After a while they left the scene, and at Kyongkor the deer was killed and its meat offered to the clan gods. Towards the end of the hunting scene some men entered the field with a long rope and tried to catch people; it is considered auspicious to be caught, and people pay a few rupees to be set free. Next, four Sercan men dressed as girls manured the field, and later the headman of the Gaucan clan sowed it with three pāthi of barley. Afterwards three Tulācan men ploughed the field -- one of them functioned as a ploughman and the two others as oxes; during their work, a Tulācan man dressed as a woman came and gave them beer and snacks. Following this scene, the four Sercan 'girls' began to weed the field. Suddenly, a group of Tulācan men

entered the field and captured the youngest of the girls and ran away; the captured girl was hidden behind the Gaucan god at Kyongkor. Then followed *khimī cūwā* which is the most important part of the traditional Thakālī marriage ceremony. A group of men representing the Tulācan boy entered the field singing the traditional songs, and carrying beer and liquor which they offered to a group of Sercan men sitting along a long table; reluctantly, the Sercan men accepted the drinks indicating that they accepted to give away their 'daughter' to the Tulācan boy. In the end the groom and the bride entered and bowed down to the Sercan men.

In the night the four clan gods met and (through some clan men hidden in their bodies) spoke to each other about what had happened in the last twelve years since they had met.

On 21 January the gods were carried from Kyongkor to a place about a hundred meters further southwest; and on 22 January the gods were taken to a field a few hundred meters further southwest. On 23 January the gods were carried to Dhocho which is situated on the bank of Kāli Gandaki about one kilometer south of Lārjung; according to the Tulācan clan history, Dhocho was the village of the eighteen Tulācan ancestors who were killed by the members of the other three clans (see Gauchan and Vinding 1977). On this day Tulācan men wear green turbans, and only Tulācan women are allowed to wear tikā and tie red strings in their hair.

The 24 January 1981 was the last day of the festival. On this day the gods were carried to Ghomba u. The images were detached from the bodies, and the Gaucan, Tulācan and Sercan images were placed in the cave (u), while the head of the Bhaṭṭacan's yakgod was placed at a rock above it. According to informants, the images were on a later day taken from Ghomba u to their respective temples.

At the present time, I have no comments on Mr. Somlai's description of the festival for *bū amā*, except that it would be interesting to know on what basis he concludes that this festival is 800 years old.

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